for the utility of digital expression is thorough and has significant merit. In seizing the power of images as well as words, it is likely that mechanisms such as 'kinetic text' have the potential to convey meaning more effectively, and restore a sense of 'stuff' to the 'fluff' of communication.

Lanham overestimates the flexibility of such modes of expression, however, failing to acknowledge limitations such as lack of uniformity, restricted accessibility and larger space requirements. It is telling that the website Lanham directs readers to, in order to see animations of certain figures that are featured in the book, is in the form that the author repeatedly criticises—static reproduction of text with no added value beyond the motion of the figures.

In contrast to the early substantive chapters, those following the matrix exposition largely consolidate the thesis and allow the author to indulge in venting some strong opinions. An instance of the latter is the chapter addressing the inadequacies of university bureaucracy. Ostensibly, Lanham proposes to engage in an 'audit of virtuality' on mainstream public tertiary institutions. He purports that such audits are universally applicable, consisting of a consideration of how efficiently an entity participates in the 'attention economy'. However, Lanham's example of an audit of universities descends into a tirade against the institutional bureaucracy, and the limitations of the traditional approach to tertiary education.

While online university courses and their digital communication methods provide the contrasting case to challenge many of the assumptions of this traditional framework, many of the points made are far broader and go to the heart of the university system—online or off. Despite the tenuous link to the topic of his book, this chapter was particularly satisfying, with a structured, convincing argument. Lanham probably overestimates the potential for online courses to solve the problems raised, but his criticisms are valid.

One of the most compelling critiques is of the assumption in many universities that the faculty should be employed full-time in the sequestered environment of a learning institution and that the administration exists to protect the faculty from the real world. This attitude is deeply frustrating for any student wanting to learn from a passionate and realistic teacher who conducts their work professionally and gives insight into the practical implications of the high-level theory they are struggling to grasp.

That one of the most stimulating elements of the book is this chapter criticising university bureaucracy is telling of the book as a whole—entertaining and interesting, but not necessarily connected to other parts of the book or the thesis overall. This is most likely explicable by Lanham's evident preference for discursive rhetoric over analytical economics. Credit must be given for having the bravery to tackle economics in this manner, but the strength of the book is its argument for more effective communication utilising digital techniques, not the case it makes for a new 'attention economy'. This is a book that follows its own thesis, gaining attention for some intriguing ideas by presenting them in a novel context—a triumph of style over substance.

Reviewed by Nikki Macor

The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11
by Lawrence Wright
Allen Lane
London, 2006
480pp, £20
ISBN 9780713999730

Lawrence Wright's background is a unique mix of journalism, academia and screenwriting. He was one of the co-writers of the movie *The Siege* and he draws on this eclectic background to produce an engaging, well researched and analytical book. *The Looming Tower* weaves two stories into the one book. The first is a definitive work on the origins, development, motivations and theology of Al Qaeda, and the second is an analysis of the failings of US intelligence with a distinct focus on personality and institutional conflicts. Wright's contribution is the most informative and significant in the Al Qaeda analysis.

Wright immediately establishes the framework for his analysis of Al Qaeda and the incompatibility of its goals and theology with modernity in citing the thoughts of Sayyid Qutb. Qutb was the American-educated Egyptian who became the role model for the ideological father of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri. Despite having the benefit of an American education, 'he intended to show that Islam and modernity were completely incompatible.' The story of Qutb, a man educated but fearful of the impact of Western education, westernised but radicalised, quiet in public but privately hostile to American women, is disturbingly similar to the profiles of many of

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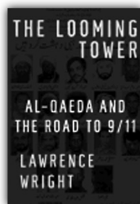
the 9/11 hijackers.

Wright highlights that despite Al Qaeda's hatred of modernity, they focused their efforts on perfecting the use of so many of the tools of modernity. In one revealing passage, which dispels the notion of the pious young jihadist studying the Quran before attacking the infidel, Wright notes that 'At night they would often watch Hollywood thrillers, looking for tips. The movies of Arnold Schwarzenegger were particular favourites.' The Al Qaeda training book known as *Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants* was distinctly Maoist not Islamist, supporting 'the diplomacy of the cannon and the machine gun.' Their values may be seventh century, but their methodology is distinctly twentieth century.



Wright spends considerable time de-mythologising bin Laden and Al Qaeda. He highlights that bin Laden is shorter than portrayed in the media; that his forays in Afghanistan with Arab jihadists were often so hopeless that the Afghans asked him to leave; how Pakistani mujahid thought he shook hands like 'a girl'; how he squandered all his wealth in poor investments in Sudan and that even allies thought that 'his IQ was not that great.' Wright's de-mythologising of bin Laden however only serves to reinforce the question of how a group of societal misfits managed to beat the national intelligence and security infrastructure of the world's sole superpower.

Perhaps the greatest irony surrounding the rise of Al Qaeda is how such a markedly anti-modernist organisation ultimately benefited so significantly from modernist values such as liberality, freedom of expression and movement. On the issue of the abuse of western liberality by terrorist organisations throughout the 1990s, Wright cites examples from Canada, the UK, the US and Germany where these organisations openly set-up shop and raised funds under the eyes of authorities. Perhaps the inherent self-defeating logic of this approach is best summarised by the German example where terrorist groups could recruit and raise money 'but only if they were foreign terrorists not domestic.' Through these examples, Wright highlights Western governments' inability to cut through political correctness and look unapologetically after the interests of their citizens.

While much of the ground that Wright covers in his second story around the failure of US intelligence is well-known, he makes well covered ground highly readable due to his focus on Special Agent John O'Neill. O'Neill is one of the few figures to emerge with his reputation enhanced in this book. In his critique of the national intelligence infrastructure of the United States, Wright has cast O'Neill in the role of observer, documenter and ultimately victim of the systemic failings of the system. John O'Neill, who died on 9/11, is a truly tragic figure. Wright depicts him as a character with numerous personal flaws but who refuses to give in to the mediocrity and complacency that surrounds him in the national intelligence infrastructure.

O'Neill ultimately decides to leave the FBI for a more lucrative job, ironically in charge of security at the WTC Centre less than three weeks before 9/11. The unanswered question one draws from Wright's systematic critique of clashing personalities, clashing FBI and CIA prerogatives, mismatched skills-sets and the treatment of John O'Neill is: how can fundamentally flawed organisations of such size seriously hope to reform and change their ways as quickly as is required?

There are two main criticisms of this book. First of all, the ending is a significant letdown to the point one feels that Wright has switched to his screenwriting persona at the wrong moment, with an eye to possible future book deals. Instead of ending the book with a revelatory statement or even a recap of the highlights, he chooses to end with an account of Al Qaeda men on horseback in Pakistan.

Secondly, Wright sidesteps key issues around decisions made, or not made, by both President Bush and Clinton. As a result, one is left with the impression that President Clinton completely outsourced any substantive decision making to those around him. There are only three cursory references made to President Bush, so no conclusions can even be made in this respect. Wright seems to be going out of his way to avoid offending both men, which is very much at odds with the honest appraisal most of the book undertakes in relation to both Al Qaeda and US intelligence failings. However, despite the sheer volume of books available on Al Qaeda and 9/11, this one stands out for its detail, readability and analysis of why Al Qaeda represents much more than simply another terrorist organisation.

Reviewed by Matt Marks

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