







12	>PREFACE
19	>INTRODUCTION
21	>1. ECONOMIES OF TERROR AND THE >PROBLEMS OF CATEGORIES.
29	>A: DIVISION.
33	>2. THE PRIVATIZATION OF THE >MILITARY, THE CHANGING ROLE OF >THE STATE, AND THE INCONSISTENCIES >OF MEDIA ATTENTION.
43	>3. POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS, >DEMOCRACY, AND VIOLENCE.
49	>B: HONOR.
53	>4. THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL- >SPECTACLE COMPLEX AND THE >CONFLATIONS BETWEEN REALITY, >BATTLEFIELD SIMULATIONS, >AND NEWS PROGRAMMING.
59	>5. POLITICAL CULTURE AND THE >POWER OF IMAGES.
65	>C: BEING.
67	>6. ECOLOGIES, REPRESENTATIONS, >AND THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF >IMAGE RECEPTION.
75	>7. ASSEMBLAGES OF IMAGE, ACTION, >AND EVENT.
83	>D: SPACE.
87	>8. EMBODIMENT AND INDOCTRINATION.
94	>BIOGRAPHIES.
95	>SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY.

> UNDER FIRE.1
> JORDAN CRANDALL
>
> THE ORGANIZATION
> AND REPRESENTATION
> OF VIOLENCE.

>01.JPG

Images of war arrest us. They aim to offer the truth of violence. It is difficult to argue with them, difficult to deny their authenticity. Witness to death and devastation, they seem to cut right through the play of signification. We read them viscerally – as if, with a rush of adrenaline, the body were instinctually reacting to the possibility of its own violation. What do we mean when we deem such an image accurate? What does it mean to *believe* such an image? Images of the truth of violence have always been intertwined with maneuvers of deception. The first full-scale attempt to document a war through photography, by the Mathew Brady team at Gettysburg, often involved the relocation of munitions and the repositioning of the dead. The history of war photography is a history of realism and stealth. The image reveals, but it also hides.

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>02.JPG

There is a gap between what one *does* and what one *performs*. We “play for the camera,” constituting ourselves within media of self-identification. We often need to shape the act of being observed to our own advantage, especially during times of conflict. Choosing one’s (potential) image can be an act of combat. This maneuvering is not limited to those who are represented. It applies to those who orchestrate the framing of the image. Consider an aerial video, shot by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), of a funeral that occurred during the 2002 siege of the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank. The IDF claims that this videotape documents a fake ceremony, staged in order to multiply the number of casualties in Jenin. At which level does this possible deception occur – at the level of institution or camera subject? Each agency plays not to the camera per se, but to their respective audiences and authorities. Each plays to the Law: the juridical paradigms that shape culture and conflict.

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>03.JPG

To a large extent, the degree to which we assign truth to an image is dependent upon the degree of our alignment with the ideological system that supports it. However, war representation, like warfare itself, is by its very nature embedded in strategic maneuvering. It is as if the image itself were a tensile surface, embedded within a dynamic of detection and deception. The embeddedness of representation was seldom acknowledged during the embedded reporting of the Iraq war. News teams with cameras deployed on the battlefield were meant to give us a sense of unfiltered immediacy. However, they ended up obscuring more than they revealed. They were embedded in an ideological construct that overrode any sense of authentic onsite content. They became munitions in another kind of war.

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>04.JPG

Accuracy seems to automatically emerge out of technological development. The logic goes something like this: Since technologies of vision give us the ability to see increasingly precise details, they therefore give us a more correct representation of something. Accuracy is to be located in the high-precision technology of visualization, not in our own perceptual faculties. Visualization is not about seeing, but about tracking: detecting an object with unprecedented accuracy, pinpointing it precisely in time and space, understanding how it moves,



01.JPG



02.JPG



03.JPG



04.JPG



05.JPG



06.JPG



07.JPG



08.JPG

and predicting its future position. One could say that we are witnessing the relocation of the site of accuracy away from the space of perception and into the technologized image itself. It is as if the image network could harbor cognition and authentication within its own confines. One sees this at work not only in high-tech systems but also in commercial news television. The newscast offers a form of automated deliberation. Combining managed combat information and entertainment, it does the thinking for its viewers.

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>05.JPG

A new quality of accuracy arises out of a resurgent form of witnessing, preoccupied with the vicissitudes of the fallible human and the logistics of the handheld. With its sense of unfiltered credibility, streamed video serves as a form of semiotic compensation for a landscape that has been colonized by standardized media formats.

One might call it *transmission vérité*, where the hidden substrata of the technology are reintroduced as part of the content of the image, and a raw immediacy appears to open up a direct access to the real. *The reality of representation* is substituted for *the representation of reality*. That is, “authenticity” arises less from the authentic representation of reality per se, and more from the authenticity of the means by which reality is portrayed. Whether “unmanned” or “embedded,” we could say that we are witnessing the relocation of vision to a space outside of the body – whether into a network or a networked “smart image,” or into a simulation of newly embodied presence through the scrim of the media construct.

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>06.JPG

Battle simulations, news, and interactive games exist within an increasingly unified space. With military-news-entertainment systems, simulations jostle with realities to become the foundation for war. They help combine media spectatorship and combat, viewing and fighting. They have a role in producing the situations that they seem only to anticipate. They deliver images of the very system of conflicts that they help to maintain. Forming a loop between perception, technology, and the pacings of the body (eye, viewfinder, trigger), they help to produce new forms of engagement and subjectivity, attention and differentiation. We locate ourselves to “this side” of the image, to the safe side, against the enemy from which it protects us. We draw lines in the sand; we say, “I stand here against you,” defining ourselves by that which we oppose. Internal solidarities cohere against external threats. Identity is formed through the conduit of a feared and necessary enemy.

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>07.JPG

Some images, by their nature, arouse conflicts as to their very existence. These images *should not be seen* by anyone, one says. This existent image *should not exist*. Such images fill us with dread. Yet, they enrapture us with a morbid fascination. Squaring these two impulses is more troubling to us than we realize. Like the aftermath of a violent car crash, we have to look, yet we don't want to see.

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>08.JPG

We are accustomed to being on the winning side of the image. After all, representation arose out of a need to protect us. Photography was driven by the need to remove the human from direct physical contact with the site of experience, placing us on “on the other side” of

representation as a shield from reality. It protected us from the vicissitudes and dangers of physical presence and in the process allowed us a form of disembodied presence. An image comes full circle when it reveals the vulnerability of its own bodily and mechanic underpinnings. The final video images of the Reuters cameraman Mazen Dana in Baghdad are a case in point. [See the images on pages 2-9.] Watching the video, we see a U.S. army tank approaching Dana and we *feel* the camera-body tumble to the ground as he is shot by a U.S. soldier, who mistook his camera for a weapon. Both machine and human collapse, the camera resting on an extreme close-up of the pavement, upon which Dana's now inert body lays. The death of the cameraman-as-stand-in reveals the mortality that hovers around the act of representation.

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>09.JPG

When we see a violent image, we can be compelled to think, who took this? Someone was there; someone witnessed this act. Yet, they did nothing to stop it. We are compelled to acknowledge the ethical codes of journalism: the pact that allows the camera to slip into the battlefield as a neutral agent, its negotiated resolve of non-intervention precisely the source of its efficacy and power. Yet perhaps, even by its very presence on the scene, the camera is somehow responsible for the violence that it documents. Somehow, through its introduction, it helps to *enact* violence. The camera helps to ensure that a violent act will stand for something. It enacts meaning, endowing significance to the isolated incident. The camera transforms life into *mise-en-scène*, and scripts an awareness of a future audience of witnesses.

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>10.JPG

Even though reality and representation can never be reconciled, technologies of vision and representation are driven by the false sense that they could be. We are compelled to locate veracity within the technologized image, yet this line of endeavor is fundamentally a dead end. Like the lead character in Antonioni's *Blow Up*, who repeatedly enlarges his photographs of a suspected crime scene in order to uncover their hidden truths, we are faced with an existential crisis when we are unable to overcome the referential gap. Reality and representation can never be reconciled. Could one, then, posit the eventual elimination of the need for the image altogether? Since images are only offered up for the benefit of humans, machine-assisted or automated seeing renders imaging superfluous. Perhaps these images are no longer representational in the traditional sense. Rather, they are awkward constructs that attempt to bridge this contradiction.

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>11.JPG

Some say that the image, instantly circulated through worldwide news and communications networks, suggests a disappearance of distance, a vanquishing of time. Increasingly, however, the image is all about timing: a precise placement within a geopolitical calendar, a surgical strike within an anticipated sequence of events. With such an image, "meaning" is less about semiotics and more about choreographics; less about language and more about intensity, territory, and rhythm. Position and passage jostle for primacy in contemporary landscapes of signification. Representations are bundled with the events that they either anticipate, stream, or document, interleaving themselves within precise temporal orders.

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09.JPG



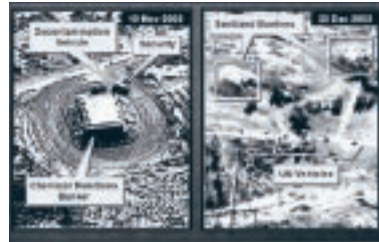
10.JPG



11.JPG



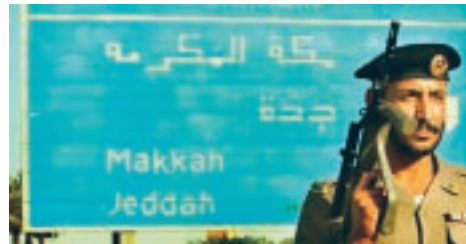
UNDERASH.JPG



DISCREDITEDIMAGERY.JPG



TRACKING.JPG



SECURE.JPG



BLACKWATER.JPG



PRISON.JPG

Under Fire explores the organization and representation of contemporary armed conflict. On the *organizational* front, it looks at the forms of militarized agencies that are emerging today, including Western defense industries and decentralized terrorist organizations. It explores the forces that contribute to their emergence, whether operating at the level of economy, technology, politics, or ideology.

On the *representational* front, it looks at the ways that armed violence materializes as act and image, searching for new insight into its mechanisms and effects. In so doing, it engages issues of economy, embodiment, symbolic meaning, and affect.

This book is one instantiation of the *Under Fire* project. It is an edited compilation of a series of dialogues that occurred online from 25 January through 19 April, 2004. The conversations revolved around a group of presenters that included Akbar Ahmed, John Armitage, Manuel DeLanda, James Der Derian, Thomas Keenan, Loretta Napoleoni, P.W. Singer, and Eyal Weizman. Asef Bayat, Susan Buck-Morss, Hamid Dabashi, Brian Holmes, and Gema Martín Muñoz helped to conduct the proceedings. The complete archive of the conversations, along with participation information, can be accessed at <http://www.wdw.nl>.

>1.
>ECONOMIES OF TERROR
>AND THE PROBLEMS OF
>CATEGORIES.

>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Sun, 25 Jan 2004 21:38:00

>

Over the last ten years I have spent a lot of time interviewing former members of armed organizations, primarily in Italy. From my lengthy conversations it emerged that money is terrorism's life-line. Economics, not politics or ideology, is the armed struggle's universal engine.

>

Following this discovery, I have conducted an economic analysis of modern terrorism. Using exclusively the tools of economics, I have retraced the birth of an evolution in an international economic system, the New Economy of Terror. This sophisticated global system is sustained by terror groups, their sponsors, terror states and various affiliates. Over the last decade the New Economy of Terror has merged with the international illegal and criminal economy. Together they generate a yearly turnover of \$1.5 trillion, equivalent to 5% of world GDP. Today, this elusive economic system – among the fastest growing economy in the world – is the feeding structure which supports and nurtures global terror.

>

How did such an economic giant take shape undetected? This is the key question that I have asked myself. The answer, I discovered, lies in the economic role that armed organizations have played in modern history since the end of World War II. Retracing terror groups' activities across the world, tracking exclusively their finances and ignoring their ideology, I was able to unveil three major evolutionary transitions of the New Economy of Terror: the state sponsoring, the privatization, and the globalization of terrorism.

>

State sponsoring was a familiar feature of the Cold War, when the two superpowers fought wars by proxy along the periphery of their sphere of influence, using armed groups fully funded by each of them. The next stage, the privatization of terrorism, took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when terrorist organizations such as the PLO and the IRA succeeded in financing themselves. Motivated by the desire to gain independence from the sponsors and by the rising costs of running armed organizations, terror groups, during this phase, widened their economic horizon. Therefore, when in the 1990s, the de-regularization of the international markets knocked down financial and economic barriers,

they were ripe for the last transition: the globalization of terrorism. Taking advantages of the economic liberalization, terror groups became a transnational entity, raising money and carrying violent cross-border attacks. The irony is that the New Economy of Terror is a product of globalization and, in particular, of the globalization that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Globalization allowed non-state entities to promote a variety of liberal causes, social changes and economic advancement but has also facilitated the networking of terrorist movements like al-Qaeda and the growing sophistication of the "terror economy." Privatization, deregulation, openness, the free movement of labor and capital, technological advances – all hailed as the key ingredients of economic success in the last twenty years – have been exploited by and adapted into the terror economy in a macabre form of geopolitical ju-jitsu. In other words, the very strengths of legitimate economies have been turned into double-edge swords.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Mon, 26 Jan 2004 13:12:57

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I wonder about the difficulties concerned with the labeling and the definition of terrorist groups. I am a Latin American/Swedish writer and anthropologist. I have been visiting Palestine during the last three years covering everyday life in the Occupied Territories. I had conversations with fellow writers and Hamas fighters in Gaza and we discussed the labeling of "terrorists." Hamas is not only a fighting organization but also a huge party with a well functioning social network. Their armed wing is labeled as terrorist but they call themselves "freedom fighters" and they are experienced by a huge amount of the Palestine Gaza population as the only shield between them and the Israeli army and settlers. Hamas works as a vicar for the non-existent Palestinian Authority. They drive day care centers, hospitals, and stores where people can buy scarce items in the impoverished region.

>

I recognize the thinking behind the definition problem. I spent four years of my youth in a maximum security prison for political prisoners in my native country, Uruguay. I was a member of the urban guerilla group called Tupamaros, who inspired several European urban guerilla groups such as Brigada Rossa and Baader-Meinhof.

The Tupamaros, a typical Che Guevara inspired movement, gathered a huge number of intellectuals and students such as myself. The CIA labeled Tupamaros as terrorist between 1971 and 1985. When the organization became a legal party, the label was dropped. During my prison time and later, when the organization decided to change the strategy from the support of the armed fight to a more parliamentary strategy (several of the Tupamaros leaders are now senators and deputies), one of our major discussions focused on identifying and classifying our actions. Should the bombing of a bus station be identified as a terrorist action? Does the circumstance that the station was mostly used to store military buses justify the bombing? But it is still a definition problem: what is the difference between terrorism, freedom fighters, and state terrorism? The states of Israel and of the United States can also be included in the definition of "rogue states" that the U.S. State Department issued after 11th September.

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Mon, 26 Jan 2004 21:23:08

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What I have found during my research is that terrorism has been often boxed into criminal categories. One of my professors during my Ph. D., Paul Gilbert, wrote an outstanding book on this topic, *Terrorism, Security and Nationality*. The central thesis is that terrorism is a crime with war aims. Terrorism poses to the modern state a unique dilemma, whether to deal with it as a crime or as a war. This springs from the double nature of the modern state to guarantee law and order and to protect national security. Gilbert claims that these two tasks fall under the same authority in the modern state. Therefore the state can choose to hunt terrorists as criminals by using the law, or as enemies of the state by using the army. Until 9/11, modern states have avoided choosing the latter option because by granting terrorists the status of soldiers they implicitly opened the question of their own legitimacy. Most Marxist groups in Europe and in Latin America attacked the legitimacy of the states they were fighting (e.g. the Red Brigades in Italy claimed that the resistance movements had been aborted by the birth of the Italian Republic and traced back their legitimacy to the revolutionary fight of the Italian partisan movement.) This is not the case for al-Qaeda which is attacking the U.S. only as the backer

of the existing oligarchic regimes of the Muslim world.

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I believe that Paul Gilbert's analysis is still very valuable today. The Bush administration has waged two wars treating 9/11 as a military attack against American national security. Thanks to this classification they have been able to implement their "pre-emptive strike policy." Again we see the modern state avoiding a clear definition of what terrorism really is and instead using the lack of it to mould the phenomenon to its own advantage.

>

The risk is still the same: to fail in understanding what really motivates terrorism. What makes people embrace the armed struggle within a democratic system precludes opening up other, non-violent channels that are available to conduct a political fight. My gut feeling is that any good definition of terrorism will have to admit that in certain circumstances the democratic state has its limitations just as absolute monarchies, dictatorial and totalitarian regimes have theirs. These limitations can apply to domestic as well as foreign policy. In the specific case of the U.S., for example, we see a fully democratic state which has been engaged in backing anti-democratic regimes abroad. In the case of Italy in the 1970s, we witnessed a blocked democracy (no alternate government) where one party had been able to rule the country for thirty years. Finally, we find democracies, such as Israel, engaged in state terrorism activities.

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>From: [Brian Holmes](#)

>Date: Tue, 27 Jan 2004 02:27:48

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I'm a kind of ordinary middle-class Californian guy who was initially interested mostly in literature. It was really the fact of seeing so many newly unemployed, newly homeless people in France where I came to live in the early 1990s that got me to read Marxist economists and philosophers and wonder about the realities of globalization. While becoming a kind of amateur art critic – under the pretense that aesthetic activity might be a kind of miniaturized experimental laboratory for materially changing the world – I also ended up working for a while with a street art group, "Ne pas plier," distributing graphic materials as part of demonstrations. The communist, or rather,

fellow-traveler sort of style of this group increasingly clashed with the style and the positions of the anti-globalization movements, and after trying and sometimes succeeding to bridge the gap it finally came apart sometime around late 2000. I think Genoa was the first big demo I did without handing out thousands of those lovely bits of graphic art. Around that point the “movement of movements” started getting treated in the media as a suspicious, violent, uncontrollable and dangerous force. Coming back from Genoa – where police infiltration in what had happened was so manifest, and where police violence resulted in one dead demonstrator, Carlo Giuliani, the son of an important syndicalist, who can still be remembered – I began to think like so many others about the recent history of Italy, about the “strategy of tension” in the seventies, about the leftist terrorism that subsequently appears to have largely been committed by a kind of paramilitary right which I have never really understood where it came from. So I was thinking about the way that accusations of extremism could be so useful when it comes time to carry out large-scale social repression. In fact I was writing about exactly that on one ordinary day like any other, except that we now know it as September 11... Since then, as civil liberties have eroded in practically every country on earth, I have become part of a journal called *Multitudes*, still in France, where so many Italian leftists had become exiles in the eighties, after being charged with... yes... terrorism. Recently I have also collaborated quite a bit with a group called “Bureau d’Etudes” who – if you want paranoid – basically attempt to do information-maps of what they call “world government,” which is an extremely complex thing. Anyway, not everything changes because I still find myself giving away those graphic maps in the street during demos.

>
 Who blows up buildings, and why? What are the economies of social violence? How does the semantic category of “terrorism,” “terrorist,” get used today? These are now questions which quite ordinary people ask.

>
 To be honest, the overly simplified and schematic idea I’ve been working with over these past two years has been that the gap between global informational integration on the one hand – which allows nearly anyone to see how other classes and national societies live – and the disparities of the global distribution of wealth

on the other, has become so great that violence is inevitable until something is done to equal things out. A sub-hypothesis is that informational integration has allowed for a fairly homogeneous kind of managerial hierarchy – essentially American in origin – to come out as the most profitable one all over the world, thus dispossessing historical cultures of a great deal of their influence on daily life and creating a certain alienation or anomie.

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)
 >Date: Tue, 27 Jan 2004 21:06:01

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To answer Brian’s point, which I find very interesting, I believe that terrorism always reflects the structure of world politics. During the Cold War we saw war by proxy develop into the privatization of terrorism where independently funded Marxist armed groups fought against state sponsored right wing groups and the states which backed them. The Italian experience is quite illuminating because the far right terrorist groups, it was discovered in recent years, had solid links with Gladio, a hidden paramilitary organization which was ready to intervene if and when communism would take over Italy. Today we see the AUC in Colombia, for example, which is an organization fully funded by the capitalist land-owners, who have received help from the U.S. via the Colombian government.

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What has changed today is the nature of the dichotomy, not the dichotomy itself, as we are no longer inside the logic of the Cold War, the issue has become the global distribution of wealth, or better the unequal distribution of wealth. I think the key to understanding contemporary terrorism rests upon this concept.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)
 >Date: Tue, 27 Jan 2004 12:59:28

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As an anthropologist and keen reader of historical sources, I am quite familiar with the need for labeling or “boxing” events and proceedings. We need structures and legislations and manuals teaching us how to deal with life. When Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* it was introduced as a manual in politics and in diplomacy. Until the Renaissance, only the Catholic Church tried to make norms and rules

to control rebellious human nature. The Crusaders were a terrorist army, attacking civilians and burning entire villages. When pope Urban announced the Crusade it was very clear the war was not between equals but between the “God’s chosen part” and the infidel, the “God rejected,” the inhuman. We find the same phenomenon in the New World, where the European conquerors treated the Indians as “non-humans.”

>

Only when your adversary is not like you, you can use against him all the imaginable tools: you can burn him on a stake or impale or starve to death or use whatever you fancy as a method. The terror is a double threat, an objective one and a psychological one. You kill someone, but you kill them in a way which establishes fear among their friends and relatives. Nobody is sure anymore, the terror strikes blind, no place is safe, nobody is spared.

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>From: [Joy Garnett](#)
 >Date: Tue, 27 Jan 2004 12:28:30

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I am a visual artist who is currently immersed in questions of how certain acts and roles are “officially” defined. Not to move away from some of the initial topics put forward for analysis, I do want to interject something regarding the use of images in the media, their use vis-à-vis the act of defining terrorist and/or freedom fighters. I’ve just been working through several projects that entail the decontextualization and re-rendering of images found in the news media – images originally used to designate and define certain states of being and acts. Ubiquitous images. Key words or phrases for them might include: “rogue states,” “terrorists,” “insurgents,” “freedom fighters,” “rabble,” “rioters,” “revolutionaries,” “headbangers,” “guerrillas,” “anarchists,” “demonstrators,” “assassins,” “extremists,” “special forces,” “SWAT teams,” “fundamentalists,” “true believers,” “imperialist forces,” “heroes,” “martyrs,” “suicide bombers”...

>

What interests me is that, a) the original context of the news photograph is lost the moment it has been taken, and certainly once the image has actually been disseminated; and b) once I myself have gone on to strip away any remaining contextualizing elements for my own painterly purposes – from captions to backgrounds to figures to tell-tale uniforms or historical

elements – making any distinction between these keyword categories becomes virtually impossible. One man’s freedom fighter is another man’s terrorist; an enemy of the state is another state’s hero, and so on. Not just the image, but the role itself is fluid. I guess that would be my actual point here: an image can be spun in just about any direction and according to plan, but not just because the image is malleable and can be decontextualized – but because the roles and identities and the movements that we construct are terribly malleable and fluid. What does the insane malleability of the picture tell us?

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>From: [Cyrill Duneau](#)
 >Date: Wed, 28 Jan 2004 03:13:05

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To briefly introduce myself, I am a Caucasian male of 31, and one of these homeless French people that Brian Holmes talks about in his post. Apologies for my sometimes broken English... I am actually living in Dublin, Ireland, in a social hostel – like tortoises carry their homes on their backs, I have carried my homelessness here. I have been involved in art, writing and music for more than 15 years now, and I know “Ne pas plier” from the bookshop that was in front of the block where my sister lived, in Evry, a Parisian suburb. They are maybe amongst the few ones who succeeded in creating a connection between art and low-class people, because they have focused on their audience rather than on their discourse, choosing to address these people in an artistic way – albeit remaining politically committed – rather than documenting their life or giving an account of it for art galleries and/or institutions.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)
 >Date: Thu, 29 Jan 2004 03:37:36

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I wonder about how the civilian societies should deal with “former terrorists.” I mean, for many years, “historical organizations,” as ETA in Spain, IRA in Ireland, FARL in Colombia, and many others, have been involved in terrorist acts against their adversaries. They still recruit new members, many of the original founding members are dead since many years. In countries such as Salvador and Guatemala, where hundreds of thousands right wing and left wing fighters fought against each other, civilian society has, with the support of FN, tried to “re-educate”

these men without any other skill than the soldier skill. Many of the organizations that started out with some kind of legitimacy because the colonial oppression or the unfair division of the land or whatever, have today transformed into militaristic and callous organizations, ruling the “liberated territories” in an authoritarian manner. If we want to avoid the risk of being hostages between military wings of right or left we should learn how to deal with the threat of the “homo terror.”

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Fri, 30 Jan 2004 10:09:03

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Back in 1996, Osama bin Laden owned Gum Arabic Ltd, the company which controlled 80% of supply of Gum Arabic – a product used in soft drinks solution and to fix the ink on newspapers. The U.S. is by far the largest importer of this product. That means that each time someone drank a soda or read a newspaper, they funded al-Qaeda.

>

In my research I have isolated some of the most striking consequences of the joint venture between illegal/terror economy on one side and “Western capitalism” on the other side. The latter feeds on the former by way of the constant flow of cash which gets laundered in the West. Another is the fact that the illegal/terror economy is denominated in U.S. dollars therefore its growth is fed by the U.S. money supply. Every year 2/3 of the stock of new dollars printed by the Federal Reserve, i.e. M1, gets out of the U.S. and never comes back. This money feeds the illegal economy and then finds its way back into the U.S. via the money laundering system. The implications are enormous. For example, the U.S. Treasury can borrow against a yearly money supply of \$500 billion, however, the real domestic demand for dollars inside the U.S. is only 1/3 of such figure, the treasury is borrowing the remaining 2/3 from the demand for dollar of the illegal/terror economy. The interdependencies between these two economic systems which feed two dichotomous entities (the West and the terror/criminal system) are so deeply rooted that they need each other to survive or at least to avoid huge crises (imagine what would happen if one takes \$1.5 trillion out of the Western economy). To find a solution to the present use of violence in economics and in politics we’ve got to be imaginative and re-invent our foreign policy.

This brings me to Ana’s interesting comment, regarding the real forces behind the Islamic insurgency. Is it really religion that drives such a phenomenal economic system or is religion just a cover-up, the ideological umbrella under which an even more extraordinary alliance has taken place? In my book, I have drawn a parallel with the Christian Crusades. I have shown that the Crusades were indeed wars of economic liberation disguised as wars of religion. The real forces which drove and funded the Crusades were merchants, bankers, and traders from Europe who wanted to end the economic dependency from Islam. At that time Islam was the sole superpower, it exercised a strong economic hegemony over the Mediterranean basin. To legitimize such insurgency, the emerging European middle class forged an alliance with the Church, pope Urban II offered the religious umbrella under which the third, essential party was brought in, the starving populations of north-western Europe. A thousand years ago, as today, the unemployed, dissatisfied populations of the colonized world rebel against the sole superpower. The real motives are economic, the official ones are ideological and religious. Osama bin Laden uses the same rhetoric as Urban II, he has the same backers and is fighting a similar war.

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How do we move forward? I believe that accepting this new scenario will lead to a revision of foreign policy. The West cannot defeat the new Islamic Crusades and Saladin and Islam could not defeat the Crusaders, no empire in history lasts for ever, there is no reason why the present one should. If we want to avoid being destroyed (eventually it will happen) we must establish links with the real economic forces which are backing the Islamic insurgency. Diplomacy is the sole tool which can defeat the economics and politics of violence. War will only increase this violence.

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>From: [Brian Holmes](#)

>Date: Sat, 31 Jan 2004 14:28:42

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One question I have concerns the sociological profile of those classes which have an economic interest in attacking the current hierarchies of the globalized economy. Because to simply “imagine” who they are, what their motives are, as I do, is hardly enough for engaging in the kind of diplomacy you are speaking about.

I recently had the quite interesting job of proofreading a number of texts by Iranian sociologists written for a Farsi/English magazine called *Pages*, whose first issue is being produced with the support of Witte de With. Here we are dealing with the opposite situation from Saudi and Pakistan: a country where the civil war has taken place, and resulted in the installation of a very different kind of regime. What struck me was that these sociologists seemed to presuppose that the Iranian revolution was necessary, not only or even primarily to redistribute the wealth, but rather because the Shah’s modernization programs, with their “open gateway” to cultural westernization, placed too much stress on the internal balances of Iranian society, in terms of rapid changes in mores, customs, familial and social relations, et cetera. So these sociologists tended to see the initial promise of a renewed socio-cultural balance in the partial re-Islamization of society, which was then betrayed by an excessive rigidity and violence of application, but which could perhaps find a new and healthier interpretation, as evidenced by two periods when the regime more or less had to “loosen up:” one in the early nineties and one right now. From this angle, the “dual society” appears as limited to the private apartment, where a middle-class woman sheds her hijab and joins the party or just sits down to watch satellite TV with everyone else. This last being (if I’ve correctly understood) an illegal activity, despite the fact that the satellite dishes are everywhere on the outsides of the buildings – and not only in the wealthier quarters.

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That optimistic old phrase, “Think global, act local” probably takes on a whole new meaning as one gets ready to leave the Tehran apartment and goes back out into the Islamized public space. As, indeed, the counter-globalization movement’s tongue-in-cheek phrase, “Think local, act global” took on a whole new meaning when the Twin Towers went down.

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Our cultural diplomacy is maybe even less advanced than the economic variety.

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>A: DIVISION.

>From: [Amir Parsa](#)

>Date: Mon, 02 Feb 2004 01:41:00

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Then, among the weary and the wicked, among the forlorn and the lost, on street corners of this and other worlds, in this city and this city and this city, under the awning of a lonely tavern, in a dark alley, in the busy bazaars of real and imaginary worlds and along the highways of blue red orange horizons: the wanderers, the poets, the liars and the thieves, the cheats and the honest tale-tellers, revolutionaries, lusty lovers and punks and thugs and charlatans, gold seekers and power-seekers, disillusioned duds and drunks, white-collar workers and blue collar workers and red collar rebels, dirty dancers and chanters and whirlers and prophets and preachers and pundits and politicians of every ilk, in a courtyard, on the dais, on their dishwasher liquid boxes, solitary walkers and sullen soldiers, believers and unbelievers and disbelievers, all the named and the unnamed, all the tamed and the untamed, in all their other worlds, being in other worlds, fashioning other worlds, dreaming other worlds, in all the other worlds.

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Friends! Colleagues! Fellow wayfarers and travelers! Fellow troubadours and vagabonds! There is no "Islamic world!" And there is, of course, no "West" – unless it's meant to depict a direction (geographic, at that). Most dichotomies being simplistic portrayals of much more complex phenomena and divisions, this one is particularly perturbing. This generalized concoction completely denies the vast complexes of individualities, subjectivities, communities, each with layers upon layers of differences and complexity and ambiguity within their own fabric, that exist and operate within all the strata of the "world;" and that are, more importantly, the very engines, guides and machines behind actual actions and creations (of guns or ideas).

>

The dichotomy also denies the actual systematic differences – economic, social, linguistic, cultural, belief systems and modes of life et cetera – that exist within all these societies. The existence of these profound differences, not to mention conflicts and struggles within each, undermine the very organic unity those terms (West/Islamic world) assume. Battles, wars, disagreements, alliances, movements, changes, cultural and linguistic and political and economic shifts, vast destructions of peoples and places that have occurred in any one geographical area are in one swoop dismissed in a stunning acquiescence to the simplistic and purposely political motivation of current rulers to attempt their invention of a reality.

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It would appear that the terms are only portrayals of existing dynamics and objects of study and discussion at university departments, by “experts,” in government circles, in magazines and newspapers and journals et cetera, whereas in fact, they are in large part inventions of those same agencies: governments, universities, even cultural entities such as galleries, museums and various types of organizations. Wide-ranging categories are necessary of course to allow for research, for shows, for funding, for audiences, for participations and forums and discussions (such as this one). Whence the incredible disparity between the supposed portrayals and the totally uncooperative realities: the models (West, Muslim society, Islamic world), crave, need, presume uniformity and actual legitimacy of the concepts and the frameworks presented, but the world (again, no adjective), with its multitude of individuals and groups and their endless complexities, in blatant defiance, just refuses to go along with the farce.

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The discourse in some quarters attributed to be “of Muslims” or “Middle Easterners” is intertwined with and co-dependent on concepts, conceptual frameworks, paradigms, perspectives, modes and methods and manners referred to in some circles as “Western” or “of modernity” or “post-something something.” The level and degree of human and conceptual interaction, the actual possibilities of communication and technology (and not just the hyper modern ones), the very processes that put peoples in touch with the concepts and ideologies and frameworks of other peoples, the actual adaptation, translations, trans-adaptations, interpretations of works in all directions makes for various degrees of conceptual cross-breeding that simply eliminated any possibility of dichotomization. The very conception of “Islam” and the later formulations of ideologues and theologues (and not theologians) are, to bring the absurdity all the way around, in some measure founded on prior impressions and inventions of old orientalists, travel-writers, or those otherwise “fascinated” with the “Orient.” Even today, many books on the shelves on Shi’ite Islam, on the history of Islam, on struggles et cetera, in certain regions some commonly refer to as the Middle East are actually translations of primary works done in English, French and German.

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To a large degree, the very discourse of the social sciences itself is incapable of giving an accurate portrait of the complex range of emotions and ideas and attachments and instincts (survival, power) that go into the creation of ideologies and action. I did not mean the opening paragraph to serve as some dreamy weave version of reality. Rather, the analytical discourses – transparent, un-figurative, trusting

in concepts and their stringing along in linguistic phrases – are simply not sufficient nor efficient in portraying the array of actions of humans with all their illogic, randomness, irrationality, uncertainty, and wildness that our species is fond of. Those scriptural interventions and itineraries are more accurate that include in their unfurling the layer upon layer of ambiguities that exist; those works that involve stylistic and linguistic manipulations in order to portray through the experience of the audience the very complexities they are discerning; those works that attempt to create different understandings of the world, the phenomena and the relationships between humans and their surroundings – specifically because they recognize their ultimate insufficiency.

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More importantly, the acquiescence to this dichotomy (West/Islamic world), and the activation of a discussion within this conceptual framework, in and of themselves constitute a surrendering to the aims of the war machines. The organization of war and subsequent actions and representations are dependent upon, and later rendered through, these prior linguistic and conceptual representations; the war machines need these dichotomies, and modalities of actual warfare are set up within this framework. These representations later get “confirmation” through various types of manipulations by the media that are in fact set up and designed to indeed confirm. They are, again, fashioning the reality, constructing the dualities, inventing the camps, the groups, the battles. Both self-defined sides in the dichotomy profit: financially, ideologically, organizationally – and multiple organs of resistance, or just plain folks who want to have nothing to do with any “side” or their faulty boundaries, are rendered voiceless and powerless.

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The adjectivization and directionification of peoples and subjectivities and societies imposes what amounts to a form of conceptual violence: imposing identities, creating notions of belonging and loyalty that can then be manipulated and exploited any which way (from hero-ification to martyrdom, to heretic, blasphemer or traitor-ifications, along with the appropriate punishments or rewards!). In one direction, citizens and constituents generalize and acquiesce to the vast single reference and lump everyone in one massive category (America, the Middle East) while in the other direction (their own homes), they dissect and divulge every motive, detail, subtlety, every underlying economic, political, personal agenda of “leaders” and parties and politics: again, convenient for the actions of their “governments.”

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Overall, the conditions are created for limited possibilities of interactions, discourses based upon faulty boundaries and divisions, generalized categories that caricature the subtleties and complexities that are at the root of phenomena, exchanges that proliferate layer upon layer of unsatisfactory portrayals of realities while creating others profitable to their agendas: all of which in the end are perfectly suited to the aims and the desires of not just one war machine, but all the war machines.

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The use of what are not even really paradigms but flawed frameworks might prevent a more wide-ranging understanding of the forces at work. It would be interesting to delve into how the very fashioning of reality, the very invention of the specific terms of the discourse and the

categories and concepts of representation, the very conditions created for exchange and interaction, are part of the structure of the possibility of warfare.

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>2.
>THE PRIVATIZATION
>OF THE MILITARY, THE
>CHANGING ROLE OF
>THE STATE, AND THE
>INCONSISTENCIES OF
>MEDIA ATTENTION.

>From: [Peter Singer](#)

>Date: Mon, 02 Feb 2004 09:37:21

>

I would like to present a brief introduction of a new and unique business-form, the Privatized Military Firm (PMF). I think it is not only fascinating but has some serious implications for security, politics, and economics.

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PMFs are defined as "business providers of professional services intricately linked to warfare." They are corporate bodies that specialize in the provision of military skills, conducting tactical combat operations, strategic planning, intelligence, operational and logistics support, troop training, technical assistance, et cetera. The companies within this field embody an industry that represents a profound development in the manner that security is both conceived and realized. With the rise of this "privatized military industry," actors in the global system can now access capabilities that extend across the entire spectrum of military activities, simply by writing a check.

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The activity and impact of the privatized military industry is quite under-realized. In the last decade, such firms have been active in zones of conflict and transition across the entire globe, from Albania to Zambia, often determining the very outcome of conflicts. They have worked in relative backwaters, like East Timor and Sierra Leone, key strategic zones where the superpowers once vied for influence, such as former Yugoslavia and the Persian Gulf, and in rich and poor states alike from Congo Brazzaville to Saudi Arabia.

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The U.S. military is one of this industry's biggest clients. The reliance of the U.S. military on this industry is driven by changes in the market after the end of the Cold War. It has boomed in the midst of the mass military downsizing (a shift in supply) and the concurrent increasing demands of new deployments, more technical requirements in the RMA [Revolution in Military Affairs], and the underlying popularity of privatization as the new best practice of government. Right now, the U.S. military does not even contemplate a major operation without a role of PMFs.

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Indeed, if any operation should have been a purely military one, it would have been the response of the United States to September 11th.

The military enjoyed broad support among the American public and any previous concerns about casualties were set aside. However, private employees still played a variety of roles in war in Afghanistan. They deployed with U.S. forces on the ground (including serving in the CIA paramilitary units that fought alongside our Afghan allies), maintained combat equipment, provided logistical support, and routinely flew on joint surveillance and targeting aircraft. Even the noted Global Hawk unmanned surveillance planes were actually operated by private employees.

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In the follow-on anti-terrorism operations around the globe, PMFs played similar wide ranging roles. The new operations in the Philippines have Dyncorp working on logistics, while other members of the firm are playing a more "active" role in operations in Colombia. Likewise, when the U.S. deployed a military training contingent to the former Soviet republic of Georgia, to help root out radical Muslim terrorists, the majority of the team was actually staffed by PMF employees.

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Perhaps no example better illustrates the industry's growing activity than the recent war against Iraq. Private military employees handled everything from feeding and housing U.S. troops to maintaining sophisticated weapons systems like the B-2 stealth bomber, the F-117 stealth fighter, Global Hawk UAV, U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, and numerous navy ships. Indeed, the ratio of private contractors to U.S. military personnel in the Gulf was roughly 1 to 10 (10 times the ratio during the 1991 war). Our allies, including the Brits and Australians, also depend heavily on contracted support. The *Economist* magazine even termed the conflict "the first privatized war." Private firms play similar roles in the ensuing occupation period. One example is the controversial Dyncorp firm, whose employees were implicated in the sex and arms trade in the Balkans, being hired to train the post-Saddam police force. Other firms, such as Vinnell, whose offices in Saudi Arabia were bombed by al-Qaeda in May, are helping to rebuild the Iraqi Army, while other firms such as the South African Erinys are building up the new Iraqi paramilitary forces. Indeed, NBC News described private security as the "fastest growing industry in Iraq." This of course doesn't include the over \$2 billion that Halliburton, which many of you may be familiar with as Dick Cheney's old firm, has made on Iraq contracts.

In fact, the PMF industry was one of the few for whom the economic outlook was improved, rather than harmed by the September 11th attacks. While the rest of the U.S. and then global economy sunk into doldrums from the shock, the prices of those in the industry listed on stock exchanges jumped roughly 50% in value, with L-3 (parent firm of Military Professional Resources Incorporated, MPRI) even doubling. A number of new firms were even launched in the aftermath of the attacks, hoping to tap the market. One example is Janusian, a British venture that seeks to provide protection and intelligence against terrorist attacks.

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The general point is that this industry is both significant and growing, despite the fact that few people have even heard of it. The privatized military industry has an estimated \$100 billion in annual global revenue and is made up of several hundred firms located around the globe. In fact, with the recent purchase of MPRI by a Fortune-500 firm, L-3, many in the public already unknowingly own slices of the industry in their stock portfolios.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Tue, 03 Feb 2004 17:23:39

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I was in South America a month ago, in my native country Uruguay, where many of the old military officers are now organizing private enterprises to guarantee the security of Corporate Executive Officers of multinational companies and banks. Oliver North was in the region and closed deals with freelance military in both Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. He is in the private security market now and offered his know-how and his close contacts with American enterprises eager to provide Latin Americans with new weapons and surveillance technology. I visited Central America some years ago and had conversations with several NGOs [non-governmental organizations] working with former soldiers, both left wing guerillas and right wing paramilitary groups, heavily funded by the United States. Now they were all unemployed and the civil society had deep difficulties dealing with all those men without any skills except military skills.

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>From: [Gena Gbenga](#)

>Date: Mon, 02 Feb 2004 22:00:19

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Peter, you have mentioned elsewhere that, for the first time in the history of the modern nation state, governments are surrendering one of the essential and defining attributes of statehood, the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. I am wondering if you could talk a bit about what you see as the long-term repercussions of this shift.

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I'm also wondering about how these corporations align with nation states. If they originate in many Western countries but operate as transnational players, do we have to begin to see them not so much as U.S. or U.K. companies but as emergent global forces that are becoming divorced from state and political controls?

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And finally, because the economic outlook has been so bright for private military firms, as you mentioned, could one speculate that these firms have a vested interest in generating and sustaining war for its own sake?

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>From: [Peter Singer](#)

>Date: Tue, 03 Feb 2004 09:52:42

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My own belief is that with the continued growth and activity of the global military services industry, the start of the twenty-first century is seeing the Weberian monopoly of the state on the forms of violence slowly break down. I have to be clear though. My assertion is not that the state is disappearing, for in many areas the power of these firms has been utilized as much in support of regime interests as against them. However, just as it has been in other areas such as trade and finance, the state's role in the security sphere has now become de-privileged. There is a growing reliance by individuals, corporations, states, and international organizations on military services supplied not by public institutions, but by the private market.

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Before I go a bit deeper into those implications, I think it would be helpful to lay out the variance in the industry. The type of firms in turn helps determine the variance in their impact on statehood, role as independent players, and likelihood of going "rogue" and working for either bad forces or sustaining war.

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The importance of this is that, often ignored by

the pundits, while there is an overall industry, all the military service firms do not look alike, nor do they serve the same market. The little previous research and writing on the topic has been primarily descriptive, mostly biased (that is written with an underlying agenda to extol or condemn the firms), and definitely non-theoretic.

>
The solution to this dilemma of how to find any significant variation in the industry turned out to be to accept the duality, which is at the very nature of the privatized military industry. At its base level, the industry is driven by military and economic fundamentals. Thus, in order to understand the varied market sectors of the privatized military industry and their varied operations, structures, and implications, I leveraged corollaries that I found both in business economics and military organization.

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The essential organization of the industry is by the range of services and level of force that a firm is able to offer. The useful analogy from military thought is the “tip of the spear” metaphor, where units within the armed forces are distinguishable (in level of impact, training, prestige, et cetera) by their location in the battlespace. Importantly, this categorization is also correlated to how business chains in the overall outsourcing industry break down, thus allowing useful crossfield parallels and lessons to be drawn. The PMF industry breaks down into three types:

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Military provider firms, also known as private military companies, offer services at the forefront of the battlespace. That is, their employees engage in actual fighting. The parallel from the regular business world are sales brokers and quick fill contractors. Examples include Sandline, Airscan, and certain Dyncorp contracts.

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Military consultant firms provide combat and strategic advisory and training services. The parallel are management consultants with similar intra-sector breakdown between those that do strategic analysis and those that do more mundane training and technical consulting. The classic example is MPRI.

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Military support firms, akin to supply chain management firms, provide rear-echelon services, such as logistics, technical support, and transportation. The classic example is Brown and Root Services, within Dick Cheney’s old Halliburton firm.

Now, the emergence of the privatized military industry will influence international and regional security in a number of quite graphic and unexpected ways. Taken together, they suggest that in certain situations the hire of private firms may increase the difficulties of managing peace. In others, their presence may dampen threats or help make the process of keeping the peace a more efficient task. Firm type and the relationship between principal and agent are critical factors.

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The impact of the privatized military industry falls under three broad areas: 1) the introduction of business contractual dilemmas into the security sphere; 2) the possibility of market disruptions on international security and human rights; and 3) the increased impact of alternative military actors on policymaking.

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The overall issue is one of divided loyalties and goals. Clear tensions exist between the security goals of clients versus the firm’s aims of profit maximization. One of the fundamental questions surrounding the industry is whether the public good and private companies’ goods are identical. The firms may claim that they would only act in their client’s best interests, but the key is that the locus of judgment in determining this interest and how best to fill it has moved from government to business. Sometimes it works great and you get better price and better quality from a good corporate citizen and sometimes it doesn’t. To put it another way, in any industry, you are going to have both Ben and Jerry’s and Enron’s.

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A difficulty with PMFs is that clients must find a way to lock in the provision of services critical to their own survival, without destroying the efficiency of a competitive market. All the normal worries you have with regular outsourcing and contracting, such as the companies overcharging, overbilling hours, providing insufficiently trained personnel, quality assurance issues, et cetera, still apply, and indeed have been found to be the case in a number of past PMF contracts. One example are Dyncorp’s contracts in the Balkans where it not only had employees participating in sex crimes, but also had former security guards and waiters working as mechanics on U.S. army helicopters. But each of these issues are further heightened when it is taking place in the fog of war.

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This problem is raised further when you add in the fact that oversight over the PMF industry is

incredibly poor to begin with, to the extent that the Pentagon right now does not even know exactly how many civilian contractors it has working for it in the Gulf region. Additionally few of the contracts have sufficient bidding processes but are automatically granted to a limited set of politically connected firms. An example here is the concern with Halliburton’s contract to feed support U.S. troops in the field. In a no-bid process, this contract was expanded to include oil well fire fighting and then repairing and then running the entire Iraqi oil system. This means that the government ends up destroying the potential of privatization. Instead of market competition that would give it the best deal, it acts to create a monopoly that overcharges it.

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The second area where PMFs impact security is driven by the fact that businesses are once again relevant actors in the military sphere. Now corporate actors might have strategic relevance in both political calculations and the final outcomes of conflict. At the same time, they operate within a very real market, with all its dynamic shifts and uncertainties.

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While states can benefit from hiring such businesses, and more easily translate wealth into military power (and thus threat), this industry is also an independent, globalized supplier, which operates outside any one state’s domain. Thus, non-state actors, from rogue forces like rebel groups, drug cartels, and terrorists, to MNCs, aid groups, and peace-keeping operations, have now all accessed formerly state military capabilities. One of the big areas of debate in the industry is the possibility of privatizing peacekeeping missions.

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PMF presence also influences human rights behavior in conflict zones where they are present. Basically, marketization creates dueling normative influences for the firms and their personnel. On one hand they have an incentive to be good corporate citizens, but on the other hand they have an interest in getting a job done, no matter what, and keeping quiet any mistakes or incidents that might not sell well.

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Sometimes this can lead to tragic occurrences, such as the mistaken bombing of a Colombian village in 1998, which was coordinated by the Airscan firm, or the accidental shutdown of a plane full of U.S. missionaries in Peru last year, coordinated by the Aviation Development Corp.

The third area is that the industry also introduces the policy impact of alternative military agents. While foreign and military affairs are generally understood to be a state domain, PMFs provide for the possibility of policy by private means. With third party entrance into governance, however, come a number of potential complications.

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These include PMFs impacting on civil-military relations between local soldiers and their regime, such as what led to an army mutiny in Papua New Guinea or being used as a way for the executive branch to get around limits placed on it by the public or other parts of government, such as what has been going on with U.S. policy in Colombia. An example of relevance here is the crash of a California Microwave System plane in Colombia last spring. CMS was carrying out military surveillance and intelligence gathering on the FARC rebels. One of their planes crashed, many say because the company skimped on a cheaper model, and three of the employees are now held captive by the rebels. The irony is that lesser paid U.S. military forces are now out there hunting for these men, who were originally contracted so that U.S. forces would not go into harm’s way.

>
So, the concept of private firms being military players sounds like something right out of a Hollywood movie. But in reality, the privatized military industry is a fact of the new global security system and merits our attention. It raises both possibilities and perils. International and national laws must be updated to account for the behavior of businesses in war and in particular control who they are allowed to work with. This is the way to solve the concerns you raise. Likewise, if governments are going to become clients of PMFs, then they must become more business-savvy in their approach, establishing good competition and oversight in their outsourcing. This is the way to solve all the problems with Halliburton that have been raised in the press the last few weeks (overbilling, charges of bribery, et cetera). In sum, being smarter regulators and clients is the only way to ensure that the public, not just the industry, gets the profits of privatization.

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>From: [Maria](#)

>Date: Tue, 03 Feb 2004 06:25:42

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I am writing from Colombia, and I have a point of criticism in regard to this project. I think it is a great and important initiative but as a person living in Colombia there is for me, a frustrating aspect to it. The discussion is exclusively related to the war between the West and the Middle East. I understand that this war has more potential to become extremely dangerous for the entire world community than wars occurring in other parts of the world, yet I think that analyzing U.S. involvement in wars in all countries would help us to understand in greater depth how the U.S. maneuvers and that they are not aiming only at "Muslim evil fundamentalists" – which some may see now as an adequate excuse for their actions.

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The war in Colombia, for example, is heavily funded by the United States and is particularly gruesome yet receives no media. It is a drawn out slow war that is kept quiet, so it is very adequate that no one, not even the artistic community, takes note of it but instead keeps concentrated on the Middle East.

>

I think that Colombians would rather be living a highly publicized war than what exists today. When a war is mediatized:

- Human rights can't be infringed upon to such an extent as occurs in Colombia.
- Survivors and displaced people receive food donations from the First World, which does not occur in Colombia.
- Cities and towns are reconstructed which does not occur in Colombia.
- The fact that thousand year old indigenous cultures are being dismantled every year – by capturing of their territories and the killing of their spiritual leaders – appalls westerners, who start campaigns. Instead of "save the whales" we have "save the Kofan" or "save the Kankuamos" (35% of the Kankuamo population was murdered last year alone).

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But outside of Colombia few know that this ethnocide is occurring. NO MEDIA. Why is there such a war in Colombia? Why is it so quiet? Why is it the country where most journalists are killed per year? Why is the U.S. so deeply involved? What are the business deals that are being made? Perhaps it is the same as in the Middle East.

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>From: [Brian Holmes](#)

>Date: Tue, 03 Feb 2004 18:27:03

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Peter, aren't there inherent dangers in the expansion of mercenary armies that can't be resolved by better regulation? Let us take the Columbian tragedy of which Maria has written. Here we have what is essentially a covert war, attracting almost no media attention. You note on exactly this subject:

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"An example of relevance here is the crash of a California Microwave system plane in Colombia last spring. CMS was carrying out military surveillance and intelligence gathering on the FARC rebels. One of their planes crashed, many say because the company skimped on a cheaper model, and three of the employees are now held captive by the rebels. The irony is now that lesser paid U.S. military forces are now out there hunting for these men, who were originally contracted so that U.S. forces wouldn't go into harm's way."

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What if the U.S. just hired freelance South African guns to do their surveillance? Then no one (in the U.S. I mean) would care if they went down. Columbian villagers could go on being crop-dusted by Dyncorp indefinitely, and the FARC's could be brushed aside so that "peaceful" corps could get into the depopulated areas, there's of course oil and other resources there, which would be profitable to the public...

>

I find it difficult to be so pragmatic about mercenaries at a moment when the tolerance for war seems to be rising so quickly in the U.S. I know that you are faced with this question constantly, but it's essential and unavoidable.

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>From: [Hamid Dabashi](#)

>Date: Tue, 03 Feb 2004 17:21:51

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I believe that unless and until we have a global conception of the massive violence that the U.S. empire is perpetrating around the globe it is impossible to have a clear conception of it. Two factors work against this global awareness: the domination of the U.S. media in news production around the world, thus selecting certain areas and disregarding others, and the nature of the U.S. domestic politics that feeds on systematic historic and geographic amnesia. People in Asia only know about Asian consequences, in Latin

America about Latin American consequences, in Africa about African consequences. The mercenary function of both U.S. and European social sciences has become (either by commission or omission – makes no difference) to chase after concepts and categories (terrorism, fundamentalism, Islamism, et cetera) manufactured by the U.S. military and propaganda machinery, completely forgetting that these are the precise functional equivalents of communism, Marxism, et cetera. Nobody now remembers that president Reagan brought the representatives of Taliban to the White House and in front of a whole brigade of soon to be embedded journalists called them "the functional equivalents of our founding fathers." Nor do people remember that Taliban were created by the Pakistani intelligence on behalf of the U.S. strategic designs and financed by the Saudis, first to expel the Soviets and second to use its Sunni-provenance to combat the revolutionary spread of Iranian Shi'ite-inspired revolution in the region.

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In short, neither historically nor geographically is a critical intelligence at work to have a clear conception of the U.S. global designs.

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>From: [Harel Shapira](#)

>Date: Tue, 03 Feb 2004 23:26:07

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While it is important to consider America, its interventions and effects, more broadly, this endeavor is a precarious one. On the one hand to understand the global ramifications and imperial permutations of the U.S.A. is important, but this effort also falls on the danger of performing the American empire. Empire means here a conceptual imperialism, and this is part of what we need to talk about when we assault dichotomies of West/Islam. It is not just the dichotomy but the claim that we can locate its author. When Bush et al. come on and claim that they are executing a war like never before, one that has no historic precedent, in its violence (shock & awe & precision) and its ideology (freedom & liberation) this is a claim to history making. On the one hand, we have American amnesia, and on the other, we have America's sense of history making. Perhaps part of the effort then is precisely to banalize America so as to make it maintain its past?

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Wed, 04 Feb 2004 10:42:55

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People have a short memory, especially in politics. However, it is the responsibility of the media to make sure people remember what has happened in the past and I am afraid this is not happening today. In the West and in the East we see a major breakdown in media coverage, only certain news items are actually broadcast. Large Western corporations own media conglomerates and de facto control the information we receive. Globalization worked very well for Western capitalism and for the terror economy but failed to bring about global awareness.

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>From: [Nik](#)

>Date: Wed, 04 Feb 2004 11:52:24

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The interesting thing about Colombia is that the war is almost a perfect example of the failure of modern counter-insurgency wars (which would seem to me to be the staple of modern warfare, both in reality and in theory, as opposed to cold war thinking which had it only as the reality). The conflict is a resource war in the most basic sense (not only for oil, drugs, minerals, but also for strategic position in a volatile area in the Americas), yet even with massive amounts of U.S. aid, the various insurgent forces (Los FARC, ELN, et cetera), indigenous groups, and various independent Afro-Colombian communities have not been wiped out or defeated (the near complete destruction of a non-armed resistance amongst the population on the other hand has been a resounding success). But it's a perfect failure for other reasons as well. Perfect, because it illustrates the role that mercenaries play in such conflicts – organizations that perform limited but specialist services (like some kind of temp agency for fighting a countries own population. It could also possibly be argued that using "foreign forces" to fight counter-insurgency wars is politically unviable and militarily unviable vis-à-vis campaigns for "hearts and minds"). And perfect because it illustrates the continuing militarization of the police and their "mercenary" adjuncts (security forces, "bodyguards" that double as assassins, right-wing paramilitaries) that comes with fighting your own population and destroying social resistance. I think that any discussion of mercenaries must encompass the role and

changing nature of “police-like” mercenaries, both in the South, and in the “periphery that has moved to the center” in the North (as far as I can recall, private security firms have been exploding in number over the last decade, and civilian surveillance services have as well).

>
Perhaps I'm over-generalizing here, but it seems to me that there is increasing convergence between military forces, police forces, and various private security firms. To this list I would add border “protection” forces as well. Is it my imagination or are we seeing the growth of integrated counter-insurgency forces, directed both at countries own populations as much as they are directed at neo-colonies and resource rich areas?

>
If that is true, then regulation would serve no purpose (except perhaps to provide a public relations solution vis-à-vis legitimizing government wars against whole populations). And if ever the regulation got in the way, governments would either employ a third country (as the U.S. does now for torture), change the regulations, or declare a state of emergency and suspend the rules. Which exist at the whim of the rulers in any case.

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)
>Date: Wed, 04 Feb 2004 02:06:00

>
In South America, I have encountered several shell-states, these are pseudo-states where armed organizations provide the socio-economic infrastructure of the state without the core, the right of self-determination. The Despaje was one of those. The shell-state aim is to fund the war economy of the group which controls it. Colombia today has been carved into several shell-states. The U.S. is heavily involved in funding the AUC so it is very much part of the economy of the shell-state. We should pay a lot of attention to Colombia because what is taking place in Afghanistan and Iraq is similar. These countries are being carved into shell-states.

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>
>From: [David Young](#)
>Date: Wed, 04 Feb 2004 15:02:28

>
I find the economic model of terrorism unsatisfying if it's left to itself. I'm not for a moment suggesting that there is no economic dimension to the current conflicts – there must

be – but I do believe that our understanding of the roots of organized violence has to be more systemic (i.e. as other contributors have argued, an irreducible web of economic, social, political and cultural dynamics). Purely economic explanations are no more satisfying than purely social explanations (they both end up in conspiracy land, with one “side” or the “other” achieving the status of the “non-we” (i.e. we have no identity – we're just “not them”).

>
Being an Australian makes it all even more problematic. Our own deputy sheriff, John Howard, has led us into Iraq, and to a refugee policy which is amongst the most mendacious in the world. On the other hand, we live next to what is by far the largest Islamic Nation in the world, Indonesia, which is itself a prime example of the heterogeneity that lurks behind the homogeneous category “Islamic.” Indonesia is an extremely complex nation, with political parties that range from the secular, to the fundamentalist. It also has a Hindu state (Bali) nestled within it – and more Balinese have been killed by Jamah Islamia than by all Australians/British and other “westerners” combined (Australia is, of course, part of the South and the East, geographically). Like Saudi Arabia, Indonesia is a country in which the ruling class expropriates property at will, but from time to time, because Indonesia is not an autarchy, relatives of the president do get arrested and incarcerated. Governments do change.

>
In addition, Indonesia has been waging highly repressive colonialist campaigns in Aceh, West Irian (Papua) and Sumatra. None of these colonial wars makes it to the headlines. Why? Because reporters are, by and large, kept completely out of the war zones, and it's been a long standing practice by both the U.S. and Australia to ignore such campaigns. The only time this tradition was broken was in West Timor and, even then, our Mr. Howard had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the fray (unlike his behavior with respect to Iraq!). In all these cases we have an Islamic nation pouring people from its overpopulated heartlands into areas which have traditionally been non-Muslim and/or non-Javanese thereby causing endemic conflict (even in Bali, if you know the language at all, you soon get a picture of massive resentment against Indonesian/Islamic economic and religious expansionism). In this respect, Islamic victims of Western and Israeli

expansionism have received far more international support and press coverage than have the victims of Indonesian nationalistic and Islamic expansionism. As a consequence, they are suffering in ways that we are simply unable to grasp. Kopasses gets away with the most egregious forms of terrorism and, frankly, even in Australia we get more coverage about U.S. colonial campaigns (often by proxy) in places like Columbia, Venezuela and the Middle East than we do about what's going on in our own back yard.

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>
>From: [Doug Brooks](#)
>Date: Wed, 04 Feb 2004 09:22:27

>
I agree with much of what Peter Singer highlights and many of his concerns but I come from a very different perspective, peacekeeping, and perhaps can offer a bit of on ground realities to support, or perhaps challenge some of Singer's assumptions and theories.

>
Before I continue, I should provide fair disclosure: I am an unabashed advocate for the use of private companies to support internationally mandated peace and stability operations, and I came to this position in the interests of humanitarianism.

>
In 1999-2000 I was an academic fellow at the South African Institute for International Affairs where I researched private military companies, peace operations and peacekeeping. After a number of research trips to Sierra Leone and other places, I came to the conclusion that the West has largely abrogated its responsibility to actively participate in international peace operations, leaving the most difficult military operations imaginable to militaries from the world's poorest countries – with catastrophic humanitarian results. And we then blame the U.N. for what is in reality a failure of the West. On the other hand, in some peace operations a small number of private companies were providing critical services that essentially underpinned these “Westernless” operations, providing some possibility for eventual success. In that light, I formed an NGO in 2001, the non-profit International Peace Operations Association in order to advocate specifically for the greater utilization of the private sector to enhance international peace operations.

>

As one can imagine, a private peacekeeping concept raises eyebrows – and on this discussion list I may be something of a “chicken in a fox house,” but today we have a situation that is so bad we must look at innovative ways to vastly improve the international system. The harsh reality of peacekeeping today means that millions of people are dying in “non-strategic” countries as a result of ineffective international peace operations. At one point, 3000 people were dying *every day* in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to that ongoing war, and this was despite an authorized U.N. peace operation. Can private, for profit companies make such peace operations more effective? Yes they can, and we have good examples of their abilities to do exactly that in the past. Can we be sure these companies will do what we want? Yes, we can – legally, contractually and even ethically. Many of the more strenuous objections and concerns raised by critics ignore the private sector perspective. In fact we find it is private companies that have been calling for better regulations long before the academic community climbed on the band wagon. Companies have more incentives and logical reasons to ensure proper behavior – and they have far better humanitarian records – than state militaries.

>
When it comes to theory, Singer has done some interesting work. Nevertheless, it is too easy to sensationalize these companies when their real influence has far more to do with cost-effectiveness and quality and far less to do with regime change, challenging the role of the state military, or undermining U.S. policy.

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> 3.
> POLITICAL
> ORGANIZATIONS,
> DEMOCRACY,
> AND VIOLENCE.

>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Wed, 11 Feb 2004 00:50:36

>

When I wrote about my experiences in Gaza and my conversations with people engaged in the different fractions of the Palestine struggle I was referring to a trip I made in March 2003. I made the trip together with some Swedish colleagues, the visual artists Cecilia Parsberg and Erik Pauser, and Torbjörn Johansson, the head of the Tools Studio at the Interactive Institute, in Umeå (see <http://this.is/TheWall>).

>

Cecilia and Erik and Torbjörn were in Rafah, they met briefly with the American activist Rachel Corrie, who was murdered some days later. They made two short films about their stay in Rafah. I went with some Italian peace activists to a little rural village, al-Qarara, near Khan Younis, one hour from Rafah. I had conversations with local leaders for the People's Party (the new name of the old Communist Party) and we celebrated together the Women's Day in the village community house. I met some Hamas people as well, some of them were part of the political wing and some of them hinted they were in the military wing, but they lacked all the attributes we, westerners, normally relate to Hamas fighters. They didn't wear masks and they didn't carry any visible weapons. They had been in jail. My experience from Gaza and Jenin, where we were last year (see <http://this.is/Jenin>), is that almost all the men and a large part of women spent some time in jail, from some months to several years. We compared their experiences with my own prison experiences in Uruguay, in the 1970s.

>

We discussed the different grounds from which we started our struggles, we were leftists, Marxists and anarchists, we were agnostics or neutral, although we came often from religious catholic families. In Gaza the struggle used political and religious arguments as well and it was difficult to perceive the borders between the religious arguments and the political goals. Does Hamas want a kind of "Islamic republic" in Gaza or in Palestine? I doubt it, the people in Gaza were political skilled and they spoke with pride about the Palestinians as the more secularized people in the Middle East. The people related to Hamas and to the People's Party were very critical of Arafat and of the way in which the Palestinian Authority ruled (or tried to rule) the Occupied Territories. They were concerned about the corruption, the misuse of the funding the

Palestinians got from the U.N. or from the other Arab countries. But the Hamas fighters appeared to me as very pragmatic people, using all kinds of tools to establish a kind of "anchoring" of Hamas in people's everyday life. I think it's similar with what happens in Sicily, where the Mafia fills the gaps the central government leaves in the villages.

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Wed, 11 Feb 2004 10:12:43

>

I agree with Ana about her analysis of Hamas, my experience confirms what she has said. To a certain extent Hamas has taken shape because of the vacuum created by the Palestinian Authority inside the Occupied Territories. The institutionalization of the PLO leadership has distanced it from the people. Exactly as Ana said, the Mafia in Sicily originally filled a socio-economic gap created by the conquest of Sicily from the Kingdom of Piedmont in the mid-nineteenth century. Initially the Mafia was not a criminal organization but an illegal one, which fought the new administration from the North. Brigands, like Il Bandito Luciano, were venerated by the peasant population as a modern Robin Hood. Eventually the Mafia evolved into a criminal organization.

>

My question is: does the climate of illegality in which these organizations come into being condition them and eventually force them to embrace other illegal activities such as crime? Can a politically motivated armed organization keep, in the long run, its distance from the world of crime?

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Wed, 11 Feb 2004 11:41:08

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In regard to the organizations who use several methods to finance their struggles it's very common today to speak about the "dirty diamonds," with which for instance Unitas, the right wing guerilla in Angola financed their operations. And I assume it was the case in most countries in Africa. In Colombia, the FARC has been accused of using benefits from the selling of drugs, in Afghanistan the Taliban banned the growing of opium, today the opium is back and pays for the weapons the warlords use. But it's interesting from a moral point of view, if you

are a "freedom fighter" or you work in an organization struggling for a change in peoples lives and so on, can you support your struggle with illegal diamonds, drugs and so on?

>

I remember my discussions in the Tupamaros (sorry to autorefer, we old timers have difficulties not to find parallels with our own times, back in the 1970s) when we spent much time arguing about which targets were legitimate and which not. (Robbing banks owned by multinational companies was legitimate, denouncing corrupt politics as well, but minor enterprises and state-owned banks were "out.")

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>From: [Asef Bayat](#)

>Date: Wed, 11 Feb 2004 19:45:56

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By training and current interest, I am a political sociologist interested in contemporary social movements with a focus on the Middle East. I have done research work on the Iranian revolution, labor movements, urban poor struggles, urban politics, youths and students. I have finished a new book on socio-religious movements (including Islamic movements, plus others) in the Middle East, with a focus on Iran and Egypt but bring insights also from other countries. Before joining Leiden University, I was teaching at the American University in Cairo for the past sixteen years. Now I am directing the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) at Leiden. In this capacity I travel to various countries in the Middle East quite regularly.

>

I like to follow up the latest round of exchange between Ana and Loretta on the issue of Hamas, violence, and illegal activities. We all know that collective violence has been with us as long as social conflicts have existed. But the pattern of its ebb and flow seems to vary. Until recently, violence (whether coming from the states or social groups) was a common feature of Latin American politics; just notice the guerrilla movements and insurrections there. Since the late 1980s, however, things seem to be different. Civil society groups seem to prefer to conduct a different kind of politics. In the aftermath of the collapse of the "actually-existing communism," the global spread of notions of "civil society," rule of law, human rights, et cetera (which developed hand in hand with economic liberalization and marketization), seem to have

undercut the tendency to do politics by violent means in Latin America. But this is not the case in other parts of the world. Some have suggested that violence in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. in Nigeria) has at least partially to do with the development of "democratization" and opening up of civil societies. Simply put, the argument runs like this: when you give free reign to people, then they can abuse it, in the same way that the states might and do abuse it. I do not buy such an argument, but it raises perhaps a question: does the emergence of civil society (in terms of non-state collectives) beget an "un-civil," violent, polity?

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Wed, 11 Feb 2004 18:07:13

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Ana, your reference to the Tupamaros is correct, the Red Brigades, the IRA and other European organizations did differentiate between legal and illegal operations. Even the language used for robbing to capitalist firms or banks reflected such distinction, "expropriation," was the noun used at the time, "proletarian expropriation" was commonly used in Italy.

>

I do believe that morally anybody who uses violence for political means is very, very different from a criminal. However, we have seen people like Arafat, Carlos the Jackal, Abu Nidal and organizations such as the FARC, the IRA and the PLO do business with the drug cartel, the Mafia and even the state they fight against. I believe that spending decades in illegality, interacting with criminal and illegal organizations, does affect armed groups, and does corrupt some of their members. Political violence needs to be focused, i.e. to have a clear political objective, and it needs to be short-lived, like a revolution, in order to maintain its integrity. When it becomes a way of life, as the state-shell I describe in my book, e.g. the PLO or the IRA, it inevitably merges with the illegal and criminal world. The FARC was a Marxist movement with a strong peasant connotation, it wanted to appeal to the people and its goal was revolutionary. Today it acts as the militia of the narco-traffickers of Colombia.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Thu, 12 Feb 2004 02:59:16

>

I agree very much with your arguments and I believe such arguments made me change my political views from Tupamaros radical left to the anarchism I feel myself related to today. As you write, Tupamaros, or FARC or IRA or ETA or Baader-Meinhof or Brigada Rossa, goals and methodologies evolve and change depending on the social contexts and the length of the struggles. IRA and ETA started as strong nationalistic movements, with a strong mass movement acting in the legality and a military wing acting as support of the mass movement. But slowly the military wing became the most demanding part, radicalizing the struggle and separating itself from its social frame. At the end ETA and IRA are acting in a similar way as the system they say they fight. The military cells became a replica of the military organization in the opposite field and all connections and relations to the masses weaken and eventually disappear. The metaphor of the war invades the language and all turns to be a military struggle between two parallel organizations.

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Thu, 12 Feb 2004 17:35:56

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On the issue of democratization and violence, mentioned by Asef, I want to point out a very interesting book by Amy Chua, *World on Fire*. Her central argument is that since the 1980s the U.S. has forced free democracy and marketization in the Third World. This phenomenon has created immensely rich ethnic minorities, e.g. the Chinese in Indonesia. Their wealth, in turn, has produced an upsurge in racial/religious hatred among the indigenous majorities. Chua adds that democratization and marketization have facilitated the U.S. penetration of Third World markets. I think there is a lot of truth in what Amy Chua says, and there is a link between the surge in political violence in the Third World and the increase in economic inequality in the same regions, perhaps even a positive correlation.

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>From: [Saba Mahmood](#)

>Date: Fri, 13 Feb 2004 12:14:10

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I teach anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. My work focuses on Islamic

movements, particularly in the Middle East, with a special interest in issues of secularism, gender, and the politics of moral reform. Since being asked to join this list serve, I have been "passively" reading the interesting exchanges. I have been particularly intrigued by the exchange between Asef Bayat and Loretta Napoleoni. Asef had suggested, provocatively, that we perhaps need to think about how the use of violence as a form of political protest needs to be related to the supposed spread of "democracy" (a slippery term since these days it seems to imply de facto support for a U.S. sponsored agenda of economic liberalization and U.S. world domination, and often excludes older questions such as support for economic justice or broad electoral participation) within parts of the "Third World." Loretta responded to Asef's comments by citing Amy Chua's new book which points to the linkage between economic liberalization and increasing economic inequality which has tended to exacerbate patterns of ethnic conflict (particularly as ethnic communities map onto class formations). Loretta's point is well taken. But I think Asef's comments also beckon us to think beyond the issue of class inequality (which in itself is a very important matter) to how forms of democratic liberal governance are not entirely inimical to the rise of illiberal social movements and forms of political action. This point has been well made by the Indian political theorist Partha Chatterjee, particularly his analysis of how colonial domination was an integral part of the logic of liberal democracy and not simply an anomaly. Similarly, the British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has written persuasively about the organic connection between Nazism and the logic of liberal democratic governance (if not modernity itself). All of these writers I think beckon us to consider the necessary connections between popular political violence and the structure of democratic liberal governance, rather than thinking of popular violence as an exception to the latter. This in turn poses tough questions for those of us who have long supported an agenda of democratization as an antidote to the rise of, what I may loosely term, illiberal or nonliberal movements.

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>From: [Chris Gray](#)

>Date: Sat, 14 Feb 2004 23:45:28

>

I think it is very revealing that Chua's book talks about "free market" democracy, which is in

actuality "free to exploit others" democracy. There is a whole bogus discourse that claims free markets equal political freedom, and social decision making in economics equals oppression, when even Adam Smith would never claim such nonsense. In the U.S. to disagree with this is to challenge what some have called "economic correctness."

>

There are many forms of "democracy," many of them not democratic at all. One of my favorites was the democratic centralism of Leninist parties.... but now they are in the dustbin of history (not that they might not crawl out some day). Right now we have to deal with the spectacle state and its shallow mediated electoral democracy which is really the classist corporatism of neo-liberalism. This is what has most struck me in the last few years, how powerful the corporations have become politically, even in Europe where social democracy seemed to put a bit of a break on them for a while. It is a long way from fascism, of course, but there are disturbing echoes... especially when nationalism becomes virulent.

>

Democracy itself has a very mixed history. It has always been based on exclusion in practical terms, even if the rhetoric was inclusive. Citizens were native-born men of property who went to war for the city-state or tribe. Everyone else was something less. Many scholars say that democratic citizens can only arise in nation-states. Here I think is a clue to escaping democracy's racist-colonialist-patriarchal origins. Global citizenship, cosmopolitanism, internationalism, these labels subvert the elitist discourse somewhat.

>

So I work toward direct democracy, local democracy, radical democracy... more nice labels that cover some very real and workable ideas and much hope. The word democracy still gives me hope but it might be too dirty to really work anymore. But what word is better? Autonomy?

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>From: [Salwa Ghalay](#)

>Date: Mon, 16 Feb 2004 01:47:14

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So far I've been in lurk mode, but have been reading with great interest your valuable contributions, which prod me, a mere literary critic, to re-focus my optic on a host of crucial issues. I find that I'm still in the process of

formulating some questions provoked by the posts I've read. For now, let me just say that the transdisciplinary sweep here is an excellent learning opportunity for those of us who have comfortably settled into the lingo and categories of thinking of their respective disciplines. So a word of thanks to the editors of *Under Fire* is in order.

>

By way of self-introduction, I am a woman academic working at the U of Sharjah, a newly established United Arab Emirates University. For the past few years, I have spent time researching women's anti-canonical narrativizations of war (specifically, Lebanese women writers and the ethico-political emancipatory spaces they have forged). I very much hope and expect that *Under Fire* will expand its purview to include *gendered* analyses of the topics so far broached.

>

For example (and this is not a comment on something I have read here): to those who see the "experiment" of the Iranian revolution as one that has engendered some incipient "democracy," my reaction is: at what cost to Iranian women? Why is it that we, activists, theorists, et al., are sometimes blind to the cost that women pay as a social model is modified, replaced, overhauled, et cetera? I am very distressed, but not at all surprised, to see that the "democratization" of Iraq has come accompanied by Bill 137, which replaces civil law with the Islamic Sharia. In discussions about Hamas, we are likewise invited to probe the gender issue. You may remember that toward the beginning of the First Intifada (I can't recall the exact timeframe), and for a very short but rather bleak period, we read almost daily reports about bodies of dead Palestinian women found disfigured. The "official" explanation at the time was that those women were "collaborators." What constitutes "collaboration" for Hamas or other Islamic groups? How are we to read the text(s) that was/were so tragically penned on those women's bodies? Which brings me to Ana's intriguing comment, about the Palestinians feeling proud of the legacy of secularism. Would you elaborate on this point? How do the people you've interviewed regard Hamas and other armed groups? How do they assess and confront the anti-women aspect of Hamas' discourse?

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Sun, 16 Feb 2004 18:16:04

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When I referred to my discussions with Palestinians proud about their heritage of secularism I was referring to my conversations with people engaged in the People's Party. Many of them had studied in the Soviet Union, that was one of the few countries which offered Palestinians courses and academic careers. (They were very disappointed about the lack of solidarity of their fellows from neighboring Arabic countries, who didn't welcome them as students.) The situation in Ramallah and in Gaza are quite different. Gaza is ruled by its own rules and the Palestinian Authority is almost inexistent there. In Gaza we saw only three big presences, the Israelis with their bulldozers, tanks and checkpoints, Hamas with their green flags and the UNCWRA with their trucks taking food to the refugees.

>

But the activists who were not in Hamas in Gaza were working in their own way and trying to offer people other alternatives. They had cultural centers with huge women participation (see <http://gaza.blogspot.com>, about the 8th March celebration in the little village of al-Qarara). The Palestinians say for them religion has never been primordial, they have few shrines and holy men's graves, they are proud of their own interpretation of Islam. But I had the perception that the different interpretations of the role of the women and of the struggle was more pragmatic than doctrinary. I met Mona al-Farra, the director of the biggest hospital in Gaza city, she was an intellectual and a feminist, she wore secular Western type clothes and drove a car and spent the most time trying to get European doctors to come and work as volunteers in Gaza, since the Palestinian doctors from Ramallah and Nablus are not allowed to go into the strip.

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>B: HONOR.

>From: [Akbar Ahmed](#)

>Date: Tue, 2 Mar 2004 14:11:40

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Following the events of 9/11 and the U.S. response, Muslims the world over perceive the U.S. "War on Terrorism" as a war on Islam and we see the effects of these perceptions daily on the evening news. From Afghanistan to Iraq, the U.S. seems to be losing the battle to win the hearts and minds of the people they supposedly want to help. Meanwhile, the Islamic communities are waging internal battles. With constant accusations about terrorism, fanaticism, and extremism, the Islamic communities must constantly defend and redefine themselves in these skeptical and often antagonistic environments. In my work, I therefore explore what is going wrong in the Muslim world, why it is going wrong, and how both Muslims and non-Muslims should move ahead toward stability and even harmony in the future.

>

In preparing for this exploration, I noticed a world-wide perception of besiegement. For example: Muslims around the world feel besieged by Western fears and inaccurate portrayals of their most central and holy beliefs, Jews in Israel feel besieged by Palestinian suicide bombers, and Americans quickly described the events of September 11th as "America Under Siege." Speculating about the social consequences of such worldwide fear and loathing I proposed the notion of honor to combat the trend. Honor, in Islamic thought, has nothing to do with the violence religious fanatics employ today.

>

In Islamic scripture, God established two central categories of responses for his followers. First, Allah established the rituals and prayers that serve to maintain the relationship between man and God. The second category of responses addresses broader social relations. The Quran teaches humanity how to create a just society based on *adl* (justice), *ihsan* (compassion, kindness and balance), and *ilm*

(knowledge). However, when faced with the economic, political, and social discrepancies in the world today, we see people resorting to ideas of tribal honor and revenge as a means to cope with the anger, frustration, and confusion that result from the challenges of our ever changing global environment.

>

Therefore, in an attempt to understand the social environments that created the popularity of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, I explore notions of honor and *asabiyya* (group loyalty, cohesion, or solidarity) within Islam as tools for mapping the global environment in which Muslims and non-Muslims find themselves and for potential hopes and dangers for the route ahead.

>

I suggest that we live in a post-honor world where inaccurate interpretations of religion, specifically the Islamic religion, lead to violence and terrorism. I believe that notions of honor within Islamic societies are changing into what I call hyper-asabiyya, where exaggerated and even obsessive concepts of group loyalty are expressed through hostility and violence, rather than through the justice and compassion taught in the Quran. I postulate that this hyper-asabiyya has resulted from the widespread loss of honor in Islamic societies due to global developments that shake the structures of traditional societies. Therefore, as societies fall back to tribal notions of honor and revenge in times of perceived crisis, people defend their own honor by dishonoring others. Where honor in the past meant doing good and pursuing noble causes, people like Osama bin Laden pervert the idea into the acts of violence and retaliation we see today. I conclude that distortions of the good ideals taught in Islam, are actually the absence of honor, thus my assertion about our post-honor world.

>

I also assert that dialogue is the world's only way ahead – dialogue between and within civilizations. Through dialogue, religious and cultural traditions must learn to know and understand each other. They must also reclaim the principles of goodness upon which their traditions were founded. I challenge Muslims to embody the principles of honor, justice, tolerance, and the value of knowledge inherent to their religion. I also exhort people and policy makers in the West to listen and learn from other cultural and religious perspectives in order to quell terrorism and hatred against them in the world today. I offer relationship building, dialogue efforts and mutual understanding as the only methods capable of steering Muslims and westerners toward better relations in the future.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)
>Date: Wed, 03 Mar 2004 21:30:40

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I have been in the south of France and met several people worried about the augmenting “islamophobia” in France. They describe the crowds gathering as mob crowds, ready to lynch anyone defining himself as a radical Muslim. But I think we all must be very clear about the degree of manipulation of masses through the media. People in Europe and in America, both North and South, are fed all the time with the false notions of a homogeneous Islam, acting as a sole voice,

assuming the role of avenger of humiliations and defeats.

The media are today “manufacturing consent” in Chomsky and Herman’s words, erasing from the memory and from the history the legacy of the illustrated Islam. Honor, (in Sweden we have a pretty harvest of “honor killings”) is an old imprint of the patriarchal lineage where the males must keep the purity of the lineage through endogamic alliances and stern retaliation laws. In Sicily and in Spain and in the Balkans the laws regulating honor and the amount of cows, sheeps or money “buying back the blood” has been clearly regulated for ages. In Albany, the “common law,” called Kanun, determines how the avenger of an honor death can continue several generations. 120 people were killed in the United States among the “Streli,” the immigrated Albanians, until the priests redefined and reformulated the old laws. My point is, I don’t see big differences between the Islam societies and other people acting as the defenders of the honor of the family, the clan or tribe.

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>From: [Bernard Roddy](#)
>Date: Thu, 04 Mar 2004 10:32:24

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Someone here recommended Elaine Scarry’s book, *The Body in Pain*, which I have begun and which addresses the question (among others) of what purpose torture is supposed to serve, how it functions, why there is rarely any information anyone really needs. This is not going to be addressed through outrage. Scarry mentions the importance of getting a confession, the way in which this destroys the world of the subject no matter that there is nothing to confess. I would be interested to know how honor functions in this context. If a suicide that takes the lives of many innocent people is honorable, perhaps it has something in common with what is supposed to be happening, the mime that is carried to extreme, under torture.

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- > 4 .
- > THE MILITARY-INDUS-
- > TRIAL-SPECTACLE
- > COMPLEX AND THE
- > CONFLATIONS BETWEEN
- > REALITY, BATTLEFIELD
- > SIMULATIONS, AND
- > NEWS PROGRAMMING .

>From: [James Der Derian](#)

>Date: Sun, 15 Feb 2004 19:28:28

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I would like to discuss the role of media and entertainment industries in the war machine, following from my recent book *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*. The title is an oxymoron, trying to capture the twisted logic of modern warfare, in which the U.S., enjoying a technological supremacy and preaching an ethical superiority, works hard to deter, discipline, and when necessary, preemptively destroy potential foes by a relatively remote (virtual), relatively discriminate (virtuous) form of killing. The subtitle is a riff off general-turned-president Eisenhower's famous presidential farewell address warning of a "military-industrial complex" (he also warned about a techno-scientific elite capturing public policy). My argument, based on an extended, seven-year road-trip to desert and urban war games, Darpa, defense industry conferences, Hollywood-Silicon Valley-Pentagon collaborations, and the like, is that with the addition of the media and entertainment industries to the mix, the complex has become a much more powerful, much less accountable network.

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I would like to begin with a question that I have struggled with over the last few years: are we tougher on our elected leaders than on our unelected media, especially when it comes to accountability? My goal is not to bare "the" truth – let that be in the eyes of the beholder – but to restore some political judgment and responsibility to the multi-media of perception that are producing different versions of the truth. I find that "exposure," from Drudge to Chomsky, produces scandal and titillation but little in the way of edification or political action.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Mon, 16 Feb 2004 19:34:39

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I met Noam Chomsky and Paul Virilio several times and they both expressed skepticism towards the "cyber society," dominated by vast war entertainment conglomerates. The alliance between the Pentagon and the developers of titles such as F-Stealth, Apache and other airplane simulators has been very successful. In Sweden one of our youngest developers teams made the game *Battlefield 1942*, where the player

can play several scenarios to try to change the course of the war. The "recruiting" games have a long story, I remember playing at the Commodore 64 the game *Commando Libya*, launched at the same time the U.S. struck Khadaffi (see <http://www.newsgaming.com/games/index12.htm>).

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>From: [Asef Bayat](#)

>Date: Mon, 16 Feb 2004 19:53:33

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Thank you James for posing the question. For a short while I thought we are off the question I had raised earlier on the "un-civility" of civil society. But I think the link is still there. Well, the composition of the contributors in this forum who come from different experiences just fascinates me. I am coming from a political field (Iran) where the media, especially the printed press plays such an empowering function for the majority. Relatively free press has in the last few years been perhaps the most powerful manifestation of an energetic civil society. And in turn the press played the most crucial role in reproducing such an energy and activism, spreading the ideals of democracy (I know this word has been misused), accountability, and secularization in Islamic Iran on a mass scale. (For this very reason over ninety dailies and weeklies have been emasculated by the conservatives). Now, James, writing from the U.S., accurately views the very media (this crucial stuff of the American civil society) as perhaps more dangerous to "truth" than corporate politicians.

>

So, what is going on? What are we (I mean people operating in authoritarian conditions) supposed to do, considering how we long for democracy? (I suppose this was a question Saba raised at the end of her intervention.) My take is that we have no better choice but to uphold democratic ideals, provided we also attempt to rescue this notion from being appropriated. I think civil society breeds un-civility when individuals or groups with vested interests perceive it only in terms of rights, or free reign for action, and not a unity of rights and responsibilities-obligations. The bottom line for both the Nigerian Islamists (who feel free to implement Sharia law but to ignore the constitution) and the U.S.A. (mainstream) media (which abuse the freedom to obliterate facts) is the same – they both enjoy their "rights" but refuse to be responsible.

>From: [James Der Derian](#)

>Date: Mon, 16 Feb 2004 16:50:10

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I have been interested for some time in the collapse of the distance between simulations (war games, training exercises, scenario planning, and modeling) and dissimulations (propaganda, disinformation, info war, deceit, and lies) through increasingly sophisticated, technologically-assisted ways of reproducing reality, including videogames. From Francis Bacon on, simulation was thought to be a "pretence of what is not," dissimulation as a "concealment of what is." But with new technological powers of verisimilitude and new virtual corporate alliances with Pentagon, Hollywood, and Silicon Valley, "wagging the dog" of reality through dis/simulations seems to be an everyday event.

>

My first encounter with the videogame crossover was at the annual military/defense/entertainment industry conference on simulations in Orlando, Florida, called ITSEC I think (just too many acronyms in the military to remember). The transformation of Doom into a marine training video was first showcased there, and I was invited to play with four others. I think I got out of the foxhole without getting shot on about the sixth try, and then I promptly killed my platoon leader (accidental friendly fire). It turns out the two guys who were kicking my ass were twelve year old kids, playing behind a curtain, just like the mighty Oz.

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This weekend was also a good one for dis/simulations. From Lebanon, al-Hurra (which means "The Free One"), set up by the U.S. to counter to al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, broadcast its first show – the president exhorting more countries to follow the Iraqi march to democracy. The idea that a change in image, rather than a change in policy, will suffice to produce good-feelings in the Middle East is, in my view, benighted spin.

>

I do agree that the reality principle is taking some body blows, especially when the most important bodies, the victims of armed conflict, are fine for videogames but considered too disturbing for the evening news: unlike the Vietnam years, no cameras are allowed at Dover Air Force Base when the bodies come home from Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the jihadists are getting just as good at info war. For high production

values, staying on message, and a good soundtrack, try googling "terrorist rap video;" you'll find a chilling reminder that although we might be guilty of hyping/constructing through simulation a global fear of the other, there are some real bad guys out there.

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>From: [Benjamin H. Bratton](#)

>Date: Mon, 16 Feb 2004 23:10:18

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Something that Ana wrote – about the *Battlefield 1942* game, and the way in which the miniaturized war works as a sort of medium for eliciting of multiple *scenarios* – got me thinking about the logics of instrumental gaming and scenario planning and their kinship to other, less rationalized forms of prophecy. Here are some initial thoughts.

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Donald Rumsfeld's now infamous "Things we don't know we don't know" are discursive (and physical) potentialities of violence that might erupt (from some virtual plan) into our "homeland" and must be first rigorously anticipated and then ceremonially prevented: a governance by hypothetical negation.

>

"We didn't game for that," the general explains. War is the futurology of war. The globalization of what Rumsfeld calls "the security environment" has produced (as explained in the *Eschatology's* of Virilio) a dangerously monocultural web of war space and wartime, one in which arms markets (large and small) are enmeshed not only with resource markets, labor markets, production markets, but are enrolled as basic currencies of the futures markets (secular and sacred) that motor the production of that war space as a collaborative prophecy.

>

This strategy-by-scenario is related to but not exclusive to the contemporary history of war gaming. The scenario planning methodologies that Kees van der Heijden employed for Shell matured on the sun-soaked tables of the Rand Corporation in Santa Monica, and were used to help steer the Vietnam War. The Policy Analysis Market, the aborted Darpa-funded project to draw upon the swarm intelligence of self-interested market players to anticipate terrorist incursions is a maturation/extrapolation of these efforts. As are the computational technologies of simulation, such as *BattleScape*, an information visualization package developed by Autometric

and now marketed by Boeing that allows military commanders to both see the battlefield in a kind of videogame miniature, and thereby *game* virtual scenarios, but now also (according to their literature) to use the simulation as an interface to the battlefield to actually administer forces there.

>

But this is not just precession of the simulacra. I think there is something more “religious” at work here (in Derrida’s ontic sense of the term). The institutional power of prophecy works for several agendas of mobilization. “Terrorist violence” constitutes a sort of virtual product, one through which the supply chain management of various militia is modulated by demand chain technologies. But in an almost embarrassingly Durkheimian sense these futures markets also rationalize the prophetic meta-discourses of fighting “evil,” whether understood as the profane America, or as that Terror which would attack America in the name of its own competing prophecies: the persistent militarization of teleology.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Tue, 17 Feb 2004 10:54:43

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I think the most interesting effect of these “alliances” between makers of entertainment and “warlords” means the war is fought at several levels, also on the symbolical level. When Armand Mattelart and Ariel Dorfman wrote the book *How to Read Donald Duck* their thesis was that the U.S. needed to gather people’s sympathy around them, to make all feel that the enemies of America are the enemies of the free world. It reminds me of Bush’s speech, “The people who are not with us are against us.” In the fifties and sixties the CIA paid through the Ford Foundation millions of dollars to sustain and maintain several cultural publications. They were a weapon in the Cold War and tried to undermine the support many intellectuals gave the Soviet Union and Cuba. Stephen Spender, the English poet, was lured by them, and the French philosopher Raymond Aron and the Italian Ignazio Silone. The redactors were recruited because they were radicals but criticized the Soviet Union. Today the Muslim world uses the same weapons and fight also its war in the entertainment field, as in the game *Under Ash*, made by a programming team in Syria (see <http://www.underash.com/>). In the game the player must destroy Israeli Merkava

tanks and save the al-Aqsa mosque from Arson. Many civilian hostages are in the game, if the player accidentally kills someone, the game ends. It’s a traditional “shoot up” but the images have changed, the “terrorists” are Israelis and “the freedom fighters” must destroy Israeli vehicles and kill soldiers.

>

Another imaginative way to fight the “simulated war” is carried by the company behind Earth Station. This is a peer2peer downloading system, free from spyware and viruses, much faster and reliable than Kazaa. The developers are Palestinians and the servers are in Gaza City and in Jenin, two of the cities constantly invaded and bombed by the Israeli army in their struggle against terror networks. Computer games are today among the broadest platforms to carry narratives and to establish truths and myths. It is impossible today to deny the economic impact of the game industry. The researcher Edward Castronova, working at the California State at Fullerton, wrote a piece about the fictive country of Norrath, the landscape where *Everquest* is played. Castronova discovered that Norrath’s gross national product per capita is \$2,266. If Norrath was a country, it would be the 77th most wealthy in the world, just behind Russia.

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>From: [Salwa Ghaly](#)

>Date: Wed, 18 Feb 2004 01:41:22

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I just have a tangential comment on al-Hurra. I saw the interview that James referred to, as well as others, where, for the past couple of days, mega doses of unabashed spin have been on offer. At the risk of being mistaken for a closet neocon, let me just say that I can see some potential good coming out of the establishment of al-Hurra. I hope it will be less constrained by Arab social and political taboos and will go where other networks fear to tread in probing issues to do with religion, sexuality, gender, et cetera. One of the journalists they have hired for a daily news/interviews program (Ziad Najm) had in the early nineties an extremely successful weekly talk show (aired on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation) in which a host of thorny topics (e.g. domestic violence, incest, abortion, political tribalism, confessionism) were discussed. That talk show went on for a few years and was a breath of fresh air. While being suspicious of the political optic of al-Hurra, I think it may well help expand the terrain of badly

needed public debate on a number of social issues. The other night, on their “Magazine” I was happy to see them tackling just one taboo area al-Jazeera, for instance, would not touch with a ten-foot pole, namely, questioning the otherness of the Other and how to bridge the political distance between Arab and Israeli. On this subject, Arab media tend to be rather monochromic falling on the side of blinkered visions and bunker mentalities: “The Israeli is a total and unassimilable Other,” which, of course, is a fabricated narrative. What that program showed was young Arabs and Israelis interacting, getting along and fostering lifelong friendships through their participation in *Seeds of Peace*, a U.S.-based program that brings together teenagers from opposing warring camps in the interest of fostering peace and advancing knowledge and understanding of the Other. This said, I have to add that I found the inclusion of Madam Secretary in the program obscene, to say the least – she who not too long ago declared that the death of half a million Iraqi children was a price worth paying.

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A new Arabic news channel is about to be launched in London, by the way. So it’ll be interesting to see how the four networks counter spin with more of the same.

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>From: [James Der Derian](#)

>Date: Wed, 18 Feb 2004 19:13:25

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First, as a supplement and minor challenge to Ben’s in/con/cisive history of U.S. efforts, from Rand to Rumsfeld, to govern the future by “hypothetical negation,” let me excerpt two articles featured today on the Pentagon’s clipping service, the “Early Bird”:

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New York Times

North Carolina: Suit Filed In Shooting Of Soldiers

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A soldier and the estate of another soldier are suing the sheriff’s deputy who shot the soldiers two years ago when he mistook Green Beret training exercises for criminal activity. The suit also names the sheriff’s office. Sheriff Lane Carter said that the deputy, Randall Butler, killed First Lt. Tallas Tomeny and wounded Sgt. Stephen Phelps in February 2002 near Fort Bragg after deputy Butler stopped their pickup truck and found a bag with a disassembled machine gun in it. The sheriff said the deputy fired to protect

himself when the soldiers came at him and went for the gun. A lawyer for the soldiers said there had been no provocation for deadly force. The State Bureau of Investigation examined the matter, and no charges were filed.

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Ariel Hart (NYT)

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Washington Post

Russian Missile Launch Flops

Test Exemplifies Military Troubles

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It was a campaign manager’s dream visual: A president weeks away from an election stands on the bridge of a nuclear submarine out at sea, watching the test launch of two intercontinental missiles capable of destroying an enemy city. President Vladimir Putin took his position aboard the Archangelsk on Tuesday afternoon, television cameras dutifully recording the moment. And he waited. And waited and waited. Finally after 25 minutes, naval officers announced what had become painfully obvious, that the launch had not taken place, and they shuffled the guests and journalists below deck, according to Russian reporters on the scene. Putin disappeared without a word. Russian news organizations promptly reported that a malfunction had scuttled the launch. Then, a few hours later, the navy’s top admiral denied that any launch had been planned. A “virtual launch” had been intended from the start, he explained, and it had been a success. “The work was carried out according to the plan,” Adm. Vladimir Kuroyedov said at a televised briefing Tuesday. “And to make things completely clear, I’ll say that the ballistic exercises were designed as a virtual launch, which was done twice, first in one spot, then in another.”

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Peter Baker (Washington Post Foreign Service)

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Even in our critiques, I think we tend to replicate the birds-eye perspective of the press and impute too much power to the war machine. If we are to challenge successfully the official efforts to make high-tech war an acceptable foreign policy option, we need to get more intimate, get in close and witness how, from the micro- to the macro-level, fog, friction, and general screw-ups regularly operate in war games as well as in war. Lewis Mumford nailed early on how “technological exhibitionism” combines with media voyeurism and a generalized fear to produce a worshipful public, making all the

easier to use military solutions for intractable political problems – think Gordian knot, but with stealth bombers, special ops, and info war rather than a sword to work with. The British had the Maxim gun (and the other side did not), but it did not keep the empire from falling.

>

The irony is that the military, especially the army, is much more savvy about what can and does go wrong than the current batch of defense intellectuals, armchair generals, think-tank pundits and a president who avoided Vietnam. A case in point is the “lesson-learned” study just released by the Army, “On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom.” It offers kudos to the soldiers, but most of the 504 pages points out how – in spite of a grossly mismatched enemy – this should not be considered a model for future conflicts, because of flawed logistics (the “running start” strategy meant supplies failed to keep up), armor badly suited for urban warfare (from tank cannons that can’t elevate above second floors to inadequate flak jackets), inept information operations (the expected mass surrenders like 1991 did not happen), and unexpected tactical asymmetries (e.g. when Iraqi fighters forced the army’s 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment to turn back with 29 of 30 helicopters averaging of 15-20 bullet holes each). This is an “organization and representation of armed conflict” that we ignore at our peril.

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>From: [Chris Gray](#)

>Date: Sat, 21 Feb 2004 06:24:02

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For all its power, the military-industrial-media-entertainment network still runs into the reality principle. The weapons of mass destruction just were not there and even if all the people in the world watched only Fox News some of them still wouldn’t believe that they were there. This is an old problem for hegemonic discourses. The Japanese war gamed Pearl Harbor and World War II and the Germans war gamed the Battle of the Bulge and in the games they lost... but they went ahead and fought for real. And lost. Wishful thinking (so much of the epistemology of the current “hard” U.S. empire), isn’t enough in our dispassionate reality.

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One thing James hasn’t stressed in his posts is how fast things shift now. The military-industrial-media-entertainment network is responsive but

> 5 .
> POLITICAL CULTURE
> AND THE POWER OF
> IMAGES .

>From: [Susan Buck-Morss](#)

>Date: Mon, 23 Feb 2004 11:24:03

>

How do we develop a common political culture? We agree pretty easily on what we are against, but how do we articulate this outside of hegemonic discourses, including our own partial collective identities? How, for instance, do we join Salwa in supporting the progressive role feminist solidarity can play in Iran, without supporting the use U.S. propaganda is making of feminism? How do we keep things "complicated and colorful" (Chris), and at the same time heed Gramsci's warning that the political weakness is not the lack of opposition but, rather, the disorganization of dissent?

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The *New York Times* wrote at the time of the global demonstrations of February 15, 2003 that George Bush had met the other "superpower:" world opinion. Is the idea possible, or is "l'opinion mondiale" too homogenizing?

>

Words like democracy and freedom are, as Saba said, slippery. "Rights," as Asef said, are incomplete without responsibility. War and terrorism are interchangeable (Ana).

>

What of images? Think of Walter Benjamin's optimism: "Only images in the mind motivate the will." The image-world is the surface of globalization. It is our shared world. Impoverished, thin, mute, dim, and easily misread, this image surface is all we have of shared experience. Otherwise we do not share a world.

>

Artists today are intervening on that shared image-surface. The work of Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige – who burned the negatives of pre-civil war post-card photos of Lebanon, and then developed the burnt negatives, showing a city destroyed; the work of Elias Khoury and Rabih Mroué, also from Lebanon, who work with the three-times-shot video of a man taken for TV before he becomes a suicide bomber. Artists seem to avoid what political movements of all types, right and left, tend toward: framing protest in terms of moral goods and evils, where the villains are responsible for everything wrong, and the heroes are self-evident; all they have to do is spread their word.

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How can political protest be more like art in this sense?

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Mon, 23 Feb 2004 18:49:01

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Susan, I think you have summarized many of the key problems of the left today. How can we make our voices heard among all the propaganda that is going on? The center and the right have indeed "stolen" a lot of the slogans and ideas of the old left. For example, the U.K. government has employed a feminist and political activist from the left to help in understanding the gender problems of Iraq. I saw her yesterday; she spent six months in Baghdad and decided to come back because in the end it is up to Iraqi women to fight their own battles, we cannot spoon feed them. Although she feels she has helped them, she has come to the conclusion that it is impossible to work within the system. This is an unjust war, a war of occupation and going to "liberate" women seems anachronistic in a context where people have not enough to eat, there is no employment and war is a way of life.

>

My suggestion is to avoid becoming part of the system, to work from outside in any possible way, support groups, NGOs, visual art, music, literature, even by keeping the discussion among cyber friends going. Culture is a very powerful tool. My suggestion is also to have the courage to say that modern democracy is clearly not working, as it is creating great inequalities.

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>From: [Harel Shapira](#)

>Date: Mon, 23 Feb 2004 21:07:49

>

I was thinking that part of the task is to stop politics itself from becoming "politics by other means." That is, the idea of doing a protest, going to a forum, et cetera as forms of being political. These are important, but maybe there is a politics of the everyday that is not located at a separate space? I think this is a space where the "activist" is not even a category – would we dare call young Palestinians throwing stones activists?

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>From: [Joy Garnett](#)

>Date: Mon, 23 Feb 2004 16:12:19

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Images resonating internally – in the mind, as Benjamin would have it – it's where they hold power, the power to motivate; but also the power to overwhelm and render immobile. To be "inspiring" almost requires a certain mystique.

Mystification. A certain quality of hyperbole, and even grandeur. To be gob-smacked by an image, to be thrown, amazed, to lose one's bearings. Stunned into silence/acquiescence also seems to be part of how images occupy the mind. It is the operative mode in cinema and in war when dealing with the general public.

>

That *is* problematic; taken as a whole, such groupings of images – the image of millions gathering to protest a war, an image repeated again and again in far-flung places, synchronistic, but also the repeated image of the heroic single figure, the bloody-minded hero holding down the fort – these images attain iconicity, and are both inspiring and enervating. Whatever they gain in symbolic power – in terms of the "larger picture" – they lose in specific meaning. Set loose from the constraints of their original context, they become immediately malleable; while losing some of their original meaning they become suited to another use. (I want to say "any other use" but that really is hyperbole.) This is the mechanism at the basis of agitprop, the simplification behind the use of imagery in political dissent and protest. But likewise it is the basis of propaganda. This is problematic – maybe even truly troubling – because this is where the two things meet.

>

The contextual/historical "anchor" would seem to be the original event, the image source, would seem to offer a solution of some kind – yes, somewhere there is a remnant of the original event, and the hard cold facts that go with it... who was massacred and by whom. But as Milan Kundera said somewhere, "The present moment is unlike the memory of it. Remembering is not the negative of forgetting. Remembering is a form of forgetting."

>

And so the photograph by default – the image in the news, the image in agitprop, the image in advertising, in propagandizing – is always part of a process of revision.

>

I feel somewhat uncertain as to how to deal with the riches of all this shared imagery. As I watch it almost all going to waste, unused, maybe unnoticed. How to absorb and re-use and re-mix it in a way that is real, invigorating, perhaps even revolutionary, but at least useful, before it all gets shot to hell.

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Tue, 24 Feb 2004 10:09:33

>

I think that the young Palestinians who throw stones are activists, they are using stones to make a point and they are very courageous because they are not risking their "political career;" they are risking their life.

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If we want democracy to work again we must go back to the streets and show our dissent. I am afraid there is no other way to make our voice heard from outside the "political system." Politicians have to be reminded that they are mere representatives of the people.

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>From: [Susan Buck-Morss](#)

>Date: Tue, 24 Feb 2004 11:42:51

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I am struck by Harel's question: are Palestinian boys throwing rocks "demonstrating" in the public political sense? He, Joy and Loretta seem to share a skepticism about politics in a global public space, as opposed to the politics of everyday resistance (or private venues – from NGOs to our own cyber discussions). But Harel: the Palestinian boys throwing rocks are also an image that travels globally, and it makes a difference that we see it. Is it reduced to a cliché in that global transmission? I don't think so.

>

Joy and Loretta: art matters... cultural resistances of all kinds... but the question is, can it defeat those who possess the means of violence? Isn't public political space still necessary? True: the work of artists is able to communicate the singularity of images/events/interventions, rather than reducing their meaning to a pre-given political category. The same is true of individual stories (of Loretta's friend who spent six months in Baghdad), that are able to convey complicated truths that cannot be easily codified – even if my social science colleagues are suspicious of "anecdotal" information that cannot be quantified!

>

But as a U.S. citizen, the voting population responsible for George W. Bush in office, I just can't give up on democracy and the vote – as mythic as it may be, there is nonetheless power in myths – and I will work very hard to defeat him. It still matters.

>

Marx wrote of the 18th Brumaire that it was a time when the old class no longer had a real base for ruling, and the new class was not yet strong enough to defeat the old class. The result was Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état* – and the May days of massacres. Is that the only possible scenario for our future?

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>From: [Alice Hunsberger](#)

>Date: Tue, 24 Feb 2004 12:46:58

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Absolutely, Harel. If Palestinians throwing rocks are not activists, who is? And the political is found in the everyday decisions we make. Just as the sacred, for a religious person, is found in every leaf that flutters.

>

Let me introduce myself. A hybrid-type, working in NGOs by day and in academia by night, teaching and writing on Islam and Islamic subjects and Persian literature. Finished my Ph. D. with Hamid Dabashi on the philosophical analysis of the soul, according to an 11th century Persian poet of the Ismaili sect of the Shi'ites, while working eleven years with Amnesty International. Now I work for the Asia Society in New York, a museum and cultural center, where I translate artistic goals into persuasive prose so funders will give money to promote contemporary and traditional arts.

>

Continuing from Harel's questions – just standing up and speaking can be a political act (the old famous, vote with your feet by leaving). The fifty students enrolled (as live bodies) for my class on Islam at Hunter College in New York City are taking a stand for themselves to learn about Islam and its history. My challenge is to help believers think in an academic way about their religion and religion in general.

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How can people “help” without being “oppressive?”

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>From: [Harel Shapira](#)

>Date: Tue, 24 Feb 2004 13:51:44

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I think it is precisely because they are risking their life that I, personally, would be embarrassed to call them “activists” in the sense of the word I carry. Their “politics” is in a sense before the “political” – it is a matter of life but not a life-style, a profession. Don't we need to at least

differentiate between figures like, say, Arundathi Roy and Noam Chomsky and the young Palestinians, Haitian revolutionaries, Iraqi militants? What strikes me about the U.S.A. is that politics exists separately from one's day to day life. Perhaps this is part of what people have been mentioning earlier – the general amnesia in the U.S.A., the history of Americans escaping politics. Are we stuck in this situation of having to go to separate spaces to express our politics because we are not “embedded” or up-close to the event?

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>From: [James Der Derian](#)

>Date: Tue, 24 Feb 2004 17:59:16

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The last few exchanges got me wishing we could channel Edward Said, a sorely missed Palestinian thrower of stones – literal, symbolic, and sometimes both – to ask him if he would have tossed that rock (more of a pebble) again in Lebanon, if he knew how its rapidly and globally circulated image would be used to discredit so much of what he stood for, including the peaceful coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians. I'd like to believe that the “artistic singularity” of the event (where pleasure, politics, and creativity meet in unpredictable ways) was well worth it. But we need to question how a globalized media, increasingly, repetitively, unavoidably, acts not only as trigger and transmitter of conflict as a global event, but also how a global audience responds to it. From the actual moment to the eventual interpretation – for better or worse – the media identifies, records, relays, represents and informs our response to armed conflict. It shapes how we remember or forget its significance, more so than any other institution. Instead of the fog of the 18th Brumaire and the man on horseback who tossed the peasants “like a sack of potatoes” onto his back, we get the fog of war – again – (first time tragedy, second time Rumsfeld) and a man on aircraft carrier who's taking half of a fearful America along for the ride. I think we are facing a public attention deficit disorder, which leaves very little time and a very distracted audience for critical inquiry and political action. That applies to artists and academics alike, if they don't get into the image game. To add to our growing list of Benjamin quotes: “History decays into images, not into stories.”

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>From: [Salwa Ghalay](#)

>Date: Mon, 01 Mar 2004 01:37:07

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In response to your comment, Loretta, about the Western feminist enlisted to help Iraqi women, I would say that the fight Iraqi women activists and politicians have put up against Resolution 137 demonstrates that they have already formulated a specific set of demands, foremost among which is the separation of religion and state. They are painfully aware of what it would mean to women for family law to fall under the mantle of the Islamic Sharia. This, I think, is clear enough indication that they don't need coaching from other feminists (Western or otherwise). What they do need, however, is support. The Feminist Majority has, in my opinion, done the right thing by launching a petition against Resolution 137 intended to apply pressure on the U.S. government, reminding it that the rights of Iraqi women must not fall by the wayside or be forgotten or sidestepped in the general mayhem.

>

Let us not forget that, for all its brutality, Saddam Hussein's regime at least kept the religious elements in Iraqi society relatively at bay (not that I accept or condone the methods used to achieve that goal). Hours after the fall of Baghdad, one of the would-be-mullahs was interviewed about his (and his group's) vision of post-Saddam Iraq, and his response was very telling: “We shall dismantle the whorehouse they call the Iraqi Women's Congress.” Mullahs and mullah-wannabees have made no secret of their plan to curtail women's rights and mobility and forcibly impose the veil (to cite two main aims). Many are the reports of vigilantism and violence around high schools and universities...

>

Given this dismal state of affairs, I can't help but be reminded that, for us, women, as well as for minority groups (et cetera) often used binary oppositions, such as, in this case, Iraqi versus American, or Inside versus Outside, are much more problematic than they seem. Though I tend not to support “imported or imposed solutions” and believe that homespun (though here, again what is “homespun,” “inside” and “outside?”) solutions have more staying power and longevity, I see Iraqi feminists as caught between the Scylla of Bremmer and Co and the Charybdis of the mullahs. If I were to choose my camp solely on the basis of who comes close to serving my interests as woman (neither does, but it's a question of the lesser of two evils!), I would very

tentatively and cautiously go with Bremmer. I do hope that before they depart, the Americans will put in place a political infrastructure that can safeguard, to the extent that this is possible in such volatile territory, the rights of individuals, women and communities. After all, it was the Americans' war on Iraq that unleashed this host of nightmarish theocratic visions nursed by groups we never knew existed.

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>C: BEING.

>From: [Ian Robert Douglas](#)

>Date: Thu, 26 Feb 2004 05:10:00

>

Isn't the essence of war, simply, the struggle for being? It is the pitched fear of one against the other in a world where people fear death.

>

Democracy, change, liberty: all these, to me, are ultimately worthless concepts unless we think and feel through the relation each of us holds – that our societies hold – to being; to “being here,” to life, to our anxieties about absence, and what Virilio calls, enticingly, “the final interval” (death).

>

There is something I know that many in the region I live in [the Middle East] struggle with (sucked under, as we are, the political systems we endure): is the entire matrix (politics, society, media, economy) but a game? How far, how ever far, can critique ever venture from power?

>

The bottom line for me (and for me what makes obscenities like al-Hurra so tragic, so pathetic), is that all I see is the will to power of being. “Otherness,” “the other:” these are also useless categories until we a) rethink and re-feel our relation to being; and b) understand, face, the simple, profound way in which – and I confess not to know, truly, if this is biological or social – we “value” life over death, and think only of living forever.

>

All of us in our way do this. I think this is at the core of so much human tragedy. Death is engineered because people can't face death. Media is engineered because people aren't living.

>

If Foucault and Debord are still good for something (and let's face it, we're still catching up), it is that they understood politics, social life, in the context of this primary right: to live and to feel and to die in one's time.

Everything that thinking, feeling and acting should confront concerns overcoming the sadness, the alienation, the loneliness, the fear, the pain and the helplessness that gives rise to our faith in being.

>

Being is at the core of racism. It is at the core of monotheistic religion. It is at the core of economy. It is at the core of discipline. It is at the core of media (especially our perverted information media). It is at the core of critique, of writing, of progress, of most philosophy, of most political thinking...

>

I'm not blind to what happens in that domain – that whole field (let's call it reality) – set apart from these questions... But I confess to sometimes thinking that we need something much more humble than "co-existence."

>

I sometimes wonder if our whole mode of existence were reversed – if we prepared for death, rather than for life – whether, somehow, the world wouldn't look much different; whether your lover wouldn't look different, whether your child wouldn't look different...

>

For sure, if being has been our orienting a priori structure of command, it has led – and seems still leading – to unbelievable, painful excesses of annihilation, killing, murder, destruction, righteousness, torture, impunity... in short, fascism.

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> 6 .
 > ECOLOGIES ,
 > REPRESENTATIONS ,
 > AND THE AFFECTIVE
 > DIMENSION OF
 > IMAGE RECEPTION .

>From: [Manuel DeLanda](#)

>Date: Sun, 22 Feb 2004 15:29:53

>

When we “civilians” think about military questions we tend to view the subject as encompassing a rather specialized subject matter, dealing exclusively with war and its terrible consequences. It seems fair to say that, in the absence of war (or at least the threat of war, as in the case of government defense budget debates) civilians hardly ever think about military matters. The problem is that, from a more objective historical perspective, the most important effects of the military establishment on the civilian world in the last four hundred years have been during peace-time, and have had very little to do with specifically military subjects, such as tactics or strategy. I would like to suggest that, starting in the 1500s, Western history has witnessed the slow militarization of civilian society, a process in which schools, hospitals and prisons slowly came to adopt a form first pioneered in military camps and barracks, and factories came to share a common destiny with arsenals and armories. I should immediately add, however, that the influence was hardly unidirectional, and that what needs to be considered in detail are the dynamics of complex institutional ecologies, in which a variety of organizations exert mutual influences on one another. Nevertheless, much of the momentum of this process was maintained by military institutions and so we may be justified in using the term “militarization.”

>

A good example of this process is the links between weapon manufacturing and its civilian counterparts. Some of the weapons that the Napoleonic armies used were the product of a revolution in manufacturing techniques which took place in France in the late eighteenth century. In French armories, the core concepts and techniques of what later would become assembly-line, mass production techniques, were for the first time developed. The ideal of creating weapons with perfectly interchangeable parts, an ideal which could not be fulfilled without standardization and routinization of production, was taken even further in American arsenals in the early nineteenth-century. And it was there that military engineers first realized that in practice, standardization went hand in hand with the replacement of flexible individual skills with rigid collective routines, enforced through constant discipline and monitoring. Even before

that, in the Dutch armies of the sixteenth century, this process had already begun. Civilians tend to think of Frederick Taylor, the late nineteenth century creator of so-called scientific management techniques, as the pioneer of labor process analysis, that is, the breaking down of a given factory practice into micro-movements and the streamlining of these movements for greater efficiency and centralized management control. But Dutch commander prince Maurits of Nassau had already applied these methods to the training of his soldiers beginning in the 1590s. Maurits analyzed the motion needed to load, aim and fire a weapon into its micro-movements, redesigned them for maximum efficiency and then imposed them on his soldiers via continuous drill and discipline. Yet, while the soldiers increased their efficiency tremendously as a collective whole, each individual soldier completely lost control of his actions in the battlefield. And a similar point applies to the application of this idea to factory workers, before and after Taylorism. Collectively they became more productive, generating the economies of scale so characteristic of twenty-century big business, while simultaneously completely losing control of their individual actions.

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>From: [Gena Gbenga](#)

>Date: Tue, 24 Feb 2004 21:52:05

>

Manuel, are you suggesting that, rather than thinking of a monolithic, determining military institution or economic institution, we have to look to diverse, mutually-interacting systems of organization, which may operate on multiple levels or scales?

>

You have provocatively said before that “the capitalist system” does not exist. Could we say the same, then, for the military institution?

>

It is very interesting how you have positioned militarization as a driving force in the standardization and routinization of production in the industrial era, and with it the development of new notions of adequacy. One wonders what happens today, when business seems to drive military development – when the military relies on the private sector for R&D and outsources many of its operations. What is particular about militarization, today, that calls for us to analyze it as such?

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>From: [Manuel DeLanda](#)

>Date: Thu, 26 Feb 2004 15:18:55

>

Yes, I am suggesting (to use another example) that all political discussion in terms of, say, “the market” and “the state” is useless, because those terms do not have any referent in reality. Of course, this implies that you believe that there is a reality which exists independently of our minds; if you do not believe that then the question of reference loses its importance. Hence I always start a discussion by asking people about their ontological commitments: if they believe everything can be reduced to phenomenological experience, with “society” being the sum total of all experiences, I end the conversation right there. Now, let’s assume we are not having a dialogue with idealists then the next step is this: Instead of “the market” one should speak (as Fernand Braudel does) of concrete real entities operating at different spatio-temporal scales: bazaars or local marketplaces (one of the oldest organizations); then, we follow the historical linkage of many such local marketplaces into regional markets (a linkage which in Europe took place as early as the 15th century); then we trace how many such regional markets were linked together (at great economic and political cost) into the first national market in England in the eighteenth century (and so on for international markets). Similarly for the “state”: it has always been a heterogeneous entity but never more so than in the present (comprising not only complex sets of institutions divided along executive, judicial and legislative lines, but a large number of regulatory agencies, military organizations, intelligence agencies et cetera). The point is that if we ignore this complexity and talk of the “market” versus the “state” we are simply uttering meaningless nonsense. So when I use the term “militarization” it is always with a definite referent out there: a specific project (such as the uniformity drive in American arsenals in the early nineteenth century) not to refer to some vague, general process. After all, routinization when wed to large size does yield economies of scale (hence capital accumulation) and that process can keep the resulting organizations going independently of any current military influence.

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>From: [Joy Garnett](#)

>Date: Tue, 24 Feb 2004 11:53:06

>

Lately I keep thinking of the demand for military-esque products, fashion and advertising vis-à-vis their actual manufacture and production. I’m thinking mystique, so I’m mostly thinking of cars right now, witness the recent explosion of hummers, hummer ads, the new boxy Toyota Scion and the jeep-esque new Honda Element. I mean, I guess this isn’t new: they’ve been marketing cars with GPS devices and smart screens and turbo what-not for quite a while now. I guess people just want a piece of that military action mystique – everything has to become a form of entertainment. Every time the U.S. gets its war on, there is an efflorescence of this kind of thing in American malls and in cities, not to mention extreme couture: those fetching chiffon fatigues strolling down the runways, worldwide.

>

So where does the demand actually originate and just how frivolous is it? How much of it is fueled by some kind of collective denial? How much of it trickles down from “above?”

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>

>From: [Manuel DeLanda](#)

>Date: Thu, 26 Feb 2004 14:36:33

>

Actually I have very little to say about this, the spread of “military motifs” in popular culture. Only within a philosophy in which all that matters are representations and in which the “linguisticity of experience” is taken for granted, can these issues seem non-trivial. (On the other hand I can understand that artists who produce representations would be concerned with this, but too much focus on representations can make artists forget about reality.) In my work representations in general play only a limited role. The reason I chose to write about the battlefield as a social space was precisely because the events that happen there are so physical and real. To put it bluntly, bullets pierce your body and kill you regardless of the beliefs you hold, that is, regardless of how you represent the events to yourself. Now, it may be argued that representations are important for morale, that is, they may not stop bullets but they make people fight. But that is only partly true: what makes people fight is not so much the semantic content of beliefs (the meanings open to interpretation) but the intensity of the devotion with which one holds those beliefs. The intensity of beliefs and

desires, the passion behind them, is not in itself representational. To give a concrete example: one could claim that terrorists crashed their planes into the Twin Towers because they believed the sentence "martyrs get seventy virgins in heaven." But imagine now that we keep the intensity with which they believed the same and change the sentence to any other one promising some kind of eternal reward, however vague. They would still have crashed the planes. This shows that even though "meanings" do play a role they play a limited role: given a level of intensity a wide range of meanings will do. On the other hand I realize that if one believes in the "linguisticality of experience" (where meanings are constitutive of reality and where objective reality as such disappears) my argument does not work. But then again, who could be interested in the work of idealist artists for whom reality does not exist?

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>From: [David Young](#)

>Date: Fri, 27 Feb 2004 12:49:40

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Another interesting point on the militarization of societies is the observation that the Fordist, hierarchical assembly line actually represented a "purification" of, so called "armory production" which was pioneered by the Springfield Armory during the American Civil War. This has gradually evolved into what practitioners in the socio-technical design movement refer to as "Design Principle 1." Workers in the socio-technical tradition have developed what we refer to as "Design Principle 2" which, in contradistinction to Design Principle 1, treats semi-autonomous groups as its building blocks, and is designed around hierarchies of function, rather than hierarchies of structure (e.g. "management" is a role, or function, not a person, or control structure – control is exercised by the responsible team, not by supervisors or managers).

>

The discipline of the modern industrial regime is applied militarism – the perfection of so-called "armory production," first used during the American Civil War. Stanley Milgram has identified the effects of active and passive authoritarianism, derived from this hierarchical "Design principle 1" on human behavior in his famous experiments (students giving electric shocks to their peers). We ignore the vast body of work on authoritarianism, dogmatism and polarization at our peril.

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>From: [Ryan Bishop](#)

>Date: Thu, 26 Feb 2004 13:24:11

>

While Manuel is right about the interplay between the military and the civilian spheres, especially in relation to standardization and routinization, it is also useful to bring the import of visual technologies back into this (as Virilio and JDD often remind us). The studies of the empirical senses in the nineteenth century that led to examinations of movement by Marey and Muybridge were not only deployed in various "entertainments" such as cinema but within factories for improving time-motion studies. These in turn led to an intensification of the ability to reproduce almost anything: machines, images, weapons, technicities, et cetera. The divisions we wish to make between various spheres of endeavor – daily politics, activism, democratic politics, stone-throwing – reinforce another important dimension of the military and the state: the power to divide, which has been the story of sovereignty and diasporas from the Torah to the present.

>

But to return to Gena's question posed at the end of her posting, I guess what makes militarization worth examining is the set of technicities it contains that have become so much of the quotidian and common-sense nature of the world in its current global moment. That, and of course, that these technicities are not meant to deliver perpetual peace (as Kant's essay on the topic would hope) but to turn us into useless hunks of suet and gristle when the state chooses to co-opt the war machine through the military and incorporate it into the body politic.

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>From: [Manuel DeLanda](#)

>Date: Sat, 28 Feb 2004 13:13:56

>

The role of representations (visual or otherwise) can only be made clear when linking them to non-linguistic practices (such as disciplining workers). But if one takes as a point of departure that everything is discursive (and meta-discursive) and fails to include the physical then the analysis will reveal nothing (then torture becomes deconstruction: what an absurdity!).

>

Representations do matter but in order to understand their real role one must put them in context. Here the ideas of Michel Foucault and Max Weber are crucial.

1) Foucault sharply distinguished between discursive and non-discursive practices. An example of the former are the practices (analyzing, discussing, gathering data) which lead to the production of discourses and categories, such as the discourse of criminology and the category of delinquency. Non-discursive practices include torturing, monitoring, drilling soldiers et cetera. Yet, literary intellectuals everywhere (I sit in panels with at least one of them each time I lecture) insist torturing and drilling are discursive. This is a bastardization of Foucault and a way of rendering his distinction meaningless (if torture is discursive what would be an example of non-discursive?).

>

2) Weber's famous method of "understanding" has been equally bastardized by making it all about semantics. To recover his insights we need to sharply distinguish "signification" from "significance." When someone asks "What do you mean?" there are some cases (when talking to small children or foreign speakers) when this may indeed be a request for a definition, hence a matter of meanings. But in most cases it is equivalent to "What's your point?" which is not about semantics but rather about issues of importance, relevance, pertinence. It is a way of saying "How is what you just said relevant to the conversation?" or "What are you trying to achieve with that statement?" This pragmatic dimension of language is lost in all discussions of representations because it is more closely related to the non-discursive, for example, to situations where we need to assess whether an event is causally significant in an explanation (your computer breaks down and by coincidence there is thunderbolt outside your house. You want to know "Was that event outside significant in the breakdown? Was it a coincidence?").

>

It is crucial today (after three decades in which intellectuals and artists alike have been trapped in the straightjacket of semiotics) that we break with those bastardizations and begin a re-conceptualization of language and images in the context of non-discursive practices.

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>From: [Ognjen Stjepic](#)

>Date: Fri, 27 Feb 2004 11:15:23

>

I live in Zagreb, Croatia, have worked in various electronic media and dealt with some of them as subjects of inquiry at Croatian Radio, Multimedia

Institute Mi2 and elsewhere. I'm an editor at Jesenski & Turk publishing (Zagreb), where my pet project is Biblioteka 42 which covers Life, Universe and Everything and features some of the more thought-provoking contemporary works on the subject of science, technology, society and media.

>

I would like to respond to the issues that Manuel has introduced. Manuel, I get a feeling that terrorism might present a challenge to your credo, as outlined in your exchanges here and elsewhere. The way I see it, you are trying to downsize analytic apparatus – ontologically crowded, no doubt – for dealing with the fact/phenomenon/myth of terrorism. That is, you admit some kinds of entities and expel others you don't see fit for materialistic philosophy. So far, so good. (I mean, I don't wish to question this maneuver by itself right now.) Let's see what are the consequences.

>

There's at least one feature of terrorism that is left unaddressed if terrorism is explained (away?) in terms of intensities of beliefs and desires: the question of justice. Terrorists intensely desire what they believe is just, and there's got to be a *justification* for a belief, all the more for such intense beliefs held by large groups.

>

I a) don't see how you can accommodate such thing as moral justification in the ontology you suggest; b) do believe that justification is the crucial issue of any discussion on terrorism; c) think that *Under Fire's* talk of representations of armed conflicts is relevant and potentially fruitful precisely because representations tend to reveal the means of justification.

>

This is, of course, a fairly abstract objection, but if I'm right, it shouldn't be too hard to think of more concrete examples to corroborate it.

>

To emphasize the importance of representation for analysis, let me give another example: Suppose there are many people in, say, Palestine, suffering from the same real conditions they live in and probably sharing many of the same beliefs. However, only some of them actually make that additional step and kill people at bus stations. Given a level of intensity, what other belief than the belief that "killing people at bus stations is justified and righteous in these circumstances" might suffice to motivate them *and* explain the terrorists' representation as heroes by their

supporters? Or, counterfactually, how would you represent as justified a crime that was done explicitly out of greed (perhaps for seventy virgins in heaven)?

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>

>From: [Manuel DeLanda](#)

>Date: Fri, 27 Feb 2004 14:17:02

>

I agree that moral justification is part of the explanation of this social behavior, but on what other basis do terrorists justify their actions than by their 1) belief in historical narratives about past injustices, 2) beliefs in their God-given rights as members of a certain religion, 3) beliefs about current facts and situations.

>

Remember I did not say that "meanings" do not play a role, all I said is that this has to be cut down to size. At any rate, same degree of suffering does not translate in the same intensity of belief or desire, that is, the same degree of passion. We know relatively little about the affective component because we have been obsessed with semantics for so long.

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>From: [Bernard Roddy](#)

>Date: Thu, 26 Feb 2004 13:56:16

>

I have to wonder whether Manuel isn't being provocative here, rather than simply conceding the equal importance of both "meaning" and "reality." I was thinking that in the interest of a non-Western orientation, perhaps a positivistic, technocratic approach might be problematic, but given such an analysis, we can still recognize, if we choose our examples well, the equal importance of representation. I for one, have serious doubts about any form of analysis that does not acknowledge the ideological or unconscious interests of the one who reflects, and the bearing that representational culture has on that. The 9/11 example is designed to show that different cognitive states could drive one to the same actions, but it is also true that what one thinks is "real" depends on what representations are informing one's cognitive faculties. Whether you can find a particular scriptural basis for your views on abortion, terrorism, or whatever, depends less on what is in the scripture and how much insight you have, than on what you want to find.

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>From: [Manuel DeLanda](#)

>Date: Sat, 28 Feb 2004 13:07:29

>

Only if you uncritically accept (like most intellectuals after the linguistic turn do) that experience is shaped by language (that is, if you accept that Kant modified by Saussure is the essence of experience). But if you do not accept that (as, for example, Deleuze does not) what's real does not depend on our minds. But anyway, trying to convince you of this is like trying to convince a Christian that Jesus is not the son of god. Who cares?

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>From: [Mary Keller](#)

>Date: Fri, 27 Feb 2004 11:16:38

>

Perhaps I have misunderstood, but I interject again with great respect for the conversation. I think one is headed down a dead-end if the religiousness of the terrorist is characterized as a product of belief. What moves one Palestinian to strap explosives to herself but does not move another Palestinian to the same action should not be corralled to that little bubble of belief that is so often the underlying notion of what constitutes the religiousness of a religious person. What moves one soldier from racing back to pick up his fallen colleague, but does not move another soldier to do the same – would you call that the first soldier's belief? Religiousness is better related to long-term, disciplinary practices that speak through the persons practicing to different effect in different bodies in different situations.

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>From: [Chris Gray](#)

>Date: Fri, 27 Feb 2004 18:05:52

>

I for one am happy to be one of Foucault's bastards. On a pragmatic level I don't find discursive and non-discursive as profoundly useful distinctions. I want to change culture (discourse systems) and the distinctions that I find useful there are between rules and meta-rules and hegemonic and insurrectionary knowledges. Everything is discourse in this schema, and war is about the making and unmaking of the world (as Elaine Scarry subtitled her wonderful book on torture and war *The Body in Pain*). Discursive strategies are interesting when they consciously interrogate the meta-rules of a hegemonic discourse, but when they

follow the rules they are part of the problem. Actions, artifacts, and bodies are all part of the conversation, or better, changing the conversation.

>

War/Terror/Torture are all the same to me on the fundamental level where they operate as meta-rules and pragmatically they are identical today where any distinctions between them are merely grammatical and are used to score political points. Differences between them aren't important on the operational level.

War/Terror/Torture are about attacking bodies as a way of reinforcing or deconstructing discourses. People look for liberating discourses and what many people want to be liberated from is uncertainty, fear of death, fear of the other, and they commit to discourses that they hope will, through sacrifice (a key motivation for war... see *Blood Rites* by Barbara Ehrenreich) and violence, remake the world into one that offers them identity, meaning, immortality, and power. Trouble is, it is bullshit and it is integral to the worst hegemonic discourses that are killing and maiming many right now and that together are going to get us all killed before our time if we don't remake the international system and politics itself to eliminate these forms of arguments.

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>From: [Ryan Bishop](#)

>Date: Fri, 05 Mar 2004 12:35:27

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Manuel, what's real might not depend on our minds but how can we access the real other than through our minds and our senses, all of which have been shaped by language, to some extent? I don't think we need to posit language as originary or the prime mover any more than we need to do so with the real, do we? Could we not simply say that language, culture and perception are mutually dependent and influential, as well as inextricably interrelated? If so, then we need not prioritize either the linguistic/symbolic or the material but rather understand that we are not engaged in a debate about confusing the map for the territory, but rather understanding that without the map there would be no territory constituted as such, and vice versa.

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>7.
>ASSEMBLAGES OF
>IMAGE, ACTION,
>AND EVENT.

>From: [Thomas Keenan](#)

>Date: Tue, 16 Mar 2004 13:09:37

>

Let me introduce myself – a bit late into the *Under Fire* game but ready to take up the discussion more or less where it left off. I direct a human rights program at Bard College, which has put theoretical inquiry and the analysis of media and expression at its core. I wrote a book a few years ago called *Fables of Responsibility*, which argued that deconstructive strategies could teach us to re-imagine concepts or experiences like responsibility, justice, freedom, and rights in a way that broke with a liberal individualist paradigm, and that opened them up to new political inscriptions. Since then I've been (slowly) writing a series of articles for a book on media and conflict, which takes the humanitarian crises and "human rights" conflicts of the 1990s as its focus.

>

So the question is: if (as James put it) media or the image "identifies, records, relays, represents, and informs our response to armed conflict," then what? Someone asked about affect – which is to say, about response, but also about responsibility, effect, impact, judgment. I think that we have tended a little too much to take this moment for granted. What comes after the image? (I am going to use the metonymy "image" to stand in for a range of inscriptions and representations in the media.) Of course, more images come after the image – images are destined for a life of reuse, political recontextualization, persuasion. zBut people also take actions, or don't; produce new images, or don't; take to the streets, or don't; fall asleep, or don't. Response, if it has any meaning or any interest, is not entirely programmed by the stimulus, the information, or the image. So the debate about the semiotics of representations, about what images mean, seems to me to miss the point, at least slightly. Isn't the question: what do images do? How do they act, and how do they make us act, with or without more images? The image has – besides a meaning, or many meanings – a power, a force, a role to play. Without it, these days, it seems that little happens. It makes things happen (sometimes), but in ways they are very difficult to map.

>

This "power of the image" was sorely tested, at both extremes, in Africa and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The decade began with the Gulf War, the Romanian "television revolution," Rodney

King, and the famine and "humanitarian intervention" in Somalia. It seemed to constitute the definitive triumph of the image. CNN, said the Secretary General of the United Nations, was "the sixteenth member of the Security Council." Everyone talked about the CNN effect, about "real time war," "headline diplomacy," a new politics or even a post-politics in which "images drive policy."

>

Remember Somalia? Starving children, clan politics, khat, "technicals," warlords, famine relief, and all the other clichés? Remember the front-page images of famine, the relief-agency-induced photo opportunities, the delegation led by CARE that appealed, successfully, to the White House to launch an armed humanitarian mission to "protect the relief convoys?" The pictures of kids in camps gave way to floodlit coverage of the first minutes of "Operation Restore Hope" – "NBC and CNN plan to air the scheduled troop landing live at 10 p.m. ET/7 p.m. PT," *USA Today* had written that day – and ended calamitously on October 3, 1993 in the events that came to be called *Black Hawk Down*. Pictures in, pictures out, as the saying went.

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The architect of the Cold War, George Kennan, saw his world disappearing in these images: "If American policy from here on out, particularly policy involving the use of our armed forces abroad, is to be controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry, then there is no place – not only for myself, but for what have traditionally been regarded as the responsible deliberative organs of our government, in both executive and legislative branches."

>

And his spiritual soul mate, Paul Virilio, even worried out loud in *Desert Screen* that politics itself was disappearing. "Today, the public image has taken over public space. Television has become the forum for all emotions and all options. We vote while watching TV. [...] We are heading toward a cathodic democracy, but without rules. [...] There is no politics possible at the scale of the speed of light. Politics is the time of reflection. Today, we no longer have time to reflect; the things that we see have already taken place. And we must react immediately... Is a real-time democracy possible? An authoritarian politics, yes. But what is proper to democracy is the sharing of power. When there is no longer time to share, what do we share? Emotions."

And yet at the very same time, there seemed to be countervailing tendencies.

>

The nickname for them would be Bosnia. One visitor to Sarajevo said, in December of 1993, "Here, there are no secrets. There are journalists here, from here pictures are transmitted, there are satellite communications, all of this is known. In this city there are soldiers of the United Nations, well armed, and nonetheless it all continues to happen." Two years later, Giles Rabine, reporting live for France 2 from the same city just after the fall of Srebrenica, commented simply that, after thirty-nine months of televised siege, "the Sarajevans have had enough of being interviewed, being filmed, being photographed; they've had enough of us watching them die, live, without trying to do anything to save them. And who's to say they're wrong?"

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I hope we can begin a conversation about this now.

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>From: [Joy Garnett](#)

>Date: Thu, 18 Mar 2004 09:56:12

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I wonder about certain clichés and assumptions we make about how images function: the idea that they can bridge gaps in experience – that images of a bombing or any tragedy can elicit understanding or empathy in people thousands of miles away. I question that. I think it's probably always the opposite. Seeing the plane hit the tower and seeing the footage of the plane hitting the tower remain forever two different orders of experience. The experience of being hit by the bullet or losing the foot to the landmine cannot be "bridged" or approximated by remote viewing, however deftly framed or intimately positioned.

>

Images function rather to solidify the utter separateness of these experiences; while seeming to "bring people together" they do exactly the opposite. They keep the gaps in place, while keeping the perception of bridging them intact.

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>From: [Ryan Griffis](#)

>Date: Thu, 18 Mar 2004 10:07:05

>

Could we discuss images as rhetoric (like any other form of communication) that are necessarily tied to an ideological moment,

without giving up on the materiality of images/words – or the question of "what they do?" Obviously, the "meaning" of an image is intricately connected to ideology and the subject-social imaginary complex, but that does not negate that words/images are things in the world that bump up against other things. In that sense, maybe it's all about relationships. Seeing the towers explode and collapse and seeing the media images of it are, as Joy says, two different experiences, but the media object is more than just a representation of the event.

>

The argument over experience versus representation seems a distraction, for me, from the chance to discuss representations as experiences/event/objects. Watching a film of someone getting shot is not "like" getting shot (or seeing someone shot in front of you), but it is no less an actual experience.

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>From: [Brian Holmes](#)

>Date: Wed, Mar 24 2004 00:55:55

>

I'd like to apply Virilio's assertions as quoted by Thomas Keenan to the most recent events – and vice-versa.

The ten devices that exploded, first on a series of suburban trains arriving in Madrid, then into the Spanish media, certainly provoked a shared emotion. The resultant images, appearing at something like the speed of light on national screens, had everything to do with an election. But have we reached a cathodic democracy? And a real-time limit? Are the Spanish (and by probable extension, the Americans, then all of us) in the grip of an authoritarian politics? Is this the end of reasoned reflection? Are there no longer any rules?

>

One of the first things to understand – or admit – about democracy, is that it has always been vastly more a theory than a fact. Until when did the people (the "demos") make free, unmanipulated decisions? And just when did the "image" usurp that power of decision? Thomas was malignly clever in placing Virilio's lamentation next to George Kennan's; and what that Cold Warrior reference suggests is that most decisions are taken behind the scenes, by unelected individuals and groups, under a shroud of disinformation. Authoritarianism is there, at the heart of our so-called democracies.

Yet the Spanish sequence reveals something different. Here was clearly a media event, murderously unleashed in the least democratic way imaginable, by a small group of conspirators. Here was also an entirely typical attempt at the political production of disinformation. Yet this manipulated media event was followed by what appears to be a “popular decision.” What really happened in Spain? And what are the likely consequences?

>

It appears – correct me if I'm wrong – that in response to Aznar's deliberate and reiterated attempts to hide any Islamist motive for the bombing, and therefore, any relation to Spain's participation in the Iraq war, the Spanish voters ousted the Partido Popular, massively favored to win the election. It also appears that they had intensive recourse to their cell phones and SMS messages and Internet connections to do so, thus making a lightning fast, widely distributed, and yet seemingly rational, eminently political use of real-time media.

>

At the same time, it appears that a small group of terrorists have succeeded in swinging a major national election in exactly the direction they intended.

>

This is not exactly a “cathodic democracy,” nor a “power of the image.” This is a complex situation where an entire population is summoned to act, in just a few days, on a contradictory and tragic tangle of variously channeled kinds of information. This marks a strange, foreboding kind of progress in the relation between democratic aspirations and concocted events, manipulated news. Isn't it impressive to see an entire country react, come to its senses, and throw out the party which a vast majority opposed on the decisive issue of participation in the war? Isn't it chilling to see how perfectly the terrorists achieved what one supposes to have been their goal? And how can anyone refrain from imagining that the current American administration, in the face of such a demonstration of symbolic efficiency, and in a situation of increasing disarray and desperation, will not try something dramatic on the eve of the upcoming November election? Is there any hope that the American people – indeed the world – would react as the Spanish voters did, to turn such a manipulation around in to its opposite, effective and immediate blowback, a reassertion of the most minimal rules of democracy?

To my mind, the Virilio-type approach fails the test of events, it fails to make any sense of contemporary conditions. People who have to both produce and consume the contents of the modern, diversified media no longer have time to lament the days when decisions could safely be left to the elites. But democracy remains much more a theory than a fact. And authoritarianism remains an eminent danger – even if it cannot simply be ascribed to the sheer existence of mass communications.

>

I'm stunned by the electoral terrorism in Madrid. To my mind, viable media theory would be more important than ever in this situation. But I don't where it is. I'm curious what you all think.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Wed, Mar 24 2004 18:31:13

>

Virilio's thesis about the interchangeable armies struck me as a very powerful and intelligent statement. And I again recognize the pattern from Tupamaros, or from the IRA or the ETA or Brigada Rossa. You struggle against other, but in your struggle you become the other, you imitate his patterns, his behavior, his arguments, they have jails, we have people's jails, they have tribunals, we get people's tribunals, they execute, we “make justice.” The reading of Oedipus myth by Lacan and Foucault is very similar, a discussion about the power. Oedipus kills Layo but he becomes Layo, he is the heir of Layos symbolical power, he get the throne, the queen and the land.

>

This morning I read an interview with the new leader of Hamas, Abdel-Haziz al-Rantissi. He says no grown up Israelis are civilians since they have all served in the military. Only the children are civilian. He says: “We choose military targets. If civilians are liable to die, that isn't a reason to stop the attack. But we don't set out to kill civilians.”

>

Its the same argument Sharon and the IDF use when they punish the Palestinians as a collective after a suicide attack. Or when they kill some civilians passing by when they launch a targeted killing. In the same perverse terms Israelis and the Hamas are as interchangeable, as Oedipus and Layo.

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>From: [Brigitte van der Sande](#)

>Date: Thu, Mar 25 2004 18:39:31

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So we are “media creatures?” That may be undeniably true for people in the West, but is that all we are? Are all our experiences, emotions, thoughts et cetera. determined by the media, or are we still able to think, feel and experience life by ourselves? These questions concern me since I started my research last year on an exhibition about war as a daily, proximate reality.

>

My motivation for the exhibition stems from the beginning of the nineties, after the Gulf War and during the Bosnian War, when I realized that the phenomenon of war and its effect on the daily life of people in war areas stay unimaginable for us in the West, even though we are bombarded with information and images in the media. I remember being at the Venice Biennale, where I realized that war was just around the corner, and that nobody seemed aware of it.

>

Just after I started the research, Susan Sontag published her book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), where she concludes that we will never be able to imagine how dreadful war is, and how normal it becomes: “Can't understand, can't imagine.” She mentions Jeff Wall's *Dead Troops Talk* from 1992 as an ultimate image of the impossibility of imagining war. Of course I didn't (want to) believe her, and I set out to find works of art that would at least raise a corner of the veil that the media (and we ourselves) have put over the experience of war.

>

In the past two years I've seen many exhibitions on art and war or related subjects, and I have to admit, I can't find what I'm looking for. Practically all the work I've seen is either too ironic or shockingly direct, creating distance instead of empathy. What is somehow possible in literature, seems to be lacking in visual art. My research turned to the phenomenon of art, trying to understand why war is treated only as a media subject, not as anything that should really concern us. Maybe my research hasn't been thorough enough, or I'm looking in the wrong places, but I haven't been able to find artists who make work that is more layered than an immediate and explicit image. Most art in this context is about media reception of war, not about perception of war itself.

>

It is telling that many of the discussions in *Under*

Fire are about representation versus reality. I think Manuel DeLanda's irritated reaction to Joy Garnett's questions about the aestheticization of the military was unjust, because as far as I can see, the issue of war as a life style is exactly what should concern us. DeLanda's real “bullet that pierces your body” is represented as a decorative hole in a fashion garment, and war itself is seen as a sample sheet for trend forecasters. Where is the reality of war then, except in the minds of a few theoreticians in the West (or should I say arm chair thinkers, including myself), and in the lives of millions in the rest of the world who haven't had the fortune to consume war through television.

>

The artists who were in New York on 9/11 – the only recent experience of a warlike situation in the West that at least triggered a collectively felt emotion – all chose for a documentary approach, registering what was happening, as if they had Goya's lines in mind: “I saw it” (Yo lo vi) and even in the case of the French filmmaker Jules Naudet, who turned his camera off and said “Nobody should have to see this” makes you think of Goya's “One cannot look” (No se puede mirar). Also many curators, like Catherine David of Witte de With, choose the documentary approach, the personal testimony in art to research culture. Is that the only approach left, or can we still believe that artists can break through appearances (representation) to uncover the essential forces in human existence: love, loneliness and death? (After Rilke.)

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>From: [Maria](#)

>Date: Sat Mar 27 02:25:46 2004

>

I am living in Colombia where war has been going on for a very long time, it's not clear if it's been just for the last forty or so years or since the Spaniards arrived. But definitely people here have a lot of experience with war and there is a very different consciousness about it.

>

There is as you said a lot of cynical work about war going around in the world. Humorous/glamorous works about war – well here in Colombia there simply is no room for this type of work, they would be perceived as bad taste. It is a very different perspective.

>

Also what I have noticed is that the general attitude in Colombia is that people are so tired of

war, seeing it in the news, the politics, the lies, the double standard et cetera, that people simply don't talk about it anymore. My friends are artists, musicians, intellectuals, activists and the such and we never talk about war, we all kind of see it as hopeless, a Catch 22 situation and talking about it as useless. A lot of people opt for never watching the news either, which is just disgusting propaganda, morbidity, death et cetera. Now this doesn't mean that people don't make art/music/film about war, it is inevitable. If we don't talk about it, this doesn't mean it doesn't exist. It floats in the air and penetrates the spirit. I have been trying to make art unrelated to war myself for the last year or so, a sort of promise I made myself, but inevitably ideas pop up in my mind that are 100% political. How can they not be political when I see displaced indigenous people begging for food on my street while their children run around on the dirty sidewalk?

>
Another detail: in Colombia most of those that make art are usually not living the war directly. As you know this is a guerrilla war that occurs principally in the countryside and the artists reside in the cities, so their perspective isn't direct. Most contemporary artists in Colombia stem from the rich or middle classes. An artist in the city may experience war because of the bombs that explode in the cities, which here doesn't really cause (as much) terror anymore; it just has become part of the normal everyday risk factor. Also, this artist sees all of the displaced people flooding into the city, perhaps he has had a friend or family member get kidnapped or killed. Yet, the artist is not the displaced person or the mother who has lost her sons.

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>
>From: [Joy Garnett](#)
>Date: Sat, Mar 27 2004 02:26:35

>
It is interesting and telling that contemporary artists who engage the subject of war should approach it in terms of how it is represented in the media. I don't believe this is simply a conceptual or academic trend, or even a particularly easy thing to do. I paint mass media as though it were direct experience, yet I know, of course, that the direct experience of war and the experience of televised war are not the same. This is where "art" comes in, and the delicate decisions that allow, hopefully, for alternate readings and layers of interpretation.

>

The direct experience of war might render the making of timely art rather difficult or even impossible precisely because of the lack of distance – the lack of a mediating factor. I really believe that to make art that isn't a mere vehicle for catharsis or sanctimoniousness requires distance – that artists are constantly employing internal distancing devices as a part of the discipline of making art. This could most definitely be said about literature as well as visual art. The most reliable distancing device is our own memories.

>
I think it is important to "discuss representations as experiences/event /objects" but maybe it is more the wont of artists to just go ahead and assume that in their work. "Media" is a part of us, part of our physicality, our myth and reality, not some appendage that we can choose whether or not to ignore.

>
Representation of "life" through media is not just a phenomenon of the West, even though much of what's out there is exported; don't "media" and its vectors get retrofitted, re-made, re-invented all the time?

>
The business of making art is the business of representation – art is media. Perhaps if Rilke were living now he might see media as one of the "essential forces in human existence."

>
I'm not sure I agree that art is the best way to create empathy, or even that the best art does so. I'm not sure whether empathy, fine human emotion though it is, results in action or in a sense of inevitability or even futility.

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>
>From: [Bracha Lichtenberg Etinger](#)
>Date: Mon, Mar 29 2004 18:37:56

>
Artists do produce works that are neither too ironic nor shockingly direct, and create empathy that allows the passage of painful feelings. It is indeed possible that you [Brigitte] are looking in the wrong places, it is indeed possible that some kinds of work need another kind of time to be effective, and that curators are missing the less-instant NOW in their rush for the INSTANT now. War is not this instant event that creates instant feeling that of necessity will produce art. War is always shockingly instant but also traumatizing in the long run and for the generations to come. It creates vagueness and vibrations on many levels

and art is involved with its chords on so many different levels. Instant reactions are important, but they are not necessarily art, even when they are translated into images made by artists and signed as art. Paul Celan's poetry was not born in the same day, nor in the day after the event.

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>
>From: [Chris Gray](#)
>Date: Mon, Mar 29 2004 18:36:57

>
Some people feel no empathy. They feel little at all. When watching a killing, when performing a killing... it is the same. These people are labeled psychopaths or socio-paths. The military estimates that perhaps 3% of soldiers are in this category. They never get shell shock/battle fatigue/post-traumatic stress; whatever the current label. They often become special forces or mercenaries. The U.S. and other countries are looking for the psycho-pharmacological equivalent so all soldiers can enjoy this fearless, resilient, conscienceless, outlook. They are optimistic.

>
Some people seem to feel everything, to have complete empathy, until it shuts them down and kills them.

>
Most of us are somewhere in-between. But how any image or event impacts someone could be very different than someone else. How anything effects someone depends on the circumstances. Some images... some mediated "things," have changed my life more than seemingly crucial events I felt first hand. After the first time I was arrested and beaten, the other occurrences weren't life changing – frightening and annoying and inspiring usually, but expected. I wasn't surprised as I was the first time. Not surprised cognitively, but surprised in my whole body. At how REAL it was. But this sense of realness strikes me in many different ways, including when confronting images, artifacts, places, facts, and sounds.

>
Of course images are a special category and mass media images a special subset of those, but for now I just want to comment on the general discussion about the qualities of experience, direct and indirect – embodied or mediated (although we all know an embodied experience is still mediated through our senses, but the range is greater). In particular, the most important case people have been raising, perhaps first

with Manuel and his deadly bullet, is viewing versus experiencing the pain of another human.

>
It seems to me that many activists and revolutionaries have more empathy than is usual. It is hardly a gift. I've often wished I could ignore what is happening in the world, the small evils and the systemic horrors, but I can't. It is real. And I think/feel it is real both because of my direct experiences AND my mediated ones – from history to indy-news to *The Great Falls Tribune* to the discussion and images of *Under Fire*.

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>
>From: [Brigitte van der Sande](#)
>Date: Tue, Mar 30 2004 21:51:08

>
I do not shut my eyes for images from the media; I read the papers, watch television, I go to documentary festivals, I see a lot, I read a lot. I agree with Chris Gray that some mediated images can be stronger than first hand experiences. For example images of violence, because violence is present in every society and many of us have experienced it personally. But again, with Susan Sontag, I do not think that someone who is in the middle of a war or who has suffered one, will agree that a mediated image of war can have more power than the direct experience. That is an essential difference between violence and war. The one is imaginable, the other isn't. The one relates directly to our own lives, the other to the lives of people we don't know, or maybe even don't want to know.

>
When I write about art in this context, I don't mean art that jumps up immediately in the middle or directly in the wake of a war. You mention Paul Celan, Bracha, and we could include other poets and writers like Primo Levi, Lydia Ginzberg, W.G. Sebald and many many others who needed time to transform their traumatic experiences from the Second World War to morally urgent works of art. As the Dutch poet Lucebert wrote in the fifties: "Beauty beauty has burned her face." But isn't it surprising that visual artists from that same generation have hardly taken on W.W. II as a subject? Is that because the "in-betweenness" space you write about, Bracha, is created more easily in a narrative structure than in a single image?

>
Susan Sontag writes about the complex issue of the "truth" of an image. Besides the (un)certainly

of manipulation of an image, the demand for “truthfulness,” we now also see the influence of movies like Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*. The imagery of the movie was based upon the famous war photos of Robert Capa, what made it seem so “real.” But the correspondence of many real war photos to film stills or other works of art make every photo suspect. Though sometimes connected to a certain format like the black-and-white snapshot or high gloss cibachrome, this is more about exploiting or consciously avoiding a specific aesthetical style. Because of this mechanism, war photographers and film makers will want to avoid the impression of staging an event, because it is equated with deceit or insincerity. To achieve that more “truthful” result, it may be necessary to be more deceitful than ever before. Hence the use of hand-held cameras for film crews (not only because of practical reasons), the deliberate use of black-and-white film or color, depending on the context where it is shown. Hence the staging of events to make them more “authentic,” the panting sounds of the running journalist. The question is: is this a problem? For an art historian who believes in the power and authenticity of images, even though they have been manipulated, the answer is: No. For a moralist, probably: Yes.

>
Seen from the other side: is it a problem that many contemporary visual artists have adopted the format of war representation, choosing for a direct, documentary approach without “tainting” their work with aesthetics? For a moralist, probably: No. For an art historian, who believes that not only the content matters, but also the form in which the content is presented: Yes. But here I walk on dangerous grounds. The former sharp division between document and work of art has been penetrated by both sides, the border between them has become fluid. The British film maker Peter Watkins brilliantly made use of the fictive documentary style in movies like *Culloden* in 1964 and *The War Game* in 1965. The penetration of reality in art and art in reality may well be the aesthetics of this day and age. Which leads me to the complicated question of ethics.

>
A particular illustrative art work for me in this context is the video compilation *Witness: AnAesthetic*, 2002 by the British artist Heather Burnett. It is a mix of action movies scenes with real shots from the civil war in Sierra Leone, that were judged too cruel to be broadcasted. You could escape the increasingly horrifying images

by pressing a big red button next to the chair. I didn’t use the button and sat out the whole thing, thinking what is art for, if not to be looked at? Afterwards, I was angry at myself for looking at images that were unbearable. And angry at the artist for showing me these images. To me this was a cynical commentary in the postmodern tradition of war as a spectacle, with me as a voyeur. Strangely enough, another video work that was at first shocking in its exhibitionism, in the end was surprisingly moving. The Belgian artist Renzo Martens made *Episode 1* in 2003, a reportage of his trip to Chechnya. Familiar images of totally destroyed cities, refugee camps and NGO offices are the background to his interviews with soldiers, refugees and inhabitants of the ruined houses. He poses one question: “What do you think of me?” One of the Chechnyan soldiers answers: “Go home. You’re just an idiot looking for adventure.” Considering the real danger of being shot by Russian soldiers, you have to agree. But by shifting the roles of interviewer-interviewee – once literally giving the camera to a woman to film him – the reactions of women changed from angry and frustrated to candid and open-hearted. They open up to him.

>
Ethically it could easily be disputed that Martens is a narcissistic fool with a twisted idea of psychotherapy. And that Burnett on the contrary poses the very moral question of our position as witness/spectator/voyeur. But wasn’t the court jester the only one who could tell the truth to the King?

> - - -

>D: SPACE.

>From: [Eyal Weizman](#)

>Date: Mon, 12 Apr 2004 21:19:40

>

Given the transfer of the technology, mechanisms, and spatial strategies of the Israeli occupation to other corners of the globe (most notably Iraq), as well as the mimicry of the techniques of resisting it, it became interesting for me to think about the mechanism of this transfer. Are images instrumental not only in the representation but in the very reproduction of conflicts?

>

It seems to me that military and political action mimics and replicates situations in several domains. Militaries “learn” through the direct transfer of information and experience from other militaries, but as well through replicating and reproducing techniques exposed in open channels. The separate cells of irregular armed resistance, no longer operating across networks and chains of command, do operate by replicating patterns, techniques and actions seen in the very same media channels. And lastly, irregular and regular forces mimic each other’s atrocities under the concept of “retaliations.”

>

The “Shi’ite Intifada” currently unfolding in Iraq, seems to be part of a whole imaginary geography that Makram Khoury-Machool termed the “Palestinization of Iraq.” He claims that across the Arab world (but it is not only there) the occupation of Iraq has been from very early on understood as similar to the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. If the Iraqi were Palestinianized, the American military was Israelianized, both in the eyes of its opposition as well as in its own eyes. A *Guardian* article from last December reported that “Israel trains U.S. assassination squads in Iraq” and that Israeli occupation technology and skills are transported from the West Bank to Iraq. Robert Fisk recently wrote that “the U.S. military asked for, and received, Israel’s ‘rules of engagement’ from Ariel Sharon’s

government.” Two years ago, an Israeli paratrooper who participated in the battle of Jenin told me that there were U.S. officers (dressed in IDF uniform) present as spectators within the rubble of the refugee camp as the last stages of the “battle” unfolded.

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There is, as Simon Marvin shows, a direct transfer of knowledge and experience between some “Western militaries” – and I have myself experienced some joint corporate/military conferences where information is exchanged. But information is gained as well through informal channels. There is much that a military officer could and does learn from turning on his TV or logging on to the Internet.

>

Information posted on the net by NGOs and human rights organizations is widely used. Disturbingly, the Human Rights Watch report on the battle of Jenin is read by Israeli and foreign militaries, not so much for its human right perspective, but for its authoritative description of the battle. There, for example, if one missed it on TV, one can learn that the best way a military could move through a dense urban fabric is to blast your way and “walk through walls.”

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When the wall around the American compound in Baghdad looks as if its components are leftovers from Jerusalem, when “temporary closures” are imposed on whole towns and villages with earth dykes and barbed wire, when larger regions are carved up by road blocks and check points, when homes of suspected terrorists are leveled, when Apache helicopters are used in civilian areas, and when “targeted assassinations” are re-introduced into a new militarized geography, it is not only because these have become parts of a joint military curriculum written by Israeli training officers, but because they spread out through a process of mimicry, at whose center the West Bank functions as a laboratory of the extreme.

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In a project I am currently undertaking with the curator Anselm Franke, we described the relation between the spatiality of the occupation in the West Bank and other conflicts as one of a laboratory. Could Iraq have happened, and would it have happened in the way it has without the Israeli “counter Intifada” measures? We tried to show that images of war are performative in the sense that they reproduce the events that they portray. Wars are both physical conflicts and conceptual systems, and concepts are reproducible.

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But the strategy of mimicry is as well central to Israel military politics itself. In an article titled “Defiled Cities” (to which I was referred by Steve Graham) Derek Gregory claims that as images of 9/11 were echoed by images of suicide attacks in Israel, the Israeli government marketed its assault of Palestinian cities and the destruction of the Palestinian Authority’s civil infrastructure as an extension to the destruction of the Taliban regime. Israel happily traveled into an imaginary geography where alongside the U.S. it was forced to engage in a similar brutal frontier war, facing similar “barbarians” bound on their total destruction.

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Mimicry and transfer could as well help to explain irregular resistance and terrorism. It seems to me that the traditional model of the terrorist “network” across which information, money, materials and orders flow,

may no longer be adequate. When phone, e-mail, money and passenger traffic are so closely monitored, even the very flexible and loose networks have difficulty in operating. I think that the model of the network may be gradually replaced with one of independent cells operating without being drafted, paid, ordered, or transported – fed for inspiration by the same common pools of images – mimicking and replicating them. Explosive belts, razed buildings, road blocks, and assassinated leaders thus float within common channels of news report and internet sites, and replicate themselves without the need for a precise tutorial or a direct order. This is part of the reason that the images from all different places seem so interchangeable.

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But if mimicry produces “almost the same but not quite” it has as well its slippages and contradictions. During the same Shi’ite Intifada we suddenly hear that a Palestinian holding an Israeli ID is being held hostage. As a Palestinian he is the model of resistance, but as an Israeli he is a very valuable bargaining or propaganda asset. What to do when models no longer fit and the real is revealed to contradict its representation?

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Tue, 13 Apr 2004 01:23:13

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In Palestine last year we took many photos of the settlements, which are placed in the same way the Christian castles were built during the Crusades. The Crusades and the ideology behind it seems to me to be still one of the most powerful metaphors we have today to describe the world and its structures.

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>From: [Eyal Weizman](#)

>Date: Thu, 15 Apr 2004 18:03:23

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It is true that some settlements are built not far from location of Crusader’s castles (Nablus, Bethlehem, Bethel...). The Crusaders castles in the West Bank were military instruments for the defense of the coastal cities and Jerusalem and for the territorial domination of the local population. They were places from which the mobile armies of the Latin kingdom could regroup and deploy. Similarly to the Latin kingdom (at least in this respect) that saw the area of today’s West Bank as a defensive frontier, Jewish settlements there were initially laid out according to the principle of regional defense in depth. The principles of this layout were borrowed (civilianized) from the IDF “dynamic defensive matrix” as conceived and implemented by Ariel Sharon between 1971 and 1973 for the Suez Canal side (and in reaction to Bar-Lev’s linear fortifications). Large parts of the settlement matrix were planned by Sharon few years later in his capacity as the minister in charge of settlements (1977-1981). The “dynamic defensive matrix” is based on strategic strongholds spread out in depth at a radius of vision/fire, and the ability to move forces fast between the points, i.e. high capacity arteries. The location of the settlements on the high ground is generally tactical (overlooking the traffic arteries and strategic cross roads, usually in the valleys) and is enhanced by a circumferential internal layout that reinforces the strength already

provided by the topography. Israeli suburbia made perfect use of the system laid out for mobile defense in depth. The “matrix” became effective instruments of development, merging the needs of a sprawling suburbia with national security and political ambitions to push ever more Israelis into the West Bank.

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Another reason settlements are on mountaintops is local “land law.” By invoking an Ottoman era land law Israel could claim all uncultivated lands in the West Bank and Gaza as “state land.” The mountaintops are usually barren, as the soil eroded down from them to the valley below. The datum of non-cultivation within the mountainous region of the West Bank becomes thus a border of sorts, above it, a patchwork of thousands of small isolated islands where Israeli civil law effectively applies and below, in the cultivated areas, separate enclaves of the martial law.

>

The problem with the location and layout of settlements according to these strategic criteria (the IDF is involved in issues of location and the layout of settlements) is that the status of settlers as civilians becomes a political (and military) problematic.

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Much of the security function of the settlements is carried out either by privates contractors or a kind of civil guard (they usually dress in IDF fatigues so as not to be mistaken for armed Palestinians, as happened more than once).

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Palestinian organizations sometimes make distinctions between Israeli civilians (those who are living within the 1967 borders and didn't wear uniforms at the time of attack) as being illegitimate targets, and settlers and soldiers as legitimate targets. Some don't. Consider Hamas' claim that because of draft law for men and women in Israel, every Israeli is effectively either a soldier, a veteran or a future soldier.

>

When I worked with B'Tselem on “Land Grab” we addressed this issue by opposing to any form of armed attack (effectively terror) by both sides. But the interesting question remains: can the term “innocent civilian” mean anything in this context? Is there a possibility (anywhere really) to be an innocent civilian? If yes, what do you need to have done to lose your “innocent” status and turn into a “legitimate target”? Are the civilian hostages in Iraq “innocent civilians”? I think this relates as well to Bataille's statement that, “Within the society the army thus forms before me a ‘constituted body,’ a world closed in on itself, different from the whole.” Can the military still be ethically considered as a separate domain? In Israel the military is a system with very little outside, and has more than simple synergic relations to both political and economic systems.

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> 8 .

> EMBODIMENT AND

> INDOCTRINATION .

>From: [John Armitage](#)

>Date: Mon, 29 Mar 2004 18:33:52

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The main focus of my research is on the cultural politics of technology. I have also carried out research with and on the work of Paul Virilio, on Georges Bataille and on cyberspace. The emphasis here has been on enhancing or at least broadening the concepts of culture, the political and technology, with a view to developing cultural politics as a discipline in its own right, as opposed to a kind of sub-discipline of cultural studies. Most recently, the central theme of my work has been the militarization of the body.

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There has been a worldwide upsurge in the production, dispersal, encounters with and therefore interest in militarized bodies. Consider the escalation of militarization and militarism set in motion by the administration of president George W. Bush in the United States. Is this not in part at least an effort to instill a military spirit into the civilianized bodies of American citizens, particularly following the catastrophe of September 11, 2001, the onset of the "War on Terrorism" and the War on Iraq?

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What do we mean by a militarized body? How are civilianized bodies converted into military use? I think here is where we need to make an important distinction between processes of corporeal militarization – the conversion of physical civilian bodies into military bodies and militarism – and the ideological or discursive aspects of militarization.

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Moreover, as I think has already been pointed out by some members of the *Under Fire* list, the notion of militarized bodies can easily be expanded beyond the practices of the conventional armed forces of nation states. Today more than ever in my view, for example, we need to ask ourselves what exactly is the difference between the militarized bodies of the conventional armed forces and, say, the paramilitary bodies of "terrorists?" Additionally, we might ask whether the civil/public servants working in what Virilio calls the U.S. "Military-Scientific Complex" or in intelligence gathering activities are civilianized or militarized. Then again, I also think we need to beware of the binary of the civilianized/militarized body. For example, what kind of bodies are those that slip back and forth between the civilian and the militarized, such as the anti-U.S. guerrilla

fighters in Iraq? There is therefore a whole range of ways in which civilianized bodies adopt and adapt to militarization and militarism. At the same time, there are myriad ways in which militarized discourses are created, disseminated and communicated, often by means of religious, mobilizing or dissenting socio-political discourses. Furthermore, such militaristic beliefs frequently result in genuinely destructive acts with spectacular consequences, as in the events of September 11 or the "shock and awe" tactics of the U.S. military-scientific complex in the war on Iraq and the consequent guerrilla attacks on the headquarters of the United Nations in Baghdad.

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Additionally, I think it is important to contemplate how civilianized bodies are converted into military use through numerous technological mechanisms and systems designed to improve the performance and responsiveness of what the U.S. Army calls "21st Century Land Warriors." What are we to make of augmented day and night vision telescopic sight now mounted on M16 rifles? Or of humans that can gather real-time front line data from overhead Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTAR) aircraft? A key issue here is of course related to the fact that high-performance militarized technological systems increasingly require the substitution of human vision. Soldiers' helmets, for instance, can now receive real-time video from Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), and are intended to enhance the lethality, speed of communication and the collation of information during coordinated attacks. In brief, increasingly, militarized bodies inhabit networked information spaces and communications technologies that convey "there" and "here" in real-time verisimilitude. Equally, wired uniforms are capable of reaching inside militarized bodies to facilitate not only the monitoring of heart and respiration rates but also the development of mind-computer communications and the visual senses through the use of real-time information displayed instantly on the retina. Further prospective techno-scientific and biological advances are presented by the arrival of militarized and micro scale "nano weapons." As Chris Hables Gray has admirably documented elsewhere, minute "cyborg insect warriors" are already able to explore, bug and contaminate the networks and capillaries of enemy computer and biological systems.

Yet, for all these sinister innovations, what actually strikes me as equally significant is that the semi-fascist appeal of militarized bodies, inclusive of cyborg warriors and the like, of new levels of militarized machinic incorporation, and even of human-machine weapon systems, shows no sign of abating. What, for example, is the appeal of militarized movies like Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers*? Or of the popular literature concerned with issues related to militarized bodies, such as Frederick Pohl's novel *The Cool War*? These are the kinds of questions posed by the American international relations theorist Michael J. Shapiro in the Militarized Bodies issue of *Body & Society*, which I recently guest edited. In his "Perpetual War," for instance, Shapiro asks the following question: why do people engage with and perform hostile acts that are unrelated to their own lives? For Shapiro, the answer to such questions seems to involve the readiness of citizens to engage in violent activities, a readiness that can be partly attributed to the inarticulateness of those militarized bodies that either refuse to or are incapable of replying to the questions concerning war asked by civilianized bodies. The militarized body of a Green Beret, on leave from the Vietnam War and drinking alone at a Pennsylvania working class bar in Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, for example, defies the distinction between inarticulateness and eloquence by replying "fuck it" to every question posed by his fellow drinkers. Nonetheless, Shapiro's interest is not just in incoherent militarized bodies, which by definition are inconsistent with the usual conventions of human communication, but also in those inarticulate civilianized bodies that, according to Shapiro, are alarmingly receptive to an impulsive conversion from civilianized to militarized. For the inarticulateness of the Green Beret does not cause *The Deer Hunter's* central characters, who are themselves about to depart for duty in Vietnam, to doubt their own imminent transition from civilianized bodies into militarized bodies, but rather generates an all too familiar unthinking conversion bordering on that of a mute automaton. In other words, whether we like it or not, it is hard not to conclude that the militarization of the body and of daily life is actually an attractive proposition for some and, for them, is actually preferable to their civilianized everyday life.

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A final set of issues that I want to highlight concern the links between present day cyborg

warriors and weapons systems which seek nothing less than the militarization of human perception itself. Such a mission is fraught with danger, it seems to me, for both militarized and civilianized bodies. For contemporary cyborg weapons systems increasingly mark out the character, importance and behavior of militarized and civilianized bodies by way of the creation and deployment of high-tech computer vision and simulation machines such as the U.S. Navy's Aegis system. Yet the problem is that cyborg weapons systems very often only appear to replicate the real-time presence or absence of militarized and civilianized bodies and repeatedly metamorphose into all too real and visceral tragedies such as the shooting down in 1988 of Iranian flight 655, a frequently scheduled civilian aircraft, by the USS Vincennes. Thus the Vincennes catastrophe occurred because the U.S. navy trusted implicitly in the digitally produced visual representations and simulated scenarios, codes and models of its Aegis system during a hazardous foray into the territorial waters of Iran. Hence, at the informational interface of the human and the machine, mistakes by both cyborg warriors and weapons systems led, by means of the militarization of human perception, to the deaths of several hundred innocent civilians. As the example of the disaster of the Vincennes indicates, then, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish civilianized bodies from militarized bodies.

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>From: [Amir Parsa](#)

>Date: Wed, 04 Feb 2004 04:20:18

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I am reminded of a spectacle I see often and that is quite eerie: of children and teens involved in 3D video games on huge screens where they anonymously enter unnamed spaces to shoot unnamed terrorists – all the while doing it with a tremendous amount of excitement and glee. All for the adventure and the benefits. It seems like this has completely and literally been transferred to the "real" realm, and I don't mean to invoke the cliché that life imitates art (I suspect those games didn't get in the hands of those kids by accident): but the complete dispensing with the whole patriotic brouhaha seems to prepare the ground for a whole lot of fabrication of the type of human ready to be a great asset to the military. Is it possible to foresee ads and attempts in various languages and cleverly adapted to the current climate of a place/region/culture that

manufactures interest and invests in creating a whole mythology about the military companies? Which would usher in representations and the design of conceptual frameworks in tune with the overall strategies and goals of the military, which involve creating a loyal following and brand identification. Which would mean a wholesale attempt at a new type of indoctrination and setting up entities conducive to the propagation of the aims of military firms. It seems to me, from the limited exposure I allow myself to TV that ads for the military have lost a little bit of their patriotic flavor and focus more now on the sheer adventure/adrenaline/ excitement factor.

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>From: [Mary Keller](#)

>Date: Tue, 30 Mar 2004 06:16:58

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The appeal of the militarized body needs some thought at a kind of postcolonial, phenomenological level I think, akin to Fanon's effort to write a recuperative narrative that picked up on Hegel's master/slave argument and entailed scrutiny of the role of violence in the establishment of a viable sense of self. If we call subjectivity an accomplishment and a trial, the role of facing death and encountering violence in order to achieve a meaningful sense of self has played a central role in the Western tradition from the Homeric epics to Hegel to the contemporary world of extreme sports where one seeks out the "epic" day of skiing, biking, surfing, boarding, et cetera. Living in close proximity to Northern Ireland I was often struck by the challenge posed by the transition of shifting a masculine sense of identity from resistance fighter to... mowing the lawn in the drizzling rain? There's not much incentive, I think, for the return to a mundane masculine world in a technologically advanced world for the person who has been living on the edge by engaging in military conflict.

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Two thoughts or perhaps I should offer them as images that have recently spurred my ongoing interest in the desires of participating as a militarized body:

- my 2.5 year old son turns everything he picks up into a gun (gender, physiology, animal-ness) - in October, 2001, I saw a young, male hitchhiker complete with body piercings and general Brad Pitt, Fight Club kind of a good looks sitting beside the gas station in Casper, WY and I thought "2 months ago this guy might have stood for a cultural rebel in the States, but now, if you

are not headed into the military, you stand for a rebel without a clue – it must be lonely to be him now."

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The combination of these two images suggests internal and external forces of desire that will conflate in the G.I. Jane and John Kerry Joe ideals that will attract and produce a militarized generation as the swing response to Generation X and 9/11.

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The militarized body and the religious body now share a common ground in terms of their global role and perception: both disciplined, both negotiating with the meta-physical ideals of their leaderships and founding doctrines, both basing ethical claims about the role of violence for producing a "just" society, and both placing the individual in the service of a larger purpose. Both kinds of bodies find a community and a sense of belonging under their respective umbrellas so that it is not useful to suggest that there is a secular/religious divide that might distinguish them. In a globalized world, this sense of belonging and enfranchisement based in disciplined participation and a willingness to fight for your cause is very significant and will have gendered norms as well. I predict we will see a large movement among Christian males and parents to link Christian discipline with militarized discipline in the effort to out-religious the link between Islam and terrorism, re-creating a space for masculine whiteness as a noble and fighting subjectivity.

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Competitiveness is linked intimately to militarization. Two more images to conclude with that are driven by a competitive one-upmanship. The first is being disseminated as a Taliban document and I received it from a student in the army reserves during my section on Islam in an introduction to a World Religions class. It depicts a Taliban leader on top saying that what the West doesn't understand is that the Taliban is willing to die for its cause. The image beneath is of Patton saying that nobody has ever won a war by dying for their cause. You win the war by killing the other guy. This juxtaposition creates the competitive "upping" of militaristic approaches and is meant to spur the reader (supposedly the Taliban member) on to shift from self-sacrifice to successful murder of the opponent, just like the enemy has always said and done. You internalize the one-upmanship of Western militarism in order to kick its butt.

The second image is from an NRA joke, the kind of thing that flies along the wires out here in the Cowboy state of Wyoming. A cowboy, a native American and a Muslim are in Texas waiting for a plane and finally start talking to each other but when the Muslim identifies his politics as radical fundamentalism, an awkward silence fills the room, and the cowboy puts his feet up on the table and chews on his toothpick. Finally the Native American says, "My people used to be many and used to cover this land." The Muslim replies, "My people are many and are growing every day. What do you make of that?" The cowboy replies, "We ain't played cowboys and Muslims yet." There is a high voltage current of American masculinity (and its feminine counterpart) waiting to deliver that punchline, with a desire as strong as the desire to feel alive.

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Theorizing militarization requires a gendered analysis of territoriality and fighting, including not only the physiological propensities of masculine animal-ness (a la *Demonic Males* by Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson looking at the evolutionary role of male fighting beginning with primate studies and ending with sociological studies) but also the Jean Kirkpatrick, Condoleezza Rice effect whereby feminine subjectivity acquires political status only if it is taken seriously as hawkish. America's favorite war hero, Jessica Lynch, was a quizzical example of the government attempting to tap into the G.I. Jane emotive image.

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>From: [Ryan Bishop](#)

>Date: Tue, 30 Mar 2004 08:06:40

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John's provocative overview is worth examining from a range of positions. But I have to admit that I was surprised by one sentence. Today more than ever in my view, for example, we need to ask ourselves, "What exactly is the difference between the militarized bodies of the conventional armed forces and, say, the paramilitary bodies of 'terrorists'?" I had thought the question was going to be about the difference between the militarized and civilianized bodies? Because, it seems to me, that since the advent of "total war" during WWII and then the Cold War, in which every single person born on the face of the earth had a target attached to his/her body, there is no distinction any more between the military and civilian body although we are led to believe, especially via the wonders of high-

tech weaponry, that there is. When the current Revolution in Military Affairs has its explicit goal as to destroy and destabilize the infrastructure, media and information systems that allow adversarial societies to remain viable entities (a point argued in *Lights Out and Gridlock*, a Institute for Defense Analyses publication), then there is no distinction between civil and military systems, sites or assemblages, but instead a targeting of all systems that might sustain an enemy, including human/social systems. We are all military bodies, in potentia.

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>From: [Mary Keller](#)

>Date: Fri, 02 Apr 2004 22:00:12

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The discourse of Deleuze raises an interesting issue as I watch this discussion list, and note silences and presences over time in the discussion. There are for me two extremes of discourse on *Under Fire*. One extreme manifests itself as the authority I give to those who have participated in militarized situations of struggle, and when they speak of their experiences either having fought, been captured and/or tortured, I release the authority of judgment and take their words as a kind of profound representation of truth. When I read their posts, and they are often very readable for me, I experience myself as a reader of extremity and feel enervated. The other extreme is that of critical theory lingo, a word I use knowing that it might deliver harm, but intending instead to signify the power and currency that psychoanalytically and philosophically-informed discourses exercise in the academic world. They are a poetry of enormous power, asserting the significance of the unconscious for the ability of the human to incorporate experience, and the central role that the traumas of subjectivity have in our ability to recover and sustain existence and expression. Nevertheless, these posts deaden my responses, run over my readership, even though I have been a student of Lacanian work for twenty years.

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In the silence between these discourses, and the errant runs between them, and the examination of images, I seek the community in which I might somehow become effective in building art or spaces for communicating, here in the belly of the militarized beast, a human and conscious response to the machine to which I have largely abdicated my power.

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>From: [Chris Gray](#)

>Date: Sun, 04 Apr 2004 08:49:19

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John's excellent comments have been horribly validated by the deaths of the four mercenaries in Iraq. Labeled "murdered civilians" by the mass media, they were all special ops experts hired to do military tasks for civilian levels of pay: mercenaries. Peter Singer's work has been much quoted in the last few days as the story unfolds. So as we see, not only are civilians militarized but the traffic includes military personnel being civilianized in part. In my opinion, this confusion is also part of the fetishizing of the bodies of dead soldiers that has lately become such a strong part of U.S. culture, with the recovery of the dead, the internment and memorialization of the dead, and so on. In the history of war, the status of the bodies of the fallen has varied incredibly. The dead of Waterloo – British, Prussian, French – were turned into fertilizer for English gardens, for example.

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>From: [Ryan Bishop](#)

>Date: Mon, 05 Apr 2004 09:46:23

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It is important to remember too that there is a long tradition of fetishizing the body, especially a body killed in battle. The pivotal scene in The Iliad includes Hektor's body being dragged about after Achilles has slain him, and the ill treatment of the body is behavior acceptable to no human, culture or the gods in Homer. So the status of the body-qua-body has a long tradition of inscriptions within the West. Ill treatment of dead bodies can incur the wrath of the gods, and in Islam, as some papers reported, is *haram*.

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>From: [Ryan Griffis](#)

>Date: Mon, 05 Apr 2004 20:11:55

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Chris, doesn't this just mean that the political nature of the military is not exclusive? Their definition of civilian/combatant (determining who is rightfully killed) is set by the political machine, no? That the U.S. military can declare all Iraqis enemy combatants (in military terms) for the sake of more efficient action, while claiming civilian status for outsourced soldiers is telling. Does the U.S. military refer to the deaths of non-military U.S. persons as "collateral damage?"

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>From: [Chris Gray](#)

>Date: Tue, 06 Apr 2004 01:10:08

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Ryan is quite right that who is labeled a combatant is very much a political decision, but the devil is in the details. Iraqis who are killed or wounded and yet can't be labeled enemy by some stretch are called accidents or "collateral damage" in Pentagonese. Contractors, even if highly trained well armed special ops vets who can shoot Iraqis, who are killed aren't called collateral damage, ever. They are murder victims according to the U.S. government and U.S. press. The military probably calls them civilian casualties officially, but might slip into the murder rhetoric as they even do with their own casualties at time, since the enemy isn't legitimate as killers, only as killed.

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All this convoluted is necessary today because war's traditional discourse doesn't fit what is happening, and yet it is by the discourse rules and meta-rules that the whole thing is organized, justified, and explicated.

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>From: [Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger](#)

>Date: Tue, 06 Apr 2004 18:33:13

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I speak from the other angle, less obvious: that of experience, of war and of art practice and of psychoanalytical healing and "second generation" transmitted effects of trauma. Theory comes later but with the same necessity and from the same roots. The point is: if we believe that thinking and art and ethics and poetry don't make a difference in this field of the horrible and for politics, what are we doing here? To make a difference in this field takes time, perhaps a lot of time. It is not as direct as political actions or politically-minded observation.

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>From: [Thomas Keenan](#)

>Date: Tue, 06 Apr 2004 18:32:53

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Dana Priest has a remarkable story, with an amazing image, on the front page of today's *Washington Post*. She tells the story of a firefight in Najaf on Sunday in which the primary American combatants were eight "commandos" from Blackwater Security Consulting, four MPS, and a marine. The fighters were resupplied by Blackwater helicopters. She writes: "The role of Blackwater's commandos in Sunday's fighting in Najaf illuminates the gray zone between their

formal role as bodyguards and the realities of operating in an active war zone."

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>From: [Bernard Roddy](#)

>Date: Tue, 13 Apr 2004 19:00:43

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Since Bataille carries on Weber's project of explaining economic morality in religious terms, but does so with reference to the function played by transgression in the formation of these norms (at least in their original formation, prior to the dilution of the sacred in modernity), it would seem that this fascination/horror over the images we reproduce of the abject, this fundamentally irrational violence we are so addicted to, might have a religious basis of sorts. While Durkheim would identify the contemporary sacred with rights of the individual rather than the demands of a collective deity, this seems far from enlightening today. And while it is certainly true that the sustainability of legitimacy, the endurance of authority, depends on the degree to which some sense of duty drives obedience, rather than utility, the question remains, whence the sense of duty toward the kinds of policies we pursue, rather than some other? And right now the only help I see is in whatever explains the fascisms of the past.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Tue, 13 Apr 2004 19:00:29

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I want go back to the Middle Ages and to Thomas Moore's *Utopia*. The best known and working image or metaphor for the Western countries were the cloister and the castle. Knights and monks were the most effective production machine, reproducing and transmitting the knowledge and administering the justice and keeping order. The factory, as in Fourier phalanstery, was a perfect unity of production, ruled vertically and with the small parts contributing to the total results. The army reproduces all those entities, a "corps" where the soldiers and the petty officers obey without discussion. The monastic orders, such as Teutonic, Hospital, Malta or Templars, were ruthless examples of militarized bodies acting behind the cover of religious zeal, but they were the power behind the power and can only be compared to the great multinational corporations of today.

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>From: [Loretta Napoleoni](#)

>Date: Tue, 13 Apr 2004 21:05:59

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I find Ana's comparison between the militant monastic orders and contemporary multinational corporations very real and powerful. What comes to mind is companies like Goldman Sachs and Lehman Brothers which are run like financial sects. The career path is always the same: vertical and highly integrated. People join right after university, often they are recruited while at university, and go through a selection process inside the company. Employees are encouraged to socialize among each other and to embrace the ethics of the company. The goal is of course to achieve more power within the financial world and the reward is the bonus at the end of the year, which often is a seven figure sum.

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>From: [Mary Keller](#)

>Date: Wed, 25 Feb 2004 10:32:20

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If the religious body (person's body) and the activist body are understood to be similar models of subjectivity, that is if both are understood to be disciplining, negotiating, bodies that are engaged with something larger that speaks through them (the will of Allah, a sustainable future, the role of art), then we can begin to dismantle the notion that there are regressive religious bodies versus progressive activist bodies. We can relate the skills and strategies of military training, artistic training, athletic training and religious training, recognizing that in all cases the training body is negotiating with power that is entrenched in material and historical force, intimately located on territories, and beckoning events of transcendence.

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>EYAL WEIZMAN is an architect who teaches at the Bartlett School of Architecture in London. He was the editor, with Rafi Segal of the book *A Civilian Occupation. The Politics of Israeli Architecture* (London: Verso, 2003). Weizman is currently developing his doctoral thesis *The Politics of Verticality* into a book and a documentary film.

>DAVID YOUNG is a psychologist, currently employed as Senior Social Scientist with the Cancer Control Research Institute in Melbourne.

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We have not succeeded in gathering biographical information about all correspondents, but would like to thank them for their contribution.

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