



20 12 2004  
3:37:05

A very blurry, low-resolution photograph of a person's face. The person appears to be wearing a light-colored shirt with a dark, possibly black, graphic or logo on the right side. The image is heavily out of focus, making details difficult to discern. In the bottom right corner, there is a white digital timestamp.

20 12 2004  
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20 12 2004  
3:37:17

> UNDER FIRE.2  
> JORDAN CRANDALL  
>  
> THE ORGANIZATION  
> AND REPRESENTATION  
> OF VIOLENCE.

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*Under Fire* is an ongoing project that explores the organization and representation of armed conflict. Looking at the forms of militarized agencies that are emerging today, it attempts to understand the nature of emergent power and the forms of resistance to it, situating cycles of violence within the modalities of a global system. It looks at the role that representations play as registers of symbolic meaning and as agents of affective change – exploring the ways that violence materializes as both act and image. It probes into cultural imaginaries of conflict and the deeper truths they may offer about collective identifications and aggressions. Through this approach, *Under Fire* aims to construct a discursive and affective terrain that can offer new insights into symptomatic violence.

This book is part of the project's second phase. It is an edited compilation of a series of dialogues that occurred online among a group of artists, theorists, scientists, critics, activists, and journalists from 27 September through 22 December, 2004. For the purposes of this book, the material is not organized along a timeline but is grouped according to the main themes that have emerged in the discussions. The complete archive of the conversations can be accessed at <http://www.wdw.nl>.



>From: [underfire-agent](#)

>Date: Tue, 05 Oct 2004 02:28:41

>

A Pakistani man named Kamran Akhtar is arrested in New York for taking "surveillance videos" of buildings in Manhattan. He claims that he is simply a video buff, shooting landmarks for his family and friends back home. After viewing one of his tapes with about fifty local business and law enforcement officials, an FBI spokesman proclaims that "This video serves no other purpose but surveillance. There is no doubt." On what basis does he defend his claim? The video "appears to be extremely preliminary and very general of an overall view of downtown. Our sense is that he doesn't know what he is taping. He is simply trying to show tall buildings in crowded areas."

>

Tourist video or surveillance video? To determine the distinction, we have to delve deep within the image. With a suspicious or inquiring gaze, we look for clues, in a situation where even the smallest choices assume ominous overtones. A suspicious angle (why does he look upward?), a curious focus (why linger on that building entrance?), an odd camera movement (why a slow pan to the right?), a hastening pace (why the agitation?), an odd level of familiarity (does he know what he is doing?).

>

A dynamic of suspicion invades a language of critical analysis. Policeman, politician, or media critic?

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>From: [John William Phillips](#)

>Date: Fri, 08 Oct 2004 08:10:31

>

The technological functionality of targeting implies a series of indeterminate length but which at the very least divides, e.g. the marker from the striker and the striker from the mark if not the mark itself into friend and foe or intended and accidental. These distinctions become minimal, just divisions rather than distinctions.

>

Kamran Akhtar's claim that he is shooting landmarks of course confesses as much. The division that is sometimes maintained between the scopic and the episcopal breaks down into the various hinges of a scopic chain that connects its marks. Perhaps we don't have to delve too deep within the image after all. The suspicious angle, the curious focus, the odd camera movement, a hastening pace, the odd level of familiarity: the movements mimic standard (military or civic, common or garden) target sighting systems with their multiple fields of view (like Lockheed's TSS, the swiveling eye on surveillance/attack vehicles) and everything (and anyone) may be marked, marking or marker; what comes next might always and immediately be the strike, for just as the TSS is always integrated with fire control technology so too sighting is linked in principle to striking. The episcopal already just is the scopic.

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>From: [Amir Parsa](#)

>Date: Mon, 04 Oct 2004 02:02:38

>

Among us roam no wanderers or weary poets anymore but possible suspects, or even "potential" "terror" "threats." The theorist is a mere



TALLBUILDINGINCROWDEPLACE.JPG



TALLBUILDINGINCROWDEDPLACE2.JPG

slip of the tongue away, is a mere detection of an untimely pull of a notebook away, from being a terrorist. The *flâneur*, friends and colleagues, is no longer: replaced, haphazardly and without himself ever suspecting it, nothing other than a lonesome, under-surveillance dude, an *emmerdeur* of the highest order, nothing but a woebegone waster of energies and words, a skeletal impostor, a mask, a weary walker who might lose it all, in the wrong gambling house, with the wrong cards, an untimely role of the dice: a madcap *flambeur*, wandering the city's streets.

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>From: [Susan Charlton](#)

>Date: Tue, 12 Oct 2004 20:39:25

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>A new campaign by National Security Australia reminds me of recent postings about incidences of "innocent" city behavior now understood to be suspicious, like taking photos of "tall buildings in crowded places."

>

>The latest promotional tool in the Australian government's war on terror is a pastiche of images that share that "terrible banality": "A new phase of the national security information campaign has been launched to remind Australians to remain vigilant . . ."

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>From: [Nabeel Ziad](#)

>Date: Tue, 12 Oct 2004 01:14:58

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>hel kalami kalam sowah walla kalam mutarasid?

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>From: [Salwa Ghaly](#)

>Date: Tue, 12 Oct 2004 20:39:50

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>"Kalam sowah"? Wa man qal an al-sa'ih ghir mutrasad?!

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>From: [Paul Mercken](#)

>Date: Wed, 13 Oct 2004 19:04:21

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>Graag zou ik weten waar dit spreken over gaat. I should like to understand what this speaking is about, please.

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>

>From: [Amir Parsa](#)

>Date: Thu, 14 Oct 2004 18:37:35

>

>Something amazing has occurred here. In an unintended *mise en abyme* of sorts, Salwa, Paul, and Nabeel have unwittingly brought forth the problematic of translation, along with its possibilities, its forms and functions, its heritage, the expectations it engenders, the illusions of the possibilities of exchange it fosters, and the communication across languages and worlds it pretends to facilitate.

>

>Translation or the lack thereof is a fluid process adapting to the needs

of the players and the target audience. Where an understanding is derived purely from the various strata of translations, it is easy to adapt it all as one goes along, to fit the actions planned. Lack of translation itself, lends to the possibility of action. Salwa and Nabeel knowingly engaged in a type of exclusion. A sort of unintended aggression itself, felt by Paul, who counters with his Dutch quip. This thing could now explode: a multitude of interventions understood by a handful, parallel planes not intersecting, a host of emotions played out, a mini-balkanization on the *Under Fire* network (of mostly invisible players). Or else, we revert to the dominant language – that of the... (victor?).

>

The name of the game is this: the fashioning of concepts (“insurgents,” “terrorists”) that have certain *parente* with what a native population (I’m talking U.S. here) readily understands, fitting perfectly an invented conceptual framework (“Middle East,” “Islamic World”), themselves with overriding images that “translate” the region (mullahs, turbans, violence, beards, veiled women) and are deeply imbedded in the consciousness of the target population, images and frameworks that are constantly updated and adapted through a host of translatory grids. The undeniable impossibility of translation in countless instances and situations, the illusion of translation, are well suited for the launching of campaigns, and the invention of a reality that suggests the necessity of these very campaigns.

>

As always, the battle begins at the outset, at the name: and the relationships with the world and the Other are launched, and actions taken, and justified, and rationalized. The right names will allow the rosy pictures, the right names will trigger the haughty campaigns, the right names will convince and comfort all the populaces all around, clamoring for the familiar, and the accessible, within their own world views.

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>From: [Salwa Ghalay](#)

>Date: Thu, 14 Oct 2004 18:22:54

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My sibylline musings on *cibler* and *être cibler* in these times of *campagnes electorales cibles* coupled with the grief I feel over the targetings in Taba, Egypt, last weekend, promoted a moment of self-indulgence and invited the linguistic *disponibilité* that was my Arabic line. Paul Mercken might have mistaken this for an instance of targeting. Mea culpa. Here are some more musings translated into necessarily translucent terms.

>

I was intrigued by the distinction Nabeel Ziad had made between “kalam sowah” (tourists’ words) and “kalam mutarasid” (targeting discourse). Why tourists, I wondered. What kind(s) of language does the tourist speak? The language of the gaze at an Other, other place, culture or mode of targeting? How do we return the gaze of the Other “touristing” in our midst? What ways of seeing and modes of surveillance determine how this encounter unfolds? Is Ziad inviting us to see him as a tourist in this forum? In the absence of an active engagement on his part with what had been said on the topic, how is one to read his query about how to classify his discourse and the degree of targeting it might or might not contain?

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ABUGHRAIB.TIFF



CONVENTIONSADHERING.JPG



AUTOMATION.JPG



SACRIFICE.JPG



GAZAMURAL.JPG



MOSULATTACK.JPG



SUBMISSION.JPG



SIMULATION.JPG

Or is he, like me, marked by certain identity markers from which neither he nor I can escape in a post 9/11 world? My response in Arabic was an act of affirmation of that identity marker and a recuperation of a part of me that is much-maligned, a part that I can't always afford to brandish in American airports and at security gates where, if my face does not give me away, the place of birth inscribed in my Western passport invariably arouses more than a passing interest. My Arabic words were an act of solidarity with someone who spoke my native language in a forum where the mere use of this particular language invites us to interrogate issues to do with language and location, words and translation, targeting and different perceptions of it. My Arabic utterance is a confirmation of my faith and pride in Arab culture, and this despite the many setbacks pre- and post-9/11. It is this Arab culture that I see as the most targeted of all, targeted both by "them" – those who want to "civilize us" through pre-emptive targeting of the variety we have witnessed in Iraq – as well as by "us": those homogenizing forces among us who seek to impose on all Arabs their totalitarian morality and theocratic fascism.

>

I responded to Ziad's distinction between tourists and targeting agents with a cryptic reference to the terrorist act that resulted in the death of many Israeli tourists, along with Egyptians and others. My blanket comment also targeted the photograph he had posted [tallbuildingincrowdedplace.jpg], as well as some of the implications of his question.

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Have my ramblings succeeded in deciphering the hermetic Semitic?

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>1.  
>TARGETING THE CITY.

>From: [Ryan Bishop](#), [John William Phillips](#),  
>[Gregory K. Clancey](#)  
>Date: Tue, 28 Sep 2004 00:34:29

>  
In the wake of high profile attacks on cities (in Eastern Europe, New York City and Baghdad) global awareness of the city as military and political target has greatly increased. Although the vulnerability of cities has been of interest and concern throughout history, relatively little urban scholarship has used targeting as an explicit model. We might look at the various ways urban spaces become targets. This might lead us to new ways of thinking about the city, based on existing models, utopian goals, or imaginary projections.

>  
We propose a double notion of the target neatly embodied in the Chinese word for contradiction, which combines the ideograms for the spear and the shield. We identify these two elements as inextricable aspects of urbanism: a scopic and episcopal function, which both protect and threaten civic spaces.

>  
Targeting in its various different senses would not be conceptually opposed to several functions that can be regarded as episcopal. These functions combine to characterize the basically benevolent caretaking and management of urban infrastructures: repair and maintenance, planning and building, policing, schooling, advising, protecting, the institutions of welfare, health (physical and emotional), insurance, social services of all kinds, churches, cemeteries, the media, distribution of goods and services. These episcopal functions imply specific kinds of targeting and they also are designed to protect against more or less malevolent targeting of the cities.

>  
The determinate separation of the two dimensions intensifies and escalates the active levels of both the scopic technologies (ways of aiming and striking) and the episcopal ones. The history of targeting (e.g., ballistics and propulsion) is thus intrinsically connected with the rise and growth of urbanism. The division between the two dimensions would be historical and very far from complete, implicating the military in the civic at all levels.

>  
Targeting thus implies at its very basis the division between the scopic and the episcopal functions, which depend not only upon each

other (in the familiar dialectic) but more crucially on the maintenance of the division. An example can be found in Homer, in which the word for veil and battlement are the same. And each functions in the same way: as a type of defense that also attracts the very thing it is intended to defend against.

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>From: [Anahid Kassabian](#)  
>Date: Fri, 01 Oct 2004 08:07:12

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The description of "benevolent caretaking and management of urban infrastructures" made me wonder if in this sense it might be worth thinking of the "target" and "culture" as co-extensive. At least in Raymond Williams' *Keywords*, where he suggests that "culture" comes only with the birth of cities, where different practices meet.

>

On the one hand, perhaps that's too general, but on the other perhaps productive. For me it leads me to think about cities that are targets because they are points of contact – like Baku early in the war between Armenians and Azeris, or Jerusalem, but also like New York – and raising questions about targeting's object as well as its roots and processes.

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>From: [Amir Parsa](#)  
>Date: Fri, 01 Oct 2004 08:06:48

>

The very phrase the "war on terror" – and *all* of its effervescent, ebullient, awesome fireworks – is derived from a phenomenon that has an intimate and inextricable link to the "city as target" (and in this case, the city as locus of violence and target of cells and autonomous bands of evildoers).

>

Indeed, there is no doubt, none at all, that the concept of "war on terror" was formulated on the existing framework of the "war on drugs," a uniquely Unitedstatesian proposal and phenomenon (I've actually heard it's translated/transplanted versions, and it sure was ridiculous, until of course it became widespread enough and used enough to be implanted in peoples' minds as a conventional notion, and part of life).

>

The analogy meant to evoke the ubiquitousness of the evildoers, their tactics and strategies, their dark and dreary natures, their mode of lurking in all corners and their mode of existence, and

the "fact" that we were now not engaged in a "conventional war" but something akin to our war on drugs. It then basically proposed many of the structural similarities that have now become part of the general consciousness: the "cell structure" of the perpetrators of the crimes, the modes of communication between the bad guys, the modus operandi and so on.

>

Whether these analogies were accurate or not at various levels concerns me less here, than their effect. There is no doubt that what the analogies proposed, implied, and subsequently acted on, was the nature, the form and functions of the conflict. They allowed one entity to raise itself and present itself as the undisputed and legitimate force of good, against a bunch of no-good, child-destroying, future-sacrificing, society-burning thugs and hoodlums. (Which is what any country or entity in conflict would do, I grant, but in this case, the model of the war on drugs was already at hand and available). They thus allowed systems of surveillance on not just the enemy but on civilians, they brought forth a whole new rapidly growing industry of security and infiltration (making lots of bucks for lots of folks!), they brought forth new departments, new human entities, and perhaps unknown to us, entirely new entities (human, cyborgs and the like, or not!).

>

The Grand Analogy also allowed for the "terrorist" to be seen and understood in ways similar to the drug dude (or lord): a good-for nothin' string-puller bent on destroying your life and your child. The analogy meant to, and helped, among other things: a) frighten (the terrorist is next door, the terrorist is lurking, the terrorist stands outside your child's school yard); b) prepare the populace and manipulate; c) distract (every other "issue" or concern becomes secondary); d) convince of the necessity of the actions of the "dubber"; e) later, justify pretty much any action of the dubber, all done for the greater good; f) allow the terms to be wonderfully woven into the fabric of the media, in ways very familiar, accessible and understandable to the viewing public, and to the point where the concepts as such – terror, terrorism – are not only a "good fit" for various types of programming on TV and radio, but part of the foundational fabric that allows shows and programs with readily adaptable storylines (the local evening newscast, game shows, spy shows and new series seeking the TV bonanza ratings)

to function, to attract, to get ratings; g) subsequently allow policies based on the same principles and formats so familiar to the citizens by now most intimate with the war on drugs; and h) finally draw a vague and sketchy enough portrait that anyone at any point, as long as they adhere to the general outline of the look and the appearance devised for each ("black guy from the 'hood" for war on drugs; "Middle-Eastern looking dude" for war on terror), can be duly punished.

>

Amazingly (but probably not coincidentally), the representational parallels, both in print and on television, between the various strata of the war on terror and the war on drugs were pitch-perfect: the uniformed officers (police in one, army in the other) breaking down a door and entering the hovel-like abode of the unkempt bad guy, the burnt-out surroundings of whatever operation, the hysterical support of family members who were, poor souls, unaware that among them lurked such unseemly characters, the triumphant seizures and press conferences, the pun-full headlines ridiculing the hoodlums' ways in tabloids, and we could go on and on.

>

What is fascinating about this phenomenon is that actual military action, intervention, destruction, obliteration and massacre (in the name of whatever, but acknowledged by the perpetrators even) are actually demilitarized through The First Analogy, and the link to the city's woes, to the city under siege. And this is why: The city, obviously, had been linguistically militarized (among many other forms that have been presented in this forum in *Under Fire.1* too), but soon enough, the war on drugs was part of its fabric: the police, the barging in, the nasty neighborhoods, the drug dens, the images and pictures and headlines and the continuation in perpetuity of it all, all had become the very essence of the city as we knew it (here, in our good old U.S. of A.), to the point that it wasn't really so much a "war" as it was the humdrum rhythm of the city. Thus, in the consciousness of the TV-gulping citizen round these parts, the war on terror is not really a war, it's just something like what the war on drugs was/is: Some sort of operation in perpetuity with uniformed folks doing their best to protect us from the bad guys who are bent on destroying our decent peaceful mode of life. Quite a fascinating reversal of the ex-militarized-city to the point of the absurd – where the military's work and functions are "de-militarized" (!) through the

analogy – but a reversal that constantly and continuously reverses itself and keeps going back and forth.

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>From: [Ryan Bishop](#)

>Date: Sun, 03 Oct 2004 01:19:02

>

Amir, you raise the representational parallels between the TV and print narratives about the war on drugs/war on terror. The similarities are indeed striking, especially the images of uniformed good guys raiding urban cells of bad guys (which are also reinforced by reality shows such as *Cops*). The door-to-door urbanization of warfare (of whatever stripe) stands in stark contrast to the aerial, precision-weapon, teleoptical warfare the military (and the U.S. population) prefers. This latter representation, the preferred because bloodless (except on the ground and for civilians), is undermined by the former but helps explain the de-militarization of the military's work that you allude to. The demilitarization of military activity has been under way for some time in its increasing immateriality (to use Virilio's useful term). The merging of police actions with military actions helps, as you note, to urbanize militarization of society generally while also helping to more explicitly militarize urban space. Of course, urban space has been militarized almost from the outset of the urban. As Tjebbe van Tijen recently noted, urbicide is almost a self-redundant term. We do, however, seem hell-bent on forgetting these dimensions of the urban. We should note, too, that an even earlier avatar of "the war that is not really a war war" is the Cold War, and that the ways in which the Cold War configured urban space within the representational imagination, not to mention the demilitarization of military activity, are essential to understand the intensification of strategies, discourses, representations, and technologies at play in our current war that is not really a war war.

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>From: [Ryan Griffis](#)

>Date: Sun, 03 Oct 2004 01:19:02

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Ryan's mention of the Cold War brought forth something for me regarding this issue of targeting. As much as targeting represents a process of focus, it is also a process of selective focus, or denial of focus. The Cold War, for example, targeted the "threat of communism"

(for the capitalist U.S.). And the entire concept of a "Cold War" only makes sense in these terms, since it wasn't exactly a "war that was not a war" for the people caught in its process in marginalized (by the dominant power struggle) lands like Iran, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, et cetera. Perhaps this relates to the "forgetting" that Ryan mentions. It is a matter of not seeing, then forgetting what is not seen as significant. The situation in the U.S. suggests that it is not a matter of historical amnesia (as some suggest) which prevents us from talking about the U.S.'s role in Central America and South East Asia, but rather a matter of thinking it doesn't matter – "it's not within our sights."

>

The very tools used by the military to better focus on targets embody this sense of erasure. Even when a "smart bomb" misses its target, it can be forgotten as an error of technology, rather than as a deliberate decision by people and institutions that included the possibility of failure.

>

I think the discussion of "city as target" would be interesting to take into the realm of urban planning as a form of violence and social control. How does the concept of the city as target relate to cities' own investment in creating targets via architectural spectacle?

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>

>From: [Amir Parsa](#)

>Date: Sun, 03 Oct 2004 01:19:02

>

A few months ago, in my utter naivety and freewheeling silent contemplative ways, subsequent to a regular subway ride and while getting off a subway car (line 7 for the curious), I posed an innocent question to the train operator, an African American lady of considerable girth who seemed quite pleasant and very approachable. Now, I do not recall what my question was, but it was quite mundane and unobtrusive, and she did go ahead and answer me in a very succinct manner.

>

What is most memorable though, and was quite striking and troubling then, is that at the end of her very quick and efficient reply, she said something to the effect of "you better put that thing away though!" The tone was not menacing, but cautionary, as if she were doing me a favor by telling me, advising me, reminding me, saving me. What thing, what thing, thinketh I, unaware, and

then of course: "what thing," blurteth I. She nods her head, looking me up and down, as if she could not even look, at, IT. What, I'm still wondering (this is all true people!), am I carrying a gun or something? I know I don't carry weapons, so, have I been set up, have I been pointed to, am I, what, is it, what is it, I'm thinking, and then, "the camera?" I mutter. "Well..." says she, giving a nasty type look. I'm smiling, a bit, kind of in the dark here, "I always carry a camera with me," I say (even though I don't), "yeah, but you're not supposed to take pictures in the subway," she says, "I'm not?" (Amir), "Nope" (conductor lady), "why not" (Amir), "Sir" (lady – she's irritated), "I'm just telling you all right" (she getting pissed), "they can take you away, but you go ahead if you want!" (she turns away). "Fine, fine" (Amir) I'll put it away, inward thought and action (and yes, it's true, I was taking pictures inside the subway, but not of, the subway, rather through the window panes, I always do, the bridges, the mist, the tops of buildings, the...).

>

Ah yes, Ryan, what happens when the cognizance of the "city as target" is heightened and internalized (for as you have justly implied, every city has always been a "potential" target) is that all is transformed: the mode of circulation, the mode of observation, the modes of notation – for those inclined to engage in these activities, but also those not. This is no longer paranoia, it has exited the realm of cautionary on-guardedness and it is real: altered mode of behavior, of relating, to things and people, of existing, really (the very next day, camera in hand still sitting, two huge and bulky officers walked into our car, and I, slowly, yes I did, yes I did, I admit it, I did, I hid, I HID, the camera!).

>

One last note on this notion of altered affinities as a direct consequence of the general cognizance of the city as target. It is not just an urban phenomenon, for yours truly, again, in many ways, should not have been surprised at the Lady in the Train, for several years back, when he was collecting notes for a book on shopping centers and parking lots – he was, yes, standing in a parking lot taking notes on the arrangement of cars and on the banality and the domination of the landscape by parking lots and traffic flow in general – a clean-shaven properly dressed fellow in a tie ran up to him with quite the menacing gait and said "Can I help you sir?!" He said, "Oh no, thanks," like the good guy he fancies himself to be, upon which Man in Parking Lot of

Shopping Center says, "May I ask you what you're doing? I'm the manager of the shopping center," and he says "Oh sure, I'm just taking notes," and Manager of Shopping Center frowns, looks him up and down, reminds him that he can't really be doing that, and that he'd appreciate it if he put things away. The urban is no longer alone in its target-ness: at least here, where walkers on the sidewalks of suburbiana are scarce, where the automobile rules the landscape and actual, literal terror spreads in the form of the horrible banality of a guy who shoots people down randomly from his car, must be added the Suburban Target, with all the necessary adjustments of the concept to the landscape, its architecture and its geography. (The city as target and now, Suburbia As Target.)

>

After September 11, I stood a couple of blocks away from the ruins of this city, next to a much older gentleman, immaculately dressed, both of us peering intently at the Arch of Towers, only so many feet away. Strangely, there were few people, no tourists, our views were not blocked, it was evening, with a strange mist and a strange cool and a strange breeze, workers working on the site, and there were even a few passersby, and you could hear the footsteps, see the silhouettes of the walkers on the walls, the sudden garments that appeared and disappeared. "They have to keep this this way," I muttered to him, whereupon, in his graveness, in a despair that I did not, somehow, identify with, with a face so worn and angry and desperate that I could not fathom, but in a low and controlled tone, he said, "they will, oh they will!" You think, I said to him, and then, unexpectedly, and in a manner wholly unfit for the occasion, he launched into a succinct and detailed and quite erudite and stunning analysis and comparison of the architectural and artistic merits of the Arches, the shapes and curves, the material, the relative position to the sun, the moon, the other buildings, etc. "They will," he said, "they have to," and I distinctly remember his adding "They're not that stupid!" The "they" of course, was generic, but I shot back, quietly, "I don't think so, I hope they do, but I don't think so, I don't think they will."

>

I never saw him again of course, but I was right. They did not, and if for one moment we suspend the notion that it is only and purely for financial and economic reasons that they did not, it was not a surprise.

>

For the unbearable truth of the target-ness of the City was upon us, and the unbearable recognition of vulnerability had to be dealt with. And this unbearable recognition of vulnerability, given the rhetoric and the modalities of analyses and the various drumbeats, here, had to be resolved through the construction of monuments that sanitized the sense of being. It had to be a monument (irrelevant who the architect would be or what shape it would take or how great or grandiose it would turn out to be) that was planned, concocted, designed, worked on. It had to be fashioned through our will and through our work, our craft, our efforts. Voluntarily, willfully, we would build: the shape, the contours, the space, the material, all needed to be derived from construction, from the fashioning of our minds, from our dominion over forces and phenomena, from our arrangement of reality and its components within our existence, through our concepts, our parameters, our arrangement of the elements, on our terms.

>

But the Arches had every desired ingredient, you shudder: the reminder of the event, the monumentality, the place for remembrance and contemplation, the makers of the dead, the signs and sigils of destruction and decomposition, the handiwork of nature (yes, human destruction as part of "nature"), and all the artistic parameters in place. In that case though, it would have been, precisely, the Terms, and Modes, upon which the monument of vulnerability had been erected that were unbearable. For it would also be a reminder of suffering, a raw suffering, an unmitigated, unobstructed, suffering, of surprise, of shock, of helplessness (during, after), of actual *parenté* with other destructions of other peoples and places which the rhetoric wanted to desperately distance us from. The notion that Destruction itself (the sum total of the chaotic but perhaps not haphazard forces and wholly ordered physical/chemical determinants that give final shape to the remaining "things"), that the Destroyers (whoever they are – but there is no doubt about the actual destruction), along with their handiwork, along with the tools and the weapons of choice, would have fashioned the landscape, physical, and by extension, mental and emotional, and Forever, would simply be unbearable, unfathomable.

>

None of that could be admitted in this "city as target." No, what we discover in the City, in the city as target, is that the polity defines itself,

defines its very essence in the way it confronts its city as target-ness – its inevitable nature as target. Now, the constructed monument, the designed monument, the manufactured monument becomes: a locus of the inscription of history; a literal design of the modes of remembrance; an imposed path of circulation, of seeing and thinking; a conditioned manner of viewing and defining oneself. Comfortable and convenient. Attuned to what is already made of our situation in the world, our ideas of ourselves, the way the universe functions. On the one occasion where the lack of conditioning, the lack of manipulation, the lack of interference of any kind, could have allowed a recognition of our inevitable condition, could have altered perceptions and ready-made explanations, where unfathomable forces and unimaginable events devised the landscape, where ruin itself, was the marker of territory and being, "we" decided to build.

>

All markers had to point towards invincibility and the will to overcome, and this will, in turn, was mistakenly made to take root in concrete – the concrete kind. The invincible city, as your provocative proposal allows us to not just formulate, but conclude, is not just an illusion, but a fallacy, and will always be that. The inevitable antidote, of course, since it must deal, is more police, more checkpoints, a populace (including, funnily enough, the same law-enforcement people who are, after all, good folks entrapped by the same delusions) at the mercy of the way the city-as-target is conceptualized and actualized, at the mercy of the attempt at eradicating the immutable, more guarding, more surveillance, more paranoia, more real altered affinities, more tourniquets, more recourses to dull reminders, the perpetual propagation of fear, more hotlines, multiple presumptions of hitherto unknown types of guilt, silly recourse to alliterations which, if they did not make one laugh at their dullness, should cause a great deal of alarm ("if you see something, say something"), and a linguistic and conceptual framework that changes the landscape of being.

>

The ephemerality of all things had come through in the awesomeness of destruction. The books on New York were wrong: the construction of the Twin Towers did not "forever change the skyline" of New York. They did not, because they are destroyed: because where there is incomparable achievement, there is unforgiving, unforgettable,

Ruin: the poetry of madness, the inescapable, unbearable cycle of creation and decomposition, the paradox of the imaginary act, the folly of the creative process, which, inevitably, fashions its own ruins.

>

Ruin, was the marker of the monumentality of the city, while it simultaneously acted as the ode to its uniqueness, to its wonder, to its uniqueness in the realm of wonder, to its uniqueness as a multifarious artifact, event, entity, organ in movement. Ruin, was the reminder of the very unfurling of the city and its energies through the capacity of humans to imagine (the most fabulous designs, the most beautiful quietude and the most shocking devastation), to create and destroy, and to fathom the very possible awesomeness of the withering of their constructions. The invincible city is a fallacy, the untargeted city is a fallacy, for it is the very fabric of the city to admit Ruin, to admit the pillars and the arches of towers without galleries in the skies. Ruins: how they make the citizen of the city as target confront their destinies: and what they will make of the cities in which they stand, monument to the withering of worlds; and in which they are, in turn, abolished: and in their place erected monuments masking the unforgiving, unbearable, destinies of imaginings.

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>From: [Ryan Bishop](#)  
>Date: Sun, 03 Oct 2004 01:19:02

>

You offer an extended and evocative meditation on the reawakening of the city as target in the urban collective memory of NYC, and by synecdoche, U.S. urban space for the nation. It is this lapse into forgettury that I find of interest. It is interesting to note that it appears on the increase again – as if, 9/11 were a mere setback in the triumphant march of largely peaceful urban life; as if, Baghdad were another instance of geographical misfortune; as if, the crosshairs of the sniper, the terrorist, the military only briefly graze urban space at odd, inconvenient moments – rather than accepting that the shield attracts and needs the spear, and vice versa, and that plans are in place to make sure the crosshairs remain over urban sites.

>

Perhaps, Amir, your lyric takes on the remembering of something forgotten with such effort that it might help to ease us out of the easy, slippery slope into the River Lethe.

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>From: [Macy Keller](#)

>Date: Tue, 05 Oct 2004 20:09:54

>

Overwhelmed by the force of Amir's prose, an odd awakening from Wyoming, the last best place on earth (say the travel brochures), I have wondered about the phantasm of the Security Mom and now I think I better understand her place, and she is an important phallacy to note. She will guide much Unitedstatesian thought, me thinks.

>

Raised rural in the emptiest state of the U.S. (Yes – this is the state where people with real money and power are now building gated communities in subdivisions nestled in valleys where water supplies are secured by well. Within the framework of "city as target," surely Wyoming will increase its importance as the no-place, the a-topic space of the U.S. imagination of itself), in my forays to urban existences on the east coast and in Scotland I came to believe that one of the greatest distinctions that ran between humans was the distinction between rural and urban humans, no matter what continent. City-as-target consciousness will surely impact this distinction further. At least until I had read the previous posts, I did not understand from whence came the Security Mom.

>

I reckon that the Security Mom, a phantasm that I could not believe really existed, does not exist in a war that is not a war. Yet she will be even more compelling in her relationship to Motherland, Mother tongue, Virgin of the home-land security forces, lady Liberty and in contrast to the veiled woman, let alone the female suicide bomber whose presumed maternal innocence makes her all the more elusive in her terror. The Security Mom is producer of soldiers, supporter of troops, HumVee driving, does and does not need you to protect her.

>

Does the presence of women soldiers complement the de-militarization of the military? Does the feminization of the military cause or rest anxiety for the Security Mom and her mates?

>

Out here, that is no-where from the perspective of city-as-target, we dead-pan that the men are men, the women are men and the sheep are nervous, so we have long understood that capable females are cause for anxiety. What is the security Mom? Is she capable? Is she capable of determining an election? I cannot



picture a more sheep-like moniker than that of Security Mom and it is easy to slide into general misogynist mockery of her power. It is to me a picture of the Soccer Mom gone awry with horsy blinders instead of infra-red scanning glasses.

>

I suppose that can only be said from a space that knows it is nobody's target. Nobody, that is, except the domestic energy production marketeers who can capitalize on this secure site of domestic fuel production at this time of crisis. But "they" are not the usual suspects, they are us, not the enemy.

>

The replacement of the towers made me shake my head at silly urban activity. Not the kind of thing rural folk would do (one likes to think from the critical distance of rural identity). Yet probably most U.S. people would equate my rural consciousness with the consciousness of the Texan Bush. Just how does rural consciousness figure in the U.S. imagination – is it Bush?

>

How does wide-open space figure in the raced and gendered imagination of the city-as-target?

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>From: [Mary Keller](#)

>Date: Sat, 16 Oct 2004 23:52:29

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In his book *Significations* Charles Long begins with an African American saying from his youth in Little Rock, Arkansas: "Signifying is worse than lying." Signifying was the intentional misrepresentation of another done by skewing a mimetic representation of an other. As such, practices like "black face" by white minstrels was signifying. Black subjectivity required interpretation and was a target that was translated by the black face of the performing minstrel. African Americans developed a double consciousness in Du Bois's words in their relationships to signifying practices; a consciousness that Fanon explored in the Algerian context in the phrase Black Skin/White Masks. The translation from black body to full subjectivity required a targeting of white subjectivity, a self-reinterpretation in order to survive one's experience as a target. The subjects who found themselves targeted (as Fanon recounts from his experiences in Paris when a white girl yells out loud "Look Mama, a negro!") experiences a direct hit (Fanon described this as his corporeal schema crumbling) and must reconstruct itself in relationship to the assumption of a white mask in order to survive.

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>From: [Salwa Ghalay](#)

>Date: Sun, 17 Oct 2004 20:43:37

>

Identity markers are sometimes in-your-face and inescapable. No "passing" is possible even when it is desired and sought after. Other times, with markers, *ça s'écrit*, as we've witnessed, for example, in the return to the veil in Muslim countries and in Muslim communities in the West where, interestingly, some second and third-generation Muslim women have "affirmed" their religious identity through a return to a visible and, as we've seen in France, highly controversial religious sign, one that their mothers and grandmothers had abandoned a generation or two before.

>

What if the "negro" in Mary's comment above were replaced by an immigrant "Meghrebine" wearing a head-scarf in a French metropolis? Or a Dutch woman walking up and down Albert Cuyp Market in loose-fitting clothes donning a tight veil? We can speak to our heart's desire of Levinasian gestures towards the Other and about finding ourselves through intersubjectivity, but the naked truth remains that the veil is likely to invite looks of disapprobation targeting, even unlocking, the subjects wearing it. When this veil is brandished as a sign of rejection of a certain core of Western values in the face of a society that identifies itself, I think, erroneously, as secular, it becomes a target of legislation as well as other forms of "resistance" from the street. But are these women not targeting that street, in addition to being targeted by it? To reverse this and speak from experience, when I walk into a classroom where all women, except me, are veiled, I sense myself at once targeted by and targeting a particular culture and set of values.

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>From: [Gregory K. Clancey](#)

>Date: Mon, 18 Oct 2004 21:29:40

>

When Ryan and I wrote "The City as Target" in early 2001, we wanted to explore this enigma: that the two terms were not allowed to converge in academic discourse, despite the orgy of city-killing and targeting-for-killing that marked the twentieth century (and begins to mark this one as well). That September there was a sudden, unexpected convergence in the realm of televised spectacle. At that moment (or the moment just before) everyone seemed certain that Global Cities or World Cities were the new overlords of

Planet Earth. This was a centering concept, for all its seeming emphasis on spherical networks. Nation-states were crumbling away like old sofas. National borders were increasingly vague, permeable, even silly places, like the one that stopped running through Germany that lively day in 1989.

>

The attack on New York might have infused a new vigor and certainty into Global Cities discourse, especially given that so much of it was published in New York. Was not New York under assault for the very reason of its globality (its ability to control, and even project violence onto others, from a distance)? The epi-Center of the attack was a towering monument to World Trade. Its attackers were located in the most mythically un-urban of places: the mountains (of Afghanistan!), the Ends-of-the-Earth, Tora Bora (as John Kerry said in every debate). A place as frightening, obscure, and distant as the Nebraska panhandle.

>

In America, however, New York became a rallying point for a re-nationalization few would have believed possible (especially the inhabitants of New York, who have long been suspicious of a nation in which they themselves have long been suspects). Then, in the course of a few news-cycles, New York was largely forgotten. From Afghanistan to Iraq, from Nebraska to Tuscany, civilizations, religions, political values and a dozen other markers with macrocosmic/microcosmic characteristics (the microcosm being the stand-up-and-fight category called personal identity) re-asserted themselves to the sound of explosions. The idea of "the city" – as a dense concentration of very different sorts of people (familiar strangers) attempting to live, prosper, partially understand, avoid, not kill each other (except in dark alleys), but eat each others' food – suddenly seemed beside the point. It wasn't even, necessarily, the focus of the new violence. One "nation" or another was under attack. And incidentally, which nation were you, in your soul of souls?

>

Now, looking back, it's striking how the initial possibilities of The City as Target (not our article, but the act, need, instinct of sustaining convergence between the complicated density and the act of violence against it) were rejected by nearly everyone.

>

In our recent City as Target activities, I've been struck again by how very much targeting matters

– and in deeply personal ways – but how few of us care or need to locate our targeted selves in specific civic configurations; how we instinctively consider the act of location – mapping – to be an aggressive act, identical with targeting itself. Had we become used to being invisible in our cities? Maybe "the city" had become invisible, in a way, to its inhabitants, or had ceased to matter given their new trans-urban "connectivities." Those things which some call "communities" (often deployed as an antidote to cities) seem to matter more, but only when and if they transcend mapping. It's these trans-urban connectivities that many of us now believe to be under threat from targeting.

>

The nation-speakers who live in our cities, and in our souls (including mine), are deft at capturing urban violence for themselves. It even presses at one in Singapore (where I'm writing from now, to map myself), where city-talk has been completely buried under nation-talk and community-talk and other languages which organize transcendent unities in the face of the fabulous daily mixing of quite singular souls. The question I'm now asking myself is when, and under what circumstances, did cities cease to matter in this way? Have we just become bored with them? Or do we hate them, deep down, and have we always?

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>From: [Bernard Roddy](#)

>Date: Tue, 19 Oct 2004 06:23:30

>

I still think about power as Foucault taught, and feel it a bit parochial to focus on the city. There was another thread here that I found interesting: Paul as sacrifice [see page 19-23]. For what it's worth, I would return to that problem of translation, and to the question of responsibility. In his book, *The Gift of Death*, Derrida contrasts a universal ethics with the one that Abraham of the Old Testament obeys, silently and secretly, without understanding, through the sacrifice of his son. Abraham is a murderer and unforgivable criminal, yet the modern forms of putting to death also compete for this claim of sacrifice. For Derrida, the religions of the Book are engaged in a fight for Abraham's secret of the sacrifice, a battle "to take possession of the secret as the sign of an alliance with God." And responsibility! At last. For I identify with this Paul in our forum, who struggled without comprehension.

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>>From: [Gregory K. Clancey](#)

>Date: Wed, 20 Oct 2004 08:36:46

>

My point exactly. "A bit parochial." Local. Spatial. Contained. Dense. Material. Teeming. Targeting. Targetable.

>

Not translatable.

>

To respond more thoroughly: Who can imagine Foucault without Paris? Has any theorist so consistently rendered up his own place, systematically opening to inspection its hidden sites in almost travelogue fashion? Power, wherever and however we encounter it in his more empirical texts, relies on density – the close arrangement of bodies (and walls) in what could only be a city, and a primate one at that. Bring Foucault to the countryside and what have you?

>

By the way, Foucault hates Paris. Entering the city gates, one is immediately enlisted in his own repression. It's why he found liberation (and death) in California, and solace late in life with Seneca, the ultimate urban escape-artist.

>

There's nothing French about this. Not every Parisian theorist so consistently takes Paris as his text. Bruno Latour, for example, describes attenuated networks which truly make discussion of cities parochial. He writes explicitly of Paris once, in *Aramis*. Otherwise, as in *The Pasteurization of France*, we are just as likely to be among cows in a field or scientists in a laboratory (the one center in his accounts, located vaguely in suburbs – if at all – and more densely populated by microbes than people). Foucault's doctors require patients, tightly packed. Latour's require heterogeneous arrangements of actors and *actants* over truly vast (though string-like) spaces. His inspiration, he tells us, is *War and Peace*, and just as Napoleonic armies preferred the field to the barricades, so do his descriptions of power depend on mobility and the propensity to continually enlist, maintain supply lines, scavenge, and *reconnoit*. We could say something similar of Virilio, though he's inspired more by electricity and guidance systems than microbiology.

>

What's my point? Only that Foucault may be our last true urban theorist, though in the grand tradition, he explicitly ignores the city that is his text, that is his theory. His "technologies" reject

(through explicit reworking) the technologies which project power for Latour and Virilio. I'm gazing right now at the cover of *A Landscape of Events*. There is a green hill, and the sky beyond, and a single white cloud.

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>From: [John William Phillips](#)

>Date: Sun, 24 Oct 2004 01:55:09

>

The parochia rather well define the range covered by the episcopal brief (and its appointments). And the sense of the parochial does seem to support the complex operations that so determinately distinguish targeting (and the forces that build up behind it) from the parochial offices (which serve the same forces). Hence our decision not only to focus on the parochia but also on targeting per se, which under the rubric of city as target are united, or at least inextricable.

>

However, "power as Foucault taught" – indeed Foucault as a name for a teaching – evokes an episcopality of the archive (as city) or the targeting of archives that the city as target also reproduces; an archiving discourse that concerns itself with populations, repressions that turn out to be incitements, an archive that works to "reinforce, control, monitor, optimize and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them" (from *The History of Sexuality*). Here Foucault's teaching joins in with a chorus of twentieth century voices (including Benjamin, Heidegger, Adorno) struggling with a technology of wars that has the destruction of cities as its end: "massacres have become vital," he observes in the concluding sections of volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*: "And through a turn that closes the circle, as the technology of wars has caused them to tend increasingly toward all-out destruction, the decision that initiates them and the one that terminates them are in fact increasingly informed by the naked question of survival. The Atomic situation is now at the end point of the process: the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence."

>

Foucault's concern with power is consistently a concern with the transformation of the "ancient right to kill," which a sovereign exercised (sometimes by refraining from killing) in order to

exercise his right to life, to the "dream of modern powers," which is situated and exercised at the level of the life of "the large scale phenomena of population," as if the transition across episteme necessitated the invention of the modern city-as-target. The "composite image of scopophilic and scopophobic interfaces" (cities and cinemas) no doubt performs part of the function of working archive, inscribing contemporary conflict within a more general and generalizable parochia, which includes the ogrish website [www.ogrish.com](#) (indeed "unreadable in some ways"); what is apparently satire or simulacrum of the parochial (in form and structure identical to thousands of other online and offline forums) offers life (if you can "handle" it) in images of its underside, this guarantor of the modern soul.

>

Sacrifice, translation, responsibility and the secret: the aporia of responsibility, it seems, straddles two kinds of in-visible, the visible in-visible (which can be made visible) and the absolutely invisible (sonorous, musical, tactile, odiferous). The secret emanates from this realm of the absolutely other – this God – who looks at me in secret because I don't see him looking at me. The God always speaks through an other (the messiah, the postman [or Jacques Lacan, the signifier's signifier] the messenger of truth, the evangelist, the other's other) the vicarious or parochial intermediary, the go between. On the basis of this "gaze," which I don't see, my responsibility is born. How to put it? "*Dieu me regarde et je ne le vois pas . . .*" but the gaze "singles me out" and institutes or reveals the "*ça me regarde*," the "it's my lookout," my responsibility, even if I cannot see anything, and certainly not where this "it's my lookout" comes from, "there where I cannot preempt by my own initiative whatever is commanding me to make decisions, decisions that will nevertheless be mine and which I alone will have to answer for" (from *The Gift of Death*, 90-91). Or Kafka's man from the country waiting a lifetime at the door of the law... whence the episcopacy, and the religions of the book.

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>From: [Ryan Griffis](#)

>Date: Mon, 18 Oct 2004 23:13:20

>

My reading of these questions is filtered through some very particular-to-the-U.S. rhetoric that has gained much media legitimacy lately. This is framed through polar oppositions like "retro

versus metro," but has many terms that get used to name this dichotomy that is meant to reflect geographic and demographic differences that somehow translate into political differences. A lot of this debate seems to be over who has the most valid claim to majority rights, i.e. "the true America." But I have some problems with this creation of a "divided America" as much as it seems to reflect polls at the moment. The categorization flattens/universalizes all differences into inseparable sets that one either accepts or doesn't. What this means for targeting is fairly obvious in looking at the current "electoral process" here in the States – and how such processes in places like Iraq and Afghanistan are portrayed to the U.S. public. "Either you're with us or against us," right? The electorate here is expected to fit into the ideological confines proscribed by the two party process, and that is certainly how it's covered (how many "debate" shows feature gross parodies of the "right" and "left" to cover "both sides" of an issue). The only concession is equally misleading allusions to the mythical "middle," that has a foot on both sides of the ideological fence.

>

In terms of the ongoing problem of "homeland security" the lack of importance attributed to cities is certainly being noted, as N.Y.C. and L.A. authorities claim a lack of funding for protecting things like ports that are the gateway to "middle America's" WalMarts and Best Buys. So this apathy or hatred towards cities may have some resonance here, but the dominance of urban centers in cultural discourse seems quite clear. People in the rural Missouri, for example, don't see themselves at the center of cultural development in the U.S. (it's not reflected in much television or movies as a place that people live), nor as a likely terrorist target. However, they "see" their national culture as a target. Perhaps this is what is meant by the burying of "city-talk" by "nation-talk"?

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>From: [Susan Charlton](#)

>Date: Tue, 19 Oct 2004 06:23:41

>

Australia has its own version of the "retro versus metro" oppositions. These have been discussed at length during the recent Australian election, where the main thrust of ideological, financial and media interest was concentrated on who now falls into which group and which major party (Liberal or Labor) can claim to represent them.

>

For me, the most sobering elaboration of this divide was that by Mark Latham, the current leader of the opposition Labor Party (“sister” party to British Labor and U.S. Democrats and losers of the election). Latham describes the uneasy alliance of Labor supporters as one of “Residents versus Tourists.”

>

For example:

>

The Tourists “travel extensively, eat out, and buy in domestic help. They see the challenges of globalization as an opportunity, a chance to further develop their identity and information skills. This abstract lifestyle has produced an abstract style of politics. Symbolic and ideological campaigns are given top priority. This involves a particular methodology: adopting a predetermined position on issues and then looking for evidence to support that position.”

>

The Residents are “the people who live in the outer suburbs and the regions – the Residents of Australia. Their values are pragmatic. They cannot distance themselves from the problems of the neighborhood, and so good behavior and good services are all-important. There is no symbolism, and also no dogma, in the suburbs, Latham says. The Residents look for small, pragmatic improvements; they are not interested in “big pictures.”

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>From: [David Young, Jenni Goricanec](#)

>Date: Mon, 25 Oct 2004 02:46:14

>

Taking our cue from the Foucaultian and Latourian turn in this thread we would like to examine the “cornered” city, the city that has nothing to lose, the city that can draw its targeters in, and seduce them with its apparent pacified deconstructedness. As a city is gradually deconstructed by the targeted transfer of energy, the networks that have been torn beneath the city’s packaging begin to reform and re-emerge. If, as in the case of Stalingrad, Mogadishu, Jenin, and Baghdad, the networks of people, machines, ideas, authority, blood loyalties/affiliations, power, rules, habits, things that can be made to go “bang” et cetera, can, through *interessement* achieve enrollment and establish stable networks of alliances, the targeters can easily become the targeted. The arts have made much of the first two cities mentioned – docudrama and fiction have both

served to communicate the stories of Stalingrad and Mogadishu. In the latter case, Ridley Scott’s filmic translation of Mark Bowden’s *Black Hawk Down* presents a city seething with rage and “nothing to lose” attitude, just like the Venus fly trap honey oozing from the ruins of Stalingrad, that first sucked the German armies into its midst, then coupled with them in a deadly but nevertheless loving embrace, while an army of one million waited to encircle this beast with two backs composed of steel, flesh, concrete and stone all jumbled and enmeshed so that anything other than the most localized forms of targeting becomes impossible.

>

In Jenin and Baghdad we see similar dynamics. First the city is targeted, then it waits, almost passive and silent, while the people, the rubble, the ruins and the tools of everyday life (gas bottles, fertilizer, cleaning fluid) start to form rhizomic, Latourian networks and then, because remote targeting is always remote, more and more “civilians” are collateralized (see the testimony of the Israeli Combat Fireman in “The Battle of Jenin”), the networks get even stronger and begin to extend outside the city, gaining access to new sources of energy and materiel. The final scene of *Black Hawk Down* is, in many ways, the most powerful, as the only non-wounded U.S. survivors, literally run for their lives, passively scoped by their own U.A.V.’s, discarded by their hi-tech mobiles, while fresh faced, happy, playful children laugh at their fear and helplessness, and the networks of raggedy militia with their “technicals” (4 wheel drive pickups with .50 cal machine guns attached) hover in the background, daring them to try it again.

>

Increasingly, the Iraqi resistance and the sometimes foreign, “Islamist crypto-fascists” who support them (the enemy of my enemy) appear to be doing the same sort of thing – laughing at the Alliance, using networks to kidnap and trade in foreign nationals, whose life literally hangs in the balance. They use the net and TV to show “them” what they can do – images, unlike words, communicate with everybody who can see them. The U.S. forces and their allies have to physically track all the news media to find out what’s happening. So far in Iraq, between ten and fifteen thousand civilians have been collateralized – making it easy to motivate potential networkers (although not quite in the same sense as our local yuppies “network”). The targeted then target other

cities – Damascus, Jenin, Gaza City, Jerusalem, Islamabad, Paris, Birmingham (U.K.), Jakarta – to demonstrate their potency to fellow Muslims who may feel powerless and humiliated, and they target yet other cities – London, New York, Sydney – to instill fear and loathing. The impact of the Mogadishu images (of Alpha Team bodies being dragged through the streets) would have encouraged this strategy.

>

In Falluja, another Stalingrad or Mogadishu appears to be gestating. More and more air power is being applied, as the U.S. forces dance in, and then scurry out, so far only wiping their bloody noses (i.e. 2-3 U.S. soldiers killed per day) – but they know, if they don’t stitch up a deal, they could have their balls ripped off – slowly, like Vietnam. Another seductive, “target me, target me” city, resplendent in the highest of heels and tightest of skirts is, of course, Jerusalem. Three faiths target this ancient city with their pornographic, end-of-days fantasies. An unholy alliance of Christian, Islamic and Jewish extremists goad each other on, comforted by the belief that when Armageddon comes, they will be the last faith standing. Hardest to understand are the Jewish fundamentalists who accept Christian entreaties to seize the Temple Mount, ignoring the belief that motivates these equally fundamentalist Christians – i.e. not until the Jews are once again in control of the ancient temple site, and the last trump sounds, warning them to convert to Christianity or be exterminated, can heaven on earth be achieved.

>

However, there is always a danger to the worm, when it turns. Following the Bali bombing, the hotel Marriott bombing and the bombing of the Australian Embassy in our next door neighbor (the world’s biggest Muslim country), it looks like significant numbers of Indonesians believe that they and their cities are the targets of Jemaah Islamiya (JI) – with good grounds – they have suffered the overwhelming majority of casualties – just like the Egyptians in Taba. Targeting cities is just as problematic and “messy” for terror networks, as it is for the “fire and forget” military networks of the U.S. sheriff and its deputies – gradually, and systematically, more and more “friendlies” are collateralized. It really does seem like there is large scale rejection of JI within the “cified” parts of Indonesia.

>

Of course, our prime minister, John “the man of steel” Howard seems to have missed this chance

to make a really constructive contribution – rather than, for example, temper his muscular talk about pre-emptive strikes against “terrorist bases” with a massive injection of aid into the Indonesian school system, so the madrasses (“pesantren” in Indonesian) begin to lose their hold over the young (because there is no viable public education system in the villages), he talks about sending Australian security experts into Indonesia, presumably to “show them how it is done.” In this context, it’s worth noting that Australia has not caught a single terrorist on its own – the French identified Willi Brigitte, the Indonesians, Malaysians and Singaporeans identified the key Bali bombers, and most recently, the Spanish informed us that the putative terrorists arrested this week for plotting to blow up the Spanish Supreme Court had made repeated phone calls to an Australian resident.

>

To conclude, our story is a tale of cities that, having been targets, learn to target. The a-historical dynamic of televised images cannot “scope” this dynamic – it looks for the most localized and current of causes and effects, ignoring the underlying processes that emerge out of human adaptiveness and the multi-functional nature of things like rubble, rage, rhetoric, ruins, tools, chemicals, mobile phones (as in *Black Hawk Down*, when the child stands on the knoll, watching the “heavy metal” coming in, and phones the war lord), and “as yet unexploded ordnance.” These processes form Latourian networks that can, and sometimes do, enmesh and strangle the targeter.

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## >A: SOUND.

>From: [Anahid Kassabian](#)

>Date: Thu, 11 Nov 2004 04:37:34

>

Much of what has transpired on *Under Fire* has led me to think in new ways about sound and the question of targeting. One talks of “sighting” targets. Even the word “target” suggests a visual image. But while we focus on the scopic and its various regimes, sound is slowly becoming the terrain of new targeting practices. Once again last week, U.S. forces attacked Falluja to a heavy metal soundtrack. New weapons, from “acoustic cannons” to a “pulsed combustion acoustic wave generator” and others, are being created. These non-lethal weapons appear to run considerable risk of inflicting permanent neural damage, though there is little discussion of it in the literature I’ve found. In cities all over the world, eighteenth and nineteenth century Western European orchestral music is being used to chase “undesirable” populations out of public spaces. And, as Merzak Allouache’s 1994 *Bab el-Oued City* reminds us, even the call to prayer can be experienced as targeting.

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>From: [Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger](#)

>Date: Fri, 12 Nov 2004 18:40:43

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The acoustic weapon and the sound have relevance to psychoanalytical considerations concerning the object of voice. The psychic object-voice – object of desire – can be a weapon aiming to hurt and manipulate, as it can be a soothing entity. As a psychic borderline, the voice gives itself even more easily than the touch and the gaze for the elaboration of the unconscious meaning of borderlines and borderlines between entities, objects and subjects, because contrary to touch where sensitivity operates on the borders and “membranes” of the body, and contrary to the gaze that operates from a distance, here by way of the

sound itself first and then by way of resonance, the outside is an immediate inside and the inside, by way of resonance again, is multiplied and connects to the outside. The psychic “lacking” object-voice, that Lacan understood first as resonance, is a psychic element. It is easy to see that from the moment the subject emerges s/he is bathed in sound, and therefore the psychic object-voice as a target for desire and a pole of human attraction is a very strong mental tool, because it links to the most primitive ways of negotiating, conceiving and understanding the world.

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I have proposed, in a “matrixial” prism, to reconsider the intra-uterine cavity as already shaping phantasmatic modes and opening specific channels of meaning. When the matrixial cavity of passage becomes an acoustic resonance camera obscura, the becoming-subject is not separated from the voice by a cut but is border linked to it by resonance and vibrations. Few subjects and objects are sharing and they are shared by the same vibrating and resonating environment where the inside is outside and the outside is inside. The borderline between I and non-I, as co-poietic poles of the same vibrating acoustic string, is transformed into a threshold and the difference between them is, by-with-in the voice transgressed. The voice, as a matrixial erotic antenna for psychic emission and reception, is therefore a very strong psychic tool of connection, love, influence, transformation and also domination, submission and destruction. Sound as a psychic voice-link makes us vulnerable because it opens in us what I call a matrixial time-and-space of encounter where, like in a resonance-cavity, inside and outside vibrate together, and the psyche is open to the world.

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In the mental resonant camera obscura the archaic force of the voice reverberates by resonances that links the inside of several different individuals into a shareable outside. It doesn’t only link multi-sensorial resonances to each other, but it also generates trans-sensorial phenomena of synaesthesia in each participant. When emotively affected, the synaesthesia allows for the border space of shareability and transmissibility, im-purity and conductability become reactivated. Archaic emotional states are echoed and reabsorbed, they are veiled but they can become revealed in the aesthetic experience. Via the resonance, in the matrixial resonance camera obscura which is both intra-subjective and trans-subjective, the acoustic is entwined with touch, the touch with movement, and all of those with fluctuations of light and darkness. The voice as a psychic object carries with it the potentiality to shake us profoundly. It is for that reason, because it can cause deep regression that will engulf different sensitivities with it, that the voice is a strong artistic tool, but it can also, I believe, be a strong tool for fight and manipulation.

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>From: [Amit S. Rai](#)

>Date: Mon, 15 Nov 2004 21:44:14

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I am thinking about Anahid’s and Ettinger’s post through the recent “Future Matters” issue of *Social Text*. Terranova argues that information operates according to different rules than does signification. Its conception of difference is not relational and structural but probabilistic and uncertain. Mathematically, information, like hearing,

functions through an logarithm that essentially reduces the immensity of possibilities to bits of information more manageable: the average level of noise necessary for a message to not get through, for instance.

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I’m wondering about this algorithm of hearing. Terranova writes that the logarithm mediates between a world graspable by the human senses and those processes too complex for our comprehension, that is, processes that “change geometrically, exponentially or multiplicatively: probabilities and explosions, compound interest, populations and proliferating neural connections.” In doing so, the logarithm mimics the way that human senses work. “The ear, too, perceives approximately logarithmically. The physical intensity of sound in terms of energy carried through the air, varies by a factor of one trillion from the barely audible to the threshold of pain; but because neither the ear nor the brain can cope with so immense a gamut, they convert the unimaginable multiplicative factors into a comprehensible additive scale. The ear, in other words, relays the physical intensity of the sound as logarithmic ratios of loudness.”

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Is then sound or hearing ever the target as such? Isn’t it rather a set of techniques that mediate between the generalized noise of logo-capitalist empire and the threshold of attention. How do we after all, catch the ear?

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Now what the mathematical theory of information leaves out is that both sender and receiver are immersed within a larger field of interactions that packs within itself a potential for transformation and even divergent tendencies (Terranova’s take on agency).

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What does all this mean for how sound is being mobilized in contemporary military technologies? It would seem that on the one hand the noise has intensified as media has proliferated, while on the other, the linkage between branding and the jingle is a key technique of sound in post-information capitalism. But to consider the example of the soldiers who play specific rock and hip hop songs as they burn and shoot their way to a new “democracy” in Iraq, I would want to know more about the actual material techniques used here, what kinds of sounds must be filtered out, what other sounds are essential to survival, and what is the threshold of sheer noise.

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>2.  
>UNVIEWABLE ICONS.

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

>Date: Tue, 19 Oct 2004 21:24:18

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Since the end of "major combat," more than 150 foreign nationals have been taken hostage in Iraq. Dozens of videos of captives being ritualistically decapitated with hand-held knives have given an iconographic grammar to the opportunistic violence of this protracted conflict. Yet the clarity of their symbolism is both bone-chillingly direct and unspeakably opaque. Their violence extends to their being viewed at all and to the enrollment of global publics in what CENTCOM would call their "optics."

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As propagandas of the deed, they spin in every argumentative direction, overwriting and overpowering argumentation as such. Yet what could be a more *direct* image than what they show, in their repetition and redundancy? They all look alike, they all sound alike, and seemingly cut from the same autistic script. But their "technology" is in the casting of the lead, that poor no longer anonymous quasi-civilian functionary of the coalition apparatus. The videos redefine the "civilian" out of the equation. In the video's horrific content and in their global viewership, they enroll and implicate their star victim, not as a sacrificial soldier, but as an everyday civilian tool of an occupation force that has already smeared the boundaries between professional occupation and military occupation off the map. The videos are not aimed at the enlisted U.S. soldiers. They are aimed, lines of sight, on the viewer himself, the one who still rationalizes his life and work to be that of a "civilian" in this larger theater.

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An incomplete list of the videos would begin (before the invasion of Iraq) with that of Daniel Pearl, a journalist working for the *Wall Street Journal*, killed by Al-Qaeda affiliates in Karachi, Pakistan. During the period of the Iraqi occupation, the video roster would include, in no special order, the executions of: three unidentified members of the Kurdish Democratic Party; Ramadan Elbu, a Turk, "a truck driver who transports supplies to the American forces"; 12 Nepali contractors; Shiite Iraqi Ala al-Malik accused of spying for U.S. forces; Fabrizio Quattrocchi, an Italian security guard guarding oil pipelines, all killed by the Ansar al-Sunnah Army; Paul Johnson, a night-vision systems repairman on Apache helicopters killed by "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian peninsula" purportedly

lead by Abdul Aziz al-Muqrin, gunned down shortly after the images of Johnson's death were made public; Luqman Hussein, a Kurdish translator accused of participating with U.S. forces in raids in Ramadi, who was working in Iraq on behalf of the Titan Corporation of San Diego, specializing in "C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance)" services to the Pentagon, along with Maher Kemal, a Turkish contractor who reportedly worked with the Americans at a base north of Baghdad; Barie Dawood Ibrahim, an Iraqi contractor who worked on air conditioning and telecommunications projects for U.S. and Iraqi forces; Anwar Wali, an Italian of Iraqi origin and an unidentified Turk; Fadhel Ibrahim and Firas Imeil, Iraqi National Intelligence officers, killed by the Brigades of Abu Bakr al-Sidiq (affiliated with al-Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad); Kim Sun-II, a South Korean translator; Durmus Kumdereli, a Turkish truck driver who shuttled supplies to the Americans; Independent American telecommunications equipment worker Nicholas Berg; eleven as yet unnamed Iraqi policemen and National Guardsmen; Kenneth Bigley, British engineer-contractor, including two separate videos of Bigley pleading for his life; separate videos threatening and carrying out the threat to decapitate American civil engineers, Jack Hensley and Eugene Armstrong killed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad group. The month of October 2004 has been by far the bloodiest, with the Ansar al-Sunnah Army focusing its efforts on non-Western victim exemplars, playing to a different global audience than Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad, who continues to menace the imaginations of white Westerners in particular.

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Obviously the issues raised by the videos are complex and difficult, I do not nearly presume to offer a fixed frame for how *Under Fire*, let alone anyone else, should finally decipher them. However, I do believe that if these gruesome videos do prove to somehow synthesize what this war *is* as a military, mediational, geographic, corporeal event(s) OR if they prove to completely divert from that key disclosure, the determination of either would be equally newsworthy.

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>From: [Saba Mahmood](#)

>Date: Wed, 20 Oct 2004 21:08:03

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It is striking to me that despite the wide reporting these "beheading videos" have enjoyed in *textual form* within American and European media, the actual images have not been widely displayed in visual form among the Euro-American public (Europe is more variegated perhaps on this score than the U.S.). This of course is in accord with the current U.S. policy of keeping images of death and human injury out of visual circulation ever since the current war started. (The film *Control Room* in some sense offers a corrective to the American media's capitulation to this policy.) The "unviewability" of these icons is in this sense unviewable from a particular perspective and location since the videos indeed have been widely circulated and distributed in the Muslim world. (In Pakistan for example cheap reproductions can be bought in urban neighborhoods.) The images contained in these videos serve as a counterpoint to those other images of civilian killings by the U.S. armed forces that have also been out of circulation in the American media but have been widely displayed on Arab and other Asian satellite TV channels. The power of these videos of beheadings therefore take on a particular valence within this juxtaposition of images and memory. For example, ever since the U.S. attack on Afghanistan and through the current war in Iraq, al-Jazeera has been displaying continuous scenes of destruction and violence visited on "civilians." The beheadings of another caste of civilians is only the most recent addition to this long visual record of similar images.

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I agree with Benjamin Bratton on several of his points, but I wonder if one needs to rethink his following remark in light of what I note above: "The videos redefine the 'civilian' out of the equation." One might say in response, it is not so much that the videos "redefine the 'civilian' out of the equation" as much as the videos reposition the civilian in a new way in this equation of brute force and an unrelenting assertion of violence as the only political idiom of our current times.

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>From: [Anahid Kassabian](#)

>Date: Thu, 21 Oct 2004 18:04:40

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Saba, I'm less sure than you sound about the circulation of the beheading videos. While they

haven't been televised, which I take to be your point, and an important one, they are online, and I gather they are widely viewed. The website [www.ogrish.com](#) offers a chilling and comprehensive list of them. And perhaps that site offers itself to neither your nor Benjamin Bratton's "angle" on the videos, though I find the site itself unreadable in some ways.

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Operation Truth, a non-partisan organization of returned U.S. vets, is currently running a radio ad with the sequential unfolding of sounds of war. "This is what a bullet sounds like going past your helmet [sound clip]. This is what a car bomb sounds like a block away [sound clip] . . ." It goes on, but I wonder if there is a comparable unhearability. I don't think it's at play in these ads, but I do think there's a question of sound and targeting that the emphasis on vision might elide.

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>From: [Ananya Vajpeyi](#)

>Date: Thu, 21 Oct 2004 01:54:39

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On the last day of the Third European Social Forum, held in London from October 15 to 17, 2004, there was an anti-war demonstration, in which 20 to 25,000 people marched from Russell Square to Trafalgar Square protesting the American occupation of Iraq and Britain's support to the U.S.

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At the concluding Trafalgar Square meeting/concert, there was a large screen set up beside the stage, constantly showing images to go along with the music. All these images were carefully selected to get their message across without any cognitive delay. There were pictures of political leaders, pretzels, Ronald McDonald, hamburgers, bombs dropping out of fighter planes, caricatures of Bush and Blair, guns, tanks, Disney-Paris, American troops in the Middle East, Arundhati Roy in the Narmada Valley, anti-WTO protesters in Seattle, South American farmers, Guantanamo Bay, Donald Rumsfeld, riot police, et cetera- i.e., contemporary images, taken from war, dissent movements, world politics and American pop culture in general, especially aspects of it that Europeans tend to dislike.

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So far, so good.

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What I found appalling and abhorrent was that the Abu Ghraib pictures were also up there.

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It is not clear to me why it's alright to put photographs of torture in loops and play them like music videos at a concert in the open air with thousands of viewers, even if it is a gathering of protest. It's not like anyone had a choice – you couldn't turn the images off, because it wasn't your private television you were watching. You were forced to behold these atrocious sights, huge, lit up, unfolding in the historic heart of London. There were children in the crowd, as many people had brought their kids along, the demonstration being held on a Sunday afternoon.

>  
Displaying the human rights violations and crimes against humanity of Abu Ghraib in a public setting without giving viewers a discretionary option – to me this seems like a gross misuse of the media. It is an assault on the viewer and also disrespectful to the victims whose misery is turned into a global spectacle. War crimes must have witnesses for there to be justice, but an anti-war demonstration is not a space for acts of witnessing that have any standing or use in a court of law. As participants in the demonstration, we were all forcibly turned into spectators equally of the cruelty of the perpetrators and the suffering of their victims, the debasement of the American soldiers at Abu Ghraib and the humiliation of the Iraqi prisoners. If my act of witnessing cannot serve a legal purpose or a political purpose or even a moral purpose, I do not want to be arm-twisted into this kind of spectatorship. Images of torture are not entertaining, not instructive, not informative, and not valid instruments of propaganda that purports to be non-violent in its methods, its medium and its message.

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Perhaps resorting to such explicit images of violence is an index of the frustration, even impotence, that many in dissenting sections of European society feel when confronted with the power of the current American administration and its allies. By descending to the level of splicing in Abu Ghraib footage, those protesting American – and in this case British and Israeli – occupation and domination in Iraq and Palestine appear to be no less desperate than the terrorists who make videos as they behead their hostages and then want these to be aired on television channels across the world. But even if it is the case that all players have been pushed to the wall by an intransigent world power like the United States, such extreme tactics have to be condemned, no matter which side employs them

and which side we would like to support in these terrible conflicts.

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Some years ago in India, I came to know and like Daniel and Mariane Pearl. Danny's horrendous execution at the hands of kidnappers and its recording on film were not just traumatic and tragic events for his family, friends and colleagues: the whole civilized world was in shock. Today decapitation videos are par for the course. What is more egregious – that innocents are butchered at all? That their murder is filmed? That such films are broadcast? That such broadcasts become routine and lose any meaning whatsoever?

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This perversion of the media in the very last hours of the European Social Forum left a bitter taste in my mouth. No one can deny that the world is radically mediatized. Media will service any ideology without much discernment. But there must be limits and rules to the mediatization of war. Recall Guy Debord: "[Life in the era of spectacular technology] no longer projects into the sky but shelters within itself its absolute denial, its fallacious paradise. . . . The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep." (*The Society of the Spectacle*, 1:20-21). Making a spectacle out of the monstrous acts in Abu Ghraib is an entailment of political slumber that also perpetuates that slumber. It is important for people to continue to build solidarity campaigns in a time of extreme, possibly terminal, cynicism. I have discovered anecdotally that hardly anyone, even those who are on the left in an organized or unorganized fashion, believes in the efficacy of protest, or in the capacity of popular movements to actually effect political change. Be it East and West, activists, artists and intellectuals are tired of raising their voices in a vacuum. It's very telling that not only do thinking people find it difficult to experience "political euphoria," they have little or no faith in democratic dissent, especially when it is expressed through non-violent means (which doesn't necessarily mean they believe in violent resistance).

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

>Date: Thu, 21 Oct 2004 21:29:20

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As is certainly already clear, 21st century wars

are fought as much with images as with bullets. The C3 (Command, Control, Communication) apparatuses that image the battle space into both a viewable, trackable terrain and an actionable interface for military administration at a distance derives from the Napoleonic battlefield tower, the optical logistics of Weiner and Shannon's missile cybernetics, the camouflage techniques of the false bunker and the invisible soldier, and has come, in its way, to envelope the globe in its scopic regimes of display and disclosure. Panoptic architectures and narratives render both cities and cinemas into a composite image of scopophilic and scopophobic interfaces. The military axiom of seeing the enemy in advance of his seeing you is, in the militarization of cinema, turned into a technology of urban planning and governance, a transference of military operation into and onto "civilian" spaces (what Virilio calls "endocolonization"). The images, or more specifically, the logistics of images becomes both a means and ends of contemporary conflict.

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In addition to this central role of imaging technologies in the execution of military operations, "images" also frame, motivate and complicate the economies of cultural narrative that legitimate or obfuscate the rationale of what is in fact being fought over. Each successive modern conflict has both employed the instruments of vision to realize itself and has been chronicled (celebrated and challenged) by the visual iconography such media afford. All wars enroll their publics in a quasi-spiritual endeavor (secular or otherwise), and are successful in maintaining the coherency of those mythological narratives to the extent that they are clarified and concretized through the consumption of iconographic images by the publics on whom or for whom a war is fought. A flag raised at Iwo Jima, a nuclear bomb over Hiroshima, the police chief of Saigon with his pistol to the temple of a suspected Viet Cong insurgent, newsreel footage of Hitler's speeches to packed stadia and the gruesome discoveries of the camps, a little girl fleeing the torrent of napalm along a remote roadway, a lone protester challenging a tank in Tianamen Square, of a plane flying into a building, or someone leaping from that building, and so on.

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The iconographic power of these images, to summarize and finalize the metatextuality of chaotic conflict, are not only the result of a

collective labor of symbolization to fill the lack of national or religious significance, they are as well a tactical device for the production and coordination of this significance. Icons have always mediated such purposes, and continue to do so. During the wars in the former Yugoslavia, footage of Muslim prisoners crowded behind barbed wire fences in makeshift camps, heads shaved, faces fearful and forlorn, was shown on several different television stations with the color artificially desaturated to black and white, and film grain noise also artificially added. The expressed purpose of these "special effects" was to evoke a recognition on the part of the global viewership of prisoners held in concentration camps during World War II, and to connect two central European genocides across circumstance and detail into a general figure of fascist evil. Just last year, the United States military, upon its arrival in Baghdad, orchestrated the toppling of one of the many Stalinesque statues of Saddam Hussein that surveyed the city, by a small, "random" group of "liberatees." Many reporters on the scene doubted that many of the small, strangely unspontaneous mob were even Iraqis at all, and it became clear that the toppling of the statue was perhaps a scripted event, to be undertaken and staged for the benefit of the world's news cameras waiting for an iconographic (or iconoclastic, as the case may be) signal that Hussein's tyrannical regime had been castrated by the American forces. The footage cycled incessantly on the world's TV sets for days, and along with the awkward tale of one Jessica Lynch cast in the ill-fitting role of "Old Shoe" from *Wag the Dog*, provided a "cover story" to signify and clarify the events and to provide an establishing shot for what would follow. However, the stream of images beaming around the world from Iraq proved to be far more complicated, and problematic than these maudlin half-time show theatrics.

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CBS's *60 Minutes* first broke the story to the global viewing audience on April 28. From a prison complex formerly utilized by Hussein's forces to administer torture on suspected dissidents, some place called "Abu Ghraib," we learn that between October and December, 2003, American prison guards had not only routinely abused Iraqi prisoners in a sadistic frenzy of homoerotic, scatophilic mind fuckery, but that they had taken dozens and dozens of digital images (both still and video) of their exploits, and had clearly choreographed their *dances macabres*



for the purpose of making such images. Furthermore, many of the guards were too only eager to share the results of their work, and, as is the nature of the digital image, hundreds of duplicate copies circulated by email beyond the control of the military investigation that had been initiated in January of 2004 by Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Richard Myers, requested that CBS delay running the story and they did for two weeks, but once the lid was off, it seemed that for weeks into the summer, more and more images and videos, evidentiary of something profoundly violent, but somehow not entirely unexpected, was revealed about what was at stake in this conflict. Bush was quick to distance the United States from both the images and the motivation for their production, even going so far out of his usual field as to discuss directly to the Arabic-speaking media about the matter. Mainstream media outlets were conflicted about how to even show the images, if at all, and equally how they could not, considering their cutting testimony about the war as a whole and the “mindset” that would execute it. Did “supporting the troops” mean disclosure or discretion?

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Attention focused on the troubled psyches of end-of-the-world lovers Pfc. Lynndie England and Spec. Charles Graner, Jr., apparently the ringleaders of this little S&M geopolitics. Juridical blame didn't stick to the system that would place such people in this sensitive position, and for the record, these aberrant knuckleheads are in no way representative of, agents of, connected to or instruments of the larger coalition civilization. Stigmatized and thrown to the wind, England sits in the brig waiting to have Graner's baby, an unfortunate conceived in the wake of this weird extended foreplay. But the official cleaving of Abu Ghraib from the war as a whole was unsuccessful. A new iconography for Operation Whatever-It-Is had been excreted upon the global viewing audience, one that directly and unequivocally, framed the interface between the coalition and Iraq, between the West and Islam, as one of sexual humiliation, bodily profanation, animalistic degradation, and violent brinkmanship.

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Of the Op-Ed-coming-to-terms initiated by the Abu Ghraib photos, Susan Sontag's piece for the *New York Times Magazine*, “On the Torture of Others,” focused on the photographic materiality

of the images as the key clue to their significance, and our ability or inability to distance ourselves from their production. Sontag states that in fact “the photographs are us.” She writes that considered frankly, the photographs, in their framing, in their exposure, synthesize the ignorant, brutal drama of the occupying motivation. Despite official attempts to scapegoat some reservists, and official attempts to singularize and peculiarize the events themselves, Sontag maintains that such dissociations are both impossible and immoral. Even if so, the war of images would complicate even further.

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This of course plays a bit differently outside the States. In the Manichean momentums of war and war opposition, viewing publics are enrolled as “witnesses” into an accountable solidarity of reaction. Here the Abu Ghraib photos signify not “us,” but “them,” the Americans who bullied this conflict onto the world stage.

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Ananya Vajpeyi wrote about the urban-scale display of these images at a demonstration last week at Trafalgar Square. But of course it is not just at such transcendental public moments that we are bombarded with such things, and their final political purpose cannot be contained by the sober proceedings of the court, or the certain duty of justice, or the civility of civil space. As the Red Brigades/Italian government proved in the 1970s, propagandas of the deed always work both toward revulsion and inspiration, resistance and acquiescence, at the same time.

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Sontag concludes her remarks on the prison photos, “even if our leaders choose not to look at them, there will be thousands more snapshots and videos. Unstoppable.” Subsequent events would overwhelm her words.

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Are the beheading videos different? If as Sontag suggests, the Abu Ghraib images are “us,” does this mean the beheading videos are “them,” the “Iraqis,” the “Muslims,” the “Terrorists?” Which “them”? Rumsfeld would certainly accept each of these bargains. Are they not “them” at all? Not “us”? Not anyone?

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Where are the points of identification with the beheading footage? They don't offer the warm, catholic figurations of the martyr that make the Abu Ghraib photos so flexible and usable for purposes of oppositional iconography. The

beheading videos are not really conversant with the war/anti-war interfaces that preoccupy the West at all. This footage doesn't care what side you think you are on.

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>  
>From: [Amit Rai](#)  
>Date: Fri, 22 Oct 2004 19:16:17  
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I think the question of the unviewable, unreadable bodies of the dead that are circulating out of Iraq (but curiously not out of Afghanistan and what of the too, too viewable, indeed pornographic bodies of Sudanese children in the *NY Times* – these bodies have to be seen in relation), and the vortex of counter-terrorism/terrorism should be put in the framework of the production and targeting of a particular kind of consumer of the informatics of war – images and sound being two distinct bodily disciplines of that informatics. The consumption of bodies through detachable, repeatable, and hence always refunited information would enable us to see that the civilian is not being created anew, or even excluded. What is being defined out of the equation is something like an outside to this war-informatics. It seems in the circulation of these information packets – sound, image, text, and their attendant affects – the consumer of war is able to bring genocidal violence into new cultural contexts, into the counter-spheres of everyday life. I think a new consumer is created through these technologies, along with distinct racial and gender identities.

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>  
>From: [Thomas Keenan](#)  
>Date: Fri, 22 Oct 2004 19:19:56  
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Benjamin Bratton wrote:

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“During the wars in the former Yugoslavia, footage of Muslim prisoners crowded behind barbed wire fences in makeshift camps, heads shaved, faces fearful and forlorn, was shown on several different television stations with the color artificially desaturated to black and white, and film grain noise also artificially added. The expressed purpose of these “special effects” was to evoke a recognition on the part of the global viewership of prisoners held in concentration camps during World War, and to connect two central European genocides across circumstance and detail into a general figure of fascist evil.”

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What is the source of this claim? Which television stations? When? Where and by whom was the “purpose” “expressed” and in what terms? I think it's important to document these references, especially since footage shot by the same crew was the target of a rather extraordinary revisionist effort, and was finally vindicated only after a major lawsuit in the British courts.

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>  
>From: [Benjamin H. Bratton](#)  
>Date: Fri, 22 Oct 2004 19:19:56  
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I cannot provide a specific citation. My own recollection is that the ITV News footage was shown on at least two American news magazine shows (I believe that it was both *Frontline* (PBS) and *Nightline* (ABC), as well as ABC's *World News Tonight*), and that I am quite certain that during the broadcast, the American program(s) did make explicit reference to the fact that these images were being presented in such a way as to aesthetically evoke newsreel footage of the camps in World War II. Specifically, the broadcast indicated that color was desaturated and that “film noise” was added to make the footage appear to be old. I believe that the preamble to the broadcast(s) indicated that this manipulation was done particularly for this broadcast only, but it is possible that the footage was only rebroadcast in this manner. The expressed claim was made that the aesthetic of the footage was both artificial and journalistically deliberate.

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More to the point, it is precisely the legal and ethical controversy over the veracity and these very images and the rightfulness of their iconic status that remains in play, beyond the jurisdiction of a court. The ITV case was about the framing and reading of selectively edited footage, and the primary “ruse” of the images here is not one of special effects, but precisely of the staging historical semiotics of the image itself. The further artifactualizations of the images would extend the complications of the complicated politics of “disclosure” that (for example) your own work examines so well. My point in the previous post is precisely that the career of the iconographic/iconoclastic image is never without such framings and reframings, and that disclosure itself discloses nothing.

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>From: [David Campbell](#)

>Date: Fri, 22 Oct 2004 19:20:56

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Benjamin, regarding your discussion about the Bosnia camp images from 1992:

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Having written extensively about this topic, I wanted to offer some additional comments by way of response to your points. In thinking about the veracity and impact of the 1992 British television reports of Omarska and Trnopolje camps in the Prijedor region of Bosnia it is necessary to distinguish three levels:

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1. The two original reports – by Penny Marshall for ITV and Ian Williams for Channel 4 – which lasted seven minutes each and were broadcast separately on two British networks on August 6, 1992.

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2. The way those reports were picked up and transmitted by other television networks around the world.

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3. The way images from those reports – the still of Fikret Alic especially – were abstracted, produced as photographs, and over time made into icons.

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I agree that for an image to become iconic requires a number of framings and reframings, and that these are worthy of critical examination. However, most attempts to raise this issue with regard to the coverage of the Bosnian camps conflate the three levels I've described, thereby suggesting that the process of "artificialization" of these images, to use your interesting but debatable term, was begun by and is the responsibility of Marshall, Williams and their networks.

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This is most evident in the demonstrably flawed Thomas Deichmann/Living Marxism allegations that Marshall and Williams concocted pictures which "fooled the world." Whatever the limits of English libel law (and there are many), it's worth remembering that the legal victory for the journalists was a decision of a jury of twelve citizens who for three weeks quite literally poured over the way the video rushes from Omarska and Trnopolje were edited into the two seven minutes broadcasts, and cross examined all involved in their production. That they awarded the maximum damages to the journalists was testament to the fact that Deichmann's

allegations were without foundation – especially the ludicrous claim that the barbed wire was around the journalists but not the inmates. During the trial even the most ardent LM members had to admit under oath that it was the Bosniaks, not the reporters, who were incarcerated in the camp.

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The evidence from the legal case is cited extensively in my articles (see page 111). But the best way to appreciate the original reports is to see them again (online at [http://www.virtual-security.net/attrocity/pt1\\_vid.htm](http://www.virtual-security.net/attrocity/pt1_vid.htm) and [http://www.virtual-security.net/attrocity/pt2\\_vid.htm](http://www.virtual-security.net/attrocity/pt2_vid.htm)). Among these many striking features is the fact that the now famous image of Alic at the wire comprises but a few seconds of the original broadcasts.

>

Moving from the original reports to the two levels at which they were interpreted is where we see the interpretative work most clearly. With regard to the second level, when I read your original comments about some of the Alic images having the color drained from them I was sceptical. But looking again at the ABC *World News* report (cited in my footnotes, and streamed in part on the site) you are correct with respect to one report. The opening few frames of Cokie Roberts' report (entitled "The Camps: A Glimpse into Genocide?"), which runs for a few seconds, takes the scenes of Alic at the fence and makes them black and white. However, that desaturation was NOT part of either the original Channel 4 or ITV reports, and neither Channel 4 nor ITV altered the images in that way. You point to a Channel 4 graphic reproduced in black and white and say they "turned up the contrast." That is the claim of Living Marxism, and should thus be treated with due caution. Moreover, this graphic was also not part of the film broadcast by Channel 4 or ITV. I've not seen it previously, but it is most likely one of those title captions that stations place behind their studio presenters as a title page, and being familiar with Channel 4's practice, it would have been in color.

>

It is at the third level – where the newspapers "frame-grabbed" the Alic at the fence image, and accompanied it with headlines and text linking it to the Holocaust – where the "historicization" of the image most clearly occurred. But, again, none of the references to concentration camps, genocide, or World War II were made in the original TV reports of Marshall and Williams. Nor does this historicization necessarily have the effect Deichmann and others ascribe to it –

in the second of my articles, I use Barbie Zelizer's work in her book *Remembering to Forget* to demonstrate that linking Bosnia to the Holocaust visually actually prevented the Bosnian war from getting the attention it warranted.

>

Deichmann and other revisionists wanted to discredit the original reports because they claimed they led to Western intervention in Bosnia – in other words, they claimed this was an instance of the "CNN-effect" where television created state policy. Only that didn't happen. For all the media attention about the camps the original reports prompted in August 1992, neither the U.S. nor Europe undertook military action as a result of these reports. It was another three years before such action (and then still limited) was initiated, by which time upwards of 200,000 people had been killed. We should reflect on that when we talk about the power of images.

>

Analyzing the reproduction and circulation of the two original broadcasts in the three levels I've outlined points up some interesting features in the construction of an iconic image. Too often, though, critics have conflated all levels as part of the revisionist attempt to deny the historical actuality of the Prijedor camps and their place in the Bosnian war. Such attempts are without foundation when the original reports are considered in their entirety and in their context. They were not a "ruse" that staged a particular historical semiotics through framing and reframing. They helped disclose the existence of Omarska and Trnopolje and the ethnic cleansing strategy of which those camps were a part, even if those in power failed to act on this knowledge at the time.

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>From: [Salwa Ghalay](#)

>Date: Fri, 22 Oct 2004 19:20:56

>

A few more thoughts on the beheading videos. It is probably safe to assume that the perpetrators of the Ur-beheadings (that of Daniel Pearl in Afghanistan and Nicholas Berg, first of its kind in Iraq) had hoped for much more televisual impact. They probably expected al-Jazeera to oblige (and through it others), especially since it had been the vehicle by means of which most of Bin Laden's videos got airtime. I don't know if the Qatari network aired either beheading fully. I do know, however, that since those "original"

decapitations, both al-Jazeera and the Dubai-based al-Arabiyah have limited themselves to the images we've all seen on Western networks: hooded men armed with machine guns they will not use to do their deeds, standing in macho positions behind stooped, blindfolded and handcuffed potential victims or victims to be.

The (ostensible?) reason given for not showing the gory scenes has been, in the words of one al-Arabiyah anchorwoman, "not to hurt the viewer's sensibilities." The end result has been that these images have gone "underground." Or, rather, they have remained in cyberspace, where to see them, you have to seek them. I don't think that this was the original intention of al-Zarqawi, or whoever it was who orchestrated or took part in those "spectacles-manques." The terrorizing scenes of nightmare becoming reality and of the unimaginable becoming possible, and indeed doable, were most probably meant to stream into our living rooms and collective consciousness uncensored. Like the scene of the second plane hitting the second tower on 9/11, the media were meant "to be there" to capture then disseminate (or simply disseminate) those images. Here, too, the images are by no means run-of-the-mill: they aim to defamiliarize our canonical visions of war and human destruction, giving a novel twist to all those images that we have long associated with modern warfare.

>

The very mise en scène of the beheadings, the random choice of victims, the deliberate use of a medieval weapon to slit throats encode a host of messages about the perpetrators of those acts, the episteme within which they operate, and the weapons they unsheathe in the face of not just the West, but also all those who oppose them, beginning with the moderate clerics of institutionalized Islam. These beheadings, it seems to me, have their place in a Jihadi grammar that has evolved over the past few decades and has targeted symbols of the Muslim religious establishment (the slaying of Sheikh Muhammad al-Dhahabi in Egypt in the late seventies, being one example) as well as secularists and intellectuals (e.g. the near fatal stabbing of Naguib Mahfouz, Egyptian Nobel Laureate). The difference between the early killings and the ones being witnessed today is that, with the advent of the Internet and satellite television, the "medieval" has merged with the "postmodern," compounding the symbolism of acts of slaughter.

>

If X group(s) found themselves unable to impact on the global public in the way it/they had hoped to, then why do they continue with the ritualized, mechanistic acts of slaughter, acts that, through repetition, are unlikely to sustain interest in the long run? Are these acts merely a modus operandi, a part of the grammar I mention above? Or are different groups mimicking each other, always upping the ante? Or is it that the perpetrators of these acts are satisfied enough with the results: most of us, I would venture to say, have not seen/sought the videos, yet we all have opinions about them, and are, at least, sharing thoughts on them in many a forum and venue. Though we have not seen the videos, we have heard enough to be terrorized.

&gt;

One last comment on those who go out of their way to seek those videos online. A cursory googling of "Iraq- beheadings" yields a substantial number of sites, many of which are stating that they posted the beheadings to make people aware "of the nature of the enemy we are up against." What, I keep wondering, do people who download those videos think they are doing? Giving themselves a reason to condone the unconscionable and justify the unjustifiable in Iraq and beyond? Are they partaking of the "war on evil" and do they want to look that "Evil" in the face? Are they skeptics who need to see the print of the nail, without which they will not believe? Do some see themselves as vicarious Jihadists, avenging the Islamic Umma against the infidels, the kuffar, through the mere act of viewing the material the media have deemed as contraband?

&gt;

It's interesting to note that in Internet/cafe settings in the Middle East, such beheadings became a subject of small talk. This communal reception of the videos is itself worthy of study. Lastly, you'll notice that the people interviewed were all young males professing to be against acts of violence. All found themselves needing to ask why they chose to view those videos. Perhaps all felt that seeking images of violence that have not come to you unbeckoned was an act that involved an element of complicity and needed some explaining.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

&gt;Date: Sun, 24 Oct 2004 01:57:22

&gt;

Some months ago I saw the exhibition *Without Sanctuary*, which features several hundred

postcards sent to friends and relatives. The postcards were photos of lynchings in the U.S., gathered by an antique dealer from Atlanta, James Allen. He spent 25 years collecting the material, buying the images in garage sales and second hand stores. The most striking in all the photographs is the atmosphere of joy and relaxation: the crowd seems to be delighted seeing these people accused of the most vague and unproven crimes and lynched. It was a kind of horrible family party, where children were taken along – we see them eating ice cream and laughing. The same relaxed faces and laughs I recognize from the pictures broadcast by television chains showing the American soldiers posing around their naked and humiliated prisoners. The torture and the mayhem and the lynchings seems to me as American as Disney World and fast food.

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&gt;

>From: [Harel Shapira](#)

&gt;Date: Thu, 21 Oct 2004 02:55:00

&gt;

Have all these terrible beheadings signaled that we(?)/they(?) have finally, as Foucault would want it, "cut off the king's head"? Or have we(?)/they(?) missed the mark?

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&gt;

>From: [John William Phillips](#)

&gt;Date: Sun, 24 Oct 2004 01:59:41

&gt;

Harel Shapira identifies a compelling issue. According to the genealogy of the epoch, as Foucault wanted it, once it becomes possible to cut off the King's head, then that possibility – the King's head – would no longer have been an effective target. Once we started to cut King's heads off the strategies, structures and systems of power had already shifted. The chopping off of King's heads was already a sign of that shift. The new target, as Foucault outlines it, would be that of the population (the outcome or offspring – the new child – of the power/knowledge congruence) or city, as we would have it. Not a walled city or forbidden city as in ancient regimens, but a populated, empowered city of strangers-in-orders, the city of accidents converted – increasingly, incessantly, retrospectively, in diverse forms of delayed action – into kinds of necessity. Such conversions follow the rules of the repetition compulsion, as Freud had discovered it, converting trauma into the necessity of its

incessant repetition and impeding absolutely the redemptive (but prosthetic) power of memory.

&gt;

The terrible beheadings perhaps signal something of the accidental target in their targeting somewhat accidentally (rather than the deliberate revolutionary *te/os* of a regicide). The target now would be the (Jungian?) individual, the plucked out representative – absolutely singular as such – of the collective (if there is one). With accidental targeting, missing the mark would be more or less the same as hitting it. The recent (i.e., 100 years or more) history of urban targeting charts this. However, the only effective target – in the Foucauldian epoch (IF we accept this) – would be a population per se.

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>From: [Harel Shapira](#)

&gt;Date: Mon, 25 Oct 2004 03:59:44

&gt;

John, I think your comment on missing and hitting as collapsing onto each other is a great insight into the situation. It also, I think, points to the condition of the U.S. which desperately seeks to produce precisely the missing head of the discourse of terror. How exactly does one win a battle without a proper head? In this instance the lack of a head is not producing conditions for a more emancipatory politics, but in a sense its cruel opposite. I think this stands both for the U.S. and for Iraqi resistance – and if we extend this metaphor to Levinas' notion of ethics as premised on the face-to-face, how do we engage in ethical politics without face-ing the other?

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>From: [Ananya Vajpeyi](#)

&gt;Date: Mon, 25 Oct 2004 02:45:46

&gt;

Benjamin: Driving your analysis of beheading videos, and also in the recent writings of Sontag, Baudrillard, Appadurai, Žižek and others, is something very disturbing. This is the inability to make sense of what is going on in the manufacture and display of these images, whether in the framework of war, or in culture at large. Every interpretive act is driven by a quest for meaning, but in this case we seem to be up against a semantic opacity, a category of phenomenon that appears not to mean, not to make sense, not to open itself up to any line of sight or insight, at least in so far as all viewing comes from a place of moral coherence. We are able to characterize the acts of murder we are

invited to witness: they show us humans (the victims) in extreme pain, they show us humans (the perpetrators) acting without mercy, they show us the irreversible transition from life to death, they show us the blood and gore that the protocols of civility usually keep out of sight, they show us violence that is not punitive, just, deserved, authorized, pedagogic, reparable – and so on. But the problem remains: *what* do they mean?

&gt;

Supposing we begin by considering the decapitation, the mutilation and finally the blasting of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan. (Prior to this, in Southern Asia we have a recent historical memory of the Chinese assaults on Tibet's monasteries, and the large-scale desecration and destruction of Buddhas there). Let's say there's a cline from the images of violated Buddha heads to violated human heads. A statement of this sort invites immediate shock and disavowal: How can you compare idols in wood, stone or metal to the living flesh of people? To decapitate a Buddha is symbolic violence; to decapitate a person is bloody murder. The former act at least signifies cultural insult; the latter signifies nothing, it is sheer annihilation of life and of meaning. At the end of the day, people are not literally the vessels of cultural, social or religious identity, such that by cutting off their heads you then wipe out what's supposedly contained in those heads.

&gt;

Obviously there is no disputing the discrepancy in degrees of absolute harm wrought by attacking an idol versus attacking an individual. But I suspect there is a clue here, as to what such violence is supposed to convey. The analogy of visual impressions is unmistakable: shattered statue, broken body. The photograph or video clip or television footage is then a sign of disrespect for the integrity of a figure, for its perfection, whether as a religious icon or as a human being. The act of destruction recorded on film is a laying-bare of the artefactual nature of a lifeless or living figure, at the very moment of its ruination, its dismemberment. Idols are made, so are people. Lo and behold, both can be unmade, undone. The message is one of disregard for what is precious: the sanctity of a god, a sage, a prophet, or the sanctity of an ordinary person. Regard: This was one you thought holy. This was one you loved. Now all you see are pieces of stone, pieces of bone, that can never be put back together again.

&gt;

I am trying to understand, along with you, what it means to make videos of decapitation, and to circulate them. I am trying to comprehend, as are you, what kind of sacrilege it is that the media are allowing themselves to become the vehicles of. One does not have to be religious to have one's faith be shaken by such images.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Mon, 25 Oct 2004 07:25:10

>

Do you mean the desecration of any sacred image should be comparable to the desecration of a body? I am reading now some essays about ritual cannibalism and the idea seems to be to mutilate the body not for hatred or love of mayhem but for love or fear.

>

The mutilated body of Christ or the mutilated body of Che Guevara were also holy but the industry of the relics has been blooming for a long time. The idea that the body is the bearer of significance and meanings (in a Lacanian way) is as old as the ideas of representation. The animals and the men drawn on the walls of Lascaux or Altamira already showed that our ancestors believed that the things you did to the drawn things affected the real things. And in Byzantium the quarrel between iconoclasts and iconolovers was a conflict between those who saw the icons as images and those who saw in the images the real gods.

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>From: [John William Phillips](#)

>Date: Mon, 25 Oct 2004 03:58:36

>

Salwa asked, "What do people who download those videos think they are doing?"

>

It's not beyond all speculation. But how would such speculation be anything more than a kind of philately? The *ateleia* would mark a messenger but not the truth ("I wanted to see the truth"). Search for "truth" in google, and find the questions answered. The Internet promises (perhaps nothing else but) opportunities to see the truth and to do so in secrecy if need be but also, for the curious, the experience of the unveiling of secrecy, as Derrida (again) puts it: "the revealing of the pudenda or the fact of 'seeing in secret.'" Or Beckett: "here are the pudenda of my psyche?" What is unreadable? Images archived alongside images of accidents,

murders, catastrophes, tortures, rapes, pornography and singing. The Internet's philately? The endless disclosure of disclosures that disclose nothing... The demand and the desire remain: "Show us the truth!"

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>From: [Ananya Vajpeyi](#)

>Date: Fri, 29 Oct 2004 23:11:32

>

A friend who is a photographer asked me the other day why it is acceptable, according to me, to be shown war footage at an anti-war demonstration in the European Social Forum, but not acceptable to be shown Abu Ghraib footage. Is war less atrocious than torture? Is it tolerable, viewing building in ruins, streets on fire, civilians hurt or dead from bombings, or for that matter, combatants in various stages of injury and suffering, soldiers killed in battle? If so, why? Obviously, the decapitation videos would provide a limit of sorts to this list of viewable/unviewable atrocities.

>

Indeed many images of conflict, of displacement, of human suffering, may offend moral and/or aesthetic sensibilities. Thresholds of tolerance for such imagery also vary from viewer to viewer, and at some point it may not be entirely predictable what counts as "too much" to confront. But I would like us to keep trying to sort through the mess of issues here, to the point where it becomes possible to state exactly why torture is in a category by itself, egregious beyond tolerance, beyond relativizing, and yes, beyond viewing.

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>From: [John William Phillips](#)

>Date: Sat, 30 Oct 2004 18:43:10

>

I applaud Ananya Vajpeyi's resurrection of what looks to me like a Jakobson (or at least post-Jakobson) communication model for approaching the question of the morality of images.

>

I also think it would be worth reconstructing the complex problems that always immediately (and instructively) follow: inevitable problems regarding production, reception, content, context or reference, meta-message and support all surround the readable message as its essentially unreadable grounds: the "blanks" that one draws (and which prompt the questions). The blanks of course are inessential insofar as one can always

ignore them; but to do so would nonetheless betray the absolutely necessary ethical ground that allows without sanctioning, e.g., one's ignorance and betrayal.

>

At the basic level of the mark (to return to the idiom of targeting), the "mind behind the eye behind the lens" would be related to the mind behind the eye before the image only by virtue of these blanks: the nothing that distinguishes them; and this would be minimally true even for the one "mind" separated from itself in aiming, capturing, viewing, and reviewing. The message aims (perhaps) at its addressee without ever being able to fix it or limit it in the slightest (not really needing to have a determined addressee in advance). Conversely the addressee would inevitably be situated as the responsible bearer of the secret. Or as the accidental target.

>

To remain within the consolation of the idea of purpose, one can nearly always identify a purpose – or a purposiveness – or if not speculate productively (arrested on charges of photography?); and this extends to the purposes of torture, ambush, terrorism, war, of photography, of exhibition, of circulation. The beheading videos, for instance, seem unambiguous in their purpose if less so in their effects.

>

Offensively banal images of torture circulate constantly (for instance as drama fictions) on cable and satellite channels worldwide, archived in digital formats and effectively representing the practice as a morally displeasing yet common means of saving the vast populations of America's cities. Abu Ghraib footage also circulates widely and is usually protected by scandalized meta-commentaries (which neither hurt nor harm the officials) as if in satire of the prosthetic memory that the urban archive determinately disperses into its media matrices, effectively forgetting/archiving at the very least a century of voluminously documented torture and mayhem, and producing as if *ab nihilo* a stable moral universe suddenly and unexpectedly invaded by such images.

>

But the idea of purpose in these cases is exactly what relativizes the category of torture: 1) as political/criminal (and thus related to issues concerned with maintaining and regulating the historical nature and culture of an ideally perfectible international law up against its own

internal limits and (il)legitimacies; the simultaneous progress and development of the worldwide shadow states, organized capital crime, non-legal money and drug cartels; inter-ethnic, inter-religious struggles; and the industries that furnish the military with the increasingly sophisticated arms technology, chemical, viral, and tele-technological; 2) as personal/criminal (e.g., the narcissism of those who – as Aristotle had noted – can only live through the suffering of others; or the rage of the vengeful reduced to paranoid-schizoid defensive reaction – discovered belatedly, it seems, by cognitive science as a kind of pleasure).

>

My proposal: the episcopal function operates as constituent of the archiving city and, as such, it helps to overdetermine any distinctions we might have made between, say, a website dedicated to "extreme" and/or streaming images, an intellectual forum, an anti-war demonstration and a civic exhibition of contemporary art. To move towards the possibility – to state exactly why torture is in a category by itself, egregious beyond tolerance – we must first, I think, address the archive that archives, that distinguishes archives in various ways, including built-in moralities and immoralisms (and their promises and pleasures). For this we would perhaps need a paleonymics and a prosthetic memory of old texts, old problems, old paradoxes. What do the aporias of the intolerable have to say of the Abu Ghraib footage? And what would it say to them?

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- > 3.
- > POWER, KNOWLEDGE,
- > AND AFFECT.

>From: [Paul N. Edwards](#)

>Date: Tue, 26 Oct 2004 21:47:42

>

Lately I've been thinking a lot about the epistemology of world-scale information infrastructures. How do the gigantic global monitoring systems that surround us shape what we know about "the world," how we can know it, and the conditions under which new knowledge can be produced and/or challenged?

>

My first book, *The Closed World*, explored the global surveillance system built by the U.S. military in order to fight the Cold War. Beginning with SAGE (Semi-Automatic Ground Environment) in the 1950s, a series of computer-based military information systems adopted an essentially similar structure. A network of remote sensors – radar, satellites, many others – relayed data to central computers, which processed it into threat assessments. Computers played varying roles in what happened next, from simply informing commanders all the way to executing pre-planned strategies by firing weapons. The hair-trigger, upward-ratcheting responses created by U.S. and Soviet surveillance nets acting in concert made the whole world vulnerable to what Paul Bracken called "nuclear Sarajevos."

>

These warning systems both reflected and helped create a "closed world discourse" that saw geopolitics as a zero-sum superpower game, with every other nation acting as ally or pawn. The enormous stakes, short time frames, and vast distances involved in Cold War nuclear strategy all pointed to high-tech solutions, distorting the superpower economies into vast civilian-powered machines for the production of technological advantage. SAGE became a paradigm for everything from the 1960s World Wide Military Command Control System to the "Star Wars" space-based missile defense fantasy, and it persists today in concepts of "global integrated surveillance" spewed forth on a daily basis by the military establishment.

>

Closed-world strategy demanded total global oversight. Satellites, with their God's-eye views, provided the ultimate technical tool. In 1998 I heard an Air Force general tell a Stanford University audience: "We are two years away from 24-hour, 365-day, all-weather, real-time surveillance of every place on the planet." Three years later, Osama Bin Laden slipped through

the total surveillance net at Tora Bora. The following year Colin Powell prostituted himself at the UN with technoporn including CIA satellite photos of supposed Iraqi WMD facilities. Finally we got to see the real stuff: the panoptic state put its cards on the table, and it looked just like a Tom Clancy novel.

>

Then the tanks rolled in and everything went horribly wrong. Nobody could find the WMD. The Tom Clancy image evaporated as the Bush administration's willful disregard of uncertainties and its overreliance on dishonest, self-interested informants came into public view. In last week's *MIT Technology Review*, a battlefield commander in the Iraq invasion recounted how the Pentagon's networked information systems failed so badly that he knew nothing about an approaching division of Iraqi tanks until they appeared in front of him. From the perfect automated panopticon, U.S. military intelligence started to look more like every other computerized information system: capable of amazing things, but severely vulnerable to bugs, attacks, unanticipated conditions, and social engineering by the other side. Only the brutal reality-control strategy of an administration committed to victory at any cost could rescue the system's epistemic authority after such a failure.

>

Across the whole Cold War period another global information infrastructure was being built. The structure looked much like SAGE and Star Wars, but the object of knowledge was entirely different. This was the first WWW: the World Weather Watch, a 1960s renovation of projects for a global weather data exchange system dating to the late nineteenth century. Today's WWW comprises hundreds of thousands of sensors on satellites, ships, weather balloons, floating buoys, and weather stations. They pump their readings into telecommunications equipment, from whence they flow to a handful of gigantic supercomputers in Japan, the U.K., the U.S., Australia, and a few other locations around the world. Using complex mathematical models of atmospheric physics, the machines simulate how the current state of the global atmosphere will evolve in the following days. These planetary forecasts become the basis for local and regional forecasts all over the world. Over time, the WWW and other, related data networks also provide us with an image of the world's climate. Since to say that the climate has changed implies that we know what the climate used

to be, this data image is the crucial basis of atmospheric politics.

>

Reagan and Bush père attempted to rebox the climate-change Pandora by insisting on scientific uncertainties and demanding more research. By the second Clinton/Gore administration, the world data network had accumulated substantial evidence of measurable global warming. Clinton tried to foreclose the controversy by declaring global warming an established fact. The ostrichhood of his father initially attracted Bush fils, but here reality control has finally failed him. Recently he abandoned the wimpy claim that we just don't know in favor of rather more terrifying macho straight talk: it's happening, but we're not going to do anything about it.

>

What's my point? Contrast the roles of these two superficially similar systems in the production of knowledge. The military system's purpose is to steal information from people who do not want to give it away. The Tom Clancy image is built on the notion of perfect hardware, but the reality is that human informants and interpreters play a gigantic role in creating the system's ultimate outputs. This information infrastructure contains many secret, proprietary components, including not only hardware and software but also trained skills and interfaces with complex people, including allies, prisoners, and paid informants from many nations – all of them with multiple, not necessarily complementary agendas. The secrecy that surrounds it, as well as its colossal size, have been used not only by U.S. governments, but also by conspiracy theorists on the left, to create an image of panoptic power. We are presently experiencing the blowback, both domestic and international, from this image's collapse. It's not the closed world after all; instead, we might say it's the Microsoft world: the world of impossibly irritating, frequently crashing, kluged-together software that nonetheless works pretty well most of the time. Despite the joke that U.S. military "intelligence" is an oxymoron, it's far from a total disaster. The disaster was the panoptic image itself. When called to produce stable facts on which to hang the invasion of Iraq, it simply could not deliver. Did the administration await further research, or better evidence, before mounting an unprovoked, illegal invasion?

>

As for the world weather data system and our knowledge about global warming, uncertainties

surround us. But here nobody has ever claimed any differently. Yes, there are still controversies about some of the data, and there are theories of the observed warming that do not involve human activity. But in the last fifteen years a very broad consensus has in fact emerged. I think I want to argue that global warming is a (relatively) stable fact because it is based on a very old and public information infrastructure. Standards for instrumentation, data exchange, and every other aspect of the infrastructure are publicly developed through the World Meteorological Organization. The one possibly important exception is weather and climate modeling, which remains a craft activity of individual research groups.

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>From: [Gena Gbenga](#)

>Date: Wed, 27 Oct 2004 09:43:38

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If the image of panoptic power has failed, then has the apparatus of the control of *perceptions* of reality become the solution?

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>From: [Paul N. Edwards](#)

>Date: Wed, 27 Oct 2004 18:45:08

>

In the October 17 issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, Ron Suskind describes an encounter with a senior aide to Bush. He writes, "The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernable reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'"

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>From: [underfire-agent](#)

>Date: Thu, 28 Oct 2004 19:51:55

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Today the Air Force's F/A-22 ("The Raptor") – the most expensive fighter in jet history (\$258 million each) and the most technically advanced

warplane ever built – officially became part of the American arsenal. *The New York Times* announced its debut with the headline “A Fighter in Search of an Adversary” – for the fighter was designed at the height of the Cold War, to penetrate Soviet radar and to shoot down Soviet jets in the case of WW III, and today has no rival. No nation threatening the U.S. has an air force capable of fighting it. Like the massive missile defense program, whose first stage was initialized three months ago with the opening of silos in Alaska and California, it is part of a Cold War apparatus that endures. At a time when it is speculated that new nuclear threats are arising, one must ask the question: to what extent does Cold War technology and ideology continue to drive U.S. military policy, and to what extent does this necessitate the continual “search for an adversary” that it demands?

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Fri, 29 Oct 2004 19:33:12

>

This reminds me of an old science-fiction story. The story is about a weasel traveling in space fighting a war that ended a long time ago and against an adversary who no longer exists. The weasel, with its sophisticated weapons, has survived the end of the world and is now alone in the universe, still on red alert.

>

Sad.

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>From: [Ryan Bishop](#)

>Date: Fri, 29 Oct 2004 19:34:26

>

Weapons systems are always in search of an adversary. The uncertainty of the actual addressee of any weapon is built into the design of the system. There might be a direct enemy as initial impetus, as with the Raptor, but military planners know that the originally targeted enemy might not be the target upon which the weapons are actually deployed. In fact, they rarely are. Many of the problems of weapons systems, not to mention military plans and operations, that the U.S. military faced in Vietnam had to do with a war being fought in the jungles of Southeast Asia as opposed to the fields and forests of Europe.

>

But geopolitical-military situations are such that an event comes along justifying the expenditure,

or so the spin goes (to return to Paul Edwards' points). This happened with Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles, long in the planning but then deemed perfect for deployment in urban surveillance and targeting – that is, intelligent U.C.A.V.'s capable of selecting a target and firing upon it without pilot control (and, of course, intelligent systems structurally demand the possibility of choosing the wrong target, otherwise it would not be an intelligent system but merely an automatic or semi-automatic one).

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Cold War weapons systems might indeed haunt our present, but Cold War technologies and techniques (as Paul's book admirably displays) haunt the most quotidian dimensions of our existence.

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>From: [Mary Keller](#)

>Date: Fri, 29 Oct 2004 19:34:39

>

Are there gendered elements at work in maintaining a Cold War mentality? Several of my female friends have made the comment that their husbands resisted putting up yard signs for candidates and we marveled that they used the same reason: why make yourself a target in a Republican stronghold?

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Is the sense of being a target or the drive to target a gendered, cognitive issue? Are there 10,000 years worth of human development that makes males aware of/concerned with the status of being targeted or the drive to target?

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>From: [Chris Robbins](#)

>Date: Fri, 29 Oct 2004 19:46:51

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The Cold War is supposedly over, but the language and imagery of the war continue to shape our thoughts, our fears, our collective and gendered imaginary. It might prove beneficial to explore the function such (visual) rhetoric serves and begin to evaluate the rhetorical devices and images for what they reveal and confuse in our world, our culture, our relationship to technology, our socio-economic arena and ourselves. How have we come to understand ourselves through this lens?

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>From: [Paul N. Edwards](#)

>Date: Mon, 01 Nov 2004 17:40:18

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U.S. military technology is certainly driven by systems effects. Any new weapon system has to fit into the existing force structure, so (for example) the light, nimble, networked soldier of Pentagon dreams still has to travel in lumbering Abrams tanks. Perhaps even more important is that defense contractors have built up a set of capabilities over many years; they need to use their assets, so we get more of the same ultra-capable, ultra-expensive stuff.

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Another factor is technological cool. Selling small, simple weapons, no matter how good, just can't compete with the maxed-out marvel of a machine like the Raptor. And finally there's design by committee, which afflicts the armed forces and military contractors just like any other organization. I recommend the 1998 HBO movie *The Pentagon Wars*, starring Kelsey Grammer, for a black-humored look at the true story of the Bradley fighting vehicle. The similar story of the M-16 rifle was well told in 1985 by James Fallows in *The Social Shaping of Technology*.

>

But none of this matters nearly as much as how military technology affects what policymakers think they can do. Part of my argument in *The Closed World* was that the whole Cold War syndrome stemmed from policymakers' belief that they could manage the whole planet by force if necessary, and that this belief was both cause and consequence of the high-tech air and missile forces built for the nuclear confrontation with the U.S.S.R. (If they didn't believe they could do it, they wouldn't have tried.) This is the most pernicious part of the Cold War legacy – the belief that the U.S. military has near-magical power to change the world.

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Chris Robbins' point that “the language and imagery of the [cold] war continue to shape our thoughts, our fears, our collective and gendered imaginary” is on target, so to speak. Tomorrow's election is precisely between those who cling to that belief in ultimate power through ultimate force, and those who learned the lesson of Vietnam: that a determined enemy can still slip through the web of American might, since that web is designed (as Jordan's post implies) to trap an enemy that is large and powerful, rather than one that is small and weak, but agile and committed.

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>From: [Mary Keller](#)

>Date: Wed, 03 Nov 2004 18:12:21

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With what looks like the defeat of Kerry, I am struck by the force of blocks of red on the election night maps. It does not matter whether or how well a candidate debates. The sheer force of political party tribalism overcomes all argument or comparison between the candidates. It doesn't matter that John Kerry put himself in harm's way as a young Yale grad and that George Bush skirted service responsibilities. Bush is imagined as the man who will take the fight to the foes and keep us safe. That tribalism signals the victory of the “belief that they could manage the whole planet by force if necessary, and that this belief was both cause and consequence of the high-tech air and missile forces.”

>

The belief that one can manage the planet by force is intimately related to the collective imagination of the global. Himadeep Muppidi has recently argued that it is instructive to compare colonial imaginations of the global with postcolonial imaginations (*Borderlines*, Vol. 23, 2004). Using Muppidi, I take the idea that “Those who cling to that belief in ultimate power through ultimate force” imagine the global from the colonial perspective. Muppidi was in part trying to untangle how it is that the “educated humanitarians” of the colonial heritage “appear particularly provincial and relatively illiterate in their attempts to read the global.” Notably, they forget the violence and terror of their past. He writes that egocentrism is not the only problem here. “It is the capacity of the self to hide from itself the primary source of the problem: the inability or unwillingness of the colonizer/ liberator to ‘escape from himself’ in its dealings with the other and to establish a relationship that is more intersubjective than colonial.”

>

In trying to figure out how it is that Bush wins, I am beginning to think that Bush only allows the every drive of the American colonial imagination to pursue its goals, primarily the boundless consumption of petroleum. I am reminded of manifest destiny. The “opening up” of the West was accomplished not through presidential leadership but through presidential resignation to the will of the settlers. Through the determined occupation of land, family by family, the settlers drove the national policy by demanding military forces to protect them when they broke into Native American territory time after time.

Those red blocks that secured a second Bush presidency represent to me the will of a colonial imagery of the global. Bush is not only a puppet for corporate America. He is a puppet for Americans. What is now called conservatism in America refers to the control of women's reproductive rights and the right to consume gasoline without noting that greenhouse gasses are a form of global terrorism. Those red blocks are a colonial imagination of the global.

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Tue, 02 Nov 2004 18:46:30

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I feel that the world (or my own world) is oscillating between "shock and awe" and entertainment to death. A kind of inertia seems to paralyze what we call the "civil society." The force and the determination we showed in the demonstrations against the war in Iraq fades away each time the "rogue states" show their weapons and their armor. Jordan wrote about the new weapons included in the arsenal of the U.S., able to fight any adversary. But what happens when the adversary is gone? Are we not hostages of a rhetorical trap which needs us to cover up its hollowness? I am searching now for the small pockets of resistance.

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I still remember the discussion in *Under Fire.1*, the need to search new definitions of terms such as nation, frontiers and terrorism. Yesterday a Left coalition won the elections in the country where I was born, Uruguay. Many of them who are now acting as senators were in jail, accused of being terrorists. We were political prisoners in a time where the U.S. foreign policy labeled all dissidents as terrorists. What happens today, when the U.S. still runs the agenda and friends and foes change shapes?

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Loretta Napoleoni wrote in *Under Fire.1* about how the terror networks work and support themselves; Eyal Weizman wrote about how Israel uses the civil architecture as a military pattern. I recognized there the heritage from the Crusades, the confrontation between Islam and Christianity. "Entering the city, our pilgrims pursued and killed the Saracens up to the temple of Solomon. There the Saracens assembled and resisted fiercely all day, so that the whole temple flowed with their blood," describes an eyewitness from the conquer of Jerusalem 1099. I am now reading Patrick de Saint Exupéry's book about the

genocide in Rwanda, *L'invouable* and I think we are repeating the mistakes than our ancestors made. We should know better now.

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>From: [Gena Gbenga](#)

>Date: Thu, 04 Nov 2004 02:59:53

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For all our focus on reason we underestimated the role of religious issues in the rallying of the faithful in the reelection of Bush, and the role of the dreams and imaginaries that his administration and the media provide. Are we ready, as critics, to confront the death of reason in America?

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>From: [Ana Valdés](#)

>Date: Thu, 04 Nov 2004 10:58:10

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I recommend a new book written by Thomas Frank: *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. John Moe reviews the book in this way:

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"The largely blue collar citizens of Kansas can be counted upon to be a 'red' state in any election, voting solidly Republican and possessing a deep animosity toward the Left. This, according to author Thomas Frank, is a pretty self-defeating phenomenon, given that the policies of the Republican party benefit the wealthy and powerful at the great expense of the average worker. According to Frank, the conservative establishment has tricked Kansans, playing up the emotional touchstones of conservatism and perpetuating a sense of a vast liberal empire out to crush traditional values while barely ever discussing the Republicans' actual economic policies and what they mean to the working class. Thus the pro-life Kansas factory worker who listens to Rush Limbaugh will repeatedly vote for the party that is less likely to protect his safety, less likely to protect his job, and less likely to benefit him economically. To much of America, Kansas is an abstract, 'where Dorothy wants to return. Where Superman grew up.' But Frank, a native Kansan, separates reality from myth and tells the state's socio-political history from its early days as a hotbed of leftist activism to a state so entrenched in conservatism that the only political division remaining is between the moderate and more-extreme right wings of the same party."

>

I am starting to that think Kansas and Tehran are equally mysterious and weird for anyone who doesn't live there. I met Noam Chomsky for the first time in 1984 and did a long interview with him. He said then "Ana, do you know which land is almost more fundamentalist than Iran?" "No," I answered. "The United States, of course, my friend!"

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>From: [Chris Hables Gray](#)

>Date: Thu, 04 Nov 2004 18:56:40

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What Ana points out has a great deal of truth in it, but living for the last nine years in Montana, I would say it is more complicated, and perhaps more typical of post-industrial semi-democracies then we might admit. Bush swept rural areas with sometimes even a little more than 60% of the vote, Kerry carried many urban areas by similar margins. Washington DC was over 90% and the California coast often over 70% for Kerry and the deep South the same for Bush. But in general, the winning margins were low-50s to high 40s in more than half the country. Even here in Montana, where the Democrats swept to power statewide after years of incredible Republican ineptitude.

>

The divisions in the U.S. cut everywhere, and there are really at least more than five major political groupings, however, the stunted mathematical logic of a two-party state makes the U.S. seem more reactionary than it is. If the U.S. had a parliamentary system, it would have several strong right-wing parties – perhaps a very right regional one in the South (think Bavaria) and a pretty right corporate partner in the north and far west. They'd be a big liberal party, and there would be several left parties and a large extra-parliamentary left (my subculture I confess) that votes now and then in rage or disgust, seldom hope: not unlike the *marginales* (a 1970s term from a great feminist analysis of the complexities of "Spain" called *España Heretica*) that were the difference in the last Spanish election.

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A stolen election, an attack on New York, a war of revenge and an imperial conquest gone bad and a fear-driven right wing vote goes up 5% and Bush is re-elected to lead Fear's Empire.

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But, it isn't as if Spain doesn't have its very popular Partido Popular and in the U.K. Labor is happy to be U.S. imperialisms' lap dog and

Denmark and the Netherlands, last I looked, had elected Conservative governments playing the fear card in the form of immigration. Yes, the U.S. is weird, I can't deny it being a Californian and after living nine years in Montana. There is a giant cultural split between cosmopolitans of many flavors and traditionalists of just as many flavors but oh-so-different, culturally. Everywhere there are people committed to democracy, just as there are the most incredible nuts. But in Europe, I've seen Fascist rallies in Rome of tens of thousands and met true Nazis in half a dozen countries. I keep going back and forth. I guess I'm arguing a bit against a Left version of U.S. exceptionalism, but at the same time, the U.S. is the empire of the moment. The U.K. was, Germany wanted to be desperately, Spain, Turkey, Rome, Athens... there have been many just in the Western timeline. Now it is frightened, divided, half-god drunk the U.S. of A., in denial about the very imperial project that the rest of the world looks at with such concern.

>

The underlying point from the elections I am going to take is just how important psychological dynamics are to politics. It was Paul Edwards' work that first made me realize that at the heart of military and technological policy there were usually psychological processes behind the seemingly rationale decisions. Shouldn't have been such a surprise to me, as someone who studies war, which is as difficult – and therefore psychologically complex – a human activity as possible. Paul's work led me to Robert Jay Lifton and Susan Mansfield (*The Gestalts of War*) and Steven Kull (*Minds at War*) and the now classic "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals" by Carol Cohen and so much more. I think we need to deepen this kind of analysis.

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>From: [Gregory K Clancey](#)

>Date: Fri, 05 Nov 2004 17:13:15

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Mary Keller writes: "The belief that one can manage the planet by force is intimately related to the collective imagination of the global."

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But where does that "collective imagination" now reside, outside the heads of Neo-Con theorists? "All politics is local," said Tip O'Neill, the present politics of the global strike force included. Looking at the red and blue bits on the American political map (the county-scale maps, not the deceptive state-scale ones) its hard not to see



density translating into destiny. The problem is not just Kansas, Ana. There are few if any red or blue states, really. All American states, unless they are very small like those in New England, are red with blue flecks. Those flecks are densities, cities, again with some exceptions, such as rural African-American counties in the South and Latino ones in Texas. And there are a few dense flecks that will always be red, like Omaha and Salt Lake City. Bush won the Texas city of Dallas by less than 1% and lost the vote in his state capital, Austin. The Bush vs. Kerry map, and the Bush vs. Gore map, is stunningly influenced by density: by differing spatial perceptions translated into political ones. And this is the case even if true blue people like Mary Keller (Wyoming) and Chris Gray (Montana) help reduce the margins of red victory in the stunningly beautiful places they live.

> Do the red people really want to “manage the planet”? I wonder. This red empire has historically been isolationist and inward-looking, and agrees to the projection of military power toward foreign places (and legislative power toward domestic urban places) when it feels itself threatened, rightly or wrongly, as it clearly does now. The blue flecks can live with ambiguity and risk. They are the logical targets of foreign aggression, after all, yet they don't support Bush's pro-active re-targeting. In fact Bush's act of targeting Iraq is perceived by the red empire not so much as an “imperial” response (the beginning of a new regime of management) but as a violent yet justified striking-out; part of a perhaps endless series of one-off strikes against ever-changing threats and evils. The arm that reaches across the water (in any direction) wishes to construct itself so it can pull back any time. Thus the populist appeal of “air power”; the idea of the B-something bombers named The Spirit of this and that based in the heartland state of Missouri, which can fly anywhere and back without landing on foreign soil. Mission accomplished and everybody safe at home. During the Cold War, the world was targeted for retaliatory destruction from Omaha, by the way. The world was electronically monitored from a mountain in Colorado. The heartland of the homeland is intimately familiar with the logic of the first strike, even if the logicians and tacticians were headquartered back East. I wonder if Paul Edwards' *Closed World* is still operative, or if we're seeing a new mutation: isolationism with a big stick.

A militia-America. The young John Kerry was a disillusioned Closed-Worlder. George Bush was an optimistic militia air-man. The flying legions got bogged down in Iraq, but that wasn't necessarily the plan.

> Mary is right in suggesting that foreign observers place too much emphasis on the power of the presidency (the imperial center) and the organized corporate culture of Wall Street (not to mention those perennial bumlbers the CIA) while ignoring the settler culture which has always constituted the de-centered base of the Republican party (a party crafted, let's remember, by the march across the Great Plains; an act of exodus or retreat from the urban Atlantic rim). It also cut its teeth (and sold itself to Wall Street) by marching armies South. Now it lives there, in one of history's ironies. But at the end of the day the grand division in American politics is not East vs. West or North vs. South. Its not even “rural” vs. “urban middle class,” because the really powerful red squares are suburbs and exurbs, full of more recent settler-refugees from the blue flecks themselves. No one dislikes the blue flecks more than those who re-settled its edges; the trekkers in that great exodus that began in the 1940s and continues strongly today. Let's paint the suburbs purplish red. The American city, flamboyant and unpredictable in its diversity (i.e. filled with criminals, deviants, and carpetbaggers) is their long-standing political target.

> This election shows the dense blue flecks to be now double-targeted: by foreign religiously based organizations on the one hand, and by domestic religiously based ones on the other. Exurban churches of various sorts loom large in the ordering of all that red space. And Karl Rove is ordering it through them.

> Europeans (and many Americans who live in the blue flecks but never leave them) need a far better understanding of the red empire in order to effectively confront it. Or even just talk to those who live there. I'll admit myself that, coming from New England, I don't fully understand that reddened landscape, even as I love certain of its spaces and the sounds of its voices (and sometimes the content of what they say). Those voices include some of our most heroically progressive people, like Woody Guthrie and Kurt Vonnegut (I don't include Martin Luther King because he was from bright blue Atlanta).

But the histories, instincts, deepest fears and concerns of most red-colored regions are different than my own (and sometimes cast me in the pre-determined role of enemy). I've criss-crossed red landscapes many times, but they remain as inaccessible and semi-magical to me (and who would deny the every-day presence of magic in the Bible Belt?) as they apparently were to that other recent criss-crosser, John Kerry. “It doesn't matter what you believe out here,” says a good friend from Nebraska “but you have to believe in it completely. You have to ask yourself: how would a person who believes in this thing I do, eat their breakfast in the morning.” Thus does Bin Laden speak as clearly to the red empire as Karl Rove. In that regard, Howard Dean would perhaps have been the better blue-fleck candidate. Or the better target? Show me who you are, the formula suggests, that I may target you the more effectively.

> It's dangerous to underestimate the anger and fight in the red spaces, and the desire for decisive solutions to deep troubles. And not the sort of solutions that come from blue flecks (still perceived as centers of the trouble). Even fifteen years ago, well before Oklahoma City, I was surprised to find the FBI headquarters in Omaha as heavily fortified as Offutt Air Force Base (against the Posse Comitatus, a local tax-resisting militia who preferred not to live in the United States I lived in).

> By the way, “defense” is popular over so much red space because it's a domestic economic program as well as a deeply held cultural prerogative. This has little to do with the rest of the world, the stock market, or even Bin Laden. “Defense” employs the otherwise unemployable young people from red places as soldiers and sailors, and it spends tax-money in red places building weapons that often don't need building. The red empire needs massive amounts of state welfare, but out of pride it's called “defense.” It's why the national budget, even under the Republicans, bleeds red. Even foreign wars have roots in local politics (although localities really prefer that “defense” stay at home). It comes down to how to convincingly manage all that (domestic) space. Democrats have to address this spatial problem.

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>From: [Paul N. Edwards](#)

>Date: Sun, 07 Nov 2004 17:13:15

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>Gregory Clancey wrote:

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“I wonder if Paul Edwards' *Closed World* is still operative, or if we're seeing a new mutation: isolationism with a big stick.”

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I don't think the plan is too hard to discern. It's not so much isolationism as the naked exercise of global power. Condi Rice was a Cold Warrior wannabe, a “scholar” of pre-1989 Czechoslovakian politics who can't read a word of Czech or Russian and whose first book was completely destroyed in its review in the AHA Journal. (She got tenure anyway, thanks in part to the affirmative action she was busy dismantling while I was teaching at Stanford.) Her idea is that when you've got the power you should use it to reshape the world to your advantage. Like, for example, Stalin.

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To me the dynamics of this administration's politics are much more like those of the McCarthy era than those of the Reagan era. Reagan inherited the full-blown closed-world vision in which a titanic struggle between good and evil took the form of identifiable actors, good states and bad states (the red and the blue, if you will). Bush uses that discourse, but it's harder to work it when the enemies are so shadowy and diffuse, and when they aren't defending a recognizable ideology or even a territory. So we go dumpster-diving for enemies now, looking under the rugs (not to mention the shirts and *brassières*, if you saw the airport search news yesterday) of our neighbors.

>

On the practical level, I'm thinking now about a politics of conversion. We have to accept the Thomas Frank challenge: to re-take the symbology of authenticity from the rural South. Listen to country music – that's where it's all laid out. Drive a truck, weep into your beer, and hark back to the lost times of childhood on a farm.

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>From: [Daniel Perlin](#)

>Date: Fri, 12 Nov 2004 18:29:01

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The search for Being, for Being to presence itself. For the essence of the thing. For the perfect word. For absolute poetry. For strength of the Being, not the being-in-the-world that we all live. Yeah, all that ontological mumbo jumbo we were subject

to in our overpriced educations. But one of the founding elements, often overlooked by so many urban scholars, is that Heidegger, ontology's twentieth century champion, was adamant about getting back to nature. From Southern Germany, he found technology, urbanity, democracy, "modern living" and commodities suspect at best, and revered the process of unfolding of Being through a deep examination of experience and *Angst*. OK, cool, but who cares. I would say that 52%, if not more, care, in the U.S.

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There is a gap, a lack, a space for desire for fulfillment. Religion, as we all know, helps fill this gap. But this gap exists before organized religion takes hold, I think. Can the language of logic, of truth, of the "real" answers, the cosmopolitan education and the language of equality really help fill this gap? Are people looking for truth? Maybe, but how do you tell them you know it?

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Epistemology, logic, the tradition of knowledge through conscious thought, what distinguishes true (adequate) knowledge from false (inadequate) knowledge? Are these the standards by which one might address this lack? Clearly, there is a woodenness to this approach, a stiffness, and an assumption: one wants to know. Perhaps that is a starting point to address the lack of fill, the hollowness attributed to the Kerry cosmopolitanism.

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Not to get too academic about it, really. I mean, after all, they both try: we will kill, we will hunt down, we will crush, terror is all around et cetera. But how do you engage a concentrated fear (*Angst*) based campaign with logic? How can you defeat obtuse color schemes and the madness of Cheney's atomic doom with an appeal for jobs, for the real. People, it would seem, don't really want "real" in the backcountry. Or is this precisely what we are missing: not what but how.

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We bomb ourselves, out of hatred for our own cosmopolitan bureaucracies and invasive truth-selling: Oklahoma, Montana, Michigan militias, Waco. In fact, we terrorize ourselves because we feel terrorized by the imposition of these truth-values, democracies of taxes, unsolicited protections. During the Clinton era, where were al-Qaeda terrorists? The desire to lash out at the unknown, the threat of change, the threat of the un-natural, the dark forest, fear. When 9/11 struck, we were hit again, anthrax. Why? Fear begets fear. Rove, Cheney, Bush, Giuliani, Ridge,

the machines in operation since the "failures to contain" the events of '68, felt the chance to step into this gap. Iron fist. No fear without response. Camera cuts to families crying, to David Letterman crying, to Dan Rather, to CNN crying, ratings ho! And so it goes, as we all know.

>  
But it is not enough to get cynical (or conspiratorial). What is this gap? How does Bush fill it? By appealing not to logic, but the "hearts" of the "American" public. A ranch. Boots. Golf. A cup of coffee in a Styrofoam cup. 1950s Texas. Kerry's Carhart Jacket seems pretty seventies, industrial, material. Working. Do people want to be reminded that they work or don't? Do they want to talk facts? Do they want the head on TV to show a Vietnam vet telling shrapnel stories? This all sounds a little too real. Or would they rather hear the operative words that drive their being: "Fear" and "hope." "War" against the dark forest, the unseen is all around, anytime is right now. Karl Rove has a vision.

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This divide, of course, isn't across the board. Plenty of rural places voted for blue, plenty of cities voted red. But in critical spaces, when politics do matter, it seems that the "self evident" facts of the atrocities committed by the current administration do not, in fact, speak for themselves. Somehow, somehow, we need to bridge the perceived gap of the city-slicker as "knower," the countryman as "feeler." We all, of course, do both. But the "facts" need to be shown as having effect. Not numbers, not truth, but effect, *affect*. Don't blame FOX, look at what they do. They work hard to create fear. Al-Qaeda sure beats the hell out of jobs statistics for fear, for ratings, for emotion, for the lack we all feel. They take facts, give them affect. If you want to appeal to being, show how being is appealing to you. That is the "morality," I think, that appeals to so many. Even the skeptics want to believe.

>  
There is no conclusion here. A strategy of openness will keep the left from shutting itself off from the rural. A tactic of listening will allow the rural to speak its desires. Of course they are Christian desires, but that's because Christianity appeals to this lack. During elections, government, if it wishes to return to its origins, to its ordinary being, needs to realign itself with its beginnings, as the Church. Not permanently, of course, but as a tactic. The best Messiah won.

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>From: [Amit Rai](#)  
>Date: Wed, 10 Nov 2004 09:26:00

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From a Shobak.org editorial by Naeem Mohaiemen and Ahmed Nassef:

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"It is no longer possible to view *Submission* and give a 'balanced' response to the work. No matter what our feelings about the effectiveness or irresponsibility of the film, director Theo van Gogh's shocking murder is the unspoken shadow that now lies over any discussion of it.

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"Following Van Gogh's sudden murder on an Amsterdam street, the Muslim community condemned the killing loudly. Clerics clearly stated that this was no way to conduct debate in civilized societies. Freedom of speech must be valued and respected. But these statements of disavowal were not enough for those on the Dutch right who would exploit this tragedy to further a racist agenda. Van Gogh's death has provided the perfect excuse for the simmering xenophobia that lurks underneath Europe's genteel surface. Fiery anti-Muslim demagogue Pim Fortuyn also exploited these tensions, before his assassination. Ironically, Van Gogh was a fan of Fortuyn and had just finished a documentary about him. Already, after Van Gogh's death, there is talk of developing a national database that will track the "risk profile" of immigrants in the Netherlands. Over the weekend, Dutch racists firebombed eight mosques and a Muslim school, signaling a scary trend that is likely to continue as the European right seeks to battle what they call the "enemy within." The memories of Kristalnacht in Germany are not that distant, and they could still be repeated within this century against European Muslims.

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"The core of the *Submission* controversy is over one incendiary piece of imagery. The praying woman is completely naked, the only part of her that is covered is her face, with a supposedly "Islamic" veil. Across her breasts, navel, and thighs are a thin diaphanous cloth – through which text from the Quran is clearly visible on her body. Nude to the camera, she repeatedly bows down to pray – even reading a Sura from the Quran at the beginning of the film. The camera lingers with a fetishist's eye over her nakedness, at one point zooming in on her raised finger (used during prayer to indicate the oneness of God). The nudity adds nothing to the critique, but it applies a devastating slap to the

face of Muslim piety. There are many valid critiques of the Muslim world's treatment of women, and there is much reform that is needed. But that reform needs to be through constructive critique."

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>From: [Maggie Schmitt](#)  
>Date: Fri, 12 Nov 2004 17:44:35

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I was in Holland and Belgium last week: the convergence of the Van Gogh murder, the Erasmus prize conference on "religion and modernity," the U.S. elections, the trial of the Vlaams Blok... all very intense. There is something very dense and very important going on around the question of epistemology: the ferocious defense of the enlightenment – linking objective knowledge and a secular liberal public sphere; the convergence of progressive Islamic theologians and poststructuralist thinkers in affirming a collective contextual construction of knowledge; the obsession of the U.S. Christian right with reviving moral truth; the Neo-Con demolition of reality and marginalization of "reality based communities . . ."

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# >B: INCIPIENCE.

>From: [Radhika Subramaniam](#)

>Date: Tue, 14 Dec 2004 07:16:11

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Let me enter your conversation through the track that originally got me thinking about cultures of violence in cities. This was about ten years ago when I was trying to “understand” riots that had taken place in Bombay in 1992-1993.

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Social and political science theorizing as well as activist and NGO organizing in the city cohered around analyses of larger political ideologies and processes as well as on the economic demographics of neighborhoods, in a crucial effort to counter the reduction to the inevitable Hindu-Muslim binary. But in conversation with people (all sorts, including the above mentioned analysts) about their experiences, often incredibly harsh and violent, I began to notice sets of fragmentary stories that were proffered as types of *explanation* for butchery, for betrayal by neighbors and friends. Impossibly banal, these were ordinary, trivial observations (of the sort that *they* use different cooking pans than do we) that seemed to hang as the cobwebs that grant an old house both its age and its persistence. That got me thinking about how so-called common-sense beliefs make sense (as in give meaning but also make sense) of the non-ordinary and of how this potential to see-saw between the horrific and the habitual might be what allows spaces of continual “terror” to become habitable. A sort of everyday unease.

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I thought of this as a “culture of suspicion” – suspicion not as a fiercely held belief about base otherness but as something lurking, just in the shadows, ready to be marshaled when needed. I am reminded of this daily in the New York city subways on which I travel where, as on Bombay commuter locals, a subliminal jigsaw is constantly being assembled with everyone on board in order to position oneself as much

for risk or escape as for the possibility of a seat. (This person will get off at Canal St.; that one is definitely on all the way to the Rockaways.) Now that we are bombarded with the announcements about watching out for suspicious packages left unattended, the puzzle solving, no doubt, has other ingredients in it. The making of each of us into policemen. Suspicion as surveillance.

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A key element of this absent-minded detection in a time of fear and terror – and others like Feldman have talked about this with regard to Belfast – are practices of telling. That is, everyone is convinced that he/she can tell who the others on the train or the street are (Hindu, Arab, Muslim, whatever) while all too frequently asserting that they themselves are able to *pass*. So the wielding of the various signifiers of identity – cap, beard, head scarf – takes on a range of contrary connotations (those who mean to be visible and derive a sense of self, safety, identity or community from it and those who mean to dissemble) together with a strange amalgam of pleasures derived from the performances, whether of disguise or of hyper-identification.

>

And so in working through this, I've also been exploring what forms a representation practice (for me, as a writer) would take in talking about cities/violence/crowds. How does one fog the impulse of the critical eye to be all-seeing and retain the shadows in the text? To allow the plunge of exploration that is the stuff of habit without hankering for perspective. Or like the article found in Benjamin's *Lost Property Office*, the blue painted backdrop that never gives way to foreground or dissolves on approach but only looms as more compact and threatening. How does one write (like) that?

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>From: [Bracha L. Etinger](#)

>Date: Tue, 14 Dec 2004 17:51:31

>

I wonder if this is also the moment to discuss what Freud called "death drive" (that force for destructiveness towards self and others that also works toward becoming inorganic "again"); Melanie Klein's notion of projection and projective identification; and what for Deleuze and Guattari are the desiring machines that can turn violent. If violence emerges as a response to crisis, it emerges as a response to personal crisis that subjectivities scatter all over their available planes – *socius*, the "other" and even the planet. Our body-psyche is an agency of this. We have difficulty in loving the neighbor – perhaps we fantasize that the *jouissance* of the neighbor is always stronger than ours, that his/her objects contain what we lack. Violence in "us" seems to me a most urgent issue.

>

"Us" is a deadly weapon. We are non-technologically-produced deadly forces, and much depends on our psycho-ethical paradigms.

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>4.

>TERROR AUTEURISM.

>From: [underfice-agent](#)

>Date: Mon, 15 Nov 2004 21:42:25

>

From Michael Ignatieff, "The Terrorist as Auteur," *The New York Times*, 14 November 2004:

>

"Terrorists have been quick to understand that the camera has the power to frame a single atrocity and turn it into an image that sends shivers down the spine of an entire planet. This gives them a vital new weapon. Before Iraq, there had been plenty of vicious insurgencies – in Algeria against the French, in Kenya against the British, in Vietnam against the Americans – but none of them used the camera as an instrument of terror. Kidnapping had been the weapon of choice for armed groups in Lebanon since the 1970s. But they didn't put their captives on the nightly news.

>

"We now have the terrorist as film director. One man taken hostage recently in Iraq described, once released, how carefully his own appearance on video was staged, with the terrorists animatedly framing the shot: where the guns would point, what the backdrop should be, where he should kneel, what he should be scripted to say.

>

"Using video cameras as a weapon may be new, but modern terrorists have always sought to exploit the power of images. The greatest film ever made about terrorism – Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1965) – was actually shot at the instigation of a terrorist. Saadi Yacef, the leader of the insurgent cell in the Algiers kasbah that the French crushed in 1957, survived capture and, after Algerian independence, approached Pontecorvo to make a film, based on his own life story. Yacef helped to produce the film and actually played himself on-screen. Had it been up to Yacef, the result would have been pure propaganda. Pontecorvo held out for a deeper vision, and the result is a masterpiece, at once a justification for acts of terror and an unsparing account of terror's cost, including to the cause it serves."

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>

>From: [James Der Derian](#)

>Date: Mon, 15 Nov 2004 21:42:25

>

I always thought reality, like New York, is a nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there, especially when it comes wrapped in the righteous trappings of the *New York Times* and

its moralist-in-residence, Michael Ignatieff.

>

By now one would think that the *NYT*, having confessed to getting it badly wrong on Iraq, would be a bit more scrupulous about providing a sounding-board to someone who provided moral cover for so many liberals advocating – or just staying silent during the run-up to – the invasion of Iraq (including many of my International Relations cohort). And this comes a week after the same magazine featured an interview with Kenneth Pollack, ex-CIA, Brookings expert who provided the intelligence-military imperative for the invasion (unlike Ignatieff, at least he apologized for getting it wrong). Go figure. At least they could have done a better job of fact-checking the piece. Some erroneous blanket claims start the piece, providing the kind of false assumptions that breed its pat conclusion: a peculiarly Muslim form of humiliation that is at the root of the terrorist videos. Consider the first claim:

>

"Before Iraq, there had been plenty of vicious insurgencies . . . but none of them used the camera as an instrument of terror."

>

I guess Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro, sitting under the banner of the Brigada Rossa – secular, Western terrorists who seemed plagued more by hubris than humiliation – on the front page of every newspaper in 1978, doesn't cut it.

>

"Kidnapping had been the weapon of choice for armed groups in Lebanon since the 1970s. But they didn't put their captives on the nightly news."

>

What about Col. William Higgins' video-captured murder by the "Organization of the Oppressed on Earth" in Lebanon in 1989? Just what nightly news was Ignatieff watching in the seventies and eighties? To be sure, the Higgins video featured a hanging rather than a beheading, and in the Moro case, the photographic image differs in impact from the videographic (a distinction Ignatieff fails to maintain, or explain, especially when it is the captured video still that has become the iconographic image of the terrorist act), and I realize, given the horror of either image, this does border on academic hair-splitting.

>

But judging from the rest of the article, I do think that the selection of evidence and Islamophobic conclusion stems from a blinkered moral telos.

America, it seems, will blink first in the video wars, since its capacity to tolerate as well as its willingness to commit such repugnant acts is limited by a superior set of moral scruples. The West might on occasion engage in atrocities, snapshots if you will, but it does not make a full-featured film of it. I find something wrong with this picture.

>

Ignatieff is right in one regard – "imagery has replaced argument" – but he once again delivers the message with an overwhelming self-regard, dressed up in a moral universalism, that cannot see beyond the simple images of good and evil and into the varied histories and individual stories that would be the beginning of a real dialogue. Instead, Ignatieff says "this is terrorism as pornography" – and as we all know, one knows pornography when one sees it. Such truisms are a better way to pre-empt rather than to start a much-needed argument about the representation of terrorism. But then again, pre-emption is now the American way, and Ignatieff seems to have become fully naturalized.

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>From: [Joy Garnett](#)

>Date: Mon, 15 Nov 2004 23:25:57

>

Regarding James's objections to the Ignatieff article, its numerous oversimplifications and "Islamophobia" certainly lead back to our dead-end: hyperbole that fuels the fear that re-elected the Bush agenda. And regarding James's retort to that erroneous statement, it misses the fact that public executions – including all kinds of beheadings – have provided an elaborate form of pageantry for centuries in Europe and in North America. The only real difference, I think, is that those were staged predominantly by courts and governments, or in the case of revolution, by the clear-cut winners. It now seems that the convention has been reversed, and this is part of what is freaking everyone out: "justice" is being meted out by the "insurgency" – the staging and the scripting is a formal, graphic and actualization of utter contempt for our highly touted idea of ourselves, our "justice", and an assertion of the almost universally perceived hypocrisy, our double standard.

>

If I were to let myself be irate about Ignatieff it might be over the fact that his article is one more opportunity missed – if I wanted yet more emphatic illustrations of "good vs. evil"

hyperbole I could have rented *Lord of the Rings* and applied it as some kind of allegory.

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>

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

>Date: Fri, 12 Nov 2004 17:43:44

>

As the coalition incursion in Falluja unfolded, reports began appearing (Nov. 10) of the discovery of the "slaughterhouse(s)" where "several" of the beheadings videos were shot. It is still unclear whether one or more "houses" were found and exactly what was found there, or who in fact was killed where.

>

Major General Abdul Qadar Mohan, chief military spokesman for the joint U.S.-Iraqi operation indicated that "we found hostage slaughterhouse(s)" (some reports indicate this in the singular, others in the plural). He says that they also found hundreds of CDs containing names and records, black clothes like those worn in the videos in "the Northern portion of the city," which could mean anywhere North of Highway 10, including near the Muhammudia Mosque, purportedly used as a command center.

>

Considering the attention on three of the Western hostages still missing, Margaret Hassan, Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, it's surprising that no one thought to look for records of their having been there. When asked, the general said: "I did not look closely." Perhaps they are being tight-lipped about what is known.

>

They do claim, however, to have looked closely enough to re-determine all sorts of complicated foreign backing of and intervention in the insurgency, as if, strangely, the coalition were there to keep non-Iraqis from determining the country's future (as quoted in several recent AP news feeds).

>

For what it is worth, the former hostage, Mohammed Raad, a Lebanese truck driver, who has kidnapped, forced to watch the decapitation of another hostage, an Egyptian (Mohammed Mutawalli?) and then later set free, tells of how on the sixth day of his being held, "he was taken away by a second group of kidnappers, who claimed to be members of the Islamic Movement of the Holy Warriors in Iraq – the Seif al-Islam Brigade. After eight days of captivity, he was driven to a remote cluster of windowless single

room mud huts deep in the desert not far from the border with Jordan." This group claims affiliation with al-Zarqawi (as do many). Raad's testimony would put at least some of the video sites hundreds of miles west of Falluja (quoted in the *Lebanese Daily Star*, October 15, 2004).

>

In the past week or so, I have had several discussions with friends regarding whether or not the beheading videos are, strictly speaking, "snuff movies." The differentiation seems to hinge on the lack of any overt or even potentially sexual thematics therein. One side of the argument holds that a "snuff" movie is footage of an eroticized murder, the other that any murder, staged, framed, narrativized for the purpose of its being filmed suits the definition.

>

The question, of whatever value it may or may not hold, is one that would today define "snuff" as a real referential signifier into existence. That is, one might suggest that until now, "snuff" movies, per se, didn't really exist. Snuff films are/were a mythological artifact from the 1970s.

>

The term "snuff movie" dates back to 1972 and Ed Sanders' book, *The Family*, his behind the scenes account of the followers of Charles Manson, and their lives leading up to, during and just following the murders in Hollywood, for which they became infamous. As you will recall, according to the prosecution, these murders, and the painting of coded messages on the walls in victims' blood were intended to pin the blame on "Black Revolutionaries" and to incite a reaction of fear and revulsion in the white middle-class, so extreme, as to lead to the instigation of a full scale race war that would culminate in the end of civilization.

>

In the book, Sanders interviews a peripheral family member and questions him about rumors that the family had made use of super-8 cameras they'd stolen from a NBC news truck in the months before the murders to film their activities, including a "short movie depicting a female victim dead on a beach." In the described scene the girl's body is decapitated.

>

The interviewee describes a cinematic scenario in vague detail, but acknowledges that he hadn't actually seen such a movie and was just relating a story he'd heard. At a raid on the Spahn ranch where the family was living, in October 1969, police seized the stolen NBC equipment,

including a camera with unused film. While never excluding the possibility that the family did film their murders, Sanders makes clear that no such films have ever materialized out of the realm of imagination and rumor. A cheap re-enactment of the films "as they might have been" was produced by John Aes-Nihil in 1984.

Nevertheless, among the many urban legends spawned from the Manson murders, the existence of "snuff films" of the murders themselves proved enduring.

>

In the early seventies literally dozens of Manson-themed B and C movies were produced. *Slaughter* was a cheapo slasher film loosely based on the Manson murders, filmed in 1971 by the husband and wife team of Michael and Roberta Findlay supposedly in South America, "where life is cheap." Four years later, Allen Shackleton and Monarch Releasing Corporation added some additional footage in which "the director" supposedly disembowels a production assistant. He re-released the film under the name *Snuff*, the term borrowed from Sanders' book, and advertised it as "The Bloodiest Thing that Ever Happened in Front of a Camera!" The film was shown with no credits to add to the raw footage aesthetic. In 1976, the film played at the National Theatre in Times Square, and generated tremendous publicity. Well after the Manhattan DA investigated and determined the screen murder to be "a hoax" the urban legend of the snuff film was born.

>

There are of course several other figures in the history of death cinema that are worth mentioning in this context. Dick Gregory first showed the footage of John Kennedy's assassination shot by Abraham Zapruder to the public on a television show hosted by Geraldo Rivera in 1975 called "Good Night America." While still images had been published in *LIFE* magazine, it was more than a decade after the assassination that the now permanent image of the president's moment of death would be public.

>

The cinematic immolation of the body has also been employed for tremendous artistic effect. Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* (1971) uses autopsy footage to build, slowly but irrevocably, a myth about the very possibilities of form and legibility, ethics and time. Alain Resnais' *Providence* (1976) begins by showing to a body that is in the act of dying the dissembling fate that awaits it. Georges Franju's

*The Blood of the Beasts* (1949) is a documentary on Parisian slaughterhouses, and one of the landmark films of the century. Released before its time, Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, released in 1962, the same year as *Psycho*, examines the cinematic/physical violence of the compulsion to document fear and pain. Scorsese sponsored its re-release in 1979. The snuff motif has also driven several mainstream films (*8mm*, *Mute Witness*, Paul Schrader's *Hardcore*, Alejandro Amenabar's *Thesis*).

>

More recently two faux snuff films, the *Blair Witch Project* and the "Guinea Pig" series from Japan, played both on the urban legend of the snuff film and parallel tradition of the "hoax." The "Guinea Pig" series, including the titles *Devil's Experiment* and *Flower of Flesh and Blood*, both from 1985, are truly startling films for their incredibly blank and methodical depiction of kidnappings, mutilation, torture and murder. There was a huge outcry in Japan about these, complete with the requisite police investigations, evasive producers looking to extend the window of publicity, and eventually the appearance of the "dead" actors and actresses for the press. Subsequent films in this series also include a "making of" DVD.

>

To me the most interesting film of this "genre" is Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*, produced in Italy and released in 1979. The film tells the story of a group of obnoxious ethnographic filmmakers seeking to shoot extreme footage in the depths of the "Green Inferno," Amazonian cannibal country. Both inside and outside the film, the reality of the violence, both physical and cinematic, remains in question. The film begins in New York with the screening of canisters of film recovered from the ill-fated expedition (a device *Blair Witch* would pilfer twenty years later) the footage that unfolds is bracingly violent, both simulated (on people) and quite real (on animals). What remains stable is the implication of the camera into a position of agency in both, one that includes effectively, the act of watching the film itself. The film ends with the gruesome on-camera mutilation of the film crew by a mob of angry, vengeful cannibals. After the course of the film, we have come to be sympathetic with the cannibals, and find ourselves rooting for the smiting of the crew at the same moment that their deaths turn the stomach. When stills of the ending death scenes were published in *PHOTO* magazine, Deodato had to go to court to testify that the actors were

not killed and that the whole thing was fake. But interestingly, in this case, it wasn't.

>

Among the most interesting sequences in *Cannibal Holocaust* is the film-within-a-film, "The Last Road to Hell," several minutes of war atrocity footage supposedly shot by the same crew we follow into the Amazon. Within the diegesis of *Cannibal Holocaust*, we watch footage of various executions and political violence, mostly from Central Africa. The dialogue tells us that despite the incredibly clear documentary quality of this footage, it has been in fact faked by the crew. The footage, however, that makes up this "fake" film, is in fact quite real footage of such atrocities! So, within the fictional space of *Cannibal Holocaust*, the real atrocity footage is presented as a hoax, while the dramatized is presented as "real," and it is the later that became the focus of judicial inquiry. Remy Belvaux employed a similar designed slippage in his faux-snuff black comedy, *C'est arrivé pres de chez vous*, 1992 (released in the U.S. as *Man Bites Dog*).

>

Given this social history of snuff, it is not too surprising that the first of the beheading videos from Iraq that most people saw, Nicholas Berg's, was also presumed by some to be a hoax, in this case part of a far more complex cinematic conspiracy perpetrated by the CIA to divert attention from Abu Ghraib. See for example, [http://www.apfn.org/apfn/pow\\_beheaded.htm](http://www.apfn.org/apfn/pow_beheaded.htm).

>

Interestingly, we also see examples of copying the beheading films, repeating them – as they themselves repeat and repeat each other – perhaps as a way to somehow make sense of them, or to take control over them. The faked beheading of Benjamin Vanderford by some San Francisco activists hoping to point attention to the dubious veracity of all such highly charge imagery is one example (see <http://videohoax.ctyme.com>). Both more innocent and more disturbing is how the frozen, redundant dramatic structure of the beheading videos has become a visual grammar of conflict understandable even by children (see <http://www.homelandsecurity.us.com/jihadkids2.wmv>) (see page 21).

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>From: [Paul N. Edwards](mailto:Paul.N.Edwards)  
>Date: Fri, 26 Nov 2004 18:38:58

>

I'm reading Margaret Atwood's depressingly

realistic post-apocalypse dystopia *Oryx and Crake*, about a world destroyed by global warming and corporate-sponsored bioengineering, eventually spun totally out of control by a kind of boy genius bio-hacker.

>

Among the forms of entertainment in this dystopia are websites with names like "hedsoff.com," where viewers can watch videos of executions and other public maimings, illegally photographed by desperately poor individuals trying to earn a buck on the side but sometimes caught in the act and snuffed themselves.

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>From: [underfice-agent](#)

>Date: Fri, 19 Nov 2004 02:29:40

>

The military's academy awards

>

>From the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD)

>"Combat Camera" List Serve, 11/18/04

>

The purpose of this mailing list item is to announce the winners of the 2003-2004 Department of Defense Visual Information Production Awards competition.

>

The principal purpose of the DoD VI Production Awards is to recognize effective, purposeful use of the production medium, to include achievement of communication objectives and appropriate use of this potentially powerful information and training tool. The DoD VI Production Awards Program is an initiative of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. The awards are conferred every eighteen months.

>

The 51 productions entered by the Military Services in the 2003-2004 competition were judged by a panel of communication and production experts October 24-28, 2004 in Washington. First, second, and third place winners were selected in the Recruitment, Internal/public information, Training, and Documentary categories. Three productions from the All Others category received Creativity Awards. One production received a Special Mention Award. The production that received the highest score overall was designated "Production of the Year."

>

The First Place awards will be presented and the Production of the Year will be announced at an

awards presentation ceremony that will be conducted early in 2005 in the Pentagon. The other awards will be forwarded to the Military Services for presentation.

>

A selection of the 2003-2004 Department of Defense Visual Information Production Awards follows.

>

A. Category: Recruitment

>

Air Force: "Recruiting the MTI" produced by Lackland Multimedia Center, 37th Communication Squadron for the 737th Training Support Squadron (TRSS), Training Support Flight, Lackland AFB, TX.

>

Air Force: "OTS: The Blue Line" produced by Air University Television (HQUA/SCV), Maxwell AFB, AL, for the Officer Training School, Maxwell AFB, AL.

>

B. Category: Documentaries

>

Air Force: "Bombs Over Baghdad" produced by and for the 1st Combat Camera Squadron, Charleston, SC.

>

Air Force: "History of the US Chaplain Service" produced by Air University Television (HQUA/SCV), Maxwell AFB, AL for the Chaplain Service Institute, Maxwell AFB, AL.

>

C. Category: Training

>

Army: "Networking the Future Force" produced by U.S. Army Visual Information Center, Washington, DC, for the Army Training Support Center, Fort Eustis, VA.

>

Air Force: "Choices have Consequences" produced by Nellis Television, Nellis AFB, NV, for the Air Warfare Center/Judge Advocate, Nellis AFB, NV.

>

D. Category: Internal/Public Information

>

Army: "Letters From War" produced by and for the U.S. Army Safety Center, Fort Rucker, AL.

>

Navy: "Fleet Combat Camera, Atlantic Capabilities" produced by Fleet Combat Camera Atlantic, Norfolk, VA, for the Commander, Fleet Forces Command, Norfolk, VA.

>

E. Category: All Others (Creativity Awards)

>

Air Force: "We Remember" produced by and for the 37th Communications Squadron, Lackland AFB, TX.

>

Army: "Discovery" produced by the Production Acquisition Division, U.S. Army Visual Information Center, Washington, DC, for the National Science Center, Augusta, GA.

>

F. Special Mention Award

>

Marines: "OpFor Weapons Recognition" produced by Combat Visual Information Center, Camp Pendleton, CA, for the HQ Group, S-4 Rear, Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, CA.

>

Congratulations to all of the winners!

>

Point of contact for the DoD VI Production Awards program is Mr. Joe Hickey, (703) 428-0640, DSN 328-0640, [dvi@hq.afis.osd.mil](mailto:dvi@hq.afis.osd.mil).

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# >C: DIRECTION.

## INT. UNDISCLOSED LOCATION – MEDIUM SHOT

>

We see three unidentified men kneeling in front of a banner in a dimly-lit room, clad in black with their heads wrapped in scarves. One man is in the foreground, reading a statement in Arabic. The two men in the background, standing to each side of him, are holding Kalashnikov automatic rifles on their thighs, with the rifles pointed upward. The banner, written in white Arabic lettering, reads “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet.”

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>

## UNIDENTIFIED MAN IN FOREGROUND

>

We are the Army Ansar al-Sunna. We will terrorize the infidels, the Americans by a crushing attack. One of our martyrdom lions will infiltrate the defenses of the enemy at the Morez base in Mosul. He will slip through a hole in the camp’s wire, exploiting the changing of the guard. We have been observing their schedule for a long time. This lion will then proceed to his target, and he will take advantage of lunch time. He will storm the dining room where the crusaders and their allies are gathered.

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>

## CUT TO:

>

## INT. UNDISCLOSED LOCATION – CLOSE UP

>

An over the shoulder view of a man grasping a Russian-made bayonet and pointing to various locations on a hand-drawn map of a military camp. A large building is drawn in the corner of the map that in Arabic is labeled “restaurant.” As the bayonet traces routes across the map of the camp, the handheld camera ZOOMS IN.

>---



> UNIDENTIFIED MAN (D.O.)  
 >  
 > Let Bush, Blair, and Allawi know that we are coming and that we  
 > will chase them all away, God willing.

>---

>  
 CUT TO:

>  
 INT. UNDISCLOSED LOCATION – MEDIUM SHOT

>  
 The two men embrace one of the men, exchanging handshakes, hugs,  
 and pats on the back.

>---

>  
 CUT TO:

>  
 EXT. MILITARY BASE – LONG SHOT – DAY

>  
 A long shot of a large white military mess tent. In the background,  
 the noon call to prayer can be heard. Suddenly, a huge fireball erupts  
 through the tent, sending dust and smoke high into the air. We hear the  
 explosion approximately six seconds after we see the blast. Fire runs  
 down one side of the metal poles holding up the mess tent.

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>  
 CUT TO:

>  
 EXT. MILITARY BASE – LONG SHOT – DAY

>  
 A long view of the torn tent from the point of view of a rapidly  
 accelerating vehicle. We see the blue and white walls that surround  
 the base as the vehicle accelerates past them.

>---

>  
 ZOOM IN to hole in tent left by explosion.

>  
 END

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> 5.  
 > EXHIBITING ATROCITY.

>From: [Ananya Vajpeyi](#)

>Date: Wed, 01 Dec 2004 01:17:05

>

Earlier this year (September 17-November 28, 2004), the International Center of Photography in New York City had an exhibition titled: *Inconvenient Evidence: Iraqi Prison Photographs from Abu Ghraib*. The ICP show was curated by Brian Wallis, and the text accompanying the photographs was written by Seymour Hersch, who was central to breaking the story, in the May 2004 *The New Yorker* magazine, of the abuse of Iraqi detainees by American soldiers in the Abu Ghraib prison.

>

There is no denying the immense service that Hersch has done to the cause of human rights by his reportage of the torture, and his analysis of the photographs that both depict as well as embody atrocity against prisoners of war, in gross violation of the Geneva conventions. Hersch's writing, including all the sections of it excerpted in the ICP's exhibition literature, is unequivocal about its moral stand even as it is restrained in its style and syntax. It is difficult to be critical of a project with which someone of Hersch's stature has associated himself, but it is equally difficult to understand the ICP's rationale for having an exhibition of the Abu Ghraib photographs. Wallis writes in his introduction to the show:

>

"Unlike traditional war photojournalism, the images were not created as documentation of atrocities, but were actually intended as instruments of maltreatment and sexual/cultural humiliation."

>

This is indeed true. The taking of the photographs was part of the torture; photography here was an aspect of torture itself. Wallis notes, further, that in looking at these photographs when they came to light:

>

"We saw events unfolding directly – not through the lenses of 'objective' observers – but through the eyes of the men and women who were involved."

>

This is also true. The atrocities at Abu Ghraib were not documented by a war photographer, whether embedded or independent. The photographs were taken by soldiers themselves. They are not anyone's photographic oeuvre; they are, as objects, exactly like the batons, guns,

electrodes, dog-leashes, and other paraphernalia used to terrorize victims, if not kill them.

>

It is very disturbing that Wallis does not see what's staring him in the face, as it were, even in his own formulation of what's going on. If this is not "war photojournalism," then why is it on display in a photographic gallery? Since when do photography museums make it their business to exhibit images that are "instruments of maltreatment and . . . humiliation"? Why is there no acknowledgment of the fact that "the men and women who were involved" were taking the photographs in their capacity as perpetrators of torture, not as amateur war journalists? Do photo-galleries set out to show the work of photographers, or do they provide wall-space to anyone with a camera, even if it be someone who uses the camera to perpetrate grave human rights abuse?

>

The ICP – and now the Warhol Museum – are not showing us what we need to see as information, because these photographs are already in the public domain, and have been for many months. They are not furthering public outcry against what happened – and could well be happening even at this moment, in Guantanamo Bay – because outrage, criticism and protest can and do carry on just as well without reproducing and framing the photographs yet again. They are not shaming – or inconveniencing, as their own title "Inconvenient Evidence" seems to suggest – the U.S. military or government, because you can't play the same scandal twice.

>

So why are the ICP and Warhol having this exhibition? For what political, artistic, curatorial or cultural purpose, with what audience in mind? The wall of a museum is not a television screen during a news hour. The wall of a gallery is not a display area for exhibits that may count as evidence during a trial in a courtroom. Abu Ghraib pictures have no place in the ICP.

>

In times of crisis and zones of conflict, the work of photography can be both humanistic and humanitarian. The corpus of images by contemporary photographers like Luc Delahaye, Ron Haviv, Gilles Peress, Stanley Greene and Tom Stoddard attests to the power of photography as an unparalleled means of capturing and conveying the human suffering entailed by war. Alas, no photographer was able to get inside

Abu Ghraib to expose its hideous interior and bring its unfortunate inmates closer to freedom and dignity. According to Wallis:

>

"Aside from the atrocities they depict, as photographs, the images from Abu Ghraib contradict the studied heroics of twentieth-century war photography that have been updated to the current conflict."

>

Photographs were taken at Abu Ghraib, true. However, their takers were not photographers but torturers; and the larger activity indexed by their taking was not photography but torture. Their purpose was not to reveal war crimes but to inflict pain; their intended viewers were not members of the public at large, including world-famous journalists, influential photography curators, you and me, but fellow-soldiers who would "enjoy" the images as a prison in-joke. There must be clarity on each of these parameters – the activity, its agents, its objects, its consumers, its purpose – else the exhibition becomes compromised to the point of being unacceptable.

>---

>

>From: [David Young](#)

>Date: Wed, 01 Dec 2004 06:16:05

>

This is hardly a new issue. Most of the concentration camp pictures taken during, rather than just after, WW II, including film of "round ups" and the humiliation of Jewish women being forced to parade naked, and being dragged through the streets by their hair, of men, women and children being frozen to death, of being asphyxiated, were taken for the edification of German film audiences (to "prove" that Jews were sub-human) and/or for the amusement of the guards. I have heard not a whisper about the "ethics" of displaying these pictures.

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>From: [Christiane Robbins](#)

>Date: Wed, 01 Dec 2004 06:16:36

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Is it the photographs or the photographers that are on display within this context – at once apart from the propaganda machine of the military entertainment complex and yet offering a nod to its own complicity? Perhaps a mirror of our own participation?

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>From: [Joy Garnett](#)

>Date: Wed, 01 Dec 2004 06:17:35

>

Ananya, your anger at the exhibition and at Brian Wallis is, with all due respect, misplaced. One is angry over the fact that Abu Ghraib goes on, unchecked and unpunished; but I wonder at your assertion that in light of that, such an exhibition has no value. It has no immediate activist value in other words, and therefore no value at all apart from propagating more propaganda.

>

After reading your post a second time several things strike me: First, it seems that your impressions of the ICP exhibition, its intentions and effect, are not based on your own experience of the exhibition but rather on your reading of the brochure. Had you experienced it you might have come away with a very different feeling altogether. I can tell you it made everything else going on at the museum – the photos from the sixties, JFK, the stills from the Zapruder video, the grainy, beautiful Magnum heyday prints – seem like so much trivia.

>

You express consternation about what institutions such as ICP signify and what they should and shouldn't exhibit as public institutions. That they should show art, not vernacular stuff, not images used as implements, not cultural artifacts. You go on to say that showing the Abu Ghraib images in a museum has no informational value because they have already been circulated in the public sphere and are easily accessed by any computer, and therefore showing them at ICP is redundant as well as repugnant.

>

But this show was not an inventory of the images, it was not intended as an exhaustive presentation, rather it was conceived quite differently: if you take a sampling of something that is ubiquitous, and you focus on it, you draw people uncomfortably close, giving them a proximity they never would otherwise achieve – so intense, so intimate and yet taking place in a public place. This, I believe, is part of the function of art, and should be part of the mandate of museums as public institutions. It is something the ICP would never have attempted in the old days; it is both telling and frankly amazing that they should choose to do so now.

>

Accompanying literature is merely that; were it to embody the complete effect you wouldn't need

the exhibition except as an afterthought. Had you been to the exhibit you would have noticed its peculiar effect. I will describe it briefly: a very small interior gallery housed the tiny exhibit, its four walls painted darkly. On three walls along with one lengthy wall text, a very small sampling from the Abu Ghraib images were pinned. These were not “photographs” in the usual ICP sense, but rather lo-res printouts from the web made with an office-grade printer. The images were printed quite small and were unmounted, with brief explanatory wall labels. Never for an instant is there any mistaking these images for anything other than what they are. The gallery is crowded, alternately silent, the viewers stricken or else their faces darkened by serious hushed talk.

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The fourth wall, in stark a contrast, held four large framed photographs, one anonymous, and the other three by well-known photojournalists: Mian Khursheed, Roberto Schmidt and Beyrouz Mehri, taken of people in Baghdad and in Gaza reacting to the published photos of Abu Ghraib. Yes, that cliché, the Arab Street. Portraits in the old fashioned Capa sense, of Arabs in pain and anger. This is what ICP usually mounts on its walls.

>  
What you fail to see because it isn't part of the brochure is that the museum itself is being used as a framing device to contextualize the Abu Ghraib event, using the lens of a few printouts and their juxtaposition with photographs of their reception in the Arab world. This has very little to do with “propagation.” Something else is happening here; I can think of few places where it could happen in this way. An art context may be one of the few ways to intercept the way in which images are normally consumed – I mean conventionally, on a daily basis, via the mass media, and other vehicles, gadgets, technologies... You assert in your post: “The wall of a museum is not a television screen during a news hour.” Indeed it is not; and that is why this tiny show has such potency installed as it is in such a place.

>  
Art is not an index of reality; photojournalism is, it purports to be while still keeping up it's “art appearances.” I think it was risky for Brian Wallis to do what he did, risky for all the right reasons.

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>From: [Ananya Vajpeyi](#)  
>Date: Thu, 02 Dec 2004 04:31:36

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But you cannot frame, gloss, annotate, paraphrase, translate, or buffer these images in ANY context other than that of first disclosure for the sake of information, and subsequent presentation as evidence in a legal or judicial setting. That's the nature of the monstrous objects we have on our hands with these photographs: they are, in almost all circumstances you can think of, to use Benjamin Bratton's phrase, “unviewable icons”: neither appropriate to show, not appropriate to see. That the museum itself acts as a framing device, or that the museum mediates these images and guides their reception and consumption, that the images come to mean something other than what they mean *because* they are placed in a photography museum – to me, this is the problem, not the solution.

>  
In this case you don't just want to put critical distance – you want your rejection of torture, of human rights abuse, of the disregard for the Geneva Conventions, of the violation of the laws of war, of war itself, of this perversion of photography, of the American occupation of Iraq, of violent and pornographic voyeurism, of impunity – you want your rejection of *all* of this to be somehow communicated to your audience, and then you want your audience in turn to reject these things also. I don't think there's any way to achieve this, to effectively negate what one is presenting, to annihilate what one is attesting, to marry the quiddity of the object on display with one's utter denial of all that it is and one's desire to dissociate oneself from it politically, ethically, morally and aesthetically in an absolute and unequivocal way.

>  
Wim Klerkx, a prominent young photographer based in Amsterdam, has made an important point that I am willing to concede: we need to understand a taker of an Abu Ghraib photograph not just as an American soldier in an Iraqi prison with a malignant intention, a perverse eye, a digital and/or video camera and an Internet connection, but as a new breed of “torturer-cum-tourist backed by the world's most powerful army.” In the lens of this soldier, photography as torture, photography as tourism, and photography as war crime all converge at a point, to create a new genre of agency and a new category of activity for which we still perhaps lack appropriate names. In as much as this person

takes the photographs in question, the photographs are his (or her) “oeuvre,” complicating my earlier assertion that these photographs are “not anyone's photographic oeuvre.”

>  
I don't agree with Garnett that Brian Wallis puts himself in an admirably risky position. I think he puts himself in an impossible position, of trying to curate images that ought neither be shown nor be seen at a venue like the ICP because in a fundamental way they are not, despite appearances, photographs at all.

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>From: [Elizabeth Philipose](#)  
>Date: Thu, 02 Dec 2004 04:32:19

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I'm glad a conversation about the ICP exhibit “Inconvenient Evidence” has begun. I saw the exhibit several times over several days and I also attended the November 9 symposium that featured Seymour Hersch, Brian Wallis and others speaking about the photos. I was uncomfortable with a number of issues but I think discomfort is unavoidable in relation to viewing these photos. Part of my discomfort parallels some that Ananya raises about the purpose of the original photos and the position we take as viewers. The photos were taken to torture Iraqis as part of a multifaceted strategy of humiliation and publicity and domination. To view the photos is to compound the humiliation and degradation and this is, in part, the purpose of the original circulation of the photos. So there is a question about who we are as we view the photos on the stark white walls of the ICP, if viewing the photos is part of torturing the subjects.

>

There is also a question of whose sensibilities and sensitivities are at stake in viewing these photos. Independent media activist and journalist Amy Goodman often says that if Americans were to see the images of what happens to people in war for one week, they would demand an end to war. There is something of that idea in the ICP exhibition of these photos. That is, the original photos circulated and raised some emotions and publicity about the functioning of Abu Ghraib and U.S. soldiers and just as suddenly, they disappeared from the public conversation about the U.S. role in Iraq. The ICP, in part, wants to keep these photos in the public domain as a way to continue the conversation that was just starting, a conversation that they believe might be part of a movement against the U.S. role in

Iraq. For instance, Brian Wallis opened the symposium with a quip that this was the first meeting of the 2008 Presidential campaign. The audience responded positively and it seemed that many agreed, the purpose of showing and discussing the Abu Ghraib photos was to mobilize people against the current militarist policies that include Americans engaged in grotesque acts of racist, colonial and sexualized violence against others.

>

So whose sensibilities and sensitivities are at stake? I was jarred by the way that genitals are digitally blurred but the faces of unnamed Iraqi prisoners are not. This is how they appeared on the Internet. In displaying the photos for purposes other than to humiliate the prisoners, should faces be blurred to protect the identity of people in their humiliation, to confer some dignity on the prisoners after the fact?

>

On the same question, what does it mean to make use of the photos of someone else's humiliation to move our conversation and activism and politics? The exhibit and the symposium both seemed to be set up as catalysts for us to feel something, to be moved, to feel rage, to be activated on a national scale, to go back and recover some emotions that perhaps we didn't feel on the first round of publicity. I felt the speakers' heaviness and sadness and perhaps, just after the U.S. election, the disappointment that U.S. populations are seemingly not moved by such events. At the same time, we have to note that it is all about us, we are centralized in the display of those photos, our emotions, our responses, our sadness, our pain. It seems an almost necessary relationship and it is not clear to me how it is to be avoided. This brings up the ways that the Abu Ghraib photos have been “logoized,” particularly the silhouette of the hooded person on a box with electrodes from his fingers. Peace groups, anti-war artists and late-night comedians have all *played* with that instantly meaningful and yet contested image, toward different ends.

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I always wonder if what Amy Goodman says is correct, that if we saw enough of the degradation of war that we would stop supporting war. It seems that there are distinctions to be made between the possibility of the pain of others to move us, and the possibility of the pain of “other others” to move us. On this point, the display of wounded, tortured and violated black and brown

bodies is commonplace and doesn't seem to be a catalyst for anti-violence movements. Just pity and despair, perhaps, and too often, indifference.

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An interesting corollary is the Margaret Bourke-White photo on a wall opposite to the Abu Ghraib exhibit room, showing a crowd of Germans who are taken to look at the bodies piled up at Buchenwald at the end of WW II. The bodies are nowhere in the scene; just the crowd of well-dressed viewers and their faces ostensibly looking toward the pile of bodies. They do not look horrified or repulsed or outraged. They look serious, curious and intrigued as though they are viewing a strange and disturbing artifact from a distant past that they once heard about in a film or a classroom. The photo doesn't suggest that anybody is moved to do or feel much of anything at all and in fact, part of what is captured in the photo is the distance between those who suffer and those who regard the suffering. Is this a distance we have, or a distance we take?

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>From: [Antonio Monegal](#)

>Date: Thu, 02 Dec 2004 18:49:15

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I was one of the curators, together with Francesco Torres and José Maria Ridaó, of an exhibition entitled *At War*, shown at the Center for Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (Spain) between May and September 2004. In spite of its title, the CCCB exhibition was not just about conflicts that are underway, all over the world, but about the phenomenon of war from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, about different aspects of the experience of war of both combatants and civilians.

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Our main focus was the culture of war understood at the same time as the environment, behavior, logic and values war produces within itself, and its inscription in cultural terms which precede and follow the actual conflict: its legacy in memory and cultural artifacts, its role in shaping the identity of nations, its potential for preparing us for and justifying future wars. The idea was that we are "At War" even when it doesn't look like it. For this purpose we combined art, photography, film, historical objects, documents, children's toys, videogames, recruitment and military industry advertising, et cetera, into a narrative that simulated the stages of development of a conflict: socialization of

violence, construction of the enemy, hostilities (with separate sections for the experience of soldiers at the front and of civilians and cities), victory and defeat, and memory.

>

Most of the issues discussed in *Under Fire* are relevant to this kind of discourse on war, particularly the subject of the city as target, which was extensively treated in the CCCB exhibition, but all these preliminaries are just to explain the perspective I'm writing from. What has motivated me to post are two references, one inside the forum and one in the news, to two other very different exhibitions, none of which I've been able to see: the ICP show that motivated Ananya Vajpeyi's commentary and subsequent postings, and the new permanent exhibition on military history at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, about which I recently read a *New York Times* review (November 11, 2004).

>

In relation to the ICP exhibition of the Abu Ghraib images, I would like to suggest that whatever their initial function as torture, or perverse souvenir, and the objectives achieved by their propagation in the media, they are now historical documents, and their presence in museums, galleries, and even history textbooks, is not only justified but necessary. Ananya Vajpeyi is right in addressing the complex issue of the ethics of display, but recontextualizing the Abu Ghraib images is a way of starting to give them a new place in memory. Should they be shown as "photography"? What the ICP demonstrated, whatever their intention, is the capacity of photography to be more than documentation, to be a form of experience, however gruesome, and a weapon. I agree with Joy Garnett that exhibitions do things by themselves, whatever their literature says, and that "an art context may be one of the few ways to intercept the way in which images are normally consumed."

>

The genre these icons belong to is by no means new. There are photos of atrocities from most wars in the twentieth century, not to mention of torture in other contexts, like the ones insightfully discussed by Georges Bataille. They are all "viewable." Very often postcards were made, and sent home, of scenes we consider horrific. The thing I find most surprising are not the photos taken at Abu Ghraib, or the torture,

but the fact that so many people are scandalized as a result of their having been effectively led to believe that this war is different from others (and that American soldiers don't do this kind of thing because they are American). We are again in the moral scenario described in *Apocalypse Now*.

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We are obviously too close to the events, but, in my opinion, memory (or lack thereof) is the central issue, even memory (or lack thereof) of yesterdays news. And that's why I want to introduce the Smithsonian's exhibition. Based on the *NY Times* review, and on precedent, it appears it cannot shed the epic approach to military history, the glorification of a country's past, the careful avoidance or ambiguous treatment of polemical issues (how can one avoid polemics in relation to war?). The title itself says everything: "The Price of Freedom: Americans at War". And it is understandable, because that is also what museums do: build up durable foundations for a proud identity. They build up ideology, because there is no such thing as a neutral representation of war, every single use of as war icon is political.

>

Political attitudes of citizens depend not just on what the media say but also on the memory of a society. It may be true that showing what war is, and what happens in wars, is the best argument against war. The problem is not that the Abu Ghraib images were shown at the ICP, but that they will never be shown at the new permanent exhibition at the Smithsonian.

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> 6 .  
> SIMULATED AND  
> IMAGINED  
> GEOGRAPHIES .

>From: [Stephen Graham](#)

>Date: Mon, 29 Nov 2004 16:25:14

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I want to argue that, essentially, war relies on two-sided constructions of place: the demonized place of the enemy Other that must be annihilated, and the sentimentalized places of the “homeland,” which must be cosseted, securitized, and whipped into a bellicose frenzy of fear, racism and hatred. Programs of organized, political violence have always been legitimized and sustained through complex “imaginative geographies.” This term – following Foucault, Said and Gregory – denotes the ways in which imperialist societies are constructed through normalizing, binary judgments about both “foreign” and colonized territories and the “home” spaces which sit at the “heart of empire.”

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Such imaginative geographies tend to be characterized by stark binaries of place attachment. These are particularly powerful in times of war. In 1983 the geographer Ken Hewitt wrote that “war mobilizes the highly charged and dangerous dialectic of place attachment: the perceived antithesis of ‘our’ places or homeland and ‘theirs.’” Very often, such polarizations are manufactured discursively through racist and imperial discourses and propaganda which emanate from both formal state and other media sources. These work to produce “an unbridled sentimentalizing of one’s own while dehumanizing the enemy’s people and land.” To Hewitt, such binary constructions “seem an essential step in cultivating readiness to destroy the latter.”

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The Bush Administration’s “war on terror” rests fundamentally on such two-sided constructions of (particularly urban) place. The discursive construction of the “war on terror” since September 11th 2001 has been deeply marked by attempts to rework imaginative geographies separating the urban places of the U.S. “homeland” and those Arab cities purported to be the sources of “terrorist” threats against U.S. national interests. Such reworkings of popular and political imaginative geographies have worked by projecting places, and particularly cities, into two mutually exclusive, mutually constitutive, classifications: those, in Bush’s famous phrase, who are either “with us” or “against us.”

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For U.S. cities, these imaginative geographies

construct a landscape of boundless, perpetual, and unknowable threat. Through this, any everyday space, object or technology is a border through which the threatening, racialized Other can leap at any moment. Banal, everyday spaces become geopolitically charged; everyday accidents and failures produce an immediate search for al-Qaeda sleeper cells. Demonized Arab cities of the Middle East, meanwhile, are widely constructed as “terrorist nests” within mainstream media and military and political discourse. Such cities are represented solely through satellite imagery, vertical maps of the city as nothing but a group of targets.

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This call to place annihilation (Hewitt’s phrase), or the killing of the city – urbicide – in media and political discourse, is backed up by a vast entertainment industry. Through this, urban warfare is consumed voyeuristically for pleasure by millions. Satellite imagery of bombings can be watched daily on the web. Newspaper maps of the battle change daily. Urban warfare video games – the industry’s new fetish – project orientalized cities where participants repeatedly kill any person that moves, as all are “terrorists.” The urban landscape is actually digitized from the physical forms of real Islamic cities. One company – Kumar Reality games, who has sponsored Fox News’s coverage of the “war on terror” – even manufacture urban war video games based on each urban battle in Iraq.

>

Whilst dramatic, these discursive constructions are far from original. In fact they revivify long-established colonial and orientalist tropes to represent Middle Eastern culture as intrinsically barbaric, infantile, backward or threatening from the point of view of Western colonial powers. Arab cities, moreover, have often been represented by Western powers as dark, exotic, labyrinthine, and structureless places that need to be “unveiled” for the production of “order” through the superior scientific and military technologies of the occupying West. By burying any similarities between the “us” and the “them” in a discourse that works by systematically producing the Third World as Other, such Orientalism deploys considerable symbolic violence.

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The Bush Administration’s language of moral absolutism is, in particular, deeply Orientalist. The result is an a-historical, essentialized projection of Arab civilization that is very easily

worked, as Edward Said wrote just before his death, to “recycle the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations to stir up ‘America’ against the foreign devil.” The Orientalist notions of racial worth that helped to shape the real and imagined geographies of Western colonialism are thus being reworked as fundamental foundations for the “war on terror.”

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>From: [Gena Gbenga](#)

>Date: Thu, 02 Dec 2004 10:52:38

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Stephen, you seem to suggest that Orientalist notions of racial worth are at play in all warfare games and simulations. Since Kumar Reality manufactures urban war video games based on each urban battle in Iraq, and also advertises on Fox News, does that make them evil and racist?

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Through the entertainment industry, “urban warfare is consumed voyeuristically for pleasure by millions.” Is this anything new? Is it only done by “us”?

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>From: [Stephen Graham](#)

>Date: Fri, 03 Dec 2004 20:34:06

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What James Der Derian calls the military-industrial-entertainment network throws up some startling, and deepening, interconnections between a militarized culture, entertainment and media industries, and the application of military force. Video games like *Full Spectrum Warrior* – one of the ones which most definitely *is* full of racist, sub human depictions of Iraqis who must be slain – are produced by the U.S. army with the help of the industry partners and theme park designers who also design mock Islamic urban districts in which U.S. marines learn how to assault places like Falluja. The controls of weapons – for example the Dragon Runner remote control vehicle – are directly designed to mimic those of Playstations. And remotely piloted aerial vehicles are controlled from VR caves in Florida whilst actually firing Hellfire missiles in and around Iraqi cities. To the user the line between a “shoot-em-up” game and the real practice of killing becomes more and more blurred.

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>From: [Gena Gbenga](#)

>Date: Tue, 07 Dec 2004 09:59:34

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You seem to suggest that media spectatorship, gaming, and actual combat are merging into one big soup where it is increasingly impossible to distinguish between reality and representation, fictional shooting and real shooting. It seems the same argument of people who feel that videogames are inherently harmful, teaching kids to become more violent, and lessening our ability to distinguish between fictional reality and true reality. It has been shown, actually, that video gaming has provided a lot of benefits for kids growing up – and like it or not, it is here to stay, and part of the environment we grow up in.

>

I don’t see what is inherently wrong with weapons controls mimicking Playstations. Playstation is part of the culture that most of U.S. soldiers grew up on. Formerly recruits learned how to be soldiers through movies as well as military training. The simulations – whether through films, television, games – provide the tropes which are embodied later, but it doesn’t mean that it evacuates people’s ability to tell reality from fiction. We’re not that stupid. If a UAV is flown from a bunker in Florida, by a pilot who learned it on simulations that are a lot like videogames, it doesn’t mean he will be a worse pilot, or that he will be bombing people just for fun.

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>From: [Chris Hables Gray](#)

>Date: Wed, 08 Dec 2004 00:45:25

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There is a great deal of evidence that killing people remotely using technology is not only easier logistically, but psychologically. This in turn has led to its acceptance morally. While the use of strategic bombing by the Japanese (in China), Italians (in Ethiopia) and Germans (in Spain) was strongly condemned in the 1930s by many countries (including the U.S.), at the same time it was being perfected by those same critics. World War II produced at least two civilian holocausts, the Nazi attempt to exterminate Romany, Jews, and Slavs (among others), and the massive bombing by all sides of cities, culminating in the fire bombing of Tokyo (the single biggest “killing” of WW II) and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Michael Sherry says in his incredibly brilliant *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of*

*Armageddon*, strategic bombing was a kind of “technological fanaticism” produced by:

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“. . . two distinct but related phenomena: one – the will to destroy – ancient and recurrent; the other – the technical means of destruction – modern. Their convergence resulted in the evil of American bombing. But it was a sin of a peculiarly modern kind because it seemed so inadvertent, seemed to involve so little choice. Illusions about modern technology had made aerial holocaust seem unthinkable before it occurred and simply imperative once it began. It was the product of a slow accretion of large fears, thoughtless assumptions, and at best discrete decisions.”

>

This dynamic grew stronger, producing the Cold War balance of terror and the U.S. failed strategy in Vietnam. Soldiers in Vietnam noticed that Zippo raids (burning villages) and direct massacres (My Lai) were frowned upon, but napalming the same villages, and killing anything that moved in free fire zones with artillery (sometimes mounted in planes), rockets, bombs, and machine guns from the air, was quite all right. The technology changes the very rules of war, and also makes mass killings of civilians that would break most people and all military units eventually, quite easy to handle psychologically.

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The U.S. practices in Iraq are incredibly like Vietnam, using massive firepower and other technologies for short-term tactical gains which produce long-term strategic failure. They mirror Israeli practices as well, where totally predictable civilian casualties from using missiles to assassinate assassins on busy streets in Gaza is called collateral damage. Even though the deaths of innocent Iraqis and innocent Palestinians (many children) far outnumber the deaths of innocents caused by suicide insurgents in Iraq and Israel-Palestine, somehow the deaths by U.S. and Israeli forces are morally acceptable (although much greater in number), while those of the other side are signs of barbarism beyond belief – yet all are equally predictable. It is because of illusions about technology.

>

A few last points.

>

\* Notice, the technology leads to practices that actually are not effective in the long run.

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\*These new distancing technologies for mass slaughter are almost always perfected on “colonial” peoples before being turned on First World soldiers and civilians. This was true of bombing, of machine guns (see especially John Ellis’ *The Social History of the Machine Gun*), and now we see it with remote weapons.

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\*There is growing evidence that while viewing violent media doesn’t have a strong impact on the viewers, playing violent media is much more likely to result in desensitivation to violence, and to the “other’s” humanity. Although, to be honest, nothing is like the impact of actual violence for dehumanizing everyone, killer and killed.

>

\* Simulations are so important for training pilots that if they can’t operate simulators (because of “sim-sickness,” much like motion and space sickness), then they are washed out, even if real flying doesn’t bother them.

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\* In the fine SF-novella (and later novel) *Ender’s Game*, children are trained to fight a space war on simulators and end up in the penultimate battle winning it while still thinking they are only gaming. Orson Scott Card goes on in the Enders series of novels to reveal that the whole war won this way was a horrible mistake in communication. This mirrors the concern Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (in, for example, the collection edited by Gary Chapman, *Computers in Battle*, in 1987) that such war by remotes and by robots can lead to a collapse of any kind of moral restraints on war. It can also lead to incredible illusions about how much war can be controlled, as Paul Edwards shows in his *The Closed World* and I do in *Postmodern War*.

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>From: [Thomas Keenan](#)

>Date: Wed, 08 Dec 2004 07:28:25

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Chris Gray wrote:

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“There is a great deal of evidence that killing people remotely using technology is not only easier logistically, but psychologically. This in turn has led to its acceptance morally. “\* Notice, the technology leads to practices that actually are not effective in the long run.”

>

Yeah, I think we all share the longing for the good old days when killing was up close and personal, when you really had to see your enemy

(“whites of their eyes” and all that) before the slaughter could begin, when war was real and effective, not this inefficient but easy virtual game stuff. Like, um, in April and May and June of 1994, when those *interhamwe* guys (and their ex-FAR friends) in Rwanda set the current world record for temporally concentrated killing, 800,000 to 1,000,000 dead people in 100 days. Getting over the moral hurdles was tricky, especially with all those priests around (Elmore Leonard’s *Pagan Babies*, since we’re talking about popular culture, has some things to say about that), but they managed. And it was difficult, logistically (although they did sort of cheat and use the radio for remote-controlling the machetes) and psychologically, but they pulled it off, pretty much by sticking to the proven hand-to-hand, or hand-to-head, whatever, strategies.

>

Or at Srebrenica, in July a year later, when Mladic and Krstic’s boys gave them a run for their money. Admittedly they reverted to Kalashnikovs, sometimes even went for anti-aircraft guns, which seems rather unchivalrous when the other guys have no airplanes, but they did pretty much stick to the extreme-proximity rule and made sure they could see who they were killing. They even made conversation. Gathering them all together in big barns or warehouses made it a bit more efficient, I mean effective, in the short and the long run.

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Or at Omarska, three summers earlier...

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>From: [Chris Hables Gray](#)

>Date: Wed, 08 Dec 2004 18:01:36

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The Red Cross actually tries to prevent massacres and other atrocities (in particular mass rape), such as those Thomas mentions, by teaching paramilitaries “warrior’s honor” (see Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*). But that isn’t my point, nor do I approve. What I am trying to explain is how highly professional soldiers (and their oh-so-civilized nation-states) can end up killing innocents daily and wholesale without qualms or protests thanks to illusions about technology, and how such operations lead not only to them losing their souls but the wars as well.

>

One of the key elements of postmodern war is that it is a *bricolage* of all types of war, and that includes the atavistic mass murders that have marked many kinds of conflicts throughout human

history. But there is also a discourse in war, going back to its ritual origins, that seeks to make it honorable, civilized, just, a rational form of politics. One may reject this discourse (as I do) but it is actually the one that validates U.S. and Israeli and many other military operations, and would have justified military interventions in Rwanda (had Clinton allowed them) and it was part of the reason for NATO interventions into Serbia. If war is to be eliminated as an integral part of human culture, as it must be if humanity is to survive now that military technologies are so apocalyptically effective, we need to understand all of war’s various discourses and manifestations. As a U.S. citizen, I am particularly interested in stopping my country’s wars (and the wars we support and pay for), and that involves deconstructing this discourse of “noble” techno-war.

>

The massacres Thomas describes are horrific, but they have their limits. The Nazis actually realized they couldn’t carry out their exterminations in the sloppy manner of clubbings and stabbings and even shootings. That is why they rationalized and industrialized their “final solution.” Technology allows war without limits, war without end. One hydrogen bomb can kill more people than all who died in Rwanda. The U.S. destruction of the Iraq infrastructure and the long military blockade that followed in the 1990s killed at least as many Iraqi innocents as the massacres in Rwanda, but without the outrage, without the widespread horror, and without the war crimes trials. And they were killed by professional soldiers with established codes of ethics, not by mobs or paramilitaries useless for real military operations. War has become terror and massacre completely, when once there were sometimes meaningful distinctions between them. And it is more deadly and efficient than ever.

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>From: [David Young](#)

>Date: Thu, 09 Dec 2004 01:07:32

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This notion that technology acts in a linear fashion through some transparent social medium is ontological nonsense. The system that does the killing is “person.weapon” and the historical evidence seems to indicate that this socio-technical system has been killing large numbers of “men, women and children” for a long, long time. Furthermore, from the Egyptian, Assyrian

and Hittite wall reliefs and paintings, to the Iraq prison photos, the strong have used depictions of the humiliation and slaughter of their victims as a platform for their own self-aggrandizement. Even our own (Australian) gung ho politicians refused to let Australian F18/A pilots fly under U.S. rules of engagement because, frankly, they are too loose. Several Australian pilots aborted their missions in Iraq because they were unsure if the target was either valid, or empty of civilians – the problem is a moral, social and cultural problem, and sheeting the cause back to technology is both scientifically and morally inappropriate.

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>From: [Chris Hables Gray](#)

>Date: Thu, 09 Dec 2004 04:00:26

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To understand how real technologies and illusions about technology lead to atrocities and to the horror of war itself is not to excuse it, anymore than understanding the psychological dynamics (as David alludes to) or understanding the twists and turns of nationalist, imperialist, and racist ideologies excuses anything. Maybe I have been unclear, but perhaps there is something about technology and the role it plays in culture that is not being understood. There is nothing linear about its actions but it isn't "neutral" either, it has real complex effects on culture in general and on the psychology of military practitioners and, so it seems, on those who analyze war as well. We can't understand contemporary war unless we try to untangle its many roles.

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War itself is not just a "socio-technological system that has been killing . . . for a long, long time," it is much more complicated than that. Susan Mansfield's *The Gestalts of War*, Barbara Ehrenrich's *Blood Rites*, J. Glenn Gray's *The Warriors*, Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* have all contributed to my understanding of this, as has war's incredible history. But just as important is talking to soldiers about how, and why, they do what they do. If war is to end, many of these practitioners will have to turn against war itself, as they have turned against specific wars recently, most notably the Vietnam war which U.S. veterans and active duty soldiers played a major role in ending.

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## >D: MEDIATION.

>From: [underline-agent](#)

>Date: Mon, 06 Dec 2004 18:09:33

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Over the past several decades, in computationally-driven cultures, we have witnessed the emergence of increasingly networked and automated apparatuses of engagement that are used for security, combat, and navigation. These are strategic applications that facilitate distributed fields of intelligence and agency. We might recognize them at work when we see calculations and computer graphical overlays on screen-based representations of events, or luminous portable information scirms that hover between viewer and world.

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Integrated into all manner of strategic informational displays – whether used for entertainment, communication, or locationing, by the military, policing, or civilian sectors – these media have in turn been integrated into a contemporary regime of spectacle. They are visible everywhere as part of a machine-aided process of disciplinary attentiveness, embodied in practice, that is bound up within the demands of a new production and security regime.

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The enabling premises of such "operational media" can be found in the 1940s WW II wartime sciences of operations research, game theory, and cybernetics. The ground was laid for its emergence in the 1950s, when the development of computing became allied with the communication, command, simulation, and control imperatives of the Cold War. Its forms were shaped by technological demands and the symbolic-communicative practices of wartime production. At the same time, such media has helped shape new economies of organization, optimization, and vigilance.

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As a conceptual and material apparatus of engagement, operational mediation has always been about the detection and strategic



codification of movement, and the development of maneuvers of strategic positionality. Against many of the orientations of virtual discourses over the last decade, which have often situated virtuality in terms of delocalization and disembodiment, its tradition is one of precise locational and temporal specificity. In this sense, operational media can be thought to serve as a *reaffirmation* of positionality and place. It plays an important role in the resurgence of temporal and locational specificity witnessed in new surveillance and location-aware navigational technologies.

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Historically, operational mediation has always been dependent on the formal modeling of closed systems and the development of highly sophisticated scenario planning techniques, which are privileged at the expense of situated, experiential knowledge. It has always been oriented toward an ideal of integrated control and panoptic oversight, where external reality is seen as manageable through the application of abstracted calculations and strategies. In this sense it is inherently protective and agonistic, coalescing against a field of potential threat, whether scripted in terms of danger or inefficiency.

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Yet, at the same time, the operational assemblage is fundamentally about acquisition. Propelled by a libidinous, suspicious, and supervisory gaze, its objects are those which are to be managed or owned. It is fueled by the demands of efficiency and vigilance, moving toward real time engagements and continuous, heightened states of alertness and preparedness, whether for protection or libidinous consumption. It is not only driven by security and productivity, but of convenient access to objects. As a technological-semiotic support, it blends combat and commodity, functioning as a link between war and consumerism.

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>7.  
 >CORPORATIONS  
 >THAT KILL.

>From: [Madelaine Drohan](#)

>Date: Mon, 06 Dec 2004 18:09:33

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In the mid-1990s a Canadian company called DiamondWorks made headlines in Britain because of its connection with a group of South African mercenaries known as Executive Outcomes. They were apartheid-era soldiers who had no place in the army of a new South Africa. So they set up on their own, offering military services to companies and governments.

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The major shareholder in DiamondWorks, a former British officer called Tony Buckingham, introduced Executive Outcomes to governments in Africa that needed help clearing rebels out of resource areas. In this way, they found work in Angola and Sierra Leone. Once the rebels were beaten back, companies in which Mr. Buckingham held shares were awarded resource concessions.

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I wondered at the time whether DiamondWorks was an exceptional case. Were other companies using armed force? Wouldn't their shareholders object? And if not them, what about the board of directors? Wouldn't governments step in? And more specifically, I wondered what would drive a corporate leader to sanction the use of armed force for profit, knowing that lives would be lost.

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It was the mercenaries that first attracted me. But the more I read about them, the less interesting they were. It was the same story over and over again: soldiers who were thrown out of work by military downsizing or political change looking for a way to make a living using the only marketable skill they had. What I found increasingly interesting was a question that was less often addressed: who was paying them? And as I read more about them, I started noticing the names of companies cropping up in the footnotes of books.

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Fairly quickly, I came up with a list of ten examples, some of them historical, of companies that used armed force or agreed to its use on their behalf. Not all of them used mercenaries. Some teamed up with the military arm of repressive regimes. Some formed their own armies. The common factor was that they used aggressive force to kill people. This was not passive defense of corporate operations. I included historical cases to see what had changed in the corporate use of force over the last century.

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I'll just name a few of the cases I looked at. I

started with Cecil Rhodes and the British South Africa Company. He formed his own corporate army and used it to take over a large chunk of Africa, which his company ran for several decades before the British government finally stepped in. One of the tactics his soldiers used in forcing Africans off their land was to throw dynamite into the caves where they were hiding. I have never seen an estimate of the number of Africans who died while resisting Rhodes' corporate advance.

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I looked at King Leopold of Belgium, who set up a number of rubber companies in the Congo with friendly financiers. These companies had their own armies and they also used the army of the Congo Free State to force the Africans into gathering rubber. Company soldiers cut off the hands of those unwilling to work. It is estimated that millions died during Leopold's regime, if not directly at the hands of soldiers, then from the famine and disease caused by the rubber companies' brutal rule.

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Moving ahead in time, I looked at the Belgian company Union Minière which hired mercenaries and financed a civil war in the Congo in the 1960s that we know as the Congo Crisis.

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I looked at Royal Dutch Shell in Nigeria, which worked hand in glove with a series of dictators. The particular incident I looked at was a protest at a Shell installation in Umuechem. Shell called in the Mobile Police, known locally as the Kill'N' Go, to attack protesters. No one knows how many people died because the police chopped up their bodies and threw them in the river.

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And I looked at Talisman Energy, which went into partnership with the government of Sudan in the late 1990s. The deal was that Talisman would provide the oil expertise and the government would provide the security. They did this through a scorched earth policy where they torched villages and launched bombing raids to clear the oil fields of people.

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Just in case you think this is all history, I went to the Democratic Republic of Congo earlier this year to look at the mining sector. Mining companies are still calling in British mercenaries to clear local people off their land before they start production.

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There were some common threads that ran through these stories. There was an attractive resource – gold, diamonds, oil, copper, timber. This resource was often made even more attractive

from the corporate point of view because conflict in the area has reduced the number of other companies willing to go after it. Another common thread is that the host governments were either weak or non-existent. This meant the local rule of law was weak. But it also meant that companies had to take security into their own hands. A final thread was that governments and international organizations with the power to intervene decided to look the other way because the corporate activity addressed some larger political goal, be it imperialism, the fight against communism, or market liberalization. The war on terrorism will be used in the same way. Iraq fits the criteria listed above, making it fertile ground for abusive corporations.

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The general point is that very little has changed in the course of a century with the corporate use of force. Rather than raising their own armies, corporations now use force at arms length, by contracting with private military firms or going into partnership with repressive governments. But the end result is the same. And the legal sanctions are ineffective. Through the use of offshore subsidiaries, corporations put their overseas operations beyond the reach of the laws of their home state and within the hands of unstable and often illegitimate governments, who have a financial interest in keeping quiet.

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>From: [Chris Hables Gray](#)

>Date: Wed, 08 Dec 2004 05:01:52

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How do you see the balance between corporations and nation-states now, and in the near future, especially as the monopoly on violence that nation-states have claimed (although never fully held) seems less clear cut than ever? Hardt and Negri argue in *Empire* that the future is about a new Empire that is not nation-state based at all, but is formed by an international capital conglomeration of a new sort and the multitudes that resist it. But Negri has admitted that the current world situation doesn't fit this model.

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>From: [Madelaine Drohan](#)

>Date: Thu, 09 Dec 2004 01:08:17

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In the cases I looked at, states and corporations often acted in unison. Or, it might be more correct to say that in most cases corporations

found elements within the governing elite to lend some local legitimacy to their actions.

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Royal Dutch Shell in Nigeria and Talisman Energy in Sudan both worked in partnership with the national governments of those countries, as did Ranger Oil West Africa in Angola. These were mutually advantageous relationships where the companies received access to resources and the members of the elite received money to help them maintain their grip on power. But the state was not fully in control of the resource area, which invariably led to the use of force either by or on behalf of the corporation.

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It has been a favorite ploy of companies challenged on the use of force, Talisman for example, to say that they have a relationship with the "sovereign government" of the country in question and it is up to that government to enforce its own "laws." In the minds of Western investors these words conjure up images of our own stable governments and predictable laws, images which really do not apply to failed or failing states in the developing world. But they do seem to satisfy many Western investors.

>

In the examples I looked at, there is some form of state involvement with the corporation in every case. When there was no government to speak of, for example in southern Africa when Rhodes invaded, or more recently in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the state involvement was external. In conflict zones, corporations certainly have the advantage over the state in that they are single-minded in their pursuit of resources and can offer the ruling elite the money it desperately wants to continue fighting a war or to keep supporters onside.

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While the relationship between states and corporations appears to be on a slightly firmer footing in the E.U., the U.S. and Japan, John Kenneth Galbraith had some rather disturbing views on this in his latest book, *The Economics of Innocent Fraud*. He contends that privatization has allowed the private sector to invade what was traditionally the public sphere to the extent that there is no longer a clear dividing line between the two. He cites military privatization in particular, saying that the private sector is now driving defense policy. He also talks of corporate control over the treasury and environmental policy.

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From: [Eveline Lubbers](#)

Date: Tue, 21 Dec 2004 18:09:49

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I've been writing extensively on how corporations use privatized intelligence services (former MI6 specialists who now work for the business world, using their contacts within the service whenever needed) to spy on NGOs and activists, infiltrate their groups and sabotage their activities. Now that reputation is the most important asset of a transnational corporation, it's ever more important to know what lies ahead, what kind of problems can be inspected. However, when "spies" are being exposed, these stories are usually brushed away as unrelated and very exceptional cases.

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I want to map the gray zone of specialized risk consultants, privatized corporate intelligence services, revolving doors between corporations and intelligence services, not to mention the booming business of Internet monitoring *and* interference by so called "third parties" that pretend to be independent sources but are in fact paid by industry interests.

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>From: [Madeleine Drohan](#)

>Date: Thu, 23 Dec 2004 00:27:06

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In the 1950s De Beers hired Sir Percy Sillitoe, who had just retired as head of Britain's MI5, to combat diamond smuggling in Africa. Sir Percy set up a private sector intelligence agency for De Beers, called the International Diamond Security Organization, and hired several of his former colleagues from MI5 to help run it. It was this organization that hired the mercenaries who killed diamond smugglers. Although he was ostensibly retired, Sir Percy was kept in the intelligence loop by senior British officials in Britain and Africa. (There is a wealth of information on this at the Public Records Office just outside London.) At the time it was felt that the Cold War necessitated government cooperation with this private sector intelligence effort because it was thought that at least some of the smuggled diamonds were ending up behind the Iron Curtain, to be used in the Soviet H-bomb program.

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It would be interesting to know whether the current U.S. war on terrorism provides a similar rationale for industry-government cooperation on intelligence. My guess is that it does.

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> 8 .  
> FIGURES OF  
> DIS/APPEARANCE .

Intelligence came up again in the case I looked at in Angola involving a Canadian company, Ranger Oil, and the now-defunct South African mercenary group Executive Outcomes. It was always rumored, but never proven as far as I know, that one of the first contracts Executive Outcomes secured in South Africa was for De Beers in the early 1990s. As they sold themselves partly as counter-intelligence specialists, it would make sense that they provided intelligence services to the company. And Tim Spicer, who headed the British mercenary group Sandline when it was hired to mount a counter-coup in Sierra Leone, was thought to have some intelligence connections from his previous career as a British officer.

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As for corporate counterstrategies, Royal Dutch/Shell have mounted an advertising campaign portraying the company as green, published an annual report on social responsibility and spend quite a bit on the type of community development projects that can be featured in the annual report. Talisman Energy, the Canadian oil company that came under fire for investing in Sudan, took a leaf from Shells book when the campaign against them heated up. They hired a young, good-looking community liaison officer, who was front and center at their annual meetings. They published their own corporate responsibility report. And they signed a voluntary code of conduct for Canadian companies and then the Global Compact. All of this got positive coverage by an ill-informed media and no doubt impressed a gullible public.

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One tactic I noticed that both Shell and Talisman used was to spread the blame around to other companies, by pointing out who else was operating in Nigeria and Sudan, respectively. Talisman did this in a slide show at their annual meeting, showing a shot of a Mobil gas station somewhat out of context amongst slides of their Sudanese operation. Shell people point out all the other international companies who are in Nigeria but are not attracting as much heat. Both companies also have tried to work with NGOs, who are not surprisingly wary about getting too close to an oil company with an image problem. I know some mining companies in the Congo are also trying this approach. It is certainly one way to take the wind out of opponents' sails.

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>From: [Irving Goh](#)

>Date: Tue, 23 Nov 2004 09:06:05

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I have tried to work out a prolegomena for “a right to disappear,” a phrase from Blanchot, and an imperative to thought that is more urgent today, I think, than in Blanchot’s time. My premise has been that the phenomenon of “city-as-target” in this twenty-first century global security condition is more cosmopolitan, in a very perverse and negative sense, than it is particular, as the phrase seems to suggest. Every body, every thing in this world is made as if an automatic citizen within this contemporary security architecture – an architecture determined by the American state war-machine. For we can only be either with the American state war-machine in the “war on terror” or against it. The latter would only become a self-declared preamble for the “justification” of a comprehensive destruction by the force of the former. And so we are (if we are not seeking our own demise), without a real choice, already guests within the hospitality of the American-determined global security architecture. With this hospitality, or automatic “citizenship,” there is really no fuss, no paper work, no logistics of human movement, no overhaul of physical ground infrastructure. The American state war-machine already has the apparatus for global security in place, or in space, to be more precise. Space-based global positioning satellites, in communication with supplementary camera-mounted unmanned aerial combat vehicles mark every body, every object, every space, as an electronic signature. For the determination of the “rogue” that will be a threat to global security, these machines have the task of imaging the world. And reciprocally, we would submit ourselves to this imaging of the world, as our testimonial gesture to affirm that we are not the “rogue” threat. That is but our perverse ethic, our “social responsibility” as “citizens” within this 21st century global security architecture.

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The condition of this “citizen” then is his/her being subject to imaging, subject to an irreducible photographable fact (irreducibly photographic because the advanced electronic moving image would still have to be frozen in order to present it as proof of imminent threat in a form of law, either before or after the fact of the destruction of the threat). The photographic state is the condition the “citizen” has found him- or herself to be in today. There is no escape from this state. The cameras are everywhere.

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We cannot escape the photographic fact. And yet philosophically, it is our responsibility, to human freedom, to think outside that subjectivity. We will have to find a line of resistance against that fact of photographic subjectivity. We cannot wage physical combat against the global security infrastructure. We cannot evade the photographic fact. And yet we will have to get outside it. And there are no more physical spaces from which we can escape that fact. We will just have to escape as we are, somehow. We will have to disappear, while remaining exposed to the photographable fact. The question that remains then is how to disappear while still being visible. Without going further, I hope it is obvious that this question is already impossible and necessary at the same time, given that we are not interested in a mere magical vanishing trick.

>

What kind of strategy shall we enact then, in order to disappear? What kind of counter-surveillance strategy against global imaging in other words? How to disrupt this *techné* of this cosmo(s)politics and its power? One way of disrupting the technics of power is to deny or negate the knowledge that it seeks to capture. And it is here that I have found Agamben’s reiteration of the phrase of “man without content” as “the negative potentiality of the poetic I” useful as a possible strategy of counter-surveillance. In living a life invested with an intensive interest in art, “the negative potentiality of the poetic I” offers a possible way of disappearing while still maintaining a presence in the world.

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Simply put, the “negative potentiality of the poetic I” is the unconcealment of what is inherently in man a becoming-art of man’s *being*. It is the letting flow of the force of *poiesis*-to-come in *being’s* work and/or life. It is the uninhibited following of the trajectory of *poiesis in being*. Heidegger has also understood this coming-of-art in being, finding it already in the irreducible fact of language in man, which only awaits its poeticizing.

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Where I deviate from Agamben is to re-cognize this “negative potentiality of the poetic I” to remain within being, without necessity of expressing, or giving materiality to, the *poiesis* in being, through a work of art outside the body of being. In other words, it is a matter of living (as) art, *being(-as-)art*, life-as-*poiesis*. After Aristotle, Heidegger, and Agamben, life is already *poiesis*

anyway. Now, for a strategy of counter-surveillance, for a way out of the photographable fact, for a way to disappear from the photograph after the photographable fact, I am suggesting that pursuing intensively this life-as-*poiesis* remains our final reserve.

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How does one disappear in living life-as-*poiesis*, while remaining visible? According to Agamben, there is a Hegelian double negation in *poiesis*. The first occurs through the fact of incompleteness of all art. Hardly ever is a work of art a point of uncontested satisfaction of the artist. The artwork is there only because there is something more and/or less about it that always remains elusive to the artwork in its actuality. Therefore the content of the artwork, its body, to the artist, is but a vestige of what has transpired for the artist to have a sense to give presence to the work of art. In the artist’s interest, his subjectivity of thought of art for Agamben, the content is not what really matters in the end. The dissolution of content is the first negation in art. Carried this (back) to the body under surveillance, we can then perhaps trace a line of counter-surveillance. As suggested already, and as Foucault has also outlined in the work of power, the technics of surveillance works only through a knowledge of the body it is watching. That knowledge constitutes its power over the watched body. But the body of *poiesis* has nothing. It negates its own content. The body of *poiesis*, in the face of the photographable fact, is a body without content. Hence, the photographable fact becomes essentially a knowledge of nothing. And with this knowledge of nothing, what holds as power for the eye of the camera is then a power over/of nothing.

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The second negation of this “negative potentiality of the poetic I” completes the disappearance of the photographable body. This negation is the maintenance of the openness of its form. Following the negation of content, the work of *poiesis* does not end within that body of the artwork. It frees itself through the constant experimentation of its own forms, its own boundaries, albeit invisible through normal perceptual optics. The second negation is the freeing of the line of what I call an “escape vector” (more than Virilio’s “escape velocity”) in all art. In a very Bergsonian-Deleuzian sense, this negation is the thought of the creative evolution of the *idée* of the work of art through a work of memory of that *idée*. This is how the body

of art exists and disappears therefore. It exists as an artwork but it is always reconstructing itself, a work that remains invisible to the world.

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To live life-as-*poiesis*: perhaps that is the reserve of thought to think the question of freedom in the face of the photographable fact, a strategy that will in the face of that fact, say *I exist, I disappear*. One can say that it is some sort of a fatal strategy, to borrow a phrase from Baudrillard. This strategy is not a waging of war with the machines of imaging devices. There’s really nothing much the civilian/non-military body can do against these architectures. It is also not a strategy of finding the blind spots of the machines so that we can hide there. To assert a right (to disappear), one should not hide. There’s no physical outside space to hide anyway. The military architecture of twenty-first century cosmo(s)-politics is equipped with “intelligent” technics to smoke the concealed body out and destroy it in its very place of concealment. So we will not wage war, and we will not shy away. We will not resist overexposure. Instead, we will put our bodies in full presence to the photographable fact. We will say, in the face of the photographable fact, *take the shot*. Because, with a mind to life-as-*poiesis*, I am able to think *I exist, I disappear*. The photographable fact will have nothing of me. At the point of that fact, I am able to be not confined by my own photographable fact. With the double negations acting themselves out in contestation with my actual body, I am able to say, to and after the photographable fact, *it is not I*.

>

The empirical challenge to a theory of a right to disappear would be the question of how to disappear. Do we have figures of disappearance? Which figure in culture, literature, politics, or history, has been able to put into active affect (in a Deleuzian-Guattarian sense) this *being-poiesis*, this life-as-*poiesis*? I suggest Benjamin’s *flâneur* as such a figure, among others. What has continued to intrigue me however, and what I would like to leave as a point of departure here, is the question: *What is our contemporary figure of disappearance?*

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>From: [Amir Parsa](#)

>Date: Mon, 29 Nov 2004 16:22:50

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First, then, the grand confession (yes, here on the *Under Fire* forum, in the absence of all other confessionals in a decidedly impious life): I have

never watched even a fragment of an all-news channel; never, not even for a single moment. I don't even peruse of those things called newspapers (unless I find them lying around for free, upon which I go straight to some sports or other diversion), and I am ceaselessly bombarded!

>

This confession, of course, has to do with the "right to disappear" prolegomenon presented by Irving Goh: so frightening in many ways, perhaps liberating in its finality, impressively documented and argued. My point here, Irving, is that even in the absence of the knowledge of the photographic fact and its finality, that "right" and desire to disappear and the subsequent emerging life-as-art are thrust upon one in light of the unbearable quotidian bombardment of the senses – and their infinite manipulation, lo, construction, of the being: their forging and fashioning of the "Human-as-Target," or the "Homo Sapiens-as-Target." It is that very consciousness of targetness itself that renders one a "HaT" (and that is how I shall use the term: a "HaT" does already have a keen sense of itself as a HaT.) And from all corners and all parts, the HaT's total being are bombarded, literally now, with all sorts of (toxic) material designed to manipulate, control, convince, and perhaps more hazardous still, integrate into some clever narrative.

>

Has one's bread and butter ever been so intertwined with the bells and bombers? Even more so with the enlightening accounts of the integrated vision and surveillance systems and subsequent military campaigns. On hilltops or desert lands or riversides and certainly in the urban metropolis, most assuredly for the HaT in the CaT ("City-as-Target," – sorry all, I couldn't resist), one's bread and butter (sustenance, existence) is inseparable from the handiwork of the bomb-makers and bomb-carriers and bomb-droppers.

>

Now, the very logic of this "right" to disappear should probably lie outside the common logic of other rights. Its form of manifestation, the way one talks about it, thinks about it or presents it, it seems to me, should do justice to the subtle essence of the engagement: the form being in tune with the poetics of the act – a poetics then, intertwined with an ethics, of disappearance. This appeals to me, frankly, more than the judicial "right."

>

What I'd also like to propose to you is a gradation of such disappearances: is there really, after

all, one form, and who would decide, judge, confirm, negate, if the right was exercised? This gradation could include a more liberal understanding of the occurrence: from absolute vanishing, to some sort of ethereal presence, and everything in-between.

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In terms of the actual figures, the grand question is whether by definition you could know them: identify them, name them, recognize them. Wouldn't the very exerciser of this right, or the liver-in-art have fashioned a different type of "figure" – one who should hopefully unsettle our general acceptance of the term yes, but also unnerve and agitate the seeker (of the figure) in that his/her very concrete and material being-in-the-world, along with all the endeavors, have taken on new dimensions and possibilities, all the way to redefining identity, subjectivity and personhood – in their more quotidian manifestations?

>

How to figure out the figure, or who the figures are. How can you even really know. What epistemological framework could be useful? Any? Which epistemology could lead the way?

>

The HaT, Irving, walks down the street and watches but does not allow the watchees to see; the HaT is not a *flâneur*: if it were, you'd detect it as an Appearer; the HaT, locus of inscriptions, of constant surveillance, of naming and subjectifications by outside entities of all kinds, constrained and contorted and twisted and torn, photographed, laughs; like everyone else a bit player in a vast machine of spectatorship – and all of what the machine entails: voyeurism, exhibitionism, authorship, transformation of the routine into artifact, transformation of the grotesque into routine – the HaT is not just an author without an oeuvre, it has done that quite curious beast one better: It is an author WITH an oeuvre! An oovrah yes, but that strips away all of the I: It is not I, that author declares, but it declares more: It declares: It is not not I – either; the HaT meanders and circulates and gallops and swirls and twists and seeks and shits and suddenly dashes into invisible spheres, then lies down on the sidewalk and naps; the HaT is in constant, perpetual, eternal movement: metamorphosing from one form to another, sliding from one mind to life-as-art to another, and then altogether OUT: of: It: proclaiming, I exist, I appear: not just as a ruse: but to allow, the next disappearance: rejuvenating the self, the

non-self, that must slide between these states; the HaT is not overground, but not underground either: somewhere along some Otherground, having destroyed forever all dualities – and even namable multiplicities; the HaT is debonair and cool why not: plus: a smile is sported on its visage; the HaT does not get mad or depressed, it just wonders constantly how it all came to be: and how it all gets to be some more: It does attempt, to exercise the right to disappear, or else is left what: chatting endlessly about the morons running the joints? (Good managers though, some); the HaT turns to life: and its livers, and says defiantly: I will extract your mysteries, and along with, slide shadowlike in the midst of the crowds – from afar cognizant of, but spurning all, the jokesters, the costumed charlatans, the ruthless fiends and self righteous, self styled leaders of those entities that amazingly find legitimacy through folks actually taking them seriously (nation states, organized systems of belief, political parties), on this or other land masses named after any number of conquerors, nincompoops, deluded madmen, psychotics, clever fiends or humorless clowns (or a combination thereof); no left, right, west, east, blue, red for the HaT, no acquiescence to faulty conceptual frameworks, no being duped by the concoction and perpetuation of series of concepts within cleverly designed fables and fictions adhering to ideological agendas, no functioning or taking of actions within narratives devised to manipulate, control and convince: but all in all, still the HaT wonders, and then wonders again, much more sillily: am I the dupe, am I the fool, and lets it hang. And then again: who is the fool, who is the dupe, who is the stranger in all this: Hulla-baloo! And so again: thirsts to disappear: and even before: the HaT, seeking a science of averting the senses, to train oneself or one's offspring, to learn to avert, with high degrees of skill, all the senses from the bombardment, from all of that which bombards, unescapable as it all seems, proclaims: It is I, It is I, It is I: sings and proclaims, It is I – as its uproarious laughter echoes through the corners of all the hallowed halls of the Machine: the HaT does all this at once – and never again – and on and on – and forever more: the HaT then shouts, in an empty hall, in that corridor of selfless souls that extends from this bridge around the globe, and unto another and all the others: The HaT whispers – a silent whisper:

>

What to do?

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>

>From: [Bracha L. Etinger](#)

>Date: Tue, 30 Nov 2004 05:58:45

>

The disappearance in front of the Other and imagining "a world without me" – first of all intends that the other is more important than myself. I disappear to make room for the other. The opposite of a war strategy toward that which is "not me."

>

I am reminded of a conversation I had with Emmanuel Levinas in 1991, concerning the move of disappearance. I am contemplating the relationship between disappearance and the difference of the feminine, and, using the figure of Eurydice (a title of a long-term series of my paintings), I say: "The fragility of Eurydice between two deaths, before, but also after the disappearance... the figure of Eurydice seems to me to be emblematic of my generation and seems to offer a possibility for thinking about art. Eurydice awakens a space of re-diffusion for the traumas which are not reabsorbed... a place for art, it incarnates a figure of the artist in the feminine." I then address the ethical stance within the aesthetical gesture: "painting as withdrawal/contracting before consciousness." Levinas then stresses the ethical alone (not the social/political!) in replying: "In the feminine there is the possibility of conceiving a world without me," however, this "world without me is a world where the world has a meaning as such: as without me. Therefore it is not a resistance to the overwhelming overburdened hyper-informaticized world but an ethical insistence on withdrawal and disappearance before the Other. With matrixial transubjectivity this links to the creative act... of painting at work."

>---

>

>From: [Knowbotic Research](#)

>Date: Sat, 20 Nov 2004 20:38:32

>

Global information technologies (Satellite, GPS and Data Surveillance) are producing new territorial principles of order, new logics of space and are constituting forms of transnational power and sovereignty. Transnational sovereignty is emerging from permanent processes of exclusion and inclusion of territories and people on a global scale. Extraterritoriality describes a logic of space that is defined outside of the state and its law systems but is yet controlled by the referring state power and sovereignty. Extraterritorialities are constructed as

"non-publics" which are external to the existing protocols that govern our civil conflicts: zones in which legal status can be suspended, in which citizenship is invalidated, in which the assumption of innocence is thrown away, in which representation is denied. Any person or territory is in the context of the "war of terror" under permanent threat of being excluded, becoming an unlawful subject or an extraterritoriality.

>  
Knowbotic Research investigates these (non)legal frameworks of transnational sovereignty which inscribe and determine in mostly invisible layers, beyond the daily surface of mass media images, our fields of action. The political procedures of the ongoing constitution of transnational sovereign powers are always enacted as test cases, probed and executed parallel on a virtual and real level. An artistic project like *naked bandit* (<http://www.krcf.org/krcfhome/Banditweb>) is able to interface and connect to the virtual level of its constitution, making it public and providing virtual and symbolic levels of engagement. Virtual engagement does not mean a derealization but a displacement of the center and a change of perspective and identity. With this project we fold up an experimental spatial assemblage which enables us to address and translate the coded layers of these new territorial encryptions and which provides interfaces to interfere into the spatial logics. This translation and transcoding into different and conceivable logics potentially re-includes the logics of extraterritorialities into the public sphere.

>  
*naked bandit* focuses on the mechanisms of detainment of so-called "unlawful enemy combatants" (terror suspects not entitled the legal status of prisoners of war): The (global) sovereign defines persons as "here" (detained) and, at the same moment, "elsewhere," not here, not anymore on the territory of the nation state, and thus banned, stripped off from the legal framework which the nation state guarantees ("naked bandit"). "Naked bandits" are here and not here: detained in extraterritorial spheres.

>  
Knowbotic Research investigates the formal mechanisms and logics of such an inclusive exclusion and the inherent formations of power. Inclusive exclusion means that on the one hand sovereign power segregates and excludes and on the other includes and detains/occupies the

excluded. We translate the dilemma of the naked bandit, being excluded from the legal body and included in an extraterritorial non-location, into three different coded levels, and thus open up virtual potentials and agencies to deal with (address, confront, alienate, contaminate) and transgress the dilemma.

> ---

>

>From: [Mary Keller](#)

>Date: Wed, 22 Dec 2004 18:13:39

>

I am wondering about the disjunction I felt when moving from Irving Goh's discussion of the right to disappear, to the *naked bandit* web event of Knowbotic Research.

>

The disjunction is summarized, perhaps, in Bruno Latour's piece in the *naked bandit* pages in which he argues that we have yet to build new public spaces. The disjunction between a desire to disappear and a desire to build a public space is what I want to bother for a moment.

>

While I believe Irving Goh wants very much to acknowledge that the right to disappear is an ontological necessity for maintaining the possibility of thinking out with the constraints of the binary "You are either with us or against us" in the context of the photographic fact, and that the right to disappear is about taking place/taking space and not abdicating space, what struck me while reading it was its resonance with a movement in the 1960s that is now called "Death of God Theology" and which was followed by deconstructionist-inspired theology as epitomized in "The Being of God when God is not Being God" found in the collection *Theology at the end of the Century* edited by Robert P. Scharlemann.

>

I am suspicious that the only people who want to contemplate a theological emptiness and an ontological disappearance are the people who carry the heritage of authority. Back in the sixties, African American historian of religions Charles Long was contrasting what he saw happening in the Death of God school with what he saw in minority theologies (such as Vine De Loria's "God is Red" and James Cone's "Black Theology of Liberation") as a contrast between transparent theologies and opaque theologies whereby transparency manifests a desire to disappear from the weight of history while opaque theologies were describing the raced materiality of history. The distinction he argued might be called a distinction

between disappearing as a target (The Being of God when God is not Being God) and appearing in a divine tragedy that required redefinition from one's status as target to a new status yet to be discovered, but certainly embodied and certainly in relationship to a divine. Worthy of status to be in relationship to a divine to which one submitted as human, not subhuman. Understanding that one was instrumental in this relationship to the divine, rather than agentive, was a central fact of post-colonial significance.

>

For Long, religion is best understood as an orientation in the world that provides one with a sense of the significance of one's location in the world. Long's argument and broad interpretation of religion undermines any religion/secular dichotomy, and allows one to make sense of the theological imagination, for instance, that has always haunted communist ideology. If it is a human necessity to make sense of one's location, then orientating meta-narratives will provide a theological anchor. Opaque theologies therefore are theologies that bring thickness, skin, materiality, and place to bear on one's significance. Transparent theologies provide a hiding place for the subject.

>

Luce Irigaray's argument follows a similar trajectory to the opaque theologies, arguing that the only diabolical thing about women is their lack of a divine referent. Full subjectivity arrives when one can orient oneself in the world to a relationship to the divine. When we are becoming divine women, we will know what woman is.

>

How is this relevant to the larger issues of this discussion? Perhaps "here, not here" as described on the web pages of *naked bandit* is the kind of disappearing that I can imagine as a productive imagination of disappearing – a disappearing that takes place in public space without reifying presence but also with the dialogical tension introduced by a third public voice that finally responds "naked bandit, here and now."

>

Perhaps *naked bandit* is an installation/event that recalls, without becoming literal, the Abu Ghraib pictures on the walls of the ICP and the Warhol museum.

>

And perhaps I am inelegantly trying to insert a memory about the theological element of all images and interpretations such that the "credit"

(from credo: to believe) given to image, and the evaluations made about those images, recognizes its pre-cursors in the eternal theological debates about icon and graven image in the Abrahamic traditions, the potential to depict impermanence in poetry or art among Buddhists as well as the creation of sand mandalas, the significance of Navajo sand paintings as they emerge in the capitalist market, and iconoclasm in so many traditions.

>

(I am reminded again of Mark C. Taylor's *Imagologies* and his argument that a philosophy that accounts for the effects of globalized culture needs to account for an a/theological reading of the power of image because in this globalized world image is everything. Hence image is divine. For Taylor, a/theology is non-totalizing theological desire and is an antidote to theologies of totalizing presence.)

>

There is a connection still to mercenaries in this vein. The desire that drives the mercenary machine is an ex-static, ex-stasis, X-treme desire, befitting our status as subjected. A desire that becomes addictive for some, a high which they cannot find in mundane existence, and is for me at base Hegelian in its significance for human consciousness. Without proximity to death, life is listless and the self does not come to know itself with authenticity. Hence the ever-present relationship of soldiers and codes that provide them with a sense of the significance of their location. When image is everything, the mercenary is really something, hence religiously significant.

>

Perhaps the prisoner pictures become a part of theology at large, and the competing interpretations of their merit on the museum walls is a theological evaluation between producing transparent theologies that allow one to disappear and producing opaque theologies that make us all aware of our status as perpetrators.

>

And in the background I know that I must become effective at making public spaces because the people in charge are very aware that they are building an empire, and that as long as academics want to discuss the issues, the room is ripe for taking the empire out to the streets of any global location they desire. When viewing the *naked bandit* website I wonder if people leave the installations better capable of inventing public space.

>

Writing from nowhere, home to the newest, elite gated community development in the U.S., the "Copperleaf," because of course Wyoming is not a target...

>---

>

>From: [Gregory K. Clancey](#)

>Date: Sat, 16 Oct 2004 00:30:36

>

Surveillance works best with unmediated human eyes. Lots of them. The most perfect regimes of surveillance may for that reason be in our pasts rather than our futures. The go-nin-gumi (five-person-group) of Tokugawa Japan, in which each action is watched by four pairs of familiar eyes (and restrained by an equal number of mouths and, if need be, arms) is oppressive yet comfortably intimate in ways that can't be mimicked by technicity. Its more universal model is the family, the root of all surveillance, whose weakening bonds in post-industrial society began to create the surveillance gaps that cameras and the like now attempt, vainly, to fill.

>

"I never suspected," says the wife of the serial killer. And who would doubt her?

>

The United States, in creating such unprecedented urban/suburban emptiness (a military legacy: a landscape molded to serve the Second World War and Cold War) has complicated surveillance to perhaps an unprecedented degree. Drivers' licenses, social security numbers, and pilotless drones are a sorry substitute. We'll see if Homeland Security can electronically survey a vast ex-urbia to which the word "Homeland" strains to restore some mythic wholeness, familiarity, and value. The parks and parking lots are so large, the aisles in the stores so long, and the density of habitation so very low. The American equation of prosperity with empty space and isolation has left a landscape so attenuated (yet cluttered with abandoned material) that it can't be efficiently "seen" except when rendered virtual, i.e. by websites which place little red stars on maps when you type in an address. But the stars only identify middle-class property-owners: the people most worth targeting in an electronic consumer-driven economy. And even then they move around so much.

>

Perhaps it's only within this ever-dispersing landscape that new regimes of surveillance even become visible. Surveillance was invisible before

because it's so perfectly meshed with daily life. Suddenly each act of surveillance is discrete, noticed, conscious, resisted: somehow marked. Most of us constantly watch screens, as I'm doing now, in a state of self-absorption. To be suddenly watched, or exposed as a watcher, is either elating (creating celebrity) or threatening (creating the potential for detention/distraction) or both at once. How we want to remain alone in the dark and control our occasional daytime appearances and disappearances – it's something new, no?

>---

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