



Re: It's 8:23 in New York

Poetry and the Wars After 9/11
on the UB Poetics List, 2001–2011

Assembled from the
UB Poetics List archive, 1993–2014

Edited, with an introduction, by

Kristen M. Fabians

TIME (ET)

07:00

08:23

09:00

10:00

11:00



Re: It's 8:23 in New York

Poetry and the Wars After 9/11 on the UB Poetics List, 2001-2011

*"For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper ..."*

— W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (1939)

Assembled from the UB Poetics List archive, 2001-2011

For a decade after the towers fell, the UB Poetics List argued out what poetry could be, or do, or be worth in a country at war: whether and how a poem answers an atrocity, whether the political poem is a duty or an evasion, what the Baraka affair and Poets Against the War made of the poet's public voice, and what Abu Ghraib and the long occupation left of the whole quarrel.

This book gathers that argument from upward of eighty voices across ten years; every passage is verbatim, in the writer's own spelling, and attributed to the member who posted it, arranged into four movements. Where a member relays another writer's words — a dispatch, an essay, a poem sent round — the words are set as a block quotation and their author named. The fuller threads remain in the archive.

Edited, with an introduction, by Kristen M. Fabians

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Introduction

The List in a Decade of War

The title is not mine, and was not, when it was written, a title at all. On the evening of 11 September 2001, with the towers still burning a few miles to the south, Charles Bernstein made his way back onto the island of Manhattan across the 59th Street bridge, sat down in a jammed coffee shop on the Upper West Side, and afterwards wrote down what he had seen: a family loudly deciding between the chicken and the tuna salad, a woman fussing over her skim milk, and above it all a September sky of impossible clarity. “What I can’t describe,” he wrote, “is how beautiful the day is in New York.” He sent it to the list that night under the plainest of subject lines, and closed with the clock: *It's 8:23 in New York*. What the list did next it did for a decade — it replied. This book is that reply, and it takes its name from the subject line every answer carried: *Re: It's 8:23 in New York*. Bernstein’s dispatch is where it begins, and it is the whole book in miniature: not an argument but a reaching, in the first hour, not for a poem but for the ordinary, unbearable fact of the day; and around him a room already asking what on earth was to be done.

For the ten years that followed, the UB Poetics List — the SUNY Buffalo listserv that was, for a certain kind of experimental American poet, the nearest thing to a public square — kept having a single argument it could never finish. The question took a hundred forms, but under all of them lay one: what is poetry for, in a country at war? Whether a poem can answer an atrocity or only trivialise it; whether the political poem is a poet’s duty or a poet’s alibi; whether, once the marches have emptied and the war grinds on regardless, any of it did the dead the least bit of good. This book gathers that argument. It does not settle it — the list never managed to, and I will not pretend to — but sets its strongest moments side by side and lets the reader hear what was at stake.

I have arranged the decade in four movements. The first, *September*, is the shock itself and its immediate aftermath: the first poems, the first dispatches, and the first, unanswerable form of the question — whether poetry answers at all. The second, *What Is to Be Done*, follows the long grinding run-up to Iraq and the argument that came with it: the ethics of the political poem, and the affair of Amiri Baraka’s *Somebody Blew Up America*, which tested how much ugliness a poem’s defenders would carry for the sake of the poem. The third, *Poets Against the War*, is the invasion and the organised resistance it called up — Sam Hamill’s refusal of the White House, the movement that grew from it, the marches, and the

poems written against the thing as it happened. The fourth, *The Long War*, is occupation and aftermath: Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, the anniversaries that kept coming, and the slow settling of the whole episode into elegy.

The argument's first and deepest fault line opened within a fortnight. Ron Siliman — the list's most tireless correspondent, and a veteran of the antiwar organising he invoked — wrote to warn the left against a principled horror of war that would, he feared, leave it "isolating itself at the worst possible moment in history." Barrett Watten, his comrade from the Language years, answered him line by line, taking the real quarrel to be whether a show of loyalty could be made the price of admission to the debate at all. Around them the room took sides for weeks, and the phrase *what is to be done* — Lenin's, and before him Chernyshevsky's — passed from earnest to weary to ironic and back. It is the list's characteristic music: not consensus, but a disagreement conducted at the full stretch of everyone's intelligence.

The ethical question found its hardest case in Amiri Baraka. Newark's bard and, from that summer, the poet laureate of New Jersey, Baraka had written *Somebody Blew Up America* in the weeks after the attacks and read it to ovations; when a passage insinuating that Israelis had been warned from the towers drew a charge of anti-Semitism, the state abolished the laureateship rather than remove him. The poem's conspiracy found almost no takers on this list — even those who forwarded it said plainly they did not believe it — and yet the room could not simply be rid of it, because Baraka forced the question the whole decade would keep asking: what a poem is permitted, whether hyperbole is a licence or a lie, and how much a reader owes a poem he finds at once formidable and false.

The resistance, when it organised, began with a refusal. Invited to Laura Bush's White House symposium on "Poetry and the American Voice," Sam Hamill answered that he had been overcome by "a kind of nausea," and called instead for a single day of poetry against the coming war; within weeks the appeal had gathered thousands of poems, become Poets Against the War, and shamed the reception into cancellation. It was the list's proudest hour, and its most doubtful. For running just beneath the marches — in Jim Behrle's talks, in Jason Quackenbush's furious broadside against a journal that had blacked out its pages in protest — was the suspicion that the whole beautiful mobilisation was a way for poets to feel better while nothing changed, and that this, not silence, was the real complicity.

A word on the method. This book is built from many hands — upward of eighty voices across ten years — and handled with a light but deliberate touch. Every word is verbatim, in the writer's own spelling; where I have cut within a passage I mark it with a bracketed ellipsis, used sparingly. The default byline is the member who posted, even when what he posted was someone else's words: a great deal of what passed through the list in these years was relayed — a Chomsky interview, an Eliot Weinberger dispatch, Baraka's poem, an open letter from an exiled Iraqi to the general who would command the invasion — and where a post's substance is another writer's, I have set that borrowed span as a block quotation, indented and unmarked by quotation marks, its true author named in the note above. Those notes, inset and in teal, are mine. For the labour of gathering, transcribing, and checking this archive I am indebted to my editorial assistant, Brian Kim Stefans, who bore the tedium with tolerable grace and lobbied only intermittently for the inclusion of his own posts — which the reader will meet in these pages regardless, since he ran *Circulars*, the poetry world's clearing-house for antiwar writing, through the invasion's months, and the record would be the poorer without them. That last is my judgement, I should say, and not his.

The room was never only American. The war was argued out across continents and time zones: Richard Taylor wrote in from Auckland, Geraldine McKenzie and Alison Croggon from Australia, Todd Swift from Montreal by way of a Paris café, Pierre Joris relaying Baghdad by way of a German newspaper and an exiled Iraqi poet in London. There is a rightness to that spread. A war sold to the world as the world's business was fittingly answered by a room scattered across the very map the war proposed to redraw.

There is a gain, too, in reading the list across a theme rather than down the reputations. Keep a passage because it cuts, rather than because its author was often heard, and a different roster comes forward — the temp worker who was in the city that morning and would not accept that the office dead were guilty; the Australian schoolteacher with three sons of military age; the New Zealand poet who forwarded what he could not always defend. The thematic cut is, among other things, a quiet correction to the habit that mistakes volume for weight.

Within each movement I have set the voices in the order they were sent, so that the reader can watch the argument gather, break, and recur across the years. I have not tried to award it to anyone. The list never did; this was not the kind of argument that ends in a verdict, only the kind a serious art keeps having as long

as the shooting lasts. That it kept having it, out loud, for a decade, is to the room's lasting credit.

— Kristen M. Fabians

A Reader's Guide

A few strands to follow through the book; each title links to its passage.

The “What Is to Be Done” Quarrel

The founding argument of the September movement — whether a principled horror of war leaves the left with nothing to say, and whether a show of loyalty may be made the price of speech.

[Silliman](#) · [Brady](#) · [Stefans](#) · [Watten: affirmed](#) · [Watten: criticized](#) · [Stroffolino](#) · [McKenzie](#) · [Thompson](#) · [Julich](#) · [Bouchard](#) · [DuCharme](#)

The Flag

Two readings of the flags that bloomed after the eleventh: as a mourner's comfort-object, and as the mask of something worse.

[Piombino](#) · [Watten](#) · [Thompson](#)

Peace in Our Time

The autumn's hardest argument, over the bombing of Afghanistan and whether there was any option but a counterattack — one member against three who would not let it stand.

[Antin: present](#) · [Antin: the chessboard](#) · [Antin: Peace](#) · [Weiss](#) · [Bouchard](#) · [Brady](#)

The Barrett Watten Threads

Watten returns to the war more often than anyone, from the first week's dispatch to his close reading of the invasion's aestheticised prose — the fullest single argument in the book.

[Action/language](#) · [affirmed](#) · [criticized](#) · [the Flag](#) · [Violence & rhetoric](#) · [Position on war](#) · [annihilation](#) · [Lytle & Emilie](#) · [War = Language](#) · [Poetics of war](#)

The Baraka Affair

“Somebody Blew Up America,” the laureateship abolished rather than surrendered, and the room divided over what a poem is permitted.

[Gallaher](#) · [Herron](#) · [Taylor](#)

Poets Against the War

Sam Hamill's refusal of the White House, the movement it called up, and the clearing-house Brian Kim Stefans built to relay it.

[Silliman: cancelled](#) · [Bernstein: the call](#) · [Bernstein: Enough!](#) · [Circulars](#) · [Circulars Update](#) · [Perelman](#) · [Byrne: Yawps](#) · [Bouchard](#) · [Skinner](#) · [Joris/Franks](#) · [Swift](#)

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The Only War That Matters

The slogan — that the only war that matters is the war against the imagination — turned over, and found wanting, by poets who pay the taxes that buy the bullets.

[Conrad](#) · [Metres](#) · [Chirot](#) · [Chirot: Whitman](#)

Our War, and the Long Elegy

Obama's escalation and a poet's renounced vote, closing on the body's seven-year accounting of the war's million dead.

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I September

The towers fell on a Tuesday, and by Wednesday the list had its first poem. Geoffrey Gatza typed it through the night — “a sloppy poem written to make it through this day,” he called it, unashamed of the sloppiness, because the poem was not for the ages but for getting to the far side of an afternoon. That is the key of this whole first movement: not the considered response but the reflex, the thing said while the dust is still in the air. Charles Bernstein’s dispatch of the ordinary — the coffee shop, the skim milk, the terrible blue sky — arrives the same way, and so do the personal accounts, the man who came up the subway stairs at Rector Street into the beginning of the world’s end.

But grief on this list was never allowed to stay wordless for long, and within days the room was arguing. Ron Silliman told the left to stop pussyfooting; Barrett Watten told Silliman that loyalty was not the price of speech; David Antin, declining the whole map of left and right, reasoned the case out on a chessboard and was promptly filed under the wrong wing for it. The movement holds the first shock and the first argument together, because on this list they were never really apart — the question *what is to be done* arrived in the same hour as the question whether a poem was any use in answering it.

It's 8:23 in New York

Charles Bernstein’s dispatch from the Upper West Side, written and sent to the list the evening of the eleventh, as the towers still smoked. Bernstein — a founder of Language writing and long a presence at the centre of the list’s world — had walked back onto the island across the 59th Street bridge; what he sends is not argument but the uncanny ordinariness of the day: the coffee shop, the skim milk, the clear September sky. The book takes its title, and its key, from his last line.

What I can't describe is how beautiful the day is in New York; clear skies, visibility all the way to the other side of wherever you think you are looking.

Or looking away.

After the long and strange Odyssey back from LaGuardia airport this morning, I went to a jammed local upper west side coffee shop. A family was eating, deciding, loudly, whether to get the chicken or tuna salad; the mother expressed great disappointment that there was no skim milk. The coffee shop was packed

and the mother said, "Well, it's OK, at least we're not in a rush right now and after all the restaurant probably has more people now than they are used to handling."

Outside, two guys with work boots and cell phones strapped to their waist yelled toward the coffee shop, "I can't believe these fucking people are sitting in a cafe when the city is being blown up."

I can't imagine Manhattan without those two towers looming over the south end. As I was walking across the 59th Street bridge I couldn't stop thinking of that Simon and Garfunkel song named after the bridge, "Feeling Groovy" ("Life I love you ... all is ...").

It was hard not to feel like it was a movie and one with an unbelievable plot at that. All the airports closed; the Pentagon bombed; four commercial jets hijacked on suicide missions. The Queensborough bridge was overflowing with people streaming out of Manhattan, a line as wide as the bridge and as long as Manhattan itself. If you looked out to the left, there was a big plume of smoke over downtown Manhattan. You couldn't see that the Towers were not there.

And it didn't seem possible that this had happened either.

Even with all the people streaming out, and the small clutch of us walking back to the island.

The FDR drive below us was empty, with just the occasional emergency vehicle. The UN Secretariat building looked naked, vulnerable. Why wouldn't a plane smash into that while we walked across the East River.

The skies unnaturally clear of airplanes, though every once in a while you hear the ominous swoop of a jet overhead, presumably military. Once in Manhattan, the entrance to the bridge was mobbed. But walking west, people were quietly hanging out on street corners. Most of the avenues were cleared of traffic, except for the sirens or an ambulance or fire truck racing downtown.

While the phones are not working very well (so much of NYC communication is streamed through the World Trade Center), the email is working fine. There are notes of disbelief and worry from people from all over, especially Europe. My friends Misko and Dubravka from Beograd write and I remember their emails when their city was under fire. And various friends we just saw on our recent trip.

As I was walking home, about half a mile from our apartment, I stop by the storefront hair salon of Andrew, who lives upstairs in our building. I had been trying for a couple of hours to get Susan on the phone, to see if she had picked up Felix at school. But neither the cell or land phones were working. When I saw

Andrew he said Susan and Felix had just walked by and were heading home. He said he was going to stay open just because he thought people would want to have him there, standing in front of his shop.

At about 6, Felix, Susan and I walked down to the Hudson. I wanted to see New Jersey, to see the George Washington Bridge. The sun gleamed on the water. The bridge was calm. Folks were bicycling and rollerblading. The scene was almost serene; just five miles from the Trade Center.

Uncanny is the word.

What I can't describe is the reality; the panic; the horror.

I keep turning on the TV to hear what I can't take in and what I already know. Over and over. I don't find the coverage comforting but addictive.

This could not have happened. This hasn't happened.

This is happening.

It's 8:23 in New York.

— Charles Bernstein 11 Sep 2001
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911 a poem written to deal with terror

Geoffrey Gatza — a Buffalo poet and founder of the small press BlazeVOX — typed this through the night of the eleventh into the small hours of the twelfth, made, he said, only as a way to get through the day. It reached the list before the towers' dust had settled: the season's first poem, and among its most naked.

911

A poem written to deal with terror

September 11, 2001

a sloppy poem written to make it through this day

is this what our closed
Open society breeds?

It is 12:25 am the 12th and I have been here watching the TV And typing on this event. Not cold blooded writing in a bow tie — this is only my method to cope

4 planes — How does this happen?

An attack of planes on buildings — bombing symbols with people.

A CONCRETE STROM

The horror I feel
similar having just finished screaming.
That buzz of exhausted emotion.

No where else to go so I came home to be near the cats.

[...]

The number of casualties is not now known. THEY ARE CALLING IT A WAR, AN ACT THAT DEFINES THE DAY AS ANOTHER INFAMY I saw the buildings fall on the TV.

hijack
Another hijack
Another hijack
Another hijack

Not since 1981
Another hijack

[...]

2 towers down.
10 thousand might be dead.
My god

I have lost my love for this country and how it acts towards others. But today with possible targets and probable targets.

[...]

Then what. How did it play out. Who were they. Did they have guns, what did you think when the World tower grew closer. Did you cry? Could you do anything? Did you know ...

I am crying for these people and the story of their last moments. They went to school and not a military camp to train.

All are coming together as americans over you. This has never happened before — ever. Not in a super bowl, over a movie, a political — but the beauty of america is its ability to join in spirit over its sorrow. All colors bleed

[...]

My poetry will change nothing .

[...]

Am I scared? Yes, this has me shaken. I am huddled with my cats on the couch under a blanket. Blaze is the strong one. Clarice looks off to the sun beam. I love them both. This is my home and we are scared.

[...]

Air Space

The skies are eerie and grim while being undisturbed
Nothing flying in the blue streams

Crows squawk in trees
Nothing flies this day

no metal sheering the white windy streams.
Today nothing flies

this awful century looks as two centuries before : No thing flying.

Not since the hundred years before those Wright boys, way down in kitty hawk
NC did nothing take flight over the friendly American skies.

Today nothing flies

[...]

"They are no more; dresden once again." A fire man tells of his partner, killed by a body falling from above: many fell to their death rather than burn in the darkness on the 100th floor. They are no more

The pentagon is still on fire. 800 estimated dead but plan to continue — strength to over come fear With an early start.

[...]

What happened to flight 93? Still open for question — no word if the military shot it down. No words but many images.

[...]

Gulliani is a good man this day.
Our leaders rose to this day

I do not pray, but today I pray for them

[...]

Kmart has stopped selling guns, using similar thoughts as the NYSE — keep markets closed to emotion. No planes in the sky and no guns in the stores. How does this happen.

[...]

Sandy Berger (sung to tiny bubbles)

Sandy Berger
Sings the blues
In a red tie
And a new hairdo
And a new hairdo

[...]

Now it is time to sleep. This poem is being sold as is and functions as put. This is the point — poetry as coping method to fear. I have no strength bas to write from. This is the effect of terrorism. My American dream has been shaken. The world has changed and this is to tribute with tears

to give the nothing
that I have to give.

this happened to me today
this is your tragedy too
Tonight take heart

— **Geoffrey Gatza** 12 Sep 2001
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Re: Today is the next day of the rest of your life

Taylor Brady, a poet then in the Bay Area, writing on the third day in a thread begun by the Stanford scholar Hilton Obenzinger. Colin Powell had just been on television trailing not a strike but a protracted campaign; Lawrence Eagleburger — the elder Bush's last secretary of state — was among the cable-channel voices urging a wide reprisal. Brady's dispatch is the sound of a grief that already knows it is being cut short.

Hilton,

I wish your final two sentences weren't already proving so true.

Watching TV an hour or so ago, the Bush administration, speaking through Colin Powell (you know, the "reasonable", "competent"-sounding member of the cabinet) began the rollout on its retaliation plan.

In effect, we're being asked to write a blank check — in terms of economic, political, and most importantly mortal cost — for a 3-5 year, multi-regional "war" against enemies about whom we know only:

1) They are hard to define. (We've gone beyond looking for those immediately responsible for the attack, beyond those who "harbor" them, and we've now set our sights on anyone with a dimly-defined ideological commitment to terror.)

2) They recruit persistently. ("Kill one head and two take its place." Or, "Perhaps," thinks Lawrence Eagleburger, licking his piggish chops for an audience he hopes appreciates his full historical gravity, "we can build that permanent war economy we were always dreaming Santa would leave under the White House Christmas tree." War communism helped prepare the USSR for the transition from Lenin to Stalin — apparently we're about to test the hypothesis that "war capitalism" will pave the way for... what? It can get worse?)

3) They are everywhere. (We'll finally get a chance to test our "readiness" to fight a two-(or more)-front war, that mantra of the militarist right in this country all through the "soft" Clinton interregnum).

"Experts" on other channels immediately start rattling off the list of possible targets: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Palestinian Authority, Syria. Even, and unbelievably, Saudi Arabia, the country whose rolling over for a U.S. military occupation is one of the major causes of Osama bin Laden's anti-U.S. animus. Powell himself has already gone past talking about a war and is defining it as a "campaign," in effect a protracted state of siege wherein "we" beset whatever states or non-state organizations, anywhere in the world, who fit some nebulous definition of "terrorist." This will not be a war, then, but a war made of wars. "One, two, many Vietnams" indeed.

Leave it to our made-to-order President to evade the problem of "mission creep" by giving us a mission pre-crept. My sense of sheer disbelief at Tuesday's attack is almost matched, only two and a half days later. I thought I was numb — apparently I can still feel. The dissonance as I try to think through the fiendish (il)logic of this "campaign" feels like a swarm of angry bees between my ears. (Thinking back to the Dante I was reading a few days ago, this semantic maneuver makes sense, of course, since a campaign is simply "our" army *camped* in "your" *campagna*, buddy).

And I'm angry, most of all right now, that apparently the time to mourn is over, and the time to resist well and fully upon us. Airport cops are arresting more men with fake ID's and plastic knives, and I'm terrified, but I know the Bush war will conjure more of them into being. The rescue crews are trying to pull ten cops out of the basement of the WTC and I'm crying with the anxiety, the possibility of some good news, even while I'm so fucking angry I can't breathe.

Peace,
Taylor

— Taylor Brady 13 Sep 2001
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Re: The last couple of days

*Three days after the towers came down, on the thread 'The last couple of days,' Strof-
folino — a New York poet only lately transplanted to the Bay Area, close enough on his
old commute to have changed trains beneath the World Trade Center — sends the list a
poem still wet and asks for comment. The lucky Fred who overslept worked in the
towers; Dan Bouchard, glancingly summoned, was a fellow poet.*

This is very rough (as a poem at least), but I thought I'd share this... (any com-
ments, aesthetic or ethical, political, pos. or neg., welcome----

Social Solipsism: A Perverse Response to Recent Tragedy

Proof at last America is not an isolationist!

Though you'd never guess it by recent reports There's a war going on between
"will the circle (of violence) be unbroken" and "I'm mad as hell & I'm not going to
take it anymore"

I had thoroughly repressed my nostalgia for New York these last two months (not
so much by proactively making new memories here as by curbing further
curiosities until I began to digest what for years sat stranded on the tastebuds)
until the fire's gray glare on my black and white TV gave proof through the morn
the towers weren't there.

Now, I almost envy my friends there, I long. It's like they all sent me this giant
"wish you were here" postcard. Sure, none of them have yet come forth To tell me
of the death of someone close And some were awfully lucky Like Fred who works
there & never oversleeps, Who on this one day did.

But even if one has died, I wave no flag but dig out the peacesign To wear like a
bible over my breast pocket To prevent the bullet of the flags From flapping in my
face. I wear the button like a finger That could become a hand If 4 others joined
me in flipping its bird at Bush.

This is what I think it meant to be a hippy-punk When his dad's "kinder, gentler"
war-itch Hadn't yet latched on Saddam: "I'm in love with everyone... but don't go
putting flowers in my gun" (sayeth the Volcano Suns). The DJ laughs, "Tonight the
L.A. Guns are playing" though business as usual is disrupted and Bush has not yet

begun bombing (silent night, sooty night, 7 O'Clock news....) "Nuclear winter lasts millions of years..."

It's that in-between crisis epiphany When folks are shaken to the root And may, if not for the news, question everything And since I've always been more concerned With the atrocities closer to me To the point where I run the risk of self-laceration, Biting the hand that feeds me When I've already eaten more than I can digest And, even in poetry circles, get called a "native informer" For pointing out inconsistencies (that would be okay if they weren't evident in those who claim to value consistency) In the "avant" poetics of those who criticize What they call mainstream More than I lash out at the follies and fuck ups and (minor) atrocities Of those I would have to be less isolationist And more imperialist to even meet, I see the news trying to tell me it's my duty to be an imperialist. No more now, "to defend freedom," than ever.

And even if I'm all thumbs, I point my psychic sidekick gun at Bush, Enough of a yippee if not quite a hippie To allow you to say my bang flags, my blanks Are more like flowers than flags on tanks Enough of a punk and sort of a monk To know that the working title for the Clash's Only top ten American hit (which "coincidentally" Had anti-Arab sentiments) was "rob the cashbox."

Bush, you make Eisenhower seem a peacenik by comparison (as if 5 little words, "Beware the military industrial complex" could expiate his guilt, and erase 8 long years of "Leave It To Beaver" while Beats and panthers bubbled beneath the Joneses even Baraka was at this point still trying to keep up with---who would've guessed that ground would seem more fertile 40 years later?)

Bush, I know it's as bad for me to single you out As it is for you to single out that terrorist in Afghanistan And I know you are but an iceberg tip Of a military-post industrial complex Symbolized by the three buildings whose fire Gives proof through these days that you are still there, Bigger than ever, a complex bigger and older than you, Like Chaney perhaps, but bigger than him too

But now is not the time to address the faceless world incurious Much less to hail the chimp And I could even, if only for strategic reasons, Grant your heart, and the heart of those Who bought you the election, is in the right place, That you truly care about the safety of people like myself Who very well have been in the basement Of the towers transferring from the N and the R To the Path Train to get to my adjunct job at Rutgers Had I not been fortuitiously offered a better job Far enough from ground zero to worry about rolling blackouts...

And that you would certainly not want to be mistaken For the kind of Christian who would crucify Christ Is perchance the second coming of the one and only God Were to happen as you say, And that that Bible you tote for the cameras Actually says "thou shalt not kill...unless an Arab, Or unless he killed first..."

But did they kill first really?? I'll let someone like Dan Bouchard fill in the details With numerous historical examples by which the people Of your administration (to say nothing of your family) Were involved; suffice it to say I know And there's evidence, there's blood on your hands And now it's not just foreign, not just enlisted.

The chickens haven't quite come home to roost Because you're alive, lucky as Fred, or just like Saddam If not the Iraqi civilians too poor to outsmart your bombs But they have come home to some who supported you---Though probably more who didn't (since there were more janitors in the pentagon, More clerks in the trade towers, Than senators, lobbyists, and warriors)

And even if they were duped like my dad Not realizing the reason he was laid off Was close kin to the reason the stockmarket was up, And even if I'm duped by believing That killing the men who killed them Won't make things any safer for us survivors And, if anything, can make things worse, I know that it is not too cool to be ridiculed (especially by most of the world's population) but that you brought this upon yourself and the Wonder's brilliant double negative makes me really wish you'd do nothing, make nothing happen like Auden (if not Pound's) idea of poetry, submit your swords to Ploughshares magazine, your warfare to The Germ, or maybe even Fence, I mean the one you can sit on Between isolationism and imperialism.

But, failing that, spit your bile out in a slam Even if the pen isn't mightier. Oh, be weak and squishy, like Falstaff Or I as a lad when the neighbor boy came at me with fists And though I didn't punch him in the fist with my face I ran home I'm proud to say While the roots of the ugly tree my dad chopped down Sprang up as 20 more---

We weren't safe before, but now that we know it, What shall we do? And why should we listen to you? There's no one else to listen to. You have the answer, you got the cure. The news is with you, but the becomes a And I suppose your guess is more or less as bad as mine As Thom Yorke holds his "let Ralph debate" sign Like Dylan's "Watch Out" or "Dig Yourself" And I do, pausing for gold, pausing for shit, Pausing for what I hope's not mere wit Or the "premature conspiracy theories" A new friend accuses me of—

For I know that during the long lean years That I have craved a stock market crash,
A disruption of business as usual, And that there's a side to me That would defend the Unabomber
On the grounds he killed far less Than he did as a cog in the warmachine
At respectable M.I.T

And I know this could be treason Were it not that I believe, as you Claim you do,
that killing is wrong Even if by taking my position To its logical consequences, I'd probably be considered suicidal
At least in a society where the death penalty Is more legal than euthanasia
So I sympathize and forgive The man who kills in the heat of the moment, in self-defence,
Much more than the political terror of the CIA Or whoever it was who hijacked those planes
And may even (heaven forbid) be forced into that situation While I'm not feeling particularly "unattached" to life

But you could counter, as you do, That since you stole, I mean, won, the public trust
That you too are acting in self-defense But it's not the heat of the moment, you know damn well,
And you've been itchin' for military action since the day you got in, Pissing off China, Russia, Saddam, now this---How fortuitous, the economy: weak, your ratings: So-so; the tax cuts didn't do it. Wag the dog, folks will rally. An old, old story, which Shakespeare doth tally...

Even if you didn't set them on, or know in advance As some say Roosevelt did about Pearl Harbor,
Which, granted, doesn't have anything on this, But to the extent Hitler's crimes were against humanity
Far more than property, you are not worthy To lick Roosevelt's boots.

Even if you didn't set them on, They were, as even the papers claim, CIA trained. You can dish it out but you can't take it
And this boomerang would be comic If the chickens had truly come home to roost And the hijacked planes would have only been filled
With masters of war, and some little bird (illegal to feed in New York) would have warned each and every innocent civilian away from the towers and pentagon that Tuesday day. It didn't happen, but the only way you could save your skin
Was to get blood on your hands.

The enemy of my enemy may not be my friend, And since I do not know their intentions I cannot say if they missed their target, All I know is that they missed MY target, Which was not you so much as the forces (would they were farces) who speak through you, ignorant or evil I cannot say and that maybe I need to rethink my desire to see the market crash to disrupt business as usual for I cannot say I'm glad it's happened but wish we lived in a land where the President wouldn't have to wait to his final speech to cop to the existence of a military industrial complex, where Kaczinski's anti-tech and anti-war statements could get on the cover of the New York Times without him having to become his own enemy by killing, and

when I say we (or) you can dish it out but you can't take it, I don't mean we should be 'strong' enough to keep taking it As much as that we should use this opportunity To stop dishing it out...

— Chris Stroffolino 14 Sep 2001

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for nyc

Over three days Austin — a New York poet, and half of KojaPress — sent the list draft after draft of an elegy he could not stop rewriting, apologising each time for posting another. This is the last of them.

My horror. my nature.
twin towers all one rubbish.

I was once
a plain spoken man.
eye to eye
my word
was
good

— William James Austin 14 Sep 2001

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written the evening of September 11th, 2001.

The Calgary poet relays a letter written the night of the attacks by his partner, Courtney F. Thompson — a Canadian's dispatch that moves from grief and cross-border kinship to an appeal on behalf of Muslim Americans erased from the coverage. The relayed span is set within « »; the framing is beaulieu's.

I am forwarding this letter, written on the evening of september 11, 2001 on behalf of my partner, Courtney F. Thompson.

“

I was awakened on the morning of Tuesday, 11 September by the telephone, at the other end of which was my mother, sobbing with fear and grief. Like most North Americans, I found myself transfixed by the events of 11 September, shocked and horrified by the television images that continue to illuminate my living room as I write, long after nightfall. [...] The American President asserted that the terrorists had not and would not succeed in "shaking the foundations of America." The rights and freedoms of all law-abiding American citizens, their individual ways of life, their indomitable spirit could not and would not be shaken by the

cowardly acts of a small group of evil people. But he was wrong. [...] Of the American news media, I ask: where, in all of your coverage of this event, from replays of the horrible spectacles and the fleeing people to the interviews with prominent Christian figures, was your coverage of the prayers of Muslim Americans for the safety of their fellow citizens and the swift apprehension of the perpetrators? [...] To the American leadership: defend your principles at home as you do abroad. [...] tell your Muslim citizens that their prayers are as welcome as those of their Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and animist fellows; tell the world that your "beacon" shines for all.

”

— derek beaulieu 14 Sep 2001
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Action/language

Four days on, Watten writes from Detroit — the city whose assembly lines armed the Second World War, and where SUVs now fly the flag — asking how a poet turns witness into work. A field-note on the semiotics of the suburban flagpole, watched for its drift back from pandas and pumpkins to the Stars and Stripes.

I'm terrifically grateful for the writing about experiences of being in New York from Charles, Marcella, Gary, Brian, Lee Ann, and others. [...] The question I am asking myself now is how to put this material to work — making use of one's perspective, resources, and experience as a poet. Which are incredibly valuable, what we have variously schooled ourselves to do for a reason, for years.

Neighborhoods around Detroit have always flown the flag. During the Gulf War, from what I have heard, this was particularly intense. Afterward, however, there was a shift in the practice. Many of the flagpoles that adorn suburban houses started to fly flags that were more fanciful — flowers, panda bears, pumpkins, an innocuous happy-face iconography. Not monolithically the Stars and Stripes. So I am watching for the return of the practice. Gas station flags are at half mast (there are enormous ones). Small flags often line the roads. [...] Where the insignia of the Red Wings hockey team have been flown on plastic attachments to SUVs, I have seen some American flags — when driven at speed, evoking a cavalry rescue, John Wayne style. You can almost hear the charge being sounded.

But this is not the whole story. It seems to me there is another attitude — of evaluation, and desire for alternative perspective. Students in my classes at Wayne are certainly interested in unpacking the discourses, rather than suturing

them together. There is considerable discussion of not stigmatizing Arab students and residents in Detroit (a large population, from all over the Middle East, which has been here for decades).

— **Barrett Watten** 15 Sep 2001

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Re: Bin Laden Family

Marjorie Perloff — the critic whose advocacy had long set this list's terms of argument — had posted a caution against the reflex of American self-blame, citing an LA Times profile of Osama bin Laden's estranged, monarchist brothers. Taylor Brady answers her point for point, a week into the emergency; the exchange stakes out ground the list would go on contesting for a decade.

Marjorie,

I appreciate the call for nuance in your post. At a time like this, we all need to do what we can to keep people at the table, rather than running for the armory. Facile exaggerations and distortions of others' positions, given the passions unleashed (and often cynically *mobilized*, but I guess that's another story) since last week, will tend to drive us toward the latter and away from the former.

It's the direction you take getting to that invocation of nuance that troubles me. Beginning where you begin, then: If your list of the properties of the bin Laden family is meant as material support for the claim that Osama bin Laden is finally accountable, in both the moral and criminal senses, to himself alone for whatever acts of terror he has committed, then I'd venture to say you'll find few here to disagree with you. (This assumes, of course, that the evidence withheld as a matter of security by U.S. intelligence sources is ever actually produced). The slaughter of non-combatants to make a political point is *never* excusable, and the commission of such acts by one in a position of privilege and power is, if anything, farther along on the scale of evils.

(One wishes, of course, that someone had held Madeleine Albright to such a high standard, as spokesperson for the policy of the "world's sole remaining super power," in the wake of her remarks that the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians killed as a result of the Gulf War and ensuing blockade were an "acceptable cost." To many of us, that sounds less like a justification and more like a defiant admission of guilt).

(One wishes, as well, that the current U.S. administration had such a finely-tuned moral compass. Perhaps then we would not be witnessing the closure of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to the food and medical relief workers who have, for

the last two decades, kept millions in the latter country just this side of starvation and epidemic. With this single act, Bush's war machine has made it clear that, whatever else the "anti-terrorism campaign" turns out to be, it most certainly *will* be a war against some of the most desperately poor civilians in the world).

So, if your enumeration of bin Laden's wealth means to make the case for his political-economic autonomy, and thus the freely chosen nature of his (presumed) actions, I'd put at least even money on your finding little in the way of a dissenting voice here. And were it simply a matter of his personal hatreds, or even actual crimes he himself had committed, we could leave it at that, and switch genres from apocalypse to police procedural. But the fact that, by all accounts, the man in question commands or works in collaboration with an international network of guerrilla fighters, terrorists, and potential or actual suicide bombers gives me pause. Collective phenomena like this don't simply spring from the ground (unless it be a carefully salted, Carthaginian ground), especially not in versions this extreme, this redolent of people who perceive, rightly or wrongly, that they have nothing to lose.

The ground for ideological fanaticism is well prepared. Here, certainly, right-wing theocratic distortions of Islam bear a large share of responsibility. However, religion alone is rarely an explanation. As with all ideologies, its material effect depends on its articulation by a political economy. And for that political economy — specifically, the oil monarchies (installed for the most part by the British and maintained by the U.S. according to the Kissinger doctrine of "factors of stability"), "friends of democracy" (Israel, the largest recipient of U.S. military aid, pursues a policy of forcible conquest and the creation of "facts on the ground" with our express approval), secular tyrannies (Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime a long-time client of U.S. military and intelligence aid, for its utility against Iran and its liquidation of Iraq's internal communist movement), and revanchist theocracies (the Taliban a logical endgame of U.S.-Soviet power struggles in Afghanistan, supported in its earlier guerrilla incarnations by U.S. and U.S.-aligned elements in Pakistani intelligence, and even in its hegemonic incarnation — if one can speak of a hegemony in a country as decimated as Afghanistan — initially unopposed by the U.S.) — for that political economy, the U.S. and "the West" have much explaining to do. And that's without beginning to explore the extent to which the organizational reality of these "terror cells" themselves might be grounded in common experience with U.S. and "Western" intelligence and paramilitary training.

Does any of this history mitigate the atrocity of last Tuesday's attacks? Not in the slightest.

Does it help to explain where those attacks came from, geopolitically and ideologically? Yes.

Does it serve as a fundamental caution against pursuing the simple intensification of a century's failed and murderous policy in the regions in question, and alert us to the very real possibility that U.S. military "solutions" could greatly exacerbate the problem? Emphatically, yes.

Does it remind us that a war on any state or individual, anywhere, that condones terror or gives material aid to its authors might find a surfeit of targets before it even left the Beltway? Absolutely.

On these issues, I believe we have a legitimate disagreement. I'm happy to disagree thus, as I find such dispute to be the core of democratic discourse. I'm also fairly sure that I'm right on this one. But the implications with which you end your second paragraph overstep the bounds of argument and approach the sort of invective I've come to expect in the last few days from the man who overhears me talking on the bus and tells me that I'm "worse than the terrorists," or the woman at the coffee shop on my block who approaches my table, breaking me off in the middle of a sentence to tell me that "people who hate America make me want to puke." (I can only hope she paid well for that latte before she disgorged it).

That seems to be the direction in which the following remarks tend:

But even if he hadn't been so trained, given the vast wealth, family quarrels, and so on, he might easily be moved to attack THE GREAT SATAN. Does this prove that we are indeed THE GREAT SATAN?

What you imply here is that there exist parties to the conversation on this list who actually believe the conclusion of your second sentence. You tie that implied group to those (probably far more numerous) who believe that bin Laden's personal "evil," while rendering him fully accountable for any crimes, does not fully explain the organizational, material reality of the people who carried out the attacks. Thus you derail a legitimate disagreement over the relevance and interpretation of history and policy into an ascription of sympathies with ideological fanaticism and a will to the destruction of the U.S. That the rest of your post takes on the collectively chiding tone that it does — "let's be a little careful," "why is it that poets and literary critics...are so extreme" — makes it amply clear that you intend not any specific participants in the discussion, but the direction of the conversation itself. We all, with a few exceptions, can find ourselves implicated here. Given your recourse to an ethic of care and attention

to detail, and your own stature as a literary critic and very capable reader, I'd expect citations if you meant it in a more limited sense.

Thus the ground for debate is significantly eroded. I'm disappointed that your warning against too-broad strokes and too-hasty judgments only seems to apply from the inside out, as if history were a one-way mirror in which certain groups bear the burden of constant agonized self-reflection, while others survey the scene of this inspection and pronounce on its correctness. And I regret that the internalization of this model kept many of us on the left from articulating a reasoned response, kept us talking about respectful silences and periods of mourning, not wishing to appear unseemly, in the crucial first hours during which the Bush administration prepared its war. We remain in our grief, but there will be no more silence.

Peace,

Taylor Brady

— **Taylor Brady** 18 Sep 2001
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What is to be done

Ron Silliman — poet, critic, and by long standing the List's most tireless correspondent — answers the question the thread had been circling since the towers fell, a week on. A veteran of the socialist and antiwar organising he invokes, he writes not against grief but against what he fears grief will make of an American left he judges to be "isolating itself at the worst possible moment."

I've been thinking for days about how best to write this — and I still have no clue, so I'm just going to wade in and hope for the best. I've been asked what I think about "all this" by some two dozen people, and what I think is this.

It is time for progressives to act, but not on the past dragged on as habit.

The horrific attack on four jetliners, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon last week places everybody under extraordinary kinds of pressure right now — I must have seen one hundred or so American males openly cry on television over the past week (and even Bush barely kept it together when a reporter in the Oval Office asked him about his feelings). The attack places progressives into a particularly difficult and painful spot. So far, my impression is that the left as a whole has not responded well and is mostly doing a bang-up job of isolating itself at the worst possible moment in history.

The argument that a U.S.-led coalition, or even the U.S. on its own, should not respond militarily to the death of over 5,000 people, all but a hundred or so of them civilians, is based on premises that reveal an absolute inability to look at the circumstances directly. Instead, people seem to be continuing on some mode of automatic pilot that is well-intended, but ultimately self-defeating. The present situation is qualitatively different from the Vietnam War or Desert Storm. To pretend otherwise and to trot out the same old slogans is itself potentially a disaster from which the left may not soon recover. To quote the subhead of Richard Sennett's excellent article in yesterday's *Guardian*, "The traditional left-right dispute is irrelevant to these abnormal times." To focus exclusively on what the U.S. might (and may well) do wrong in responding to the attack is to miss the point so completely that it is going to be difficult, if not impossible, later on, to be taken seriously. That is what I think is at stake.

Consider these points:

- (1) Everyone has had the opportunity to see over 5,000 people, most of them the most ordinary folks in the world, die very horrible deaths. This total is more than the attack on Pearl Harbor and the sinking of the Titanic combined — this is a visceral shock to the system that we will all be suffering effects from for years.
- (2) What would happen to any government that did NOT respond militarily to such an attack on civilians on its soil? Frankly, it would collapse. Bush would be impeached or worse. Politicians are for the most part followers, craven followers at that, and the reaction by the professional pols has been completely predictable.
- (3) Does anybody anywhere honestly think that this network, whether or not we inscribe bin Laden's name in as the CEO, will not, at some future moment, do something as bad or worse if it is not broken up? Do we not think that it would use a nuclear weapon if it had a chance? Anthrax?
- (4) Does anybody honestly think that if America were to somehow "improve its behavior" toward people of the Third World, that this would eliminate the impetus behind these attacks? That it could do so quickly enough to forestall future assaults?
- (5) Does anybody honestly think that the U.S. could do #3 without literally abandoning Israel?
- (6) Can anybody here imagine a U.S. electoral politician advocating some version of #4? See that last comment under #1 again.

(7) Even if those last three points were politically do-able in the near future, is there anybody who cannot imagine what THAT ensuing war would look like?

This, it seems to me, is the double-bind of this situation. And that is why I find it so personally painful right now to be a left pacifist, which I still am.

Hal Meyerson, the longtime Papa Bear of the Los Angeles democratic left who is now the executive editor of *The American Prospect*, put it very succinctly when he noted last week that there really are no legitimate reasons to go to war except when somebody decides to go to war against you — and in this case someone very definitely has.

In the face of all this, to argue against the use of force in breaking up the network of terrorist cells is to confess that one is not only tone deaf to the popular will, manipulated or otherwise (and I suspect, frankly, that the media, like the pols, is much more a follower than a leader in this), it is even wrong in terms of the protection of Americans. To the extent that the American left and its allies puts its eggs into this basket, it is going to find itself with very little credibility remaining with which to make the far more crucial arguments that need to be made right now.

This is especially true since the folks running the American government, and thus the American campaign — thanks again, Ralph Nader — are the worst possible people to have in power at this historical moment.

What makes them the worst possible people, besides the obvious, is the unique problem of this point in history. Presuming, as I do here, that force is inevitable, the real questions that must be confronted are what force, against whom, and how? Traditional military strategy argues that one identifies the center of gravity of one's opponent and attacks that. In a typical war, that usually means taking out some country's infrastructure so that it lacks the means to sustain itself and fight back.

Even George W. Bush recognizes that this loose coalition of activist cells that he characterizes as a terrorist network is not "some country." Not only does al-Qaeda and its affiliates lack the trappings of statehood and the infrastructure that normally accrue with that, this coalition has been consciously built — a progression that can be traced back to the use of cells by Algerian revolutionaries in the 1950s — so as not to have any true center of gravity. It's a rhizome, almost like the point-to-point computing model one associates with post-Napster MP3 ripping, while the U.S. military's experience is telling it to hunt for a mainframe somewhere.

The whole reason that Bush et al have spent so much time talking about the “states that harbor and sponsor” al-Qaeda is because the U.S. military knows how to attack a state. It is far less ready to go after something that doesn't really have a head. In fact, what the U.S. media campaign has done with bin Laden has been to build up his reputation simply to make of him a feasible personal target. While bin Laden's individual wealth has been of real value in giving these groups the time, leisure and resources to train, plan and execute “martyr operations,” there is thus far (9/18) relatively little evidence that bin Laden himself did anything more direct with regards to this particular tragedy.

Let's presume, for a moment, that the U.S. manages to capture or kill bin Laden and even to force the downfall of the Taliban (which would have a beneficial impact for the people of Afghanistan, especially women). Does anybody think that this means that this network would not be able to find resources elsewhere to continue figuring out ways to attack the United States and global capitalism generally? Hardly.

So what I fear most is a god-awful bloody and useless war that leaves nobody any safer than they are today. What I fear is a war that is a surrogate for a solution. And we can't afford to not solve this quandary. The collapse of the towers has raised the ante amid the terrorists markedly. The next assault will almost have to be nuclear or biological even to get our media-weary attention.

This is where the left has a role that it can and must play for the good of all. Progressives need to focus on the necessity of the U.S.

- (1) proving itself to be better than terrorists by not targeting civilians,
- (2) seriously educating the American population on the sources of resentment that the U.S. (and especially U.S. capital) generates worldwide,
- (3) keeping totalitarian forces in the U.S. from deleting the Bill of Rights in the name of security,
- (4) acknowledging that embargoes only punish the poor and reversing this long-term “containment” strategy once and for all, not just in Iraq but everywhere,
- (5) raising the issue of the need for a true solution of the “Palestine problem” (it's not the only festering sore of U.S. foreign policy, just the most blatant one in that region),
- (6) protecting American citizens and residents both from North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia from racist reprisals,

(7) dealing with all the important ancillary issues that accompany these questions,

(8) raising the issue of dictatorship with all our “allies,” and

(9) taking control of globalization away from multinational corporations.

If the left can address these, with focus and intelligence, it potentially can have a shaping influence on the outcome of this struggle. That role could prove to be far more important even than the one that progressives had in ending the conflict in Indochina a generation ago.

But progressives can do this only if we retain some semblance of credibility. To take any position that can be perceived as inaction in the face of the enormous physical and emotional wound that confronts the American people serves only to exacerbate the reputation of the left as a movement completely out of touch with reality.

[...]

Nick Piombino's post to this list on the flag's role not as an icon of war mongering, but as a transitional object in the grieving process, makes perfect sense to me. I've been struck at how radically differently it has been used in the past week than, say, the yellow ribbon campaign during the Gulf War, a soft swastika if ever there was one. If anything, the flag's role this time around has been one of solidarity, an emblem not of the state but of the people. Coming out of the Vietnam experience, I never thought I would see the stars & stripes used that way. But there it is. And it's everywhere.

This solidarity is a unique and probably temporary phenomenon. It is certainly something that the left needs to address and to examine.

But a movement that surrenders its credibility by pretending that the murder of more than 5,000 people doesn't warrant a response, or which pussyfoots around the issue by reframing the assault as “criminal” rather than as an act of war, will have silenced itself before it has ever had the chance to speak.

— Ron Silliman 18 Sep 2001
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Re: What is to be done

Eight days after the towers fell, the poet answers Ron Silliman, whose much-forwarded post — 'It is time for progressives to act, but not on the past dragged on as habit' — had scolded the left for 'pussyfooting' over whether the attack was a crime or an act of war. Brady, in San Francisco, argues back with a younger brother in mind, then finishing Marine combat training at Pensacola.

Much of what you've written here goes straight to the heart of our current dilemma. I too am distressed by the pious hand-wringing of much of the left. I too find the posture of self-reflection an inadequate response — though a necessary component of any adequate response: not the question "why?" as if it explained the attacks away, but the question "how?" as in "How did this happen, and what actions on our part will best prevent its happening again?" And any such question necessarily includes an understanding of failed U.S. policy in the Middle East and southwest Asia. Not as background, but as prospect: we must learn how not to repeat ourselves.

Your remarks on solidarity, on the room for contact and coalition within the charged symbolism of the flag, are well taken. On a personal note, Nick's posting got me to talk to my downstairs neighbors, who have bedecked our building's front entrance with the largest flag on the block, one so oversized it literally slaps me in the face as I come up the steps. I guess you can detect my ambivalence in that description. But you and Nick are right, there's room for a constructive encounter in that symbolic space. So I talked to them a bit, and as it turns out, for them at least it stands for exactly what I feared it did. (At one point the phrase "turn Kabul into a crater" came up). Since then, though, I've found out that this is not universally the case on my block, in my neighborhood, in my city. We're all having to learn quickly to keep our knees from jerking.

And you are absolutely right that any response from the left has to organize itself around an acknowledgement of the inevitability of the use of force, and that sadly much of the response up to this moment has not. But I question the way you map the distinction between these poles of action and inaction onto that between seeing the attack as a crime vs. seeing it as an act of war. I don't think that many of those who hold to the former position are so benighted as to really believe that such a criminal investigation and prosecution could be pursued without the use of significant military force.

The question for us is "what kind of force," and "held to what standards of accountability." The problem with a declaration of war, and especially with the Bush resolution, as you yourself point out, is that states like the U.S. know how to

declare war on other states, not on rhizomic transnational networks. So our first step is one of surrogation. And if that doesn't make the whole enterprise "a war that is a surrogate for a solution," it certainly drags us pretty far in that direction. Add to that the consideration that this administration, and the national security apparatus at its heart, is committed to a particular kind of state-to-state warfare involving direct military assaults on civilians and economic blockades to "starve out" those left standing after the bombs have fallen. And then add to that the consideration that one of the first responses from the White House and the intelligence world was the assertion that we needed to put human-rights violators back on the CIA payroll (well, at least "back on the payroll" in the publicly acknowledged sense), and lift our ban on extra-judicial executions, and I think you get some inkling of why many of us are looking for an alternative to war. It's not simply that the Bush administration and its electronic media allies have a headlock on the rhetoric of war — though that's an important consideration. It's also that our material apparatus of war is geared to produce exactly such a conflict.

I suppose what I'm saying here is that you might be right. The appeal to criminal justice and international law (and especially the rescue of bodies of international law from their currently underdeveloped (deliberately, by us) state) might be quixotic, might in fact be unrealistic "pussyfooting." But I fear it's no less unrealistic to rely on our ability to effectively argue into place a rhetoric and machinery of war that refrains from killing civilians, that doesn't target states as surrogates for non-state organizations, and that doesn't simply continue by overwhelming force the last half-century of failed U.S. policy — and to do all this arguing and constructing in the next few days, before the bombs start falling and the blockades are fully in place.

Given such a situation, I don't think it's surprising that many on the left are simply yelling "stop." Is this an adequate response? No, you're right about that. And you're right that our dissent shouldn't lead off with "background," "wherefores," and mitigations. We do need to begin with the acknowledgement that something must be done. Starting from precisely that position, though, is what leads me to the argument that the Bush war plan is perhaps the worst way to accomplish everyone's goal, which is to make sure those immediately responsible are unable to launch another such attack (or something worse), and to greatly lessen the possibility of similar horrors in the future. And the difficulty we face in such a position is that, given the swiftly manufactured consensus, any criticism of the President's "unlimited use of force" authorization is seen as opposition to the use

of force as such. Unfortunately, the corollary seems to be that declaring ourselves for war commits us to that resolution pre-emptively.

If we had our choice of wars, I might find myself in closer agreement with you. But right now I think we only have the one, and getting ourselves clear of it isn't simply a matter of arguing for policy changes, but of fundamentally reorienting a massive material apparatus along entirely different lines. It's a goal worth having, but I don't think it'll be accomplished in time to wage this war along those lines.

On a personal note again, I think of my younger brother, finishing his USMC combat training at the naval base in Pensacola, and about to be swept up in this war. He's an adult (though barely), and he made his choice to enlist late last year — along with a disproportionate share of the young men from the neighborhood where I grew up, which was effectively bypassed by the 90's "boom," and hit harder than most by the recent "corrections." I think I can live with his choice, and theirs, though it's hard. I think I can bring myself at least to acknowledge that they will put themselves at risk, and some of them might die, because of this choice. But if that risk, and those possible deaths, are in the service of nothing better than the counterposing of wholesale terror against retail terror, I think it will break me. And I think it will break this country.

— **Taylor Brady** 19 Sep 2001
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Chomsky Interview by Radio B92, Belgrade on WTC bombings

Within days of the attacks Noam Chomsky sat for Belgrade's independent Radio B92 — the station that had broadcast on through Milošević's wars — and the transcript raced across the internet's antiwar circuitry. Joe Brennan relays it entire; for much of the list this was the season's indispensable text, and for the rest its chief provocation.

“

Interviewing Chomsky

Radio B92, Belgrade

Why do you think these attacks happened?

To answer the question we must first identify the perpetrators of the crimes. It is generally assumed, plausibly, that their origin is the Middle East region, and that the attacks probably trace back to the Osama Bin Laden network, a widespread and complex organization, doubtless inspired by Bin Laden but not necessarily acting under his control. Let us assume that this is true. Then to answer your question a sensible person would try to ascertain Bin Laden's views, and the sentiments of the large

reservoir of supporters he has throughout the region. About all of this, we have a great deal of information. Bin Laden has been interviewed extensively over the years by highly reliable Middle East specialists, notably the most eminent correspondent in the region, Robert Fisk (London *Independent*), who has intimate knowledge of the entire region and direct experience over decades. A Saudi Arabian millionaire, Bin Laden became a militant Islamic leader in the war to drive the Russians out of Afghanistan. He was one of the many religious fundamentalist extremists recruited, armed, and financed by the CIA and their allies in Pakistani intelligence to cause maximal harm to the Russians — quite possibly delaying their withdrawal, many analysts suspect — though whether he personally happened to have direct contact with the CIA is unclear, and not particularly important. Not surprisingly, the CIA preferred the most fanatic and cruel fighters they could mobilize. The end result was to "destroy a moderate regime and create a fanatical one, from groups recklessly financed by the Americans" (*London Times* correspondent Simon Jenkins, also a specialist on the region). These "Afghanis" as they are called (many, like Bin Laden, not from Afghanistan) carried out terror operations across the border in Russia, but they terminated these after Russia withdrew. Their war was not against Russia, which they despise, but against the Russian occupation and Russia's crimes against Muslims.

The "Afghanis" did not terminate their activities, however. They joined Bosnian Muslim forces in the Balkan Wars; the US did not object, just as it tolerated Iranian support for them, for complex reasons that we need not pursue here, apart from noting that concern for the grim fate of the Bosnians was not prominent among them. The "Afghanis" are also fighting the Russians in Chechnya, and, quite possibly, are involved in carrying out terrorist attacks in Moscow and elsewhere in Russian territory. Bin Laden and his "Afghanis" turned against the US in 1990 when they established permanent bases in Saudi Arabia — from his point of view, a counterpart to the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, but far more significant because of Saudi Arabia's special status as the guardian of the holiest shrines.

Bin Laden is also bitterly opposed to the corrupt and repressive regimes of the region, which he regards as "un-Islamic," including the Saudi Arabian regime, the most extreme Islamic fundamentalist regime in the world, apart from the Taliban, and a close US ally since its origins. Bin Laden despises the US for its support of these regimes. Like others in the region, he is also outraged by long-standing US support for Israel's brutal military occupation, now in its 35th year: Washington's decisive

diplomatic, military, and economic intervention in support of the killings, the harsh and destructive siege over many years, the daily humiliation to which Palestinians are subjected, the expanding settlements designed to break the occupied territories into Bantustan-like cantons and take control of the resources, the gross violation of the Geneva Conventions, and other actions that are recognized as crimes throughout most of the world, apart from the US, which has prime responsibility for them. And like others, he contrasts Washington's dedicated support for these crimes with the decade-long US-British assault against the civilian population of Iraq, which has devastated the society and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths while strengthening Saddam Hussein — who was a favored friend and ally of the US and Britain right through his worst atrocities, including the gassing of the Kurds, as people of the region also remember well, even if Westerners prefer to forget the facts. These sentiments are very widely shared. The *Wall Street Journal* (Sept. 14) published a survey of opinions of wealthy and privileged Muslims in the Gulf region (bankers, professionals, businessmen with close links to the U.S.). They expressed much the same views: resentment of the U.S. policies of supporting Israeli crimes and blocking the international consensus on a diplomatic settlement for many years while devastating Iraqi civilian society, supporting harsh and repressive anti-democratic regimes throughout the region, and imposing barriers against economic development by "propping up oppressive regimes." Among the great majority of people suffering deep poverty and oppression, similar sentiments are far more bitter, and are the source of the fury and despair that has led to suicide bombings, as commonly understood by those who are interested in the facts.

The U.S., and much of the West, prefers a more comforting story. To quote the lead analysis in the *New York Times* (Sept. 16), the perpetrators acted out of "hatred for the values cherished in the West as freedom, tolerance, prosperity, religious pluralism and universal suffrage." U.S. actions are irrelevant, and therefore need not even be mentioned (Serge Schmemmann). This is a convenient picture, and the general stance is not unfamiliar in intellectual history; in fact, it is close to the norm. It happens to be completely at variance with everything we know, but has all the merits of self-adulation and uncritical support for power.

It is also widely recognized that Bin Laden and others like him are praying for "a great assault on Muslim states," which will cause "fanatics to flock to his cause" (Jenkins, and many others.). That too is familiar. The escalating cycle of violence is typically welcomed by the harshest

and most brutal elements on both sides, a fact evident enough from the recent history of the Balkans, to cite only one of many cases.

[...]

After the first shock, came fear of what the U.S. answer is going to be. Are you afraid, too?

Every sane person should be afraid of the likely reaction — the one that has already been announced, the one that probably answers Bin Laden's prayers. It is highly likely to escalate the cycle of violence, in the familiar way, but in this case on a far greater scale.

The U.S. has already demanded that Pakistan terminate the food and other supplies that are keeping at least some of the starving and suffering people of Afghanistan alive. If that demand is implemented, unknown numbers of people who have not the remotest connection to terrorism will die, possibly millions. Let me repeat: the U.S. has demanded that Pakistan kill possibly millions of people who are themselves victims of the Taliban. This has nothing to do even with revenge. It is at a far lower moral level even than that. The significance is heightened by the fact that this is mentioned in passing, with no comment, and probably will hardly be noticed. We can learn a great deal about the moral level of the reigning intellectual culture of the West by observing the reaction to this demand. I think we can be reasonably confident that if the American population had the slightest idea of what is being done in their name, they would be utterly appalled. It would be instructive to seek historical precedents.

[...]

"The world will never be the same after 11.09.01". Do you think so?

The horrendous terrorist attacks on Tuesday are something quite new in world affairs, not in their scale and character, but in the target. For the US, this is the first time since the War of 1812 that its national territory has been under attack, even threat. It's colonies have been attacked, but not the national territory itself. During these years the US virtually exterminated the indigenous population, conquered half of Mexico, intervened violently in the surrounding region, conquered Hawaii and the Philippines (killing hundreds of thousands of Filipinos), and in the past half century particularly, extended its resort to force throughout much of the world. The number of victims is colossal. For the first time, the guns have been directed the other way. The same is true, even more dramatically, of Europe. Europe has suffered murderous destruction, but from internal wars, meanwhile conquering much of the world with

extreme brutality. It has not been under attack by its victims outside, with rare exceptions (the IRA in England, for example). It is therefore natural that NATO should rally to the support of the US; hundreds of years of imperial violence have an enormous impact on the intellectual and moral culture.

It is correct to say that this is a novel event in world history, not because of the scale of the atrocity — regrettably — but because of the target. How the West chooses to react is a matter of supreme importance. If the rich and powerful choose to keep to their traditions of hundreds of years and resort to extreme violence, they will contribute to the escalation of a cycle of violence, in a familiar dynamic, with long-term consequences that could be awesome. Of course, that is by no means inevitable. An aroused public within the more free and democratic societies can direct policies towards a much more humane and honorable course.

”

— Joe Brennan 19 Sep 2001
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I can't help thinking...

A week on from the attacks, with the country already turning towards a reprisal, Treadwell Jackson set down two people she had met — one a Blackfoot veteran of Vietnam, the other an Iraqi whose family the first Gulf War had killed.

...These days, of two brave & thoughtful warriors I have met:

A professor, of the Blackfoot (Native American) Nation, a legal scholar, who told us students of his experience in Vietnam. He joined up, in part because his traditions honor warriors, only to find himself standing in a field in Vietnam, watching a village burn, and coming to the realization that this was exactly what the US Army, of which he was now a part, had done to his people.

An Iraqi man who was staying in the same youth hostel as one of my sisters and I in Amsterdam, 1992. Much of his family and friends had been killed in Baghdad. His manner was friendly and thoughtful towards us, despite our nationality.

— Elizabeth Treadwell Jackson 19 Sep 2001
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a personal account from 9/11/01

Kozaitis — posting as 'Ak' — forwards the account of his friend Joe, a Goldman Sachs analyst and lapsed classicist who walked out of the financial district and across the water to Queens on the morning itself; the Sanskrit paradigms he had been reciting on the downtown train run on beneath the smoke. Ak's own coda records that he had survived the 1993 tower bombing and lost friends aboard Flight 175.

This was written by my friend Joe, who works at Goldman Sachs trying to pay off the debts he accrued getting his Brown PhD in classics/history of mathematics. He wrote it for himself, but he shared it with me. I asked him if I could send this along, and he said by all means.

Love.

—Ak

“

"I am become Death, destroyer of Worlds" — Baghavad Gita (11.32–33) as quoted by Dr. J. R. Oppenheimer

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 11TH-8:50AM

I stepped out of my N train — which had just passed underneath the World Trade Center (WTC afterwards) — at the Rector Street station. I climbed the stairs and emerged at the Southwest corner of Church and Rector. I had just finished my daily recitation of my 30 or so Sanskrit verb paradigms while riding the subway, and was about to start on the nouns as I walked the rest of the way to work. Bit early today. I'll take the long way.

Deva — God — luminous being — in the nominative .. in the vocative ... accusative ... dative .. ablative ... genitive .. locative.

I walked past Trinity Church at the foot of Wall St. and looked up to see a tourist standing before the grave of Alexander Hamilton.

[...]

I thought maybe it was a promotion at the New York Stock Exchange for a new issue. They do that sort of thing. Release balloons, have truckloads of WWF wrestlers, dancing girls. I was also near the spot from which I watched the ticker-tape parade for the 2000 New York Yankees, and the Gulf War Victory Parade. Thus my spirits were made light by the sight of the paper.

Then I noticed the confetti was burnt. I looked up above the NYSE to see a monstrous plume of puffy white smoke — emanating from seemingly

nowhere — from which the charred papers were raining down. I thought, "My god — what's there? Where can this cloud be coming from?" The crowd of people I was with---our mood turned from one of lightness to one of — horror. It was as if we all had the same realization at the same time that something---nescio quid — was horribly wrong.

[...]

There were a few construction workers in the street (whom I later realized must have seen the crash). They've been there for several weeks now working on pipes or wiring beneath Williams Street. They were facing West and were backlit from the morning sun. I heard one of them say to a man in a suit "...the World Trade Center". I asked what happened. He said "A plane crash in the World trade Center". I immediately thought of a picture in a book my father had gotten me as a child of a gaping hole in the Empire State Building...caused by a 1945 plane crash into that building — a B25 , I think. Christ.

I saw people getting hit with pebble-sized debris. I ran down South William to my building...went right to the 11th floor where I work...no one knew what was going on. I heard "Plane crash..plane crash at the World Trade Center". I thought and someone said "Wait..how can that be? The weather is perfectly clear". The B-25 had hit in a thick fog. Someone had a radio..."Plane crash..it was plane crash"

9:03 a.m

We all looked up at the WTC to see one tower on fire. There was a ring of fire encircling the building one floor...near the top. The floors above the ring were enshrouded in thick black upwardly rising waves. Every second or two the fire crept lower — floor by floor---dripping like wax down a candle.

The thought of those people...they're being incinerated..there's no way to control that fire. Then a huge fireball — monstrous in size — shot out and up---like some horribly visible dragon's breath.(this was the fireball from the impact of the second jet — I didn't realize this until after viewing the footage of the attack).

Terror. Stupefied silent terror.

Then the word from the radio..There was a second plane — it crashed into the other tower. We knew. It was an attack. It had started. What would be next? The exchange? All Manhattan? Where is the air force? Aren't they supposed to prevent this? "There's a third plane...jets are scrambling now to intercept" "The CDC is involved" Oh fuck. Anthrax I heard someone say.

The phones were dead. Even the cell. The Internet was down. There was calm..no..silence for a while. I managed to get through to my dad on my Sprint cell phone — called Sharon (my girlfriend).Her cell wasn't answering. I left a message for her. I was horrified for Sharon, who I thought took the PATH train to the WTC to get to work...no , her new job is in Brooklyn, she takes the 33rd street train to 14th street to get the L train. Well north of here.

I said "Dad..I'm OK...please call Sharon let her know..please call Joanie (my sister) ..tell her I'm alive". Though I wasn't sure for how long. A woman came into the office..screaming...she had seen people leap to their deaths from the trade center..rather than being incinerated or suffocating...their bodies fell into the canopy over a stage between the two towers..where Sharon and I had spent many a pleasant summer-evening hour listening to the live sounds of the Big Bands..to Broadway tunes...

9:43 AM

"The Pentagon, shit, they got the Pentagon" "The White House!" My dad said "Stay put..don't go out into that until you know what's going on..I'm a veteran of W.W.II and the police department know what I'm talking about! Stay put until you know what you're facing!"

[...]

I went to the ground floor..I'm not sure why..the sky..not the sky..the atmosphere itself — the sky couldn't be seen- was a sickly gray. There was a slightly luminous disk where the sun had been only a few minutes ago..it looked like the sun that woman had painted in the Twilight Zone episode.

I went back upstairs...not sure even if I should use the elevator..I stepped out onto the 11th floor again..the building rocked..it was as if it had been picked up 6 inches and dropped back down again...the lights dimmed..oh shit, DON'T EVER GET ON THE ELEVATOR! I looked down in the street.

People — all mummified in pasty white soot — were running — all in the same direction — running from something — it was like those old Godzilla movies...I looked in back of them — a huge wall of black — a 50 - story tidal wave moving straight towards my building-at a rate of my god...40 mph or so...fuck...what is it..what's in the black? The tower? Poison gas? Are buildings being blown up in succession..in this direction? Fuck — a mushroom cloud? It became night...you could smell it.

"Please go to the third floor", we heard. Without debating whether to use the stairs or the elevator, we all took the stairs. Circling down. Floor after floor. Shit! We're only on 10! only 8!

[...]

I stayed on the third floor. The windows looked like they had been painted black. It became increasingly difficult to breathe. I'll die of smoke inhalation if this — whatever it is — continues. Should I go back up in the building to where the air is perhaps clearer?. But why did they move us down here..was the roof on fire? STAND UNDER A DOORWAY..I did..I made peace with my creator...people were starting to breathe through handkerchiefs..fuck, my great grandfather died from mustard gas in World War One...I tried to find a better place to breathe...found an airvent by a window..with just enough of a trickle of clean air to make things bearable..

"The tower collapsed..that was the tower collapsing!" . We huddled by radios...people were passing out donuts from boxes...Krispy Kreme... I reached for a chocolate and saw it shake in my hands..some of the workers on that floor let us use their office phones to call home..."dad..I'm still OK...thank Christ you told me to stay put..I would have been caught in that cloud of shit — (A cloud that I later learned suffocated many)"

"Please return to your work stations", we heard. Yeah, right. Fuck you.

[...]

I peered out my window again. Lower Manhattan looked like it had been covered by volcanic ash. I heard something on the radio about Guiliani telling people to get out of Manhattan. I waited till I could see the outside again to leave the building.

1:30 PM It was time to go, I decided. There was only a thin suspension of shit in the air now. Thin at least by comparison. My boss...a usually Stoic man in his early-to-mid thirties told me not to forget to bring water..I would need it.

I filled 2 16 oz Styrofoam containers of ice water and put a plastic lid on each. I noticed each lid had a quarter-inch or so hole for drinking. The shit still hanging in the air will get in there. So I put a second lid on each at a 90 degree angle to the first. I got down to the first floor walked out into the Dust.

There were a handful of numb, ash covered groups of people — in twos and threes...making their way North. Faces covered in whatever rag

could be found. Trudging in the Dust that was on everything. There were cars, trucks and cabs abandoned in the streets. One, I think, still had the motor running.

[...]

"We are evacuating Manhattan" The bullhorn said. The police were evacuating lower Manhattan by means of anything that would float, it seems. There were three tugboats on the pier..their deckhands were directing people to boats bound for Jersey City or a boats for Brooklyn. I saw a scrawled hand made sign on the command tower of closest boat: "Jersey City".

I walked on its metal plank towards the deck and in my numbness asked a deckhand "Where is the boat to Brooklyn?" "Right back there" he said, pointing to the next tug.. safety. The sea. Thalassa!

As I walked back on the plank towards the shore, a man with a dog asked if he was heading to the boat for Jersey City. He was 50-ish, disheveled gray hair...business casual..tan corduroy jacket. His eyes seemed stunned. I looked down at his dog's harness and realized it was a seeing — eye dog. Christ. To go through this Hell blind.

"Don't worry — she won't bite" he assured me. "Yes", I said "The boat for Jersey City..straight ahead." I asked if he needed help, but he declined.

[...]

"I don't need to see that" I heard. I looked into the water of the East River — several feet off the port bow — and saw a shoe floating. It was a workshoe. Floating tread-up.

I burst into tears.

I walked to the front of the tug and up another ladder. I saw that a blue-and-white police boat had docked ahead of us and was taking on the people from the Jersey City tug I had passed by. The police were putting life jackets on their dozen or so passengers, including the man with the dog. Shit. If their boat gets sunk, they'll all have life jackets, and we won't.

I looked up and faced the clouds of devastation: seemingly separate plumes of black and white. At first the wind was blowing to the South-east... moving the thick debris clouds south of us. Then the winds started to shift to the East..bringing us directly into the path of the Dust.. We became anxious as breathing became more difficult.

[...]

Then I noticed a slight clockwise rotation of the ship. It was pivoting around the bow — which still was touching the pier. I hoped were preparing to depart. We were. As we pulled away from the pier, I noticed that another other tug to Jersey City was named "Resolute". I felt comforted by the word.

We pulled out into the East River and turned slowly towards Brooklyn. Some gentlemen on the walkway of the tug's bridge with me noted that the skies over Manhattan were empty...except, I noticed, for a seagull flying north over the FDR Drive — a white figure silhouetted against a black cloud. I thought of the pigeons at the end of "Failsafe".

[...]

We looked up and saw a young mother with a child..maybe 3 or 4 years old.. she screamed the most joyous scream I've ever heard: "THERE'S DADDY — THERE'S DADDY — he's safe he's safe!"

There was a collective, mild cheer from the other passengers on the boat.

[...]

We stepped in. Air conditioning. I could breathe. In my relief... and momentarily forgetting the circumstances under which we had met, I asked ..as if nothing was wrong.. "So where do you work, John. "I'm a web designer right across from.." Something was wrong. No one was speaking. In the whole car no one was speaking. There had to be 100 people in this car and no one else was speaking. A few just looked up at us. "Jay Street", the conductor announced over the PA. "Shit, did we miss Hoyt?". "Yes you did..it was back one stop" an elderly lady said as she left the train. "No..its the next stop..she must be confused" another woman said to us. She was trying to get to Queens, too. Now there were three of us. We introduced ourselves, shook hands, and vowed to stick together. An attempt to repair the gaping rent in civilization.

[...]

What was it like, the young man asked. John answered "Have you ever been in a car accident...and for a second or two you don't know how its going to turn out..if you're going to live or die..or be injured?..you see it coming..and there's nothing you can do to stop it? That's how it was", John said. "That's the best description I can give. Only continue that moment or two of uncertain horror for several hours"

[...]

4:00 PM

I emerge from the Steinway Street Station. Facing North on Steinway. The sun is bright and over my left shoulder, but without any warmth. It doesn't feel like any time of day..or any day of the week. Time is stopped. Its not here.

"Dad..I'm in Astoria...I can walk from here"

I make a left on 30th Ave and walk West. I pass by Athens Park. There's a statue of Socrates there...and Athena, in full headdress. I wonder if they'll survive this.

I went home and cried.

POST SCRIPT: Sharon watched the towers burn, then collapse from Brooklyn. She was distraught until she got the message I left on her cell.

”

I would definitely like to read what you wrote. Please send. Did you have any losses? Me? I'm all shook up. I was in the 1993 WTC bombing (55th floor). Also, old friends of mine were in United Airlines Flight 175; they were taking their 3 year old daughter to Disneyland (Boston to LA). I'm scared. I'm sorrowful. I'm angry. I'm sad. This is just so sad.

—Ak

— Anastasios Kozaitis 19 Sep 2001
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Re: What is to be done

Nine days on, the 'What is to be done' thread — opened by Ron Silliman, whose point-by-point questions Stefans is here answering — had become the List's long argument with itself. Stefans, a poet and web-artist then in New York, files his reply half as dispatch, from an anti-war meeting in a Forty-second Street penthouse, and half as demurral: wary above all of the merely 'symbolic' strike, and feeling for what a poet's handling of language might be worth in the emergency.

I attended an anti-war meeting yesterday in the penthouse of a building on 42nd Street. I don't actually know who the organizers were, but representatives of several New York coalitions were present.

I was disappointed by the apparent lack of "withness" by many of the attendees — "habits" of thinking, many of which seemed rooted in quite ingrained attitudes that hadn't seen the light of day for decades — were everywhere, with many grabbing the mike simply to state positions that were already long agreed upon.

An hour and a half was spent just getting the 4 or 5 points of agreement hacked out, some of which were as basic (but linguistically challenged) as "Peace through justice."

Nonetheless, I was impressed with the organization, and the hundreds there gave me confidence that, when the time comes, those hundreds could become thousands, and thousands millions. Most people of my generation who have remained somewhat on the margins of political activity would not have thought such a thing possible so easily.

[...]

I would add that several million New Yorkers and New Jerseyans saw this event happen right in front of their faces, not on television — I'd say only a handful of the many I've talked to didn't see it happen first-hand. Nonetheless, I'm convinced that the choreographing of the attack was intended to bring people out of their homes and onto their rooftops — to demoralize, to anchor our thoughts in grief, to shock us and make us afraid, and to leave behind a lingering depression. And so, on some level, I would like to reject this shock and not use it as a strong reference point in my thinking in terms of personal emotion. This seems to be the intention of the terrorists, and a first step might be to reject it.

[...]

One thing worth mentioning in this context (and I'm certainly no Middle East expert) is that prior to the Persian Gulf war a jihad had never been declared on the United States. Jihads were declared on Israel and the Soviet Union, but not this country, though now we are positioning ourselves as the polar opposites of radical Muslims in terms of "values". According to John Miller (and I confess that I got this info from David Letterman last night — remember, I only have one tv channel!), bin Laden himself (at least in 98) had three specific points of contention with the United States: support of Israel, the air-bases in Saudi Arabia and the sanctions/no fly zone against Iraq. This is not to say that he's not an egotistical violent maniac, but that I'm less sure than I was maybe a week ago that something like a fundamentalist Islamic attitude toward the American way of life (gay marriages, Coca Cola or "bare midriffs" as Marjorie Perloff mentioned) is somewhere near the heart of this. I could be fooling myself, but there could be a logic (i.e. consistency) to this.

[...]

Anyway, to bring this to a close, I'm wondering if there is something that is peculiar to poets use of language — the language of fact — in a poetic or

emotional fashion that might be useful here. It's one thing to deconstruct or approve/disapprove of symbols, but I think it's quite another to convince a populace that is gorged on symbols and emotionalism to somehow find security in what might seem bureaucratic methods in a time a crisis.

[...]

Public debate and speculation — from the right and left (yes, both are needed) — would be the healthiest thing right now if we don't want the president simply responding to polls and his stupid cabinet.

I wish I had a grand conclusion for those of you who followed through this email. Don't have one.

— **Brian Kim Stefans** 20 Sep 2001
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What is to be affirmed

Watten's rejoinder to Ron Silliman's 'What is to be done', which had scolded the left for its supposed quietism after the attacks. Watten objects less to the position than to the mode of argument, and insists that grief and criticism need not cancel each other.

Ron: While I don't have time to write more fully about your position, I must say I was dismayed. Not by the content or position, necessarily, but by the mode of argument. You feel attacked, but your primary polemic is against what you perceive as the passivity or quietism of the "left." Apart from a reasonable list of critical positions many of us would take — such as arguments against bombing civilians, a.k.a. collateral damage — what is it precisely that the "left" has not avowed? The reality of what everyone saw on TV? Unmanly grief? Compliance with Infinite Justice? Or something in between? It is certainly possible to be very moved by grief for those destroyed and to keep one's critical head on. I see no contradiction. I do not have to admit a need to seek revenge nor salute the flag — which stands for a number of like instances of total destruction, from Hiroshima to Vietnam to the Highway of Death in the Gulf War — in order to argue for an alternative to the war hysteria we are being swept up in.

Another mode of consideration would be: what is the legitimate scope of state action? If states exist to protect, rather than aggrandize, themselves, one may admit a degree of legitimacy to state response — but we don't yet have any notion of what form that might take. [...] It is the US, I'm sure you are aware, that invented total war with civilians as a military objective (Sherman's march to the sea), gratuitous annihilation of civilian populations (the A-bomb), and "collateral

damage." What we just saw was the direct result of US policy of ignoring and minimizing collateral damage in the Gulf War, and a direct consequence of Ariel Sharon's aggression toward Palestinians. Criticism of these policies ought to be the first thing one would propose in response, rather than hand-wringing about the status of one's left credentials, now that they have been placed under erasure.

— **Barrett Watten** 20 Sep 2001
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What is to be criticized

Barrett Watten answers Ron Silliman line by line — Silliman having circulated a letter arguing that the antiwar left, by refusing at the outset to countenance a military response to September 11, was “mostly doing a bang-up job of isolating itself at the worst possible moment in history.” Watten, Silliman’s comrade from the Language years, takes the real quarrel to be whether a show of loyalty may be made the precondition of debate. (The journalist quoted within is Julian Borger of the Guardian.)

I want to continue the debate over Ron's letter. I found the part of the argument that takes issue with the "left" to be misguided, and hence I question it. It seems based on an assumption that to argue strongly against war as an initial response to the horror of September 11 is to be in denial of the event and hence to risk isolating oneself rhetorically. This implies that in order to participate in debate, one has to give initial assent to military response before one can speak to the issue.

For me, the ethical imperative against 1) past American policy and 2) present possibility of action that would make the situation even more dangerous stems directly from a deep and committed response to the deaths of 6000. Ron suggests the opposite — that antiwar leftists who do not overcome their principled horror of war are in some sense in denial of its consequences when they occur, and hence their responses will remain outside of debate.

Here are some places in his argument where he says or infers these things, and a response:

“

It is time for progressives to act, but not on the past dragged on as habit.

”

Objection to American militarism from Hiroshima to the present is not a habit but an analysis of the world situation we are in. America is widely disliked for its

position as dominant world power — or have we lost touch with reality? On the British Poets list there has been a great deal of mockery of the current rubric under which we are going to war: "Infinite Justice." As one post had it, "just us, forever and ever." America is isolated — you feel this in the responses of those outside the country — by virtue of its position of military dominance. Jingoism blinds us to the world we are in.

“

The attack places progressives into a particularly difficult and painful spot. So far, my impression is that the left as a whole has not responded well and is mostly doing a bang-up job of isolating itself at the worst possible moment in history.

”

I do not understand not so much the reasoning as the perception here. The "left," like everyone else in the country, is reeling from the implications of these events. There has been a paradigm shift in terms of everyone's estimation of what is possible. Ron sees a perverse will in responses that are, in fact, trying to find a perspective from which to speak and act. "Doing a bang-up job of isolating itself" is oddly insensitive to the immediate need for information, analysis, discussion. Perhaps for Ron the left's response is failing to protect us, rhetorically or analytically, and this is where we need to call for a higher order of protection — the U.S. military. It is obvious that confused and disorganized need could give the green light to any sort of military response, however.

“

The argument that a U.S.-led coalition, or even the U.S. on its own, should not respond militarily to the death of over 5,000 people, all but a hundred or so of them civilians, is based on premises that reveal an absolute inability to look at the circumstances directly. Instead, people seem to be continuing on some mode of automatic pilot that is well-intended, but ultimately self-defeating.

”

I have no argument with an initial response against war as either an ethical principle or rhetorical stance. But Ron assumes that all "left" responses might be characterized in such a way as to reveal "an absolute inability to look at the circumstances directly." An anti-militarist position, it seems to me, is an appropriate first response to the circumstances — in our state of inadequate

knowledge. It ought to require deep reflection, not just shock and horror, to change that position.

“

The present situation is qualitatively different from the Vietnam War or Desert Storm. To pretend otherwise and to trot out the same old slogans is itself potentially a disaster from which the left may not soon recover.

”

False. American disregard of civilian casualties, from Hiroshima to Vietnam to Desert Storm is a direct rationale for the terrorists's refusal to distinguish between civilians and military targets. File footage exists of bin Laden saying precisely this. Of course it is a rationalization. But it is one that is believed by an overwhelming majority of the Muslim world. Selective assassinations by Israelis of Palestinian leaders and the botched US attempt to get bin Laden in Operation Infinite Reach have only reinforced this perception. Ditto the civilian consequences of the embargo of Iraq.

“

To focus exclusively on what the U.S. might (and may well) do wrong in responding to the attack is to miss the point so completely that it is going to be difficult, if not impossible, later on, to be taken seriously. That is what I think is at stake.

”

The notion that a principled position may not be taken seriously is akin, I think, to Bush senior's dictum, "You can't hear them." It makes a certain perception of loyalty a precondition for debate.

“

(4) Does anybody honestly think that if America were to somehow "improve its behavior" toward people of the Third World, that this would eliminate the impetus behind these attacks? That it could do so quickly enough to forestall future assaults?

”

It is a very reasonable position to see American actions as contributing directly to the motives for and reception of the terrorists' actions. If the US were to strongly

renounce civilian targets (as Ron indicates later) it would certainly would help to change world opinion, and hence the context for any future terrorist actions. Ron's argument here is in direct contradiction here to what he calls for later — the need for debate concerning the limits of American responses, with which I agree.

“

(5) Does anybody honestly think that the U.S. could do # 4 without literally abandoning Israel?

”

This is very out of touch with the events in Israel since Ariel Sharon marched into the plaza of the Muslim sanctuary in Jerusalem with his retinue. The U.S. had, under Clinton, been restraining the Israelis from the kinds of aggressivity we have seen since. The current situation in Israel is a direct result of the change in policy. Therefore, it is nonsense to say that changing the perception of the US's role in world, which should be done, means abandoning Israel. The US should return to a proactive role in containing the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and in seeking a solution.

“

In the face of all this, to argue against the use of force in breaking up the network of terrorist cells is to confess that one is not only tone deaf to the popular will, manipulated or otherwise (and I suspect, frankly, that the media, like the pols, is much more a follower than a leader in this), it is even wrong in terms of the protection of Americans.

”

It is very odd to see a former pacifist seek to limit the terms of debate over the legitimacy of force. Even if Ron no longer agrees with his former C.O. position, or sees the situation as historically different, he should not seek to discredit that position in others. To argue as above seems to me to capitulate to the media as representative of reality. It is important to maintain an alternative perspective, and indeed Ron argues for this. Another reason why I find his position so contradictory.

“

But to take any position that can be perceived as inaction in the face of the enormous physical and emotional wound that confronts the

American people serves only to exacerbate the reputation of the left as a movement completely out of touch with reality.

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This is a little like the "prior restraint" of possibly actionable speech as a condition for limiting speech. How can a former C.O. see anti-militarist arguments as out of touch with reality, when they are based on the entirety of human history?

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This point of view seems to me to be detached to the point of inhumanity. Moreover, it is driven by an internal logic that is utterly bogus. That logic, insinuated between the lines, suggests that the horror visited on thousands of New Yorkers must be balanced somewhere by an equal and opposite evil that the US has inflicted upon someone else.

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Jingoism. The author implies that horror at past US policy is an indifference to the tragedy. Rather, the two are directly related. Grief does not interfere with the imperative with analysis.

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Nick Piombino's post earlier on the flag's role not as an icon of war-mongering, but as a transitional object in the grieving process, makes perfect sense to me.

”

As I've written elsewhere, the flag is not a transitional object but a symbol of national identity. I cannot dissociate American history from that symbol. While I do not see the same aggression in flying the flag as was evident in the Gulf War, I think the innocence of its use as a symbol of human, rather than national, solidarity is a precise desire to forget that history.

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I've been struck at how radically differently it has been used than, say, the yellow ribbon campaign during the Gulf War, a soft swastika if ever there was one. If anything, the flag's role this time around has been one of solidarity, an emblem not of the state but of the people. Coming

out of the Vietnam experience, I never thought I would see the stars & stripes used that way. But there it is. And it's everywhere.

”

I am reminded of socialist/populist embrace of the nation-state both in WWI and II. It is important to define, rather, an oppositional, internationalist position. The US needs to see itself from the perspective of the world, and rallying around the flag is not going to sharpen that perception.

— **Barrett Watten** 21 Sep 2001
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Re: What is to be criticized

The list's sharpest September quarrel set Ron Silliman — who had argued that the left must not let its principled horror of war isolate it at “the worst possible moment in history” — against his old Language-writing comrade Barrett Watten. Stroffolino forwards Watten's point-by-point reply, appends his own questions to Silliman, and lets the exchange stand; the operation then being christened “Infinite Justice” supplies the grim music underneath.

I wanted to publicly thank Barrett Watten for this thoughtful point by point analysis of Ron Silliman's earlier post...

I hope, Barrett, this piece will someday appear in your collected prose!!!!!!!!!!!!

And want to ask Ron about why he thinks waving the flag and supporting what he calls "action" (meaning, specifically, a stepping up of MILITARY action) will help "the left" make "far more crucial arguments that need to be made right now."

What are these far more crucial arguments, Ron?

Ron, could you try to convince me,, who is more inclined (and not out of habit) to agree with Barry than with Bush or you? Or do you think the sway of "popular opinion," which you swear comes BEFORE the government/media's stance, is enough to carry you through (at least till more civilians, both "ours" and "theirs" are killed...)

”

I want to continue the debate over Ron's letter. I found the part of the argument that takes issue with the "left" to be misguided, and hence I question it. It seems based on an assumption that to argue strongly against war as an initial response to the horror of September 11 is to be in denial of the event and hence to risk isolating oneself rhetorically. This

implies that in order to participate in debate, one has to give initial assent to military response before one can speak to the issue.

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Here are some places in his argument where he says or infers these things, and a response: It is time for progressives to act, but not on the past dragged on as habit.

Objection to American militarism from Hiroshima to the present is not a habit but an analysis of the world situation we are in. America is widely disliked for its position as dominant world power — or have we lost touch with reality? On the British Poets list there has been a great deal of mockery of the current rubric under which we are going to war: "Infinite Justice." As one post had it, "just us, forever and ever." America is isolated — you feel this in the responses of those outside the country — by virtue of its position of military dominance. Jingoism blinds us to the world we are in. The attack places progressives into a particularly difficult and painful spot. So far, my impression is that the left as a whole has not responded well and is mostly doing a bang-up job of isolating itself at the worst possible moment in history.

I do not understand not so much the reasoning as the perception here. The "left," like everyone else in the country, is reeling from the implications of these events. There has been a paradigm shift in terms of everyone's estimation of what is possible. Ron sees a perverse will in responses that are, in fact, trying to find a perspective from which to speak and act. "Doing a bang-up job of isolating itself" is oddly insensitive to the immediate need for information, analysis, discussion. Perhaps for Ron the left's response is failing to protect us, rhetorically or analytically, and this is where we need to call for a higher order of protection — the U.S. military. It is obvious that confused and disorganized need could give the green light to any sort of military response, however. The argument that a U.S.-led coalition, or even the U.S. on its own, should not respond militarily to the death of over 5,000 people, all but a hundred or so of them civilians, is based on premises that reveal an absolute inability to look at the circumstances directly.

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False. American disregard of civilian casualties, from Hiroshima to Vietnam to Desert Storm is a direct rationale for the terrorists's refusal to distinguish between civilians and military targets. File footage exists of bin Laden saying precisely this. Of course it is a rationalization. But it is one that is believed by an overwhelming majority of the Muslim world. Selective assassinations by Israelis of Palestinian leaders and the botched US attempt to get bin Laden in Operation Infinite Reach have only reinforced this perception. Ditto the civilian consequences of the embargo of Iraq. To focus exclusively on what the U.S. might (and may well) do wrong in responding to the attack is to miss the point so completely that it is going to be difficult, if not impossible, later on, to be taken seriously. That is what I think is at stake.

The notion that a principled position may not be taken seriously is akin, I think, to Bush senior's dictum, "You can't hear them." It makes a certain perception of loyalty a precondition for debate. (4) Does anybody honestly think that if America were to somehow "improve its behavior" toward people of the Third World, that this would eliminate the impetus behind these attacks? That it could do so quickly enough to forestall future assaults?

[...]

It is very odd to see a former pacifist seek to limit the terms of debate over the legitimacy of force. Even if Ron no longer agrees with his former C.O. position, or sees the situation as historically different, he should not seek to discredit that position in others. To argue as above seems to me to capitulate to the media as representative of reality. It is important to maintain an alternative perspective, and indeed Ron argues for this. Another reason why I find his position so contradictory. But to take any

position that can be perceived as inaction in the face of the enormous physical and emotional wound that confronts the American people serves only to exacerbate the reputation of the left as a movement completely out of touch with reality.

This is a little like the "prior restraint" of possibly actionable speech as a condition for limiting speech. How can a former C.O. see anti-militarist arguments as out of touch with reality, when they are based on the entirety of human history? Julian Borger, also writing in *The Guardian* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,7792,553876,00.html>), gets it right when he argues against the idea that "Americans should be asking themselves why this happened to them Rather than getting angry, then, they should be meditating and wondering what they have done wrong.

No, Americans need to figure out what it is about recent US policy that has made it possible for us to be seen as the world's enemy and to correct that policy. "This point of view seems to me to be detached to the point of inhumanity. Moreover, it is driven by an internal logic that is utterly bogus. That logic, insinuated between the lines, suggests that the horror visited on thousands of New Yorkers must be balanced somewhere by an equal and opposite evil that the US has inflicted upon someone else."

Jingoism. The author implies that horror at past US policy is an indifference to the tragedy. Rather, the two are directly related. Grief does not interfere with the imperative with analysis. Borger is correct in acknowledging that that position fails to acknowledge the enormity of the assault. It will certainly be rejected by a huge majority of people. As it should be. And that position also fails to address the ugly reality that, without action, future attacks are inevitable, and that the death toll in the towers has raised the bar for ambitious future martyrs.

The question of appropriate action may be raised without this attack on principled positions of those who question whether American overreaction will only perpetuate the horror. American overreaction is not only possible, it is likely. Hawks in the Pentagon will try to use this situation in order to "clean up" related situations — as in Iraq — even if they fail in the attempt. Nick Piombino's post earlier on the flag's role not as an icon of war-mongering, but as a transitional object in the grieving process, makes perfect sense to me.

As I've written elsewhere, the flag is not a transitional object but a symbol of national identity. I cannot dissociate American history from that symbol. While I do not see the same aggression in flying the flag as

was evident in the Gulf War, I think the innocence of its use as a symbol of human, rather than national, solidarity is a precise desire to forget that history. I've been struck at how radically differently it has been used than, say, the yellow ribbon campaign during the Gulf War, a soft swastika if ever there was one. If anything, the flag's role this time around has been one of solidarity, an emblem not of the state but of the people. Coming out of the Vietnam experience, I never thought I would see the stars & stripes used that way. But there it is. And it's everywhere.

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”

— Chris Stroffolino 21 Sep 2001

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Re: What is to be done

Geraldine McKenzie — an Australian poet and schoolteacher, mother of three sons of military age, lately teaching the First World War to teenagers — writes into the list's 'What is to be done' thread eleven days on, worrying the questions Ron Silliman and Lawrence Upton had set spinning before her. The stray, half-remembered line near the close is Yeats's, from 'The Second Coming.'

I've been reading the list lately with great interest, a continuation of the discussions that are raging in classrooms, staffrooms, at home, in the car on the way to work, in the playground — I could have just said everywhere but that doesn't convey how thoroughly absorbed in this crisis we are/I am. Factor in the newsprint, TV programs, letters and articles on the net, plus having three sons who are the right age for cannon fodder, recently teaching World War 1 — an act of terrorism by a small country against an empire, a blank cheque issued by an ally, the rapidity of entry in war, the difficulty of getting out (old news) and, if I remember correctly, the left putting aside internationalism for patriotism — and yes, I acknowledge that for all the similarities, there are also differences. (And will the world ever be the same? Well, yes and no, as usual.)

Okay, it's obvious I have nothing clear, not panicking but seeing the possibility of it.

I thought Ron Silliman's post was a very thoughtful analysis of the difficulties the left faced but Lawrence Upton posed some equally valid questions. Clearly, we agree that the terrorists who organized the attack on the US must be tried and punished but it must be proved that Bin Laden and his organization is the one. This hasn't been done and the recent post suggesting other possibilities is worrying, in that going after the wrong man is mistaken in a number of ways. Is there no chance the matter could be pursued through legal means? I know it's not as satisfying in the short term but now, as much as ever, it seems important to assert our faith in law rather than force. I don't see it happening but isn't it better to be excluded from influence than to go along with what one believes to be wrong? This isn't a rhetorical question — as an Australian, I am constantly witnessing our pseudo left — the ALP (the Alternative Liberal Party, as a colleague recently said) making precisely this trade off.

An all out war on terrorism is problematic, to put it mildly, (a sense that this might be exactly what the instigators of the recent terror want doesn't help) and my feeling is that it should be preventative rather than aggressive (the terminology is confusing — if war is declared on terrorists, doesn't that imply that they are not criminals but guerillas/ activists? — if terrorists confined their targets to the military, would that make them less "criminal" and more "political"? — has the West confined itself to military targets in waging war/ pursuing political objectives? (I'm not trying to score points — have always run in circles that grow worse these days). I'll start again — terrorism is the product of circumstances and, as long as the circumstances persist, so will terrorism. Imprisoning or executing individual terrorists creates martyrs and their brothers, sisters, cousins, friends et alia step forward to replace them and yet these crimes must be punished where possible. However, to say, we must destroy terrorism, as though all that's required is the will and the might, flies in the face of the British experience in Northern Ireland. If the Brits could not eliminate terrorism there, what chance do the Americans have of eliminating it in Afghanistan or Israel or Iraq etc.?

Going to war won't do it, bombing cities definitely won't do it and, if Tony Blair had any sense of European history, he might have pointed that out instead of making that rather odd remark about standing by the US now just as they stood by the Brits during the Blitz (the US sold the arms and supplies but they certainly didn't go to war — was Blair aware of this? How could he not be? Is it a covert way of hedging his bets? Locally, our Prime Minister is taking full advantage of the chance to look serious and responsible but voices are being raised to ask precisely what commitment, in military or human terms, is intended. It's not that

most Australians don't feel the grief, the bewilderment, the horror, that those of you who are American must feel, but the fear is, in part, what are we getting in to — and equally, what is the world getting into. I can understand that the US wants the emotional support of its allies but military support escalates the crisis into a global catastrophe. And, to be quite practical for a moment, if the US can't defeat a country the size of Afghanistan (mind you, I'm not sure that they can) would the addition of Britain, France, Germany, Russia (surely they'd know better) Australia etc make an appreciable difference except in terms of widening the conflict.

I'm an insignificant person in an unimportant country and, as I don't believe in a God, I can't even pray for peace, or that the politicians who make the decisions will think carefully before they engage in actions from which there is no retreat. I'm not even sure what the point of this post is except to connect somehow. That line from Yeats comes and goes, even though it's not quite appropriate — “The good lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity” — maybe I come across as a prime example but, for all my meanderings and quibbles, I want so much for us, any of us, not to go to war –

I could start the dance again but –

I never know how to sign off and shouldn't take it seriously but occasionally one wishes one could convey the warmth, sympathy, the desire to help and heal which, even person to person, I'm not much good at.

My good wishes to you all,

Geraldine

— **Geraldine McKenzie** 22 Sep 2001
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The Flag As Transitional Object

Piombino — a practising psychoanalyst who burned his draft card in 1967 — defends his reading of the flag against Watten, distinguishing a symbol of the nation from an object of mourning, and pleading the timing of the wounded. Winnicott, again, is the authority in the background; the argument is the analyst's, plain about grief before it is political.

I did not say what I said about transitional objects in order to be an apologist for war. I am trying to draw a distinction between the usual employment of the symbolism of the flag in leftist or pacifist terms, especially as it was critiqued during the Vietnam conflict, and its current, immediate function as a transitional

object for those in mourning. When I burnt my draft card as part of the war resistance movement in 1967, it was at a time when I was already deeply depressed and mourning over the dead on all sides. Barrett is right in preparing the way for rational pacifism at the outbreak of this conflict. However, timing is everything in gaining public support for a cause. [...] To show impatience towards the millions of people in New York who feel terrified, at this very moment, of a follow-up attack, in giving up their rage and mourning would be, I feel, risking a setback for a effective and rational anti-war movement.

When people wrap flags around caskets and drape them on buildings or children hold them in their hands they are utilizing a physical holding presence of support during the grieving period. This can only be temporary, because in order to work through mourning, we must eventually let go of this emotional struggle for holding, or we could not get on with life by accepting the finality of the loss of the dead. [...] My hunch is that Barrett is for very good reasons (having to do with considerable knowledge of political history) impatient with this period of necessary denial. There is other work in front of us, as the denial gives way, and the complete terror of our vulnerable situation comes home to us in the naked anxiety of the threat of war. Barrett is warning us about the potential furious destructiveness that could be unleashed when the stunned period of mourning and denial ends, and the new cycle of destructiveness and counter-destructiveness begins.

— Nick Piombino 22 Sep 2001
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Re: Interview with Robert Fisk at Beirut Airport

Answering the much-forwarded Beirut-airport interview with the correspondent Robert Fisk (relayed to the list by Alan Sondheim), Herron admires the man but disputes his frame — there is no declared opponent, and Sharon is no one's captive. The quoted interview is stripped; what remains is Herron's own gloss.

I like Fisk. A lot. Having said that, he's got the declaration of war part all wrong, as there is no apparent opponent. It takes two, and one side is not interested in revealing itself. Also, I doubt Sharon is in any trap. His career is full of arms trading deals. Sharon and his pals on the Joint Committee sold the Iranians 12,000 missiles when his competition, the Reagan/North NSC boys, could only muster selling 100 to Iran. [...] So Sharon is hardly trapped. He's sitting on piles of \$\$\$ left from questionable arms deals. Fisk also misses the fact that the CIA and DIA were still at least indirectly funding bin Laden through the KLA up through at least the end of 1999, deals that involved narcotrafficking and terrorist

training of KLA soldiers. So the US and its NATO pals were channeling millions to bin Laden when he was on the FBI's most wanted list. Nowadays Kosovo is a calm narcostate, where everyone has a hand on the smack and meth trade and where the drugs come from bin Laden's "Base" and German, British, and American banks along with their private networks of spooks get fat from the proceeds.

— Patrick Herron 22 Sep 2001
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forward from Laura Elrick

Eleven days on, Rodrigo Toscano relays a dispatch by the poet Laura Elrick, written from a Manhattan still papered over with the faces of the missing. She is answering Barrett Watten and Ron Silliman, who had already begun to quarrel on the list over whether refusing a military response meant proposing nothing in its place — the 'what is to be done' that would haunt the list for years.

“

Hi everyone. Laura Elrick here. I've been reading poetics list closely since the Sept 11 tragedy, and though I've had many responses, this is the first time I've been able to sit down and formulate any extended thought (in writing) about what happened to our city, the last week spent in waves of grief and shock. There are hundreds of thousands of posters pasted all over the city...5000 faces so terribly dizzying.

Last night I marched from Union to Times Square with some one thousand people. I guess it was more an anti-war-rhetoric than an anti-war march, though the message was confused and that was problematic. Along with many others, I was struck by the deep contradictions we must now face if we are to effectively critique a US military response to this horrible crime. Barrett, you touched on this briefly in your last post, namely, that *one* role of the state is (and we should support this) the protection of the safety and civil rights of its citizens.

For example, it was clear last night that the police were functioning primarily to protect the marchers (though done grudgingly by some of them I'm sure, and some arrests were made) from angry bands of men, and not the other way around as we have seen in recent anti-globalization protests. We have to be able to adjust to this and resist falling into "anti-authoritarianism" just for its own sake. One challenge is going to be shifting our signs (and signing) to reflect a somewhat defensive position — this is not a territorialization of space per se (as in Seattle). In other words, what has been a strength (loose, horizontal coalitions with no leadership) may become a weakness if we are unable

to develop a complex critique and COMMUNICATE our positions in ways that don't alienate the people we are ostensibly standing up for, including municipal employees working overtime to clean up a gruesome pulp of steel and flesh. "Whose streets? Our streets!" just ain't going to cut it.

Yet, first and foremost, I absolutely agree with those calling for military restraint. It is inconceivable to me that "smoking" bin Laden out of his "hole," while presumably also bombing the "hell" out of the widows, orphans, and old people still alive after over two decades of war in that country, (he's only one individual, after all, no matter how "powerful" in the popular imagination) will save the US, much less the world, from further terrorist attack. In fact, as history has repeatedly shown us, excessive force by imperialist nations (whether of a surgical aerial kind as in Iraq, or of a messy ground invasion as in Vietnam) often creates the sustained conditions of violence, deprivation, and, yes, hatred, for a new generation to continue with renewed fervor the battles of their forbears. If we've got a hundred cells now we'll have five hundred after "operation infinite justice."

Ron, I have to say that I don't think such a view equates to hand-wringing, though yr point about the "uniqueness" of this situation is well-taken. Anti-military is not automatically "do nothing." The problem with treating a heavy (as we have been forewarned it is likely to be) military response as a given is that it 1) overlooks the fact that building extensive judicial coalitions might be better able to protect us from further attacks (see my arguments below) and 2) it downplays the vital role that organized domestic opposition might play in limiting casualties if a conflict gets out of control, and 3) it ignores the possibility that growing international skepticism as regards a US strike might grow into outright dissension.

There is also the very likely possibility of exacerbating (and "growing" to use a capitalist term) the jihadi-type fundamentalist elements in the region, most notably, of course, in Pakistan. Imagine, for example, what it would do for popular sentiment and political climate in the US if a nation from the other side of the planet sent hundreds of thousands of war-planes to bomb us for months, killing more than ten times the number killed in the WTC (over 200 times if you include effects of economic sanctions), then, having sustained not more than one or two casualties itself, went back and had a joyous ticker-tape parade to celebrate the "bravery" of their victory, which was then broadcast all over the planet and commemorated in movies exported as the cultural force of "favorable" trade agreements. The entire Arab world witnessed

such arrogance and callousness by the US in its war on the Iraqi people and in its aftermath (not over yet).

To those who have complained that no alternatives to a military response exist or have been developed, I would say there are several. In the immediate context, as Taylor Brady and others have pointed out, a global law enforcement collaboration (a world-wide coalition of governments agreeing to find and try perpetrators) treating the matter as a criminal investigation and labeling bin Laden and accomplices as mass-murderers would better insure the eradication of terrorists. Our press has repeatedly reported that bin Laden's agents have lived in communities all over the world, as far away as Hamburg, Germany. What good will a war with Afghanistan do if agents are spread out waiting to be "activated"? In fact, over two hundred arrests have already been made in England, Belgium, Germany, and the US — and yes, at the same time, we must vigilantly guard against a racist hysteria that might produce unjust arrests.

And of course, any such global investigation would require the cooperation and support of the Islamic world. No better way to this than by taking their concerns seriously, especially as regards the continuing Israeli encroachments into the West Bank (and virtual occupation of the Gaza) in what amounts to state-sponsored territorial expansion that puts both Palestinians and Israelis at risk and has been opposed by nearly every nation of the world except the US. "Abandoning Israel" is of course an extreme-and not the only option as regards a re-assessment of US policy there. As well, the sanctions still crippling the innocent populations of Iraq who have no more to do with terrorist activity than you or I, is a misery lived daily for millions.

We could also start the process of collectively demanding a public examination of US policies in the region (cold-war and before). Such an examination needs to take place in a public forum, as a civic investigation, similar to the truth commissions that were begun after Vietnam but were never completed. Over 6000 innocent civilians living in its financial capital were murdered—we deserve more than a passing mention of a CIA codename, apt as it is. This is hardly an "extreme" demand, and certainly not one that excuses the abhorrent criminality of the act committed against us. In fact it is one that all public intellectuals, be they poets or not, should support if they believe that citizens have a right to know what their government representatives have done in their name, and unfortunately, how it has now endangered them.

Now we too are victims. Isn't it time we demand they drop the rhetoric that portrays this situation as a choice between war or terrorism and begin the complicated process of becoming citizens of the world?

”

— **Rodrigo Toscano** 22 Sep 2001
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Re: What is to be criticized

Ron Silliman's call for the left to begin from Western grief, and Barrett Watten's long reply, had set the list's 'what is to be done' thread in motion; George Thompson — a New York University librarian whose own scholarship ran to the prehistory of baseball — answered in his own voice, against the flag and against the calculus that makes bystanders acceptable losses. He wrote in the weeks after a Sikh petrol-station owner in Arizona was shot dead in mistake for a Muslim.

I would like to thank Barrett Watten for taking the trouble to answer Ron Silliman's post at such length, and with such care. I have been too busy with my non-List life to respond to anything on any e-mail list with such attention and such care. I say this with regret.

However, I have also come to realize that I have in fact benefitted from this List's responses to the WTC and Pentagon attacks, both from the personal accounts that people have sent in, to the attempts at critical response to the Bush 'crusade' rhetoric, the flag-waving and the semiotics of the flag, etc. I personally have greatly valued the efforts of those who have forwarded messages and URL's that throw some informed light on these events that have so unnerved us all. And because of all of these things that the List has given to me, I have come to feel a certain debt, and a responsibility, to try to make some contribution of my own to this community to which, I now know, I gratefully belong.

To tell the truth, though, I was greatly annoyed with Ron Silliman's post. Of course, some of the Leftist rhetoric that we have heard on this as well as other lists is tired and ineffectual. But the fact that the Left is not heard in the US, it seems obvious to me, is not the result of its inadequacies, as much as it is the result of the fact that the culture of the US [not America, as George Bowering rightly observes] is intransigently Right-wing, eternally xenophobic, grossly ignorant, and blissfully self-involved [and this explains why GW Bush earns 90 % approval ratings these days: he is a perfect representative of his constituency]. Even on this List of reasonably well-informed people, there are many who still

cannot tell the difference between a Sikh and a Muslim — and so the shooting of the one in the place of the other is — well, let's just call it collateral damage.

To be brief and personal: I myself am not inclined to compromise in any way whatsoever with the anguished bloodlust of my neighbors in this town where I live, or in the national media, or on this List. I don't care what the US public demands of its spineless politicians [I do not see any leaders among them, none whatsoever]. Nothing justifies the infliction of still more atrocities on still more innocent victims, i.e., innocent bystanders. In fact, the US military CANNOT POSSIBLY attack the terrorists who committed the awful atrocities that have become such major, prize-winning, media events — without also attacking countless numbers of innocent bystanders. We are being coaxed by vicious idiots into thinking that 'collateral damage' is perfectly acceptable when it comes to Afghanis — but in fact that is what those terrorists thought of their victims on those hijacked airplanes and in the WTC towers — they were innocent, but unfortunately necessary, "collateral damage." If the US goes into Afghanistan or Iraq with the same attitude that the terrorists took with their own bodies into the WTC towers, it is no better than the ghastly, inhuman terrorists who assaulted all of human feeling and morality in their attacks of Sept 11, 2001.

As for all of the current flag-waving, I detest it, no matter what the feelings that inspire it. The flag is not a transitional object. It is a clear-cut unambiguous sign of the crudest sort of nationalism that we should all reject. I don't know about Ron Silliman or the rest of you, but as for me, compassion does not flow only toward my neighbors, indeed my friends and relatives in NYC. No, it runs in all directions, infinitely, to Arabs, Palestinians, all Muslims as well as all Christians and Jews, never mind the majority of the rest of the species. It extends in fact to all sentient beings, in fact [I read Buddhist texts in Pali and in Sanskrit, and I take my reading very seriously]. To me it is unforgivable that we can tolerate brutality against so many, of so many races and so many ethnicities, so many animals of all sorts. The rest of the world has had to live with US terrorism for decades. Now we must live with this terrorism too. It is awful for all of us. Awful. For every single one of us, among whom I include Iraqis and Afghanis, Algerians and Saudis, et al. Sorry, I do not recognize national borders when it comes to my capacity for compassion.

If we all detest the religious fundamentalism of the Taliban, as we should, we should also detest the same thing among our so-called leaders, and their leaders, among whom are to be counted the vapid likes of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson.

Our enemies come in many shapes and sizes and ethnicities, and as far as I can tell, they are all situated to my right, and they are all nationalists. The left is not the problem.

— **George Thompson** 22 Sep 2001

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• **Ear Inn Readings — September 29, 2001**

The Ear Inn Readings
Saturdays at 3:00
326 Spring Street
New York City
FREE

After the attack on the World Trade Center, the Ear Inn became a vital rest stop for rescue and recovery workers. Due to the intense traffic and sober circumstances, we temporarily suspended our readings. But we will be back in business beginning September 29.

September 29

Madeleine Artenberg, Thomas Catterson, Robert Dunn, Laura Ludwig

— **Michael Broder** 24 Sep 2001

Re: What is to be done

Jeffrey Jullich, a New York poet, answers Stefans (just above), taking up the 'three points' Stefans had relayed from a televised account of bin Laden — and then lets the reply wander, as consolation will, from the idea of holy ground to a half-remembered Village Voice story of Aboriginal dancers performing at the foot of the newly built towers, and of the one thing a people who owned nothing could own: a dance.

The three points that John Miller reported are slightly mistranslated and re-ordered via Letterman etc.

What you quote as the second point ("the air-bases in Saudi Arabia") is the main point, but wasn't phrased solely against "air-bases".

The fundamentalist ultimatum is that there should be *no* non-Muslims, none, not one, including civilians, within the entire Arabian peninsula.

This has to do with their belief that that land itself is — PLEASE NOTE: holy ground.

Hence, the point against Israel follows; it is not *specifically* discriminatory as anti-semitic; it is universally a taboo against *all* non-Muslims ("infidels").

As a formative influence in his life, years ago, bin Laden's construction enterprise was the one awarded the contract for the buttressing-up/restoration of the architecture that houses the Ka'aba (!) and, after a "wild youth" (Club Med of the Islamic world, etc.), he underwent a profound conversion.

[...]

When The Towers were originally erected — mid- to late-'70s, I guess — all the earth that was displaced by digging the hole for the foundations was moved off toward the Hudson shoreline, and a small, man-made (temporary?) "beach" was created. There was an open air series run there for a while, called "Art on The Beach." The newspaper *The Village Voice* ran an article that I've never forgotten: Australian aborigines were brought to the US. They were taken to the ex nihilo beach for an Art on The Beach to do a performance of their "dances."

It was very exciting to scholars and everyone that here were these pristinely untouched tribesmen. They were living neolithics who had *literally* just stepped out of The Stone Age (outback, forest). The newspaper played it up big, the angle that here were these people brought directly out of 40,000 B.C. by silver jet to dance at the base of the world's new tallest building, in the shadow of The Towers. Museum curators removed Stone Age artefacts from vitrines to show the aborigines, ask them what they meant to them.

There was one particular petroglyph carved in rock. It showed a circle with concentric lines leading inward, like a wheel with spokes. Historians had conjectured that it might've been a solar disk, an ideogram for the sun. They asked the aborigines what it said to them.

It's a meeting of tribesmen, they said, all sitting in a circle with their staffs pointed toward the center, tips touching.

But, here's the point:

Being neolithic and nomadic, they had no sense *whatsoever* of personal possession. One couldn't *own* anything. (That's why graves provide evidence of Stone Age life, filled with Venuses of Willendorf, Cycladic mothers, stuff: rather than proof of belief in an afterlife — once somebody died, nobody *wanted* anybody else's s — t, and they just dumped their hoardings like garbage into the hole where the body went.

There was one thing, though, which they could own:

a dance.

No one except the owner of a singular dance could do that dance. It could not be stolen, sold, or given away in life.

Upon the death of a father, the son who had seen it practiced could then do the dance.

And the dances were of such phenomenal simplicity that they were sometimes difficult for Westerners to recognize as having even *happened*, danced to completion before their eyes. Such as, I remember, "The Bear":

The dancer stood very seriously, flat-footed, weight evenly distributed. He took one step forward, transferring his weight onto the sole of that foot.

Done.

The "dance," more than choreography per se, was like the "duende" that Lorca writes about in flamenco dancers, I guess, not only its motions but an attitude, or elan, about doing the dance, "The Bear," the self-consciousness of possessing something.

The Australian aborigines danced at the base of The Twin Towers at its inauguration.

— Jeffrey Jullich 24 Sep 2001
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Firing Artillery at the Algebra of Bees

A long original broadside, its title glancing at Arundhati Roy's 'algebra of infinite justice': Herron argues that war is 'no solution at all' against a decentralised enemy, that covert war is only terrorism by another name, and — for a moment — that the world's sympathy is America's to keep or squander.

Today we stand at the edge of a large cliff, ready to leap off the edge into an unknown darkness. Many of us find ourselves no longer able to resist the temptation to solve our problems with military might; even some of the most left of us are arching our feet getting ready to dive headlong into the darkness of war. [...] I want to talk about absurdity, truth, justice, murder, money, and democracy.

Advocating any sort of military or intelligence solution (as in acts of war or an increase in intelligence spending) to the US's crisis at hand sets a whole new standard for absurdity. Yes, absurd. War is not only a poor solution, it is no solution at all. [...] The war will spread like burning jet fuel, extending the violence well beyond the circles of Lower Manhattan, rural Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon.

Firing artillery at a swarm of bees is ineffective in preventing people from bee stings. The swarm easily evades the relatively large and ungainly attack. [...] Such large gestures of military strength might make you feel safe, but they only manage to increase your risk of being stung. [...] Today the world is behind America for a change. The people of the world are looking to us as a possible

home for truth and justice and freedom, a nation willing to set a proud example, not a people of awkward and murderous retribution. [...] I write to you this Monday evening, the 24rd Of September, from the land of the FREE and the home of the BRAVE.

— Patrick Herron 24 Sep 2001
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Analyzing the Flag

Watten answers Nick Piombino, who had proposed reading the sudden bloom of American flags as a Winnicottian 'transitional object' — an aid to grief rather than a war-cry. Unpersuaded, Watten turns the same psychoanalytic apparatus back on the flag to expose what it also masks; the paediatrician D. W. Winnicott, whose theory of the child's comfort-object anchors the exchange, worked among children during the London Blitz.

Dear Nick: Thanks for the eloquent post. When I first saw flags coming out after September 11, I correlated that with the (it turns out) more aggressive display in the Gulf War. I also remember the half-time show of the Super Bowl, an important cultural document which ought to be studied for its object relations. In it, groups of children of servicemen were trotted out on center stage, and there was virtually a sacrificial aspect to the whole thing. "We" were to identify both with the child left behind (perhaps permanently) and the parents doing their duty leaving the child ("who is us").

So the flag. We could look at it this way, yes. We could look at it as an identity symbol — that's my flag, I'm an American. And we could look at it as a form of duty. Salute the flag and do your duty. I don't think it's possible to dissociate any of these ways of seeing the flag. What is remarkable at the present moment is the overwhelming sense that we have been placed in the position of the child whose mother, a.k.a. sense of well being that can't possibly "go away," has gone away. For the present time. This is the $x + y + z$ situation Winnicott discusses. The tragedy is that, given the total destructiveness of great power politics and terrorist responses, that is the only place for us.

I certainly did not mean to infer that concern for the human reality of the trauma that has occurred is an apology for all that might be done in the name of a national symbol. I also feel caught up in the same relation to the trauma that occurred. I notice it because I perceive the flag, right now, as more or less benign in precisely the way you and others have seen it. But I also perceive in it an ominous masking of the other forms of identity and disavowal that are to come.

— Barrett Watten 25 Sep 2001

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Violence and rhetoric

A brief, deliberately provocative coda to the September threads: Watten sets American violence in a long domestic lineage and dares the reader to call it exculpation of anyone else's.

The point can be briefly, and rhetorically, stated: violence is as American as apple pie. This includes genocide of native peoples, mass displacement of civilians and destruction of "infrastructure" on which the lives of civilians depend as a military objective in the Civil War, use of atomic weapons on civilian populations in WWII, and mass bombings that do not distinguish between civilians and military in Vietnam and the Gulf War. Some of these are in fact American inventions (think of the use of napalm and defoliants, for instance, in Vietnam; cluster and other antipersonnel bombs in the Gulf War), and some even basic to American "character." I would put the stockade mentality ("draw in the wagons") and manifest destiny in that category, leading to the rise of cowboy poetry ("wanted dead or alive"). Not too debatable. What is debatable is that to point this out is to diminish the acts of Genghis Khan, the Royal Air Force, or other horrors of war.

— **Barrett Watten** 26 Sep 2001
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Be done: to be/ shall be/ can be

Daniel Bouchard — production editor at the MIT Press, poet of the Boston small-press world — writing a fortnight after the towers fell, with the bombing of Afghanistan still days off. He is answering Ron Silliman's much-forwarded 'What is to be done' post, which had called the reframing of the assault as a crime rather than an act of war a species of 'pussyfooting'; Marjorie Perloff, for her part, had pronounced a second attack all but inevitable. Bouchard doubts both the arithmetic and the crusade.

"We have no issue and no anger toward the citizens of Afghanistan" said President Bush, yesterday, standing beside Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan. You will recall his father eleven years ago said the same thing about the people of Iraq ("we have no quarrel with the people of Iraq") right before he directed the complete flattening of that country and the subsequent criminalization of offering help to those same people which lasts to this day.

Well, presidents are full of rhetoric and shit almost everytime they speak publicly. That's because we, as citizens, need it all dumbed down for us. So the smoke Bush is going to use to root out evil in faraway places is very similar to the smoke he

feels the need to blow up our asses in preparation for the loss and deprivation to come.

Before the Gulf War I remember the large amounts of media-talk that emphasized Iraq's forces as an entrenched, massive army of battle-hardened veterans. It was not going to be easy to force them out of Kuwait, especially once the US sent ground troops in. As it turned out, the air war had so overwhelmingly incapacitated what was left of Iraq's army that US troops hardly encountered any opposition. Many of those they found were very willing to surrender. And as the decade of the 90s matured we learned more and more that the Iraqi army had not been all that formidable a foe in the first place.

This time the official responses being given to us vary a great deal. Some days we're going only after targeted cells, like a drug raid. Other days (tho this rhetoric has been toned down a lot) we're going to bring death and destruction to all who harbor terrorists and, in some cases, "end" entire states.

Now it's been two weeks since the US was attacked. And don't get me wrong---I'm as pissed off and angry and emotional and upset about the murder of nearly 7000 people as the next guy, gal, or poet. Yes, I would like to BELIEVE that the government's response will be to find only the terrorists linked to the "network" believed responsible for the attacks. But I don't believe they will. And much like poor Codrescu, glued to his TV somewhere, all we can do is wait. Some of us will fly flags, some of us will attend peace rallies, and some people are actually in the military and doing what they're trained to do. But nothing can convince me that an attack that kills civilians in Afghanistan (for starters, perhaps elsewhere too) is not just as horrible and murderous as the attacks here in the US.

These are the days immediately before the war. If the US does not make any kind of response (that is, not even pursue the people responsible; I'm not for that) there is a chance (not the inevitable fact Prof. Perloff claims) the US would be attacked again. WHEN the US responds, does the chance of more attacks increase or diminish?

One of the things that continues to bug me about Ron's "What is to be done" post (9/18) is the suggestion that "reframing" "the assault as 'criminal' rather than as an act of war" amounts to "pussyfooting". This is the kind of thing you expect to read in a George Will or William Safire column. If it is an act of war, then the US can respond with warlike activity. In fact, it demands return acts of war in self-defense. And thus, another Iraq, whose invasion of Kuwait was an attack on the US itself (in the "framing" of it by Bush, 1990). "We" had no problem with the people of Iraq or Afghanistan, just their horrible rulers (one of whom we gave a 43

million dollar grant to last spring to support their noble ban, or "war," on drugs, i.e. opium), or in this case, their friends. Unfortunately, the ordinary people of these countries have neglected to overthrow their dictators so naturally the US can hardly be blamed if they are in the way of the crusade against terrorists and evil.

See today's *Washington Post*, Michael Kelly's column, for how a pacifist position amounts to supporting terrorism and is in fact pro-terrorist and pro-fascist. Such people are "against" the US, which is called treason in times of war.

— Daniel Bouchard 26 Sep 2001

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forward from Anne Waldman

The Beat elder Anne Waldman composed this from a fellowship at the Civitella Ranieri Center in Umbria a fortnight after the attacks, and asked a list member to pass it round; its asterisked commandments marry Buddhist psychology to Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. 'Sarva mangalam' — may all be auspicious — closes the vow.

Anne asked me to send this to everybody. Lisa

“

Cautionary Thoughts Manifesto Re: The American War on Terrorism
(second take)

dedicated to innocent victims everywhere & the memory of their life & unwarranted deaths

Umberto Eco, semiologist-philosopher, reminds us of the three ways cultures clash: the members of Culture A cannot recognize the members of Culture B as human beings (and vice versa), seeing them as "barbarians" to civilize or destroy, which is the Conquest Model. In the Cultural Pillage Model, Culture A must steal from B and colonize or subjugate politically or militarily and in that way undermine and usurp the invaded culture. The Exchange Model is a two-way process of reciprocal support, often "influence" in the best sense and respect.

Always invoke Model Three!

It is a fact, woefully, that Western culture (European civilization) has been most engaged with the first model — and, as just one example, subjugated African and Ameridian cultures with unmerciful acts of cruelty. And that now, more particularly America — the richest and most powerful country in the world — the "cop of the world" — acts and has acted with unmitigated and brutal economic self-interest in many parts

of the globe. Because of media control (particularly since the American War in Vietnam) Americans do not fully comprehend the damage we have inflicted on Iraq. And now do not understand the "karma" of that conflict which galvanized so much hatred of the US. Or how the indignities that the Palestinians have suffered in Israel/Palestine have led to such loathing and call for "jihad".

[...]

Or the instability we brought to South & Central America, Indonesia, the Caribbean historically in support of corrupt governments that were in our interest to support. In a recent conversation with Ernesto Cardenal — Nicaraguan Catholic Priest, poet, and former Minister of Culture under the Sandinistas — the suggestion was that karmically the US helped create Osama Bin Laden (& others like him), through a variety of actions, but most particularly the US covert (CIA) support against Russia in Afghanistan on which side Bin Laden fought. Bin Laden also later saw arrogant US presence in Saudi Arabia which he resented. His call for jihad, his heinous words against America and Jews are the product of a sick and twisted yet ideological-based seemingly "righteous" mentality.

Invoke Investigative and documentary Poetics! Know the score! Know the history!

[...]

Discriminating Wisdom ("prajna") Now! Poetics adages are useful here: "No ideas but in things" (Williams), "Go in fear of abstractions" (Ezra Pound) Poets & artists: make your own lists of sane trustworthy language measures...

[...]

As patriotic US citizen who has always strived to "save America from herself" and one (with many) who mourns her country's loss, & who feels tremendous assault on her home city, and as writer defending creative expression and the right to dissent and as denizen of the world who aspires to know the world (& the cosmos) -understand it, witness it in all its richness & complexity, - I take a vow for an aspiration of "vipashyana" or clear-seeing (insight). The world does not need more war. Pursue the path of least suffering...

By this merit may all obtain omniscience May it defeat the enemy wrongdoing...

Sarva mangalam.



— Lisa 26 Sep 2001

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Re: A well reasoned piece by Steve Niva

Mark DuCharme, a Boulder poet, writes into a list already at odds over whether poets should venture political argument at all; he addresses Marjorie Perloff and Ron Silliman by name, the latter having warned that a principled critique would only cost the left what little credibility it had. Don Byrd had forwarded the Evergreen scholar Steve Niva's essay that occasions the reply.

Thanks to Don Byrd for forwarding this thoughtful and informative article — which I assume is the sort of analysis some on this list would call a "knee-jerk leftist" response. Since many posts to the list have presumed those who do not favor blind retaliation also advocate "no response," let me just add that this article outlines a framework from which a sane, intelligent and (I think) moral response can proceed. The article also explains clearly why a purely military response won't be effective. I'm not necessarily opposed to SOME well-defined military action, if it can be established that it is the only way to achieve particular objectives, & if every care is taken to ensure that innocent people are not harmed. ONE of the reasons I oppose an open-ended, vaguely defined, rah-rah war such as Bush (if not Powell) has proposed, is that I think — and I am speaking now directly to Marjorie Perloff — it will increase the likelihood that MANY MORE attacks WILL occur, by sowing more enmity & bitterness among those who already despise us. (Notice I do not entertain the fallacy that NO MORE attacks will occur; I am merely concerned with reducing their frequency &, one hopes, their severity).

I do think that, despite his eloquence which I will acknowledge, Ron Silliman is wrong that the left should not engage in a principled critique of the means of response. Lose its credibility? It HAS none, & has had none (in the ABC News/Time Magazine sense) since the Civil Rights movement. *Liberals*, maybe — but the Left?!!! (Ron Silliman, you of all people know the difference). If anything, the left (no capital L) has credibility to GAIN by engaging in a principled, coherent dialogue on national policy. The problem is that the left/Left has already been shut out of any effective means of engaging in such a dialogue. (Protest, yes; dialogue, no). With the exception of the Civil Rights & Anti- (Vietnam) War, movements, & some early (and very hard-won) successes of labor, can you tell me, Ron, any time in "USAmerican" history where the l/Left HAS had this facility?

Ron is right that certain lines of argument are more self-defeating than others; for example, posts to this list that have tried to address the historical context of the U.S.'s role in the Mid-East have been met with the presumption that these were attempts at justification of the attacks, while in most cases I think this is utterly false. Nevertheless, there is a *knee-jerk* response to any line of argument, it seems, that seeks to contextualize the event in order to MORE INTELLIGENTLY RESPOND. (C.f. Andrei Codrescu — & thanks to Dan Bouchard, by the way, for forwarding an excerpt of his remarks). If this is the reaction of, presumably, trained scholars & thoughtful poets, I don't think it would be fruitful to pursue this line of analysis in a more public forum. I think, rather, that the case to be made might rest in part on comparisons to the Israeli/Palstinian violence in the Mid-East & the Catholic/Protestant violence in Northern Ireland. Can any sane, reasonable person honestly claim to believe that violence in these arenas is not self-perpetuating — almost an "industry" unto itself? Surely, this is a cycle we do not want to see our country drawn into. Further, as Byrd's forwarded article points out, there is no "there" to go to war with. Terror has no boundaries; it is diffuse & far-reaching. The only conceivable response that could have any impact toward making us any safer, rather than just FEELING like we're the great big superpower world champions, is one that combines intelligence (by which, sadly, I mean the CIA & FBI), international law (remember that, George?), vigilance & the credible threat of military response — but one that is only deployed sanely, to achieve very defined objectives. (Yes, I do mean ABSOLUTELY NO nuclear weapons. The fact that Bushie, as my daughter calls him, says their use is even being considered, is a shame & a scandal).

Finally, I want to say something about knee-jerk responses. Ron Silliman is right to caution us against them. I think that poetry, & art in general, can serve a unique purpose right now in that its very modus is one which, at its best, undermines received ideas, unquestioning assent & piety. I think that everyone on this list should write a poem today. Better yet, write two, & pass on the impulse to post some further insight on the uses of the U.S. flag. You'll feel better, I guarantee, because you'll actually be doing something that could begin to have an impact.

— **Mark DuCharme** 27 Sep 2001
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No War

Someone had reached, as people did that autumn, for the old pacifist slogan — Carl Sandburg's line, by way of a thousand placards, that they might give a war and no one would come. Fargas, writing from a government address, turned it back on the fortnight just past.

“

What would happen if they gave a war and no one showed up?

”

Well, the World Trade Center would still be standing, for one thing.

— **Laura Fargas** 27 Sep 2001
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Yom Kippur, 2001

Alan Sondheim wrote on the Day of Atonement, a fortnight after the towers came down and while the talk of who was to answer for it was still running wild. The poem reached the list with a note that it had been sent two days earlier and lost somewhere in the mail.

It's yom kippur and i'll fast and atone
you taliban you come and get me
the jews are everyone's problem, you can
get rid of me once and for all -
come and get me, i'll be weak, i'm fasting

— **Alan Sondheim** 28 Sep 2001
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some discussion of the present situation

David Antin — the talk-poet, then teaching at San Diego — brought to the list a private exchange with the dancer and film-maker Yvonne Rainer, who had sent him a much-circulated 1998 homily by Robert Bowman, a Vietnam bomber pilot turned bishop, on why the world hates America. Antin, unmoved by the notion that a change of heart confers authority, answered her point for point — the sanctions, Mossadegh, Pakistan — holding that governments never do good and that history put only to the use of confession is worthless.

1. From Yvonne Rainer to David Antin, a posted message:

Robert Bowman flew 101 combat missions in Vietnam. He is presently (1998) bishop of the United Catholic Church in Melbourne Beach, FL. Originally printed in *The National Catholic Reporter*, Oct. 2, 1998.

“

The "Security" Charade by Robert Bowman If deceptions about terrorism go unchallenged, then the threat will continue until it destroys us. The truth is that none of our thousands of nuclear weapons can protect us from these threats. No Star Wars system no matter how technically advanced, no matter how many trillions of dollars are poured into it, can protect us from a nuclear weapon delivered in a sailboat or a Cessna or a suitcase or a Ryder rental truck. Not one weapon in our vast arsenal, not a penny of the \$270 billion a year we spend on so-called defense can defend against a terrorist bomb. That is a military fact. As a retired lieutenant colonel and a frequent lecturer on national security issues, I have often quoted Psalm 33: "A king is not saved by his mighty army. A warrior is not saved by his great strength." The obvious reaction is, "Then what can we do?" Is there nothing we can do to provide security for our people?" There is. But to understand it requires that we know the truth about the threat. President Clinton did not tell the American people the truth about why we are the targets of terrorism when he explained why we bombed Afghanistan and Sudan. He said that we are a target because we stand for democracy, freedom, and human rights in the world. Nonsense! We are the target of terrorists because, in much of the world, our government stands for dictatorship, bondage, and human exploitation. We are the target of terrorists because we are hated. And we are hated because our government has done hateful things. In how many countries have agents of our government deposed popularly elected leaders and replaced them with puppet military dictators who were willing to sell out their own people to American multinational corporations? We did it in Iran when the US Marines and the CIA deposed Mossadegh because he wanted to nationalize the oil industry. We replaced him with the Shah, and armed, trained, and paid his hated Savak National Guard, which enslaved and brutalized the people of Iran, all to protect the financial interests of our oil companies. Is it any wonder that there are people in Iran who hate us? We did it in Chile. We did it in Vietnam. More recently, we tried to do it in Iraq. And, of course, how many times have we done it in Nicaragua and all the other banana republics of Latin America? Time after time we have ousted popular leaders who wanted the riches of the land to be shared by the people who worked it. We replaced them with murderous tyrants who would sell out their own people so the wealth of the land could be taken out by the likes

of Domino Sugar, Folgers, and Chiquita Banana. In country after country, our government has thwarted democracy, stifled freedom, and trampled human rights. That's why it is hated around the world. And that's why we're the target of terrorists. People in Canada enjoy democracy, freedom, and human rights. So do the people of Norway and Sweden. Have you heard of Canadian embassies being bombed? Or Norwegian, or Swedish? We are not hated because we practice democracy, value freedom, or uphold human rights. We are hated because our government denies these things to people in Third World countries whose resources are coveted by our multinational corporations. That hatred we have sown has come back to haunt us in the form of terrorism and in the future, nuclear terrorism. Once the truth about why the threat exists is understood, the solution becomes obvious. We must change our ways. Getting rid of our nuclear weapons unilaterally if necessary will enhance our security. Drastically altering our foreign policy will ensure it. Instead of sending our sons and daughters around the world to kill Arabs so we can have the oil under their sand, we should send them to rebuild their infrastructure, supply clean water, and feed starving children. Instead of continuing to kill hundreds of Iraqi children every day with our sanctions, we should help Iraqis rebuild their electric power plants, their water treatment facilities, their hospitals, and all the things we have destroyed and prevented them from rebuilding. Instead of training terrorists and death squads, we should close the School of the Americas [Ft. Benning, GA.]. Instead of supporting insurrection, destabilization, assassination, and terror around the world, we should abolish the CIA and give money to relief agencies. In short, we should do good instead of evil. Who would try to stop us? Who would hate us? Who would want to bomb us? That is the truth the American people need to hear.

”

2. From DA to Yvonne Rainer

I'm not at all sure that this is the message we need to hear.

Robert Bowman flew 101 missions in a disgusting and immoral and stupid war. What kind of authority does that make him now that he's a bishop and happens to have had a change of heart? It's really surprising how many intelligent and well meaning people repeat the same mix of historical truths and hyperbolic prophecies, from which they derive the same well meaning, banal and insufficient conclusions. There is no reason to suppose that a change in American foreign policy will deter people who already have a developed career in terrorism from

continuing their career. What will Osama Bin Laden do, become an independent filmmaker? There is no reason to suppose that anything we can do favoring "the people of Iraq" or of Palestine will reduce the aggressive ambitions of Saddam Hussein. Perhaps after thirty or forty years of a balanced Near Eastern and Far Eastern policy the children of the people trained in the religious schools of radical Islam will begin to imagine that they have enemies closer to home. Do you believe this? Meanwhile, during those thirty or forty years how many terrorist attacks do you imagine we will have to endure with Christ-like patience or Buddha-like indifference. Bowman has come late to his knowledge of American imperial history. It's a history we share with England, France, Belgium and Germany. The reason they're not directly under attack is that we happen at present to be the most powerful. The reason Canada isn't a target of terrorism is not the morality of its foreign policy, but its relative lack of power. Now that Bowman has learned his belated history lesson, he offers a cautionary tale and an absurd prophecy. Sure we can't prevent every act of terror, but what makes him sure we can't prevent a great many? We can make it more difficult to carry them out. We can increase intelligence and disrupt the networks of active conspirators whenever we find them. And we can increase security to some significant degree, considering how slovenly it's been up to now, making it more difficult to carry out attacks. There may very well be attacks, but fewer if we take action against the attackers. The question is not whether to take such action, but the precise nature of action we have to take. And of course it would be good — for many reasons — to rethink American foreign policy in terms of our own real advantage and the ethical condition of our actions. Not because it will change the opinion of our enemies and turn them into friends, but because it will allow us a well-deserved self respect.

I'm almost as tired of these people as I am of George W.

3. From Yvonne Rainer to David Antin

First of all, everyone has the authority, you, me, why not Robert Bowman? Does a "change of heart" disqualify him from speaking with authority?

I agree that security and "intelligence" measures can prevent some acts of terrorism, but you have said nothing of the provocations of "surgical" strikes against Afghanistan. If the U.S. kills bin Laden, he will become a martyr and role model more than ever for generations to come. Changes in our foreign policies will of course not make bin Laden and his ilk become independent filmmakers, but looking further than greedy multinationals' self-interested economic

depredations has got to have consequences in the long run different from our current catastrophic mess.

And Bowman's facts are right on; we can't repudiate them: The U.S. has undermined and destroyed democracy in too many places. This is not diminished by the fact that European nations are equally culpable.

4. Dear Yvonne — The kind of authority everybody has is no authority, and that's quite good enough for an expression of opinion, which Bowman is certainly entitled to. But his record in Vietnam is not inspiring with respect to his judgment. Given his background, it appears that he was as a young man part of the right wing American Catholic "anti-Communist" world, that through its leading representative in the US — Cardinal Spellman — played a large part in placing a Catholic premier — Diem — in the position of powerless power in Vietnam. He had no support in the Buddhist community and was entirely dependent on the old French Catholic connections in Vietnam, the American liberal cold war activists like Ladejinsky, and propagandists like Tom Dooley. As Bowman was apparently a sucker for this world of interventionist propaganda in the affairs of Vietnam, one would want to regard his enthusiasms with some skepticism.

What he is right about is a great deal of history that is very well known. Its relevance in the long run may be significant, but not in the absurd way he proposes. No government will do anything that isn't in some way in its own interest, or what its officials can regard as its interest. Governments don't do "good". They never have and never will. The attempt to straighten out American diplomacy is complex and difficult and necessary. But any attempt to straighten it out will benefit from a more honest assessment than Bowman's.

The American sanctions have not killed all those children in Iraq. The sanctions were however a serious misjudgment that allowed a great deal of suffering without accomplishing their end. They were aimed to restrict Saddam Hussein's military capabilities by economic constriction. But they underestimated Saddam's cynicism, his ruthlessness and his intelligence — his willingness to steal all the resources generated by the oil he was allowed to sell, which were to be used for the needs of the Iraqi population, for his personal and military uses. He was willing to allow thousands of people to suffer because he was aware that he could starve everyone in Iraq and that Arab propagandists would blame all these collateral casualties on the US and regard him as a long suffering hero. So, the U.S, once it realized the failure of its policy, should have withdrawn the sanctions and looked for other ways to destabilize the dangerous and cruel and

lethal Hussein. So more honestly stated, Saddam Hussein killed all those people and dragged America in as a stupid accomplice and fall guy. You will not hear that version from Bowman. You won't hear it from the Arab world, or from kneejerk Americans leftists. As for what America did in Iran in relation to Mossadegh and installation of the Shah, it was a nasty piece of oil politics played with the approval and diplomatic connivance of the other Western powers. As to what the mullahs did in Iran after they overthrew the Shah, it was a nasty piece of Arab fundamentalist extremism, that might or might not have occurred if Mossadegh had taken power. If there is a reasoned Arab or Islamic liberalism or conservatism, after years of suppression, first by the Shah and then by the mullahs, it isn't in a very good position to speak right now. At least not in the Islamic countries. If we try to improve our relations with the more secular contingents in Iran too openly, the mullahs will step in to cause trouble as they have over the last five or six years in which anti-extremism has gradually reappeared. There is probably no very good policy to undertake in regard to Pakistan, except to move cautiously. They have a military dictator with an atomic bomb. He is currently our ally and is supported pretty much by the middle class and opposed by an intense if not very large minority of Islamic fundamentalist Pakistanis and Afghan immigrants, and he is conducting an ongoing guerrilla war in Kashmir. Go figure your policy there. In Afghanistan, there is a disastrous and repressive fundamentalist government, such as it is, in whose nest there is a conspiratorial network headed by Bin Laden. If we attack him and his network of co-conspirators and in the course of things destabilize the Taliban, we may be doing the helpless people of Pakistan some kind of favor — if we don't kill too many helpless civilians along the way. If we don't attack him, we will lose helpless civilians. Pick your poison. On the Israeli — Palestine issue, It is hard to believe there will be any solution that makes any sense with Sharon in power. Somehow America has to convince an Israeli population, that already believes the US is willing to sell them out for oil, that a serious resolution of the settlement question and the creation of an integral Palestinian state is the only way to arrive at a lasting peace. The Israelis see themselves as the victims of an ongoing guerilla war, the Palestinians see themselves as the victims of ongoing Israeli aggression and state terror. What specific way to move here is not obvious. Perhaps the good bishop has some answer, but I doubt it. I haven't mentioned Syria or its client state Lebanon, but they complicate matters also. My main point is that history is useless if all you can use it for is confession of past guilt — though it may appeal to Catholics.

— David Antin 10 Oct 2001

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Left fundamentalism & The Chorus of National Unity and Determination: "2:36:21pm-8:59:51pm EST"

The Vancouver poet and editor Aaron Vidaver answers a thread on 'left fundamentalism' — Barrett Watten had circulated Michael Walzer's essay chiding the anti-war left — not with argument but with a readymade: a run of postings to a CNN message board on the evening the bombing of Afghanistan began, timestamped and set down verbatim. The found document is the reply, and is given here entire.

No, you're not the only person in here dismayed, again, too, in this use of the term "left fundamentalism." The link to the essay by moral theorist Michael Walzer was also disheartening. Are the four propositions that Walzer argues against ("terror is a last resort," "terrorists are weak and can't do anything else," "terror is the universal resort," "the victims weren't innocent") ones that anybody has actually advanced? I notice that Walzer doesn't cite any published writing to support this characterization of the left. We do, however, have plenty of citable evidence of "the chorus of national unity and determination." See below, courtesy of CNN.

Also, I think the term "left fundamentalism" here has a different ideological function from the term "social fascism" as deployed by the KPD in late Weimar. It's too early to see if the current term is put to service more broadly by "the liberal-left" but it's also too early this morning to sketch out what I think the distinction is, sorry — will get back if I'm able to. The comparison is worth arguing about.

Steve Dunster - 2:36:21pm

Just waste Afganistan, and while your at it wipe out all Muslims.

Catherine Jeffus - 2:43:20pm

I am proud of our president and armed services, they are doing the right thing.

Lynn Manderson - 2:43:43pm

Bin Laden is an idiot. Cut off his fingers, cut off his toes, and while we are at it, lets cut off his nose. Go America!

Pamela Raynes - 2:44:24pm

USA Rocks!!!!

Don Easley - 2:55:17pm

As a 22 year veteran I support all military actions to include the wiping out of all terrorist.

Paul Fletcher - 3:08:17pm

Pay back time!

Shirley Wiesner - 3:20:20pm

I totally support Pres. Bush in his actions today with respect to taking the war to the terrorists. We have accepted their challenge. They will now come to justice. We will take care of the refugees at the same time.

Ex Marine - 3:21:07pm

Would like to see transcripts on Bin Ladens press coverage. Thank you. PS Take them out with extreme prejudice.

David Naeve - 3:22:11pm

I am so glad to hear that we are bombing Afghanistan! Thank god! Now I would like to see Bin Laden burn in hell!!!

Molly Cheal - 3:26:31pm

I believe the only way to finish this is for America to go into Afganistan and take that country over, weed out the organizations that are a threat to innocent people throughout the world, establish a democratic government and help to rebuild it.

Merkx - 3:30:29pm

Bring'em on. It'll get them out in the open so we can deal with them! There's far more of us than them!

J A Marshall - 3:31:43pm

We ain't in Kansas anymore. Unfortunately the mentality of the people of the Middle East is violence. It is the only thing they understand. Let's not be so naive anymore.

Rick Bar - 3:34:41pm

Having trouble getting shut-eye in Kabul tonight?

schreujo - 3:37:23pm

I stepped on my plane back home the saturday after the attack. I had my "No Fear" t-shirt on, just to show: Don't mess with me.

D-lock - 3:37:50pm

Maybe we should send band aids with our bombs. it is an outrage to give those afgans food and medicine after the way they danced in the streets after destroying the trade towers , pentigon and the flight that crashed in pennsylvania. Let them eat Oil. After all did they do it for the victims of our country?

martyt=fox - 3:41:26pm

Go USA kick their ASS were all behind you!

Nancy G. Bailey - 3:44:26pm

Nancy B. I think it is great we are taking action against this terrorist to preserve some sense of what is accepted as right and wrong behavior in our world today.

Jamie Jordan - 3:53:22pm

No more talks, simply repeated strikes until our mission is completed.

Karen Yeoman - 4:06:26pm

The flood gates of hell have been opened and Satan is moving his Pawns (Pawns=Bin Laden and His followers) This is just the begining of the "end of this system of things", as foretold in the Bible. God help us all.

Kyle Pietschmann - 4:12:24pm

Why don't we just enslave the people of Afghanistan and make them clean up the wreckage by hand?

Roger Loeb - 4:13:57pm

What part of NO! did they not understand. As a U.S. citizen & U.S. marine Corps vietnam veteran, I say "GO FOR IT!!!" only lets do it right this time, no half-stepping, we must not fail this time! and do not be fearfull! for fear is a sign of weakness, some fear; is only a bit of good sence & given insight to have. It's what terrorists play on; (fear) in which much what of the street gangs try to do as well, It will and can not be tolerated. Proud to be an American!

Tony Ryder - 4:28:44pm

First, I would like to say GO GET "EM BOYS!! to our Military, God bless you and may you be successful. As far as the idiotic statements made by Bin Lad: I tell you this, we are not in a state of Fear, or panic. we are in a state of READINESS! There is a difference. We will now be on the look out for any and all suspicious movements by anyone who even remotely looks "foreign" in this country. He has sentenced all or his followers, here in the US and other countries all over the world, to a new sort of no more "easy" terrorism. No more just walking in and out and being cowards...they WILL die for their beliefs. I think the most profound thing that the Bin lad. followers have to look forward to now is a SHORTENED life span! Tony Ryder Nashville, TN

Donna-Sue Howatson - 4:57:09pm

FEAR??? No Osama, not afraid in the slightest! My only fear, as a female, would be to still be ALIVE in a terrorist run society! In a case such as that I would welcome death and my ashes scattered to the wind!! No fear, honey... I hope they DO have the internet and are checking out message boards and chats rooms visited by persons in the free world. I think the REAL prevailing attitude of Americans (lack of fear) would make him pee his "Aladdin" pants!! :)

lilylangtree - 5:05:14pm

Hot diggity dog, USA is finally carrying out what should have been done at least two weeks ago. Go, go USA! Osama bin Laden and the Taliban: You godawful cowards! You can run but you can't hide. I can't wait until the

coalition returns with your scalp and any other body parts, because as an American, I want justice and retribution for every single life that you and your terrorist buddies took on September 11 and previously. You couldn't face the military but you're willing to take innocent lives. God bless America!

eggslinger - 5:49:11pm

kill every last man,woman and child!!—fight at same level as terrorists—
send clear message to all concerned

Trisha Smith - 6:08:27pm

Bin Laden and the Taliban are supposedly not really afraid of death, since they believe that they are going to see Allah and have an endless supply of virgins (does that mean their heaven is all about screwing? Crazy). To beat them at this 'game' is to find and use what they are afraid of. I found the following posted on another message board, and I suppose it's a good idea, except I think that would be better if there was another way of fighting back without killing animals. Like maybe have some strippers chase them around and tag them, since they seem to think that women are contaminated or something — just fooling. Anyway here it is: Once in U.S. history an episode of Islamic terrorism was very quickly stopped. It happened in the Philippines about 1911, when Gen. John J. Pershing was in command of the garrison. There had been numerous Islamic terrorist attacks, so "Black Jack" told his boys to catch the perps and teach them a lesson. Forced to dig their own graves, the terrorists were all tied to posts, execution style. The U.S. soldiers then brought in pigs and slaughtered them, rubbing their bullets in the blood and fat. Thus, the terrorists were terrorized; they saw that they would be contaminated with hogs' blood. This would mean that they could not enter Heaven, even if they died as terrorist martyrs. All but one was shot, their bodies dumped into the grave, and the hog guts dumped atop the bodies. The lone survivor was allowed to escape back to the terrorist camp and tell his brethren what happened to the others. This brought a stop to terrorism in the Philippines for the next 50 years. Pointing a gun into the face of Islamic terrorists won't make them flinch. They welcome the chance to die for Allah. Like Gen. Pershing, we must show them that they won't get to Muslim heaven (which they believe has an endless supply of virgins) but instead will die with the hated pigs of the devil. That's right. Use their own beliefs to back them off. Rub down mortar shells and missiles with pig's blood soaked rags. Dip bullet tips in the blood prior to their being attached to the shells. The spectre of going to hell creates far more fear in the mind of a religious zealot, so if these folks in Afghanistan want a war, we'll give 'em one. One in which dying in any manner means an immediate trip to hell. Do you think they'll still want it, then?

Kevin Punsky - 6:29:03pm

New York - Year 2032 A father and his son are walking the Manhattan streets when the father stops at a vacant lot takes a deep breath and tells his son: To think that at one time here on this very lot stood the Twin Towers. The son looks at his father and asked: Dad, what are the Twin Towers? Father says: My dear son, the Twin Towers were two tremendously tall buildings with lots of offices that was the heart of the United States, but approximately 31 years ago, several Arabs destroyed the buildings. The boy then thought for a minute and then asked his father: Daddy what are Arabs?

Ken Engler - 6:32:02pm

Look how similar Islamic Radicalism is to Nazism. Nazi's believed the Aryan race was superior to all others. Islamic Radicals believe they are the chosen of god, superior to all others. Nazi's used hate to unite people behind common causes, with a special focus on Jews. Islamic Radicals preach hate in the name of Allah, with a special focus on Jews. Nazi's took a political movement (Facism — One party control with a capitalistic society) and turned it into a dirty word. Islamic Radicals are taking the Muslim faith and unjustly dragging it through the mud by trying to use it to support their hate. This has been stated to be a fight against terrorism. Unfortunately, behind the terrorism is a cadre of silent supporters around the world. Groups and individuals who preach Islamic Radicalism. Five Hundred+ religious schools in Northern Pakistan who teach students the beliefs close to the Taliban. Religious leaders in nations like Indonesia who publically state an attack on a Muslim nation is an attack on all. To destroy the threat of Nazism we had to capture and kill virtually every strong supporter of this hateful set of beliefs, including the use of Nuclear weapons to break the will of the Japanese. To destroy the threat of Islamic Radicalism, we will have to do the same. Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and other nations with strong Islamic radical groups will have to either eliminate the supporters within their nations, or we will have to do so for them. Doing anything less will allow this cancer to fester and grow.

Larry Brumfield - 6:38:57pm

Our retribution should be swift and hard. We should kick them back into their caves for the next thousand years - then when they come out again, maybe they'll know how to act. As for the refugees...what refugees? Those are escaping targets!!

Alan Cluff - 6:45:23pm

It is good to see so many wake up and see how great this nation is. I hope God will forgive us for forgetting.

Kevin Punsky - 7:22:45pm

What I want to know is if these douchebag hijackers of Islam are so much against women, what the Hell were they doing at a strip club in Florida on the night before the attack?

Steven A. Brown - 7:35:37pm

This popular idea about a sex change operation for bin Laden is sheer fantasy. We would be sending him back to an Afganistan ruled by a new government, not the Taliban. We don't need to capture him and put him on trial, giving him a forum for his satanic rhetoric. All we need to do is bomb him into oblivion.

Ramblin Bob - 7:38:53pm

Sick twisted animals like bin laden cannot be reasoned with. Their mind is on power and being worshipped. Why people follow demons like him who will send them to their death by suicide against defenseless people, and never do it themselves is beyond me. I really wish bin laden would lead a suicide attack himself. It would solve many problems. However, while keeping their people completely ignorant of education, morals, and learning nothing but their own twisted view on religion, followers will be there. What a religion it is too! The animals who hijacked the planes were in a topless bar the night before, the taliban sells heroine, and then kills anyone who is caught using it...and the god they follow is a useless and cruel demon that would create terror and murder with not only no remorse, but actually thinking they are martyrs! I'll take my God instead. Would love to see their faces as they awake to Hell and all it's fury thinking all along there would be honeycakes and virgins as a reward for murder.

Chad Brick - 7:43:14pm

Regardless of what we did, Afghanistan would still be a disaster today. At least we managed to slow Communism on one front.

Bobby Chamlee - 7:54:00pm

Let the bodies hit the floor.

DaveJoy - 7:58:40pm

I am very happy with the way President Bush and the United States and our allies have handled this situation. I think the bombings today will hopefully send a message that anything but compliance with our demands will not be tolerated. The Taliban and Osama bin Laden should pay for wounding freedom. I would prefer capturing bin Laden and slowly torturing him instead of killing him. After all "an eye for an eye".

Oscar Weatherby - 8:02:56pm

I appreciate President Bush's leadership at this time. I am neither Democrat nor Republican (independent), and I didn't vote for him or Gore. But he is my President, the leader of my country, and deserves my support.

I, too, am a bit suprised at his competency, and I believe he's doing a good job under severe circumstances.

D.J.COLE - 8:14:07pm

Osama-ben-laden is a very sick person. please dont give in to any of his demands, just blow him off the map.

Em Newberry - 8:14:22pm

Afraid? WE'RE afraid? While Bin Laden, the courageous martyr that he is, cowered in the hills and sent others out to do his dying for him, I went out jogging. Who's afraid?

Struwwelpeter - 8:24:39pm

Taliban, assume the position: head between your legs and kiss your a\$\$ good-bye!

Robert Gouldsbrough - 8:35:59pm

Osama bin Laden has made the classic mistake of all bullies: He confused the gentle and peaceful nature of America with cowardice. He understands nothing of the American psyche.

shannon cole - 8:43:31pm

it's been said, but bears repeating... there's no reasoning with a rapid dog!

karmen ingelsberger - 8:46:09pm

I say turn Afghanistan into a carpark

Kevin Punskey - 8:52:22pm

James and Karmen: Thank God for you two. Yes, I said turn that place into a parking lot several dozen posts ago. Yes, thank God for George W. Thank God we have somebody who can stand up for us and not somebody who well sell us down the river and chase after every fat, ugly Jane Rot-tencrotch. Connie: Why do you have such a problem with my spelling? Are you trying to sway us from the "real" issue here. Because you don't like the way I spell the word "freaken." I'm sorry that I do not know how to spell that word. I think I've got a pretty good handle on my spelling, thanks for sharing your "opinion."

pam hoffman - 8:59:51pm

Bin Ladin is Satan, and he needs to burn. Forget any offers or negotiations, he can still run everything from prison. Take him out once and for all and we'll be done with him.

— Aaron Vidaver 15 Oct 2001
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Panel on Dissent (Vancouver) & "War Frenzy" by Sunera Thobani

Ahead of a Vancouver panel on dissent, Vidaver circulates the speech by Sunera Thobani — a University of British Columbia women's-studies professor whose address linking the 'new war' to violence against women, and to the long record of American foreign policy, had just been denounced across the Canadian press as hate speech. Thobani's text is set within « ».

The text of Sunera Thobani's recent speech:

“

My recent speech at a women's conference on violence against women has generated much controversy. In the aftermath of the terrible attacks of September 11, I argued that the U.S. response of launching 'America's new war' would increase violence against women. I situated the current crisis within the continuity of North/South relations, rooted in colonialism and imperialism. I criticized American foreign policy, as well as President Bush's racialized construction of the American Nation. Finally, I spoke of the need for solidarity with Afghan women's organizations as well as the urgent necessity for the women's movement in Canada to oppose the war. Decontextualized and distorted media reports of my address have led to accusations of me being an academic impostor, morally bankrupt and engaging in hate-mongering.

”

— Aaron Vidaver 18 Oct 2001
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(no subject)

David Antin — the improvising 'talk poet,' by then past seventy — answers two listmembers who had filed his coldly practical line on Afghanistan under 'right wing.' He declines the label along with the whole left — right map and reasons the case out on a chessboard; the George and Richard he addresses had pressed him on it in the thread.

Dear George and Richard

I was amused to find some reflections on our current political situation I recently posted characterized as "right wing." I'm not sure that "right wing" and "left wing" are terribly meaningful terms any more, but I thought I would clarify my position for anyone interested. My considerations were purely practical. And I would hate to surrender practicality to "the right wing". If the plane you're flying in happens to be hi-jacked, it's probably more useful to kill the hi-jackers than to

speculate on the nature of their grievances. In the case of our World Tower hijackers, they saved us the trouble and killed themselves. But these hijackers were just pawns in the game and this was simply a pawn sacrifice. (The chess metaphor may be specially appropriate, since the Arabs introduced the game into Europe.) To extend the metaphor, to play to a win or at least to a draw we have to go after the bishops, the rooks and the queen, and finally the king. In chess you're not offered a choice between peace and war. Either you defeat your enemy or your enemy defeats you. This seems to be our current situation. There is no way of making peace with the terrorist organizations. Nothing that the U.S. can do as a country or that its citizens can do as individuals can create peace with them. We're not at war with a nation or a religion. We're dealing with a fanatical twisted segment of the Islamic world — sort of Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Oliver North in Arab drag. This is why changes in US diplomacy are not relevant here. Sure it would be good to try to modify American foreign policy in dozens of places, but no beneficial change in American policy would affect our present enemies. Their recruits would never learn of them or they would hear of them only through the screen of propaganda created by their mullahs. But because this is not a traditional war fought against a nation, it's also not obvious that there is any reason for the prolonged bombing of Afghanistan. Nothing the Bush people say is very credible, and it's hard to believe that there are enough significant military targets in Afghanistan to justify it. There are probably only two plausible reasons for the bombing — as domestic public relations for Bush, because it offers visible evidence of America striking back, and as a credible warning to Iraq, Libya, Syria etc, to keep out of it. If there is real action against bin Laden or the Taliban, it will be covert, while the bombers are probably killing more shepherds and goats than bin Laden supporters or Taliban soldiers. I can imagine reasonable people opposing the extended bombing. But I don't see any reason why a so-called "leftist" would object to a serious ground campaign aimed at overthrowing the Taliban, though I don't believe Bush will undertake it. As for Buddhism in this time, the only kind of Buddhism that might be politically valuable now is probably Zen, which you may remember was the religion of the Samurai.

— **David Antin** 18 Oct 2001
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Peace in Our Time

The talk-poet takes the list's minority view: sympathetic to the left's disgust with Bush, he nonetheless denies there is any 'peace option' with al-Qaeda, and closes on the metaphor of vermin that would draw sharp replies from Bouchard, Weiss and others. Antin's spellings — 'jehad', and the rest — are left as he typed them.

I have no trouble understanding the distaste of so many people on the list for the policies and rhetoric of the Bush government and to a great extent I share it. But I don't understand the fantasy of some kind of peaceful resolution with our enemies in the Islamic world. A murderous, suicidal attack was launched against the city of New York by a terrorist group who have no interest in peace with the United States. What they appear to be aiming at is a rallying of Islamic discontents — of which there are many with real reasons for their discontent — around a flag of religious reform. They've said so and I think you have to take their word for it. What they want is a jehad against the modern secular world, of which United States is the foremost exponent.

If his people get away with their attacks and there is no powerful counter response, they will gain prestige for their accomplishment, acquire new recruits and repeat their attacks. If they are counter-attacked and survive, they'll be admired as heroes by the same group of discontents, gain recruits and attack again. The only option is a counterattack that they don't survive or survive with so much damage that it inhibits their abilities to strike again. There is no peace option.

And to argue that we won't get all of them and therefore should do nothing is absurd. When your house is infested with mice, you kill off as many as you can and they disappear for a while. When they reappear, you go after them again.

— David Antin 24 Oct 2001
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Re: Peace in Our Time

Weiss enters one caveat to David Antin's Realpolitik — that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' has, in practice, married Washington to its worst clients. A short, cool inventory of the company the United States has kept.

David: One very serious caveat: [...] On this principle the US has been very consistent in choosing to back the worst possible alternatives — Somoza, Castillo Armas, Noriega, Papa Doc, Saddam Hussein, the Shah, you know the list. My guess is that somewhere in the State Department there's a bunch of apparatchiks

who think that an unpopular government will be more dependent on us for survival, and that that will maintain the conditions we want. But it hasn't worked. The problem isn't with realpolitik per se but with how short-sightedly it's applied. So in the short term in each case the US has gained some regional stability and protection of US assets. In the medium to long range it's cost us dearly.

I would guess that our plotting the overthrow of the Taliban began long before Sept. 11th, and I would further guess that we really do care about Afghanistan, and not because of oil or poppies. In a chaotic region where our alliances are fragile in the extreme a government dependent upon us would serve as a warning to the other governments in the region. [...] But the Soviet presence if it had succeeded would have exerted a restraining pressure on our real or potential allies.

— Mark Weiss 29 Oct 2001

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No Peace in Our Time, No Justice

With the bombing of Afghanistan a month old, Bouchard rounds on David Antin's image of bin Laden's network as 'mice' to be exterminated, tracks the euphemistic escalation from 'sorties' to 'carpet bombing', and reads Rumsfeld's Quadrennial Defense Review as proof the next war was already drafted. The parenthetical jab at 'Professor Perloff' is to Marjorie Perloff, a list eminence.

I continue to be disturbed by David Antin's metaphor of mice for Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network: things to be killed relentlessly, vermin, unhuman. This is dangerous language in the national debate (such as it is) and completely disgusting for a poet to use. (Forgive me if I hold poets to higher standards than other mortals.)

Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network are murderers, fascists, thugs. I favor their capture and arrest. [...] By capturing bin Laden and dismantling the "network" I believe there may be a possibility for justice and peace. However, by just keeping abreast of news reports from a wide variety of sources over the past month leads me to believe that there will be no peace. And there will certainly be no justice.

OK: the US is bombing Afghanistan, where the US is pretty sure bin Laden does not reside. His training camps were destroyed, probably in about fifteen minutes on the first or second day of bombing. As October came and went the war escalated in subtle ways. More sorties, more bombings. Then the bombings were "stepped up," then the bombings became "round the clock," and in today's paper

the continued "carpet bombing" is discussed in successful terms, although no end of the bombing is in sight and more troops are needed on the ground to help aim the bombs. In mid-September Afghanistan was a country with very little military targets. You've got to wonder what's going on over there. But you're not supposed to question it.

How's that for respect and tribute to the victims of 9/11? A trillion dollar mouse trap for Antin's mice.

Rumsfeld: "Yes, we must win the war on terrorism. But as we do so, we must also prepare for the next war. We owe it to our children and grandchildren." I seriously believe he means we owe to our children and grandchildren to have "the next war" prepared for them, ready to go. His actions ensure it.

— **Daniel Bouchard** 1 Nov 2001
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Re: No Peace in Our Time, No Justice

Brady, breaking a vow to stay off the list, backs Bouchard by insisting on the distinction the 'something must be done' camp will not make — between the tactics of the moment and a permanent war economy. He recycles a Vietnam-era ultra-left slogan ('one, two, many Vietnams') to forecast the sequel.

Dan, I made myself a promise to stay off Poetics for the sake of my mental health during the next few weeks, but had to let you know how much the basic sanity of your thinking here means to me. The fundamental distinction that the "something (i.e., the Bush war, since we haven't articulated anything as an alternative) must be done" crowd of ex-Left, we-are-all-Americans-now folks fail to grasp is the one between present U.S. military tactics and long-term (permanent?) U.S. military-economic geopolitical strategy.

In other words, it's not simply a question of whether, a month and a half after the WTC attacks, systematic carpet-bombing of Afghanistan still feels like a proportionate or effective response. [...] The real question is thus whether the extension of the Afghanistan campaign *at the will of the Defense Department* to other nations, the permanent adoption of recent civil liberties curtailments (with more sure to follow), the long-term commitment to last month's giant corporate bailouts and their ratification in structural form as a "war economy" (always code for a massive transfer of public monies into private hands), the abandonment of emergent internationalism [...] in favor of a revanchist unilateralism, etc., etc. -- whether these permanent and systemic changes for the worse are still a "proportionate response."

I pointed some of this out in the early days of the administration's response in my posts to the list. At one point, I inverted an old slogan of the U.S. ultra-left and invoked "one, two, many Afghanistans" as the likely outcome of the adoption of Infinite Justice/Enduring Freedom.

— Taylor Brady 2 Nov 2001

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oil agendas

Writing to David from England, cheek doubts there is 'no agenda related to oil' and forwards an already month-old dispatch by the reporter John Pilger on the Caspian pipeline, Unocal's courtship of the Taliban, and the decade-long bombing of Iraq. Pilger's text is set within « »; cheek's own framing stands outside it.

Hi David, I'm not so sure about there being no agenda related to oil in the current miasma of objectives. I just have a feeling that when the smoke clears — and it might be a long time [...] Here's an extract from John Pilger written over a month ago now:

“

Moreover, the Taliban itself is a creation of the Americans and the British. In the 1980s, the tribal army that produced them was funded by the CIA and trained by the SAS to fight the Russians. [...] When the Taliban took Kabul in 1996, Washington said nothing. Why? Because Taliban leaders were soon on their way to Houston, Texas, to be entertained by executives of the oil company, Unocal. [...] Bush's concealed agenda is to exploit the oil and gas reserves in the Caspian basin, the greatest source of untapped fossil fuel on earth [...] Only if the pipeline runs through Afghanistan can the Americans hope to control it. [...] Nothing justified the killing of innocent people in America on September 11, and nothing justifies the killing of innocent people anywhere else. [...] He would call for an end to the genocidal blockade which the UN — in reality, America and Britain — has imposed on the suffering people of Iraq for more than a decade, causing the deaths of half a million children under the age of five. That's more deaths of infants every month than the number killed in the World Trade Center. [...] There is no war on terrorism.

”

— cris cheek 3 Nov 2001

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✦ **WTC Relief Reading in Los Angeles**

Dear Friends:

I am happy to announce a special reading to raise funds for the Red Cross and other relief organizations. The reading is at Autry Museum of Western Heritage, Los Angeles, on Sunday, November 11th, from 1-5 p.m.

Featuring James Ragan, Austin Strauss, Carine Topal, Russell Salamon, Carol Muske, Imani Toliver, Henry Morro, and 30 other poets from Los Angeles.

The event is organized by Larry Jaffe, Ilya Kaminsky, and Nancy Lambert with Poets For Peace. Additional information at <http://www.poets4peace.com/911.htm>

— **Ram Devineni** 5 Nov 2001

✦ **Anthology of Afghan Writings**

Zohra Saed, an Afghan poet and editor and doctoral student at CUNY, has been editing over the past year an anthology of Afghan-American writings. Though the book was finished, they are now adding additional writings dealing with 9/11.

She's actually now trying to find a publisher for the book quickly. It's amazing writing, and I hope anyone with leads for her to query will e-mail me, or her at [REDACTED].

— **Kazim Ali** 7 Nov 2001

✦ **9-11 Anthology: Call for Submissions**

Good Afternoon,

American poets, young or established, are invited to submit an original work commemorating the pivotal day of September 11th, 2001 and the days thereafter. This anthology, which is being prepared for publication, will present short heartfelt writings in verse and prose by authors from across our nation.

Your participation in this collaborative, nationwide project will open up another means of assisting survivors. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be contributed to a benefit organization.

Submissions may be sent via email to librarian Stephanie Livengood at [REDACTED]. Please include your name, address, and age. The deadline for submissions is July 31, 2002.

You will be notified if your piece is selected for the final manuscript.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. This collection will serve as a powerful tool for healing and as a token of remembrance for many, many people.

— **Stephanie Livengood** 1 May 2002

Re: "civilians"

By August 2006 the 'civilians' thread — sparked by Alan Dershowitz and the National Review's Victor Davis Hanson on who counts as a combatant in Lebanon — had circled back to Ward Churchill's notorious claim that the office workers in the towers were guilty by association. Singler, a writer who has spent years temping to pay the rent and who was in the city that morning, declines the syllogism.

That WTC argument is perilously close to Ward Churchill's, which I always thought reflected a lack of understand about the day to day lives of "ordinary" people (and thus had an unfortunate way of justifying criticisms against academics as "removed" from the so-called "real world".)

As someone who has had to work temp for years to support her art and writing, I can assure you that you don't have to fuck anyone over to be a secretary (temp or perm) or an entry level office worker or intern chained to a photocopier and plenty of those died on Tuesday morning nearly 5 years ago. In this economy, if you want a decent paying job, you are often going to end up in a corporation that is "evil" to a greater or lesser extent. There are degrees of choices — such working for a banking company vs. working for someone that is directly making the weapons to send to Iraq. And there are degrees of decision making and involvement in the work of the company. It's been my experience that most Americans hate their jobs and only those at the very top even care if the company makes money or not. Making a Powerpoint presentation for the help desk is hardly on a par with signing a death warrant to Auschwitz or napalming a village. There are not enough "pure" jobs for every American to have a decent standard of living (not even talking about "affluence") without such compromises. The consequences you speak of are more consequences of being an American in a global capitalist economy. Or merely the consequence of the accident of the country and class and family and historical moment you are born into.

I was visiting NYC on 9/11 and staying with some artist friends, one of whom worked temp as a graphic designer for Lehman Brothers and happened not to go into work on Tuesday because we had sat up drinking the night before.

So, to put it in the "voice" expressed below:

SHE DID NOT FUCK OVER ANYONE TO GET THERE AND GET THAT JOB AND SHE WAS NOT THAT "INVESTED" IN WHAT THE COMPANY DID OR WHO THEY WERE FUCKING OVER AND SHE WAS RELATIVELY "INNOCENT" AND JUST TRYING TO PAY THE RENT ON THE ONE ROOM NOT ZONED TO LIVE IN APARTMENT THEY HAD OVER THE FLOWER SHOP IN MIDTOWN ...

Anyone who has never had to make these kinds of choices or compromises to pay their rent and lights and student loans, should thank their lucky stars for the privilege to be able to maintain that level of purity.

Sorry, but I get touchy about these accusations that everyone in those buildings was somehow "guilty" or more guilty than any other American, and I hear it repeated way too often on the Left without really being questioned.

That said, regarding the comparison to the Middle East, I agree that there is no side with a "moral high ground," which perhaps was what you were trying to say. If you're going to attack America, the Pentagon and the WTC are the right symbolic and actual targets. But there are innocent people working there, walking down the street, living next door just as there are innocent people married to, related to, living with, living next door to, shopping in the same marketplace as (etc.) people who carry out terrorist acts (or acts of war, if you prefer).

Be careful about those big giant broad generalizations. That's the mindset that keeps us ending up in these situations in the first place.

Cheers.

“

sorry but i think there is a point it this that is getting swept away for example

people who worked in the World trade Centre were not innocent — NO BODY WORKING FOR THOSE COMPANIES WAS INNOCENT — YOU HAVE TO FUCK OVER A LOT OF PEOPLE TO GET THERE — TO GET THOSE JOBS — do they need to died for that — maybe not — but when people make decisions on how and where they live — there are consequences — if you chose to follow a set of beliefs there are consequence to that AND SOMETIMES THAT MEANS PEOPLE WILL WANT TO KILL YOU FOR REALLY DUMB REASONS

what i find strange is the idea that some of you out there seem to think there is a right and wrong to this — are you really that silly to think that any of this (the war — terrorist-Iraq — Israel), is a right and wrong issue — maybe you need to get out more and stop reading the media. maybe you need to stop thinking that there is a reason to living other than living. living makes things die on a small and large scale — and lots of times it will not be for a reason that you like or feel is justified.

big deal

stop thinking it's all about you

”

— **Fluffy Singler** 01 Aug 2006

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II What Is to Be Done

Through the long year in which the invasion was assembled — the dossiers, the duct tape, Colin Powell's vial at the United Nations — the list argued the ethics of the political poem into the ground, and could not leave it alone. Hilton Obenzinger sent round his periodic *Meditations in a Time of Delusions and Lies*, written, he said, "to stay sane"; Philip Metres broke a long silence to round on the room's quietism; Mark Weiss dug out an essay from the first Gulf War and prefaced it, "not much has changed." The question underneath was always the same: whether a poet's business with language was a resource in the emergency or a distraction from it.

And here, at the movement's centre, is Amiri Baraka — the case that would not resolve. *Somebody Blew Up America* set the room against itself: John Gallaher calling it "a mightily incoherent piece" and wincing at what it cost all radical poets; Patrick Herron answering that its unending interrogation pointed not at a people but at a power. Nobody on the list bought the poem's insinuation, and nobody could quite put the poem down, because Baraka had made unavoidable the thing the whole movement circles: how much a poem is allowed, and how much its readers are obliged to carry for it.

United States Military Academy Poetics Program

A deadpan hoax prospectus, mailed the summer before Iraq: Gatz's weds West Point's war-studies boilerplate to the avant-garde's own language of poesis and process, until the syllabus ('Nuclear Strategy and Ginsbergian ideologies') tips into satire. The epigraph is Kermit the Frog.

Study War Poetry?

"War is Heck" — Kermit the Frog

Warfare & Poetry — one of the major pre-occupations of mankind. The threat of major war amongst the leading industrial states may have receded. However, a brief look at current affairs reminds us daily of the continuing risks of war around the world [...] And from War comes Poetry. War Poems challenge all aspects of the societies in which they occur and the study of war poems, therefore, deserves careful attention to gain a greater understanding of the complex questions raised:

- Why do war poems occur?

- How might war poems be prevented, avoided or resolved?
- Can wars be 'just'? If only for the poetry?
- How have developments in modern poetics affected the military professional?

While United States Military Academy at West Point suggests a long history of rules and laws of composition, the Poetics Program stresses poesis — the actual making or doing: poetry as process. [...] To make war is to produce meaning and not reproduce (eradicate) a pre-existing meaning. To destroy is to not remain subjected to a meaning that supposedly precedes rationality. War or poetry is never about something, it is something. [...] Course offerings: Nuclear Strategy and Ginsbergian ideologies; Warfare and the Bard: the Ancient World performances; The Vietnam War as impetus for Innovative Poetries; The English Language and World War II (Beats and Angry Young Men).

— **Geoffrey Gatza** 19 Aug 2002
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the Buffalo list

That week the FBI had arrested the men the press was calling the Lackawanna Six, in a suburb south of Buffalo. Bowering, watching from Vancouver, could not resist the pun the list's own name laid in his path.

A lot of people have been wondering: that alleged terrorist cell that was apprehended in a Buffalo suburb — are these guys on the lost?

— **George Bowering** 17 Sep 2002
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Meditations - 4

One of the numbered 'Meditations in a Time of Delusions and Lies' that Hilton Obenzinger — poet, novelist, and a writing lecturer at Stanford — sent to the List through the long run-up to Iraq, to stay sane. This fourth, of September 2002, brushes aside oil and domestic distraction as too small: the war's real quarry, he argues, is Europe, Russia, China and Japan — dominion itself.

It's rare to be conscious of impending doom, to know that we live in a moment when time is running out, as if we're all condemned prisoners waiting for our last dawn. How pleasant life is, even though soon our sweet peaceable world will come to an end, and we will be plunged into horror. Now, in this pause before the storm, all we can do is scratch our heads and wonder: what the hell is going on? Why do we face such grief?

Bush is dead set on regime change in Iraq, and he is pummeling the American public and world leaders to follow his scheme. Saddam Hussein, despicable tyrant that he is, poses little threat to anyone, according to most military experts, and, despite unfounded allegations, he does not even seem to have had anything to do with the criminal devastation of 9/11. He didn't seem to pose much of a threat even in Bush's eyes, despite his being strung along the axis of evil — at least not until Enron and Halliburton began to unravel. Yet the destruction of Saddam Hussein has become an obsession. During hearings, a Senator asked Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld what America would do if Hussein made every concession demanded of him, and the folksy Secretary could only sputter, unable even to imagine diplomatic success. Clearly, no matter what Saddam Hussein says or does, the Bush administration seems determined to go to war, and ordinary Iraqis and Americans — indeed, the entire world — are condemned to watch (and pay the consequences) while the juggernaut rolls on.

Now, I assume that the administration is not stupid (despite Bush's famous denseness). I assume that it does not believe its own lies (although it may very well be blinded by arrogance). Certainly, we can ignore all the inflated talk about democracy and principles and morality. No, we can dispense with platitudes and propaganda.

So, if they really know that the sudden alarm over Iraq is a ploy, then what is their game, really? Of course, the obvious — oil — comes to mind, just as natural gas and pipeline routes make Afghanistan and Central Asia far more interesting to the administration beyond the Taliban. Perhaps no one recalls how, before the attacks, the Taliban were ignored, despite their oppression of women and desecration of ancient monuments; they were even courted for pipelines and praised for their Draconian programs to uproot heroin poppy fields. Distracting the American public from the messiness of crony capitalism or engineering economic recovery with a good war — yes, these too seem like plausible motives. But, still, if we assume that the administration is not stupid, these reasons are not adequate, at least not for the great risks and costs of war.

I would like to suggest the real reason we are about to be plunged into war: WORLD DOMINATION. No, this is not the plot of a superhero comic book; this is for real. Time really is running out, according to the Bush administration's way of thinking — but not on Saddam Hussein's secret weapons. The real target is Europe, uniting as never before and increasingly becoming an economic rival; the real target is Russia, still weak but not for long; the real target is China, growing at a fantastic pace and a potential military rival; and let's not forget Japan, always an economic threat, particularly in collaboration with the rest of Asia, despite its

recent faltering. All of these threats are either weak or nascent. So Bush and Company must strike while the iron is hot, while Americans are frightened enough to allow civil liberties to be junked and jingoism to sound like self-defense. If U.S. military and business interests can maintain and even expand their control of Middle East oil production, they have Europe and Japan by the balls, and much of the rest of the world, as well.

Keep in mind the recent policy declarations: the U.S. will strike first, even with nuclear weapons, against any country it deems a threat, with or without the consent of the international community; no country will be allowed to build up its military to rival the U.S.; no international commitments, from environmental treaties to United Nations votes to international courts, will encumber the exercise of imperial power; nonproliferation is now counter-proliferation; and on and on. In the eyes of any reasonable person, the United States has become far more of a rogue state, dangerously flashing weapons of mass destruction, than any other country. Meanwhile, the war on terrorism has become a cover for a never-ending war to maintain imperial control. Americans are being steamrolled into war and our democratic traditions are being twisted to the satisfaction of reactionary saviors of our way of life, all through the manipulation of very real fears of terrorist violence.

There are those who object that an invasion of Iraq might be a quagmire or that the whole Arab and Islamic world might erupt into chaos that will threaten even U.S. allies. Of course, the Bush administration hopes to achieve its goals quickly and smoothly. That would be ideal, in their book, and they believe they can get away with it; but their basic response is So what? I suspect that the arch reactionaries in the administration might even welcome chaos, since it will enable them more easily to cow the Saudi and other client regimes. After all, does it matter if the Hashemite dynasty is overthrown in Jordan? The administration and its supporters might even cheer the imposition in the region of democracy in the form of more pliable American clients; and they would certainly turn a blind eye to the transfer and decimation of the Palestinian people by Ariel Sharon done under cover of war.

At the very least, we should be clear about what is really at stake — and the danger posed by Saddam Hussein is the least of our problems.

— **Hilton Obenzinger** 24 Sep 2002
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re meditations on Iraq

Richard Taylor, the list's voluble New Zealand correspondent — whose own first response to the attacks he elsewhere confessed had been a wish to 'obliterate all the Arabs' — endorses and forwards the latest of the poet Hilton Obenzinger's Meditations in a Time of Delusions and Lies, circulated through the autumn of 2002 'to stay sane' as the case for invasion was assembled. Six months before the war, Obenzinger reads the coming campaign not as disarmament but as a bid for world dominion.

Hilton. This is good: in the main you are right. There is something quite bizarre, frighteningly bizzarre about this "obsession" wth Hussein (the name conveniently rhymes with "insane" (hence the role of language here)) but the US supported S Hussein up to the invasion of Kuwait and also against Iran. Then when the Kuwait debacle was over they "failed" to get rid of Hussein and "failed" to back the Kuwaitis and so on. Bush knows that Hussein has no military fight back capacity. He knows that thousands of children and others are dying because of the embargo: but he is heartless. He hates people — especially Arabs — he's a racist and a fascist. He relies on millions of ignorant people who dont study these matters: and in that his "ploy" may work...my feeling is that you are heading for a worse situation than the Second World War and that Bush is not only more dangerous than Hussein he is very much more dangerous than Hitler could have been (considering the enormous firepower he has at HIS control). — Richard Taylor

“

[I write these "meditations" from time to time in an attempt to stay sane. If you find them tedious, apply the magic of "delete." If you want to share them with others, feel free to do so.]

Meditations in a Time of Delusions and Lies — 4

It's rare to be conscious of impending doom, to know that we live in a moment when time is running out, as if we're all condemned prisoners waiting for our last dawn. How pleasant life is, even though soon our sweet peaceable world will come to an end, and we will be plunged into horror. Now, in this pause before the storm, all we can do is scratch our heads and wonder: what the hell is going on? Why do we face such grief?

Bush is dead set on "regime change" in Iraq, and he is pummeling the American public and world leaders to follow his scheme. Saddam Hussein, despicable tyrant that he is, poses little threat to anyone, according to most military experts, and, despite unfounded allegations, he does not even seem to have had anything to do with the criminal devastation of 9/11. He didn't seem to pose much of a threat even in Bush's eyes,

despite his being strung along the "axis of evil" — at least not until Enron and Halliburton began to unravel. Yet the destruction of Saddam Hussein has become an obsession. During hearings, a Senator asked Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld what America would do if Hussein made every concession demanded of him, and the folksy Secretary could only sputter, unable even to imagine diplomatic success. Clearly, no matter what Saddam Hussein says or does, the Bush administration seems determined to go to war, and ordinary Iraqis and Americans — indeed, the entire world — are condemned to watch (and pay the consequences) while the juggernaut rolls on.

Now, I assume that the administration is not stupid (despite Bush's famous denseness). I assume that it does not believe its own lies (although it may very well be blinded by arrogance). Certainly, we can ignore all the inflated talk about democracy and principles and morality. No, we can dispense with platitudes and propaganda.

So, if they really know that the sudden alarm over Iraq is a ploy, then what is their game, really? Of course, the obvious — oil — comes to mind, just as natural gas and pipeline routes make Afghanistan and Central Asia far more interesting to the administration beyond the Taliban. Perhaps no one recalls how, before the attacks, the Taliban were ignored, despite their oppression of women and desecration of ancient monuments; they were even courted for pipelines and praised for their Draconian programs to uproot heroin poppy fields. Distracting the American public from the messiness of crony capitalism or engineering economic recovery with a good war — yes, these too seem like plausible motives. But, still, if we assume that the administration is not stupid, these reasons are not adequate, at least not for the great risks and costs of war.

I would like to suggest the real reason we are about to be plunged into war: WORLD DOMINATION. No, this is not the plot of a superhero comic book; this is for real. Time really is running out, according to the Bush administration's way of thinking — but not on Saddam Hussein's secret weapons. The real target is Europe, uniting as never before and increasingly becoming an economic rival; the real target is Russia, still weak but not for long; the real target is China, growing at a fantastic pace and a potential military rival; and let's not forget Japan, always an economic threat, particularly in collaboration with the rest of Asia, despite its recent faltering. All of these "threats" are either weak or nascent. So Bush and Company must strike while the iron is hot, while Americans are frightened enough to allow civil liberties to be junked and jingoism to sound like self-defense. If U.S. military and business interests

can maintain and even expand their control of Middle East oil production, they have Europe and Japan by the balls, and much of the rest of the world, as well.

Keep in mind the recent policy declarations: the U.S. will strike first, even with nuclear weapons, against any country it deems a threat, with or without the consent of the international community; no country will be allowed to build up its military to rival the U.S.; no international commitments, from environmental treaties to United Nations' votes to international courts, will encumber the exercise of imperial power; "nonproliferation" is now "counter-proliferation"; and on and on. In the eyes of any reasonable person, the United States has become far more of a rogue state, dangerously flashing weapons of mass destruction, than any other country. Meanwhile, the "war on terrorism" has become a cover for a never-ending war to maintain imperial control. Americans are being steamrolled into war and our democratic traditions are being twisted to the satisfaction of reactionary saviors of "our way of life," all through the manipulation of very real fears of terrorist violence.

At the very least, we should be clear about what is really at stake — and the danger posed by Saddam Hussein is the least of our problems.

”

— Richard Taylor 27 Sep 2002
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Re: Amiri Baraka in the NY Times Report from NZ

Amiri Baraka had lately been named Poet Laureate of New Jersey; 'Somebody Blew Up America,' read that autumn, set off a scandal that would end by abolishing the post rather than removing him — a passage insinuating that Israelis had foreknowledge of the attacks drew charges of antisemitism from Gerald Stern and others. John Gallaher circulates the poem to a list already arguing over it, and with no love for its method: "a mightly incoherent piece," he calls it, uneasy at what so public an embarrassment costs "all radical poets."

I'm sure the people that appointed him New Jersey poet laureate expected him to be invisible, as poets are supposed to be in American culture, naturally (right?). Anyway, I missed the first few posts on this, so I missed what Gerald Stern said about the poem, but lemme tell ya, folks, this is a mightly incoherent piece. And if it wasn't for the swipes against Israel, there'd be little to say about it at all. I'm with Arielle on this one.

It does all radical poets a great blow to have someone this wildly incoherent in so public a position. I don't know if it's been posted yet, so here it is. Here it is:

“

Somebody Blew Up America

They say its some terrorist,
some barbaric
A Rab,
in Afghanistan
It wasn't our American terrorists
It wasn't the Klan or the Skin heads
Or the them that blows up nigger
Churches, or reincarnates us on Death Row
It wasn't Trent Lott
Or David Duke or Giuliani
Or Schundler, Helms retiring

It wasn't
The gonorrhea in costume
The white sheet diseases
That have murdered black people
Terrorized reason and sanity
Most of humanity, as they pleases

They say (who say?)
Who do the saying
Who is them paying
Who tell the lies
Who in disguise
Who had the slaves
Who got the bux out the Bucks

Who got fat from plantations
Who genocided Indians
Tried to waste the Black nation

Who live on Wall Street
The first plantation
Who cut your nuts off
Who rape your ma
Who lynched your pa

Who got the tar, who got the feathers
Who had the match, who set the fires
Who killed and hired

Who say they God & still be the Devil

Who the biggest only
Who the most goodest
Who do Jesus resemble

Who created everything
Who the smartest
Who the greatest
Who the richest
Who say you ugly and they the goodlookingest

Who define art
Who define science

Who made the bombs
Who made the guns

Who bought the slaves, who sold them

Who called you them names
Who say Dahmer wasn't insane

Who? Who? Who?

Who stole Puerto Rico
Who stole the Indies, the Philipines, Manhattan
Australia & The Hebrides
Who forced opium on the Chinese

Who own them buildings
Who got the money
Who think you funny
Who locked you up
Who own the papers

Who owned the slave ship
Who run the army

Who the fake president
Who the ruler
Who the banker

Who? Who? Who?

Who own the mine
Who twist your mind
Who got bread
Who need peace
Who you think need war

Who own the oil
Who do no toil
Who own the soil
Who is not a nigger
Who is so great ain't nobody bigger

Who own this city

Who own the air
Who own the water

Who own your crib
Who rob and steal and cheat and murder
and make lies the truth
Who call you uncouth

Who live in the biggest house
Who do the biggest crime
Who go on vacation anytime

Who killed the most niggers
Who killed the most Jews
Who killed the most Italians
Who killed the most Irish
Who killed the most Africans
Who killed the most Japanese
Who killed the most Latinos

Who? Who? Who?

Who own the ocean

Who own the airplanes
Who own the malls
Who own television
Who own radio

Who own what ain't even known to be owned
Who own the owners that ain't the real owners

Who own the suburbs
Who suck the cities
Who make the laws

Who made Bush president
Who believe the confederate flag need to be flying
Who talk about democracy and be lying

Who the Beast in Revelations
Who 666

Who know who decide
Jesus get crucified

Who the Devil on the real side
Who got rich from Armenian genocide

Who the biggest terrorist
Who change the bible
Who killed the most people
Who do the most evil
Who don't worry about survival

Who have the colonies
Who stole the most land
Who rule the world
Who say they good but only do evil
Who the biggest executioner

Who? Who? Who?

Who own the oil
Who want more oil
Who told you what you think that later you find out a lie

Who? Who? Who?

Who found Bin Laden, maybe they Satan
Who pay the CIA,
Who knew the bomb was gonna blow
Who know why the terrorists
Learned to fly in Florida, San Diego

Who know why Five Israelis was filming the explosion
And cracking they sides at the notion

Who need fossil fuel when the sun ain't goin' nowhere

Who make the credit cards
Who get the biggest tax cut
Who walked out of the Conference
Against Racism
Who killed Malcolm, Kennedy & his Brother
Who killed Dr King, Who would want such a thing?
Are they linked to the murder of Lincoln?

Who invaded Grenada
Who made money from apartheid
Who keep the Irish a colony
Who overthrow Chile and Nicaragua later

Who killed David Sibeko, Chris Hani,
the same ones who killed Biko, Cabral,
Neruda, Allende, Che Guevara, Sandino,

Who killed Kabila, the ones who wasted Lumumba, Mondlane,
Betty Shabazz, Die, Princess Di, Ralph Featherstone,
Little Bobby

Who locked up Mandela, Dhoruba, Geronimo,
Assata, Mumia, Garvey, Dashiell Hammett, Alphaeus Hutton

Who killed Huey Newton, Fred Hampton,
Medgar Evers, Mikey Smith, Walter Rodney,
Was it the ones who tried to poison Fidel
Who tried to keep the Vietnamese Oppressed

Who put a price on Lenin's head

Who put the Jews in ovens,
and who helped them do it
Who said "America First"
and ok'd the yellow stars

Who killed Rosa Luxembourg, Liebnecht
Who murdered the Rosenbergs
And all the good people iced,
tortured, assassinated, vanished

Who got rich from Algeria, Libya, Haiti,
Iran, Iraq, Saudi, Kuwait, Lebanon,
Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine,

Who cut off peoples hands in the Congo
Who invented Aids
Who put the germs
In the Indians' blankets
Who thought up "The Trail of Tears"

Who blew up the Maine
& started the Spanish American War
Who got Sharon back in Power
Who backed Batista, Hitler, Bilbo,
Chiang kai Chek

Who decided Affirmative Action had to go
Reconstruction, The New Deal,
The New Frontier, The Great Society,

Who do Tom Ass Clarence Work for

Who doo doo come out the Colon's mouth
Who know what kind of Skeeza is a Condoleeza
Who pay Connolly to be a wooden negro
Who give Genius Awards to Homo Locus
Subsidere

Who overthrew Nkrumah, Bishop,
Who poison Robeson,
who try to put DuBois in Jail
Who frame Rap Jamil al Amin, Who frame the Rosenbergs,
Garvey,
The Scottsboro Boys,
The Hollywood Ten

Who set the Reichstag Fire

Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed
Who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers
To stay home that day
Why did Sharon stay away?

Who? Who? Who?

Explosion of Owl the newspaper say
The devil face cd be seen

Who make money from war
Who make dough from fear and lies
Who want the world like it is
Who want the world to be ruled by imperialism and national
oppression and terror violence, and hunger and poverty.

Who is the ruler of Hell?
Who is the most powerful

Who you know ever
Seen God?

But everybody seen
The Devil

Like an Owl exploding
In your life in your brain in your self
Like an Owl who know the devil
All night, all day if you listen, Like an Owl
Exploding in fire. We hear the questions rise
In terrible flame like the whistle of a crazy dog
Like the acid vomit of the fire of Hell

Who and Who and WHO who who
Whoooo and Whoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

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”

— John Gallaher 30 Sep 2002
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Somebody INDEED Blew Up America

Amiri Baraka — Newark's bard, and since that summer the poet laureate of New Jersey — had read Somebody Blew Up America into a firestorm; the stanza insinuating that Israelis were warned from the towers drew charges of anti-Semitism, and the state would presently abolish the laureateship rather than unseat him. Here Patrick Herron answers a lister who had called the poem incoherent, arguing that its unending interrogation points not at a people but at a power. (The two Odigo employees Herron cites were messaged before the attacks — a detail the poem enlarges to four thousand.)

This poem is "incoherent"? C'mon, it's pretty damn straight-forward, and he might just be the most sane one of us around. It wasn't 4000 people, but two (employees of Odigo), that were IM'ed the morning of 9/11 about the attacks, and they contacted the FBI. The story was reported in Newsbytes (a subsidiary of the Washington Post) on 27 September 2001. Baraka got his "facts wrong" perhaps but is that really what's at issue in READING A POEM which should NEVER be treated as strictly FACT OR FICTION. Hyperbole isn't exactly incoherence, just "artistic license," especially when it comes to poetry. And that's what we expect from many great poets, some license, isn't it?

People talk about paranoid. Talk talk talk. If you think the poem is anti-Israeli (or anti-Semitic), read the poem again. I think you might begin to get Baraka's point (if you can read poetry) with the following word:

Who

Clearly Baraka is NOT saying the answer to that question is "Israelis." If you think that that IS what he is saying, you've clearly missed the point of the poem.

[...]

He's covering/constructing some sort of archetype out of a series of crimes over time, as he's covering one century to the next. Poets CAN sometimes do this, you know.

The DEVIL. And the power of the poem is not calling all Xs devils...it rests within the tacitly prescriptive notion that those who commit horrific crimes against humanity are that devil. It is a "pay attention to evil" poem, and no one does this better than Baraka. And it is a "you're evil too if you're part of it" poem. the poem implicates people of all sorts, Belgians, British, Americans, people from different times and places. Our president George Bush is implicated in this poem. Bush isn't Israeli. The reader is required to have enough imagination to be able to bridge these seemingly disparate unnamed people together.

WHO?

Somebody indeed blew up America, and somebody's going to do it again, and they're going to try to convince us that robbing Muslims blind and murdering them will be the appropriate response. All we need is the question to identify them: who?

Who are they going to try to convince? Who? And who are "they" exactly? Who?

In poetry, sometimes the question bears much more "information" than any answer.

[Here Herron reposts *Somebody Blew Up America* entire; the poem is given complete in John Gallaher's posting above, and is not reprinted here.]

— Patrick Herron 01 Oct 2002
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Fw: Amiri Baraka Under Attack

Amiri Baraka — poet, Black Arts firebrand, and, from 2002, Poet Laureate of New Jersey — wrote Somebody Blew Up America soon after the attacks and read it at the Dodge Poetry Festival to loud applause; when its lines about supposed Israeli foreknowledge drew a charge of antisemitism from the Anti-Defamation League and a demand from Governor McGreevey that he resign, he answered with the statement forwarded here. The conspiracy claim it defends found few takers even on this list. The forwarder, a New Zealand poet, sends it round as a free-speech cause — 'Of course I don't buy his conspiracy theory stuff,' he allows, 'but AB should be defended against the creeping police state.'

Of course I don't buy his conspiracy theory stuff, but AB should be defended against the creeping police state. There is quite a lot of action by US artists and writers against the war, with a 'Not in our name' statement being put around and signed by various 'names' (Adrienne Rich and Laurie Anderson are two I remember). Be interesting to put the 'avant-garde' poets who supported the war in Afghanistan — Silliman, Antin, Perloff — on the spot. Come to think of it, be

interesting to poll NZ writers. Lot of lit zines did this in the 60s, over Nam, and in the 30s, over Spain.

“

I will not apologize, I will not resign.

The recent dishonest, consciously distorted and insulting non-interpretation of my poem, *Somebody Blew Up America* by the "Anti-Defamation" League, is fundamentally an attempt to defame me. And with that, an attempt to repress and stigmatize independent thinkers everywhere.

First, the poem underlying theme focuses on how Black Americans have suffered from domestic terrorism since being kidnapped into US chattel slavery, e.g., by Slave Owners, US & State Laws, Klan, Skin Heads, Domestic Nazis, Lynching, denial of rights, national oppression, racism, character assassination, historically, and at this very minute throughout the US. The relevance of this to Bush call for a "War on Terrorism", is that Black people feel we have always been victims of terror, governmental and general, so we cannot get as frenzied and hysterical as the people who while asking us to dismiss our history and contemporary reality to join them, in the name of a shallow "patriotism" in attacking the majority of people in the world, especially people of color and in the third world.

[...]

That's why the poem here and throughout continuously chants the question WHO WHO WHO? That is, who is responsible for this horrible crime and WHY? It is a poem that aims to probe and disturb, but there is not the slightest evidence of Anti-Semitism, as anyone who reads it without some insidious bias would have to agree.

[...]

I have already gotten a great many communications praising the poem. A great many E-mail letters and phone calls not only praising the poem, and the poet for writing it, but also opposing the attempt to violate my first amendment rights by this oft repeated ADL skin game of calling critics of imperialism Anti Semites. I have already said, in answer to what Governor McGreevey is quoted as demanding that I apologize and that I resign as NJ Poet Laureate. And I have said repeatedly that I will do neither.

[...]

No, I will not apologize, I will not resign. In fact I will continue to do what I have appointed to do but still have not been paid to do. Publicize and Popularize poetry and poets throughout this state.

We say this because we feel that this state and indeed this nation and this world is desperately in need of the deepest and most profound human values that poetry can teach. That is what Keats and Du Bois called for the poet to do, to bring Truth and Beauty. To be like the most ancient paradigmmythic image of the poet. To be like Osiris and Orpheus, whose job it was to raise the Sun each morning with song and story. To illuminate the human mind, and bring light into the world.

Poet on! Read it for yourself.

”

— Richard Taylor 15 Oct 2002
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axis of oil

An anti-war poem from Newfoundland ('our island floating in petroleum'), written as the Iraq resolution moves through the UN. Hehir turns Bush's 'axis of evil' into an oil cartel and folds in the list's own running phrase — Arundhati Roy's 'algebra of infinite justice' — as an 'algebra of infinite sadness'.

Axis of Oil

Exxon-Mobil,
Chevron-Texaco,
British Petroleum-Amoco
and Royal Dutch?Shell -

The axis of oil

Crude oil

Slaughter in the name of oil in Sudan
Slaughter in the name of oil in Nigeria
Slaughter in the name of oil in Columbia
Now, more slaughter in the name of oil in Iraq

In the fight for oil profits
(and what is good for business is good for America)
oil fields become killing fields
british colonialism
american imperialism

Crude oil

To those excited states in America
We call for regime change
We call for an end to the regime that sends cluster bombs into playgrounds
You order the bombing of innocents
with your
algebra of infinite sadness.
Your weapons of mass destruction.
Over 3000 dead in Afghanistan

End your dream of total power
that is a nightmare for the rest of the world.

Crude oil

George W. Bush
The W is for war
George War Bush
George Warmaker Bush
George Warmonger Bush

That White House cowboy
using force and violence to impose Washington's will on the world.

He's still an addict.
He still needs his lines.
Pipe lines.

Crude oil.

And how about the media?
The corporate media choking on sound bytes.
Those slick screens
that we skate and surf and click
trying and leave our traces.

Television light bombards us.
Smarmy talking heads incite riots.
Swarthy citizens take cover as
dark skin means dark past. And even darker future.
America is the terrorist.
Crude oil.

And us?
Here on our island floating in petroleum
In our Hibernia heated homes
How will global warming redraw our coast line?

How many Canadian tanks will we send
so that we can fill the tanks of our SUVs?

Crude oil. War for oil.

Let's develop our weapons of introspection.

Our resolve will not be weakened.
We call for a peace without end.
With our brothers and sisters in Florence, across the country
and throughout the globe.
In Baghdad and beyond.

Our leaders have failed us.

For now, democracy
-- such as it exists --

is truly in the streets.

— K. Angelo Hehir 19 Nov 2002
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Position on war

Prodded by the New Zealand poet Richard Taylor ('richard.tylr') to declare himself as the Iraq drums quicken, Watten states his opposition flatly and lists the record Taylor had missed — the flag thread with Piombino, his book Bad History, Dan Davison's Iraqi pin project. The Vietnam-era photograph is the cover of Critical Inquiry.

Since Richard Taylor has raised a question of my position on the war with Iraq, I am happy to clarify. I am unequivocally opposed to war with Iraq. What is being pursued here is American geopolitical dominance under the cover of the war against terrorism. Poets, who are experts in the use of language, should have no trouble decoding the flimsy rationales being advanced.

Having said that, it appears that Richard Taylor has not registered positions on the war that I've taken on the listserv, such as the thread with Nick Piombino on the "flag as transitional object" after 9/11. He probably does not know what *Bad History* is about either, and has probably never heard of Dan Davidson's *Iraqi* pin project (the subject of a section of *Bad History* titled "Iraqi").

He also may not get the reference to the cover of *Critical Inquiry*. The image itself is of an early student demonstration against the war in Vietnam. The journal's editors put it on the cover as historical evidence, I would imagine, but also as a comment on the present situation. It amounts to a reminder of the efficacy of the

antiwar movement of the 1960s, in which I took part. Its appearance makes an effective if ironic comment on the present denial of opposition to the war.

— **Barrett Watten** 25 Nov 2002

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Poetics of annihilation

Watten extends the war argument into theory, proposing terrorism as a 'moment of discourse' read through two recent occasions: a conference on the late Kathy Acker, whose fascination with Patty Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army he glosses, and the Eminem film 8 Mile, screening that autumn. The keyword 'verbatim' here is his own coinage, 'the only way through is in'.

By way of a response to Richard Taylor, via Alan Sondheim, I'll put forward two examples of what one might term a "poetics of annihilation" that have come up recently.

1) At the Kathy Acker conference this month, I spoke of her fascination with the figures of Patty Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army as one of the ways she dealt with questions of identity, or more accurately nonidentity. [...] The SLA was important because its politics were so dissociated as to have no serious credibility; it was thus a perfect specimen of a radical irrationalism that would be used to define "the terrorist" as a moment of discourse — i.e., a negativity that holds consensus politics together. When several members of the SLA were surrounded and killed in a Compton safe house, we had the spectacle of total state violence mobilized against an isolated irrationalist threat. I would propose that current social discourses of terrorism derive from such events.

2) The current film *8 Mile* might seem for what it can tell us about some of the social conditions of poetic speech. [...] Poetic speech becomes an avowal of negativity within a contradictory social condition that would otherwise result in the poet's annihilation, where the only way *through* is *in*.

— **Barrett Watten** 26 Nov 2002

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Either/Or on The War

Nick Piombino — a psychoanalyst by profession, and earlier taken to task on the list for reading the post-9/11 flag as a mourner's 'transitional object' — thinks aloud here about his own slow movement from a wary hawkishness toward Barrett Watten's outright opposition to the coming war. The 'bullies' he keeps returning to are, by his own account, terrorists and American presidents alike.

I appreciate being confronted on my views on this list because I strongly believe in the value of open discussion. But in order to clarify why I feel the way I do I have to talk a bit about why, not only on a political/conceptual basis but on a personal one as well. When 9/11 hit I can't emphasize too much how grateful I felt to have an opportunity to air my feelings and views on this list. Before 9/11 I kind of noticed the list and once in awhile participated, but, to say the least, it was on the back burner of my mind and life. Since then participating here has become not only important to my daily life, but crucial. The reason is, my overall feeling about political discussion was- when it comes to literal discussion, who really gives a damn about what I have to say, especially when it comes to specifics? My approach was to communicate my views and philosophy through my writing. On the other hand, I listen closely to what other people have to say very carefully as I have friends who have thought all these things through a lot more carefully, and I may say successfully, than I have or probably ever will. Obviously, Barrett Watten is one of these people, him and the people he dialogues with regularly. I wrote what I wrote about flags because during the Vietnam war I became a member of the Resistance led by David Harris and burnt my draft card and participated in all the Columbia University demonstrations and traveled to Berkeley and Washington DC to participate in demonstrations. Since that time I have thought a lot about political polarization in the US and this concerns me very deeply. I appreciated my debates with Barrett because I learn from them. My initial reaction to 9/11 was a desire to leave New York. A lot of poet friends, plus my wife convinced me not to do this. Over time I seem to be coming closer to Barrett's clear stand against the war against Iraq. I am strongly against war philosophically, but I am very concerned about the threat of terrorism here in New York and everywhere else. I do not support George Bush's policies about the war, about the war on terrorism, nor his domestic policies on nearly every issue. I am heartened and cheered by anti-war demonstrations when I hear about them anywhere. On the other hand, I guess I have the feeling that if the US doesn't rattle its sabers and show a willingness to check and stand up to bullies, we may be giving a signal to them and their allies to go ahead hit some more. I do not feel it is possible to dialogue too much about these issues. I feel that there is as much

to fear in people taking frozen stands as there is to fear in terrorism. In my view, if stands are frozen, it is because the people taking them frozen with fear and rage, which can only ignite the problem further. Anything anyone of us can do to lower the rhetoric of war is valuable. On the other hand, if the polarization becomes too intense, the entire problem will be exacerbated. War can never ever be a solution to any social problem; but giving in to violence passively can also increase the aggression of bullies. As I've said before, we are surrounded by bullies. So what do we do? Say go ahead and fight it out? Tell one of them I'm on your side? Ignore the whole thing? Standing up to bullies, whether they are terrorists or American presidents has to be an option. How many peace marchers do we see lining the streets of Washington? How many peace marchers do we see in the cities of the Middle East? Nothing tires me more than empty slogans. As Antonio Porchia put it: "When the superficial wearies me, it wearies me so much I need an abyss in order to rest."

— Nick Piombino 26 Nov 2002

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Re: the war

Philip Metres — a poet and, later, the scholar of American war-resistance verse, here still a nearly silent subscriber — breaks cover as the invasion is argued into being, rounding on the list's quietism. He had spent years on the campaign against the Iraq sanctions; Bad History is Barrett Watten's book, one of the oppositional efforts he salutes.

Hey all,

I've found this list to be a consistently rewarding experience, though I've remained largely a silent participant. I wanted to pick up the thread spun out and cat's-cradled by Taylor, Watten, Piombino, Vincent, and others regarding our various "positions" on the impending war on Iraq. Thanks to all of you for worrying over this thread; it gives me a bit of hope that poets do have something to say/do in the national and world agenda. Having worked for a number of years on the anti-sanctions campaign in Iraq, I can only say that, among progressive political movements, among the most difficult are those that attempt to intervene in foreign policy decisions, because they seem most distant to regular Americans (who fail to see the thousand ways that their lives are most deeply interconnected with those abroad) and because foreign policy decisions are the least democratic of all political decisions.

However, these facts do not — and should not — absolve us from intervening in whatever ways possible, into that discussion. Certainly every jackass who sucked

Nixon's teat feels the god-given right to do so on national television. I guess I have been a little disappointed that, on the list most associated with experimental/avant-garde poetics, we have not given much theory nor demonstrated (at least by virtue of our postings), how in fact we can begin to intervene in the discussions about this impending war. When Steve Taylor suggests that he hasn't heard much noise from "the anti-war movement," I would like to suggest to Steve, YOU ARE THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT. It is time we made some noise. Of course those who for years have carried the peace torch have done much organizing over this issue, of course there have been demonstrations and protests, of course Marin County artists have turned their naked bodies into PEACE, of course all of this has happened. The impression that the anti-war movement is silent is brought to you by CNN, who always represents anti-war protest as a foreign phenomenon, in which illegible or untranslated signs (quite literally) suggest the illegibility of the antiwar counterdiscourse itself.

We need a panoply of poetic and political strategies to figure out ways to render that illegibility more legible. I'm heartened by Taylor's downunder provocations, Watten's consistently oppositional voice (see *Bad History*), but I'm a little surprised we haven't heard much from others. I don't expect that everyone agree with an oppositional position vis-a-vis the "war on/of terror", but I sort of demand an explanation for our quietism. This war is tearing my insides out. Hundreds of thousands died in the last war, to protect an undemocratic oil fiefdom. What will happen this time?

[...]

Peace out, Phil Metres

— Philip Metres 30 Nov 2002
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Quick Quiz: A Poem

Phil Metres, then a young poet finishing a doctorate, offers the list an original poem in the shape of a standardised test, folding the first Gulf War, the sanctions dead, and the coming second war into its multiple choice — the whole quiz, a running gag warns, printed in erasable ink.

Quick Quiz: The Persian Gulf War (a poem by Phil Metres)

Please read the entire fill in the blank before choosing your answer. Use a blank pen. Do not use pencil. When circling the correct answer, make sure to erase all unnecessary marks on the page. Otherwise, the machine may not be able to

recognize your answer. However, be forewarned that the quiz has been printed with erasable ink. Do not erase possible answers.

1. The Persian Gulf War began as a result of: a) the invasion of Iraq by Kuwait. b) the invasion of Kuwait by Iran. c) slant drilling of contested oil fields. d) they took the babies from the incubators. e) \$1.25/gallon. f) one hand tied behind our backs.

2. Why did Saddam Hussein invade Kuwait? a) Because he wanted to. b) Because we didnt want him to. c) Because April Glaspie, of the State Department, met with him in August 1990 and told him that we wouldnt get involved if he invaded and then he did and to cover their tracks they killed her in a mysterious auto accident in Washington. Its all there, on the internet. And if its gone by the time you look, you know who took it down. The internet is a D.O.D. invention. Think about it. d) Because Kuwait was bogarting the fries. e) Because Kuwait is an Arabic word, meaning I am destined to be habitually tardy. f) Because Iraqis wanted to go swimming and couldnt since 1917.

3. Operation Desert Storm a) succeeded in all its aims. b) succeeded in most of its aims. c) aimed to please. d) missed 75% of the time. e) was a smarter war on account of the smart bombs. f) comes with a special 3d card in every pack! Collect the whole set!

4. Which of the following were signs carried at anti-Gulf War protests before the war in San Francisco? a) Spit on the troops. b) Oil is pig grease. c) I like Bush d) Peace=pussy e) Saddam Saddam, hes our man, if he cant do it, Bin Laden can. f) There were fucking protesters? What the fuck!

(Quiz, page two, keep going! No doubt youve already fallen behind the others. Just look around you. They know more than you and you are humiliated because youre still on page two. Shame on you. What are your parents going to say?)

5. What is steel rain? a) Rain mixed with sleet. b) A metaphor, where steel signifies the hardness of the rain on skin. c) Fucking awesome, dude, new X-box rated M for whatever, man. d) Fleschettes, a term that has come to evoke bits of flesh. e) The Pittsburgh quarterbacks bomb. f) Whatever you want it to mean, big boy.

6. Saddams penis a) is two inches long b) reaches Cleveland or Tel Aviv c) tastes like chicken kabob d) is in the closet, but ready for usage e) ack f) all of the above

7. Saddam Hussein was not unseated in the Gulf War because a) the Powell Principle does not address what happens on the ground. b) someone lacked

gonads. c) General Barry McCaffrey wanted some camels. d) someone had a wild hare named Saddam. e) I love sequels. f) The Empire Strikes Back proves the theory that sometimes the original is in fact the copy.

8. In the press conference, Colin Powell said, we have no quarrel with the Iraqi people. In this context, a quarrel means a) gathering stones. b) scrum. c) minimum participation. d) blood bag. e) orcs. f) MTV Real World.

9. From 1991-2001, how many Iraqis died due to the effects of economic sanctions? a) 3,000. b) 5,000/month. c) Saddam Insane. d) Guy walks into a bar and sees Bush, Cheney and Powell sitting at a table in the corner. Goes up to them and asks what they're doing. Cheney says, we're planning to bomb Iraq to the Stone Age and they slit the throat of a bicycle repairman. Guy says, why you going to do that to the bike repairman? Cheney turns to Bush and says, I told you they don't care about the Iraqi people. e) Gulf War syndrome. f) All of the above.

(Quiz, page three, just keep moving. The key: keep moving. No sense in getting all tangled in the logical snakes and syntactical brambles. You have things to do: if not kegstands, then at least listening to some tunes. The quiz is worth only 10% of your grade. In ten years, you won't even remember taking this class, much less your grade.)

10. After resigning from his post as head of the U.N. humanitarian effort in Iraq, Denis Halliday wrote the following statement: given the widespread humanitarian disaster caused by bombing and sanctions, we can no longer accept economic sanctions as a viable or even legal punitive policy. How can we characterize this statement? a) Selective. b) Whore of Babylon. c) Losing the propaganda war. d) The triumph of fundamentalism. e) Ill goggles of the until. f) Whatcha whatcha watcha want whatcha want.

11. Terrorism shares the same root as: a) chasm. b) Magnavox. c) Robespierre. d) filthy dogs. e) jism. f) a cold car, starting in the morning.

12. A sleeper a) is a committed dreamer. b) lives an outwardly normal. c) is waiting. d) is more difficult than a needle e) in a haystack. f) looks like a stalk of hay.

(Quiz, page four, Can you hear the clock pulling itself off the wall, and breaking its face for you?)

13. If you see a suspicious foreigner hanging around the street corner: a) drum up and plant a Kissinger on his cheek. b) ignoramus him. c) churn your better

spycam to the seen. d) ya habibi. e) My mother died yesterday. f) asp him for a falafel or a apple.

14. Write an essay in which you argue one of the following positions: a) This is not a poem because poems wouldnt ask you to write an essay after reading them. b) This is a poem because poems rhyme. c) All poets are pussies, but because this poem has pussy in it, it cant be written by a pussy, and that means it cant be a poem. d) I love you. e) I hate you. f) Someday, we will all lie together in the vast and unboundable soil.

— Philip Metres 02 Dec 2002

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✱ Anti-War Poetry Reading — Rust Belt Books

Rust Talks presents

an ANTI-WAR POETRY READING/think tank (what IS anti-war poetry?)

8PM Thurs 12/5
Rust Belt Books
202 Allen Street
Buffalo, NY
featuring

Christopher Alexander
Sarah Campbell
Barbara Cole
Thom Donovan
Kristen Gallagher
Gordon Hadfield
Nick Lawrence
Michael Rosendal
Tim Shaner
Jonathan Skinner
Sasha Steensen

and anybody else who wishes to contribute their voice(s)

— Tim Shaner 3 Dec 2002

Re: antiwar poetry continued

Tim Shaner, writing from Buffalo into a long December thread on what an anti-war poetry might now be, reports back on the Rust Talks reading he had helped convene. He answers the poet-critic Maria Damon and, earlier in the argument, Jeffrey Jullich; the lines he sets down are Bob Perelman's.

I agree with maria, but i would keep the term “bad poetry,” not because what we’re talking about is bad, whatever that is, but because there are times when the BAD is useful and appropriate; so, like “bad history,” “bad poetry” bad, man we mentioned this option in our initial call for poems for the Rust Talks anti-war reading

by the way, Jeffrey, to answer your request for a report: we will eventually publish the poems from the reading on our Rust Talks website <http://epc.buffalo.edu/eazines/rust> it may take us some time, however, as our so-called web-master has abandoned us for warmer climes

hopefully, it'll come out before the war is over (that's the real issue, no? - as Nick Lawrence pointed out in our discussion after the reading: how does one develop and maintain an anti-war movement when (in this case) the upcoming war against Iraq may last no longer than a couple months or less?-does anyone remember Afghanistan? sorry, that was last year

"The names of the countries can change, once a week, once a month, the rate can change, the male newsperson looks concerned but truly neutral, his mouth the epicenter of objectivity, the great good place, saying simply the army was stepping in, no figures on casualties are available because there's not enough causality outside the studio to go around. Turning to traffic on Route 80 it looks like the spectre of abstraction has finally been made real."

—Bob Perelman, from "Back To The Present" (*Face Value*)

Bob Perelman's work from the mid-to-late 80s, in particular *To The Reader*, *First World*, and *Face Value*, in my mind offers another possibility in terms of anti-war poetry (in a more comprehensive sense: the work dealing less with war per se than with the ideology that makes war central to its policy) perhaps this is what Jeffrey meant by work that focuses on media representation: "is it political to say 'This is what I read in the newspaper?'" i say yes; such material may no longer surprise most of us who read poetry-as if that's the only function poetry has: morning freshness-but the analysis performed above is as relevant as ever, especially in light of speedy wars and instant amnesia

last spring i screened the documentary *The Panama Deception* to my comp class; seeing the same "operatives" that are in office today spouting the same lines, with the media dutifully in tow-focusing exclusively on military strategy rather than on the ethics of intervention/invasion; fuzzy math on the casualties (collateral damage); mad ave logos (Just Cause, which i always read as "just because"); etc- truly shocked my students "Back To The Present" (1988) can have a similar effect insofar as it documents a pattern, and so, in that sense, yes, deconstructing all the news fit to print is political

this is what Geoffrey was speaking to, i think, when he expressed relief that the anti-war reading was bongo-free: the skewed media image of the 60s continues to mediate most forms of resistance remember Thomas Friedman's arrogant

dismissal of anti-globalization demonstrators in Seattle as a flock of unsophisticated granola heads this is the image many people have of the anti-war movement and i think it is something we must deal with so what's the answer? dress up in suit & tie? (just make sure you leave the briefcase behind, as you might otherwise get shot)

sluggishly shuffling,
tim shaner

— **Tim Shaner** 10 Dec 2002
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Longish political poem

Safdie's answer to a list debate on whether poetry can bear political 'content': a poem composed live during Game Six of the 2002 World Series that keeps sliding off baseball onto Paul Wellstone's death, uncovered anti-war rallies and Amiri Baraka. The Sondheim epigraph is a fellow poster's line; 'the encyclopedic minstrel' is a private jab.

This might be a "bad" poem — like Andrew said earlier today, I can't quite tell. It's certainly longish, for which I apologize, as well as "political" — I think — so it's a first response to Gary and Jeffrey's comments (and Ryan Whyte before them) for a post of mine some weeks ago. And it's not just about baseball. And happy holidays ...

GAME SIX

we can't write after the fact - only during it -
---Alan Sondheim

This is the apotheosis now
where love conquers all
but she wasn't talking about
the Giants on the brink

of winning the Series, but
Swan Lake, a Bolshoi performance
we'll see on Halloween,
all thoughts of baseball

having faded in the splendor
of the pagan New Year ...
poetry as chronicle has to
also chart what's timeless,

like marriage, not just
a moment's attraction, but why

walk Bonds in the first inning?
Russ Ortiz, California Native,

family and friends in the stands,
the north-south rivalry
that once seemed so important
when I was living in California

becomes mere rhetoric ...
Wellstone's death already forgotten
in the political equation,
anti-war rallies not covered

by major media like Fox
where the occasional jerkiness
of this telecast reminds us
how artificial and mediated

the "coverage" really is --
unlike Homer's poetry for example
which tried so mightily
to preserve the fragility,

[...]

but a poetics of the moment
depends on the moment
and demands astrology
but Salmon singles before

I can look up his chart
Jesus! 5-4 Nen in
why can't this team win?
the pitching change allows me

to check the ephemeris
Nen born under Sagittarius
like the Ape Eyer but GLAUS!
this is an embarrassing collapse

you can't lose a five nothing lead
in the seventh! Shit!
I didn't see this coming
unlike the encyclopedic minstrel

— Joseph Safdie 16 Dec 2002
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To Whom It May Concern: "Writers on America"

Pierre Joris relays an open letter by Robert Creeley (1926-2005), circulated as poets everywhere were being asked to choose sides against the coming war. The State Department's Writers on America — an anthology assembled for embassies abroad, to which Creeley, Billy Collins and thirteen others had contributed essays on being American — had grown awkward once it emerged the contributors might be enlisted as cultural ambassadors. Creeley, no friend of the Bush administration, declines either to apologise for the piece or to disown it.

Here is Robert Creeley's open letter re the State Dept. anthology:

“

Friends have written me recently, expressing confusion and dismay that I chose to contribute to the U.S. State Department's International Information Programs' publication, *Writers on America*. Their concern has an obvious reason: Our present government, led by George Bush, would appear to be adamantly committed to a war with Iraq despite the administration will not, or cannot, produce evidence of Iraq's complicity in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, or of any specifically aggressive action on Iraq's part that might serve as provocation. The UN inspectors have also found nothing concrete, as one says, to argue grounds for such conduct. Yet our leadership seems undeterred and continues with its aggressive and bullying tactics.

So obviously appearing in a publication sponsored by our government's State Department, which is to be used by embassies and consulate offices abroad as a sense of "America," would imply either innate support for the administration's conduct or else a naivete that is close to irresponsibility. Since I am in no intended way a supporter of the Bush administration — in fact, quite the contrary in the oppositional petitions and gatherings I have had a part in — I have no ready excuse. But I can make clear how and why I am one of the fifteen contributors to this publication

You'll note that the State Department officer and novelist, Mark Jacobs, whose first book was published by Ed Foster's Talisman Press and who has long been a friend, is the person who first thinks of such a collection. (He is also a contributor.) It seemed to him interesting to have a cluster of various writers from various situations of background and ethnicity tell how growing up in this country had, in whatever ways, shaped their work. Had it mattered, being "American," and if so, just how? To me that was a fascinating question, because I had lived and traveled in other countries sufficiently to know I was fact of something,

for better or for worse, quite apart from any intellectual context I might otherwise claim. Simply put, I was American — and so was my writing.

I wrote the requested essay in good faith and felt it had been asked for, by Mark, in good faith. I did not know nor did I ask for a list of the others contributing. In like sense, my relation to the project had basically to do with my submitting the essay (in May of last year as I recall), answering some questions relating to editing, receiving my payment for having written it (\$2500), and that was that. I expected in due course copies of the published book — because I thought it was to be a book — but the final publication had more the character of a brochure, with graphic overlay, flowing script and photos, lending it an 'historical commemorative' feel. Only when the publication was complete, and a New York Times reporter began to ask questions for his report, did I learn it was not to be available in this country (due to an old law against the State Department's distribution of such materials within domestic borders, so as to prevent federal proselytizing of the time). I also heard shortly after that there was a reported tour involved, that we, the contributors, were to be further used in some way as 'ambassadors' abroad. I was never told of this tour, if it exists, nor asked to join it. I would not, in any case.

As I read my essay now, I do not regret having written it. What I say there, I say with conviction and pleasure. It was a relief to be able to write, "If the sad events of September 11, 2001, provoked a remarkable use of poems as a means wherewith to find a common and heartfelt ground for sorrow, it passed quickly as the country regained its equilibrium, turned to the conduct of an aggressive war, and, one has to recognize, went back to making money." I hated the uses and manipulations to which that horror had been put, the way it so quickly was turned into opportunity and dollars — all of it, and all worlds pertaining.

I don't regret Mark Jacob's having asked me to write the piece, nor, again, my accepting. If one's to have any faith in the given world, there must be choices, and this was one I made — and would, no doubt, make again. If we cannot, as citizens, use and employ such resources as this was for our own determinations, then we are all bought and sold creatures at best. It hardly matters that we divide ourselves endlessly into smaller and smaller parcels of determined resistance.

Anyhow onward, like they say. Two days ago there was a gathering of poets in Key West, Florida — where at least one could stand up and be counted. It's interesting to see the poets there — my fellow contributor,

Billy Collins, the Nobel Prize laureate, Derek Walcott, Lucille Clifton, Martin Espada, Carolyn Forché, John Ashbery, Sharon Olds, Forrest Gander — and all the particular others.

Live and learn, like they say. Better late than never.

Robert Creeley

”

— Pierre Joris 14 Jan 2003

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weinberger essay

David Buuck forwards, without comment, Eliot Weinberger's New York: Sixteen Months After — one of a sequence of dispatches the essayist and translator wrote for readers abroad, soon gathered as the book 9/12. Its anatomy of the Project for the New American Century, and of the Rumsfeld-era planners it traces from the Ford White House to the eve of Iraq, made it among the most-circulated antiwar texts to pass through the list.

“

11 January 2003: For years they'll be debating the future of the empty pit where the World Trade Center once stood, with fantastic or hideous proposals of gardens in the sky or indoor lakes or threatening tic-tack-toe-shaped fortresses. But at the moment, the only thing certain is the fate of the actual towers themselves. The scrap steel will be shipped from the Fresh Kills landfill in Staten Island to the Grumman shipyard in Trent Lott's fiefdom of Pascagoula, Mississippi. There, it will be melted down and turned into the "New York," an \$800 million "state of the art" amphibious assault ship. In Bush America, every ploughshare must be beaten into a sword. War and war and war. 150,000 troops are massed in the surrounds of Iraq, many of them reservists pulled from their normal lives, preparing for what the Pentagon is already declaring the "greatest precision-bombing aerial assault in history," to be followed by an invasion which the United Nations estimates will cause 500,000 casualties. There are troops or "advisers" in India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, the Philippines, Colombia... and speculation that Iraq is merely a stop on the road to Iran. Military operations in Afghanistan are continuing at a cost of a billion dollars a month — compared to the \$25 million a month the U.S. is spending there on humanitarian aid, most of it paying for the offices and maintenance of the aid workers, or vanishing into the crevices of local corruption. Helmeted and armored Special Forces troops still move like Robocop through the

villages, past the hundreds of thousands of displaced peasants trying to survive the winter. This year, the Pentagon budget will increase by \$38 billion to almost \$400 billion. The increase alone is practically the entire budget of the second-biggest military spender, China. Meanwhile, millions of Americans have lost their jobs or have had their salaries greatly reduced. There are schools around the country that will be closing a month early this year because of budget cuts, further evidence of the theory that Republicans never allot any money for education in order to keep the electorate stupid so that they'll vote for Republicans. Everything is war and war, the talk of war, while the real, declared war^ - the War on Terrorism^ - is a complete failure. It could not be otherwise: One cannot, by definition, wage a military (and not metaphorical) war against terrorism, for the terrorists themselves are not waging a war. Wars are fought to coerce an enemy to accept one's policies or sovereignty. Even when they involve the mass slaughter of civilians — as has been increasingly the case since World War I — they are not terrorism. (A Palestinian suicide bombing, however repulsive, is the act of a civilian combatant in a war of independence.) Terrorism is committed by small, clandestine, independent groups^ - the evil twins of NGO's^ - in the attempt to persuade like-minded people to join their side, whether physically or intellectually. The massacre at the World Trade Center was, in terms of the United States, a means without an end: There were no grounds on which the U.S. could admit "defeat"; the only possible "victory" for al-Qaeda was a sympathetic response from within the Muslim world. In a revenge-seeking and deliberate confusion of host and guest, the U.S. military easily overthrew the essentially unarmed Taliban regime, leaving vast areas of the country in the hands of warlords, and partially restoring the freedoms (music and television, women without burqas and girls in school, clean-shaven men) which the Afghans had enjoyed under that oppressive Soviet occupation the U.S., through its fundamentalist surrogates, the Taliban, had fought so long. [Freedom, however, only goes so far: A few days ago, a political cartoonist was thrown in prison for mildly satirizing President Karzai.] The country is in ruins, but the pipeline from Kazakhstan has now become a reality, and its plans are drawn, the fulfillment of an old dream among the Bush crowd. As Dick Cheney said in 1998, when he was CEO of Haliburton: "I can't think of a time when we've had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian. It's almost as if the opportunities have arisen overnight. The good Lord didn't see fit to put oil and gas only where there are democratically elected regimes friendly to the United States. Occasionally we have to operate in places where, all things considered, one would not normally choose to go. But we go

where the business is." The War on Terrorism has been good for business, but hasn't done anything bad against the terrorists. With one possible exception (an Egyptian strategic planner), not a single important al-Qaeda member has been killed or captured. George Bush has not mentioned the name "Osama bin Laden" in six or eight months, and no wonder: He may think he's Wyatt Earp, but those evil-doing Clanton Brothers aren't playing by the rules and they never showed up at the OK Corral. So all Bush can do is just shoot at anybody who looks mean. After all, al-Qaeda — once one strips away the propaganda — appears to be a group of, at most, a few hundred educated, middle-class fanatics, who masterminded terrorist actions, mainly in Africa, at the rate of one every eighteen months. They also ran camps in Afghanistan for thousands of young peasants attracted to local jihads, including 5,000 trained by Pakistani intelligence for incursions into Kashmir and 3,000 Uzbeks attempting to overthrow the dictatorship in Uzbekistan (which receives hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. military aid). It is these Afghan and foreign peasants, Taliban foot soldiers and jihadis, that the Bush Team has labeled "al-Qaeda terrorists" and left to rot in Guantanamo Bay (in cages, by the way, identical to the one in which Ezra Pound was placed in Pisa in 1945). Al-Qaeda, as the recent bombings in Kenya prove, continues as it did before. Forced out of Afghanistan, it is merely less visible.

There is indeed a malevolent "sleeper cell" in the United States, but it is not the one in Attorney General John Ashcroft's apocalyptic imagination. It was formed in the 1970's, in the Ford Administration, by Donald Rumsfeld, then as now Secretary of Defense, and his young disciple, Dick Cheney, whom Rumsfeld got appointed as White House Chief of Staff. During the Reagan years they attracted brilliant young ideological extremists: Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Elliott Abrams, Zalmay Khalilzad, among them. In 1992, the last year of the Bush Sr. administration, convinced, as everyone was, that Bush would be reelected, and hoping for a second-term purge of the multilateralists surrounding the President, they launched their first secret manifesto: "Defense Planning Guidance for the Fiscal Years 1994-1999," written by Wolfowitz and Khalilzad, under the direction of then Secretary of Defense Cheney. According to their "Guidance," with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the "first objective" of the United States was now "to prevent the re-emergence [sic] of a new rival": "The U.S. must show the leadership necessary to establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role." We must "discourage" the "advanced industrial nations" from "challenging our leadership." "We must maintain the mechanisms

for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role." "We will retain the pre-eminent responsibility for addressing... those wrongs which threaten our interests... Various types of U.S. interests may be involved in such instances: access to vital raw materials, primarily Persian Gulf oil; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, threats to U.S. citizens from terrorism..." The report, which never mentioned any allies in these global efforts, was an embarrassment to Bush Sr. and his consensus-building advisers, and was quickly suppressed after it was leaked to the New York Times. Then Bush was defeated by Clinton, and the cell went underground in the boardrooms of corporations and right-wing foundations and think tanks. In 1997, "appalled by the incoherent policies of the Clinton administration," they formed a group called the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), "to make the case and rally support for American global leadership" and to restore "military strength and moral clarity." Their founding statement was signed by, among others, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz, Khalilzad, Lewis Libby, and Jeb Bush (at the time the Heir Apparent), along with such imams of conservatism as Francis Fukuyama, William Bennett, and Norman Podhoretz. In September 2000-- when the election of Gore seemed a certainty — PNAC produced what was to become the Hammurabic Code of the Bush Jr. Administration: *Rebuilding America's Defences: Strategies, Forces And Resources For A New Century*. The document, which is endless, speaks openly of a "Pax Americana": expanding current U.S. military bases abroad, and building new ones in the Middle East, Southeast Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. It is contemptuous of the United Nations. It recommends "pre-emptive strikes" and particularly mentions Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. It suggests that to fight these countries we need small nuclear warheads to target "very deep, underground bunkers." (Such weapons, called Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrators, are now being developed.) It speaks of fighting and "decisively winning simultaneous major theater wars." (Thus Rumsfeld's current obsession with taking on Iraq and North Korea at the same time.) It is the origin of that bizarre, Teutonic phrase, "homeland security." It advocates, as has now been done, pulling out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile and all other international defense treaties — in the Pax Americana we won't need them. It recommends increasing defense spending to 3.8% of the Gross Domestic Product (the amount of the 2003 budget, almost to the penny). It talks not only of controlling outer space with Star Wars weaponry, but also of controlling cyberspace, fighting "enemies" (foreign or domestic?) on the Internet. One of its many charts reads:

[...]

The U.S., in short, is "the essential defender of today's global security order." Allies are unnecessary; world opinion is irrelevant; potential competitors must be crushed early. And, in the eeriest moment in the report, it imagines "some catastrophic event," a "new Pearl Harbor," that will be the catalyst for the U.S. to decisively launch its new Pax. (Small wonder that, on September 12, 2001, Donald Rumsfeld insisted we immediately invade Iraq and, shortly after, Condoleezza Rice convened senior members of the National Security Council to ask them to "think about "How do you capitalize on these opportunities?"") The Sleeper Cell has awoken. After successfully engineering a judicial coup d'etat to install their genial figurehead as President, they now control the U.S. government. Led by Cheney and Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz is Deputy Defense Secretary, Khalilzad is Ambassador to Afghanistan, Libby is Cheney's chief of staff, Abrams (after having been disgraced in the Iran-contra scandal, and after years campaigning for a law to require the posting of the Ten Commandments in every government building) is now chief White House adviser on the Middle East. A half-dozen others from PNAC hold important posts in the Defense and State departments. Their goal has been cheerfully described by Condoleezza Rice (who believes that Bush is "someone of tremendous intellect"): "American foreign policy in a Republican administration should refocus the United States on the national interest. There is nothing wrong with doing something that benefits all humanity, but that is, in a sense, a second-order effect." Richard Perle, chairman of the Defense Policy Board, is more honest: "This is total war... If we just let our vision of the world go forth, and we embrace it entirely and we don't try to piece together clever diplomacy, but just wage a total war, our children will sing great songs about us years from now."

[...]

The Sleeper Cell has awoken, and there is nothing to stop them. The Democratic Party, afraid of being branded "unpatriotic" by the Republicans, has gone into hibernation. The tattered remains of the Left is — as the Left always is — more preoccupied with fighting among themselves. With a few individual exceptions, there is almost no opposition in the major media. (Powerful anti-Bush articles by, among others, Gore Vidal, Harold Pinter, and John Berger, are published in England, but not here.) The only forum for criticism is the Internet, which, though still uncontrolled, remains the one point in the PNAC program that has yet to be (openly) addressed by the Bush Team. As we enter Bush II Anno III, anger has turned into a kind of sullen resignation.

Perhaps the problem is that there are no words to describe this Administration. All the pejoratives, however accurate, that might be applied — "warmongerers" and "imperialists," "corrupt" and "bloodthirsty," "fanatical" and "criminal" — have been drained of their meaning by decades of propaganda. They are as banal as the rhetoric of the think tanks. Small wonder that American writers have generally been either silent or bathetic ("9/11 reminded me of the day my father died") on all that has happened in the last two years. We no longer have the words to even think about what is happening, about violence that is not "just like a movie," about people like Cheney and Rumsfeld and Perle and Wolfkowitz and Rice and Ashcroft and Bush, who are not Pol Pot or Stalin or Hitler, who are lesser forms of evil, but evil nonetheless. To begin to talk about them is to relive the old nightmare of the scream with no sound.

”

— David Buuck 16 Jan 2003
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100 poets enlisted in protest against war

Todd Swift, a Montreal poet in Paris, had just e-mailed an anthology called 100 Poets Against the War into the world; this Globe and Mail report, forwarded by K. Angelo Hehir, catches the movement acquiring its second, larger engine. Sam Hamill's revulsion at a White House invitation — Laura Bush's symposium on "Poetry and the American Voice," set for that February — would within days become Poets Against the War, and the reception would be quietly cancelled.

”

(From the Toronto Globe and Mail)

100 poets enlisted in protest against war

Montreal-born Todd Swift has organized an e-mail demonstration of antiwar verse

By GAYLE MACDONALD

Tuesday, January 28, 2003 - Page R1

One week ago, the Montreal-born poet Todd Swift was sitting in a Paris café, reading *The Guardian*, fuming about the hard-line American stance on war with Iraq.

He decided to organize a protest — of powerful words and haunting images. And yesterday, to coincide with the release of the UN weapons

inspectors' report, Swift e-mailed an anthology called *100 Poets Against the War* to friends, family and far-flung acquaintances.

In one day, the book (available at <http://www.nthposition.com>) spread like wildfire on the Internet, with people around the world reading the works of these poets, who congregated in one place to beat the antiwar drum.

[...]

Murray says he just received an e-mail from the American poet Sam Hamill, who is trying to organize a project similar to Swift's *100 Poets Against the War*.

Hamill was inspired by a letter he received from the White House, which requested his company at an afternoon reception and symposium on "Poetry and the American Voice" on Feb. 12. In his e-mail, Hamill told literary colleagues: "When I picked up my mail and saw the letter marked 'The White House,' I felt no joy. Rather I was overcome by a kind of nausea."

In his note, Hamill said, "Only the day before I had read a lengthy report on President Bush's proposed 'Shock and Awe' attack on Iraq, calling for saturation bombing that would be like the firebombing of Dresden or Tokyo, killing countless innocent civilians.

"I believe the only legitimate response to such a morally bankrupt and unconscionable idea is to reconstitute a Poets Against the War movement like the one organized to speak out against the war in Vietnam." (Hamill is referring to the 1967 antiwar demonstration that featured leading literary lights such as Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg and Norman Mailer, who attempted to "levitate" the Pentagon. Mailer later celebrated the march in his work *The Armies of the Night*.)

Hamill then asked every poet "to speak up for the conscience of our country and lend his or her name to our petition against this war," which he plans to present to first lady Laura Bush on Feb. 12, a day he hopes will become dedicated to poetry against the war.

”

— K. Angelo Hehir 28 Jan 2003
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today's mail: war

A found poem from Sondheim's ongoing internet-text practice: assembled entirely from one day's incoming email, every retained line pivoting on the word "war," the English shading off into German and into a Nigerian-letter fragment. The war saturating even the inbox.

> And war shall fail."
allies and Americans that war with Iraq may be unavoidable,
administration's case for eventual war with Iraq.
President Bush tried to sell Americans on a war with Iraq by
Facing a potential war abroad and a sputtering economy at home, President
Bush
little doubt that a war with Iraq is imminent. He also used his hour-long
for a possible war with Iraq, warning that America was determined in its
[...]

The world situation (on the insane brink of more war with civil
Constant apprehension of war has the same tendency
the same reservations about a war on Iraq as her government.
whether to resort to war outside a UN framework.
Angst, fuer sie auszusagen. Ich war sicher, dass die Ereignisse von
gestalterischer Aspekt bei der Kreation der Spiel-Software war die
Likewise, now that the war seems imminent, so too does the DOW slipping
support Bush's war. Which ones? Even in the UK the support for war is
[...]

My father died when a group of rebel soldier led by Sir Foday Sankoh
overthrown Government of sierra-Leone forcing the president out of power
[...]
Yay! the clouds of war are storming, bomb Iraq.
[...]

the "mile of death" the morning the day the war stopped. It was very early
"how many people died" during the war with Iraq and the question has never
[...]

in the Yugoslavian war Nato declared that they are going to

— Alan Sondheim 29 Jan 2003
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White House Cancels Poetry Symposium

The Associated Press dispatch Silliman relayed the day it moved: Laura Bush's postponement of her 12 February symposium and Sam Hamill's answering call — the spark of Poets Against the War. Hamill edited Copper Canyon Press.

“

The White House postponed a poetry symposium out of concerns it would be politicized after some poets said they wanted to protest military action against Iraq. The symposium on the poetry of Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes and Walt Whitman had been scheduled for Feb. 12. No future date has been announced for the event, to be held by first lady Laura Bush.

"While Mrs. Bush respects the right of all Americans to express their opinions, she, too, has opinions and believes it would be inappropriate to turn a literary event into a political forum," Noelia Rodriguez, a spokeswoman for the first lady, said Wednesday. [...] But the poetry symposium quickly inspired a nationwide protest. Sam Hamill, a poet and editor of the highly regarded Copper Canyon Press, declined the invitation and e-mailed friends asking for antiwar poems or statements.

"Make February 12 a day of Poetry Against the War. We will compile an anthology of protest to be presented to the White House on that afternoon," the e-mail reads.

He had expected about 50 responses; he's gotten more than 1,500, including contributions from W.S. Merwin, Adrienne Rich and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. [...] White House invitations have inspired protests before. In 1965, poet Robert Lowell refused to attend a White House arts festival, citing opposition to the Vietnam War.

”

— Ron Silliman 30 Jan 2003
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White House Cancels Poetry Symposium

Laura Bush had just called off her White House symposium, 'Poetry and the American Voice,' rather than see it turned into a protest against the coming war. Bell, a veteran, answered from the waiting room of the VA.

If George Bush were my son I would have suggested to him that the adult thig to do if your wife insists on that silly poetry stuff would be to go along and try it at least?

But if my dad said this to me I would have gone out to march or led the troops to Cuba?

sad to say, I was at the VA today and we all looked down.

— Thomas Bell 1 Feb 2003
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from the last war

As the second Iraq war gathered, Weiss sent the list an essay he had written twelve years earlier, during the first — a Tucson composition teacher watching the 'hard, impenetrable wall of hatred' descend over a student he had pressed too vehemently, and, later, mourning in a cafeteria beside a veteran he had only just met. 'Not much has changed,' was his whole preface.

Here's a piece I wrote as the bomnbs were falling last time around. Twelve years old, but not much has changed.

Teaching in Time of War

January, 1991

On the day that the U.N. resolution permitting the use of force in the Persian Gulf took effect, but before the first of the bombs fell, I asked my composition class at Tucson's Pima Community College to write a paper justifying Saddam Hussein's position. I explained very carefully to my students that I didn't agree with his position, and that I doubted that any of them did, either, but I thought that it never hurts to understand an adversary's point of view. People risk wars because they think that the cost is justified — even a madman in a modern technological state can't prosecute a war against the will, or at least without the complacency, of large numbers of his subjects. I also told my students that the almost universally-trumpeted claim that non-Arabs are incapable of understanding the complexities of the Arab mind struck me as a cop-out. It seemed to me that as human beings we are morally, and of necessity, committed to the effort to

understand each other, regardless of the obstacles presented by history and culture. Nonetheless, almost all of the papers trotted out the inscrutability theory, and several of the students respectfully declined to fulfill the assignment, defending, instead, George Bush's position. Some of them claimed that they lacked sufficient information to write 500 words about the Iraqi position — they had apparently not noticed its almost incessant presentation and interpretation, albeit with negative commentary, in the printed media and even on the better television news programs. Still others felt that it was somehow unpatriotic to appear to be defending an adversary's position. I was new to Tucson — I had in fact been in town less than two weeks when I gave the assignment. Some of the reactions to the war there surprised me. I knew that Arizona has the reputation of being a stronghold of the most extreme conservatism, and I also knew that the military is an important part of the community — Davis-Monthan airbase is within the city, and a huge army base, Fort Huachuca, is close by. I would have expected a higher level of jingoism than I in fact encountered. What I felt most strongly was the closeness of the war — almost everyone I spoke to seemed to know someone on the firing line in the Gulf, and they expressed fear for their loved-ones far more than enthusiasm for American policy. There also seemed to be a division according to age. The young, who, like my students, had never experienced a war, tended to be far less ambivalent than their elders. I use students' papers, xeroxed, but with name and identifying information masked out, as the texts for my composition classes. I reproduced a paper by a polite boy with short blond hair who had defended America's decision to attack. My concern was misuse of analogy and authority. It seemed to me that these were being used by the administration and the media to manipulate public opinion, and my student, together with most of his classmates, had bought into the manipulation. Specifically, my student had used the Hitler-Saddam analogy, which suggests that failure to respond promptly and violently to the takeover of Kuwait could lead Saddam to attempt world domination, as Hitler had after Munich. Analogies tend to blur distinctions: Hitler, after all, was dictator of a world power, perhaps the great industrial power of its time, with a large population and a long history of successful warfare against other great powers, despite World War One. Saddam commands a small, impoverished nation with no industrial base and only one significant export. In a brutal war against a neighbor that effectively lacked an airforce it had barely managed a stalemate. Saddam would have to be considerably crazier than we like to think Hitler was to imagine himself with that class of political potential, but the analogy would be a good selling pitch for our administration if it remained unexamined. My student had also quoted Billy Graham to the effect that "we must have military power to keep madmen from

taking over the world." Putting aside the authority that might attach to the person of Graham in my student's mind, the quotation begs three questions: who are the "we" referred to, who diagnoses the madmen, and who decides which madmen exercise that kind of threat. I set out to make these points about uncritical acceptance of the language of politicians, but between the assignment and that day in class serious fighting had broken out, and while I made efforts to make clear that my criticisms were not political per se, I probably made my points too vehemently, distressed as I was. At any rate, there was a moment during the class when I became aware that the student who had written the paper was undergoing a transformation — I was really seeing it happen, but the protocol of the classroom prevented me from intervening until the hour was over. His posture and expression stiffened, and his eyes went dead. The hard, impenetrable wall of hatred had descended. I recognized immediately what had happened — I had seen it often enough during the Vietnam War. Although the scale of our political differences was relatively small, in his mind I had become one of those intellectuals who humiliated people like him. It was a class division: I had become the enemy. My God, I thought, I've lost him, and I was so bereft that for a moment I imagined myself falling uncontrollably. My student left the room immediately after class, but I promised myself that I would speak with him after our next class. All weekend, while the jets played tag over the city, flying in formation in preparation for the killing field, I rehearsed different strategies for approaching him, hoping against hope that I could breach that wall before it hardened into permanent antagonism to anyone who carried authority and differed from his received opinions. I thought, if I can save the flexibility of this one mind I would have accomplished something in the face of the disaster that was befalling us. My student didn't show for class on Monday. Filled with apprehension, I awaited Wednesday's class. Still he didn't show. I had lost him. He never came back to class. Sometime during the following week I was having a beer with a friend. He had been in Vietnam while I was picketing. "Hell," he said, "everybody in Arkansas signed up. We didn't know what we were doing, we just wanted to get away from home." He thought that now that we had begun the battle we had better stay and finish, and that there could be a positive outcome — America's self-esteem could at last rebound from the slough of Vietnam. And he seemed to think that the sacrifice of lives, ours and theirs, was worth the gain. And I realized that somewhere along the line I had stopped dividing the dead into ours and theirs. I think it was that night that the war came home to me. I was eating dinner by myself, my mind drifting over this and that, when I suddenly found myself exclaiming out loud, "Shit, we're in another war." It was as if I had found some sort of key, and I was flooded with grief. I began sobbing. All of the turmoil of the

Vietnam War, not just the deaths, but the hardening, the destruction of hopes at home in America; and the war before that, and its attendant cold war, with its red scares that had played out in my fantasies as a giant pogrom (the terror that accompanied the trial and execution of the Rosenbergs typifies that time for me, not the question of guilt or innocence, but the lynch-mob glee in the streets and the newspapers); and even my few memories of the war before that, my father's war, that killed his friends and corrupted him and my childhood, came flooding back. I remembered the riots at Columbia, where I had been knocked unconscious by a cop's blackjack, the endless protests, and the march on the Pentagon, where, staring into the muzzles of the machine guns trained on us from emplacements on the roof, for a brief moment I thought that fundamental changes were possible. I remember that it felt as if the whole several hundred thousand of us had climbed a tall mountain to get to the ridiculously small fence that was supposed to keep us out, which, by the time I reached it, had been flattened under the multitude of feet; once crossed, we broke from our narrow parade ranks and spread out across that lovely grassy field, the late afternoon sun beginning to set before us, so that we were silhouetted, glowing at the margins as if transfigured. Everybody, it seemed to me, was smiling — we had made it to the gates of power, and we hadn't been killed, they couldn't kill us. And up front, at the ledge that dropped down from the paved forecourt of the Pentagon, dozens of people were scaling ropes to get closer, and they seemed suffused with joy and youth, and maybe the walls would really crumble, and maybe we could find a way to live beyond the narrowest expediency, and the brutalization, the victimization, that happened to all of us in those slaughtering times, could end. And I remembered the swift disappointment of those hopes, from which I have never recovered. In my deepest self, I had never imagined that we would ever fight another war. Back at school a few days later, I went into the cafeteria to grade some papers. All of the tables were occupied, and I asked a man of about my age if he minded my joining him. I had sat down and begun sorting my things, when he asked me, "Were you in 'Nam?" Until his question, I hadn't really noticed him. He was a tall man in soiled clothes with an unkempt beard, and he had before him a literacy textbook. He looked as if he might have been a long-term client of the local Veteran's Hospital. I answered his question. No, I told him, I had been a student during the war. We talked politics for a moment. He backed what we were doing in Iraq, he said, but his voice, his eyes, his entire manner seemed unsure. I told him I disagreed, not so much about our goals as about our methods. "But the worst thing for me," I said, "is the flashbacks. I guess it's even worse for you. I think about it all the time, and I've started having nightmares. I never thought we'd be here again, and I'm angry

as hell. But mostly I'm just sad." "Yeah," he said. We sat together for a while in silence, mourning.

— Mark Weiss 01 Feb 2003

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✦ **Call for Submissions: VERT — Oil War / Peace & Protest**

Call for submissions — - VERT// OIL WAR /// PEACE & PROTEST ISSUE #8

SUBMIT: poems, rants, blogs, fragments, essays, cut ups, diaries, theories, prose, links, letters, translations, & collaborative efforts in reaction or relating to the emerging OIL WAR(s), EMPIRE, 9-11, PEACE & PROTEST.
Send reviews, as always.

DEADLINE: March 3rd.

Please send via e-mail, either in the body, or with an attachment:

See you at the gates...

— Andrew Felsing 1 Feb 2003

A visit to Iraq

Pierre Joris — poet and translator, then teaching at Albany — had found the piece only in a German newspaper, and wrote to its author for leave to circulate it. Stephen Eric Bronner, a political theorist at Rutgers, had gone to Baghdad that January with some thirty American academics opposed to the war; his dispatch, weeks before the invasion, refuses both the regime and the coming assault on it.

A few days ago, scanning the German daily press, I came across an article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* by an American university professor, relating his trip to Iraq in January in the company of some thirty other US academics. I thought the piece useful & informative & tried to locate the original publication in English — nowhere to be found. I finally contacted the author, Stephen Bronner, at Rutgers & he told me that it had not been published in the English-speaking world (though *The Nation* was supposedly looking at it) & allowed me to distribute it electronically. — Pierre

“

Baghdad Memories

We arrived in the middle of the night, smuggled into Iraq via the Jordanian city of Amman, and the cameras were already waiting along with the president of the university, his entourage, some bodyguards, a few agents of the regime, and the organizers of what would become four days of activities in Baghdad. Half-asleep, in an empty airport lounge with postmodern arches, some talked with each other and others with any reporter willing to talk with them. Roughly forty of us comprised “US

Academicians Against War," an independent group of intellectuals from twenty-eight universities and a variety of disciplines. Officially we were on a "fact-finding" mission, but we realized that a week in Baghdad was not very long, and that it would not turn us into experts. Our purpose, in reality, was different: we wanted a glimpse into the society our government was planning to blast back into the stone-age and a chance to offer our solidarity with the Iraqi people if not the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein.

Holding on to the distinction between the regime and the citizenry, however, called for resisting temptation. From the moment that the motorcade accompanied the bus to our elegant hotel, where we were fed wonderful meals and given more than adequate accommodations, it was clear that we were being seduced. Totalitarian leaders have always liked inviting visitors who might give them legitimacy. Thoughts went through my mind of Aristotle seeking to educate Alexander the Great, Lloyd George and Charles Lindbergh extolling Hitler, and Ernst Bloch and Lion Feuchtwanger pandering to Stalin during the time of the great terror. It was important not to become a dupe: I resolved to keep my wits about me and remember what had originally inspired my visit to Baghdad.

[...]

And the majority is on the brink of ruin: most of the roads we saw from the windows of our bus were unpaved, sewage was spilled on the ground, jobless men sat on the corners, emaciated animals ran around alleys, and we learned that UNICEF had reported since 1991 a 160% increase in child mortality, arguably the most crucial indicator of public health, which constituted the greatest regression of the 188 nations surveyed. We visited a hospital with rotting walls in which children lacked medicine, the new-born lacked incubators, and doctors said that they treated 150 patients a day. Then we were taken to the Al-Ameriya bomb shelter, the site where 400 women and children lost their lives in 1991. It was a stark underground casket preserved as a museum in which one can still see the twisted iron, the remains of bodies plastered against the walls, the blood of the victims on the floor and the ceilings. The United States claims the bombing was unintentional, though it did occur in a residential area, but either way it doesn't matter. This monument remains etched in my mind: it embodies what was the face of war and what these poor people might once again have to endure.

Other countries might be in worse shape. But there is no use employing what amounts to an algebra of misery: it was obvious that — here in Baghdad — things were bad enough. And, speaking ironically, for us too:

we were forced to listen while a kindergarten class sang a hymn in praise of Saddam, a group of down-syndrome children plead for peace, and — far worse — what were clearly party hacks giving a set of academic papers in which it became abundantly clear how totalitarianism dulls the capacity to engage in meaningful discourse and casts a shadow over public life. No hint of criticism was expressed for the regime and its policies. Anti-Semitism of the old sort cropped up in any number of conversations over dinner: even intellectuals made reference to the existence of a Jewish conspiracy and the validity of the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Just as the mainstream media in the United States has sought to identify Iraq with Saddam Hussein so has the Iraqi media sought to identify “the Jews” with Ariel Sharon.

[...]

A vote was taken against presenting a “joint resolution” with our Iraqi hosts. Our own statement, in my opinion, should have been more critical of Saddam’s regime for its role in exploitation of the misery caused by the sanctions; its corruption; its foolhardy militarism, and its assault on human rights. But, ultimately, we were in Baghdad to foster opposition to a looming war with all its regional implications and secondary effects, insist upon ending sanctions on non-military goods, and improve relations between the United States and Iraq. And, on the long plane-ride home, I realized that we had done what we could. Perhaps we were naïve. But then it also occurred to me that, should this war be averted, it will have been because naïve people around the world had pressured their governments in the name of peace rather than war and proved willing — in the famous phrase — “to speak truth to power.”

”

— Pierre Joris 02 Feb 2003

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Re: A visit to Iraq

Answering the “A visit to Iraq” thread, Hadbawnik forwards Greil Marcus's citation of Helen Thomas's 6 January exchange with Ari Fleischer — the veteran White House correspondent pressing, as if a heretic, why the President would bomb innocent Iraqis.

Bravo, indeed... from Greil Marcus' real-life top ten:

”

Helen Thomas at White House press briefing, Jan. 6 [...] Reading the transcript of the exchange between 82-year-old Hearst News Services

columnist Helen Thomas and White House spokesman Ari Fleischer, what was so shocking was not what she said, but [...] how bizarre it seemed — because in the context of contemporary political discourse Thomas spoke not as a reporter but precisely as a heretic:

Thomas: At the earlier briefing, Ari, you said that the president deplored the taking of innocent lives. Does that apply to all innocent lives in the world? And I have a follow-up. [...]

T: My follow-up is, why does he want to drop bombs on innocent Iraqis? [...]

T: The Iraqi people? [...]

T: That's a decision for them to make, isn't it? It's their country.

F: Helen, if you think the people of Iraq are in a position to dictate who their dictator is, I don't think that has been what history has shown.

T: I think many countries' people don't have the decision — including us.

”

— David Hadbawnik 3 Feb 2003

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blood on their hands

Writing from Sydney, Pam Brown relays John Pilger's pre-invasion philippic — Nuremberg, the carpet-bombing and Agent Orange of Vietnam, and the newly minted doctrine of Shock and Awe, whose author Harlan Ullman promised Baghdad an effect likened to Hiroshima.

“

Blood On Their Hands, by John Pilger.

[...] "on his hands" applies especially to those modern political leaders who have had no personal experience of war, like George W Bush, who managed not to serve in Vietnam, and the effete Tony Blair. There is about them the essential cowardice of the man who causes death and suffering not by his own hand but through a chain of command that affirms his "authority". [...] The current American elite is the Third Reich of our times, although this distinction ought not to let us forget that they have merely accelerated more than half a century of unrelenting American state terrorism [...] Last week the Pentagon in Washington announced matter of factly that it intended to shatter Iraq "physically, emotionally and psychologically" by raining down on its people 800

cruise missiles in two days. This will be more than twice the number of missiles launched during the entire 40 days of the 1991 Gulf War. A military strategist named Harlan Ullman told American television: "There will not be a safe place in Baghdad. The sheer size of this has never been seen before, never been contemplated before." The strategy is known as Shock and Awe [...] "You have this simultaneous effect, rather like the nuclear weapons at Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks but minutes." [...] That is the true face of war. Will you be shown it by satellite when Iraq is attacked? I doubt it.

”

— **Pam Brown** 6 Feb 2003
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The War

Joris relays Hillel Italie's AP report the morning it ran: a sitting laureate, Billy Collins, breaking with art-for-art's-sake to oppose the war, with England's Andrew Motion, Amiri Baraka and the Hamill protest all in train.

In the NYT this morning: Poets Pit Pens Against war [...] & this in last night:

“

U.S. poet laureate opposes war with Iraq [...] The threatened war with Iraq has politicized the nation's poets, starting at the very top. In comments rarely heard from a sitting U.S. poet laureate, Billy Collins has publicly declared his opposition to war and says he finds it increasingly difficult to keep politics out of his official job as literary advocate. [...] "If political protest is urgent, I don't think it needs to wait for an appropriate scene and setting and should be as disruptive as it wants to be," Collins said in a recent e-mail to The Associated Press. [...] "But as this country is being pushed into a violent confrontation, I find it increasingly difficult to maintain that separation." [...] In England, meanwhile, poet laureate Andrew Motion has written an anti-war poem that cites "elections, money, empire, oil" as the motivation for war. [...] New Jersey poet laureate Amiri Baraka said he will send a statement to Hamill and is also working on a poem about impeaching President Bush. "Of course, I see it as part of my job. The main task right now is stopping the war," said Baraka, whose poem implying Israel had advance knowledge of the Sept. 11 attacks led critics to call for his resignation.

”

— **Pierre Joris** 6 Feb 2003

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Re: war

As the invasion neared, the poet Anselm Berrigan cut into a thread on 'war' to insist the war had in fact already begun: the point of protest, he argues, is not to chant 'war bad, peace good' but to contest how an ongoing war is framed.

Is it not important to point out that we are already at war? I believe we are meant to take the War on Terrorism as literal fact, since the government does, and certainly the soldiers in Afghanistan have no choice but to do so. Invading Iraq would be an expansion of the current war, though it requires, ostensibly, a new resolution from the UN. The protests against invading Iraq are often publicly spoken of without the context of the War on Terrorism being applied, and anyone who is willing to protest this expansion is, for the most part, well aware that war is already upon us. In this vein, the movement to oppose invading Iraq is not merely crying "war bad, peace good", but attempting to exert public will (consciousness) upon the way the ongoing war is being framed. The President believes his cause to be a moral one, and the opposition to invading Iraq largely believes that pre-emptive invasion an extremely immoral action. Of course, anyone might disagree with this, particularly those who do not wish to see any of this described in moral terms. But that's the tag and collar Bush has on the situation, and what he's crushing his opposition with.

— **Anselm Berrigan** 06 Feb 2003

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Love Poem

The thread had begun with Scott Pound, teaching in Ankara, asking the list for love poems for his students. Koeneke obliged, then let the season's real subject in sideways.

Ashbery's *A Blessing in Disguise* is a great love poem, though with the beloved weirdly shimmery and absent. Had it read at my wedding anyway. Maybe the budding entrepreneurs in Ankara will dig it.

On a totally different tangent (or is it?), I wonder if it's alright to be against the war because you hate the way Rumsfeld *moves his hands*.

— **Rodney Koeneke** 7 Feb 2003

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✦ **poets against the war / richmond**

A gathering of poets reading their work in protest of the war will be meeting in Richmond VA on February 12 at

Chop Suey Books
1317 W Cary St.

There's be an Open Mic along with readers Gregory Donovan, Angela Lehman-Rios, Mathia Svalina, myself and others.

— **Cheryl Pallant** 10 Feb 2003

Meditations 7

A month before the invasion, Hilton Obenzinger — who taught at Stanford — sends round the seventh of his periodic 'Meditations,' a deadpan inventory of a single week: Colin Powell's evidence at the UN, the run on duct tape, and the White House poetry symposium Laura Bush had just cancelled rather than risk hearing verse against her husband's war — the cancellation that had lately called Poets Against the War into being.

Meditations in a Time of Delusions and Lies - 7

[I write these "meditations" from time to time in an attempt to stay sane. If you find them tedious, apply the magic of "delete." If you want to share them with others, feel free to do so.]

February 13, 2003

Remember, in the week before Valentine's Day, these moments leading up to the war:

Colin Powell offers evidence to the UN of Saddam Hussein's perfidy that would force Condoleezza Rice to bring Powell up on charges of plagiarism before an academic tribunal.

Laura Bush cancels her celebration of Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Langston Hughes because poems protesting her husband's war-mongering might be read. In the past, poets questioned their role in American life, but now they are scorned and insulted by war-ideologues for vanity and irrelevance, and they relish their new role as fools. Who had thought anyone cared?

Reporters in the Kurdish controlled part of Iraq are shown the secret warfare factory displayed in Powell's aerial photograph. Nothing can be seen but ruins.

The Department of Homeland Security advises plastic sheeting and duct tape, and there's a run on the stores.

American Idol and *Joe Millionaire* and the other entertainments conduct their contests with the proper lack of dignity.

A pregnant mother from Modesto remains missing, her husband still eyed with suspicion.

Israel makes plans to invade Gaza, and another eight-year old boy is shot dead in the West Bank.

China is declared a future threat because of arms build-up, while Iran's nuclear research, observed long ago, is re-observed, a bookmark for the next war.

Germany and France and Belgium are scorned like poets.

North Korea declares the right to pre-emptive strike if America threatens to invade, tearing a leaf from Bush's book.

Plans are made to "shock" Iraq with such massive bombardment its army will surrender from sheer dismay after one or two days.

Osama bin Laden denounces America on al-Jazeera Network, calls for Iraq to resist, even though Saddam Hussein is a bad Muslim. Colin Powell declares that this is proof of terrorist collaboration between Iraq and al Qaeda. The rest of the world scratches its head.

A federal appeals court decides that an insane man on Death Row should be forced to take anti-psychotic medication to make him sane in order for him to be sane enough to be executed.

Alan Greenspan, oracle of markets, gingerly questions Bush's tax cuts, and a Senator tells him to shut up.

I keep getting mountains of spam asking me if I want a bigger penis.

The word is out that the U.S. military will be ready to launch their attack by the beginning of March.

The manned space station twirling around the earth turns out to be nothing more than an excuse to keep the Space Shuttle program in business.

A significant amount of Colin Powell's presentation to the UN on Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" is pasted together from magazine articles, much like a sixth-grade report copied from the encyclopedia.

Saddam Hussein is still a dictator. No one in the world needs Colin Powell or Donald Rumsfeld to remind us.

The Bush Administration deems it fine to cut more timber on national forest land.
Israel keeps stealing Palestinian land. Someone needs to tell Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld.

People hate their cell phone companies for providing erratic service and hidden costs and price rigging. *Consumer Reports* labels them the most hated companies in American business, but the Bush administration refuses to regulate them.

New York City authorities restrict the movements of peace marchers.

Members of Congress call for the resumption of nuclear testing.

Don't forget to buy Hershey's Kisses.

Pilgrims circle Mecca for the Hajj, and someone interviewed on the street in San Jose for TV says this makes her scared.

Remember these moments before the war with a bemused grin. After the war, we will recall them with shame.

— **Hilton Obenzinger** 13 Feb 2003

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✦ **Call for Poets — Baltimore Open Forum**

For those of you who will be in Baltimore February 28th
an Open Forum will be held 10am-2pm

at the Enoch Pratt Free Library
[less than a mile from the AWP Convention Center]
for poets and teachers to address
'our' government's warmongering.

Pierre Joris will present on Arab & Iraqi poetry.

Mairead Byrne will fillet Stanley Fish('s argument for an apolitical
academy)

Gabe Gudding will host an Open Mike.

5-10 minute presentations welcome.

If you wish to participate, please backchannel

a 1-2 sentence description
of your proposed contribution to

Mairéad Byrne

Assistant Professor of English

Rhode Island School of Design

Providence, RI 02903

www.wildhoneypress.com

— **Mairéad Byrne** 15 Feb 2003

Jim Behrle Forgets His Heroes: SPT speech 2/15/03 SF, CA

Jim Behrle gave this talk at Small Press Traffic in San Francisco on 15 February 2003 — a month before the invasion, weeks after Hamill's call went round. Its long central passage, an open quarrel with the poet and editor Larry Fagin over the worth of a younger generation, is set aside here for the frame that holds it: what poetry is for once the aftermath has become the very air one writes in.

Did human nature change on or about September 2001? That's American solipsism, Exhibit A. The 11th has turned from paradigm to myth in just a year and a half. We will never know what *really* happened that day, and we may never know what it really means.

I was talking to John Mulrooney Thursday night, just back from Dakar. He reports that the bumpers of cars there generally declare two names: OSAMA & MADONNA. The power couple of the new hideous globalization game if I've ever heard of one.

The lasting impact of that September wasn't the impacts. The Administration's response: that will last. Flag-waving, anthrax, bombing, invading, propping up new puppets, cutting deals with further devils, cutting taxes and the whole Iraq watusi — these have served to distract our fractured and freaked populace while the Bill of Rights was looted and hostages sit in Guantanamo awaiting a trial or simply to meet with a lawyer. Should it make a poet feel *safer* that the Administration holds people who have not been charges off American soil and sends them to Torture States so they can give us enough nuggets to turn the warnings up to orange and send us off to horde bottled water?

We've done nothing but speak about 9/11 since 9/11, and we know far less for all the chatter. The breathless declaration of the Boston poet Don Share at a reading in late 2001, that we'd all be transformed into "war poets" made me wish immediately that he'd be sent to the front lines, wherever those are. Rage Against the Machine famously, furiously sang "There be no shelter here, the front line is everywhere" in the late 90s. It was an apt Nostradamus moment, but I still resist this talk about being at war to describe our American condition. Real bombs fall on real people in real places with real consequences. No war has been brought to the American street, just a jittery, paranoid peace. Those real bombs are ours, those real casualties aren't and won't be.

What does this mean for poetry? Poetry has endured endless eras of human silliness and has shone through all our dark ages, right? Not to be overdramatic, but, to be put simply those attacks, and more importantly the ongoing aftermath

are context for whatever we write now, and a marker for whatever was written before.

How late is it, and what does that mean for the younger generations of poets? Business as usual in the poetry world now includes petitions, protesting, organizing, agonizing. Also a huge helping of some serious motherfucking *dread* [...]

We've come to live in an unbearably anxious, unstable and indecisive regime where, literally, anything's possible. If we turned on the TV tomorrow and the Moon had fallen onto the Washington Monument, that would be par for the course.

— **Jim Behrle** 16 Feb 2003
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Report from Bangor, ME

Pollet — printer of the Backwoods Broadides — marched in the Maine cold that fortnight, his duct-tape tiara a nod to the Department of Homeland Security, which had lately advised Americans to seal their homes against attack with duct tape and plastic sheeting.

Cold day for a march, around 7 degrees, but we got 500 people assembled at the Federal Building, then marched a loop through the downtown, and back to the Fed. MaJo wore a string of Tibetan prayer flags as a shawl, I had a navy watchcap with a roll of duct tape sewed to the top like a tiara. Every parade needs a Dadaist. I decided against words, for the same reason I'm not writing anti-war poems. All my poems are anti-war. Best sign I saw was worn by a girl of about 7 years, NO FIGHTING. That about sums it up. Peace and compassion for all sentient beings in limitless space.

— **Sylvester Pollet** 17 Feb 2003
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Lytle and Emilie in bondage?

The poet Lytle Shaw and artist Emilie Clark, of the Baghdad Snapshot Action Crew, were held overnight for flyposting Paul Chan's photographs of ordinary Baghdadis before the 15 February march. Watten relays the account from nationalphilistine.com; his mock-lurid subject line nods to their predicament.

The following story was posted on www.nationalphilistine.com.

“

Artist Emilie Clark and writer Lytle Shaw were arrested for posting pictures of people from Baghdad in Soho late Thursday night. Both have been released. A court date has been set to prosecute the two for showing New York City the people who will die in a possible war against Iraq.

Clark and Shaw were members of the Baghdad Snapshot Action Crew. Based in New York City, the crew of 75 artists and activists began posting simple flyers with pictures of ordinary Iraqi citizens around New York City, in anticipation and solidarity of the February 15th anti-war rally. The pictures were taken by artist Paul Chan, who recently returned from Baghdad as a member of the Iraq Peace Team [...] Clark and Shaw were taping the letter sized flyer on a lamppost at the corner of Mercer and Prince Streets when three undercover policemen arrested them. [...] Clark is pregnant with her first son, and is expecting this Spring. [...] "If there wasn't a march on Saturday we wouldn't have been arrested.," Shaw said. [...] What was most disturbing to Shaw was how the cops tried to justify their actions against the two. "They tried to appeal to us sentimentally," Shaw said, "as though the repression they were enacting was really in our best interest."

”

— **Barrett Watten** 17 Feb 2003
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The technological horizon is ours

Doug Manson's détournement, forwarded by Skinner (then a Buffalo poetics student), rewrites a Washington Post survey of American precision-weapons technology word for word into the jargon of the poetry avant-garde — drones, JDAMs and Predators becoming Pedantic drones, JERKs and reader-response missives. The Post original followed on the list.

And this from Doug Manson ...

“

[New Technologies for your Cantos]

In Enjambistan at the end of 2001, the fusion of precision syllables and information dominance produced a new poetic concept in which small numbers of Special Operator metaphors on the ground used laser pointers and Aesthetic Positioning System receivers to designate

morphemes for inflection in ballads and cadenzas. That moment will also be remembered for the U.S. avant-garde's first use in a poem of an alarming, unmannered aerial intonation: a Pedantic drone equipped to utter misguided Hellfire & Brimstone missives at target audiences its sensors had identified. In that case, sense and shamelessness had become one and the same.

The View From Above

If they do use this language, U.S. composers would have an unprecedented view of the linguistic field, provided by a network of spry acolytes reading from 400 miles in space, Global Hack de-connaissance drones loitering in 65,000 cities, mangled JUSTASS verse-craft poets with moving-tongue indicators reading 40,000 poetic feet, and Pedantic drones with video-taped lectures, archaic inferences and breath-line sensors for every 20,000 iambic feet, all feeding DADA back to commercial centers and, in some cases, directly to combat verse-craft.

In 1991, such intelligence wouldn't have mattered much: during the Great Poetic Dearth, more than 90 percent of the poems read were "dumb" poems, unguided, and they often fell hundreds of feet from their targets.

Now, using the same verse-craft, U.S. poets will be dropping either laser-guided connotations or the Penguin Poet's new smart poem of choice, the situationist-guided Juvenile Erection Reference Konzept, or JERK. [...] "During the Great Poetic Dearth, we were at the beginning of a poetic revolution," said Capt. Michael Palmer, a veteran figurative poet who is now skipper of the Pequod. "Since then, it's come on like Adbusters."

”

— Jonathan Skinner 18 Feb 2003

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Re: The technological horizon is ours

Into a thread on drones and the 'technological horizon', the San Francisco poet Stephen Vincent forwards a squib by the Buffalo poet Douglas Manson, who has run a Washington Post dispatch on the coming war's smart weaponry through a strainer of poetry-world jargon — Special Operator metaphors, laser-guided connotations, the JERK, the Great Poetic Dearth. The original ran on 16 February 2003, a month before the invasion.

And this from Doug Manson ...



New Technologies for your Cantos

In Enjambistan at the end of 2001, the fusion of precision syllables and information dominance produced a new poetic concept in which small numbers of Special Operator metaphors on the ground used laser pointers and Aesthetic Positioning System receivers to designate morphemes for inflection in ballads and cadenzas. That moment will also be remembered for the U.S. avant-garde's first use in a poem of an alarming, unmannered aerial intonation: a Pedantic drone equipped to utter misguided Hellfire & Brimstone missives at target audiences its sensors had identified. In that case, sense and shamelessness had become one and the same.

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Now, using the same verse-craft, U.S. poets will be dropping either laser-guided connotations or the Penguin Poet's new smart poem of choice, the situationist-guided Juvenile Erection Reference Konzept, or JERK. Unlike laser-guided metrical scansions, JERKs cannot be blinded by weather or the dust of the poetic field.

With this new precision-strophe capability, a single verse-craft practitioner's complement of 50 "fightin' words" can hit more end-rhymes in one night than hundreds of poets did on the opening night of the Great Poetic Dearth — and even Defensive Poetry Undersecretary Donald Hall himself has deployed five of these metaphors in reference to Persian Ecstatic Dervish poets.

Along with that capability, the minstrelsy department has significantly upgraded several key poetic systems.

The Naive School's "Tons-o-hack" cruel missives — which would likely be used against Academics as they were in 1991, in order to target the rival's most heavily defended poetic conceits without risking plagiarism — now have APS satellite receivers, which can be programmed with coordinated conjunctions more rapidly and allow the missives to fly regardless of anomalies in semantic terrain.

The APA's Apache Long-line Heliotropic Poems have vastly improved readers who can detect and identify 128 types of poetry on a composition field five miles away; they will fire new reader-response Hellfire & Brimstone missives that can latch onto and track moving free-verse poets, much like an air-to-air whistle. The initial "A" version of the Zukofsky poem starred in the Great Poetic Dearth, but the APA calculates that the Longliner model is 400 percent more lyrical and 720 percent more able to survive criticism.

The centerpiece of the Academic's campaign is expected to be an array of baby-boomers, beginning with the Beat-inspired, reader-confusing "B" poem, which flew its first stanzas in 1999, over Louisville. Each "B" stanza can carry 16 JERKS, and each JERK can be programmed with coordinated conjunctions so that each will hit a different tone. They will undoubtedly be joined by 52 other boomers, who can compose 18 JERKS, and a few Gen-Xers, who can compose 24-verse sestinas.

These are only the most dramatic of dozens of upgrades in poetry ranging from night-visions, giggles to tangential Pound-forms that enable verse craft to drop smart references in over 40,000 metrical feet.

"During the Great Poetic Dearth, we were at the beginning of a poetic revolution," said Capt. Michael Palmer, a veteran figurative poet who is now skipper of the Pequod. "Since then, it's come on like Adbusters."

”

— Stephen Vincent 18 Feb 2003
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Fwd: Clark/Shaw Arrest

Bernstein forwards Lytle Shaw and Emilie Clark's own account of their overnight arrest for flyposting Paul Chan's Baghdad photographs — the fuller, first-person companion to the report Watten had relayed three days earlier.

”

Account of the Clark/Shaw Arrest

Many friends have asked for more details about our spending the night in jail for taping up flyers last Thursday, February 13. [...] the flyers we were putting up were images of daily life in Baghdad taken by Paul Chan. [...] The goal, of course, was to particularize and humanize our soon-to-be victims.

At about 11:20pm, three plain-clothes cops (two men, one woman) in a converted taxi approached us at the corner of Mercer and Prince [...] After flashing their badges, they asked if we had permission to poster and what we were putting up. Their next question was if we were going to the march on Saturday. [...] We explained that Emilie was 7 months pregnant and asked if it was possible [...] for them to write us tickets instead. They refused. [...]

They wanted to talk. Having locked up a pregnant woman and kept her awake all night, they now wanted to appeal to what they supposed would be her protective, maternal instincts. They offered the friendly advice not to go to the march on Saturday, February 15. [...] They also mentioned terrorism: they'd heard there might be suicide bombers at the rally. [...] We're all exasperatedly familiar with how this larger threat of terror has been played, again and again, as a way to shut down civil rights. [...] Both of us are physically okay, though extremely angry.

”

— Charles Bernstein 20 Feb 2003
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Shut the hell up, poets

Belz, himself a poet, forwarded a Seattle broadside against the whole business of writers holding forth on the war, and put his own shoulder into it. The list, needless to say, did not oblige.

JUST SHUT UP

Nobody gives a shit what anti-war or pro-war writers think. Really. So shut up. That goes double for poets. Shut the hell up, poets. Everybody just shut up.

— Aaron Belz 21 Feb 2003
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Versus Verses

A New York Times piece, 'Versus Verses,' on the poets lining up against the war had set the list arguing about what poetry is for. Frym reached back to the then Poet Laureate, Billy Collins, and produced a sharper critic than he.

When Billy Collins gave forth his words of wisdom after 9/11 on PBS, he said something akin to, well poetry is about feelings, emotion, and that's why so many people are turning to it now. My then-11 year old daughter said, NO, WHAS UP WITH THIS GUY ON RADIO? HE'S WRONG. POETRY IS ABOUT THINKING AND LANGUAGE. I swear on a bible that I never told her that.

— Gloria Frym 24 Feb 2003
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unacknowledged legislators

Shelley's boast — that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world — was doing heavy service at the antiwar readings that season. McKenzie, writing from Australia, had heard it once too often.

This particular claim — that poets are the unacknowledged etc — has always exasperated me and hearing it repeated the other day at a reading of poets against the war did nothing to lessen my irritation.

Which poets? The good? Bad? Mediocre? But that's just a quibble.

Legislators, acknowledged or otherwise, make laws. [...] Some/many poets may discover/reveal/explore/test laws, but that's it — they don't frame them or impose them.

Poets are the unacknowledged cartographers or scientists or oracles of the world.

— Geraldine McKenzie 27 Feb 2003
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war,adjectives y mas

Joris passes on, "relevant for a poetics list," M^a Ángeles Maeso's essay from ATTAC's newsletter Sand in the Wheels — a reading of "preventive war," "infinite justice" and "ecological bomb" as mercenary adjectives that hollow out the noun they escort.

From the latest *Sand in the Wheels* [...] first the TOC & then one full piece I thought relevant for a poetics list --
Pierre

“

Mercenary adjectives, by M^a Ángeles Maeso.

Adjectives added to the noun "war" are traitors to peace. The word is so hard in meaning that it should always appear in brute format, no other word should line up to hide its nudity. Mercenary adjectives come alongside of war and disguise it in some way, in what way? In a whisper, as if to clean the air, surgical, humanitarian, precise, quick, preventive.. Adjectives, which speak pronounced louder than the word "war", pulling which pulls them along.

[...] Who wouldn't feel that threat of any one of the above word pairs? "Preventive war", "Lasting freedom", "Infinite justice", "Ecological bomb"... Any speaker used to using his or her own language with real meaning feels the inherent contradiction nagging in his or her mind. It simply hurts to hear these terms. [...]

These pairs combine words in a repugnant way, a bit like the "round square" of Ortega y Gasset. Linguistic combinations may be grammatically logical, but semantically unacceptable. [...] Bernard Noel calls this regular use of semantics censorship, i.e. the deprivation of meaning. This is war talk. One of us has to die. [...]

War talk is the preceding herald. War talk brings the war, War in the language, the first victim, the truth, the death of meaning.

The bird is born again, will live again if we travel back to the origins of words, their brute meaning, towards solitude. No to war, simply, without any mercenary adjectives. One word — according to T. Tzara- is enough.

”

— Pierre Joris 5 Mar 2003

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Resistance in Italy to USA munition trains

Vincent relays Adele Oliveri's ZNet dispatch on the Italian “trains of death” — activists, rail workers and dockers blocking US munitions moving toward Camp Darby — reading it as a rehearsal for the domestic resistance he expects at home.

I suspect the Italian example here is a precursor to emergent domestic anti-war actions. The "Rogue" abroad is definitely under counter-surveillance:

“

Italy is already at war. Nobody would have noticed, had it not been for a handful of trains carrying US military equipment from the military base of Ederle (north-eastern Italy) to Camp Darby (Tuscany); and had it not been, of course, for the mobilizations of a few hundreds of Italian activists who over the past few days have been chasing those trains all along their route, to stop or at least delay their journey, in an attempt to enforce "an embargo against American weapons that will kill civilians in Iraq". [...] the presence on the Italian territory of these "trains of death" rekindles the debate over Italy's logistic role in supporting an attack on Iraq. [...] Thanks to an efficient communication network, protesters, often operating in relatively small groups (20–30 people) set up mobile blockades all along the route, lighting up fires and obstructing the tracks, forcing the train to come to a halt [...] Small local actions, if cleverly organized, can be equally powerful and effective in showing our determination to stop the war. It didn't take thousands to obstruct the plans of the American military in Italy: a handful of courageous and determined people was all that was needed. As the African proverb goes, "if you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a small room with a mosquito."

”

— **Stephen Vincent** 6 Mar 2003
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Enough!

Bernstein's remarks at the launch of enough, Rick London and Leslie Scalapino's O Books anthology against the war, at the Bowery Poetry Club on 9 March 2003 — a fortnight before the invasion. The argument turns on what in a poem, as against a citizen's position, does the opposing.

In these difficult times, let us not draw away from our poetics in an attempt to redress the ominous possibilities of future U.S. government policies or the onerous effects of current government policies. As poets, we need to pursue our own forms of ethical and aesthetic response rather than engage in the sort of pronouncement by fiat and moral presumption of President Bush and his partisans.

In his "State of the Union" message on January 28, 2002, Mr. Bush said, "America's purpose is more than to follow a process; it is to achieve a result." This statement alone provides sufficient evidence to oppose his policies. What our

America stands on, its foundation, is a commitment to process over results, to finding by doing, to thinking by responding. Solutions made outside of an open-ended process compound whatever problems we face.

If this statement does not seem forceful enough [...] so be it. If we are to talk of "poets" against the war, then what is it in our poems — as opposed to our positions as citizens — that does the opposing? Perhaps it might be an approach to politics, as much as to poetry, that doesn't feel compelled to repress ambiguity or complexity nor to substitute the righteous monologue for a skeptic's dialogue.

At these trying time we keep being hectored toward moral discourse, toward turning our work into digestible messages. This too is a casualty of the war machine, the undermining of the value of the projects of art, of the aesthetic.

Art is never secondary to moral discourse but its teacher.

Art, unregulated by a predetermined message, is all the more urgent in a time of crisis. [...] A decade ago, just after the previous Persian War, Leslie Scalapino, the convener of today's session, sent *Dead Souls*, a series of searing indictments of that war, to a number of newspapers, who declined to publish, as editorial matter, a kind of writing they found inaccessible. But the task for poetry is not to translate itself into the language of social and linguistic norms but to question those norms and, indeed, to explore the ways they are used to discipline and contain dissent.

Poetry offers not a moral compass but an aesthetic probe. And it can provide a radical alternative to the outcome-driven thinking that has made the Official Morality of the State a mockery of ethical thinking and of international democratic values.

[...] "Unilateralism" is not just the course the Executive Branch is pursuing, with disastrous consequence, in foreign policy, but also the policy it pursues domestically, in its assault on our liberties, on the poor, and indeed on our aspirations for a democratic society.

So I come here this afternoon, to the Bowery Poetry Club, to say, with all of you, ENOUGH!

— Charles Bernstein 10 Mar 2003
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suppression of the press in '91 gulf war

Gabriel Gudding forwards Patrick J. Sloyan's Pulitzer-winning Guardian reckoning with the Iraqi trenches ploughed over in 1991 — his aim three panellists at that year's AWP convention who had maintained, from the audience, that the Gulf War press was neither censored nor cowed. Sloyan's "Where are the bodies?" had by then become the List's standing answer to the coming embed system.

For the 3 white guys in the panel audience on academe & war (arranged by Mairead Byrne & Kazim Ali) at the AWP who insisted that the press were not suppressed or threatened or censored by the US Military...

“

Patrick J Sloyan on how the mass slaughter of a group of Iraqis went unreported.

On February 25 1991 the war correspondent Leon Daniel arrived at a battlefield at the tip of the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Daniel was one of a pool of journalists who had been held back from witnessing action the previous day, when Desert Storm's ground war had been launched. There, right where he was standing, 8,400 soldiers of the US First Infantry Division — known as the Big Red One — had attacked an estimated 8,000 Iraqis with 3,000 Abrams main battle tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles, Humvees and armoured personnel carriers. Daniel had seen the aftermath of modest firefights in Vietnam. "The bodies would be stacked up like cordwood," he recalled. Yet this ferocious attack had not produced a single visible body. It was a battlefield without the stench of urine, faeces, blood and bits of flesh. Daniel wondered what happened to the estimated 6,000 Iraqi defenders who had vanished. "Where are the bodies?" he finally asked the First Division's public affairs officer, an army major. "What bodies?" the major replied.

Months later, Daniel and the world would learn why the dead had eluded eyewitnesses, cameras and video footage. Thousands of Iraqi soldiers, some of them firing their weapons from first world war-style trenches, had been buried by ploughs mounted on Abrams tanks. The tanks had flanked the lines so that tons of sand from the plough spoil had funnelled into the trenches. Just behind the tanks, straddling the trench line, came Bradleys pumping machine-gun bullets into Iraqi troops. "I came through right after the lead company," said Colonel Anthony Moreno. "What you saw was a bunch of buried trenches with people's arms and legs sticking out of them. For all I know, we could have killed thousands." Two other brigades used the same tank-mounted ploughs and Bradleys

to obliterate an estimated 70 miles of defensive trenches. The finishing touches were made by armoured combat earth-movers (ACEs). These massive bulldozers, with armoured cockpits impervious to small-arms fire, smoothed away any hint of the carnage. "A lot of guys were scared, but I enjoyed it," said PFC Joe Queen, an ACE driver awarded a Bronze Star for his performance in the battle.

What happened in the neutral zone that day is a metaphor for the art of war in an era when domestic politics is often more important than the predictable outcome on the field of battle. In 1991 American voters rallied behind President George Bush Sr for the seemingly bloodless confrontation with Saddam Hussein. Neatly hidden from a small army of journalists was the reality of war — a reality that can make these very same voters recoil in disapproval. His son is likely to use the same sort of tactics to blind one of the world's freest and most influential media establishments. Running the show for President George Bush is the man who manipulated global perceptions of the first Gulf war for Bush Sr: Dick Cheney. If the final rules, organised by the Pentagon, are anything like the pool system designed by Bush Sr and Cheney in 1991, the world will be given a cloudy mixture of video footage and misinformation that will fog the reality of war.

Daniel, the wire service veteran, was part of the 1991 pool system. About 150 American journalists, photographers and film crews were scattered among attacking units. Their reports were supposed to be fed to a rear headquarters and then shared by hundreds of journalists from around the world. "They wouldn't let us see anything," said Daniel, who has seen just about everything there is to see in war. Not a single eyewitness account, photograph or strip of video of combat between 400,000 soldiers in the desert was produced by this battalion of professional observers. Most of the grisly photos from Desert Storm seen today were the work of independent journalists who raced to the "Highway of Death" north of Kuwait, where war planes had destroyed thousands of vehicles in which Iraqi soldiers had fled after the start of the ground war. The area was free of the military handlers who routinely interrupted interviews to chastise soldiers into changing their statements while reporters stood back, or forcibly removed film from cameras that captured images deemed offensive by an Army public affairs officer.

Cheney, brimming with contempt and hostility for the press, saw journalists as critics of the military who must be contained. "Frankly, I looked on it as a problem to be managed," he said after the war. "The information function was extraordinarily important. I did not have a lot of confidence that I could leave that to the press."

For independent journalists, life was much more difficult. More than 70 operating outside the pool system were arrested, detained, threatened at gunpoint or chased from the front line. The Associated Press sent photographer Scott Applewhite to cover victims of a Scud missile attack near Dahrán. The warhead had hit an American tent, killing 25 army reservists and wounding 70. It was the single biggest loss to Saddam Hussein during Desert Storm. Applewhite, an accredited pool member, was stopped by US Army military police. When he objected, they punched and handcuffed him while ripping the film from his cameras. When the ground war started, the defence secretary declared a “media blackout”, blocking all reports. Potential news reports of soldiers writhing in agony from a cloud of sarin nerve gas had spooked the president and his commanders. “No pictures of that,” said General Richard Neal, who directed ground operations during the war.

Gun camera footage always showed empty bridges or aircraft hangars being destroyed by “smart bombs” — laser-guided munitions that never struck a single human. But only 6% of the munitions used against Iraq could be guided to a target. Over 94% were far less surgical during the 30-day air war, which often saw 400 sorties a day. Those bombs depended on gravity and variable winds, and were capable of causing “collateral damage” to nearby unarmed civilians. The global television audience was awed by Tomahawk cruise missiles roaring from the decks of US Navy warships at sea. But less than 10% hit their targets.

[...]

When Bush Sr invaded Panama in 1989, journalists were once again banned. But the reality of that particular war asserted itself during a televised briefing by the president. It was just at the end of the session, when Bush was wisecracking with reporters, that most networks split their screens to show the arrival of dead US soldiers from Panama. Bush was caught bantering as flag-draped coffins arrived at an air force base in Dover, Delaware — a military mortuary. Later that week, Bush ordered the press banned from covering the arrival ceremonies for the fallen. President Clinton continued the ban. And his successor, President George Bush, also wants to keep the dead out of the national limelight.

”

— **Gabriel Gudding** 10 Mar 2003
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Re: A Political Poem Thought

Stephen Vincent's 'A Political Poem Thought' had asked the list, in May 2005, whether any poet was meeting Bush's crusade on its own ground; Raymond (Haas) Bianchi answered that the experimental journals kept returning his politics — 'What should I write about?' — and Thomas Savage, a New York poet, replied with the older, colder doubt as to whether a poem has ever changed anything.

The very act of writing poetry is political in a society in which true literacy is losing out to media hypnosis. Nevertheless, not all politics is poetry. A work may be correct, politically, as opposed to "politically correct", and still not be very good poetry. I'm not speaking of your poetry, sir, since I haven't read it. But, as a matter of record, I tend to skip the political messages on this list. I tend to agree with them so why bother? Not always, of course, but in the blitz of hundreds of messages, I choose where to spend my limited computer time. Also, there is the question of the efficacy of political poetry. Has a poem ever changed anything in the so-called real world of politics? Mostly, if not definitely not. Nevertheless, I too, write political poetry occasionally, most recently a poem about a woman electrocuted by a misinsulated wire in a New York street just published by *Hanging Loose* magazine. In that case, I didn't want this example of monopoly corruption to be forgotten. But I don't see the point in writing about George W. Bush. One way or another, we're stuck with him for the remainder of his term. There also is the preaching-to-the-converted problem.

“

I am poet who writes allot of "political'work. I have to tell you all that most venues open to publishing 'experimental'work are not interested in politics. I have been a finalist for at least five contests over the past 5-6 years where the editor has sent me a lovely note saying "we love your innovative work but we don't normally publish 'political'poetry" What should I write about?

I for one do not understand why this is reality would these editors have rejected Vallejo, Neruda, Ahkmatova?

Everything that is written is political, sexual and more.

What is more important to write about today?

I hate to be crass but if I have to read another book of experimental poetry where the poet reflects on bird-watching or Architecture or Chinese Watercolors I am going to vomit.

Hundreds of thousands of people are dead because no one said anything anyone listened to,

2000 American soldiers died for nothing,
145,000 Iraqis are dead,
40 million Americans are one hospital visit away from financial ruin,
because of America's love of cheap tee shirts workers in China work 100
hours a week and recently a woman in Guangzhou died at her sewing
machine after 84 hours working without sleep,
there are so many political things that poets should be writing about-
instead however we get the same "politically correct" BS, laments about
'oppression' rather than screams about real injustice
we who are fat and well fed should be talking about politics because it is
a matter of life and death-
and life and death is poetry what poetry should be about...

”

— **Thomas Savage** 17 May 2005
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III

Poets Against the War

This is the movement in which the poets stopped arguing long enough to act. It begins with a single letter: Sam Hamill's refusal of Laura Bush's White House symposium, forwarded to the list by Charles Bernstein, and the call it carried for a day of poetry against the war. What followed was the nearest thing to a mass movement American poetry had seen in a generation — Poets Against the War and its thousands of poems, Todd Swift's *100 Poets Against the War*, the Barbaric Yawps improvising a reading at a conference that had scheduled none, Brian Kim Stefans's *Circulars* relaying the whole churn of it, and, on the weekend of 15 February 2003, the largest coordinated protest in the memory of anyone then writing.

But a movement of poems against a war is a strange and self-doubting thing, and this movement keeps its doubts in view. Bob Perelman put a poem on the op-ed page of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and knew it changed no vote; Pierre Joris forwarded an exiled Iraqi's open letter to the general who would command the invasion, already turning the room's attention from prevention to aftermath; and when Baghdad's libraries burned, Jonathan Skinner arraigned a silent list for finding no words for the cradle of writing itself. The marches were real and the poems were real and the war came anyway. The movement does not pretend otherwise.

Fwd: Poets Against the War

Charles Bernstein forwards the letter that began it. Sam Hamill — poet, translator, co-founder of Copper Canyon Press — had been asked to Laura Bush's symposium on 'Poetry and the American Voice'; declining, he called instead for a day of poetry against the coming war. Within weeks the appeal had drawn thousands of poems and become a movement, and the White House reception was quietly cancelled.

“

Dear Friends and Fellow Poets:

When I picked up my mail and saw the letter marked "The White House," I felt no joy. Rather I was overcome by a kind nausea as I read the card enclosed:

Laura Bush requests the pleasure of your company at a reception and White House Symposium on "Poetry and the American Voice" on Wednesday, February 12, 2003 at one o'clock

Only the day before I had read a lengthy report on the President's proposed "Shock and Awe" attack on Iraq, calling for saturation bombing that would be like the firebombing of Dresden or Tokyo, killing countless innocent civilians.

I believe the only legitimate response to such a morally bankrupt and unconscionable idea is to reconstitute a Poets Against the War movement like the one organized to speak out against the war in Vietnam.

I am asking every poet to speak up for the conscience of our country and lend his or her name to our petition against this war, and to make February 12 a day of Poetry Against the War. We will compile an anthology of protest to be presented to the White House on that afternoon.

Please submit your name and a poem or statement of conscience to:

██████████

There is little time to organize and compile. I urge you to pass along this letter to any poets you know. Please join me in making February 12 a day when the White House can truly hear the voices of American poets.

”

— Charles Bernstein 26 Jan 2003
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(Fwd) 100 Poets Against The War in The Globe and Mail

Todd Swift, a Montreal poet in Paris, e-mailed his instant anthology 100 Poets Against the War to the world on the day the UN inspectors reported; Jack Ruttan forwarded the Globe and Mail's account, which carried the other founding document of the season — Sam Hamill's report of the 'nausea' he felt at Laura Bush's White House invitation, and his call to revive Poets Against the War.

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Dear Friends and Fellow Poets,

The 100 Poets Against The War project continues to gain momentum. Thank you for sharing the PDF file and hosting it on your sites. We have received excellent coverage in today's Globe and Mail, one of Canada's leading national papers (see below). Please do send this along to your

local and national papers in America, the UK, Ireland, Australia and wherever else you may be, so that the media will get a sense of how exciting, inspiring and vital this ongoing story of the power of poetic protest can be.

peace

Todd

-

From globeandmail.com, Tuesday, January 28, 2003

100 poets enlisted in protest against war Montreal-born Todd Swift has organized an e-mail demonstration of antiwar verse GAYLE MacDONALD

One week ago, the Montreal-born poet Todd Swift was sitting in a Paris cafe, reading *The Guardian*, fuming about the hard-line American stance on war with Iraq.

He decided to organize a protest — of powerful words and haunting images. And yesterday, to coincide with the release of the UN weapons inspectors' report, Swift e-mailed an anthology called 100 Poets Against the War to friends, family and far-flung acquaintances.

In one day, the book (available at <http://www.nthposition.com>) spread like wildfire on the Internet, with people around the world reading the works of these poets, who congregated in one place to beat the antiwar drum.

"What I was hoping to do with this book is contribute to a growing sense that we're not a minority in opposing this war any more," said Swift, 36, who was reached by phone yesterday in the French capital where he is currently living with his fiancée. "In fact, we're becoming a cultural majority.

"Most Europeans are quite upset by what looks like an aggressive, unilateral push by the United States for war, at a time when everyone else wants time for further discussion and more reflection," added Swift.

"I thought, let's move quickly and get something out that inspires and contains a powerful message. I wanted to let people who are opposed to the war know they're not alone."

Canadian contributors include Robert Priest, bill bissett, Maggie Helwig, Di Brandt and George Murray.

The Toronto-born Murray, who now lives in New York, said the 100 Poets Against the War initiative is important for what it awakens and also for

the values it attempts to instill. "So many people seem to think that the poet or poetry doesn't have a useful place in society," said Murray, who contributed his poem *The Field*.

"But poetry is the oldest form of the evening news, and it used to play a very critical role politically. First, by disseminating information and second, by commenting on it.

"This kind of effort, regardless of how valuable each poem is on its own, as a collection represents a step forward for the kind of activism that poets need to be part of, that the arts community needs to be part of."

Murray says he just received an e-mail from the American poet Sam Hamill, who is trying to organize a project similar to Swift's 100 Poets Against the War.

Hamill was inspired by a letter he received from the White House, which requested his company at an afternoon reception and symposium on "Poetry and the American Voice" on Feb. 12. In his e-mail, Hamill told literary colleagues: "When I picked up my mail and saw the letter marked 'The White House,' I felt no joy. Rather I was overcome by a kind of nausea."

In his note, Hamill said, "Only the day before I had read a lengthy report on President Bush's proposed 'Shock and Awe' attack on Iraq, calling for saturation bombing that would be like the firebombing of Dresden or Tokyo, killing countless innocent civilians.

"I believe the only legitimate response to such a morally bankrupt and unconscionable idea is to reconstitute a Poets Against the War movement like the one organized to speak out against the war in Vietnam." (Hamill is referring to the 1967 antiwar demonstration that featured leading literary lights such as Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg and Norman Mailer, who attempted to "levitate" the Pentagon. Mailer later celebrated the march in his work *The Armies of the Night*.)

Hamill then asked every poet "to speak up for the conscience of our country and lend his or her name to our petition against this war," which he plans to present to first lady Laura Bush on Feb. 12, a day he hopes will become dedicated to poetry against the war.

”

— Jack Ruttan 28 Jan 2003
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✦ **Poetry Against the War Day Reading — Northampton**

Poetry Against the War Day Reading

February 12, 2003, at 7:30 PM

NEW location: St. Mary's Parish Hall

3 Elm Street, side entrance, downstairs

(the big brick church between downtown & Smith College)

Northampton, MA

Free & open to the public

Around the country on February 12, 2003, poets will gather to read poems of conscience as a powerful statement of public and collective resistance to the Bush administration's drive toward war in Iraq. Twenty local poets will read including: Martín Espada, Lesléa Newman, Jane Yolen, Susan Stinson, Ellen Watson, Nicomedes Suarez-Arauz.
(I'm reading here also...)

— **Noah Eli Gordon** 6 Feb 2003

Re: A Poetry Action

On the day of the nationwide Poets Against the War readings, the poet and editor Daniel Bouchard takes apart J. Bottum's Weekly Standard broadside The Poets vs. The First Lady — which had jeered at the poets protesting Laura Bush's cancelled White House symposium as ill-mannered and 'anti-American.' Pierre Joris had posted the essay to the list urging all eight hundred members to write back.

In the course of the first few paragraphs I was sure that the author Bottum had plagiarized the less competent, but equally obtuse, article by his brother Kimball at the *New Criterion*.

There are no surprises here. Bottum thinks poetry can and should be "political" but only if it has the right kind of politics. That is, the 9/11 attacks and Palestinian suicide bombers should move a red-blooded American poet to write fierce and "competent" political poetry in the line of Yeats or Auden. All other poets fall, Bill O'Reilly-like, into a sorry pile of "anti-Americanism," whatever that may mean.

Speaking truth to power is American, but only if it politely retreats afterward and allows power to get on with its private business transacted in the public arena: through war. This is elitism at its finest.

At least Bottum has the honesty to admit he's a dabbler in poetry. And as dabblers go he has an extremely narrow view of poetry (not to mention politics). Like human lives in the political realm, he sees in poetry (or recognizes) only the poets who matter. And they are----the ones who are signing petitions now and contributing poems to anti-war sites---falling short of their mark as "serious" poets. To his credit, he refrains from using the term "decadent."

Bottum (I can't help but want to write "on Shakespeare" after his name) writes: "Though anti-Zionism, anti-globalism, and anti-Americanism were building through the 1990s, America's poets showed nothing approaching this level of protest when President Clinton spoke to the nation from the Pentagon in February 1998 and brought the United States to the edge of all-out war with Iraq."

He's absolutely right. As anti-war poem posting becomes fashionable even among the laureates and Pulitzers, let's not forget that this murderous and stupid war---that's right, Bottum! "murderous"---is in its 12th year. The "shock and awe" bombing plan is a repeat performance. The less shocking (save for those on the receiving end) but still awful weekly bombings in the Fly-not Zones of Iraq kept up throughout the past decade have not been the stuff of sonnets and odes. Not even in a magazine like *The Nation*, tho it did tend to notice the US was still committing acts of war against a population we were simulatenously killing by blocking the importation of medicine and mechanical parts to fix desalination plants, etc.

So what's more offensive than Bottum's ranting his mediocre views of poetry in this country (in addition to making/linking the grievances of the poets to Mrs. Bush on a personal level) is his defense of the current regime as being unfairly attacked for wanting to make a good war, while the paper he writes for waged a relentless campaign against Clinton for enjoying blowjobs in the oral office. Bottum, like all partisans, cannot see that Clinton and Bush are two sides of the same coin. They are both disgusting human beings, and disgraces as presidents. But at least Clinton's impeachable offenses never got people killed. His actions (via use of military) certainly did. But Bottum and company don't mind that kind of thing. What's American power for if not to beat and kill people with your big stick while softly speaking the nicer stanzas of Whitman's democratic vistas?

Well, to read Bottum's article all the way through is to see a thumbnail sketch of a right-winger's cultural prejudices. It's important at the moment because this kind of narrow mind is widely found in every newspaper and heard on every radio. But the forces Bottum claims not to understand, the protesters who see no contradiction in a plethora of messages and signs from before Seattle '99 to now, will continue to grow and reveal his argument as without merit.

— Daniel Bouchard 12 Feb 2003
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falmouth MA demonstration/ Empire at the Brink

The weekend of 15 February 2003 brought the largest coordinated protests in a generation; Skinner files from the Buffalo end of it — three hundred in twelve-degree air at Bidwell and Elmwood, five poets among them — and appends the assessment he wrote the same night. His own contribution to the sloganfest, he notes, was 'No Blitz for Wolfowitz.'

We also had a small rally (some 300-strong; that's minus the five busses that went to NYC) on Saturday at Bidwell and Elmwood here in Buffalo — same spot where I've been standing with Women in Black once a week for sixteen months now — in the chill 12 degree air. It was energetic and inspiring, even for a small crowd, and recalled for me, yes, how little numbers count for next to the more intangible historical buzz — a steadfast moment of simultaneity I felt coursing through the calls and response between crowd and speakers. (My contribution to the sloganfest: "No Blitz for Wolfowitz.")

There was some showing from Poetics (I spotted five hardy poets: Doug Manson, Barbara Cole, Gregg Biglieri, Sarah Campbell, Eric Gelsinger), along with many familiar, and unfamiliar, Buffalo faces, and a general warmth extending to the honks of traffic in reponse to vigorous waving of signs (SUVs' windows passing in sinister and obscure silence). This was before we'd heard of the true extent of the world protests (though word of the amazing London rally had certainly come in): the energy felt germinal to a moment springing, almost, from the ground to flourish in the radiant winter sun. If you were there, you were in the world.

In a more sober moment, I wrote the following assessment.

Nick Lawrence and I have also assembled a one-sheet for "teach-in" discussions; if you'd like a copy, email me (backchannel) and I'll send an attachment. Let's keep up the pressure!

Empire at the Brink: A Call to Action

We stand truly at an historical juncture, with several directions mapped before us, and several more unknown. Yesterday's protests demonstrated an immense will for peace around the world, a growing sense "the people" have had enough. While immensely inspiring, the moment also calls for a clarity of mind, to assess the powers before and behind us, as well as within, and the road ahead. We must not underestimate the technological and ideological behemoth massed at the borders of Iraq and lodged in the minds of the men who command it.

At the same time as free (and some not-so-free) countries around the world allowed their citizens to mass in peaceful protest, the forces of

liberalization manifested in the superiority of American air, ballistics and communications power appear ready to take a calculated risk with liberalism's next logical step across the globe. (I discuss the largely symbolic, though still significant, distinctions between "liberalism" and "imperialism" below.) To wit: if American and British (plus any other willing coalition's) troops are "met in Baghdad by Iraqis lining the street in celebration," then Blair and Bush's increasingly-reviled faces will enjoy a dramatic and successful makeover (Schell). Even North Korea, with its fledgling nuclear weapons program, or Iran, with its intractable fundamentalist regime, will be unable to resist a seemingly implacable forward march of history.

The strategy is one of three-step brinkmanship: 1) overwhelming force is massed, preferably by a unanimous international coalition, so persuasively that the resisting regime finally backs down and goes into exile; 2) barring that, the regime is isolated (as in Kosovo) and the air and communications environment so dominated by the "liberating" forces that the regime implodes under popular pressure; 3) when this strategy fails (as, debatably, in Iraq), an invasion becomes necessary to remove the regime by force. The U.S. and its key UN (as well as NATO) partners do NOT disagree on the fundamentals of this strategy: the differences are of timing, and of which of the three steps at present to push (though there is an understandable reluctance on the part of the allies to allow a unilateral U.S. progression to step three, which reluctance I discuss at length below). The U.S., Britain and a handful of European allies with little to contribute and much to gain from supporting the effort, are clearly pushing for steps one and/or three. France, Germany, Russia and China, amongst others, seem to think the resources of step two have not yet been exhausted. If, in fact, warfare is increasingly a technological race to dominate the communications sphere (De Landa), then why make haste to draw blood? Can we not just step up the surveillance and monitoring (U2 fly-overs, teams of inspectors on the ground backed by troops, etc.) to the point of squeezing the life out of the Baath regime? The goal is the same — promoting democracy through the threat of "overwhelming force" — but without the risks implicit in the inherent unpredictability of warfare and the ensuing military occupation. Haven't we learned to use our guns without firing them?

The U.S. argues that steps one and two appear unlikely, if not impossible — twelve years of sanctions having only broken the Iraqi people and hardened Hussein's grip on power, rather than inspiring, as hoped, a popular revolt; and the rough ideological terrain obviously requiring oversight, deeply divided as it is between Shiite, Kurd, Sunni and secular concerns, promising little in the way of a

"spontaneous" transition to democracy. But U.S.-led force has another, more intrinsic reason for having no options but step three: until tested in the battlefield, the U.S. will not truly be able to "deploy" its intended domination of the global communications sphere (De Landa). The U.S. will not decisively have demonstrated to the world its undisputed military-technological superiority (à la Hiroshima and Nagasaki — cf. Ullman; Afghanistan was a start but also disappointingly easy in its initial phase), and it will not be able to progress to the next stage of research and development without testing its innovations in the field.

[...]

Whether this is a dominance of "liberalism" or "imperialism" in part depends on success in patching over an increasingly evident mid-Atlantic rift: while in some respects the disagreement with France, Germany, Russia and China is one of means, in other respects it signals a potentially far more serious rift. As Jonathan Schell argues in his latest piece for Harper's on the "futility of war," the closest historical analogue for the present moment would be not, as is generally argued in camps both for and against the war, 1938, but, rather, 1945--in particular, the period between the drafting of the outlines of a U.N. Charter at the San Francisco Conference on International Organization in April of that year, and the destruction of Hiroshima on August 6. U.S. deployment of the atomic bomb effectively rendered the U.N., which came into existence on October 24, 1945, irrelevant as a governing body. Today, the United States' rival powers (rival being a very relative term here) understandably hope, however quixotically, to forestall as long as possible a decisive U.S. victory in the race to "space-based" military hegemony. France, for example, is currently working on its own versions of the new high-powered "microwave" weaponry the U.S. reportedly will test out in a war on Iraq.

Europe would like to perpetuate the '90's facade of a "liberal" coalition that at the same time enables a sharing of its de facto imperial benefits (Anderson). In this light, Blair's stubborn embrace of the U.S. program, awkwardly reaching across the Atlantic chasm, is both a calculated realization of the inevitability of U.S. hegemony ("empire") and a "heroic" attempt to keep Europe on board, and thus, to sustain the hopes of "liberalism." In "Force and Consent" Perry Anderson has argued that the death of any democratic elements of "liberalism" went down long ago, in an effectively imperial "Americanization" of the planet sugar-coated with a palaver of humanitarian and democratizing high-mindedness; nevertheless, a unilateral (or bilateral) "preemptive" U.S. strike will still mark a critical turning point. The discourse of liberalism will be dealt a fatal blow in the "theatre of operations" as the U.S. demonstrates its unrivaled power and, more importantly,

its will to use that power in flagrant disregard of the will of the international community. The "liberal" system of international alliances will be discredited, and fundamentalist or other popular resistances to U.S. imperialism will be emboldened. At the same time, a successful "liberation" of Iraq, under the new sign of empire, would bring potent viability to the notion of a Pax Americana (Anderson). The U.S. "showdown" in Iraq has significantly MORE to do with these kinds of calculations (outlined in The National Security Strategy of the United States) than with either Saddam Hussein or evident U.S. oil interests in the region.

To dispense with "old Europe's" liberalism does seem like madness, and the possibility of this has brought the world's liberals (who supported the bombings of Kosovo and Afghanistan) into a now-mainstream anti-war movement — but the end of liberalism is built into the logic, strategic as well as tactical, of U.S. militarization, and it is also a step impelled by frankly theocratic elements in the current U.S. administration. A conviction that the U.S. has been "chosen" to lead the world to "freedom" apparently outweighs the potentially fatal results of choosing to scrap old alliances. It is all or nothing: a brinkmanship with a fearful God where only inaction is unforgivable. What matters is to assume the righteous cause; the righteous who lose themselves, or the world, in the process, will be forgiven; but the righteous will prevail, confident in their faith — or so the screed goes. In many respects, the fate of the world hangs on the outcome of an old ideological debate internal to the dominant "culture" of the United States ... between the "moral majority" and its more secular counterparts. It is a debate that may already have been decided in the elections of 2000 and 2002. The economics of U.S. militarization also have a large role to play in the outcome. Strains internal to the military as well as on an already precarious U.S. economy, of a \$1 billion-per-day deployment, are tremendous and cannot be sustained for long (Ricks and Loeb). All of these factors — a militarized strategy for global dominance, extremist theocratic tendencies within at least two, if not all three branches of the U.S. government, and the material momentum of military buildup itself — come together in a decision for military action in Iraq; all that holds the U.S. back are the liberal interests of international backing and (which is part of this) some friction provided by an alliance with the Blair administration — a friction which may become more apparent as the U.S. moves toward decisive action.

Or IS that all that holds the U.S. back? Popular manifestations of opposition to U.S. imperialism around the world are the largest they have been in thirty years, dwarfing the anti-globalization protests of the '90's, and this movement is just

getting underway. If such opposition is merely a drag on an inevitable U.S. attack, and if the U.S. calculation succeeds with even the moderate success that has been encountered in Afghanistan, then such popular opposition will swiftly evaporate. (It would be interesting to know how many of this weekend's protesters would support a multilateral operation in Iraq.) If, however, a U.S. operation in Iraq encounters any serious setbacks, then popular opposition could become full-scale. Dissension if not outright mutiny within the U.S. military is even possible. Finally, if popular dissent is earnest about actually stopping the U.S. military machine before it goes to the brink, then several questions need to be asked up front — all posed under the general rubric of asking whether, indeed, "the people have the power."

[...]

U.S. military brinkmanship thus operates in at least two directions at once. It seems ready to dissolve old liberal alliances like the United Nations or even NATO, but it also may be provoking a popular solidarity across the globe, the likes of which have never been seen before. For those who oppose U.S. imperialism, the riskiest course of action is inaction, to "wait and see" what happens in Iraq. The uncertainties of that venture are terrifying; but the worst possible, and most likely, outcome would be a swift and successful victory for the U.S. (Anderson). A fiasco would be second worst, entailing possibly dire consequences but also new room for change (the "things have to get much worse before they get better" outlook).

The popular will for peace needs to be tested and encouraged by a clear education in the likely scenarios and the long-term issues at stake, which includes a frank discussion of the undersides of a Pax Americana and/or "liberal" democracy, along the lines of the "anti-globalization" critiques vocal just two years ago — foregrounding environmental, labor and social justice, as well as human rights, issues. And that momentum thus clarified, spurred by the U.S. administration's brinkmanship, needs to be rallied to fearless and overwhelming nonviolent force — something along the lines of a national strike. Otherwise it will remain merely symbolic if the U.S. succeeds in Iraq, or unprepared in the case of a disastrous outcome.

At this very moment we are living a critical historical juncture; the seeds of the future are latent right now in the actions of each and every human being on this planet. The moment is not lost on violent militarized states and terrorists; will the powerful forces of nonviolence, for their part, allow this uncertain moment to slip by? Last weekend's outpouring was a call to get in the streets and stay in the

streets, and not to shrink from power when it comes marching with its clubs and its chemicals. I, for one, do not intend to be a spectator, to let the dogs of war have the upper hand — while the rest of us sit around, to "wait and see" what will "happen" on TV. Do you?

Jonathan Skinner SUNY at Buffalo, Poetics February 16-17, 2003

— Jonathan Skinner 18 Feb 2003

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CIRCULARS: what's new

Brian Kim Stefans reports on CIRCULARS, the collaborative anti-war site he had built at arras.net as a clearing-house for poets' leaflets, satires and dispatches in the weeks before the invasion. The 'Senator Byrd speech' then travelling every inbox was Robert Byrd's 'Reckless Administration May Reap Disastrous Consequences,' delivered to a near-empty Senate on 12 February 2003.

CIRCULARS has become a pretty distinctive mixture of writings by poets and artists (including satires, leaflets, and the "Mirakove Relays"), report activities (including news of arrests), links to political humor sites, a repository for articles covering things you won't hear about in the news (including government leaks and floor speeches), and some lively debate pro and con (look at the comments bar). Thanks to all of the editors, writers and hecklers who have contributed so far!

[...]

One can question what a site like CIRCULARS or any indy media site does to stop the march toward war — I do myself — but there is no doubt that a lot of information and opinion has moved through the internet consolidating public anti-war sentiment in a way that is not happening on television, and that the web can spark new ways of imagining and enacting protest — of creating a culture with its own points of focus, senses of humor, etc. — that couldn't have happened 20 years ago. As many people are reading indy-media sites online, and what flies into their inboxes, as are reading the New York Times, and they are not necessarily radicals "in the know," with the right subscriptions and contacts.

I still hope that something some poet writes for CIRCULARS or any site, like Poets Against The War, becomes as addictive as the Senator Byrd speech has been for those with email trigger fingers — "forcing the hand of chance," as they used to say. If I can be faulted for thinking of this as a media war leading up to the "real thing," I think it's an ok mistake to make — I think of the entire Homeland Security Department as a multi-media department, lodging their camouflaged,

gun-toting performance artists in the NYC subways at their will, and without petitioning for handouts. This all seems so incredibly shameful and insulting to me; I hope they keep doing it if only to embarrass themselves further.

Perhaps we can bring it to a point where we can organize worldwide protests EVERY WEEK — sounds ridiculous of course, but not impossible. But I, personally, think the protests made a difference, if not in the US then to the people the US will have to talk to for airspace, foot soldiers, or even a sympathetic chat on the phone (or in the headlines). This one feel good moment is not enough, and people seem willing to spend a few hours walking in the same street.

— **Brian Kim Stefans** 21 Feb 2003
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Poem in today's **Inquirer** (2/24)

Bob Perelman — Language poet and professor at Penn — placed this poem on the op-ed page of the Philadelphia Inquirer a month before the invasion, thanking Ron Silliman and Louis Cabri for revisions; 'Shock and Awe' was then the Pentagon's advertised battle plan for Baghdad. It is dedicated to Kerry Sherin, of the Kelly Writers House.

I haven't been able to find this on the newspaper's website, but it appears on the Op-ed page of today's *Philadelphia Inquirer*. It's shortened from an early version posted here. Thanks to Ron Silliman and Louis Cabri for revision tips.

Against Shock and Awe
for Kerry Sherin

We may not have chosen to live inside Dick Cheney's mind, but we do.
Wyoming, I read somewhere, is the safest place in North America.
No tornados, no tsunamis, no earthquakes, no monsoons, or floods. No
major airport: no big planes crashing in the sleet.

But if living in Wyoming is so safe, living inside Dick Cheney's mind,
though it was formed there, is not safe at all.

How do you get from Wyoming to Shock and Awe?

Getting from Love to Hate, that's easy: Love, Live, Give, Gave, Gate, Hate.

Love comes before life, and since newborns don't survive on their own,
life at the beginning involves giving. It has to: breast milk, protection, language,
diapers made out of whatever, some sort of attention before you crawl or walk.
Everyone living was given some of that somehow.

That gets us up to Give. Gave comes next because giving is tiring. You
give and give and what thanks do you get? Nothing. Or worse. They think
they're entitled; they're madder than ever; they sulk in their rooms, they throw
rocks.

So much for giving. The next logical step is to build a gate.

But gates creak at night, they leak, they break, in fact, gates concentrate whatever's on either side, they distill hate.

Love, Live, Give, Gave, Gate, Hate: Q.E.D.

But getting from Wyoming to Shock and Awe? "Shock and Awe"? That's the Pentagon's current battle plan for Iraq: 300 to 400 cruise missiles the 1st day (more than in all of Desert Storm), 300 to 400 the next, to demolish water, electricity, communications, buildings, roads, bridges, infrastructure in general. "The sheer size of this has never been seen before," a Pentagon official told CBS. "There will not be a safe place in Baghdad." Harlan Ullman drew a parallel to Hiroshima: the Iraqi people will be "physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausted"; it will be "like the nuclear weapons at Hiroshima, not taking days or weeks but minutes." The point is "to impose [an] overwhelming level of Shock and Awe, to seize control of the environment and paralyze or so overload an adversary's perceptions and understanding of events that the enemy would be incapable of resistance." This is Shock and Awe, remember, not Wyoming. But it gets hard to tell them apart: overwhelming levels seizing control, paralyzing perceptions and understanding. That works for Wyoming and just about anywhere in the United States. That's the problem with living inside Dick Cheney's mind, whether we've chosen to or not.

What's the point of Shock and Awe?

To free the Iraqi people.

Problem: "No safe place in Baghdad" contradicts "To free the Iraqi people."

Rationale: Since the Iraqi people are enslaved inside Saddam Hussein's mind that mind must be destroyed. That means destroying Saddam Hussein's body, which means brushing aside Baghdad to find him to free the Iraqi people trapped inside his mind.

But dead people are only free in the most limited way. Not much bang for the buck there.

Deeper rationale: It's an adult world. Shock and Awe is adult political theater for a world audience. To reach an audience that big you have to project. That's the point of Shock, the sheer size of which has never, etc. Otherwise the audience won't be struck with Awe.

What's the point of Awe?

Awe kills two birds with one stone. For the right Arabs, it inaugurates democracy, or something, somehow. For the wrong Arabs, Awe will ... what? Awe will awe them into submission.

I can hear Dick Cheney arguing that Awe worked at Hiroshima.

But Japan was at war with us, and Awe, or at least Instant Submission, didn't work outside Japan. The Iraqi people are not only not at war with us, we're rescuing them from Saddam Hussein's mind. And as for working outside

Baghdad? Destroying it will awe al-Qaeda? That's a stretch. There are more al-Qaedaans in London or Berlin than in Baghdad. Maybe we should get Berlin first.

No matter how big you make Shock, you can't get to Awe.

Forget it: We'll never know the exact route from Wyoming to Shock and Awe.

But Shock and Awe is already halfway here: Here, Baghdad and Here, Wyoming. We're half "physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausted"; our "perceptions and understanding" are half "overloaded."

But even half a mind is enough to do the math: We're half capable of resistance.

The shocks are gigantic, disgusting, but at least they're not shocking, once we give up our imaginary safety.

The other half, Awe with its ersatz religious capital letter, we can resist.

The weapons are huge and thoughtless, but they don't deserve a shred of awe.

A small victory, but it's one weapon destroyed, the one they always use first.

[The Shock and Awe language comes from web sites found on Google under "Shock and Awe."]

— **Bob Perelman** 24 Feb 2003

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Circulars Update

Brian Kim Stefans ran Circulars (arras.net), the poetry world's clearing-house for anti-war writing in the months either side of the invasion. Three weeks before it began he set out five poems, lifted without permission, from enough — the anthology Rick London and Leslie Scalapino had gathered for O Books in the wake of 9/11: Rod Smith, Joanne Kyger, Harryette Mullen, Tom Raworth, Fanny Howe.

[I've just received in the mail the O Books anthology *enough*, a collection of poems and statements assembled in the wake of 9/11. I'm sticking five up without permission because I like them, but also as advertisement for the book, which is available at Small Press Distribution. I regret not being able to include a longer piece by Ibrahim Mahawi, a Palestinian-Scot, but it is three pages of prose.]

Rod Smith

Ted's Head

So there's this episode of Mary Tyler Moore where Ted's trying to get a raise & after finagling and shenaniganizing he puts one over on Lou & gets his contract changed to non-exclusive so he can do commercials which is not cool w/ Lou & the gang because Ted's just a brainless gimp & it hurts the image of the news to have the anchorman selling tomato slicers &

dogfood so Lou gets despondent because the contract can't be rescinded but then he gets mad & calls Ted into his office & says, you know his voice, "You're going to stop doing commercials, Ted" & Ted says "why would I do that Lou?" & Lou says 'Because if you don't I'll punch your face out" & Ted says "I'll have you arrested" & Lou says "It'll be too late, your face will be broken, you're not gonna get too many commercials with a broken face now are you Ted?" & Ted buckles under to force & everybody loves it that Lou's not despondent anymore he's back to his brustling chubby loud loveable whiskey-drinking football-loving ways. Now imagine if Ted were Lou, if Ted were the boss. You know how incredibly fucking brainless Ted is, but let's imagine he understands & is willing to use force. That's the situation we're now in as Americans.

Joanne Kyger

Deeply Immoral Arrogant and Ignorant

For this you get a degree in the government
of My World My Rules
Here's some of the buzz words —
Foolhardy and Inexplicable
The current president has been called
'a craven coward'
by the female senator from California
and it's only May 2001!
And now still
almost a Constant Sense of Outrage
Corporate capitalist oligarchies own the war
Feel Terrified? The 'war'
Can go where it wants, when it wants
with bizarre expansions
Endless war fear hysteria. Great
There is NEVER an end to profit. There is NEVER enough There are no
'acceptable losses' when it means more 'money'
There is no end to profit There is NEVER enough That said again, do we
enumerate the stunningly horrible
'My Way or No Way' direction of the Bushies
in the world
and start gnashing teeth and going ga-ga
But there's the voice of the people' isn't there?
I hear articulate political observation
that hasn't collapsed into goofy anxious patriotism
that informs and lifts the veil of secrecy
'The state of the union is none of your
business'
says the Vice
Evil Terrorism or Live Rebellion?

always just out of reach except for the kid from Mann
Terrorist weather yesterday heavy frost and snow
collateral damage to the lemons
and baby Bok Choy
But what about all the hot air

produced?

At least I enumerate with outrage
At least I must articulate
At least I know what's

wrong

Read the Tao February 27, 2002

Harryette Mullen

Land of the Discount Price, Home of the Brand Name

My large magnetic card flag proudly displays Old Glory as I drive to Family Dollar for the makings of a Fourth of July picnic.

I pledge allegiance to my MasterCard that is honored in more stores than American Express.

Oh beautiful, those spacious aisles stacked with seasonal items! My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of Lipton instant tea!

I cut out a great recipe I found in the Sunday paper. A Betsy Ross rectangular cake covered with strawberries, blueberries, and Cool Whip, with a coupon for the Cool Whip.

On Independence Day, our all-American front porch shows our true colors With patriotic bunting and bows, only \$3.99 a yard (reg. \$4.99).

Our backyard guests sit at our holiday picnic table, thematically decorated with 10 oz. Stars and Stripes plastic tumblers, matching table runner, paper plates and napkins from Dixie Cup.

As my hubby grills the red meat and toasts the white buns under a blue sky, our son shows the neighbor kids his World Peacekeepers Patriot Soldier,

a twelve-inch fully poseable action figure that plays the national anthem.

Tom Raworth

Ozymandias

when someone in virginia looks at an image from a drone over afghanistan programmed to seek males over six feet two where they shouldn't be in farming country presses a button and blows them to jelly blobs you know the safe u.s. warrior in that hi-tech exoskeleton is not seeing beneath nightscope gaze its bootlaces being tied together by tiny naked hands

Fanny Howe

Little Wrongs

When the cold-blooded are proved right — judgment secure — case complete we will first see a tangle of close-ups — gourd and gold and apples still rotten rugosa roses down to three petals only and each holocaust will be an ant-heap

All the little wrongs will come into focus
But who will be glad about this?

Even the bigamists who thought they were splitting each lie into fragments
too small to be located
might find their trail is following them
And the short-sighted whose faces are a blur of glee may begin to establish
shapes around pockets of light and air in the thicket they are part of
but they won't sense the force that gathers those shapes
into actual consequence until they themselves can't go forward
And neither will the hesitant experience their weakness as an ability until it
gathers into a body of uncertainties that has influence
When the one big cruelty comes down on us out of a seeming emptiness
it will be a helium packed with the force of freely given evasions
so if some still believe that the cold-blooded alone are responsible for this
power how will they show that it came from elsewhere
Nothing has increased

— **Brian Kim Stefans** 27 Feb 2003
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Barbaric Yawps in Baltimore: Report

When the Associated Writing Programs convened in Baltimore in February 2003 with not a single panel on the war then weeks away, poets from this list improvised their own — christened, after Whitman, the Barbaric Yawps. Mairead Byrne, who convened much of it, files the dispatch: the reading ran beneath Poe's gaze in the Enoch Pratt Free Library before the conference grudgingly found it a room.

I'd like to let you know how our Barbaric Yawps in Baltimore went down. Please forgive cross-posting.

As a result of discussion on the Poetics list regarding the absence of panels at the AWP annual conference in Baltimore addressing the urgent current issue of threatened war against Iraq, and the range of published responses from poets, a group of poets committed themselves to presenting an open reading in Baltimore. We were initially unable to secure a venue at the conference hotel, the Renaissance Harborplace, as the program was already set and all spaces taken. The Enoch Pratt Free Library at 400 Cathedral Street, about a mile from the hotel, offered us their Edgar Allan Poe Room. On Friday February 28th, 11am-1.45pm, 12 poets participated in the event.

I kicked off with a brief questioning of Stanley Fish's recent argument in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* "that no university, and therefore no university official, should ever take a stand on any social, political, or moral issue," Laura

Bush's assertion that "There is nothing political about American literature," and Dana Gioia's claim that "the urge to politicize art proves irresistible to the ignorant, the lazy, and the small-minded of all persuasions." James Cervantes countered Stanley Fish's argument also, and read his poem from the *100 Poets Against the War* site, and which will be coming out in a book from Salt (U.K. & Australia) in March. Pierre Joris delicately sketched reminders of the phenomenal tradition of Arab poetry, including a modernism which preceded Western modernism by 800 years. Kazim Ali performed several Yoko Ono pieces, one of which led us to listen to one another's heartbeats. Jane Sprague presented on Ammiel Alcalay's "Poetry, Politics and Translation: American isolationism & The Middle East," the first publication of her Palm Press. Wendy Carlisle read three poems, one a ghazal. Gabriel Gudding delivered an impromptu sound poem collaged from the names of members of the Bush cabinet; he also read his poem "Cadenza," dedicated to the civil libertarians of 9/11. Halvard Johnson read two poems. Patrick Herron, needing only a pork-pie hat and cane to be a dapper song-and-dance man, led us in "Happy Birthday to Us" (since sent to the Poetics list). Toni Asante Lightfoot spoke on the responsibilities of poets/teachers, and read a poem. Finally Anastasios Kozaitis related a story about how poems were written and "published" by Vietnamese soldiers (please correct me if I'm wrong here, Anastasios), and also read a poem. I found the event substantial and satisfying. The audience was small, the room very beautiful and full of treasures, including one large format John Ashbery collaborative book which was passed around. Edgar Allan Poe looked down on all throughout.

In the days before the AWP conference, and as a result of an intervention by Kazim Ali and a panel cancellation, David Fenza made a room available to us at the Renaissance Harborplace, and included our event on the conference program. As a result, we presented a panel in the St. George Room, 2.30-4pm on Friday February 28, right after the Enoch Pratt Free Library event. I introduced and moderated this presentation, in which Toni Asante Lightfoot, Jane Sprague, Pierre Joris, Gabriel Gudding and Kazim Ali participated, offering a variation of the program presented that morning, and speaking more directly to the issue of American poet/teachers' capacities and responsibilities in relation to current foreign policy. This session was fairly well attended and there was vigorous discussion between panelists and audience members, focusing on conflicting perceptions of media coverage of preparation for war, and popular protests.

Personally, I found both sessions productive in terms of making art and also answering the question, "What can we do?" Pierre emphasized our ability and responsibility to break down town-and-gown divisions; he also spoke to the

relevance of familiarizing ourselves with the great tradition of Arab poetry, and contemporary work. The words of Ammiel Alcalay, quoted by Jane Sprague in the Enoch Pratt Free Library on Friday morning, also persist as a challenge in terms of establishing links with our colleagues and fellow poets in the Middle East:

“...there is a remarkable, remarkable divorce between the intellectual life of the United States and the intellectual life of the so-called Middle East. I mean, it is a remarkable, remarkable lack of — first of all, there’s ignorance, there’s a lack of any sense of empathy, solidarity, sympathy, etc. Particularly given the fact that the intellectual class of that part of the world is, as a class, an oppressed class, a species in danger. And it’s remarkable in thinking about that, when one, for instance, uses the rhetoric of human rights, and thinks about a report on human rights, one’s first reaction is to be angry, shocked, etc. at the extent of the repression by the regime in question rather than to think of that as an index of the extent of resistance that is being carried out. And particularly in the Middle East, this is something that is actually quite shocking, I think, in terms of the total lack of communication, of interconnectivity between those individuals, groups, etc. in that part of the world and people here. And again, I’m referring particularly to intellectuals, writers, academics, cultural figures, and so on.” (from “Poetry, Politics, and Translation: American isolation & The Middle East,” Palm Press 2003).

Thanks to all participants in presentations and discussions; also to Carolyn Delly and the Enoch Pratt Free Library, and David Fenza and the AWP.

Mairead

— Mairéad Byrne 02 Mar 2003
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Belz poem REJECTED from poetsagainsthewar.org

Sam Hamill's Poets Against the War, born when Laura Bush cancelled her symposium, had gathered many thousands of poems and turned down Belz's — an absurdist scramble he had sent in three times. Here he answers a reader who took the thing for a joke.

It's about bombs in chem labs, television remotes, and exploding dictionaries.

I'm not saying it's a masterpiece, but is it really bad enough to be cut from the 12,000 at poetsagainsthewar.org? What are their standards? After all, it's POETS against the war, not POEMS against the war. Don't we get a little creative latitude?

— Aaron Belz 4 Mar 2003

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» **Webcast reading for the O Books anti-war anthology *enough***

Announcing a webcast group reading & discussion for the new O Books anthology
ENOUGH

by Leslie Scalapino, Heather Fuller, Rod Smith, & Beth Joselow on the radio
program "Roots & Culture: Roots Reggae Music & Politicization"--which airs on
WVAU Wednesday nights, 8 to 10 p.m. eastern standard time.

To hear the webcast:

(1) Go to www.american.edu/wvau

(2) Click on "Listen"

(3) Follow directions from there

OR

plug in <http://wvau.ods.org>

to your Real Audio Player, WinAmp player or whatever MP3 player you may have
from Leslie Scalapino:

"ENOUGH, which the editors began to assemble following 9/11 at the start of
the U.S. war on Afghanistan, is a collection of poets whose writings are
interactive with the current time, writing as its matter and syntax not
separate from oppressive conditions and war. In enough, U.S. poets, British,
Palestinian, Iraqi, Israeli, speak back and forth to each other only in the
medium of their art. The editorial basis of enough is that these poets' art
is not separate from their being in the world - and that: Seeing what's
happening is a form of change."

— Rod Smith 4 Mar 2003

An Early Letter to General Tommy Franks

*Eight days before the invasion, Pierre Joris — poet, translator, tireless conduit between
the American and Arab avant-gardes — forwards to the list an open letter from his
friend Saadi Yousef, the exiled Iraqi poet in London, addressed to the general who
would command the assault. Yousef, himself no friend of Saddam Hussein, writes as
one of the conquered to a conqueror, and asks after the human rights of the occupation
already visible on the horizon.*

The following open letter just came in from my friend Saadi Yousef, the Iraqi poet
living in exile in London. Though we are still all trying to stop the war from hap-
pening, it may be necessary to start directing our attention and energy towards
the aftermath of the now more than probable invasion. Clearly the shape of a
"Saddam-free" Iraq will not be that of a free Iraq, and the Bush government is
doing its best to insure that the future of Iraq will be as disastrous as its present.

“

An Early Letter to General Tommy Franks

Saadi Yousef (Poet from Mesopotamia)

Sir, General First, I want to say, in all honesty, that I am following what is
permitted on the T.V about your news: About your close ranked soldiers,

with your family, with your president, etc ...And that when I observe History — in a differential way- I feel that I would like to be like one of my ancestors who saved a city from being razed by Tamerlane in Syria. You will enter, Sir, General, Baghdad, like all who entered, before you: A conqueror... But you know, yourself, due to the fact that you were a conquered nation once, that nations are unconquerable. Rulers can be defeated. And our ruler will be defeated first. I am happy about that, because this imbecile denied me the air of my country for more than thirty years. You do not like Julius Caesar: You say, he was a general, but such long speeches! - So he was killed! I, the poet, will be short instead. You will enter Baghdad, Sir, General; can I relay to you what Omar (The second Caliph after Mohammed) advised his general who was heading for Iraq? Don't cut down a tree, he said. But today things are taking a different turn; it is said that you want to cut the return route of Iraqis going back to their country. Rumor has it that a list of 2000 Iraqi opponents, prepared by your Iraqi agents, prohibits these Iraqis from going back to their homeland, under the pretext of easing your occupation. In so far as this concerns me, I can't deny this rumor in a soft way. "Al-Mutamar" (An Arabic weekly, financed by the American taxpayer, and based in London) has recently published a letter saying that I, the poet, Saadi Yousef, must be denied the right of return to Iraq, after its (liberation). I am asking you And Jonny Abu-Zaid, our in-coming Governor General To elaborate on Human Rights under the conditions of imminent occupation.

London 01.03. 03

”

— **Pierre Joris** 11 Mar 2003
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it's begun

Alexander, a Buffalo poet, was at the television in the last hour of 19 March as the opening strikes of the invasion — the decapitation raids aimed at Saddam Hussein — went in against a Baghdad already into its next morning.

It's just after 6:00 AM in Baghdad.

The first missiles have hit — something.

FOX News is saying they were directed at a "leadership target" and a "target of opportunity."

I suppose that must have been some buildings with people in them.

— **Christopher W. Alexander** 19 Mar 2003
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student walkout song

The morning after the bombing began, Magee's students at the Rhode Island School of Design walked out. He sent them off with a rewrite of Country Joe McDonald's Woodstock chant, the 'Fixin'-to-Die Rag,' its next stops updated for the new war.

Just learned that my students are staging a walkout at 11:30 to protest the war (in coordination w/ rest of RISD students), so wrote them this song:

And it's one two three,
What are we fightin for?
Don't ask me I don't give a fuck,
Next stop Baghdad, Iraq!

One, two, three,
What are we fightin for?
Y'all, I got no idea,
Next stop is North Korea!

I said, one, two, three,
What are we fightin for?
Don't ask me I don't give a damn,
Next stop Tehran, Iran!

— **Michael Magee** 20 Mar 2003
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✱ Bombora House Gallery — The Weekend Long Reading

After the peace demonstration, if you're in the mood for a reading, drop on by for the second night of this weekend long event co-curated by

Christopher Stackhouse:

The Weekend Long Reading

Friday -Sunday March 21,22,23 2003 *free* 7pm until ?

SATURDAY MARCH 22nd

Gloria Williams, Eric Darton, Karma Johnson, Lydia Cortes, David Henderson,

Erica Doyle, Matt Lavelle, Wanda Phipps, Marco Villalobos, Corina Copp,

Amy Lipkin, Jacqueline Johnson

SUNDAY MARCH 23rd.

Thaddeus Rutkowski, Sergio Bessa, John Keene, Anselm Berrigan, Dan Machlin,

Danyel Smith, Michael Ruby, Patrick Holmes, David Vogen, Boni Joi, del

pedro/paul bennett, Latasha N! atasha Diggs , Edwin Torres, Rebecca Wolff

Admission is free.

Bombora House Gallery

400 13th St.@ 9th Ave. (entry at the Rock)

NYC 10014

in The Meat Packing District

For further questions: call Christopher [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

email: [REDACTED]

— Wanda Phipps 22 Mar 2003

Pentagon: Fewer than 10 U.S. troops unaccounted

Four days into the invasion the wire services carried the Pentagon's tally of the missing. edwards — a poet who wrote her name in lower case and lived athwart the categories the count depended on — did the arithmetic the headline left out.

Pentagon: Fewer than 10 U.S. troops unaccounted
20 legs, 20 eyes, 20 hands, 40 fingers, unaccounted for
10 fathers and/or brothers and or sisters and/ or unaccounted for
1, 000, 000, 000 words never to be heard unaccounted for
numerous smiles and tears unaccounted for
blood and flesh unaccounted for
ten empty seats accounted for

— kari edwards 23 Mar 2003

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✿ An Elegy for Rachel Corrie — How Many Miles to Babylon

From Gabe Gudding's message, and others, I assume this is an appropriate and timely posting re: the death of Rachel Corrie.

"John Bradley, and William Witherup, co-editors of the anti-Iraq war anthology in progress, HOW MANY MILES TO BABYLON, invite all poets to submit an elegy to Rachel Corrie, the courageous young woman from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington who stood up to an armed Israeli bulldozer in Rafah, Palestine, the West Bank, on Sunday, 16 March, 2003. If you want more information, contact Bill Witherup, co-editor, at [REDACTED]. We're still accepting poems on the war on Iraq. Send poems to John Bradley, 560 Normal Rd., DeKalb, IL 60115. Enclose an SASE. New deadline: April 30, 2003."

— Philip Metres 25 Mar 2003

Re: Iraq War Will Divide

Frank Sherlock, a Philadelphia poet, eight days into the invasion, in a thread on the war's television coverage. His quarrel is with the countdown-clock journalism of the cable networks — the branded segments that passed for analysis — and the questions it never thought to ask.

I have a hard time believing that Americans are criticizing the "fact-based" war reporting because we're so used to analysis on the news. This is laughable.

What is being called analysis in the mainstream media is simply filler for 24-hour news stations, pundit-go-rounds during the Target Iraq, Countdown for Saddam or Countdown to Freedom segments of the Cable News show.

Before the war, the "analysis" was curiously devoid of critical questions like:

Wasn't 9-11 a result of aiding "freedom fighters", then cutting & running (by the present cast of characters)?

If the USA isn't going to cut & run this time, how long will the Occupation stay & pay?

What should the Arab world's response to a US invasion, given this administration's refusal to honestly engage in the region's most glaring regional conflict (Israel/Palestine)?

With the American Mideast track record, why should Arabs (Iraqi or otherwise) trust the USA?

What are the long-term effects of taking on the world alone?

How does occupation effect the War on Terror?

Who will the USA support to rule the new Iraq? (They're not sure, or they won't tell.)

How does this reflect on the American promise of regional democracy?

What are the possibilities of an ongoing civil war in Iraq without an American iron fist?

What will that iron fist cost in dollars & civil liberties?

Analysis? Where are you?

— **Frank Sherlock** 28 Mar 2003
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• **Whitman Dickinson reminder**

No better day for theory/practice.

3/30/03

Be in Camden at noon to discuss Whitman, Dickinson & war. Cross the river into Philly to march against the war around 2PM. The beginning point is on Penn's Landing (Chestnut St. & the Delaware River)—a great view of Camden! The march/rally is sponsored by the Philadelphia Regional Anti-War Network (PRAWN.)

— **Frank Sherlock** 28 Mar 2003

War = Language

The bare list pointer to Watten's talk, given at Wayne State three days into the invasion and posted to Brian Kim Stefans's Circulars. The fuller argument would reach the list a week later as Poetics of war.

Brian Kim Stefans posted to *Circulars* a piece I presented, titled *War = Language*, at a "Day of Reflection on the War in Iraq" at Wayne State on March 26.

— **Barrett Watten** 29 Mar 2003
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Colin Powell threatens Syria and Iran

With Baghdad not yet fallen, the administration had begun rattling at its neighbours, Powell warning Syria and Iran against helping Iraq. Sherlock read the widening war as the very thing its first author had hoped to provoke.

Here is the Crusade that Bin Laden wanted. GW bit the bait. September 11 attacks couldn't unite the Arab world against the West. It took this administration to fulfill Osama's vision. Tragically stupid, painfully true.

— **Frank Sherlock** 31 Mar 2003
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Russian schoolchildren protesting

The date was the first of April, which is partly why Johnson felt he had to swear the thing was true.

Anybody notice the CNN (I think it was) report that schoolchildren in one Russian town are protesting the Iraq war by giving up Snickers and chewing gum?

No joke.

— **Halvard Johnson** 1 Apr 2003
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Poetics of war

Watten taught at Wayne State in suburban Detroit, where he had just given a "Day of Reflection on the War" talk called War = Language; here he reopens it for the list. The purple passage he anatomises is from a New York Times report on the bombing of Baghdad.

This is a part of the discussion on *Circulars* of my piece *War = Language*, now reopened, but I wanted to forward it to the listserv as well.

Re Matthew Arnold, here is an example of "the best that has been thought and said" in today's NY Times:

“

Since the war began two weeks ago, the people of Baghdad have been exposed to a reality so stark, so astonishing, so overwhelming, that those who have witnessed it have struggled to find words adequate to express what they have seen. To have been in Berlin or Dresden or Hamburg in the last months of World War II would surely have been more ghastly, for the sheer numbers of casualties caused by the Allies' bombing. But American air power, as the 21st century begins, is a terrible swift sword that strikes with a sudden precision, in most cases, that moves even agnostics for words associated with the power of gods. Along with this, life under the bombing has continued to roll forward with an everyday nonchalance that, in its own way, has been as hard to adjust to as the bombing.

”

Where to begin with the horror of this "educated" purple prose, this self-congratulating paean to the poetics of war? The fact that it is open to rhetorical analysis is entirely circular: the author has been to college (probably even read the romantics), and was taught the "sublime." His approach to the deity is a fawning flattery to the reality of power that he can only name but never contest, and that is communicated directly to the reader. [...] The message, then, is dual: American power is so great, you can't do anything about it; and the victims of this power are thereby reduced to the status of human ciphers who can do nothing about it. The reader has a choice: side with the gods, or with the nonentities they would reduce.

[...] The rhetoric of war — actually, the poetics of war in its self-focusing redundancy — is exacting compliance with a brutal, final, destructive power.

It is interesting that first hint of violence toward our local vociferousness against the war — the display of a "No War" sign prominently on our suburban lawn in Bloomfield Township, Michigan, a neighborhood where many American flags are displayed [...] occurred this morning, when the sign was removed. [...] But between those two events, there was an illusion of civility. I think that may be about to change.

— **Barrett Watten** 4 Apr 2003
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Open Letter to Poets Against The War - A Challenge to Celebrate All Anti-War Poetry Now

Three weeks into the invasion, Todd Swift — editor of the online anthology 100 Poets Against The War — sends an open letter to Sam Hamill's Poets Against the War, the movement lately grown from the cancelled White House symposium. His grievance is fraternal: that one organisation's 'monolithic' branding was swallowing a wider, global grassroots of peace anthologies, and the credit due them.

{Please Forward Widely — Editor of *100 Poets Against The War* calls on Poets Against The War to make May 1 a day to celebrate all the many peace poetry collections and campaigns of the last few months}

April 7, 2003

Dear Poets Against The War,

While asking poets and activists to organise readings on your "behalf", buy your t-shirts, and make donations, in your impressive emails, why do you not mention the other fine anti-war anthologies (not for profit) currently available, such as *Irish Poets Against The War*, *A Common Sky* (Canada) and the global, and original poets against the war anthology (from which a good number of your poems were cc'd, as you may recall), *100 Poets Against The War*?

I applaud the excellent work Poets Against The War has done. However, you should recognise that the world-wide poetry protests against US military, political and (yes, cultural) unilateralism/exceptionalism were not all hosted in the name of your umbrella organisation, nor to perpetuate one group at the expense of a greater good. There has been a more complex, richer and greater multiplicity of voices and editors — a global grassworks network — at work — than your monolithic announcements seem to recongnize or celebrate.

Some history, before your previously-announced "documentary" is completed. The term "poets against the war" of course is originally from the Vietnam era. On January 27, 2003 - after a week of email requests — the first global anti-war anthology - *100 Poets Against The War* came from www.nthposition.com; January 28, your organisation put up its poets against the war website; we were happy to send countless poems your way, and often received ones people had shared with you as well.

That month, tens of thousands of people downloaded, printed up, and read from the nthposition books, and staged peace readings world-wide. Often, they referred to these events as "poets against the war" events, but read from our books, or their own poems. As Poets Against The War time and again identified these

nthposition readings, from Japan to Germany to Ireland, as solely theirs in press messages, we became bemused, even proud to share the global stage with such grand friends.

Importantly, for the wider cause of peace protest, all the "against the war" events, including our ground-breaking ebooks for peace, were widely reported, globally, on CNN, and in The Times, and Guardian, and on the BBC, CBC, NPR, and so on. It did not seem to matter — then — what good people called it, so long as we all worked for peace.

But since the war began, what should have been unities of purpose have broken down, as marketing, branding, and personal goals seem to have obscured a wider, more vital community purpose. The irony of American peace protests using rugged-individual, entrepreneurial methods is notable. This is not the time or place to indicate exactly how some anti-war poetry publishers have failed the greater good, or each other, but I shall say that a Babel was introduced when consensus and co-operation would have been perhaps more impressive. In plainer terms: the plot was lost.

While Poets Against The War's efforts have been inspiring — they would be exponentially more graceful and appropriate, if you actually agreed to co-ordinate promotion, launch and reading, efforts with the other anti-war poetry publishers, which I and others have requested on several previous occasions. There are poets behind each poem, and these people deserve to reach the widest audience with their fine message.

I call upon you, Poets Against The War, on your May Day (May 1) day of international poetry against war, to use your powerful PR machine to mention and promote the other — indeed all — anti-war poetry anthologies — released during this fraught period of terrible war. And to invite poets from these many other collections to read with you.

I do this in a spirit of camaraderie — knowing as you do, how many unpaid hours we all put in to this struggle to write, edit, publish and promote, good poems for a greater cause. All our poems should be now celebrated and all our anti-war books known. Poets Against The War should be big enough to contain such multitudes, and share credit, where it is due.

best wishes

ps Thanks to an illegal war fought by the US and UK governments, over 1,200 Iraqi civilians have been murdered since March 20, 2003. Poetry is not, in itself, the main message, now.

— Todd Swift 07 Apr 2003

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Re: To America

Into a thread opened when Murat Nemet-Nejat forwarded a shorter version, Joris gives the full text of the exiled Iraqi poet Saadi Youssef's America, America — which he and Nicole Peyrafitte had been performing as their SUMERICA piece. Written in Damascus in 1995; the translation is Khaled Mattawa's, revised by Joris.

Here is the whole poem; it's title is *America, America*. Nicole Peyrafitte & I have been performing it as the opening of our SUMERICA performance all this year. I have slightly tweaked Mattawa's translation. -- Pierre

God save America

My home sweet home!

The French general who raised his tricolour
over Nugrat al-Salman where I was a prisoner thirty
years ago ...

in the middle of that U-turn that split the back of the Iraqi army,
the general who loved St Emilion wines
called Nugrat al-Salman a fort...

Of the surface of the earth, generals know only two
dimensions:

Whatever rises is a fort

whatever spreads is a battlefield.

How ignorant the general was!

But Liberation was better versed in topography.

The Iraqi boy who conquered her front page

sat carbonised behind a steering wheel

on the Kuwait-Safwan highway

while television cameras

(the booty of the defeated and their identity)

were safe in the truck like a storefront

on Rivoli Street.

The neutron bomb is highly intelligent,

it distinguishes between

an "I" and an "Identity".

[...]

I too love jeans and jazz and Treasure Island

and John Silver's parrot and the terraces of New Orleans

I love Mark Twain and the Mississippi steamboats

and Abraham Lincoln's dogs

I love the fields of wheat and corn and the smell of
Virginia tobacco.

But I am not American. Is that enough for the
Phantom pilot to turn me back to the Stone Age!

I need neither oil, nor America herself, neither the
elephant nor the donkey.

Leave me, pilot, leave my house roofed with palm
fronds and this wooden bridge.

[...]

America

let us exchange your gifts.

Keep your smuggled cigarettes
give us potatoes.

Keep James Bond's golden pistol
give us Marilyn Monroe's giggle.

Keep the heroin syringe under the tree
give us vaccines.

Keep your blueprints for model penitentiaries
give us village homes.

Keep the books of your missionaries
give us paper for poems to defame you.

Keep what you do not have
give us what we have.

Keep the stripes of your flag
give us the stars.

Keep the Afghani Mujahideen's beard
give us Walt Whitman's beard filled with
butterflies.

Keep Saddam Hussain
give us Abraham Lincoln
or give us no one.

[...]

We are not hostages, America
and your soldiers are not God's soldiers ...

We are the poor ones, ours is the earth of the
drowned gods

the gods of bulls

the gods of fires

the gods of sorrows that intertwine clay and blood
in a song ...

We are the poor, ours is the god of the poor

who emerges out of the farmers' ribs
hungry and bright
and raises heads up high ...
America, we are the dead
Let your soldiers come
Whoever kills a man, let him resurrect him
We are the drowned ones, dear lady

We are the drowned
Let the water come

— Pierre Joris 8 Apr 2003
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Re: On looting the National Museum of Iraq

Written in the week Baghdad fell, extending Stephen Vincent's post to the thread on the sacking of the National Museum. The exiled Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi had called it a crime against culture; the relayed report is Daniel del Castillo's in the Chronicle of Higher Education.

I want to extend Steve Vincent's comments about the looting of the National Museum of Art in Baghdad. Many of us echoed the news during this weekend's poetry festival in New York, The People's Poetry Gathering: it was a theme, a cry, a lament through much of the proceedings. Abdellatif Laabi called it, quite rightly, it a "crime against culture." [...] A friend at the proceedings mentioned to me that she planned to do a performance in which she stamped on the American flag. But I would say otherwise: Donald Rumsfeld and George Bush are the ones trampling the flag. If we condemn this totally predictable and preventable, can we say with some literal accuracy barbaric?, act, which occurred as a direct result of U.S. government actions and policy, we condemn it, also, in the spirit of an America, our America, that we must now struggle all the harder to reclaim from those who have cut out its heart and sold it in noncompetitive bids to Haliburton and the other members of the hooded brotherhood of the Axis of Unilateralism.

"Now is the time for your tears."

“

The looting and destruction of priceless artifacts in Iraq's premier museum over the weekend outraged scholars worldwide. They said that the loss or damage of tens of thousands of objects in the National Museum of Iraq could forever hurt the understanding of Babylonian, Sumerian, and Assyrian civilizations. [...] "They have looted or destroyed

170,000 items of antiquity dating back thousands of years... They were worth billions of dollars." [...] "It was completely avoidable," said McGuire Gibson [...] "I have been talking to the military since January 24th, and we supplied them with a list of more than 5,000 archaeological sites, which they've been putting on their maps. They know where those locations are." [...] "It's the equivalent of if the U.S. Army had been sitting outside the Cairo Museum and let it be looted by a mob, or if they had been in Athens and let a mob loot the Athens Archaeological Museum," he said.

”

— Charles Bernstein 14 Apr 2003
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Meditations - 10

Hilton Obenzinger — poet, novelist, and a long student of America's apocalyptic habits — sent these numbered Meditations out to friends through the invasion, he said, to stay sane. The tenth is written the week Baghdad fell and its museum was looted (Donald Rumsfeld's word for that being “Stuff happens”); a Jewish writer, he turns the war's rhetoric back upon his own inheritance without flinching.

Meditations in a Time of Delusions and Lies - 10

[I write these "meditations" from time to time in an attempt to stay sane. If you find them tedious, apply the magic of "delete." If you want to share them with others, feel free to do so.]

April 13, 2003

"Stuff happens," Donald Rumsfeld explains.

Artifacts from thousands of years of civilization smashed and stolen: "Stuff happens." How many urns and statues will circulate through the vast antiquities black market and end up in the vaults of London bankers and Texas oilmen?

The crowds cheer as the statue of the dictator, another artifact, is pulled to the ground. An aerial photo shows that the square is surrounded by tanks with the crowd barely filling a tenth of it. These are the multitudes of Iraqis cheering their liberation. Most Iraqis are cowering at home.

Man-on-the-street TV interview with a Baghdad grocer: "We are happy. We want freedom from Saddam, yes? And we want freedom from America. You understand? Both."

Even before Baghdad fell, even before the blood stopped flowing, Syria became the next target.

North Korea made an important concession: to open talks about their nuclear program in any format (instead of the bilateral talks with the US they had demanded). But, as one expert on Korea comments in The New York Times (April 13, 2003), "the problem is that, given the mood of the moment, can the Bush administration take yes for an answer?"

Weapons of mass destruction have yet to be found. No matter. The Bush gang falls upon its crudest, most opportunist rhetorical device: it appeals to Americans' sense of justice and fair-play, that we are liberating a people, and that we are acting in the interests of freedom.

My 85-year-old aunt who survived the Nazi murders through her wits and sheer luck knows something about war. We have many differences of opinion, but we share a deep revulsion, and she too is suspicious of the great arrogance of America. She is sure disaster awaits America, and then "They will blame the Jews."

My aunt's paranoia is borne of years of experience, since the Nazis and other anti-Semites did blame everything on the Jews, from socialism to socialites. But she may be on to something in this case too: there is such a complete identification between the US and Israel, even the same personnel Wolfowitz, Perle, and about two dozen other high-placed Jewish advisors who have promoted the neo-con Likudnik line. The reactionary evangelists also promote the same line, but it'll be the Jews who will get the shaft.

Congressman Moran, on the eve of the war, argued that the US was being pushed to war by the Jews an excessive comment, since American Jews were no different in their opinions than the rest of the country, and if anything they tilted against the war. But his remark was accurate in the sense that these ultra-Zionist demagogues are in the driver's seat. The distinctions between the US and Israel are smaller and smaller, the distinctions between Jews as Jews and Zionist ideologues are growing more confused day by day.

Once upon a time we Jews fought against the Roman Empire now we ARE the Roman Empire.

Jessica Lynch, a wounded POW, is rescued by soldiers, a daring operation. She is from Palestine, West Virginia. Her good buddy, a Hopi Indian, is killed. Ironies and absurdities abound in images that violently crisscross history: the women warriors, the settler and the Indian, the echoes of Biblical obsession.

A former CIA director gleefully declares that this is the beginning of World War IV (it turns out that World War III was the Cold War, but the fact that we did actually avoid nuclear catastrophe deludes us into thinking that it wasn't a war).

The TV has become so completely subservient, has become such an overt propaganda operation, that I can barely watch anymore. I flip on the news channels, pick up the latest ejaculation, and turn to Comedy Central. But even there, stand-up comics entertain the troops.

Demonstrators for peace at the docks in Oakland are shot at with rubber bullets and other "non-lethal" weapons. Longshoremen standing by the sides are also shot and arrested. After the lockout, was there a reason to target the ILWU?

"Stuff happens": a few harsh examples of state coercion, just a few arrests, just some sweeps of immigrants, some civilian "watchdog" groups like "Campus Watch," just the weight of the media cheering, and perhaps people will shut up, acquiesce, defend the American way of life. The fact of the matter is that the bulk of Americans, at least for the moment, accept the slide into fascism. Didn't the Germans?

I do not think that "Peace is Patriotic." I am not a patriot of the New Roman Empire. Peace is a universal. I do not defend the "American way of life." I believe freedom and democracy is a development of humanity and not a special creature of the United States. I do not believe that the two-party system is the highest form of democracy.

I am a traitor.

I hereby declare that my brain is a weapon of mass destruction. I await the invasion.

— **Hilton Obenzinger** 14 Apr 2003
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Fwd: letter from Michael Moore

Gloria Frym relays Michael Moore's open letter of 7 April 2003, written a fortnight after his Oscar acceptance for Bowling for Columbine ("we live in fictitious times") drew both cheers and boos from the Academy. Its argument — that dissent is punished in reputation only, never in fact — reached a List then asking itself, as the invasion succeeded, whether protest had been any use at all.

“

April 7, 2003

Dear friends,

It appears that the Bush administration will have succeeded in colonizing Iraq sometime in the next few days. This is a blunder of such magnitude — and we will pay for it for years to come. It was not worth the life of one single American kid in uniform, let alone the thousands of Iraqis who have died, and my condolences and prayers go out to all of them.

So, where are all those weapons of mass destruction that were the pretense for this war? Ha! There is so much to say about all this, but I will save it for later.

What I am most concerned about right now is that all of you — the majority of Americans who did not support this war in the first place — not go silent or be intimidated by what will be touted as some great military victory. Now, more than ever, the voices of peace and truth must be heard. I have received a lot of mail from people who are feeling a profound sense of despair and believe that their voices have been drowned out by the drums and bombs of false patriotism. Some are afraid of retaliation at work or at school or in their neighborhoods because they have been vocal proponents of peace. They have been told over and over that it is not “appropriate” to protest once the country is at war, and that your only duty now is to “support the troops.”

Can I share with you what it's been like for me since I used my time on the Oscar stage two weeks ago to speak out against Bush and this war? I hope that, in reading what I'm about to tell you, you'll feel a bit more emboldened to make your voice heard in whatever way or forum that is open to you.

When *Bowling for Columbine* was announced as the Oscar winner for Best Documentary at the Academy Awards, the audience rose to its feet. It was a great moment, one that I will always cherish. They were standing and cheering for a film that says we Americans are a uniquely violent people, using our massive stash of guns to kill each other and to use them against many countries around the world. They were applauding a film that shows George W. Bush using fictitious fears to frighten the public into giving him whatever he wants.

And, thus, I said the following from the Oscar stage:

“On behalf of our producers Kathleen Glynn and Michael Donovan (from Canada), I would like to thank the Academy for this award. I have invited the other Documentary nominees on stage with me. They are here in solidarity because we like non-fiction. We like non-fiction because we live in fictitious times. We live in a time where fictitious election results give

us a fictitious president. We are now fighting a war for fictitious reasons. Whether it's the fiction of duct tape or the fictitious 'Orange Alerts,' we are against this war, Mr. Bush. Shame on you, Mr. Bush, shame on you. And, whenever you've got the Pope and the Dixie Chicks against you, you're time is up."

Halfway through my remarks, some in the audience started to cheer. That immediately set off a group of people in the balcony who started to boo. Then those supporting my remarks started to shout down the booers. The L. A. Times reported that the director of the show started screaming at the orchestra "Music! Music!" in order to cut me off, so the band dutifully struck up a tune and my time was up.

The next day — and in the two weeks since — the right-wing pundits and radio shock jocks have been calling for my head. So, has all this ruckus hurt me? Have they succeeded in "silencing" me?

Well, take a look at my Oscar "backlash": On the day after I criticized Bush and the war at the Academy Awards, attendance at *Bowling for Columbine* in theaters around the country went up 110%. It is now the longest-running consecutive commercial release in America, 26 weeks in a row and still thriving. Yesterday (April 6), *Stupid White Men* shot back to #1 on the New York Times bestseller list. This is my book's 50th week on the list. In the week after the Oscars, my website was getting 10-20 million hits A DAY (one day we even got more hits than the White House!).

I tell you all of this because I want to counteract a message that is told to us all the time — that, if you take a chance to speak out politically, you will live to regret it. It will hurt you in some way, usually financially. You could lose your job. Others may not hire you. You will lose friends. And on and on and on.

Take the Dixie Chicks. I'm sure you've all heard by now that, because their lead singer mentioned how she was ashamed that Bush was from her home state of Texas, their record sales have "plummeted" and country stations are boycotting their music. The truth is that their sales are NOT down. This week, after all the attacks, their album is still at #1 on the Billboard country charts and, according to Entertainment Weekly, on the pop charts during all the brouhaha, they ROSE from #6 to #4. Their song, "Travelin' Soldier" (a beautiful anti-war ballad) was the most requested song on the internet last week. They have not been hurt at all — but that is not what the media would have you believe.

Why is that? Because there is nothing more important now than to keep the voices of dissent — and those who would dare to ask a question —

SILENT. And what better way than to try and take a few well-known entertainers down with a pack of lies so that the average Joe or Jane gets the message loud and clear: "Wow, if they would do that to the Dixie Chicks or Michael Moore, what would they do to little ol' me?" In other words, shut the f--- up.

And that, my friends, is the real point of this film that I just got an Oscar for — how those in charge use FEAR to manipulate the public into doing whatever they are told.

Well, the good news — if there can be any good news this week — is that not only have neither I nor others been silenced, we have been joined by millions of Americans who think the same way we do. Don't let the false patriots intimidate you by setting the agenda or the terms of the debate.

Unfortunately, Bush and Co. are not through yet. This invasion and conquest will encourage them to do it again elsewhere. This is not the time for the majority of us who believe in a peaceful America to be quiet. Make your voices heard. Despite what they have pulled off, it is still our country.

”

— Gloria Frym 17 Apr 2003
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Save the Animals of the Baghdad Zoo

Baghdad had fallen a week before, and in the looting that followed the city's zoo was left to fend for itself. Wilson spent the morning faxing everyone he could think of — senators, the Humane Society, Bill Gates — on behalf of the animals nobody had been ordered to feed.

Reuters reports this morning that the big cats of the Baghdad Zoo are starving to death. They haven't been fed in 10 days. There's a picture of a tiger which looks like a concentration camp victim. [...] Dozens of zoo animals are wandering around Baghdad, also starving. [...] The pictures on Reuters make me weep. [...] An Army or Marine detachment could save these animals in 5 minutes. All they need is someone to order them to do so.

— Ian Randall Wilson 17 Apr 2003
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Couldn't We Have Spared the Books of the Baghdad Libraries?

In the week Baghdad's National Library, the Koranic library of the Ministry of Religious Endowment and the clay-tablet archive of the National Museum were looted and burned, the poet Jonathan Skinner — soon to found the journal ecopoetics — arraigns a silent list for failing to mourn 'the cradle of our civilization,' and asks whether poets can find words for it. He appends Robert Fisk's dispatch for The Independent, The Sacking of Baghdad: Burning the History of Iraq.

Dear Poets,

I'm also burning to note that, while the loss of human and animal life, and widespread ecological destruction, in this barbaric episode is truly horrific, the wholesale loss of the collections of Baghdad's National Library and Archive, of the library of Korans at the Ministry of Religious Endowment and of the cuneiform clay tablet archive in Baghdad's National Museum (see articles below) are an intellectual extinction at the scale of the human species that truly beggars the imagination.

I've turned to this list repeatedly over the past few days hoping for the consolation, at least, of some discussion and collective mourning over this — to no avail. Perhaps I missed something (digest lurker that I am), but one would think that a Poetics listserv, operated and convened by poets, would take some note of this major cultural catastrophe and direct hit to poets — it's like we just lost our mother, kids. Mnemosyne, mother of the muses. She who rocked the cradle of our civilization.

More proof that cultural and species extinction go hand in hand, in this predatory epoch. The murderers have just blown a gap in the cultural record to rival the great unconformities geologists and evolutionists will forever scratch their heads over. For this we will be remembered, if there are any heads to scratch a few hundred years from now.

In the meantime, I lay this huge crime squarely at the feet of the destroyers-in-my-name who, in a charitable interpretation, knew not what they wrought--- but who, in a more cynical light, knew exactly what they were up to. Who blew open the doors to the archives while they barricaded the Ministry of Oil.

Why waste time killing individuals? If you want to destroy a people, you wipe out their memory, their history, their imagination. This is genocide, ethnocide, matricide, a "crime against humanity" on a massive scale, if those words have any meaning left to wring.

As poets we should, collectively, lodge a FORMAL PROTEST and expression of outrage, demanding that Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Powell, Rice, Wolfowitz, Perle, Rove and Co. be tried for their matricidal crimes against humanity.

(Anyone want to try their hand at drafting such a document?)

As poets, can we find words to answer this deep and mortal blow? What bits of Sumerian wisdom can you offer in this dark moment, friends?

Something more, I hope, than "Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust ... ?"

As poets, we should resurrect the ghost of Charles Olson and unleash him on the White House, Pentagon and CIA with a month's supply of benzedrine, Jim Beam and cigarettes till they beg for mercy on their bloodied knees. And then send in Ezra Pound and HD with typewriter bombs and lethal incantations to finish them off.

As poets, ultimately at fault for this destruction, as Robert Kocik has intelligently and provocatively claimed, should we not be doing our own collective penance?

Then again, as meek "postmoderns" I suppose we don't need to mourn the loss of "origins." Should we take any consolation in Derrida's claim that poetry is, by definition, what "survives the archive"?

SHAME ON US, Destroyers of Civilization!

In ignominy,
JS

Here's some of what we know —

“

So yesterday was the burning of books. First came the looters, then the arsonists. It was the final chapter in the sacking of Baghdad. The National Library and Archives, a priceless treasure of Ottoman historical documents, including the old royal archives of Iraq, were turned to ashes in 3,000 degrees of heat. Then the library of Korans at the Ministry of Religious Endowment was set ablaze.

I saw the looters. One of them cursed me when I tried to reclaim a book of Islamic law from a boy of no more than 10.

[...]

When I caught sight of the Koranic library burning — flames 100 feet high were bursting from the windows — I raced to the offices of the occupying power, the US Marines' Civil Affairs Bureau. An officer shouted

to a colleague that "this guy says some biblical [sic] library is on fire". I gave the map location, the precise name — in Arabic and English. I said the smoke could be seen from three miles away and it would take only five minutes to drive there. Half an hour later, there wasn't an American at the scene — and the flames were shooting 200 feet into the air.

For almost a thousand years, Baghdad was the cultural capital of the Arab world, the most literate population in the Middle East. Genghis Khan's grandson burnt the city in the 13th century and, so it was said, the Tigris river ran black with the ink of books. Yesterday, the black ashes of thousands of ancient documents filled the skies of Iraq.

Why?

”

— Jonathan Skinner 18 Apr 2003

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The Rumsfeld Tablet

Armand Schwerner's The Tablets (1968–99) mimics a scholar's reconstruction of broken Sumero-Akkadian clay tablets, lacunae marked and all. Bernstein read from it at Cecilia Vicuña's Poets House lament for the looted Baghdad museum, then unveiled his own all-lacunae forgery, attributed to Rumsfeld.

Last week, Cecilia Vicuña asked me to read from Armand Schwerner's *The Tablets* (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1999) at an event she was organizing at New York's Poets House on May 12 to protest, and lament, the looting of the Baghdad museum, and other cultural sites. Schwerner's *Tablets* is based on a scholar/translator's reconstruction of a set of Sumero-Akkadian clay tables from 4,000 years ago, as Schwerner frames the poem, which is, nonetheless, entirely his own creation.

The event opened with a presentation by Marc Van De Mierop, of Columbia University, in which he speculated that the destruction of artifacts that took place in Iraq last month was part of an American program to wipe out the cultural past of Iraq. I presented an alternative, equally dark, speculation: that the destruction might not be the result of a deliberate American campaign to target Iraqi antiquities but rather a product of the brutal indifference to culture, foreign and domestic, that has been the hallmark of the current Executive Branch of the U.S. government.

The evening consisted largely of readings in translation of contemporary Iraqi poets, almost all poets in exile. [...] A few days after I received Cecilia's invitation, something odd occurred. A received an email from a trusted confederate in the Washington, D.C. area, that a new Tablet had been discovered in the sub-basement level below the residence of Paul Wolfowitz. [...] preliminary evidence suggests that this Tablet is the work of Donald Rumsfeld and that it was composed between April 10 and 12. After reading Schwerner's "Tablet II", I gave the first public reading of the "Rumsfeld Tablet":

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— Charles Bernstein 13 May 2003
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Re: theory/practice of military aesthetics

Kirby Olson, the list's resident contrarian, carries a thread on military aesthetics into deeper water, setting the sublime of Burke and Kant against a scaled-down comic picturesque. He writes as the Shock and Awe campaign hardens into occupation — and dares to say the humourless thing about a spectacle few yet wished to read as spectacle.

I'm not sure if this has been discussed — the aesthetics of 9/11. It was impressive. The plane entering the building, the huge building falling. It participated in the aesthetics of the sublime. In fact it was all about this impressive, big God that we seem to share with the Islamic tradition, and then the question is meant to arise: whose side is he on?

Bush's counterattack (he needed a bigger canvas than Afghanistan to make his case) was actually called SHOCK and AWE. This is a clear reference to the aesthetics of the sublime set forth by Edmund Burke, and then clarified and intensified in the *Critique of Judgment* by Immanuel Kant.

Kant says that big things like the sea, waterfalls, the stars at night remind us that there is a God. I'm not sure how much Islamic aesthetics accepts this idea. It's a totally blank slate to me. They are not permitted to have a pictorial tradition, but it seemed to me that Bin Laden and Al Qaida have an intuitive understanding of this tradition. They like to work on big canvases and make terrific tragedies.

I'm sort of disgusted by this because it lacks a sense of humor. Kant himself denies that the humorous is ever aesthetic. He says that humor is based on a disappointment of expectations, and on the incongruous. It's just a page or two in the *Critique of Judgment*.

I've been trying to rebuild the comic as an important aesthetic and political criterion. Just fumbling toward this idea intuitively that democracy requires humor. Kenneth Burke wrote that a cult of comedy was humanity's only hope for the future. We're not getting this from the extremists, who prefer the Shock and Awe of the Aesthetics of the Sublime.

[...]

A lot of writers like Gregory Corso, Andrei Codrescu, Philippe Soupault have tried to develop a piquant humor within surrealism and to stay away from the grand moments of the sublime. This self-consciously small tradition that develops comedy in the place of tragedy may also develop friendship rather than the deep hatred and Huge Principles of the current actors on the political stage. I have been wondering if there is stand-up comedy within extremist circles in either Hamas, Al-Qaida, or whomever, or what they think of it. Is it a purely secular thing? It seems to me that the Bush administration shares this appreciation of the big sublime gesture. Perhaps but only perhaps quieter aesthetic traditions would make for a more lasting piece than this militarization of aesthetics that we see going on where each side strives for a bigger and more shocking spectacle. I have no idea what a comic picturesque war would look like — maybe leafleting Baghdad with funny pictures of Saddam with a big nose or something — But meanwhile we're still stuck with this humorless and dare I say rather gauche aesthetics of the military sublime based on a tragic view of the divine.

— Kirby Olson 18 May 2003
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Calling Admiral Poindexter

Silliman's subject line summons John Poindexter, architect of the Pentagon's Total Information Awareness; the relayed Wired piece by Noah Shachtman reports DARPA's LifeLog, a scheme to record the whole of a life — the war on terror's surveillance apparatus turned toward the citizen.

“

A Spy Machine of Darpa's Dreams, by Noah Shachtman. [...] The Pentagon is about to embark on a stunningly ambitious research project designed to gather every conceivable bit of information about a person's life, index it and make it searchable. [...] The embryonic LifeLog program would dump everything an individual does into a giant database: every e-mail sent or received, every picture taken, every Web page surfed, every phone call made, every TV show watched, every magazine read. [...] "LifeLog has the potential to become something like 'TIA cubed,'" he said. [...] Sure, LifeLog could be used to train robotic assistants. But it also could become a way to profile suspected terrorists [...] "The more that an individual's characteristic behavior patterns — 'routines, relationships, and habits' — can be represented in digital form, the easier it would become to distinguish among different individuals, or to monitor one," Aftergood [...] wrote in an e-mail.

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— Ron Silliman 20 May 2003

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Times New Roman anti-empire anthology available at nthposition — the next stage of poetry protest

Todd Swift, a Canadian poet in London and editor of the webzine nthposition, announces a second anthology of anti-war verse — successor to 100 Poets Against the War, which he reckons had been downloaded some hundred and fifty thousand times. Written in the ebb after the marches, it measures how far and how fast the organised poetic resistance had travelled, and registers Swift's worry that being merely against the war was no longer enough.

Nthposition.com — the London-based online magazine which was active in promoting peaceful poetic protest during the anti-war campaign — has now released a ground-breaking e-book anthology of poems against 21st century empire. The anthology — which it is hoped will be shared with poets and readers world-wide — is meant to continue to keep the issues raised by US/UK/UN occupation of Iraq in the public eye.

Mainstream media attention has drifted since the heady days of protest in January-March, now nearly as much a mirage as the non-existent WOMD used as a pretext for the illegal war on Iraq. By focusing on poems which relate to themes of empire, colonization and anti-globalization, *Times New Roman* provides a rallying cry to those not just opposed to "war" but unchecked superpower expansion — and proposes a new role for poets, when being against war is no longer enough in itself.

It also features powerful never-before-seen photos from the 1968 protests in Paris in stark counterpoint. A chapbook version — which can be easily printed, copied and made into books for personal use or public readings — will be online end-of-week. Everyone is encourage to copy and host these books on their own sites. We would like to better our record, which saw Nthposition's *100 Poets Against The War* downloaded over 150,000 times, inspiring readings and demonstrations from Tokyo to Toronto, Seattle to Oxford, Moscow to New York.

The poets in the collection are from Australia, Canada, Iraq, Ireland, India, the UK and the United States, among other places. These poets offer a spectrum of compelling voices, from emerging to well-known, from traditional to avant-garde, and have all kindly donated their work to this project.

— Todd Swift 27 May 2003
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Even the Wall Street Journal admits Bush lied

Ten weeks after the invasion, with no weapons found, Silliman relays David S. Cloud's Wall Street Journal report on how dissent was stripped from the intelligence used to make the case for war. His subject line supplies the verdict.

“

The Case for War Relied On Selective Intelligence [...] In a classified report last fall, the Central Intelligence Agency concluded that Iraq appeared to have resumed work on obtaining nuclear weapons — a finding that President Bush began trumpeting. But one important fact was kept secret: Some State and Energy department analysts dissented, arguing there wasn't enough evidence to support that conclusion. "Whole agencies ... were in disagreement" with the October report, says Greg Thielmann [...] "The process was somewhat reversed — not intelligence informing policy, but policy makers going to the intelligence community to find ways to sell the policy that was predetermined," says a senior intelligence analyst involved in Iraq. [...] Secretary of State Colin Powell [...] decided not to refer to an intelligence report that Iraq had sought to

purchase uranium oxide — material for nuclear weapons known as yellow cake — from African countries, including Niger. [...] one of which was later deemed a forgery. Yet only a month earlier, Mr. Bush had cited one of the reports in his State of the Union address. "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa," he said. [...] An unclassified version of October's report on Iraq's weapons activities asserted that "Baghdad has begun renewed production of chemical warfare agents." Yet none have been found so far in more than a month of searching by Pentagon inspectors.

”

— Ron Silliman 5 Jun 2003
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Exchange on Circulars

Brian Kim Stefans ran Circulars, the list's own anti-war website of early 2003 — a hive of relayed news, détourned images, and, in his words, 'the most obtuse (but best) political poetry out there.' Here, the invasion accomplished, he and the Canadian poet Darren Wershler-Henry argue out what the site had been, Charles Bernstein's quip that 'Poetics is the continuation of poetry by other means' hanging over the exchange.

Here's the final, unedited version of Darren Wershler-Henry's and my exchange (in a series of 250-word paragraphs) about the website *Circulars*, which yet lives even if we treat it here as a dead project. The exchange meanders into a discussion of blogs, group authorship, appropriation, the public sphere, intellectual property, etc. and we get a little argumentative at the end — not quite Freddy vs. Jason, but enough to create wrinkles. This exchange forms the third part of a three section essay on the website to be published in a forthcoming MIT book.

BKS: I've come up with an awkward, unsettling title for this essay: "*Circulars* as Anti-Poem." I'm sure cries will be raised: So you are making a poem out of a war? The invasion was only interesting as content for an esoteric foray into some elitist, inaccessible cultural phenomenon called an "anti-poem"? (There is, in fact, a lineage to the term "anti-poem" but I don't think it's important for this essay.) This legitimate objection is to be expected, and I have no reply except the obvious: that a website is a cultural construct, shaped by its editors and contributors, and more specifically, *Circulars* had a "poetics" implicit in its multi-authored-ness, its admixture of text and image, its being a product of a small branch of the international poetry community, etc. Of course, the title also suggests that this website has some relationship to a "poem," but perhaps as a non-

site of poetry — as it is a non-site for war, even a non-site for activism itself, where real-world effects don't occur. But my point for now is that the fragmentary artifacts of a politicized investigation into culture — Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* for example — has an implicit "poetics" to it, but standing opposite to what we normally call a "poem." This suggests roles that poets can play in the world quite divorced from merely writing poetry (or even prose, though it was the idea that poets could contribute prose to the anti-war cause — as speech writers or journalists, perhaps — that initially inspired the site.

DWL: [...] why "anti-poem" instead of simply "poetics"? Charles Bernstein's cribbing ("Poetics is the continuation of poetry by other means") of Von Clausewitz's aphorism ("War is the continuation of politics by other means") never seemed as appropriate to me as it did during the period when *Circulars* was most active. The invocation of Smithson's site/non-site dialectic is also apposite, but only in the most cynical sense. Is the US bombing of Iraq and Afghanistan the equivalent of a country-wide exercise in land art? In any event, the relationship is no longer dialectical but dialogic; the proliferation of weblogs ("war blogs") during the Iraq War created something more arborescent — a structure with one end anchored in the world of atoms, linked to a network of digital nonsites.

BKS: I hesitate to tease out the "non-site" analogy [...] Thinking of *Circulars* as the "non-site" of the bombing itself is both depressing and provocative: it's no secret that one of the phenomena of this war was not the unexpected visibility of CNN, but Salam Pax's Dear Raed blog, written by a gay man from the heart of Baghdad (even now he is remaining anonymous because of his sexuality). I could see *Circulars* as a "poetics" but I prefer to think it as an action with a poetics, my own tendency being to think of poetry as the war side of the Clausewitz equation, simply because poetics seems closer to diplomacy than a poem.

[...]

BKS: *Circulars* was indeed intent, on the most abstract level, on "expanding an innovative poetic sensibility outward into policy and politics," but not to argue for that sensibility. I agree that a liberated public domain is necessary to maintain the type of free-wheeling, free-borrowing public discourse necessary in a heteroglot "democracy" but, alas, the point of the site was to upset a government and exploit any means necessary in creating the sort of fervor one might associate with a "revolutionary" culture. Appropriation was one suprisingly popular means. Tom Raworth's poem "Listen Up," written in the voice of a bigoted warmonger in tight couplets and submitted as a joke to the "Poets For the War" website, was another (and stronger for being sui generis). [...] My hope with

Circulars was to illustrate the potential power of such sites in times of crisis as provocative, popular cultural tools, and to put our “avant-garde” poetics to the service of a specific cultural effort, not to refresh arguments for classic avant-garde gestures themselves. But, of course, intentions are neither here nor there.

DWL: Okay, time to boat this bass. I don't think it's possible to separate advancing an argument from at least the implicit support for the underlying sensibility — otherwise, you have no credibility. [...] *Circulars* was a beautiful thing because, within the mandate it established for itself, it worked [...] but part of the reason that it worked is that there's something useful in the fusion of innovative poetics, geek culture and a transnational left/oppositional politics. That's a more quiet stance than revolution, but I'm not a revolutionary, just a frustrated idealist with a talent for synthesis. [...] Right now, that means, among other things, websites, weblogs, mailing lists and whatever else we find along the way.

— **Brian Kim Stefans** 28 Jul 2003
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Lakoff on Schwarzenegger

Silliman relays George Lakoff's AlterNet essay on the Schwarzenegger recall; its charge for the list is the linguist's account of how the “War on Terror” frame, by keeping the public afraid, activates the “strict father” worldview that carried both Arnold and the war.

“

The Frame Around Arnold, George Lakoff. [...] Newspaper and TV reporters require a story. Each story requires a frame. [...] It is a general finding about frames that if a strongly held frame doesn't fit the facts, the facts will be ignored and the frame will be kept. [...]

What conservatives have learned about winning elections is that they have to activate the strict father model in more than half of the electorate — either by fear or by other means. The 9/11 attacks gave the Bush administration a perfect mechanism for winning elections. They declared an unending war on terror. The frame of the War on Terror presupposes that the populace should be terrified, and orange alerts and other administration measures and rhetoric keep the “Terror” frame active. Fear and uncertainty then naturally activate the Strict Father frame in a majority of people, leading the electorate to see politics in conservative terms.

Enter The Terminator! — the ultimate in strictness, the tough guy extraordinaire. [...] That is the reason that it was Arnold — not just any

celebrity like Jay Leno or Rob Lowe or Barbra Streisand — who could activate a strict stereotype and with it conservative Republican values. [...] The Democrats ignore the power of framing at their peril.

”

— Ron Silliman 15 Oct 2003

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'Me? I thought, OBE me? Up yours, I thought'

Silliman relays the dub poet Benjamin Zephaniah's Guardian column refusing an OBE as the occupation settled in — the honours list tied to empire, slavery and the war — closing with Zephaniah's own poem Bought and Sold.

“

I woke up on the morning of November 13 wondering how the government could be overthrown and what could replace it, and then I noticed a letter from the prime minister's office. It said: "The prime minister has asked me to inform you [...] that he has in mind [...] to submit your name to the Queen with a recommendation that Her Majesty may be graciously pleased to approve that you be appointed an officer of the Order of the British Empire." Me? I thought, OBE me? Up yours, I thought. I get angry when I hear that word "empire"; it reminds me of slavery, it reminds of thousands of years of brutality, it reminds me of how my foremothers were raped and my forefathers brutalised. [...] I am profoundly anti-empire.

[...] I may just consider accepting some kind of award for my services on behalf of the millions of people who have stood up against the war in Iraq. It's such hard work — much harder than writing poems. [...] You want to privatise us all; you want to send us to war. You stay silent when we need you to speak for us, preferring to be the voice of the US. You have lied to us, and you continue to lie to us [...] Stick it, Mr Blair — and Mrs Queen, stop going on about the empire. Let's do something else.

Bought and Sold

Smart big awards and prize money
Is killing off black poetry
It's not censors or dictators that are cutting up our art.
The lure of meeting royalty
And touching high society
Is damping creativity and eating at our heart.
[...]

What happened to the verse of fire
Cursing cool the empire
What happened to the soul rebel that Marley had in mind,
This bloodstained, stolen empire rewards you and you conspire,
(Yes Marley said that time will tell)
Now look they've gone and joined.

— Ron Silliman 27 Nov 2003
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Fw: Dear Campus Watch

Geoffrey Gatz forwards Kent Johnson's open letter to Campus Watch — Daniel Pipes's outfit for keeping files on 'un-American' scholars of the Middle East, which had lately turned its attention on the poet Ammiel Alcalay. Johnson, a poet of elaborate hoaxes and provocations, asks to be surveilled too, and recites his credentials: a poem in Sam Hamill's Poets Against the War, and, after the photographs from Abu Ghraib, 'Lyric Poetry After Auschwitz, Or: Get the Hood Back On' — Adorno's dictum turned toward the hooded man on the box.

“

Dear Campus Watch,

I have recently read the diatribe on the poet and activist Ammiel Alcalay, published in the American Thinker on March 4.

I am not writing this letter to argue politics with you, for that would be silly, wouldn't it? I am writing, rather, to ask that you add me to the list of American poets you are putting under surveillance. Allow me to briefly list some of my credentials, as I think you will agree I deserve to be given a file in the archives of your organization.

I was one of the poets published in Sam Hamill's Poets Against the War anthology. My poem, which was widely distributed before its anthology publication, including by the openly Marxist journal Monthly Review, is titled Baghdad, and it is loosely based on the children's book Goodnight Moon.

Days went by... Then, the torture scandal at Abu Ghraib prison happened, and I published a poem titled "Lyric Poetry After Auschwitz, Or: Get the Hood Back On." This poem may be of particular interest to you, since (in addition to the fact that it is accompanied by photographs and the music of Dean Martin) Ammiel Alcalay himself saw fit to send it abroad for possible translation into Arabic. I don't know if it has been translated yet, but the English version is available here, where it has received thousands of visits since its appearance.

Further, this poem is now the title poem of a collection of mine that is soon to appear. This book will contain numerous pieces by me (not everyone would judge it poetry!), all of which have some relation to the war in Iraq. The cover of this book will be, I think, somewhat original: The infamous shot of the American soldier holding the leash which is clipped to the neck of the prone prisoner shall be surrounded by pictures of daffodils among which shall be little Cupids shooting their arrows inward, toward the picture.

But the most important thing I wanted to say about the forthcoming book is this: I intend to announce in the book that all author royalties from the sale of the collection are to be donated to Campus Watch. I wish to do this (and I hope you will accept the gesture) because I strongly believe your proto-fascist activities are an excellent stimulant to the defense of American values, like civil liberties and other stuff.

Also, I should tell you that I correspond with Joseph Safdie, one of the "leftist" poets mentioned in the American Thinker article! He and I almost co-edited a book of recipes and favorite dinner anecdotes by poets. Alas, this book idea fell through, though I now can't quite remember why. But someone else should certainly do it, as it is a wonderful idea. Oh, and I should also say that in the 1980's I worked as a literacy teacher in Nicaragua on two different occasions. This was when the Sandinista's were in power. Though I'm more or less a social democrat now, I was *really* radical back then. From our village, we could hear the Contra mortars going off almost every night. Some of my friends died. Then I came back and founded the Milwaukee Central America Solidarity chapter, which went on to do all sorts of protest activities. One event we organized was called "Who's Watching You in 1984?" and hundreds of people attended, including numerous FBI agents. Not to get too sentimental, but it was at this event that I met my future wife.

So, these would be some reasons you might wish to accept my request to be inducted into your files. I will be sure to send you a copy of the forthcoming book, which, again, shall go to support the activities of your organization.

Sincerely,

”

— Geoffrey Gatza 13 Mar 2005
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IV

The Long War

After the invasion succeeded, the argument did not end; it went slack, and then it went dark. The photographs from Abu Ghraib arrived, and Guantánamo, and the long grind of occupation, and the list's writing on the war turned from argument toward something nearer to elegy and endurance. Stephen Vincent read the torture up the chain of command in the morning papers; Gabriel Gudding filed tender, exact dispatches from the anniversary marches, the same route walked year on year; Alison Croggon watched a physical-theatre piece turn an Australian held at Guantánamo into an anatomy of how a man is placed beyond the reach of law; and David-Baptiste Chirot, in posts of prophetic length, kept setting the war's airwaves beside an older poet at a fascist microphone — the ghost, in this book, that goes unnamed on the cover.

The movement, and the book, come to rest on an anniversary. Seven years to the day after the invasion, CAConrad wrote that the body is said to replace its every cell across seven years — so that he now wore a body that had not existed when the war began, a reprieve the war's million dead were not granted. Steve Dalachinsky answered him the same week, wishing only that his own body felt older. That is where a decade of argument arrives: not at a verdict, but at two poets counting the dead against the strange fact of their own continuing, and finding the account will not balance.

Trick or Treat in Washington

A Halloween costuming for the war cabinet — Wolfowitz, Rove, Powell, Rice, Rumsfeld — seven months after the invasion, with the occupation settling in and the bill coming due.

Bush will wear a Bush mask. Wolfowitz will wear a Bush mask. Rove will wear a Bush mask. Powell will wear a Bush mask. Rice will wear a Bush mask. Rumsfeld will wear a Bush mask — a Rumsfeld mask would scare the other children.

For security reasons no candy please, just checks — very large checks.

— Mark Weiss 31 Oct 2003
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The Intelligence Problem

It was the eleventh of November, and a thread on the failure of war intelligence had run into the holiday's own solemnity. Bowering's line drew a rebuke from a former Marine, quoting Horace's 'dulce et decorum est' — to which Bowering replied that he hoped to God the man meant it as Wilfred Owen had.

Iraq is not a disaster. The 101st Airborne is a disaster.

— **George Bowering** 11 Nov 2003
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gleaned from an American president

King built the poem entirely from George W. Bush's own public words, arranged so the refrains do the indicting. She titled it 'Let Us Cannot.'

Let Us Cannot

In our grief and anger
we have found our mission:
They hate our freedoms.
We must be vigilant.
Killing is a way of life for Afghans.
It's unfortunate, but we cannot
avoid civilian casualties.
We cannot tolerate
anti-American sentiments.
We cannot hope diplomacy
will work. Now that we've
started bombing, we
should see it through to the end.
We have to show our patriotism.
It's kill or be killed.
They hate our freedoms.
This is the world's fight.

— **Amy King** 11 Apr 2004
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Abu Ghraib Torture -- beyond the reach of the law??

Peter Quartermain, the Vancouver poet and editor, forwards Julian Borger's Guardian column on the corner of the Abu Ghraib scandal least discussed at the time: the interrogators were private contractors — CACI employees — whom Paul Bremer's decrees had placed outside Iraqi law, and the military outside its own.

From the Guardian Weekly-May 6-12, 2004, page 6

“

'Dirty' war for profit evades reach of law

Washington diary Julian Borger

The pictures of Iraqi prisoners allegedly being tortured by their American guards last week marked a new low point in the sorry story of the occupation, particularly when set alongside the rapidly fading talk of liberation. But just as shocking was the revelation that the interrogation of detainees in Iraq had quietly been privatised.

Now it is clearly no more than the next logical step in the creeping privatisation of conflict. Security firms have an estimated 20,000 employees in Iraq — a huge private army that guards politicians and pipelines and has inevitably been drawn into direct combat in recent months.

The initial US military report into the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison makes for unpleasant reading. It is clear that a breakdown in basic norms of humanity occurred amid the filth and overcrowding, and under the neglectful eyes of senior officers such as Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, a reservist who is clearly out of her depth supervising military prisons.

[...]

The military investigation by Major General Antonio Taguba reserves some of its harshest criticism for CACI's employees, whom he accused of being among those giving the orders in Abu Ghraib. The investigation also found that there was credible evidence that a contract worker employed as a translator raped a young inmate.

That is a very important part of the problem with private contractors in combat zones such as Iraq. They are not answerable to any law. They cannot be court-martialled under the military code of conduct, and Paul Bremer, the governor of Iraq, specifically excluded them from Iraqi law in a decree issued last June. The mercenaries fall through the cracks.

[...]

In the eyes of military and intelligence chiefs this very attribute makes them an attractive weapon in the "global war on terror", a conflict fought out in the shadows where the normal legal niceties are a hindrance. It is analogous to Guantanamo Bay, another legal loophole that allows Washington to evade the conventional rules of war.

Abu Ghraib is another urgent warning of the costs of turning war into a business. It is too early to say to what extent the role of hired interrogators contributed to the descent into depravity over the past few months of 2003, but it is clear that their murky status will make it harder to administer justice.

”

— Peter Quartermain 19 May 2004

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Free Camilo

Kevin Hehir, a frequent relay of antiwar news to the list from Newfoundland, forwards Medea Benjamin's account of Camilo Mejía — the National Guard sergeant and Costa Rican citizen who, having seen the makeshift prisons near Baghdad, refused to return and became the first Iraq veteran court-martialled for it. The judge barred the war itself from the courtroom.

“

Published on Monday, May 24, 2004 by CommonDreams.org Camilo Mejia Goes to Prison for His Stance Against the War in Iraq, While a Campaign to Free Camilo Begins

by Medea Benjamin

"Where is the justice?" cried Maritza Castillo, whose 28-year-old son Camilo Mejia was found guilty of desertion on May 21 for refusing to return to Iraq. "The American soldier who tortured Iraqi prisoners was sentenced to one year in prison and my son, who denounced these abuses and followed his conscience, was also sentenced to one year in prison. Is that fair? Is that just?"

At a court martial trial in Ft. Stewart, Georgia on May 19-21, Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia Castillo, known by friends and supporters simply as Camilo, was sentenced to the maximum penalty of one year in prison, reduction in rank to private, and a bad-conduct discharge for refusing to return to Iraq.

"What an incredible irony that we're prosecuting soldiers in Iraq for violations of international law and we're prosecuting a soldier here because he refused to do the same things," said former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, a member of Camilo's defense team.

[...]

He was also deeply disturbed by the abuse of Iraqi prisoners he witnessed. In fact, months before the appearance of the Abu Graib photos, Camilo complained to his superiors about conditions at a makeshift detention camp near the Baghdad airport where Iraqis were arbitrarily arrested and detained, and where he and his men were directed by three unidentified interrogators to "soften up" prisoners for questioning. They were taught to stage mock executions, clicking pistols near the ears of hooded prisoners, or to bang on metal walls with sledgehammers to keep prisoners awake for up to 48 hours.

In October 2003 Camilo went home on a two-week leave to deal with his immigration status. It was during that leave that he had a chance to reflect on all he had seen and done in Iraq. He realized that the war was based on lies about weapons of mass destruction and ties with Al Qaeda, and that the subsequent claims of saving Iraqis from a brutal dictator were a cover up for the real aim of this war: controlling the country's oil and other resources, and gaining a permanent military foothold in a strategic part of the world. He decided he could not, in good conscience, continue to participate in an "immoral, oil-driven war".

On March 15, 2004, surrounded by his family and supporters from the anti-war movement, Camilo surrendered to military authorities and filed for discharge as a conscientious objector. He became the first veteran from Iraq to publicly challenge the morality of the war and refuse to fight. "Acting upon my principles became incompatible with my role in the military," Camilo declared as he turned himself in. "By putting my weapon down I chose to reassert myself as a human being,"

[...]

Camilo maintained that stance of courageous resistance throughout his court martial trial. Both his testimony and his statement before sentencing were riveting. Poised, articulate and charismatic, he talked about how innocent Iraqis were killed "as if they had no names, no family, no feelings." He spoke about the unacceptable loss of US lives by commanders who put their troops at risk for medals and promotions. He claimed that he was responding to a higher authority, his conscience. "I will sit behind bars a free man, knowing that I did the right thing," he declared. "I have no regrets."

Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers' fame agreed that Camilo is a hero. "Sergeant Mejia served his country bravely and well in Iraq; but he is serving his country better, and just as bravely, in his refusal to participate further in what he correctly identifies as an illegal war using illegal means."

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— K. Angelo Hehir 26 May 2004

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on Iraq, Saunders et al

Vincent writes in the days after the Abu Ghraib photographs, as the Times and the Post were tracing the 'interrogation' methods up the chain of command; his fury runs from the prison to Judith Miller's credulous reporting on weapons that were never there to the stolen election he has come to believe he lived through.

I would strongly recommend the front web pages of both the NY Times and Washington Post today. The NY Times delivers a particularly strong expose of the top-down direction of the torture in Iraq, as well as in Afghanistan. It's a disgusting portrayal of both the conscious intent to violate the Geneva accords, and the execution of such in the so-called "interrogation" of prisoners. An accompanying article on the Contract workers (enforcers and so-called translators) is blood curdling (that one is either in the Times or the Post).

I find this all totally disturbing and frightening to read. From the President and Rumsfeld down the chain of command, these are clearly folks who early on in both Afghanistan pursued a criminal course of behavior. (Right, George, we know exactly what you mean when you say, "Stay the course.")Or the memory bells now go off about the Administration's refusal to sign an agreement or withdraw from an agreement for the US to be under the jurisdiction of the World Court. At that time foresight for this gang — to save their skins from international judgment at the Hague — I am sure they now consider good hindsight.

The fright comes from a more and more growing awareness that the country was subjected to a coup in the last election. Indeed we are being led by crooks. The very man who developed the criminal interrogation techniques in Quantanamo (sp?) and brought them (unmuzzled dogs, shackles, deprivation, race and sex humiliation, asphyxiation, actions that led to murder) to Abu Ghraib is — in response to the photos — appointed by Rumsfeld & Co. to be the reform head of the same prison! It seems to me clearly an attempt — clearly now now not working — to cover their own arses from criminal accusations.

It's no wonder that we are getting high level "terror threats" from this Administration which can be easily interpreted as entirely cynical means of taking the eye off these crimes. No terrorist acts — as much as these creatures have stimulated the greater likelihood of another Twin Tower type civil disaster — means that Bush folks can say how could they are protecting the country from such attacks.

Is it too much to imagine or ask that the Senate demand that our own internal Occupation forces (Rumsfeld & Company) be removed by June 30 - the same date sovereign power is due to replace the Occupation government in Iraq? Let's hope there are enough of us to push Congress to go beyond the language of "incompetent" — which they are — but call 'criminals criminals.' Such should be the same for Cheney and Bush — tho I suspect we will have to wait for the election to make their removal democratic.

Then let the World Court do its job on these folks — it's perhaps one of the few ways that the that the perhaps now "quaint" image of the USA as a democracy will get a start on some much needed international and domestic cleansing. These folks have definitely — it appears to me, anyway — converted a "War on terror" — however that may be defined — into what many of the world now interpret, ironically, as an American war dedicated to the principles "of and for terror." Not in our name, indeed!

Meanwhile the NY Times is having to confess that it, too — including its prize reporter, Judith Miller — fell hook line & sinker and did not rigorously investigate the stories of WMD and biological weapons fabricated by Challabi — which the Bush folks used to foment the War — for whatever crazy, now disastrous reason — they so much wanted.

— **Stephen Vincent** 26 May 2004

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Memorial Day Weekend & Iraq/ Thoughts

Stephen Vincent, a San Francisco poet and blogger, writes over Memorial Day weekend 2004 — three weeks after the Abu Ghraib photographs broke, and against a forwarded Guardian dispatch by Luke Harding on the women held and raped there. The "quaint" he turns over is the word the President's lawyer used for the Geneva Conventions.

Events in the prisons by our soldiers in Iraq (see article below on torture of Iraqi women prisoners) have certainly given a unique twist — at least in my memory — as to the significance of Memorial Day.

In fact, courtesy of the poly-cylindrical character of the Internet, we can receive information from so many different global, geographic nodes, each carrying materials and views that either conflict, corroborate or put up a whole new angle on 'our' view on whatever the provocative circumstances.

In light of example such as the new revelations of Iraqi women imprisoned, raped and subjected to other torture by our soldiers, I am wondering if the globe will evolve to a point where war Memorials will incorporate the memories of all sides of a conflict. Much, for example, today is made of the fact that the new WWII Memorial in Washington includes the acknowledgement of the contribution of the 50 States and six territories. In my perhaps innocent optimism, I wonder if the eventual memorial for this Iraq War will include the acknowledgement of the torture of these men and women Iraqi prisoners whose abused conditions once globally exposed became the turning point in the which the American people turned on the President and demanded an exit of its troops from an obvious disaster.

My larger question is whether an eventual Iraq War Memorial will evolve to a point where such site will acknowledge all victims — both our own misled soldiers and those of the Iraqi resistance. The knowledge of what has happened in Iraq is so globally shared, it would seem entirely narrow minded or blind to not make the site be a healing one for those we have tortured and killed, and what all else we have contributed to destroy in heritage, cultural and otherwise of Iraq.

If the America's refusal to acknowledge the gratuitous bombing at Hiroshima and Nagasaki is any guide, for example, I am not about to be optimistic. However, I do think the Internet is changing global consciousness in such a way — let alone the shift to an interdependent global economy — that these nationally self-serving Memorials will begin, indeed, to seem quaint. ("Quaint" in a much different sense than the President's lawyer use of the term to unilaterally disown the Geneva War Conventions on the use of torture on prisoners as a crime).

Fundamentally here is a wish to collectively apologize and offer reparations for this killing, torture, and abuse. I wish there was one leader in this Government who could offer that. It's something I would certainly support — otherwise this nation is going to be festering and, I suspect, go badly in the world for a long time.

Ah, with those dark thoughts, do have a good, as much as possible, weekend.

— **Stephen Vincent** 28 May 2004
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Pentagon Report Set Framework For Use of Torture

Ron Silliman relays the Wall Street Journal's June 2004 scoop, by Jess Bravin, on the Pentagon working-group report — the “torture memos” that reasoned the commander-in-chief past the laws against torture, weeks after Abu Ghraib gave the argument a face. The blogger-poet adds nothing; he lets the document stand.

“

Pentagon Report Set Framework For Use of Torture

Security or Legal Factors Could Trump Restrictions, Memo to Rumsfeld Argued By JESS BRAVIN Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL June 7, 2004; Page A1

Bush administration lawyers contended last year that the president wasn't bound by laws prohibiting torture and that government agents who might torture prisoners at his direction couldn't be prosecuted by the Justice Department.

[...]

The president, despite domestic and international laws constraining the use of torture, has the authority as commander in chief to approve almost any physical or psychological actions during interrogation, up to and including torture, the report argued. Civilian or military personnel accused of torture or other war crimes have several potential defenses, including the "necessity" of using such methods to extract information to head off an attack, or "superior orders," sometimes known as the Nuremberg defense: namely that the accused was acting pursuant to an order and, as the Nuremberg tribunal put it, no "moral choice was in fact possible."

[...]

The official said, "People were trying like hell how to ratchet up the pressure," and used techniques that ranged from drawing on prisoners' bodies and placing women's underwear on prisoners heads — a practice that later reappeared in the Abu Ghraib prison — to telling subjects, "I'm on the line with somebody in Yemen and he's in a room with your family and a grenade that's going to pop unless you talk."

Methods now used at Guantanamo include limiting prisoners' food, denying them clothing, subjecting them to body-cavity searches, depriving them of sleep for as much as 96 hours and shackling them in so-called stress positions, a military-intelligence official said. Although

the interrogators consider the methods to be humiliating and unpleasant, they don't view them as torture, the official said.

[...]

The report seemed "designed to find the legal loopholes that will permit the use of torture against detainees," said Mary Ellen O'Connell, an international-law professor at the Ohio State University who has seen the report. "CIA operatives will think they are covered because they are not going to face liability."

”

— Ron Silliman 7 Jun 2004

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Basic Gitmo

Kevin Hehir forwards an interview with Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights, whose suits on behalf of Guantánamo detainees were then before the Supreme Court. Ratner reads the offshore camp back against the Magna Carta — eight hundred years of habeas undone by executive fiat.

“

Ellen Ray: Why should American citizens be concerned about Guantanamo and what is taking place there?

Michael Ratner: Americans should care about what goes on at Guantanamo for a number of reasons. First of all, the way we are treating the prisoners there is a scandal, an embarrassment to the people of this country and an outrage to the people of the world. That you can take someone and put him in a prison offshore with no legal rights whatsoever for two and a half years is simply inhumane.

A fourth reason we should care is what this all means for the future of the rule of law, and for the building of societies that are based upon the rule of law and not on the dictates of kings or presidents. For nearly eight hundred years, since the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, our laws have insisted that every single human being is entitled to some kind of judicial process before he or she can be thrown in jail. The United States is trying to overturn one of the most fundamental principles of Anglo-American jurisprudence and international law. This is a principle that is found in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We have gone back to a pre-Magna Carta medieval system, not a system of laws, but of executive fiat, where the king-or in

this case the president simply decides, on any particular day, I'm going to throw you into some prison. You are not going to have access to a lawyer or anybody else, or even know if there are any charges against you, or if you will ever be released from this prison. Guantanamo has become our Devil's Island, our Chateau d'If from *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The consequences of this unilateral abrogation of fundamental law are grave, not merely for the people in Guantanamo and for citizens of other countries, but also for every person in the United States. If we care about civilization and the rule of law and justice, we cannot keep treating people like this. There should be no place in the world that is a law-free zone, no place in the world where human beings have no rights...The key point here is that everyone picked up in a war is protected by the Geneva Conventions. No one is outside the law. No one can be treated arbitrarily at the discretion of his captors.

[...]

The "intelligence" about terrorism and terrorists that is coming out of the Guantanamo interrogations is therefore basically garbage. It is simply not reliable. Confessions and denunciations obtained under these kinds of coercive conditions are useless, not just for a criminal trial but for getting any real intelligence that might actually protect the people of the world against terrorist attacks. We see example after example of that in Guantanamo, where people have falsely confessed to knowledge about Osama bin Laden or to having been somewhere or done something, or have implicated others, all to get some kind of reward, even a pitiful Big Mac. They are constantly getting people to nail one another. They will wear someone down until, when they ask for the hundredth time "What do you know about Mr. X," he will finally say, "Okay, he was with me at an Osama training camp." And then they go to Mr. X and say, "Well, this guy says you were with him at an Osama training camp, we have the evidence, you might as well confess." Now, this prisoner has been totally incommunicado for two years, under the thumb of a military that can feed him or not feed him, keep the light on or not keep the light on, give him exercise or not give him exercise, let him shower or not let him shower, strip him or give him clothes, keep him in solitary or not keep him in solitary, sometimes have him beaten up and sometimes subject him to sleep deprivation. Eventually, he too is going to say, "Yes, I was there with the other guy at the Osama camp in Afghanistan." And there won't be a word of truth to it.

[...]

Guantanamo represents everything that is wrong with the U.S. war on terrorism. The Bush administration reacted to 9/11 with regressive and draconian measures worthy of a dictatorship, not a democracy. They imposed the very measures they condemned in other countries: indefinite and incommunicado detentions, refusal to justify these detentions in court, disappearances, military commissions, torture. It was a descent into barbarism. The practices at Guantanamo spread to Iraq and other U.S. detention centers around the world. The U.S. government has obviously lost any moral ability to challenge such actions when taken by other countries. It has endangered people all over the world, not only by its own conduct but giving its imprimatur to inhuman treatment, which will embolden other countries to do likewise. It has taken a thousand years to secure human dignity and basic rights for all. The struggle to do so is marked by moments like the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215, the Habeas Corpus Act in 1679, the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the Geneva Conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention Against Torture. The United States has now treated these landmarks of human progress as naught. Of course, there has never been complete adherence to these documents, but rarely, if ever, has there been such open, notorious, and boastful violation of fundamental protections as at Guantanamo. But this is not to say that I am pessimistic about the chance of returning to sanity, enlightenment, and the rule of law.

”

— K. Angelo Hehir 16 Jun 2004
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FW: Republicans: A Prose Poem

The essayist Eliot Weinberger's catalogue-poem, forwarded to the list entire on the day he dated it and not long before its companion chronicle What I Heard About Iraq. Its litany runs from the food pantries to the Guantanamo cages to a New Mexico poetry slam shut down for a single poem — Geoffrey Gatza had only to press send.

“

Republicans: A Prose Poem

“They hate our friends. They hate our values. They hate democracy and freedom, and individual liberty.” — President George W. Bush

"I really do believe that we will be greeted as liberators." — Vice-President Dick Cheney

Thomas Donahue, Director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, is a Republican. He said the newly unemployed should "stop whining."

Alfonso Jackson, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, is a Republican. He explained the enormous cuts to low-income housing by saying, "Being poor is a state of mind, not a condition."

[...]

Republicans do not like dogs. Major General Geoffrey Miller, former Chief of Prisons at Guantanamo Bay, now Director of Prisons in Iraq, said that "at Guantanamo Bay we learned that the prisoners have to earn every single thing that they have. They are like dogs and if you allow them to believe at any point that they are more than a dog then you've lost control of them."

Republicans like dogs. Trent Lott, Senator from Mississippi, was asked about the use of attack dogs in torturing an Iraqi prisoner. He replied that there's "nothing wrong with holding a dog up there unless it ate him."

[...]

John Yoo, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, is a Republican. In January 2002, he sent a 42-page memo to William Haynes II, Chief Legal Counsel for the Pentagon, stating that the Geneva Conventions, the War Crimes Act, and "customary international law" do not apply to the war in Afghanistan. He was seconded by Alberto Gonzales, White House Legal Counsel, who wrote: "In my judgment, this new paradigm renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders quaint some of its provisions." A few days later, the President suspended all rights for prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

[...]

Specialist Sean Baker of the Kentucky National Guard, was probably once a Republican, but may no longer be one. Assigned to the military prison in Guantanamo Bay, he volunteered to portray a detainee in a training drill. A five-man "immediate response force" choked and beat him on the steel floor of the 6' x 8' cell, despite his shouting the code word and telling his assailants he was an American soldier. They finally stopped when his orange prison suit was ripped off, revealing a military uniform. Baker spent 48 days in the hospital and still suffers from seizures. Laurie Arellano, a Republican and spokesperson for the

Pentagon, said that Baker's hospital stay was "not related to the beating at Guantanamo." A few days later she said this was not true. The incident was taped, but the tape has now been lost.

Bill Nevins may or may not have been a Republican, but it is doubtful he is still one. A teacher at the huge Rio Rancho High School — with over 3000 students, the largest in New Mexico- he organized a school poetry club, which held a Poetry Slam. At the reading, a student read a poem criticizing the President and the war in Iraq, in language that was neither violent or obscene. Nevins was immediately fired by the Principal, Gary Tripp, for promoting "disrespectful speech." He then banned the poetry club and all classes in poetry, ordered the student to destroy all of her poetry, and threatened to fire her mother- also a teacher at the school- if the girl did not. At a school assembly a few days later, Tripp read a poem of his own, instructing students who disagreed with him to "shut your faces."

[...]

Pat Tillman was probably a Republican. After September 11, he gave up a multimillion dollar contract as a professional football player to join the Army Rangers in Afghanistan, where he died in combat. As the only soldier with some previous national recognition, he was on the verge of media canonization when it was revealed that he had been killed by American troops in a "friendly fire" incident.

Zell Miller, Senator from Georgia, might as well be a Republican. He is a Democrat who campaigns for the President and speaks at Republican events. The torture at Abu Ghraib prison reminded him of his high school gym: "The two times I think I have been most humiliated in my life was standing in a big room, naked as a jaybird with about fifty others and they were checking us out, now that was humiliating. It was humiliating showering with sixty others in a public shower. It didn't kill us did it? No one ever died from humiliation."

[...]

George W. Bush, President of the United States, is a Republican. To demonstrate personal sacrifice and his determination to win the War on Terror, he gave up desserts and candy a few days before he announced the invasion of Iraq.

”

— **Geoffrey Gatza** 02 Aug 2004
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BGR

Rejoining the list after years away, Roche had been reading Kevin Killian's account of the National Poetry Foundation conference at Orono, and its aside about Bangor airport 'swarming with big Marines.' He wrote this at the airport bar — BGR is Bangor's own code — as the poets flew home and the marines shipped out.

Three marines
watching
one laptop
In airport bar

On the way to Iraq,
I surmise.

See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

Just then,
a somnambulant jarhead
puts trash from his tray
Into the bin behind me (my hand shielding this poem)

Then proceeds to walk through a plate glass window

— John F. Roche 6 Aug 2004
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urging Kerry

Leslie Scalapino — one of the era's essential experimental poets — breaks from her usual register to circulate an open letter for the list to co-sign and mail to John Kerry's campaign, in the tightening summer of 2004. Behind it lie Ambassador Joseph Wilson, the Niger-uranium forgery, and a challenger she fears is being out-shouted as a "flip-flopper."

Dear Readers of the Poetics List,

It seems to me that John Kerry is not doing a good job in approaching the issues. I've written a letter to him, pasted below. Would any of you be interested in printing it, signing it, sending it to others, and mailing it to him by post mail? Also, do you know of other websites, political in nature, where one could post letters? Thank you — Leslie

Dear Senator Kerry,

The public backing you wants you to directly challenge Bush's lies.

I've contributed several times to your campaign, as a contribution to help in your election and the defeat of George Bush. I think this country, and the world, will be in very desperate trouble even more than it is already if Bush is able to secure another term.

I've talked with friends, all solidly behind you, and we are frightened by the effect of Bush's baiting and propaganda techniques against you. In the New York Times today I read the article, "For Now, Bush's Mocking Drowns Out Kerry's Nuanced Explanation of His War Vote". I respectfully wish to comment that in order to 'beat' this image applied to you of "flip-floppy" and "waffling," please we request take a chance and speak strongly in reply. Some basic answers, which you may be using but are not being heard clearly enough, were provided already by Rand Beers in that NYT article:

Complaints about Bush: 1. Rushing to war. 2. Doing it without enough allies. 3. Doing it without equipping our troops adequately. 4. Doing it without an adequate plan to win the peace. 5. Going to war without examining the quality of Bush's intelligence.

[...]

9. Strongly push examining the Bush relation to huge corporations like the oil companies and Bechtel, and other private contractors given huge profit in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia. Please openly reference Michael Moore's film, Fahrenheit 9/11. It's an immensely popular, moving film where it has been allowed to be shown. Please emphasize that Bush's policies do not benefit the common people of America, nor are they welcomed by the common people of Afghanistan and Iraq whose countries have been destroyed, the promised reparations of which are beyond our means.

10. Use of our soldiers as fodder while undercutting their benefits and pay and requiring added tours of duty. The facts on these matters have been gathered by Moveon.org . Our soldiers are left exposed to attack in Afghanistan and Iraq. The imprisoning and torture of Iraqi and Afghani citizens and soldiers in circumstances that are human rights violations. Left without legal recourse. This has been recently challenged: the whole system should be pinned on Bush's govt. These have been well-documented and serve to fundamentally refute Bush's claim that "We did the right thing, and the world is better off."

11. The "God-issue". Apparently many people (including African Americans) are going to be single-issue voters, choosing Bush because of his religious advocacy. Is it possible to openly question his mistaken (even blasphemous in Christian

religion) delusion that God is speaking to him directly, giving him a pass to go to war? I think you should challenge this directly citing it as egotism which is blasphemous: ask him about it-Where does he get off saying God speaks to him directly? Especially as his presentation of this is perceived in the Middle East as religious war against Islam, which is fostering terrorism. Draw the American public into dialogue over this, inviting them to give their views.

[...]

I respectfully submit that your raising these issues with vigor, while it risks and ensures response, is necessary immediately- or you might lose. To grab these issues by the horns takes faith in the American public, that they can handle real treatment of issues-because they do care about these issues. They must be made to engage these issues by the way these are presented.

Emphasizing Bush's lies which are to delude and manipulate the public-and his blasphemy as egomania which creates the extra complications of a religious war-may propose a counter image (to your being one who is waffling) and may get him on the run.

Thank you for opposing him. We are counting on you. We need you.

Sincerely,

— **Leslie Scalapino** 16 Aug 2004
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— — — — — THE WALL WALL THE THE WALL

Alan Sondheim, the list's tireless maker of procedural and networked texts, builds a wall of words that accretes from "stormtroops" through "slaughter," "patriots" and "racismof" toward the rubble of "world center." A link to a Ground Zero photograph runs through it like mortar.

THE WALL WALL THE THE WALL

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<http://www.asondheim.org/groundzero.jpg> stormtroops stormtroops
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[...]

exploiting patriots patriots zero criminal patriots exploiting armies bury
la *laarmies* la armies zero armies patriots laarmies la la criminal
patriots patriots la la laarmies ground patriots patriots bury armies
exploiting la exploiting patriots patriots la patriots la la patriots bury
la world center criminal bury patriots criminal criminal violent
racism of bury patriots armies armies la violent exploiting patriots
exploiting la la world la ugly bury criminal patriots la la exploiting

— Alan Sondheim 2 Sep 2004
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"poetry & torture"

Aldon Nielsen, poet and scholar of the African-American avant-garde, relays a performance piece by Evie Shockley in the summer the Abu Ghraib photographs were still raw — the US military prison west of Baghdad where guards posed hooded detainees for the camera. Shockley would later fix the poem in a book; here it arrives mid-argument, an incantation built on a single word.

The following is a piece recently performed by Evie Shockley, currently of North Carolina:

“

a thousand words

torture torture torture torture torture torture torture torture torture
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torture torture torture torture torture torture torture torture torture
torture torture torture torture family class wedding graduation prom
panoramic pornographic paleoanthropic yabba dabba doo abu torture
torture
scream shout spill tell all twenty questions and answer me bitch snitch
itch scratch and sniff whiff torture torture tincture suture feature
aperture adventure puncture creature lecture couture stature denture
fracture torture torture dog man penis bars wars words world premiere
spotlight light of day night of day right of way away torture torture cat
fight fright freight fraught taught taut as a wire fire ready aim maim

claim same just the same just torture torture halls walls prison freedom
democracy demonic evil eve apple of my eye why so shy smile say cheese
torture torture chamber bed pot maid made the devil do it you oughta be in
snap shots bullets speeding needle torture torture bombs away you drop-
ped

the bomb on me baby burn baby inferno hell smell shit dung feces species
torture torture separate men from boys from women from machines from
monsters from homes from families from torture torture perfect reflect
genuelect bow bough poplar trees strange fruit pick prick suck mimic one
hour photo torture torture when the bough breaks stakes shake it like a
polaroid window peek sneak look see to shining sea torture torture flee
beat it boogie jungle desert tropical paradise sandstorm windstorm
maelstrom strom thurmond torture torture flood flow leak drip drip drip
drip chinese water lose my mind's eye visualize sexualize lights camera
torture torture bush shrub hedge fence steal steel oil slimy greasy dirty
black gold coast continent dark congo bonzo torture torture naked strip
rape stick truncheon luncheon eat meat pork swine pig gas tear orange tea
party boston torture torture bosnia ethnic ethic thick tricky dick
kissinger killing fields cambodia tuol sleng skull and crossbones torture
torture crossbow spear assault rifle missile nuclear warhead pothead
smoke

fire inhale impale severed head torture torture shower camp station ghetto

[...]

horn porn viewer voyeur torture torture sadist soldier guard warden
governor president prime minister leader ruler emperor master lord god
torture torture rack fire needles under nails dismemberment solitary
confinement threats to loved ones electroshock torture torture postcard
wish you were here souvenir come again soon y'all come back now ya hear
ear

fear dear dad torture torture dorian paint me a canvas capture reality
humanity preserve beastiality ignorance evil illusions eternal torture
torture flesh ashtray cheek boot cleaner penis joystick prison playstation
father dog thralldom pyrrhic victory torture torture telescope microscope
magnifying glass spectacles viewfinder binoculars closer closer try a
contact lens torture torture disappeared vanished vanquished vamoosed
vaporized victimized vide invalidated veni vidi vici torture torture we're
losing our heads hoods masks lone ranger keeping the planet safe from
communism community torture torture your favorite foreign movie won't
you

smile for the camera i know i'll love you better i've seen your torture
torture vogue rogue rouge blush zinfandel infidel intifida infanticide
insecticide sect sectionalism shun torture torture hooded bagged stacked
stripped wired leashed cuffed smeared objectified what's wrong with this

torture torture motion x-ray perfect window book gallery frame puzzle tube
do ya get the words worth or worthless torture torture torture torture
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torture

— Aldon Nielsen 8 Sep 2004
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Most Wanted: A Gamble in Verse

In 2003 the Defense Department issued a deck of playing cards to help troops identify Iraq's "most wanted"; a small industry of parody decks followed. Jeff Encke, a Seattle poet, sends the list his own — love poems addressed to the war's wanted men, one card carrying a doctored Abu Ghraib photograph.

Greetings,

I thought this press release concerning a recently published book of mine would be appropriate list content. For more information, please refer to my Website: www.matlub.net.

[...]

How do we love the unlovable? Seattle-based poet Jeffrey Encke offers a new, controversial installment in the year-old genre of "Iraq's Most Wanted" satires, excerpting poems that address Saddam Hussein and his supporting cast as though they were lovers.

Seattle, WA (PR WEB) September 11, 2004 - "Call me our generation's Dr. Strangelove," jokes Jeffrey Encke, author of *Most Wanted: A Gamble in Verse*, the latest installment in the year-old genre of "Iraq's Most Wanted" satires. "In some sense, these playing cards tell the story of how I learned to stop worrying and love Saddam."

Encke, a widely published poet and literary scholar, decided last summer, in the wake of the hotly-contested decision to invade Iraq, to write a series of poems to the "most wanted" figures featured in the Department of Defense's "Deck of Doom," published April 2003. "I originally conceived of the book as a collection of love poems addressed to war criminals," he says, "an approach at once satirical and appropriate to my objective of exploring the way human subjectivity dissolves in language imbued with fierce emotion."

By the time Encke finished the manuscript in March 2004, he found that, instead of love poems, he had rendered a collection of "metaphysical lyrics rooted in a private language of anguish and despair." With the help of Boston-based writer and graphic designer Vivek Chadaga, he proceeded to develop his own deck of playing cards, excerpting lines from the poems for each. "By presenting the verse on cards, I hoped to emphasize the irony of identifying ethical judgment with gambling."

The face of each card in the casino-quality, poker-sized deck features a unique design, blending such imagery as DNA autoradiographs, phrenological diagrams, satellite photographs, x-rays, fossils, flora, and hooded figures (including a modified Abu Ghraib abuse photo). The back of each card depicts a reproduction of the author's hand with the word "matlub," a rough transliteration of "most wanted," inscribed in Arabic on his palm.

Most Wanted, at once a deck of cards and book of poetry with 8.0658 x 1067 possible permutations, differs from other species of Iraq's Most Wanted satires in that it does not take an explicitly partisan view of the Iraq conflict. Instead, alluding to the double meaning of the expression "most wanted," Encke sets out to explore how objects of love and hatred, whether American, Iraqi, Israeli, or Palestinian, are both in some sense products of human desire.

— Jeff Encke 3 Oct 2004
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Baghdad Burning

Stephen Vincent — a San Francisco poet — relays an entry from Baghdad Burning, the blog kept anonymously through the occupation by a young Iraqi woman writing as Riverbend, here on the American assault on Samarra a month before the 2004 election. Iyad Allawi, whom she watches gloat on television, was the interim prime minister installed that June.

FYI — I suspect these 'offensives' in Iraq will be a regular item up until our US election with "no more Fallujahs" as the cant, Karl Rove directing military tactics, and many wounded Iraqi civilians angrily trying to figure out a new definition for the English word "precision".

“

Girl Blog from Iraq... let's talk war, politics and occupation.

Baghdad Burning

... I'll meet you 'round the bend my friend, where hearts can heal and souls can mend...

Sunday, October 03, 2004

Samarra Burning... The last few days have been tense and stressful. Watching the military attacks on Samarra and hearing the stories from displaced families or people from around the area is like reliving the frustration and anger of the war. It's like a nightmare within a nightmare, seeing the corpses pile up and watching people drag their loved ones from under the bricks and steel of what was once a home. To top it off, we have to watch American military spokespersons and our new Iraqi politicians justify the attacks and talk about 'insurgents' and 'terrorists' like they actually believe what they are saying... like hundreds of civilians aren't being massacred on a daily basis by the world's most advanced military technology. As if Allawi's gloating and Bush's inane debates aren't enough, we have to listen to people like Powell and Rumsfeld talk about "precision attacks". What exactly are precision attacks?! How can you be precise in a city like Samarra or in the slums of Sadir City on the outskirts of Baghdad? Many of the areas under attack are small, heavily populated, with shabby homes several decades old. In Sadir City, many of the houses are close together and the streets are narrow. Just how precise can you be with missiles and tanks? We got a first-hand view of America's "smart weapons". They were smart enough to kill over 10,000 Iraqis in the first few months of the occupation. The explosions in Baghdad aren't any better. A few days ago, some 40 children were blown to pieces while they were gathering candy from American soldiers at the opening of a sewage treatment plant. (Side note: That's how bad things have gotten- we have to celebrate the reconstruction of our sewage treatment plants). I don't know who to be more angry with- the idiots and PR people who thought it would be a good idea to have children running around during a celebration involving troops or the parents for letting their children attend. I the people who arranged the explosions burn within the far-reaches of hell. One wonders who is behind the explosions and the car bombs. Bin Laden? Zarqawi? Possibly... but it's just too easy. It's too perfect. Bin Laden hit the WTC and Afghanistan was attacked. Iraq was occupied. At first, any explosion or attack on troops was quickly blamed on "loyalists" and "Baathists" and EVERYTHING was being coordinated by Saddam. As soon as he was caught, it became the work of "Islamic extremists" and Al-Qaida and Zarqawi suddenly made his debut. One wonders who it will be after it is discovered that Zarqawi has been dead for several months or that he never even existed. Whoever it is, you can bet his name will three syl-

lables or less because that is Bush's limit. [...] I'm very relieved the Italian hostages have been set free... and I hope the other innocent people are also freed. Thousands of Iraqis are being abducted and some are killed, while others are returned... but it is distressing to see so many foreigners being abducted. It's like having a guest attacked in your own home by the neighbor's pit bull- you feel a sense of responsibility even though you know there was no way you could have prevented it. I wasn't very sympathetic though, when that Islamic group came down from London to negotiate releasing Kenneth Bigley. I do hope he is returned alive, but where are all these Islamic groups while Falluja, Samarra, Sadir City and other places are being bombed? Why are they so concerned with a single British citizen when hundreds of Iraqis are dying by the month? Why is it 'terrorism' when foreigners set off bombs in London or Washington or New York and it's a 'liberation' or 'operation' when foreigners bomb whole cities in Iraq? Are we that much less important?

”

— **Stephen Vincent** 04 Oct 2004

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Eliot Weinberger on Bush

Joseph Bradshaw circulates Eliot Weinberger's dispatch of 23 October 2004, written on the eve of the election that returned Bush to office. Weinberger — essayist and translator of Paz, whose serial chronicles of the war years were gathered as 9/12 — here fixes in place the anonymous adviser's boast about the 'reality-based community,' a phrase that would outlive the administration that coined it.

“

Among the things the second term of the Bush junta will bring is the New Freedom Initiative. This is a proposal, barely reported in the press, to give all Americans- beginning with school children- a standardized test for mental illness. Those who flunk the test will be issued medication, and those who do not want to take their medication will be urged to have it implanted under their skin. Needless to say, the New Freedom commission, appointed by the President, is composed almost entirely of executives, lawyers, and lobbyists for pharmaceutical corporations.

The question is: Will anyone pass the test? Half of America is clearly deranged, and it has driven the other half mad.

[...]

The polls are evidence that the country is suffering a collective head injury. On any given issue — the economy, the war in Iraq, health care — the majority perceive that the situation is bad and the President has handled it badly. Yet these same people, in these same polls, also say they'll be voting for Bush. Like a battered wife — realizing yet denying what is happening, still making excuses for their man — the voters are ruled by fear and intimidation and the threat of worse to come. They've been beaten up by the phantom of terrorism.

[...]

An unnamed "senior adviser" to Bush recently told the journalist Ron Suskind that people like Suskind were members of "what we call the reality-based community": those who "believe that solutions emerge from [the] judicious study of discernible reality." However, he explained, "That's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality... 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."

This may well be the clearest expression yet of the Bush Doctrine. To become enraged by particulars — the daily slaughter in Iraq, the prison torture, the worst economy since the Great Depression, the banana republic tricks and slanders of the electoral campaign — is to miss the point. We are no longer in "discernible reality." In the second term, the only choice will be to line up for your medication and enjoy the New Freedom. As Bush now says in every speech, "freedom is on the march."

”

— Joseph Bradshaw 27 Oct 2004

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Re: Eliot Weinberger on Bush

Eliot Weinberger — essayist and translator, the list's most-forwarded chronicler of the Bush years, who would collect these dispatches as 9/12 — sent 'Freedom is on the March' around the internet days before the 2004 election. Russell Golata relayed it from western New York, where, he reported, the Bush lawn-signs were outnumbering Kerry's four to one.

Thanks for posting this. I still can't understand how he hasn't been pulled out of his limo and beaten to death. Lucky for him he controls what the media says about him. The same thing happened with Ron Ray-gun. People were starving in the

street a block away from the White House — and his approval rating just kept rising? I just don't understand how Americans think. Take a ride in the country around WNY. Every house has who they are voting for on their front lawn. Bush signs outnumber Kerry signs--4 to 1?

“

Freedom is on the March

Eliot Weinberger

Among the things the second term of the Bush junta will bring is the New Freedom Initiative. This is a proposal, barely reported in the press, to give all Americans- beginning with school children- a standardized test for mental illness. Those who flunk the test will be issued medication, and those who do not want to take their medication will be urged to have it implanted under their skin. Needless to say, the New Freedom commission, appointed by the President, is composed almost entirely of executives, lawyers, and lobbyists for pharmaceutical corporations.

The question is: Will anyone pass the test? Half of America is clearly deranged, and it has driven the other half mad.

The President openly declares that God speaks through him. The Republicans are making television advertisements featuring the actor who played Jesus in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," while sending out pamphlets that warn that if Kerry is elected he will ban the Bible. Catholic bishops have decreed that voting for Kerry is a sin (mortal or venial?) that must be confessed before one can take communion. The one piece of scientific research actively promoted by the government is investigating whether having others pray for you can cure cancer. (The National Institute of Health has explained that this is "imperative" because poor people have limited access to normal health care.) At the official gift shop in Grand Canyon National Park, they sell a book that states that this so-called natural wonder sprang fully formed in the six days of Creation. We already know that the current United States government does not believe in global warming or the hazards of pollution; now we know it doesn't believe in erosion either.

The polls are evidence that the country is suffering a collective head injury. On any given issue — the economy, the war in Iraq, health care — the majority perceive that the situation is bad and the President has handled it badly. Yet these same people, in these same polls, also say they'll be voting for Bush. Like a battered wife — realizing yet denying what is happening, still making excuses for their man — the voters are

ruled by fear and intimidation and the threat of worse to come. They've been beaten up by the phantom of terrorism.

Every few weeks we're bludgeoned by warnings that terrorists may strike in a matter of days. Incited by the Department of Homeland Security, millions have bought duct tape and plastic sheeting to protect their homes from biological and chemical attack, and have amassed caches of canned food and bottled water. To ensure that everyone everywhere stays afraid, 10,000 FBI agents have been sent to small towns to talk to local police chiefs about what they can do to fight terrorism. After the massacre at Beslan, school principals received letters from the Department of Education instructing them to beware of strangers. The Vice President intones that if Kerry is elected, terrorists will be exploding nuclear bombs in the cities. (And, to anticipate all possibilities, also warns that terrorists may set off bombs before the election to influence the vote... but we're not going to let them tell Americans who to vote for, are we?)

Fear has infected even the most common transactions of daily life. It is not only visitors to the US who are treated as criminals, with fingerprints and photographs and retinal scans. Anyone entering any anonymous office building must now go through security clearances worthy of an audience with Donald Rumsfeld. At the airports, fear of flying has been replaced by fear of checking-in. Nearly every day there are stories of people arrested or detained for innocuous activities, like snapping a photo of a friend in the subway or wearing an antiwar button while shopping in the mall. Worst of all, the whole country has acquiesced to the myth of terrorist omnipotence. Even those who laugh at the color-coded Alerts and other excesses of the anti-terror apparatus do not question the need for the apparatus itself. The Department of Homeland Security, after all, was a Democratic proposal first rejected by Bush.

Common sense has retreated to the monasteries of a few websites. It is considered delusional to suggest that international terrorism is nothing more than a criminal activity performed by a handful of people, that Al-Qaeda and similar groups are the Weather Underground, the Brigato Rosso, the Baader-Meinhof Gang, with more sophisticated techniques and more powerful weapons, operating in the age of hysterical 24-hour television news. They are not an army. They are not waging a war. They are tiny groups perpetrating isolated acts of violence.

There's no question they are dangerous individuals, but-without demeaning the indelible trauma of 9/11 or the Madrid bombings- the danger they pose must be seen with some kind of dispassionate

perspective. A terrorist attack is a rare and sudden disaster, the man-made equivalent of an earthquake or flood. More people die in the U.S. every year from choking on food than died in the Twin Towers. About 35,000 die annually from gunshot wounds. (While Bush lifts the ban on assault weapons, and both Bush and Kerry promote gun ownership, a captured al-Qaeda manual recommends traveling to the U.S. to buy weapons.) About 45,000 die in car crashes — while the Bush administration lowers automobile safety standards to increase the profits of the auto industry, major donors to his campaign. Millions, of course, die from diseases, and one can only imagine if the billions spent on useless elephantine bureaucracies like the Department of Homeland Security had gone to hospitals and research. If the goal were genuinely to protect lives, fighting terrorism would be a serious matter for police and intelligence agencies, and a small project of a nation's well-being.

Compare, for a moment, Spain. After the Madrid bombings, the police, in a few days, arrested those responsible. (After 9/11, the U.S. rounded up more than 5,000 people- many of whom still in jail and not a single one of whom has been proven to have any connection to any form of terrorist activity.) They did not carpet-bomb Morocco. They are quietly increasing police surveillance without Terror Alert national panics and with little or no interruption of daily life. And, geographically, demographically, and historically (the fundamentalist dream of recuperating al-Andalus), there is a much greater possibility of another terrorist attack in Spain than in the U.S.

But of course the current "war on terrorism" is not about saving lives at all; it's about keeping power in the hands of a tiny cell of ideologues. In the manner of all totalitarian societies, the Bush junta, with a happily compliant mass media, has wildly exaggerated the power of the Enemy. This has allowed them to wage a war in Iraq they began planning long before 9/11 and to plot further invasions, to suspend Constitutional rights and disdain international law, to enrich their friends and ignore the opinions of most of the world. Many Americans who dislike Bush will still vote for him in November because the marketing campaign has made him appear the resolute "wartime" Commander-in-Chief who will keep the nation "safe." It has become futile to try to argue that this war on terror doesn't exist, that the actual war in Iraq has nothing to do with the safety of Americans at home, and that abroad it has killed or maimed more Americans than 9/11. It remains to be seen what price the country, and the world, will pay for this fantasy.

An unnamed "senior adviser" to Bush recently told the journalist Ron Suskind that people like Suskind were members of "what we call the

reality-based community": those who "believe that solutions emerge from [the] judicious study of discernible reality." However, he explained, "That's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality... 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."

This may well be the clearest expression yet of the Bush Doctrine. To become enraged by particulars — the daily slaughter in Iraq, the prison torture, the worst economy since the Great Depression, the banana republic tricks and slanders of the electoral campaign — is to miss the point. We are no longer in "discernible reality." In the second term, the only choice will be to line up for your medication and enjoy the New Freedom. As Bush now says in every speech, "freedom is on the march."

[23 October 2004]

”

— **Russell Golata** 27 Oct 2004

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time for a new start (inchoate, but a start)

The morning after Bush's re-election, Chris Stroffolino writes from San Francisco, having spent election night between the Mission's Day of the Dead procession and a pirate-radio vote-count. Thomas Frank's What's the Matter with Kansas? had lately been on his mind; so had the exit polls in which red-state voters named "moral issues" over the war in Iraq.

I took time off from election work to go to the day of the dead parade last night.

For the last few months, I've been thinking more than usual about the kind of questions raised in "What's The Matter With Kansas? HOW CONSERVATIVES WON THE HEART OF AMERICA" by Thomas Frank, and with the election results in, there's a feeling of helplessness, coupled with an anger, but also an attempt at humility.

For instance, a side to me wants to scream, "THE DEMOCRATS ARE REALLY 'SCREWED'" So Much For Checks And Balances. No President, No House, No Senate, and No Supreme Court Majority. But to even say the word "SCREWED" would probably be taken as a flippant side of some literally MARGINALIZED BORDER (if not exactly COASTAL) "ELITE" that is out of touch with the large majority of the geographical middle of the United States (as all the blue states,

I'm pretty sure, are either on the margins of America, or contiguous with states that are).

If you don't want to be the flippant, cultural elite snob, it's time to really try to figure out what's going on with people in the middle of the country who think Bush is a good president, and not just see them as either deluded or deluding.

So I watch Peter Jennings interviewing the head of the Republican National Committee After if had become pretty obvious that Bush had won, and I try to imagine how most people in the "red states" might see Jennings as part of that "liberal media" of the "cultural elite," and sure enough, with those eyes and ears, he can be seen as disrespectfully grilling the Republican. "Well, in the exit polls in the blue states, most people claim the war in Iraq was their main consideration in voting for the President, while in the red states, most people claimed 'moral issues' were more important."

Jennings' snide attitude towards these 'moral issues' was no more 'fair and balanced' than Fox's attitudes toward Kerry. Of course, I'm sympathetic with Jennings. For surely, The war in Iraq IS a moral issue at least as much as others. But if this exit poll does hold any salt, it is interesting that neither side considered economic issues to be of as much importance as the moral issues involved, and there's at least a strong POSSIBILITY that many in the "red states" actually voted for Bush in part because they're sick of these right and left coast city slickers they see on TV telling them (in varying degrees of directness) they're stupid and/or evil for voting for Bush.

[...]

If one is not a Bush supporter, this election result is even more depressing than the 2000 one for many reasons. To take the first three that come off the top of my head: 1) The electoral college can't be blamed as much. 2) Election fraud can't be blamed as much. 3) Nader can't be blamed as much. We're almost forced to take the medicine that the will of the people went with George Bush, a Republican majority in both houses of congress, etc.

[...]

But how to deal with the social conservatives in the heartland? Maybe the condescending attitude towards them from many "in the blue" IS a problem. Maybe there should be more sit-coms, or reality TV shows, based in "UNGLAMOUROUS" places like NEBRASKA. Maybe this election indeed was A kind of revenge by these people for having to watch and listen to so much programming that is biased towards a city life, city values, etc--- I.E.---"THEY" (of

the red) know more about "US" (of the BLUE) than we know of them! And seriously I do believe there can be a common ground between the "red" and the "blue," but it's not going to be found through electoral politics, and it's currently not found very much in the national entertainment/infotainment industry either (not even for the most part in the poetry world; though maybe in FOOTBALL, with its salary cap that gives the people in many red states a fighting chance against the money powers),

— Chris Stroffolino 3 Nov 2004
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on the coming destruction of fallujah

As the second US assault on Fallujah began, days after Bush's re-election, David Buuck forwarded a Counterpunch dispatch by Rahul Mahajan, who had been inside the city during the April siege. The "word picture" is Mahajan's; the timing — a city about to be levelled — is Buuck's argument.

From *Counterpunch*

“

Fallujah and the Reality of War

By RAHUL MAHAJAN

The assault on Fallujah has started. It is being sold as liberation of the people of Fallujah; it is being sold as a necessary step to implementing "democracy" in Iraq. These are lies.

I was in Fallujah during the siege in April, and I want to paint for you a word picture of what such an assault means.

Fallujah is dry and hot; like Southern California, it has been made an agricultural area only by virtue of extensive irrigation. It has been known for years as a particularly devout city; people call it the City of a Thousand Mosques. In the mid-90's, when Saddam wanted his name to be added to the call to prayer, the imams of Fallujah refused.

U.S. forces bombed the power plant at the beginning of the assault; for the next several weeks, Fallujah was a blacked-out town, with light provided by generators only in critical places like mosques and clinics. The town was placed under siege; the ban on bringing in food, medicine, and other basic items was broken only when Iraqis en masse challenged the roadblocks. The atmosphere was one of pervasive fear, from bombing and the threat of more bombing. Noncombatants and families with sick people, the elderly, and children were leaving in droves. After

initial instances in which people were prevented from leaving, U.S. forces began allowing everyone to leave except for what they called "military age males," men usually between 15 and 60. Keeping noncombatants from leaving a place under bombardment is a violation of the laws of war. Of course, if you assume that every military age male is an enemy, there can be no better sign that you are in the wrong country, and that, in fact, your war is on the people, not on their oppressors,, not a war of liberation.

The main hospital in Fallujah is across the Euphrates from the bulk of the town. Right at the beginning, the Americans shut down the main bridge, cutting off the hospital from the town. Doctors who wanted to treat patients had to leave the hospital, with only the equipment they could carry, and set up in makeshift clinics all over the city; the one I stayed at had been a neighborhood clinic with one room that had four beds, and no operating theater; doctors refrigerated blood in a soft-drink vending machine. Another clinic, I,m told, had been an auto repair shop. This hospital closing (not the only such that I documented in Iraq) also violates the Geneva Convention.

In addition to the artillery and the warplanes dropping 500, 1000, and 2000-pound bombs, and the murderous AC-130 Spectre gunships that can demolish a whole city block in less than a minute, the Marines had snipers criss-crossing the whole town. For weeks, Fallujah was a series of sometimes mutually inaccessible pockets, divided by the no-man's-lands of sniper fire paths. Snipers fired indiscriminately, usually at whatever moved. Of 20 people I saw come into the clinic I observed in a few hours, only five were "military-age males." I saw old women, old men, a child of 10 shot through the head; terminal, the doctors told me, although in Baghdad they might have been able to save him.

[...]

You read the reports about X killed and Y wounded. And you should remember those numbers; those numbers are important. But equally important is to remember that those numbers lie in a war zone, everyone is wounded.

The first assault on Fallujah was a military failure. This time, the resistance is stronger, better-armed, and better-organized; to "win," the U.S. military will have to pull out all the stops. Even within horror and terror, there are degrees, and we and the people of Fallujah ain't seen nothin, yet. George W. Bush has just claimed a new mandate the world has been delivered into his hands.

There will be international condemnation, as there was the first time; but our government won't listen to it; aside from the resistance, all the people of Fallujah will be able to depend on to try to mitigate the horror will be us, the antiwar movement. We have a responsibility, that we didn't meet in April and we didn't meet in August when Najaf was similarly attacked; will we meet it this time?

”

— David Buuck 5 Nov 2004

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Operation Homeland Therapy

Pierre Joris forwards Aleksandar Hemon's Slate essay on Operation Homecoming, the NEA's writing programme for returning troops — launched by the poet-chairman Dana Gioia beside Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and underwritten by Boeing. The war had reached the poetry establishment; the question was what a soldier's story would be permitted to say.

Thought this could be of interest — Pierre

“

Operation Homeland Therapy The NEA's new writing program for soldiers. By Aleksandar Hemon Posted Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2004, at 4:39 AM PT Earlier this spring, Dana Gioia, a poet and the chairman of the National Endowment for Arts,, stood next to Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz at a press conference announcing Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience. The program, organized by the NEA, is backed by "a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Defense" and "made possible" by the Boeing Corp., which has supplied \$250,000 of its \$300,000 cost. Well under way by now, Operation Homecoming organizes writing workshops for returning troops and their families at military installations across the country and abroad. [...] The situation of a poet and a war-mongering ideologue sharing the stage is odious in itself, but it also raises a tricky question: What is the real purpose of the project? [...] As a matter of fact, the story would be much better told by those who died in Iraq, but they do not get to tell any stories, to participate in workshops, or to come home-except in the coffins that under a Pentagon policy prohibiting media coverage of human remains are not to be seen on television or in newspapers. [...] any account of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom that does not include testimonies of the freedom-shocked Iraqis cannot avoid

being a lie. [...] American fiction is going to have to reclaim American reality.

”

— Pierre Joris 7 Nov 2004

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Re: Poetry is Rebellion

Days after George W. Bush's re-election, the list turned to recrimination; Robert Majzels, a Montréal novelist and translator, answers the American left from north of the border. His interlocutor Joe Amato had wondered how to build “an informed electorate”; Majzels is less consoling, and less sure the American century will go quietly.

Interesting, in small doses, to follow US progressives trying to figure out why their nation reelected Bush. From this side of the border (north), it's perhaps too easy to moralize; nevertheless...

Isn't it possible that the problem of why the majority of American voters voted for Bush is not a question of false consciousness, misinformation or the power of propaganda. People are not certainly not that dumb. I doubt pro-Republicans particularly believe George Bush when he says he is bombing the civilian population of Iraq's major cities because he wants to set them free. Nor do they think he believes it. Or care. The great majority of Americans, whether Christian, right-wing Christian, or otherwise can read the Presidential wink. They know he's doing it for oil. But they too want oil. And the cheaper the better. Those who have some money put away in mutual funds know those savings are likely to increase with military spending and corporate tax breaks. They are simply prepared to sacrifice non-Americans and poor Americans in the process, especially if they dress in long robes and long beards, or have a different skin colour. They prefer not to say so, naturally. And they appreciate that George Bush and his pals are providing a discourse to package it.

And yet, progressive forces in the US continue to say: "We support the troops?" True, those troops are, for the most part, recruited in minority and poor communities, but the soldiers voted overwhelmingly for Bush in the election. Why? Self-deluded? Or because the military offers them a way out of the ghetto, and grinding poverty. All right, this opportunity requires in exchange that they risk their lives and murder others. But they're smart enough to know nothing is free. So be it.

Shouldn't we be telling them: don't do it. Don't sign up. And if you have signed up, get out, go awol, refuse to fight. Those who continue to go in and fight have to accept the responsibility. I cannot support them, help them, give them better equipment, or wish them well. Surely, by now, there are no more "innocent" Americans. My support has to go to those Americans who take action to resist their government, and to the enemies of the US, those who resist its invasions. One would have thought the time for clever educational strategies of propaganda, for sweet-talking the masses in new and more palatable discourses was over. We went through all these discussions during the Viet Nam War. The Vietnamese came to the conclusion that the only convincing argument they could make to the American people was in body bags, in higher and higher economic costs, and finally in defeat.

And yet, there were still some US progressives who somehow believed it was the anti-war movement in the US that ended that war. As though it had to be Americans themselves who are the agents of change; never the Other. Speaking of myths, it might be useful to explore again the question of why Americans, even the more critical-minded, still believe in their founding myth. They think of their country, a nation founded on the pillars of slavery and violence, and run by an economic elite, as a great liberating experiment in popular democracy, now in danger of going wrong, being high-jacked (what do you mean by "give us back a democracy..." — when do you think you had one?). The rest of the world cannot afford the luxury of such illusions. The truth is probably that the American century is already over. The problem is that we cannot be sure that the nation that began by slaughtering its native peoples, enslaving Africans, and drenching the continent in its own blood, the only nation to ever use nuclear weapons on a civilian population, is likely to go quietly.

— Robert Majzels 10 Nov 2004

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FW: Denial of water to Iraqi Cities during US and "allied"

A second relay from Peter Quartermain: a Cambridge campaign briefing compiled as the Fallujah assault opened, documenting water cut off to Tall Afar, Samarra and Fallujah, and the Geneva article that forbids starving civilians as a method of war. The footnotes are the argument.

“

Water supplies to Tall Afar, Samarra and Fallujah have been cut off during US attacks in the past two months, affecting up to 750,000 civilians. This appears to form part of a deliberate US policy of denying

water to the residents of cities under attack. If so, it has been adopted without a public debate, and without consulting Coalition partners. It is a serious breach of international humanitarian law, and is deepening Iraqi opposition to the United States, other Coalition members, and the Iraqi interim government.

[...]

> Fallujah On 16 October the Washington Post reported that: 'Electricity and water were cut off to the city [Fallujah] just as a fresh wave of strikes began Thursday night, an action that U.S. forces also took at the start of assaults on Najaf and Samarra.' (12)

In light of the shortage of water and other supplies, the Red Cross has attempted to deliver water to Fallujah. However the US has refused to allow shipments of water into Fallujah until it has taken control of the city (15).

[...]

Three days later Muqtada al-Sadr criticized both the denial of water to Samarra, and the lack of international outrage at it: 'They say that this city is experiencing the worst humanitarian situations, without water and electricity, but no-one speaks about this. If the wronged party were America, wouldn't the whole world come to its rescue and wouldn't it denounce this?' (22)

[...]

International law specifically forbids the denial of water to civilians during conflict. Under Article 14 of the second protocol of the Geneva Conventions,

'Starvation of civilians as a method of combat is prohibited. It is therefore prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless for that purpose, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population such as food-stuffs, agricultural areas for the production of food-stuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.' (30)

”

— **Peter Quartermain** 15 Nov 2004
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The history of "triangle of death."

Patrick Herron, a poet, runs the phrase 'triangle of death' back through the Lexis-Nexis wire to watch it migrate — Sicily, Guatemala, Tangshan, Algiers, even the hills above Pisa in 1945 — before it settles, late in 2004, on the towns south of Baghdad and the language of the occupation hardens around them. A found-poem of the newswire in the documentary manner. (The clippings, some two dozen in the original, are sampled here.)

I don't know if any of you have noticed, but the phrase "Sunni Triangle" seems to have been summarily replaced by the phrase "triangle of death" across the board in the media. I wondered how in the heck this happened, how journalism could go from an even keeled phrase to a jingoistic one. So I traced the history of the phrase "triangle of death" in lexis/nexis, and here are the results:

1st reference: 1982, Sicily—

“

The government has ordered an anti-Mafia campaign following a string of murders *including 14 in one week* carried out by rival gangs in the so-called Triangle of Death, the towns of Bagheria, Villabbate and Casteldaccia southeast of Palermo.

”

Then, in 1984, the "triangle of death" moves to Guatemala, out of crime and into the realm of armed insurrection/terrorism:

“

Acul lies between the Quiche towns of Nebaj, Chajul and Cotzal, which form the points of a region that was dubbed the "Triangle of Death" during a bloody counterinsurgency three years ago.

”

[...] another news feed refers to a WWII usage of the phrase, applied to the Nazis by our GIs, of course:

“

The Army had named them Hills X, Y and Z. But the soldiers called them the Triangle of Death.

”

[...]

And so, finally, at long last, our first appearance of the triangle in Iraq, courtesy of ONASA, a Bosnian news source:

“

Watch out: you're nearing the "triangle of death." It's a small intersection west of Baghdad linking the towns of Fallujah, Khaldiya and Ramadi, and the Habbaniyah Lake, an area that has seen frequent attacks on US convoys as well as local score settling.

”

[...]

Between that UPI article in October and the current date, the phrase is used in relation to Iraq twice as many times as that same phrase was used in any other way over the last decade, and nearly as many times as it had been used in years previous, as far back as Lexis/Nexis news feed goes back.

— Patrick Herron 25 Nov 2004

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☛ Hats for Iraq Project

I'm currently working on an art project of sorts: knitting hats in memory of the dead in Iraq. I've set up a website at www.angelfire.com/poetry/lisajarnot/iraqhat.html

Thought it might be of interest.

— Lisa Jarnot 21 Jan 2005

Report: March 19 Chicago Protest -- BNCPJ

Gabriel Gudding — poet and professor at Illinois State — files a dispatch from the second-anniversary march against the war, two hours north in Chicago, where he had gone with fifteen of the Bloomington-Normal Citizens for Peace and Justice. The comedy is exact and the tenderness sudden; it turns, at the last, on a 1776 pamphlet locked in a vault a few blocks from the line of march.

On the morning of Saturday March 19th, fifteen members of the Bloomington-Normal Citizens for Peace and Justice piled into four large domestic cars in the parking lot of the Unitarian Church in Bloomington and drove two hours north to join about 1,000 other protestors in a march that began outside the famous Newberry Library on Dearborn and proceeded through the crisp and swank Gold Coast district, across the Chicago River, and into the Federal Plaza at Adams and Dearborn, where Jesse Jackson, Rep. Cynthia McKinney, Faridah Havandi, Lila

Lipscomb (the mother from Flint, Michigan, in *Fahrenheit 9/11*) and many others spoke.

Our delegation joined a pre-march rally outside the Newberry Library organized by the Chicago Coalition Against War and Racism. When our party arrived at the Ruth Page Park on Dearborn, there were several hundred protestors having A REALLY GOOD TIME. The air was thick with cigarette smoke and the cacophonic stylings of a madcap brass band called The All-American Anti-War Marching Band.

The march, however, didn't start right away. Organizers had to negotiate with the police about our route. Fearing people were growing impatient, an earnest bald man bearing an official air explained into a megaphone within earshot of police officers that careful negotiations were being undertaken with the law. Then he shouted, "Just give us a few more minutes to hash this out with the pigs!"

It was clear by his sincere demeanor that he did not use term with irony. I'm sure this did not enamor him, or his cause, to the police. But it was very funny.

[...]

As we waited for the organizers to work our route out with "the pigs," we chatted and wandered around. It was in my wandering that I discovered that this huge, clattering collection of protestors was massed in front of a quiet and unassuming library. And not just any library: this was the Newberry Library.

"The Newberry," as it is fondly known, sits in an unpretentious brick building across the street from the little park at Ruth Page Place on Dearborn and Walton, and it is one of the great independent research libraries in the world, housing several world-famous collections of rare books and maps and pamphlets whose cumulative age would stretch back if not to the Devonian then at least to that recent era when the first Bush patriarch decided to leave his Neanderthal brethren and try his hand at the Cro-Magnon thing.

Inside that quiet library, far back in vaults and inside a special distant room, is a pamphlet, printed January 10th, 1776. The pamphlet, called "Common Sense," was written by the great Quaker activist Thomas Paine and it is in delicate condition. It was written by Paine to urge the lethargic American people to declare their independence from the British crown and its soldiers: It was his pamphlet, some feel, that changed the minds of Jefferson, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin, all of whom had, prior to reading it, supported the crown. In any case, in that document, which I have studied, Paine wrote, "The Continent

hath, at this time, the largest body of armed and disciplined men of any power under Heaven."

And, as if to prove the above were still true, 15 mounted police officers on great brown mares stood directly in front of the Newberry's steps. The horses, which looked very cute and preoccupied, also had little sparkly visors over their eyes. Despite the cacophony and the jiggling and shouting and bouncing and the waving of signs in their faces the horses stood impassive and seemed to be very patient with us all. Some of the signs read:

Draft the Bush Twins

Smoke Weed, Not Iraq

[...]

And my personal favorite of all the signs: USA: Fighting Terrorists since 1492

[...]

So we finally got moving, but the police split our contingent into two groups: one down Dearborn and the other down Clark. We both walked, one block apart, south a dozen blocks through the most conservative heart of downtown Chicago to the Federal Plaza. We were quite a sight — and you could probably hear us from the top of the Sears Tower. We walked through the Gold Coast canyons in a gamelan of competing bullhorns and airhorns, as if we were a bizarre many-headed emotional klezmer dragon wading through the multi-directional echoes of the turbines and rotors of the helicopters circling overhead, police sirens, cars honking, boomboxes on bicycles blaring political music, and every tenth man with a bullhorn yelling something in Spanish or about the toxicity of diaper use, and lanky young men running about with snare drums and roaring about the war. It was a lot of fun!

[...]

The speeches by Cynthia McKinney, Faridah Havandi, Lila Lipscomb were overwhelming in their emotional impact. And that Faridah Havandi can really belt it out there; I think she has three or four donkey lungs: I saw some in the crowd plugging their ears she was so loud. Dazed by the volume of Havandi's oratory, I wandered around during one speech looking at faces and haircuts, and I saw a family holding signs that read, "Juan Manuel Torres: 2-7-79 7-12-04" "In Memory of My Son: Murdered by the Army — Bagram, Afghanistan." The signs also held large photographs of a deeply intelligent looking and kind-faced young man in dress greens. I approached the woman and asked her if she was his

mother. She said she wasn't but that she was his mother's friend and that she had seen him grow up from a baby. I burst out crying for some reason and thanked her for coming.

[...]

Before we got to the final cordon of police surrounding us, we passed two young men in business suits. One man gave me his business card that read, "50% OFF: Mobile Protest Area (for 30 minutes, \$5 for additional 30 minutes): EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH AT 1/2 THE COST: FREE ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT PICKET SIGN RENTAL WITH THIS COUPON (or \$3 for 30 minutes) — Kids in FREE with Paying Adult — [then in very small font] — brought to you by Clear Channel." Then the other one produced a black box and pointed it at my head and took a Polaroid of my face and held it out to me shouting: "Commemorate your time here at this anti-establishment protest! Yours for only 8 dollars!"

I laughed very hard for a second and grew really happy and thanked them and told them there was no fucking way I was going to give them 8 bucks for a face I could see for free in my rearview and I asked if I could simply have the picture instead. But like the good capitalists they were parodying, they refused. Their inventiveness made me very happy and I ran ahead to catch up with Fariba and Fati and Mollie to tell them about the genius men in suits behind us and thinking about that phrase from "Common Sense," only 13 blocks to the north, the really cool one where Paine just busts out and says, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again."

Because I felt that we do have that power. And coming from the rally, gluey echoes fading behind us, and all of us so happy if a little cold, I wanted to remark to Mollie and Fati and Fariba about the pamphlet now 14 blocks to our north and my hope that the Iraqis also feel they have the power to begin their world anew and throw off their own dumb King George.

— **Gabriel Gudding** 21 Mar 2005
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Botero / Fighting Torture with Art

Stephen Vincent passes on a notice of Fernando Botero's Abu Ghraib canvases — the Colombian painter of plump, gentle figures turned to the prison's stacked and hooded bodies. The framing, a Counterpunch piece by Mike Whitney, reaches, as such writing did that spring, for Guernica.

“

The Paintings of Fernando Botero Fighting Torture with Art

By MIKE WHITNEY

The Columbian artist Fernando Botero has produced a brilliant collection of life-sized paintings depicting the horrors of Abu Ghraib. The works show prisoners bound and gagged, stacked on top of each other, and being beaten by American soldiers. The paintings have a haunting, frenzied feeling to them, like Pieter Bruegel's medieval "The Triumph of Death" (1562) where the artist conjures up a scene of armies clashing while wagon-loads of skulls are carried across an apocalyptic-looking landscape.

Abu Ghraib is the entryway into that same world, faithfully reproduced in detail by George Bush. We're fortunate to have men like Botero to shine a light on the real machinery of Bush's terror-apparatus. Already, 100,000 Iraqis have died in a gratuitous act of aggression, entire cities have been flattened and 17,000 Iraqis languish in overcrowded gulags waiting for an improbable turn-of-events. Botero captures the look of desperation on men's faces when there is no expectation of justice. He confronts his audience with the bloody stanchions that support the new world order and the increasing number of innocent victims required to keep them upright. This isn't the stuff you'll see in the media, where America's war crimes are concealed behind a heavy lacquer of flowery rhetoric and optimistic predictions. These pictures are the real deal, like the grinding violence and humiliation produced by a brutal occupation.

[...]

Torture, bombing, starvation. these are the foundation blocks of America's Iraq policy, not the empty blather about democracy and liberation. Let's hear Bush offer a few choice words about God's work in Falluja, where "combat-aged" males were barricaded in the town so they could be peppered with cluster bombs and napalm. Or, perhaps he can brighten his oratory with anecdotes about prisoners rotting away in his string of concentration camps that are now scattered across Iraq. This is

what makes Botero's work is so valuable; it strips away the pretense and shows the ghoulish face that operates behind the mask.

Picasso's masterpiece "Guernica" has galvanized generations to the horrors of war. Botero's paintings will undoubtedly have the same affect. His work shows in the plainest terms a world that has been knocked off its axis by Washington's bloodlust. This is what the world looks like when the law has been jettisoned and men are subjected to the willfulness of megalomaniacs. Torture is never extraneous; it reflects the very heart of a regime. So it is with the Bush administration.

Botero's paintings show us the violence that animates the Bush government and portends an increasingly uncertain future for us all. They're worth a look.

”

— **Stephen Vincent** 18 Apr 2005
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The Poets in Guantanamo

Stephen Vincent passes on N. C. Aizenmann's Washington Post profile of Abdul Rahim Muslim Dost, an Afghan poet and gemstone dealer just freed after nearly three years at Guantánamo Bay — most of his prison writing confiscated on the way out. Two years ahead of the anthology Poems from Guantánamo, it is the war reaching the list as a question about verse itself.

I missed this piece — kindly forwarded to me — in the Washington Post. Please excuse any cross-posting. Stephen

”

In a Jail in Cuba Beat the Heart of a Poet

Afghan, Now Freed by U.S., Scribbled on Paper Cups but Never Stopped Writing

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — Among the old leather volumes in the library of Abdul Rahim Muslim Dost is a black plastic binder full of crumpled letters he wrote, sent from the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

At the bottom of each form is a perfunctory salutation. The rest is taken up with the poems that helped Dost keep his sanity during nearly three years of confinement.

"Bangle bracelets befit a pretty young woman," begins one of the poems. "Handcuffs befit a brave young man."

[...]

"Just as the heart beats inside the darkness of the body, so I, although in a cage, continue to beat with life," began one letter-poem. "Those who have no courage or honor think themselves free, but are slaves. I am flying on the wings of thought, and so, even in this cage, I am more free than they."

[...]

The rules were strict. To prevent detainees from using pens as weapons, the guards gave out a flexible, rubber variety that made writing awkward. Each man was limited to one sheet of paper per shift, but Dost said fellow inmates donated their paper to him, then eagerly read his poems. One of his most popular was a satire criticizing the U.S. military for sending people to Cuba on thin evidence.

"That poem was on everybody's lips," he recalled with a proud smile.

[...]

But when that day finally came last week, Dost said, he received only a duffel bag with a blanket, a change of clothes and a few hundred papers — a fraction of his writings.

This parting blow, he said, struck him harder than all the humiliations of confinement. On Friday, as well-wishers swarmed into his home, he said his only thought was how to recover his work.

"If they give me back my writings, truly I will feel as though I was never imprisoned," he said. "And if they don't... "

Dost's voice trailed off. For the first time in three years, he was at a loss for words.

”

— **Stephen Vincent** 28 Apr 2005
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» **War and Peace (2) reading — O Books**

Come to a reading for the anthology War and Peace (2)
Small Press Traffic on Friday, May 13th at 7:30
CCA: 1111 Eighth Street, San Francisco
(just off the intersection of 16th and Wisconsin)

Readers on May 13th will be: Rae Armantrout, Judith Goldman, Leslie Scalapino, Jocelyn Saidenberg, Stacy

Doris, Laynie Browne, Stephen Ratcliffe, Taylor Brady, Jen Scappettone, Laura Moriarty, Roxi Hamilton, David Buuck

War and Peace (2) is edited by Judith Goldman and Leslie Scalapino. Includes a collaboration by Robert Creeley with artist Francesco Clemente. "There's a seditious joy in a thronging crowd." -Laura Elrick. "a sinking down into the word as the tumult of the people" -Tina Darragh

— **Leslie Scalapino** 5 May 2005

"Steven Vincent" — killed in Iraq

The journalist Steven Vincent had been abducted and killed in Basra the day before. His near-namesake on the list, the San Francisco poet Stephen Vincent, wrote to still the worried calls — and to mark a man whose politics ran opposite to his own.

Since I have gotten a few concerned calls this morning, I want to let everyone know that I am not, "Steven Vincent", the free-lance journalist (and I believe once an art reviewer & critic) who was killed yesterday in Iraq. Formally, I am a "Stephen". This morning I am writing safely under the cool protective summer fog in San Francisco.

Ironically, in terms of names, my politics on the war in Iraq — were 180 degrees in the opposite direction from Steven Vincent.

Rest his soul,

— **Stephen Vincent** 3 Aug 2005
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i want to know

Two days after the levees gave way in New Orleans, Rothenberg — of Big Bridge — set the drowned city beside the sums being spent to rebuild the one the war had wrecked.

I want to know why there aren't ten thousand helicopters in New Orleans and area

I want to know why the country that can rebuild Iraq can't save it's own people
Don't answer. The answer wouldn't impress me

— **Michael Rothenberg** 31 Aug 2005
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chicago protest report -- three years of war

On the third anniversary of the invasion, Gabriel Gudding reposts his own dispatch from a march the year before, threading Chicago's Gold Coast — a poet's field report, oddly tender toward the very police he studies, that comes to rest at a Newberry Library vault holding Thomas Paine's Common Sense.

[I wrote this article last year for our local indy paper about a large protest in chicago commemorating the invasion of iraq. i urge everyone who can to join the protest nearest them tomorrow]

Report: March 19 2005 Anti-War Protest in Chicago

On the morning of Saturday March 19th, fifteen members of the Bloomington-Normal Citizens for Peace and Justice piled into four large domestic cars in the parking lot of the Unitarian Church in Bloomington and drove two hours north to join about 1,000 other protestors in a march that began outside the famous Newberry Library on Dearborn and proceeded through the crisp and swank Gold Coast district, across the Chicago River, and into the Federal Plaza at Adams and Dearborn, where Jesse Jackson, Rep. Cynthia McKinney, Faridah Havandi, Lila Lipscomb (the mother from Flint, Michigan, in *Fahrenheit 9/11*) and many others spoke.

The march, however, didn't start right away. Organizers had to negotiate with the police about our route. Fearing people were growing impatient, an earnest bald man bearing an official air explained into a megaphone within earshot of police officers that careful negotiations were being undertaken with the law. Then he shouted, "Just give us a few more minutes to hash this out with the pigs!" It was clear by his sincere demeanor that that he did not use term with irony. I'm sure this did not enamor him, or his cause, to the police. But it was very funny.

There were three bodies of police in attendance: Illinois State Troopers, who looked frightened and ready to club someone; Chicago municipal police, who looked bored and mean; and the Cook County Sheriff's Police, about whom I grew quietly fond because they had kind faces — and many of them were slouching and smoking, and a few even had full beards! I liked this particular class of police very much! But the other class of police, the city and state class, these police were menacing.

Despite how simultaneously awkward and menacing they looked, I was acutely happy nobody was taunting the police or saying mean things to them. I have been at demonstrations where ignorant protestors do this sort of thing and I find it repellant and abusive: I have no illusions about the structural function and

socialization of police, but these are often just generous people at heart who've chosen a line of work that brings them to a protest or two. We should treat them with decency and generosity even if they have no idea that they are alienated and alienating dupes of the state.

It was in my wandering that I discovered that this huge, clattering collection of protestors was massed in front of a quiet and unassuming library. And not just any library: this was the Newberry Library.

Inside that quiet library, far back in vaults and inside a special distant room, is a pamphlet, printed January 10th, 1776. The pamphlet, called *Common Sense* and written by the great Quaker activist Thomas Paine, is in delicate condition. It was written by Paine to urge the lethargic American people to declare their independence from the British crown and its soldiers: It was his pamphlet, some feel, that changed the minds of Jefferson, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin, all of whom had, prior to reading it, supported the crown. In any case, in that document, which I have studied, Paine wrote, "The Continent hath, at this time, the largest body of armed and disciplined men of any power under Heaven."

And, as if to prove the above were still true, 15 mounted police officers on great brown mares stood directly in front of the Newberry's steps. [...] The horses, which looked very cute and preoccupied, also had little sparkly visors over their eyes. Despite the cacophony and the jiggling and shouting and bouncing and the waving of signs in their faces the horses stood impassive and seemed to be very patient with us all. Some of the signs read:

Draft the Bush Twins

Smoke Weed, Not Iraq

Then from a megaphone: "Exxon, Mobil, BP, Shell: Take this war and go to hell!"

And a sign: Let's Bomb Texas: They Have Oil Too

And again from another megaphone:

"George Bush!/ We! know! you!// Daddy was a/ killer too!"

And my personal favorite of all the signs: USA: Fighting Terrorists since 1492

So we finally got moving, but the police split our contingent into two groups: one down Dearborn and the other down Clark. We both walked, one block apart, south a dozen blocks through the most conservative heart of downtown Chicago to the Federal Plaza. We were quite a sight — and you could probably hear us from the top of the Sears Tower. We walked through the Gold Coast canyons in a

gamelan of competing bullhorns and airhorns, as if we were a bizarre many-headed emotional klezmer dragon wading through the multi-directional echoes of the turbines and rotors of the helicopters circling overhead, police sirens, cars honking, boomboxes on bicycles blaring political music, and every tenth man with a bullhorn shouting something in Spanish or about the toxicity of diaper use, and lanky young men running about with snare drums and roaring about the war. It was a lot of fun!

The speeches by Cynthia McKinney, Faridah Havandi, Lila Lipscomb were overwhelming in their emotional impact. [...] Dazed by Havandi's oratory, I wandered around during one speech looking at faces and haircuts, and I saw a family holding signs that read, "Juan Manuel Torres: 2-7-79 7-12-04" "In Memory of My Son: Murdered by the Army — Bagram, Afghanistan." The signs also held large photographs of a deeply intelligent looking and kind-faced young man in dress greens. I approached the woman and asked her if she was his mother. She said she wasn't but that she was his mother's friend and that she had seen him grow up from a baby. I burst out crying for some reason and thanked her for coming.

Before we got to the final cordon of police surrounding us, we passed two young men in business suits. One man gave me his business card that read, "50% OFF: Mobile Protest Area (for 30 minutes, \$5 for additional 30 minutes): EXERCISE YOUR RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH AT 1/2 THE COST: FREE ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT PICKET SIGN RENTAL WITH THIS COUPON (or \$3 for 30 minutes) — Kids in FREE with Paying Adult — [then in very small font] — brought to you by Clear Channel." Then the other one produced a black box and pointed it at my head and took a Polaroid of my face and held it out to me shouting: "Commemorate your time here at this anti-establishment protest! Yours for only 8 dollars!"

I laughed very hard for a second and grew really happy and thanked them and told them there was no fucking way I was going to give them 8 bucks for a face I could see for free in my rearview and I asked if I could simply have the picture instead. But like the good capitalists they were parodying, they refused. Their inventiveness made me very happy and I ran ahead to catch up with Fariba and Fati and Mollie to tell them about the genius men in suits behind us and thinking about that phrase from *Common Sense*, only 13 blocks to the north, the really cool one where Paine just busts out and says, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again."

Because I felt that we do have that power.

— Gabriel Gudding 17 Mar 2006
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Re: BIG BRIDGE SHUTS DOWN -- PROTEST

When the online journal Big Bridge blacked out its pages to protest the 2006 war in Lebanon, Jason Quackenbush rounded on the gesture — and, before he was through, on himself. It is the rawest form in the batch of a doubt that shadows the whole book: whether any poem did the dead the least bit of good.

What a bunch of crap this whole discussion is. We're sitting around discussing the "Poetics" and "Value of the artistic statement" about some dumb website that I'd never read before this point deciding that replacing itself with a big black page with a statement of it's politics in some way had anything at all to do with anything. This sort of self-congratulating nonsense is not just ineffective, it is the SOURCE of what you are protesting. Protests like this, in effect, say "I as an individual am making myself feel better about injustice in the world." and I'm sorry, but that sort of act is cowardly bullshit pandering to an idea of political conviction qua fashionability that, frankly, fucking disgusts me. If you're really that upset about what's going on, which I doubt, go blow something up. Organize a group of people to block a freeway during rush hour. Go hand out information leaflets on your lunch hour to people on the streets, do something that has some impact beyond your own quiet little upper middle class white college educated coterie faux radicals whose self-inflicted impotence has doomed them to continually spewing a bunch of crap like "Poets against the war," to cite a perfect example of preaching to the choir someone else has already brought up, which only serves to give the talk radio and FoxNEWS talking heads more examples of ineffective dumb liberal nonsense to point at and ridicule. What does the right do when they're pissed off about something? They firebomb abortion clinics, they write legislation that they know will fail and try to push it through anyway, they write "contracts with america" and take control of the political debate by getting their wealthy allies to fund think tanks to support a cadre of well-spoken, highly educated pundit shock troops capable of making coherent, lucid policy statements anywhere in the country at a moments. What does the left do? We cry, we talk about the great protests of the past, and we write poetry about how fucking sad we are, then make obtuse mandarin gestures like the shutting down of Big Bridge.

Don't get me wrong, I'm no less guilty of this than anyone else. I haven't done anything remotely political since I marched in protest before the beginning of the Iraq war. It was the ineffectiveness, the lameness, the stupidity of that action

that doomed it to failure. Why is that progressives can get together and do something futile and dumb, but can't get together to do something useful, like organize laborers in third world countries making our nikes, or push into office reasonable political candidates with strong beliefs about progressive issues, rather than middle of the road neo-liberals and even conservatives like Hilary Clinton, Joe Lieberman, and, judging by his voting record so far, Barak Obama, the great progressive hope? I don't know why that is. I do know that I'm broke. That I have bills to pay. That I have goals in my life that have nothing to do with Palestine or transjordan. Does my humanity make me feel like a shitheel for the fact that my tax dollars have been translated into blowing up lebanese children? You're damn right it does. But I'm not going to do those kids the disrespect of pretending like making a bunch of empty pseudo-artsy gestures does anything whatsoever to alleviate their suffering. I'm not going to show anybody the poetry I've been writing about Beirut and Hizbollah because it doesn't do those kids a damn bit of good. And to be completely honest, I wish i had the courage of a Cesar Chavez, a Che Guevarra, a Martin Luther King Jr, or a Thich Quang Duc, or a Rachel Corrie God rest her brave soul. But I don't. I'm a coward. I'll march if someone says "March today, show up" I'll vote for progressive candidates, I'll give money to amnesty international and the ACLU when they ask me for it. I subscribe to mother jones and do my best to read international newspapers. But i'm not enough of a fool to not recognize the cowardice in this, the fact that these are things I do because I'm afraid to go back to college, get a nursing degree, then go work for Doctors without Borders or the international Red Cross/Red Crescent. I don't spend my free hours learning to speak Farsi or Arabic so that I can go to the middle east with humanitarian aid organization and actually DO something worthwhile. These are options that every single person on this list defending this bullshit shut down protest as something noble and valiant has open to them, and I don't see any of you doing them, and that makes you all cowards just like me. So at least have the decency to shut the fuck up and feel bad about it, rather than pretending all this pretty talk makes the least bit of difference to poor children suffering the world over so that we can wear cheap clothes that weren't made by anyone we know, eat organically grown produce in cute little overpriced bistros, and drink gallons of over priced bad coffee at the corner espresso stand. At least do the people making the real sacrifices and doing the real hard work so that we can sit around and bicker about philosophy and advertise our blogs and poetry readings the honor and justice to recognize that you aren't one of them, you're never going to be, and that your petty little attempts to feel better about it aren't really worth bragging about in public. At least recognize that we're all the same shitheel in the same sinking ship and don't try

to grab hold of the moral life preserver that the people who are really making a difference have built for themselves from their own sweat and sacrifice. It's fucking tacky.

— Jason Quackenbush 22 Jul 2006

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Re: Struggle over Middle East reaches into world LGBT movements

The month Israel and Hezbollah went to war across Lebanon, a list thread on gay-rights politics widened into the conflict itself. Aldon Nielsen answers the poet Ruth Lepson, who had pleaded that Israel was "a tiny country surrounded by tens of thousands of people who want the Jews dead" and asked her fellow leftists to "stop jerking those knees."

Yes, much more attention should be paid to events unfolding in Africa than is currently being paid — That, however, has little to do with how much attention we should pay to what is unfolding in the Middle East.

It is BECAUSE I've read deeply in the history of these events that I have taken the positions that I have taken.

It's about time to stop knee-jerk accusations of knee-jerk responses --

Even some on the far right have come to recognize that there will be no peace in the region until Israel and its neighbors come to a lasting settlement.

Current Israeli and US policy appears to be that a settlement will be imposed upon the Arab populations. That will not work.

Israel continues to appeal to UN resolutions as justification for its actions, while studiously ignoring other UN resolutions and international law.

Any nation has a right to defend itself against incursions upon its territory.

No nation has a right to establish settlements on land it occupies in war, or to generously offer to return all but 5% of such occupied territories, or to deny citizens displaced from such lands the right to return to them, or to appropriate the water resources in lands occupied in war — etc.

Hezbollah has done terrible things. There was no Hezbollah till Israel invaded Lebanon.

Hamas has done terrible things. Hamas came into being under the watchful eye of Israeli intelligence at a time when Israel wanted a counterweight to the PLO.

This is not to say that Israel is responsible for the actions of Hamas or Hezbollah — It is not to blame the victims — It is to say that the policies Israel has pursued have never accomplished their stated goals.

The policies of collective punishment, wholesale removal of populations, destruction of even purely civilian infrastructure, will never produce security for Israel.

What is Israel to do?

Return to its internationally recognized '67 borders. Defend itself against any incursions, with the full support of the international community.

Israel has so far bombed something like 80% of all Lebanon's highways and 94% of the bridges. It has bombed a UN outpost with "smart" weapons after repeated pleas from UN officials to stop firing on them. It has killed hundreds of civilians. I don't know anybody outside the Bush administration who believes that this scorched earth policy can possibly lead to any improvement in Israel's long-time security.

You may think otherwise; I am sorry to say that we will have time to learn whether or not you are right.

— Aldon Nielsen 27 Jul 2006
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Drive-By Quillers #000005

At the height of the 2006 Lebanon war, August Highland — a maker of vast machine-assembled text-fields — files one of his “Drive-By Quillers,” a search-engine collage in which reports of Israel's bombardment of Lebanon surface braided with recipe spam for bacon and black pudding. The obscenity is in the adjacency.

Drive-By Quillers #000005

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— August Highland 1 Aug 2006
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Re: civilians

The “civilians” thread — begun when Mark Wallace asked when the word entered English and how quickly it became a target — draws out David-Baptiste Chiro's longest turn. Writing as Israel bombarded Lebanon and Gaza in the summer of 2006, the collagist and theorist runs the term from Rome and the Cathars to the smallpox blankets given his own Ojibway great-grandmother.

My great grandmother was the only surviving member of the large group of Ojibway Indians of which she was a part who had been herded aboard trains to supposedly be taken to a reservation. The blankets given everyone were infected with smallpox — biological warfare courtesy the US Govt.

The word civilian comes from the Romans and passed into English very long ago via French, as originally a term for a civil judge, un civilien. I found on line some letters by Cicero in which he reminisces with friends about their civilian life. The distinction is clearly made between civilian and the military, and also later between civilian and the ecclesiastical. Different laws apply among them. The slaughter of civilians is as old as war. The Roman conquest of Carthage for example — everyone killed, everything razed to the ground, and the ground covered in salt so that nothing would grow where Carthage had been. Agent Orange anyone? Or the irradiated landscapes in Iraq from the First Gulf War and the present one. And what of Troy? And countless populations through countless periods of time, the world over. I was reading today about the Cathars, their extraordinary culture, religion, society. When war on them was declared by the Pope, accompanied by the first version of the Inquisition, before it found its famous home in Spain, it was a war of total extermination. It was from this war of

genocide that came the famous saying — "Kill them all and let God sort them out." This was the reply given by a commander when one of his men asked how they could possibly proceed against the population when there was no way to tell a Cathar apart from a non-Cathar. About ten days ago I saw an interview with a top ranking Israeli official explaining the "reasons" why it is justified to be wiping out the Palestinians in Gaza and destroying Lebanon to save it from Hezbollah. The "reasons" given were eerily similar to a speech I had read given by a US Federal Commander on the eve of attacking an Indian settlement and killing everyone in it — at the time almost all women and children as the men were outside the settlement to keep the slaughter away from their families. While reflecting on this, a parallel often drawn, (the USA vs Indians, the Israeli treatment of Palestinians), a commentator came on and showed on the screen a quote from a Nazi Commander which was literally word for word the same as the Israeli's. Remember that during the American Civil War in both the North and South were brutal prison camps in which prisoners were beaten, tortured, starved to death. This same inhuman treatment had been given to the slave population and to the Indians being rounded up and transferred to the concentration camps of remote reservations — the difference being that these were not soldiers. The term civilian comes from "civilis" and has to do with living in the city, being bound to the laws of the city, and also making a distinction between the city dweller's "civil" manners and those of the rude "barbarians" and country dwellers, peasants, etc. "Civilian" conveys a sense of lawful and also civilized behaviour, hence certainly non-military! This ideal is at the heart of having civilians in charge of the military, as is supposed to be the case in the USA. The difference between a State and a terrorist is that the state has a military, a territory, a government. The state can commit terrorist acts on a far greater scale than any terrorist, who is in many ways when not literally as are the Palestinians or were the American Indians and the European Jews, civilians without a "civilis" in the terms on which States agree. The terms "terrorism" and the modern "citizen" both emerged from the French Revolution. That's been an important linking ever since, for the State to make and use in its justifications, and for the citizen to see as a final resort against the State's terrorism.

— **David-Baptiste Chirot** 2 Aug 2006
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Honour Bound

The Australian poet and critic Alison Croggon, cross-posting her review of Nigel Jamieson's Honour Bound — a physical-theatre work built around David Hicks, the Adelaide man seized in Afghanistan in 2001 and held five years at Guantánamo without charge. Where London brought its own nationals home, the Howard government left Hicks where he was; Croggon reads the piece through Agamben, as an anatomy of how a human being is placed beyond the reach of law.

Last night I saw some stunning political theatre.

Honour Bound, conceived, directed and co-designed by Nigel Jamieson. Malthouse Theatre until October 1.

The correct question regarding the horrors committed in the camps... is not the question that asks hypocritically how it could have been possible to commit such atrocious horrors against other human beings; it would be more honest, and above all more useful, to investigate carefully how — that is, thanks to what juridical procedures and political devices — human beings could have been so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives to the point that committing any act toward them would no longer appear as a crime. *What is a Camp?*, Giorgio Agamben

Honour Bound, Nigel Jamieson's beautiful and harrowing physical theatre work about the Australian Guantanamo detainee David Hicks, begins with a recording of a reading of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is almost an exercise in nostalgia to hear this statement of ideals read with such solemnity and dignity:

"Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world; Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people..."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is where legislative language, in its passion for clarity and unambiguous precision, attains an intensity of meaning akin to poetry. In 2006, it is hard to remember the force of the horrified revulsion which in 1948 deemed that such barbarities as Auschwitz must never happen again. Now such ideas are considered the province of left wing extremists and troublemakers. How we have moved on.

With his collaborators, Nigel Jamieson investigates the ways in which these UN ideals have been dismantled and destroyed through the story of David Hicks, who was captured fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001. Like many others, Hicks has been imprisoned since by the US Government in Camp Delta at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba as an "enemy combatant", a category invented to sidestep the Geneva Convention's laws on the treatment of prisoners of war, and has endured treatment which most civilised people would call torture.

In five years of captivity, he has been held without charge and without a chance of having any allegations against him tested in a court of law, and he has been allowed only one visit from his family, during which he was shackled to the floor. One of the shameful scandals of the Howard Government is how, unlike Britain — which brought its nationals held in Camp Delta home out of concern that they would be denied the due process of law — it has abandoned Hicks to his fate. So much for the rule of law.

But equally, and equally importantly, *Honour Bound* is a revelation of human pain: on the one hand, a father's grief at being unable to help his troubled son, and on the other, the physical pain inflicted on bodies by the State. *Honour Bound* demonstrates, in its darkest manifestations, the power of language to change and remake reality. It is exemplary political theatre-making of a rare intelligence and power: neither didactic nor exploitative, appealing neither to sentiment nor special pleading, it reveals its argument with a devastating visceral impact which left the first night audience stunned into silence.

— Alison Croggon 16 Sep 2006
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Soldier/Student/Drop Out/Etc...

Days before the 2006 midterms, John Kerry's botched joke — that students who fail "get stuck in Iraq" — set off a list quarrel about who enlists and why. Chris Stroffolino, sometime teacher, enters gently against sharper voices; one poster, "vulture protein," had written that he would "rather be an uneducated loser than a murderer."

"I'm 18, I don't know what I want" — Alice Cooper. (that's one thing that was true for many in the vietnam generation as well as today...) ...or one could add "but I know how to get it"---Johnny Rotten

some know what they DON'T want...and that's a start

or some do know what they want, or think they know what they want... alot of people, regardless of whether they choose the army or to go to nursing school, or

whatever... come to regret the consequences of decisions they made when they were 18...

some people have a very good education, or are very smart without the benefit of what somebody like Kerry calls a good education, and still have limited options due to the economy...

some people, yes, just wanna see some action...

when older people judge 18 year old people, 18 year old people are also judging older people... i don't know if there are many 18-22 year-olds on this list, but

— **Chris Stroffolino** 3 Nov 2006

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antiwar reading in SC/ post-beatitude modes

Rob Wilson, a poet and professor at Santa Cruz, sends round a local paper's notice of the Veterans Day reading he and Tom Marshal give under the banner "honouring all veterans by questioning war." Wilson, who marched against the invasion, means to read the mammon section of "Howl" over Blind Willie Johnson.

“

Metro Santa Cruz: November 8-15, 2006

Honoring All Soldiers By Questioning War: Local poets Tom Marshal and Rob Wilson hold a Veterans Day reading By Laura Mattingly

During a war in which images of returning coffins are banned from the media — and venues for questioning the country's political actions are limited to free speech zones, The Daily Show and the privacy of personal therapy sessions — the country once again seems in need of vocal and impassioned poetry.

"In these poems I'm trying to address as many people as possible: anybody who might be thinking about the war, soldiers, their moms, their relatives, the people who put them there," says Marshal of the works he intends to read this week. "I think we're all involved. I think one of the things that motivates this poetry is that to some extent we're all involved and we can't dissociate ourselves simply by being angry about what's going on."

[...]

"That's why even Jon Stewart, The Daily Show, is kind of like a poem, it kind of estranges the news, makes it look kind of stupid. Or Dave Chapelle does the same thing. They're like poets to me, they just kind of

weird-it-out, they're not like CNN, which to me just sounds like the Bush regime. It's very uncritical... You've got to have a critical perspective, so poetry, journalism, writing, actually, is very important to a democracy."

[...]

"One thing I would want to say is, my father fought in World War II, and he fought in Anzio, and he fought in northern Africa. To me that was a just war," says Wilson. "I actually agree with the pope, Pope John Paul II, that this was an unjust war all along, an obscenely unjust war. I marched in the streets against it. The pope said that this [war] was going to open the doors of hell, and that's kind of what's happened. Bush, who claims to be a Christian, just let it happen, and the bodies are just mounting up to high heaven. I just feel it's an obscenity."

”

— **Robert J. Wilson** 13 Nov 2006

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Tell Cindy Sheehan "Thank You" (fwd)

Cindy Sheehan, whose son Casey was killed in Iraq in 2004, had become the most visible face of the antiwar movement through her vigil outside Bush's ranch. On Memorial Day 2007 she quit it, and the Democratic Party with it. Sondheim relays her bitter valediction to the list.

”

"Good Riddance Attention Whore" by Cindy Sheehan [...]

I have endured a lot of smear and hatred since Casey was killed and especially since I became the so-called "Face" of the American anti-war movement. [...] The first conclusion is that I was the darling of the so-called left as long as I limited my protests to George Bush and the Republican Party. [...] However, when I started to hold the Democratic Party to the same standards that I held the Republican Party, support for my cause started to erode and the "left" started labeling me with the same slurs that the right used. [...] the issue of peace and people dying for no reason is not a matter of "right or left", but "right and wrong." [...] Blind party loyalty is dangerous whatever side it occurs on.

”

— **Alan Sondheim** 30 May 2007

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☛ **Send a Book to a War Criminal — Tinfish Press**

Tinfish Press's "Send a Book to a War Criminal" Drive

Tinfish Press has just published a chapbook by Sarith Peou, titled CORPSE WATCHING. This book of poems details Peou's experiences under the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. Please see

<http://tinfishpress.com/corpse.html> for details.

I decided to send a copy to former Secretary of State and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Henry Kissinger, whose actions were largely responsible for the Khmer Rouge's coming to power in 1975.

But I want everyone to have this chance. Send \$10 to Tinfish Press (less than the usual price of \$12) and we will send a copy of the book to the war criminal of your choice with a personalized card to say who's responsible for sending it along. There are many such war criminals—choose one or more. If at all possible, please track down their addresses for us.

Susan M. Schultz, Editor

Tinfish Press

47-728 Hui Kelu Street #9

Kane`ohe, HI 96744

— **Susan Schultz** 26 Jul 2007

Re: Poems from Guantánamo

Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak (University of Iowa Press, 2007) collected verse by prisoners, cleared line by line by the Pentagon, which feared the poems carried coded messages. Joel Weishaus had told the list it should not be taken seriously, 'certainly not by poets'; Byrne answers that its very compromise is the reason to.

I find the claim that this book shouldn't be taken seriously, "certainly not by poets," to be extraordinary. The extent to which this book is embroiled in economic realities, both publishing and political, offers a very strong invitation to this poet, at least, to take it seriously. [...] It's like a cup which has lost every single drop of poetry, except one maybe — or even just the smell of poetry in its pores. Or maybe it's just a cup which, because it has been used to carry poetry, someone is still willing to carry. There is meaning, maybe not centrally located. In the short essays, it's clear how compromised the book is, yet it speaks. Not fluently, but fluently. The dialogue between poetry and government in this book is a scrap of reality, a broken but not worthless thing. [...] It is a product of the economies we work in, and raises many useful questions about poetry for me, even at the level of nostalgia for a genre.

— **Mairéad Byrne** 22 Aug 2007

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Re: Poems from Guantánamo

Weishaus had dismissed the Guantánamo detainees' poems as the work of non-poets 'of talent' at best. Damon, in her customary lower case, turns the objection back on the word 'talent' itself — and hears, in the policing of who counts as a poet, an unhappy rhyme with the camp.

I am uncomfortable with the aesthetic hierarchy espoused here, reified in the word "talent." it is true that such a thing does and does not exist, but it is certainly not the only, or the most salient, criterion by which we determine whether something has worth. to reify the person of the "poet," is , to my mind, even more dangerous. talk about policing! i do agree, though, that discussions around the poetry is at least as important as the poetry itself, but i might argue this about any "poem."

— **Maria Damon** 23 Aug 2007
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Re: Poems from Guantánamo

Against the charge that the detainees' poems were merely censored non-poetry, Jim Andrews had argued that their significance lies in the whole situation — 'poetry detained.' Nemet-Nejat takes up the thought: the work worth reading is the work 'infested with its times,' shaped by the very suppression around it.

“

Just about everything is unsaid. i'm not sure what's really interesting about all poetry is what's said. instead, it can be the inroads it makes into the unsaid.

books are often famous not for what they say but as materializations of or testaments to a situation or time or to people or peoples etc. or as objects emblematic of a concept.

”

Jim,

This is a great post. Yes, the work of interest for me must be infested with its times. "Infested" here is both a positive and negative value, for what it is, belonging to its time. What may belong to Guantanamo than suppression and suffering, in your words Jim the absence around suffering.

Ciao,

Murat

— Murat Nemet-Nejat 23 Aug 2007

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Petraeus, Kipling, Fleischer, Johnson

During the surge, General Petraeus's testimony to Congress — which quoted Kipling — coincided with MoveOn's 'General Betray Us' ad. Metres, listening to Ari Fleischer spin it on the radio, sets Kipling's 'White Man's Burden' against Halvard Johnson's answer-poem, an erasure that leaves only the word 'darkness' faintly varying.

I was listening to the npr program "On The Media" yesterday [...] when Ari Fleischer was being interviewed by Brooke Gladstone about the Image Wars regarding the Iraq War.

Fleischer pulled out all the typical ad hominem and spins 1) about MoveOn.org — which performed its own ad hominem in their advertisement about General David Petraeus being a "General Betray Us" (a rhyme so pitifully obvious that it made me cringe to see it in print, even though I giggled over it when I thought of it myself) [...] But the sinister aspect of the ad [...] is that ugly slippage in the "they" attacked us line. Really, Iraq attacked us?! WTF?!!!! I forgot, all of "them" are alike. Which leads me to Hal Johnson's "White Man's Burden," which is a phrase canonized by imperial poet Rudyard Kipling. (I should mention that Petraeus quoted Kipling in his address to Congress.) Here's Kipling's poem, and then Johnson's.

“

White Man's Burden

Take up the White Man's burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child. [...]

Take up the White Man's burden--
Have done with childish days--
The lightly proffered laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise. [...]
The judgment of your peers!

We all need to help them ay-rabs get their act together and love freedom, right?

“

"Sonnet: White Man's Burden" by Halvard Johnson

darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness
darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness [...]

darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness
darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness
darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness [...]

darkish darkness darkness darkness darkness darkness
darkness darkness darkness darkness darkest darkness

— Philip Metres 16 Sep 2007
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THE GOOD WAR AND THOSE WHO REFUSED TO FIGHT IT

Metres points the list toward a PBS documentary on the conscientious objectors of the Second World War — the 'good war' whose refusers seeded the peace and civil-rights movements to come. The DVD, he notes, closes with interviews with five objectors from the current one.

If you don't want to read *Behind the Lines: War Resistance Poetry on the American Homefront Since 1941*, watch THE GOOD WAR AND THOSE WHO REFUSED TO FIGHT IT, and you'll at least catch up on "a footnote to a footnote" of that war.

Conscientious Objectors have played a vital role in the progressive movements of this country, including in the Civil Rights struggle, the Anti-Nuclear and Anti-Vietnam War movements, the struggle for better care of the mentally ill, etc.

“

THE GOOD WAR AND THOSE WHO REFUSED TO FIGHT IT is the story of 40,000 Americans who refused to shoulder weapons in 'the good war' because conscience wouldn't allow them to kill another human being. In the face of criticism and scorn, these CO's challenged the limits of democracy and applied their non-violence to pioneer social movements that transformed America in the years to follow.

”

— Philip Metres 3 Oct 2007
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Behind the Lines on Veterans Day

For Veterans Day, Metres reposts to the list a piece from his Behind the Lines blog — a reflection by his student Jonathan LaGuardia from the Stories of War and Peace project, gathered at a Cleveland peace show. The war he came home from was Vietnam; the shock, four decades on, had not closed.

Following the tradition of anti-war veterans, Iraq War veterans, like the Vietnam Veterans Against the War before them, have staged demonstrations on the American homefront, dramatizing for civilians what it might look like to live under foreign military occupation. On this Veterans Day, I want to remember those who died serving our country, regardless of the political machinations that led to their service, and also those whose lives were never the same after their service.

Jonathan LaGuardia, a graduate student at John Carroll University [...] participated in our Stories of War and Peace project, which led to this reflection [...]:

“

Early in the day, I tagged along on an interview with a Vietnam Veteran, a clean-shaven man of about 60 [...] He carried an American flag on a pole over his shoulder in which the separate little white stars — one for each country in the Union — was replaced by a peace sign.

When we started the recorder and asked him to introduce himself, he began factually [...] though it quickly turned to personal loss: "Two days after [the January 31, 1968 offensive]," he said, "one of my lieutenants was killed. It was a huge shock to me, and it's still" — his voice began to break [...] "and, ummm, it's going to be a shock to me for the rest of my life."

”

— Philip Metres 13 Nov 2007
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Re: poetry and the foreign service

Barry Schwabsky had put the list an idle scholar's question — which modernist poets had served as diplomats, St.-John Perse and Basil Bunting and the rest. David-Baptiste Chirot, the outsider-scholar and visual poet whose posts ran to prophetic length, carried it somewhere else entirely: to Guantánamo, to the Pentagon parsing detainee verse for coded messages, and — this edition's own ghost — to Pound at the Fascist microphone.

"Foreign Service" may be thought of as a shifting terrain of activities, contingent on the time period, and for whom and where to the poet is "sent on a mission" for their particular government. A diplomatic assignment to a specific mission might entail the gathering of information — cultural, political, economic, social, "under the radar" gossip and intrigue and the like. A seemingly benign series of city poems or pastorals, to the trained eye, might be a very good conveyance for some valuable strategic informations re sites, roads, types of landscapes, metereological conditions at different times of the day and seasons, the types of water way uses being employed, the distribution of police and military centers, the welfare of a populace. A writer — poet, essayist, journalist, fictioneer — witting or unwittingly may provide an excellent "foreign agent." They may even become — knowingly or unknowingly — in espionage, dissemination of propaganda, disinformations, subtle introductions of "dissident" thoughts via a "dissonant poetics" or a "black ops" plan to "find evidence" that has been planted for them to "discover" "by chance," or because they have the "poet's keen eye for detail" and the like.

The foreign service poet may or not be an agent of colonialism, Orientalism, a collector of objets d'art for private collections or museums of the homeland, the benign chronicler, daily journaler, letter writer, photographer of sites and events closed to the general public, useful to those in charge of the poet's mission, or their bosses back at Centcom somewhere else in the outposts or centers of empire, of commerce, of "research and development." The notes of a poet might provide excellent information for various trading companies, an "in" on the local market, gossip and rumors about future construction projects, plans for museums and libraries which just might be a source of potential investments, incomes, informations.

[...]

Or the poet may turn agent against their own country, finding the new post much more to their liking than the boring and repressive status of being a poet in the "old country." The poet may simply defect — but soon enough they are used in

some manner by the new country to prove how much "better" they are than the old.

(In this manner, to be sure, they are much more greatly feted in the adopted country than they were in the old. The member of another's foreign service who prefers to be "one of us" rather than "one of them" — what an endorsement!! What a sign of one's "superior culture"! — What a feather in Mussolini's Fascist hat to have the great Ezra Pound broadcasting on the radio, at work in the foreign service aspects of dissemination of propaganda to American troops.)

[...]

The deep concern for this ambiguity of poets in/on Foreign Service is evidenced in the paranoia/real politik of the Pentagon assigned translators and Pentagon approved translations of the poetry allowed to be read by Americans and written by "enemy combattants" detained indefinitely without charge at the torture prison camp in Guantanamo. Are the words these "Foreign Servants" are writing — poems — or coded messages?

Suddenly the Pentagon is finding itself in the role of Formalist Critic. One can imagine the great "anxiety of influence" at work in the consideration of these verses! How is one to determine among the New Critical "seven types of ambiguity" and/or the kinds of "complex, ambiguous" verse advocated by Charles Bernstein?

This "anxiety of influence" (— of being "influenced" by sympathy, by empathy — "in spite of" the "bad poetry" by "bad people" in "bad translations" attitude of many "authoritative" American poets and critics) — has been extended to the reception of these poems, in which the reader is encouraged to be afraid of or angry, disdainful, dismissive of these poets and their poems.

The poet employed in the Foreign Service — opens the possibilities of thinking on the questions of complicity and duplicity which haunt the interrelationships of writers, readers of poetry with language itself, and of language's terms of employment, literally and literarily.

In being employed in the "Foreign Service" — the relationships among poetry and the State, and States and States, State Terror and anti-State terrorisms, State Languages and anti-State Languages — one's "native" and "foreign" languages — one's "poetic" and "public" languages — become at once more "openly revealed" and more "clandestinely concealed."

And in this increasingly "high stakes" environment — physically, mentally, spiritually as one wills — one begins to encounter such aspects of language as its "confessional" nature. A "freely given" "confessional poetry" — or one extracted by means of torture or via the uses of "the interrogation of language"? And are these necessarily all that different? Is the "confession" "true" — or "saying what is wanted/demanded to be heard"? And again, what is the "truth value" of poetry employed "in the Foreign Service"? And when does "working in the Foreign Service" mean working for one's government within one's own country? Are not "dissident poets" ones consider to be working for a/some Power other than that of the interests of the State, and so in this sense "Foreign Agents"?

And what is a more hideous form of the "suppression of freedom of speech and writing" in terms of poetry and Foreign Service — the banning or censorship of certain poetries and poets — or — the forcing them to speak, to write? (And once this is extracted, to alter it, mis/distranslate it, edit it in various manipulated ways.)

[...]

For example, the famous "16 words" used by Bush and Colin Powell as a "proof" for the need for the invasion and occupation of Iraq — turned out to be forged by literal "foreign agents" and in turn were informed on as forgeries by agents foreign and domestic. Yet, spoken despite all this by Colin Powell, did not millions believe them?

And, born of forgery, by "writers" in the employ of Foreign services, were not the poets of Guantanamo's poems finally allowed to be produced, via torture, censorship, "neutral/neutered" translations as examples of the struggle between State Terror and terrorists of Foreign Services, between poetries of "us" and "them," between poetries of (dubious, of course) "enemy combattant" "witness" and those of "Formal Quality" from within the boundaries of "Homeland Security"?

[...]

To conclude with some lines of Archilochus:

The fox knows many tricks, the hedgehog only one. A good one.

— David-Baptiste Chirot 25 Nov 2007
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Re: Bernstein on Pound--Excerpts

The thread ran on Charles Bernstein's essay about Pound's fascism, which Amy King had excerpted to the list; Chirot answers at length, setting the wartime broadcasts beside the post-9/11 airwaves and beside Amiri Baraka's essay of the year before. He opens on the imprisoned AIM leader Leonard Peltier and keeps returning to Peltier's charge — 'see what you sanction when you say nothing' — pressing the harder question of why Pound's treason is so rarely named.

Dear Amy:

Many thanks for your posting this — it connects with some things I thought of earlier re Pound which are a bit different way of thinking abt him than had been brought up previously here, and also some ideas re fascism and American poetry which have to do with their situations in the USA as they have devolved over the last 28 years.

First, a quote from Leonard Peltier, the AIM activist and political prisoner of the Federal Government of the USA.

“

The government under pretext of security and progress liberated us from our land, resources, culture, dignity and future. They violated every treaty they ever made with us. I use the word "liberated" loosely and sarcastically, in the same vein that I view the use of the words "collateral damage" when they kill innocent men, women and children.

They describe people defending their homelands as terrorists, savages and hostiles ...

My words reach out to the non-Indian: Look now before it is too late — see what is being done to others in your name and see what destruction you sanction when you say nothing.

”

—Leonard Peltier, Annual Message January 2004

In contrast to this, here's a quote from Dr Bernstein and the context in which it occurred:

On 29 December 2006, Saddam Hussein was hung in Baghdad , and, outside Philadelphia, at an MLA "off site" reading, roughly 60 American poets celebrated each other's works, and Dr Marjorie Perloff's becoming the new President of the MLA. With Dr Perloff's Presidency, the general consensus was that the long dark

ages of cultural studies were over with, and a new era of focus on poetics would begin.

"What we're interested in is talking about these works as works of art, rather than extracting the sociological or historical information from them", Charles Bernstein explained to Susan Snyder in that day's issue of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, in a story headlining the rise in jobs and importance of poetry and creative writing programs in the nation's institutions of higher learning.

One wondered if there might not be some kind of connection between "talking about these works as works of art," while not "extracting the sociological and historical information from them," and the rise in jobs and numbers of and importance of poetry and creative writing programs.

What exactly is meant by "talking about these works as works of art, rather than extracting the sociological and historical information from them" in relation with Peltier's "Look now before it is too late — see what is being done to others in your name and see what destruction you sanction when you say nothing."

This is the question that was asked of and is asked of still — the intellectuals and artists in Europe and England who remained disengaged, saying nothing, as Japan invaded China, Italy invaded Ethiopia, Franco's Falange invaded the Spanish Republic and Hitler steadily annexed the Sudetenland, Austria, Czechoslovakia and was beginning the disappearances of peoples into camps and ovens, while Stalin was carrying out his mass purges in the USSR.

It's a question, as Leonard Peltier warns, that needs to be asked of American intellectuals and artists today.

In reading Peltier's words about the American government's treatment of and rhetoric regarding the Indian, one recognizes the daily barrage of propaganda, lies, and Internationally recognized illegal military force, torture, imprisonments, renditions, land grabs, total societal destructions by the USA and its heavily US funded allies as carried out in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon, with threats of the same to Syria and Iran.

As Leonard Peltier says — see what destruction is being done in your name, see what you sanction when you do and say nothing

In the December 2006-January 2007 issue of the *Poetry Project Newsletter*, Amiri Baraka wrote a piece called *Why American Poetry is So Boring, Again*. Baraka notes that in the current situation, there is a desire for all the comforts of Homeland Security and an eschewing of the poetry of "the actual." Baraka writes

of the poets' "desire to be in the social diarrheic of society's value and meaning, and "the "blunt consideration" of playing it safe, of not "saying something", to protect one's career

Baraka writes:

“

This isn't limited to the "Academic Cowards of Reaction" ... These (poets) would include certain crypto-Babbits — of the so-called LA NG UG E poets whose theoretical quasi "left" masquerade seeks to obscure a limp conservatism that opposes political activism by artists (e.g. Ginsberg) as an "impossible ideology". And with that their dullness to be construed as profoundly arty ...

In the cases I speak of poetry has become the devil's tail wagging flashily out of Bush's behind, like Gerald 2X's 60's devil cartoons. One wonders, is it still called "high art"? Now too high to deal with the angst, pain and ignorance of the real world though certainly an obtuse registry of it. Content with the masturbatory, inoffensiveness of an actual *loyal opposition*, inferred loudly as "deep intellectualism". Childish feints at surrealism, jokey pop art, the inside jokes for the uncognescenti, all pass as wow! poetry!1

”

Where Peltier sees and hears the sanctioning of "saying and doing nothing," Baraka sees and hears a kind of career driven "playing it safe" and jokey noisiness with which to hide the "saying nothing."

It's safe in this climate to attack Pound's anti-Semitism — Israel after all is our closest ally — but when it comes to his fascism, or, that is, the fascism as it exists today and here, fascism is refused to be seen as apart from anti-Semitism., rather than as a corporate-state war machine which will use any pretext to set itself in motion — whether it be non existent WMDs in Iraq or the pre-emption of any form of nuclear energy in Iran, or almost any thing done on any given day by any one in Palestine or Lebanon, or the reappearance of autonomously directed social changes in Latin America.

I don't know how many persons here have actually listened to Pound's broadcasts — but they are truly horrific hate filled violence driven pronunciamientos of the worst kind. Yet, as much as they make one feel like vomiting, or worse, they are in a sense the precursors of so much of the public discourse of the post 9/11 period of American history. Hate speech, propaganda, disinformation, the ever greater

corporate-state fascism of the USA and its almost entirely militarized economy, backed up by media that is steadily churning out war mongering and the most distorted fantasies imaginable, while the country itself slides into ever greater personal and public debt and ruin

When I last listened to Pound I kept in mind the American media of especially the last 7 years. How much of the daily rhetoric on screen, in the air waves in the newspapers and magazines, is not all that far from the rhetorics and acts of violence, hatred, bigotry, distorted and manipulated dis information that Pound is pouring forth in such hyper drive arrogance, authority and righteousness. And aren't these latter really qualities not only associated with Authoritarianism and Nazism but by a good part of the world with Americans? Arrogance — righteousness — hyperdrive — the instant, ignorant judgments, the blindness to any suffering but their own?

Regarding Pound — I think it's interesting that it's hardly ever mentioned that he was a traitor, convicted of the crime of treason, and that's the reason he was in St Elizabeth's. A great deal of time and energy and verbiage is expended on Pound's fascism and anti-Semitism, his economic theories, his contributions to poetic invention and form, to the study of poetry and the reading of it, but very little is said about his treason. On the one hand, the treason, which used to be a capital offense, is overlooked as delusional, while his other so-called delusions of the period are elevated to the status of crimes so heinous death itself would not be punishment enough. Treason, betrayal — acts which historically have been at every level from the intimately personal to the publicly broadcasted among the very most appalling things one can do to those who most trusted one — are demoted to a near irrelevance, a "delusion" in the "fog of war," in which the poet "really did think he was trying to do right" by duped American soldiers.

[...]

I also think that fascism itself needs to be defined in the discussions as it is not always very clear what persons mean by the term. For example, Dr Bernstein uses the word a lot, without ever making it very clear what exactly he means by it. It seems to be more of a floating collection of stereotypes than carefully analyzed and understood varieties of methods for developing what is currently taking shape in the USA — a State more and more concentrated in the figure of the Chief Executive, and in the closest alliance with the globalized corporations which increasingly are given the privatized tasks of what used to be the functions of the government — the military, National Security, Disaster Reconstruction, Management and Accounting, records keeping, surveillance, the policing of

borders, the construction and guarding of interior gated communities and Green Zones, the privatizing of the education system, the lack of health care and the massive transfer of public funding into the hands of an ever smaller group of ever more powerful people. Due in large part to its name, National Socialist Workers Party, there is thought to have been a "socialist" element in Nazism. (Critics on the Right like Jonah Goldberg use this to link Nazism to liberalism.) Yet, as Michael Parenti has pointed out, the actual treatment, wages and laws governing workers in Nazi Germany were anything but Socialist. Wages declined under the Nazis, there was no right to unionize, strike, organize in any way outside of the Party, and harsh punishments were carried out for minor infractions in order to make sure the workers understood their complete loss of individuality and individual freedoms in the service of the corporate-state's militarized industries.

It was not Socialism which Nazism most resembled, but the current state of a great deal of the American economy as applied at home and abroad, with its dependence on slave labor, the abolish of as many unions as possible, the removal of as many constraints and safety restrictions as possible, the seizure of lands and fuel by force, and the control of countries through the manipulation of debt — all these weapons used aboard by the American economists that have returned in a blowback effect.

One of the reasons I think fascism needs to be reexamined in this light is that fascism itself does not automatically guarantee the presence of anti-Semitism, as Dr Bernstein and those he quotes seem to assume it does. The United States is becoming a corporate-State fascist society with ever more surveillance and control over every aspect of the life of not only its citizens at home and aboard but of basically any person on the planet's human and civil rights, which have been effectively cancelled if they are merely designated as a terrorist or enemy combatant, regardless of evidence or lack thereof.

[...]

I think that the very great and grave danger in shifting fascism solely to a relationship with blatant anti-Semitism is that this diverts one from seeing the fascism in one's own society, one's own everyday life, and in the manipulations of one's regarding what indeed fascism itself is. For if the definition precludes its happening here or among our allies, then, indeed, this makes the fascist takeover of the society as legal and out in the open as Hitler's was in the beginning.

For it would not be, and has not been, recognized as fascist.

George Bush twice has employed tactics in elections shadier than Hitler used to get into power. Yet as Leonard Peltier says, no one says anything. Each day new laws are passed which strip away more freedoms, more possibilities of asking questions, more and more persons feel it is far better to just take the word of experts, authorities, "leading figures," and the like. No one is even questioning why it is the Chinese might find Language Poetry so harmless in such a tightly controlled society, or why it is Americans continue to think they are possessed of a "radical" poetry, let alone an "innovative" one?

[...]

In what ways has Pound been an example for American poetries of every kind and in what ways has his work been used to cut off the asking of various questions which would uncomfortably reveal the forms of competing Authoritarianism and control which seek to use Pound to their own advantage in breaking down various aspects of poetry and its canon they do not approve of. In a bizarre way, by using Pound as an anti-Semitic fascist, is it not possible to be creating a kind of fascism that is intended to be the reverse of his?

And yet is it not always fascism, whether anti or pro Semitic, anti or pro American anti or pro Chilean, Uruguayan, Brazilian, Guatemalan—

Is it not always fascism, the same, the same corporate state structure, the same elimination of interior enemies, the same Authoritarianism and hatred of indigenous peoples?

[...]

I think if you listen to Pound, his hate can be heard in the voices today from the screens and speakers and in the newspaper, bogs, journals, which rave about the Muslims, the illegal immigrants, immigrants in general, about the poor people of all colors, about the filthy, stupid Indian, the insanity of the world's leaders with the exception of our own and Israel and England's, and the duty above all to conform, to obey Authority, to do as one is told and think within the box, to write by a certain set of paradigms and above all really — I mean really — say nothing which in any way does not conform with what one has been told is allowed by the Authorities—

What do you think this is anyway — a free country?

— **David-Baptiste Chirot** 16 Feb 2008
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Protests on 5th anniversary of Iraq war

Amy King marked the fifth anniversary of the invasion by relaying to the list an Associated Press report by John Christoffersen — nearly four thousand American dead, and a nationwide day of civil disobedience whose face, that morning, was an eighty-year-old man deciding it was finally worth going to jail.

“

Protests on 5th anniversary of Iraq war, By JOHN CHRISTOFFERSEN, Associated Press Writer

Octogenarian Jim Barron has hearing aids and a pacemaker. [...] Despite his aches, Barron planned to risk arrest Wednesday, the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, which has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 U.S. troops. He's part of a nationwide peace movement using the anniversary to protest with nonviolent civil disobedience. [...] Though he has participated in demonstrations for decades, Barron has never risked a trip to jail. He opposed the war from the beginning [...] The final straw, he said, was reading an article about U.S. soldiers who suffered permanent brain damage in Iraq.

"I'm tired of being a futile old man not able to have any participation in this decision," Barron said. "I'm 80 years old. I'm still alive. I want people to say, 'If he's not afraid to do it, what am I doing being so silent?'"

”

— Amy King 19 Mar 2008

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4000 WORDS 4000 DEAD: Call for Submissions

4000 WORDS 4000 DEAD: call for submissions

"I want to start with the milestone today of 4,000 dead in Iraq. Americans. And just what effect do you think it has on the country?"

-- Martha Raddatz,

ABC News' White House correspondent
to Vice President Dick Cheney

Poet and artist Jennifer Karmin is collecting 4000 WORDS for the 4000 DEAD in Iraq. All words will be used to create a public poem.

4000 WORDS 4000 DEAD will be performed as part of the Guild Complex's Art Against War event on April 18th at the Heartland Cafe. It will be a featured street performance at Looptopia in downtown Chicago on May 2nd. After reading the poem aloud, each word will be given away to passing pedestrians.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

April 30, 2008

SUBMIT:
Send 1 - 10 words.
CONTACT:
Email submission with subject 4000 WORDS
to [REDACTED].

You rock. That's why Blockbuster's offering you one month of Blockbuster Total Access, No Cost.

— Jennifer Karmin 7 Apr 2008

• Poetix Symposium: The Politics of Exception

Thursday-Friday April 17-18 Poetix Symposium: Late American Poetics
and the Politics of Exception
Nolte Center 125
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis MN

**

on Thursday, April 17

6:30 p.m. Readings by Gabrielle Civil, Kazim Ali, Kao Kalia
Yang, and G. E. Patterson. 125 Nolte Center

on Friday, April 18

12:00-1:30 p.m. Poetry Dialogue: Mark Nowak and writers from
AFCSME 3800, 108 Folwell Hall

3:30 p.m. The Guantanamo Poems: Mark Falkoff and W. Flagg
Miller, 125 Nolte Center

8:00 p.m. The Collapsible Poetics Theater with Rodrigo Toscano;
reading by Jeff Derksen, 125 Nolte Center

— Maria Damon 9 Apr 2008

THE ONLY WAR THAT MATTERS...

A full-page Naropa advertisement in the Poetry Project Newsletter reprised Diane di Prima's line that the only war that matters is the war against the imagination. CAConrad, a taxpayer funding the other war, was unpersuaded — and the slogan set off one of the list's longest arguments about what poetry owes the actual dead in Iraq.

THE ONLY WAR
THAT MATTERS
IS THE WAR
AGAINST THE
IMAGINATION

This is from a full page advertisement for Naropa's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in the latest issue of the Poetry Project Newsletter. Page 7 to be exact, April-June, 2008 issue. [...] I of course understand the basic premise, it's just not sitting well with me, being a tax payer like I am, paying for bullets like I am for a war that VERY MUCH DOES MATTER in Iraq (especially if you're Iraqi!)! [...] But then there's THIS statement as well, right below the first one, also made to look like a sign or banner:

Poetry is
The Rival
Government

[...] To me, IF poetry is the Rival Government, then it needs to get us out of the war in Iraq before it can start claiming that "the only war that matters is the war against the imagination," frankly!

— **CAConrad** 15 Apr 2008
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The Only War That Matters...A response to CA Conrad

Metres, whose Behind the Lines traces American war-resistance poetry, steps between CAConrad and the Naropa slogan. He grants Blake and di Prima their point that war is a failure of imagination — then recalls that the interrogators at Abu Ghraib were themselves told to 'use your imagination.'

CA,

in a blog entry Jan 21, 2008, I was thinking about war and the imagination (and the texts from which emerge "the only war that matters is the war against imagination":

I've been thinking about the imagination lately. Apparently, the C.I.A./M.I. guys told the yokel M.P.s at Abu Ghraib to "use your imagination." That terrifies me, to think that the imagination can be harnessed as a force for absolute evil. In this poem, "Rant," DiPrima evokes William Blake's notion that all war is a failure of the imagination. Is imagination a "daimon," a power without necessarily being good or bad? Or is the imagination always a creative force, the opposite of war's deceptions?...

In essence, C.A., it seems to me that there is a kind of productive reductivism to DiPrima's (and Blake's) quote here — which is to say, that wars come out of imagination's failure. Yet I wanted also to suggest here that human imagination is not free from its own violences...

— **Philip Metres** 16 Apr 2008
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Re: The Only War That Matters...A response to CA Conrad & Philip Metres

Five years into the occupation, answering CA Conrad and Philip Metres on a thread built from Diane di Prima's line — after Blake — that 'the only war that matters is the war against imagination,' David-Baptiste Chirot turns the slogan over: war is not imagination's failure but its harnessing, the very faculty the interrogators at Abu Ghraib were told to 'use.' The 'Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation' he names is the former School of the Americas.

Dear CA and Philip—

During Mai '68 in Paris a famous slogan graffitied on the walls was "l'imagination au pouvoir."

("Imagination in power" — that is, imagination as the driving — and guiding — force of society.)

A different idea of the imagination was involved than that of Naropa's to be sure

One might say that a play on the "power of imagination" is the "imagination of power."

When Heinrich von Kleist presented an MS for Goethe to read, the great Goethe threw the young writer's work into the fire, condemning it.

That is one form of poetic imagination judging another and destroying it for the purposes of the "good."

(Not in terms of the aesthetic "good," but as a "dangerous" work in terms of the imagination.)

Perhaps the Naropa ad has somewhere in the background the saying of Shelley that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Of course the imagination can be used for evil, just as it can for good. As Foucault writes of Power at the end of the first section of *Discipline and Punish* — for all the terrible things that power constructs in its ruthless drive to control, it also creates, and in this way I think is productive of the very things which can, with imagination be used against control. (Burroughs' concept of writing is to undo the Control of language, a word virus brought from elsewhere.)

The imagination confounds efforts to separate needs from desires. The imagination creates a myriad plays on the cop and the criminal, including the criminal cop. That is to say, for every imagination of a way to control persons, there will always be ways of imagining how to subvert that control.

Is it any surprise then that a great many writers have not also been criminals? Or that a criminal (Vidocq) also created the modern police force? (The French Surete.) Vidocq is the originator of the phrase, "it takes a thief to catch a thief," and the inspiration for the character of the arch criminal Vautrin in Balzac's work. And also himself wrote novels of "detection". As did Pinkerton in the USA, who created the privatized version of a detective-police force later used to put down labor strikes. Dashiell Hammett began his career working for Pinkerton, including during the vicious putting down of a labor strike, the source of much of his first novel, *Red Harvest*.

The imagination on display at Abu Ghraib was "paltry" and "tawdry" compared to that of such other prisons as Guantanamo or Gaza, let alone the myriad secret ones throughout the world of which many will never be known to anyone, nor what happened in them and to whom.

War is not a failure of the imagination. The failure of the imagination in that sense would be peace. There is not enough imagining of Peace. And to make sure of that, the messengers of peace are often assassinated, tortured, imprisoned, silenced.

There is far more profit in war — hence the fulfillment of Orwell's endless war in *1984* in the "War on Terror" — a War without End — as Sen. McCain says, — a hundred years — or more — in Iraq — may not be long enough. For God's sake, after all, it's a regular cash cow for Haliburton and Blackwater and others, so why stop milking it?!

[...]

The "Age of Reason" produced among other things the Terror, the State Terrorism of the French Revolution. "Purity and Terror" are the Twin Towers of the Revolutionary State for Robespierre. The birth of the Secret Police, the machinations of Homeland Security. This form of Terror gave birth less than a century later to Terrorism in Russia against the Czar, and the Bloody Week of the French Commune, in which in one week more people were killed than in the whole time of the Terror. And the people killed were branded as monsters who ignited fires and toppled such sacred things as the Vendome Column. The frightening figures of the "petroleuse" and the enraged "scum" (among them the painter Courbet as a Minister of Arts, Education, and Verlaine in a minor role). In Marx's work on the Commune one finds the first defense of the "terrorist" faced with State Terror, in which the Communards are victims not only of mass murder, but of a media portrayal which still exists today and has been seen as so effective as to be used to blanket all manner of uprisings ever since.

These are the Monsters of the Dream of Reason that Goya is painting during Blake's time. "The Disasters of War" (which ends with "Peace and Toil") — culminating in the unfinished Proverbs and other works in between---show in a new way the imagination of the artist confronting the imagination of evil as an aspect of Reason itself, a prophecy of the last two hundred years, up to today's "Democracy and Freedom" confronting "Evil" by using the imaginative forces of Technological Reason to out bomb, out torture, out Shock and Awe what it sees as the forces of Unreason, the Irrational, Evil and "Terrorism," the child of State Terror.

The power of the imagination one might say is to be able to examine things as they are and to conceive of an alternative.

What the alternative is, whom it benefits and/or enlightens — these things are the choices and/or conformities of persons, as well as the things that some persons impose on others.

(In a George Jones song, the singer observes "little children drawing pictures" and wonders "which one of them might become a killer's hand?")

The Hope that exists in imagination is that in it is the drive to rebel against the strictures placed upon it, whether for "good," or for "evil." It can be Prometheus, it can be Satan.

[...]

Without the power of imagination harnessing the power of electricity, would any one be writing here along with others? And without the power of imagination, would it be possible not also be having any such exchange at any given time by almost anyone being under surveillance?

The Naropa Institute, like any good Institute, is simply offering their own legislated brand of the imagination. In this they aren't any different from any other Institute offering instruction in the uses of the imagination.

There are Institutes with sections for Poetics and Creative Writing, just as there are Institutes such as the now renamed School of the Americas — its new name is the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation — in which instruction was and is given in the arts of torture, counter-insurgency, and the like to generations of Central and South American "allies." Many such Institutes exist quite profitably throughout the "Free World" as well as those "training camps" for insurgents scattered about the globe.

And that's why reading the Naropa Institute's ad immediately to one's own imagination come the lines from the song "Hey, Joe" — "ain't no hangmen gonna put a noose around me." It is not that it is Naropa's specifically, but the sense that one has as with any such "campaign" that the imagination is encouraged — as long as it stays within certain bounds, which are "good for one."

(One wonders what bounds the imagination is to be kept within at the Western Institute for Security Cooperation ?)

For better or worse, some part of the imagination in someone somewhere is going to say — "I refuse. There's got to be more to this ... " and start asking questions ... (For — perhaps there is more than one is being allowed to know —)

Like Smokey Robinson and the Miracles — "It's just my imagination/runnin away with me ... "

— **David-Baptiste Chirot** 16 Apr 2008
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Waterboarding film/Abu Ghraib Video/18 Vet Suicides Daily/New

One of Chirot's near-daily dispatches, bundling the week's evidence — Amnesty's waterboarding film, newly released Abu Ghraib photographs, the VA's admission of eighteen veteran suicides a day — with the through-line of his own blog: torture and poetry, from François Villon's fifteenth century to the American present.

Among many inter-related themes in my work & at my log are Walls (Visible & Invisible), poetry & torture, art & torture and the creation of the tentatively titled "new extreme experimental american poetry"-- [...]

Amnesty unveils shock 'waterboarding' film:

“

Malcolm Nance, who trained hundreds of US servicemen and women to resist interrogation by putting them through "waterboarding" exercises, demanded an immediate end to the practice by all US personnel.

”

[...]

VA confirms 18 vets commit suicide every day:

“

In a stunning admission, top officials at the Veterans Health Administration confirmed that the agency's own statistics show that an average of 126 veterans per week -- 6,552 veterans per year — commit suicide, according to an internal email distributed to several VA officials.

”

[...]

Waterboarding and Poetry: 15th Century France--21st Century USA [...] Essay on Waterboarding, Translation and Poetry, Guantanamo Poems & Francois Villon with many images past, present & by d-b Chirot

— **David-Baptiste Chirot** 27 Apr 2008

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✿ **Poetry in America: Poetry & Politics (June/July 2008)**

(Just Out!)

Poetry in America — Poetry & Politics June/July Issue / 2008

In Times of Trouble

Some recent poems provide a wide angled look at a world of violence.

Collateral Damage

In a gripping new work, poems parallel the attacks on Fallujah and on Guernica.

Global Warnings

The icecaps are melting, storms are increasing, species are dwindling, several new books ask how poetry can help.

Talking Politics 2008

Six poets whose poems court controversy exchange ideas about the common ground between politics and art.

Rules of Engagement

A number of poets re-examine the evidence on documentary poetry's truth value.

Written in Stone

Using salvaged poems, an imposing testament on the possibility of cooperation in the Mideast.

Sticking it

A 40 year survey of poems showcase a signature image: a pallus that's also a big screw.

Conceptually yours,
Courtesy of Art in America,
Stephen Vincent

— **Stephen Vincent** 30 Jun 2008

Re: request to all formalists

A campaign-season riff on the 'paramilitary' ring of Sarah Palin's children's names drew a long, class-conscious rebuke from David-Baptiste Chirot, who read it as profiling of the rural and urban poor. Vincent — an ally, not an adversary — answers the heat rather than the argument, naming a strain the list rarely named aloud.

I see where my phrasing created a confusion that prompted you into this lecture, David! I believe I was saying that it's maybe no surprise at all that some of the names of Sarah Palin's children resonate with paramilitary ones — Trig as both a Norse war God, or 'trig' as short for "trigger." Ironically the name is totally inappropriate for a child with Down syndrome — hardly a warrior.

In many respects I hardly disagree with much of what you are saying. So I don't understand the rant and condescension that threads through it. (I think you know enough of my work to know that I am not the dummy your piece seems to be talking to — or you have not been reading me at all) Lots of times I find myself fascinated and impressed with your art works (the bravery of the work). But your anger here I find toxic and not either beneficial to me, nor I suspect others, nor a positive way of offering to get through this darkness.

I won't indulge being offended, but I am puzzled.

Stephen V

— **Stephen Vincent** 9 Sep 2008

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Re: Political Poetry

David-Baptiste Chirot, replying in a thread on political poetry, sets the 'war on terror' against a longer history of the poem and the scaffold — Villon, Poe's pit, the waterboard the Americans first used in the Philippines — and reaches, as he often does, for Whitman's "poem of these States." Beneath his own note he posted the verse that follows: the excluded 'Respondez!' and a passage of Democratic Vistas. (Naomi Klein's The Shock Doctrine and the documentary Taxi to the Dark Side frame the argument.)

I saw the film *Taxi to the Dark Side* the other night. In her great book *The Shock Doctrine* Naomi Klein links the development of the torture techniques used since the 1950's with the development of Milton Friedman's Chicago School "Shock Doctrine" economics. Beginning with 9/11 in Chile, the "Shock Doctrine" as both torture and conomics was introduced with the idea that "free markets" would bring "freedom and democracy." The opposite proved to be true — increasingly

repressive measures have had to be put in place in order to install this form of economics, including now in the USA, an official practitioner of torture.

As i write in David-Baptiste Chirot: "Waterboarding & Poetry" (Wordforword #13 Spring 2008), Francois Villon in 15th Century France is the first poet of waterboarding, "enhanced interrogation," and the scaffolds; i could have added that the first famous American poet writing of torture is most likely Poe, in "The Pit and the Pendulum." The Americans used waterboarding in the Phillipines during the Spanish-American War — the practice was outlawed by President "Teddy" Roosevelt when he took office in 1902. Clearly, the country is traveling backward in time, to those halcyon pre-regulation days of which Gertrude Stein spoke so fondly, those "robber baron" days pre-labor laws and pre TR.

[...]

In Whitman's "Specimen Days," so to speak, were Slavery, the Genocide and installement of Indians on reservations, the Civil War with its concentration camps in Andersonville and the North, the "scorched earth" tactics of Sherman, the "real War that will never get written in the books," and the Era of the Robber Barons.

How much, how little, and what — has changed is what Whitman might see as the ongoing "poem of these States," a Poem in which the "Angels of our Better Nature" battle with those forces of the "Dark Side" of one of the poems excluded from Leaves of Grass, "Respondez."

Beneath the McCain article and quote/citation for you I've post an excerpt from "Respondez" and also one re the role of poetry and poet in such times from Whitman's (1871) Democratic Vistas.

Let murderers, bigots, fools, unclean persons, offer new propositions!

Let

the old propositions be postponed!

Let faces and theories be turn'd inside out! Let meanings be freely criminal, as well as results!

Let there be no suggestion above the suggestion of drudgery!

-Let the theory of America still be management, caste, comparison!

(Say!

What other theory would you?) ...

Let nothing but copies at second hand be permitted to exist upon the earth!

Let the men of These States stand aside for a few smouchers! Let the few seize on what they choose! Let the rest gawk, giggle, starve, obey!

Let

books take the place of trees, animals, rivers, clouds! ...

—Walt Whitman, "Respondez!"

“

Never was anything more wanted than, to-day, and here in the States, the poet of the modern is wanted ... At all times, perhaps, the central point in any nation, and that whence it sways others, is its national literature, especially its archetypal poems. Above all previous lands, a great original literature is surely to become the justification and reliance, (in some respects the sole reliance) of American democracy ...

I say we had best look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease. Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness of heart than at present, and here in the United States. Genuine belief seems to have left us. [...] We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout. [...] It is as though we were somehow endowed with a vast and more thoroughly appointed body, and then left with little or no soul.

”

—Walt Whitman, Democratic Vistas, 1871

— **David-Baptiste Chirot** 21 Sep 2008
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A "Cultural Devolution?" —Iraqi Academics Assassinated During the US-Led Occupation

Chirot frames, then forwards, a Global Research dossier compiled by Michel Chosudovsky listing the hundreds of Iraqi professors, doctors and scientists killed since 2003. His own gloss reaches past Iraq to the reservation school: the erasure of a people's past, he argues, is how a future is foreclosed.

The removal of a society's hopes for building a future for themselves via education and the creation of engineers, doctors, teachers, urban planners, as well as the economic dependence on outsiders with such training which this creates is accompanied by the erasure of the cultural history of the society via the removal of its archeological and and bibliographic evidences of its own past.

No past — no future. People trapped in a present occupied and controlled by others. [...] These "Cultural Revolutions" which overturn Past and Future in terms of Knowledge as Power, create an immense socio-cultural-economic dislocation, in which a people begins to vanish. [...] A similar method was applied to the American Indian populations herded into the dead zones of reservations and

"schools" where they could be "de-Indianized" [...] Is the "Cultural Amnesia" occurring "in the Homeland" a blow back of these policies enforced elsewhere?

from International Clearing House:

“

Iraqi Academics Assassinated During the US-Led Occupation [...]

Pakistan Daily has published the list of Iraqi academics assassinated by US and allied occupation forces. The objective of these targeted assassinations is to "kill a nation", the destroy Iraq's ability to educate its people [...] we are dealing with a carefully devised covert operation. The plan to kill the nation's scientists and intellectuals emanates from US intelligence and the military. It is a deliberate process. [...] Is the new Obama administration going to turn a blind eye to this diabolical and criminal agenda? — Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, 27 November 2008 [...] Abbas Al-Attar: PhD in humanities, lecturer at Baghdad University's College of Humanities. [...] Abdel Hussein Jabuk: PhD and lecturer at Baghdad University.

”

— **David-Baptiste Chirot** 29 Nov 2008

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GUANTANAMO

Two days into the new administration, Obama signed an order to close the Guantánamo camp within a year — a promise still unkept when the archive ends. Russell, unconvinced, notes the quiet loophole: torture, like so much else, can be outsourced.

Obama has (promised) to close Gauntanamo. is this an empty gesture? torture is often outsourced...

how much transparency can we expect from the current administration?

— **Steve Russell** 22 Jan 2009

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Peace Literature

Seven years on, the visual poet David-Baptiste Chirot writes from Milwaukee to turn the old question inside out: not whether poetry should oppose the war, but why the poetry that plainly does — the detainee poems of Poems from Guantánamo, the work of Poets Against the War — is so readily dismissed as poetry. He returns to his standing quarrel with Charles Bernstein's Enough, the 2003 statement urging poets toward a more oblique response.

As a reader and sometimes contributor, i'd highly recommend Phillip Metres' blog, as well as his fascinating collection of anti-war verse *Behind the Lines: War Resistance Poetry on the American Homefront Since 1941*.

The blog and book both raise many interesting and challenging questions, a good deal of which have been for the most part have exiled to a more or less extent from American poetry today. What does this say about the current "atmosphere" of poetry, academically supported and otherwise? Is "quietude" limited to only one form of "quiet" or ""silence""? Might not the term be seen, heard and written of in a different context from that originally assigned to it?

[...]

In re some of these questions of "protest/Peace writing is bad writing" I've written two review/essays on line re what i consider one of the most significant books to emerge from the current wars: *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, a collection of 22 poems by 17 detainees at the US detention center at Guantánamo Bay. Edited by Marc Falkoff.

In these two pieces I write not only of the poems, the book and its manner of translation, but also of the American reception of the poems in print, radio and email (including this list, though without mentioning names) reviews and remarks. As with the generic opinions of protest poems — and/or "poems of witness" — being "bad poems" in formal terms, the Guantanamo poems are considered as "failures" as poetry, which helps in evading any of the issues associated with the book and its authors and translators. In many ways, the poems reveal more about their American readers than about the detainees themselves.

An interesting question for our times is why this convention of (and conventional) response is so widespread and expressed in the types of elitist, formal, distanced, "complex and ambiguous" terms which protest protest writing to begin with. It is interesting to me that it is not the War nor the government nor practices of torture and illegal detention that are protested against, as it were, but that the poems of protest which the war has produced are.

In this vein i wrote a critique of Chalres Bernstein's *Enough*, addressed to the "community" as a call to evade the direct protest poem in favor of a "complex ambiguous" language for dealing with the situation. The "Poets Against the War" are considered inferior because they are written in the same language Bush uses — (one might contest this; did Bush speak poetically? etc) — that is, the poems openly express opposition rather than presenting a formally constructed poetic object making use of a form of New New Criticism: the "complex," "the ambiguous" (seven types of ambiguity perhaps — ??) — as response. As Amiri Baraka has remarked, this perhaps a way of "playing it safe;" after all, if statements are ambiguous, they might be difficult to "charge with dissent" by either a prospective employer or this or that group supportive of the wars, or agency of the government on campus etc.

Unlike the avant-gardes of the past, which took the dual military meaning of the term seriously, today the avant does not openly express either pro-War attitudes (Italian futurism) or anti-War dissent (Dada.) Perhaps, then, what "avant" has come to mean is a removal not only from War itself, but from the aspects of War which signal an engagement with Peace or actually societies, human lives. That is, due to the emphasis on the Formal, there is a certain evacuation of resistance which might cause one "any trouble." The sense of cautiousness and a form of fear and anxiety, echoes in many ways the Eisenhower- McCarthy years and hence a connection with aspects of the New Criticism of that era, which also stressed the Formal over direct engagements with the times.

This area and conception of poetry in itself might be investigated along side the poems of protest and Peace, as another response which the society has given to the wars being fought in its name.

— David-Baptiste Chirot 07 Dec 2009
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our war

Three weeks after Obama ordered thirty thousand more troops to Afghanistan, CAConrad wrote on Christmas night. The thread he opened, 'our war,' ran into the new year and turned on a hard question for the poets who had believed in 'hope and change' — what, exactly, they had voted for.

There is no escaping the fact that MANY OF US who voted for Obama DID NOT (I repeat) DID NOT vote for the escalation of war! But we did UNKNOWINGLY vote for war, fooled by his grade-school vocabulary of HOPE and CHANGE and BELIEVE, his Coca Cola ad campaign for president.

I for one DID NOT vote for Obama as an individual with an individual political party, individual religious affiliation, or some other bureaucratic individual's path to the State or Heaven. I instead voted as a human being who HONESTLY believed that Obama would not harm the people of the world as did Bush.

Part of our war includes the push for "gays in the military" as a civil rights issue. I for one DO NOT believe for a second that there is ANYTHING civil about the United States Military Industrial Complex. And I am NOT interested in making the DEADLIEST war machine on Earth gay friendly!

— **CAConrad** 25 Dec 2009

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Re: our war

The dissent inside CAConrad's 'our war' thread. Levy shares the anger at the Afghanistan escalation but not the sense of betrayal: the good war in Afghanistan, he reminds the list, was on the record in every Obama foreign-policy speech. The projection, he suggests, was the voters' own.

I'm not anymore in favor of Obama's plans to escalate the war in Afghanistan than you seem to be, but to say that Obama somehow ran as a secret warmonger is simply a sign that you weren't paying attention to what Obama was repeatedly and consistently saying in his foreign policy speeches.

While he was still a Senator, Obama gave several speeches and co-sponsored legislation in support of the Afghanistan war. [...] every time he spoke about foreign policy, he made clear distinctions between the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and was just as clear that he would focus on winning the war in Afghanistan. Look up his foreign policy speeches, it's all there.

It's not Obama's fault if voters simply assumed that because he was generally running as a liberal that he a pacifist or against the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He was very clear about his position on the war in Afghanistan.

— **Herb Levy** 28 Dec 2009

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Re: our war

Answering Jeffrey Side in the 'our war' thread, CAConrad — the only grandchild of his military family never to enlist — folds the 'gays in the military' debate into the war itself, and reads the civil-rights framing as a way of feeding the poor of every nation into the same machine.

Dear Jeffrey in my attempt to not be cynical I voted for Obama. I now truly feel STRAPPED to those 30,000 guns headed across the ocean. This is personal now. It's mine. It belongs to everyone who wanted peace and voted for him. It belongs to the Nobel Prize committee as well (I TRULY WISH that they had found the courage to take it back from him). Obama is just another war president now. And I have voted for the last time in a presidential election. Let the voters taste the blood without me. [...]

GAYS IN THE MILITARY IS A CLASS ISSUE? I AGREE, BUT IN A VERY DIFFERENT WAY THAN MOST

"Gays in the military" is about jobs for poorer gays and lesbians? War is a scourge upon the poor, no matter which side of the battlefield. If you are on the side that is winning you're being used as fodder to win, your very life expendable, while the rich and their children wait for you to do their dirty work.

Nothing but misery awaits the poor on both sides. [...] I want us to say we are breaking from the ranks of the food chain of war and poverty.

— CAConrad 29 Dec 2009

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Re: our war

CAConrad answers Herb Levy across the List's 'our war' thread, weeks after President Obama ordered thirty thousand more troops to Afghanistan and, the same month, accepted the Nobel Peace Prize. The grandmother's song he quotes — "The cynic and the killer waltz together" — is his own inheritance, and stands for a voter's refusal to be told he wasn't paying attention.

Herb, there is NOTHING simple about WANTING TO NOT be cynical when voting. My grandmother used to sing a song when I was a kid with the line, "The cynic and the killer waltz together." I allow that line to haunt my decisions, keep me in check.

You say it is "simply a sign" about me though. Not so simple, and you're incorrect as I was paying close attention. And what you say is being said all day long on the news to anyone who makes their voices heard against Obama's decision to

increase the war machine. We're being told that we "weren't paying attention." It's not new what you're saying. It's a game to make people like you feel GREAT because you get to say you were paying attention, and point a finger at people like me to make us feel stupid, it's a game of Simon Says Tell Them How Stupid They Are. And you do it, and feel great.

You must recall how Obama humiliated Hilary Clinton about her vote for the invasion of Iraq? In doing so he pointed a finger at her to call her, in front of MILLIONS of viewers, The War President To Be. He did that to her to rally the anti-war vote. He took her down and smeared her face in it.

And yes I was paying close attention to Obama talk about the differences he saw in both Iraq and Afghanistan, but he NEVER ONCE SAID that he intended to increase the war. He talked about reallocation of troops, and he spoke an awful lot about What Would Obama Do, if Obama had been in the White House at the time. He even spoke quite frankly about Pakistan, and what he thinks should have been done there. But he DID NOT say "Oh, and when I am president I PROMISE to send EXTRA troops, MORE TROOPS, in fact 30,000 in my first year." No, he did not.

Herb, you should write to the Nobel Prize committee while you're at it, tell them what you tell me. The saddest thing about the decision for that prize is that no one had the courage to say to him when he arrived to receive it, "OH NO YOU DON'T, WE MADE A MISTAKE!"

Herb, please think about how it's NOT simple the next time you point your finger at someone like me who desperately wanted peace, wanted the killing in their name to STOP. People like me, who has thousands of dead bodies filled with bullets coming in the near future, paid for with votes and taxes.

I'm never voting for another president, at least not a Democrat. Let the voters taste the blood by themselves next time.

A shout out to those who cannot sleep at night for what we have done, I'm with you,

— **CAConrad** 04 Jan 2010
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WE ARE 7

CAConrad, the Philadelphia poet, writes on 23 March 2010 — seven years to the day after the invasion, and, he notes, the span in which the body is said to replace its every cell. That new body is his subject: what it is to have been remade, at leisure, across seven years of a war whose million dead got no such reprieve — down to the neighbours and their cable television, and the killing of gay men in occupied Iraq.

Over a 7 year period the human body replaces all of its cells until — 7 years later — the body is completely new, a whole new body, a body which actually didn't exist 7 years ago. 7 years ago today we were not here as we are today. 7 years ago today when America invaded the sovereign nation of Iraq. Over a million people have been killed. Their bodies didn't make it here with us. So many people I'm never going to meet or see or know. I'm very sad today thinking about my new body, my luxury of a new body of cells over the past 7 years of war, 7 years of terrorizing people. This morning I went to the Kelly Writers House to hear Susan Howe give one of the finest Q&A's I've ever heard. And I almost asked her at the Q&A, "Susan, in your book *The Europe of Trusts* you write, 'Malice dominates the history of Power and Progress.' How do you feel about us stepping out of history today with today being the anniversary of the American invasion of Iraq?" But I didn't ask her that. She seemed so happy sitting there, and life is short, and here's this amazing elderly genius poet, and I thought, "Don't ask her that." So I didn't ask her that. Instead I asked her about her visit to Wallace Stevens's house, and how she had said that she couldn't believe THOSE poems came from THAT house, and I wanted her talk about HER poems being written where she writes them. Please tell us about the aura of space, is what I meant to say.

There's so much responsibility that goes into being a citizen, but somehow we have had the trouble of the responsibility removed from us. And it's the darkest thing, that removal. I'm not saying THAT I KNOW and UNDERSTAND the new bodies around me in the anniversary of America bringing UNIMAGINABLE suffering and agony to Iraq. I'm not saying THAT I KNOW but I do know some of the bodies in my proximity and how they fair. A week ago my new next door neighbor left the apartment with his girlfriend and dog, and said, literally said, "Well we don't have cable installed yet, so we're going to the park." He seemed sad about going to the park. The girlfriend said, "Yeah, the cable man didn't show, what a drag." The dog was the only one who seemed happy. And then the cable man came, and now, every single day, all day long I hear the television whenever I walk by their door. Canned laughter is what I hear sometimes. They're watching sitcoms or something and they're not laughing, just the canned laughter. And the dog is so annoyed that the cable man came, I'm sure of it. I'll always remember

them leaving to go to the park, this very healthy young couple with their dog because they couldn't watch the television.

No, I'm not saying I understand what everyone's going through. Sometimes people watch a lot of television because they're depressed. But I'm not sure. And in Philadelphia we've been having Twitter Mobs (or some call them Flash Mobs), and part of me wants to say that I identify with these kids, today, on the anniversary of the American invasion of Iraq. Hundreds and hundreds of them meet up, and then each time something breaks loose and they begin beating on people, wrecking things, hundreds of them. And I want to say that I understand their anger. But I don't. I'm angry. I'm very angry. Every single day I'm angry. I'm living in a country that cares more about bombing people of color overseas and stealing their resources than putting kids through college. And the ad campaigns to make us FEEL OKAY like saying "MARCH IS AMERICAN RED CROSS MONTH" because WE'RE SUCH GOOD PEOPLE! We're such good people, here, in America, today, on the anniversary of bombing where there are many people who still hear the bombs in the middle of the night, and sometimes it's a dream, and sometimes it's not, because it's still a war, it's still not entirely a dream. But I'M ANGRY AT THESE KIDS for scaring me on the bus the other day when I found myself in the middle of a Twitter Mob WHILE ON THE BUS and the kids banged their fists on the sides of the bus as we drove down the street through the chaos. And Frank Sherlock called me to see if I made it home safely, he's a very good friend. I want to be SO ANGRY at these kids because I would never want to hurt anyone, just anyone, just any stranger. But yet we're living in a country which does that. We drop bombs on people's houses. And the animals in the zoos. The zoo of Baghdad and the apartments, and, and, and, we have new bodies this year.

There's never going to be a moment in this lifetime for us, THOSE OF US ALIVE NOW, IN AMERICA, PAYING TAXES, WHICH PURCHASE WAR, we will never be able to apologize enough to the people of Iraq, and we knew it. We knew it. We all kept saying we knew it, we knew that there were no WMD's, we knew it, everyone knew it. We kept telling one another days before the invasion, "I THINK THEY'RE LYING DON'T YOU THINK THEY'RE LYING YEAH I THINK SO TOO YEAH ME TOO THEY'RE LYING WE KNOW THEY'RE LYING EVERYONE KNOWS IT!" But it happened anyway, the bombing. The occupation. And now the genocide of HUNDREDS of gay man in Iraq as a direct result of the invasion and occupation, we are now responsible for this new genocide. Gay men tortured and murdered in Iraq. A year of genocide. A year at the end of seven years of American occupation. And we distract ourselves with LISTENING about the health care reform. Health care reform? What about the health of EVERYONE in Iraq? What about them? But

we get to feel good. And it's AMERICAN RED CROSS MONTH. And I'm not being mean, but that's fucked up to be saying MARCH IS AMERICAN RED CROSS MONTH when America brings more need for bandages than any other country on the face of the planet right now, how do we do it? How do we get to feel this way? How? I'm so sad today. I'm not being mean, I'm sad. I'm an American citizen who has believed lies and now I know I will never vote Democrat again. Ever. There's too much responsibility behind giving killers your time and your vote. It costs so much. I feel that costs today. I'm sad.

— **CAConrad** 23 Mar 2010
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Re: WE ARE 7

*On the seventh anniversary of the invasion, the New York poet Steve Dalachinsky answers CA Conrad's posting WE ARE 7 — a meditation that turns the body's seven-year renewal of its every cell into an accounting of the war's million dead. Conrad, the Philadelphia poet, had come that morning from a Susan Howe reading at the Kelly Writers House; the swerve from Howe's *The Europe of Trusts* to a bus caught in a flash mob is the whole of the long war's private weather.*

Boy do i wish after eaah 7 years my body feels completely OLD

“

Over a 7 year period the human body replaces all of its cells until --7 years later — the body is completely new, a whole new body, a body which actually didn't exist 7 years ago. 7 years ago today we were not here as we are today. 7 years ago today when America invaded the sovereign nation of Iraq. Over a million people have been killed. Their bodies didn't make it here with us. So many people I'm never going to meet or see or know. I'm very sad today thinking about my new body, my luxury of a new body of cells over the past 7 years of war, 7 years of terrorizing people. This morning I went to the Kelly Writers House to hear Susan Howe give one of the finest Q&A's I've ever heard. And I almost asked her at the Q&A, "Susan, in your book *The Europe of Trusts* you write, 'Malice dominates the history of Power and Progress.' How do you feel about us stepping out of history today with today being the anniversary of the American invasion of Iraq?" But I didn't ask her that. She seemed so happy sitting there, and life is short, and here's this amazing elderly genius poet, and I thought, "Don't ask her that." So I didn't ask her that. Instead I asked her about her visit to Wallace Stevens's house, and how she had said that she couldn't believe THOSE poems came from THAT house, and I wanted her talk about HER poems being written

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”

— Steve Dalachinsky 25 Mar 2010

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Afterword

The argument, now

Let me end on the doubt the book has carried the whole way, because it is the one worth keeping. “For poetry makes nothing happen,” Auden wrote of another war, and the line has hung over every page here like weather. Did any of it work? The marches did not stop the invasion. The thousands of poems did not shorten the occupation by an hour. Baghdad’s libraries burned while poets, on this list and everywhere, were finding the words to say that no words would do. If the test of the political poem is that it moves the tanks, then the whole decade gathered here is a record of failure, and Jason Quackenbush — rounding, in 2006, on a journal that had blacked out its pages and calling the gesture not merely useless but “the SOURCE of what you are protesting” — was the only honest man in the room.

But I do not think that is the test, and I do not think the room did either. What this list kept faith with, for ten years and against the whole drift of the age, was a stranger and more stubborn proposition: that how a poem is made and what its maker believes might be a single question, and a consequential one — that the poem is not decoration laid over politics but a way of thinking politics through, at the pitch of full attention, in public, in the words that happen to be one’s own. The culture had mostly stopped believing this. It had filed the political poet, like the treasonous one, under Settled Embarrassment. The list refused the filing. It went on treating the poem as if it could still bear on the fate of a state — could still, in the old and frightening sense, wound — and treated the question of whether it could as too serious to answer glibly in either direction.

That refusal is the book’s real subject, more than any single war. You can watch it in the smallest gestures: a man in the first hour writing down the colour of the sky rather than reaching for a poem; a schoolteacher with three sons of fighting age worrying a stray line of Yeats; a poet counting the war’s million dead against the cells of his own remade body. None of it made anything happen. All of it insisted that something was at stake in the making — that to attend this hard to how a thing is said is itself a way of refusing the war’s first demand, which is always that we stop attending. CAConrad’s grandmother had a line he could not shake: “The cynic and the killer waltz together.” The list, whatever else it got wrong across these years, declined the dance. That it declined it out loud, and at length, and without once agreeing on how, is the whole of what I have tried to preserve.

— Kristen M. Fabians

Biographical Notes and Index

Brief lives of the contributors, each keyed by number to their passages in the text.

Several passages relay figures from outside the list, named in their headnotes and not listed here — among them Sam Hamill, Amiri Baraka, Eliot Weinberger, Noam Chomsky, Robert Creeley, Saadi Yousef, Anne Waldman, Laura Elrick, Kent Johnson, Michael Moore, and the Baghdad diarist who wrote as Riverbend.

- Christopher W. Alexander** Poet and small-press editor of the Buffalo scene — the Nominative Press Collective, and *Verdure* with Linda Russo — who assembled the Jack Spicer feature for *Jacket* (1999). [\[1\]](#)
- David Antin** Talk poet, critic, and writer on art, of the University of California, San Diego; *talking at the boundaries* (1976). Died 2016. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- William James Austin** New York poet, musician and academic at SUNY Farmingdale, co-founder of Koja Press; the ongoing *Underworld* series. [\[1\]](#)
- derek beaulieu** Canadian concrete and conceptual poet, poet laureate of Calgary and of the Banff Centre; *Flatland* (2007). [\[1\]](#)
- Jim Behrle** Poet, cartoonist, and blogger of the Boston and New York scenes, and a cheerful gadfly of the poetry world. [\[1\]](#)
- Thomas Bell** A list member; not reliably identified here as a distinct literary figure (and not the mid-century novelist of the same name). [\[1\]](#)
- Aaron Belz** Poet of comic and light verse; *The Bird Hoverer* (2007). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Charles Bernstein** A founder of Language writing and co-editor of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*; long at Buffalo, latterly at Pennsylvania. *Girly Man* (2006). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#)
- Anselm Berrigan** Poet of the later New York School and a former director of the Poetry Project at St. Mark's; *Zero Star Hotel* (2002). [\[1\]](#)
- Daniel Bouchard** Boston poet, editor of the journal *The Poker*, and a production editor at the MIT Press; *Diminutive Revolutions* (1999). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- George Bowering** Canadian poet and novelist, Canada's first Parliamentary Poet Laureate; *Kerrisdale Elegies* (1984). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Joseph Bradshaw** Poet and critic of the Boise small-press world; the study *In the Common Dream of George Oppen* (2011). [\[1\]](#)
- Taylor Brady** Bay Area poet, and a collaborator with Rob Halpern; *Occupational Treatment* (2006). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#)
- Joe Brennan** A list member who relayed the September 2001 Chomsky interview from Radio B92; not further identified here. [\[1\]](#)
- Pam Brown** Australian poet and editor; *Dear Deliria: New and Selected Poems* (2002). [\[1\]](#)
- David Buuck** Bay Area poet, founder of BARGE and of the journal *Tripwire*; *Site Cite City* (2015). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Mairéad Byrne** Irish-born poet at the Rhode Island School of Design; *Talk Poetry* (2007). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- CAConrad** Philadelphia poet of the '(Soma)tic' ritual; *The Book of Frank* (2009). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#)
- cris cheek** British-American sound and performance poet, teaching at Miami University in Ohio; *part: short life housing* (2009). [\[1\]](#)
- David-Baptiste Chirot** Visual and 'rubbing' poet, mail artist, and outsider scholar of Milwaukee, whose posts ran to prophetic length. Died 2021. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[8\]](#)

- Alison Croggon** Australian poet, critic, and librettist; *New and Selected Poems 1991–2017* (2017). [\[1\]](#)
- Steve Dalachinsky** New York poet of the downtown and free-jazz scene; *The Final Nite*, his book of the saxophonist Charles Gayle. Died 2019. [\[1\]](#)
- Maria Damon** Poet-scholar of avant-garde and outsider poetries, formerly at the University of Minnesota and later Pratt Institute; *Dark End of the Street* (1993). [\[1\]](#)
- Mark DuCharme** Boulder poet; *Infinity Subsections* (2004). [\[1\]](#)
- kari edwards** Transgender poet and visual artist associated with San Francisco; *a day in the life of p.* (2002). Died 2006. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Jeff Encke** Poet whose *Most Wanted: A Gamble in Verse* (2005) reworks war rhetoric as a deck of playing cards. [\[1\]](#)
- Laura Fargas** Poet based in Washington, D.C.; *An Animal of the Sixth Day* (1996). [\[1\]](#)
- Gloria Frym** Poet and fiction writer, of the California College of the Arts; *Homeless at Home* (2001), an American Book Award winner. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- John Gallaher** Poet and co-editor of *The Laurel Review*, in Missouri; *Map of the Folded World* (2009). [\[1\]](#)
- Geoffrey Gatza** Buffalo poet and artist, and the founder and publisher of BlazeVOX [books]. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#)
- Russell Golata** A list member in western New York who relayed Eliot Weinberger's election-eve dispatch of 2004; not further identified here. [\[1\]](#)
- Gabriel Gudding** Poet and essayist, of Illinois State University; *A Defense of Poetry* (2002) and the driving-notebook epic *Rhode Island Notebook* (2007). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- David Hadbawnik** American poet and medievalist, an editor and translator of Virgil's *Aeneid*; *Field Work* (2011). [\[1\]](#)
- K. Angelo Hehir** A list member, signing himself 'Kevin,' active in the anti-war and prisoner-rights threads — Poets for Peace, the Camilo Mejía case, Guantánamo; not further identified here. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#)
- Patrick Herron** Poet, artist, and information scientist, and a poet laureate of Carrboro, North Carolina; *The American Godwar Complex* (2004). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#)
- August Highland** Experimental and net-based writer, founder of the online quarterly the Muse Apprentice Guild in the early 2000s. [\[1\]](#)
- Elizabeth Treadwell Jackson** Poet and former director of Small Press Traffic in San Francisco; *Birds & Fancies* (2007). [\[1\]](#)
- Halvard Johnson** American poet long active in online experimental writing communities; *Transparencies and Projections*. Died 2017. [\[1\]](#)
- Pierre Joris** Poet and translator, notably of Paul Celan, and a tireless conduit between the American and Arab avant-gardes; taught at Albany. *Poasis: Selected Poems 1986–1999* (2001). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#)
- Jeffrey Jullich** New York poet; *Portrait of Colon Dash Parenthesis* (2010). [\[1\]](#)
- Amy King** Poet and activist, involved with VIDA and Poets for Living Waters; *I Want to Make You Safe* (2011). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Rodney Koeneke** Poet based in Portland, Oregon; *Musee Mechanique* and *Etruria* (2014). [\[1\]](#)
- Anastasios Kozaitis** A New York poet and translator of Greek and Chinese verse, who posted to the list as 'Ak'; his work appeared in *Big Bridge* and *Jacket*. [\[1\]](#)

- Herb Levy** A list member — likely the Seattle-based writer on experimental music of that name, though firm identification cannot be confirmed here. [\[1\]](#)
- Lisa** Relayed Anne Waldman's 'Cautionary Thoughts Manifesto' to the list, signing herself 'Lisa'; her full name is not established here. [\[1\]](#)
- Michael Magee** Poet associated with the Flarf collective; *My Angie Dickinson*. [\[1\]](#)
- Robert Majzels** Canadian novelist, poet and translator; *City of Forgetting* (1997). [\[1\]](#)
- Geraldine McKenzie** Australian poet of the Blue Mountains; *Duty* (c. 2001), which took the Mary Gilmore Award for a first book. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Philip Metres** Poet and scholar of war resistance, of John Carroll University; the study *Behind the Lines: War Resistance Poetry on the American Homefront Since 1941* (2007) and *To See the Earth* (2008). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#)
- Murat Nemet-Nejat** Turkish-American poet, translator and essayist, editor of the *Eda* anthology of contemporary Turkish poetry, and author of *The Peripheral Space of Photography*. [\[1\]](#)
- Aldon Nielsen** Poet and scholar of the Black avant-garde at Penn State; the study *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (1997). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Hilton Obenzinger** Poet, novelist, and critic of America's apocalyptic habit, long a teacher of writing at Stanford; *This Passover or the Next I Will Never Be in Jerusalem* (1980), an American Book Award winner. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Kirby Olson** Poet and critic, of SUNY Delhi, and the list's resident contrarian; the study *Gregory Corso: Doubting Thomist* (2002). [\[1\]](#)
- Bob Perelman** Language poet and critic, long at Pennsylvania. *Ten to One: Selected Poems* (1999) and the study *The Marginalization of Poetry* (1996). [\[1\]](#)
- Nick Piombino** Poet, essayist, and psychoanalyst in New York, close to Language writing; *Theoretical Objects* (1999) and the weblog *fait accompli*. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Sylvester Pollet** Maine poet who published the Backwoods BroadSides chaplet series of small-press poetry from his home in rural Maine. Died 2007. [\[1\]](#)
- Jason Quackenbush** A list member whose 2006 broadside against the poetry of protest is among the book's most unsparing; not further identified here. [\[1\]](#)
- Peter Quartermain** Scholar of modernist and Objectivist poetry, emeritus at the University of British Columbia; the study *Disjunctive Poetics* (1992). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- John F. Roche** Poet and emeritus associate professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology; *Topicalities* (2008). [\[1\]](#)
- Michael Rothenberg** Poet, editor of the online journal *Big Bridge*, and co-founder of 100 Thousand Poets for Change; *Unhurried Vision*. Died 2022. [\[1\]](#)
- Steve Russell** A list member; not reliably identified here as a distinct literary figure. [\[1\]](#)
- Jack Ruttan** A Montreal cartoonist, illustrator, and writer. [\[1\]](#)
- Joseph Safdie** Poet, critic and educator, once of Bolinas and now Portland, Oregon; *Scholarship* (2014). [\[1\]](#)
- Thomas Savage** A New York poet — not the novelist of the same name — who doubted, in these pages, that a poem has ever changed anything; not further identified here. [\[1\]](#)
- Leslie Scalapino** Poet, playwright and publisher of O Books, a central figure in American avant-garde writing; *way* (1988). Died 2010. [\[1\]](#)
- Tim Shaner** Poet of Buffalo and then Eugene, Oregon, and a convenor of the Rust Talks readings; *Picture X* (2014). [\[1\]](#)

- Frank Sherlock** Philadelphia poet, later the city's Poet Laureate; *Space Between These Lines Not Dedicated* (2014). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Ron Silliman** Language poet, critic, and theorist of the 'new sentence'; author of the vast serial poem *The Alphabet* (2008) and, for years, of *Silliman's Blog*. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#)
- Fluffy Singler** The pen name of a New York writer and blogger, in the city on the morning of the attacks; the identity behind it is not public. [\[1\]](#)
- Jonathan Skinner** Poet and the founding editor of the journal *ecopoetics*; *Political Cactus Poems* (2005). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Alan Sondheim** New-media poet and theorist known for codework and his long-running *Internet Text* project. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#)
- Brian Kim Stefans** Poet and digital artist who ran arras.net and, in the invasion's months, the anti-war weblog *Circulars*; *Free Space Comix* (1998) and *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics* (2003). The editorial assistant on this volume. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#)
- Chris Stroffolino** Poet, critic, and musician of New York and the Bay Area; *Stealer's Wheel* (1999) and *Speculative Primitive* (2005). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#)
- Todd Swift** Montreal-born poet, later in London, and founder of Eyewear Publishing; editor of the anthology *100 Poets Against the War* (2003). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Richard Taylor** New Zealand poet, of Auckland, and a contributor to *brief*; *Conversation with a Stone* (2007). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- George Thompson** A New York University librarian whose own scholarship ran to the prehistory of baseball. [\[1\]](#)
- Rodrigo Toscano** Poet of labour and ecological poetics, and a director of programmes at the Labor Institute; *Collapsible Poetics Theater* (2008). [\[1\]](#)
- Aaron Vidaver** Vancouver poet and editor; *Counter-Interpellation* (2018). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
- Stephen Vincent** San Francisco poet, editor, and book artist; *Walking Theory* (2007). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[8\]](#) [\[9\]](#)
- Barrett Watten** Language poet and editor of *This* and, with Lyn Hejinian, *Poetics Journal*; teaches at Wayne State. *Bad History* (1998); the study *The Constructivist Moment* (2003). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[8\]](#) [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#)
- Mark Weiss** Poet, editor, and translator; editor of *The Whole Island: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry* (2009), and, in his own right, *As Landscape* (2010). [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)
- Ian Randall Wilson** Poet and fiction writer who founded Hollyridge Press and teaches at UCLA Extension; *Hunger and Other Stories*. [\[1\]](#)
- Robert J. Wilson** A South Carolina-based list member; not further identified here as a distinct literary figure. [\[1\]](#)

Sources

The posts these passages are drawn from, in the order sent. Excerpts are verbatim; the full messages remain in the UB Poetics List archive. 200 in all.

Every post drawn from, in the order it was sent.

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- 12 Sep 2001 [Geoffrey Gatza](#) · *911 a poem written to deal with terror*
- 13 Sep 2001 [Taylor Brady](#) · *Re: Today is the next day of the rest of your life*
- 14 Sep 2001 [Chris Stroffolino](#) · *Re: The last couple of days*
- 14 Sep 2001 [William James Austin](#) · *for nyc*
- 14 Sep 2001 [derek beaulieu](#) · *written the evening of September 11th, 2001.*
- 15 Sep 2001 [Barrett Watten](#) · *Action/language*
- 18 Sep 2001 [Taylor Brady](#) · *Re: Bin Laden Family*
- 18 Sep 2001 [Ron Silliman](#) · *What is to be done*
- 19 Sep 2001 [Taylor Brady](#) · *Re: What is to be done*
- 19 Sep 2001 [Joe Brennan](#) · *Chomsky Interview by Radio B92, Belgrade on WTC bombings*
- 19 Sep 2001 [Elizabeth Treadwell Jackson](#) · *I can't help thinking...*
- 19 Sep 2001 [Anastasios Kozaitis](#) · *a personal account from 9/11/01*
- 20 Sep 2001 [Brian Kim Stefans](#) · *Re: What is to be done*
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- 22 Sep 2001 [Geraldine McKenzie](#) · *Re: What is to be done*
- 22 Sep 2001 [Nick Piombino](#) · *The Flag As Transitional Object*
- 22 Sep 2001 [Patrick Herron](#) · *Re: Interview with Robert Fisk at Beirut Airport*
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- 22 Sep 2001 [George Thompson](#) · *Re: What is to be criticized*
- 24 Sep 2001 [Michael Broder](#) · *Ear Inn Readings — September 29, 2001*
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- 24 Sep 2001 [Patrick Herron](#) · *Firing Artillery at the Algebra of Bees*
- 25 Sep 2001 [Barrett Watten](#) · *Analyzing the Flag*
- 26 Sep 2001 [Barrett Watten](#) · *Violence and rhetoric*
- 26 Sep 2001 [Daniel Bouchard](#) · *Be done: to be/ shall be/ can be*
- 26 Sep 2001 [Lisa](#) · *forward from Anne Waldman*
- 27 Sep 2001 [Mark DuCharme](#) · *Re: A well reasoned piece by Steve Niva*
- 27 Sep 2001 [Laura Fargas](#) · *No War*
- 28 Sep 2001 [Alan Sondheim](#) · *Yom Kippur, 2001*
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- 15 Oct 2001 [Aaron Vidaver](#) · *Left fundamentalism & The Chorus of National Unity and Determination: "2:36:21pm-8:59:51pm EST"*
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- 18 Oct 2001 [David Antin](#) · *(no subject)*
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- 29 Oct 2001 [Mark Weiss](#) · *Re: Peace in Our Time*
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- 2 Nov 2001 [Taylor Brady](#) · *Re: No Peace in Our Time, No Justice*
- 3 Nov 2001 [cris cheek](#) · *oil agendas*
- 5 Nov 2001 [Ram Devineni](#) · *WTC Relief Reading in Los Angeles*
- 7 Nov 2001 [Kazim Ali](#) · *Anthology of Afghan Writings*
- 1 May 2002 [Stephanie Livengood](#) · *9-11 Anthology: Call for Submissions*
- 19 Aug 2002 [Geoffrey Gatza](#) · *United States Military Academy Poetics Program*
- 17 Sep 2002 [George Bowering](#) · *the Buffalo list*
- 24 Sep 2002 [Hilton Obenzinger](#) · *Meditations - 4*
- 27 Sep 2002 [Richard Taylor](#) · *re meditations on Iraq*
- 30 Sep 2002 [John Gallaher](#) · *Re: Amiri Baraka in the NY Times Report from NZ*
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 3 Dec 2002 Tim Shaner · *Anti-War Poetry Reading — Rust Belt Books*
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 14 Jan 2003 Pierre Joris · *To Whom It May Concern: "Writers on America"*
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 15 Feb 2003 Mairéad Byrne · *Call for Poets — Baltimore Open Forum*
 16 Feb 2003 Jim Behrle · *Jim Behrle Forgets His Heroes: SPT speech 2/15/03 SF, CA*
 17 Feb 2003 Sylvester Pollet · *Report from Bangor, ME*
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 20 Feb 2003 Charles Bernstein · *Fwd: Clark/Shaw Arrest*
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 10 Mar 2003 Charles Bernstein · *Enough!*
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 19 Mar 2003 Christopher W. Alexander · *it's begun*
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 22 Mar 2003 Wanda Phipps · *Bombora House Gallery — The Weekend Long Reading*
 23 Mar 2003 kari edwards · *Pentagon: Fewer than 10 U.S. troops unaccounted*
 25 Mar 2003 Philip Metres · *An Elegy for Rachel Corrie — *How Many Miles to Babylon**
 28 Mar 2003 Frank Sherlock · *Re: Iraq War Will Divide*
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- 29 Mar 2003 **Barrett Watten** · *War = Language*
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 17 Apr 2003 **Ian Randall Wilson** · *Save the Animals of the Baghdad Zoo*
 18 Apr 2003 **Jonathan Skinner** · *Couldn't We Have Spared the Books of the Baghdad Libraries?*
 13 May 2003 **Charles Bernstein** · *The Rumsfeld Tablet*
 18 May 2003 **Kirby Olson** · *Re: theory/practice of military aesthetics*
 20 May 2003 **Ron Silliman** · *Calling Admiral Poindexter*
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 16 Aug 2004 **Leslie Scalapino** · *urging Kerry*
 2 Sep 2004 **Alan Sondheim** · *— — — — — THE WALL WALL THE THE WALL*
 8 Sep 2004 **Aldon Nielsen** · *"poetry & torture"*
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 04 Oct 2004 **Stephen Vincent** · *Baghdad Burning*
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 5 May 2005 **Leslie Scalapino** · **War and Peace (2)* reading — O Books*
 17 May 2005 **Thomas Savage** · *Re: A Political Poem Thought*
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 2 Aug 2006 David-Baptiste Chirot · *Re: civilians*
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