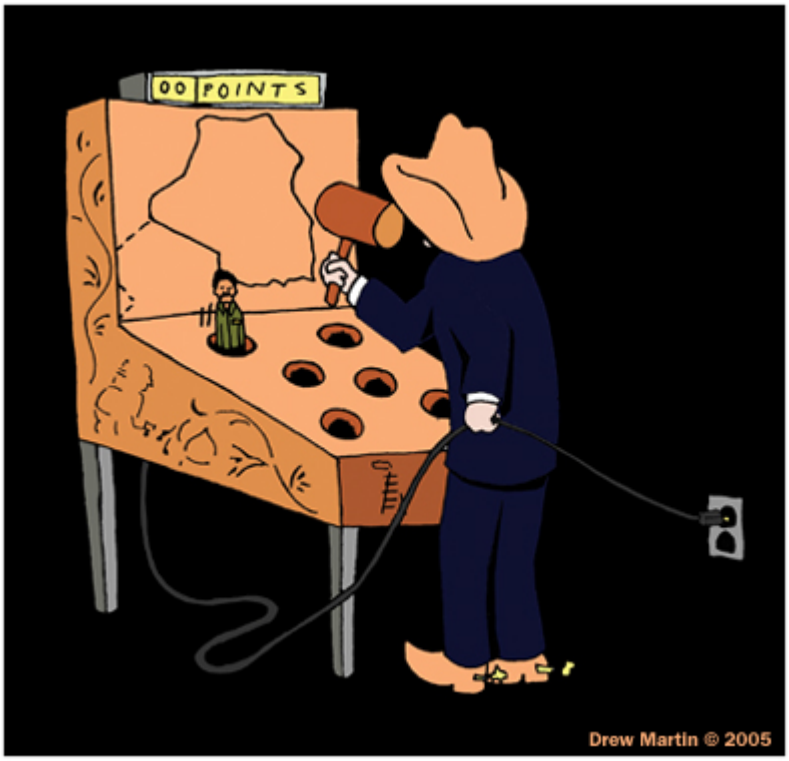
2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

Table of Contents

Iraq Redux: How Things Looked Then And How They Look Now 1
London Bombs Come In All Sizes And Shapes 11
George W. Strangelove And The Triumph Of Nuclear Faith 17
The Revolutionary Spirit 20
Tale Of Two Cultures: A London-Barcelona Diary 30
On The Afl-CIO Split 36
On The Future Of Trade Unionism 41
Einstein On Race And Racism 46
Einstein's Legacy — Where Are The "einsteinians?" 57
Prologue To Mark Twain's "to The Person Sitting In Darkness." 64
To The Person Sitting In Darkness 67
Bergman's Last Words: Saraband? 76
On Star Spangled To Death 80
Omer Kavur, Film Director Whose Themes Were Time And Memory, Dead At 61 83
Cinema And Critical Reflection: A Conversation With Ken Jacobs And Family 85
Andrey Gritsman: A Poet In Intercultural Space 94
Five Poems 97
Interview With Andrey Gritsman 104
Review Essay: Edward Said: Criticism and Society, by Abdirahman Hussein Edward Said at the Limits, by Mustapha Marrouchi 108
Stuff That Happened: Jonathan Safran Foer's Extremely Loud And Incredibly Close .. 116
Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology And The Law To Lock Down Culture And Control Creativity, By Lawrence Lessig 120
Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-century Europe, By Victoria De Grazia 122
Mediated: How The Media Shapes Your World And The Way You Live In It, By Thomas De Zengotita 128

Iraq Redux: How Things Looked Then And How They Look Now

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3



It is now two years since President George W. Bush landed on an aircraft carrier and proclaimed victory in Iraq with the words: “Mission Accomplished!” The threat to the United States had passed, the weapons of mass destruction had not been launched, and an ally of al Qaeda had been destroyed. Statues of the dictator tumbled, Iraqis awaited a democratic regime that was just around the corner, American neo-conservatives and their liberal fellow travelers congratulated themselves on their steely realism, and polls showed that support for the military action had gone through the roof. There was nothing left to do other than mop up. As for the residual resistance of the Ba’ath Party, once headed by Saddam Hussein, the president would soon call upon them to “bring it on!”

The Iraqi resistance brought it on, all right, and it would seem that the cry “mission accomplished!” was a bit premature. More than 1,700 Americans have died and more than ten times that number have been wounded while 100,000 Iraqi citizens are dead and, it should follow, at least ten times that number wounded. The population of Falluja fell from 300,000 to 30,000. Other cities like Mosul and Baghdad were destroyed, along with hundreds of mosques. One new military offensive after another has proven fruitless in quelling the resistance against the occupation. According to Carol J. Williams of *The Los Angeles Times* (2 June 2005), the frequency of suicide bombings is “unprecedented, exceeding that of Palestinian attacks against Israel and of other militant insurgencies such as the Chechen rebellion in Russia.” Sixty attacks per day are taking place along with ongoing sabotage against oil pipelines and the Iraqi infrastructure. The Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, said on 28 February 2003 complained before a subcommittee of the House of Representatives that $12 billion had been spent containing Saddam Hussein since the end of gulf War I in 1991. Since 2003 more than $212 billion has been spent on the Iraqi war.

Perhaps the “shock and awe” necessary to bring about regime change would have been worth it had 1) the invasion been supported by international law and an international coalition of forces; 2) had the horrible dictatorship of Saddam Hussein posed a genuine threat to the United States; 3) had the action furthered the assault on terror 4) had the American citizenry been able to deliberate meaningfully on the legitimacy of military action; 5) had the military action improved the international standing of the United States or 6) had there really been the prospect of forming a genuine democracy in Iraq *ex nihilo*. Two years later, however, it has become clear that none of these conditions actually existed. They should be taken up in turn.

Three justifications exist under international law for regime change. The first is to avert a humanitarian catastrophe: no one has suggested that a humanitarian catastrophe was on the agenda in Iraq and, in fact, the worst humanitarian catastrophes perpetrated by the disgusting regime of Saddam Hussein occurred while the United States was supporting him in his disastrous war with Iran. The second justification for regime change is self-defense. Since it was not Saddam who attacked the United States, but the other way around, such a justification would have required proof both that weapons of mass destruction were being hoarded by Saddam and that *in the future* would constitute a threat to the United States. In his State of the Union speech of January 2003, President Bush insisted that Saddam possessed 26,000 liters of anthrax, 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin, one million pounds of sarin, mustard and VX nerve gas, 30,000 munitions for delivery, as well as mobile biological weapons labs and uranium from Niger. Not one of these claims has been substantiated. Two major studies commissioned by the Bush Administration itself,[1] in fact, stated that Saddam had already abandoned his nuclear program in 1991 and his chemical weapons program in 1996. Even if there had been an authentic belief that these weapons actually existed,[2] however, the “pre-emptive” strike undertaken against Iraq would still have contravened international law. In Iraq unlike Afghanistan, which speaks to the third legal justification for regime change, the UN Security Council never sanctioned military action. Unlike in Afghanistan, The pathetic “coalition of the willing” brought together by President Bush, which resulted in America bearing the greatest brunt of the combat, has by now virtually disintegrated. The sympathy accorded the United States in the aftermath of 9/11 has been squandered. The illegality of its Iraqi policy along with the lying and the incompetence and the sheer arrogance of the Bush Administration produced a collapse in the moral standing of the United States everywhere in the world.

America was instead taken for a ride by the current Vice President Dick Cheney, Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the ubiquitous Paul Wolfowitz, and a host of other neo-conservative colleagues who called for the overthrow of Saddam in their Report for the New American Century of 2000. They were advised by a group of Iraqi con-men in exile, like Ahmed Chalabi, who insisted that the war would be over quickly and that American troops would be welcomed by the Iraqi citizenry. Indeed, by July 2002, the confidence of these neo-conservative “realists within the Bush Administration had grown to the point where they already considered an invasion of Iraq “inevitable.”

The now justly famous “Downing Street Memo” confirms this. First published by *The Times of London* on 1 May 2005, the memo contains minutes of a meeting in which the British

Intelligence Chief of MI-6, Richard Dearlove, who had just returned from the White House, told Prime Minister Tony Blair that intelligence and facts "were being fixed around the policy" and that, while the case against Saddam was "thin," military action was on the agenda. Written by the British National Security Aid, Matthew Rycroft, the memo also makes clear that the invasion would prove "protracted and costly" and that "little thought" had been given to "the aftermath and how to shape it." It noted that, since an arbitrary determination of the need for regime change contravened international law, "it was necessary to create the conditions" that would make it legal (The memo is reprinted with a fine introduction by Mark Danner in *The New York Review of Books* June 9, 2005).

The Downing Street Memo suggests that going before the United Nations was a sham from the start. Vice-President Dick Cheney, in fact, saw it as unnecessary. But the Bush Administration ceded to the concern of Tony Blair that an imprimatur be given the invasion by the United Nations. Blair apparently feared a revolt among the backbenchers of his Labor Party should England go to war unless as a last resort. In the light of the Downing Street Memo, however, the allies' reliance on Hans Blix and the weapons inspectors working for the United Nations can be construed less as an attempt to avoid war than as an incompetent attempt to create a trap for Saddam. Precisely because Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction, Bush and Blair believed, the inability of Saddam to produce and then eliminate them could be used as a justification for war.

Another tactic complemented this one. In the English *Sunday Times* of 29 May 2005, Michael Smith reported that the Royal Air Force and American aircraft doubled the rate at which they were dropping bombs on Iraq in 2002 in order to provoke Saddam Hussein into giving the allies another possible excuse for war. By August, in fact, Smith notes that it was already possible to speak of a "full air offensive." The Downing Street Memo therefore not only complements claims that napalm-like bombs had been used by the American military[3] but, what is perhaps even more devastating, reports that the "war" had already begun before the official attack of March 2003, congressional authorization of the war in October 2002, and the UN resolution of November that would send inspectors into Iraq (http://www.truthout.org/docs_2005/061605L.shtml). Little wonder then that at a hearing dealing with the memo before the House Judiciary in June 2005, which was organized by the indefatigable Rep. John Conyers, calls were finally being heard for the impeachment of the President (Sterling Newberry provided a list of grounds for impeachment on 14 June 2005 at http://forum.truthout.org/blog/). As of 30 June 2005, it would seem, 42% of American citizens agree with him <http://www.zogby.com/news/ReadNews.dbm?ID=1007.

Bush is slipping in the polls. Well over half of Americans now believe that the war was a mistake and *The New York Times* reported on 6/16/06 that only 37% support the current policy in Iraq, and only 42% feel that the president is doing a good job. The House International Relations Committee voted 32 to 9 to call for a plan to establish a stable government that "permit a decreased U.S. presence there" while Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc) introduced a similar resolution in the Senate. Disgust with the mendacious and incompetent policies pursued by the Bush Administration in Iraq have led even members of his own party like

Representative Walter B. Jones (R-NC) the nitwit politician who initially wished to discard the name "*french fries*" in favor of "*freedom fries*" when France refused to support American policy to call upon the president (in all seriousness) to "declare victory" and begin withdrawing troops from Iraq.

The Downing Street Memo is the smoking gun that could be used to confirm that President Bush and his neo-conservative advisers lied to the American people about the threat posed by Saddam and manipulated information that would lead public opinion to support the war. The only serious justification for the invasion of Iraq would have rested on proof that the regime of Saddam Hussein was somehow linked with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. But Secretary of State Colin Powell himself admitted that no proof of such a link existed while *The Chicago Tribune* (17 May 2005) reported a discussion on February 19, 2002 between Bob Graham of Florida, formerly Chair of the Senate Select Intelligence Committee, and the head of US Central Command, General Tommy Franks, who told him that "we are not engaged in a war in Afghanistan . . . (and that) military and intelligence personnel are being redeployed to prepare for an action in Iraq." Graham apparently noted that he was "stunned" upon learning that "the decision to go to war with Iraq had not only been made but was being implemented to the substantial disadvantage of the war in Afghanistan." What this suggests, of course, is that the Iraqi War appreciably weakened the fight against the real enemy, al-Qaeda, and the criminal organizations that launched the attacks upon the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11. Tacitly, the Bush Administration has admitted as much: the "war on terrorism" has now, with little fanfare, been relabeled the "war on tyranny."

Democracy has been trumpeted as a product of the Iraqi War. Elections in Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq are positive developments. Developments in Palestine have been marked less by the impact of the Iraqi War than the looming withdrawal from Gaza by Ariel Sharon and the rise to power of Abu Mazen following the death of Yassir Arafat. Parliamentary elections are on the agenda. But they have already been postponed due to the fear that Hamas might win them. In any event, the further success of democracy will depend upon whether they lead to the elimination of obstacles to the construction of a Palestinian State. Massive demonstrations against Syria culminated in parliamentary elections that sought to bring Lebanon out from under the yoke of its neighbor. That Syria did not respond militarily may well have been the product of fear concerning trouble on its border with Iraq and a possible invasion of the United States. In Egypt, however, claims regarding the march of democracy require a dose of skepticism. The campaign to re-elect President Hosni Mubarak seems a sham since it has begun with repression of demonstrations against his rule by a coalition known as "Enough!" while his most important electoral opponent has been threatened with jail. Municipal elections in Kuwait and giving women the right to vote certainly constitute steps in the right direction. But the democratic road is long. As for Saudi Arabia, whatever the minimal democratic gains on the municipal level, the regime remains as reactionary as ever and critics of the ultra-fundamentalist and ultra-powerful Wahabi sect are faced with blatant repression.

Iran has meanwhile been pursuing a nuclear program for domestic energy purposes and

perhaps even for developing a nuclear device. This has placed it at odds with the European Union as well as the United Nations. Its aim is quite obviously to produce self-sufficiency and a way of defending against external threats. The new approach has inflamed nationalist passions and there is little doubt that the invasion of Iraq has been used to marginalize genuinely democratic forces by linking them with western imperialists. A backlash is evident and nostalgia has grown for the revolutionary days of 1979. But few believe that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the religious-populist mayor of Tehran, would emerge victorious in the presidential election of June 2005. A veteran of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, anti-western in his rhetoric, new constraints on civil liberties, social life, and the role of women is to be expected. Ahmadinejad's election is already being hyped by neo-conservatives as a justification for military action against Iranian "fanatics" whose nuclear ambitions pose yet another threat to American "security." Tensions between the United States and Iran are running high, especially given the new influence exercised by Iran on Iraq and its Shi'ite majority, and it is doubtful that they will subside in the foreseeable future. That the Iranian people have spoken doesn't seem to matter: they obviously voted wrong.

Democracy involves more than elections. It also involves civil rights and a minimal basic commitment to social justice. In Afghanistan, where elections will take place in September 2005, the Taliban has resurfaced in rural parts of the country. Hundreds have been killed and thousands injured in the renewal of fighting while the economy has collapsed to the point where 40% of the population is living below the subsistence level and six million are starving. Afghanistan is now ranked 173 out of 178 on the United Nations Human Development Index. The foundations for a stable, secular, democratic regime are notable only by their absence. Funds for reconstructing Afghanistan, which now amount to les than $20 million in American aid, are obviously constrained by the costs of the Iraqi War. No surprise then that opium production should have increased along with the power of the drug lords and tribal chieftains. The hidden fear is that the Iraqi insurgency led by a combination of crime bosses, religious leaders, and supporters of the old regime — will provide a model for what happens in Afghanistan.

As for Iraq: that a vicious dictatorship should have fallen from power, that elections should have taken place, and that certain elements of the Sunni community are willing to participate in drafting a constitution, potentially constitute important developments along the democratic path. But the fundamental contradiction defining Iraqi democracy remains what it was since the fall of Saddam: the sovereignty of the constitutional assembly rests on the support of an occupying power. The only way in which the new constitutional democracy can present itself as sovereign is for the occupying power to leave. If the United States leaves, however, Iraq might conceivably plunge into civil war. No reference to a repressed civic culture of democracy can change this situation, which dwarfs the question of how through political finesse the insurgency might be divided against itself, and all other issues ultimately derive from it. The other important issues involve dealing with the utter economic collapse of Iraq; the deep rifts between its Sunni, Shi'ite, and Kurdish constituencies; and the response to an insurgency that has turned everyday life into a shambles.

It should be remembered that Saddam ran a society in which 80% of Iraqis were employed by the government. Attempts were made to "liberalize" the economy by Paul Bremer in the wake of the American invasion, but these only whetted the appetites of foreign investors close to the American government, like Bechtel or Halliburton, for swallowing practically the entire wealth of Iraq. The current government of Iraq is, by contrast, committed to employing the state to foster economic equity. Without even considering the future impact of a devastated infrastructure on education, health, investment, and an explosion in crime on the resumption of normal life, it is now the case that 70% of Iraqis are unemployed, the Dinar is virtually worthless, and — according to Felah Alwan who heads the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq, agricultural workers receive less than $70 dollars a month. Most people in the villages work for $1 per day and even on construction sites around Baghdad and Nasariya, workers receive about $4 per day.

$11 billion worth of oil revenue has been lost; 92% of Baghdad households have an unstable electricity supply; 39% have no safe drinking water; and 25% of children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition.

As for Falluja, Mosul and most other major cities, they are in shambles. Resurrecting the economy will require huge infusions of capital, or extraordinary austerity with respect to benefits accorded workers, and it remains unclear either how to garner the former or how to bring about the latter. The economic future of Iraq, in short, looks worse than bleak. Under the very best of circumstances, dealing with these issues would require an efficient, sovereign, and decisive government whose legitimacy is unquestioned. None of these conditions, however, apply in Iraq. The bureaucracy is a wreck and the only people with inner knowledge of its workings are civil servants of the former regime. Most of them are Sunnis, a minority that held power under Saddam, who tend to view the present government as constituting "an occupation of Kurds and Sh'ites." Various senior Sunni clerics and some political organizations like the Iraqi Islamic party oppose the insurgency and some will undoubtedly issue religious edicts commanding their followers to participate in drafting the constitution and future voting. Aside from dividing the country into ethnic constituencies, which would leave the Sunnis bereft of oil-rich land, there still remain few incentives even for them to strengthen ethnic and ideological groups whom they perceive as enemies. They will remain a social minority, their religious interpretation of Islam will receive secondary status, and their political influence will be tempered. A centralized government will not place primacy on their concerns in contrast to the Kurds, whose fundamental preoccupation is with autonomy if not independence, though they too are believers in the Sunni brand of Islam.

As things now stand, Iraq is on the verge of disintegrating. The social fabric is unraveling amid economic collapse and chaos in the streets. A constitution is being framed that, assuredly, will receive little respect or loyalty from below. Ethnic and tribal divisions are on the point of exploding and little remains of the vaunted new civil society. In general, especially given the indigenous character of the insurgency, most of those being trained for military duty are more interested in being paid than in fighting. At the same time, though intent upon "de-Ba'athification," the present government needs precisely those people whose loyalty it doesn't

command. That the United States must prepare for its “exit” is becoming painfully obvious.

The most basic criterion of sovereignty, according to a political tradition that goes back to Machiavelli, lies in the ability of a state to hold a monopoly on the means of coercion. As things now stand, however, the Iraqi government itself has countenanced the legitimacy of roughly six private, ethnic and sectarian, militias. Disbanding them would most likely have been impossible though the silly idea of Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass) that they be used in the national reconstruction of Iraq involves nothing less than putting the foxes in charge of the chicken coop (*The New York Tuimes*28 June 2005). Even the most cursory glance at the history of private militias shows that, wherever they have arisen, they have been ideologically rigid and anti-democratic: they almost always tend to identify the national interest with their own. That situation has clearly not changed. Indeed, when the Sunni Mayor of Baghdad threatened to resign unless the city received increased funding to improve its infrastructure, the paramilitary organization of the Shi’ite Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq saw fit to pre-empt the move by simply deposing him.

The largest militia in Iraq is the Kurdish *pesh merga*. Intent upon controlling the city of Kirkuk, and envisioning a Kurdish state, this militia is now openly policing a region that already gained a measure of autonomy under Saddam Hussein. The *pesh merga* is comprised of roughly 100,000 partisans while the Shi’ite militia, otherwise known as the Badr Organization, is not much smaller. The Special Commandos Force of the government, meanwhile, however, 10,000 and it has been notably ineffective in preventing the assassinations of numerous Sunni dignitaries. Making matters worse is that President Jalal Talabani, who is a Kurd, leads the *pesh merga* while the Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari helps direct the Shi’ite militia while Iyad Allawi the former prime minister of the provisional government, who is apparently known as “Saddam without a moustache,” controls the Muthana Brigade and the Defenders of Khadamiya. Thus, while the leaders all have a stake in opposing the insurgency, the existence of their private armies creates a potentially untenable situation with respect to the rule of law and its enforcement.

A Baghdad University poll taken earlier in the year, according to *The Los Angeles Times* (29 May 2005), showed that the number of Iraqis who expected their democratic government to gain in strength had dropped from more than 80% to 45%. This only makes sense. The insurgency is now basically targeting Iraqi civilians, especially those intent upon working with the existing government, rather than American military personnel. It is, by all accounts, growing stronger rather than weaker. Nearly 500 car bombs have been detonated since “sovereignty” was achieved with over 2,000 Iraqis killed and another 6,000 wounded. Elections may have taken place, but they did so under conditions of turbulence and fear. The fact that so many Iraqis voted speaks to their bravery but also, and this is usually ignored, to the instability of Iraqi society. Little wonder then that anti-American candidates were nowhere to be found, numerous candidates did not have their names on the ballot, and it is fair to say that most voters had no idea for whom they were voting. The deadline of August 15 2005 for drafting the constitution has already passed, moreover, and any future document will most likely paper over the most telling questions facing the new state. The result most likely will be a division

between central and regional authority that satisfies no one. What also seems clear is that the Shi'ite clergy will demand various privileges at the expense of the government and Islam will not be treated as simply one "source" of legislative legitimacy but rather as its primary inspiration: Islamic law or Sha'ria will clearly undermine equality for women and have a sharp impact on civil liberties, divorce, inheritance, and the private sphere of social life.

None of this is of particular interest in the United States. Its citizens are worried about the war but increasingly bored with the goal of building democracy in Iraq. The glitz is gone: the devastated cities fade from view, corruption is greeted with a shrug, torture becomes an unfortunate excess, and the news gives its usual nod to the number of American dead. But it ignores how the dream of a secular democracy in Iraq has vanished, the way in which the invasion has intensified fundamentalism throughout the region, and the dramatic collapse of America's standing in the world community. Scandalized by a pattern of torture that extends beyond the Middle East, sick of a people with a culture that they can neither love nor understand, American citizens are just like in Vietnam growing resentful of those who do not understand that war is hell and that it requires sacrifice. There is a sense in which the war is already lost. Discussions are already becoming public concerning the character and timing, if not of a withdrawal, then the gradual reduction of American troops. Even the AFL-CIO has now called for "rapid" disengagement of American troops. The war is carrying an ever more expensive price tag and there is a growing malaise. Everyone loves a winner, but more and more citizens are becoming fed up. This transformation from what was initially a gung-ho hyper-nationalism to what is an increasingly impatient indifference says much about the character of the American polity and its citizens.

Support for President Bush has fallen to Vietnam levels of 34%. Talk of impeachment is growing and 500,000 have already signed a petition calling for a response by the President and his most important officials to the Downing Street Memo. They have, so far, politely "declined" to provide one. Leaders of the Democratic Party, though mostly complicit in supporting the invasion of Iraq and licking their wounds after the disastrous electoral defeat of 2004, now smell blood in the water. Striking is their lack of genuine self-criticism. They are no different in this respect than the half-wit pundits like Bill O'Reilly and Anne Coulter who are upset by the "incompetence" of the invasion and already bemoaning the spread of "defeatism." No less than those in the Bush Administration who planned the way, or the Democrats who supported it, they remain unwilling to reflect upon the assumptions that got us into this mess or on the legitimate opposition that the invasion generated throughout the world. Unconcerned with why the United States invaded in the first place, content that Saddam has fallen from power, the inability to develop clearly defined goals only follows.

Should the United States leave Iraq things might get worse: "disengagement" is a gamble." But, then, what does "worse" imply? American officials have already revised what they can accomplish In Iraq: the vision of an oil rich, self-sufficient, secular democracy with a reconstructed infrastructure has gone the way of all flesh (*The Washington Post*, August 14, 2005). What remains is the dead letter of a "constitution." Terror against Iraq civilians is continuing unabated and towns once considered purged of insurgents, like Falluja, have seen

the resistance arise again from the ashes. That only makes sense since even when considering suicide bombing, most experts now agree, its source is not simply fundamentalism but the desire to compel the withdrawal of imperialist forces from what terrorists consider a colonized territory. How long can it continue? No one can give specifics but, looking at history, any genuinely national response to imperialism can continue for a very long time.

The British Foreign Minister, Jack Straw, has openly admitted that the presence of American troops is fueling the Sunni insurgency (http://www.truthout.org/docs_2005/080205Z.shtml). So long as the United States remains in Iraq, moreover, its sovereignty and the independence of its government will be tainted. Compromise with the Sunnis with respect to local governance, guaranteed levels of representation in the national assembly, a general amnesty for former insurgents, and an improvement in relations with Iran and Syria might according to the Project for Defense Alternatives provide a foundation for American withdrawal. Even should such a program be implemented, however, it is foolish to be overly optimistic. The most likely outcomes are a democracy with a legitimacy deficit, a partition of Iraq or a new dictatorship.

American intervention has created a situation in which any genuine "solution" seems utopian. Little wonder then that Karl Rove should be chastising congressional liberals for their "timidity" in dealing with terror or that Donald Rumsfeld and his acolytes should be raising the decibel levels of his warnings against defeatism. Ultimately they have little to offer other than platitudes and assurances that America will "prevail." The United States wishes to maintain its bases, its lucrative contracts for reconstructing the country, and its hegemonic presence in the region. Under conditions in which ethnic or religious leaders gain their standing through control over private militias, Iraqi politics to the extent that it remains civil — will increasingly turn into bargaining based on military calculation. As for the democratic legitimacy of the current regime, it will continue to rest on not much more than the absence of Saddam Hussein. A partitioning of Iraq between Sunnis, Kurds, and Shi'ites remains a genuine possibility. What kind of regimes these groups might erect is unclear though it is doubtful that any of them they will prove particularly tolerant to outsiders and dissidents. Should Iraq remain united, the likelihood is that the strongest of its warlords will survive in coalition with weaker adversarial allies. Or put another way, whether the United States stays or whether it goes, a new strongman with or without a moustache is probably already peeking out from behind the shadows concerned only with assuming power and formulating an ideology secular or theocratic that can justify its solitary exercise.

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[1] Note the transcript of the testimony provided by David Kay before the Senate Armed Services Committee: www.cnn.com/2004/US/01/28/kay.transcript Also see the Congressional testimony offered by Charles Duelfer, Director of Central Intelligence and Special Advisor for Strategy Regarding Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction at http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2004/tenet_testimony_03302004.html and his final CIA Report www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7634313

[2] See my article, "Anatomy of A Disaster: Class War, Iraq, and the Contours of American Foreign Policy"
in *Logos* Vol.2, No.4 (Fall 2003)

[3] Contrary to claims made early in the war about precision bombing and the ongoing disclaimers about the use of napalm bombs, according to Colin Brown writing in England for *The Independent* (17 June 2005), it appears that the American military employed MK77 bombs in Iraq that were based on "an evolution of the napalm used in Vietnam and Korea, carry kerosene-based jet fuel and polystyrene so that, like napalm, the gel sticks to structures and to its victims. The bombs lack stabilizing fins, making them far from precise."

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London Bombs Come In All Sizes And Shapes

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On the terrible morning of the London suicide bombings the Sky news cable channel in Britain, owned by Rupert Murdoch and anchored by manic Murdochian mannequins, summoned three terrorism experts plus an Amnesty International spokeswoman. The latter obviously was tossed in for a bit of balance, although duly outnumbered by what one guessed were truculent Thatcher wannabees. Not at all. Every expert, despite sly goading by the interviewer, counseled caution, solid police work, and a strengthening of community relations, rather than the usual *sotto voce* call for revenge and racist divisiveness. Things are a little different in Britain. It is inconceivable that Murdoch's US Fox channels would trot in authorities who failed to parrot the government line. As Tariq Ali observed a month later, the reason Londoners handled the bombings without any evident hysteria is that they were already half-prepared' for them. They sensed all along that the idiotic Iraq intervention would lead to bloody blasts in their own city.

Could the London attacks turn out to be Britain's Madrid in their political outcome too? National leaders, as George W. Bush appreciated after winning the trifecta" on 9/11, customarily enjoy a no-lose situation when their own follies abroad stir up horrors at home. The Spanish people, linking the Madrid attack to deceitful authorities who followed Bush into a profoundly unpopular war, dumped their government the first chance they got. The electoral result shocked cynical pundits who expected fearful citizens to rally around the very leaders who had endangered them because, after all, who else can protect them? That excruciating bind usually works beautifully to keep knaves in office, but it did not do so in Spain. Tony Blair and even George W. Bush, may well wonder if the world, as they know it, is going mad and if they are going to become political casualties, instead of beneficiaries, of the vaunted war on terrorism.'

Just last May the British conducted a general election whose most important aspect, ironically, may be how an explosive government memo ultimately shakes up the US. Tony Blair hung on to his precarious premiership despite his Labour majority shrinking by some hundred seats (and overall vote falling to 36%). The American mainstream media now are doggedly doing their best not to notice a colossal smoking gun' thrust into plain sight at the time. What happened is that Blair suffered a leak of a July 2002 government memo (minutes' is the technical term) affirming both the casual mendacity of Bush and the pushover pliability of Blair himself as to a pre-determined assault on Iraq. A protective US media dutifully filters out bad news about Bush (a CNN co-founder recently endorsed "the right of the Pentagon to lie when it is in the country's best interest to lie," which only the Pentagon apparently is fit to determine) but cannot seem to suppress news of the scandalous British memo.[1] As for the British election,

antiwar activists could hardly have asked for a better result, one calibrated to repudiate a Blairist love for markets and tagging along with Bush while lifting “old Labour” leftists into a strong bargaining position inside government. Blair consequently is unlikely to stay in office beyond 2006, and the bombings appear only to assure his departure.

Blair’s lies, which originate in his crony Bush’s lies, came unerringly home to roost. On March 13 Blair was asked about a leaked memo written by advisor David Manning in March 2002 wherein Manning assured Yanks that “you would not budge in your support for regime change.” Blair denied he said it. Manning’s memo, however, says: “[to Condoleezza Rice] that you would not budge in your support for regime change but you had to manage a press, a Parliament, and a public opinion that was very different [from] anything in the States.” In other words, the British public, like Americas, could indeed be manipulated, but required a different and slightly more sophisticated style of deceit.

That spillage was bad enough for Blair. But no leak surpasses that of the minutes taken by a national security aide to Blair in July 2002 showing Bush as dead set on invasion. The “Downing Street memo,’ as it is called, found Bush “wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD.” So “intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy [and it] seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided.” (US and UK air strikes on Iraq doubled in late 2002 and early 2003 to provoke Saddam into some rash action.) This memo confirms what counter-terrorism expert Richard Clarke and former Treasury secretary Paul O’Neill attested earlier about unscrupulous White House hijinks.[2] Internet news sources, maverick columnists and a left-liberal radio station are keeping the story alive. Over one hundred US representatives and nine US senators had lined up by July to publicize the memo. A demonstration is planned for September 24 in Washington DC to demand Congress investigate the memo and its implications. (Another London anti-war demonstration is planned two days earlier.) Even the *Washington Post*, of all newspapers, turned up the heat by reporting that National Security Council staff in the run-up to war were busy trawling for any shred of evidence that Saddam might possess WMD because the staff knew their case was so feeble. After all the needless carnage inflicted in Iraq, why should reprisals come as much of a surprise?

One watches with an acute sense of *déjà vu* UK Prime Minister Tony Blair demonstrating a state of denial as to how British Muslims feel about Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and, yes, local conditions. This conceit Tony knows best’ breeds bad consequences. There are predictable projects afoot to analyze captured bombers so as to nab anyone remotely fitting their profile’ a terribly counterproductive solution’, but one that commends itself to a government insistently blind to the domestic consequences of its foolish and dishonest intervention in Iraq. Most British citizens are not as gullible and systematically misinformed as Americans. Polls after the 7 July bombings, and 21 July attempted bombings too, show that 2 of 3 Britons strongly suspect that the suicide attacks are related to the unjustified Iraq war. It was rare to hear anyone say, “Why us?” (Indeed, the July 28 announcement by the Provisional IRA of its intent to disarm also reminded every Londoner of their long history of terrorist experiences.)

Blair, averse to dealing seriously with young Muslims, instead summoned a group of eager-to-please imams who often did not even understand the language of British born brethren. So occupying a cozy spot at the hearth in 10 Downing Street is the Muslim Council of Britain, led largely by folks Blair either nominated to the House of Lords or knighted. From these highly obliging quarters Blair gets happy talk reports in a perfectly circular way containing only what he wants to hear. The frightened clerics lecture whomever shows up that suicide bombs, and indeed any form of terrorism, violates Koranic principles. That is splendid, so far as it goes. Yet if suicide bombers are perpetrators of evil," then how does one characterize invader armies in the Middle East utilizing high tech weapons that kill and maim civilians in droves? If their weapons are expensive enough and kill at a sufficient distance, does it make the soldiers or their political leaders morally superior to someone wrapping homemade explosives around their waist? The Blair-approved battalion of scholars and half-educated clerics do not dare say that today evil is fighting evil, that one form of destruction is as vile as the other, or that each form of violence drives the other on to greater horrors.

In Britain a new climate of fear stems not only from suicide bombs, but also from an extremely edgy shoot-to-kill' government and from vengeful elements of the public (with personal assaults on Muslims up sixfold since 7/7).[3] So clerics say whatever suits the government, which is hardly going to win credibility in their communities. Indeed, a few clueless clerics stray into the realm of unadulterated black humour. Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Whaid, an Islamic scholar, according to *The Guardian*, deplored the combination of human rights laws and constant media attention which allegedly gave exiled radicals a platform to preach evil' for over a decade. So we behold a stern Islamic scholar inside a western democracy deriding human rights not a rousing democratic message although authoritarian leanings in this regard seem to please Blair.

It gets even weirder. More than a hundred imams had been welcomed by the UK prison service into jails where they converted sundry inmates to the serenities of Islam, including shoe bomber' Richard Reed and at least one accused London bomber who obviously decided they were more Islamic than the eager imams. (Former Tory minister Jonathan Aitken during his imprisonment claims that imams even tried to convert him.) Now nervous UK authorities, after sober second thoughts, are removing Muslim clerics from conversion opportunities. Yet the same authorities consult the same clerics as to how to quell worrisome extremist tendencies among young Muslims at large. It's a comical spectacle, were it not so sad.

These desperate government maneuvers together with ham-handed police profiling' antagonize, not sooth, fretful young Muslims. It is not that government initiatives to improve community relations are wrong; the problem is that they are incomplete and, worse, come across as insincere. The crystal clear message of the fatal shooting of an unlucky Brazilian by the police, on the other hand, is that it is open season on anyone authorities even imagine is suspicious. Anyone back from holiday with a deep tan needs to be mighty careful. This is no way to tamp down apprehensions or curb recruitment to extremism. Young Muslim men and women we speak to are scared.

The many young Muslims who, for example, helped elect MP George Galloway last May, will stay peacefully enough on the left, but some others are susceptible to extremists. They are the people who must be reached, as Galloway himself stressed. Indeed, extremist Muslims fiercely opposed Galloway, an antiwar coalition leader and stout defender of minority rights, by claiming that Islam forbade voting, period. Most British-born Bangladeshis, a majority in his area, supported Galloway, whose RESPECT party includes in its coalition the Muslim Association of Britain and the Socialist Workers Party, while RESPECT candidate, Lindsey German, came in second in a neighboring and mostly Muslim constituency. Galloway overturned a ten thousand vote Labour majority and the result underlined the breakaway of young Muslims from the staid voting patterns of their elders. One boon is that this shift to left-leaning parties reduces any appeal that fundamentalists exert. The East End boasts a long tradition of immigrant ethnic groups favoring progressive politics, stretching back to Jewish refugees from Europe who settled there and fought Oswald Mosley's fascists in the 1930s.

The Blair government clings to a convenient notion that bombers are motivated solely by a psychopathic hatred of the West. This self-serving version of reality makes it easier to hide behind a hard-line stance and, as a bonus, to persist in a dirty and daft foreign war. Yet the British secret service MI 5 itself refuted Blair by stating that "Iraq is a dominant issue for a range of extremist groups and individuals in the UK and Europe.' Chatham House foreign policy researchers issued a report that came to quite the same conclusion. Outside the Blair government, democracy in Britain, to Blair's discomfort, still functions in some praiseworthy ways.

An internal threat certainly exists. One must cultivate dialogue not only with hand-picked Muslims but with leaders of new groups, especially youth groups, and even more widely with antiwar groups, who happen to be a sizable section of the Labour Party itself. Dissident Labour MPs are nearly as ignored by Blair's cabinet as are Muslim youths. Blair also ought to resist saying suicide bombers are all alike. The proposition is not remotely persuasive here. Young Muslim people, who oppose and are horrified at bombings in London often understand what drives Palestinians to the most desperate measures given the odds they face.

Blairspeak, a rigid Orwellian rhetorical style, stems from a lazy establishment habit of treating terrorism as a category devoid of context and circumstance. Aren't all suicide bombers crazy? In the 1950s movie Exodus, we recall Paul Newman's character saying proudly that Jewish refugees had a big advantage over opponents: they fought for a cause a new state of Israel for which they were prepared to die. Aren't Palestinians fighting for a cause? There are of course demented zealots slinking around but one also needs to recall they commonly are the shining products of Deobandi sect madrassas in the Muslim world financed originally by the Saudis and Western intelligence agencies to turn out fervent cannon fodder for an anti-Soviet Afghan war. Afterward, they went hunting for different infidels. Once brainwashed, they can't be switched on and off.

There is no shortage of sensible Brits who approach grisly events with care and reason. London Mayor Ken Livingston invited the Egyptian-born Islamic scholar Yusif Qaradawi from

Qatar, who condemned the London bombs but pointedly declined to criticize Middle East suicide bombs. Livingston stood by Qaradawi in the face of rabid tabloid rage. Swiss-born Professor Tariq Ramadan promotes liberal religious opinions but, as a grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was prevented by the State Department from taking up an American academic appointment. Yet Scotland Yard helped finance a seminar recently where he spoke. These are personages who can talk to Muslims abroad, credibly and prudently. Ken Livingston and Scotland Yard realize this, but Blair and his inner circle just don't get it, and don't want to. It would mean admitting that Iraq is a gory travesty, and was from the beginning.

Yet, deep down, we suspect a key reason most newspaper editors refuse to hold Blair partly responsible for the London bombings and, in the US, yawned at the British memo is because of sheer boredom over yet more examples of the devious ways that high level policy really works. Spilling blood and wasting billions is less reprehensible than staining Monica Lewinsky's dress. Deceit, ho-hum, is a government tradition. Recall the memo the Reagan administration concocted in 1981 to implicate tiny El Salvador (and Nicaragua) as a dire Communist threat, although it was rapidly debunked in those somewhat hardier journalistic days. But let's skip over intervening episodes of wretched lies to the grisliest intervention of all: Vietnam

In 1965 Hans Morgenthau, a classic hard-headed realist, shredded the US official report: "Aggression from the North: The Record of North Vietnam's Campaign to conquer the South." Morgenthau retorted: 'while normally foreign and military policy is based on intelligence that is, the objective assessment of facts the process here is reversed: a new policy has been decided upon, and the intelligence must provide the facts to justify it." A civil war in the South was redefined by US elites as a war of "foreign aggression."[4] The goal was "to pour in forces and munitions and prop up the corrupt South Vietnam state." It was the "white paper's purpose to present that proof," despite a "grotesque" discrepancy between facts and assertions. Morgenthau lamented that, "the document showed a tendency to conduct foreign and military policy not on their merits, but as exercises in public relations. The government fashions an imaginary world that pleases it, and then comes to believe in the reality of that world and acts as though it were real." Last year in the *New York Times* a smug (if not insane) Bush official was quoted as mocking people who live in a "reality-based" world whereas the Bush people create their own higher reality and impose it on everyone else. Iraq, of course, is the nemesis.

In the UK Blair invokes "our values" tirelessly, but just what cherished values is he citing? The values of bombing Iraq whenever it pleases certain Western powers? Is he celebrating the bedrock values of Western democracy? Then why aren't Scandinavia, Germany, or France bombed too? Might it perchance be because they are not implicated in Iraq? Or is Blair talking about defense of hard-won civil liberties? If so, then Osama bin Laden so far is winning with ease as Blair, like Bush in Patriot Act America, continues to throw away liberties and brings his nation down to bin Laden's level. Bush, meanwhile, brays about "freedom" (for entrepreneurs, and no one else), depicts insurgents as all Saddam loyalists, and ignores the misdeeds, to say the least, of a colonial US military force (as 14 permanent bases are built to protect American control of oil) who routinely "regret any inconvenience" they cause. Yet "the

facts are what they are," Morgenthau warned, "and they take a terrible vengeance on those who disregard them." The London attack is, we fear, a tiny part of the price. For Morgenthau the only sensible answer to this grim entanglement was to withdraw. Eventually the US did. The US (and the UK) will again. But after what toll is exacted?

Notes

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[1] Polls find 6 of 10 Americans "favor bringing most troops home within a year" because the war in Iraq was a bad idea. Startlingly, a Zogby poll found 42% believed Bush should be impeached if it is proved that he misled the US into war. Bush's approval ratings are in the low forties and sinking this summer. Even an obsequious media can read these statistical tea leaves about Bush's popularity and therefore become a bit bolder.

[2] See Richard P. Clarke Against All Enemies (New York: Free Press, 2004) and Ron Suskind, The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, The White House and the Education of Paul O'Neill (New York: Simon & Schuster 2004,)

[3] The Guardian, 3 August 2005, p. 1

[4] Hans J. Morgenthau, "Vietnam and the National Interest in Marvin Gettleman, ed. Vietnam: History, Opinions and Documents of a Major World Crisis (New York: Fawcett, 1965). pp. 365-375.

George W. Strangelove And The Triumph Of Nuclear Faith

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

The silver-spooned cowboy in the Oval Office just presented a fine new saddle to the nuclear horseman of the apocalypse.

It was a gift worthy of hell. “President Bush agreed yesterday to share civilian nuclear technology with India, reversing decades of U.S. policies designed to discourage countries from developing nuclear weapons,” the Washington Post reported Tuesday. The lead was more understated in the New York Times: “President Bush, bringing India a step closer to acceptance in the club of nuclear-weapons states, reached an agreement on Monday with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to let India secure international help for its civilian nuclear reactors while retaining its nuclear arms.”

No matter how the story was spun, it could only be read in the world’s capitals as further proof that U.S. nuclear policies are grimly laughable — thanks to policymakers in Washington who simultaneously decry and promote nuclear proliferation. And nowhere will the hypocrisy-laced ironies be more appreciated than in Tehran.

More than 50 years after the U.S. government launched its “atoms for peace” program, faith in the peaceful atom is alive and well in Iran. While a large proportion of the American public distrusts nuclear power, Iranians routinely echo the positive themes that the industry and its supporters have labored to promote ever since President Dwight Eisenhower pledged “to help solve the fearful atomic dilemma” by showing that “the miraculous inventiveness of man shall not be dedicated to his death, but consecrated to his life.”

Touting the use of nuclear fission to generate electricity, American presidents have strived to make sharp rhetorical distinctions between atomic power and nuclear weapons technologies, despite their extensive overlap. Such reassuring distinctions now have wide credibility in Iran, as I found last month during conversations with Iranian political campaigners, clerics, bazaar merchants, shoppers, teachers and students. Almost all gave notably similar responses when asked whether their country should acquire nuclear energy.

The replies — often tinged with indignation that the atomic prerogative would even be questioned — reflected why nuclear development was a non-issue in Iran’s latest presidential campaign. The Iranian public appears to believe what nuclear-power boosters

loudly proclaimed to the world for several decades — that nuclear energy can be safe and distinct from the capacity to build nuclear weapons.

If nuclear power plants are good enough for the United States, the prevailing logic goes, then Iran is certainly good enough for nuclear power plants. Present-day Iran, with its eagerness to use nuclear reactors to generate electricity, is a success story for generations of pro-nuclear politicians in Washington.

A civil atomic pact, signed in 1957, initiated nuclear assistance from the United States to Iran. In 1972, President Richard Nixon urged the Shah to build nuclear power plants. The Shah fell in 1979, but after many delays the Islamic Republic resumed work on the nuclear plant near Bushehr, a project that is currently being denounced in Washington.

In Tehran, no one I talked with seemed to have any doubt that such projects should continue. At the city's bazaar — where I could not find any expression of support for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons — there appeared to be something close to a consensus for building nuclear power plants.

"It should be done," said a 26-year-old owner of a carpet shop who gave his name as Nahdi. "If it's going to be dangerous, it's dangerous for everyone in the world, not just for the Iranian people. How come they all have access to that kind of energy and just talking about Iran and Iranians?" In a baby supply shop, the man behind the counter said: "It is Iran's right, like other countries."

Cleric Hassan Khomeini — the most prominent grandson of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founding leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran — responded to my question in much the same way. He pointed back at the country now pointing the finger at Iran: "The same thing happened in the United States. You've got access to lots of oil and gas resources, and what happened? The United States is producing nuclear energy."

In a mid-June interview, shortly before the first round of the presidential elections, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani told me that nuclear weapons are antithetical to Islamic law and that Iran should never try to acquire any. Yet, like every one of his opponents, Rafsanjani (then seen as the frontrunner) expressed strong support for nuclear power in Iran.

Given its vast untapped reserves of oil and natural gas, Iran's claim of needing nuclear-generated electricity might seem farfetched. But arguments about whether Iran really "needs" nuclear power may be beside the point. For the Iranian government, the issue is a matter of national sovereignty and basic prerogatives. In a region where Israel, Pakistan, and India have atomic bombs (made possible by nuclear technology exported from the West), Iran appears to want to keep its nuclear options open.

Unwilling to forsake the myth of the peaceful atom, the United States continues to proselytize for nuclear power while practicing what it preaches. As long as that continues, Washington is in no position to convincingly question the merits of nuclear fundamentalism in Iran or anywhere else.

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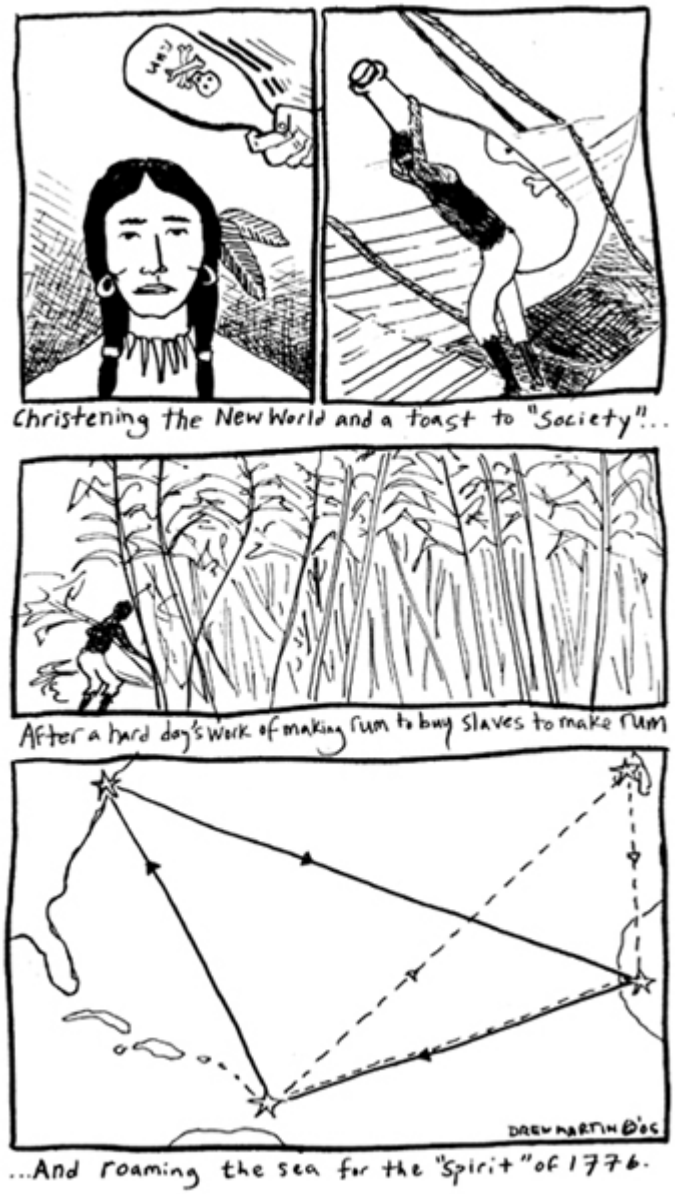
The Revolutionary Spirit

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

Rum and revolution have been associated together for centuries. Rum is “the global spirit with its warm beating heart in the Caribbean,” the one factor that is shared by all the cultures of the region, and enthusiastically drunk by the descendants of those who were enslaved to produce it.



I began drinking rum with uninformed enthusiasm at an age that would have had the child welfare crowd taking me into care if I had been in New York instead of Liverpool. But I began researching the subject seriously many years later while working in the Caribbean, which was my point of departure.

All over the islands are massive forts and harbors, barracks and other monuments to the time when the Caribbean was to the world what the Gulf is now. Literally hundreds of thousands of soldiers died in the struggles to control these fecund volcanic hilltops where ample supplies of

sun and water combined to make sugar.

It was not the only parallel with the modern world: rum and sugar anticipated modern problems of globalization, of empire and deficits, of war and taxation.

The sugar trade provided the liquid capital to fund the British National Debt, the real secret weapon that ensured British dominance against the threat from a much richer and more populous France. So where does rum fit?

It was in Barbados in the first half of the seventeenth century that the British colonists realized that the by-product of sugar refining, molasses, was more than just an inferior sweetener. In the tropics it fermented quickly, and although the immediate product was an intestinal challenge of a high order to any drinker, when distilled, a gallon of molasses produced a gallon of high-octane spirit.

Known *as Kill-devil, Barbados Water*, or *rumbullion*, before rum became the common term, it was a desirable commodity that quickly enhanced the profits of the sugar trade, while making more bearable the endless toil in the tropical heat necessary to grow and refine it.

The production of rum in Barbados transformed the economics of the island, which switched rapidly to a sugar-growing monoculture and equally rapidly from a majority white indentured work force to a chattel slave based economy. Incidentally, the white workers also rose, and were suppressed with mass executions in the early stages before racism was added to the Planters' sins of cupidity and cruelty.

It would repay study to see how much the mainland North American colonies benefited from the experience of the Barbadian plantation owners. Not only did they invent the principle of no taxation without representation in an agreement with the Cromwellian government during the Civil Wars in Britain, they were the first to introduce legislation that codified African slavery as different from the traditional indentures for white workers and to justify this breach of Common Law by inveighing against the supposed inferiority of Africans.

Many of the English settlers in North America came via Barbados and they brought their social innovations with them, as well as a thirst for rum, which became a major item of trade.

It was not until much later that the British Isles and their North Atlantic colonies produced enough of a grain surplus to make gin or whisky on a regular basis, and even when they did, it took much more bulk of grain to produce the same amount of alcohol. Nor did they produce grapes and wine on any scale, so the metropolitan government saw no problems with rum production within the colonial system.

Not so France, where in the early eighteenth century the cognac producers successfully lobbied for a ban on rum production for export from the French islands.

On the one hand, the lucrative production of rum gave the British colonies an economic

advantage; on the other hand, Adam Smith's invisible hand was busily mixing it between the North Americans and the British.

The British islands used all their molasses to make their own rum, which the colonial elite drank for preference. The colonists largely benefited from the imperial connection, but rum was a crucial commodity. The presence of lakes of molasses in the French islands proved an irresistible temptation, so much so that the Yankee traders were easily able to overcome any scruples that may have resulted from the wars being fought between France and Britain, even though a major purpose of those wars was to safeguard the American colonies from the French threat in Canada.

The colonists drank prodigious quantities of their own rum, but they also used it to trade for furs with the Indian tribes, while many of them quietly rejoiced at the damage rum did to Indian societies which amounted to alcoholic ethnic cleansing. Even more sinisterly, New England rum was the major trade item for slaves on the African coast.

When the French and Indian war was over, the British were paying over a quarter of their GDP in taxation, mostly to pay off the National Debt. The colonies offered but never delivered contributions. It was clear that "no taxation" was the primary thought, not representation. The British sent in the Navy to enforce customs collection, and played into the hands of the secessionists by providing an excuse for insurrection.

Even when the war came, rum was an essential war supply, with both sides fighting to deprive the other side. George Washington, that unlikely socialist, even advocated government owned distilleries to meet the need and was as scornful as any modern Virginian about French fries in the Congressional canteen at any attempts to substitute a French wine ration for rum for the continental armies.

Aided by temperance and prohibition, this inconvenient history, both rum and the essential Yankee role in the slave trade has been edited out of popular historical consciousness.

But then, more recently, who remembers that the Bacardi family bankrolled Fidel Castro up in the hills, and greeted him when he arrived in Havana with a banner "Gracias a Fidel" draped across their headquarters? Of course, they took it personally when he nationalized their distilleries, but they had already gone multinational, incorporating in the Bahamas and distilling in Puerto Rico, so they still conduct their grudges against Castro in the American courtrooms for ownership of the Havana Club brand, which, although banned by the Embargo from the US, is selling far more successfully than Cuban sugar across the rest of the world. And touchingly, Fidel was telling Cubans that drink was bad for them, so that there would be more for export.

Perhaps more damaging than this family feud is the way that Bacardi has used its economic and political clout to flood out better rums from the rest of the Caribbean with its own undistinguished spirit. For many islands, faced with competition from European sugar beet, Archer Daniel Midland's high fructose corn syrup and their accompanying tariff barriers,

making high value added branded rum from their sugar crop is one of their ways forward in a world where the empires have moved on and forgotten how much of their own and African blood they shed to conquer these volcanic rocks, and how much money they made from it.

* * *

For its first two centuries, Barbados' position as the first port of call for ships to the other British colonies in the Western Hemisphere gave it an importance greater than its tiny. Any "good" ideas that originated in the island, whether rum, sugar plantations, African slavery, or even the idea of calling the head of the local government the President, were sure to spread to all the British colonies, and in those early days, they were carried by the departing colonists.

Some of them founded Charleston, where they left their marks on the names and habits of the Carolinian town and helped to establish a long established but frequently forgotten connection between the Caribbean and the Eastern seaboard. Eleven of the first 23 governors of South Carolina came from the islands, seven from Barbados.[i] Henry Winthrop, son of John Winthrop, New England's first governor had put in three years in Barbados before moving north.[ii].

While maintaining the trading connections that progressively expanded over the following century they took something far more pernicious than rum. Slavery had no basis in contemporary English Law, and it took the autonomy of the Barbadian planters to codify it separately.

The Barbadian slave code in 1661 was a legal breakthrough that was in fact adopted by Antigua and Jamaica, and then copied and emulated by South Carolina and Virginia, transforming the English legal idea of indentures for a fixed period into a state of perennial servitude for one group of people only. Whom the planters wished to enslave, they first insulted. "The Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Africans and Negroes," began by referring to its subjects as "heathenish," "brutish," and a "dangerous kind of people."[iii]

So, along with an aversion to taxation, and the title of President, the codification of black slavery went along with rum as Barbados' contribution to the development of the North American colonies. Two out of three of Churchill's triptych on the Navy, Rum and the Lash are definite Barbadian exports to the mainland. Buggery was optional, one supposes.

Many other aspects of the economic and social structures of the Southern Plantation system had a dry run in Barbados. Even at this early stage Barbados had some amusing precursors of later stereotypical Southern lifestyles. Long before the Kentucky Colonel's heyday, every planter or "gentleman" on the island is titled as "Captain" or "Colonel." But there were more serious precursors, a persistent semi-feudal politics setting poor whites as the first bulwark against the possibility of slave revolts. You could say that the fuse for the American Civil War fizzled its way north from Barbados, the sugar colony that rum made profitable and habitable.

Many of the founding fathers had family connections and current ties to the islands, ranging

from George Washington's sojourn in Barbados to Alexander Hamilton's birth in Nevis, and Thomas Jefferson's visit to St Kitts, where his grandfather had had a plantation. There they had time to appreciate the model mix for the new republic, at least from the Southern colonies perspectives slave-owners' autonomy.

Washington visited Barbados in 1751 and was almost tempted to stay by his calculations which could have started a whole new alternative history. He confided to his diary, "Canes is from 40 to 70 ton of sugar, each ton valued at 20/ out of which a third is deducted for expenses, unless rum sells for 2/ and upwards pr Gallon than it is, though the sugar is near clean."[iv]

Adam Smith put it more cogently than the founder of the US, whose grammar and style improved over the years. "It is commonly said that a sugar planter expects that rum and molasses should defray the whole expense of his cultivation, and that his sugar should be all clear profit."[v] The presence of Washington is testimony once again to the connections between the mainland colonies and the Caribbean.

However it was not just the South, but also New England that owed its heritage to the island. It was two Indian slaves, John and Tituba, brought from Barbados to Salem by minister Samuel Parris, whose native rituals inspired the Salem Witch-hunts, thus setting the precedent for the periodic paroxysms of intolerance that still beset the American mainland.[vi] Barbados was everywhere in spirit and in rum throughout the new colonies.

But it was not only the plantation system that the Barbadians exported northwards it was also one of the more commercially lucrative ideas about what to do with their rum, and morally on a par with the "customs of the country" that they had exported. Soon emulated by Jamaica and the other islands, they took their rum to Africa to trade for slaves.

John Winthrop was a pioneer of the Barbadian- Boston connection. His journals record the first documented slave voyage from Boston November 1644, with a voyage that took staves for casks to Cape Verde Islands, traded them for slaves which they took to Barbados and exchanged for sugar and tobacco which eventually reached Boston after a five month round trip voyage.

Rum Rapine and Revolution the Triangle

It was one thing selling dried fish to feed slaves and drinking the profits. But in the hands of the New England merchants, rum soon became a double enslaver, depending on the toil of slaves to make and being the main trade item to buy slaves in West Africa. To get their drinks, from an early stage coastal monarchs staged slave raids on their weaker neighbors. By 1679, French slave traders were already complaining that the brandy they had formerly used in trade for slaves in Africa had been flooded out by cheaper rum, and one recorded that a large bull was bought for one pint of spirit in 1697 in Senegal. The Monarchs along the coast had a huge thirst and in Gabon, they gave an elephant tusk for a measure of liquor which they had emptied before they left the vessel.[vii]

British histories always depicted the Triangle Trade with its apex in Liverpool and Bristol. Manufactured goods left Britain for West Africa, and were traded for slaves who were taken to the Caribbean and the mainland colonies where they were exchanged for with sugar, molasses and rum for the British home market.

The New England colonies had a triangle all their own, although it shared a base on the same gruesome middle passage. But its apex was across the Atlantic in New England, Boston and Providence rather than Bristol and Liverpool. Regardless of whose "triangle" it is, reality does not always favor simple geometrical metaphors and the so-called triangle was much more like a cats cradle with multiple nodes. There was a lot of direct trade between the American colonies and the Caribbean and between both and Britain, not to mention the voyages carrying Grand Banks fish to Southern Europe.

From a moral dimension, there was indeed a triangle, or rather the trinity, of disrepute: slaves, rum and sugar. In this "triangle," the rum that was made from the molasses that had been traded for cod, was then bartered in West Africa for yet more slaves who were taken to the Caribbean or southern mainland colonies. The resulting trade links connected the frozen seas of the North West Atlantic to the torrid beaches of the Bight of Benin with the keystone of the structure the slave-worked sugar plantations of the Caribbean.

The mainland colonies were "the key to the Indies without which Jamaica, Barbadoes and ye Charibby Islands are not able to subsist,"[viii] one writer commented in 1661 and it became truer as the decades rolled by and as the hogsheads of molasses and rum rolled into the holds of the trading fleets. But it was also doubtful whether the mainland colonial economies would have taken off so quickly without the trade to the islands.

The movements of men, goods and ships which rum impelled ensured that New England and the North American colonies were not like French Canada, or the Spanish Main. The traditions of local autonomy and lively entrepreneurship ensured that they did not linger as a sleepy backwater fossilized economically and socially at the time of the settlement, but became a major link in the global network, with a vigorous and growing commercial and industrial life of their own.

The ships were built, supplied and equipped locally in New England, on a scale that matched the mother country's capabilities. Indeed their shipbuilding and navigation techniques overreached that of their more conservative transatlantic cousins. For example, Franklin remarked on British captains' refusal to take advantage of the extra speed offered by the Gulf Stream. Yankee skippers roamed the globe in emulation of the Viking example of seeking riches at sea that they assuredly could not cultivate in their cold and relatively infertile home.

However, the rum trade also distorted economic development. George Weedon concluded that, "the substitution of rum for food affected the whole business of commercial exchange in this period. Between the derangement of an inflated currency, and the diversion of productive industry to distilling and its collateral slave importation, the building of vessels and the catch

of fish fell off."

While allowing for some effects from the wars with France, he concluded unequivocally, "the main cause in the decline in these important industries must be found in rum."[ix] It did not take long for the New England traders to get in on the act. In the late seventeenth century, Taussig comments with bitter irony, the Yankee merchants' first battle for "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights" was their petitioning parliament, along with their English colleagues, to break the monopoly of the Royal Africa company on the slave trade along the coast of Africa. They enthusiastically proposed export duties of 10% on goods leaving for Africa to defray the costs of the slave forts and factories along the coast. Their proposal was adopted: whether they paid the tax as scrupulously is another story. [x]

In the Treaty of Utrecht following the War of Spanish Succession in 1713, in addition to Gibraltar, Britain secured Newfoundland, along with confirmation of the Royal Assiento, whereby British ships, in return for a large cash payment up front to Spain, were licensed to trade slaves to the Spanish colonies. British for these purposes included the British colonies as well and the trade just grew and grew.

By 1721 the factor for the British Royal African Company on the Slave Coast reported that rum had become the "chief barter" there even for gold, let alone slaves.

There was much more to show in the way of negative results for the people on the base of the triangle. In 1740, four out of every ten slaves bought by the Codrington Plantation in Barbados died within three years. We must not belabor the New England divines alone for their flexible ethics. They were drawing on an old tradition. Since the Codrington Plantation was owned by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, its overseers branded slaves on the chest with "SOCIETY," to remind them and others that these human chattels were doing the Lord's work. James Oglethorpe when he founded Georgia tried to keep out both rum and slavery with only very temporary success. The great evangelist George Whitefield sympathized with the colonists against John Oglethorpe, who he complained deprived them of – rum and slaves.

The heartland of abolitionism, piety and the Union in the Civil War, and Prohibitionism afterwards, has not often been ecstatic about being reminded of its close connections to rum and the lash. So popular histories have tended, if anything, to minimize both.

Even at the time, there were some mild signs of embarrassment about the business. For example, Captain David Lindsay of Newport called the vessels engaged in the trade "rum Ships" rather than slave ships and another slaver captain referred to "us rum men." Even the rum for the slave trade was euphemized into "Guinea Rum." As Taussig put the hypocrisy, "New Englanders in honesty referred to Missionaries on deck and rum in the hold.'"[xi]

"Guinea Rum" was what we now call overproof. It was double or even triple distilled to save the cost of freight, and water would be added at the destination to get it to the appropriate and more drinkable strength. Champlin's trade book of the Rhode Island slaver, the Sloop *Adventure*, records that they traded 500 more gallons of rum than they had shipped despite

evaporation, which could have been sharp practice or just normal business.[xii]

As Simeon Potter, who had himself made his fortune privateering, ordered his Captain Earle of the King George in 1764 “Make Yr Chief Trade with the Blacks and Little or none with the white people if possible to be avoided. Worter yr rum as much as possible and sell as much by short mesuer as you can.”

One could say that Potter’s political principles were just as flexible. Despite calling his ships “The Prince Charles” and “The King George”, he became a superpatriot at the time of Revolution and was made Major General of the Rhode Island Colonial Forces. More consistently, he was as remiss at paying taxes to the revolutionary government as he had been to the royal government.

He anticipated his successors in American politics by having his legal residence in the town of Swansey, Massachusetts, where the taxes were much lower than in Bristol RI, where he made most of his money. Neither tax evasion, nor slave trading stopped him finishing his days as a vestryman at St Michael’s church in Bristol. It was what Weedon called “A casuistry of culture, combined with rude impassioned humanity- a commingled hash of Satanic civilization and simple savage nature. ” that enabled such to speak of the inalienable rights of man, and liberty or death, while either dealing in slaves, or owning them. [xiii]

And what was the price of soul? In 1764 it was £12, – or 110 gallons of rum in the standard unit of exchange. [xiv] In 1755 was 799 gallons of rum, two barrels of beef and one of pork for four men, three women, three girls and one boy.

Twenty years later, just before the Revolution, Rhode Islander Aaron Lopez was paying only 22 gallons a head.[xv]

George Washington was perhaps the most outstanding example of weighing souls against spirits and the osmosis of deceit involved in the process. In 1766, while still a British officer and a gentleman, the future President shipped off a slave called Tom to the West Indies to be sold in exchange for other things, a hogshead of best Jamaican rum.[xvi]

With no truth in advertising law to inhibit him, he did not tell prospective purchasers that Tom seemed to have nursed the spirit of independence and freedom that later canonized his master and was being sold because he was “unruly.” Somehow, it seems more shocking that he actually sent Tom to sell himself! He sent him to the Captain of a sloop bound for the Caribbean with a letter saying that “With this letter comes a negro (Tom) which I beg the favor of you to sell in any of the islands you may go to, for whatever he will fetch, and bring me in return for him,

> One hhd. of best molasses
>
> One ditto of best rum

One barrel of lymes, if good & cheap

One pot tamarinds, containing about 10 lbs.

Two small ditto of mixed sweetmeats about 5 lbs each.
And the residue, much or little in good old spirits."[xvii]

Setting the price of a human being in such tawdry trade goods rather than in coin of the realm appears more shocking even if the effect is the same. To sell ones own soul for a cask of rum is one thing, but to sell someone else's certainly tarnishes the halo of the founding father.

Like most people of taste, Washington preferred the West Indian to the New England rum, just as he preferred the Virginian definition of freedom to that elaborated by Lord Mansfield in England in his famous declaration that slavery was illegal in Britain itself. "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" Samuel Johnson asked, and has never been adequately answered.

But one of the side effects of the Revolution for freedom and liberty was that a critical shortage of New England rum affected all the slave traders along the coast. The locals had become habituated and were unhappy with the substitutes.

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[i] Tree 19

[ii] Tree 11,12

[iii] Beckles, Barbados 33

[iv] Washington Diaries, q in Taussig, p 37

[v] Smith, 157

[vi] Dunn 337

[vii] Huetz de Lemp 88

[viii] see Barty-King, p 158 TK original

[ix] Weedon op cit., cited in Taussig 18

[x] Taussig 155

[xi] Taussig xi

[xii] (appendix Taussig)

[xiii] Taussig 102

[xiv] Taussig 97)

[xv] Thomas 328

[xvi] Aykroyd 92

[xvii] Taussig 27

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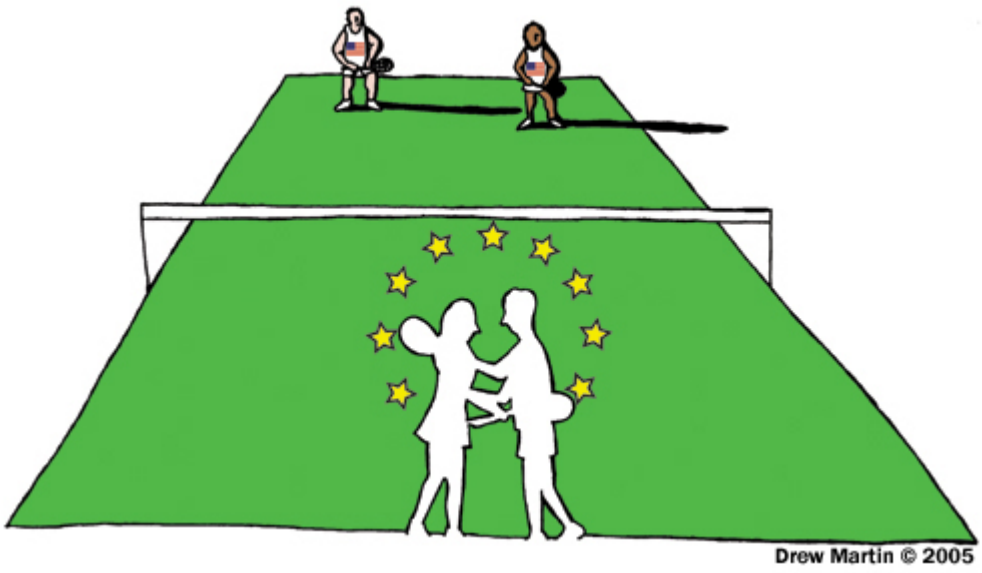
Tale Of Two Cultures: A London-Barcelona Diary

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

It was a dream come true: I had been playing tennis since I was eleven years of age, and always told myself I had to see Wimbledon before I died. As I approached sixty, a minor miracle made this dream come true, and I unexpectedly came into possession of tickets for Centre Court for the last five days of this year's championship matches. And so, on June 28, I flew to London, and then planned to spend the second week of July in Barcelona, visiting friends and walking around the city. My forthcoming book deals, in part, with urban design, and one can hardly do better than Barcelona as a case study of a city that had turned out right.



As part of my research as well, I had been thinking a lot about the differences between Europein which I do not include Great Britainand the United States. This might also be conceptualized, at least partly, as a difference between Anglo-Saxon and Latin cultures, or perhaps between cultures still pursuing an imperial agenda (the U.S. being a de facto continuation of the British empire) and those that have long since given it up. Two years ago, the pro-war neoconservative scholar, Robert Kagan, gave voice to these differences in an essay called "Power and Weakness," which was subsequently expanded into a book, *Of Paradise and Power.* Kagan's argumentthat Europeans could indulge themselves in "feminine" things such as improving the quality of life only because the "masculine" American military was protecting them from an external threatwas one I found misguided and offensive. *What* external threat, after all? Kagan never says; but inasmuch as he was one of the early (1990s) proponents of "regime change" in Iraq, along with American domination of the globe, his writings always struck me as being little more than imperialist apologetics. "Americans," asserts Kagan, "are from Mars; Europeans, from Venus." ("We are not from Venus," retorted the German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, before the United Nations Security Council on the eve of the Iraq war; "rather, we are the victims of the war god, Mars"a nugget of European wisdom that eludes American militarists like Robert Kagan.)

It was, of course, a measure of the U.S.-European difference that Kagan's ideas were heavily excoriated on the European side of the Atlantic, and regarded as some sort of conceptual breakthrough in the United States. In fact, the argument is simplistic, part of the ideological justifications then being mounted for aggressive action against a virtually nonexistent enemy, a war that had been predetermined on what one might call "theological" grounds. And yet, in an odd way, the comparison is apt. The title of Kagan's book captures it very well. Europeans, writes Kagan, live in a kind of paradise, a world of social welfare, reliable pensions, long paid vacations, universal health care, andnot leastgracious and elegant cities. Americans, on the other hand, live in wastelands such as Dallas and Atlanta, organize their lives around money, power, and competition, and, says Kagan, derive much of their satisfaction in life from "their nation's military power and their nation's special role in the world." Personally, this so-called "satisfaction" strikes me as being a species of existential fraud; but then I'm not exactly a majority voice on the U.S. scene.

In any case, my arrival in London: the first thing I noticed was the sense of noise and pressure that pervaded the city. I had lived in London many years ago; in the wake of the "Thatcher revolution," it had become a very different place. The British are constantly on the go, heavily stressed out. It seemed like every other person on the street was talking into a cell phone. Indeed, these gadgets kept ringing during the match at Wimbledon, occasionally disturbing the playersdespite the fact that the announcer repeatedly asked patrons to turn their phones off. As I looked around the stands, I noticed many people staring at their cell phones or talking on them, instead of watching the match. Sitting in the lounge of my hotel at night, quietly reading, I was frequently confronted by hotel guests bursting in, flipping open their cell phones, and loudly conducting business as though the place were an extension of their office. This privatization of public spacethe death of the commons, one might call itis the by-product of a world that privileges individual ambition over communal welfare. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher declared that "society does not exist," and, like Ronald Reagan, set out to destroy it. (Lewis Mumford once commented that the U.S. goal was to collectively live out a private dream.) Both of them succeeded, pretty much: it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The cell phone is merely the coup de grâce.

Mars and Venus, in any case, showed up with stunning clarity on the tennis court, when (July 3-4) Maria Sharapova defeated Serena Williams for the women's championship, and Roger Federer defeated Andy Roddick for the men's. I was delighted to see Venus (the goddess, not the tennis player) win: in both cases, it was the victory of grace over power (or even rage). Serena seemed to be bursting with anger; her only goal was to win. Maria, on the other hand, was quiet and concentrated, to the point of being meditative; her goal was to play well. Similarly, Roddick's approach was one of brute force, or controlled fury; he had vowed to "hit the crap out of the ball," and he did. At first, Federer was thrown off guard by this, but he finally managed to regain his balance, and to respond to Roddick's violence with finesse. I found it weirdly symbolic to see the American tennis players, in effect, mirroring U.S. foreign policy, while the European players were patiently showing the Americans how to live. (A lesson lost on them, I fear.) Back in my hotel room, I listened, that evening, to a recording of Verdi's opera, *Nabucco*"Oh, mia patria si bella e perduta!"and felt sad.

With Wimbledon over, I spent July 5 at the Hopper exhibit at the Tate Modern. There are few American artists, or even artists period, whose work is as psychologically haunting as Edward Hopper's. In paintings such as *Automat* (1927) or *Nighthawks* (1942) one sees quite clearly the dark side of the "American Dream": the isolation and pervasive melancholy that lurks underneath the surface bombast. Americans, I thought, must be the loneliest people on earth; they just don't know it. Certainly, no one managed to capture the soullessness of a life devoted to power and "success" as well as Hopper did; and if, on an unconscious level, life in the U.S. was this bleak in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, what would his paintings look like, I wondered, if he were alive today? An article on Hopper in Barcelona's *La Vanguardia Magazine*, which I read only a few days later (July 11), makes just this point: "la pregunta pertinente es cómo habría pintado los Estados Unidos más crueles, fundamentalistas y divididos de George W. Bush." (The pertinent question is how he would have painted the crueler, more fundamentalist and divided United States of George W. Bush.) Hopper, the article concludes, was a dissident mirror of a society "en aparienca feliz, pero llena de dudas morales (como ahora), y sobre todo infinitamente sola." (happy in appearance, but filled with moral doubts (like today), and above all infinitely alone)

Part of the process of Americanization, of course, is giving people the means to hide from the desolation that Americanization leaves in its wake. Kagan's comment about U.S. pride in the nation's military prowess is one example of this; religious fundamentalism is another. Really, if Hopper were to paint *Nighthawks* today, the people in the painting would be on cell phones or Prozac, or staring into TV or computer screens, or stuffing themselves with Big Macs from McDonalds. I never thought much of the politics of Jean-Marie Le Pen (to say the least), but when he warns his countrymen that unless globalization and Americanization are contained, France could wind up looking like Omahawell clearly, the man has a point. Mars has its temptations: left to its own devices, America could well turn every face on earth into an empty one, every European café into a scene out of a Hopper painting.

The comparison kept showing up; I couldn't get away from it. That evening (July 5), I went to see Patrice Leconte's new film, *Confidences trop intimes.* The night before, in my hotel room, I wound up watching a 1997 George Clooney-Nicole Kidman film on TV, *The Peacemakers*, a "romantic" antiterrorist bit of fluff that was so stupid as to be embarrassing. From the first few frames, absolutely nothing is in doubt: the golden hero will defeat the evil enemy threatening the United States and win the pretty girl. Like most Hollywood stuff, it is as subtle as a train wreck, and utterly predictable; which is what U.S. audiences want. It made me think of the recent comment of the vice president of a major publishing firm in the U.S., that sales of foreign literature in translation had fallen off dramatically in the United States during the last few years because the U.S. public can't grasp the nuance involved in the stories, and has no tolerance for ambiguity, which is particularly characteristic of European fiction. The contrast between *Peacemakers* and *Confidences*, in any case, couldn't have been greater in this regard. Unlike typical Hollywood fare, Leconte's film is not a simplistic tale of sex and "romance" (where there is in fact *no* real romance), with the plot line being a foregone conclusion. Rather, the direction of the film takes shape very gradually, and even at the end, the outcome is not clear. It demonstrates that uncertainty and ambiguityprecisely those things that make

Americans anxiousare the things that give life its real sparkle.

But it goes even deeper than this. In the United States, it is hard to argue for quality of life without being attacked as an elitist, or for communal solutions to social problems without being accused of (political) "liberalism" (a word that evokes horror in the hearts of the majority of the population). I've often thought that our motto, "In God We Trust," should be changed to "What's In It For Me?" It will, in fact, take something like an act of God to get Americans to stop using cell phones in public, because annoying the people around you is not something we worry about (there is no society, after all, in our world viewjust individual "atoms"). Collective decisions for the common weal are quite rare in a laissez-faire society. Some time ago the American author Stephen King made an offer to his readers at large, that he would write his next novel online if 75% of those reading it would agree to download each completed chapter for the nominal fee of one dollar. If more than 25% failed to pay for the book-in-progress, he would simply quit writing, and everybody would lose out. It was quite a bargain, given the cost of new hardback books these days. How did the U.S. public respond? But of course, you know the answer: nearly half acted out of individual greed rather than community responsibilityi.e., downloaded the book without paying for itand so King pulled the plug. The point is that extreme individualism is very powerful, much like an aggressive cancer, whereas communal arrangements tend to be very fragile. The laissez-faire mentality can invade and disrupt a culture overnight, as it were; after which it becomes very difficult to revert to status quo ante.

In any case, I arrived in Barcelona around 7 p.m. on July 7, and took a taxi to Esplugues, where I was staying. As I walked the streets later that evening, I turned off Laurea Miro and onto a very long courtyard, tucked away from the main street. The pavement was done in brick, there were lots of benches to sit on, and to my left was a "center for culture and recreation." It was a pedestrian zone, and issued out onto a park. The first thing I was struck by was the beauty of the design, in a "suburb" of sorts that wasn't particularly fancy. The whole courtyard area was oriented to human social life. The second thing I felt, after a week in London, was the palpable atmosphere of relaxation and friendliness, as people interacted with one another. Unlike London, and much of the U.S., people here are not alone: they were clustered in groups of six or more, engaged in relaxed or animated conversation. I suddenly realized how harsh London was, how solitary, how high-pressured. (And how expensive: the metro fare starts at about four dollars, the same for a cup of tea, and a simple lunch easily goes for about twenty dollars.) Clearly, the pure laissez-faire life, in which everybody is out for themselves, exacts an enormous toll; but perhaps there is also something about Anglo-Saxon cultures that is simply unloving, I'm not sure. I stood at a kiosk, noticing how much was going on in terms of meetings and cultural events. While I was doing this, two men came up and posted a notice for meetings of the Associació Catalana Contra la Contaminació Acústica (Catalan Association Against Noise Pollution). Like all the other posters, it was in Catalan; I could read about half of it. After the men left, I went over to a family sitting on a bench and asked the father if he could translate for me from Catalan to Spanish. (How easy thisapproaching a complete strangerwas to do!) He said that it was an association dedicated to decreasing the noise level in Catalonia, including scooters, traffic, loud music, etc. He added that Barcelona was much noisier now than it had been just ten years ago. As I looked around at the large courtyard and cultural

center, I noticed another big difference from London: no cell phones were in use, even among teenagers. Whereas I would guess that in London, the ratio of cell phone use on the street is one out of every two or three people, in Barcelona it is something like 1:100. In terms of having a sense of social cohesionnot to mention relative quietit makes an enormous difference.

July 8. I buy a copy of *El País*. On page 6, there is an interview with Patrus Ananias de Souza, Brazil's "Ministro del Hambre Cero" (Minister of Zero Hunger)can one imagine such a cabinet post in England or the U.S.?who is quoted as saying, "El desarollo económico no es suficiente para promover la igualidad." (Economic development is insufficient to promote equality.) Neoliberal globalization, he went on to say, is merely financial in nature; authentic globalization, on the other hand, is about human rights, management of the media, the Kyoto Protocol, ethical values, building peace… Tell it to the Bush administration, I thought; although the Democrats, it must be said, are only slightly better. Neither of the two major parties envisions a truly different way of life beyond that of corporate consumerism, and that way of life is in the process of destroying all other ways of life. A poster for the Forum, a five-month-long conference on cultural diversity, sustainability, and peace, proclaims in Catalan: "A Barcelona volem canviar el món" (In Barcelona we wish to change the world); and I thought: good luck! I suspect that the U.S. will Americanize Barcelona long before this great Catalan city can even hope to Barcelonize the U.S. After centuries of tumult and torment, the Spanish have become a practical people. After March 11, with nearly two hundred dead and the threat of terrorism hanging over them, they did the sensible thing: got rid of the toady who hitched his career to George W. Bush and the phony war in Iraq, and voted in a democratic socialist government, the only type of government that is reasonable for the Western industrial nations, in my opinion. If an al-Qaeda attack had occurred in the U.S. prior to the November 2 election, Americans, being a "theological" people rather than a practical one, would surely have clung to Bush; nor will they *ever* consider electing a democratic socialist governmentthis would be beyond the pale. As the U.S. historian Richard Hofstadter once put it, "It is America's fate not to have ideologies, but to *be* one."

July 13: I open the London *Guardian* and read that the Bush administration and the Department of Justice have been exploring ways in which the presidential election in November might be legally postponed, in the event of a potential terrorist threat. For the first time in the history of the U.S., the government is actually talking about canceling a presidential election. Is this really happening?

Two weeks later, I'm back home in Washington, DC. It's about 9 a.m., and I get on the elevator in my building. There are three other people there, and I say, "Good morning!" as I walk on. They just stare at me, as though I had spoken in Urdu, or was initiating the opening phase of some bizarre and dangerous ritual. Normally, I just give up; nonresponse is pretty common in the land of Edward Hopper, where the citizens are so stressed out that they wall off the world as a reflex. But this morning, still carrying the glow of "Venus" inside me, I don't want to throw in the towel, I don't want to accept this profoundly antisocial value system. "What?" I exclaim; "nobody says Good morning'?" Embarrassed, they fall over themselves now to reply to my greeting. For a brief moment, I shocked them into base-level civility. But as I and they

well know, it’s not going to last.

There is no doubt about it: I am home!

Postscript, June-July 2005:

I returned to Barcelona almost exactly a year later, to complete a certification program I had been working on to teach English as a second language. My fears that the United States would Americanize Barcelona proved to be disturbingly well founded, though I never imagined that the process would happen so quickly. In the preceding twelve months, it seemed as though there was a tenfold increase in the use of cell phones. Suddenly, Barcelona was noisy as hell. As in Londonnot quite as bad, but almostpeople were walking down the street, oblivious to their surroundings, mentally removed from the physical and social environment, and yelling into their phones. The din was incredible, and the city now had a distinctly American commercial flavor to it. I reflected that the combination of extreme individualism and endless high-tech innovation (toys for adults, when you get right down to it) was a lethal formula, virtually irresistible, moving through the world like a cancer, and destroying silence and society in its wake. But the sense of Spanish grace, much to my relief, wasn’t completely gone. If you are sitting at a café with a stranger (or are together on an elevator), they will say goodbye as they take their leave. Sales personnel still make eye contact and smile at you as they hand you your change, a dramatic difference from the sullen indifference of their counterparts in DC. On the metro with two friends, I was amazed as one woman, sitting in one of three seats in a row, got up and moved across the car, gesturing for us to sit down, having moved so that the three of us could sit together. I read an article in *La Vanguardia* about a social experiment being conducted in Catalonia, of putting young people in their early twenties together with elderly folks in their late eighties, as roommatesan experiment that was proving to be remarkably successful. So Spain is not America yet, not totally globalized and homogenized; but given what happened in one year, I shudder to think of what will happen in five. The American goal, then: life without love, without community, and above allwithout a moment’s peace.

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On The Afl-CIO Split

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

In some respects it was fitting that four important affiliates declared their withdrawal from the AFL-CIO in the days running up to the 50th anniversary convention in July 2005. A merger which was conceived in a unity that signified complacency was dissolved. The problem now is what can workers expect from the fissure? Will the defectors form a new federation? How can they fulfill their promise to launch a massive organizing drive in the current reactionary political environment? And can an alliance which embraces quite disparate forces help revive the somnambulism that has afflicted labor's ranks for more than two decades? Are those who split the kind of leaders that are capable of calling on the rank and file to mount resistance to the ongoing corporate offensive against wages and working conditions? And why should we expect this alliance to make a radical departure from the unimaginative program, and political subservience to the Democratic Party that has marked the decade long record of the Sweeney administration? To gain perspective on these questions we might find it useful to revisit the moment of the AFL-CIO merger. Such a look might clarify why Organized Labor has suffered such devastating defeats since the late 1970s and why, despite the growth of the Service Employees (SEIU), whose president is the main antagonist in the conflict, the rest of the unions, including those that defected with him, are suffering the same stagnation and decline as most others.

After twenty years of separation, CIO president Walter Reuther who led the largest of three very powerful industrial unions, the Auto Workers, brought some four and a half million CIO members consisting of 20 international unions back into the Federation. It was not a marriage made in heaven. Having purged so-called Left Wing unions from the CIO, in which communists played an important role, Reuther and his fellow CIO unionists shared with the AFL many things: with almost no exceptions they shared the fervent conviction that Communism and particularly the Soviet Union was the root of all evil. They were deeply committed to the permanent war economy because it was a leading post-war job machine as well as a potent ideological weapon that glued the labor movement to the priorities of the war machine and a weapon which also thwarted Labor's reform agenda for a half century. Capitalism and the large United States corporations that dominated it was, despite many conflicts with the labor movement, considered by many union leaders as part of the Free World coalition of which Organized Labor was a vital part.

But there was still a residue of democratic values and even militancy in many CIO affiliates which most of the AFL groups did not give a rat's ass about. Many CIO leaders remained wary of the merger, although Reuther pushed it through with minimum opposition. In the end, though, almost all of them fell in line. Almost alone among CIO presidents, Michael J. Quill of the Transport Workers, whose capitulation to Cold War politics and internal purges of the Communists helped to set the tone for the erosion of union democracy, stood up at the final

CIO convention and warned delegates that by seeking peace with the AFL they were betraying the militant, progressive legacy of their organization. He predicted the merger would fail to sustain the forward march of Labor and voted against it. Of course, the leaders of the major CIO affiliates ignored his warnings and proceeded to dissolve their organization and hand over the leadership to a conservative building trades official, AFL president George Meany. A few days later the two organizations which, at the time, represented more than a third of the labor force, became one and Meany, a cold war hawk, was named president with Reuther as an uncomfortable second in command.

During the 1950s, Reuther, who had distinguished himself by questioning whether the auto corporations needed to raise prices in order to raise wages, became a relentless lobbyist for defense contracts for the Auto and Farm Equipment corporations with which the UAW had collective agreements. In the spirit of the new environment of labor/management cooperation, which pervaded leading steel as well as Auto corporations (at least at the top), Reuther signed the first five year contract with the auto corporations. Among other departures from the past, the agreement contained a rigid no-strike clause, in return for binding arbitration to address workers' grievances. Within a decade, under the slogan of labor peace, other unions began to follow suit and signed long term agreements with employers. Yet, the long road from a grievance to arbitration resulted in hundreds of unresolved complaints in General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. Workers were burdened by a corporate offensive on their hard-won working conditions that was spotlighted by a company policy of speedup and draconian discipline, including arbitrary discharges.

By 1955, despite relatively high wages and, in the wake of the defeat of national health insurance in 1949, the elements of a private welfare state that the UAW negotiated with a high-flying management, worker resentment was smoldering and soon broke out in a series of wildcat strikes, even as the merger was being consummated. As a result the UAW brass was forced to take a step back; the contract was modified to permit strikes over discharges and onerous working conditions, but the leadership never recanted its embrace of labor peace. Like his counterpart in the Steelworkers union, the ever accommodating David McDonald, Reuther toured the auto plants in the company of high ranking company executives to signal the union's determination to cooperate with the introduction of new technologies and with companies' drive for higher productivity. Declaring that the key to full employment and raised living standards was worker productivity, Reuther all but renounced the union's tradition of fighting for shorter hours and for greater worker voices in setting production norms.

In time, Reuther changed his position on United States foreign policy, sharply criticized Meany for his subservience to it and went so far to take the UAW, temporarily, out of the AFL-CIO, threatening to form a new federation with the Teamsters and other dissident unions. Towards the end of his life-he died in a plane crash in 1970– he reversed direction and opposed the Vietnam war. By the time of his death the AFL-CIO had long abandoned its façade of non-partisanship and was not only securely folded into the Democratic Party as a junior partner, but, despite a rash of wildcat strikes against speedup in the auto industry, particularly in Lordstown, and Norwood, Ohio, the UAW, no less than the rest of Organized Labor, remained

ideologically committed to class collaboration.

With the exception of some industrial union participation in the Civil Rights struggle in the South, even as most of the crafts retained their anti-black policies, the 1960s were marked by Labor's indifference, even hostility, towards the new social movements that emerged during the decade. Some union women formed the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), which joined with other women's organizations in fighting for the equal rights amendment and for equal pay for equal pay at the workplace. But the demands of black workers for union construction jobs and for apprenticeship opportunities hit a brick wall. The major breakthrough of this period was the rise of public sector unions, most of which were majority women, blacks and Latinos. Unions like the State, County and Municipal Employees, the Teachers, and state employees associations that, at first were independent of the AFL-CIO, seemed to give the labor movement new energy. Many were active in the struggle for women's rights, gradually joined the anti-Vietnam war protest and conducted militant strikes at the public workplace, which prompted some legislatures to outlaw strikes by public employees. By the late 1980s, unions represented a third of public employees and were setting their sights on the health care field which although largely part of the non-profit private sector is heavily subsidized by government and by union-negotiated pre-paid health insurance.

The SEIU's rise from a medium sized union of janitors and doormen into the largest union in the country is due, primarily, to its intervention into the public and health sectors. While it never fails to remind the public and fellow unionists that it has transformed itself by devoting a large portion of its treasury to organizing, its growth owes as much to its former president John Sweeney and its current chief Andy Stern's shrewd business sense. SEIU has been built on some important campaigns, especially among the working poor, but its growth owes as much to mergers and acquisitions of existing independent public employees unions, affiliates of other national unions such as the huge health and hospital local 1199, which some would describe as raiding. Stern, James P. Hoffa-the Teamsters president-and the two leaders of UNITE HERE, Bruce Raynor and John Wilhelm are not bereft of tactical imagination and significant resources with which to conduct an aggressive organizing campaign. But in most other respects they are in the old mold of top-down bureaucratic unionism.

Consider the decision to split from the AFL-CIO. No doubt each union consulted with its executive board, composed mostly or exclusively of full-time paid officials of the union. But, consistent with the predominant mode of organization in today's unions the rank and file was not part of the process by which the decision was arrived at. Some locals of all of the splitters did call meetings to discuss the withdrawal. The leaders, however, acted unilaterally. In democratic organizations such radical steps would surely be preceded by a genuine debate among the members where the pros and cons can be rehearsed, resolutions entertained from the locals and a public convention and/ or a referendum held to determine what the pleasure of the rank and file is.

There are other concerns that need to be raised with respect to the split. Stern has made known his desire to form a new partnership with the corporate giants of the service sector.

While attacking Sweeney's penchant to, in Hoffa's words "throw money at the Democrats (the AFL-CIO gave more than $200 millions to John Kerry's 2004 presidential campaign), SEIU donated more than $65 million to the campaign. And there is not a whisper about what may be one of the most important tasks facing workers: in the face of media complicity and indifference to the problems of working people, to the economic and social crisis facing many of them, the Coalition that boycotted the convention has indicated no plans to start a national daily or weekly general circulation newspaper, buy radio and television stations, conduct an otherwise intense campaign to get its message across to the public. Equally salient, the nature of the contemplated organizing campaign promises to remain quite conventional, dominated by paid staff rather recruiting from the rank and file and organizing from the bottom, seeking Labor Board-run elections or card checks rather than opening the door to the revival of the strike as a main form of securing recognition, remaining oriented to getting contracts rather than organizing workers whether there is a practical chance of a contract or not. Needless to say, the new coalition understands that the Labor Relations Board has become an employer tool. At best they have proposed to seek employer agreement to recognize unions that show they represent a majority of their employees. But card checks as a tactic presupposes much more union power than currently exists. And while the strike weapon has become a museum piece because workers and their unions seem terrified to face the employer's wrath under various labor relations laws that give them few breaks, we hear no conversation about how to open new avenues for worker voices.

Nor is there special sensitivity to the obvious changes that have occurred in the workplace, particularly the dominant role of technology in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. There are some who recognize the importance of the internet in mobilizing around social and political issues, but neither Sweeney nor Stern has spoken about its potential and certainly have not taken the opportunity to articulate labor's voice in cyberspace. These changes have altered the nature of the labor force, bringing into existence millions of credentialed and technically trained workers who, except in the public sector, are largely outside of the unions. It is true that SEIU has paid some attention to the problems faced by physicians in hospitals and private practice, But like many of its affiliates, it acquired the network of doctor's locals which began as independents. It has not developed an all-encompassing strategy to extend its purview in this field. As with the rest of organized labor, the new coalition partners are likely to perpetuate the neglect of professional and technical workers that, with the exception of the Communications Workers (Sweeney loyalists), has failed to come to terms with the 21st century workplace.

Some labor intellectuals and activists have welcomed the new departure as an opportunity. The best of their arguments is that the historical evidence demonstrates that competition is good for workers. The rise of the labor movement during the progressive era, the 1930s upsurge and the explosion of public sector unionism in the 1960s were marked by intense competition within the labor movement. But these were the greatest periods of union growth. If two or more unions fight for representation of a group of workers, the non-union option is often marginalized. Some argue that even the conservative unions, made secure by article 20 of the AFL-CIO constitution which prohibits raiding, are forced by competition to up the ante, to

promise a more aggressive and militant brand of unionism. For it must be acknowledged that under the existing regime of no competition in organizing workers have few alternatives to get out from under an oppressive union administration. Rather than promising more chaos, the new coalition proposes more order. True discontented workers can decertify the existing union, but only in a specified period after the expiration of the contract and then form an independent organization. But since the Teamsters returned to the AFL-CIO fold in the post-James R. Hoffa era, competitive unionism has fallen on hard times. Some claim this is one key reason for falling membership.

The question is whether the splitters can muster the rhetoric and the style that attracts workers. Whatever its practices, until the 1970s, the Teamsters paraded an image of economic power that was unrivalled by its AFL-CIO competitors most of whom were making nice to the bosses. The Teamsters had success because they offered a program of resistance. Are there any sections of Organized Labor that even remember how to talk the talk of class power when for decades, they have assured workers that they can secure justice by peaceful means, that the old methods of baptism by fire were outmoded and the labor movement had become "responsible"? Why should most workers trust union organizers who do not inspire them with a spirit to fight the boss, who cannot prepare them for the inevitable employer offensive, who do not promise to recruit workers to a new social movement that, at least, recognizes that American capitalism and its anti-labor laws and practices is the problem? Stern and company have high hopes, but in the end they mean no harm. They speak as if they are ready to break from the thrall of electoral politics but, like Reuther a half century ago, are prepared to sue for labor peace. Is this the stuff of a new crusade?

The fundamental question underlying the split is what would constitute an effective politics and strategy adequate to stop the rapid deterioration in workers' living standards? What can arrest the decline of real wages, the proliferation of temporary and contingent work and the profound regression in the already weakened system of industrial and labor relations? That's the first question. I want to suggest that organizing more workers is only one and perhaps not the most important condition for mounting a counter-offensive. The sufficient condition is the emergence of a Left within the labor movement that forces the issues, that opens wide a discussion in both major sections of Organized Labor. For this is the first period in recent history when there is no organized left to pose the uncomfortable questions. But this is also the first time in decades when those questions are getting a hearing, even if they are uttered in incoherent and fragmented ways.

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On The Future Of Trade Unionism

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

It should have been the time for a celebration of the golden anniversary of a calculated *mariage de raison* that had endured in spite of sometimes serious disagreements. Instead, the couple created in 1955 by the fusion of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (the AFL-CIO) has experienced a separation that will certainly lead to a bitter divorce. Two of the largest of the federated unions refused to participate in the quadrennial convention that took place from July 25 to July 28 in Chicago; and the departure of others will surely follow in the immediate future. Superficially, since the leader of the dissidents, Andrew Stern (54 years old) had been the protégé of the president of the AFL-CIO, John Sweeney (71 years old); the rupture has all the ingredients of an Oedipal drama. In an interview with the *New York Times* (July 29 2005), Sweeney-who had come to power ten years ago in a coup in which Andrew Stern was a crucial player-claimed that his opponents wanted to "force his retirement" and to "dictate" the person who would succeed him. But, obviously, the causes of the divorce are found at a deeper level.

At the time of the marriage, in 1955, nearly a third of American workers were members of unions, whereas by 1985 only 19% remained enrolled, and last year their number had dropped to 12.5 % (of whom barely 8% were in the private sector). The AFL-CIO nonetheless has some 13 million members, whose national dues (of $7.23 per person) support an organization that federates 57 unions (of different sizes), and is capable of mobilizing its supporters for important political fights (for example, 24% of John Kerry's voters in 2004 came from union households). The national headquarters in Washington forms an impressive lobby whose weight is felt in a variety of debates that concern working families. But it's precisely this orientation that has become a problem, counter the critics of the AFL-CIO, who have united under the slogan "Change to Win." Mobilizations around particular issues and influence brought to bear in the halls of power no longer suffice; trade unions have to begin once again to enroll new members and to expand their reach beyond the declining industries to organize in the neglected sectors of the economy. At the moment, however, only five affiliated unions devote more than 30% of their resources to organizing, whereas the dissidents have demanded that all member unions spend at least 50% of their funds on recruitment projects.

The first impact of the split will be to weaken the AFL-CIO, which will lose 4 million members and roughly 25 million dollars in dues payments each year. (If more unions leave, as predicted, the losses will be higher.) The departing unions criticize the present leadership for devoting too many resources to the quest for political influence while neglecting the principle duty of the trade unionist: to recruit and unite workers so that they can defend themselves. One source of the problem is obviously the fact that traditional industries are disappearing, moving production abroad with the result that the existing unions have no reason to spend their money in searching for new members; their obligation, it seems rightly to them, is to protect their

existing adherents and prior gains. Those sectors of the economy that are growing, such as the services, health and public employees, remain largely untapped. This distinction between an old and a new economy explains the optimism of Andrew Stern, the head of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) whose membership has grown from 700,000 to 1,8 million during the past decade.[1]

"Was it necessary to cut all ties?" is the question asked by the allies of John Sweeney. They wonder whether it would not have been better to seek a compromise-which indeed, they had proposed. They were willing to increase the resources devoted to organizational work-though not quite as much as the dissidents wanted, but still to a reasonable degree. More important, their counter-argument continues, the crucial point to recognize is that the true hindrance to developing further the power of trade unions comes from anti-union laws voted by Congress (such as, for example, the obligation to certify a union as representing the workers of a given firm, and the definition of what counts as bargaining in good faith by businesses that don't hesitate to employ union-busting practices). It is in Washington, they argue, that we will be able to change things, and that's why we devote so much of our resources to lobbying, as well as legislative and electoral projects. From this point of view, their self-defense turns into a counter critique: the competition that will grow from your splitting to go your own way, they tell the dissidents, will weaken us both[2]; each of us will be tempted to poach on the territory of the other while the allies of capital will sit back and apply the age-old principal of *divide et imperium*. And so, at the conclusion of his interview with the *Times*, John Sweeney mocks his critics as spoiled children who, when they saw that they could not win, picked up their marbles and went home. In spite of their claims to principled opposition, their behavior represented, he concludes, nothing but a quest for power.

In order to understand the split that is occurring, we need to return to the origins of the cold-blooded *mariage de raison* of 1955. At the time, the trade unions representing the professional sectors of the economy had been long united in the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which sought to increase the well-being of its members while excluding explicitly any broader project of social change. That vision of "pure and simple trade unionism" had overcome the opposition from various socialist movements-until the Great Depression of the 1930's, which gave rise to new radical demands. The Keynesian politics of the New Deal proposed new rules that sought to encourage the development of the union movement. The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was born in this context. It sought to organize unskilled workers in such industries as automobile, steel and coal, which the AFL had neglected. The success of the CIO was greater than anyone had hoped, and the great sit-down strikes of 1936 at General Motors remained a model, and a threat. But these successes could not be repeated; neither history nor capitalism stands still. At the end of the war, a new tendency began to be felt. In spite of president Truman's veto, the republican Congress passed the Taft-Hartley law that took back many of the advantages won by labor during the New Deal. In the meanwhile, the anti-communism of the Cold War led to purges among the more militant unionists. It was in this context that the *mariage de raison* between the AFL and the CIO-between whom no love was lost-took place: each needed the other in order to preserve its influence.

The supporters of “Change to Win” base their hopes on the analogy between their project, which seeks to organize the neglected (or new) strata at the bottom of society and the early success of the CIO. They suggest that the new activism that they incarnate will revivify a union movement that has remained-like the old AFL the captive of its past and a hostage to its members who want to preserve their prior gains and the social relations they guaranteed. This analogy can be pushed further. Since the majority of workers in the service sectors are ethnic minorities, the new unionism will have to follow the model of the early CIO in denouncing the implicit racism of those who put their narrow self-interest above the collective well being of a democratic society in which social divisions must not become quasi-hereditary, passed on from one union family to another. The same historical comparison suggests the need to create cross-union alliances to fight against such contemporary heirs to the old industrial giants as Walmart or Federal Express-just as the CIO mobilized social and political movements to fight General Motors or U.S. Steel. Up until now, those giants had taken advantage of the fact that the AFL-CIO is a loose federation whose president does not have the power to act against destructive inter-union competition. The divisions that result prevent coordinated action: 57 unions under one rickety umbrella make conflict inevitable, as the AFL-CIO itself recognized by proposing the need for consolidations (although it is unable to wield sufficient power to put its wishes into practice). This is another ground for the split, argue the dissidents, who want to create a more tightly run ship[3].

The analogies drawn by the dissidents are interesting, but the America of the new twenty-first century is not that of the New Deal. Indeed, in a sense, the worm was already in the fruit of the success of the CIO. The successful organization of the industrial giants led inevitably to the integration of the unions as increasing numbers of blacks moved north after the war. Racial tensions followed. These were exacerbated by the support given to the civil rights movement by the leading progressive edge of the CIO, the powerful United Auto Workers led by Walter Ruether and his progressive allies. At the same time, the Vietnam War brought about an increasing alienation between political liberalism rooted in the CIO and the anti-communist trade unionists of the AFL, whose socially conservative members found it difficult to understand the morals of a new generation. With the advent of the inflation (or “stagflation”) in the outgoing 1970s, the election of Ronald Reagan comes as no surprise. But his first act, at the beginning of 1981, the firing of the striking air traffic controllers and dissolution of their union, was a sign of the times to come. This aggressive element of republican politics, interrupted for a moment by the 1992 election of Bill Clinton-who had to confront a republican Congress after 1994-has been accentuated by George W. Bush. If all history is a history of class struggles, capital seems to have won the battle in the United States.

The wager of “Change to Win” is enormous. Its bet is all or nothing. The media have stressed mostly the negative consequences for the Democratic Party, at both the national level and in state and local politics, where unions bring with them an important contribution of activists and money. From this point of view, John Sweeney and his supporters seem to have the better argument when they insist that change has to make use of the existing political channels. And they are not wrong: the members appointed to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) that was created by the New Deal to level the playing field between capital and labor can

challenge union gains by interpreting laws favorably to business. But the critics are not wrong either. They stress that the attempts to play on the political terrain have been marked by a series of defeats, and that it is useless to continue to ram one's head against the same brick wall while repeating the mantra that a just cause will always, ultimately, triumph. They add that such repeated failures will, in the long run, discourage eventual allies who could emerge from sectors of society that have been hitherto ignored. If the traditional political path is closed (at least for the time being), then a new vision is needed in order to revivify those whose (justified) discontent does not, by itself, constitute a strategy. If the economy is no longer what it used to be, and if the chasm between the rich and the poor has deepened, then perhaps one should take advantage of the fact that the out-sourcing of mass production industries does not affect the service sectors that tend to escape from the threatening effects of globalization. This poses the question whether victories on this economic terrain could find a political translation? Could the dissidents be the carriers of a new perspective that has not yet found an adequate political formulation?

It is impossible to predict who will prove to be right, much less who will win. But it should be noted that the opposition between these two perspectives repeats a well-known dilemma present throughout the history of the Left. Beyond the opposition between reform and revolution, what is at stake is the alternative between a transformation that comes from the top down-by means of the state-and another vision that emerges from below-through the self-organization of workers. But that historical dichotomy was challenged by the emancipatory movements of Eastern and Central Europe that led to the rediscovery of the power of the forgotten democratic civil society. Americans, who think that they incarnate democracy, never reflected on how communism fell. But the new movement could force a reflection. Whereas the CIO organized workers of mass industries who worked in the same place and who became conscious of their unity because the union was recognized as representing them in negotiations, employees in janitorial services, salespeople at Walmart, health care workers and so on work in separated job-sites and come together only when they make an effort to participate in the work of the union.[4] As a result, the kind of solidarity that arises in the service sector differs from the unity that is created by a trade union that represents workers in mass industries. The latter type of unity comes from the top-down, passively, whereas the new solidarity emerges from a sort of "horizontal" sharing of experiences among individuals who are at first more isolated from one another. Could one imagine that, in this case, the result of a new trade-unionist advance would be a reflection on the (discouraging) state of the American political and social relations similar to the one that resulted from the emergence of the CIO? It would be clear that, in the last resort, trade unionism is not a corporatism that works for the sole good of its members. Since its birth, it incarnates the idea that power must not be concentrated in a single place outside of society. Society, in its plurality, has always the right to challenge those who think they can monopolize its interests. Reflections such as these, that are implicit in the challenge posed by the supporters of "Change to Win" could lead trade unionists and their allies to recognize that their role is not limited to realizing a utilitarian logic of self-interest that, in the end, is hardly different from the one practiced by capitalism. If it does, American democracy will benefit from it.

Notes

[1] It should be noted that Stern's predecessor was non other than John Sweeney, who is hardly the archetype of the old-time trade unionist.

[2] The AFL-CIO voted in increase in national dues of 43 cents for each member in order not only to replace the lost dues from the dissident unions but also, explicitly, to fight back against raids by the new competition.

[3] It should be noted that the principal ally of Andrew Stern is the Teamsters' Union, who have for a long time had bad relations with the AFL-CIO, which excluded them for some years due to their cooperation with organized crime. Furthermore, not so long ago, the Teamsters supported republican candidates, whereas the AFL-CIO has been staunchly democratic. And the fact that "Change to Win" wants to get support from social movements such as the ecologists could well run up against the sectorial interests of employees of the trucking industry. Another marriage of convenience?

[4] It is not surprising that a recent poll suggested that 52% of non-organized workers said that they would like to be able to join a union. But of course the interpretation of the procedures for certification of a union depend on the National Labor Relations Board, whose republican majority does not make things any easier.

This essay is a translation, by the author, of a weekly "Chroniques de la démocratie américain" that will cover the year from the November 2004 election to November 2005 forthcoming from éditions Buchet-Chastel, Paris in early 2006.

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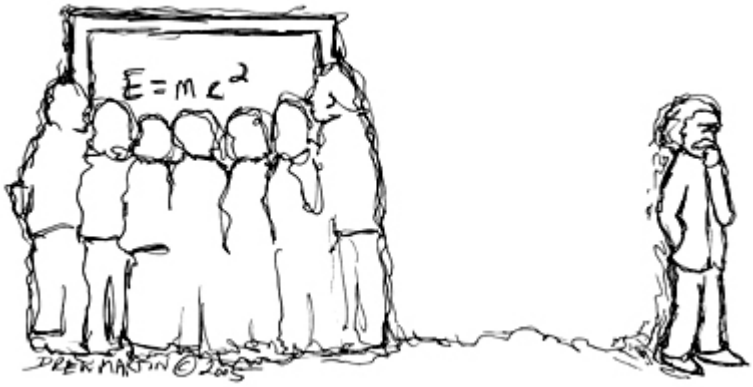
Einstein On Race And Racism

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3



On January 30, 1933, the day Hitler and the Nazis took over the German government, the most famous scientist in the world may also have been the luckiest. Albert Einstein and his wife Elsa were away from their Berlin home on a visit to Pasadena, California his third winter there as a guest faculty member at Caltech. The Einsteins had planned to return home in the spring, but that was before January 30. Within a few months, the Nazi regime made it clear that Einstein was still alive primarily because he was not in Germany.

Einstein, more than any other scientist, arguably more than any other human being, by his very existence a genius who was also a Jew, a democrat and, later, a socialist gave the lie to Hitler's Nazi theories.

Even before the Nazis started calling themselves Nazis (before Hitler's National Socialist Party emerged in the mid 1920s), right-wing German nationalists had targeted Einstein for attack: Some of these Nationalists took to waiting for Einstein outside his apartment on Haberlandstrasse, or his office in the Prussian Academy of Science, and shouting denunciations of "Jewish science" as soon as the familiar figure appeared. Others filled his mailbox with obscene and threatening letters. On one occasion, a gang of right-wing students disrupted Einstein's lecture at Berlin University and one of them shouted, "I'm going to cut the throat of that dirty Jew." An anti-Semitic demagogue named Rudolph Leibus was arrested [in 1921] and fined the trivial sum of sixteen dollars for offering a reward to anyone who would assassinate the hated scientist.

And while he was invited to speak and hailed by audiences around the world one trip took the Einsteins to China, Japan, Palestine, and Spain, where they were cheered by hundreds of thousands — in Germany, a group calling itself the Committee of German Scientists for the Preservation of Pure Scholarship launched an attack on Einstein, labeling the Theory of Relativity "a Jewish perversion." Even in winning the Nobel Prize in 1921, Einstein faced anti-Semitism.[1]

For several years in the mid 1920s, public anti-Semitism subsided and the ultra-Nationalists lowered their profile as the German economy steadied with substantial economic aid from the

US and England. But towards the end of the decade, the economy faltered, and the far-right flexed its political and paramilitary muscles. Hitler's Aryan-supremacy racism infected millions of Germans seeking scapegoats for their economic difficulties and loss of international influence. And when the worldwide economic depression of 1929 brought rampant unemployment and inflation to Germany, it also brought the Nazis a large, disgruntled base of potential recruits. The Nazi Party, led by Hitler, had first made headlines in 1923 with its "Beer Hall Putsch," a failed attempt at taking over the government in the German state of Bavaria. Following the "Putsch," the Party grew slowly, and by 1929 they had 12 representatives in the Reichstag (the German Congress). The impact of the economic depression and the success of Nazi propaganda brought a sudden surge of Nazi votes in the 1930 elections, increasing their Reichstag seats to 107.

Nazi street-gangs launched increasingly violent attacks against Hitler's enemies, especially leftists and Jews. As one historian put it, "To ready the ground for the Nazi rise to ultimate power, the party raised the level of violence witnessed by ordinary Germans with each passing month." An incident on June 10, 1932, was typical of the strategy. That afternoon, several hundred members of the Nazi SA and SS private armies invaded the working-class district of Berlin-Wedding, blocked the ends of a stretch of road chanting anti-Semitic slogans and attacking anyone luckless enough to be out and about. The Nazis beat up some thirty locals, including several old people and one pregnant woman, who was hospitalized in dire condition.

There was no question about the identity of the Nazis' number one target. Their hostility, in the words of Philipp Frank, "was concentrated to an astonishing and…frightening degree against Einstein." In 1929, a Leipzig publishing house issued a book titled One Hundred Authors against Einstein. The book itself had little impact, "but it was a warning," according to Levenson. Attacks against prominent Jews may have faded during the stabilized mid-1920s, "but now…the threat was back." A friend who visited Einstein in Germany in 1930, described the growing signs of anti-Semitism "Many Jewish shops had been sacked" and reported that the scientist, "for all his serenity, was anxious."

The threats against Einstein increased as Hitler came closer to power. A local baker in Caputh, the village near Potsdam where the Einsteins had built a summer house, began to complain loudly to his customers about the scientist's "Jewish house." In late spring 1932, the scientist stopped walking alone, and their friend Antonina Vallentin warned Elsa that to "leave Einstein in Germany was to perpetrate a murder." Just before he and Elsa left Germany for the last time in December 1932, he received a "friendly warning" from a top German General that his life "is not safe here any more."

Officially, the Einsteins were departing for one more semester abroad and planned to return to Berlin in the spring. Einstein told the NY Times, "I am not abandoning Germany…My permanent home will still be in Berlin." But he may have had a suspicion they would not return: When the steamer Oakland left Bremerhaven on December 10, 1932, it carried the Einsteins and thirty pieces of luggage. It was, as Einstein's friend and biographer Abraham Pais put it, "a little excessive for a three months' absence."

In America, Einstein was quickly vilified by the German state. He was assailed as the chief of a secret anti-Nazi movement, sometimes described as “communistic,” sometimes as the “Jewish International.” On March 23, the Third Reich barred Jews and Communists from teaching in universities, working as lawyers or in civil service jobs. Scientists, especially Jewish scientists, were a special target for the regime that preached Aryan supremacy. One Nazi pedagogical leader put it plainly: It is not science that must be restricted, but rather the scientific investigators and teachers; only men who have pledged their entire personality to the nation, to the racial conception of the world will teach and carry on research at the German universities.

The Nazis repeatedly raided the Einsteins’ Berlin apartment, seized all their belongings, and froze their bank account. In March, Nazi SA agents ransacked their summer house in Caputh, searching for a secret cache of weapons “allegedly hidden there by Communists,” and intended for an anti-Nazi uprising. When they found no weapons “all they found was a bread knife,” the NY Times reported they confiscated the house, anyway, declaring it was “obviously” about to be sold to finance subversive activities.

Einstein was suddenly a refugee. Even if he might miraculously have survived a return to Germany, he told the press: “As long as I have any choice in the matter, I shall live only in a country where civil liberty, tolerance and equality of all citizens before the law prevail… These conditions do not exist in Germany at the present time.”

But the Einsteins did return to Europe in the spring and summer of 1933, spending several months in the Belgian coastal town of Le Coq-sur-Mer for rest and reconsideration of future plans. On hearing that Nazi newspapers had put a price of $5,000 on his head, Einstein quipped, “I didn’t know I was worth so much.” Nonetheless, the death threats were serious: During his stay at Le Coq, the Belgian government assigned two 24-hour bodyguards to protect him from a reported Nazi assassination team. And when the Hitler regime issued an official book of photos of “Enemies of the State,” the caption under Einstein’s photo read: Noch Ungehängt Not Yet Hanged. Einstein was also wanted but alive and thinking by leading institutions of learning around the world. Several European universities, including Oxford, Paris, Madrid and Leiden, offered Einstein faculty positions, as did the newly-established and well-funded Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.[2] Einstein felt at home in Europe, but, as author and physicist C. P. Snow, explains, the choice of where to settle was, to a large extent out of his hands:

He was himself Hitler’s greatest public enemy… He was a brave man, but if he returned [to Germany], he would be killed…. Belgium suited him. He was more comfortable in small cozy countries (Holland was his favorite), but he wasn’t safe from the Nazis. Unwillingly, he set off on his travels again, [and moved] to Princeton….

It was a kind of exile. There is no doubt that he, who had never recognized any place as home, sometimes longed for the sounds and smells of Europe. Nevertheless, it was in America that he reached his full wisdom and his full sadness.

Before leaving Germany, Einstein was not only an outspoken critic of the Nazis, but he had begun to speak out against racism in America the parallel to Nazi anti-Semitism and Aryan-Superman theory was hard to miss. In 1931, W. E. B. Du Bois, a founder of the NAACP and editor of its magazine, The Crisis, wrote to Einstein, still living in Berlin:

Sir:

I am taking the liberty of sending you herewith some copies of THE CRISIS magazine. THE CRISIS is published by American Negroes and in defense of the citizenship rights of 12 million people descended from the former slaves of this country. We have just reached our 21st birthday. I am writing to ask if in the midst of your busy life you could find time to write us a word about the evil of race prejudice in the world. A short statement from you of 500 to 1,000 words on this subject would help us greatly in our continuing fight for freedom.

With regard to myself, you will find something about me in "Who's Who in America." I was formerly a student of Wagner and Schmoller in the University of Berlin.

I should greatly appreciate word from you.

Very sincerely yours,

W. E. B. Du Bois

Einstein replied on October 29, 1931:

My Dear Sir!

Please find enclosed a short contribution for your newspaper. Because of my excessive workload I could not send a longer explanation.

With Distinguished respect,

Albert Einstein

To American Negroes

A Note from the Editor [Dr. Du Bois]:

The author, Albert Einstein, is a Jew of German nationality. He was born in Wurttemburg in 1879 and educated in Switzerland. He has been Professor of Physics at Zurich and Prague and is at present director of the Kaiser-Wilhelm Physical Institute at Berlin. He is a member of the Royal Prussian Academy of Science and of the British Royal Society. He received the Nobel Prize in 1921 and the Copley Medal in 1925.

Einstein is a genius in higher physics and ranks with Copernicus, Newton and Kepler. His famous theory of Relativity, advanced first in 1905, is revolutionizing our explanation of

physical phenomenon and our conception of Motion, Time and Space.

But Professor Einstein is not a mere mathematical mind. He is a living being, sympathetic with all human advance. He is a brilliant advocate of disarmament and world Peace and he hates race prejudice because as a Jew he knows what it is. At our request, he has sent this word to THE CRISIS with “Ausgezeichneter Hochachtung” (“Distinguished respect”):

It seems to be a universal fact that minorities, especially when their Individuals are recognizable because of physical differences, are treated by majorities among whom they live as an inferior class. The tragic part of such a fate, however, lies not only in the automatically realized disadvantage suffered by these minorities in economic and social relations, but also in the fact that those who meet such treatment themselves for the most part acquiesce in the prejudiced estimate because of the suggestive influence of the majority, and come to regard people like themselves as inferior. This second and more important aspect of the evil can be met through closer union and conscious educational enlightenment among the minority, and so emancipation of the soul of the minority can be attained.

The determined effort of the American Negroes in this direction deserves every recognition and assistance.

Albert Einstein

Du Bois’ request for a message from Einstein revealed that the African American scholar had a flare for public relations. Einstein’s article brought The Crisis a rare, if small, headline in the NY Times: EINSTEIN HAILS NEGRO RACE. Nearly twenty years later, another Einstein-Du Bois correspondence would bring even more momentous results, but in the fearful 1950s, there would be no press coverage. On the eve of Einstein’s move to America he joined the international campaign to save “the Scottsboro Boys,” nine African American teen-agers from Alabama, falsely accused of rape eight of them sentenced to death in 1931. For Einstein, the Scottsboro Defense was the first of several protests against racial injustice in the American legal system. For J. Edgar Hoover and his FBI, it was the first “Communist Front” listed in Einstein’s file.

Einstein joined with Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois and the Civil Rights Congress. Indeed, almost every civil-rights group Einstein endorsed after 1946, including the Council on African Affairs cited earlier, had Robeson in the leadership. Perhaps because Einstein had seen the Nazis use the “Communist” scare tactic, he did not shrink from Robeson’s red glare. Like Robeson, the CRC had close ties to the Communist Party. While defending Rosa Lee Ingram, Willie McGee, the Martinsville Seven and other African Americans they saw as victims of “racist frame-ups,” the CRC also supported the more than one hundred CP officials jailed under the Smith Act[3] during the McCarthy/Hoover period. CRC statements pointed to Hitler’s Germany where the Nazis had first rounded up the Communists while most liberals shrugged from what they thought was a safe distance.[4] It was a historical parallel Einstein agreed with. “The fear of Communism,” he declared at the height of the McCarthy era, “has led to practices

which have become incomprehensible to the rest of civilized mankind…"

His outspokenness on civil rights included a virtually unknown 1948 interview with the Cheyney Record, student newspaper at a then-small Black college (Cheyney State) in Pennsylvania: "Race prejudice has unfortunately become an American tradition which is uncritically handed down from one generation to the next," Einstein declared. That he did the interview is hardly surprising, given Einstein's previous visit to Lincoln University and his openness in talking and writing to young people. More surprising, however, is Einstein's statement in the same interview, "The only remedies [to racism] are enlightenment and education. This is a slow and painstaking process in which all right-thinking people should take part."

Shortly after the Cheyney interview, Einstein continued his organizational network by sending a message to the "Southwide Conference on Discrimination in Higher Education" held at Atlanta University in 1950, and sponsored by the Southern Conference Educational Fund. With the Red-scare, Congressional investigating committees like HUAC had red-baited virtually any southern group that called for integration, and driven many of them out of existence. The Highlander Folk School, where Rosa Parks took part in interracial discussions during the summer before her famous arrest for refusing to move to the back of a Montgomery, Alabama bus, was one of the few organizations that managed to survive. Another was the Southern Conference Educational Fund.

Four years before Brown v. Board of Education, SCEF sponsored a rare integrated conference in the South (albeit at a Black university) to oppose racism in southern universities.[5] In his greeting to the group, Einstein wrote:

If an individual commits an injustice he is harassed by his conscience. But nobody is apt to feel responsible for misdeeds of a community, in particular, if they are supported by old traditions. Such is the case with discrimination. Every right-minded person will be grateful to you for having united to fight this evil that so grievously injures the dignity and the repute of our country. Only by spreading education among all of our people can we approach the ideals of democracy.

Your fight is not easy, but in the end, you will succeed.

Perhaps Einstein's most effective civil-rights action was testimony he didn't actually give. At the start of 1951, the Federal Government indicted W. E. B. Du Bois, then chairman of the Peace Information Center, and four of the group's other officers, for failing to register as "foreign agents." The government's principal charge was that the Peace Information Center described by historian Robin D. G. Kelley as an "antinuclear, anti-Cold War" group had committed the "overt act" of circulating the Stockholm Peace Petition. The petition declared:

We demand the outlawing of atomic weapons as instruments of intimidation and mass murder of people.

We demand strict international control to enforce this measure.

We believe that any government which first uses atomic weapons against any other country whatsoever will be committing a crime against humanity and should be dealt with as a war criminal.

We call on all men and women of goodwill throughout the world to sign this appeal.

Several millions people signed the worldwide peace petition initiated in 1950 by the Stockholm-based, pro-Soviet World Peace Council. HUAC denounced it as "the most extensive piece of psychological warfare ever conducted on a world scale…a smoke screen for [Communist] aggression." If one needs a single image to represent McCarthyism in America, it might well be the picture of W. E. B. Du Bois in 1951 facing a judge in a Federal courtroom the world-renowned black scholar, at the age of 83, goateed, short in height but standing unbent, wearing a pinstriped, three-piece suit and handcuffs. Like Robeson, Du Bois had refused to go along with Washington's anti-Soviet, anti-Communist policies, refused to cooperate with Congressional investigating committees, had his passport suspended, and had been ousted from the NAACP.

Shortly after the Federal indictment, Einstein sent Du Bois a copy of his just-published book, Out of My Later Years it was almost exactly twenty years after Einstein had first heard from Du Bois and written his statement for The Crisis. In April, Du Bois wrote back and included information about his upcoming court case: "Mrs. Du Bois and I have received your autographed book with deep appreciation and will read it with pleasure and profit. I am venturing to enclose with this letter a statement on a case in which you may be interested."

Einstein quickly volunteered to testify as a Defense witness in Du Bois Federal trial. To give Einstein's appearance in court the maximum impact, defense attorney Vito Marcantonio[6] held back the announcement until the last minute. In a rare, first-hand account, Shirley Graham Du Bois, describes the judge's response:

The prosecution rested its case during the morning of November 20… Marcantonio…told the judge that only one defense witness was to be presented, Dr. Du Bois. [But] Marcantonio added casually to the judge, "Dr. Albert Einstein has offered to appear as a character witness for Dr. Du Bois." Judge [Matthew F.] McGuire fixed Marcantonio with a long look, and then adjourned the court for lunch. When court resumed, Judge McGuire…. granted the motion for acquittal.

Confronted with the prospect of international publicity that would have resulted from Einstein's testimony, the judge dismissed the case for lack of evidence before the Defense had a chance to present its witnesses. Nine days later, Du Bois wrote to Einstein again:

My dear Dr. Einstein:

I write to express my deep appreciation of your generous offer to do anything that you could in the case brought against me by the Department of Justice.

I am delighted that in the end it was not necessary to call upon you and interfere with your great work and needed leisure, but my thanks for your generous attitude is not less on that account.

Mrs. Du Bois joins me in deep appreciation.

Very sincerely yours,

W. E. B. Du Bois

Einstein almost never spoke at universities during the last twenty years of his life. His increasingly frail health made travel difficult, but mainly he considered the pomp and ceremony of degree presentation to be "ostentatious." Some may find it remarkable that Einstein chose to break his no-college rule by going not to an Ivy-League producer of prestigious degrees,[7] but to a traditionally black university. (Chartered in 1854, Lincoln was "the first institution anywhere in the world to provide a higher education in the arts and sciences for male youth of African descent.") But for Einstein, the 60-mile trip from Princeton to Lincoln was not a casual choice. His visit was "in a worthwhile cause," he told the assembled students and faculty. "The separation of the races [segregation]," he declared, "is not a disease of colored people, but a disease of white people," adding, "I do not intend to be quiet about it."

Disease? To appreciate today Einstein's choice of the word requires examining specific symptoms of the segregation sickness so widespread in America eighty years after the Civil War. Black soldiers, as we have noted, when allowed into combat at all, fought in segregated units under white officers. To a true believer, segregation always came first even before patriotism: Vowing never to fight "with a Negro by my side," a 28-year-old, West Virginia lawyer and future Senator named Robert Byrd wrote to Mississippi's Senator Bilbo in 1945, "Rather I should die a thousand times, and see Old Glory trampled in the dirt never to rise again, than to see this beloved land of ours become degraded by race mongrels, a throwback to the blackest specimen from the wilds." (Byrd has since undergone a sea-change in his views on race.)

Racial segregation was the rule in most of America in May 1946, with separate and unequal public and private facilities from housing and schools to buses and beaches throughout the south and many other parts of the country, including Princeton, NJ. Some textbooks and even some documentary films have pictured the separate (and decidedly unequal) waiting rooms in Southern bus and train stations, and even the separate drinking fountains marked "colored" and "white." But the disease went deeper. Even the blood donated to save lives was donated at racially segregated blood banks (when blacks were allowed to donate at all), with "white" and "colored" blood kept in separately labeled storage units. In 1942, in the midst of a world war, the American Red Cross met in Washington and concluded that, while there is no difference in the blood of the races, "most men of the white race objected to blood of Negroes injected into their veins." No one apparently asked, according to one writer, "how many white soldiers, hemorrhaging from a gaping wound on the battlefield and sinking into a coma, would stop a

medic from giving them the wrong color' plasma." The policy of racially segregating blood continued in some parts of this country well into the 1960s!

The Lincoln students in Einstein's audience, of course, knew most of this in 1946. "On Friday, May 3rd, a very simple man came to Lincoln University," one student wrote a few days later in the school newspaper, The Lincolnian:

His emaciated face and simplicity made him appear as a biblical character. Quietly he stood with an expression of questioning wonder upon his face as…President Horace Mann Bond conferred a degree. Then this man with the long hair and deep eyes spoke into a microphone of the disease that humanity had. In the deep accents of his native Germany he said he could not be silent. And then he finished and the room was still. Later he lectured on the theory of relativity to the Lincoln students.

That night, Albert Einstein went back to Princeton…

Before returning home, Einstein had dinner at the home of Professor Laurence Foster and his family. Dr. Foster's daughter Yvonne, shown in the photo of Einstein with children of Lincoln faculty members, recalls, "The faculty had been warned that Einstein was very shy and low-key, and, in fact, he was quiet and spoke very little at dinner, but he became amused by [her younger brother] Larry's Pennsylvania Dutch accent and couldn't help but smile during the conversation." She adds: "We were honored" that during the degree-presentation ceremony, "Einstein wore Professor Phillip Miller's academic robe and daddy's mortarboard."

"I was very happy to know that my boy had an opportunity to see Dr. Einstein," one student's mother told Lincoln's President Bond shortly after the event. In a letter to Einstein, Bond relayed the mother's words, adding his own thanks: "All of us are as grateful as this humble mother." Einstein's choice of Lincoln, as well as his words, clearly seemed intended to send a message to a wider audience. But the media then – like the media since then – had different news priorities. While almost all of Einstein's public speeches and interviews were extensively reported by major newspapers even sticking out his tongue made the front pages in this case, the mainstream media treated the address by the world's most famous scientist at the nation's oldest black university as a non-event. Only the black press gave Einstein's speech meaningful coverage. The Philadelphia Tribune and Baltimore Afro-American carried first-hand front-page reports with photos of Einstein receiving the honorary degree from Lincoln's President Horace Mann Bond and lecturing on relativity to Lincoln students. The Tribune's headline, stretching across half the front page, read: EINSTEIN AWARDED PORTFOLIO in Historic Campus Ceremony.

Other black papers covering the story included the NY Age, NY Amsterdam News ("Einstein: Race Problem a Disease of White Folks'") and Pittsburgh Courier. All included photos. No one has (yet) found a copy or transcript, or even notes, of Einstein's speech at Lincoln, nor has it ever been quoted in the plethora of Einstein biographies and anthologies. What follows are sections of his ten-minute speech from the report in the Baltimore Afro American of May 11,

1946. The Afro-American article, by J. W. Woods, is datelined LINCOLN UNIVERSITY, Pa.:

The only possibility of preventing war is to prevent the possibility of war. International peace can be achieved only if every individual uses all of his power to exert pressure on the United States to see that it takes the leading part in world government.

The United Nations has no power to prevent war, but it can try to avoid another war. The UN will be effective only if no one neglects his duty in his private environment. If he does [neglect it], he is responsible for the death of our children in a future war.

My trip to this institution was on behalf of a worthwhile cause. There is separation of colored people from white people in the United States. That separation [segregation] is not a disease of colored people. It is a disease of white people. I do not intend to be quiet about it.

The situation of mankind today is like that of a little child who has a sharp knife and plays with it. There is no effective defense against the atomic bomb. For our own safety, we must use it on an international basis. It cannot only destroy a city but it can destroy the very earth on which that city stood.

The New York Times (May 4, 1946) carried a brief item on p. 7, with a total of one sentence about the speech: “Dr. Einstein said he believed there was a great future’ for the Negro [and] asked the students to work long and hard and with lasting patience.'” Assuming that was taken from the same speech (none of the reports in the black press cite or allude to that sentence or anything similar to it), it’s interesting to contrast what the Times singled out to publish with what the black press reported.

Notes

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[1] Einstein had been nominated for the Nobel Prize in ten of the previous twelve years, 1909 1920, but it was only after he had been hailed as a world-renowned celebrity that the Nobel committee agreed to award him their prize. Years later, Irving Wallace, author of The Prize, interviewed Sven Hedin, one of the Nobel judges, who acknowledged that anti-Semitism had influenced the judges to vote repeatedly against an award for Einstein (Wallace, The Writing of One Novel). During the 1930s, Hedin publicly supported the Nazis and was a close friend of Göring, Himmler and Hitler.

[2] Designed from the start as a center exclusively for theoretical research, the Institute and its founder, Abraham Flexner, hoped to attract the most outstanding scholars from around the world to live, think and do research at the IAS which, although located in Princeton, would be independent from the University. Besides their obvious contrasts the IAS was not a degree-granting institution and had no student body one key policy difference central to this story is that the Institute but very clearly not the University welcomed Jewish scholars from around the world. To a large extent, the IAS reflected America’s emerging status as the leading financial

and technological power in the world, and Einstein was the Institute's most valuable asset, ensuring it immediate recognition and international prestige.

[3] The Smith Act, originally enacted in 1940, outlawed "conspiracy to teach and advocate the overthrow of the government by force and violence." During World War II, the Federal Government indicted several members of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party under the Smith Act. The Communist Party made no protest against those indictments.

[4] Not all liberals shrugged. Einstein had signed an unsuccessful appeal, along with Kathe Kollwitz and Heinrich Mann, in 1932, urging the Socialists and Communists to unite behind a single slate of candidates which could have been able to defeat the fascists.

[5] If you were an African American football or basketball star at a Northern or Western university in 1950, you would almost always be left at home when your school traveled to play a Southern school. Yet signs of change were, emerging. In 1955, thousands of students in Atlanta held an unprecedented demonstration, burning effigies of Georgia Governor Griffin to demand that he permit the Georgia Tech football team to play an interracial Pittsburgh team in that year's Sugar Bowl. (NY Times, December 4, 1955, p. 1.)

[6] Marcantonio was a popular, independent, fiery, left-wing Congressman from New York's East Harlem, with popular support from both the Italian and Puerto Rican communities there. Among his many distinctions, he was the only member of Congress to vote against sending US troops into the 1950 Korean "Police Action."

[7] In 1936, Einstein refused to take part in Harvard's Tercentenary ceremony because German universities were participating.

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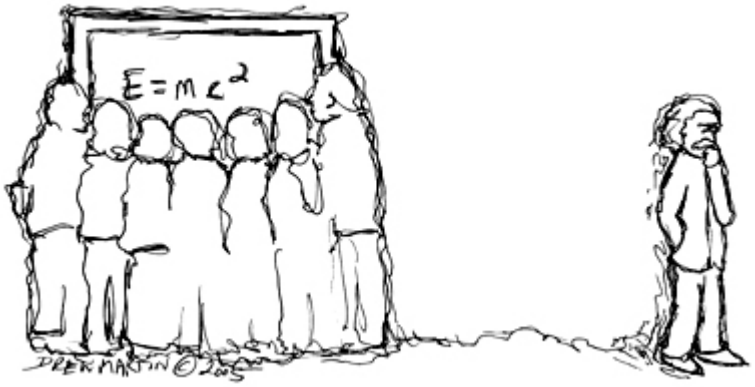
Einstein’s Legacy — Where Are The “einsteinians?”

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

For more than two centuries after Newton published his theories of space, time, and motion in 1687, most physicists were Newtonians. They believed, as Newton did, that space and time are absolute, that force causes acceleration, and that gravity is a force conveyed across a vacuum at a distance. Since Darwin there are few professional biologists who are not Darwinians, and if most psychologists no longer often call themselves Freudians, few doubt that there is an unconscious or that sexuality plays a big role in it. So as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Einstein’s great discoveries, the question arises: How many professional physicists are Einsteinians?



The superficial answer is that we all are. No professional physicist today doubts that quantum theory and relativity theory have stood up to experimental tests. But the term “Einsteinian” does not exist. I’ve never heard or read it. Nor have I ever encountered any evidence for a “school of Einstein.” There is a community of people scattered around the world who call themselves relativists, whose main scientific work centers on general relativity. But relativists make up only a tiny minority of theoretical physicists, and there is no country where they dominate the intellectual atmosphere of the field.

Strange as it may seem, Albert Einstein, the discoverer of both quantum and relativity theory, and hence clearly the preeminent physicist of the modern era, failed to leave behind a following with any appreciable influence. Why most physicists followed other leaders in directions Einstein opposed is a story that must be told if this centennial year is to be other than an empty celebration of a myth, unconnected to the reality of who Einstein was and what he believed in.

Physicists I’ve met who knew Einstein told me they found his thinking slow compared to the stars of the day. While he was competent enough with the basic mathematical tools of physics, many other physicists surrounding him in Berlin and Princeton were better at it. So what accounted for his genius? In retrospect, I believe what allowed Einstein to achieve so much was primarily a moral quality. He simply cared far more than most of his colleagues that the

laws of physics have to explain everything in nature coherently and consistently. As a result he was acutely sensitive to flaws and contradictions in the logical structure of physical theories.

Einstein's ability to see flaws and his fierce refusal to compromise had real repercussions. His professors did not support him in his search for an academic job and he was unemployed until he found work as a patent inspector. The problem was not just that he skipped classes. He saw right through his elders' complacent acceptance of Newtonian physics. The young Einstein was obsessed with logical flaws that were glaringly obvious, but only to him. While the great English physicist Lord Rayleigh said he saw "only a few clouds on the horizon" remaining to be understood, the 16-year-old Einstein wondered what would happen to his image in a mirror if he traveled faster than the speed of light.

Einstein's single goal in science was to discover what he called theories of principle. These are theories that postulate general rules that all phenomena must satisfy. If such a theory is true, it must apply universally. In his study of physics he identified two existing theories of principle: the laws of motion set out by Galileo and Newton, and thermodynamics. The basic principle of the first is the relativity of uniform motion, that the speed of your own motion is impossible to detect. Einstein's discovery of special relativity came from 10 years of meditation on how to reconcile the relativity of motion with James Clerk Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism, which describes the propagation of light.

While he mused about electromagnetism, Einstein made thermodynamics the focus of his early work. He began by following the Austrian physicist Ludwig Boltzmann who argued that the laws of thermodynamics could be derived from applying statistics to the motion of atoms. This view was unpopular at the time because many influential professors did not believe matter was made of atoms. They instead believed matter was continuous. Einstein's work led to his demonstration in 1905 that Brownian motion-the continuous, jerky movements of pollen grains or other tiny objects immersed in liquid-offered a proof of the existence of atoms.

At the same time, Einstein applied Boltzmann's approach to thermodynamics to electrodynamics. This led to his discovery of the photon, a discrete packet of electromagnetic energy, and to the realization that such a packet must be both a wave and a particle. Although Einstein was thus the discoverer of quantum phenomena, he became in time the main opponent of the theory of quantum mechanics. By his own account, he spent far more time thinking about quantum theory than he did about relativity. But he never found a theory of quantum physics that satisfied him.

There are by now only a small minority of physicists who think Einstein was right to reject quantum theory as the foundation of our understanding of nature. No theory has been more successful at explaining a vast array of experimental data. It is the basis for our understanding of virtually all of physics, with the possible exception of gravity and cosmology. Einstein was willing to concede that quantum mechanics explains the recorded behavior of the subatomic world, but he was convinced it had two flaws. First, it fails to give precise predictions for the outcomes of individual processes. Instead, it gives only statistical predictions. To check them,

one must do an experiment many times and compare the resulting distributions of outcomes with the predictions of the theory. Second, quantum theory fails to give an objective picture of the world that is unconnected to our role as observers. The formulas of quantum theory correspond to our actions preparing experiments and measuring their outcomes. Einstein objected to this because he believed strongly that physics should provide a picture of nature "as it is in itself."

After 1930, virtually all of Einstein's colleagues were certain the revolution was over and that physics was nearly complete. Nearly alone in his stance, Einstein saw the quantum as only a stepping stone to the real thing, which he searched for the rest of his life. Quantum theory was not the only theory that bothered Einstein. Few people have appreciated how dissatisfied he was with his own theories of relativity. Special relativity grew out of Einstein's insight that the laws of electromagnetism cannot depend on relative motion and that the speed of light therefore must be always the same, no matter how the source or the observer moves. Among the consequences of that theory are that energy and mass are equivalent (the now-legendary relationship E = mc2) and that time and distance are relative, not absolute. Special relativity was the result of 10 years of intellectual struggle, yet Einstein had convinced himself it was wrong within two years of publishing it. He rejected his theory, even before most physicists had come to accept it, for reasons that only he cared about. For another 10 years, as the world of physics slowly absorbed special relativity, Einstein pursued a lonely path away from it.

Why? The main reason was that he wanted to extend relativity to include all observers, whereas his special theory postulates only an equivalence among a limited class of observers-those who aren't accelerating. A second reason was to incorporate gravity, making use of a new principle he called the equivalence principle. This postulates that observers can never distinguish the effects of gravity from those of acceleration so long as they observe phenomena only in their immediate neighborhood. By this principle he linked the problem of gravity with the problem of extending relativity to all observers.

Einstein was the only one who worried about these two problems. Meanwhile, other physicists came up with ways to incorporate gravitational phenomena directly into special relativity. This was the reasonable thing to do, for they were building directly on the success of the new theory Einstein had invented. And they succeeded in making the theory consistent. Moreover, their extensions of special relativity agreed with all experiments that had been done. So why did Einstein reject it? His reason was that his colleagues' approach-incorporating gravity into special relativity rather than crafting a whole new theory-disagreed with his equivalence principle. Einstein understood quickly that there was a key experiment that could distinguish between the incremental approach of the other physicists and his own, radical approach. This was to measure the bending of light by the sun's gravity, an effect predicted by the equivalence principle. A reasonable person might have waited to see how the experiment came out, and indeed, an opportunity to test the theory came in 1919. By that time Einstein had invented his second theory of relativity, which he called general relativity. The experiment appeared to confirm the new theory's predictions. The result was announced on the front pages of the world's newspapers, making Einstein the first scientist to be a star.

General relativity is the most radical and challenging of Einstein's discoveries-so much so that I believe the majority of physicists, even theoretical physicists, have yet to fully incorporate it into their thinking. The flashy stuff, like black holes, gravitational waves, the expanding universe, and the Big Bang are, it turns out, the easy parts of general relativity. The theory goes much deeper: It demands a radical change in how we think of space and time.

All previous theories said that space and time have a fixed structure and that it is this structure that gives rise to the properties of things in the world, by giving every object a place and every event a time. In the transition from Aristotle to Newton to special relativity, that structure changed, but in each case the structure remained fixed. We and everything that we observe live in a space-time, with fixed and unchanging properties. That is the stage on which we play, but nothing we do or could do affects the structure of space and time themselves.

General relativity is not about adding to those structures. It is not even about substituting those structures for a list of possible new structures. It rejects the whole idea that space and time are fixed at all. Instead, in general relativity the properties of space and time evolve dynamically in interaction with everything they contain. Furthermore, the essence of space and time now are just a set of relationships between events that take place in the history of the world. It is sufficient, it turns out, to speak only of two kinds of relationships: how events are related to each other causally (the order in which they unfold) and how many events are contained within a given interval of time, measured by a standard clock (how quickly they unfold relative to each other).

Thus, in general relativity there is no fixed framework, no stage on which the world plays itself out. There is only an evolving network of relationships, making up the history of space, time, and matter. All the previous theories described space and time as fixed backgrounds on which things happen. The point of general relativity is that there is no background.

This point is subtle and elusive. I was very fortunate to know the great astrophysicist Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar during his last years. Chandra, as we called him, was the first to discover that general relativity implied that stars above a certain mass would collapse into what we now call a black hole. Much later, he wrote a beautiful book describing the different solutions of the equations of general relativity that describe black holes. As I got to know him, Chandra shocked me by speaking of a deep anger toward Einstein. Chandra was upset that Einstein, after inventing general relativity, had abandoned this masterpiece, leaving it to others to struggle through it.

I now believe that Chandra partly missed the point, and he is certainly not alone. The deepest point of general relativity is not that the universe may expand or that there are black holes. To think this way is to believe that general relativity is just another step in the progression of Aristotle to Newton to special relativity. Chandra, in his interest in the solutions of the theory, was, I fearlike so many others-reaching for a beautiful flower but missing the beauty of how it is that flowers come to be. But Chandra was right that in spite of the great triumph general relativity represented, Einstein did not linger long over it. For Einstein, quantum physics was

the essential mystery, and nothing could be really fundamental that was not part of the solution to that problem. As general relativity didn't explain quantum theory, it had to be provisional as well. It could only be a step towards Einstein's goal, which was to find a theory of quantum phenomena that would agree with all the experiments, but satisfy his demand for clarity and completeness.

Einstein imagined for a time that such a theory could come from an extension of general relativity. Thus he entered into the final period of his scientific life, his search for a unified field theory. He sought an extension of general relativity that would incorporate electromagnetism, thereby wedding the large-scale world where gravity dominates with the small-scale world of quantum physics. He tried a variety of means such as adding new dimensions of space-time or loosening somewhat the mathematical structure of general relativity. The irony is that some of these gambits worked, but they still led nowhere. For it turns out, that unified theories are a dime a dozen. There are many ways to generalize general relativity so as to incorporate the laws of electromagnetism. Nor is it much harder, as has been done recently, to extend the theory a bit further to incorporate nuclear forces, and so have a unified theory of all the forces.

Indeed, the number of such unified theories keeps increasing. Recent estimates based on results from string theory indicate there are more than 10100 distinct unified field theories. Thus, it is as unclear now as it was for Einstein whether pursuing a unified field theory will lead to real progress in understanding nature.

One way to understand this story is to say that theoretical physics has finally caught up to Einstein. While he was shunned in his Princeton years as he pursued the unified field theory, the Institute for Advanced Study where he worked is now filled with theorists who search for new variants of unified field theories. It is indeed a vindication of sorts for Einstein because much of what today's string theorists do in practice is play with unified theories of the kinds that Einstein and his few colleagues invented.

The problem with this picture is that by the end of his life Einstein had to some extent abandoned his search for a unified field theory. He had failed to find a version of the theory that did what was most important to him, which is to explain quantum phenomena in a way that involved neither measurements nor statistics. In his last years he was moving on to something even more radical. He proposed to give up the idea that space and time are continuous. It is fair to say that while the idea that matter is made of atoms goes back at least to the Greeks, few before Einstein questioned the smoothness and continuity of space and time. To one friend, Walter Dallenbäch, he wrote, "The problem seems to me how one can formulate statements about a discontinuum without calling on a continuum as an aid; the latter should be banned from the theory as a supplementary construction not justified by the essence of the problem, which corresponds to nothing real.' "

However, Einstein made no progress with this new direction. He complained that, "we still lack the mathematical structure, unfortunately." To another friend, H. S. Joachim, he wrote: "It would be especially difficult to derive something like a spatio-temporal quasi-order from such a

schema. I cannot imagine how the axiomatic framework of such a physics would appear, and I don't like it when one talks about it in dark apostrophes. But I hold it entirely possible that the development will lead there."

So what is Einstein's real legacy? Are any of us his followers? In this centennial year, there will be many who claim the mantle. That includes the community of relativists, but many of them rarely look beyond the theory. Instead they study it by finding solutions on computers or by looking for gravity waves. There are also a few physicists who follow Einstein in rejecting quantum theory and in searching for an alternative. Einstein would have been happy that some scientists agree with him, but he likely would have been critical that most work in that area ignores the problem of unification.

Some string theorists will claim to be Einsteinians, and certainly Einstein would have approved of their search for a unification of physics. But here is how Brian Greene, in his last book, describes the state of the field: "Even today, more than three decades after its initial articulation, most string practitioners believe we still don't have a comprehensive answer to the rudimentary question, What is string theory? . . . Most researchers feel that our current formulation of string theory still lacks the kind of core principle we find at the heart of other major advances."

Einstein's whole life was a search for a theory of principles. It is hard to imagine he would have sustained interest in a theory for which, after more than 30 years of intensive investigation, no one is able to put forward any core principles.

He may in this regard have been happier with approaches to quantum gravity that stay closer to the core principles of relativity. For example, loop quantum gravity preserves his discovery that space and time have no fixed background, and it also provides an answer to Einstein's questions of how to go beyond the continuum. But Einstein would have found unacceptable all approaches to quantum gravity that take quantum mechanics as fundamental, including string theory and loop quantum gravity. Einstein never wavered from his rejection of quantum mechanics. His motive for making a unified field theory was not to extend the domain of quantum mechanics; it was rather to find an alternative to quantum mechanics. No research program that accepts quantum mechanics as a given can count itself to be within Einstein's legacy.

I think a sober assessment is that up until now, almost all of us who work in theoretical physics have failed to live up to Einstein's legacy. His demand for a coherent theory of principle was uncompromising. It has not been reached-not by quantum theory, not by special or general relativity, not by anything invented since. Einstein's moral clarity, his insistence that we should accept nothing less than a theory that gives a completely coherent account of individual phenomena, cannot be followed unless we reject almost all contemporary theoretical physics as insufficient.

So is it possible to follow the path of Einstein? To do so, you cannot be a crank; you must be a

well-trained professional physicist, literate in current theories and aware of their limitations, as he was. And you must insist on absolute clarity in your own work, rather than follow any fad or popular direction. Given the pressures of competition for academic positions, to follow Einstein's path is to risk the price that he paid: unemployment in spite of abundant and obvious talent and skill at the craft of theoretical physics.

In my whole career as a theoretical physicist, I have known only a handful of colleagues of whom it can truly be said have followed Einstein's path. They are driven, as Einstein was, by a moral need for clear understanding. In everything they do, these few strive continually to invent a new theory of principle that could satisfy the strictest demands of coherence and consistency without regard to fashion or the professional consequences. Most have paid for their independence in a harder career path than equally talented scientists who follow the research agendas of the big professors.

Let us be frank and admit that most of us have neither the courage nor the patience to emulate Einstein. We should instead honor Einstein by asking whether we can do anything to ensure that in the future those few who do follow Einstein's path, those who approach science as uncompromisingly as he did, have less risk of unemployment of the sort he suffered at the beginning of his career and less risk of the marginalization he endured at the end. If we can do this, if we can make the path easier for those few who do follow him, we may make possible a revolution in science that even Einstein failed to achieve.

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Prologue To Mark Twain's "to The Person Sitting In Darkness."

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

Picture Huckleberry Finn, a bit older and flintier, in Army uniform remorselessly slaughtering Filipino insurgents, and their hapless families, at the inauspicious turn of the 20th century. What would nigger Jim think?[1] A tad earlier, these same villainous Filipinos had been hailed in the fickle US press as glorious freedom fighters for helping America to oust their Spanish colonial overlords.

Can't imagine it?? Mark Twain, wisecracker extraordinaire, easily could. Ignorant American youths, he reckoned, could do just about anything that their cynical leaders ordered them to do in the service of profitable conquests. The cold-blooded extermination techniques applied by our boys in the Philippines, after all, had been exceedingly well refined during the long march Westward.[2] Following murderous orders is what military life is all about, a life from which a young and conflicted Samuel L. Clemens in 1861 prudently slipped away to go West and sit out the Civil War.

Forty years afterward, as the US ambitiously pushed its frontiers across the Pacific, Mark Twain was probably the most famous American alive, renowned for dispensing comic homespun phrases that beautifully punctured human follies, stupidity and self-deceit. Yet imperialism, especially the incipient hypocritical American brand, wasn't exactly the stuff of back woods burlesque. Twain, despite a lifelong weakness for get-rich-quick gadgets (and frittering away a fortune on them),[3] did not hesitate to risk his highly marketable folksy image in order to lampoon the underlying avaricious aims of the "blessings-of-civilization trust," a robust entente cordiale of corporate vampires, expansionist ideologues, and sanctimonious bible-thumpers.

Witness if you please, a corporate cabal gaining political control in Washington and pressing its exploitative economic strategy abroad with the full backing of the US arsenal. A plainly mediocre President (McKinley), who is nestled deep in their tax-exempt ermine-lined pockets, not only goes along with seizing distant lands but eventually got off his knees to suggest that this was a divinely inspired mission.[4] The news media, thrilled, backs the Godly venture wholeheartedly. The public customarily is treated like P. T. Barnum's congenital suckers, ripe for the picking by evolutionarily superior con men, known as tycoons. The natives in the distant land, meanwhile, fight back fiercely against their counterfeit liberators. Young American military recruits are turned into torturers and murderers for the sake of sweet imperial pillaging for a select few. Ring a bell?

Twain, a passionate man rife with roiling contradictions, usually came out on the decent side of

his own warring urges. So, at the start of a gory new century Twain, now in his mid-60s and emerging from bankruptcy and from his grief over the death of a daughter, clearly retained his piercing practiced eye for all-American commercial hokum, feel-good lies, and government-issued tall tales. After a long European sojourn, and as Philippines atrocities continued into a third year, he scribbled "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," first published in North American Review in February 1901.

Here is the legendarily rambunctious Mark Twain who mused on the difference between a buffalo-hunting earl and an anaconda ("The earl wantonly destroys what he has no use for and the anaconda doesn't."). [5] Here is the Mark Twain who, from his grave, chides purse-lipped historians about the French Revolution that they so tearfully rue that "there were two Reigns of Terror in France if we could but remember and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passions, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon a thousand persons, the other upon a hundred million; but our shudders are all for the horrors of the minor terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty and heartbreak?' A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief terror that we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror – that unspeakable bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves." [6] Take that, Simon Schama.

In this neglected essay, well worth a resurrection, Twain excoriates the worst that is to be found in America at the same time as he displays, in the course of doing so, what is best. Does history repeat itself as farce? Not when it was a brutal farce to begin with.

Notes

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[1] Well, actually, he might have served in a suitably segregated way beside Huck. Regiments of buffalo soldiers" were dispatched to do the dirty work too. See Stuart C. Miller, "Benevolent Assimilation": The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Stanley Karnow, In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines (New York: Random House, 1989); and Russell Roth, Muddy Glory: America's Indian Wars" in the Philippines (West Hanover, Mass: Christopher Publishing, 1981).

[2] See Richard Drinnon, Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1980).

[3] Andrew Hoffmann, Inventing Mark Twain: The Lives of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997). pp. 281, 434-447.

[4] President William McKinley wrote: “When next I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps, I confess I did not know what to do with them. I sought counsel from all sides-Democrats as well as Republicans-but got little help. I thought first we would take only Manila; then Luzon; then other islands, perhaps, also. I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way-I don’t know how it was, but it came . . . That there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.”

[5] Mark Twain, Letters From the Earth (New York: Fawcett, 1967), p. 177.

[6] Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969) p. 40.

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To The Person Sitting In Darkness

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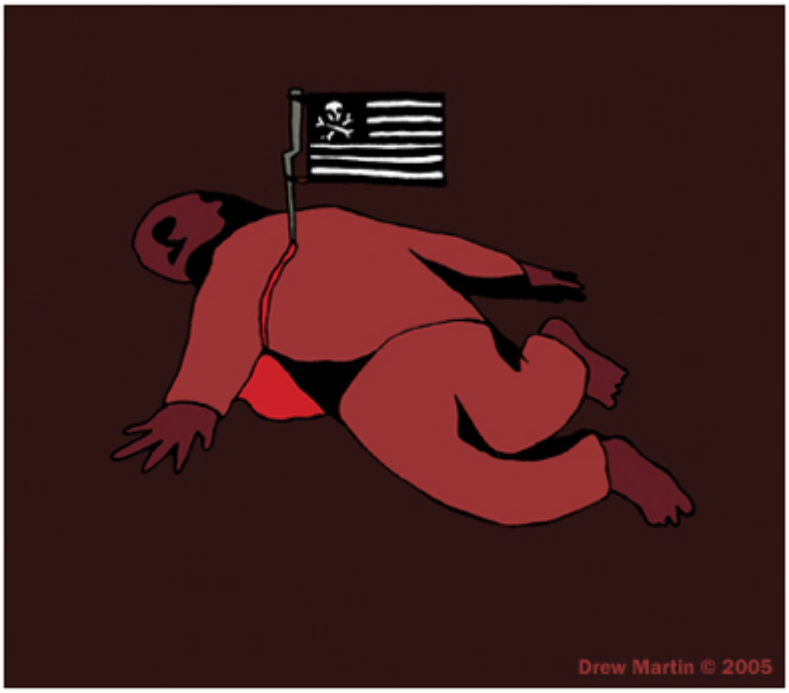
Extending the Blessings of Civilization to our Brother who Sits in Darkness has been a good trade and has paid well, on the whole; and there is money in it yet, if carefully worked but not enough, in my judgement, to make any considerable risk advisable. The People that Sit in Darkness are getting to be too scarce too scarce and too shy. And such darkness as is now left is really of but an indifferent quality, and not dark enough for the game. The most of those People that Sit in Darkness have been furnished with more light than was good for them or profitable for us. We have been injudicious.



The Blessings-of-Civilization Trust, wisely and cautiously administered, is a Daisy. There is more money in it, more territory, more sovereignty, and other kinds of emolument, than there is in any other game that is played. But Christendom has been playing it badly of late years, and must certainly suffer by it, in my opinion. She has been so eager to get every stake that appeared on the green cloth, that the People who Sit in Darkness have noticed it they have noticed it, and have begun to show alarm. They have become suspicious of the Blessings of Civilization. More they have begun to examine them. This is not well. The Blessings of Civilization are all right, and a good commercial property; there could not be a better, in a dim light. In the right kind of a light, and at a proper distance, with the goods a little out of focus, they furnish this desirable exhibit to the Gentlemen who Sit in Darkness:

LOVE,

LAW AND ORDER,

JUSTICE,

LIBERTY,

GENTLENESS,

EQUALITY,

CHRISTIANITY,

HONORABLE DEALING,

PROTECTION TO THE WEAK,

MERCY,

TEMPERANCE,

EDUCATION,

and so on.

There. Is it good? Sir, it is pie. It will bring into camp any idiot that sits in darkness anywhere. But not if we adulterate it. It is proper to be emphatic upon that point. This brand is strictly for Export apparently. *Apparently.* Privately and confidentially, it is nothing of the kind. Privately and confidentially, it is merely an outside cover, gay and pretty and attractive, displaying the special patterns of our Civilization which we reserve for Home Consumption, while *inside* the bale is the Actual Thing that the Customer Sitting in Darkness buys with his blood and tears and land and liberty. That Actual Thing is, indeed, Civilization, but it is only for Export. Is there a difference between the two brands? In some of the details, yes.

We all know that the Business is being ruined. The reason is not far to seek. It is because our Mr. McKinley, and Mr. Chamberlain, and the Kaiser, and the Czar and the French have been exporting the Actual Thing *with the outside cover left off.* This is bad for the Game. It shows that these new players of it are not sufficiently acquainted with it.

It is a distress to look on and note the mismoves, they are so strange and so awkward. Mr. Chamberlain manufactures a war out of materials so inadequate and so fanciful that they make the boxes grieve and the gallery laugh, and he tries hard to persuade himself that it isn't purely a private raid for cash, but has a sort of dim, vague respectability about it somewhere, if he could only find the spot; and that, by and by, he can scour the flag clean again after he has finished dragging it through the mud, and make it shine and flash in the vault of heaven once more as it had shone and flashed there a thousand years in the world's respect until he laid his unfaithful hand upon it. It is bad play bad. For it exposes the Actual Thing to Them that Sit in Darkness, and they say: "What! Christian against Christian? And only for money? Is *this* a case of magnanimity, forbearance, love, gentleness, mercy, protection of the weak this strange and over-showy onslaught of an elephant upon a nest of field-mice, on the pretext that the mice had squeaked an insolence at him -conduct which 'no self-respecting government could allow to pass unavenged?' as Mr. Chamberlain said. Was that a good pretext in a small case, when it

had not been a good pretext in a large one? for only recently Russia had affronted the elephant three times and survived alive and unsmitten. Is this Civilization and Progress? Is it something better than we already possess? These harryings and burnings and desert-makings in the Transvaal is this an improvement on our darkness? Is it, perhaps, possible that there are two kinds of Civilization one for home consumption and one for the heathen market?"
Then They that Sit in Darkness are troubled, and shake their heads; and they read this extract from a letter of a British private, recounting his exploits in one of Methuen's victories, some days before the affair of Magersfontein, and they are troubled again:

"We tore up the hill and into the intrenchments, and the Boers saw we had them; so they dropped their guns and went down on their knees and put up their hands clasped, and begged for mercy. And we gave it them *with the long spoon."*

The long spoon is the bayonet. See *Lloyd's Weekly,* London, of those days. The same number and the same column contains some quite unconscious satire in the form of shocked and bitter upbraidings of the Boers for their brutalities and inhumanities!

Next, to our heavy damage, the Kaiser went to playing the game without first mastering it. He lost a couple of missionaries in a riot in Shantung, and in his account he made an overcharge for them. China had to pay a hundred thousand dollars apiece for them, in money; twelve miles of territory, containing several millions of inhabitants and worth twenty million dollars; and to build a monument, and also a Christian church; whereas the people of China could have been depended upon to remember the missionaries without the help of these expensive memorials. This was all bad play. Bad, because it would not, and could not, and will not now or ever, deceive the Person Sitting in Darkness. He knows that it was an overcharge. He knows that a missionary is like any other man: he is worth merely what you can supply his place for, and no more. He is useful, but so is a doctor, so is a sheriff, so is an editor; but a just Emperor does not charge war-prices for such. A diligent, intelligent, but obscure missionary, and a diligent, intelligent country editor are worth much, and we know it; but they are not worth the earth. We esteem such an editor, and we are sorry to see him go; but, when he goes, we should consider twelve miles of territory, and a church, and a fortune, over-compensation for his loss. I mean, if he was a Chinese editor, and we had to settle for him. It is no proper figure for an editor or a missionary; one can get shop-worn kings for less. It was bad play on the Kaiser's part. It got this property, true; but it *produced the Chinese revolt,* the indignant uprising of China's traduced patriots, the Boxers. The results have been expensive to Germany, and to the other Disseminators of Progress and the Blessings of Civilization.
The Kaiser's claim was paid, yet it was bad play, for it could not fail to have an evil effect upon Persons Sitting in Darkness in China. They would muse upon the event, and be likely to say: "Civilization is gracious and beautiful, for such is its reputation; but can we afford it? There are rich Chinamen, perhaps they could afford it; but this tax is not laid upon them, it is laid upon the peasants of Shantung; it is they that must pay this mighty sum, and their wages are but four cents a day. Is this a better civilization than ours, and holier and higher and nobler? Is not this rapacity? Is not this extortion? Would Germany charge America two hundred thousand dollars for two missionaries, and shake the mailed fist in her face, and send warships, and send

soldiers, and say: 'Seize twelve miles of territory, worth twenty millions of dollars, as additional pay for the missionaries; and make those peasants build a monument to the missionaries, and a costly Christian church to remember them by?' And later would Germany say to her soldiers: 'March through America and slay, *giving no quarter;* make the German face there, as has been our Hun-face here, a terror for a thousand years; march through the Great Republic and slay, slay, slay, carving a road for our offended religion through its heart and bowels?' Would Germany do like this to America, to England, to France, to Russia? Or only to China the helpless imitating the elephant's assault upon the field-mice? Had we better invest in this Civilization this Civilization which called Napoleon a buccaneer for carrying off Venice's bronze horses, but which steals our ancient astronomical instruments from our walls, and goes looting like common bandits that is, all the alien soldiers except America's; and (Americans again excepted) storms frightened villages and cables the result to glad journals at home every day: 'Chinese losses, 450 killed; ours, *one officer and two men wounded.* Shall proceed against neighboring village to-morrow, where a *massacre* is reported.' Can we afford Civilization?"

And, next, Russia must go and play the game injudiciously. She affronts England once or twice with the Person Sitting in Darkness observing and noting; by moral assistance of France and Germany, she robs Japan of her hard-earned spoil, all swimming in Chinese blood Port Arthur with the Person again observing and noting; then she seizes Manchuria, raids its villages, and chokes its great river with the swollen corpses of countless massacred peasants that astonished Person still observing and noting. And perhaps he is saying to himself: "It is yet *another* Civilized Power, with its banner of the Prince of Peace in one hand and its loot-basket and its butcher-knife in the other. Is there no salvation for us but to adopt Civilization and lift ourselves down to its level?"

And by and by comes America, and our Master of the Game plays it badly plays it as Mr. Chamberlain was playing it in South Africa. It was a mistake to do that; also, it was one which was quite unlooked for in a Master who was playing it so well in Cuba. In Cuba, he was playing the usual and regular *American* game, and it was winning, for there is no way to beat it. The Master, contemplating Cuba, said: "Here is an oppressed and friendless little nation which is willing to fight to be free; we go partners, and put up the strength of seventy million sympathizers and the resources of the United States: play!" Nothing but Europe combined could call that hand: and Europe cannot combine on anything. There, in Cuba, he was following our great traditions in a way which made us very proud of him, and proud of the deep dissatisfaction which his play was provoking in Continental Europe. Moved by a high inspiration, he threw out those stirring words which proclaimed that forcible annexation would be "criminal aggression;" and in that utterance fired another "shot heard round the world." The memory of that fine saying will be outlived by the remembrance of no act of his but one that he forgot it within the twelvemonth, and its honorable gospel along with it.

For, presently, came the Philippine temptation. It was strong; it was too strong, and he made that bad mistake: he played the European game, the Chamberlain game. It was a pity; it was a great pity, that error; that one grievous error, that irrevocable error. For it was the very place and time to play the American game again. And at no cost. Rich winnings to be gathered in, too; rich and permanent; indestructible; a fortune transmissible forever to the children of the flag. Not land, not money, not dominion no, something worth many times more than that dross: our share, the spectacle of a nation of long harassed and persecuted slaves set free through

our influence; our posterity's share, the golden memory of that fair deed. The game was in our hands. If it had been played according to the American rules, Dewey would have sailed away from Manila as soon as he had destroyed the Spanish fleet after putting up a sign on shore guaranteeing foreign property and life against damage by the Filipinos, and warning the Powers that interference with the emancipated patriots would be regarded as an act unfriendly to the United States. The Powers cannot combine, in even a bad cause, and the sign would not have been molested.

Dewey could have gone about his affairs elsewhere, and left the competent Filipino army to starve out the little Spanish garrison and send it home, and the Filipino citizens to set up the form of government they might prefer, and deal with the friars and their doubtful acquisitions according to Filipino ideas of fairness and justice ideas which have since been tested and found to be of as high an order as any that prevail in Europe or America.

But we played the Chamberlain game, and lost the chance to add another Cuba and another honorable deed to our good record.

The more we examine the mistake, the more clearly we perceive that it is going to be bad for the Business. The Person Sitting in Darkness is almost sure to say: "There is something curious about this curious and unaccountable. There must be two Americas: one that sets the captive free, and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him, and picks a quarrel with him with nothing to found it on; then kills him to get his land."

The truth is, the Person Sitting in Darkness *is* saying things like that; and for the sake of the Business we must persuade him to look at the Philippine matter in another and healthier way. We must arrange his opinions for him. I believe it can be done; for Mr. Chamberlain has arranged England's opinion of the South African matter, and done it most cleverly and successfully. He presented the facts some of the facts and showed those confiding people what the facts meant. He did it statistically, which is a good way. He used the formula: "Twice 2 are 14, and 2 from 9 leaves 35." Figures are effective; figures will convince the elect.

Now, my plan is a still bolder one than Mr. Chamberlain's, though apparently a copy of it. Let us be franker than Mr. Chamberlain; let us audaciously present the whole of the facts, shirking none, then explain them according to Mr. Chamberlain's formula. This daring truthfulness will astonish and dazzle the Person Sitting in

Darkness, and he will take the Explanation down before his mental vision has had time to get back into focus. Let us say to him:

"Our case is simple. On the 1st of May, Dewey destroyed the Spanish fleet. This left the Archipelago in the hands of its proper and rightful owners, the Filipino nation. Their army numbered 30,000 men, and they were competent to whip out or starve out the little Spanish garrison; then the people could set up a government of their own devising. Our traditions required that Dewey should now set up his warning sign, and go away. But the Master of the Game happened to think of another plan the European plan. He acted upon it. This was, to send out an army ostensibly to help the native patriots put the finishing touch upon their long and plucky struggle for independence, but really to take their land away from them and keep it. That is, in the interest of Progress and Civilization. The plan developed, stage by stage, and quite satisfactorily. We entered into a military alliance with the trusting Filipinos, and they hemmed in Manila on the land side, and by their valuable help the place, with its garrison of 8,000 or 10,000 Spaniards, was captured a thing which we could not have accomplished

unaided at that time. We got their help by by ingenuity. We knew they were fighting for their independence, and that they had been at it for two years. We knew they supposed that we also were fighting in their worthy cause just as we had helped the Cubans fight for Cuban independence and we allowed them to go on thinking so. *Until Manila was ours and we could get along without them.* Then we showed our hand. Of course, they were surprised that was natural; surprised and disappointed; disappointed and grieved. To them it looked un-American; uncharacteristic; foreign to our established traditions. And this was natural, too; for we were only playing the American Game in public in private it was the European. It was neatly done, very neatly, and it bewildered them. They could not understand it; for we had been so friendly so affectionate, even with those simple-minded patriots! We, our own selves, had brought back out of exile their leader, their hero, their hope, their Washington Aguinaldo; brought him in a warship, in high honor, under the sacred shelter and hospitality of the flag; brought him back and restored him to his people, and got their moving and eloquent gratitude for it. Yes, we had been so friendly to them, and had heartened them up in so many ways! We had lent them guns and ammunition; advised with them; exchanged pleasant courtesies with them; placed our sick and wounded in their kindly care; entrusted our Spanish prisoners to their humane and honest hands; fought shoulder to shoulder with them against "the common enemy" (our own phrase); praised their courage, praised their gallantry, praised their mercifulness, praised their fine and honorable conduct; borrowed their trenches, borrowed strong positions which they had previously captured from the Spaniard; petted them, lied to them officially proclaiming that our land and naval forces came to give them their freedom and displace the bad Spanish Government fooled them, used them until we needed them no longer; then derided the sucked orange and threw it away. We kept the positions which we had beguiled them of; by and by, we moved a force forward and overlapped patriot ground a clever thought, for we needed trouble, and this would produce it. A Filipino soldier, crossing the ground, where no one had a right to forbid him, was shot by our sentry. The badgered patriots resented this with arms, without waiting to know whether Aguinaldo, who was absent, would approve or not. Aguinaldo did not approve; but that availed nothing. What we wanted, in the interest of Progress and Civilization, was the Archipelago, unencumbered by patriots struggling for independence; and the War was what we needed. We clinched our opportunity. It is Mr. Chamberlain's case over again at least in its motive and intention; and we played the game as adroitly as he played it himself."

At this point in our frank statement of fact to the Person Sitting in Darkness, we should throw in a little trade-taffy about the Blessings of Civilization for a change, and for the refreshment of his spirit then go on with our tale:

"We and the patriots having captured Manila, Spain's ownership of the Archipelago and her sovereignty over it were at an end obliterated annihilated not a rag or shred of either remaining behind. It was then that we conceived the divinely humorous idea of *buying* both of these spectres from Spain! [It is quite safe to confess this to the Person Sitting in Darkness, since neither he nor any other sane person will believe it.] In buying those ghosts for twenty millions, we also contracted to take care of the friars and their accumulations. I think we also agreed to propagate leprosy and smallpox, but as to this there is doubt. But it is not important; persons afflicted with the friars do not mind the other diseases.

"With our Treaty ratified, Manila subdued, and our Ghosts secured, we had no further use for Aguinaldo and the owners of the Archipelago. We forced a war, and we have been hunting

America's guest and ally through the woods and swamps ever since."
At this point in the tale, it will be well to boast a little of our war-work and our heroisms in the field, so as to make our performance look as fine as England's in South Africa; but I believe it will not be best to emphasize this too much. We must be cautious. Of course, we must read the war-telegrams to the Person, in order to keep up our frankness; but we can throw an air of humorousness over them, and that will modify their grim eloquence a little, and their rather indiscreet exhibitions of gory exultation. Before reading to him the following display heads of the dispatches of November 18, 1900, it will be well to practice on them in private first, so as to get the right tang of lightness and gaiety into them:

"ADMINISTRATION WEARY OF PROTRACTED HOSTILITIES!"
"REAL WAR AHEAD FOR FILIPINO REBELS!"*
"WILL SHOW NO MERCY!"
"KITCHENER'S PLAN ADOPTED!"

Kitchener knows how to handle disagreeable people who are fighting for their homes and their liberties, and we must let on that we are merely imitating Kitchener, and have no national interest in the matter, further than to get ourselves admired by the Great Family of Nations, in which august company our Master of the Game has bought a place for us in the back row.

Of course, we must not venture to ignore our General MacArthur's reports oh, why do they keep on printing those embarrassing things? we must drop them trippingly from the tongue and take the chances:

"During the last ten months our losses have been 268 killed and 750 wounded; Filipino loss, *three thousand two hundred and twenty-seven killed,* and 694 wounded."

We must stand ready to grab the Person Sitting in Darkness, for he will swoon away at this confession, saying: "Good God, those 'niggers' spare their wounded, and the Americans massacre theirs!"

We must bring him to, and coax him and coddle him, and assure him that the ways of Providence are best, and that it would not become us to find fault with them; and then, to show him that we are only imitators, not originators, we must read the following passage from the letter of an American soldier-lad in the Philippines to his mother, published in *Public Opinion*, of Decorah, Iowa, describing the finish of a victorious battle:
"WE NEVER LEFT ONE ALIVE. IF ONE WAS WOUNDED, WE WOULD RUN OUR BAYONETS THROUGH HIM."
Having now laid all the historical facts before the Person Sitting in Darkness, we should bring him to again, and explain them to him. We should say to him:
"They look doubtful, but in reality they are not. There have been lies; yes, but they were told in a good cause. We have been treacherous; but that was only in order that real good might come out of apparent evil. True, we have crushed a deceived and confiding people; we have turned against the weak and the friendless who trusted us; we have stamped out a just and intelligent

and well-ordered republic; we have stabbed an ally in the back and slapped the face of a guest; we have bought a Shadow from an enemy that hadn't it to sell; we have robbed a trusting friend of his land and his liberty; we have invited our clean young men to shoulder a discredited musket and do bandit's work under a flag which bandits have been accustomed to fear, not to follow; we have debauched America's honor and blackened her face before the world; but each detail was for the best. We know this. The Head of every State and Sovereignty in Christendom and ninety per cent. of every legislative body in Christendom, including our Congress and our fifty State Legislatures, are members not only of the church, but also of the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust. This world-girdling accumulation of trained morals, high principles, and justice, cannot do an unright thing, an unfair thing, an ungenerous thing, an unclean thing. It knows what it is about. Give yourself no uneasiness; it is all right."

Now then, that will convince the Person. You will see. It will restore the Business. Also, it will elect the Master of the Game to the vacant place in the Trinity of our national gods; and there on their high thrones the Three will sit, age after age, in the people's sight, each bearing the Emblem of his service: Washington, the Sword of the Liberator; Lincoln, the Slave's Broken Chains; the Master, the Chains Repaired.

It will give the Business a splendid new start. You will see.

Everything is prosperous, now; everything is just as we should wish it. We have got the Archipelago, and we shall never give it up. Also, we have every reason to hope that we shall have an opportunity before very long to slip out of our Congressional contract with Cuba and give her something better in the place of it. It is a rich country, and many of us are already beginning to see that the contract was a sentimental mistake. But now right now is the best time to do some profitable rehabilitating work work that will set us up and make us comfortable, and discourage gossip. We cannot conceal from ourselves that, privately, we are a little troubled about our uniform. It is one of our prides; it is acquainted with honor; it is familiar with great deeds and noble; we love it, we revere it; and so this errand it is on makes us uneasy. And our flag another pride of ours, our chiefest! We have worshipped it so; and when we have seen it in far lands glimpsing it unexpectedly in that strange sky, waving its welcome and benediction to us we have caught our breath, and uncovered our heads, and couldn't speak, for a moment, for the thought of what it was to us and the great ideals it stood for. Indeed, we *must* do something about these things; we must not have the flag out there, and the uniform. They are not needed there; we can manage in some other way. England manages, as regards the uniform, and so can we. We have to send soldiers we can't get out of that but we can disguise them. It is the way England does in South Africa. Even Mr. Chamberlain himself takes pride in England's honorable uniform, and makes the army down there wear an ugly and odious and appropriate disguise, of yellow stuff such as quarantine flags are made of, and which are hoisted to warn the healthy away from unclean disease and repulsive death. This cloth is called khaki. We could adopt it. It is light, comfortable, grotesque, and deceives the enemy, for he cannot conceive of a soldier being concealed in it.

And as for a flag for the Philippine Province, it is easily managed. We can have a special one our States do it: we can have just our usual flag, with the white stripes painted black and the stars replaced by the skull and cross-bones. And we do not need that Civil Commission out there. Having no powers, it has to invent them, and that kind of work cannot be effectively done by just anybody; an expert is required. Mr. Croker can be spared. We do not want the

United States represented there, but only the Game.
By help of these suggested amendments, Progress and Civilization in that country can have a boom, and it will take in the Persons who are Sitting in Darkness, and we can resume Business at the old stand.

*New York: Anti-Imperialist League of New York, 1901

Bergman’s Last Words: Saraband?

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

I began to attend Bergman’s films in my late teens-an insecure, confused adolescent hungrily seeking explanations and solace for my existential angst. Bergman films like *Wild Strawberries* and *The Magician* so powerfully affected me that I began to reflect on my own life in a different light. Here was a director who made films that didn’t adhere to Hollywood’s conventions- which even when produced by the most stylistically striking and richly archetypal of directors (e.g., Hawks, Ford, and Hitchcock) left the center of my being untouched. Bergman saw film, not as a well-shaped narrative, but as “a form of art that goes beyond ordinary consciousness, straight to our feelings, deep down into the dark room of our souls.” Fifty years later- with my having evolved into a much more confident and less anguished person-his films continue to shatter any pieties that I still hold about personal relationships and existence itself.

Saraband, the 86-year-old Ingmar Bergman’s putatively final film-though he has retired from the screen before-is in the tradition of Bergman’s best work about complex human relationships like Winter Light, Persona, Passion for Anna, Shame, and Scenes From a Marriage- *Saraband’s* prequel.

Scenes From a Marriage (1974)- a less pared down work than *Saraband*– was a commercial and critical success, and originally a six-part television film that reached millions of people. After cutting almost 120 minutes it was given a theatrical release-without the film ever feeling diluted and incoherent. Dependent on psychologically penetrating close-ups and searing dialog, Scenes was arguably the most moving and complex dissection of marriage ever shown on screen. Its central characters, Johan (Erland Josephson), an egotistical, womanizing academic scientist with a stalled career, and Marianne (Liv Ullman), a more selfless but passively controlling divorce lawyer, ostensibly have a happy marriage. But Bergman quickly disabuses the audience of that illusion when their relationship begins to unravel. Though at the film’s conclusion, Johan and Marianne, who are now married to other people, are having an affair with one another. The film closes with two people, incapable of living together, but cleaving to each other in the warmth, sexual attraction, and alienation of an “earthly and imperfect” love.

Saraband opens with the 63-year-old Marianne making an impulsive visit to an embittered, cynical 86-year-old Johan, who has retired to an isolated villa in the mountains. She hasn’t seen him for more than thirty years, despite their “imperfect love” (and he has lost contact with their two daughters-one of them institutionalized), and unknowingly enters a tangled familial

world riven with conflict and alienation. Johan's cellist son Henrik (a stunning performance by Borje Ahlstadt), from an earlier marriage, whom he treats with contempt, lives nearby with his 19-year-old pure-looking, student cellist daughter, Karin (Julia Dufvenius). Both grandfather and father dote on her, though Henrik's relationship with his daughter goes far beyond mere affection.

At the heart of this emotionally volatile chamber piece is the relationship between Henrik and Karin, and though Johan and Marianne's renewed connection in old age is powerfully evoked, it's not foregrounded. Henrik wants to totally control Karin (whom he teaches), and reshape her in the image of Anna-his much loved wife who died two years before. Karin has become the only thing in Henrik's life that gives it meaning. They even sleep in the same bed, and in one instance he kisses her passionately on the mouth, which initially she doesn't seem to resist, but then abruptly recoils from. Though the film never suggests that actual incest ever takes place. And Karin, in turn, feels utterly oppressed by his emotional demands and rages, but is tormented and guilt-ridden about separating herself and leaving him bereft. It's clear that when she chooses to assert her freedom, he will not be capable of accepting her decision with equanimity.

Saraband (a saraband was an erotic 17th and 18th century dance) is conceived by Bergman as ten movements, with no more than two characters in each sequence, plus a prologue and epilogue. And Bergman constructs it as a self-reflexive film with Marianne directly addressing the camera in the prologue and epilogue, and with chapter headings for each duet. Shot in digital video, generally in tight spaces, and using two-shots, close-ups and long takes, the film sacrifices expressive imagery and movement to clarity.

However, despite the film's transparency it remains a profoundly layered work. As usual, Bergman creates characters that can't be reduced to one or two qualities or whose conduct is schematic or predictable. All four are nuanced complicated figures whose behavior can shift from moment to moment. For example, the overweight, self-loathing, suicidal Henrik has eyes that are permeated with despair. He is both odious and vulnerable. In one scene Marianne enters a deserted church where she hears Henrik playing Bach on the organ. At first, they talk affably, though he cries when talking of his wife Anna's death. But abruptly he shifts gears, and displays suspicion and then naked hostility towards Marianne. Henrik's rages can be frightening in their intensity. And like many Bergman characters, he is totally conscious of how repulsive and insane his behavior is, but his self-knowledge does not make him any more palatable a person.

In fact, it's hard to conceive that anything else but Henrik's helplessness and futility could have elicited the love his saintly wife Anna felt for him. And Anna's ghostly presence and enigmatic smiling photo hovers over much of the action-mourned by all who were linked to her. Though we have only the word of the other characters that she offers some light in this angst-ridden world.

Bergman is not a director who indulges in physical violence, but *Saraband's* emotional violence

is much more potent and disquieting than George Lucas' brilliantly empty special effects in his *Star Wars* franchise, or Michael Mann's beautifully kinetic bloody murders in *Collateral*. In one scene when Henrik comes to borrow money from Johan, one viscerally experiences the unwavering hatred the father feels for his son, and his reveling in his power to thwart the son's desires.

All of *Saraband's* characters are flawed, though Marianne, who is outside the familial turmoil, is seemingly more compassionate and serene than the others. She is taken aback by Johan, whom she remembers being "a touch pitiable and vulnerable," because he has turned into so vindictive and pitiless an old man (which Josephson strikingly embodies by the malice he conveys through his eyes). And why she lingers on in the house remains puzzling to her and the viewers, for even as a sounding board for the other characters' despair, though somewhat reassuring, she is of little help.

Watching Ullmann in close-up, one is aware that over the years she has gained weight, has wrinkles under her eyes, and her characteristic radiance has faded a bit. But she remains inalterably who she is- indulging in none of surgical make overs that are the stock in trade of Hollywood stars' trying to stem the aging process. And Ullmann's talent for registering a wide range of shifting emotional responses-melancholy, irony, sympathy, and tenderness- is stunningly sustained, as well as her capacity to still evoke memories of her luminous presence in past Bergman films.

In the film's most striking scene Johan and Marianne are sleeping in adjoining bedrooms, and Johan wakes up in the middle of the night in tears, having had an anxiety attack and drenched his nightshirt. He cries out to Marianne "that my anxiety is bigger than I am-I'm too small for my anxiety." It's one of those classic Bergman scenes where a character, without a false note, conveys the depths of his emotional being.

In the scene Marianne is warm and consoling, and invites a frightened, suddenly very human Johan to sleep in the same bed with her. They both get undressed, and Josephson standing there, naked in all his aged fragility and defenselessness, enters her bed in order to get through the night. It's a profound emotional shift in a film that contains only rare moments where a tender connection between characters is expressed.

The film's brief epilogue provides one more powerful emotional revelation. Marianne visits her catatonic daughter, and touches her face. In response she opens her eyes in recognition, and then shuts them. Marianne then addresses the camera, her eyes filling with tears, informing us that it's the first time in their life together she has truly "touched" her daughter. Even the relatively steady Marianne carries her own profound incompleteness and alienation. In a Bergman film-no character is free from despair. Though even in dark works like *Saraband*, Bergman conveys empathy for even his most abhorrent characters.

If *Saraband* is truly Bergman's final film, the maestro has exited losing very little of his genius for emotional immediacy and honesty. In Liv Ullmann's opinion, it's "the most personal" film he

has made. Personal-in the nakedness of its emotions, and the sense of an old man trying to deal in his last years with a life he now sees as utterly repugnant (“shit”). And though Saraband has moments that feel too explicit-Henrik explaining away his psychic states-and where the film’s level of rage seems excessive and repetitive, none of my cavils really matter. Bergman is a giant whose gift for exploring the human psyche and soul make most other directors working today look like pygmies.

On Star Spangled To Death

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

Organic, living organism that grew and grew over the period of 47 years.

Ken says, “The film is done; it weighed on me all those years.” But I wouldn’t take that for the last word. Maybe the only film I know that is Artaud: Monumental Song of Despair & Hope. Of epic proportions, incredibly complex in meanings. It’s an absolute masterpiece that will be seen differently by every viewer. The greatest found-footage film. No found-footage film can be made after this one; add to it Joseph Cornell, Bruce Conner, Julius Ziz, and Bill Morrison. A film that contains some of the most cinematic and grotesque film material from the first 100 years of commercial cinema.

A film that is not about avant-garde. A film that is not like Brakhage or the last Bruce Elder, who create their own worlds of their own making. This one creates a world according to Ken Jacobs out of bits of the banal, clichéd, grotesque, vulgar, dripping sentimentality that is being sold to the people as real food and everybody feeds on it and even enjoys it and then dies.

Jerry Sims in Ken Jacobs' Star Spangled to Death.

Ken Jacobs: "It is a social critique picturing a stolen and dangerously sold-out America, allowing examples of popular culture to self-indict."

So Ken takes a knife and cuts it all open. Irreverently and lovingly and with a skill of a good surgeon he reveals it all to us from the inside, and we do not know whether to laugh, cry, run out screaming, or applaud.

And there is Jerry and Jack wrapped in it all, trying to live in it, to exist one way or another-you have to be Jack to still dance through it all at the same time as you cry and starve. Yes, this is a film that sums it all up and you almost hate it, but at the same time you know it's all true, it's all true, this is all the America we live in, our home, the official America of the 20th century, here it is on the plate, so eat it and then vomit it all out.

Luckily for me, this is not my America in this film: I live in another America, the America of my dreams.

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Omer Kavur, Film Director Whose Themes Were Time And Memory, Dead At 61

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

One of Turkey's most poetic and honored directors, Omer Kavur, died on 12 May 2005 at the age of 61. For years Kavur has been battling lymph node cancer, but continued to make films through 2003 when his "Karsilasma" (Encounter) was premiered to critical acclaim.

Born in Ankara in 1944, Kavur studied film at the Sorbonne in Paris in the late 1960s, began making documentary films, and in 1979 made his first feature, "Yusuf and Kenan." Since then he made a remarkable series of visually complex, powerful narratives that have common themes of memory and illusion. "Motherland Hotel" in 1986 gradually turns into a sequence of imagined encounters seamlessly linked to reality. The next year, in "The Night Journey," a film director roams across the Anatolian landscape mixing images from his film-to-be-made with the people he encounters. With "The Secret Face" in 1991 Kavur vaulted into a mythic world of yearning and self-discovery. Scripted by Turkish modern novelist Orhan Pamuk, "The Secret Face" resonates with echoes of Chretien de Troyes and Richard Wagner, a Parsifal quest in our own time.

"The Secret Face" is breathtaking, but is exceeded by his next film "Journey on the Hour Hand" which Kavur completed in 1997. Again there is a meticulous, almost documentary attention to details which roots the film in "reality." But in "Journey" we discover a world where time can stop, and even fold back upon itself, with events and characters repeating their previous lives, loves, deaths. Again a clockmaker is the protagonist who repairs instruments that measure time.

Both "The Secret Face" and "Journey on the Hour Hand" are passionate love stories that contain fantastic elements, a benign association (or a cult?) in the former, and the folded fabric of time in the latter. In most other respects they occupy the same world we live in, with such details as automobiles, telephones, television, trains, etc. The fantastic elements are introduced early, or very late, but in an understated way that is matter-of-fact, something that is accepted by Kavur's protagonists. And thus accepted by us.

The presence of clocks-public clocks in civic buildings and individual timepieces-is a signature motif for Kavur. Within the Turkish context they are also an emblem of the new era. Scores of clocktowers were erected at the end of the nineteenth century. Like the cinema and the airplane, they shaped the development of modern Turkish culture.

Finally, and one hopes this applied to Kavur himself, his later films end on a note of bliss, of acceptance. The different quests of his films end with his protagonists fulfilled, having found their way through "lost lands, forgotten towns." And survival, beyond death; as Kerem (in

“Journey on the Hour Hand”) writes in his diary, “feelings never die.”

Kavur had an in-person retrospective at Anthology Film Archives in November 2000, followed by a tour of his films to several American cities. His films were shown at Cannes and many international film festivals. He is survived by his wife Selma.

Cinema And Critical Reflection: A Conversation With Ken Jacobs And Family

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Ken Jacobs has been making avant-garde and experimental films for over forty years. Along with Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and Peter Kubelka, Jacobs' films represent the most provocative and innovative spirit in experimental cinema. Over the years he has developed a unique technique distinct from other filmmakers of the genre. Yet, he has also engaged American politics in a way uncharacteristic of avant garde artists. Forty years in the on-and-off making, the recently completed Star Spangled to Death *is Jacobs' magnum opus. Logos sat down with Ken Jacobs and long-time collaborators wife Flo, daughter Nisi, and son Azazel to discuss the new film, but also to explore the function of cinema and art. Learn more about Star Spangled to Death by visiting* www.starspangledtodeath.com*. Nisi Jacobs' site is* www.thefieldprocess.com*. Azazel Jacobs:* www.nobodyneedstoknow.com*.*

All of the following images are taken from the film Star Spangled to Death.

Gregory Zucker: Let's talk about your aesthetic. What is the over-riding theme that comes through in the body of your work?

Ken Jacobs: I think the best way to explain what I am trying to do is through an article I recently read in the Sunday Times about a video game based on the Coppola film *The Godfather*. Essentially, you play as a mafia henchman. Throughout the game you are given options. You determine the course your character takes. The game crafts an experience. The player has total control over the choices made within the game. Yet, the game designer explained in the article that it was his job to make sure that whatever path the player chose to take it would still make the story progress forward. So, the designer has to craft all the elements that make the story progress while still allowing the player to make various choices throughout. Now, first of all, this is cinema; it has been from the beginning. This is what I would call "indeterminate cinema." From the beginning that is what has interested me, indeterminate cinema. Now, because film is linear, because things take place from moment to moment on the screen, cinema is determinate, but I feel that when one reflects on cinema and interprets what has just been seen one can determine the experience for him or her self.

GZ: So it seems from what you are saying, and from how I understand your work, that you try to give the viewer the freedom to constitute his or her own aesthetic experience.

KJ: Well, yes, I try to explode cinema. Now, this video game is not what I had in mind when I first started thinking about a kind of aesthetic engagement in which the viewer is able to determine his or her own aesthetic experience. Nevertheless, this is the latest development in cinematic experience. I see fewer and fewer people at movie theatres and, from what I understand, more and more people are buying these video games where they can craft their own reality within the context of the game.

GZ: Whereas you were hoping an indeterminate cinema, an explosion of cinematic images presented to the viewer, would allow the viewer through reflection and interpretation to take an active role in the aesthetic experience, you see that this idea of indeterminacy is being used to reify viewers.

KJ: Ironically, when I first got started making films, in a vague sense this is what I hoped for a cinema by which, through interpretation and reflection, the viewer could constitute his or her own aesthetic experience. Yet, experiences like the one manufactured by this game have no place for interpretative or reflective capacities of the human mind. They merely give the illusion of choice, while turning people into automatons. It lends no real freedom to the viewer, or in this case, player. Here it's just training and triggering in violence. It's just a matter of choosing who to kill. You are taken deeper and deeper into this fake reality, which gives you a false sense that you are making decisions. In a sense, games like this one are just continuing a trend amongst many films. I hoped that an indeterminate cinema would force the viewer to actively reflect on what they saw on the screen and not just be a passive receiver of images, but make decisions and judgments. I want to give the viewer as much freedom as possible to reflect on what they have seen.

Nisi Jacobs: No one makes any choices. I think that saying that these games are anything like what Ken calls “indeterminate cinema” is a misnomer. It’s all very predetermined within the context of the game. It does not challenge you in anyway to be active. It does not encourage anyone to be creative. I think that discouraging creativity and an active reflective viewer makes people less critical in their everyday lives, which ultimately takes a toll on people’s political engagement.

GZ: I’m interested in this idea of an active versus a passive viewer. How do you promote an active viewer?

KJ: Well, you want to pose questions to your viewer. Cinema creates an experience for its viewers and many people come to depend on the experiences provided them by the movies. Most movies are coherent. They are fairy tales that lead to something. Movies have resolutions. Many people live at the movies and tolerate fumbling through their real lives. Life is different; it does not seem to lead to anything. It’s diffuse, yet infinitely penetrable. So, the difference is between a cinema that is a cooked, or organized experience, and one that encourages viewers to reflect and have their own experiences. The difference is between living through the movies and using the movies to enrich your critical engagement with life and the real world. One is an experience that dominates while the other condemns you to be free.

GZ: In the case of your film, *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son*, you took a film that had already been made in the early part of the twentieth century and re-edited in such a way that you took the film apart. You dissected the film, freezing certain frames, replaying certain sequences over and over, etc. The film lost its narrative structure and was presented to the viewer in an entirely other way. You force the viewer to look at film in a new way. It's not a packaged story.

KJ: Yes, very few people analyze their experience of film. When they walk out of a theatre, they do not talk about what they have experienced. If they like what they see, they will usually say something like, "wow, that was a good movie, it was exciting," and that will be it. They are not critical of their experience. Many movies just try to excite passions and tap mechanisms in people – their sexual and violent urges. It feeds thrills to the viewer. That's what makes money and discourages critical thought. When people are given an aesthetic experience that allows them to move beyond saying "that was an exciting movie" and analyze what they saw.

NJ: The film industry tries to feed a product that they know will sell. They know how to unlock people and sell them an experience that appeals to people's passions.

KJ: The point behind the indeterminate cinema was to move away from that kind of cinema. It was supposed to make people think and not just be passive riders on a roller coaster. Now this idea of the indeterminate cinema has been usurped and become something marketable.

Azazel Jacobs: I do not think that things are that hopeless. Just because an indeterminate cinema style is being used by these video games, that does not mean it cannot be used to convey radical ideas. With *Star Spangled to Death*, Ken has created a film that speaks to the current political situation. It still has an impact on the audience and promotes reflection. Even though these video games are employing a similar technique, they do not have the same effect on its audience.

Flo Jacobs: The work seems very improvised. As the film was made over thirty years, Ken was constantly searching for new things to add to the film and responding to what was going on at the time. So, you were constantly shooting new scenes or finding new "found footage" to add.

GZ: Much of the footage you include deals with American political controversies or views that were perhaps common at the time that they were expressed, but from the standpoint of today are considered scandalous. For example, you include footage from Richard Nixon's famous Checkers speech, films of animal testing, and footage from explicitly racist and orientalist documentaries and narrative films. The film was released a little bit before *Fahrenheit 9/11*; do you think there was a similar impulse to expose the problems with American political culture and society in general in the way that Moore tried to expose the true nature of Bush's "war on terror"?

KJ: I could not make a film like *Fahrenheit 9/11*. I respect Moore for what he did. That film was urgently needed. I made an art film. I'm a child of the 30s and the Great Depression. I grew up in New York during World War 2 and watched McCarthyism take hold, so I heard the rhetoric about the war against fascism or the war against Communism. For a while, I believed the rhetoric about patriotism and all the other lies that were fed to me, that we were the good guys. For example, it was hard to come to understand that even during the war against fascism this country did horrible things like bombing civilians or neglecting Jews. Also, coming to understand the extermination of Native Americans or the hundreds of years of slavery was important to me. I had to come to terms with the glowing propaganda I was fed about America's greatness. Especially with what is happening today under Bush, it seemed like the proper time to let all these thoughts out. The film is not nihilistic. The footage I shot that is in the film includes two protagonists played by Jack Smith and Jerry Sims. Jerry represents the idea that America is basically good, corrupt, but good. Jack represents a hatred for American

society, almost a death wish for it.

NJ: Most films about American history manipulate and misrepresent what has happened in this country or what it has done. This film urges people to look at America's past and present for what it really is. At the same time it straddles a love/hate relationship to America and its history. In a sense the film tries to end denial and help people to reject the fabrications they have been fed.

FJ: At first, I was sad that the film was not completed in 1962-63 when you first started working on it. Yet, by waiting all this time, I think it was able to step back and take a look at the course of American history and pick up on trends in society.

GZ: Having spoken about your aesthetic and *Star Spangled to Death* it seems that the notion that our reality has been packaged and manufactured for us, whether it be in the arts or in politics, is a recurring theme throughout your films.

KJ: Most people do not question their world. They think that the world that exists today is the only one that has ever existed and that what they are shown is all that exists. Artwork shows other possibilities, it is another language. It is an enigma. The art that I make is not about

messages. It is about presenting enigmas. I think that that is a sane stance for the artist to take in the world. The role of the artist is to show other possibilities, which helps to bring a little sanity to the world that is imposed on us.

Andrey Gritsman: A Poet In Intercultural Space

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

My first encounter with the poetry of Andrey Gritsman occurred on a cheerless winter night in 2004. Gritsman was giving a poetry reading at the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York City. The RCI had invited him to promote the Romanian translation of one of his recent poetry collections, *In Transit* (2004). The evening began with a warm reception in his honor-tables richly bedecked with vegetarian and meat-based hors d'oeuvres, spirits and several varieties of Romanian wines. Gritsman approached the podium flanked by two of the finest voices producing poetry in Romanian and English today: Nina Cassian and Carmen Firan.

Gritsman, a charming, silver-haired man of hearty build, greeted the audience with a wry joke and began, in a hypnotic rhythm, reading a poem dedicated to Nina Cassian. In just a few cadenced strokes, Gritsman's poem evoked more than just an atmosphere of living, breathing ironies drawn from the habits and places that color everyday life: it transmitted a feeling, an intimate vantage point into the paradoxical nature of intercultural existence. From Cassian's 5pm whisky ritual to the surrealistic experience of geographic and spiritual distances, Gritsman brought together the comforts of mundane existence and the alienation of the DP, the displaced person.

These first impressions I had of Gritsman were, I was later to discover, the driving force behind his poetry. Most of Gritsman's compositions are inspired and informed by the virtue of being in between cultures-of not only inhabiting, but also cultivating what he refers to "an intercultural space." This intercultural space for Gritsman constitutes more than just an intimate connection with his native Moscow and the US, that place that in his youth fueled the landscape of his imagination and would later become his adopted home and the home of his children. Its scope extends beyond mere recognition of the unique and multifarious cultural, linguistic and identity fusions, fragmentations and compromises that grow out of the intersection of two or more cultures. A poet occupying the intercultural sphere feels an immediate connection, a spiritual kinship of sorts, with all of those who have felt at odd ease in their geographic and national surroundings-those who Gritsman refers to as "displaced persons." For Gritsman that which connects displaced persons-these individuals who speak in an intercultural voice- is neither delimited by time nor geographic boundaries. This displacedness and intercultural awareness are the qualities which both unite and distinguish poets of foreign origin like Joseph Brodsky, Vladimir Nabakov, Zbignew Herbert, Derek Wolkott, Czeslaw Milosz and Nina Cassian.

Poetry produced among diaspora in intercultural space is according to Gritsman, "poetry in solitude." This can be attributed to the relationship the artist in intercultural space has with the literary language process: he or she tends to be alone with it. "The surrounding market

and landscape are indifferent to the radiation of creative energy. This is the space where different physical and lyrical laws are enforced. And that is good; it is good to be alone. It is also good to be with others who are alone as well, nurturing something precious, placed somewhere in the middle of the chest. Such an artist has tempting opportunity to be a voyeur. There is something mysteriously wonderful of not only watching but also experiencing the surround through this alien prism." This view is consistent with how he identifies himself as a poet in intercultural space. He is adamantly opposed to being seen as a Russian poet. He finds this qualification both restrictive and misleading. Gritsman prefers to describe himself as an "American poet with an accent."

One need not search long in Gritsman's *Long Fall* (his latest poetry collection in English) to discover that this bilingual soul can credibly maneuver within the English language and the tropes of American life with the aplomb that is characteristic of one who is observing the culture from the inside. But oftentimes, and perhaps it is also so with Gritsman, it is precisely the experience of having been an outsider that makes one acutely sensitive to what distinguishes the insider. However this tension may or may not have resolved itself in Gritsman, one thing is for certain: he is remarkably able at articulating the archeology of suburban New Jersey with not only authentic immediacy but with both affection and uncompromising irony. Thus metaphors like "the greasy homey warmth of the diner by Route 547 local" occur as naturally in Gritsman's poetry as do the "Presbyterian bluish eyes," "the air conditioners set on low cool" when he satirizes "the regulated certified environments."

Gritsman is also a talented essayist. In his essay "The Poet in Intercultural Space" in *Long Fall* he candidly expounds on the role of the poet and poetry in contemporary society. Here Gritsman expresses a genuine distaste for the ways in which institutionalization pervades the very fiber of relationships, everyday life and poetry. Poetry that subordinates itself to current cultural trends, political platforms or market demands is completely out of sync with the poetic impulse and the union between word and life. Poetry must have a vital impulse. What must come through in a poem for Gritsman is a vital impulse accompanied by what he terms, the poet's "intonation." "Intonation is the poet's internal tone" and what Gritsman sees as the "most important feature that comes with talent; everything else is *earned*." Yet, that which the "literary industrial complex" seems to reward and recognize is precisely the type of poetry that comes out of distinguished MFA-granting institutions.

It is also compelling to consider the way in which Gritsman conceives of the poet and his role in society. Gritsman does not subscribe to the hermetic brand of poetry that is common at present. What a poem should convey is an intonation that expresses the way in which a poet registers a moment in time, it should not solely engage in self-analysis. "An author should be talking about himself, placed, then into the broader context of his or her time, not, merely, into the context of life's petty crimes perpetrated on the individual: divorce, sleeplessness, underappreciation by one's peers, etc." While believing that poetry is an autonomous enterprise, not beholden to politics or history, he also believes in its capacity to strike notes that apply to the historical and universal qualities of the human condition. If the urgency to change course in Gritsman was doubted it becomes abundantly clear in his invocation of the

late Czeslaw Milosz: “hermetic literary culture” is like “a cage in which one spends all of one time chasing one’s own tail.” And for someone who is passionate about exercising his poetic intonation and cultivating intercultural space, chasing his own tail is without a doubt something which Gritsman has neither the time nor inclination to do.

Andrey Gritsman i*s a native of Moscow, Russia, and immigrated to the US in 1981. Gritsman has authored four volumes of poetry in Russian:* No Man’s Land (Petropol, S.-Petersburg), Double (Hermitage, New York), Transfer (Arion, Moscow) *and* The Island in the Woods *from the Pushkin Foundation Publishing House in S.-Petersburg. His poetry collection* Transfer *was nominated for the prestigious Russian literary award MOSCOW COUNT in 2003. He has written a bilingual book in English and in Russian* View from the Bridge (Poems and Essays), *which was published by WORD in New York in 1999. His new collection of poems and essays in English* Long Fall *has just been published by Spuyten Duyvil Press in New York. His poetry collection* In Transit *in English with Romanian translations was published in 2004 in Bucharest, Romania.*

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Five Poems

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

CATCHER

You are a catcher of the lights
from your childhood in the apple orchard,
a lone patrol with smokes in a tight skirt,
reconnaissance detachment.

In the afternoon, after the pill wears off
your eyes are alert and out there
all of them are waiting
to be taken into custody,
into account, to pay their dues of warmth,
to attach themselves to the pulsating surface,
when the announcement of despair is on the air,
unanswered calls, a fugue of fear.

You are the restless creature, lost between
the destination points of the East Coast:
departure-arrival-feast-departure-end again,
in fact, not having any destination, leaving traces
on the highways between the streaming trees,
and in the cities, where the weathered statues
are left behind, abandoned spirits,
which outlived the parting,
not seeing you, still seeing you.

They are inside the niches on the sidewalk,
hunchbacked, lit weakly by the light
spilled from the kitchen window:
egg-salad for your son or late night coffee, before
the Valium kicks in, the glow from the living room
where a book is left open on the low table
by an ashtray filled with your Marlboro stubs,
like fingers fallen off,

those desiccated specimens of breath,
Nature Morte – still life of death
in the Medical School museum
closed for the summer.

for D.D.

LONG BEACH ISLAND

U-peel shrimp, all you can eat.
Seagulls on the sidewalk
tear apart yesterday's *Investor's Business Daily*
by the closed dead-bolted
ice-cream joint.

We sit by the window
in a small seafood shack:
local fish, hearty chowder,
lobster tail on sale, salty golden
fish-n-chips piled up, freckled
sixteen year olds in short
quasi-catholic uniforms,
Irish-Italian stock, up
for eight hours straight.
Daughters of maritime provinces,
eating sea salt for breakfast,
born and raised on quicksand,
on moving islands. Islands,
catching fire at sunset.
Non-existent land, where ships
could not find the straight
to lend the helping hand
to the brothers and sisters.

Burnt offerings of the
pilgrims' settlements,
drowning in the wetlands.
Cod, haddock, grouper,
scales by the cold fire-ring,
The last rites of a prayer
in the candlelight
as the last ray
touches landscape
in a cathedral of the sky,

as now the sunset touches the face
of my unknown child

across the table.

DAY'S LIFE

I get up at 7 o'clock.
Not 6.15 like before
since now I don't have to cross the river.

I embrace the Stairmaster,
listening to the "Stairway to Heaven,"
or to Beethoven,
or to my own pulsating heart,
conductive system firing up
like a lighthouse
sending flashes of light
to the empty sea.

After coffee I am off for work,
obeying speed limits,
using the directional signals.
At work I perform in a formalized
and certified environment,
air-conditioners always set
on low cool, so
they would feel comfortable:

women, sealed in their sheer pantyhose,
like overnight parcels
and men, hiding their bellies
behind the shirts of self-forgiveness.

The deadly routine shapes itself
into various Assyrian forms:
the transparent clouds of deodorant
cover raw essence of the cubes,
spokes and wheels.

Finally, as the day comes to an end,
reversed countdown,
I rest among the shadows of my childhood,
or what I thought it was.
I don't know any more,
it may still go on.

And when I think about it

I can describe it only
in my own language.
And at the place where I am now
it does not matter anyway.

ON THE WAY TO THE EMPLOYEE CAFETERIA

For D.K.

Along the corridor to the employee cafeteria
we walk down with him as usual
passing paintings of the dead
Members of the Board
from the good old times,
as their Presbyterian bluish eyes
look at me with indignant curiosity.

There is a big window on the right
where spring is trying to make its way
into regulated certified environment
of the inner courtyard. We enjoy it anyway
thanks to the square of cold blue sky,
that looks indifferently
at the bottom of our lives.

So, Dave says: there's supposed to be good weather finally,
next week. And I think of next week,
and of next month and of the next decade etc,
as I usually do, pretending
that I am perennial and eternal.
And Dave says: Great, my favorite grilled chicken sandwich
is on the menu today.
Well, that's worth living, I think.

Over the platter he talks about "Hitler's Willing Executioners,"
about insatiable lawyers and about his Mom, who moved to Boca Raton,
where *everybody* lives now.
And how they went to Israel and Jordan together,
while it was still not deadly.
And that now it's too late for him to make a family.

And I think: What a shame!
What a happiness that would be for a nice Jewish girl,
if there are any left.
And I realize that I can never see his eyes

behind his thick glasses.

And we walk back to the office and now
the Founding Fathers of the Institution are on the right,
their glassy gaze has not changed,
while we had the sandwich.
The incarcerated spring is on the left now,
and the blue eye in the sky still does not understand
how come I don't get it,
what's going happen with us.
And now I know that he knew,
and I didn't, and that he knew
that I did not know. And that I couldn't even know.
Since it's impossible to know.
Once you know – it's too late,
and that's the point.

And we go back to work
and don't say anything,
And now I just can guess
what a bottomless void
one can pass by on the edge
walking along the corridor
on the way down
to the employee cafeteria.

RECEPTION

There is a reception after the reading.
It lasts about 30 minutes
since an electrician and the janitorial service
should be paid overtime.

After the applause we all gather and mingle
around the table with
Gallo Chablis, Melba crackers
and with one or two
wet strawberries on the Hallmark plate
like rat hearts at the biology class.

We listen to a 23 -year -old
fiction writer in lilac tights
working on a novel.

During the discourse

we screw, fall in love or
disintegrate a few fellow participants

and spend a lifetime with one
on the other side of the room,
the one we never get to talk to
since she is conversing all the time
with a tall psychotherapist with oily hair,
standing by a trash can
under the red sign “Exit”.

We ask, and not hearing the answer –
answer. Busy talking,
we grow fibroids and nasal polyps
and plan our lives for the next twenty years.

As we talk the weak spirit
melts down in a plastic cup
freezing our fingertips,
and by the time the room is habitable
the time is killed and the party is over.

We walk out into the empty street
and the surrounding night
invites us to our real world:
moonlight, wet sand,
cold magnolia leaves,
calling of the freight train,

our own smell, leading us
back home, where nobody waits, so
we can play cards with dead relatives

until someone comes
and turns on the light.

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Interview With Andrey Gritsman

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

LOGOS EM: Who were your earliest poetic influences?

AG: Well, certainly in Russian poetry Lermontov and Pushkin. I would say Vladimir Mayakovsky was very important during my early years, mainly because my father liked him a lot and read his poems to me aloud. To a certain degree Yessenin. In other words, these two giants in Russian poetry at the beginning of the twentieth century. Not so much at the time Alexander Blok and symbolists or Acmeists: Mandelstam and Gumulyov, not Akhmatova and Pasternak, mainly because they were really not published or there was not enough published during my teenage years.

Pasternak was very minimally published. He was a very well known poet, and I heard his name. But Akhmatova and particularly Mandelstam were not published for many years. They were really published probably in the early to mid sixties, or even the late sixties. So for my generation the knowledge of Russian poetry of the twentieth century was rather biased. To a significant degree, we were exposed to the so-called group of "war poets." There were some very good poets among them. They were very popular when we were at school, such as David Samoilov, Alexander Mezhirov, Semon Gudszenko. There was also a famous group of Komsomol poets right before WWII and at the beginning of WWII, an early generation of war poets, such as Mikhail Kulchitsky, Pavel Kogan, all of them from the Moscow Literary Institute, before WWII. Many of them died in the first phase of the Great Patriotic War. So, we also knew some poems of those people who were actually very good. Some of it is very strong poetry.

LOGOS – EM: In this wonderful essay in *Long Fall*, "The poet in intercultural space," you talk about intonation as the feature that separates original writing from a product that is born out of "borrowed" air. Could you elaborate on what you mean by "intonation?"

AG: I would say that every poet should find or hear the voice of his or her own soul, its original intonation. There are a lot of great influences and the person who either does not have a significant original voice or is not trying hard, can easily be seduced by infectiously wonderful cadences and voices in poetry surrounding him or her and use this. Contemporary American poetry is somewhat different because it is mostly in free verse so to a lesser degree one can recognize a specific voice. Although an American poet could fall into this prosody trap as well. Sometimes I can see that one is using Charles Simic's method or Mark Strand's method or C.K. Williams' approach. Or somebody all of a sudden feels that he is Charles Bukowsky.

It is more recognizable in Russian poetry due to sound influences, because of more formal, mostly rhymed cadentical poetry. Such influence may be very great. So the main difficulty and

the main task is to free oneself from Pasternak, to be free from Mandelstam or for many female poets to free themselves from Tsvetaeva or Akhmatova. This is kind of the curse.

LOGOS – EM: Speaking of intercultural space, you were born and grew up in Moscow and immigrated to the United States as an adult with your young family, what is your relationship to the US in terms of your own feelings of national identity?

AG: I think that it is more complex than it seems to be since I am certainly rooted in Russian culture in terms of language, cultural references and an attachment to many places. Ideologically, as a young developing person, I felt myself, at least in my mind, more at home in the West, and particularly in the U.S. than in the Soviet Union. I always felt and feel this more so now, that the U.S. is in some ways similar to the Russian Federation because of the sheer vastness, complexity and multicultural nature of the place. The U.S. certainly much more so than Russia. Because in Russia there are many nationalities, but still there is one strongly dominating and definitely overwhelming nationality in terms of culture and language. I also felt Jewish, although my native language was Russian. It seems to me that European countries are much more confined to their own cultures, to their own histories and destinies and in those countries one would always feel like an outsider no matter how comfortably one can live there.

LOGOS – EM: Andrey, I really appreciated what you said in that essay about the poet and the importance of historical and political consciousness: "An author should be talking about himself, placed, then, into the broader context of his or her time, not, merely, into the context of life's petty crimes perpetrated on the individual: divorce, sleeplessness, underappreciation by one's peers, etc." (8). What do you think would need to happen in order to draw American poets and writers out of their insularity and into more of an intercultural space?

AG: I believe that the poet should really represent only himself or herself. Not any specific political, social, or ethnic group. And I think that there is an inner core, an inner voice, that should be speaking in its own voice, and not in the voice of some platform or group. Unfortunately, we know too many historical examples of very gifted poets and authors who associated themselves with some movements and eventually turned out to be in a big internal or external crisis. We remember Vladimir Mayakovsky, Ezra Pound, Allen Ginsberg, really great lyrical poets in their strongest verses.

With respect to the issue of "intercultural space," I think that one should concentrate less on literary competitions announced in poets and writers magazines, or on a number of publications, on where the book is published, who said what about whom, and things like this. The craft is certainly very important and one should go through years of exercising the craft and finding his or her own voice. But I think that one of the problems of contemporary American letters and in particular poetry, is what has been called "creeping MFA-ism," a tremendous number of programs which produce "poets" who know something but who are the products of the MFA system. The higher echelon poets teach in the MFA programs or in various English departments, Slavic departments, Hispanic, Arts departments, particularly in

the English departments, etc. By the way, I have a tremendous respect for many of these people. Many of them are editors of wonderful, very strong, very good, smaller and a little bit larger literary magazines. I really admire this and think that these people are the "crusaders" in the darkness of contemporary American pop culture and everyday life. For some reason they find it necessary to put so much effort and time and talent into this and work and produce these magazines, including your own magazine *Logos*. I really admire this. And many of these people I have found when I sent my submissions to various journals. They do really love poetry, do read it and very deeply understand and this is amazing. On the other hand, there are a lot of people who treat poetry as just another profession, another field of applying some kind of energy. It could be poetry, it could be studying textiles, or medicine or paralegal and I think that this is a problem.

LOGOS – EM: What is your relationship to Russia and the Russian literary scene? I know you see yourself as a Russian writer in Diaspora, but do you identify with that scene as well?

AG: Well, I don't really live there. I visit quite regularly and give readings and see people and publish my verse and essays. By virtue of being a Russian writer in Diaspora, I do belong to the Russian language literary scene, not necessarily to the Russian political literary scene. This way I am to a significant degree an outsider, but on the other hand, to be a Russian poet in Diaspora is also a certain position, or I should say a "classifiable position". So, I know what is going on, I know many of the active actors. I am pretty close with some other writers in Russia and perhaps have some usual dislikes with others, but I am certainly not completely insulated from the Russian literary scene. Now, that magazine that we started publishing, *Interpoezia* in Russian and in English that certainly helps a lot to establish and maintain contacts. It contains some of the most contemporary Russian poets who live both in Russia and outside of Russia, in North America and in Europe, in Siberia.

LOGOS – EM: Do you feel yourself as part of a community of Russian writers in Diaspora here in New York?

AG: Yes, I am a Russian writer in Diaspora here on location in New York. But there is really no strong community or cohesive group here in the New York area. Most of the talented writers or poets, of which there are several, live mainly in New York and some others scattered around the United States mainly in the universities. But in New York, there is a group. We all know each other, we come to each other's readings, sometimes participate in the same magazines or anthologies, but it is really not a school or a movement or a cohesive group at all. For some time, I really wanted this to happen. It never really materialized that way, I guess for a variety of reasons. One of them is perhaps to a certain degree being scattered in contemporary American life. Trying to live your own life. There are certain qualities of alienation in American life. Everybody lives in his or her own job, family, and so on. So this perhaps reflects on how Russian creative people live here in America. They live to a greater degree as Americans.

LOGOS – EM: How did you come to titling your latest collection of poems, texts and

essays “Long Fall”? It’s a very suggestive and metaphysical metaphor and I’m intrigued by it.

AG: Your suggestion is absolutely correct. What I was looking for when I was thinking about a title for this book was to try to put a poem on the cover of the book. And a poem is a metaphor first of all. And this is certainly a double metaphor. *Long Fall* related to some movement and to the time of the year and to whatever else one might see behind it. So because of this dubious ambivalent meaning I think it becomes a poem in two words. And that is why I liked it and wanted to put it there. Besides I think that to a certain degree it reflects my inner condition and really my inner landscape.

Review Essay: Edward Said: Criticism and Society, by Abdirahman Hussein Edward Said at the Limits, by Mustapha Marrouchi

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

"The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, quoted in Said's *Orientalism*, p. 25).

"The focus of the book is on the extraordinary ferment of a critic's intellectual life, all the way from politics to literature, cultural history, to music. In such a long span, any such treatment has to be selective, and the book has its fair share of skimmings and exclusions. But I have tried to register something of the wealth of intellectual preoccupations of this remarkable individual and to frame it theoretically with some reflections on the nature of intellectual work in general and is place in cultural life in particular" (Marrouchi xiv).

While the process of "remembering Edward Said" began around 1992 when he was diagnosed with leukemia, Said's passing on September 25th, 2003, confirmed the urgency and necessity of building an up-to-date critical analysis of his literary-political writings, while also surveying the impact of his life as a scholar and political activist. Two recent books, Abdirahman Hussein's *Edward Said: Criticism and Society* and Mustapha Marrouchi's *Edward Said at the Limits*, provide vital assessments of the Saidian critical corpus-surveying the symbiotic relationship between his work as a literary critic, living and writing in the United States, and Said's growing political awareness through his coming to consciousness as a Palestinian intellectual. He described Orientalism nearly thirty years ago, as "an attempt to inventory the traces upon [him], the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals."[1] While neither *Edward Said: Criticism and Society* or *Edward Said at the Limits* can be described as simple autobiography-as Hussein's effort is an analytic synthesis of how Said's work, from *Beginnings* through to *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, and later books such as *Culture and Imperialism*, stages a confrontation between a "agonistic dialectic" and an "archaeological/genealogical approach" whereas Marrouchi's survey connects Said's personal evolution to his work as a Palestinian spokesperson, music critic, and literary theorist through such Said's memoir, *Out of Place* and the famous Wellek lectures, which became *Musical Elaborations*-one senses an attempt by both authors to narrate Said's life by weaving together the fate of the Palestinian exile with an evolving, against-the-grain, and oppositional critical awareness that restores confidence in the importance and restlessness of the solitary thinker posed against an array of corrupt governments-guided by provincial interests-, frightening religious dogmas, and short-sighted

institutions.

It's this figure-cum-trope of "the engaged intellectual speaking truth to power" against daunting odds that pulses through both of these important studies; each captures Said's immense energy and passionate commitment to speaking out against grave injustices, his ability to break the easy-going collegiality of the professional guild while confronting one's own colleagues, who often collude with the dictates of disciplinary decorum, while ignoring some of the most horrific aspects of U.S. and European military adventurism: Said's call to "worldliness" brings with it a recognition of the connection between academic criticism and affairs of state-indeed, to what degree does academic knowledge provide a sort of ideological cover or rationale for the U.S.'s worldwide imperial plundering? That Said, as a sort of native informant, could ask this question in so many various ways, while weighing the colonial effects of this U.S. military expansionism upon others, signifies a critical act of Chomskyian proportions with a twist: as a Palestinian, Said was often writing a history of his own people's dispossession and loss. The act of writing this history forms an act of resistance against the gregarious, defanged, uncritical, and "official" stories of U.S manifest destiny-stories that readily ignore the faces of its victims.

While Marrouchi's *Edward Said at the Limits* examines the dynamic interplay between Said's biography and his courageous attempts-through political activism and a much needed polemicism-to awaken academic criticism from its slumber, Hussein's Edward Said: Criticism and Society focuses on developing a coherent view of Said's methodology from his first books, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* and *Beginnings*, through his later books, *Culture and Imperialism* and *Musical Elaborations*. Extending an argument developed earlier by Tim Brennan, Hussein works through many of the misrepresentations and misunderstandings of Said's supposed Foucauldianism in *Orientalism* and develops an understanding of what Hussein calls Said's "agonistic dialectic" that often combined with an "archaeological/genealogical approach" that cut through the ideological veneer that often mars contemporary criticism, providing ideological cover for state apologetics."[2]

In Hussein's estimation, then, Said devoted both his literary and political careers to upending ideological alibis and cover-ups as these have been perpetuated through pseudo-scholarly projects, projects that promote projections of state power and the demonization of Arab peoples, particularly when they interfere with Western interests and self-understanding. The brilliance of Hussein's study resides in its insightful observation that Said's abiding and consistent concern, from *The Fiction of Autobiography* through to *Culture and Imperialism*, is to examine the problematic of individual agency in relation to culture-how does the individual consciousness resist and invent itself within and against the hegemonic and multiple pressures of a dominate culture, pressures that ensures the force of imperial domination and its attendant discourses such as orientalism? The will, the life force that animates human action, must be activated by choice-the choice to confront injustice or misrepresentation, while demonstrating a disregard for the material consequences. This attitude animated Said's life and career, as Hussein points out:

> *The point I want to insist on, is this: whether explicitly stated (as in The Fiction) or simply assumed, there is a sense in which Said's entire critical project is predicated on the very idea of a radicalized dialectical engagement-an engagement between an author and his work, between critical consciousness and the material (textual or otherwise) under its scrutiny, between the intellectual and the category of culture (whether broadly or narrowly conceived) that empowers and constrains him or her, and so on" (34).*

According to Hussein, this dialectic between the individual and the social, or the specific and the total, animates Said's critical concerns throughout his scholarly corpus. The ability of the individual to begin, to break free of tradition and to start anew-as a burgeoning sign of critical consciousness- represents a radical act of freedom, a necessary act of resistance that occurs between culture and system. As Hussein writes, "In effect, the mind interrogatively engages the world but does not subsume it altogether. On this view, Said's various historical studies-despite their considerable thematic disparity-can be seen as attempts to render as cogently as possible the anthromorphic geneses, deracinatiions, dispersions, and transformations of modernist consciousness since the eighteenth century" (Hussein 11). Such a huge epistemological project, as Said demonstrated in *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine,* and *Covering Islam: How the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, contains within it radically disruptive and transformative possibilities for understanding the very categories and containers of human perception, which are often explained and promulgated by the "learned discourses" of research paradigms and mass-media pundits.

Filiative loyalties, those we owe to nation, family, and species cannot be broken-they are facts of birth. Affiliative loyalties, those that arise by virtue of profession and temporary alliances, replace filiative relationships; in this sense, one can refashion an identity through relations unrelated to birth, relations that can be invented and fashioned according to time and circumstance. It is this individual effort, in Said's estimation, that exists between the filiative and the affiliative. Breaking free of the constraints of a textual tradition or a disciplinary apparatus, or departing from the cliché-ridden dictates of a cynical real politick, manufactured for the benefit of a crippling conformism, can have a numbing effect upon the critical mind as it navigates between the Charybis of independence and the Scylla of communal acceptance. Criticism before solidarity, then, according to Said, must stand as the critical intellectual's guiding mantra; which the condition of exile drives home quite firmly. The condition of exile, as Said so powerfully demonstrated and enacted, provides a site-a stance or state of mind-through which to remain alert to the seductions and trappings of power, attractions that often reduce the most perceptive critic to a mere state functionary, as well as through which to fight the Gramscian "war of position." In his *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said writes:

> *Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in*

> *the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you need the approval of a boss or authority figure; you want to keep a reputation of being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get a honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship.[3]*

This constant intellectual vigilance, so necessary for resisting the easy comforts and acceptance of a mass-culture mentality, brings with it a loneliness and isolation that becomes difficult to sustain over time. The pressures of career, family, and the day-to-day drudgery associated with contemporary life often relegate the embrace of the critical attitude to an unreachable and impractical ideal: only a handful of intellectuals, the Chomskys, Saids, Finkelsteins, and the Shahaks, can live up to Benda's critical model-resisting trahison des clercs. Standing against daunting odds, going against the cultural flow, and not engaging in the massive, selective amnesia that is so much a part of the American cultural landscape requires constant effort, an energy and sense of purpose that never longs for a pep rally, a sign of acceptance and reassurance. When one receives such a sign, it's high time to change course, to re-evaluate one's position in relation to the larger culture, and to chart a new direction that avoids the idée reçues that reduce the complexity of the human community to a facile formulation of "us" and "them". Such idée reçues include "the exportation of democracy," "the war on terror," "unequivocal support of the only democracy in the Middle East," and "the necessity of defending our values and way of life." These repetitive, mind-numbing incantations have taken on the form of cultural dogmas that are seemingly uncontested and uncontestable, where to question them is to commit a sort of thought crime, a high intellectual treason of sorts. That Edward W. Said continually challenged these incantations throughout his critical career signaled his staunch unwillingness to simply enjoy an orthodox academic career, free of the world's complexities and unseemliness-a stance he surely could have taken. Because of his restlessness and discomfort with what he sensed was the liberal Left's gregarious tolerance for several types of social oppression throughout the world, including, of course, the dispossession and occupation of the Palestinians and Palestine through the creation of Israel and the U.S.'s continued support of expansive Israeli militarism respectively, Said could not enjoy a regular academic career.

That the Israeli government has been able to speak for "the Jewish people" and, in turn, to and often for the Palestinian people, two groups upon whom have been inflicted the most horrific nightmares of the twentieth century and that both groups should be pitted against one another in a death struggle over territory stands as one of the century's most perplexing and cruel ironies. The figure of the refugee, whether Eastern European or Palestinian, creates a metaphoric condition through which to explore the cruelty of modernity and the utter failure of

intellectual criticism to address the complicity of knowledge production in producing this thing called “the conflict.” The treatment of the refugee, then, becomes a symbol through which to gauge humanity’s progress toward creating a brotherhood and sisterhood of men and women. That the human community has so frequently averted its eyes from the status of the refugee throughout much of world history attests to the defenselessness and utter marginality of those dispossessed through war and oppressed through occupation. Both Marrouchi and Hussein treat this evasion, particularly as it animated Said’s critical concerns, particularly in his last years. Through his bringing together of “discrepant experiences” and the creation of conditions of possibility for non-coercive community, and as the last follower of Adorno and as “as a Jewish-Palestinian,” Said sought to complicate and intercede where others sought to simplify and polarize.

The Palestinian refugee, however, has been dealt a doubly cruel fate: while the dispossession of one’s homeland and cultural institutions is surely difficult enough to endure, the labeling of sentiments that express anger and disappointment toward this dispossession as “anti-Semitic” surely signal the immensity of just how much is at stake in representing Palestinian history and culture. This is the darker side of modernity’s commitment to reason that Said documented with such rigor and clarity throughout his trilogy-*Orientalism, The Question of Palestine,* and *Covering Islam*-through to *Culture and Imperialism*. That idée recues, rather than careful analysis, have marred the criticism of Said’s critical corpus have led many academics to overlook that Said’s consistent concern has been to explore the importance of the individual in society, working within and against traditions, large discursive structures, and daunting odds.

The ability of the individual to make an impression, a mark, upon the collection of civilization’s accumulated texts and traditions signals the importance of human agency in forging intellectual resistance against discourses such as orientalism, imperialism, and the luxuries of a culture’s selective amnesias. Said’s career-long belief that the individual could still emerge through these maze of discourses-while attempting to awaken an intellectual community from its self-induced, philosophical slumber-finds repeated expression from Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography through to Freud and the Non-European. The importance of the individual relying upon, while also resisting tradition, found such repeated articulation in Said’s work because it was directly tied to Said’s self construction as a critical intellectual. Paul Bové, in his *Intellectuals in Power: A Critical Genealogy*, places Said in a pantheon of thinkers that include Nietzsche, Foucault, Auerbach, I.A. Richards, and Hodgkin, who sought to secure their own dynastic place within the Western tradition by enacting an intellectual charisma and independence, which radically depart from this tradition, while also securing their dominance within it.

Posing a challenge to the tradition, through a type of intellectual resistance that stands as an immense threat to entrenched political interests-particularly those that configure the Israel-Palestine conflict in the American public sphere-Said created a persistent problem for those attempting to construct a self-serving history of the Middle East that would erase the many injustices visited upon the Palestinians for over the last fifty years. The al nakba (the catastrophe of 1947) and al naksa (the setback of 1967) are erased from the West’s memory.

Benjamin's famous statement that "[e]very document of civilization is a document of barbarism" seems apt here. Seemingly every treaty or accord that has been brokered between the Palestinians and Israel by the United States stands as a glaring testament to Benjamin's statement. The survival of cultural practices and traditions, to a degree, depends upon the repeated exercise of a type of symbolic violence that excludes marginal and abnormal discourses. Said's attempt to take stock of this symbolic violence in such texts as *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine*, and *Covering Islam* interrupts a doctrinal hegemony that had remained largely unopposed. That a Western educated Palestinian, who suffered the pangs of dispossession and loss, would subject the epistemological ruses of philosophical idealism and empiricism to such a thoroughgoing critique, exposed the degree to which Orientalist scholarship worked co-extensively with the aims of imperialism. As Said points out, however, choosing a supposed neutral position-often which takes the form of silence-is as much a choice as becoming engagé:

> *…there is no neutrality, there can be no neutrality or objectivity about Palestine. This is not to say, on the other hand, that all positions are equal, or that all perspectives are*
> *as heavily or as lightly invested. But it is to say that so ideologically saturated is the question of Palestine, so manifestly present is it to most people*
> *who come to deal with it, that even a superficial or cursory apprehension of*
> *it involves a position taken, an interest defended, a claim or a right asserted. There is no indifference, no objectivity, no neutrality because there is simply no room for them in a space that is as crowded and overdetermined as this one.[4]*

Hussein claims that "Said's dissatisfaction with idealism and empiricism stems from his conviction that, separately and together, these two modes of intellection (and, by extension, the two broad philosophical-cultural traditions deriving from them) have repeatedly collaborated with ideological coercions and mystifications" (10). That a native informant would use his high modernist training to trace the history of Orientalist discourses was, by definition, a polemical attack upon the collegiality often demanded by the guild. As Timothy Brennan recently observed, "Rarely has uncollegiality been so handsomely rewarded."[5] It is clear that the scholarly community was not quite ready for Said's critique. As Marrouchi writes, "For many in the West, he is still a slightly embarrassing presence, the unruly enfant terrible who makes a display of himself at the dinner table" (206). We should remember the difficulties Said experienced in even securing a publisher for *Orientalism* in the late 1970's. As the requisite critical vocabularies and paradigms were still not quite in place, the importance of what Hussein labels Said's "left-handed analysis" could not even have been recognized.

It is possible to view the Saidian critical corpus as providing a powerful corrective, a form of intellectual resistance, against popular representations, and in turn, misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims in Western culture, particularly the United States. Just as Hussein finds that Said expressed a consistent concern, throughout his scholarly work, about the dialectic between the individual and culture, it should be equally recognized that Said-through this dialectic-is struggling to understand the West's domestication of Islam through the discourses of orientalism, imperialism, and anti-Semitism. That such hostile and negative stereotypes (e.g. Arab irrationality, Arab intransigence to civilizing processes, and the Arab incapacity for self-government) could be generated to defame, and to a degree, to "understand" over three-hundred million Arabs attests to the strength of the West's epistemological dominance, solidified through the "triadic interaction" between Orientalism, neo-imperialism, and Zionism (Hussein 283). As Said writes in *Covering Islam*:

> *It is only a slight overstatement to say that Muslims and Arabs are essentially covered, discussed, and apprehended either as oil suppliers or as potential terrorists. Very little of the detail, the human density, the passion of Arab-Muslim life, has entered the awareness of even those people whose profession it is to report the Islamic world. What we have instead is a limited series of crude, essentialized caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as, among other things, to make the world vulnerable to military aggression. I do not think it is an accident that talk during the 1970s of United States military intervention in the Arabian Gulf, or the Carter Doctrine, or discussions of Rapid Deployment Forces, or the military and economic "containment" of "political Islam," has often been preceded by a period of "Islam's" rational presentation through the cool medium of television and through "objective" Orientalist study (which, paradoxically, either in its "irrelevance" to modern actualities or in its propagandistic "objective" variety, has a uniformly alienating effect)… (Covering Islam 28).*

Said's efforts to recuperate a neglected history, a history of the demonization and the "cruel and punishing destiny" of the Palestinian Arab in the West and elsewhere, stands as a towering testament to his belief that he was writing the history of anti-Semitism's secret sharer-Orientalism.[6] Now that we have Abdirahman Hussein's *Edward Said: Criticism and Society* and Mustapha Marrouchi's *Edward Said at the Limit*, we can accurately judge the success of Said's efforts, to borrow R.P. Blackmur's famous phrase, to create "a technique of trouble" for exposing the loose seams of a Western metaphysical will-to-dominance. "In what sense, then, and with how much success," we may ask "did Edward W. Said live up to his early billing as a secular border intellectual?"[7] Hussein and Marrouchi make the answers to these questions fairly clear.

[1] *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979, p. 25.

[2] See Andrew Rubin's "Technique of Trouble" (South Atlantic Quarterly, December 2003.)

[3] *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 11.

[4] Said, Edward. "The Burden of Interpretation and the Question of Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studie*s, 1992, p. 30.

[5] See Brennan's "The Illusion of a Future*: Orientalism* as Traveling Theory" Critical Inquiry, Spring 2000.

[6] Said writes in *Orientalism*, "I have found myself writing the history of a strange, secret sharer of
western anti-Semitism. That anti-Semitism and, as I have discussed it in its Islamic branch, Orientalism resemble each other very closely in a historical, cultural, and political truth that needs only to be mentioned to an Arab Palestinian for its irony to be perfectly understood" (28).

[7] See Abdul Jan Mohamed's "Worldliness-Without-World, Homeless-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual" in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*. Michael Sprinker, Ed. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 96-120.

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Stuff That Happened: Jonathan Safran Foer's Extremely Loud And Incredibly Close

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Fiction and philosophy have had an uneasy time in the wake of 9/11. Perhaps it's because no intellectual response can match or adequately combat the political response of the Bush Administration, which was swifter, more brutal, and more insidiously deceptive than even the most seasoned members of the Left imagined. In the wake of this ongoing catastrophe, novelists have been apprehensive as to how to respond. Political life has taken on a cast of sickening clarity. Daily injustice feels wearily familiar. No trauma is foreign; no cruelty unheard of; no political crime beyond contemplation. In such an atmosphere, could any dramatization of the September 11 attacks be anything but a kind of exploitation?

There was reason to be heartened when novelist Jonathan Safran Foer stepped forward with *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. In his first novel *Everything Is Illuminated*, about a writer's trip to find his family's ancestral shtetl, the indulgence of the "roots" quest, with its pilfering from superficial readings of Bruno Schulz and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, was tempered by the Thesaurus-inflected English of Foer's often hilarious Alexander Perchov. What could have been just a gimmick was transformed into an allegory, the truth of the past conveyed through its miscommunication. The book suggested the promise of an intuitive, burgeoning talent able to describe the relationship of one's self to a difficult, foreign past.

In a recent interview Foer expressed some surprise that most writers had avoided 9/11 and said he believes that it demands works of art, and that to make art from tragedy cannot be bad. The "challenge" is unavoidable. Foer tells the story of the attacks-or, more precisely, their local aftermath-through 9-year old Oskar Schell, who lost his father on 9/11. The plot concerns Oskar's trek over the course of eight months to match up a key his father owned to a lock somewhere among the homes of New York; the only clue he has is that the key may have belonged to someone named "Black." Oskar hopes that the "key" will "unlock" the mystery of his father's death-literally, *how* he died in the attacks-and put an end to his trauma.

Some reviewers were irritated by the child's precocity, arguing that it pushes well beyond credibility. Oskar is a politically correct child of Manhattan's Upper West Side; a vegan who takes French lessons and writes letters to Stephen Hawking (Oskar's favorite book is *A Brief History of Time*), makes vows not to be "sexist again, or racist, or ageist, or homophobic, or overly wimpy, or discriminatory to handicapped people or mental retards" (87). Oskar never offends and when he does say something that might be construed as offensive, he covers his tracks: "There was a lot of stuff that made me panicky, like…Arab people on the subway (even

though I'm not racist), Arab people in restaurants and coffee shops and other public places." Does it matter that Arabs make Oskar panicky? It might have mattered, had Foer raised the issue later but, like most implications or consequences of the attacks, it simply doesn't come up. In fact, the book's moral and physical geography only narrow so that it increasingly is only about Oskar's wanderings, his character becoming a vacuum that sucks out the social and political air from the novel.

Oskar's believability matters less than the question of his intelligence, and the intelligence of the novel as a whole. As with anyone in the age of Google, Oskar has fields of information at his fingertips (although even here, anachronisms abound Oskar uses the Internet constantly, but only sends letters, never an e-mail). He "know[s] a lot about birds and bees, but [he doesn't] know very much about the birds and the bees"; that is, he knows the terms of human relations, but he doesn't know how they actually relate. Apart from sheer youth, Oskar is impoverished of experience by the very way he leads his life. He keeps a journal of photographs that he calls, *Stuff that Happened to Me*. But nothing actually happens. His father's death, the real and yet undecipherable event around which *Extremely Loud* orbits, takes place outside the narrative. The photographs are things Oskar collected but hasn't lived through himself. Occasionally, they're pictures taken by somebody else-Laurence Olivier in *Hamlet* (which Oskar's school is putting on-he's playing Yorick, when of course it's the eponymous, precocious character who lost his father whom he should be playing), or the recurring shot of a body falling from the Towers. Everything Oskar knows is held at a cool distance, like Stephen Hawking's universe. His knowledge tends towards the scientific, to what can be observed, though rarely by himself. The one thing he cannot find it out is what actually happened to his father, a brute singularity that convinces him that information alone will not do. Early on he hints, "even though I'm not anymore, I used to be an atheist, which means I didn't believe in things that couldn't be observed."

It would be a triumph of the novel if Foer counterbalanced this intentionally limited intellect and its great but unexplored suggestiveness, with an operating intelligence that played behind or around the central narrative. Then we might find that the novel itself has something smart to say about 9/11. But Foer cannot make intelligence, political or otherwise, manifest itself in his novel. The novel's claustrophobia, much remarked upon, stems from Foer's inability to disseminate his energies beyond his narrator. Foer is seemingly obsessed with what creative writing teachers emphasize: the creation of a distinct "voice." As a result, the novel has its own fast-talking voice (and an annoying one at that), but as a whole the work itself suffers from the same lack of experience that one would hope was only confined to Oskar. It is redolent of pure provinciality, a political chauvinism that limits the sadness of the attacks to a single kind of loss for the kind of person who might have been Oskar's parent.

Foer must have foreseen this problem; in order to counter it, he interrupts Oskar's narrative with letters written by his grandparents, which describe in intentionally stilted prose the history of their relationship. They are German survivors of the bombing of Dresden (here, as elsewhere with the inclusion of photographs, he filches from W.G. Sebald). Foer clearly hopes that their letters will inject the novel with needed historical perspective upon the natural

history of destruction. But the letters, like most of the novel, belong to no era at all. In a rather obvious trope, his grandfather loses the ability to speak after surviving Dresden's destruction; his mother fakes an eyesight problem, forcing her to type pages and pages of blank paper (which occupy a solid four pages of Foer's book).

Foer claims to be concerned with scenes of what he called "frustrated communication"; Oskar's speechless grandfather writes the words YES and NO to communicate, with predictable results ("…when I rub my hands against each other in the middle of winter I am warming myself with the friction of YES and NO, when I clap my hands I am showing my appreciation through the uniting and parting of YES and NO"). Instead of singing in the shower, he writes song lyrics on himself which turns "the water blue or green, and the music [runs] down [his] legs."

Despite the flashiness of his prose, these scenes of miscommunication could go into any novel about any traumatic event, insofar as trauma is, well, difficult to communicate. His grandparents profess things like "I have no need for the past…I did not consider that the past might have a need for me" (78); "Life is scarier than death" (322); "You cannot protect yourself from sadness without protecting yourself from happiness" (180). These platitudes mean as little in context as they do out of it. Oskar observes, "Everything that's born has to die, which means our lives are like skyscrapers. The smoke rises at different speeds, but they're all on fire, and we're all trapped" (245). Admirable for a 9-year old, one supposes, but nonetheless Foer flattens all tragedies into pat aphorisms-Dresden, 9/11, Hiroshima, East Timor, the Spanish Civil War, and "bad stuff that happened in Africa" (154), it turns out, are all basically the same awful thing, and they, you know, make people really sad.

The book ends with Oskar reordering pictures of the falling body to make it seem as if it falls up, out of the picture, towards the skies. Some find it inexplicably moving. What it really amounts to is the triumph of fiction's incredible solace-that is, a solace beyond belief, accessible only in the realm of "faith"-in the face of what actually happens. Where reasons cannot be discovered, comfort can be manufactured by imagining things as they might never have been. To the extent that September 11 presents a literary challenge, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* deftly skirts it. It is best characterized not by its ambition but rather by its dogged inoffensiveness. Here is a textbook case in anti-intellectualism, with its proud refusal to seek out what we haven't understood, striking a safe stance against implicating matters by dealing with hard questions.

Fiction so simplistic is an escape from understanding, not an aid to it. Something else is demanded from this tragedy; perhaps not art at all-at least, not as Foer practices it. Critics have largely let Foer slide on the question of September 11. Why? Writers in the United States are schooled in the idea of creating a successful "voice," in portraying a certain character or rendering new a certain stock situation. They learn these notions of craft and plotting in the service of entertainment, which led Susan Sontag, for one, to complain that the philosophical tradition is largely divorced from the production of novels in America. "The notion of an intellectual in most Americans' minds," Sontag said, "is so impoverished, that it's separated from that of a writer…For American writers, simply to avow that they have the education, or

the cultivation, that they very often have, is something that isn't done — they're like politicians who want to adopt a folksy accent." Foer's novel is only the latest example. Headlining events alongside writers with more complex political ideas, like Lewis Lapham, Salman Rushdie and Don DeLillo, Foer is clearly out of his element. "In America right now," he has said, "we use words like 'smart' to talk about bombs. American rhetoric is grounded in ideas of capital-G Good, capital-E Evil, and it's very clear who is on which side. But in a book you can do just the opposite. You can use all lower-case words." This sort of preciousness riles one when, within the discourse of a serious situation where indeed lives are at stake, more articulate, more intelligent voices need to be heard.

Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology And The Law To Lock Down Culture And Control Creativity, By Lawrence Lessig

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 3

When an author is as publicly active as Lawrence Lessig, and when a book comes with a supporting web site, an author's blog, and surrounded by previous and subsequent discussions of many of its themes and proposals, the reviewer can find it difficult to know where to start. Anybody with more than a passing interest in political, legal and ethical issues arising from new media development is likely to be familiar in some way with Lessig. *Scientific American* named him as one of its Top 50 Visionaries. A colleague and I included him in our top twenty' (18, as it turned out) analysts of the information society in a briefing requested by the Information Society Commission, an advisory body to the Irish government.

Lessig is a widely respected commentator, an advocate and activist ("a cultural warrior"), as well as an academic. His frequently cited blog has had leading Democrats, judges, politicians and professors, as invited contributors. His web site carries the badges of the campaigns with which he is prominently associated, chief among them Creative Commons (chair: Lawrence Lessig), a licensing agency that presents a kind of third way' between traditional copyright and free-for-all.

Lessig acknowledges the uncertainties that attend this discussion. He steers between the condemnations and the celebrations of Napster downloading and other such challenges to copyright protection. He warns against the dangers of a polarized debate. He distinguishes in nuanced ways between the rights of authors, publishers and re-publishers. But he is very certain that the current trends in copyright law are damaging to culture and to democracy. Over the 300 pages of this book, the reader is being persuaded to accept a definition of the copyright problem to which Creative Commons is one, if not the, answer. Free Culture' has itself been published through the Creative Commons licensing procedure, which means that it can be downloaded from the web, subject to certain terms.

Lessig stacks up many fascinating cases and illustrations and compelling arguments to persuade readers of the validity and urgency of his concluding set of recommendations. He invokes American traditions, represented by the United States constitution and Walt Disney's creativity, to buttress his case. Although the heart of the book is in the detail of law, Lessig as an advocate presents his argument as one about culture and creativity. For this reader, this scaffolding is the least persuasive aspect of the book. The use Lessig makes of "free" (as in

“free culture”), of “culture” and of “creativity” is highly tendentious. Here, “culture” refers to the entertainment industries and its products. “Creativity” refers to production in those industries, as evidenced in the strange notion of the “volume of creativity”. “Free” is the opposite of “non-free”, although the reference to “free-culture licenses”, as provided by Creative Commons, expresses the irony of which Lessig seems hardly aware – of freedom having to be licensed.

What this book’s usage of “culture” leaves out could fill several more books. That may well be Lessig’s intention, as a prolific author. He makes only passing mention of the scandal surrounding the control of rights in scholarly publishing with which he is actively engaged through Public Library of Science. He leaves out of view the arguments about journalists’ copyright and “open source” journalism, although these chime with those he does pursue. And he gives scant attention to cross-cultural difference, except perhaps to reveal a disquieting lack of interest in European norms and values.

Lessig’s critique of the drift of US copyright law is that it is approaching European standards. However, he does not stop to reflect why Europe is as it is (not singular, for a start) and fails to notice the contradiction in his citing of the (European) British Broadcasting Corporation as an exemplar of best practice in archive access.

Lessig’s primary references are those of a constitutional lawyer the fundamental law of he United States and the judgments of the Supreme Court. A significant part of this book is the self-critical account of how he pursued a case through to the Supreme Court, in support of a New Hampshire citizen who was being obstructed in his efforts to build a public archive of literature in the public domain. Goliath slew David, and, in this book, David’s defender is licking his wounds, pointing out how he failed adequately to demonstrate the harms caused by the “extraordinary land grab” that is going on. Much of the detail in these chapters, in the historical examples of copyright claims and in the accounts of industry lobbying of Congress is intriguing, and appalling. Lessig demonstrates through myriad examples how controls on creative expression are becoming both broader and tighter. He reports almost casually on the way policy-makers and legislators are in the thrall of big-industry interests. He describes the growing power of ever-larger media conglomerates, though he turns a blind eye to dominant Disney, whose early achievements served to support his case on the necessary role of “piracy” in cultural production. He presents a valuable model of evolving relations between Norms, Law, Market and Architecture (technology).

Lessig believes strongly in the potential of the Internet to facilitate a shared culture. In blogs, he sees unfettered public discourse at work. In the instantaneous republication that is going on continuously on the Net, he sees cultural democracy in practice. Formalities are needed to protect such activity, but less regulation, and, above all, fewer lawyers. In these conditions, Lessig believes, a free culture can be reclaimed from the land-grabbers. Just how we get there, or just how the tide is to be turned, is not so clear.

Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-century Europe, By Victoria De Grazia

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One of the fundamental ideas of late 20th century America was that the collapse of actually existing communism reflected a permanent turn in human affairs. Francis Fukuyama called it "the end of history": the exhaustion of alternatives to the liberal democratic state in the form we see it today. Proclaimed in 1989 as the Soviet system began a free fall into oblivion, Fukuyama's thesis attained the status of a creed in most quarters. Without it the wider political acquiescence regarding America's increasing role in world affairs during the post Cold War period, as well as the agreement of both political parties as to the necessity of a "war on terrorism," would be incomprehensible. The American intelligentsia largely has consented to the idea, seeing the present configuration of the global economy as a, more or less, autonomous outcome of "globalization."

The geopolitical considerations of the American state in shaping globalization -a vision of endless growth and the commodification of everything-is usually shunted aside in favor of viewing it as a free market utopia entailing a powerful cultural process of liberation for the masses through consumption. Our estimation of American influence is deeply related to these ideas inasmuch as the U.S. has been the leading economic power since the end of the 19th century and has endeavored to spread its version of an open capitalist society.

What we see in de Grazia's book is an attempt to detach consumption as a cultural phenomenon from its wider political moorings. Hence, the book exhibits what we might term an over-correction' of the stoic old Left view that dismissed commodities as the flotsam and jetsam of capitalism. A generation ago left-leaning intellectuals were almost uniformly critical of "capitalist culture"-especially advertising, mass consumerism and entertainment industries. Some might well have taken their inspiration from Thorstein Veblen whose *The Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1902 was a critique of the first Gilded Age (arguably we arrived at a second one in the 1990s, if not Reagan's 1980s). De Grazia's work, by contrast, fits uncomfortably well with a fresh cohort of intellectuals who swallowed the market revolution' whole.

For de Grazia, consumption apparently is liberation. What matters is the personal freedom of choice that buying provides along with its social spin-offs – their corrosive effects on tradition, social class and patriarchy. However, the ability to distinguish between means of subsistence, on one hand, and artificially created needs, on the other, remains a fundamental critical tool; useful, for example, when distinguishing private pleasures from public goods. For de Grazia such a perspective seems hopelessly out of step with the march of history: "By the early 1980s

it was clear that every movement to build an insurmountable barrier against the invasion of false needs' had failed . . ."(466).

Still, de Grazia does us a service in offering a largely untold story of how American patterns of consumption became influential in post-war Europe and even in the shaping of European social democracy. She's right to point out that most of this impact is obscured by contemporary political sentiments as well as by the sheer passage of time. Her fascinating story begins in the 1920s when "Americanism" burst on the European scene, prompting a "transatlantic clash of civilizations." She starts with the Rotary Club which planted chapters across Western Europe until the rising nationalisms of the 1930s and an ensuing war washed them away (until they revived in the 1960s). Rotary embodied certain small town American virtues,' which is to say it combined a pro-business mentality with a service ethic rooted in America's open-ended civil society tradition of voluntary association.

Rotary also was internationalist and anti-militarist in the mode of Henry Ford. There should be no room for warfare or silly nationalism in an open world dedicated to the practical business of selling cars and improving life for everyone. Yet the Rotarians found their message bumping up against limits. European branches were subject to the full play of local complexities, including nationalist orientations, the suspicions of organized religion, and traditional conceptions of social prestige. So chapters abroad incorporated and exhibited indigenous cultural traditions. Sometimes, in adapting to local conditions, they violated sacrosanct Rotary principles. The Italians, for example, used Rotary to shape a social network replicating traditional stratification. At other times, the Rotary Clubs were the antithesis of American counterparts. The Germans wielded the club like a weapon within their 1920s culture wars such that cosmopolitan Berlin soon was influenced by American (and Russian) modernism in everything from architecture to music.

Rotary certainly provided shock troops for an all out assault on the European way of life. The goal of generating American living standards accompanied Ford's planned inexorable expansion. Ford wanted to know what to pay workers in Europe in order to equal American standards. His perplexed company found that measuring the standard of living' was impossible in countries where the market was thoroughly fragmented by class and by location. European consumption habits and practices reinforced distinctions of social class, and created an "old bourgeois regime of consumption," distinguishable from "modern mass consumer culture" (10).

De Grazia argues that there is no way to separate the European tradition of "aesthetic consumption" with its ethic of restraint, from the *regime* of consumption with its reliance on class-specific distribution networks which denied the working class its share of the good life'. Just as European merchandising was divided between department stores for the bourgeoisie and small shops for the working classes, "bourgeois Europe" promoted a culture that divided the privileged from the have-nots. In contrast, by producing mass quantities and distributing them in low cost chain stores, American consumer culture promoted a more even playing field. Hence when the new "habits" of consumption arrived in Europe, they "pressed up against European societies' barriers of distinction'" (107).

Among these habits' was the American kitchen and its paraphernalia of consumer products, the triumph of which not only improved the European standard of living, creating a "cross-Atlantic consumer household," but permitted an organized cultural regime to "step over the family threshold into the privacy of daily life" (426). The American model household was seen as a source of women's liberation, as leading French and German feminists attested. American homes were no longer a woman's domain; responsibilities were shared. American consumer culture, de Grazia concludes, began the process of replacing *"homo oeconomicus* with the better-socialized Economic Woman'" (434).

Prepared food surely freed up the housewife's time. Yet the greatest importance lies in the creation of what we once called "mass culture." De Grazia sees this as a process that includes Hollywood's triumphal assertion of "entertainment value" over the European art film and the of the appeal to popular taste in mass advertising over the tradition of aesthetic consumption. It is all a part of the process of globalization. Here de Grazia gets it right.

Mass consumption-symbolized in supermarket treatment of all costumers as equals-was an invention whose "Americanness" can be best appreciated in light of its clash with European consumer patterns. Rotary Clubs, as components of the civil society, reflected an "aptitude for association" (de Tocqueville, quoted on 27) that preceded development of a specifically American capitalism, just as European consumption practices reflected their own distinct mentalities. The values of American Rotarians-especially,"the service ideal" which adapted the "Calvinist idea of individual redemption through on-earth social action" (34) to an instinct for salesmanship-became the foundation for "the new ethic of consumer-oriented capitalism" (35). The Rotarians always adhered to democratic mores and practical-mindedness, thereby becoming "practical idealists" (37) who constituted the foundation of American capitalist culture.[1]

This was a part of spreading American hegemony by inspiring friendship, affection and imitation (what Joseph Nye aptly calls "soft power") rather than relying on political power or military force. But de Grazia sees consumerism in its own terms, as a largely autonomous process. Cultural formations (assemblages of values and practices with accompanying social mores) spread across national lines because they are superior to, and more popular than, pre-existing ones. As it disperses, culture undergoes change so that what was peculiarly "American" about consumer culture got eclipsed as this cultural pattern spread into Europe, becoming a part of the global' commodity culture. According to de Grazia all traces of the old bourgeois European culture faded while the new social democratic oneemerged which shared a surprisingly great deal with American liberalism. Both rested on a social foundation of rising prosperity, though in the case of the Europeans-and here lies a strength of her book-there was a marked hesitancy to acknowledge the extent to which they partook of the American model.

One reason for this reluctance is related to an inherent limitation in de Grazia's theoretical model in understanding cultural change, namely the way in which cultural paradigms become naturalized.' In fact, many aspects of American culture were almost routinely Europeanized, adjusted to the national norms of different societies.[2] De Grazia overlooks this because she

tends to think of “consumerism” as a whole and because her larger point is that commodity culture was in the process of constructing an independent global cultural sphere.

She fails to acknowledge the strong cultural “survivals” of the European past. Germany maintains to a remarkable degree their old bourgeois reading culture; despite the “pizza” craze and new fast food restaurants. Italy is still absorbed in its traditional foodways and in the importance of craft to life generally. France continues to funnel state support to the arts and to insist on real architecture in its public buildings (even factories have architectural values: note Airbus’ impressive new assembly plant in Toulouse). The Norwegians reinvented the harsh but vibrant conditions of their past life as a modern *friluftsliv*-“fresh air life”-which provides a code of fitness that has stood against the tendency of the consumerist ethic to “supersize” us all. European consumption patterns continued in some respects to be restrained by these older practices and customs. Granted they are less important now than a generation ago, as recent changes to the European system of higher education certainly attest, but still there is a deeply ingrained sense in European societies of the importance of circumscribing acquisition and emphasizing restraint and “taste” acquired through education. This stance corresponds to a kind of aesthetic consumption which combined show with restraint.

Initially, those values were connected to a skewed system that rationed education and restricted upward mobility. But now that those conditions have been changed in Europe the older aesthetic values, under new circumstances, turn out to be themselves pretty healthy. What makes European cities so interesting and livable is that the State has converted the buildings and grounds of the upper classes into public spaces, regulation controls excessive concentrations in urban cores and public transportation systems keep the cores viable. Very few American cities have managed this feat. There still is a palpable reluctance in Europe to permit commodification to penetrate all spheres of life.

All these achievements may be seen as limited, as secondary, made possible only by the regulatory state, a reflection of a limited provincial perspective, the survival of scorned 19th century nationalisms. Yet they should not be ignored for they point to a powerful fact: the survival in Europe of deep feelings about preserving (and improving) the public character of life. The concerns have to do with a common identity, basic equality, the economic viability of agricultural and industrial regions, and the structure of social democracy. This lies behind lingering sentiments for socialism and nationalism. Of course, there are dangers in such sentiments as any review of Europe’s ideologically strident past reveals. Indeed both the recent anti-EU votes, and the widespread anguish about them, show us polities caught between their desire to maintain a distance from the failed past and their fear that in creating a new Europe they will become too much like the society (USA) it is meant to hold at bay. The American “Empire” that Europeans experience may be irresistible, but not in the sense de Grazia means.

This sense of being trapped in history is prevalent. The problem of consumption is rooted in the success we’ve had in becoming powerful economies capable of transforming nature in accordance with our will. An organized system of production requires an organized system of

consumption. As productive systems become more efficient, the question of how to distribution becomes acute, especially how to avoid over-production and under-consumption. Both communism and fascism tried to construct planned regimes that matched production output to consumption and both collapsed in the face of the consequences their respective systems generated: war in one case, and stagnation in the other. They were false hopes. Yet de Grazia devotes merely a page to socialist cooperativism (distribution through consumer-owned stores) in Belgium. She dismisses the economic planning of the Popular Front government in France as a failure. And although she duly notes that Sweden was the only European country that kept pace with American income growth rates before WWII, she ignores Swedish experiments in garden cities and consumer cooperatives. She prefers to focus instead on the hideous Nazi regime to underline her point that American style capitalism was the only real alternative.

De Grazia's highly selective reading of European history is more than matched by her discussion of American history-and particularly that of the role of the American working class. Applauding American workers' high wages and their "entrepreneurship as consumers" (99), de Grazia misses the central irony of 20th century American history: that the individualist consumer paradise was saved by a great showing of communitarian spirit in the form of a revitalized union movement, the actions of the organized American Left, and massive State intervention during the 1930s. Furthermore, there's something unseemly about tooting one's horn about high wages in the U.S. when the State-centered regulatory system which supported those wages during most of the 20th century has been undermined over the past thirty years by a neo-liberal regime, producing increasing disparities of wealth-and a new class of largely powerless and underpaid service workers.

In the end, de Grazia simply misunderstands the triumph of American consumerist capitalism, remaining silent about the strategic investments-the expensive conduct of a Cold War-that underwrote the project. In fact, though we'd never guess by reading *Irresistible Empire*, geopolitics were at least as important as economics in shaping Cold War Europe. This is more than a minor academic nuance. We otherwise are unable to understand why today the Bush administration resurrects raw military power and political intimidation as the major components of American foreign policy-leaving all forms of "soft power" in the lurch. Indeed, it doesn't explain why the Europeans resigned themselves to the decline of the western alliance and decided, at least in the short term, to engage the new players in world politics-China, India, Brazil-with their own version of geo-economics, the perhaps competing "irresistible empire" of European productivity, technology and investment.

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[1] I think de Grazia does us a disservice on the other hand in failing to clearly point out that the origin of the values was in the civil society in the 19th century before the arrival of mature capitalism. Entrepreneurial capitalism simply appropriated this cultural space bending it to its own end.

[2] Much good work has been done by European Americanists on this phenomenon. See for example, Erik Aasard, Elisabeth Harion-Sarifidis and Dag Blanck, “American Influences in Sweden,” http://www.engelska.uu.se/research.influence.html

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Mediated: How The Media Shapes Your World And The Way You Live In It, By Thomas De Zengotita

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M*ediated* by Thomas de Zengotita is a wonderful book. It's also a book I found myself quarreling with-not on every other page, but at certain points, and that vigorously. No doubt it's intentional-I recently heard de Zengotita remark that he had learned to write the way he spoke in class and he is obviously an inspired teacher at one of the great preparatory schools in Manhattan, Dalton. I graduated from the (then) boys-only, Boston Public Latin School and first met girls from Dalton forty five years ago at college: freshmen who were tough, smart, and taking no nonsense, more than my equal as a Harvard senior full of himself. (Those who graduate from Tom's classes must be particularly fearsome.) Before reading *Mediated* I knew Thomas de Zengotita as a writer of short stories (we published one in the magazine I edit, *Fiction*) and as the author of a complex essay on the Enlightenment in *Harper's*, one that made me reconsider the contemporary relevance of a script for rational behavior that the 18th century intellectuals wrote for humankind. The voice in which *Mediated* is written smacks, however, of the best of classrooms, funny and charged with provocation. While that will assure it of a wider audience, its message is serious and sobering: "People refuse to accept the fact that reality is becoming indistinguishable from representation…" This is a hard idea to accept, although the "virtual world" is certainly everywhere and de Zengotita presents it as terrifying, for it flatters and "the flattered self is spoiled. It never gets enough. It feels unappreciated. It whines a lot. It wants attention." Worst, despite the wave of flattery from the screens, billboards, signs, our bodies are "manifestly unequal to the wave of solicitation lavished upon them."

The notion that everything is "mediated," that it's impossible to experience a nightmare directly anymore, except as it is represented, is an idea that I resist. While cell phones and chat rooms, and the fetish of being constantly hooked up to electronic umbilical cords, to boyfriends, parents, etc., separates me from their generation, I can't believe that the deep traumas of life exist even for my children in a virtual world and are quickly succeeded by other representations. If it's so, I will try to bid them a fond farwell, because the human gene as I understand it has been so altered by this electronic interference that the strands which linked me to generations before me are severed. (This nightmare is one of several "scenarios" *Mediated* proposes.) I continue to be haunted by my parents' deaths, deaths I try to grip through representation because their power over me is so great I need the "mediation" of philosophy and religion to try to keep them from overwhelming me.

I have seen this in the lives of friends whose children have died before them, when the human

consciousness of the fragile span of life threatens to destroy their hold on any reality. Thomas de Zengotita mocks the scientist who (responding to the ho-hum when science broke the barrier of the speed of light) urges us "as a species of thinkers and doers to maintain our awe of nature while at the same time subduing and shaping it."

To which, Thomas, in the voice of one of his cocky students, cries, "Hello?

"It's up to us to *maintain* our awe of nature."

The statement certainly invites this ironic rejoinder. On consideration, however, recovering awe in the face of our own mortality and the immensity of existence in relation to it is a task of human consciousness, one that gives us an appreciation of our brief span of life and perhaps prepares us for the trial of death. (It is epitomized for me in a rabbinic epigram in which a rabbi who has grown too familiar with the idea of God asks for a measure of awe and is driven under the bed with terror.) Thomas de Zengotita begins *Mediated* with a story of studying acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse and the announcement of the Kennedy assassination being misinterpreted by the students as a cue for an improvisation of a "what if" script, feeling the eerie falsity of playing at grief. I also studied at the Playhouse and had a brief career as an actor. Representation of anger as an actor (Shakespeare's Richard the Third was my favorite role) kept me sane during bitter, frustrating days of high school, and I watched my son smother his own rage by entering the virtual world of video games and shooting down villains when he was being beaten up by the bullies in his class. He also took to the stage in school and it helped him escape an unhappy role assigned to him by corridor toughs and princesses. I showed him Tom's chapter on those fashion doyens of prep school and their devastating power over status. He laughed with appreciation but then warned me that it was often more complicated.

Still, it's impossible to escape the truth of *Mediated's* thesis, regardless of how one may take issue with particulars. I feel as the author does, overwhelmed on a daily basis by a world that is represented to me, challenged to "feel" by stimuli, which in their "representation" of reality," seem to offer all possibilities but whose possibilities are staged rather than real. The book asks in regard to this, "Do you make the distinction as a matter of routine processing? Or do you rely instead on a generalized immunity that puts the whole flood in brackets…the ultimate reaches of your soul on permanent remote?" And why is this distinction important?

"The discrete display of options melts into a pudding-and what I will call the Blob, usually a metaphorical entity, shimmers into visibility at this moment, the moment when you stand a-mazed before the vast display at the megaStore."

Can one predict what this process of endless options and "virtualization" may imply in one's children and in the generations following them, what the result will be of the constant "mediation" absorbed through television and advertising. Tom contradicts one expert, a Professor Rorty, who "can't imagine a culture whose public rhetoric is ironist…a culture which socialized its children in such as to make them constantly dubious about their own process of socialization.

“Where has Professor Rorty *been*?

“I guess he never saw T-shirts that read *Because I’m the Mommy that’s why…*

“The whole of popular culture is drenched in an ironism only a professor could miss-and a primary target is precisely the child-viewer’s “process of socialization.” The implications of this “socialization” run though the whole of the book and bring us to its frightening conclusions. Its chapters on children prepare us for these but can stand on their own as arresting essays. “No society in history has sanctified children the way we do.” And yet this sanctification is a form of recognition that De Zengotita can not help but “sanctify” as he ponders it. “What we see in children, through children, is all things given for the first time.” His gift for irony does not leave us here, however, as he “meditates” that quintessential story of childhood, *Peter Pan*, quoting its owlish, cynical author, J.M. Barrie. “Children are gay, innocent and heartless,” Forcing us to see the bitter irony behind the fairy tale, Tom remarks, “*Peter Pan* is all about instinct, imagination and, above all-utter selfishness,”

At the end of *Mediated*, those lines will return to haunt us, as the Descartes, Locke, Nietzsche, are marshaled to show us the society that we are headed for, a society where God is dethroned and we have become the sole proprietors of a universe of self regard, and mechanical manipulation, speeding up at an alarming rate.

In its brilliant pages on adolescence which like childhood seems to stretch further and further into adult life, the book warns that the virtual, ironic “exhibition of transgressive sex” that engulfs the contemporary adolescent, because it is so “managed” may have robbed the act of meaning: “It’s all for the best, but something is lost, a dimension of meaning and power that we can only encounter at the point when our comprehension and capacity to manage end. At the edge of the real.

“Which accounts for the fact that we have so many pubic exhibitions of sex that aspire to be transgressive. But-the dialect of mediation again-in reaching for the real in that way, they succeed only in extending the reach of the virtual.”

I wonder though-didn’t all the pornography I devoured as an adolescent also promise that virtual world and didn’t I pass from it into the terror and mystery of the real when I found young women who could not be “managed”?

One walks most of the time, however, through a “managed” territory of everyday life that *Mediated* makes only too clear. “Chatting on your hands-free caller ID-equipped cell phone as you walk across the park, everything that isn’t summoned by you, for you, flows by like streaming video on some random screen in a foyer-that’s what the external world gets reduced to when we are snuggled down in MeWorld.” I found myself typing up sentences like this and others that vividly describe how I live at present. “We will so conduct ourselves that everything becomes an emergency.”

“Life in a flood of surfaces that demand attention means a life of perpetual motion, and TV

provides the model."

Indeed *Mediated* reads like a skeleton key or *The Outsider's Insider Guide* to the current crop on Television, the hospital and courtroom dramas that run a half dozen plots at once and rarely come to a conclusion. "Stress dramas are about the working lives of the media people who make them."

The implications of this stress that are dramatized in the medium of Television, *Mediated* argues, alter our sense of time. "Cell phones and answering machines and digital telemarketing messages and Xerox machines and Web sites and BlackBerries -these are all representational technologies too. They all siphon your attention into unreal time. They represent what is not present and confront you with something else you have to deal with, if only to discard it…" The battle to preserve one's private time, real time, which is also one's private and real space, it seems, is almost lost. One example tolled a painful bell in me. "Looking back, having no answering machine provided a built-in-buffer, an automatic prioritizer, an automatic time expander.

"Now, of course it would be just rude."

That was exactly what I was accused of by a friend of some forty odd years when trying to drop by to see her a month ago, I admitted that I did not have a cell phone. I asked her to call me at specific time that evening or agree to an hour that we could meet the next day. "You have to get a cell phone!" she responded angrily. "You can't do this to your friends."

My children join in with the same refrain. (My friend never did call me, but called my daughter on the latter's cell phone.) But I don't want to be always on call, always available, or always facing the option of having to shut on or off my attention and access. I want time that is entirely as much as I can make it, mine.

For it is time as we know it, one of the constituents of our uneasy grip on reality, that is disappearing. It begins with our children, according to Tom, in a way that is seemingly harmless, but nevertheless has strange implications. "They can feel nostalgia for times they never lived through. That's how much a part of the contemporary environment representations have become…" Yet as the sixties, seventies, eighties retreat, will this attempt to live in past time finally overwhelm our children, as the nineties, and the decades of the Twenty First Century pile up? "There are signs of collapse into a synchronistic pastiche."

Again, "representation" in *Mediated's* reading, is a process that overburdens us with choices. Since we are constantly in motion in our heads, with everything frantically asking for attention, we have no real time in both the literal and metaphorical sense. And this reflects, De Zengotia observes, what has been happening on the planet in terms of human management. "Our motion through the last few centuries has been more like that of the skidding car than the steady march of progress we sometimes kid ourselves into believing in…" In fact, a reaction against progress begins to set in, "It can get to be a problem, this new new thing thing… Maybe the postmodern taste for retro and pastiche is more than a cultural phase? Maybe it's a necessity."

I am tempted in the spirit of *Mediation* to put myself in the center of this review and talk about my readings of the Clinton and Bush presidency, which Thomas de Zengotita sees through the shrewd eye of the media analyzer and actor, noting Clinton's sleazy magnetism as an entertainer, and Bush's bad acting, "indicating" rather than relaxing into a roll, exhibiting a self consciousness that only endears him to his audience. I will forbear this pleasure however, and speak instead about my engagement with the book.

Mediated at its best is really a set of questions. Is religion possible-Zengotita asks, finding himself seeking a more serious place to wonder about the world, and discovering a church for a moment in that circle of seekers who stopping their cars, get out to stare up at the skies and receive a measure of awe, taking in the weather. Even that dissipates for the author, as the weather itself on the television screen in anticipation of a major storm, is so discussed and chewed over that it is "staged"; reduced except for those stung by disaster, to a chewed over cliché. The disasters like the recent Tsunami, only briefly bring us up to consciousness of the nightmare that can tip the oceans over our heads, but as the author points out, quickly becomes a series of mediations on the uses of charity and the efficiency of distribution and aid.

If indeed reality is increasingly "mediated" so that we perceive it as staged in ironic mode, doesn't it have another side as well? As a member of a web site known as the Edge, which sometimes blurs the distinction between what can be called science, philosophy and fiction, as its scientists speculate on the nature of existence, I have been challenged in the last few years by the notion of consciousness. All consciousness may be a form of fiction, of invention, and self-deception may be a necessity of consciousness. It is not clear, if we live in a reality that we, and our predecessors, biologically, have in large part created. Acting then is not an ironic mode of existence in which we do not live naturally, only playing at existence, but the way in which we try out possible ways to exist, which then become natural. This may extend to many creatures that exist alongside of us and may be part of the process of their evolution and ours.

One of the charms of *Mediated* is its sense of our common experience of life at this point in the Twenty First Century, that fiction that we call reality. The book is not so much a denunciation of ourselves as a warning. We are in danger of losing a sense of belonging to the world that we live in, of feeling natural and complete. (*The Book of Genesis*' praise of the last patriarch, Jacob, is that he is a "complete" man.) In a brief few pages Tom recalls his grandfather, the surgeon's ease in handling things against the author's own clumsy clutter of objects, and we sense his admiration of that lost sense of completely possessing objects and the rhythms with which we use them. He sets his grandfather's relation to objects against contemporary usage. What if "someday people would be able to pay attention to everything at the same time?" Tom answers his own question. "Wouldn't that be cool?" then challenges it.

"Huh!"

"What does that even mean?"

"There's only so much that a human being can pay attention to in a given moment…If you don't

want to sink, you learn to surf, you have to. You learn how to go fast…it means missing most of what goes on around you but learning not to regret it because nothing is that much more valuable than anything else…more forwarding, more Cc-ing, more browsing, it's all so easy, so insulated, compared with actual human encounters and the clumsy stubbornness of implements and furnishings in the physical realm…" And then in a moment when *Mediation* quietly does answer its own questions, Tom recalls his grandfather's, his tackle box, his ease. "But it was his hands that I remember most of all, the care they extended to everything he touched, one by one, no haste, no waste, to each its due. That much was obvious. But subtler qualities made for beauty in even his simplest actions. Before using things, he took time to assess them… He never held anything too tightly, but nothing every slipped his grasp. And he loved to prepare-to unwrap, to lubricate, to sharpen. To lay everything out. When at last he executed a task, the outcome followed from the preparation like a dénouement…. No wonder that the things he owned, seen in repose, apart from him, showed the history of this treatment in graduates of their wear, in just those places that reflected implemental purpose. No wonder that they always seemed to be waiting for him to come back."

For underneath the hip rhetoric which the book's voice parodies and exploits is a stern protest against the dizzy motion that we have embraced, articulated in Tom's essay on the Enlightenment, which challenged the dangerous swamp of cultural relativism. The ideal of eighteenth century thinkers, that men and women possessed a common humanity, he argued was not only worth defending but is our only hope to continue in a rational human society. In a mediated world however, the notion of a bedrock value begins to lose meaning "Kermit the Frog gives college commencement addresses because no dominant discourse now determines values-and vice versa."

Has everything lost "value"time as well? The tocsin sounds in his final chapter as he considers the threat of September 11th and his own reaction. And despite himself and the retreat of the moment, he acknowledges the way awe has dissipated into a general anxiety. "The possibility of mass terror haunts the world." If we don't agree that we all share humanity, we may well blow ourselves up. Yes, but that "possibility" of the end of the world, has haunted men and women for a long time. I witness my memory of the first atomic bomb, adults communicating to me their fear that reality had changed forever. It haunted me before that, as I became conscious of the world around me, during the outbreaks of polio in 1943 and 1944, when the illness lurked everywhere and seemed to strike at will. That "awe" or "fear"the Hebrew word embraces both meaningsis part of the mystery that *Mediated* acknowledges. The book asks at one point, reflecting on the plethora of books, art and their spread among the general population, whether "all this creative activity-while indubitably mostly a good thing-has to reach a certain point of mass meaninglessness." At that point I would challenge its metaphor of the blob and recall the example of Tom's grandfather and his pace.

Creative "genius" is in my opinion, as rare today as it has been in the past. What may be true is that the obsession with "going fast" has made it impossible for many intelligent people to discriminate between what is worth slowing down to spend time with or assimilate. Very few "poets" whom I know, have read Dante. One of the major shapers of Western thought and of its

poetics is too much trouble for them to try to absorb. To its credit, *Mediation* dispenses its own medicine. The final chapters, return to the time of Descartes, Locke, and Nietzsche, forcing us to look at ourselves through these philosopher's eyes, pause and wonder-where are we hurrying to?