

variant

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Editorial

A cultural complaint

Variant has recently been asked to account for itself by the Office of the Scottish Charities Register (OSCR), following a complaint about the ‘political’ nature of the magazine. We understand that this complaint was centred on a possible conflict between that supposed ‘political’ agenda, and our charitable status. We can only guess as to the origin of the complaint in question, as OSCR are not permitted to divulge the source. However, one particular email, received in April this year, has stuck in our minds: it concerned Joyce Carmichael’s ‘Letter from Palestine’ (Variant 19). Here is an excerpt from that email:

“The writer shows a naive and dangerous lack of knowledge about the conflict. For instance, she refers to the Jenin ‘massacre’, what massacre? It is a fact the UN confirmed that there was no massacre in Jenin.

“She refers to the bulldozing of buildings and the destruction of the PLO headquarters. Of course they were destroyed, they were harbouring terrorists. It is a fact that the houses of the families of suicide bombers are destroyed, they are then fully compensated by the terrorist organizations, and re-housed. There is no reference, in her letters, to the fact that hundreds of innocent Israelis have been murdered by what she refers to as ‘resistance fighters’. She also does not seem to have recorded that it was the Palestinian intifada that began all the fighting in the first place. She omits to mention the fact that Yasser Arafat was offered everything he wanted at the Oslo peace accord, which would have meant peace for the Palestinian people, yet he turned it down. How can the Israelis make peace when they have no one to make peace with? We only have her version of IDF behavior, they may well have had justification for any searches as we know too well how terrorists exploit civilians to hide weapons etc.

“All of these facts have been omitted from her ‘Letters from Palestine’, she seems to have totally ignored the reasons why these things are happening in the West Bank, why it is necessary for the IDF to be there in the first place, why the security wall was built, and why it is necessary to have checkpoints etc. The terrorists attacks occurred first, not the other way around. Her article is dangerously one sided and the innuendo and biased [sic] is appalling.

“You are publishing your magazine and placing it in the public arena therefore your editorial has a responsibility to its readership. If you are going to print such journalistic babble then at least make sure you have some balance and some truth to the reporting otherwise your magazine is simply a propaganda base for every ranting, uninformed, ignorant letter writer from anywhere. It is not enough to simply absolve yourself of responsibility by saying ‘Opinions expressed in Variant are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the editors.’”

We have no way of knowing whether this email was connected with the complaint received by the OSCR, however attention was drawn to the same article by the investigating officer assigned to our case. It is our understanding that a number of similar complaints were co-ordinated by a single group in response to Carmichael’s article. We do not intend to deal with the substantive points raised in the email above, that is, the nature of the Israeli occupation of Palestine—arguing these points is beyond the remit of an editorial such as

this. However, since an issue has apparently been raised about Variant’s charitable status, and the compatibility of this with our ‘political’ content, we offer the following statement of our position. (This defence of our activities seems to be becoming a habit; how can it be that our unassuming little arts journal can evoke so much consternation?)

Variant is both a form of collaborative curatorial / aesthetic practice in its own right and an educational, discursive public space. Both of these areas of activity have developed out of and alongside identifiable curatorial and artistic practices and their associated concerns. Variant engages with a diverse range of communities, cultural organisations and practitioners. As well as this, it is an advocate of what was more traditionally defined as ‘the arts’, which in the contemporary situation with the advancement and crossing-over of fields of artistic and cultural practices (informed by post-modernist, feminist, post-colonial and queer theory, and an understanding of the increasing permeation of global capitalism) would be more inclusively defined today as the socio-economic politics of cultural production.

In furtherance of Variant’s stated aim in its Objects of Association, to inform and educate the public, Variant—in part—seeks to encourage discussion and exploration of the many interconnected cultural, social and political issues affecting society today. Variant is committed to providing coverage of ‘the arts’ in the context of these broader social, political and cultural issues, working for a greater number of voices to be represented than would otherwise be heard. The readership of Variant magazine is as diverse as the public venues through which we are distributed (see distribution list), representing and reflecting a wide variety of issues and concerns. Variant does not just publish and distribute a magazine, but also acts as a hub, a point of contact and a public research and educational tool.

There is a broad cross-section of content within Variant magazine which reflects multiple areas of concern, not just to artistic communities but to wider society. As such, Variant endeavours to have a diversity of content that may deal with highly specialised issues but attempts to relay them in a manner that is clear and engaging for a diverse readership. Variant is a unique, innovative achievement highly praised within the arts and cultural sectors for its cross-disciplinary approach to publishing. This approach and the areas covered within the magazine reflect a contemporary concern for the complexities of cultural production and issues which impact upon them.

We believe it constructive—and essential—to place articles that explicitly review the field of culture alongside articles on issues that inform or have consequences for the very production and subject of ‘the arts’. Variant’s diversity of content frames ‘the arts’ in a ‘real world’ context of political and economic imperatives, rather than depicting them simply in terms of consumerist escapism. It moves ‘the arts’ out of a specialist niche and treats them with greater weight, and in so doing makes them available to readers whose attention might not otherwise be drawn to them—and vice versa.

In furtherance of Variant’s Objects, we have made contact with cultural organisations who pro-

mote the rights of and/or represent minority and disadvantaged groups. This is something which we have followed through extensively in the magazine. Variant has been involved in ground breaking work on the subject of equal opportunities, in terms of addressing subjects such as inequalities of race, class, gender and forms of cultural oppression—including media representation—not only how these are evidenced within the fields of cultural production but the societal context within which such values are received and (re)produced.

Raising what might be perceived as contentious or difficult areas for discussion in the public sphere is itself an important and legitimate activity—increased public awareness and the promotion of public participation in media criticism is vital work which furthers Variant’s stated

Objects. The ideal of a free press is held up as a fundamental principle of democracy. In considering the development of a media, we begin from the premise that truth-telling should be motivated by compassion for suffering rather than greed for wealth, status and privilege. An authentic desire to remove the suffering of others—itself a laudable charitable cause—provides a powerful incentive for rationally identifying the real causes of problems and real solutions in response to them.

This, in our view, should be an ethical point of departure for writers.

Examination and dissemination of writing which either directly or indirectly places issues of human rights, censorship and cultural representation in a broader educational and social context has been one of the features of Variant. Some articles specifically relate to furthering public awareness of the need for the social responsibility to address these issues, others act with a more direct form of agency in raising awareness of competing forms of representation in their own right. If we understand the production and replication of the media and its conventions as a cultural *and* political subject, then it is clearly within Variant’s Objects to provide information and analysis that departs in some measure from the mass media’s consensus—there are many recent examples of the corporate media belatedly apologising for misleading of the public over the Iraq war. Well documented analysis of the mass media—how its agendas are influenced by its structures of ownership and proximity to power—exposes its partiality, and the illusive character of its rhetoric of ‘balance’. In furtherance of Variant’s Objects, and its public responsibility, one of Variant’s roles can be recognised, at a comparatively low level in the broader cultural environment, as providing a democratic balance to cultural and political preconceptions, internalised canons and dominant modes of constraint and organisation. This explicitly falls within “improv[ing] and advanc[ing] the education of the public.” Variant is an educational vehicle, increasing knowledge and understanding of the interwoven (we would argue inseparable) social, political and cultural environments; generating broader understanding of the context in which culture is (re)produced is fundamental to Variant’s core objectives. Variant is of particular value to the public development of cultural and educational activity in providing a space for a continuous, independent public conversation that might otherwise not take place—and which currently does not take place anywhere else in the UK, in this form.



An Open Account of Variant

Yearly Expenditure

(based on three issues in 2003)

Production Costs

Print	£3330.00
Distribution	£4669.50
Administration	work in
kind	
Design	£900.50

Premises

Rent	£3000.10
Council Tax	£285.01
Electricity	£896.00

Salary

Editors' wages	work in
kind	

Office Expenses

Telephone	£747.12
Online Connection	£179.88
Photocopy costs	£10.00
Reams of Paper	£21.96
Cartridges for Printer	
£53.85	
Battery for Computer	£9.00
Manila Paper	£70.17
Parcel Tape	£16.20
Postage	£4669.50
Zip discs / CDs	£49.99
Banking Charges	£40.58

Editors' Expenses

Public Transport	£688.30
Research and Development	£84.84

Yearly Income

Editor Income

(based on one individual)

Income support	£2841.80
Housing Benefit	£2964.00

Income

Advertising	£8985.00
Subscriptions	£589.50
Donations	£120.00
Bank interest	£2.05
Core Funding	£0.00
One off grants	
GCC £1000	£1000
SAC*	£0.00

*£8000 (1/4/04 - 31/3/05)

Total costs per year	£15052.90	£15052.90
Total cost of one issue	£5013.63	£5013.63
Total cost of one issue per reader		£0000.50

Mr Hebbly Goes to Town

Metaphrog

The spray of drizzle was soothing to the temples, it almost balanced the scream of traffic and flurry of people staggering all around him. A woman in a purple waterproof anorak approached aggressively holding her ground, an absurdly angular figure leaning forward, refusing to move, teeth clenched against the wind, body braced against any inevitability, glasses glinting in a parody of evil. Moving sideways a little didn't bother him; he caught himself grinning and then felt guilty, saddened by the woman's pathos. So much stress, so many spoilt minutes, disappointed loved ones. He tried not to imagine any more. Was it worse or was this some hideous distortion caused by a new malignant shift in his own fragile state of mind. For some people this time of year must be nightmarish, dreadful. For some it was a struggle to stay alive: he should think himself lucky.

Anyway, it wasn't worth analysing really, could lead to depression; better to try and sort out more pressing problems. The bank would be busy, everywhere was ridiculously busy, and it would all take a little longer than usual. A moustachioed man with lascivious eyes danced into view: apparently he was occupied shaking something in each hand, and shouting prices and endorsements. A deliberate commotion outside a shop that had taken the place of the local newsagent and looked like it had been especially designed for the purpose of selling flashing lights and small explosives. As he passed, and attempted to ignore the shaking somethings, the man muttered something that sounded like: 'wombat'.

On the corner there hovered a stinky meat mias-

ma, the butcher was filling a second large plastic bin with oozing gobbets, bags of bits. Generally it was unwise to attempt crossing the road until the little green men appeared. Vans and cars forced their ways through congestion then hurtled a short distance over the wet surface. He wondered if anyone else found this strange, if anyone else noticed the pointless speeding and stopping. Angry cars everywhere, screeching and vrooming. Occasionally drivers would honk, or even wave an aggressive fist at each other or at a pedestrian. Old hunched figures smelling damply of lonely flats milled backwards and forwards peering at the traffic lights and the reflections in the blackened smoked glass. The light changed and they began milling carefully across, waiting patiently for the impatient drivers barging through the shuffling crowd.

The opposite pavement, normally populated by the odd local care-in-the-community characters or disgruntled hairdressers, was today a sea of writhing bodies. Shopping: the modern leisure activity and necessity.

An aching nostalgia sapped his mood as he made his way to the pelican crossing in heavier rain. A hooded figure lurched by, moving fast, mumbling a greeting, the pressure of addiction, anxious face already beginning to look a little jaundiced.

Tommy had said he heard a fox. A funny thing to hear in a city over the near constant noise, but then the animals fed off all the garbage. Rats ran riot in the quiet. He got really tired of them trying to sell him a



loan. Buy a car. "You know I've never actually learned to drive, too much of a space cadet. Daydreaming. Resigned myself to being a passenger in life." There had been a silence then. "I can't drive." No? "Well why not borrow some money to take some lessons?" Last time he'd been to the bank he'd politely declined a new account, a giant furry animal had kept on waving at him. He'd thought it was a rabbit. "A fucking giant rabbit waving at me." But Gerry had assured him it was a squirrel. Later in the park he'd thought about that: nuts, something about saving up for the winter.

Fire engines had begun to arrive along the road in both directions, settling outside the Co-op, sirens blaring orange against the darkening clouds. It was only late afternoon but it felt like night. Bovine faces stopped and peered at the firemen, lopsided grins appearing on white round moons. Smoke billowed from the high windows into the bruised sky.

The bank windows were duller than they should have been, the blinds had been closed, but the yellowy light was visible inside. The wooden door stood shut.

"What time is it?"
"Only half past three. But the blinds are closed!"
"Maybe there's a robbery."

The old woman wrinkled her nicotined face and laughed, "Santa probably needed money."

Extracting the Michael

Tom Jennings

Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* has attracted frenzied debate among right-wing, ‘quality’ liberal and radical and alternative media and critics alike—all trying to enlist the meanings mobilised by the film into their own discourses of politics, journalism, and the ‘reality’ of the world. Fair enough, as far as it goes. Somewhat surprisingly, given its enormous commercial success and an audience already many millions strong, its significance as a film has received much less attention—as a commodity circulating in a popular cultural environment which articulates with, but cannot be reduced to, current affairs and documentary genres. So, though it may be necessary to carefully scrutinise the levels of accuracy and logic and to judge the status of the information and arguments presented, analysis of *F911* so far has been reluctant to imagine what its impact might be on the attitudes of cinemagoers seeking spectacular entertainment, and what relevance this might have to its potential political resonance. From this angle, it may be impossible to disentangle the complicated presence of the director as author and film star, and his taking the piss out of power, from other substantive effects of the film. Nevertheless, what follows attempts to sketch out what would be needed to begin that task.

Reference to the song lyrics ‘Won’t Get Fooled Again’ ends the film, with George W. Bush attempting a quotation and, as per, getting his lines wrong. Counterposed to a line from Orwell (1984)—“the war is meant to be continuous ... a war of the ruling group against its own subjects”—Moore aligns himself simultaneously with the US ruling elites and with the general populace (‘us’). Both are counterposed to ordinary lower class Americans (‘them’) who, he asserts, join the armed forces to preserve freedom because ‘we’ ask them to. “Will *they* ever trust *us* again?” (my emphasis) is Moore’s rhetorical question. The slippage of agency is curious given *F911*’s demonstration of all the different ways the Iraq war and its policy corollaries have damaged nearly everyone involved both at its sharp end and in the distant ‘heartlands’. Meanwhile, as comprehensively and convincingly documented in the film (including with their royal Saudi and Bin Laden family business associates), the war’s biggest beneficiaries have been the same US corporate profiteers who bankrolled the 2000 presidential election campaign.¹

This rather different kind of scandal is the film’s starting point. Even here, it wasn’t enough for the rabid neoconservative clique who engineered the Bush/Cheney victory to mobilise the usual panoply of seedy Republicans, fundamentalist Christians and other moral fascists against such an obviously pathetic yuppie pillock (Al Gore). To get their latest moronic puppet into the White House, they still needed media manipulation courtesy of Dubya’s cousin at Rupert Murdoch’s Fox News, blatant vote rigging in Florida presided over by his brother Governor Jeb Bush, and the final (and most revealing) farce of the Supreme Court and Senate lining up to slavishly protect ‘the institutions of State’ from any serious investigation. According to Moore’s hype machine, *Fahrenheit 9/11* was intended to cut Bush’s cowboy gang off at the pass in the next presidential elections in November. If successful, this will allow upper class Democrat John Kerry to pander to corporate interests instead, just like Clinton did, but presumably without being quite so brazen about it.²

Star Strangled Banners

Unfortunately, the fascination with figureheads and personalities is no aberration. Moore’s efforts

in this direction in the past included the mantra of ‘Tweedlebrush or Tweedlegore’ in his active support for Ralph Nader (who seriously eroded the Democrat vote last time) and, apparently in all seriousness, trying to kickstart a campaign to persuade talk-show host Oprah Winfrey to run for president. On the other hand, this track record does indicate that *F911*’s patronising conclusion about lower class kids and their parents duped into enlisting then being betrayed by their leaders, is no accident. Presenting himself as so right(eous), in opposition to those who are both wrong and evil, leaves him no real alternative but to portray his audience as hapless marks at the mercy of power and needing enlightenment from his bluff and bluster. Through what is, in effect, his (unconscious) identification with the powerful, Moore blends strategies drawn from homegrown populist political traditions with the emotionally resonant narrative and structural devices of popular culture genres. As a music-hall master of ceremonies, carnival huckster or rabble-rousing demagogue, his underlying motivational pattern is to inflate and project his own ego through his work, resulting in a concealment of intellectual deficiency under a blanket of narcissism and paranoia, energised with appeals to sentiment focused on his self-deprecating ‘ordinary guy’ charisma.

It certainly works as entertainment, as testified by the record-breaking box office of *F911* particularly among working class audiences and in conservative mid-West and armed forces towns, who normally turn out for melodrama served up in standardised Hollywood dressings and who may shun worthy documentaries. Moore thus raises his stock in the media markets and boosts his personal star profile and mythology as a ‘working class rebel’. From this angle, inspired parallels are drawn between the economic destruction of Western urban/industrial wastelands and the military havoc wreaked in Iraq, along with the depression, desperation and grief suffered by both sets of inhabitants. This is set against the sinister prowling of armed forces recruiters and the cynical dishonesty of their patter; reproduced and attenuated later in the abuse of Iraqi citizens by those recruited. On their return home in both physical and psychic torment, Iraq veterans then learn that their government is enthusiastically cutting back the already pitiful levels of medical and welfare aid due to them. It’s not even deemed necessary to remind us of Vietnam.

Rarely are arguments like this put together so effectively on screen in front of such huge audiences. Better still, they are interspersed and augmented with a wide range of highly salient and suggestive information which, although already in the public realm and theoretically available to anyone with the resources required to collect it, is scrupulously suppressed, skated over, or (at best) detached from all context in mainstream current affairs reportage. So the press managed to spin into a semblance of coherence the thoroughly spurious and contradictory explanations and justifications over Iraq offered so hamfistedly by the government.³ If part of the project is to propel into a widespread consciousness elements of the kind of critique normally associated with meticulous scholars such as Noam Chomsky (whose readership is relatively tiny in comparison), then *F911* has to be judged a triumph.

Likewise, plenty of footage is uncovered demonstrating the utter irrelevance of political processes purporting to protect against executive excess. First the top judges and senators (Democrat and Republican alike) refused to invalidate Bush’s election in the first place—better to disenfranchise a few thousand mainly poor Black

Florida voters (and that’s just the ones known about) than question the integrity of the electoral system. Then the 2002/3 Patriot Acts legislated unheard-of degrees of surveillance and interference with ‘civil rights’, supposedly to facilitate anti-terrorist policing. Congress voted these bills through without anyone even reading them, but this was no regrettable oversight in a moment of panic. Instead we are assured by one put-upon

Congressman that he and his colleagues never have time to examine what they vote on. The film’s failure to consolidate and interpret these demonstrations of the meaninglessness of liberal democracy’s institutions has to be its greatest missed opportunity. It mirrors the comparably craven disregard for all those routinely excluded from the flag-waving decency of white Middle America, as various non-white and muslim people suffer heightened harassment – unofficially from neighbourhood racism and as terrorist suspects for the official kind. Moore looks the other way because he daren’t ask his main target audience any of these *really* searching questions.⁴

Less, Moore, Too Much

Note, though, that while characters, variables and phenomena in the political realm are the explicit nuts and bolts of the text, *F911* doesn’t work as political analysis. Moore makes no pretence of providing any conclusions regarding the history and nature of the US state and the pivotal contemporary role of the media in its reproduction. Worse, those of a forensic disposition will be able to find many inconsistencies and dubious assertions in his innuendos. In those rational terms, what he often does is to collage verifiable information with found footage, in order to highlight correlations which are very pertinent to questions of various vested interests. Going over the top to insinuate direct causal relationships is mischievous, but doesn’t necessarily intend to be taken so seriously.⁵ As part of the narrative, this kind of trick milks humour from our intuitive awareness of the decadence of power, which can then be mobilised as grist to the mill of outrage. As such, his material is well worth projecting into the public realm—whatever the framing—because there is just too much to be papered over. It defies easy answers; refuses pat clichés; shatters conformist homilies; and overflows any neat, naff attempts at conventional containment. The result is therefore intensely ambiguous, as with much of the director’s previous work.⁶

Moore’s tactic is to take an issue of contemporary concern and uncover 57 varieties of cans of worms in true muckraking gonzo journalism style and fashion. The material is then woven together with crescendos of hilarity, rage and horror, orchestrated by Moore the Magician into revelations of innocent individuals (and families) beset by the disgusting twin towers of organised money and power. The viciousness of the satire in the first half of *F911* is undoubtedly effective in reinforcing the class hatred necessary to anchor any clear-sighted rational response in passionate engagement. Here the film is content to allow this tide to flow and ebb around the only piece of restraint on show—the blank screen of September 11th signalled only by sound effects from Ground Zero. Once the focus shifts to the diverse personal tragedies of communities and lives shattered by the war on terror, however, satire turns to sancti-



mony. The energising momentum of laughter is lost, as is the increasingly threadbare plot. Overkill centres on the choice of a single family from Moore’s home town as the prism through which to understand the effects of war. Lila Lipscomb from Flint, Michigan, whose son died in Iraq after she urged him to enlist, has to stand in for the global degradation of humanity that this chapter of US imperialism represents.⁷

Perhaps to many ordinary Americans this clinches his argument that Bush is a traitor, if feeling for the bereaved parent captures those who previously voted for him.⁸ But when it comes to the complexities of history and politics, and the collective reflection needed to work out what to do next, Moore always fails to deliver. Structural change never makes it onto his agenda, despite

being clearly implied by the sorry mess of corrupt incompetence throughout the ruling elites, state institutions and tame media in the past four years.

Here, the Bush administration’s foreign (and domestic) policy has amounted to war (full stop)—not on terrorism but employing it in Afghanistan, Iraq and the more or less low-intensity propaganda and repression aimed at opponents at home (also painted as un-American and thus, in effect, as ‘foreigners’) Furthermore this was always the neoconservatives’ explicit agenda, starting from outright opposition to any kind of peace process in Palestine. But

without historical context in *F911*, this pattern is presented as somehow exceptional, rather than a particularly virulent example of business as usual.

The closing admonition to not be fooled again now sounds like a vain hope—simply the latest in a long line of failures of the popular will—which Moore can’t acknowledge without threatening the putative efficacy of the decency of ordinary folk in a narrative trajectory which depends on its appeal to an acceptance of the nobility of the ideals and traditions of the American political system supposedly disrupted by the Bush clique. *F911*’s downhome moralising, cheap jibes, exploitation of sentiment, and even its casual xenophobia, can then be understood as symptomatic of Moore’s failure of nerve. He cannot attack the myths of American ‘freedom’ and the history of this discourse in stitching together America’s diverse constituencies into a patriotic unity—which is not only every bit as fraudulent as Bush et al’s conduct but which has always underpinned the ‘manufacture of consent’. It’s a major part of the problem, rather than the reassuringly familiar wellspring of resistance that the film invokes.

The director imagines that, through its sheer rhetorical power, his cinematic rollercoaster can help transform the reactionary defensiveness of middle America into a movement for change. But on the face of it, and according to his PR, his desired outcome of voting out Bush would merely recuperate all of the energy generated back into the miserable electoral game, thereby re-legitimising what the film has already shown to be irredeemable. This does no justice to the visceral euphoria occasioned by the expert editing and structuring of images, sound (bites) and story arc in *F911* create the expectation of a satisfying climax—according to Hollywood conventions, for instance. Whereas the film ends with (in no particular rank order): an appeal to human decency; an assertion of that decency’s gullibility; the stupidity and duplicity of leaders; and a faith in future, better leaders. Is Moore taking the piss, pissing in the wind, or just full of piss and wind?

The Power and the Vainglory

Many have concluded that *F911*’s inadequate ending therefore confirms the judgement that it is a bad film, despite their acknowledgement of its power. But although it’s not difficult to show that the political analysis is unconvincing and the quality of the journalism questionable, these are hardly criteria of cinematic excellence. The reasons for its power thus seem more difficult to pin down.

Even cinema critics—who might be expected to appreciate the blockbuster provenance and deal with the effectivity of its fictional universe accordingly—found themselves suspending their professional judgement and watching instead an unusually long party political broadcast.⁹ There appears to have been a widespread cognitive dissonance arising from the mismatch between the denouement and what has gone before. Many viewers (present author included) reported reactions of raw but conflictual emotion on emerging from the cinema—simultaneous distress and exhilaration, for example—along with a thoroughgoing confusion as to what the film has done to us, and what it might mean.

In contemporary cinema, though, singular linear narratives have for some time been out of fashion. Since the 1970s the formal structures of postmodern art films have seeped into the mainstream, with alternative endings, unresolvable red herrings, and playing with time, memory and perspective virtually the norm.¹⁰ *F911* stirs up a whole mess of dormant and suppressed emotion, and rhetorically nails it onto the specific reality of this chapter of the New World Order via the cathartic power of cinematic audiovisual montage. No simple readings or conclusions are provided, actually, and the director as trickster almost delights in preventing these from arising. In responding to such experiences, the conflictual and contradictory elements of the audience’s psychology and everyday understanding interact to some extent with those of the image stream. We tolerate, and even seek this out, at the multiplex. In other situations which seem to require it, we gear ourselves up to be serious, rational beings. Here, strenuous effort may be made to resolve such chaotic fracturing—whenever awareness of it can’t be avoided – because it is so uncomfortable. Masquerading as documentary, *F911* simultaneously prompts both these orientations.

If such a juxtaposition of fantasy and current affairs seems outlandish,¹¹ it can be thought of in the context of the rise of many new visions of documentary in independent and alternative media. A growing awareness of the inadequacy of liberal notions of journalistic ‘balance’ has fostered dissatisfaction with the limited understanding possible of current affairs within this paradigm—given the stranglehold of commercial integration and monopolies of media programming.¹² Similarly, in the recent renaissance of cinema documentary, other filmmakers concentrate on a more careful balance of information and narrative, inviting viewers to contemplation rather than reaction.¹³ Those of the newer UK ‘faux naïf’ school place their subjective involvement in the discovery process and their personal social responses to their subjects more at centre stage. Nick Broomfield¹⁴ embarks on quests to understand controversial celebrities and events, encouraging interviewees to open up in response to his persona of a bumbling amateur investigator with an amiably naive liberal worldview.

Other such documentarists on television exercise their fashionable cynicism more openly in exoticising ‘minority’, ‘weird’ or ‘subcultural’ scenes, either from perspectives of superior knowledge and taste, or a more well-meaning secure upper class nerdy fascination.¹⁵ All the above maintain liberal detachment, so that the results amount to tourism through worlds which—however threatening—remain forever bracketed off; never really meaning much to them, let alone fundamentally affecting or changing anything. The gathering of information, and any consequent enlightenment, therefore merge in the amusement of the protagonist and the entertainment of the viewing audience—neither of whom are ultimately touched by the experience. Their fundamentally complacent premise and conclusion is that, in practice, alienation and dissociation in cynical stasis are the only achievable values.

Shock, Horror – News as Farce

But Moore, though he may be smug, is neither liberal nor detached, and his expertise lies in provocation rather than scrupulous exposition or the search for an all-embracing ‘truth’. His method, using comedy conventions as a starting point, is to

directly implicate the anguish and pain that is a fundamental ingredient of his audience’s own lives in illuminating and enlarging upon ‘objective’ situations about which we are usually only ‘informed’ by the cool authority of the news. Most of the debate about the value of *F911*, like views on the dwindling trust in mainstream current affairs on the part of the general public, or of tabloid power, assume that engaging the emotional response of the audience must be suspect, if not wholly negative—thus failing to appreciate our increasing orientation to the world through the lenses of our cultural literacy.

Before the last few decades of media diversification, remember, News was monolithic and monovocal—and generally understood as the singular voice of power. It could therefore be ‘trusted’ in that very specific and limited sense. Now the news anchor and star reporter stand in, but with the proliferation of images and gazes and post-modern splintering of our selves and societies we hear many versions and nuances of what used to be distilled into the one absolute word. The nature and modus operandi of propaganda have moved on, and the petty squabbling, internecine manoeuvring and decadent baseness of the ruling strata and those scrambling up the ladders of status are now visible for all to see. Overloads of trivia multiply the complexity of explanation—but then the world is complicated. The opportunities for satire are also vastly improved—through means which are always also inevitably partial, whether face to face, in local public fora and stagings, grass-roots publishing, or in making inroads into mainstream media in comics, animation, TV and film.

Comedy is potentially an extremely effective tool in savaging pretension and false authority.¹⁶ True, Moore flirts with the other end of the comic spectrum, displacing his audience’s unacknowledged self-disgust onto shared objects of prejudice—where the balm of laughter converts sorrow into hatred. Neurotic pride and vanity prevent such performers from extracting the michael from themselves—a far more effective ploy. The honest pathos of one’s own abjection generates genuine and conscious empathy—which, when handled with the requisite skill, facilitates analogy with the wider tragedies of the world. These too render us abject, but collectively so, and the puncturing by the satirist of the bad faith of the powerful takes the hilarity beyond catharsis. In the route from tame court jesters to carnivalesque subversives, and to the French revolutionary pamphleteers, for example, this becomes overtly political with an increased readiness to take action in the world—when it chimes with pre-existing tendencies for a wider clamour for change. But the comedy itself can’t create or lead anything, so our only option is to laugh uneasily at (not with) Moore for his delusional grandeur.¹⁷

One example which transcends most of the aforementioned problems with Michel Moore’s approach and that of the newer documentarists is Channel 4’s Mark Thomas Comedy Product—whose title immediately signals a self-conscious acknowledgement of the limitations of cultural commodities. Nevertheless the structure of the programme takes us back to the intimacy of club stand-up routines, and the studio and television punters are always invited to laugh at as well as with the comedian. The quest for answers to admitted naivete and ignorance means that methods are developed in practice, and a range of pragmatic forms of action advised. The emphasis throughout is on collective work and discussion, with the front man a delegate rather than leader. Overall, a dynamic sense of change implicates the audience too, rather than retreating to the complacency of existing beliefs. No perfect solutions are ever offered as a sop to satisfy the passive recipients of uplifting performance.¹⁸

Beyond a Joke

To sum up, regarding *F911* as primarily a popular cultural product enables us to reverse the terms of debate about its qualities. The political intervention it proclaims is, in fact, part of its commercial promotion—not the other way round—and Michael Moore’s primary motivation, in practice, is to enhance his position (in terms of both economic



and cultural capital, because these have become so closely entwined nowadays in the realms of public media). F911’s success has been engineered by a commercial strategy (or simulation) of ‘guerilla’ marketing using the convenient excuse of the political career of a more obviously tainted than usual US president. It is an example of the persuasive potential of media and popular culture genres having entered the body politic through their saturation of our daily lives, from infancy, in the discourses embodied in cultural commodities—just as in the past it made sense to analyse folklore, mythology and religion in terms of the limiting and limited narrative possibilities offered there.

At home in his high-profile environment, Michael Moore can neither be extracted from his unconscious alignment with (other) celebrities in the star system, nor from other planets in the political universe—any more than current affairs are usefully considered to be analogous to hard-nosed theoretical physics (chaos, charm and entropy and all). As an individual Moore is far from an intellect of genius, has any number of prominent and visible ideological and personal warts, and wouldn’t pass muster in the real world as any kind of salesman let alone a politico (you’d be too busy laughing). But the egomania and drive needed to bring together large volumes of human and financial collateral in translating his vision onto celluloid probably also provide the entrepreneurial savvy to persuade investors to cough up. To them he’s doubtless considered a safe bet, in the established cinema tradition of paranoid mavericks prone to hysterical posturing. Some of these, such as Oliver Stone, also consider their work as ‘subversive’—and it may be so, though rarely in the ways they imagine.

On balance, despite its many shortcomings and even its frankly reactionary overtones, I, for one, am happy that *F911* is out there in the world and that so many millions of us are seeing it. Of course it’s important to be clear about the film and its director—the cowardice as well as the bravery, clangers and bullseyes, clarity and befuddlement. Further, it’s no bad thing to acknowledge that this is also a fair description of the human condition in general. In universalising the moral decency of common folk (Moore) and natural human common sense (Chomsky),¹⁹ we will always be found wanting. There’s little point bemoaning the fact that we are human animals with hearts, guts and minds; or that it’s a dirty world and we are in a mess. The mobilisation of emotion fosters an appreciation of the world and its people that both punctures the purity of power and avoids paralysis from imperfect knowledge.

The hints are also all there in F911 that the imagined community of nation is the most profound con of the present era, with its mouldy cement of voting for leaders as liberal democracy’s feet of clay. A less opaque perception is possible of the close-knit globalising networks of domination and suffering disappearing over the on-screen horizon—from the complementation regimentation and abuse of underclass enlists and Baghdad residents to the harassment of white US respectables and invisible internal ‘others’. Few show signs of fighting back in the film, but the implication is that any or all might. So might the audience; and more belligerently than by meekly lining up to vote or paying to be thrilled. Out of pain can come laughter, and there are many kinds of both. One laughter, one pain; one love, one blood—these are unlikely slogans at hustings for the lesser corporate-military evil. But they might begin to make sense to those viewers of *F911* not prepared to sweep their gut reactions back under the carpet-bombing of presidential election news. Therefore our conclusions and interpretations can usefully converge around what active political use to make of all this—not trying to enforce as authoritative any of the many possible readings of what is, in the end, only a film.

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Notes

1. And although Moore himself might get even richer, thanks to the film, he is at least urging its internet pirating and distribution.
2. Cue a video outtake showing Bush addressing a fund-raiser gathering as “the haves and have-mores; I don’t call you the elite, I call you my base”.
3. Cue Secretary of State Colin Powell emphatically denying two months before September 11th that Saddam Hussein had any capacity for WMDs.
4. In his book *What Next: A Memoir Towards World Peace*, Serpent’s Tail, 2003, Walter Mosley stresses that, from their centuries of hard experience of noble US humanism in action, many Black Americans weren’t at all surprised that the country could be hated so much. Thus *F911* could easily have found resources for such discussion very close at hand.
5. Interesting critiques which accept the film in those terms can be found in: Todd Gitlin ‘Michael Moore Alas’, www.opendemocracy.net/themes/article-3-1988.jsp; and Robert Jensen ‘Beyond F911’, www.counterpunch.org/jensen07052004.html.
6. In television series such as *TV Nation* and *The Awful Truth*, bestselling books like *Downsize This!*, *Stupid White Men* and *Dude, Where’s My Country?* and the films *Roger And Me*, 1989, and *Bowling For Columbine*, 1992.
7. She works as a employment counsellor to the jobless, so Moore’s rare appearance on camera hounding national politicians—only one of whom has offspring on Iraq active service—ironises as it humanises.
8. The matching shots of a grieving Iraqi mother impotently railing at American barbarism, however, are just as likely to reinforce depressive apathy.
9. So, for example, Mark Kermode (‘All Blunderbuss and Bile’, *The Observer*, 11 July) mistakes his lack of engagement with Moore’s vulgar exploitation of real grief and horror as based on Britishness; whereas B. Ruby Rich (‘Mission Improbable’, *Sight & Sound*, July, pp.14-16) is seduced by the Cannes Festival PR into discussing *F911*’s emotive power only in terms of swingometers.
10. See my ‘Class-ifying Contemporary Cinema’, *Variant* 10, 2000, pp.14-16, for further discussion.
11. Despite the title being borrowed from a Ray Bradbury science fiction novel.
12. Two forthcoming documentaries tackle the significance of these developments in the present context: the independently distributed critique of Fox News, *OutFoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism*, dir. Robert Greenwald (see article by Don Hazen, www.alternet.org/story/19199/); and *The Control Room* about Arabic cable channel Al Jazeera, to be broadcast on BBC2.
13. For example Errol Morris reveals the inevitable partiality of perspective of his subjects in their particular fields, using expressionistic visuals, filming styles and editing to emphasise gaps and uncertainties in the stories told—in , for example, *Gates of Heaven*, 1979, *The Thin Blue Line*, 1988 and *The Fog Of War*, 2003—the latter revealing the pomposity and shallow self-delusions of Vietnam war architect Robert McNamara.
14. E.g. in documentaries about Thatcher and South African fascist Eugene Terreblanche, two about serial killer Aileen Wuornos, and *Biggie & Tupac*, 2001.
15. E.g. Jon Ronson and Louis Theroux respectively.
16. Despite most ‘alternative’ comedians preferring to assert cool distinction by sneering at the cretinism of ordinary people.
17. And at others who reveal their (stars and) stripes in thrall to leadership cults—such as the *Socialist Worker* review calling on Moore to stand for office. For a corrective, see the No Sweat campaign’s more prosaic take on *F911* (www.nosweat.org.uk).
18. Clearly inspired by Michael Moore’s TV work, disappointing tendencies sometimes cross over too, such as occasional hints of little Englandism—but not too often. Respectability is decisively rejected in Mark Thomas’ insistence on retaining his own effing and blinding vernacular—which works for me, even if ensuring the show’s relegation to a minority schedule slot.
19. Attributions which also seem to be transhistorical in their mythical persistence.

Notes on *Human Rights Watch*

Macdonald Stainsby

The organization Human Rights Watch (HRW), much like counterpart Amnesty International (AI), is cited often by individuals and organizations of all political creeds and persuasions. Whether it is far-right opponents of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez or leftist solidarity activists working on helping the beleaguered Palestinian people, it seems a citation from HRW is so respected that it takes on the air of non-ideological and non-partisan, making it so that they stand above the fray of politics. But is this really the case? Well, one of the main issues that can be brought up is simply how the organization pigeon-holes these matters. To deal with this point, I found simply one article on the HRW main webpage (hrw.org) and dissected from there. The article in question is available at: <http://hrw.org/editorials/2003/nigeria120403.htm>

And right from the start, it is too deeply woven with imperialist ideology to simply take apart when a line appears that is in favour of Western imperial interests. The White Man's burden approach to the "Human Rights" and International law implications implied therein are simply astounding. It is not so much what is said but rather how things are framed. The *ideology* of HRW, much like the major bourgeois media, as has often been said, is like the pane of glass you don't see, but which really determines the appearance of what you are looking at.

Let me first digress. International law since WWII, and more particularly the Geneva conventions of 1948, are not at all ambiguous. The first examples of precedents for today's law were the Nuremberg trials. There, the court detailed, the greatest threat one could put upon the rights of the world was to launch illegal aggressive war. These, in fact, were the primary charges that

brought convictions to men like Herman Goering. Does HRW still even mention this illegal act? After all, it was these charges—against the peace of humankind—that saw the Nazis get hanged (or swallow capsules). As Nuremberg saw it, all other crimes stemmed from the one basic crime against the peace of humanity.

HRW's front page recently had a 'special section' on Iraq. Seems promising, too. A picture of an Iraqi woman beside the title: "Off Target: The conduct of the war and civilian casualties in Iraq". Then the list of articles includes demanding a fair trial for Saddam; that civilian deaths were preventable; the creation of the war crimes tribunal is not being done properly; and Q & A on Iraq. This last one starts with what should be sufficient to dismiss it:

Question: What are the basic principles of international humanitarian law underlying military occupation?
HRW: International humanitarian law provides that once an occupying power has assumed authority over a territory, it is obliged to restore and maintain, as far as possible, public order and safety.

No, what International Law provides is not a human rights veneer for complaining about the insufficiencies in the American-appointed police force, that is to twist the precedents of WWII on their head. The implication, again this is the key area that HRW tap dances within, is that there was a legitimacy to the establishment of the Occupation itself, much like the administered regions of a defeated Germany in 1945. However, Germany had launched an all-out aggressive war, had invaded multiple countries, and had never

even contemplated a surrender until the state built by the Nazis was vanquished. Today, rather than Saddam's Iraq, those who are guilty of aggressive war, war crimes, illegal occupations et al are members of "the coalition of the willing". A human rights argument based on an honest interpretation of human rights law must simply call for the dismissal of the Occupation period, as a violation of the most elementary human rights: self-determination and popular sovereignty, and peace.

There is no international law that upholds the American presence or the legitimacy of it for anyone. For that, Human Rights Watch is needed. Again, what is not said is the real issue: Fair trial for Saddam Hussein? Okay. Arrest Bush and Blair as well. The law is very clear and could indict any coalition member without even trying. You don't need a law degree nor special rulings: just the face of it ought to be clear. By not raising this even peripherally, it is assumed this is 'ridiculous' or ideological. It reinforces, excuse the academic banter, the imperialist ideological paradigm. Subvert, First World liberals! Subvert! Civilian deaths were preventable? So the bombing now needs, what: a departmental review? This is like taking issue

not with the invasion of Poland or France *per se*, but rather simply the brutality of the Blitzkrieg. Such a discussion would make the entire article appear like not condemnation, but rather advice to the coalition. It establishes a seeming coziness with the brutal (and murderous) occupiers that should make any human rights analysis (or analyst) queasy.

Let me now return to the HRW document on Africa. The article on the recently held Commonwealth meetings was brutal as well. Again, it is what is not said that really needs to be flushed and fleshed out. This article was written (in Australia) for *The Australian* by Rory Mungoven, global advocacy director for Human Rights Watch in New York. It opens with this gem:

"When John Howard goes to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Abuja today, he will at least be spared having to deal with some of the Commonwealth's more embarrassing relatives."

The sheer racism of this, never mind the imperialist ideology it is shot through with, are what is truly embarrassing. Of course, those that are so nasty to HRW's Mungoven are Robert Mugabe and Pervez Musharraf. That this is addressed to how Howard—a Prime Minister who is only second to Tony Blair in supplying military help to the illegal invasion of Iraq—should intervene more in other countries is as clear a statement about where HRW sees itself in today's world. That John Howard is not called on this ongoing massive violation of human rights, international law and a crime against peace—but instead is seen as the 'upholder of human rights'—is not something that can be overlooked. The greatest war criminals of this short millennium are touted as their defenders. Orwell as human rights advocate.

The article is about the leader of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo. He has granted asylum to Charles Taylor of Liberia, and apparently ran less than squeaky clean elections in 1999. Never mind suspicions about why Nigeria and why now? Talking about oil in these discussions does get repetitive—leading a campaign into Iraq that removes popular sovereignty, kills upwards of ten thousand from bombs and guns and hundreds of thousands more through blockades and intermittent bombings for twelve years in non-sanctioned 'no fly zones', denying medicines, and ultimately taking control of the oil of the people in order to suit the needs of Empire: What does a human rights advocate do about all of this? We must express our deep felt hope that these white men from colonial states will uphold 'international humanitarian law'.

Today, anywhere in the world, when a group like HRW starts talking about 'human rights', it is important to try one little trick. It will get you through 95% of those articles with a better understanding then if it is taken without deep, deep cynicism. Try substituting 'property rights' for human rights. Then it becomes easy to see why Blair is 'democratic' and Robert Mugabe, Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro are lumped together, no matter how different they might be from one another. The same, of course, was true of Slobodan Milosevic. And today, the government of Yugoslavia has just started (in full imperialist occupation) to lift what amounted to martial law after Zoran Djindjic—the expert pro-West anti-communist privatizer appointed prime minister—was assassinated. Where is the screaming and howling from HRW about that? Only a few months ago, the Libyan revolutionary leadership



announced that it was abandoning the socialist aspects of their revolution. Lo and behold, Qaddafi then is 'coming in from the cold' only months later. Weapons of mass destruction? How about diversions of mass deception.

Look to see either AI or HRW to put forward Moammar Qaddafi for this years Nobel Peace Prize. You get commended by imperialism for surrendering to imperialism. That is why Yasir Arafat was given the Nobel Peace prize for his work in establishing the Oslo settlement process (pun intended). When he was only willing to go 95% over to the side of the imperialist occupation, he was re-branded a terrorist. And HRW? I would need to write for several pages to list the things that go unsaid when one finally tracks down anything regarding the situation in Palestine. There is nothing pointing out that the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is illegal. Yes, they will condemn the odd “incursion” but in the same discourse as they do with the American occupiers—that they can be convinced otherwise with persuasion and letter writing. When a desperate occupied Palestinian blows herself up, HRW is on the case, condemning “crimes against humanity”, the single gravest charge they can issue. HRW and AI both uphold part of the 1948 conventions: they will state that the refugees from 1948, 1967 and all other refugees and their descendants have the right (as is international law) to return to their place of birth, i.e. the right to go home. However, the only way to find this out is to search for it, the entire Palestinian conflict is kept a long way away from the front pages of the HRW website, lest it cost them the financial support of certain members. Further on Palestine: the wholesale theft of water is not mentioned; the assassination of 'militants' is never mentioned unless it involves “collateral damage”; the entire conflict itself is not even mentioned on the front page of their 'regional' link to the Middle East, in fact. One would get the impression that they are worried about the

embarrassment that such coverage might cause: exposing their absolutely breathtaking pro-imperialism (the whole section is devoted to asking America to illegally occupy Iraq less brutally) and pro-Zionism (saying nothing means saying yes). And back to the article on Africa and the commonwealth countries. What does the venerable Rory Mungoven suggest we do about the human rights violators in the commonwealth? He starts his closing paragraph (a call for sanctions and isolation of Obasanjo) with this statement, now growing beyond irony into mere farce:

"Howard, Tony Blair and other Commonwealth leaders should speak out on these issues or risk being accused of double standards, which would undermine the effectiveness of their interventions on Zimbabwe and Pakistan, and the Commonwealth's commitment to human rights itself."

Effectiveness of their interventions? Double standards? Commitment to human rights itself? No kidding, Rory! Need I spell this out?

Imperialism has had growing trouble convincing people around the world since September 11 that they are really humanitarian based imperialism. Bill Clinton, with limited success, sold such an image with his slaughter of peoples in the Balkans. George Soros, billionaire philanthropist and top financier of HRW, helped engineer the coup that recolonized Yugoslavia once and for all in October 2000. Since, the image of America the human rights crusader has been reduced dramatically. That reputation has been tattered almost out of reach with the swagger and trigger happy unilateral regime in Washington DC led by Cheney and Bush. Imperialism needs to have a veneer of pro-human rights language, a humanitarian concern for the everyman (and woman, especially in the Middle East). That ideological control over the minds of the oppressed, as Steven Biko said, is the greatest weapon in the hand of the oppressor. After 9-11, the humanitarian impulse was harder



and harder to sell, but thank goodness groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch will work overtime to rescue their image, encourage people to believe in the legitimacy of their war criminals in charge.

One might be tempted to say that without human rights discourse, the world at large would be forced to discuss the benefits and merits of militarism, racism and imperialism instead. HRW is absolutely essential in helping the modern Empire in protecting itself ideologically. Or, to use the language of pro-sports: they are not only on the team, HRW and AI are among the most valuable players game in and game out. They give it their all, and it's all the little things they do that can't be measured, but make them among imperialisms most valued assets.

Should we continue to rely on their pronouncements regarding various conflicts? Certainly, just as one should do the same with the *New York Times*. However, one would be foolish to suppose the *New York Times* is “neutral” or is telling the whole story. It is quite clear where they are coming from on these matters. Let us not be fooled by the language of Rudyard Kipling, George Soros and Human Rights Watch, either. They are merely more players on the same team, even if they are sent into the game only to “mop up” when the other players make a mess they can't clean up themselves.

The Case of Argentina: Recuperated Factories and the Multitude

Derek Merrill

"Que se vayan todos!" [They all must go!]

Yelled by over a million Argentineans, calling for the elimination of politicians in office during the 2001 economic collapse.

"Work that is liberated is liberation from work."

Toni Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*

When in the midst of Argentina's economic crisis the workers at Brukman, a garment factory, were locked out and barred from entering work, they found themselves subject to the global phenomenon of obsolescence.¹ What action can people take when their profession, neighborhood, or city become defined as obsolete overnight? How can they attempt to under stand the processes that easily produce them as useless when the forces of production have become nearly invisible? Day after day, peoples' labor skills and social positions change for the worse by constantly renewed conditions of production in the global economy. So, how do the socially obsolete possibly change their situation if they are always within the forces that define them as useless?

As a way to begin answering these challenges that some of us have faced and all of us potentially face, we can look to the specific case of Argentina. In December of 2001, with its economy sinking from its water mark high, a neo-liberal tidal wave crashed over the country, sweeping out to the depths of the ocean economic stability and radically changing the social landscape of the country. In the aftermath, as when the ocean tide lowers and exposes plants and creatures not visible during high-tide, so too did the disaster of Argentina reveal the resourcefulness and inventiveness of those most directly affected. The most interesting and dynamic responses to this crisis have come from wage laborers, people who have worked on the assembly line, or have occupied the lower rungs in the hierarchy of business. They have directly responded to their situation by occupying and eventually recuperating their places of work for themselves. This is no easy task as each place of work posed its own unique set of legal and bureaucratic problems, therefore eliminating any chance for workers to set an exact model for others to follow. The effect the workers have had in Argentina, and the attention they have generated throughout the world, have some people saying that this is not mere survival on the part of the workers, but a revolution.

Are the workers harnessing the winds of the economy, taking it for a ride? Or are they fighting a terrible storm, using all they can to protect themselves from its destruction? Aside from using (badly) strained and clichéd nature metaphors, not unlike the ones economists use, I want to discuss the economic collapse of Argentina, the response from the workers to this event, and finally, I want to briefly contextualize this in the larger discussion and theorization of the multitude, as discussed by Antonio Negri² as a way to think about connections to other struggles against the processes that make people useless, present or future. By referring to the multitude, I identify

possible strategies of refusal and of production through the models Argentina has offered us to think about capitalism, social organization, and the recuperation of space.

Argentina

The poster child of neo-liberalism, Argentina's economy soared during the 1990s. Equating the peso to the dollar, privatizing public resources while cutting social services, businesses profited mightily. But this period of economic prosperity started to become unstable by the closing of the '90s. Finally, in December 2001, the economy imploded, sparking "a mass uprising that brought literally millions of enraged Argentines into the streets against their government ... In the first ten days of this popular insurrection, no less than four presidents were installed and overthrown."³ In the aftermath, Argentina owed the IMF over 141 billion dollars, which it defaulted on, and the peso lost 78% of its value.⁴ At a certain point, the peso/dollar ratio was 4:1, now it hovers somewhere near 3:1.

Already before December 2001, there were signs the economy was dissolving and employees were the first to feel its dissolution. In certain industries, the relationship between workers and their bosses were strained due to dwindling pay checks and inconsistent periods of pay. A typical example: workers at Grissinopoli, a breadstick factory, had to endure a wage decline for almost a year. Their "weekly salary declined from 150 pesos to 100, then 40, which was then equivalent to 18 dollars. Finally, as the company was going towards bankruptcy, the workers demanded recompense. The managers offered \$4.50 and told them to leave."⁵

If a company went out of business, workers had to consider the arid economy, which left about 1 in 5 adults out of work⁶; that's "34% of the employable work force unemployed."⁷ The closure of businesses meant that the owners, in some instances, fled the country with cash, leaving the company owing money for gas, electricity, rent, and to companies who supply the raw materials for production. Around 70 billion U.S. dollars fled the country in the months surrounding the peak of the crisis.

To get a sense of the amount of loss in Argentina, and how value basically fled the country, the percentage of growth and productivity dropped from -4 in 2001, to -10.9 in 2002. When compared to the average of consumer prices, which jumped from -1.1 to 25.9, one can measure the magnitude of the impossibility of living. Jobs dropping while prices rising.⁸

Faced with debt and no viable alternatives from the outside, workers at Grissinopoli decided to stay and occupy the factory, rather than leave as the bosses demanded. While this appears to be an easy decision, its consequences were psychologically and physically demanding. For not only at Grissinopoli, but other places as well, occupying a factory meant exposure to the threat of police violence, which was not uncommon. Plus, occupying a factory did not guarantee recuperation. Workers at IMPA, a metal factory, occupied the plant for



months before they could begin production. Before making bread sticks, the people in Grissinopoli took shifts guarding the factory 24 hours a day, surviving on the spare change they collected from students at the public university and by selling food.⁹

The only option for many workers was to remake their situation by occupying abandoned factories. This spread into other areas not commonly associated with each other, affecting people who were socio-economically different. Places as distinct as a shipyard and a school, print shops and medical clinics, a hotel and a bread factory, a metal shop and clothing factory, were—to name but a few—recuperated areas of work. From the recuperation movement, the cooperatives have salvaged around 10,000 jobs. And while the recuperation of factories has created jobs without bosses, taking a closer look at the tasks one must perform complicates reducing this to a victory for the workers.

If the appropriation of private property by the workers threatens the very existence of capitalists, perhaps the emerging work ethic and formation of a new workers' consciousness appears horrifying to certain people on the left. Workers' statements, and the way they've been discussed in articles, eerily echo the work ethic and demands of a business owner or manager. The workers in one factory emphasized the need to be more careful when making their product because any ruined piece of cloth would come out of everyone else's pocket, not the bosses. Without bosses, work requires the need for mindful practices at work, reminding us of the banner in the film Office Space that asks employees: "Is this good for the company?" Workers at Ghelco rely solely on themselves to continue to live since they have no one to support them if they lose business. Says Norbert Monzon, president of the worker's cooperative at Ghelco, "Right at the beginning there was no one there for the average Argentine on the street. We're doing what we've always done, what we know we can do as well as anyone. And now we're doing it knowing that if we don't, there won't be a job, there won't be a paycheck." Showing that workers were always crucial to the value of a product, Jorge Lujan Gutierrez admits, "It was difficult to get started because even though the company (Chilavert, a print shop) had a reputation, people did not believe that we workers were capable of managing things. We had to show that the high level of quality was still intact and that the only thing missing was a few executives in the front office."¹⁰ As such concerns from consumers might suggest—concerns over maintaining high standards in the eyes of the old capitalist regime—the changes workers have had to make since recuper-

ating the factories casts them as students of scientific management or advanced marketing rather than budding revolutionaries. The drive to survive appears to translate to embracing capital. In fact, from the perspective that workers must also possess the skills and knowledge of an owner, recuperating a factory could really be seen as a crash-course lesson in starting one’s own business.

In other instances, workers must adapt to the multiple demands placed on them. For an owner who downsizes a company while expecting workers to multitask and produce the same amount of work, Argentina is a wet dream. The workers at Ghelco acknowledge that life since the recuperation "has not been easy. Many are putting in 12-hour days as they juggle new managerial or administrative duties with their former production posts." Says one worker who labels containers and cleans the bathrooms when not greeting customers and clients as a receptionist: "The freedom of not having a boss is great, but we have a moral obligation to each other to work hard."¹¹

Sacrifice seems to be part and parcel of a recuperation. At Ghelco, by first working for little or no money, the cooperative's workers were able to boost production to 24 hours a day, six days a week. As a rule, everyone earns the same pay. Among others, Ghelco’s success story encourages people to place a new emphasis on the worker as someone who is suddenly capable of participating in his/her future while simultaneously disproving the notion that capitalists are needed to organize production. Any celebration of this sorts, however, asks for reconsideration since we can easily shift the workers identity to that of an entrepreneur, one who works long hours as anyone in a start up company would. While working longer hours and increasing profit, the workers at Ghelco are less delusional, unlike entrepreneurs with visions of being the next Bill Gates or making millions on an invention like the Pet Rock.

Not earning millions, the workers are still able to mystify people who wonder out loud how workers can remake a business when "shrewd industrialists with an open credit line ran these companies into bankruptcy."¹² The questioning goes beyond simple business acumen and reveals rather the inability to imagine change, especially coming from below. And perhaps this is what scares capitalists and encourages the left. The worker, after having his/her opinion disregarded, all of sudden has a say in the company. From being told not to think, to having to learn how to run a business and make decisions on how to do it, the workers enter a transformation in his/her relation to production. No bosses means for workers no formal hierarchy, only direct control over their working environment and production of life. Successfully transformed places of work do not happen by the will of the workers or through the leadership of the individual; it’s the collective will of the social. During the struggle to recuperate Brukman, a textile factory, the workers were joined by other recuperated factories, neighborhood assemblies, student organizations, and left-wing political parties who aided and supported their struggle. We see then the beginning of thinking about forms of the multitude, as Negri states: "Cooperation itself is part of that creativity of singular labour. It is no longer something that is imposed from outside. ... Singularities of and in the multitude have assumed cooperation as quality of their labour. Cooperation—and the common—as activity is anterior to capitalist accumulation."¹³ Considering the social relationships formed among disparate groups introduces the possibility of political organization beyond the limits imposed by capital. It is through the work of organizing, not work itself, that the case of Argentina becomes dangerous to capitalism since it initiates a possible transformation of subjectivities.

Transformation—multitude

Certainly the recuperation of factories is not necessarily overturning capital. In fact it is very much complicit with it. However, we must also recognize the necessity for these people to make money to live. In most cases the drive to recuper-

ate factories was the expression of the desire to work. As one worker stated her reason for occupying the factory: "we just wanted to keep coming to work."¹⁴ This decision to continue working does not free the worker from the toils of labor or the demands of capital. Yet there is a significant difference in this attitude when we compare it to similar kinds of businesses in the United States. If we think of cooperatively owned businesses in the United States, they seem to exist from an option of several business models. And places such as organic grocery stores or outdoor equipment warehouses, at times, are not only downright expensive, and play really bad classic rock, but project a particular lifestyle reminiscent of the grooviness of the ’60s. When looking at Argentina, the workers most likely did not have this in mind. "Just wanting to work," conveys a desire to produce life, not to acquire a life-style.

In addition to not overthrowing capitalism, the recuperation of factories isn’t a refusal of work as when, for instance, workers deliberately sabotage their equipment or reduce the level of production. Neither is it a celebration of work, or of confirming or celebrating a worker’s identity as central to the struggle for economic equality and better life. The recuperations are positive acts that have the power to disrupt. The desires implicit in the drive to recuperate express a common need. Thus to communicate the workers practices and struggles beyond local experiences and translate them to the level of the global, they must be framed using different terms and conceptual models. If the case of Argentina teaches the world anything, it suggests that we must think beyond the confines of a subjectivity already produced and ensconced by capital, or the State. Protesting against, for example, the IMF as a concerned computer programmer from California, or resisting the policies of the Homeland Security as a member of the Ayn Rand Society, merely reproduces the logic of capital, strengthening it, reforming it. These are the same people who use their Union to bargain in favor of playing the radio during work so they can endure the day. With the radio on, any work schedule seems possible, and life is tolerable. Against this, the multitude is a positive force from which to disrupt predictable structures of resistance.

The recuperations are a dynamic form of organization, an "organization" of singularities, wherein singularities are produced by subjectivities who want to live and who engage with a "cooperation that is beyond measure." The multitude, a coalescence of a singularity, frees us from thinking of revolution, of making change through work by the worker, or through a specific concern expressed through a group, like the Sierra Club. In this sense, multitudes are not predetermined subjects produced or apprehended by capital. They emerge as being endlessly creative in their social and political relation to the global. Importantly, Negri’s notion of the multitude insists that the "the multitude is a social agent, a multiplicity that acts. Unlike the people, the multitude is not a unity, but as opposed to the masses and the plebs, we can see it as something organized."¹⁵ This organization is unlike traditional forms seen from social or political movements. The activity of organization emerges from participating in something lived rather than planned: "the unemployed, the one who was fired from the factory, or even worse, the one who remains excluded and has never yet entered the factory or the productive society, all of these are equally part, they all participate, in the multitude. They participate in the social activity. It is social activity in which one that creates value. It’s not the participation in the labor commanded by capital."¹⁶ The value created by the multitude moves beyond exchange value, or the value of the worker in relation to labor, and strives toward making and ensuring the production of social activity not based on the demands of the market.

For work, and as seen in the recuperated factories, this suggests new forms of labor that do not interpolate the worker . And perhaps what is subversive about the case of Argentina is not the workers taking over factories, but workers disappearing as we know them, resisting representation

and initiating forms of counterpower. The reified subject dissolves, and instead emerges as a political subject who struggles to live.

To bring this back into the multitude of Argentina, we can consider the words of Osvaldo Perez, a machinist and president of the co-operative Metal Varela aluminium factory: "Some people are saying that we're not capitalists, but we're still working within capitalism. The truth is, what we most want is to be well off, to live well."¹⁷ Perhaps the multitude shouts this, confirms itself in the positive drive to create meaningful forms of life. "Que se vayan todos!" is not just a cry for the elimination of politicians, but of hierarchical forms of production and social organization. Since 2001, this cry echoes throughout the multitude, signalling the fading into memory of a traditional worker and initiating an emerging subjectivity in transition that knows, "work which is liberated is liberation from work."

Notes

- For more information about Argentina's financial and political crisis, and labor and social movements, see Znet's extensive collection of articles, available at: <http://www.zmag.org/ZNET.htm>

Also, see Estaban Magnani’s *El Cambio Silencioso: Empresas y F-bricas Recuperadas por los Trabajadores en la Argentina*. Published by Prometeo in Argentina.
- In addition to Negri’s own work, see his collaborative works with Michael Hardt on the multitude, *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004).
- Jim Straub, "Argentina’s Piqueteros and Us" www.TomDispatch.com, 2004.
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- Lindsay, "Job Action".
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- Lindsay "Job Action".
- Lindsay "Job Action".
- Toni Negri and Paolo Virno, " Public Sphere, labour, multitude. Strategies of resistance in Empire." Seminar organised by Officine Precarie in Pisa. Coordinator: Marco Bascetta. [5th February 2003].) Transcription & translation by Arianna Bove. Emphasis in original.
- Lindsay "Job Action".
- Antonio Negri, "Approximations: Towards an Ontological Definition of the Multitude." Translated by Arianna Bove.
- Lecture delivered by Antonio Negri at Grissinopoli, 27 October 2003. The following transcribed lecture was forwarded by Dr. Marcelo Matellanes, professor at the University of Buenos Aires. It was translated from the Italian into Castellano by two anonymous members of the audience. It was translated from Castellano into English by Guillermina Seri.
- Lindsay, "Job Action".

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Next on the Left, or: ‘What good is a map if you know the way?’

Tim Stott

For the French curator, critic and art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud geography/cartography is now the most appropriate means of exploring the networks, boundaries and socio-economic formations that constitute and circumscribe human relations¹. The complexities of the contemporary world—of financial markets, information networks, social relations, etc.—are ‘unfigurable’ and opaque, and thus no longer representable²; but they can be surveyed and mapped. Accordingly, contemporary art can be described as an ‘offshore zone’ that attempts both to maintain a distance from, and venture into social realities by shifting the scale of its attention: its critical ‘eye’ is not panoramic, but *varifocal*. Representations no longer correspond to reality as it is lived, nor can they be superimposed upon it: hence, cartography becomes a spatial *activity*—to be *lived through*. In short, it is no longer a matter of describing a *surface* (such as the surface of the globe), but of reconstructing a *scene*.

Because of the ‘connectionist ideology’ and ‘reticular imagination’ that govern contemporary life, and the tendency towards near-instantaneous communications and ever more rapid transportations, accessibility and making connections now has more to do with *virtual* than *spatial* proximity³. Where social relations and encounters have become obscured by their ‘spectacular’ representation, they can be given form and developed through the ‘topocritical’ artwork, which serves as a framework within which to enact models of living.

Topocritical art aims to “encourage a ‘democracy of viewpoints’, a polyculture of the imagination [in opposition to] the monoculture of information”⁴. To do this, it must make ‘archaeological excavations inside the knowledge, objects and spaces that determine our reality’⁵ because within the present administered society there remain *terrae incognitae* of living, human spaces that stand against the statistical transformation of the mass in mercantile civilisation. When investigated and reconstructed in the relational artwork, the products of this research are ‘re-humanised’, so to speak.

In order to test Bourriaud’s claims, we must make a brief excursion into the history of Western European cartographic practice. So, I shall begin with a seemingly unrelated question: Why would the highest mountain in the world be named after one man, whose origins lay thousands of miles away, and who had never in his life set eyes upon the ‘great snowy mass’ of Mt Everest? To answer this question fully would require an extensive study of the activities of the British Trigonometrical Survey in the Indian subcontinent⁶. As such historical research is beyond the scope and intention of this essay, I mean to answer the question obliquely, through a consideration of cartography as an instrument of knowledge-as-power, and as an extension of the panoptic, acquisitive eye/I, or a prosthesis to the ‘body of law’.

Cartography and/as power

Broadly speaking, a map is used to clarify the topographical and geographical complexities of a particular area in order to assist navigation across or within it. In this sense, both the map as a depiction and the cartographic activity that supports it are dynamically linked to the designs (in both senses of the word) and purposes of those who make them. Infused with socio-economic and cultural values, maps play a discursive and rhetorical role; they are “a class of rhetorical images and are

bound by rules which govern their codes and modes of social production, exchange, and use just as surely as any other discursive form”⁷.

Cartography then is intimately linked to practices of acquiring geographical and topographical knowledge, but it also reflects that accumulated knowledge back upon the object of its study, and enables those who have access to such knowledge to employ it strategically and to affect this geography according to their own interests. The aptitude for cartography to do this might be better understood when knowledge is analysed in terms of spatial metaphor. A spatial/strategic analysis “enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power”⁸. As a ‘territory’, knowledge inscribes itself upon the surface of the earth through the patterns and systems that cross and sustain it; as discourse it is administered and politicised. In both it is strategic and combative.

If knowledge-as-power has a spatial dimension then it can clearly be seen that the surveyor of the landscape does not merely replicate an environment but, in doing so, reproduces the territorial dictates of particular political interests: surveying would be an act of ‘surveillance’⁹, somewhat disguised by the *doxa* that treats accurate measurement as an end in itself¹⁰. Thus, to map a geographical area is to assert sovereignty over it (to claim to *represent* it, pictorially and politically), and to divide the space ‘contained’ therein “in terms of territorial control and political authority”¹¹, so that the map speaks a rhetoric which asserts and communicates proprietorial and territorial rights.

The primary spatial form of power is *territoriality*¹². However, the places, areas, and regions identified by mapping are not territories *per se*, but become so only when the boundaries and divisions that they describe become authoritative, and are used to influence or control the movements in that area, and across its borders. Boundaries, and the maps that articulate and ‘authenticate’ them, communicate possession, and the control of either already extant boundaries or the means of putting them in place confers a certain control of access to the area that the boundary circumscribes. Territoriality is a relationship (across what is controlled by being contained, and between that and what is thereby excluded), and therefore it is not absolute but differential, occurring as part of a complex hierarchical organisation: moreover, because it is relational and not directly spatial, it can have influence over and through space, and in this way it is a form of action over distance. The map, as a representation of territoriality, enables this distribution of influence; it is something of a ‘prosthetic eye’.

When power is inscribed upon the land it becomes reified, and it makes the relationships of power and influence tangible by making them visible. But when power is made visible in such a way, it also becomes ‘natural’. A ‘body of law’ may be taken for granted when its pattern is displaced from the relationship of control to the territory that carries it; when it becomes, quite literally, ‘the law of the land’.

The interests of capital continue to benefit from the obfuscatory and classificational aspects of territoriality. Capital needs to see space as a framework “in which events are contingently and temporally located”¹³; and because capital requires constant accumulation and growth, relations between spaces and things must remain fluid. The strategies of territoriality enable spaces to be defined and designated ‘vacant’ in such a

way that they become available to capital (the phenomenon of ‘squatting’ illustrates this point clearly). Unwittingly or not, cartographic practices support a discourse of power, ideology and surveillance, and they act as instruments of *territorialisation*: “They create a knowledge space within which certain kinds of understandings and of knowing subjects, material objects and their relations in space and time are authorised and legitimated”¹⁴.

An eye that surveys and maps the landscape consists of many eyes that work as one: this eye is supposedly neutral and without desire—disincarnated and ascendant. It can be traced back to St Augustine’s denunciation of the vicissitudes of *concupiscentia ocularum*¹⁵, yet which turns its ‘invisible eyes’¹⁶, not to God, but is held instead by the ‘divine light’ of scientific rationality. We now begin to see how appropriate it is that the imperial heights of the ‘great snowy mass’ should be synonymous with the elevated eye/I that once attempted, in the name of science, technology and progress, to survey, and hence *colonise*, all of India from atop the ‘apex’ of its practice of measurement, triangulation.

The ‘walker’ and the ‘voyeur’

The ‘panoptic’ eye of cartography in the service of empire is de-personalised, a detached vision in the service of a mobile, surveying consciousness. It is the eye of Icarus, or the ‘voyeur-god’:

His elevation transforms him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was “possessed” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and Gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more¹⁷.

Laid out below, the world becomes a readable picture, a ‘human text’—a fiction only available *in theory*. The ‘voyeur-god’—the “space planner, urbanist, city planner or cartographer”¹⁸—can know, in the rarefied air of his/her alienation, only a world devoid of breath. Unsituated and displaced, the omniscient view of the voyeur is seen from nowhere: its ‘space’ is impossible to occupy, being that of a timeless present—it is ‘utopic’¹⁹. Its putative description of a space supposes all to be visually present before the eye/I, and thus comprehensible, but in order to make this description it must construct an abstract and homogeneous space, free of contradiction, division and radical difference. But such a ‘description’ cannot be ideologically neutral; the objects that it presupposes to be available to description (such as the demarcation of urban ‘territories’) are hypostatized and isolated from their histories, or perhaps given more ‘appropriate’ ones.

As an instance of the ‘microphysics of power’, the imposition of rational order upon space is “the minuscule and ubiquitously reproduced move of ‘gridding’ (*quadriller*) a visible space in such a way as to make its occupants available for observation and ‘information’.”²⁰ However, society does not only function according to its dominant types of procedures (those that have become discourse)²¹; there are other practices that remain minor. Beneath the “monotheistic” dominance of “panoptic apparatuses” (Foucault) there survives a “polytheism” of divergent and fragmented practices²²; and it is through these ‘minor’ practices that power functions, and is contested. If, as Foucault claims, the determining apparatuses of society are obscure, then when one practice begins to dominate others it will become prominently visible,

and it's previously 'silent' functioning will be diminished. This visibility compromises the efficacy of the now dominant practice, and allows it to become 'vampirised' by other practices: in short, as a practice becomes more dominant, it becomes more *vulnerable*²³. This shows that the dominance of one practice can never be total, just as the patterns of consumption that capital develops in order to reproduce itself can never be exhaustive or final. 'Between the lines' of power, other, underprivileged patterns might be operational in society as 'tactical' (rather than 'strategic') practices of consumption²⁴. This is where Michel de Certeau talks of the 'walker', in contrast to the 'voyeur'. The 'walker' knows space bodily, not visually, and moves through the city by following and inscribing a 'text' of which he/she is not the author, and which he/she cannot read. The strangeness (the *terrae incognitae*) of the everyday eludes representation: it disrupts and obscures the clear, ascetic sight of the 'voyeur'.

This being said, the space of the 'walker' does not escape the exercise of power within it: in its actions, the 'walker' is a subject of (state) power and ideology. This is best explained by a brief examination of the Baroque character of the 'walker's' space. Visual culture of the Baroque period is very much at odds with the hegemonic abstract space of the 'voyeur-god'²⁵. The Baroque had a fascination with opacity, ambiguity, indecipherability and the (melancholy) desire to represent the unrepresentable. It refused an ascendant, panoramic vision, and accommodated itself instead to the distorting and overwhelming excess of appearances found in the burgeoning urban environment: a "madness of vision"²⁶, if you like.

In seventeenth century Spain, the Baroque was a time when a multiplicity of individual viewpoints were being asserted, giving rise to social instability. This constituted a threat to the hegemonic aspirations of the then absolutist monarchy, but rather than respond with violent repression of disruptive social forces, the monarchist state established a 'culture of guidance'. This was a reactionary culture that sought to 'correct' the erosion of extant social hierarchies by mediating and directing the agency of the masses²⁷.

'Guidance' was most effective where the state's propaganda had the largest audience. In seventeenth century Spain, this was the theatre. As a theatre audience, the agency of the mass would be guided through the narrative of the play by the interrelated mechanisms of 'suspense' and 'wonder'. Significantly, the 'wonder' felt at the end of the play when the plot reveals itself establishes a retrospective narrative causality. This is also the moment when the audience, having been lost, or 'suspended' in the plot, finds itself anew. In effect, a speciously 'changed' subject is introduced to a pre-configured social space. The interest for the state in this *performance* of change and development that does not actually affect the underlying structure hardly needs reiterating. State-organised performances offered catharsis for the "moment of unease"²⁸ inherent to the daily urban experience of the masses, which might otherwise spill over into acts of sedition.

If the Baroque can be characterised as a time when St Augustine's *concupiscentia ocularum* held sway, then we might say that the 'ecstatic' and volatile body of the masses was seduced and placated by the *corpus iuris* (the 'body of law') when it recognised itself within a preconfigured narrative. Most importantly, this guidance is not simply imposed 'from outside' on subjects that are 'already there', so to speak. Inasmuch as the state mediates the agency of the subject, it also predisposes that subject towards a particular course of action *before* it can be thought of as the effect of a subject, so that every action on the part of a subject is always-already a reaction to the state. We cannot conceive of one without the other²⁹. The significance of this bind between subject and state will become clear in the discussion of Pierre Joseph's map-making below, but for now, suffice to say there are critical deficiencies at both extensions of the topocritical cartographers 'varifocal' length (those of the 'voyeur' and 'walker').

Mapping narratives / walking in

the city

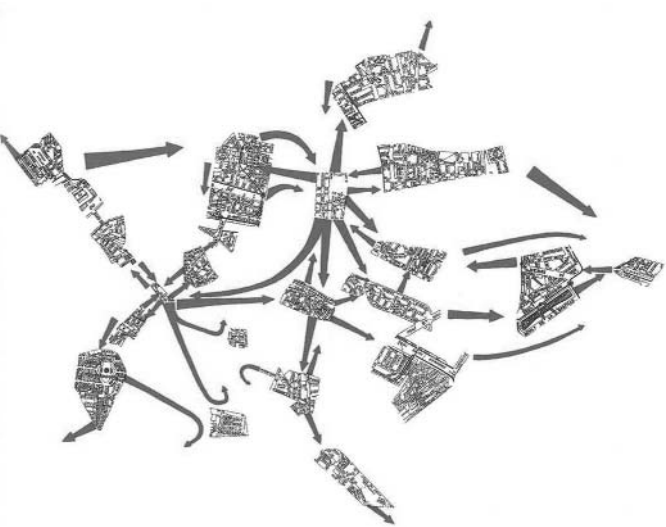
The 'walker' traces a *trajectory* rather than plots a point or connects graticular coordinates. The French artist Pierre Joseph's 'memory maps' of Japan and the Paris *métro* trace an accumulation of *trajectories* through time, which are remembered in the practice of map-making. For Joseph, maps are the "the world lost and the world found"³⁰, a way of 'realising' the world and forming a plan (in both senses of the word). His journeys compare to the 'spiritual itineraries' of Matthew Paris, which allow "*human interpretation to enter into the cartographic text*"—"exegetical maps [that] *treat nature negatively as a space of discontinuity between sites of civilisation*"³¹. In these, the natural world becomes a 'non-space', open to human imagination. Matthew Paris' maps might be better described as *historia* rather than 'geographies': they are not maps to be followed literally, but, in common with contemporary *mappaemundi* of the thirteenth century, they are an aid to "self-distancing from the world in preparation for the contemplative ascent"³² and ultimately to the contemplation of the spiritual unity to be found in God's plan, beyond the vicissitudes of history and geography. These 'itineraries' engage the viewer's interpretative faculties in a way that the naturalised framework of instrumental rationality (gridding, plotting points, marking definite boundaries, etc) never can: they are discursive and open to historical exegesis. Interpretation enters by way of the 'empty sign' of the parallel lines that connect the 'sites of civilisation', showing the natural world beyond as unread and unwritten—a 'non-space', or gap—known in total only by God, and knowable in part only by the spiritually enlightened traveller of the imagination. Being wholly dependent upon the contingencies of viewing and reading, these 'itineraries' "literally reverse modern habits of map reading: instead of moving from the map to an objective world, we move from the map to a deeper textuality"³³. The natural world is personalised, established through reading, interpretation, and presumably dialogue as to its nature and extension. Similarly, Joseph's maps personalise the environment of the 'traveller' through the function of subjective interpretation, whilst recognising the necessary deficiencies of such an account. Knowledge of this totality 'beyond' is accessible only to one who is omnipotent and to whose (master) plan the 'walker' must remain subordinate: in Paris's case this is, of course, God; in Joseph's it seems to be capital.

For Joseph, maps make the world familiar again, allowing one to chart a 'possible itinerary'. They correspond to the reality of one's surroundings in such an assuring way that it is enough just to have a map in one's pocket and not consult it. To follow a map is to place oneself under a benign authority; to follow a strategy dictated by a world already "thought out by others", that then allows for play within it:

In a way, you place yourself under a guardianship and you start with the principle that the world has already been thought out by others and that you can play around with that capital.³⁴

In creating his own maps, constructed without prior consultation of other maps of the area, Joseph claims to re-place his own 'murky' experience of an area in the structure of the conventional cartographic plan: to produce a perfect 'replication' of the area would be to make himself 'invisible'—his personalised versions aim to show his *resistance* within an urban milieu. To do this he must make the imaginative leap of thinking the world no longer there, that there is a world to be retraced—"[the] posture of a fake pioneer"—eventually rediscovering himself in the singular experience of personal map-making.

Whilst this practice might be welcomed in response to the 'neutral' and reified 'descriptions' of cartographic survey, asserting instead the contingencies and vicissitudes of personal urban experience, and the *activity* of mapping that considers space not in absolute but in relational terms, still, it naturalises the political and ideological forces that bear upon this experience. Following the notion of 'cultural guidance' mentioned above, we can see how rediscovering one-



self thus—recognising oneself in 'a world thought out by others'—might be to re-introduce oneself as subject, according to the retrospectively causal narrative that preconfigures social space.

Inasmuch as the subject imagines itself autonomous, and the sum of his/her experiences as irreducible to the discourse of ideology, "this imaginary distance towards ideological identification is the very sign of its success"³⁵. In short, although Joseph returns a necessary, *active* subjectivity to cartographic practices, he neither adequately investigates the complexity of contexts and goals that constitute this subjectivity, nor draws out the specific politics of that constitution.

Undoubtedly, there is a need for a 'cognitive mapping' (such as Joseph makes) to represent the urban networks of 'late capitalism'³⁶—those spaces of immediacy, perceptual saturation and discontinuity—so as to forestall the alienation of the urban citizen from their environment. The identity of the subject is, in part, determined by its position in space and its relation to other 'bodies': there is a "cartographic consciousness"³⁷ that defies easy representation, and therefore demands a broadened stock of representative means. The significance of research into cognitive mapping—how the subject visualises their environment in map-like form so as to be able to orient his/herself—is to be found in the relation between these visualisations and behaviour, and to what extent this behaviour distorts, or is distorted by, the substantial environment³⁸. In particular, this cognitive mapping *might* disclose those patterns by which a subject is addressed in its environment: disclosing either how a subject is 'guided' in its behaviour (see Maravall above), or conversely, those points of convergence between subjects that might establish some form of collective visualisation. Following this train of thought, we might now look at the Situationist maps that Guy Debord based upon the tactic of the *dérive*, to which Joseph's work has some affinity.

Debord's *The Naked City* (1957), as a 'map' of the *dérive*, is said to bring out those differences that are suppressed by the abstract and homogeneous 'descriptions' of the 'voyeur', by fragmenting and re-connecting the Plan de Paris. In the *dérive*, the city is experienced as a 'cluster' of events, never fully seen and always contingent³⁹: there are spaces where experiences coalesce or 'resonate', so-called 'unities of atmosphere', between which an *open* narrative is traced by red arrows marking trajectories of 'impassioned attraction'. Space is shown to be 'inhabited', not as the contextual 'container' for social relations but as a product of the performance of inhabiting, and thereby space is incorporated into social practice. As a practice of 'inhabiting' space, the *dérive* was an attempt to contest the reification of lived experience as it becomes representation, and so contest the 'society of the spectacle'⁴⁰: in other words, to re-entangle the detached eye/I in the densely opaque daily behaviours of urban experience⁴¹. It was also an attempt to transgress the (instrumentalist) territories and causal narratives inscribed upon social space, in order to reconstruct them in terms of libidinal and sensual pleasures: it was to unearth the 'sum of possibilities' for a new organisation of urban life that were hidden in the (reified) structure of the city⁴².

The function of Joseph’s works as ‘cognitive maps’ is ultimately normative—they aim to attain a ‘command’ of a particular terrain and to determine its character; but in order to obtain a coherent position for the subject and for his/her view, they must sacrifice the contingency of subject positions and relations. The *Naked City*, however, resists that “regulative ideal” (of the cognitive map) when it becomes the *site* (not the *scene*) of a ‘social geography’ that lives out the discontinuities and divisions of the urban environment: “It openly acknowledges itself as the trace of practices of inhabiting rather than as the imaginary resolution of real contradictions”⁴³. In contrast to Joseph’s habit-forming wanderings, psychogeographic cartography expresses a “*complete insubordination to habitual influences*”⁴⁴.

The *dérive* is somewhat akin to the nineteenth-century practice of *flânerie* developed by Baudelaire. The persons active in both are out of place⁴⁵, ambivalent towards the crowd that surrounds them: the former through affecting an aristocratic detachment, the latter through a suspension of class allegiance. However, the difference between them is in their attitude towards the “hegemonic scope of modernity”⁴⁶: unlike the *dériveur*, the *flâneur* makes no criticism of the gendered and class-based “gaze of modernity which is both covetous and erotic”⁴⁷. The *flâneur* maunders through the Parisian *passages* with a voyeuristic and aloof gaze, the city surrounding him as spectacle offering itself up to his discerning ‘eye’. He considers the city to be immediately present (or ‘thought out by others’) to his aestheticising gaze, rather than under continuous social construction. In addition, according to his ambivalent situation as bohemian rebel and producer of commodities, he becomes

...the observer of the marketplace. His knowledge is akin to the occult science of industrial fluctuations. He is a spy for the capitalists, on assignment in the realm of consumers.

And further:

Empathy with the commodity is fundamentally empathy with exchange value itself. The *flâneur* is the virtuoso of this empathy. He takes the concept of marketability itself for a stroll. Just as his final ambit is the department store, his last incarnation is the sandwich-man.⁴⁸

That is to say, by virtue of his bondage to them, the *flâneur* comes to embody the fluid commodity forms of the marketplace: as a producer of cultural commodities, he peddles ideological fashions—as a ‘sandwich-man’, he advertises for the state.

Considering the above, it seems that Joseph’s ‘wanderings’ are closer to those of the *flâneur* than the *dériveur*. Perhaps a closer comparison could be made with the Surrealist street adventures of André Breton et al, wherein the city becomes a succession of impressions that leave their traces across the subjectivity of the walker. To experience the city in such a way is to formulate, describe and articulate a renewed subjectivity; it is to once again ‘find one’s way’, to display oneself, in a re-familiarised environment, *à la* Joseph. As we have seen, the problem here is that to ‘find one’s way’ seems to be to configure a subjectivity by following those ‘paths’ already inscribed upon the urban landscape by those who maintain, through the authority of their accumulated capital, the (self-proclaimed) capacity to structure it. Furthermore, it might be more a case of *re-territorialising* rather than *de-territorialising* (see above): i.e. a case of re-mapping the boundaries of power according to a more fluid rationale rather than subverting the authority of those boundaries and the spaces of power they delineate.

The *dérive*, however, is a way of walking that does not allow for autobiographical representation: it is a collective activity that attempts “an impersonal objectivity of impression” by affecting the “enunciatory and ambulatory disappearance of the walker”⁴⁹. It follows desire into the labyrinth wherein it loses its way without any hope or desire to ‘find’ itself again in a description (a map) of an itinerary, or the retrospective composition of a coherent narrative. Where the Situationists attempt a *living critique that would lead to “revolutions in individual everyday life*”⁵⁰,

Joseph’s *pseudo*-tourist itineraries offer nothing but a full recuperation of the *status quo*. The construction of situations, as a prelude to the (‘artistic’) reconstruction of life, was not to be a spectacular performance, nor was it made for visual consumption or publication. To paraphrase Vincent Kaufman (see note 50 above), the real game of reconfiguring the experience of the urban environment commences once it foregoes the possibility of describing or determining its actions; i.e. once it no longer makes the attempt at “absolute valorisation and preservation of the present moment” that is (modern) art⁵¹.

In conclusion, we will return to Bourriaud’s original statements concerning the necessity of cartographic art practice. The representation of social encounters is, of course, necessary for numerous reasons, but when these representations become a substitute for encounters *per se* then something has been lost: cartography functions as an aid to knowledge of social relations, not as their replacement. In becoming ‘art’, the ‘subversive plurality’ of marginal groups, situations or experiences falls under the gaze of a contemplative subject, that reduces them to a play of ‘relational forms’⁵², and offers no *necessary* connection between these forms and social forms of exchange⁵³. Or, to put it another way: when Bourriaud describes contemporary art as a “social *interstice* ... a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system”⁵⁴, he would do well to remember that art is also the commodity-form *par excellence*.

Although it claims to re-establish intersubjective relations, ‘topocritical’ art⁵⁵ often succeeds only in reaffirming the privileged authority of the artist-subject (as can be witnessed by the exclusive cabal of artists, curators, critics, etc. that Bourriaud supports, and who sometimes seem to be the only ones having any kind of ‘relation’ to what they are doing). The very mobility and fluidity of *some* contemporary art and its practitioners (“the majority of artists today are globetrotters”⁵⁶) only further embeds art practice within the ideology and circulation of capital. As a ‘social interstice’, art is limited in its critical abilities if its only terms of reference, or its only models, are those of the capitalist economy, which it considers to be ‘second nature’. It is uncritically assumed that the privileges of ‘globetrotting’ artists, based upon the model of the mobile professional classes and correlative to the ‘gentrification’ of urban areas, are ubiquitous or universally representative: is it either a ‘connectionist ideology’ or ‘reticular imagination’ that governs contemporary life? Not necessarily. This way of life presupposes a level of *material* support that goes unacknowledged, or is assumed to be ‘friction-free’, by much allegedly critical art practice: ‘hypermobility’ is most often considered as a corollary to digital technology and telematics, and not another instance of the erosion of space by time that accords with the capitalist ideology of accumulation.

To claim that ‘accessibility has more to do with *virtual* rather than *spatial* proximity’ is to privilege “the fact of instantaneous global transmissions over the concentrations of built infrastructure that make transmission possible”⁵⁷. That is to say, this mobility is wholly imbricated in *fixed* areas of production that have a *spatial* extension—a space where the local and the global engage. It is (usually) in the space of the city that the global ‘comes down to earth’ in the local, and thus, the city emerges as a strategic site for a “place-specific politics with a global span”⁵⁸. Yet this strategic potential is obviated if the ‘non-place’ of a cartographic practice is established, as this would deny political engagement with the local in ‘street-level’ politics. Bourriaud says elsewhere that, “the model [of contemporary art] is not necessarily reduced in size but is quite capable of functioning on a scale of 1:1 [...] Reality is imposed as the sole instance of legitimisation of artistic activity”⁵⁹, but scale is not just a matter of size, it is also a matter of position and assumed distance—that distance which is a prerequisite of cartographic practice. This necessary distance of

the contemplative eye leads us back toward that position of putative neutrality and coherence, which does not allow for the contestatory nature of the represented terrain, and rehearses the various conceits of naming mountains after men.

Notes

- 1 Bourriaud, N. ‘Topocritic: contemporary art and geographic enquiry’, in exhibition catalogue for GNS, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 5th June-7th September 2003, pp.9-40
- 2 Giving some putative physical description, or copy, of a territory cannot account for the speed, fluidity and ephemerality of contemporary means of transport, communication, and media technologies; “Physical description is to geography what anatomy is to sexuality. They no longer suffice to realise the complexities of their “domains”.” (Marcadé. B. ‘GNS: Leçon de Géo au Palais de Tokyo’, *Beaux Arts Magazine* 230, July 2003, pp.68-73, p.72—author’s translation). See also, Bourriaud, ‘Topocritic ...’ pp.18-21
- 3 The ‘annihilation of space by time’ is a necessary condition for economic growth and accumulation of capital: see, Harvey, D., *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*, (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2001), Ch 12. That *virtuality* results from the logic of capital accumulation is something rarely addressed by Bourriaud, at least not explicitly or at any length, yet it would seem to compromise the critical aspects of ‘relational’, or ‘topocritical’ art, based as they are upon such a logic of temporal and mobile connections
- 4 Bourriaud, ‘Topocritic’, pp 32 and 37, respectively
- 5 Ibid, p.34
- 6 Its project—begun in 1806 and finally discontinued after the Great Rebellion of 1857—was to map a 20’ arc of the longitudinal meridian using basic trigonometry, advanced surveying equipment, and prodigiously complex mathematics, all to gain an unprecedented degree of cartographic accuracy. The ‘hero’ of this expedition was one Sir George Everest. A comprehensive historical account of this expedition is significant by its absence; the only offering being John Keay’s *The Great Arc: The Tale of how India was mapped and Everest was named*, (HarperCollins, London, 2000), which reads more like a Boy’s Own adventure than historical research
- 7 Harley, J. B., ‘Maps, Knowledge, and Power’ in *The Iconography of Landscape*, D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (eds), (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988), pp.217-312, pp. 278-9
- 8 Foucault, M., ‘Questions on Geography’ in *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-7*, edited by C. Gordon, (Brighton, 1980), pp.63-77, p.70. as Foucault notes, it is well known that the discipline of geography developed in the shadow of the military
- 9 See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, translated by A. Sheridan, (Penguin Press, London, 1977)
- 10 The accuracy of surveying techniques is not just a technical issue but is linked to political and economic changes that might alter either the use- or exchange-value of the land being surveyed: ever more detailed subdivision of land being a means of extorting maximal returns per area on investment. The emphasis placed upon accuracy as a measure of scientific veracity serves to naturalise these expansive, colonial interests of capital. See, Harvey, D., *Spaces of Capital...* esp. ‘Cartographic Identities: geographical knowledge under globalisation’, pp.208-233
- 11 Black, J., *Maps and Politics*, (Reaktion Books, London, 1997), p.12
- 12 Sack, R. D., *Human Territoriality: its theory and history*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986), p.26
- 13 Sack, ‘Human Territoriality: a theory’, in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 73, 1983, pp.55-74, p.67
- 14 Turnbull, D., “Cartography and Science in Early Modern Europe: Mapping the Construction of Knowledge Spaces”, *Imago Mundi* 48, (1996), p.7
- 15 Desirous or covetous eyes; strongly associated, by St Augustine, with sexual desire
- 16 See St. Augustine, *Confessions*, translated and with an introduction by H. Chadwick, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991), pp.209-212
- 17 Certeau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984), p.92
- 18 Ibid, p.93.

19 Marin, L., *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. R. A. Vollrath, (Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1984), p.207.

20 Certeau, *The Practice ...* pp.46-7.

21 It might be that Foucault’s focus on the power of official authority unwittingly contributes to that power by creating its supplementary ‘resistance’, and *perversion* of the authority of Law merely rearticulates it in its negative aspect.

22 See, Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, translated by B. Massumi (Minneapolis University Press, Minneapolis, 1986)

23 See, Certeau, *The Practice...* pp. 48-9

24 On the difference between ‘tactics’ and ‘strategies’; see, Certeau, *The Practice ...* III. “Making Do’: Uses and Tactics’, pp. 29-42, XII. ‘Reading as Poaching’, pp.165-176; and xix

25 I.e. Cartesian perspectivalism; but also, it poses an alternative to the quasi-cartographic description of the world’s surface in the Northern tradition: see, Alpers, S., *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983)

26 See, Buci-Glucksmann, C., *La folie du voir: de l’esthétique baroque*, (Editions Galilée, Paris, 1986)

27 See, Maravall, J. A., *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, translated by T. Cochran, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986), p.68

28 Rose, J., *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, (Verso, London, 1986), p.233

29 This is Maravall’s notion of the *resorte* : see, ‘Translator’s Introduction’ in Maravall, Culture of the Baroque, xxvii-xxviii

30 GNS, p.124

31 Gaudio, M., ‘Matthew Paris and the Cartography of the Margins’, *Gesta* XXXIX/1, 2000, pp.50-7, p.50. On the performative relation between the viewer/traveller’ and the map, see: Connolly, D. K. ‘Imagined Pilgrimage in the Itinerary Maps of Matthew Paris’, *AB* LXXXI, 1999, pp.598-622

32 Kupfer, M. “Medieval world maps: embedded images, interpretive frames”, *W&I*, X (1994), p.270

33 Gaudio, ‘Matthew Paris...” p.53

34 Joseph, P, GNS, p. 125

35 Jijek, S., *The Ticklish Subject: the absent centre of political ontology*, (Verso, London, 1999), p.259

36 Jameson, F., ‘Cognitive Mapping’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited and with an introduction by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (MacMillan Press, London, 1988), pp.347-357

37 Harvey, *Spaces of Capital*, p.221

38 See, Sack, R. D., *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought*, (MacMillan Press, London, 1980), esp. pp.95-105

39 Debord, G., ‘The Theory of the Dérive’, in *The Theory of the Dérive and other situationist writings on the city*, edited by L. Andreotti and X. Costa, published to coincide with the exhibition *Situationists, Art, Politics, Urbanism*, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 3rd November 1996 to 6th January 1997, (Actar, Barcelona, 1996), pp.22-7

40 See Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), translated by D. Nicholson-Smith, (Zone Books, New York, 1994)

41 The influence of such activities upon de Certeau’s ‘walker’ is here made clear: cf. de Certeau, *Practice...* pp.92-3

42 See, Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, *Les Lèvres Nues* # 6, 1955, in *Theory of the Dérive and other...* pp.18-21

43 McDonough, T. F. ‘Situationist Space’, *October* 67, Winter 1994, pp.59-77, p.69

44 Debord, ‘Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography’, op.cit, p.20: my italics

45 See, Benjamin, W. ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’ in *Illuminations*, edited and introduced by H. Arendt, translated by H. Zohn, (Fontana/Collins, London, 1973), pp.157-202, p.174

46 McDonough, ‘Situationist Space’, p.73

47 Pollock, G., *Vision and Difference*, (Routledge, London, 1988), p.67; quoted in McDonough, op. cit., p.74

48 Benjamin, W., *Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, (Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999) pp.427 and 448, respectively

49 Kaufmann, V., ‘Angels of Purity’, translated by J. Goodman, *October* 79, winter 1997, pp.49-68)

50 ‘The Theory of moments and construction of situations’ (unsigned), *Internationale Situationniste* # 4, June 1960, pp.10-11, reproduced in *Theory of the Dérive and other...* pp.100-1, p.101

51 ‘Editorial Notes: The Sense of Decay in Art’, *Internationale Situationniste* 3, December 1959; reproduced in *October* 79, winter 1997, pp.102-108, p.106. On the problems of the use of Situationist tactics to “spice up descriptions of otherwise politically tame art practices”, see Simon Ford’s article ‘Pseudo Situationism’, in *Art Monthly*, October 1997, pp.19-22. In light of this, the slight irony of the discussion in the present article is not lost on the author

52 See Bourriaud, N., *Relational Aesthetics*, translated by S. Pleasance and F. Woods, (Les Presses du Réel, Paris, 2002), pp.11-21

53 Cf. ibid, p.84-5

54 Ibid, p.16

55 It must be stressed that this is by no means an exhaustive analysis of ‘topocritical’ art, and much of the work being made in this area continues to be some of the most exciting in contemporary art. Nevertheless, I believe Joseph’s work serves as an adequate example, and some criticisms that I have attempted to make of his work might be equally pertinent to others.

56 Bourriaud, ‘Topocritique...’ p.32

57 Sassen, S., ‘The City: Between Topographic Representation and Spatialised Power Projects’ in *Art Journal*, vol.60 no.3, Summer 2001, pp.12-20, p.13

58 Ibid, p.19

59 Bourriaud, N., ‘Modelised Politics’ in *Flash Art* XXVI, n.171, summer 1993, p.142

On the Night Shift: From Lynndie England to Copper Green

Mike Small

Liberty for Sale, 25 August 2004

"I have just come home from work and think back over my workday. I mix with refugees from evil and tyranny from all over the world, including those who fled apartheid. I drink my coffee with Muslims and Mandarins, Pakistanis and Indians, all breathing the fresh air of freedom. You have the nerve to depict our beloved Lady, Miss Liberty as a cheap, cigarette smoking slut, dragging an Iraqi by a collar. You insult our symbol of freedom and liberation from fear and evil. You make a mockery of the Statue that has greeted millions who sought shelter from the darkness of Europe and Asia. You vilify the Smile of welcome that greeted millions of our heroes as they returned from wars that guaranteed your freedom."¹

Susie Q, American posting, Open Letter to Jonathan Shapiro, US cartoonist who depicted the Statue of Liberty in the same pose as Lynndie England

It's exactly a year to the day that Ali Ismail Abbas's family were bombed and today the report by James Schlesinger on the torture at Abu Ghraib jail is released—heading an 'independent' team appointed by Donald Rumsfeld the report admitted that 'indirect responsibility' for the conditions that led to these and other abuses go right to the top of the Pentagon's chain of command.

The report ('Final Report of the Independent Panel To Review DoD Detention Operations August 2004') states:

"The events of October through December 2003 on the night shift of Tier 1 at Abu Ghraib prison were acts of brutality and purposeless sadism. We know these abuses occurred at the hands of both military police and military intelligence personnel. The pictured abuses, unacceptable even in wartime, were not part of authorised interrogations nor were they even directed at intelligence targets. They represent deviant behaviour and a failure of military leadership and discipline."

It was the photos of Lynndie England that really woke the world, then, a few days later, slowly America woke up to what they were doing.

It was reported that Private Lynndie England, at a military hearing in Fort Bragg, North Carolina showed no alarm when confronted with pictures of her gloating over naked and cowering Iraqi prisoners.

Instead, her first reaction to news that she was under investigation for abuse was: "It was just for fun."

As military witnesses were brought forward like school children caught thieving at the shops, the banality of the torture emerged. Chief Warrant Officer Paul Arthur told the court: "They didn't think it was that serious. They were just joking around and having some fun during the night shift," later adding: "From the get-go, it was jokes and frustration."

Private England giggled nervously at the front of the court. The prosecutions case (though it's not entirely clear who's being prosecuted) is largely from photographs, with more than 280 images of abuse of detainees, and of Private England engaged in sex acts with Corporal Graner.

But there's no doubt the story is less about the personal culpability of Lynndie and the rest of the cannon-fodder Blair and Bush used in the war, than the long term legal and geo-political implications of having a rogue state on the loose. But it's worth also looking at the broader picture of how it feels working with US allies like this; what consuming coverage of this does and feels like. The backdrop to this is a supine Labour Party who's been led into this unending war by the noses, and the affect on all of us of consuming war-porn, Labour lies and military spin.

'Little Ali' Gets a Football Shirt, 15 October 2003

"...those few who were still able to tell right from wrong

went really only by their own judgments, and the did so freely; there were no rules to be abided by, under which the particular cases with which they were confronted could be subsumed. They had to decide each instance as it arose, because no rules existed for the unprecedented."²

Hannah Arendt

The feeling of real shame to be associated with Iraq started with 'Little Ali'. There's no point being self-righteous about Dubya, Lynndie England or Guantánamo Bay. This was our war too, we were the double-act dubbed the 'Coalition of the Willing' and British military intelligence officers were interrogating prisoners in the notorious Abu Ghraib jail in Iraq even as the first reports of abuses at the prison came to light.

Like it or not, this *was* in our name. Remember that as your hand marks the cross for Tony next year—whether it's fear of the revenge of Tory Middle England with the UKIP, or the Trots with their dangerous school-lunch-socialism motivating your bout of dubious self-preservation at the ballot.

It's the end of the news the night of the England-Turkey game. We needed a funny little story to cheer us up after all that serious investigative reporting that's come before. What's it to be tonight? A dog in a tree? A really big pie in Guernsey? A man who found a budgie in his pizza? No. Tonight it was 'Little Ali'.

Ali Ismail Abbas—you might remember him, we killed his mum Azhar who was seven months pregnant, his dad, his ten year old brother Abbas and thirteen other members of his family and blew his arms off.³ Then we got all doe-eyed and Princess Di-Memorial about it, so we flew him over to Britain. Like a latter day freak show he was soon doing the rounds, and got a new pair of arms courtesy of the 'big hearted readers' of the *Daily Mirror*.

We liked the wee guy. He seemed, well he seemed plucky, not having any arms and all, you know he still smiled a lot. So we gave him a bunch of surgery and tonight he was the funny story at the end of the news.

'Little Ali' became the subject of some classic pieces of the most crass journalism. In one the BBC turned the story on its head, asking 'Could Ali type with his new hands?'⁴ In a brilliant feat of journalism the story was turned from a neo-imperialist tragedy into a triumph of Western technology.

Never mind the human face of the war, or the language-lies of military jargon ('Little Ali' was a classic case of 'collateral damage'), here was a great science and technology story. The underlying message was really this: 'we may have bombed his family and maimed him but we can also rebuild him'. It's great being omnipotent.

The recurring wording in online and newspaper sources ('Little Ali' played well in the tabloids) was stuff like: "The world has been gripped by the plight of 13-year-old Ali Abbas since he lost both arms in the Iraq war."

'Lost', sort of careless then? Responsibility for action was absent.

Back to ITV. Somebody somewhere in some media office asked though, 'What's the hook?' The hook? He's a 'Man U' fan. So the England team, led by David Beckham, all signed a shirt for him. I didn't see whether it was long-sleeved or short, or whether it was adult-sized, you know maybe one of the team's (maybe even David's?) or a child-sized one, they didn't really cover that, I can't remember. Later it was widely reported he asked for a Man U tattoo on his false arm.



Watching ITV News normally makes me feel like a pervert, but tonight it made me feel that we were all becoming degraded, subjugated, contemptible.

But it wore off, and I was bored and numb again soon.

April 2004

Then in April of this year four American 'civilian security contractors' were shot and burnt in their cars in Falluja, before a cheering crowd dismembered the corpses, dragged them through the streets and hung two of them from a bridge. It's difficult to relate to death, even when your granny dies you can't really handle it. A war is unimaginable to most of us. At the time of the first exposure to Abu Ghraib a few rugged, gum chewing hacks came out with a sort of trite statement: "It's just the middle classes who'll never see a war, this is what happens..." they'd trail off knowingly. And it's true, wars are (probably) unimaginably horrible, full of desperate dishonourable acts. How would I know?

Watching the telly hasn't helped. Nor has reading the newspapers (even the grown up ones). First the double standard of *Al-Jazeera* being condemned for showing US dead on television. Then the *Daily Mirror* which published pictures of someone spraying water on someone in the back of a transit van, or was it a Luton? Then in San Francisco Benjamin Vanderford pretended to chop his own head off as part of his campaign for local office. Then Britain said it would accept convictions from prisoners who's confessions it knew were elicited by torture—an extraordinary legal departure for Britain to take, and this under a Labour Government? Robin Cook and his 'ethical foreign policy' seem a long way off now don't they—if they ever really amounted to anything? I don't know if any of those in the torture pictures we've seen come under this specifically, or whether they are relating to those from Guantanamo Bay but other countries, such as Denmark, have specifically withdraw from this deeming it to be a violation of their sovereign laws.

Then the start of the Premiership. Would Chelsea win it again? What's happening with Sol Campbell? See that Alex Rae!

Copper Green, September 2004

"If anyone still thinks that the only people who dreamt up the idea about torturing prisoners were just some privates and corporals at Abu Ghraib, this document should put that myth to rest."

Tom Malinowski, Washington, Director of Human Rights Watch.

I suppose one has to shake-off the feeling of shame and take a look at what's happened. It's predictable perhaps that the top brass are ducking the allegations of a review body appointed by Torturer in Chief Donald Rumsfeld, cheered to the rafters on his sneak visit to Iraq after Abu Ghraib first blew open.

The facts are plain and depressingly simple. After witnessing acts of physical and psychological abuse during a visit to Abu Ghraib in October 2003, Red Cross delegates queried US military officers at the prison about the practice of keeping some prisoners naked, in completely bare and unlit cells. According to the report:

“The military officer in charge of the interrogation explained that this practice was ‘part of the process.’”

Most prisoners at Abu Ghraib have not been charged with any crime and are being held without trial. A report released by human rights group *Amnesty International* in March observed that, “families waiting outside Abu Ghraib prison say most of their relatives were picked up in indiscriminate raids” aimed at netting some suspected supporters of Iraqi resistance attacks on US occupation troops.

In some cases, the detainee has simply been related to an Iraqi whom the US invader army wants to detain—spouses and children being arrested to “encourage” people sought by the US occupiers to come forward, a blatant violation of international law.

But this is not isolated to one jail in Iraq, cases against the Coalition of the Willing are being pressed for incidents in unknown sites across the country and in numerous secret camps throughout the world.⁵ In December 2002, the *Washington Post* revealed that suspected Taliban and al Qaeda fighters held at the US-controlled Bagram air base in Afghanistan were being tortured. It reported:

“Those who refuse to cooperate inside this secret CIA interrogation center are sometimes kept standing or kneeling for hours, in black hoods or spray-painted goggles, according to intelligence specialists familiar with CIA interrogation methods.”

The debate becomes centred around not whether this happened, nor how widespread it was, but whether it was part of a systematic programme or a general failure of control, a collapse of moral authority, or the assertion of an immoral one. It becomes increasingly clear that the only sensible analysis is that it was the latter. As Seymour Hersh has written:

“The roots of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal lie not in the criminal inclinations of a few Army reservists but in a decision, approved last year by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, to expand a highly secret operation, which had been focussed on the hunt for Al Qaeda, to the interrogation of prisoners in Iraq. Rumsfeld’s decision embittered the American intelligence community, damaged the effectiveness of elite combat units, and hurt America’s prospects in the war on terror.”

According to interviews with American intelligence officials, the Pentagon’s operation, known inside the intelligence community by several code words, including Copper Green, encouraged physical coercion and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners in an effort to generate more intelligence about the growing insurgency in Iraq.

According to Hersh:

“A senior C.I.A. official, in confirming the details of this account last week, said that the operation stemmed from Rumsfeld’s long-standing desire to wrest control of America’s clandestine and paramilitary operations from the C.I.A.”

Although the new report into the abuse of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison is expected to incriminate at least a further two dozen military personnel it states clearly:

“...there was no official policy of abuse at the jail.”

It’s not so much a cover up as a dumb-down. “The report will show that these actions were bad, illegal, unauthorised, and some of it was sadistic,” a defence department official told the *Washington Post*.

Bad actions. Unauthorised actions. “But it will show that they were the actions of a few, actions that went unnoticed because of leadership failures,” he added.

Crucially, and here’s the centre of the storm, according to Mr Schlesinger, it would be wrong for the Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, to resign:

“His resignation would be a boon to all of America’s enemies.”

Neither did the four man panel think the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, should resign.

No surprise there then. But while Hutton, Butler and now Schlesinger get these thugs a Get Out of

Jail in the short term, their evasion erodes remaining confidence in the elite rule they represent. Even functionaries like Hoon, normally anonymous in state torture, suddenly become more prominent, as do their apologists and escapologists in the media.

Lounge columnist and war-enthusiast Christopher Hitchens is one who’s feeling embarrassed.⁶ Columns like his ‘Moral Chernobyl’—prepare for the worst on Abu Ghraib’ are almost enough to elicit sympathy for his compromised position. You can almost feel him squirm after a heavy Washington lunch when he writes:

“So in a distressing sense...we face something like a collective responsibility, if not exactly a collective guilt.”

I suspect those of us who warned of this moral chaos and descent into darkness share less of the collective guilt than the adopted US cheerleaders.

But Hitchens’ ramblings get even scarier when he provides us with his analysis of the Irish Question:

“They didn’t win because their idea of bombing a large Protestant community into joining a united Catholic Ireland was a bit mad to begin with. And they also didn’t win because security methods became tremendously more professional.”

Yet as the Medical Foundation which cares for victims of torture has stated:

“The United Kingdom is no stranger to such issues. Thirty years ago British security forces in Belfast decided to use five interrogation techniques, which had been finessed by the KGB, against IRA suspects. These were hooding, noise bombardment, food and water deprivation, sleep deprivation and being forced to stand for long periods spreadeagle against a wall. Fourteen Republican suspects were rounded up and endured several weeks of such treatment, before being released without charge, with some suffering acute psychological illness.”

In the ensuing controversy, the then Prime Minister Edward Heath, after setting up two enquiries, endorsed a minority report by Privy Councillor Lord Gardiner who held that there was nothing in domestic law that permitted members of the security forces to act in such a manner, and no officer or politician had the right to authorise it.

But the US has exempted itself from international war crimes, and acts as a rogue state with Blair and cohorts. We were promised a breakthrough in the ‘road map’ for peace in the Middle East, and instead we have Israel threatening Iran with military action and practicing ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians. We were promised weapons of mass destruction, but they don’t exist. We were promised democracy in Iraq and we have appointed rulers and *Al-Jazeera* banned. We were promised stability and we have Najaf.

Attacks on US troops are running at dozens a day, frequently accompanied by looting, burning and stoning. It is generally believed in Baghdad that around 1,000 Iraqis leave the country every day for Jordan and Syria because the security situation is intolerable. According to the Iraqi media, gunmen have killed roughly 750 in the last year. Friends of the Americans such as Ahmad Chalabi are discredited; enemies such as the young Shia firebrand Moqtada al-Sadr are in the ascendancy.

We were promised an investigation, soul-searching, honesty, then John Scarlett is appointed the new head of MI6 and investigations into the killing of Iraqi civilians by British troops are fundamentally flawed. Many have not even resulted in autopsies of the victims.⁷

But judgment day comes—whether it’s from a generation politicised by lying politicians who preach morality as they send soldiers to do their dirty work and preach scripture as they sanction torture—or from the MPs who have announced plans to have Blair impeached for “high crimes and misdemeanours” in taking Britain to war against Iraq.⁸

Good luck to them but the real test has to be to change the way the state works towards war like a cancer seeking healthy cells. We need to learn real lessons from what happened in Iraq about the collapse of legal structure, the impotence of parliament, the moral bankruptcy of the Labour government and the inadequacies of the anti-war movement. A few heads on platters would be a reassuring but ultimately pyrrhic victory.

Yet Rumsfeld deserves different than the cheers he received on his trip to Iraq. A classified

Pentagon report, adding to the investigative work of Hersh and contributing to the emerging picture from the Schlesinger Report highlights a series of legal arguments apparently intended to justify abuses and torture against detainees, appears to undermine public assurances by senior US officials, including President George W Bush, that the military would never resort to such practices in the “war on terrorism”.

Short excerpts of the report, which was drafted by Defense Department lawyers, were published in the *Wall Street Journal* in August. The report claims that the president, in his position as commander-in-chief, has virtually unlimited power to wage war, even in violation of US law and international treaties.

“The breadth of authority in the report is wholly unprecedented,” says Avi Cover, a senior attorney with the US Law and Security program of *Human Rights First*, formerly known as *Lawyers Committee for Human Rights*. “Until now, we’ve used the rhetoric of a president who is ‘above the law’, but this document makes that [assertion] explicit; it’s not a metaphor anymore,” he added.

While it is unknown whether Bush himself ever saw or approved the report, it was classified “secret” by Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld on March 6, 2003, the eve of the US invasion of Iraq, according to the *Journal*. The collapse of legal authority—or its exposure—has stood hand-in-hand with the mercenary armies, the private security guards holding hands with the SiS in Abu Ghraib, and the whole sorry picture being presented to us by a Labour government sick and staggering on with its pitiful inheritance of neo-liberal dogma.

As the economist JK Galbraith has written:

“As the corporate interest moves to power in what was the public sector, it serves the corporate interest. It is most clearly evident in the largest such movement, that of nominally private firms into the defence establishment. From this comes a primary influence on the military budget, on foreign policy, military commitment and, ultimately, military action. War. Although this is a normal and expected use of money and its power, the full effect is disguised by almost all conventional expression.”

What we have seen is the descent into barbarism. Where leaders rule without moral restraint, legal redress or ethical direction but ‘Little Ali’ gets a Manchester United tattoo on his artificial arm.

Notes

- 1 Open Letter to Jonathan Shapiro, US cartoonist who depicted the Statue of Liberty in the same pose as Lynndie England. See <http://forum.mg.co.za/printthread.php?Cat=&Board=mediaissues&main=108254&type=thread> for the original image
- 2 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the Banality of Evil*
- 3 The 13-year-old lost both arms and suffered 60 per cent burns in a coalition attack on Baghdad early in the Gulf War which claimed the lives of his parents, a brother and 13 other family members.
- 4 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3146771.stm>
- 5 *Amnesty’s* report cites the example of Abdallah Khudhran al Shamran, a Saudi Arabian national detained by occupation troops in April 2003 while travelling to Baghdad: “On reaching an unknown site, he said he was beaten, given electric shocks, suspended by his legs, had his penis tied and was subjected to sleep deprivation.” Also see: ‘America’s gulag’, Stephen Grey, *Newstatesman*, 17/5/04. In which “Stephen Grey uncovers a secret global network of prisons and planes that allows the US to hand over its enemies for interrogation, and sometimes torture, by the agents of its more unsavoury allies.” http://www.newstatesman.com/site.php3?newTemplate=NSArticle_NS&newDisplayURN=200405170016
- 6 ‘A Moral Chernobyl, Prepare for the worst of Abu Ghraib’, *Slate Magazine* <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102373/>
- 7 ‘Report to the High Court’, Friday July 30, 2004
- 8 Reviving an ancient practice last used against Lord Palmerston more than 150 years ago. Eleven MPs led by Adam Price, Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, and including Elfyn Llwyd, and Alex Salmond are to table a motion when Parliament returns that will force the Prime Minister to appear before the Commons to defend his record in the run-up to the war.

“A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk, Along the briny beach” Govanhill Baths Trust

Govanhill Baths was effectively closed by Glasgow City Council on 29th March 2001, against the wishes of the unconsulted local community—the majority of users of this long essential service on their doorstep. Glasgow’s ‘Govanhill Pool: Southside Against Closure’, the community protest group, undertook their own detailed survey to assess the impact. The study was damning. It revealed that six months on 55% of former users had not used other swimming facilities; those most affected being retired people (75%), the unemployed (77%), the sick or disabled or not fit for work (68.7%), and the Indian/Pakistani community (90%)—the enclosed Edwardian style pool has been identified in a SportScotland study on ‘Ethnic Minorities and Sport’ as a Best Practice example of breaking down barriers to participation in sport as the Baths’ enclosed facilities provides privacy and permits segregated swimming for men and women. To top it all, Govanhill Baths lies in the unhealthiest constituency in Britain and yet the health impact of the closure on the local community was not even considered by the Council, who seem to be insistent on a policy of taking fitness facilities out of local communities and centralising them for car users—73% of households in Govanhill do not have a car according to a Community Scotland Study.

Only due to the commitment and ingenuity of the local community does Glasgow City Council still have the opportunity to go some way to redeeming itself. Variant met up with Fatima Uygur, formerly of Southside Against Closure, to catch up on the latest developments with Govanhill Baths.

We received a phone call from the *Evening Times* saying, ‘Do you know there’s a special meeting called by Glasgow City Council Culture & Leisure Services Department, it’s not on the listed meetings for the year, and the only thing on the agenda is the pool—it’s to be decided whether or not it’s surplus to requirements for that Department.’? We panicked. We couldn’t make the meeting, and of course it was to be declared surplus. So the Baths have now gone to Development and Regeneration Services—just sitting there.

The Dixon Centre is basically an old age care home, and it put in an expression of interest for the Baths and had a feasibility study done, paid for by the Govanhill Housing Association, to use the building for a new day care facility. This would mean demolishing the building and having a ‘new build’.

Something that’s gone in our favour is that Historic Scotland has said that the pool and façade have to be retained—but what the Dixon Centre can do is record the pool and concrete over it for possible future use. On finding this out, a number of people deluged them saying, ‘What are you doing, this is outrageous!’ They have now backtracked a bit and have said over the phone that if the community want a another use for it they will not intervene, but it looks like the Govanhill Community Development Trust¹ are very keen on pursuing the Dixon Centre’s interest in the Baths’ site.

We found out one possible reason for this enthusiasm from a Community Council meeting at Crosshill / Govanhill which GCDT happened to attend—a fluke. GCDT argued that once upon a time they were actually considering using the former Royal Samaritan Hospital—which they’ve already developed and sold off mostly as private housing—for their facility but somehow decided against it. It didn’t work out—basically it sounded like they’d sold the property off and there wasn’t enough property left for their own use.² We presume as a result they’re very keen to develop the

Baths, as quickly as possible. I didn’t realise how much Govanhill Housing Association were so proactive in the regeneration of the area.

Also, the Larkfield bus depot is seeking permission for 400 to 600 proposed housing to go on the site, it’s being moved further out—we just saw the plans for this massive concentration of housing. We’re asking the Community Council—even if they do object it’s going to go ahead anyway—that they should write to the developers and the Council to say ‘You’re having all these houses built, we can’t stop you, as part of your social responsibility will you commission a feasibility study into the pool for the Govanhill Baths Trust.

We’ve just set up the Govanhill Baths Trust and Govanhill / Crosshill, Battlefield, and Strathbungo / Shawlands Community Councils are all going to endorse a public meeting where we’re going to elect the first board of trustees. I’m still very upset that Glasgow City Council are not going to have a publicly run leisure facility, but to save the building this is what we’ve been forced to do.

We had a meeting with Development & Regeneration Services before Govanhill Baths was declared ‘surplus to requirements’. Gill Wright from the Manchester Victoria Baths—that won the Restoration BBC TV programme—has been a supporter of the campaign to save the pool from the outset and she came to the meeting, which impressed them. Basically we were told: ‘Get something in. Get architects to have a look at it. Just do it’. He said he had a number of architects in mind that we could consider—we’ve e-mailed and e-mailed and he hasn’t sent a list. So, we’re desperately looking for architects—we’ve got two companies we’re thinking of, Assist is one who do some degree of free community work. Basically we want to sit with some architects who’ll do it for free—I’m sure there’s some good architects about, we just have to find them.

We’ve actually said to the Dixon Centre, we will work with you, the Baths building is vast, why can’t it be shared? Apparently they want something much bigger—they’re not interested in saving any Baths or pool facilities. We’re also going to have a meeting with the GCDT to see if they can see us and give a free feasibility study—like they did for the Dixon Centre—into the pool.

There were good things during the *Glasgow Govanhill Pool: Southside Against Closure Pool Campaign*—the Health Board said it would donate a new boiler if we could convert one of the pools into a hydrotherapy unit. This is our dream—we want a functioning healthy living centre. So we’re going to reapproach some of these organisations.

We contacted the London Pools Campaign. This campaign is liaising with all the pools in London which are being demolished—each year in London at least one pool closes, this year Charlton Lido has closed, Northolt Swimarama will close in the autumn and Ladywell Pool has announced its closure. It’s something atrocious. There is a pool in London that’s actually shut and falling to bits but they’re waiting until the end of the London



bid for the Olympics before they actually demolish it, because you can’t really bid for the Games if you’re demolishing existing infrastructure. Their website (www.londonpoolscampaign.com/) is very good. We received messages of support from Columbia, Queensland, all places... and photographs of similar demonstrations around pools and the community, or bathing areas like public beaches, that were being shut down. It was really great, we felt part of something, rather than marginalised in Govanhill in Glasgow. We’re going to try and set up a UK Pools conference to get everyone together for some united action, and they’re going to help us get our web site up and running again. We’re also in touch with a couple of other pools that have become community trusts. So it’s all go.

We had a meeting with Glasgow Building Preservation Trust—who saved the Tron. They encouraged us to write directly to Charlie Gordon the leader of the Council. So we wrote to him saying we’re a new organisation determined to save the Baths and put them back into community use, we would like your support and would like to work with the Council in any way possible to assist us in this venture—nothing so far, but at least we’ve done it and can follow it up. There are some Councillors in the area that are very supportive, and most of the list MSPs in the area are supportive. So we’re optimistic about getting something done, it’s just a case of getting people on board.

We’re having another meeting with Development & Regeneration Services—though I think they’re keen to push through with the proposal from the Dixon Centre. At least the Crosshill / Govanhill Community Council is absolutely opposed to the Dixon Centre being located in the pool. It objects to any community facility being used for another community facility simply because of the shortage of land and stuff the council have mucked up. It’s interesting what the Govanhill Community Development Trust is actually doing. Their remit of ‘regeneration’ is ‘sustainable community enterprises’—sustainable is just another word for private. They keep talking about bringing in business units and all this, while Govanhill is awash with empty buildings that don’t end up coming to anything.³ But I think they want to attract a much more gentrified clientele. We’re worried—as you know, the area’s becoming quite gentrified. There’s a major push to have big posh housing in the area. If you look at any brochure the main push is right near the Hidden Gardens development.⁴

Another issue is the old Shell garage on Darnley road has been shut down and sold for private housing development. By all means have artists studios, cheap areas where people can come, community centres and so on, but I don’t think that’s what GCDT are interested in. I have nothing against new development as long as it’s not going to take away from facilities and units and businesses that already exist. There are a couple of churches at the moment have had feasibility studies done to convert them into different facilities, what they are at the moment we don’t know.

Archie Graham, the local Councillor for the area of Shawlands / Strathbungo, has not objected to one housing development in the last five years—he used to be on our Community Council, but doesn’t turn up any more—at the same time



community facilities are being shut down. The Council will argue, ‘Look at all this regeneration happening in the area.’ There is the odd cafe opening up but that only looks like regeneration when you look at the devastation immediately before it when they built the one way road system through Govanhill that shut dozens of businesses down. The fact that one has reopened is not an endorsement of the whole approach.

What distresses me the most is that somehow the argument over the public subsidy of private business has crept in and been won. In the community people are led to believe that the council, the government, don’t have any money and we have to do this. More and more doubt is being cast on these Public Private Projects—recently, for example, Fife abandoned such a school building scheme and even the government’s Audit watchdog has cast serious doubt on the long term efficiency of the scheme in terms of debt being accrued for the tax payer. Getting into bed with big business was once something of a slur, now the meetings that go on with private companies in Glasgow is astounding.

So Govanhill Baths Trust’s next move is to have a public meeting and we’ve got to start our press push. There was a great article in the *Guardian* at the start of the Olympics on the state of pools in the UK—we’ve one swimmer from Glasgow—and they mentioned Govanhill pool campaign. The other thing is Manchester pools that won the restoration programme received £3.8m with £1 million of this in donations from ordinary people, so we’d like to do something like that. We’re determined to keep the cost of a swim affordable for all the community.

What’s great about living in Govanhill is that if we’d been situated anywhere else we would have lost the Baths long ago. I think that just from circumstance, previous experience and people having had enough has all added up to quite a militant little area. So hopefully we can build and

get our pool back for the local community and its many other users. There’s great support but there isn’t actually a guidebook which says you’re at this stage in your campaign and this is how to set up a trust, it’s all about learning. There’s a lot of people willing to do that, for sure.

Breaking news

Since Govanhill Baths Trust’s last meeting with Regeneration and Development Services, they have let them know that they are very keen to push through with the proposal from the Dixon Centre, and that at present they would not be looking at any other options!

If there are any architects / planners interested in assisting with the campaign, please contact Govanhill Baths Trust on: 07779995483.
“United we will swim!”

Notes

1. A subsidiary of Govanhill Housing Association, Govanhill Community Development Trust (GCDT) was set up to “develop initiatives in areas other than housing” which, in the rhetoric of regeneration, “contribute to the social and economic development of Govanhill”. This includes: “Workspace management and development” (ie. private business units) and “Community Regeneration” (amongst other things, both establishing and working with/through a Residents Group, a Careers Fair, and curiously with support from Glasgow City Council the purchasing of a 'green machine' street cleaner to improve the local environment; “Managed day to day by the council, it targets the streets most affected by litter and dog mess.”)
2. According to GCDT’s web site, the initial conversion of the former Royal Samaritan Hospital was to provide 30 housing units for sale and 13 for rent—valued at £3.5 million. The project was funded by Communities Scotland, the Executive’s housing and regeneration agency, Govanhill Housing Association and Govanhill Community Development Trust, Scottish Enterprise,



Strathclyde European Partnership. But in addition, there is to be the conversion of the former Hospital’s Block F to an Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Centre, including new office accommodation for the Association, Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Centre and new offices for Govanhill Housing Association, Govanhill Community Development Trust, Govanhill Local Housing Organisation and the Govanhill Social Inclusion Project —valued at: £3.1 million. The funders are broken down as: Communities Scotland Wider Role Funding, Govanhill Housing Association along with Govanhill Community Development Trust, European Regional Development Fund, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow.

3. The Sunday Herald, 29/8/04, also casts doubt over the health of Glasgow’s office market ”as a mass of space...competes for a small number of prospective tenants.” With rents being squeezed as “a small number of prospective tenants have their pick of a flood of new developments.”
4. The Hidden Gardens are situated just behind the Tramway Theatre, according to their website they are “Scotland’s first permanent public garden for the 21st century and a visionary new landmark for Scotland...the result of a two year consultation and design process that have seen the transformation of a derelict industrial site on Glasgow’s south side into a tranquil and inspirational haven.” Clearly, the unravelling history of arts funding spearheading private property development in Glasgow needs to to be thoroughly investigated.

An exposé of dishonest media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict

Jean Shaoul

Bad News from Israel: Greg Philo and Mike Berry, Pluto Press, London, 2004

The Glasgow University Media Group's new book, *Bad News from Israel*, exposes the dishonest role the main TV news coverage in Britain plays in distorting the Israel-Palestine conflict and misinforming the public.

Far from explaining the origins of the conflict, most news bulletins function as little more than the overseas arm of the Israeli government's propaganda. Israel is able to mobilise the support of billionaire media owners, Zionist pressure groups and write-in campaigns to intimidate journalists who try to take a more objective stance.

The result is an alarming level of ignorance and confusion among viewers, a lack of interest in the conflict, and feelings of helplessness and the impossibility of change. Above all, poor and biased coverage plays a crucial role in preventing an informed public debate about how the conflict might be resolved.

These criticisms are far from new. But *Bad News from Israel* provides reams of evidence to back up such views.

The book's authors, sociologists Greg Philo and Mike Berry, monitored and analysed four separate periods of news coverage by the BBC and ITN, Britain's two main TV news channels, between the start of the Palestinian intifada in September 2000 and the spring of 2002. They examined around 200 news programmes and compared them against the national press and other programmes such as Channel 4 (C4) News and BBC2's current affairs programme, Newsnight. They interviewed over 800 people and brought well known broadcasters and programme makers to take part in discussion groups with ordinary viewers and find out what they thought about the conflict and its coverage.

Philo and Berry found that news items were reported with little explanation about the origins of the conflict, the United Nations resolution establishing the state of Israel on part of Palestine, and the subsequent war between Israel and her Arab neighbours. Neither did the news spell out how the establishment of the state of Israel and the subsequent war had led to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fleeing their homes, both because of the horrors of war and the forced expulsions organised by the official Israeli military forces and Zionist terrorist groups sanctioned by the then Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion. There was little or no explanation of how many had become refugees again after the 1967 war and had lived in squalid refugee camps ever since.

While news coverage focused on the day to day details of the Palestinian armed uprising, few reporters described how Israel had seized the West Bank and Gaza 37 years ago and illegally occupied it ever since in defiance of numerous UN Security Council resolutions. There was next to no explanation of the meaning of that occupation: that the Palestinians lived under military rule in all but name, had no civil rights and suffered enormous economic and social deprivation.

The figures are quite stark. In the period between September 28 to October 15, 2000, BBC1 and ITN devoted 3,500 lines of text to the uprising, but only 17 to the history of the conflict.

The lack of public knowledge closely mirrored

the absence of such information on the TV news.

Without any contextual information, most viewers did not appreciate that the Israelis had seized the Palestinians' land to build the Zionist settlements, closed hundreds of roads, diverted their water supplies, uprooted their olive groves, assassinated their political leaders, detained people for years without trial, routinely used torture, and imposed collective punishment in the form of house demolitions and curfews.

If the journalists did make passing reference to such abuses, they failed to point out that all of this was illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Not surprisingly, therefore, viewers had little understanding of what had given rise to the uprising. Only 10 percent of the groups of British students interviewed in 2001 and 2002 knew that it was Israel that had occupied Palestine. Some even thought that the Palestinians were the occupiers. Many saw the conflict as some sort of border dispute between two countries fighting over land. A massive 80 percent did not know where the Palestinian refugees had come from or how they had come to be dispossessed.

The study found that the language used by reporters routinely favoured the occupying Israeli military forces over the occupied Palestinians. Words such as 'atrocities', 'mass murder', 'lynching' and 'slaughter' were used to describe Israeli deaths, but not Palestinian. Journalists used the word 'terrorist' to describe Palestinians, but 'extremists' or 'vigilantes' to describe an Israeli group trying to bomb a Palestinian school.

There were constant references to Israel's security and Israel's right to exist, but little mention of Palestinians' security or their right to exist.

The study found that the impoverished and humiliating conditions faced by Palestinians for decades under the military occupation were virtually ignored. There were no visual pictures of the economic and social consequences of the military occupation, the brutal treatment at the hands of the military, the squalid housing, the shortage of water, or the contrast with the settlers' homes that had swimming pools and lawns.

The bias was quite blatant. In the sample of news items in 2001, the news coverage was six times more likely to show the Israelis as 'retaliating' to Palestinian 'terrorism', which led viewers to blame the Palestinians. There was no indication that the military occupation had spawned the resistance to Israel, or that the Israeli armed forces had provoked Palestinian violence.

There was more coverage of Israeli deaths than Palestinian, even though three times the number of Palestinians had lost their lives, and the journalists have the evidence that proves it.

That is not to say that the journalists were uniformly pro-Israel and unsympathetic towards the Palestinians. They do show the consequences of Israeli military actions, but it is the Israeli explanation that is most frequently cited.

Again, the gaps in knowledge closely followed the reporting. In 2002, only 35 percent of students questioned knew that the Palestinians had suffered more casualties than the Israelis. In so far as



some of the focus groups were better informed, it was because they had access to other sources of information: the press, books or further study in higher education. In other words, despite its potential TV was not the most useful source of information. The Israeli settlements in the occupied territories were presented as vulnerable communities, rather than as having a key strategic role in expanding Israel's borders and imposing the

occupation. Built as fortresses on hilltops to give a commanding position, their occupants are often heavily armed.

Focus groups told Lindsey Hilsum, a Channel 4 News presenter, that they would welcome a "quick potted history", with somebody saying "This is all because in 1948, this happened and that happened", or, as Hilsum put it, "A sort of new readers start here".

The journalists report the tactics and responses of the various parties involved in the conflict. On one occasion they cited the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak as saying that he would use all means to restore order and concluded that the Palestinians were likely to react violently to such a move. There was no critical consideration of the nature of the 'order' that the Israelis would restore and that it would mean military control, large scale arrests, imprisonment without trial, torture and extra-judicial killings. Neither did the journalists discuss what the Palestinians could or should do to end this.

Similarly, while the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, was routinely blamed by the Israelis for breaking off the peace talks at Camp David in July 2000, the journalists made little attempt to investigate what the terms 'peace' or 'normalcy' meant to the Palestinians.

Producing the news

The book's authors provide some interesting insights into the operational reasons why the news is presented in this way.

The demand by the commercial news channels for 24 hour news 'as it breaks' means that journalists spend more time in front of the camera than collecting and analysing the news. It makes them more reliant on easy-to-source and cheap information, meaning official sources of information. While the BBC, which has the largest international news teams in the world, remains publicly funded, 25 percent of its income comes from commercial sources, including the syndicating of its news coverage.

Veteran Middle East journalist Robert Fisk explained that the journalists' narrative of events was built around the last thing some official has said. "There seemed to be no real understanding that the job of the reporter is to analyse what is really happening, not simply to pick up on the rolling news machine", he said.

Senior journalists told the research team that they were instructed not to give explanations. Paul Adams, the BBC's defence correspondent, said, "It's covered as if it's a very large blood feud and, unless there is a large amount of blood, it's not covered."

George Alagiah, presenter of the BBC's six

o'clock news, pointed out that the BBC constantly stressed that the viewers' attention span was just 20 seconds and that if the news didn't grab people, then people may switch over in that first minute.

Another BBC journalist told the research team that he had been instructed not to do 'explainers' by his own editor. As he put it: "It's all bang bang stuff".

Israel's control of the news content

The study shows that the Israeli perspective predominated in TV news because of Israel's well-developed system of lobbying and public relations.

One very experienced Middle East correspondent for the BBC gave several practical—but essentially political—reasons for the biased news reporting.

Israeli authorities can provide documents in the appropriate language and put forward a fluent English speaker, well versed in addressing the western media, to put the Israeli perspective on the latest events in a studio in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv or anywhere else in the world. Its media organisation sends out 75-100 emails to reporters every single day.

The Palestinians, by contrast, were described as their own worst enemy. They spoke poor English, were perceived as boorish, were typically incoherent, and were deemed to have 'missed the point'.

Secondly, the Palestinians find it impossible to surmount the hurdle of dozens of road blocks to get to the studios in Jerusalem, leaving them to give a brief response down the, at best, crackling telephone line. Essentially reactive, they sent out just five emails a week.

Thirdly, the same system of restrictions meant that it was nearly as difficult for the journalists to reach the Palestinian areas to report on what was going on there and obtain a Palestinian viewpoint. None of the Western news channels put any resources into maintaining a news team in the occupied territories.

While all of these factors clearly affect how the Israeli and Palestinian perspectives are presented and perceived by viewers, the journalists made little attempt to compensate for the disadvantages that the Palestinians are working under. At the very least, they need to explain to viewers why they were unable to get to Ramallah to interview the Palestinian Authority leaders or were using a poor telephone line because of the restrictions imposed by the Israeli military authorities. As Philo and Berry put it, "To avoid doing this is to legitimise a structural imbalance".

The book cites Keith Graves, who spent many years reporting for the BBC in the Middle East, as one of a number of journalists working in the occupied territories who complained of extensive intimidation by the Israeli authorities. He suggested that this had worsened as the uprising had continued.

"When I was first based in the Middle East as the BBC correspondent 30 years ago, Israel was rightly proud of its position as the only country in the region where journalists could report freely. Not anymore. Under the Sharon government intimidation of reporters deemed 'unfriendly' to Israel is routine and sanctioned by the government", he wrote in the *Guardian*.

This is something of an understatement. The Foreign Press Association in Jerusalem and Reporteurs San Frontiers accused the Israelis of deliberately targeting gunfire at journalists, noting that eight had been wounded as of June 2001. *The Killing Zone*, a Channel 4 programme, gave details of what they regarded as the deliberate killing of a colleague by Israeli security forces, when he had been filming the bulldozing of Palestinian homes.

Israel organises powerful lobby groups to represent it in the United States and in Britain and make sure that the media run with their line. The Independent quoted the Israeli embassy in London as saying, "London is a centre of media

and the embassy here works night and day to influence that media. And in many ways I think we don't do a half bad job, if I may say so... We have newspapers that write consistently in a manner that supports and understands Israel's position and its challenges. And we have had an influence on the BBC as well."

If the media do not "support and understand Israel's position", then their reporters face a barrage of critical emails. *The Observer* has written, "News organisations that fall foul of Israel are accused of being pro-Palestinian at best, and worst anti-Semitic".

Lindsey Hilsum commented on "the number of emails that I receive saying that I'm anti-Semitic because I have written something they don't like about Israel". *The Observer* also noted the organised letter writing campaigns and the growth of websites that target individual journalists and provide ready-written letters of complaints for subscribers to send out.

The Israelis have also utilised rhetoric about the 'war against terror' in their public relations armory, and successfully exploited revulsion produced by suicide bomb attacks by Palestinian militants.

Nachman Shai, a key Israeli spokesman in the early years of the intifada, told the research team, "We selected the first [war on terror] instead of the second [anti-Semitism] because we are part of the Western world. We very much played the first argument. It worked better with governments, they gave us more support. It's like if you run out of arguments, you are stuck with anti-Semitism. The first one is based on common interests."

The strategy had worked. He regarded the quality of the international media coverage, including Britain's, on the conflict as having improved, and cited the effect of suicide bombings on how the conflict was seen:

"It has gradually become more balanced than in the beginning...the media are now seeing more of the complicated issues than at the beginning, because of the indiscriminate violence of the suicide bombers against the Israeli population," he said.

Political pressure on the media

The research also showed the political and corporate links that are important in ensuring that Israel's perspective predominated.

Speakers from the US, who usually endorsed or supported Israeli positions, were regularly featured on TV news. No other countries or governments who were critical of Israel were given as much air time, if any at all, as the US.

Some of the US politicians were strongly influenced by the Christian Right, which had joined forces with the powerful Zionist lobby, particularly AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee), which Fortune magazine consistently places in the top five special interest groups. No other foreign policy-based lobby group makes it into the top 25. AIPAC's annual conferences regularly feature the attendance of half the US Senate and half the members of the House of Representatives.

Although AIPAC plays a hugely influential role in the media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the US, its activities are rarely analysed. In part, this is because it is believed to have organised mass write-in campaigns or suspension of home deliveries of newspapers protesting at alleged pro-Palestinian bias.

In Britain, Sam Kiley, a correspondent of the Times newspaper, part of Rupert Murdoch's communications group, which also owns Fox News in the US, resigned in September 2001, blaming its pro-Israeli censorship of his reporting. He spoke of Murdoch's close friendship with Ariel Sharon and heavy investment in Israel.

Writing in the *London Evening Standard*, Kiley pointed out, "The Times foreign editor and other middle managers flew into hysterical terror every time a pro-Israel lobbying group wrote in with a quibble or complaint and then usually took their

side against their own correspondent... I was told I should not refer to 'assassinations' of Israel's opponents, nor to 'extra-judicial' killings or executions".

Kiley was also cited as saying the paper's executives were so frightened of crossing Murdoch that when he interviewed the Israeli army unit responsible for killing a 12-year-old Palestinian boy, he was asked to file the piece without mentioning the dead child.

The Daily Telegraph, part of the US Hollinger group that also owns the Jerusalem Post, previously owned by the disgraced Conrad Black, has also been subject to complaints by its journalists that Black's strong support for Israel has affected its editorial policy.

The Guardian newspaper wrote, "Three prominent writers—all of them past contributors to Mr Black's *Telegraph* group—have signed a letter to the *Spectator* [magazine] accusing him of abusing his responsibilities as a proprietor. Such is the vehemence with which Mr Black has expounded his pro-Israeli held view, they say, no editor or correspondent would dare write frankly about the Palestinian perspective".

The travel writer William Dalrymple, one of the three authors of the letter, wrote in the *Guardian*, "A press baron is an immensely important figure. With that power, comes responsibilities, and those responsibilities are abused when he makes it clear that certain areas are off-limits to legitimate enquiry, and that careers will suffer if those limits are crossed."

The general response of the BBC and ITN is to bow to the pressure. As Professor Philo explained to the World Socialist Web Site, the conflict is so controversial that it is easier not to go over the history. This serves to remove the rationale for the Palestinian uprising and conflict with Israel, leaving journalists reliant on Israel's public relations material rather than the Palestinians' story of their lost homes or struggle for national liberation.

He cited the case of John Pilger, whose programme Palestine for ITV resulted in more than 4,000 emails, largely pro-Zionist and critical, being sent to the TV regulator. It took six weeks to write a 20,000-word response justifying his film. Rodrigo Vasquez, the producer of *The Killing Zone* for Channel 4, had a similar experience. While the regulator eventually cleared Pilger, it is not something that other journalists want to go through.

In other areas, he said, reporters can be more critical of the official line. For example, reporters can castigate African governments for their corruption. But if the subject was oil, then it became more difficult. The oil companies have lawyers. Journalists know what they can say and adjust their scripts accordingly. Everyone gets to know the parameters of their own organisation.

The book provides a devastating picture of the extent to which the truth is the victim of a pliant media that is, notwithstanding the honesty of a few journalists, only too ready to sacrifice its professional standing in the interests of powerful pressure groups and their corporate backers. But it fails to draw out the wider political, economic and strategic interests that lie behind the TV companies' reluctance to report the Israel-Palestine conflict from within and across the Arab world and the occupied territories, as they once did, as well as from Israel.

The media has no interest in presenting an historical explanation of the tragedy that has befallen the Palestinians, created the monstrous garrison state that is Israel today and threatens to embroil the two peoples in barbarism. Such an analysis would cut across the British government's support for the US and Israel as the custodian of its interests in the region.

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Blair's Wars

Phil England

'Blair's Wars', John Kampfner, (Free Press, new paperback edition, £7.99)

John Kampfner is the political editor of the *New Statesman* and the first edition of the book was based on 60 interviews with senior ministers, advisers and civil servants from across government as well as key players in US, Europe, Russia, Middle East, UN and Nato. This updated new paperback draws on an additional 25 interviews and extends the book to include the Hutton enquiry. It's a Blair's eye view constructed without having access to the Prime Minister himself and the nearest we have to a UK equivalent of Bob Woodward's *Bush at War*.

Kampfner's original intention was "to fill a gap in the bibliography of Blair studies—foreign policy," but his title tells that the book ended up with a narrower focus starting with the observation that Blair has taken the UK to war five times in six years: Iraq in 1998; Yugoslavia in 1999; Sierra Leone in 2000; Afghanistan in 2001; and Iraq in 2003. It's quite an achievement. "No British Prime Minister and few world leaders come close," says Kampfner.

One downside of this approach is that—particularly in the earlier part of the book - Kampfner accepts official justifications a little too readily. But his principle mistake is the assumption—stated on page one and repeated later in the book¹—that "none of these wars could be defined through the traditional concepts of national interest or repelling an invader." To suggest that the Prime Minister has simply abandoned the traditional concept of 'national interest' in foreign policy is a shallow reading of events which omits much evidence to the contrary. Each of these wars can be read as a traditional resource war. The difference is that we are no longer the leading player but have been hanging onto the coat-tails of the world's superpower. The question Blair and his advisers are tasked with solving on behalf of the ruling elite is how well our 'national interests' are served in playing this subservient role—and there is a strong case to argue that they have been getting it wrong.

A Taste of Things To Come: Operation Desert Fox

Kampfner is all trees and no wood. He fails, for example, to provide the necessary background information to explain why Saddam Hussein might have constituted a threat that was not a military one. During the cold war Saddam had pursued an independent policy that was not allied exclusively to West nor East. Crucially in 1972 he nationalised the oil company (an unforgivable crime in the eyes of the West—particularly if you are sitting on the world's second largest proven reserves of oil) and fed the proceeds from rising oil prices into agriculture, health care and literacy projects for the benefit of his own people.²

At the time of the 1998 air strikes on Iraq the country had been effectively disarmed during eight years of UNSCOM inspections. As former weapons inspector Scott Ritter put it: "Iraq has destroyed 90-95% of its weapons of mass destruction. ... this missing 5-10% doesn't necessarily constitute a threat. It doesn't even constitute a weapons program. ... Likewise, just because we can't account for it doesn't mean Iraq retains it."³

But by this time 'regime change' in Iraq was the open policy of the US. Clinton had just signed the Iraq Liberation Act which authorised military aid of up to \$100 million to opposition groups. Kampfner relates that Blair was getting reports of Iraq obstructing the inspectors but omits Ritter's testimony that the US used the inspections to provoke the Iraqis in order to provide a pretext for bombing.⁴

US and UK planes hit around 250 military targets with supposed 'pinpoint accuracy'—but there was scant evidence that any of these directly related to the allegedly ongoing WMD programme. The bombings actually provided Saddam with a reason not to readmit the inspectors. "Operation Desert Fox" provided a precedent for an illegal attack without clear UN authorisa-

tion—something that would be repeated in many of Blair's Wars including the attack on Yugoslavia which followed.⁵

Goodbye Socialist Republic

"Kosovo for all its problems" declares Kampfner, "was the high point in liberal intervention, when Blair enjoyed the support of most of the party and country."⁶

In his analysis of the US-led NATO attack on Yugoslavia, Kampfner again fails to provide critical contextual information. There is no mention of the role of outside intervention in destabilising and fragmenting Yugoslavia after US policy towards the country changed with the 'fall' of the Soviet Union in 1989. Starting with the suspension of IMF credits, the attack on Yugoslavia formed part of the ongoing, global economic-military offensive of 'opening up' countries' economies to exploitation by Western capital.⁷ As with most journalists at the time, Kampfner overlooks the telling Rambouillet clause that stated: "The economy of Kosovo shall function in accordance with free market principles."⁸ He does mention that "[Robin] Cook and [Hubert] Verdine suspected that Albright had determined the outcome [of the Rambouillet talks] in advance ..."⁹ but doesn't mention the fact that "Henry Kissinger and many others have pointed out [that] some of Nato's terms [such as the right of Nato forces to move across the whole of Yugoslavia] seem to have been designed to be 'deal-breakers' designed to ensure that the Yugoslav government would reject the terms."¹⁰

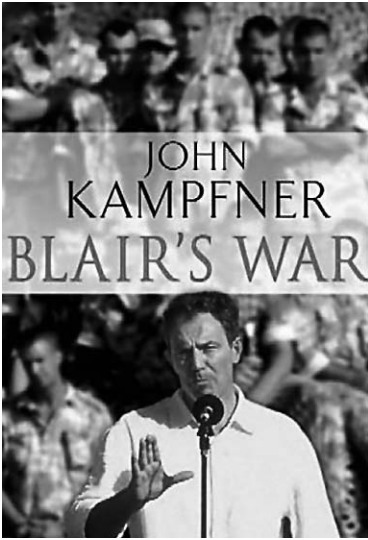
Nor does he question the official rationale or ask if the response was proportionate. Instead, his summary of the war is relatively upbeat: "Kosovo, while militarily flawed, did see the end of Serb ethnic cleansing and started the process that led to the removal and trial of Slobodan Milosevic."¹¹

Blair's sales pitch for war was a human rights one yet many atrocity stories that fuelled the enthusiastic media cheerleading for war turned out to be false.¹² The war was given retrospective justification by the refugee exodus which took place during the war—although this was something that had been predicted. Kampfner quotes "one of Blair's closest colleagues" as saying: "Our whole policy was saved by the refugees (...) Milosevic provided evidence to prove the case for bombing."¹³ But as media lecturer Philip Hammond noted: "No doubt refugees fled actual and rumoured violence by Serb paramilitaries, while many were expelled and deported. Yet it is also certain that many others fled from fighting between the KLA and Yugoslav forces, and from Nato bombing."¹⁴ The 'international community' did not seem to express the same concern about the 200,000 Serb refugees driven from Kosovo by Albanians after the conflict.

If the mission was a human rights one, why were NATO bombing civilian targets? "They ran out of military targets in the first couple of weeks," said James Bissell, the Canadian Ambassador to Yugoslavia. "It was common knowledge that Nato then went to Stage Three: civilian targets." These included "public transport, non-military factories, telephone exchanges, food processing plants, fertiliser depots, hospitals, schools, museums, churches, heritage listed monasteries and farms."¹⁵ After the war a UNHCR study found that only 12 per cent of pre-war health facilities remained and that 60 per cent of schools had been damaged or destroyed.¹⁶ Estimates of civilian deaths from eleven weeks of NATO bombings range from 500 to over 2,000 and the UN estimated another 10-15,000 were injured.

Somewhere in Africa

Comparitvely speaking, UK actions in Sierra Leone have not been given the same amount of coverage in the media as our local European crisis. The media spotlight did get drawn to the country in 1998 when a Customs and Excise investigation revealed that the mercenary firm Sandline International was operating in the region with UK complicity. Sandline is part of an elaborate net-



work of private military and mining companies which have been involved in many shady deals and would have gained mining concessions in return for helping restore the ousted elected president, Tejan Kabbah, to power. Sandline insisted "its plans including supplying arms in contravention of a UN arms embargo had been approved by the Foreign Office" and it appears that the UK High Commissioner Peter Penfold had a hand in the contracting of the company.¹⁷

Since "[Robin] Cook would later insist that this was the first he knew of any problem," the affair raises a general point about arms-length covert actions. To what extent did the FCO and intelligence agencies have their own agendas and how much did Cook and Blair really know? What other covert operations has the New Labour government been involved in that we do not know about?

For Tony Blair his conscience was clear: "Whatever mistakes may have been made in the drafting of the [UNSC] resolution [which imposed the arms embargo] and in the distribution of messages around the Foreign Office, Britain had been right to support Sierra Leone's elected government. Kabbah was back in power so what was the problem?"¹⁸

Abdel-Fatau Musah, an expert on the region, sees things differently: "The UK could have achieved this goal more honourably if it had used the UN and OAU [Organisation of African Unity] structures to pile more pressure on the junta that had, in principle, agreed to hand over power in 1998 but was prevaricating, testing international resolve ... By tacitly endorsing the use of Sandline in this project, however, the UK achieved the exact opposite of its objectives: it was obliged to collaborate with [Nigerian President] General Abacha's forces through Sandline; indirectly, it helped prolong instability in Sierra Leone and condoned the exploitative motive of Sandline's involvement."¹⁹

The Sandline debacle affair led the Foreign Affairs Select Committee to recommend that the government draft legislation to bring the mercenary trade under control. Four years later the UK is still dragging its feet on bringing in legislation that might bring the mercenary trade under parliamentary control and make it more accountable for its actions.

Instability continued with rival mercenary groups backing opposing sides for a share in the spoils²⁰ and in 2000 British forces supported a UN peacekeeping mission supported by a liberally interpreted UN Security Council Resolution.

Afghanistan

Awkwardly for Blair, the Bush junta which took power in 2001 did not deal in the rhetoric of liberal intervention but of pre-emption and US primacy. A September 2000 document produced by the principle architects of the new administration's foreign policy under the banner of Project for a New American Century "called for a massive increase in defence spending so that the US could 'fight and win multiple, simultaneous, major theatre wars.' They pondered that some 'catastrophic and catalysing event, like a new Pearl Harbour' was needed to assure US global power."²¹

The rationale given for the first of these wars—the attack on Afghanistan—was twofold: to route out al-Qaeda and reduce their threat in a response to their attacks on the US; and to overthrow the Taliban since they were harbouring them and since they were a repressive regime. The first aim was not achieved. Bin Laden was not killed or captured nor were any of al-Qaeda's other senior leaders.²² The Taliban were ousted from Kabul but the rest of the country has been carved up by warlords and is not under President Hamid Karzai's control.

The fact is that the US was already threatening Afghanistan with military action before 11 September 2002. The dossier Downing Street prepared for MPs, *Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities on the United*

States, overlooked “the use the terrorists had made of places like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.”²³

In his speech to the Labour Party conference that was a sales pitch to the country for the war, Blair promised the Afghan people: “The conflict will not be the end. We will not walk away, as the outside world has done so many times before. We were with you at the first—we will stay with you to the last.” Since Kampfner’s story is written from the perspective of No.10 there is little detail of the effects of the campaign on the ground.²⁴ Yet in the bombing campaign that followed, over three thousand people were killed—more than were killed in the collapse of the World Trade Centre. There has been negligible reconstruction of the country.

Yet again Kampfner’s Afghanistan analysis omits a crucial detail. Hamid Karzai, had previously worked as a representative for the UNOCAL oil and gas company who had been negotiating with the Taleban for a pipeline across the country that would be of critical strategic importance to the US in accessing the lucrative energy reserves of the Caspian Sea region. Several months after his coming to power he had signed a treaty with Pakistan and Turkmenistan authorising the construction of such a \$3.2 billion gas pipeline through Afghanistan²⁵ and at the end of the campaign the Americans were left with bases in all of the energy-strategic Central Asian republics.

Iraq did not pose a military threat

One of Kampfner’s key revelations is that Robin Cook had requested a meeting with the head of the Joint Intelligence Committee, John Scarlett, in February 2002 to view the intelligence that Blair had regarding Iraq’s WMD. This allowed Cook in his resignation speech to say with some authority: “Iraq probably has no weapons of mass destruction in the commonly understood sense of the term—namely a credible device capable of being delivered against a strategic city target. It probably still has biological toxins and battlefield chemical munitions, but it has had them since the 1980s.”

Tony Blair’s main rationale by the eve for war was to talk up the threat posed by the ‘linked dangers’ of terrorism and WMD²⁶: “That the world would face a threat of an altogether different scale if Saddam made his chemical and biological weapons available to terrorist groups.”²⁷ Yet there was nothing of substance to back up this concern either.²⁸ When Number 10 presented its human rights case in the December 2002 dossier “Crimes and Human Rights Abuses” Amnesty International accused Blair and Straw of being selective in order to support the drive for war.²⁹

“Blair’s political aides and senior intelligence officials agree that Saddam posed no greater threat on 12 September 2001 than he had on the 10th. They accept that the intelligence on that is clear.”³⁰ Since there was no threat the war was illegal under international law.

A Prior Commitment: Misleading Parliament and the Nation

The truth, as Kampfner reveals, is that Blair had already committed himself to war on 6 April 2002 at Camp David. The deal was that if Bush went down the UN route, Blair would go to war with Bush, with or without a resolution.³¹ Having committed himself and the nation to war he then had to make a case for war. Since a clear threat did not exist this inevitably involved misleading the nation.

The principle tool for making the case was the September 2002 dossier *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*. The first draft of the document was rejected by Downing Street for being insubstantial. Andrew Gilligan’s central claims—disputed by the government—have subsequently been substantiated by evidence given to the Hutton inquiry and by the testimony of Kampfner’s interviewees. “Downing Street, our source says, ordered a week before publication, ordered it to be sexed up, to be made more exciting and ordered more facts to be, to be discovered [and] ... the government probably knew that the 45 minute figure was wrong, even before it decided to put it in.”³²

In his evidence Scarlett “admitted that the 45 minute reference in the September dossier had ‘related to munitions, which we had interpreted to mean battlefield mortar shell or small calibre weaponry, quite different from missiles.’ Geoff Hoon told the inquiry that he had known this all along.” This fact was omitted from the

September 2002 dossier. Blair said that he was not aware of this until after the Commons debate on the eve of war. This is simply not credible.³³

By the end of 2003 none of the nine key conclusions of the September 2002 dossier had been proven.³⁴ In his speech before the 18 March vote in the House of Commons on the eve of war Blair repeated that the threat was real and growing and that people would just have to trust him.³⁵

The Oil Imperative

“For bureaucratic reasons we settled on one issue, weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason everyone could agree on.”

Paul Wolfowit ³⁶

War on Iraq had of course been a long-standing aim of the neo-conservatives who are now seated in the Bush administration. In a letter to President Clinton in 1998 Richard Perle, John Bolton, Richard Armitage, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz argued for “removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime from power” otherwise “a significant portion of the world’s supply of oil will all be put at hazard.”³⁷

It’s blindingly obvious of course that the Bush administration is an oil administration. If you need evidence for the only plausible explanation for the war on Iraq, look no further than the Bush government’s National Energy Policy Development Group report published in May 2001. Chapter Eight makes clear that oil is a key foreign policy objective. It states that America’s “engagement will be global, spotlighting emerging regions that will have a major impact on the global energy balance.” The Middle East will “remain vital to US interests” and “will be a primary focus of US international energy policy ... Concentration of world oil production in any one region of the world,” however, is considered “a potential contributor to market instability, so US attention is also focussing on increasing its domestic production and in developing production in Central and South America, West and Southern Africa, Russia and Central Asia. Promoting investment by American energy firms in oil exporting countries “will be a core element” in US “engagement with major foreign oil producers.”³⁸

Larry Lindsey, Bush’s former top economic adviser said in September 2002: “When there is regime change in Iraq, you could add three million to five million barrels [per day] of production to world supply. The successful prosecution of the war would be good for the economy.” Peter Beaumont and Faisal Islam writing in *The Observer* note that some analysts believed that Iraq’s production could rise to 10m barrels of oil per day after five years. They also pointed out that “the hawks have long argued that US control of Iraq’s oil would help deliver a second objective. That is the destruction of OPEC, the oil producers cartel, which they argue is ‘evil’—that is, incompatible with American interests.”³⁹

Then there is the threat of the Euro starting to replace the dollar as the dominant reserve currency (with all the benefits that brings) prompted by an oil trade conducted in the currency. This is a trend that has been spearheaded by Iraq.⁴⁰

It’s odd that there’s barely a mention of the “O” word in Kampfner’s book.

“Deeply reckless”

The nearest we get for an explanation for Britain’s support for the war on Iraq from Kampfner’s sources is that “he was irked by the neocons’ links with the Tory party. He was determined to do everything possible to prevent them driving a wedge between New Labour and the Republicans.”⁴¹ Perhaps it was David Manning’s dictum that put Blair behind Bush come what may. “At the best of time, Britain’s influence on the US is limited. But the only way to exercise that influence is by attaching ourselves firmly to them and avoiding criticism wherever possible.”⁴²

But is there any evidence for the existence of a positive or restraining influence? Blair might claim credit for making Bush ‘go down the UN route’ but he gave up any leverage the UK had by pledging to go to war with or without UN authorisation. His belief that he had secured Bush’s commitment to the road map was shown to be illusory when Bush agreed to Sharon’s unilateral plan to “withdraw from Gaza but to formalise Israeli occupation of several parts of the West Bank.”⁴³ Furthermore, we have seen little, if anything, concrete in return for our willingness to maintain the fiction of the ‘special relationship’

The UK went along with the US in over-riding the authority of the UN and cutting the disarmament process short. Blair chose to side with the world’s leading rogue state rather than with “multilateralism, consensus and the rule of law.” After announcing its doctrine of primacy and pre-emptive attacks, the US proceeded to destroy the central tenets of progressive multilateralism: the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty; the Kyoto Treaty; the Biological Weapons Convention; and the UN’s convention on small arms. If we had kept to the post war principles of international law and made a principled refusal to go ahead without UN authority—as Harold Wilson had refused to provide troops for Vietnam—it would have undermined the US’s domestic support at home and made the war difficult to execute.

Instead Blair went more than the distance to lend the Bush project an unwarranted legitimacy: flying numerous diplomatic missions, logging more air miles than Colin Powell and meeting with the leaders of over 70 countries.⁴⁴ The *New York Times* wrote: “He has often articulated the goals of the war on terrorism more eloquently than Mr Bush. He has not only been Washington’s partner in facing the wider world, but on many occasions the world’s ambassador to Washington. America should be grateful for both roles.”⁴⁵ Blair’s disposition caused a rift with Europe and now he commands little respect at either home or abroad.

Is the world a safer place?

The attack on Iraq compounded rather than addressed grievances of Muslim people. A Foreign Affairs Select Committee report in February concluded “that the war in Iraq had possibly made terrorist attacks against British nationals and British interests more likely in the short term.”⁴⁶ When UK targets were bombed in Istanbul in November 2003 Jack Straw “told Blair’s advisers he was in no doubt that Britain had been attacked for its role in the war.” In March this year 200 people were killed and over a thousand injured in Madrid as a result of the Spanish government’s support for the war. The same month the Metropolitan Police Commissioner declared that an attack on London was ‘inevitable.’

And what of Iraq itself? After a body count of over 11,000 civilian casualties⁴⁷ the country looks increasingly like the new Vietnam. *The Independent’s* celebrated journalist Robert Fisk writes in a recent dispatch: “Much of Iraq has fallen outside the control of America’s puppet government in Baghdad but we are not told. Hundreds of attacks are made against US troops every month. But unless an American dies, we are not told. This month’s death toll of Iraqis in Baghdad alone has now reached 700—the worst month since the invasion ended. But we are not told ... Baquba, Samara, Kut, Mahmoudiya, Hilla, Fallujah, Ramadi, all are outside government authority ... Foreign workers pour out of Iraq for fear of their lives ... Oil pipeline explosions are now as regular as power cuts. In parts of Baghdad now, they have only four hours of electricity a day; the streets swarm with foreign mercenaries, guns poking from windows, shouting abusively at Iraqis who don’t clear the way for them.”⁴⁸

Sooner rather than later though, America’s oil imperative is going to have to face up to the climate change imperative. In February this year the Pentagon put out a report warning that the threat to global stability from climate change vastly outweighs the threat posed by terrorism. The report says that the issue “should be elevated beyond a scientific debate to a US national security concern.” Abrupt climate change would “challenge United States national security in ways that should be considered immediately.”⁴⁹ Perhaps the necessity for urgent action to reduce our dependence on oil to avoid the worst affects of climate change, along with the painful lessons of Iraq, can help move us towards a less reckless future. Kampfner’s book meanwhile exposes the central folly at the heart of Number 10.

Notes

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- 3 Scott Ritter with William Rivers Pitt, “War on Iraq: What Team Bush Doesn’t Want You To Know”, Profile Books, 2002, pp. 24-5
- 4 Ritter & Rivers Pitt, pp. 51-5
- 5 See for example, Mark Littman QC “Neither Legal Nor Moral: How NATO’s war against Yugoslavia breached international law”, Committee for Peace in the Balkans,

- 2000
- 6 Kampfner, p. 47
- 7 David Chandler “Western Intervention and the Disintegration of Yugoslavia” in “Degraded Capability” edited by Philip Hammond and Edward S. Hermann, Pluto Press, 2000, pp. 19-30
- 8 Quoted in John Pilger “Censorship by Omission” in “Degraded Capability”, p. 138
- 9 Kampfner, p. 43
- 10 Peter Gowan “The War and Its Aftermath” in “Degraded Capability”, p. 46
- 11 Kampfner, p. 386
- 12 See Phil England “Degraded Capability” review in Variant volume 2, number 11, summer 2000, p.16, www.variant.org.uk
- 13 Kampfner, p. 59
- 14 Philip Hammond in “Degraded Capability”, p. 127
- 15 John Pilger in “Degraded Capability”, p. 143
- 16 Quoted in Paul Watson, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14/6/99
- 17 For a detailed discussion of this above episode and mercenary activity in Sierra Leone in general see A Country Under Seige by Abdel-Fatau Musah in “Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma” edited by Abdel-Fatau Musah and J. ‘Kayode Fayemi, Pluto Press, 2000, pp. 776-116
- 18 Kampfner, p. 68
- 19 Ibid, pp. 102-3
- 20 Ibid, pp. 105-6
- 21 PNAC “Rebuilding America’s Defences: Strategy, Forces and Resources” quoted in Kampfner, p. 154
- 22 Kampfner, p. 148
- 23 Kampfner, p. 125
- 24 See Mark Curtis “Web of Deceit—Britain’s Real Role in the World”, Vintage, 2003, pp. 47-55, for example, for details of the effects of the bombing campaign
- 25 Lutz Klevevan “Oil and the New Great Game” in *The Nation* magazine, 16/2/04, www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Oil_watch/Oil_NewGreatGame.html
- 26 Milan Rai “Regime Unchanged”, pp. 33-4
- 27 Kampfner, p. 157
- 28 “Leaked report rejects Iraqi al-Qaeda link”, BBC News, 5/2/03
- 29 Kampfner, p. 225
- 30 Kampfner, p. 157
- 31 Kampfner, pp. 196-7
- 32 Kampfner, pp. 338, 348, 375
- 33 Kampfner, p. 375
- 34 Kampfner, p. 360
- 35 Kampfner, p. 309
- 36 Kampfner, p. 338
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- 45 Kampfner, p. 137
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