

## QUID 9: AGAINST IMPERIALISM A PROLEGOMENA, EX ED.

The publication of *QUID 9* has been held up by several depressive pillars, including the inside neap-angle of mental rack between the respective pulls of (1) lunacy and (2) you are my sunshine. Limbs drifting apart, the tongue sopping with unnoticed jingo-frisson, feet boinging along the queue to the beam pipe. There was no public response to the Editorial of *QUID 8*, now recommissioned by my book *Antifreeze* as 'Ejector Vacua Axle;' apparently Peter Blegvad may have wanted to leave the Church and not sing his song about the boy whose father was a tree, after hearing me recite it (the P.A. had by this point broken down) at a London benefit for MSF, *Out of Bounds*.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in some distant repercussion this will count for more than I can credit. But for now, in the universal highchair of the "double vacuum" (so politely undermultiplied by Amiri Baraka way back in 1977: "No communist party, no national / leadership"), what do we do? Suck or blow? No *wind* in the vacuum to piss against: try *that* again?<sup>2</sup> To be idiomatic within a vacuum is a shining thing; to be vacuous in a plenary idiom is how we are now conscripted to do this, it's a kind of gluttonous fasting, Jerome on a diet of roasted peanuts in manic fast-forward, all chanting desperately and honestly and hatefully against the new season's injustice, cantors with gobs blue-tacked to the hollering brick wall. Is irony in *this way essentially* a kind of clausal pile-up, or only *now*? Box after box. *Vide* Beckett: "It's vague, life and death." As a matter of which the question trembles and flashes: what's the pass-concept to get out of the ultra-left margin to which poetry is categorically resigned? Is the concept: poetry's materiality as the last blockade against the wholesale (rather than dialectical) complicity of consciousness with imperialism? Is it: the valiant hermeneutic runaround once again fobbed off with a mere *aura*, this time by Agamben, that art is the unconcealing of humanity's essential rhythm on "the earth?" More about the earth later. Perhaps the pass-concept is something to do with poetry and *the body*. If the body is cognitive, if our habits and flinches are metaphysical and themselves a kind of knowledge, what is it exactly that we know? Or could know, if the body's unconscious were plumbed? ("The gall bladder has mountains; cliffs of fall / Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap / May who ne'er hung there.") Knowledge within the

---

<sup>1</sup> This event was organized by Chris Goode in November 2001. Sean Bonney's and Harry Gilonis's contributions to the evening are reprinted here. Blegvad rounded off the evening with a charming mix of humour and poignancy, as in the "his father was a tree" song, intended to divert the audience from the joyless astringency of polemic through shifting the focus of the event onto identity politics and the absurdity of racial intolerance. A kind of "nuke the rag-heads" in laudable, timeless, individualist reverse. Marjorie Perloff's gardener would presumably have *wept*.

<sup>2</sup> The "glorious strife" still fit for epic c.1743:  
 "A second effort brought but new disgrace,  
 The wild Meander wash'd the Artist's face:  
 Thus the small jett, which hasty hands unlock,  
 Spirits in the gard'ner's eyes who turns the cock."

vacuum has *vagueness* as its essential predicate.<sup>3</sup> Has the body, as now the fantastic vacuum is upsized, become *vaguer still*? Since *September 11th* I've found that I'm able to come only intermittently, not in the continuous Heraclitean flux of our former estrangement. Animals sense these things. A lioness whelped. Horses neigh. Ghosts shriek and squeal about the streets on CCTV. Is this a prophecy? Libidinal *Entausserung* "as" family planning? Is my orgasm a fluent euphemism for bullet-spray, cut out by pacifist balls? These and other questions perplex the man in the street now firming up for the mass traipse toward enlightenment in its most innovative phase. And of course linguistic innovation is the reconnaissance it always has been, setting the exam questions of the dream-world to come, scribbling out a brand new, fully-hope-fitted aeon.<sup>4</sup> But what particularly should poetry do, what schedule of leap / bound? Is the ultra-left margin a kind of tugboat jettisoned into outer space? The reintegration of high and low art forms, the convalescence dreamt by Adorno, might be key. A return to *the whole* of culture, no longer (*dixit* Debord) "the meaning of an insufficiently meaningful world," but (*qua* Poetics) *an* anti-meaning of / as an always already sufficiently unmeaningful world-system. If our leaders can do this, then we should make damn sure that poetry can keep up. Kofi Annan was canny enough about the everyday to appear on *Sesame Street*:

Annan stepped in when puppet character Elmo and his friends argued over who would get to sing the alphabet song. In the end he persuaded them all to join in. Afterwards he said it was "wonderful to reach out to young people" and hoped that he showed children "the spirit of the UN, a spirit of understanding, sharing and working together". He said some politicians needed to be more like the characters in the show: "Elmo and his friends will tell us, it's the way they are, they tell it straight." "Keep it simple and it brings you back to earth. I think that is very important, we all need that."<sup>5</sup>

We do, we need it. The return to *earth* was suggested by another mediator, Ron Silliman, when he stepped into the still-trembling polemic vacuum to remind us that Bush might risk being *impeached* if he didn't mobilize the U.S. military-cultural complex against terrorism; the "left," as Silliman understands it, would only isolate itself by "continuing on some mode of automatic pilot" to condemn military reaction, as if "traditional left-right dispute" still had

---

<sup>3</sup> See my essay 'Vagueness, Poetry' in *QUID* 7b, plus Robin Purves' follow-up in *QUID* 8i.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Charles Bernstein's 21<sup>st</sup> recommended poetry experiment, a real wrist-nimbler-upper: "Dream work: Write down your dreams as the first thing you do every morning for 30 days. Apply translation and aleatoric processes to this material. Double the length of each dream. Weave them together into one poem, adding or changing or reordering material. Negate or reverse all statements ("I went down the hill" to "I went up the hill," "I didn't" to "I did"). Borrow a friend's dreams and apply these techniques to them." Could Silliman have been applying aleatoric processes to his avowed "left pacifism," with a view perhaps to defamiliarizing socialist beliefs such that their materiality as signifiers might once more be recognized? It's hard to say.

<sup>5</sup> BBC News, Friday, 7 December, 2001:  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/newsid\\_1697000/1697088.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/entertainment/tv_and_radio/newsid_1697000/1697088.stm)  
 Judging from Annan's passionate intervention in the current escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a call for Israel to cease all military action against Arafat's headquarters, we might hazard a guess, not having seen the episode in question, that Elmo and his friends *in fact* told the Secretary General to run along back to his pigeon-hole at Reuters with its bedanglement of palliative trumpets. Is the wool being pulled over our eyes?

any relevance. A felicitous metaphor, but does Silliman go *far enough*? Perhaps from his warnings we can take more elaborate heed, and ask the question he implies more directly: was the left *ever* anything but a mission of resentful mystifiers intent on self-alienation from the popular voice of injured patriotism? What could Lenin possibly have said, faced with the Hellenic spectacle of G.W. Bush, a grown man, *almost beginning to weep* “when a reporter in the Oval Office asked him about his feelings”?<sup>6</sup> Revolutionary fervour is all good and well; but these are bad and sick times in which the very timelessness of humanity itself is at stake, its tears bouncing onto the faggot-heap of barbaric hatred. Perhaps *this* is the exit-sign we’ve all been too hotheaded to notice. Could it be that poetry must make a leap of good faith, out of the cynic’s layby, out of the nil-stinking privet of intense dialectical consciousness, out of the fridge-magnet marginalia of the ultra-left, and back gloriously into the infinite fold of what Silliman reminds us is “the popular will?” How else can poetry keep up the pretence to be democratic? Are we big enough to admit it, that we’ve spent long enough groping in finical misery after a language of consummate vivid resistance, and that all this time we’ve had our heads buried in the sand like a bunch of Iraqis on the Basra Road? Are we big enough also to take the lead in this return to earth from its natural origin, the big country itself, the big culture amongst whose avant-garde Silliman is a respected pioneer, the big-hearted U.S.A.?

The critical segue is unique and throatcatching, thus: (1) when I was a child I threw myself about with perpetual clarity and fixation. I am now broken with myself indistinct and without poise. I don't know what sincerity can mean. Tell me precisely how to be afraid of vulnerability: I cannot have that fear, it has distorted itself away, it's now only *invulnerability* that terrifies me. I don't know if this should make sense. (2) I listened when I woke up today, my head hurting and my throat dried out, to your copy of B-----' R-----'. The music was next to my painting. How can we be freely honest when the whole prospect of consequence per se is so gilded with incredibility. But, honestly, what do you need to say? If we haven't yet communicated in our most total speech, why is this? What are our reluctances? What are mine. I don't know that I can say. Let's open ourselves to each other and demand the breakdown of partial sincerity into its recuperable scraps. Make something new and less obviously possible. Tell me about yourself exactly. Does this sound histrionic. (3) I feel like a pitiful and destroyed man lapsing now constantly rearward into the origin of my pain, from which everything I now do is a receding dead-end. And barely careful about this or interested in it. I need love so *desperately*, so stupidly and impossibly. Without it my life is pure attendance, pure waiting for the end of waiting only. Everything screws up and drops. I'm shaped forever by that single need, it is the displaced core of all the quiet and

---

<sup>6</sup> Silliman's beacon of an essay, quoted here and throughout this editorial, continues to glitter and warm at: [http://au.geocities.com/masthead\\_2/us/silliman.html](http://au.geocities.com/masthead_2/us/silliman.html). See Andrea Brady's essay in this issue for a larger treatment of Silliman's piece and the chorus of sober agreement roused by it.

brilliance possible within me and now dissipated. (4) I sat last night in a bar again drunk and talked gently with near strangers hoping for nothing particular or eventual. Later became more stupid though did nothing. I called your house at 3 in the morning for a second or two then hung up. (5) I used to design animals and provide their statistics, I began with some kind of enlarged boar. Made perfume by dropping rose petals into an ice-cream tub full of water. Spiders trapped in compartmentalized cardboard would die into a kind of fascinating deliquescence. I loved to be alone then, but can't suffer it now. (6) Is my life something I can reclaim even from inside the loss of that proposition, or is it fixed now by the irrelevance of repair into mere continuity and balancing regret against the refusal of stoical temperance. (7) Who are you. Tell me exactly about yourself. This is never a challenge. Open yourself. That must be how love batters away its counterfeit. From this the bound into true, that is, anti-imperialist, fortitude is a leap alike to spark from match to petroleum, the whole mouth blazing like the clouds' gentle euphony in a sky ecstatic with raw sunlight. Instances of which can be extruded piecemeal into the swelling clagnut of historical counterconsciousness via *Prontaprint*, if sent to:

Keston Sutherland, Editor  
*QUID*  
 Gonville & Caius College  
 Cambridge, CB2 1TA  
 England

kms20@hermes.cam.ac.uk, www.barquepress.com

#### Malcontents:

John Wilkinson, 'September 11 <sup>th</sup> '	5
Andrea Brady, 'Grief Work in a War Economy'	6
Pascal Boulanger, '( 11 September 2001' [trans. Jérôme Game]	25
Stuart Calton, [a poem]	27
Eric Suchère, 'N° 48 (septembre 2001), L'achèvement' [with a translation by Jérôme Game]	28
Harry Gilonis, 'Three Misreadings of Horatian Odes'	29
Chris Emery, [three poems]	33
Sean Bonney, 'The Management Consultant Has Gone For Lunch'	36
Chris Goode, [a text]	43
Jérôme Game, ' <i>this aggression will not stand, man</i> '	47
Peter Middleton, 'And We Had Those Nightmares Where'	50
Hubert Lucot, 'Operations' [trans. Jérôme Game]	51
Ben Friedlander, 'After Psalm 137'	53
Marie-Angelique Bueler 'Bombs and Bangs'	55

## JOHN WILKINSON • SEPTEMBER 11TH

Angled for the absent driver, the notepad codicils  
 hard to decipher hold his next movements.  
 Leather relaxes, metal cools, paper  
 has been used. And of a sudden  
 mottled ragged rippling changeable sky draws back:  
 flat eggshell blue will stay informed, unequivocal.

That was an after-effect, spasms of data traffic  
 muscle through for patterning, made single-minded;  
 the skyline clarifies repeatedly  
 again, again. A loss & loss will scribble  
 two sheaths outside-in so commodities & ideas  
 slump & glaze slips, the citizens who were worldly-

wise, various in their appetent lives, dying smashed  
 against one door framed to admit one thought,  
 this only, scramble for their last  
 calls of love. Which is an order of sorts.  
 On an evening sky the wheeling swan grows uglier:  
 a car, a box or silent bag decrees a paradise union

fixative. Who comes home? The tables always turn  
 as tables must, the value of investments  
 can decrease or prove violent, air  
 has been invested, the tap can't ever be stopped.  
 Who's buying back, crazes mud debentures,  
 crazes glass now it's written off, crazes eggshell blue.

## ANDREA BRADY • GRIEF WORK IN A WAR ECONOMY

The World Trade Center site has become, says a psychologist who has volunteered to counsel workers there, a 'sacred burial ground'.<sup>7</sup> But as a focus for community memory and regeneration, a ritualised space, and an assertion of the religious character of American social life, the site is disturbingly banal. The hoardings that surround its devastated city blocks are strung with fading commemorations, team posters and autographed jackets from union locals, stuffed animals and fake flowers. Such elegiac tokens represent the grief of disparate communities, attaching itself to a specific site of loss. They also express that desire for revenge which Bacon called 'a kinde of Wilde Justice' which puts the law 'out of Office', and which the US has begun to satisfy from the illegal cages of Guantanamo Bay.<sup>8</sup>

The insignia of mourning reassert the will of local populations in national action. They advertise forms of belonging undamaged by attacks on American targets – and, by extension, a heightened awareness of national belonging. Visitors walk from City Hall down a stretch of Broadway renamed 'the Canyon of Heroes'. Banners on lampposts remind New Yorkers to 'do your part: spend money', either on the t-shirts airbrushed with Presidential speeches and exploding logos, 'Wipe Out Bin Laden' toilet paper and other memorabilia, or on the luxuries that absorb Manhattan's ragged economic energy for undamaged miles north of Battery Park. That this grief should take both emotional and consumerist forms is not a contradiction, but a premise of promoted, self-validating national identity. Attorney General John Ashcroft, addressing the National Religious Broadcasters Convention on February 19, defined the war against terrorism as 'the defense of our right to make moral choices – to seek fellowship with God that is chosen, not commanded.' But, he continued,

Terrorists have a different understanding of choices. Because they fear that people with freedom will reject their ideas, terrorists seek to deny us our freedom. They distrust personal choice because they have abandoned every value except their own lust for power. In a universe of choices—a marketplace of ideas—their way offers us nothing.<sup>9</sup>

The war has been defined as a competition of contrarities, good versus evil, freedom versus slavery, democracy versus tyranny, piety versus atheism and fundamentalist perversion. In this agon of values, certain freedoms are becoming technically obsolete. At the same time, freedom, identified with choice as limitless consumption, elides quickly into the demagogy of the free market. The destruction of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has apotheosised the American way (the prosperity, liberties and self-satisfaction seemingly

---

<sup>7</sup> G.R. Anderson Jr. 'Postcard from Ground Zero: Months After the Terrorist Attack in New York City, an Odd World Takes Shape.' *City Pages.com* vol. 22 no. 1096, 5/12/2001. see <http://www.citypages.com/databank/22/1096/article9998.asp>

<sup>8</sup> Bacon, Francis. 'Of Revenge.' *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*. ed. M. Kiernan. Oxford: Clarendon, 1985. p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> 'Freedom—an Endowment from God.' Remarks from Attorney General John Ashcroft at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention, February 20, 2002. see <http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/speeches/2002/021902religiousbroadcasters.htm>

offered by unregulated capital), giving it a sacrificial and transcendent basis for unfettered growth through permanent war.<sup>10</sup> By positioning itself as a charitable, victimised and honourable agent, the US justifies its achievement of ‘full-spectrum dominance’ and the capacity to wage assymetric warfare in the theatres of its choice.<sup>11</sup> In this paper, I will consider how grief has been used tactically to assert the US military agenda, by looking first at how ritualised mourning is instrumental to the maintenance of social structures. My aim is not to evaluate the ‘sincerity’ of expressions of grief, or to condemn them as naive, mercenary or conniving; instead, I hope to show that grief, far from being a spontaneous and private outpouring, is a socialised response whose power in galvanizing populations has long been recognised.

### **“Ground Zero to Ground Hero”<sup>12</sup>**

The placards and condolences at the WTC mostly express the senders’ nationalist pride, and their desire to maintain accustomed forms of living and thinking threatened by September’s attacks. This conservative tendency is not unusual for mortuary ritual, which (anthropologists have argued) tends to smooth the disruptions to social hierarchy caused by death.<sup>13</sup> Mortuary rituals in traditionally hierarchical societies emphasise the loss not of an individual but of a social agent; that vacated agency is filled, during the ritual, by the heir. The funeral audience becomes participant, really or by proxy, in a social ritual whose chief roles are reserved for the kinship group or a particular strata of social leadership. But its participation also lays claim to the dead. In this way, the ritual combines inclusion and exclusion, the breakdown of hierarchy and its maintenance. For participants it can be palliative, releasing not only the sorrow of loss but also the tensions which build up within systems of hereditary power. When the ritual is foregone, or the community is excluded from it, unexpressed grief can emerge in other, more revolutionary expressions and undermine the smooth transition of power. But even in the most orthodox performances, funerary rites bring private emotional states into contact with the law, the government, the church, and community discipline, and can thus offer radical opportunities for reimagining and changing social life.

Harry Triandis argues that in individualistic societies, where loosely-linked citizens view themselves as independent entities whose conjunction is motivated by their own preferences

---

<sup>10</sup> Vice President Dick Cheney has said the US is considering military or other action against 40 to 50 countries and warns that the new war may last fifty years or more; ‘the US defence secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, asked the Pentagon to come up with post-Afghanistan options in which they were to think the unthinkable’. Ewen MacAskill, ‘Other countries could face US military action’, *Guardian* 17 November 2001.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Trifkovic, Srdja. ‘State of the Union: An Empire, not a Republic.’ *Chronicles Magazine*, 1 February 2001. <http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/News/Trifkovic/NewsST020102.htm>

<sup>12</sup> John Walsh, presenter of *America’s Most Wanted* (Fox Network)

<sup>13</sup> see for example Hertz, Robert. *Death and the Right Hand*. trans. Rodney and Claudia Needham. London: Cohen and West, 1960. p. 77.

and goals (the social model of Locke and others), the expression of grief is more intense because the dead will have occupied a more exclusive role in the life of the bereaved than in collectivist societies.<sup>14</sup> In such societies, grief disappears not into the restructuring of social relations in which human beings are most importantly vocational agents, but into the abyss of losing the unique and irreplaceable one. By contrast, in collectivist societies, the funeral can be a point of condensation for social relations. It calls all members of a community into an actively perceived relationship with the power structures embodied in the deceased. This ethnopsychological model of the funeral may seem applicable only to collectivist societies. After all, except such expressly heraldic funerals as President Kennedy's (the riderless horse) or Princess Diana's (Earl Spenser invoking the nobility's blood ties against the centralised monarchy), most funerals celebrate private individuals privately.

But even the commemoration of private individuality in contemporary Western funerals can seek out exemplary characteristics on which a communal ethic and culture can be modelled. In his State of the Union address, George Bush claimed that

in the sacrifice of soldiers, the fierce brotherhood of firefighters, and the bravery and generosity of ordinary citizens, we have glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self.<sup>15</sup>

J-P Vernant has argued that in archaic Greece, 'the social memory' used the emblematic hero 'to root a whole system of values in the absolute, in order to preserve it from precariousness, instability and destruction: in short, to shelter it from time and from death.'<sup>16</sup> Existing 'within the public domain', the Greek hero was an embodiment of the values of the 'common culture.' Similarly, the elevation of NYPD and Fire Department officers to heroic status in the corporate-sponsored epideictic which now blankets the American airwaves, anchors their accidental deaths in the values of donation and brotherhood; the brave performance of official duty becomes a tribute to the absolute of the service economy.

Against such reasserted cultural values, Bush dismissed the rival values of secularism and consumerism which, he claimed, the terrorists believed had exceeded all other forms of civic duty for Americans. 'Our enemies believed America was weak and materialistic, that we would splinter in fear and selfishness. They were as wrong as they are evil,' he asserted.

None of us would ever wish the evil that was done on September the 11th. Yet after America was attacked, it was as if our entire country looked into a mirror and saw our better selves. We were reminded that we are citizens, with obligations to each other, to our country, and to history. We began to think less of the goods we can accumulate, and more about the good we can do.

September 11<sup>th</sup> is given as a national day of reckoning, the apocalyptic rending of the veil of materialism. In this Pauline typology, individual sacrifice initiates a new era in the law.

---

<sup>14</sup> Triandis, Harry C. *Individualism and Collectivism*. Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> for a transcript, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>

<sup>16</sup> Vernant, J-P. 'Death with Two Faces.' in *Mortality and Immortality: the anthropology and archaeology of death*. ed. S. C. Humphreys and Helen King. London: Academic Press, 1981. p. 286.



Appointing September 11 the day of judgement, precedent to the founding of the new American Jerusalem, the Bush administration urges us to relinquish critical access to historical antecedents in order to stockpile the righteous violence of revenge. The spectacular deaths offer absolution from the bonds of America's criminal history. Ground zero became year zero. The millenarians among Bush's evangelical cabinet will have been pleased to hear commentators describe this as a unique historical moment. The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council acknowledged that 'while Allies and Russia have suffered from terrorist attacks against civilians, the horrific scale of the attacks of 11 September is without precedent in modern history.'<sup>17</sup> The numbers are clearly not unprecedented. What *is* unique is its victims: Americans, mostly urban, mostly white and middle- to upper-class, individuals whose advertised uniqueness is advertised, celebrated and commercialised on an unprecedented scale.

David Dolan, a Zionist journalist, compared the attack on America to previous attacks on Israel. 'But for all the terrorist casualties we have suffered in the past year, and indeed in the decades before, nothing even remotely compares to what the United States has just experienced. If our Sunday was black, then America's Tuesday was a black hole.' On the event horizon of that black hole, time collapses; history begins anew. The world's moments of silence pointed forward into a different epoch. September 11 provides an exact moment (a deadline) for the revision of consciousness; it is suggested that this date, baptism by fire, re-oriented US intellection about the world and its own history and responsibilities. Of course, this revisionism is empty rhetoric. America may (Bush observed in his State of the Union address) have 'come to know truths that we will never question: evil is real, and it must be opposed.' Like the old, the new world is governed by infallible and axiomatic American principles – to question them is to dishonour the dead. So as the towers of Babel crumbled, a unanimity of language was enforced. This repression of dissent was not only the preoccupation of far-right organisations, but also of putative leftist poets and academics. It was enforced through insult, threat and reduction to speechless symbolism, and through repressive models of grief provided by the organs of bourgeois spiritual 'well-being'.

### **Back to Basics**

Hilton Obenzinger wrote to the Buffalo Poetics listserv, 'we've seen the fabric of reality torn and what has been revealed is the utter horror of human depravity.'<sup>18</sup> The apocalyptic unveiling of September 11 peeled back the benign super-reality of New York, and American life, revealing something more essentially human and at the same time inhumanly vague. The victims became heroic paradigms – men like Todd Beamer who vaulted out of ordinary

---

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2001/p010913e.htm>

<sup>18</sup> <http://listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0109&L=poetics&P=R15139>

citizenship into historic exceptionalism via Larry King, becoming expressions of a dormant American patriotic identity which will prove useful in war.<sup>19</sup> Disaster comes home; its victims are recognisable, can be identified in their particularities which are likely to be similar to our own. The images of explosion, replayed from every angle, replicate the flashbacks typical of post-traumatic stress disorder – while also *causing* trauma in ordinary viewers. We are conscripted into a legion of witnesses and cannot extricate ourselves. In the society of the spectacle, witness and television makes death more ‘real’ while losing its imaginary qualities. These attacks on America’s capitals allowed the greatest number of possible eyewitnesses, among the poetic community or the financial and political leadership. Charles Bernstein expressed his own experience as a man on the street; in conclusion, he postulated

the image is greater than the reality  
the image can't approach the reality  
the reality has no image

The media has taken considerable pains with those images, working to humanise the quantifiable losses in New York and Washington. The *New York Times* ran an obituary of each victim, often headlined with unbearably homely details of lost daily lives. The individuality of the victims was reinforced with each replayed image of single figures falling, or voice from the grave left on answering machines.

Such images, Ron Silliman argued in an essay published on the same list on September 18 and afterward on *Masthead*, are sufficient justification for military action.

Everyone has had the opportunity to see over 5,000 people, most of them the most ordinary folks in the world, die very horrible deaths. This total is more than the attack on Pearl Harbor and the sinking of the Titanic combined – this is a visceral shock to the system that we will all be suffering effects from for years.<sup>20</sup>

Tragedy gets worse when its victims are the consummate individuals, unique and yet familiar (‘most ordinary folks in the world’). Meanwhile, helpfully, the sanctions regime and the illegal no-fly zone have maintained the *de facto* news black-out in Iraq: unable to view ‘man-on-the-street’ footage from Basra, uninterested in any from Sudan, we cannot recognise individual targets and our sympathy peters out. Fascist representation has made us, as Gillian Rose says, into the ultimate predators.

---

<sup>19</sup> In exchange for America’s lost individuals, we are offered the individual enemy: a one-man terror machine. Osama bin Laden is a useful cipher, because he can be represented in his spectacular singularity (training videos, speeches, conversations in caves) on television, and because he is mysterious, absconded, in fact *general*, another man (as the congressman from Louisiana would say) with a diaper on his head. Though associated with Afghanistan, to the great cost of the Afghani people, he is *nowhere*, stateless and on the move. His physiognomy is scrutinized for signs of kidney disease, any possible fatality which could rob the US of its terminal revenge. Feeding a frenzy for particularity, the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph* [25 November] asked handwriting experts to examine his signature on a fax: they concluded that bin Laden was ‘chronically unhappy and in need of self-protection, motivated by an overpowering libido and possibly compensating with an inflated ego for neglect during his childhood’; while Bush’s own hancock shows him to be ‘a tenacious, practical, determined man who was strongly self-controlled and never pursued a lost cause.’

<sup>20</sup> for this post and reactions to it, see <http://listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A1=ind0109&L=poetics> or [http://au.geocities.com/masthead\\_2/us/silliman.html](http://au.geocities.com/masthead_2/us/silliman.html). Marjorie Perloff responded, ‘I cried when I read Ron’s report. It is truly the best thing I’ve read on the situation we’re in and it is so humane, accurate, brilliantly argued, and fair-minded. Thank you Ron. This article should be circulated widely--let’s all do that--and printed in a leading periodical. And of course later on it will be part of Ron’s Collected Writings.’

It is only the ultimate predator whose sympathies can be so promiscuously enlisted. Only the ultimate predator who can be made to identify exclusively and yet consecutively with one link or another in the life cycle, because she can destroy the whole cycle, and, of course, herself. Since she is the ultimate predator, she can be sentimental about the victimhood of other predators while overlooking that victim's own violent predation; and she may embellish her arbitrary selectivity of compassion in rhapsodies and melodramas.<sup>21</sup>

The effect of these images is exacerbated by what Jessica Mitford called the 'American way of death'. Hospitals, nursing homes and hospices have so efficiently institutionalised death (especially in the United States) that it is very easy to reach adulthood without ever attending at a deathbed or seeing a corpse – except as a cosmetic catastrophe at an open-casket wake. Linking profit to the happiness of its customers, the funeral industry absorbed reminders of physical death and corruption. 'In order to sell death, it had to be made friendly.'<sup>22</sup> Guy Debord argues that this amiable presentation of death is another convenience of the Spectacle:

Someone who has given up the idea of living life will surely never be able to embrace death.[...] Promoters of the "American way of death" dwell solely on how much of the *appearance* of life can be maintained in the individual's encounter with death.<sup>23</sup>

The corpse was, for Christian attendants at funerals throughout the early modern period, an object lesson in mortality and the ensuing rewards of faith: a heavenly apotheosis. The ability of the remains to repulse a modern onlooker underlines the impossibility of our own self-realisation. The corpse has become a full-stop for the capitalist producer caught up in her material individuation, the dead material abandoned entirely by spirit.

The funeral encourages friends and family to build intimacy around the merits of a person as irrecoverable loss. According to a U.S.-based counselling service, The Grief Recovery Institute, a funeral or other 'conclusionary ritual' [*sic*] 'marks the final progress in the life of an individual'; 'notifies the interested segment of the society of that final progress'; and has 'an absolutely unchanging purpose: *To create an accurate memory reflection of the life of the person who died.*' That is, through testimony to personal characteristics, mortuary ritual embeds in memory an accurate and singular image of a life's complex process. The funeral moment should be as fixed, transcendent and ahistorical as the defunct object it consecrates. Funerals should provide necessary confirmation of loss and serve 'an aspect of our human-ness which demands visual confirmation of the information we have received or have been led to believe is true', since 'the absence of such confirmation can have long-term harmful effect on those who naturally seek that proof.' Even in death, the spectacle replaces reality. The funeral, a rite of separation according to Van Gennep's classification, becomes part of the separation inherent to the spectacle.

---

<sup>21</sup> Rose, Gillian. *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*. Cambridge: CUP, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Ariès, Philippe. *Western Attitudes towards Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*. trans. Patricia M. Ranum. London: Marion Boyars, 1976. p. 99

<sup>23</sup> Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1995. thesis 160, p. 115.

## Moments of Silence

So, when Susan Schultz wrote that ‘Grief, by any other means, is now our politics’, we can begin to understand how these spectacular events drew Americans from apathy to pathos.<sup>24</sup> Ron Silliman decrees that ‘It is time for progressives to act, but not on the past dragged on as habit.’ By demoting the knowledge built up by left-activists and the working class into a ‘habit’, he preaches an abandonment of history. This is, he continues, ‘the worst possible moment in history’ for leftist isolation, that is, dissent. Without strategic complicity at the nadir of human history, the left will banish itself and lose ‘credibility’. Grief, as an absolute and inalienable political right, must not be subverted by ideology.

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

The wounded body politic answers its violation with force: such sentiments, ‘natural’ to the individual, are apparently sufficient justifications for politics. Grief allows the state’s particular interests to be replaced by a populace united in feeling: a sensible Leviathan responding instinctively to pain.

Dissent has undeniably been suppressed in the name of solidarity from the right and such professed leftists as Silliman. Peter Beinart, editor in chief of *The New Republic* wrote, “This nation is now at war. And in such an environment, domestic political dissent is immoral without a prior statement of national solidarity, a choosing of sides.” The media demands uniform responses to grief, ideological complicity, as a sign of goodness. On September 19, the conservative internet journal *FrontPageMagazine* called Congresswoman Barbara Lee’s vote against congressional emergency anti-terrorist measures traitorous.

We are at war again, and it’s time to call things by their right names. Barbara Lee is not an anti-war activist, she is an anti-American communist who supports America’s enemies and has actively collaborated with them in their war against America.<sup>25</sup>

This dogmatism reached its apogee in Michael Kelly’s article ‘Pacifist Claptrap’ for the *Washington Post* on September 26. He argued, ‘in the situation where one’s nation has been attacked ...pacifism is, inescapably and profoundly, immoral. Indeed, ...pacifism is on the side of the murderers, and it is on the side of letting them murder again.’

This attitude – equating pacifism, willingness to debate non-military responses, *intellectual work* with appeasement and finally murder – was also paraded past the Poetics list by Marjorie Perloff. She wrote on September 21,

I think there's one thing that is still wholly misunderstood on this List and maybe I see it because I'm older (if not wiser) than most of you. The reason there has to be action (we can debate what kind of action) is 99% self-defense, pure and simple.

---

<sup>24</sup> “The instant politicization of our grief,” says one email/ September 17.

<sup>25</sup> cf. ‘Actually, They DO Dare Call It Treason’ by Terry Krepel. <http://conwebwatch.tripod.com/stories/2001/treason.html>

We can sit and debate the similarities between our crimes and their crimes till we're blue in the face, but unless we do something THERE WILL BE ANOTHER ATTACK. ... without concerted action by ourselves and our allies, you won't have to worry about the U.S. being a nasty Imperialist super power any more. Because it may not be here at all. Fortunately, about 92% of the country, acc. to polls, seems to understand this.

Perloff reiterated this populist argument in a controversial letter to the *London Review of Books*,<sup>26</sup> where she first compared Mary Beard to Chamberlain and then claimed Beard's unpopular opinion might be one reason

why academics are now so poorly regarded by the rest of the population and why there are so few academic jobs for recent Humanities PhDs, either in the US or the UK. Outside the ivory gates, 95 per cent of the US population evidently disagree with Beard's assessment.

This ceaseless invocation of public opinion, as a natural rather than a manufactured index of desire, is just another mechanism for enforcing conformity. Nationalism becomes compulsory through recourse to sacral opinion, exemplifying the false logic of individual democratic activity.

Perloff's letter is part of the battle to censor dissent especially on American campuses. Statistics, polls and an absolute public consensus prove the perverse and alienated nature of academic thinking. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, founded by Lynne Cheney and Joe Lieberman, itemized 117 'unpatriotic' responses to the terrorist attacks by university faculty and students.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the Institute for American Values countered such deviance with its own 'Letter from America', 'endorsed by the nation's leading just war theorists' and signed by 'sixty prominent U.S. academics.' The letter argues in aggressively theological (Christian) terms and 'in the name of universal human morality' that 'There are times when waging war is not only morally permitted, but morally necessary, as a response to calamitous acts of violence, hatred, and injustice. This is one of those times.'<sup>28</sup>

Popular writers also urge Americans to resist critical thought. The refusal to open oneself to new forms of knowing is a form of combat, a patriotic response to the terrorists' tyrannical will. *FrontPageMagazine.com* warned

THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM WILL BE WON, or lost, between *your* ears. Your mind is the target. Your mind is the battlefield. Horror is the weapon, and terror the intended result. If, as President George W. Bush says, we are horrified but not terrified, then the terrorists will lose. Defeat or victory is therefore ultimately under your control, nobody else's.

Terrorism is ideological warfare. Americans may grieve but they must be unideological. This advice was promulgated by the U.S.'s most powerful organ of middle-class consumer propaganda: Oprah. On a show aired shortly after the September 11<sup>th</sup> bombings, Oprah asked resident counsellor Dr Phil McGraw for advice. He outlined his thoughts on her website later. Under the category of 'Psychological and Physical Effects,' he writes,

<sup>26</sup> LRB Vol 23, No 20. 18 October 2001

<sup>27</sup> See Martin, Jerry L. and Anne D. Neal. 'Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It.' <http://www.goacta.org/Reports/defciv.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> See [http://www.propositionsonline.com/Fighting\\_For/fighting\\_for.html](http://www.propositionsonline.com/Fighting_For/fighting_for.html)

The intent of terrorism goes beyond destruction. On a larger psychological level, the idea is to disrupt our day-to-day lives. Terrorists aim to disturb how we live, to frighten us and to challenge what we think about our world.

Our personal challenge is to not give in to any of that. Keep being who you are and doing what you normally do. Don't let these attacks allow you to become overly reclusive or paranoid. Each and every one of us is fighting a battle of wills. We have to say, "I will not succumb." It isn't easy to work through these difficult feelings. You don't have to like it, you just have to do it.

The response which Rose says is demanded by fascist representation – experience without transformation, the untouched self-defences of the intact subject – is transformed into a repulsion of the terrorists' objectives. The patriot is compelled into an emotional and pious fortitude. The refusal to think is meaningful.

Dr McGraw advises in his last step to wellness, 'Find meaning in the process of healing.' Though process is being prohibited, the valency of process is supposed to provide meaning. What meaning? The term hides nothing; its virtue is emblematic, a preponderance of satisfaction that something like the self has been realised in something like its relation to the world, reorganising the world's chaos into closure through emotional self-investment. Obsession with 'closure' seeks those rituals of communal commemoration which are now outmoded. Closure is the ending that Weber says is missing from the story of progress which would give meaning to life by death. But consumers are advised that closure is found, instead, in the symbolic exchanges between the damaged ego and the superego in private, or especially in the domestic sphere. 'Closure' enables the suppression of dissent and the restoration of a producer to the marketplace, without confronting the causes and social consequences of grief – as if the processes of loss, mourning and resolution are useful only in so far as they manufacture a resting individual as surplus value. The healthy one is 'closed'. Closure is, above all, a feature of narratives rather than real experience. If inquiry should be always be directed inward, in order to preserve a sanctified and sheltered perception of the world manufactured by the culture industry before these catastrophic events, then inquiry cannot become political. The discourse of emotional health works to shut us into individual packets of apathy.

### **Feeling Alone**

That a political culture based on sentimentality should enforce a wholly sentimental (irrational) response to catastrophe is not surprising. Perhaps Silliman should not have been so amazed to see

one hundred or so American males openly cry on television over the past week (and even Bush barely kept it together when a reporter in the Oval Office asked him about his feelings).

Grief and other emotions are, if anything, *over*-indulged on the box. The soft-focus morning interventions for housewives, the 'spirit' sections in *Borders*, the 'Awareness Movement' have

raised an army of consumers of emotional health. From her anthropological research on contemporary American subjects (especially women), Catherine Lutz concludes that emotions allow us to voice our difficulties in maintaining the social order – as the funeral once did. On the other hand, she asks,

whether the proliferation of emotion discourse in American life, combined with the construal of emotion as a private and subjective state, might not both confirm a sense of self as separate... and provide an idiom for asserting the existence of bonds between people in the face of the actual attenuation of such bonds by mobility, distance, and the social fragmentation of class, gender and race.<sup>29</sup>

A highly articulated emotional life tells us that we exist. It legitimates our experience as meaningful, but it also enforces the borders between ourselves and others.

The replacement of such forms of community and association with an introspective, consumer-based doctrine of emotional health, is of course convenient for the political order. In a study of political engagement in a small Washington town, Nina Eliasoph observed that informants would regularly present their activism in ‘moral minimalist’ terms in public. They adopted an approach which she called ‘Momism’.<sup>30</sup> That is, informants who spoke cogently about their political objectives in private would in public communication filter all their hopes and demands through their status as mothers. Eliasoph suggests that this qualification suppresses disagreement among participants by associating political goals with indisputable and essential feelings. She does not analyse its structural causes. It is nonetheless clear that the reduction of political motivation to *feelings* like maternal care, and political thinking to *intuition*, effectively restricts the political imaginary to local ameliorations. Citizens focus on what’s ‘do-able’, divorcing national or international politics from problems affecting their own environment or families. Consequently, they present the blank cheque of apathy to their elected officials, about whose activities they know and care little.

Apathy, lamented after the most recent British general election and seen as a root cause of the electoral crisis in the US last November, is structurally useful. As Castoriadis reflects,

contemporary ‘politics’...does everything it can to remove people from the direction of their own affairs and complains at the same time of their ‘apathy,’ ceaselessly pursuing this chimera of citizens or activists who always can be found simultaneously at the height of enthusiasm and in the depth of passivity.<sup>31</sup>

Ron Hirschbein diagnoses creeping political apathy as rooted not merely in the recognizable inefficacy of the voting procedure – statistically, even the free male citizen of Athens was unlikely to have made any difference through his ballot – but in a ritual as much in decline as the public funeral. That ritual no longer allows a narcissist expression of nationalism.

Voting no longer provides the narcissistic nutrients that nourish a robust sense of significance... Individuals shun the ballot box because voting no longer offers the illusion that it is instrumental (politically efficacious). Worse yet, electoral politics

---

<sup>29</sup> *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. ed. Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod. Cambridge: CUP, 1990. p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Eliasoph, Nina. *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life*. Cambridge: CUP 1998.

<sup>31</sup> Castoriadis, Cornelius. *Political & Social Writings* vol. 1. trans. D. A. Curtis. Minneapolis: University of MN Press, 1988.

is bereft of expressive value: Casting a ballot no longer provides ritualistic gratification and hardy entertainment.<sup>32</sup>

As he argues with cheerful pragmatism, ‘The permanent government relies on a complacent middle class – a silenced majority – enjoying real prosperity and the delusions of self-determination.’ This complacency is bought with the pageants of a fluff provisional or ceremonial democracy. But last autumn, the banalization of ritual was accompanied by obvious juridical indecency. In the odd moment where individual numbers seemed to matter, court appointment of the President supplanted the popular vote.

Apathy has since been squeezed out by nearly compulsive displays of nationalism. At a Philly Flyers ice hockey match on 20 September, fans requested that the game be suspended so that they could watch the President’s address to Congress. Silliman celebrated that grief was recuperating even the nationalist symbols vitiating since Vietnam: ‘the flag’s role this time around has been one of solidarity, an emblem not of the state but of the people.’ The run on flags and patriotic insignia has been heralded by some as a symbol of resurgent community identification and political consciousness. It is not. Nationalism provides an outlet for the individual narcissism repressed in private life. Adorno describes it as ‘the characteristic form of absurd opinion today’. The remedy for collective narcissism is not merely the overcoming of those disappointments and privations that afflict the individual in everyday life, he argued, but critical thought. And yet, as we have seen, critical thought is being exiled from public life, while narcissism is fed on television. Ordinary Americans could record their Christmas goodwill message to the troops at any Circuit City, and they might even be broadcast on a major network or over Times Square.<sup>33</sup>

Americans have recently become politicised because our politics have so long been sentimental. If a shoddy discourse of the emotions reinforces the boundaries of the subject, then emotional politics reinforce national boundaries. Displays of rectitude – from the propagandistic dumping of 37,500 rations of Pop Tarts in the desert to Bush’s invitation to every American schoolchild to donate \$1 to the American Fund for Afghan Children – may convince us of our own unshaken goodness. But they are not indications of political awareness expanding to recognise the needs and humanity of others. We’re gearing up for war again, and as you might have expected, the humanity of our enemies has been discounted with exemplary skill.

### **X-Ray Insights**

Suffering provides an opportunity for self-reflection which, it turns out, is actually surveillance – watching one’s neighbour as oneself. As the USA Patriot Act demonstrated,

---

<sup>32</sup> Hirschbein, Ron. *Voting Rites: The Devolution of American Politics*. Westport, CT: Prager, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, the military will have a prime-time infomercial of its own next season in Jerry Bruckheimer’s newest brainchild, ‘Profiles from the Front Line,’ a reality tv co-production of Disney and the Pentagon.



patriotism requires submission to surveillance and the surrender of civil liberties. The good America is ready to do for itself includes Bush's plan for a volunteer USA Freedom Corps, which will embrace Operation TIPS (Terrorist Information and Prevention System). TIPS will enable 'millions of America transportation workers, postal workers, and public utility employees to identify and report suspicious activities linked to terrorism and crime'. Bush also hopes to double the number of neighbourhood watch programmes in the next two years, 'incorporating terrorism prevention into its mission.' Another proof of goodness is transparency.

The extreme version of this surveillance has already raised international hackles. The manacles, opaque goggles, earmuffs, and face masks strapped to prisoners transported to Guantanamo Bay render them incapable of expression or communication. An old theory holds that human beings are distinguished from animals by their powers of *ratio* and *oratio*; these animal prisoners seem only to use language to plot destruction and death. At the same time, their sensory deprivation reasserts US sovereignty, preventing the prisoners from scrutinizing their captors or surroundings, while allowing the military guards and the media an invasive look at their prey, to penetrate even into the reserved and mysterious interiority of their bodies: Camp X-Ray indeed.

Government rhetoric prepared us for this inevitability by stripping the terrorists of their humanity. First Bush described al-Qaeda as animals: 'They run to the hills; they find holes to get in. And we will do whatever it takes to smoke them out and get them running.' In the State of the Union address, he called on nations to 'heed our call, and eliminate the terrorist parasites'. General Richard B. Myers, US Chief of the Joint Staffs, justified the heavy-handed treatment of al-Qaeda prisoners: they are so 'dangerous that they would gnaw through the hydraulic cables' on their transport plane to bring it down.

It is not only a rhetoric of beasts, but one of shadows. Relishing his poetic opportunity in the abbreviated, staccato syntax of self-qualifying assertions that was hugely popular in editorials following the attack, John Balzar wrote in the *LA Times*: 'We have seen the face of our adversary. Our adversary is faceless....' His editors continued the paradox, 'Evil attacked. The people withstood the assault.' America reacted with the resolve of a suddenly confluent identity. The *LA Times* observed that 'Nationwide, people swarm blood banks, eager to have their own blood flow into the veins of those wounded by an unknown enemy.' The body politic is reconstituted by loss; the desire for continuity, formerly served by the state funeral, is satisfied through rituals of selective donation (personal, physical loss or sacrificial blood) and uniformity (of thought, or resolve). That uniformity of bodies and minds is apotheosised, of course, in the military.

## Terrorism and the Individual Talent

What does this have to do with poetry? I hope this paper won't seem like an opportunistic bashing of certain literary 'schools' in the context of national tragedies and fascist military build-ups; but it is important, I think, to examine the criticism which has justified certain avant-garde methodologies in light of their proponent's subsequent right-wing militarism. What does it mean, given her recent remarks, when Marjorie Perloff described the work of Susan Howe, Bernstein or Lyn Hejinian as enacting a 'demilitarization of syntax'?<sup>34</sup> What can we learn about the failures of formalist methods or naturalist transparency from their practitioners' responses to violence and threat?

First, consider that poets responded in public forums as many did privately: to recount where-they-were-when. They reproduced the event as narrative. Brian Kim Stefans speculated about a performance by Eileen Myles in mid-September

that a good New York School poet – in the best “meditations in an emergency” tradition – are [sic] always keeping some record of the minor events of their days, somehow finding value and beauty in even the most trivial aspects of life, holding them against the hugeness of historical (often bad) events. It's a strength and a weakness, but nonetheless much more a strength in these times.

The poet's ability artfully to capture street-level experience for the *individual* comes of age. Just as people across the nation are being urged to focus on their local particularities and relations as a source of potential meaning, so the poet can record the immediate – the unmediated, the historical before it becomes historicized. Alan Sondheim responded to the proliferation of such reports on the Poetics list with a critical post on September 12:

o what we are doing is writing stories. this is what i was doing when it happened:  
this is what i felt: this is what i heard oo this is what i was doing when it happened:  
this is what i felt: this is what i heard ooo the stories begin, develop, end: the stories  
follow the traditional logic of time extrapolated from human behavior: from the  
human construct of the world until: one's death oooo [...] this is the event i am  
making up: this is the plot of my story: this is a good, a wonderful plot: this is quite  
original oo.o you write as if you were there, as if you were part of it: as if you were  
part of something o what we are doing is telling truths: these events almost seem  
real: you write so well, almost as if these things happened: you turn fiction into  
truth

It's tempting to read the adoption or eschewal of creative techniques under pressure as an explicitly political gesture. After all, Language writers have long maintained a politicised opposition to confessional poetry. For many, MFA workshops market the cultural by-products of the same cheap sentimental verity I've outlined above. It was odd, then, to read Language writers like Bernstein and Lee Ann Brown themselves using workshop-style conventional, lucidly emotional reportage in their September 11 poems. It was as if the moment itself offered a unique and transcendent legitimacy, in which formal experimentation became another obsolete freedom. Perhaps this is because the individual,

---

<sup>34</sup> Perloff, Marjorie. 'Collision or Collusion with History.' *Contemporary Literature* Winter 1989 p. 526.

produced and emphasised by death and mortuary ritual, has not been completely alienated by Language poetry's critical methods, whatever its claims to the contrary.

The war on confessional poetry has also been waged between your ears. Again and again, marginal, avant-garde poetry has proclaimed the workshop poem its enemy;<sup>35</sup> while romantic or naturalist poetry has jostled with incomprehensible formalism.<sup>36</sup> Christopher Beach, for example, sizes up team captains Stephen Dobyns with Lyn Hejinian. While 'Dobyns attempts a consistent voice predicated on the idea of the unified individual (or, in ideological terms, of the bourgeois subject),' Hejinian rejects 'tonal consistency' and the idea of the unified subject which it might support. Though poets like Chris Stroffolino have argued with the binarism of accounts of new poetics (by Jed Rasula especially),<sup>37</sup> the antinomian posturing of the debate (between workshop and worker) is affirmed in a recent issue of *Aerial* magazine dedicated to Bruce Andrews. Rasula describes Andrews's work as 'antithetical to any possible school or group, however much it may have contributed to making the group visible in the first place. Bruce Andrews is a one man heterodoxy not reducible to a component of a communal orthodoxy.' (p. 23) He continues,

Andrews' work rigorously deploys words as *flaunted* differences—differences which are not resolved, as is customarily the case, into the rhetorical flow of the sentence and into the stratification of meaning as hierarchy. Reading Andrews, we learn to savour the words as characters, almost as individual as people anarchically thrown together in a public space, helplessly revealed in their difference....The fundamental estrangement Andrews has persisted in introducing to American poetry is the withholding of the person. If the voices of actual people seem to seep through, at times permeating the texture of the poetry, then his work has succeeded in deposing the display window dummy of the workshops. (pp. 25-7)

Rasula, representing the formalist mode recognised under the moniker of 'Language writing', argues that it replaces personal with the unsewn individual. For him, Andrews's poetry offers a possibility for constructing a social agency instead of the specific, unique individual, for 'withholding the person'. This privation of the personal allows 'the voices of actual people', plaintive or otherwise, merely to 'seep through' a broken machinery of syntax. Andrews accomplishes this through the maintenance of unresolved difference – words revealed 'helplessly' – in a kind of poetic anarchy.

How empowering is this method? Andrews himself argues,

Nothing purely interior or individually psychological is allowed to familiarize all this.  
Nothing lets us person-ize or character-ize these singularities of event and experience.  
The self, the imagined integrity, wrecked.

---

<sup>35</sup> See for example Beach, Christopher. 'Poetic Positionings: Stephen Dobyns and Lyn Hejinian in Cultural Context.' *Contemporary Literature* 38 (1): Spring 1997, pp 44-77.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Bernstein, 'Stray Straws and Straw Men', *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* p. 39; Logan Esdale, 'This Poetry Which Is Not One.' *Lagniappe* 2 (2).

<sup>37</sup> cf. Chris Stroffolino. 'Against Lineage.' *Readme* 4: 'This debate is played out in terms of the difference between the aesthetics of a mainstream academic workshop poetry and the aesthetics of a more patently avant-garde poetics of indeterminacy. While the former largely supports humanist values and the notion of a pre-existing "I," the latter, insofar as it problematizes the self at all, considers it a function of cultural/linguistic determinations. Most of the poetry of the former "school" considers poetry an essentially mimetic and expressive art form, while the latter, for the most part, denies the value of personal emotions and relationships....Unless these two modes are put in dialogue with each other, both foreclose an interindividual notion of identity.'

The ego, that big towering regulator, starts to give way in the face of a deregulation... of who we are and all we might be.  
We face up to words which are more like deindividuated subjectivities (or production lines for future subjectivity).

Subjectivity gets felt as a complex bodily surface, with the familiarities of the person subject to an ecstatic clearing and extension.  
Or to notice that our own subjective and particular experiences don't always have to be mediated through our 'self', that commodification.  
A shifting pragmatism of experiential reactivity: that's what we feel like.<sup>38</sup>

This reduction of the self to a 'commodification' which is produced on the assembly lines of words strips the self of historical meaning, while of course making reification the condition of biological life and emotional relations. But the 'singularities of event and experience' cannot be reorganized from such an anti-system into the basis collective action. Even normative grammar as 'a machine for the accumulation of meaning seen as surplus value'<sup>39</sup> is useless. The power-relations of grammar, and its unfolding of meaning over time, are banished as hierarchical; but doesn't chaos, and a refutation of historicity, replace them? Steve McCaffrey picks up this premise in a well-known article, arguing that

Grammar, as repressive mechanism, regulates the free circulation of meaning (the repression of polysemy into monosemy and guided towards a sense of meaning as accumulated, as surplus value of signification)...Meaning is like capital in so far as it extends its law of value to new objects. ...Meaning is the unconscious political element in lineal grammaticization. Words (with their restricted and precisely determined profit margin) are invested into the sentence, which in turn is invested in further sentences. Hence, the paragraph emerges as a stage in capital accumulation within the political economy of the linguistic sign. The paragraph is the product of investment, its surplus value (meaning) being carried into some larger unit: the chapter, the book, the collected works.<sup>40</sup>

But, I'd counter, the reintegration of social agency into class power is postponed by a linguistic system which alienates any shared or certain meaning. This system may activate a privatised reader, but she is sequestered even from the powers of exchange, through meaning, with other agents.

More importantly for this paper, I'd argue that the fetishizing of the endless deferral of meaning replicates our inability – or unwillingness – to encounter death. Bernstein's argument for a poetry that is willing

To eject, that is, the idea that there is something containable to say: completed saying. / So that poetics becomes an activity that is ongoing, that moves in different directions at the same time, and that tries to disrupt or problematize any formulation that seems too final or preemptively restrictive<sup>41</sup>

reads, finally as a fear of the fixity of the individual which arrives so implacably with death. Death does not *create* hierarchy; one of humanity's favourite things about death is that it

---

<sup>38</sup> Bruce Andrews, 'THE POETICS OF L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E.' (Talk delivered in the Textual Operations Talk series, organized by A. S. Bessa, at White Box in New York City, September 25, 2001) Published by ubuweb.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce Andrews, 'Writing Social Work and Political Practice' *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* p. 134

<sup>40</sup> 'From the Notebooks' *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* p. 160.

<sup>41</sup> Bernstein, Charles. 'Optimism and Critical Excess (Process).'

*levels* hierarchy. Death can be an opportunity to confront hierarchy through communally shared evaluations of life. Eventually, an assertion like Hejinian's that

the line itself may serve to limit choice, to curtail extensions of thought in language; in such a case some kind of hierarchy is implicit, its values embedded in the surrounding culture<sup>42</sup>

repositions anarchy of meaning as healthy, democratic pluralism; but rather than infinite political choice (which is of course in no way desirable) we are consumers of an infinite variety of textual products.

The degeneration of collectivist aesthetics into semantic anarchies based on the isolated individual is exemplified even in a book which aims to reactivate collective reading practices. Juliana Spahr's *Everybody's Autonomy* advocates gestural poetics and autocratic reading strategies of the kind developed by the Language writing. She maintains the opposition between Language and naturalist writing, claiming the latter 'values individualism and nonconformity. It sets the poet up as a seer, guide, and shaman.' By contrast,

when language writing emphasizes reading's co-production, the forms of writing change. Individualism and its clear voice, even in its plural forms, are necessarily abandoned. And at the same time, the left's conviction that an uneducated populace needs to be educated by works written in as conventional (often called "clear") a manner as possible is challenged. (p. 58)

Again, Spahr seems to be advocating the collective reading strategies which oppose the individualism of both language and naturalist poetry. She admires works which present 'a collective attention to the multiple, an attention to the diversity of response in the name of individual rights' (p. 13) These works emphasise connection, encouraging

readers to come together and points to how it is right to be interested in works that have meanings that lie beyond one's control. Yet it also respects individualism. In works of connection, readers mix with a (textual) space that is multi-faceted, a space where separateness and difference are not neglected but are made to play themselves out within and against a model of collectivity. / This desire to have it all, to be both autonomous and related (also a central concern of anarchism), is a useful one for discussions of identity. (p. 71)

Can we have it all? Individuality and community, self-governance and socialism, autonomy and relation? Should we? Though she advertises that these strategies are not individualistic, their similarity to anarchy rather than autonomy suits what is, finally, a liberal paradigm: inclusion which maintains difference, the coalition of separate(d) individuals, infinite choice, the absence of authorial intervention in the free trade of meanings. Spahr celebrates Gertrude Stein for encouraging

a sort of anarchy, not the sort the Sex Pistols called for where rules are abandoned in the name of chaos, but rather one where the work allows readers self-governance and autonomy, where the reading act is given as much authority as the authoring act.... [This poetry] works to have both individuality and community. (p. 14)

But anarchy is not necessarily synonymous with autonomy. It can mean the dissipation of collective bases for organisation.

---

<sup>42</sup> Lyn Hejinian, 'Hard Hearts': *Aerial* 9 p. 64

## Conclusion: Dead Ends and Renewed Grief

Trotsky described anarchy as an individualist politics which remains trapped in petty bourgeois ideology; and its use of individual terrorism

is inadmissible precisely because it belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes toward a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission... The more "effective" the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more the attention of the masses is focused on them—the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organization and self-education.<sup>43</sup>

The terrorists on September 11 did not oppose America's democratic and civilized premise of respect for the sacral individual life with the dark abstraction of impersonal evil; they opposed it with itself, the individual sacrificed. That the destruction of those lives and buildings results in an unprecedented uniformity of nationalist grief and desire for revenge, shows not only our continued subjection to the spectacle, but the dangers of a political life erected on the scaffold of individualism. The rituals of American dying can offer no meaning for the loss of individuals except as unique subjectivities forever extinguished (and therefore, perhaps, worth commemorating with subjective and emotive verse). The rituals of American politics can offer only the bitter recompense of exchange, dead Afghans and Arabs for Americans. The enemy are human products in which less has been invested – they are described to us as things restricted, unknown, and bestial, in comparison with our chronicled individual lives. So we will feel ourselves to be the ultimate losers. The deficit will launch a thousand ships.

Grief has supplanted political discourse, shut down academic debate, legitimated unilateral military aggression, relieved us of historical responsibilities as it also recommenced history. Knowing this, how can we express radicalised emotion in poetry or in politics? How can we recognise the lost individuals and the complex civic agencies they fulfilled, without being drawn into a coercive and conservative sentimentality? Grief is never an unmediated feeling. But neither is it just a plodding through conventions, a rhetorical performance. Grief is impure, and it is useful. Erik Mueggler argues that

To treat ritual laments merely as strategic rhetorical positioning is to slip towards separating individuals into private, autonomous, competitive subjects...Yet to understand laments as expressive of profoundly personal states of grief and loss is to rely implicitly on another version of this same vision, in which a subject's ultimate reality is a private, internal core or locus of the self, where all affect takes place prior to being publicly expressed.<sup>44</sup>

If mortuary ritual is 'a communication system' which uses symbols to convey information, it is subject to *noise*.<sup>45</sup> Grief can be subversive. It can confirm the bonds within a community,

---

<sup>43</sup> 'On Terrorism', from November 1911 issue of *Der Kampf* (monthly of the Austrian Social Democracy). p. 10

<sup>44</sup> Mueggler, Erik. 'The Poetics of Grief and the Price of Hemp in Southwest China.' *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 57 (3): August 1998, pp. 979-1008.

<sup>45</sup> Tainter, Joseph A. 'Mortuary Practices and the Study of Prehistorical Social Systems.' in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*. vol. 1. ed. Michael B. Schiffer. New York: Academic Press, 1978. p. 113.

or vent fears of exclusion and change.<sup>46</sup> In Cretan funerals in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the lament of the widow was instrumental rather than resigned. Linking her personal experience to collective representations of grief, she caused others to identify with her suffering, and subverted the misogynist authority which consigned her to poverty and diminished status.<sup>47</sup> Historically, grief has also been used to initiate ‘uncontrolled sequences of reciprocal violence.’<sup>48</sup> Since the terrorist attacks, it has provided the U.S. with an absolute mandate for unlimited and indiscrete revenge killing of Afghani civilians – already, in many estimates, exceeding the total lost on September 11.<sup>49</sup> But if grief is also one of the ‘pre-cultural’ emotions, a biological imperative, it cannot be excluded from the drives which structure social bonding. We must therefore find a way to use it, to subvert the official grief which justifies the largest military spending increase in two decades and is our induction into perpetual war, with the grief that impels collective action and renews commitment to human liberation. To do so, we must recognise that grief can be as tactical as dying.

---

<sup>46</sup> *Celebrations of Death: the Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*. ed. Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington. CUP, 1991. p. 46.

<sup>47</sup> Herzfeld, Michael. ‘In defiance of destiny: the management of time and gender at a Cretan funeral.’ *American Ethnologist* 20 (2): p. 241-255.

<sup>48</sup> Holst-Warhaft, Gail. *Dangerous Voices: Women’s Laments and Greek Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

<sup>49</sup> see Conetta, Carl. ‘Operation Enduring Freedom: Why a Higher Rate of Civilian Bombing Casualties.’ *Project on Defense Alternatives Briefing Report #11*. Commonwealth Institute. <http://www.comw.org/pda/0201oef.html>.

**PASCAL BOULANGER • ( 11 SEPTEMBER 2001 [TRANS JÉRÔME GAME]**

I awake            brusquely enlarged  
or in a dwell

Poetry with blood  
thrown  
out    in the world    amongst the others  
music on the rubbles  
the event  
          that glorifies the eye  
or tears it apart

In stupor  
& glory  
          believe what you want  
but the visible face of this world  
          is its sole face

Infinitely light            a simple note  
there the foam  
outlined by infinity  
          the golden key  
          the silver key

Just as lonely as when I was a child  
          wondering catholic  
in the shades  
the cold  
the detachment

A white rag  
          flutters at a window's handle  
for residence  
          an unfolded map a dispersed book  
in time

*omnibus laetitiis laetum*

Everything remains thought  
everything ceases to weigh  
          suddenly  
          unforgiving

against the masked priests  
against friends of death

*what this term of nihilism designates is a historial movement going back long before us and that goes beyond ourselves stretching in the remote places of the future*



The mountain is what it was  
an arrow towards the sky  
nihilism  
a retreat from the world

silence ?  
forgetting ?

Question of method

golden coating on the ways  
sunshine on the fields of the sea

**STUART CALTON**

Dine 'though not over on that campy Tudor lodging, sheering your lips with an eye-glass, wolfing a brace of sedatives, it's very gone on another style. In California one only has a first name, that one is replete with tics. Under the pressure of those, bugs top-down, the smile you now glimpse, I am grim, polishing the cone of a cracked tip at the border. Tied up in a transit, I am free to declare; both proper woozy. Lifestyle capture.

So to glistening on the skyline, of course! a miniscule, happy part, let us shore up those crushing galaxies, tent-pegged to the bare bone. The man who tends our garden is an honest man, rising straight into the cloak, he impends awesome on the neck-line, "like something out of a movie." Meanwhile, popping! the tics all landing in the mouse, running rings, buttering the hook because high jack this fags faces drawn on dog shit.

**ERIC SUCHÈRE • N° 48 (SEPTEMBRE 2001), L'ACHÈVEMENT [WITH A TRANSLATION BY JÉRÔME GAME]**

L'image fixe : braque sur : saisit d'un trait l'effondre sur lui-même en aspire du haut à bas en bref à peine : disparaît la masse en affaissement vertical dans l'urbain dense de l'île : où s'expire la beauté de chaque projection et enroulements blancs et replis centrifuges dans le confus du gris de fumée : ébahit en non-c'est-pas-vrai du spectaculaire inédit. L'image fixe au banal des travailleurs citadins en plongée légère de l'épaule : le bruit entend que la caméra cherche à hauteur d'oeil : balaye gauche-droite en poursuite d'un objet invisible dissimulé des bâtiments et se prolonge à la perspective de rues que closent les tours au synchrone juste de l'irruption dans le cadre de l'avion à la seconde encastre. L'enregistrement mime la catastrophe en son mouvement : trajet, impact, zoom avant, explosion, zoom arrière. L'image fixe l'imprécis d'une tache noire similaire au document d'archive déjà : en plan fixe passe : disparaît : déflagration. Autre film donne : saisi à même hauteur : entre dans le cadre droit vers gauche : percute direct la tour sur le bord : l'explose traverse dans le même laps de l'impact perçu latéral. Le film mime l'enregistrement scientifique de précision d'événements ultra-rapides avec vue des effets : projections de débris triangulaires blancs acérés en jets. Les sources multiplient la suite des images : résumant le film pris en cours : établissent le scénario en coupes permanentes, reprises et passages par le même : répète ou diffère de rushs de tous angles et points cardinaux avant le montage ou : par le nombre d'explosions : une bande-annonce. Du lendemain, le gel photographique permet l'observe prolongé d'une image : du bâtiment en fond : comme l'arête ne se perçoit que par la modification des valeurs : des bandes verticales longues tapissent la surface en fond d'abstraction : centre : dans le cadrage sans terre ni ciel : une silhouette floue du grossissement photographique d'un moment vidéo : le saisi entre immobilise la chute d'un corps droit : à une seule jambe arque en marche ou course ralentie inverse : donne l'achèvement d'un geste.

N° 48 (September 2001), The achievement

The image freezes : points toward : grasps in a flash falls on itself sucks up from above puts down in brief almost : disappears the mass in vertical sagging in the dense urban of the island : where expires the beauty of each ejections and white coiling-up and centrifugal folds in the confusion of the gray smoke : amazes in the no-it's-not-true of the brand new spectacular.

The image freezes to the banal of the city workers in light high angle shot from the shoulder : the noise hears that the camera is searching at eye-level : scans left-right in pursuit of an invisible object dissimulated some buildings and stretches to the street perspective closed by the towers at the very synchronic of the eruption in the frame of the plane to the second embeds.

The recording mimics the catastrophe in its movement : trajectory, impact, zoom in, explosion, zoom back. The image fixes the non-specified of a black spot similar to the already archival document : in a fix shot passes : disappears : deflagration. Other film it gives : taken at the same height : enters the frame right towards left : directly percolates the tower on the edge : explodes it goes through in the same laps of the impact perceived lateral. The film mimics the scientific high-precision recording of ultra-fast events with vision of effects : ejections of white sharpened triangle-shaped debris in spurts. The sources multiply the rest of the images : sum-up the film taken in the middle : establish the script in permanent cut-

views, reruns and passing by the same : repeats or differs of rushes in all angles and cardinal points before the editing or : by the number of explosions : a trailer. Of the following day, the photographic gel allows the prolonged observes of an image : of the building in its basis : as the edges can only be perceived by the modification of values : long vertical strips carpet the surface on a background of abstraction : centre : in a framing without earth nor sky : an out of focused silhouette of a photographic enlargement of a video moment : the grasped in between immobilises the fall of a stretched body : an arching one-legged walk or inverted slow-motion run : gives the achievement of a gesture.

## HARRY GILONIS • THREE MISREADINGS OF HORATIAN ODES

(the misreadings are, in order, those of western statesmen, liberal commentators, and the author.)

### a misreading of Horace, Odes IV.14

quae concern of citizens honorum  
afflicted in quotidian affairs

abstraction taken concrete form in troops  
nuper quid Marte will not tire

inplacidum foreign nationals et  
arces Alpibus milite on high

mox *grave* major (grave)  
through rent clouds your duty

speaking to you today ruinis  
through language and grammar

at my request south winds scourge  
the military capability per ignis

ut barbarorum the perils  
horrendamque et war

the conflict et extremo metendo  
quo die quo die your country

those sacrifices are laudemque  
et optatum massive brutality

imperiis decus this commitment  
Medusque missiles on the

te rapidus *Tigris* (Tigris) violence  
necessary dominaeque murderers

qui terrorism as an attack  
our victory qui remotis.

You have my shaken armis.  
The pieces are peaceful nation.

## a misreading of Horace, Odes I. 29

your heart on ghazis et acrem militiam  
*inglorious* you stop non before paras  
 non horribilique as of money  
 trade aggrandisement and loot

outside ivory gates the economic *burning*  
*through* sponso necato faces of the misery  
 openly cry on television mani- pulated  
 parti-coloured or otherwise

will neget arduis carrying sagittas  
 the tender rivers may see the stars  
 and stripes keeping totalitarian *swords*  
 reverti montibus ownership *erect*

you we once thought saner  
 deaf to the popular flow  
 'facts' mutare *forsake the Muses*  
 for shields nobilis *books in dust*

## a misreading of Horace, Odes I. 35

Necessity, Goddess who canst, precedes to arms!  
 O wonder present madder conducted  
 to our perishable bodies

ingratiating blandishments of office-seekers  
 you to pauper ambit dominate  
 preche pretty to our houses

of barbarorum of tyranni  
 et ferox with hard fierce their head  
*attributes particularly addressed to the eyes*

*incapable of distinctness* with a careless flick  
 kick over that marching column  
 the edifice of society itself vulnerable

the attribution of an abstraction  
*Necessitas Securitas* and *Pax* are leaning on pillars  
 the sentient polygon “ad weapon”

you white Spes et rare Fides  
 fraudulent friends veiled cloth  
 houses share the suffering

nor quit ne fall / the state’s tall  
 liar an unpoetical word  
 like dried shit

you serve Caesarem  
 in we ultimos orbis Britannos  
 poets cannot have misinterpreted

quid in hard refugimus lasts  
 venturing on something forbidden  
 no piety left untouched

o utinam is new facts  
 hope yet may draw arms  
 quit *tyranni* blunt with excessive use

## CHRIS EMERY • [THREE POEMS]

### WAR GAMES

Null tunes scalding my deafened kin along the feet  
 Though tight absurd temples & floating buns soar through  
 Ravening across the beautiful skies like as enough times

There where old segs link up as I dream still of land kill  
 Luring the mystic arterial plates of a ripping eye  
 In humdrum Playtex nurture games my fat boy dropping Ts

For quickies in the bone bed tight as if penalties matter  
 Bad skirts pumping the kit as I would moralise over lungs  
 Scabbed over or thumping beside the local nodding figures

The gnawing gorgeous perfumes under red mud or blue  
 Wafting limpid wrecks towards the furious impish lice  
 The funnel of this meant a fabric twisted into packs

Forms of resilience in cheese wire or perpetrating acts  
 In the blast tube motionless beside a fantastic flower  
 Or some outer germ mute and laughing pathetically

And perfectible too in other riches as if starring me  
 The meagre stem cells calling each other over miles  
 Lying there forty feet down on the spill stripping us

Each knife indicative of some learned treatise  
 Of moisture scenes as if history had determined wounds  
 Pasteurised in the black massage we all danced to madly

The dead flex peopled like a snake up to framed ash  
 Musty in gobs or neutered and caving in for kisses  
 A cheerleader patting the simple piles of heads

The make believe runt charming for some idle reason  
 As if coaxing hand-me-down pellets or matching faces  
 Of lacunae it would take GANNT charts to show us

Crammed in the pink yew mortified at a cadence  
 Lamenting new bulkheads whilst the spillage sends us  
 Argon dreams butane dreams packed in stone for sex

Cartilage waste upon waste as all the governors retch  
 Made to make a difference in utterly savage nodes  
 A tree burning and the cause burning for free too



## DECEMBER

Distraught on the Vlatava  
 Drilled in moist  
 Government an  
 Almost inseparable  
 Loyalist infirm  
 Fibre  
 Un-

Played  
 Before sections  
 Bending to the task  
 Beds played out  
 Foremost  
 Glazes pronounced

Tre-  
 Pan  
 Trepan-  
 Ning  
 Gild-  
 Ed  
 Choronzon  
 Fielding the same  
 Said thing in stems or  
 Bays about the head  
 Ablaze

For cordite and meals  
 Simply echoes  
 For virtuous  
 Inviolable  
 Clods

Bone cost  
 Featured in sealed  
 Elijah trucks  
 Keeping time  
 Through island sounds

Ig-  
 Nited arms  
 Waving in flaps  
 From the singing  
 Paraphernalia  
 Of dead  
 Nights

**PARASITES**

To jeopardise the incarnate rope  
And single out modest lessons  
From the whispering wreckage  
Tangled up in scouring rooms  
Amid wires and simple chops  
Cubes as such in vocal space  
Emptying the life of life like so

## SEAN BONNEY • THE MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT HAS GONE FOR LUNCH

walked fr vauxhall cross  
 to obelisk tha  
 GULL  
 to cleopatra the GULL  
 on sunshine on  
 pastry round  
 th GUT\_MOUTH  
 walk  
 the GULL\_WALK  
 up villiers  
 to cross and  
 ON

up west th  
 rampires and hellrakes  
 and leaves                    falling  
 and light                    falling  
 and                                falling  
 and  
                                  walking on  
                                  un-shine

cough twice and  
 ON

on cough-blister  
 walking on  
 cheek-blister

but then

sunlight  
 parc mercuric  
 sparrows

orange berries  
 emergenc

the parc was  
 something to  
 to spout  
 GULLS

to bind the eyes  
 intact in  
 tin sparrows  
                                  the dead-line

walking on  
 the masonry quarter  
 in all these rooms these  
 pits of glass  
 its hard to see the

FUCK LIKE A CANNIBAL  
 in veins you could swim down  
 in don't be so rude  
 in what the

                                  outside  
 the world  
                                   is  
 walking on  
                                   gloat-face  
 is walking on un-shine

up the charing cross  
 & derail at  
 Greek St. derail ed  
 by restaurant hours  
 &  
 who the hell are these  
 lunching on  
 daymob  
 of

& onward. gullblack  
 is Bakunin's secret network of  
 ROAST PIGS  
 the betrayals are

arches &  
 bridges built of

glass-sharp  
 squirrel fox  
 shards  
                                   from clay build a monster  
                                   to walk with. only at noon

night-cries  
 abandon the word  
 for a dose of celebrity theory  
 up west

the wyrd

up t Greek St

derailed - - -

                                  nightcries

I like drinking coffee  
and talking about swearing

MOONSPIT  
hieroglyphic  
the betrayals are  
head or heels  
[Bakunin, toothless & haunted

& to equate the war  
w. Some child repeatedly  
gobbing in his own face  
for a whole half-hour  
mercuric

nets

that stars are  
bankrupt  
& magazines  
will keep us warm

IGNITION

as we develop a fear of  
GULLS  
of what they know what we don't

& this is

so shut it

o once I had a money  
blew it all out  
on tobacco &

silver lining  
[splashveins

anarchism  
is only a suggestion  
redsky at nite  
means we're in

choke-pears  
shopkeeps

abandon the world  
for a host of breaking suns  
for a

splashvein  
 [up totnam cort was all  
 field &

where I live  
 all marshgas -----

all these raindrops  
 fell on  
 sunshine  
 & then

no-one will consider

the import

the nation is

choke-pears, rampires & hellrakes

where I live  
 all copbreath

is  
 is  
 everybody is

orange berries

with a dose of  
 patriotic  
 blister

and leaves                    crawling  
 and light                    crawling  
 and

everybody is  
 just like everybody is  
 just like

VOICE ONE:    blah  
 VOICE TWO:    blah

walked fr vauxhall cross  
 marsh-ground crystals  
 only the footsteps the  
 crackling sky  
 lit up & torn  
 as paper is

this paper

rain-stuffed on Greek St  
recalls

terror

or bourgeois freaks obsessed w litter  
or was that land-mines

[the anarchists in Soho, weary and tired, in shop-doorways  
tattered daub the sky  
w. one more coffee. Old Compton St  
teach me new swearwords  
tearing the tears from

VOICE ONE: blank

mercury is

on new oxford st  
Bakunin in feathers  
& windows

for a dose of

mercury is  
fireground  
for a dose of

we are not imagined  
(everything I say is what I don't say

what I say is

up Berwick St  
for second hand CDs  
& sanctity is

MOONSPIT

(or was that backgammon

VOICE ONE: hold out till the engines come

IMAGE: hand outstretched.  
a lack, the face of

VOICE FIVE: laughter laughter

VOICE ONE: lennon mccartney

VOICE TWO: “The bomb is the echo of your cannon, trained upon our starving brothers; the shriek of those maimed and torn in your corporate slaughterhouses; tis the shadow of the crisis, the rumbling of suppressed earthquake”

IMAGE: blank

IMAGE: laughter

IMAGE: blank

up west  
for a dose of

sunlight  
parc mercuric  
sparrows

orange berries  
emergenc

the parc was  
something to  
to spout  
GULLS

to bind the eyes  
intact in  
tin sparrows

the dead-line

walking on  
the masonry quarter  
in all these rooms these  
pits of glass  
its hard to see the

FUCK LIKE A CANNIBAL  
in veins you could swim down  
in don't be so rude  
in what the

outside  
the world  
is  
walking on  
gloat-face  
is walking on un-shine

IMAGE: blank

IMAGE: blank

IMAGE: tin sparrows



IMAGE: blank

IMAGE: gulls

IMAGE: blank

IMAGE: blank

IMAGE: blank

it is not terror  
the sadness is

the

## CHRIS GOODE

For Immediate Release  
Office of the Press Secretary  
October 7, 2001  
Presidential Address to the Little Ducks  
The Treaty Room

1:00 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

THE DUCKS: Quack.

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon, Gwent Wade.

GWENT WADE: Ahem. Sorry to Jonah. Sorry to speaker.

THE PRESIDENT: We are joined in this operation by our staunch friend, Gilbert Rattan.

GILBERT RATTAN: *[still asleep]*

THE PRESIDENT: First up on tonight's show: "Terrorists". What may burrow deeper into caves and by the blue ball it is said...

*[Pause.]*

*[louder]* It is said...

THE WORLD: *[wearily]* What I recently received: (1) a jelly nutset, (2) one Afghanistan, (3) a lisp cupped by nationals committing murder in the WTC. And by scansion's lisp, ameba expensing local fist. Thanks.

*[Pause.]*

THE PRESIDENT: Yip. Ameba expensing local fist, kids. Yip.

THE DUCKS: As much as thee, we ask a first name.

THE PRESIDENT: Uh-huh. Frederic Jameson reminds us so by the cows.

THE COWS: ...So few people, perhaps many a beautiful new hospital.

A FRESHMAN: Shoo.

THE PRESIDENT: Terrorists may burrow deeper into a choice to carry out your zero countries, in it more than 92 countries in this. Frederic Jameson tells us lass Goths gee us in this young oust slaw so gay. I am willing to be directly blamed on motor-car tyres.

THE WORLD: About as much cop.

THE STINKING ROCKING HORSE (Asia, Spanish): Yo schists mi mortalidad  
www.whitehouse.gov los padres.

THE PRESIDENT: See me, little pigs. This completely spurious media consensus.

THE DUCKS: You have shared intelligence.

THE PRESIDENT: Yip. For immediate release. Soon Sally. On my orders.

THE WAR: An upbeat note.

A FRESHMAN: Shoo.

THE PRESIDENT: I don't want my Dad to disrupt the crocodile thinking it will eat him.

SALLY: I am enduring freedom. I am yellow. I am Dick. West of the White House, la  
quackeries nut plan.

RUBEN VARGAS: Her rhyming jerking warps.

THE DUCKS: But Ruben, we want to go big big down.

*[FX: Toy Ghana.]*

ENGLAND: Cheers.

THE PRESIDENT'S DAD: Look, those who profane a battle are taking that which will result  
from fear today we go.

THE COWS: [ruminatively] Fear today, run away. Fear at night, rusted wright. Fear  
tomorrow, Mary Beard. Fear of beards, pogonophobia.

THE PRESIDENT: As Jameson tells us so suddenly, and Father, we'll also drop food.

THE DUCKS: This time quite literally.

THE STINKING ROCKING HORSE: (Asia, Spanish): Mi back-suspenshun war ominous  
rusted wrights through diplomacy themselves.

THE PRESIDENT: So, tragically, to terrorism, little ducks.

THE DUCKS: Your 87,133 innocent people are united by lameness in our foe. Soak we hasty,  
learn awry speech.

GWENT WADE: Ahem. Terrorism. Fuel-pump tit packed in. With it, say.

RUBEN VARGAS: I hereby cancel my boat.

THE PRESIDENT: Including: innocent thousands, public relations firms, every Marine,  
dating agencies, the angels with dirty faces, the daemon hippos, the TV networks, the  
Mormons, the pets, the Mormons' pets...

THE WORLD: Equal cop.

THE PRESIDENT: But also drop food! Including: nuts, fust, standard English tongue,  
American presidents grown on the ominous new farm. This time quite literally, today.

*[FX: Toy Ghana.]*

ENGLAND: Cheers.

THE PRESIDENT: Get the bad with a laser can. Office of innocents. Snails with beards. Kin scuds. Landless blue. The barbaric criminals who practice the way for some proper stink.

THE STINKING ROCKING HORSE (Portuguese): Raise innocently the acumen of the grading maraca forces, the muted, military holograph cipher.

THE PRESIDENT: Frederic Jameson reminds us, like, to fight.

THE WAR: An upbeat note, that.

A FRESHMAN: Shoo.

THE PRESIDENT: We should not falter. Patience will eat. This time quite literally.

RUBEN VARGAS: I hereby cancel my farm, my full confidence, and one duck.

THE DUCKS: What is this if not terrorism?

GWENT WADE: Ahem. America. Peace. Fear. Gasket seals. Baby Sally. The face of Muslims. All of us fit from rhapsody and shopping. Wahayy.

SALLY: You'll get cookies for this.

THE PRESIDENT: I will eat here the war.

THE COWS: Too little, pigs.

THE GANNETS: *[upending matins]* Three little pigs, surely.

THE PRESIDENT: Ladies and gentlemen, Marjorie Kerplow: a baffling lisp, a sylph-like isotherm.

*[743 innocent people do divertimento. 743 innocent people do phono to phono. 743 innocent people ride in the red house. 743 innocent people look up.]*

MARJORIE PERLOFF: What maternity do we localize when we stoop? In me you consolidate the denunciation of dismantled intercom devices.

SOURCES CLOSE TO RICHARD DILLON: I vandalize, libel, and quote till I die, with carsick mechanism, loudspeaker and fist, yea, even from storeroom to catwalk.

MARJORIE FLUFFER: Ceiling, warring, predestination, and carillon: all violate the ocular bosun. Click on banner: grading, gaming, finance. Copyright Marjorie Rector Dividend.

SOURCES CLOSE TO RICHARD DILLON: Beeline commissions. Draft hair. Eheu, assassinated precedent. From umbra to testicle.

MAJOR KERFUFFLE: You could be forward in the approximate manpower.

SOURCES CLOSE TO RICHARD DILLON: Your addition –

PALAVAR MAJORA: My boundary –

OMNES: Our wavelength. “Aaaaah.”

A LAMB: *[sotto voce]* You gastric bitch.

A FRESHMAN: Shoo.

THE PRESIDENT: *[Adagio for Stings]* Y’know, folks, I recently received a touching letter that says a lot about the state of America in these difficult times -- a letter from a 4th-grade girl, with a father in the military: "As much as I don't want my Dad to fight," she wrote, "I have seen an mpeg of Osama bin Laden [forget]ing a donkey. You can therefore take my father and do whatever the [forget] you like. My whole life is over. I wish I had been blinded by the notorious Islamic dropsy rather than see Osama bin Laden [forget]ing a donkey. I mean, you know, I mean, you know, I mean, you know, I mean, you know, I mean, you know, I mean, you know, I mean, you know. [Forget] it. Whatever.”

This young folk-girl knows what America is all about. Since September 11, an entire generation of young American folks has gained new understanding of the folk value of freedom, and its cost in duty and in sacrifice. Folk in hell, yip. And so, I’m delighted to welcome the puking ghost of Jerry Garcia to introduce our final number.

THE VOMITING GHOST INDEED OF JERRY LEWIS: Yes, bin ladies and jelly nutsets, it’s Operation Infinite Cockerel. Over to you, Enoch. Jesus, I’m bleeding again. Jesus, look at me. Look at this blood. Look at all this blood.

DAN CUOCO (DIRECTOR, I.B.R.O.): Ruben Vargas was born May 17, 1932, in Orange City, CA. Managed by Bert Brodese (and later co-managed by Frank Sinatra), he was the most prominent Mexican-American Heavyweight in the mid to late 1950s. Vargas was a courageous, durable and aggressive fighter who moved constantly forward from a crouch and possessed knockout power in either hand. Fred Eisenstadt, a writer for “The Ring” magazine, described him as an intellectual engaging in fisti-cuffs *[sic]* for a livelihood because of his love of philosophy. Ruben’s quote to Fred after he was asked about the strange difference between his ring career and philosophy was:

RUBEN VARGAS: *[with excruciating slowness, over the period of several hours, literally]* There is philosophy in everything – including prizefighting. Because, as you know, life itself is a battle. It’s dog eat dog; the survival of the fittest; kill or be killed – stuff like that. (Eisenstadt, F. The Ring, vol XXXVIII, no 5, June 1959, page 22, “Ruben Vargas – Heavy Thinker”)

THE PRESIDENT: Good night America. God bless. Prevail tight. Papa going to buy you SOME ANTIHISTAMINE.

ENGLAND: Cheers.

GILBERT RATTAN: *[still asleep]*

END 1:07 P.M, EDT

## JÉRÔME GAME • THIS AGGRESSION WILL NOT STAND, MAN

### I

*We can bomb forever.  
Bill C.*

*I heartily endorse hollywood is getting I think we it's a good i-d we involve to help out in any way we in this war we'd showbiz execs do their bits at that war the most powerful the in the entertainment community assemble for war summit in beverly hills premier resort on sunday discussing assisting white house white officials in getting the right message across the execs look at how every possible plot-lines morale-boosting winning the propoganda senior adviser senior producers senior media figures key-players in arranging the summit with a to who ran the bush campaign the co-host the chairman the of entertainment group inc. the white house inc. **BRIEFS** execs them themes of government emphasis in including not limited tolerance courage patriotism **FUCKING NUKE THE FUCKS !!** might service assist through public service announcements warn children the dangers of drugs stop drunk driving the move follows growing concern the is losing propoganda war support for bombing campaign make no mistake your military is **READY** you we'll we will **SMOKE** them their ass out we will out of their holes likes*

I'm sitting in the midst of a classroom with the little kids listening to a children's story and I realise I'm the commander in chief and the country is under attack & *<what are the key-elements of a reprisal adapted to the attack? our priests will tell us the will of god>* & rid the world of evildoers general ! the united states can do whatever it wants in self-defence &

for

*you can burn our highest towers  
destroy our business centres  
but american liberties will prevail  
the only one who would the only he could break us would be god  
he will never allow the defeat of our army*

the business bank morgan stanley does not know what **DOES NOT KNOW** what has happened to **BECOME** of the integrality of **THE INTEGRALITY** its employees it's, it has that is, it's **3 600** people the business morgan is

nothing has changed in bellville texas since the 11th but the atmosphere me not be but some are really scared they go by the city-hall or the tribunal just to get checked get reassured just to check that everything is in place solid & in order in the stutions if

## II

*until this attack I felt that patriotism was drifting away particularly amongst the youth but america is the greatest nation ever created since the beginnings of time as americans you are the most productive the most creative and the freest inhabitants of the planet be proud remain strong president bush will lead us to answers and justice*

In upper right hand corner page 3 the last night remind yourself that in this night you will face many challenges you'll have to face them understand this obey god his messenger don't fight amongst yourselves stand fast god will stand fast with those who stood fast you should engage in such things you should pray you should fast you should ask god for guidance you should ask god for help continue to pray throughout this night continue to recite the koran purify your heart and clean it from the time of fun and waste has gone the time of judgment is **HERE** from there you will begin to live the happy life the infinite paradise be optimistic the prophet was always optimistic check all your items bag clothes knives will IDs passport check all your make sure nobody follows you make sure you're clean your clothes are clean including your shoes when the time of truth comes and zero hour arrives straighten out your clothes open your chest and welcome death for the sake of keep a very open mind keep a very open heart of what you are to face in the morning try to pray the morning prayer with an **OPEN** mind with an open heart don't leave but when you have washed for the prayer continue to pray when you enter the plane : oh god open when you enter the plane oh god all doors for me oh god who answers prayers and answers those who ask you I am asking you god for your help when you step into the plane I am asking you for your help I am asking you for forgiveness I am asking you to light up my way god I trust in you I ask with the light of your faith that has lit the whole world and lightened all darkness on this earth there is no god but god we are of god and to god we return I want to light up I want to **RETURN**

*I was born in this stadium loved it but we would arrive to play football and we would find a man hanged to the upper bar of the goal the talibans forbid any sports they would poke even the balls and put them on the players' heads in the name of islam then we convinced them that we could play with certain conditions dressed from top to toe stopping for prayers sometimes they would show up in their smoked screen window cars they would tell us we had to vacate the field at once to give way to the executioners the public would come either by pleasure or forced the criminal would be exhibited then a doctor would sever the hand or the foot with a saw or the person would be shot in the then the talibans would parade through the stadium exhibiting the severed hands and feet that they would later on hang on some tree in down town Kabul the stadium had become a zoo personally as a man and as a sportsman I couldn't believe it notwithstanding my fear of bombings I'm delighted americans have destroyed the talibans*

### III

*A war against terrorism is a war of the mind, so broadly defined that the enemy becomes anybody who makes us afraid. Stoked by trauma, tragedy and dread, the creativity of our paranoia is in overdrive right now.  
Patricia W.*

everyone who wears the uniform at war declared for a token act sweeping sustained effective our response we'll be responding don't you make no mistake about don't you the beligerants will be exposed discovered against the united states have to chosen their own destruction vowed vengeance revenge those who did it smoke them holes get them running shoot them rabbits fuck justice ! bring them bodies

thank you all very much thank you thank you all very so much we very need we meet tonight as we plan to kill the rabbits after two of the most and most inspiring in we have endured we have endured & so many we have also faced unprecedented bioterrorist attacks directly delivered in our **MAIL** fuck!

what we can do when we've shown our children sent in more than \$1 million for children afghanistan in compassion jewish and christian americans reached out their muslim neighbours brothers reassessing priorities more time in prayers more time in houses of **WORSHIP**

we the target of who boast they want to kill kill all americans kill kill all jews kill kill all christians confront defeat seek destroy our freedom impose its views we war to save civilisation we no seek it we fight it we prevail we purchasing sanitising the mail with equipment **I'M SO PROUD OF OUR MILITARY** I'm so proud is pursuing its mission destroying disrupting dismantling bombing deliberately systematically adhering our values we no target innocent civilians people about daily lives working shopping playing worshipping movies baseball games a few initiatives Communities of Character spark rebirth citizenship and character and service flags flying everywhere on houses store windows cars lapels lemonade and cookie sales for children in afghanistan you in your Neighbourhood Watch Crime Stoppers wrong idea of americans shallow materialistic consumers only getting rich ahead wonderful nation loving people people with free faith freedom and opportunity people everywhere schoolchildren letters of friendship to muslim children different countries ambassadors american values great story of our nation born in spirit yearning for freedom courageously risked lives greater opportunity ours the cause of freedom just cause just ultimate victory reassured cos' unless we



**PETER MIDDLETON • AND WE HAD THOSE NIGHTMARES WHERE**

astrophysics of an all together now  
plunk down, clomp

with gamma cuts and eon waits—  
it is just to [sic] big to be about this size

to carry forward  
hows and whys that hardly know how to restore past uriosity ©

sorting pictures again (the one of scrabbling blooded  
or could have (betterment or not

a roof is a beginning says the aerial bomb gazing down  
and dismissing its basement

bang you're dead global explanation  
shrapnel cores out wounds per military expenditure soul

must be some unknown forces out there to explain what our instruments see  
hate is so connectable

on one end a tank's slithering turret and the other  
back to school (they love a god story

or is it the alphabet empire missing zeroes again or the square root of minus oneself  
this unwar thoughtstuff

no different to go odd or goo destiny with estimates  
of kill quality

does it help to think cosmos thinks must  
and blip art

to memory smudge word aimed at a cork patch of local habit the size of an eye  
keep the head on critique

does (does) resist (thing is) saying strike, heat, disembody  
you find yourself caught on film demonstrating gravity's consumerism

and then it all explodes at the end in metonymic excess  
as the imaginary numbers count themselves back one by one

## HUBERT LUCOT • OPERATIONS

Pale autumn at my Parisian table, Raquel calls me over the phone. According to her far away sister (Andalusia?), New York is burning, entangled in a war of which we have no idea. Raquel asks me to switch on "my cable".

In silence, science-fiction of the 1930s and hyper-technology meet when two little hammers with wings, one then another, crash into a tower and its twin, both projecting the sand of their collapse on themselves.

The language of this *live history* is American but the commentator incriminates Orientals from another time. He indicates an extra LEAP: United-States enters History today insofar as they had never known war before... whilst toy airplanes smash anew into the long black rectangles which splinter open, then are shattered to the ground then are shattered to the ground again, when, once again born out of the celestial emptiness, the two airplanes, the first then the second, inseminate with their noses the still perfect rectangles.

### ON THE STREET

A boulevard in Eastern Paris, sort of esplanade, pétanque players; little water fountains, sandy areas. Realising a rubbing in which the tip of his sleeve is involved, a man sitting on a bench conveys *moral deprivation* to me. Two minutes before, in the window of an old-fashioned newsagent, I had read "AMERICA CRIES OUT FOR REVENGE". The mightiest tools in the world are going to increase nothingness on earth. The man with the frayed sleeve presents me in every day's words with the nothingness towards which a chunk of the population is innocently being pushed.

### BOMBING OF A POOR COUNTRY

How is such an enormous crime possible? How to think the enormity of the moderation with which European chiefs consider it? How to think their spinelessness? What do the persons of Jospin, Baladur, Fabius tell us as they follow each other on the television screen in the fine woodworks of the French national Assembly united in a secular mass? They spell out clichés with difficulty, as if they were reflecting, as if they had a thought. Then, in a flash, a butler straight out of a comedy, Tony Blair, jitters in Cairo, in Ankara. His idiotic playfulness contrasts with the stupid gravity of the French faces.

I've had an operation, I am facing Paris, a slice cut out south to north from the east, where the Saint-Ambroise hospital is: to the left, the square belfry of the Gare de Lyon; stuck to it the Panthéon and the Val-de-Grâce; in the middle, the Tour Eiffel above Notre-Dame's two towers; to the right, the column of the Bastille (where) is the Centre Pompidou (red, blue mass).

I could enjoy dying "in the arms of Paris" which my glance *embraces*, I thus sink, also, in the idea that our Baladur (his mouth as a chicken's arse), Fabius (same arse), Jospin, wisely agreeing to the demented war wanted by "America", are criminals. This is in me a sensation, which I have to treat aesthetically to reach a truth.

The moderation of Baladur, Jospin, weighing their words—which today I call *personal*: those of a small privileged group on a miserable planet—appears to me as a hormonal or medicinal *compound*. I have an idea of the physicochemical system to which all of this belongs.

## TO UNDERSTAND

I say to myself OPERATIONS: surgical military of the mind. I say to myself: “modern Earthman, I’ve seen images more than I’ve seen the world”, “Shall I push away the images to see the world?”

The two towers crumble down, anew and again, one, the other, for days and days on end, until the end of times.

They and their foggy fall are, mysterious obviousness, the signs of a subterranean flux. That my mind add a tip, a punctuation, I feel a necessary flux that is not yet called History; I imprint on me the supreme Meaning of a dream of disparate and concrete objects, I may suppose (dream) that some pentagonal mafia is organising all that, and the “fabulous progress” in armament, and world commerce. Progressively, in the Propaganda or Programme, the hypothetical and nowhere to be found aggressor, with the silky turban, with a face, with words, has dissolved in Evil. It is no longer a man or a band that We will track down, We will plug the trace of a satanic Good into the planet’s width. First, We dreamt of a annihilated axis: Iraq-Yemen (Queen of Saba) – Sudan, then from the same Iraq, so We please, ruin will befall Iran, North Korea, Philippines.

When I have THIS go through my body and, from there, via the sight of Paris lying down as Merovigian litter against my hospital bed, I understand better the being of the faceless Afghan woman (her pretty face is a plaid taffeta basket) who fails to make sense of the murder of her child by a bomb coming from the West.

The text *OPERATIONS* puts together excerpts of a book in progress.

## BEN FRIEDLANDER • AFTER PSALM 137

*For Charles Reznikoff*

By the Hudson  
River we slumped

And cried. Our  
Ghetto blasters blared  
On as strangers

Listened. "What do  
The words mean?"  
They asked in

Amusement. But how  
Could we explain  
On alien soil?

If I forget  
You, O homeland,  
May my tongue

Swell up in  
My mouth. May  
My bones become

Brittle and break  
If I cease  
To think of

You, if I  
Do not keep  
My birthplace in

Memory, even when  
Distracted by happiness.  
Remember, O God,

Against these people,  
The day of  
Our downfall; how

The nation cried,  
"Bomb them, bomb  
Them back to

The stone age!"  
Fair America, you  
Predator, a blessing

On those who  
Repay you in  
Kind; a blessing

On those who  
Kidnap your children  
And kill them.

*After September 11th I heard an inordinate amount of stupidity about the Bible vis-a-vis the Koran. I composed this poem to illustrate the complicity of all our traditions in a history of warfare in which the distinction between civilians and soldiers has only intermittently been respected. If you've forgotten the original, look again.*