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Vietnam, Iraq, Terror

While the comparison between the Vietnam and the Iraq Wars stands in many regards, it doesn't in a fundamental one: the Vietcong were fighting for their right to self-determination and to construct an equal society. Sectarian militias and the other factions fighting in Iraq, in contrast, have a terrifying program. The occupied Iraqi civilians are caught in a war without a possible side to choose. We should then begin by making a distinction between the Iraq War and invasion, and the so-called war on terror.

The program of terror is blatantly retrograde and repressive: religious suppressive control of secular society and elimination of women's rights. In sum, it is a pre-1789 agenda, effectively put forward in the U.S. by the Republican Party. Terror is not outside this society; it's among us. The basic duty of any person within the cultural sphere of the West is to fight terror, beginning with the immediate space of professional action.

Protests

It must be noted—or rather not forgotten—that the invasion of Iraq prompted massive demonstrations worldwide, including in the U.S.

In South America, anti-imperialism revived by the invasion galvanized the entire political spectrum to the point that a party with any laterally or marginally declared support to the U.S. is not electable at any level: city, region, or country. The Iraq War helped to speed up the subcontinent's tilt toward a democratically elected Left that has, after forty years of generals and neoliberal technocrats, placed in key cultural positions vocal antiwar advocates belonging to the ranks of the intelligentsia. The current ministers of culture of Bolivia, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina are, respectively, Magdalena Cajías, a historian and filmmaker; Paulina Urrutia, an actress; Gilberto Gil, a tropicalist musician; and José Nun, a sociologist, whose landmark academic article "Middle Class Military Coup" (1967) exposed the complicity of the educated liberals with the advent of U.S.-backed military rule in the subcontinent.

The Question Concerning Technology

The Internet has fulfilled Brecht's 1932 demand of radio: that the receiver be a producer. Political action in the West using the Internet appears to be confined

to organization, debate, and fundraising, which are no small concerns. This seems to be a rerouting of existing political subjects and tropes, a use of the Net as a tool. But the Internet and hypertechnologies of communication regiment new bodies, agencies of images, subjects, and notions of place. These further implications are far more explored by political organizations that are beyond the nation-state and its rules of engagement for politics and war.

If anything mirrors the open diagrammatic forms of the Net, it is the new decentralized armies that combine guerrilla tactics with classic Clausewitzian strategies, like Hezbollah; or the proliferation of Al Qaeda-inspired cells that don't obey or communicate with a central command.

Classic cell structures were compartmentalized but had one "responsible" party that acted as a liaison with the next level of the hierarchy. Since such structures were ultimately pyramidal, infiltration or capture at any level could compromise at least the next level. Technology radically reshaped those methodologies, from both the standpoints of conception and execution. Islamic fundamentalists don't only use the Net. They are the Net.

There is an unexplored and paradoxical double negation in the U.S.: the space of mass communication—both TV and Internet—is entirely neglected as part of the proactive strategy of the "war on terror," and the billionaires of the technological industries, hyperprivileged political subjects of postcapitalism (of hippie and antiwar backgrounds, such as the creators of Apple), seem to have abandoned the idea of influencing the U.S. government. Bill Gates meets with the president of China or fights poverty in Africa entirely on his own terms; while the oil, gun, and pharmaceutical industries control, lobby, or simply become the government at every level.

Universities

The late 1960s were the last moment of true internationalism and the only moment in which the revolutionary dictum of students making alliances with the working class was made effective, or at least seriously attempted worldwide. But above everything, U.S. universities were places of social mobility. We know perfectly well that American education is now carefully designed to perpetuate and possibly enhance social differences.

Admissions is the place where political action could—and should—begin. How can the so-called postcolonial studies be made operative? How can other narratives emerge? Not exactly by having emancipated star faculty who are spectatorial in front of the fact that they are just teaching the children of privilege useful political correctness. The hierarchical assumption that sociopolitical narratives are determined and activated by the professor and not by the student body is elitist at the root.

It is specialization and the triumph of the disciplinarian formatted as career

paths that erased the possibility of collective action, transgression, and politicization, even within the humanities. Franz Boas and Aby Warburg would not be able to correspond today. The disciplinarian presses knowledge production toward fixed identities, regardless of the relative autonomy of disciplines. The intersection between methodology and interpretation as the locus for specific knowledge and value production stratifies the circulation of such production, paralyzing political action.

Students

The generational goal of most students is to graduate with a high GPA, pay off their loans, and satisfy their parents' mandate. Chemical modification of reality and behavior, once the territory of the contestatory and the experimental against the normative reality of the American Dream, is now controlled by college health services pushing antidepressants or whatever upper or downer will guarantee that freshmen don't drop out or underperform, driving down the college stats. The institution itself deals the drugs to assure its status quo.

The Artist

Defining the artist as a "highly paid and market-dependent provider of infotainment" implies that artists exist only if they successfully participate in the market. This is true only for a small fraction of artists. Among the increasing number of South American and Eastern European artists active from the '50s to the present that are being "discovered" by institutions and biennials, only a few access the market. Both inside and outside the U.S. the enormous majority of artists live on the brink, whether they produce cultural craft, infotainment, crypto-poetic souvenirs, fetishized merchandising of radicalism, celebrations of the arbitrary, modes and moods of relation, chic or formalized depiction of the disenfranchised (which may even include their participation), or lucid critical models.

We have all known since June 1968 that there is no space outside the spectacle and that no matter how radical or heroic the aesthetics of denunciation, no matter how astute or personalized the analysis, you can at best provide a model to explain why your oppression as a bourgeois artist and intellectual makes you an accessory to that very oppression. Whatever your production, it will be reified and instrumentalized. This irreducible double bind is the state from which we always work, not a point at which we suddenly find ourselves rendered inane by Art Miami Basel and the hedge-fund boom. The fact that the art market exploded is not an indication that the ethos of all practitioners has imploded. The very autonomy of the cultural and artistic spheres that signals domestication to capital

enables discursive spaces entirely foreclosed in other realms. This contradiction is to be exploited, not only denounced.

What to Do?

As a testimony to the fragmentation of the field (and our own), we can at best replace that question with another: what do we do? A basic precondition of political expression and antiwar activism is some-kind of exchange space (or counter-public sphere) in terms not absolutely dictated by market forces.

Experimenting with the subversion of the structures and forms in power is a long-standing South American tradition. We take our clues from Liberation Theology and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which effectively co-opted the repressive and socially enlarged resonating spaces of the Catholic Church and the educational systems to enact changes at both molecular and structural levels.

The social form of exchange that epitomizes the art market is naturally the gallery. Rather than making the gallery an art work itself, we attempt to reconfigure and resignify it as a social space (which we specifically choose not to define as an art work either), to use the advantages of privatization for our own ends, for once; to make it a means of production in which younger artists can assert their genealogies and benefit from explicit endorsements, hence generating a system of public legitimation not necessarily regulated by sales; a place where art history is read and reconstructed without institutional agendas and constraints, to enable us and others to see, and see ourselves and themselves seeing; a space in which discursive and curatorial coordinates are exclusively geared to the desires and politics of the producers and their created, found, or preexisting audiences. The fate of subcultures and countercultures is absorption. We meant our experiment to have its own death inscribed in its program, setting three full seasons as the timeframe for its implosion.