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DOUBT FEAR

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Doubt Fear

| BY CAROLINE A. JONES

Fear. The most ancient of vehement passions, the most basic of the chemically-triggered impulses we call emotions. A loud noise, the acrid scent of a predator, a sudden movement caught in peripheral vision, the gathering dusk—fear is an evolved response to such stimuli. Visual, auditory, and somatosensory cortices send their inputs to the amygdala, in the medial temporal lobe of the brain, where the limbic system begins to process the stimulants to fear. As the amygdala goes into action, it bypasses the thalamus to send its signals directly to the autonomic centers of the brainstem. Stimulants stream into the blood, pumping up the musculo-skeletal system and getting the “paleopallian” or old mammalian brain ready to freeze, fight, or flee. Admired for its expediency, the amygdala unfortunately relies on neuronal pathways most effective in only one direction: output. Once initiated, the neuronal sequence called fear is difficult to terminate or redirect.

The private experience of fear can have public, instrumental outcomes. Consciously deployed or subliminally leaching into policy decisions, fear can function as a political tool. Fear can be produced, maintained and distributed much like any other cultural product, and visuals are prime conduits for its transmission. The effect of visual imagery is immediate. It sometimes seems to bypass higher consciousness or contemplation, working at the level of what I want to term a “politico-optical unconscious.”¹ Fear is politically effective because we experience it as purely interior, as the unique and private possession of an inner self—even when it is stimulated and produced by much larger state and cultural apparatuses.

Plate 57

Volvo
820 or 830
Blud
June 19, 1985
21.09
Corniche of the sea, Tripoli
79 killed
150 injured
150 kg. of TNT
Hexogen



What roles do visual images play in preparing the political terrain for invasion? How does imagery work to produce a population willing to aggress upon a distant and invisible land? How are pictures used to maintain that collective will? If recent fear-inducing imagery from government, private, and media sources present a specific taxonomy of fear, contemporary artists Walid Ra'ad, Mark Lombardi, and Gerhard Richter engage it through an entirely different dynamic. In place of the political use of fear, they deploy doubt. Conceptual rather than expressive, their art provides a theoretical and aesthetic refutation of public fear, yet avoids postmodern ambiguity: Truth is situated, not unattainable.

In these artists' hands, doubt has a profoundly social effect. It stimulates public discourse and debate. Using information as the medium of choice and enlisting aesthetic distance to slow the visual cortex, they seek to stimulate skepticism in place of credulity, productive doubt in place of pious certainty, public conversation in place of private fear.

My work on this topic began in response to the manipulation of public fear prior to the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003. Visual codes played a primary role in stoking fear. Vivid colors marked guarded conditions and elevated threats, fueled by unsupported rumors of dirty bombs and weapons of mass destruction that led well-meaning citizens to support the rush to war. Much has happened since the invasion began in March 2003—yet I am more determined than ever to think through these visuals by locating them in a broader context. Here, I will explore the canny complexity of contemporary art and the polymorphous aspects of visual culture, as they can either play into mass confusion or stimulate our need for talk.

The tropes of the visual culture of fear have a long history that meets the modern period in the aftermath of the original *Terror*—the French Revolution. Intellectuals and artists around the world groped for imagery that would stabilize anxieties about their own restless populations, in the face of the upheavals in eighteenth-century France. Parisians' views were sharpened by visuals: rapidly-generated drawings, newspapers, broadsides, caricatures, and posters, as well as longer-winded history paintings that sought to capture the tumultuous politics of revolution in uniquely visual forms. Mechanically reproduced and widely distributed, visual culture seethed with contradiction and dissent, dodging state censors to depict Terror, tyranny, and the rumpiled path to a civil society. Text and its requirement for literacy could be bypassed in favor of such instantaneous visual shorthand as, for example, the Phrygian cap. Parisians adopted this headgear (which had been worn by freed Greek slaves in Roman times) to emblemize their peculiar new status as citizens. Intriguingly, the theorization of aesthetic modernism also took root within this voraciously visual population.

The Phrygian cap provides a perfect point of entry into the shifting visual terrain of fear's instrumental politics. It traveled into moder-

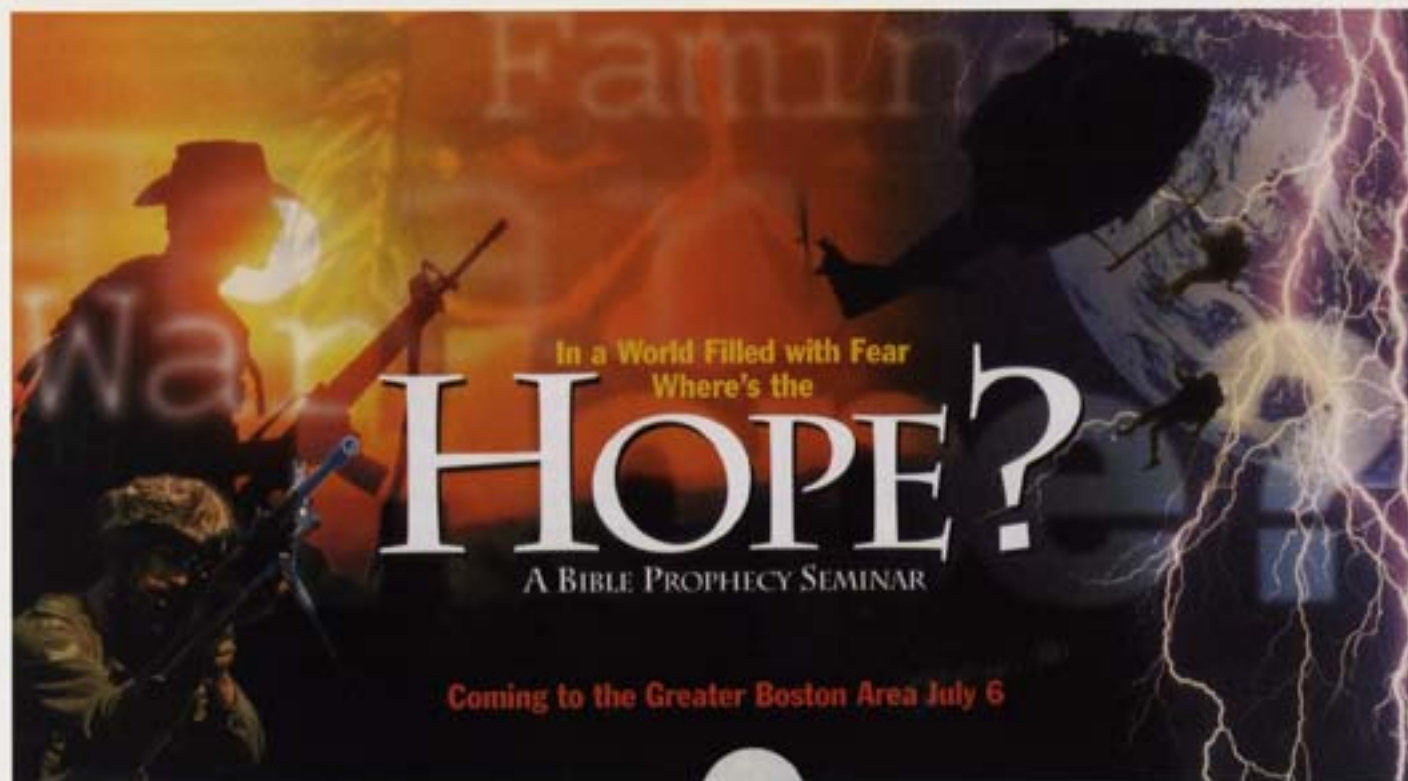


nity on the head of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830, complete with her unsheathed rifle, the bare breasts of traditional *curias* imagery, and a pedestal of dead bodies. The ambivalence in Delacroix's image is as powerful as it is tantalizing. Liberty stirred complex emotions, perhaps because the ongoing struggles initiated by the French Revolution were not fought between empires but among classes. On the one hand, Marianne was the erotic standard-bearer of victory, a modern Nike whose passion would hold *le peuple* together even in the face of their deepest doubts. On the other, the massed bodies, and Marianne's smoke-smudged flesh, flushed face, bared bosom, and fixed bayonet all summon a visceral fear—who would this frightful avenging angel take for class enemies? The ingredients of acute modern fear (we might as well call it what the French did, *terrorisme*) are all provided—the smoking city, the dead urbanites, and the surging conflict that draws even women and children into its maw. While Delacroix's painting has traditionally been treated as a stable signifier of the people's triumph, I would argue that its ambiguities activate interpretive doubt.

One has only to compare Delacroix's fascinatingly complex icon with its more resolved sister, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi's *Liberty Enlightening the World*, 1884, known to most as the Statue of Liberty. The bayonet has become a book, the partisan *tricolore* an Enlightenment beacon, the slave cap a crown of light, the muscular bosom the peplum of a chaste classical goddess. This is a fairly stable icon. Is it simply that the France of 1884 had resolved the anxieties of 1830? More likely, to be exportable, icons of freedom had to banish the corpses of civil war. The discursive stimulus of Delacroix's doubt fueled the fifty-year trajectory of Liberty from a fear-inducing image of aggression to a clear emblem of welcome. Doubt, and discourse, fueled the transformation of defensive fury into welcome, the emotional opposite of fear.

Roughly a hundred and twenty years later on September 11, 2001, Liberty was spared by Al Qaeda, a formerly obscure organization begun by Saudi dissidents opposing U.S. policies in the Middle East. Thousands of non-combatants died in the most visible, horrifyingly *telegenic* terrorism in global history. The ensuing politics of fear produced broad-ranging attempts to reconfigure the conflicted modernist legacy of the French and American revolutions into a unity based on combat and surveillance rather than justice, knowledge, or other "enlightenment" values. Typical of this reconfiguration is the Bush administration's mangling of the enlightenment symbol of the "all-seeing-eye."

Associated with anti-clerical Freemasonry, the "all-seeing eye" had been adopted in the 1790s by French revolutionaries to signify the providential nature of their democratic franchise: in place of God would be Destiny. Even before that, it had been proposed to the Continental Congress in 1776, when it met after the American



Opposite: Initial logo for Total Information Awareness program run by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, ca. 2002.
 Above: Arise Institute, *Hope: A Bible Prophecy Seminar*, direct mail brochure posted to Boston, Princeton, and other areas in the summer of 2004.

Revolution to determine the design for the great seal of the fledgling United States. Self-consciously, the eye of providence was meant to neutralize revolutionary terror, bringing light and knowledge where there had been terror and fear. But the all-seeing eye dominating the creepy logo for the Bush Administration's ill-fated "Total Information Awareness" program had different implications. It now resembled the eye of Sauron from *Lord of the Rings*, searching for the furtive enemy lurking on the side of the globe most invisible to Americans—the cradle of civilization and imagined terror in the Mediterranean Middle East. That middle-eastern blind spot on the first TIA logo is significant. How can Americans be trained to see an invisible enemy?

The Bush administration has had a difficult time successfully racializing its war on terror in the multi-ethnic population of the current U.S. When Tom Ridge planned the free brochure for Homeland Security's "Ready.gov" initiative ("You can be afraid. Or you can be ready...") he knew that enlisting citizens to spy on their neighbors had to be presented as an ecumenical, disinterested matter. The brochure thus included images of heartland men, their vaguely Latino wives, and the single black females who make up the bulk of Washington's office workforce. Outside government proper, Bush's fervent supporters on the religious right persisted in exposing the President's covert agenda—a dark, primitive, probably heathen Other looming over the globe, held back only by a cowboy with an assault rifle, a marine sharpshooter, and a Vietnam-era Huey helicopter sent by God. The fear packed into this Armageddon imagery is far more potent than the hope it purports to summon. That Huey looks to be dropping soldiers like flies, right into some righteous lightning bolts that say "God is pissed!" The floating question marks around the soldiers say it all—how the hell did we get here? Are we guilty, and is that why God is letting us die?

Such religious concoctions attempted to raise frightening questions that evangelical Christianity could be seen to answer. Images have unruly power, however, and the unauthorized pathways I have pursued in even a cursory reading of this direct mail flier show that fear itself can be more potent than any rational or spiritual decisions proposed to resolve it. What, our paleopallian brains rightfully asked, was to be done about such pervasive and invisible enemies? The Bush administration's production of a furtive enemy lurking everywhere, yet not quite in view, stimulated fearful citizens to huddle together—but then what? Here the media played a determining role, producing images that made action seem inevitable—the physical action desperately craved by the pumped-up physiology of fear.

Think of CNN's shameless advertisements for its European broadcasts in the summer of 2002, which riffled through a series of inflammatory shots—Saddam Hussein brandishing a rifle, a fireball exploding, weeping Palestinians—and then urged us to "Watch what happens." Print media also played their role. An Associated Press photo published in the *Boston Globe*, for example, creates the impression of an endless array of hardened bodies and armored personnel carriers just itching to fight. This image is highly characteristic of the visual culture of fear—it can be taxonomized as the power of massification. Like the hydra-headed demons and many-eyed lambs in medieval images of the Apocalypse, it is proliferation itself that boggles the mind. When fear and anticipation oustrip experience, massification seems to rule.

The visual imagery of massification can be brought to bear on the victims of terror (whether the body count of 9/11 or the largely unrepresented Iraqi casualties). Massified images can also be used, as in the *Globe*, to produce a "logical" pathway for response. The organism experiencing fear craves a simple resolution to its limbic panic: freeze,

Top: March 15, 2003—Front page, *Boston Globe*, showing the massed power of U.S. troops poised to invade Iraq. Below: April 4, 2004—Massed power is given to the furtive enemy, in the form of Moqtada al-Sadr's "Army of the Mahdi" marching in Baghdad.



flee, or fight. We can imagine that resources play a role in this decision: the maximum power is needed to fight, a middling amount to flee, and little to freeze. The U.S. media created inevitability around one decision: fight. All that power, poised in the Persian Gulf, met the biophysiology of fear to compel citizens to say, as U.S. President Bush did when he released this pent-up power in March 2003, "Feels good!" Normally liberal rags like the *New York Times* and the *Globe* played along and simply amplified the administration's visual line. The fantasies of endless impervious bodies, industrialized for easy replication and hardened phallic strength, provided the visual stimulus for one particular outcome; and sure enough, the April 6 headlines announced "invasion begins." The mechanized image published that day on the front page of the *Times* was enlarged from data-poor digital sources. It conveyed a pixellated, game-boy omnipotence, its edge of fear neutralized by the look of simulation, like PlayStation on pause. Fox network had already provided the theoretical basis for such an image, instructing its anchors to refer to such U.S. soldiers as sharpshooters, not snipers (it's a matter of skill, not death).

As the invasion dragged on, images of massified, serial, patriotic, yet oddly simulated bodies began to break apart. In their place, evocations of isolation and vulnerability began to creep into view. This was either the return of the repressed, as when *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich decided to republish some of the most disturbing images of 9/11 two years after the fact, or a real-time shift in information, as when isolated policemen were shown cautiously peering into car trunks at Boston's airport, on the same page that terrified Egyptians were pictured fleeing attacks from Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa mosque. In such a pairing (from December 2003), images of surveillance were shown to be the necessary counterpoint to images of terror. Surveillance isolates us, but the lack of surveillance leads to even greater terror.

More liberal media increasingly offered such images of isolation as the war in Iraq dragged on. Suddenly there were taxonomic inversions and confusions, where the enemy was given the massified attributes that had earlier been reserved for U.S. power. The furtive enemy was amalgamated with the iterative soldier in one extraordinary presentation of Moqtada al-Sadr's faceless female "Army of the Mahdi." The possibility that these women might have been conducting a political demonstration was foreclosed by the accompanying headline, "Iraqi cleric hints at violence against US." Only doubt could prompt the question, "How will this army of women get over here to kill us, and with what?" Like Delacroix's terrifying figure of *Liberté*, these women participate in a psychosexual trajectory where a feared Other is given the attributes of a phallic woman. Scholar Klaus Theweleit set out the terms of this widespread development in his pioneering two-volume study of *Male Fantasies in fascist Germany*.¹ As militarization and fear occupy the minds of men, the enemy is increasingly figured as a demonic female, harboring weapons in the darkness under her clothes. The militarized male psyche posits this woman as psychically defeatable, yet fears her phallicized image. Of the thousands of pictures available to newspapers that day, these chador-cloaked women apparently spoke most clearly to the visceral fear of American men.

Marking the one-year anniversary of the invasion in Iraq, photographer David Swanson produced the necessary counter-icon to this phallicized, female enemy. His new imagery of U.S. isolation focused on a single soldier, unprepared and utterly alone. This boy, one of the

children Bush sent into battle, is shown burdened beyond his years by insidious materiel creeping serpent-like out of the Pandora's box of war. Far from inhabiting the hardened body of male fantasy, he is literally coming apart, his prosthetic tools of aggression threatening to scatter far from his vulnerable body.

When the corresponding icon of enemy isolation from Abu Ghraib came to light, the circle was complete. The chief emblem of Iraqi prisoner abuse came to be a single isolated man, his outstretched arms connected to wires in a Christ-like pose of supplication, his upper torso cloaked in a shapeless black hood. This image fueled a strange symmetry between perpetrators and victims in the minds of many Americans. Through their horror, they empathized with the young, untrained civilians put into uniform and ordered to interrogate Iraqi citizens. At the same time, U.S. viewers could not help but feel the implicit accusation of the prisoner's Christ-like martyrdom, his stigmata fueled by an electric power grid set up by Halliburton from imported generators running on Kuwaiti oil. As W.J.T. Mitchell pointed out, we had somehow become the Roman soldiers in a passion play, caught in a web of power relations that seemed entirely beyond our control.¹⁶ Journalism's emotional manipulations left us desperately in need of the hermeneutics of doubt.

Perhaps fatal to a soldier or a prisoner of war, doubt is crucial for citizens in a putative democracy. It opens public discourse against the closure of fear. It may seem like quite a leap to connect David Swanson's newspaper photograph to Walid Ra'ad's *My Neck Is Thinner Than a Hair*, 2004. There are, however, intriguing parallels that link such images. Growing up in Lebanon during the war between occupying Israelis and foreign PLO/Hezbollah fighters, Ra'ad longed for a photojournalist's dispassionate relation to the carnage. As a teenager, he collected cameras from his relatives and slung them around his neck, walking the ravaged streets to photograph obscure buildings that had been damaged just the night before.


Ra'ad met the pervasive climate of fear with a personal/professional aesthetic. Even then, he sought to imitate the look of forensic distance—drawing circles around bullet-holes, gridding and measuring

CLASSIFIED INFORMATION

Boston Globe
 THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 2004

CLASS, SUBVANT
 Times: 30¢; Daily: 35¢; News: 10¢; Sports: 10¢; Entertainment: 10¢; High School: 10¢; Classified: 10¢; Home: 10¢; 2004: 10¢; Price: 10¢; News: 10¢

US may extend the stay of 15,000 troops in Iraq



PHOTOGRAPH BY AP/WIDEWORLD

Private First Class Carroll S. Watson of Brown, Texas, gathered fresh ammunition during an overnight stay in Ramadi.

Americans advance on

Spotlight on Rice
 Following a series of speeches at the White House, Rice's administration may be ready to negotiate with Iraq, but the national security adviser will

Insurgency prompts shift



Top: April 8, 2004—Isolation is the new media message, embodied by the under-trained U.S. child soldier burdened by coils of ammunition.
 Above: Walid Ra'ad and The Atlas Group, *My Neck Is Thinner Than a Hair* (plate 2-7-88S), 2004, inkjet print, 20 X 25 cm (courtesy of The Atlas Group / Meir Semler Gallery / Anthony Reynolds Gallery; photo © Walid Ra'ad)

sites, annotating the back of photos with details of place and event. During this same period, Ra'ad reports that his Palestinian mother and Lebanese father chose to separate. Ra'ad's youthful forensic aesthetic shows the formation of a subject split from the experience of the war into a bureaucrat who coolly organizes its indexical traces.

Ra'ad left the turmoil of East Beirut in the early 1980s, attracted to the practical and humanitarian career of medicine, and the safety of anywhere else. A photography elective drew him back to the seductive ambiguities of visual art, and he ended up in the Visual Studies program at the University of Rochester where art history and theory hammered home a crucial lesson—there is less to objectivity than meets the eye. For his dissertation, Ra'ad examined the proliferation of autobiographies then being published by American clerics and aid workers who had been held hostage in Beirut.³ He also interviewed former prisoners from Israeli detention camps. His textual deconstruction of these parallel captive narratives directly informed his next artistic production, *The Bachar Tapes*, 2001, in which a "secret" hostage of local Middle Eastern origin reveals erotic connections between Arab and American prisoners, their seeming homology an unsettling wrinkle in the political economy of fear. Since the mid 1990s, such inversions and reflections on trauma became the cool *modus operandi* of Ra'ad's work, as he codified a veritable documentary bureaucracy in the putative archives and imagined persons of The Atlas Group.

Drifting into the Atlas Group installation, bloated with political certainties and visual bombast from elsewhere in the massive *Documenta 11* exhibition, I lost myself in its nuanced dubiety. Was there really a Dr. Fadl Fakhouri who could have balanced his everyday work with such a fantastically bizarre history of the Lebanese wars?

Could there possibly be a club of gambling historians as interested in the photo-finish of the horse race as they were in the injured victims of the war? [*Missing Lebanese Wars*, 1999] Could forensic science restore a color photograph found at the bottom of the Mediterranean, and identify in its ruined emulsion the faces of disappeared Lebanese citizens? [*Secrets in the Open Sea (SOS)*, 1994-2004] The apparent absence of irony in Ra'ad's work was one of its most seductive features, especially in the context of *Documenta*. There was no winking, no invitation to smugness, no certainty handed to the viewer for complacent acquisition. Slowly the sense of Ra'ad's project emerged: there was little sense to be made of the Lebanese wars, despite the obsessive but ultimately diversionary efforts of government officials to document such things as the daily bombings of stolen cars on the streets of Beirut. [*Already Been in a Lake of Fire*, 2004]

State employees never asked the political questions. The foreign militias thus tolerated them. Ra'ad mimics this empty forensic activity and shows its powerfully demented side. "In Lebanon," Ra'ad states, "notions of certainty are unavailable." He nonetheless acknowledges that "we're trying to establish a model for how this history can be written" in a plausible but not certain future.⁴ Taking various subject positions, Ra'ad asks "what are the conventions that allow speech to go unchallenged for a bit?" His work slowly and cumulatively critiques both the various accounts of conflict and the positions from which they are produced—what might be called their return address.

Doubt functions very differently here from the ambiguity or fractured subjectivity thought to be characteristic of postmodernism. The traumatic subject posited by the Atlas Group can potentially be healed, if the gaps in historical memory are bridged by new cognitive material



Description of the Winning Historian:

He is not merely miserable. He is brilliant at it. There seems no event, no matter how trivial that does not arouse him to a frenzy of self-mortification

Historians' Initials and Bets:

1. KS -717
2. MM +830
3. FF +729
4. PH -222
5. HG +311
6. RO +001
7. AB -921
8. SK -112

Race Distance:

1000 m.

Winning Time:

1:10

Average Speed:

50.5 km/hr.

Winning Historian / Time:

PH - 222

Distance Between Horse and Finish Line:

- 18



Left: Walid Ra'ad and The Atlas Group, *Missing Lebanese Wars* (p. 131), 1999, inkjet color print, 25 X 33 cm (courtesy of The Atlas Group / Sleir Semler Galerie / Anthony Reynolds Gallery; photo © Walid Ra'ad)
Opposite: Walid Ra'ad and The Atlas Group, still from *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes* (English Version), 2001, DVD, 18 minutes (courtesy of The Atlas Group / Sleir Semler Galerie / Anthony Reynolds Gallery; Photo © Walid Ra'ad). This still shows Souheil Bachar as one of the hostages held in Lebanon.

(echoing the narrative reconstruction of the talking cure). There is a history that can be told. It must, however, be understood as a cumulative collation of histories: collective, yet individually positioned, and insistently open to doubt. Doubt is needed to fuel discussion, to keep opening the case, to thicken the narratives.

Significantly, Ra'ad sees the artist's talk itself as a genre of performance art, and is one of its adepts. Four planted questions follow his deadpan reports on the Atlas Group's activities: one audience member interrupts, one answers a question, two more are heard. Knowledge of this formula never quite prepares us for the event, when someone inevitably asks, "How can you fake this material, when real people died?" We are embarrassed by the questioner's discourtesy, by his naked aggression. Our pulse quickens, even though we secretly harbor the same rude question. Ra'ad's answer (or the answer that emerges from the audience) is to ask in return, "How many people died? This is a question you can now conceive of asking."

Doubt initiates the process of identifying our ignorance. It limns the boundaries of the blanks in our collective histories, or the gaps in our personal experience. For his part, Ra'ad "wants to take seriously the displacement" of things and people as a result of trauma, whether that displacement was a result of his mother's departure from the family home, or from the bullets that drove neighbors away from the apartment building next door. The forensic encyclopedias Ra'ad has consulted list and illustrate all known forms of bullets: each has a color and shape, a country of origin, a required armament, a recommended speed of discharge, a period of probable manufacture. Such encyclopedias have decorum; they do not speak to the holes the bullets make, or to the kinds of gaps opened by shrap-

nel in the soft tissues of the human body. Trauma also produces a decorous response to violence. It tactically curtails the mind's capacity to take in information. As with fear (a temporary but analogous state), trauma redirects violence onto information itself, preventing it from reaching the mind, or blanking it out—seeking to contain the damage. Ra'ad's proliferation and multiplication of information can, in turn, be seen as a kind of compensatory excess. (He denies this possibility, but acknowledges that his very denial may be possible "because containment worked so well.") Ra'ad's work as the Atlas Group identifies the blank spaces of the historical unthought, and supplies narratives and images that might begin to fill them. At the same time, those narratives and images only open new blanks: how many died? Where, when, how, who?

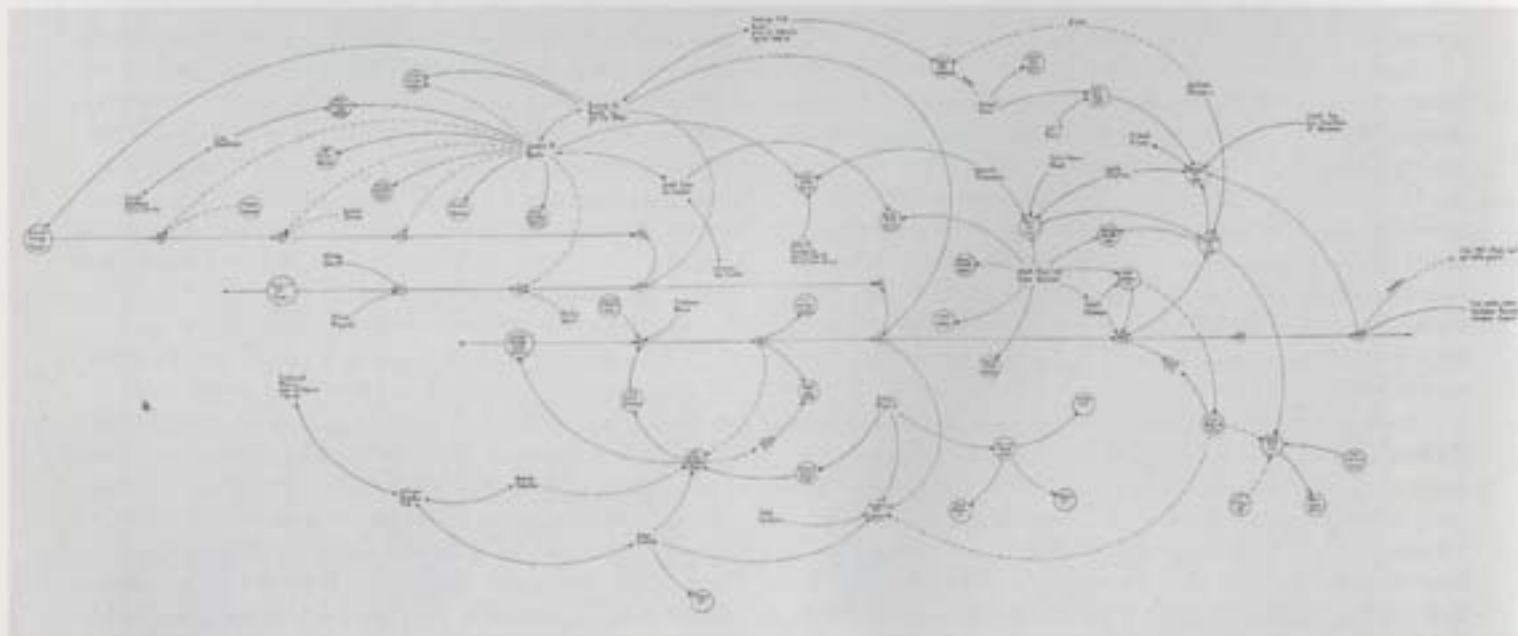
Speaking of the personal and often gendered violence that affects the individual victim of geopolitical conflict, Ra'ad recalled that the objects his mother took when she left their home had become, for him, extraordinarily redolent, even Proustian. If their displacement was literal, it also figured the paradox of which I am speaking: how a gap in one place can become an irruption somewhere else. Doubt can also be seen as the experience of new knowledge that erupts, unauthorized, into a different narrative space. Displaced, the objects that Ra'ad's mother moved from one house to another can be analogized to the photographs appropriated by her artist son. Some he "takes" himself (an appropriative gesture theorized only intermittently in photography), others he finds in newspaper archives or lifts from Lebanese popular culture. Of all these displaced and transplanted bits of knowledge he says: "If I have no memory, maybe they do."

In his most recent work, Ra'ad moves from cool framings of trauma and violence to a multi-layered exploration of the specific relationships that structure and contain the violent event. His current projects encompass elegant digital images and interactive gaming environments. The program he is developing includes players, topography, the necessary forms, and a language of description. Players must choose their avatars from groups designed to provide boundaries around the violent event: Red Cross and Red Crescent workers, for example. Topography entails the parallel mechanisms of geographic containment: traffic diversion, area-specific electricity cut off. What are the appropriate interactive algorithms, the best visual representations for these complex relationships?

In still images such as *I Was Overcome With a Momentary Panic at the Thought That They Might Be Right*, 2004, hovering engines evoke in us the desire for aestheticized violence that signals the presence of the sublime. In our capacity to enjoy the beauty of the abstracted explosion, we become like Edmund Burke watching a distant volcanic flame, or Kant contemplating a flood from his safe spot on the mountain—these natural events are sublime, because we ourselves are neither burning nor drowning. Ra'ad's version mobilizes the technological sublime. There is an apotheosis of the engine here, a sacralized emblem for the conflict in Lebanon, which was heavily fueled by the sale of stolen cars from Europe coming through the Mediterranean ports to finance foreign militias. The "innocent" car is dismembered—but its parts remain miraculously intact. The engine, dynamic spirit of capitalism, floats in equipoise above the unsullied body of the chassis below. What is happening here? Our simple doubt as to the answer opens onto an entire epistemology—the hermeneutics of doubt.

This concise analysis of the Atlas Group has suggested how the aesthetic production of doubt can counter the politics of fear. Indeed, Ra'ad's activities in four areas (lecture, publication, installation, web) have had extraordinary success. The Atlas Group, initially a fiction, now has in its ranks an architect (Tony Chakar, a Lebanese shop owner) and a political scientist (Bilal Khibez, who works at a newspaper in Lebanon). Initially publishing his own writings pseudonymously, Ra'ad can now call on the apparatus of art history (your humble scribe), the academy, museums, art criticism, publishing and the market to promote his ideas.

Other artists share Ra'ad's strategies, and the hermeneutics of doubt may be gaining real cultural force. Such artists purvey conceptually-based practices and images that use information itself as a medium—elegantly designed or occluded to seduce the ignorant, intrigue the curious, and perplex the complacent. Think, for example, of Mark Lombardi's simple and mesmerizing *Global Networks*, once described by the late artist as "narrative structures." Often dealing with some of the same characters and events as Ra'ad (for example, the Iran-contra affair of the Reagan years), Lombardi also crafted an obsessive personal archive of index cards that attempted to track and authenticate the facts he shuffled, even though his drawings' trajectories would be characterized by his opponents as leaps of bad faith. Sometimes resembling the electronic globe-spanning financial networks that sustained the corruption he wanted to describe, Lombardi's elegant drawings are insistently hand-made, as if the humble scribal act of transferring, again and again, the evidence of criminal corporate greed would erase the last lingering doubt for his viewers, and propel them towards a sustained course of action to bring about a better world.

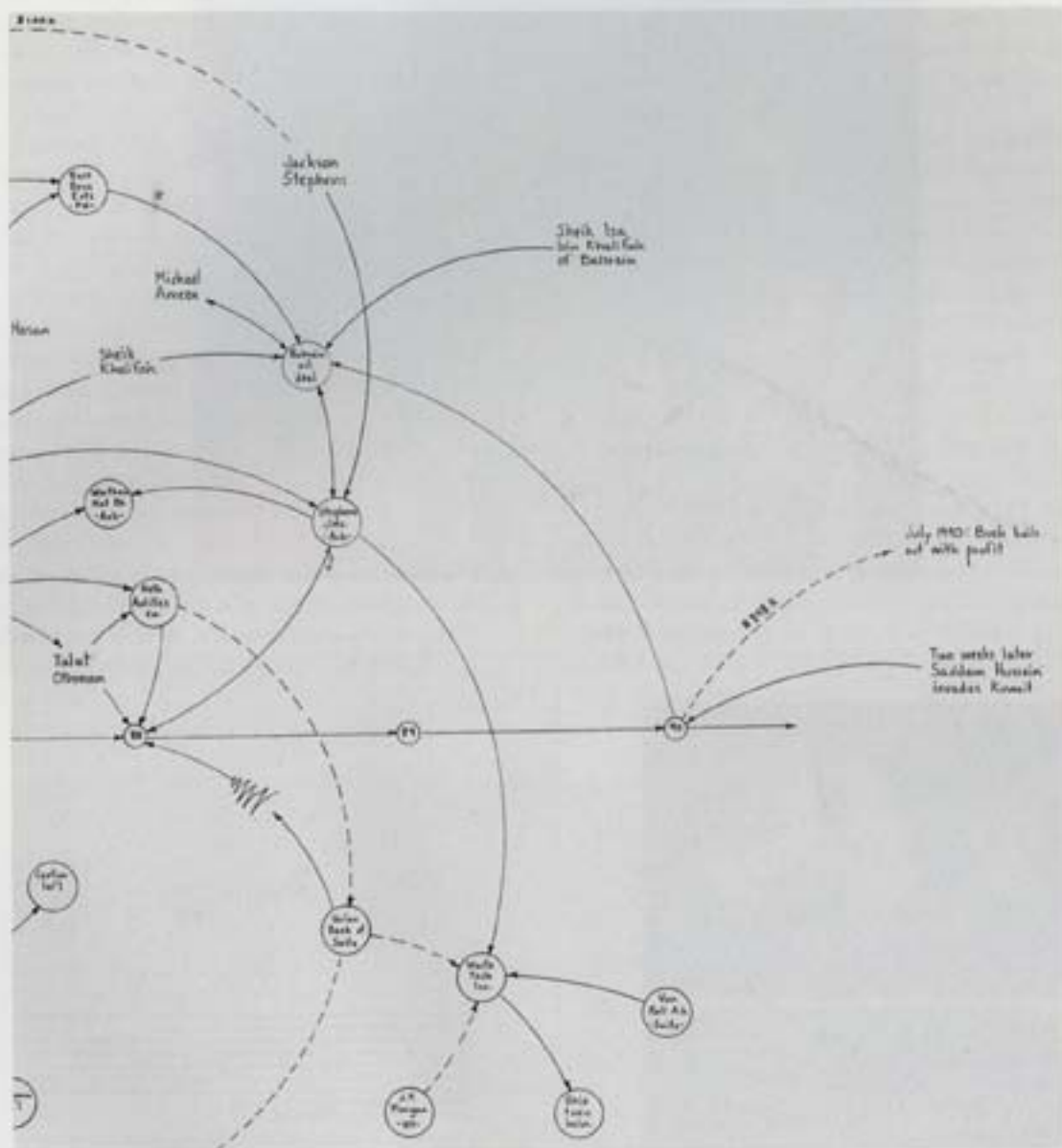




...sein. Dieser Präsident offenbar nicht begreifen, daß Amerika wahre Stärke nicht in der Schwere seiner
 ...und andere einzuzeichnen, sondern in der Fähigkeit andere zu inspirieren?
 Das klingt schon unheimlich zu schön. Aber ich habe an der Hoffnung fest, daß die Werte nicht haben
 sind. Wahrheit wird bedient sich dem Verstand. Wahrheit wird die Menschheit nicht mehr retten. Zusam-
 men mit Millionen von Amerikanern habe ich für die Unwissenheit anderer Menschen, für die unabhän-
 gigen Zerstörer im Iran und für die Sicherheit anderer Nationen. Wagt Gott die Verurteilung Staaten von
 Amerika in den nächsten Tagen schriftlich zu schreiben. Als wir uns liegen und stehen an die Freiheit
 zurückzuführen, die uns gegenüberlich verhängungsgewalt ist.
 Auch dem Amerikaner von Michael Buchart.

• Nach Ansicht des amerikanischen Präsidenten haben die heutigen Staaten kein anerkanntes Recht,
 Gewalt anzuwenden, um ihre nationale Sicherheit zu gewährleisten. Dieses hat Amerika gebietet ge-
 genüber, weil auf der UN-Organisation seiner Verantwortung nicht parallel zu anderen als "Landesrat" bei
 Amerika, wie jeder Staat, das Recht auf Selbstverteidigung - im Fall eines bewaffneten Angriffs. Doch
 selbst dieses selbstgegebene Recht hat ein Land nur, bis die Sicherheitsrat der Vereinten Nationen oder
 auf Veranlassung des Weltfriedens und der internationalen Sicherheit selbstständiger Maßnahmen getroffen
 hat.
 Heute zeigt sich die hochkomplizierte Beziehung des Friedens, denn die Größe der Verantwortung
 für die Wahrung des Friedens zunimmt. Die Staaten haben sich durch unerschrocken und sich dazu verpflich-
 tet. Verantworten des Schutzes zu tätigen. Dieser Schutz kommt nur allein durch den Aus-
 druck, daß er die Anwendung von Gewalt legitimieren kann. Grundbedingung sind alle Staaten verpflichtet,
 jede gegen die legitime Unversehrtheit oder die politische Unabhängigkeit eines Staates gerichtete
 oder sonst mit dem Zweck der Verletzung Nationen anzuwenden durchführung oder Anwendung von Gewalt
 zu verhindern.

Top: Gerhard Richter, 448-2, 1987, oil on canvas, 225 X 200 cm, collection of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (©Photothèque des Musées de la Ville de Paris)
 Above: Gerhard Richter's artist book War Cut was published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln, in 2004 (344 pages, 25 X 21 cm, ISBN 3-88375-757-6, \$75.00)
 Opposite: Mark Lombardi, George W. Bush, Harken Energy and Jackson Stephens, ca. 1979-90 (Self version), detail, 1999, 24 1/8 X 48 1/8 inches (courtesy Donald Lombardi and Perog)



Mark Lombardi, George W. Bush, Harken Energy and Jackson Stephens, ca. 1979-90 (5th version), detail, 1990, 24 1/8 X 48 1/8 inches (courtesy Donald Lombardi and Pierogi)

In the early months of 2004, as an important exhibition of Lombardi's work closed in New York,⁶ German painter Gerhard Richter took a very different approach to adjudicating between fear and doubt. Whereas Ra'ad and Lombardi both work in the tradition of a conceptually-inflected leftist documentary aesthetic,⁷ Richter's images are lushly painted, but often clinically abstract. Unlike the younger artists I have been discussing, Richter's work has always seemed ironic, a conversion from automatism to the automatic that perhaps only an ex-Socialist Realist could truly understand. Taking 216 details from the painting entitled *6/8-2, 1987*, Richter made an artist's book called *War Cut*. Juxtaposing more or less random close-ups of the painting with selected paragraphs from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a Frankfurt daily newspaper, *War Cut* produces an elliptical, oblique view of the events and issues that emerged during the first two days of the Iraq war. Its 344 pages refuse to comment on the controversial American invasion, offering "mere" journalistic facts that assume the same mysterious chunkiness as the pictorial details.

"When the war started," Richter recalled, "I heard all these conflicting opinions. I thought newspaper reports were...[as] impotent and ineffectual as everything else in the face of catastrophe—but their plain presentation of the facts consoled me." Contradictorily, the artist also claimed, "I read most of the texts only after I placed them with the pictures. ...I was not looking for straightforward narrative, which is maybe also why I chose that particular abstract painting. Some of my other abstract paintings are less ambiguous. Their atmosphere is either very agitated or tranquil or almost story-like in their narrative flow.... This picture had none of that. It was close to being uncommunicative, which I don't mean negatively."⁸ Closer to Ra'ad than Lombardi in some respects, Richter presents a seductive dance of doubt and unknowing that catches our interest, and gets us to engage with the authorless news snippets as if they were "like literature," in his words. "Form is all we have to help us cope with fundamentally chaotic facts and assaults. ...The more dramatic events are, the more important the form. That is why people marry in a church and why we need a priest for a funeral."⁹

Richter claims to have had no reason for using details of this particular painting in *War Cut*—although one might read this composition, which presents twin columns of black surrounded by sulfurous reds, yellows, and acid greens, as an almost literal figuration of 9/11. Even if this anachronistic reading is impossible given the painting's production in 1987, it is suggestive for its re-selection by Richter in 2002. Such an iconographic reading would surely violate the hermeneutics of doubt, and displease the cool German strategist. Cutting the symmetrical abstraction into details allows "some images" to "match the cruelty and the madness described in the texts," as he commented—yet all these details are arranged like a film (as the title *War Cut* implies), so that the abstract sequence "begins somehow or other, has tranquil and wild, nasty and fantastic passages, and then once again fades away, ending in white. A dream."¹⁰ Surely this aesthetic operation is not unlike the chilling forensic algorithms and combinatorial logic deployed by Ra'ad's Atlas Group. Like Ra'ad, Richter believes that war happens, but is never adequately captured by "the many different judgments, prejudices and simplifications we hear and read."

Richter, Lombardi, and Ra'ad give us no easy answers. There is no ready taxonomy that would capture Richter's fragments and abstractions, Lombardi's spidery flow charts and networks, and Ra'ad's sublimely exploded cars. These images bring no handy icons to speed the

visual traffic in fear. It is the stubborn complexity of such artistic practices that I want to praise—their demand for time, for thought, for discussion. The hermeneutics of doubt can sway the amygdala in its chemical flush, and call the cortex to its higher function. Paradoxically, doubt is strong, dogma weak. This, then, is my call: artists and culture workers of the world unite! Spread doubt, not fear. ■

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NOTES

¹ Here I am reinserting politics into Walter Benjamin's term, which was adapted by Rosalind Krauss in her critique of modernism, *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.

² Covering the televised speech Bush gave from Washington to announce his administration's decision to unilaterally invade Iraq on March 19, 2003, Martin Merz, Ron Hutcheson and Drew Brown reported for Knight-Ridder Newspapers on March 20 that "Minutes before the speech, an internal television monitor showed the president pumping his fist. 'Feels good,' he said." Archived at numerous websites, among them Knight-Ridder's own <http://www.realcities.com/mld/kn/washington/5434637.htm>, and "Unknown News," <http://www.unknownnews.net/insanity032003.html>, (accessed August 2004).

³ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 volumes, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, "Echoes of a Christian Symbol," *Chicago Tribune*, June 27, 2004.

⁵ Ra'ad defended his dissertation entitled titled *Beirut...à la folie: A Cultural Analysis of the Abduction of Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s* in the Visual Studies program at Rochester Institute of Technology in 1996.

⁶ Unless noted otherwise, all Ra'ad quotes are taken from an interview with the author, December 29, 2003.

⁷ Ra'ad to Amal Wallach, "The Fine Art of Car Bombings," *New York Times*, Sunday Edition, Arts Section, June 20, 2004: 30, 33.

⁸ This is a paraphrase. I do not have access to Ra'ad's script, only my notes from the presentation he gave at the HTC forum at MIT in the fall of 2002.

⁹ The exhibition *Mark Lombardi: Global Networks* curated by Robert Hobbs and toured by Independent Curators International, was recently on view at the Art Gallery of Ontario. It will be presented at the Milwaukee Art Museum through April 10, 2005.

¹⁰ The early work of Hans Haacke, for example.

¹¹ Gerhard Richter, interviewed by Jan Thom Prikker in April 2004, translated by Tim Nevill and published in *The New York Times*, Sunday Edition, Arts and Leisure Section, July 4, 2004: 26.

¹² *Ibid.* Quotes reordered slightly.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.