

lumpen 86



Operation: Summer of Love

On May 22, 2002, Office of Fatherland Defense Director Ed “Lalo” Mar addressed employees in the Office of Fatherland Defense Auditorium on the Agency’s Strategic Cultural Direction. The following are excerpts from the Director’s address regarding the current crisis.



First, the threat environment is growing more diverse, complex, and dangerous; the surveillance state, disappearance of civil liberties, repression of the culture, ending of democratic freedoms. It’s easier and easier for elites to have a serious impact, with less visibility and warning. The potential for surprise has increased enormously.

Everything we do will have as its primary goal the strengthening of our two most fundamental capabilities: cultural revolution and defending freedom. These are the activities that determine whether or not we serve our customers day in and day out.

We are in the cultural espionage business. We are going to stay in the cultural espionage business. Agent operations have been our backbone for 50 years, and clandestine cultural operations have consistently yielded invaluable public value. I will not let that change.

The challenges facing HUMINT [human intelligence] are great. Some of our most important targets – lawless corporations, the imperial state, social repression, and fascists in government, to name a few – are hard to get at. We confront technologies that present unprecedented challenges to our ability to operate under cover. And we must combat a wider array of counterintelligence and disinformation concerns like the media monopolies and state gestapo.

All of this means we will have to mount increasingly complex and tactical operations. At the same time, we have must also be prepared to meet the inescapable demands to surge. We have to have the agility and the flexibility to surge without hollowing out the hard target operations that must remain our principal focus. There is room for tactical and general deployment of ideas, global justice, human rights, and democratic principles.

To meet these challenges, we will rebuild our field strength. Over the next few years, we will increase the number of our operations officers. We will augment existing stations and increase the number of our stations and bases. And we will see to it that they have the communications infrastructure they need to support their operations.

At the core, our success depends on our people. We will establish a recruitment program that parallels the very best in private industry. We will bring the best and the brightest people into OFD day after day, month after month and prove we have a mission and system of rewards in place to give them the incentive to stay.

In light of our need for incentives I am pleased to announce our 2002 tactical media campaign for public safety, Operation Summer of Love. Our pilot program begins June 2002 in Chicago and it represents a major paradigm shift to confront corporate control of the public domain, state repression of humanity, and to celebrate our freedoms while we still have them.

This large-scale culture hack is a challenge to the current “oil group” state-media alliance presentation of the War on Terrorism™. The Orwellian *Strength Through Ignorance* ploy must be challenged. We have the strength and the numbers to defeat the tactics of the wagers of “endless war” and unveil their motives.

The Summer of Love campaign includes public arts and civil society strategies that encourage public dialogue, personal engagement and consciousness raising. This reclamation of public space should embrace the street with symbolic and real gestures of love and resistance. As always we will perform our duties with perfection on target and on mission.

Advocated tactics in this information campaign remain unconventional: graffiti, stencil and poster campaigns, public street vending, smiling at strangers, playing boomboxes with the New Sound on the streets, public displays of affection, picnics in parks, skateboarding in restricted areas, leaf-letting, elevated cinemas, matchmaking, skill sharing, dismantling of surveillance systems, television occupation, summer bar-b-ques, random hugging, planting gardens, pirate radio, open engagement with desire and other more technical practices.

It is your duty to report to your station officers to initiate tactical operations in your neighborhood and street. Station Chiefs are briefed to provide details for your role in the New Strategic Cultural Revolution. Operation Summer of Love depends on our total participation for ultimate success.

We are all officers of Fatherland Defense. It is up to each and every one of us to prove our system, our civil society, our country is always ready to fight against the Terror of Terror. Ask not what your country can do to support terror but what can you do to foment love.

The Office of Fatherland Defense requires all operatives to register and report their specific duties and practice throughout the Summer of Love Campaign period. Mission briefings and project updates can be found at:

www.lumpen.com/fatherland/summeroflove.html



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Lumpen Patriot Committee

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The Lumpen Patriot Committee is funded in part by a generous grant from the Office of Fatherland Defense. The mission of the Office will be to develop and coordinate the implementation of a comprehensive national strategy to secure the United States from terrorist threats or attacks. The Office will coordinate the executive branch's efforts to detect, prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks within the United States and around the world.

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Tactical Media

Codename: Stickyfingers

Instructions: Identify the offensive gumball machine(s), replace the patriotic icons with graphic images of 9/11 to expose the base nature of this profiteering. Wash hands thoroughly before returning to work.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Group Esperanto Communiqué 05222002

Shortly after the tragedies of September 11th, it came to our attention that several Chicagoland enterprises were engaging in manipulation of the horrible events for fiduciary gain. This plan, known to corporate insiders as Project Profiteer, mandates the distasteful proliferation of the American flag and other related icons on area gumball machines.

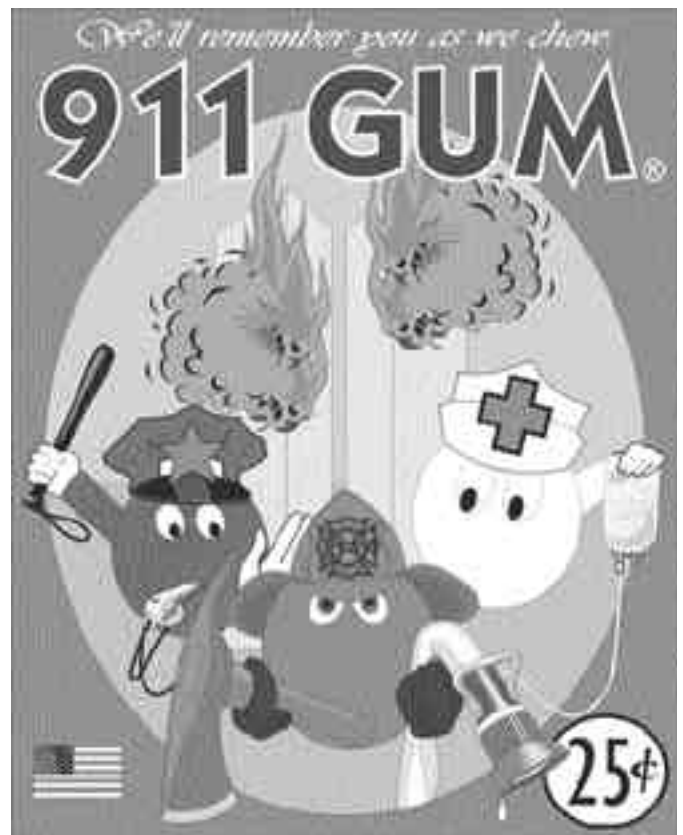
It has become increasingly obvious that the American capitalist system knows no other way: any earmarks of the popular consciousness will be ruthlessly regurgitated into marketing schema in order to connect with potential consumers.

When the public mind is overcome by the 2001 disasters, the system expresses no restraint in exploiting those symbols as well. As a result, the deafening Al-Qaeda statement and the subsequent horrible loss of life are repackaged for us and become completely trivialized.

Upon the first emergence of Project Profiteer, agents of Group Esperanto sprung into action - convening immediately to devise its own three pronged counter-measure strike; codenamed Stickyfingers. (see photos)

The Group Esperanto Action Team has constructed a Sticky Counterstrike Device (SCOD), a copy of which is attached to this communique [available at www.lumpen.com]. The SCOD may be reproduced digitally to facilitate the ease of distribution over the world wide web and subsequent deployment by the Group Esperanto Militia nationwide.

SCOD instructions: print out onto Avery laserjet 8.5" x 11" sticker paper. Cover with contact paper and cut to size. Upon deployment, simply peel off backing, place onto offending gumball machine(s), and apply 2-3 seconds of direct pressure to affix.





Video Petition Project

Artist Emergency Response (AER) launches Video Petition Project to voice opposition to the Israeli Occupation and to speak for a just solution to the Palestinian Refugee Crisis and an equitable and lasting peace in the Middle East.

AER is a student group at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago working with faculty and staff, consisting of Jewish, Non-Jewish, and Arab American members working to respond to the current Middle East Crisis as artists and activists.

Eleven AER petition statements will be read on camera by people in the United States and Canada. The video will serve as the visual testimony of North Americans asserting their multi-faceted views against the Israeli Occupation.

These voices are underrepresented by the media, despite their large and growing numbers, and cannot be dismissed as anti-Semitic or self-loathing simply due to their criticisms of the Israeli Government and its policies.

Beginning in the summer of 2002, AER will work with organizations and individuals throughout the US and Canada to sign thousands of individuals onto the Video Petition.

The completed tapes will screen in a variety of venues, from colleges, universities, and high school campuses to community organizations, art venues, public access television, radio, and internet sites. The Video Petitions will also be sent to public officials and leaders.

For more information or to endorse or participate in The Video Petition Project, please contact AER: artistemergencyresponse@hotmail.com

Sticker Exchange

Attn: All Graffiti Writers

Chicago, 1993: Our beloved Mayor Richard M. Daley creates the "Graffiti Blasters" program so "property owners can get free help to remove graffiti." The truth is, we know many members of "the community" don't want to have graffiti removed and that those who think they do might not know the facts. That's where the Sticker Exchange Comes in.

In the upcoming summer months, beginning in Chicago and then in Columbus, Ohio, a project will be started where normal everyday newspaper dispensers on the street will be transformed into dispensers of pro-graffiti propaganda/information. The dispensers will vend brochures which play with the language of buff squad and graffiti blaster city fact sheets- things like "how to spot a vandal", "10 steps to avoiding graffiti" and "stopping graffiti 101". Things like this are often dispersed by anti-graffiti community groups and city Streets and Sanitation Departments.

The goal of the project is to make a brochure which seems similar (and strange) enough to look like one of those anti-graffiti brochures but will be altered to encourage the art of graffiti appreciation, rethinking how space is used, and what people's relationship to graffiti is.

Included in the brochure will be a collection of "HELLO my name is..." stickers (the stickers don't have to say "HELLO my name is..." but must be that size or they cannot be included). This is the beginning of an opportunity to get stickers up other places and have people pay attention to them that might usually walk past them. The brochure will encourage the person reading it to take the sticker and put it up. These stickers will also reach the hands of other writers in other cities who are interested in getting them up.

For more information contact magicjohnson1985@hotmail.com. Send your stickers to Sticker Exchange c/o Just Seeds PO Box 476971 Chicago, IL 60647



Hay! Market Research

Radicalism never looked so good.

A few months ago members of the Pink Bloque, a radical feminist dance troupe, had a May Day action in Downtown Chicago. These artists, administrators, activists, dancers, and direct social service providers are making street activism more fun for themselves and others, in an effort to explore the possibilities of tactical cuteness.

What they do: dance and dialogue on street corners near you
 What they like: clothes, social justice, booty shaking, pop culture, good food
 What they dislike: racism, sexism, capitalism and dominance in all its forms (also, dreadlocks on white people)

Hay! Market Research: Advertising the Past, Assessing the Present

Hay! Market Research is a small team of researchers dedicated to the assessment of common knowledge surrounding the Haymarket Riots of 1886 in the City of Chicago.

The activities of Hay! Market Research include strategic on-site public advertising of historical information and propaganda, distribution of information and statistics through handouts and one-on-one verbal exchange, and administering surveys assessing peoples' knowledge of the events of the Haymarket riots and their opinions on ideas the events raise such as free speech, free assembly, and the death penalty.

The accompanying photos were taken on May 14, 2002 at the former site of the Haymarket Police Statue on Randolph Street near Desplaines in Chicago's West Loop.

The distribution of the survey's findings through the Hay! Market Research website at <http://www.haymarketresearch.web1000.com>



Summer Reading

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The New Rulers of the World by John Pilger

Verso Press

The Best Democracy Money Can Buy by Greg Palast

Pluto Press

Appeal to Reason: 25 Years of In These Times

Seven Stories Press

If you like Chomsky, it's time to introduce you to John Pilger. *The New Rulers of the World* is a good place to investigate the double standards and injustices of the politics of globalization. Pilger is a bad ass muckraking journalist that would be assassinated in most countries for the critical work he puts out. Using Indonesia and Iraq as examples, he explains the cold truth of globalization where the US destabilizes countries, often by coup d'états. Once the puppet governments are set up and backed these dictatorships return the favor by giving the country to corporate groups that decide how best to loot a country's resources. This kind of globalization by coup is responsible for the mass death of the world's most innocent: children. Give *New Rulers* to anyone that believes globalization is about "free markets". Read it if you want to explain how the system works to Mom and your friends. Globalization is institutionalized rape where oftentimes unaccountable US government agencies in hand with corporations like American Express and Ford Motors are the criminals and where innocent people in the rest of the world are the victims. This forced relationship often favors genocidal policies to ensure profit.

Some Lumpen readers may know Greg Palast because he broke the story about how Florida Governor Jeb Bush illegally eliminated over 65,000 Democratic voters from the election in Florida... In case you're saying to yourself "well, if that's true, why didn't I read or hear about it on the TV?" Well... if you're still in this level of thinking then please throw this magazine away and fuck off til you wake up. Besides the Bush coup d'état bombshell, Palast gives a macro look at how corporado con men steal from us, and manipulate global policy at the expenses of human life. He's go the primary documents to prove it.

In These Times, a biweekly magazine that should be required reading for every fucking journalist and TV anchorman in the US, just released *Appeal To Reason: 25 years of In These Times*. If you dig *Lumpen*, *In These Times* will wig you out. They have been one of the few consistent active voices left for a politics of sanity in these times of insane paranoia and manipulative politics. This anthology represents a logical analysis of our recent past.

Seven Stories Press is a very important Paul Revere type of Publishing House releasing longer essays in the form of little books that discuss many hot button topics that should be on every citizen's mind. To maintain good mental and ethical health check out their many titles at www.sevenstories.com and buy some. Without them we are lost. Their latest, *Secret Trials and Executions: Military Tribunals and the Threat to Democracy*, by Barbara Olshansky, is a detailed analysis one of the many sweeping maneuvers made by our own Evil Doers to revise laws that have curtailed our civil liberties beyond belief. -Edmar

Stencil Graffiti by Tristan Manco

There is plenty of spray can porn: the glossy spreads of new European 3-D letters, the classic old school montages of NYC bubble letters rolling on full cars, the amateur blurred-out faces in front of walls of fame, etc., so imagine the surprise when one finally runs across a well-written book about the often ignored, seldomly celebrated art of stencil graffiti. Stencil graffiti has its roots in revolution and protest and has recently been coming into vogue again through the work of artists like Banksy, Shepard Fairey, and Dave Kinsey, who have crossed over the bridge and brought the stencils of protest and street politics into the art gallery and the larger consciousness.

Modern stencil artists follow in a long historical tradition — primitive man used his hands, Egyptians used leather and papyrus, and so forth. Manco goes out of his way to paint stencil artists in a positive light, talking about the ethics and reasons behind many current artists' work. After a brief but thorough set up the reader is introduced to the different categories of stencil graffiti: pop art, people, tribal, protest, etc. Interspersed within this visual mix are profiles on contemporary stencil graffiti artists. What sets the stencil apart from the spray is the focus on communication with a wider population, and that is made apparent throughout the book. The use of

stencils for protest and political action seems to temper any interpretation of a piece of stencil graffiti, giving it a stronger social relevance. With 400 full color pictures and concise, readable text, *Stencil Graffiti* is a great first step in bringing attention to an under-appreciated art form. I only hope a new stencil renaissance will follow, so we'll see more stencil works appearing around the city this summer. -Logan Bay

Inflight compiled by Johan Grimontprez

Did you know that in 1972 airline pilots were going on strike due to the frequency of airplanes that were being hijacked? Did you know that in 1969 the Havana airport expanded its restaurant and gift shop to meet the needs of the frequent influx of hijacked American airline passengers? Did you know the term "hijack" as it relates to stealing a manned plane was first used in 1958 by *The New York Times*? These facts and more are contained within the pages of *Inflight*. *Inflight* was published as an art project in 1999 and serves as a sort of pre-millennial time capsule for all things relating to hijacking.

There are chilling interviews with hijackers and hijacked as well as photos and even maps of hot spots to which hijacked planes flew. What makes this collection so amazing is the sheer amount of information, and number of hijackings that have taken place. In 1969, hijackings served as a way to express the desperation of the Palestinian people in relation to their conflict with Israel. For many normal Americans, these acts were the first time they had even heard of or taken notice of issues on the world stage. By thoroughly investigating and collecting information about such a specific subset of terrorism, *Inflight* serves to solidify not only the act of hijacking in the reader's mind but the larger issues that surround such acts.

Designed and laid out like a typical in-flight magazine, *Inflight* even comes with a safety information card and vomit bag. As a work of art, it is amazing, leaving this reader so hypnotized and rabid that he couldn't put the magazine down — I read it cover to cover in one sitting. In light of recent events, *Inflight* takes on new meanings and issues that originally could not have been foreseen but now the ideas and issues explored in this work seem more relevant and appealing than ever. The relevance comes not from any imparted sense of stability but from all the questions a work like this makes one ask of one's self and society. Pick up a copy, if you can find one. -Logan Bay

Zing Magazine #16

We all know art magazines: lots of white space around some small color pictures of ongoing exhibitions, ads for galleries and openings (lots of ads), the same big names on the covers with new art. Well, *Zing* is changing all that, with a hefty 200-plus page count per issue and art (lots of art). Forget what you know; *Zing* gives you art and gives it to you good. Beautiful page spreads, full color, full bleed. Just you and the art. Each issue *Zing* hands over its pages to different "curators" to do with them what they wish. What happens is something beautiful in the world of art publishing — an innovative mix of art and aesthetics, composition and commentary. Along with the mixed art content is your standard fare: scene, show, and book reviews. *Zing 16* is out now and has it all, from experimental architecture by the Acconci Studio to abstract close-up photographs of underwear by David Brady. Plus, this issue comes with a special CD, the first-ever Aesthetics Records compilation, featuring tracks by pulseprogramming, L'altra, 33.3, Team Forest, etc. The compilation is beautiful and covers the breadth of the lush melodic electric acoustic that Aesthetics is so well-known for, making the CD alone worth your hard-earned \$12. -Logan Bay

Rinzen Presents: RMX Extended Play

72 Dpi: Anime

Thousands of lone geeks hiding behind slick flash websites, tweaking vector based graphics and clever mixed media collages are in a race to stamp their own visual landscape onto the sponsored cultural spaces we inhabit. They work in the information sweatshops and propaganda suites of advertising agencies or at home doing freelance work and postcards for friends' music shows. These kids create the corporate pornography that shall shoes for Nike, execute the identity of insurance and car companies and inspire new look and feels found in ads in "hip" fashion mags and party fliers. Most of them have to do shitty work for clients. Some have the opportunity to put their vision unspoiled onto paper and screen in company-supported websites, design contests and zines.



If they are good their work will be broadcast for 15 days of fame in executing ideas for MTV2 interstitials. If they are real good they will define the graphic design, marketing and promotional feel for an independent electronic music label or clothing line. Their designs will sell thousands of units even if the music is mediocre and the t-shirts are sewn together by slave child labor in China. Recognition of these design skills will inspire thousands of their fellow heads in an unending race to create the next best thing to get the Holy Grail of corporate money and design annual fame. The outstanding designers (or clever self-promoters) will mutate and become recognized as “visual artists”, selling knock-offs of their signature look-and-feel for hundreds of dollars on design geek sites and hip pop art galleries. Some, who are smart and socially responsible, might do some pro bono agit-prop work for the anti-globalization movement. The rest will be biting the predominant style and look for inspiration in thrift shops and dollar stores.

Obviously we like the geniuses doing the agit-prop design work for the revolution.

It is within this underworld to the corporate design hegemony that a series of design poses and boutique groups have managed to do both client work and their own personal work leaving a trail of independent vision (some Lumpen readers may see this type of work in Graphic Havoc, for example). If you are curious about advanced design work you might be able to find it online, if you know where to look. If you shop for mags to put on your coffee table you might be lucky enough to spot a spread or two in the latest issue of design mags like Eye, IDN, Emigre, Studio Voice and a few others.

If you are a real head or at least call yourself a designer, it's most certain you have found the creme of the crop in the design universe within a Die Gestalten Verlag book. This Berlin-based publisher is responsible for elevating the designer to the class of rock star. All of their books are rich finely printed artifacts that have become instant fetish items for any aficionado of the new graphic design or whatever other catchy marketing phrase one can put on the revolution in design. If you are a designer confirmation of your genius will only come when DGV does a retrospective on your work. They have become the curators of what is cool in graphic design and no one has caught up quite just yet.

DCV's latest title, *Rinzen Presents: RMX Extended Play* is a clever exquisite corpse project where the hot team at Rinzen presents 16 original designs and their hot shot buddies like Matt Owens, the Designers Republic, Designershock, and others rework it to some interesting new tangents. It comes with an audio cd inspired by the graphic design contained within containing remixed cut-ups of the designers' voices.



72 dpi – Anime is a truly disgusting project that includes a sampling of some of the best experimental web inspired motion design work of 2000 and 2001. The interactive DVD contains hours and hours of video, animation, user-oriented work and motion graphic work that intersects around the interactivity and styles of sleek flash work. It provides the sort of inspiration that promotes layers envy and is a must have for any “new media” worker. The book is a smattering of stills from the motion projects and is more for reference than for pure aesthetic appreciation. If you are looking for a gift for that designer friend or spouse Die Gestalten Verlag knows whom to please. They are pricey books but worth the investment. Ask for these titles at your favorite bookstore. -Edmar

Dancing Star compiled by Brian McMullen

Okay, let me tell you a little something about Love: Love lives in a 7"x9" blue-and-white box titled *Dancing Star*. Officially, *Dancing Star* is an art and literary publication of the Collins Living-Learning Center at Indiana University, but it takes on completely different dimensions through McMullen's obsessive curatorial and storytelling skills. Inside you get five small booklets, a small zine reprinted to the size of a memo book, and a trap-door compartment holding a larger newsprint section and “limited edition inaction figure” (a plastic fetus in action-figure packaging, complete with an individually handmade costume of a karate master, ballerina, superhero, or soldier).

Surprises lurk around every corner... there's an interview with the author Jonathan Ames about his doodles (published here for the first time), the first published autobiography of a professor who has spent his entire career on the study of others' autobiographies, and a wide variety of submissions from students and friends. A plastic sleeve in the newsprint section holds a tiny little booklet with *150 Lines* by Catherine Bowman, a “modular narrative” with fifteen stanzas that have been individually rubber-stamped in random order so that each booklet reads differently. One of the larger booklets even contains an original paperback cover from McMullen's collection, lovingly tom off a mystery novel or self-help guide and glued into place for use as a postcard.

Beyond all the treats and tedious detail-sweating, though, a story is being told. It's a story about dreams, and coming of age, among shadows of failure and death. *Dancing Star* is a whole box full of the kind of idealism that we all need so badly. At a time when most non-commercial design projects are little more than coffee-table-sized business cards, this is a shot of sincerity that has a thing or two to tell us about ourselves. Available at Quimby's. -Dakota Brown

Secure Connection

Don MacKeen

The Economist printed a correction recently. It read:

In the issues of December 16th 2000 to November 10th 2001, we may have given the impression that George Bush had been legally and duly elected president of the United States. We now understand that this may have been incorrect, and that the election result is still too close to call. *The Economist* apologises for any inconvenience.¹

Meanwhile, the London Financial Times notes that “online gambling fraud surges,” generating “a fifth of all internet fraud, making it the biggest card crime problem on the web.”²

These two items of news may seem unconnected; they are, however, really two sides of the same coin.

We are presently at war with a concept, as well as with people: civilians, combatants, and illegal combatants. The great coalition of the democratic and “freedom-loving peoples” of the world is strained, as President Bush articulates a future in “you’re either with us or you’re not with us.” So, while the UK’s staunch support is welcome, its criticisms, say regarding a potential war with Iraq, are not. After all, the USA supplies the people of Scotland with Trident nuclear missiles, the only European soil blessed with this privilege. That Trident is deeply unpopular with the Scottish people is neither here nor there; as Dr. Kissinger noted, regarding the democratic election of a socialist government in Chile in 1973:

“I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people.”

Democracy, as practised by the USA, is designed to further the progress of Business. The USA is an open society, one in which individual freedom is less curtailed than in many other countries. However, American freedom is the ability to buy a handgun as easily as buying socks. It does not extend to the freedom to have health care, as the 40 million plus Americans who currently lack health care can attest. Guns and health are closely related, not just in terms of cause and effect, but as both are, in the USA, commodities. A national health service would mean that the commodity nature of health is, at least, mitigated. This would result in a lack of freedom, the freedom to profit from a commodity. This is why the US government spends more of its gross national product on health than any other industrialised nation. Those who would decry this as “corporate welfare,” going to pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies, etc., clearly do not understand why the USA is the standard-bearer of freedom.

The internet, which has yet to be the money tree many supposed it was, has still had an impact on the USA, where 72% of people are online³. In a nation with almost universally bland news coverage, the internet has meant that those who don’t agree with the dominant position as presented by the New York Times, CBS, NBC, etc., whether to the right, left or otherwise, can make their views heard, organise and effect change. The “Battle in Seattle” cannot be said to be the result of the internet. It’s roots go back to the Third World campaigns of the 1980s. But the internet played a part, and has generally made organising more efficient.

It has also increased paranoia, as it is seen as a sort of Big Brother influence. For

instance, there is ECHELON, developed by the USA’s National Security Agency, along with their counterparts in the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia during the Cold War. Designed to monitor electronic messages, this system scans through millions of messages, searching for particular keywords. No doubt systems like ECHELON could be used to curb the freedom of some of the activists currently organising through the internet. It may make it easier to target particular groups—easier than it was, say, in the 1920s when German and Scandinavian immigrants were deported from the USA for being members of socialist clubs.

“Six months of non-stop investigations of Arab and Muslim residents in Canada and the United States, have produced little or no evidence to support widespread fears in the two countries that they played any role in the deadly attacks on September 11.”

And yet some 1200 Arab and Muslim Americans have been detained in the USA, as well as 30 to 50 in Canada.^{5,6}

“Many are fighting deportation orders in courts, while scores of young Arabs and Muslims, most of them students studying overstaying their visas or workers found committing minor infringement of immigration laws, are being packed off to their native countries without recourse to legal protection, and consequently, any hope of ever returning to their studies or jobs or friends and relations in places where they lived for years before September 11.”⁵

Online gambling fraud and stolen elections—the fight for freedom and democracy and the return of detention camps. In all of this there is an almost seamless union of commerce and patriotism.

In 1922, the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen wrote:

“The current situation in America is by way of being something of a psychiatric clinic. In order to come to an understanding of this situation there is doubtless much else to be taken into account, but the case of America is after all not fairly to be understood without making due allowance for a certain prevalent unbalance and derangement of mentality, presumably transient but sufficiently grave for the time being. Perhaps the commonest and plainest evidence of this unbalanced mentality is to be seen in a certain fearsome and feverish credulity with which a large proportion of the Americans are affected.”

1. *Economist*, 11/17/01.

2. Mackintosh, J

“Online gambling fraud surges: internet credit card company seeks to tighten security”, *Financial Times*, March 28, 2002.

3. George Bush in Des Moines, IA, March 1, 2002
<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/02030200.htm>.

4. Press release, UCLA Center for Communication Policy, November 29, 2001.
“2001 UCLA Internet Report Finds Declines in E-Commerce, Major Concerns About Online Privacy and Credit Card Security”.

5. Kaneira, N
“Cloud of suspicion hangs over Muslims”, *Gulf News*, March 25, 2002.

6. Dunne, N,
“US Muslims see their American dreams die”, *Financial Times*, March 28, 2002.

Cat Chow

Interviewed by Al Burian

Sitting in the living room which doubles as her studio, meticulously sewing strips of shredded American currency into tiny ringlets for a chain-mail patterned dress, she looks like a spokesmodel for obsessive-compulsive disorder, but her finished products are undeniably impressive, striking in their craftsmanship and tactile weirdness.

Her artwork appears to reside at the exact midpoint of punk rock craft project, high-concept art piece and haute couture. Her clothes are constructed from common household items (tape measures, sand paper, band-aids) or odd materials (a dress made from baby-bottle nipples, a kimono made out of holographic “yellow power ranger” cards). Some of her work has had an apparent political content to it (i.e. the Power Ranger kimono with its depiction of the Asian female power ranger). But her newest work, not for sale, a dress made from one thousand shredded one dollar bills, ups the confrontationalism ante considerably.

For one thing, the method of construction, mutilation of US currency, is a felony. I’m always down for a felony which doesn’t involve ski-masks and semi-automatic weapons (mail fraud, ripping the tags off of mattresses— dude, I’m there), so I took Cat up on the offer to help run the shredder in the initial stages of the garment’s creation. I have to confess, despite the abstract appeal which the wanton destruction of a third of my annual income held, turning a hefty bag full of crisp, new, bundled stacks of George Washingtons into confetti was an unnerving experience. When the shredder finally overheated and jammed, I felt like Oliver North, or one of those Enron assholes.

A week of sleepless nights in front of a sewing machine later, Cat Chow’s money dress was on display at the Art Fair at Navy Pier. Although not fully completed (the version shown at the Art Fair was the \$550 tennis-dress as opposed to the \$1000 floor-length version which Cat promises to have done soon), the piece, on display amidst a zoo of international art galleries and four-digit price tags, seemed a perfect metaphor for the art fair itself, or the commercial forces which underlie and drive art and fashion, and the title seemed to make the statement explicit: “not for sale.” Ironically, by the time the Art Fair was packing up shop, the piece had “sold:” a little orange dot by the title plaque indicated that someone had offered to buy not for sale.

“I was a little, uh... surprised,” Cat admits. “Everyone kept asking, ‘are you going to sell it?’ I hadn’t really finished the entire piece and I hadn’t really decided that. And then the *Sun-Times* printed that not for sale was selling for three thousand dollars.” But Cat is not in a hurry to sell the piece. “I know, from the point of view of the gallery I showed with, that’s why they’re at the show. The guy [who wanted to buy the piece] was from some P.R. firm or something.”

So, after breaking federal law to indict capitalism via evening wear, what do you do for a follow-up? “I’m making a dress out of Nokia cell phone face-plates,” explains Cat. “It’s for a fashion show in New York put on by *Gen Art* that they do every year... Nokia wanted to do a cellphone dress, so the *Gen Art* people reminded them about me. So, it’s interesting. This is the first time that a major corporation has commissioned me to do a piece. Of cell phones, no less.” Does this seem like a contradiction of the apparent statement made by not for sale? “Yeah, I thought about doing a series called ‘sellout,’” Says Cat, half-jokingly, “where I was thinking that it would be funny to do as a statement, to get all these corporations to sponsor dresses and call them sellout #1, sellout #2, sellout #3...”



Mr. Lif

Interviewed by Edmar

The Definitive Jux record label is becoming a positive global force in hip hop. Headed by rapper and producer El-P, aka el Producto, Def Jux has released a string of fierce genre bending releases that are redefining the emerging independent hip hop nation. With Def Jux comes innovation and cultural dissent. One of the driving forces of this movement is Mr Lif, one of the best rappers in Hip Hop, period. Hailing from NYC by way of Boston Mr Lif is dropping mind bombs with hard sick beats. His new Ep and Lp are due out this summer. I had the pleasure of chatting with Liff during the recent Fantastic Damage tour at the Metro.

EM Hi Lif. Thanks for allowing us the opportunity to ask you a few questions.

LF Thank you for the opportunity.

EM A lot of people differentiate mainstream hip-hop from independent hip-hop. What do you think of the kind of dialogue people are having about the differences between mainstream, let's say Outkast vs. and independents like Aesop Rock and yourself?

LF You know, I think that gap has closed considerably in the past couple years. I used to be one of those kids that was like, "Well I won't listen to Jay Z, and I won't listen to this and this and that." I think there was a time where it was a very legitimate criticism when hip hop started to get really really popular, and, thus, really, really commercialized. It was just an ill time, because you started to see a different type of rap creep up where it wasn't based on lyricism. It was more based on hooks and catchy ass beats, and the hooks would correspond with catchy ass beats. And the lyricists weren't really concerned with providing social commentary. They were more just talking about the privileged aspects of life. And a lot of cats were just trying to stick to their guns. That was where the whole backpacker movement spawned from to me. It was just a bunch of cats who knew what hip hop was, and who didn't want to see it go over to some shit that didn't have any lyrical content. You know what I'm saying? We wanted hard beats.

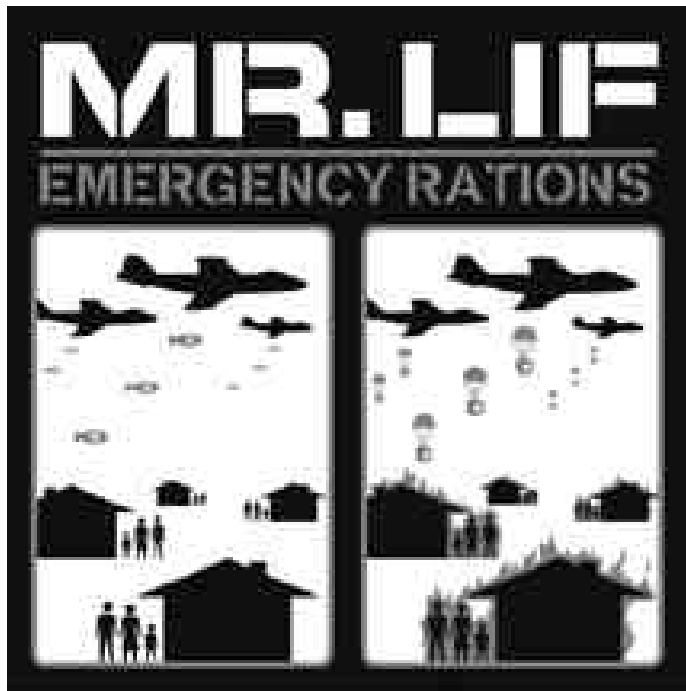
EM It was a grass roots movement.

LF Yeah, but I mean, fuck it. It was what hip-hop was. It was hard ass beats and hard ass rhymes. When cats stop doing that, or, when, what was predominate in hip-hop was cats who weren't doing that, I think that a lot of people felt slighted. But I think that Outkast is fucking brilliant. They reinvent themselves every record. I mean what more can you ask for from artists.

EM Do you think there's room for musicians and artists to introduce experimental ideas on a major label?

LF I think that is true from groups that have been on since back in the day. Like Outkast, they dropped in like '93 or '94. I remember I had *Entrance to 36 Chambers*, when I had *7th Grade Elizabeth*. That was like '93. They've been on Arista since then. They threw themselves into it. They got in during an era when you could still make raw rap shit and put it out and sell units. That time has changed. We don't see the raw shit so much in the forefront. There's a couple cats that on their label, said, "I'm gonna make raw shit." But I think they developed that clout from early on. And then the A&Rs allowed them to do that.

Wu-Tang for instance. *36 Chambers* was like the dirtiest possible record. I almost returned that record to the store after I bought it. I thought they didn't master it. You know what I'm saying? It just sounded so grungy. They got their pull at



a time when you could put out a dirty ass record. And they still have a lot of their control. I mean independent artists now, I think are put in the position where you have to prove that you can sell a lot of units independently before you get that opportunity to be on a major label. And then you look at Jurassic 5 or like Dilated Peoples. They're on major labels. They have the opportunity to make music that is what they feel and what they want to do. I'm sure they've got some A&Rs barking at them to try to switch up some formulas or incorporate this or that, but I feel for the most part they are able to still do what they want. It's such a rare thing. I don't know if a lot of these major labels even know how to sell acts like that.

EM It may not even be necessary for a major label to pick up an independent hip-hop act when phenomena like Company Flow occur.

LF I don't even know man. I mean to me, I'm perfectly happy right now. There are so many factors that go into it. Eminem, who's an independent artist, hooked up with the right people. For a lot of cats I know in the underground, we wish his beats were a little harder sometimes. But he's got skills. I think mainly it's just not wanting to be tampered with. That's why I'm happy being an independent artist right now. Maybe later on I'll want to do something else, and maybe I'll have proved myself to a point where I feel like I can step to a major label like that and not have to worry about them messing with my music.

EM But you know, one thing that you may have to worry about is the notion of self-censorship. For example, you're down for making some socio-cultural-political commentaries in your work. A lot of artists may not be able to sell that kind of work to a major label because it is a critique of the system. Maybe that hurts it. Of course, you could make the argument that PE or Rage Against the Machine was picked up by a major, preaches revolt and it doesn't matter. The label and the market co-opts the dissent and renders it as a commercial product. They can get around that issue of any serious critique. But you know, even as the anti-globalization movement continues to grow, you're one of the few artists out there, in the world, in terms of western music, hip hop, punk rock, independent rock, etc., who is actually making any kind of cultural criticism of these trying times. Do have any peers working on a cultural critique of the system in their music as well? What drives you to do that?

LF Well, first of all, that was the reason I wanted to start rhyming, to do exactly that. To try to put the lessons I'm learning from life into my music and share it with people. You know, an incident like 9-11, I see what happened and the first thing that pops up in my mind is—OK, why is this happening? Who got paid off this? What are the next moves? The towers come down. What are the names that are being called? Two hours later, they're saying Osama Bin Laden. OK. If they knew it was that cat, why wasn't he doing something before?

You know, you just watch how people move. You watch what the media puts out there for the public to gobble up. You watch the way that they play with the human soul and spirit. And how they manipulate our sentiments. I try to make my theories based on that—at least put a hypothesis out there, something that's different than what they are putting out there for everyone to gobble up: "America's a great country that hasn't done shit to anyone. These people are attacking our freedom because they don't want us to be free." Like it's that simple.

But the truth is, America's the most powerful country in the world. I mean you can compare it to a high school. Look at who is the powerful cat. It's probably the bully. Or rather, in the business world, think about what business means. What does business pertain to? Business pertains to being cold, callous, straightforward, and going for what they want without taking into consideration anyone's feelings, and strictly calculating it for financial gain. America is the greatest business in the world. Enough said.

EM I think it's really great, for example, that you just came out with your lat-

est EP, "Emergency Rations," some of which seems partially a critique of what is going on in America post 9-11 Now when did you start working on that?

LF I started working on that October 1 when I got off tour. I was on tour from September 1 to September 30 or something like that. We were on the road. We were actually in Montreal when the towers came down. And I had a long time to think about it... work through all the sentiments... just wishing I was home with my family.

EM You were travelling around the country and you noticed this kind of knee-jerk patriotism?

LF Yeah. Definitely, we were just checking the news all the time because we wanted to know what happened. And then watching our President come out talking about how we are going to smoke them out, bring them to justice—you know, smoke them out of their holes and bring them to justice. The reality is that we don't really know who fucking flew those planes into those towers. You don't know if it's something that was supposed to happen. It could have been some American group who was fed up with the conditions here in America and the things that America does in various countries around the world. But the bottom line to me at least is no matter who did that shit, who would they pin it on? The Middle Eastern people have been our scapegoats for, like, how long? How long has the Saddam Hussein's regime been in power?

EM One interesting aspect of the album is that in *Emergency Rations*, you disappear. Mr. Lif disappears. What happened to Mr. Lif?

LF Well basically, that's something that I created to kind of bring out the nature of the absurdity of how we all feel this instinct to bite our tongues. To not critique and jump that far out of line. But also the fact that we are all so caught up in the grind of trying to keep our heads above water, that we really don't have the time to go out and demonstrate—just go out and boycott some shit. And if you do, you're probably going to spend the night in jail. You know, if you miss a day of work, a lot of people can't function anymore. You miss that one day, that extra 50 or 60 dollars is missing.

EM So do you feel like you're speaking for a lot of people out there?

LF Yeah, I'm trying to. And also the whole thing with being missing is the fact that we're invisible. That the foundations upon which this country are built by the people who are out there working the shitty jobs, paying inflated taxes when they are not getting any money anyway, and religiously showing up to work because they can't afford to miss a day. Those are the people that are not represented, because they are not the two percent of the population that has the actual wealth in this country. They have very little say about what appears on the TV screens, what's going to be on the billboards. They are the people that are consistently manipulated by the major corporations to buy products. So that's what the disappearance is about. And also about the fact that I dared to speak out and now I've been brought in for questioning and never released. Which has happened to several people I'm sure since 9-11.

EM What do you think of the dynamics of the world now? Now that we live in "The Age of Terror" run by the Bush regime? Where any decision or policy whether it's increasing oil production in Alaska to taking away the right of abortion in America is linked to some sort of war of terror. What can we do to dissent and make a difference?

LF You know, for me I think it starts with changing your mind. You got to look at the world we are living in and look at what's being promoted and question it. You know if you're watching CNN or your 5 or 6 o'clock news—question that shit. Ask why they are promoting it. It's a fucking commercial. Why are they promoting Saddam right now? They are using instruments of fear right now. You

RIGHT ON!
~~Knife Assault~~



know terror has now brought people in America together in the name of revenge, to an extent... which ultimately has us looking to our government for guidance because we are afraid. And every now and then they let you know that, let's say, banks are going to be a target now, restaurants are a target. They've got you to where you just want to stay in your home and not live life. I think it's going to require on our part, some serious decision making. To like not believe everything we see, and seriously try to seek information about what is real.

I feel that we are so deep in the hole of muck and bullshit. I mean how many commercials have I seen in my life? That shit is all a part of me. Like my desires are completely manufactured by people in a board meeting that sit around a big marble table. And this is what I am. I am a man who is 27 years old who has been brought up in a TV culture that's coming at me at more and more of a rapid pace. Just flashing images at me, and I'm looking for a way out. But meanwhile, what's the answer? Do I leave modern life and just try to resort back to the land? Do I just live in the fucking forest or bush or jungle and just try to fend for myself? God created humans with opposable thumbs. You know we have an advantage. We are allegedly the most intelligent.

I mean I should have the proper survival instincts. But I've been made such an invalid by the crutch that is modern living that I don't know how to survive out there. I have no options. And also now I'm bound by my work. I have to go into studios and depend on technology to get my word out. I have to depend on the Internet to show my videos, which I hope to be making some time. And I have to use the stores to get my CDs in there. It's tough and believe me, I'm burnt out by it, and I feel like I'm caring less and less about money at a time when I should be caring more because I'm making a lot of moves. I should be putting money in my pocket. But I think the lowest form of communication is arguing about money.

EM That's what a lot of people think, but when you say shit like that people think you sound like a communist or socialist, which is a bad thing in their mind. Fact is capitalism causes a lot of problems in our everyday lives and in deciding what kind of world we would prefer living in. I mean collectively, as a group of humans, we should be able to choose the best society for us all. Man, it would be great to go to the dentist for free, get healthcare for free, higher education if I wanted to for free. Or practice making art as my job without worrying about shelter, food, day to day survival. There is enough wealth and know-how around to allow us to collectively make decisions to create an egalitarian society where everyone gets basic human rights, civil liberties and has a say in the develop-

ment of our civic and public life.

I mean today we're all turned off and we're all jaded and cynical about the society and world we live in. And you're helping us think about it through rhyme and song. It's admirable. I want to let you know that you are one of the few people in music who are leading in this legacy of commentary. From the 50s, the 60s, even the labor movement of the 30s, it was song and lyrics, that brought complicated ideas and commentary to the people.

LF Well don't sleep on the fact that I'm inspired by different artists, Aesop Rock, EL-P, and others are very good friends of mine who I see delving within themselves to form honest music that comes from the heart. That is very inspirational. I see EL-P coming out with his albums. I met him when the group broke up and I've seen him build to this point over the last four years. I'm incredibly proud. You know he speaks in code. He's cryptic, but the messages are strong. I love EL's record because it challenges the human mind. You can't just pop it in and immediately cast your review of it after one listen. You've got to listen to it eight times to figure out what's going on. Our attention span has been completely demolished. Yea, I had to listen to EL's record like eight times. It sounds unlike anything else. But in terms of the messages hitting home, and understanding the styles he's flipping and the textures, and bridges that he's putting into the songs—that's shit that no one else is doing in hip-hop. It's fucking futuristic b-boy shit.

EM So do you feel that by working with innovators it allows you guys to keep moving and creating?

LF We got to man. We've got to keep moving., It's going to be a big year for us. I mean, EL-P is on it now. Aesop brought *Daylight*. Merz is coming out. I'm dropping an EP and an album this year. What's up next year? Ace is going to hit again. We've got to come through. We've got to keep it moving and hit hard and that's what we're focused on.

EM Well we expect that man. All I can say man is collaborate with as many people as you can. Infuse the new kids with the energy and the dynamics and the notion that it's ok to speak your mind on what's happening around you.

LF Yeah man. Thank you.

Fidel Castro

Last December Brazilian journalist Breno Altman traveled to Cuba for the Forum Sao Paulo, an annual meeting of Latin American leftist intellectuals. During the course of the convention he spent 12 hours talking to Fidel Castro. The 13-page interview was published recently in *Reportagem* magazine. Here are a few highlights, translated to English for your reading pleasure.

FC Countries spend money on wars mainly because of crises which need to have the attention taken off of them. I remember before World War Two, America's economy was in a state of crisis. Roosevelt didn't invent the war of course, but what he did was take the US out of its isolationism. Roosevelt saw the dangers of fascism and he had his contradictions, just like we have ours... He was a statist, he had good help, he used the war to build businesses, inject money into the market, develop infrastructure... It was the type of war that helped the economy, even producing things that were never consumed.

BA And Bush's war on terrorism?

FC This war no. Who are you going to sell the arms to? This war is not going to generate arms consumption, unless it's only among the North-Americans themselves.

BA But all the petroleum reserves they have in the Middle East...

FC No. This is all an invention.

BA But the whole Bush family made their money in Petroleum and the whole Bush administration has its roots in Petroleum, right?

FC Yes, but this war is about Hegemony. World Domination.

BA Among who?

FC For hegemony. It's a power grab.

BA To demonstrate what?

FC More capacity, more power. You don't have to become involved in such a serious problem over petroleum, which, after all, can be purchased. This administration came in with a strong chip on its shoulder. It wants power over the world. They know they have rivals. China, with a future perhaps economic, perhaps military. Russia, which has its weapons—however ineffective they would be towards American targets. For the Americans security is a religion which they indoctrinate into the people, most of whom aren't in any kind of danger whatsoever. Any little thing that happens in Haiti they call a danger for the security of the United States. Imagine if Cuba was crazy enough to produce nuclear weapons. If you launch three missiles they will launch 300 against you. These days it's better to start a war with slingshots, rocks and things like that. Legitimizing the use of a weapon which they have a thousand times more of than you do has no logic whatsoever.

BA Do you think that this war for hegemony, as you call it, could extend into

Latin America?

FC No, no. There is no need whatsoever to have a war in Latin America. It's enough just to give orders.

BA Do you think the anti-globalization movement can become a continuation of the old International proletariats which have faded out?

FC Not only this, but it can become something much better. Because it wasn't born out of political parties, so regulated, but out of something very spontaneous and free, with standards of respect and a spirit of union and creativity and because of this it can become something better than the Socialist International.

BA And would this be socialist or communist?

FC It could be an International that doesn't define itself by a regulated ideology, but by principles that are real and freely felt. Something much richer in the variety of ideas, initiatives, criteria and discussion. That accepts the principle of consensus, that doesn't require unanimity, doesn't have to be based on ambition. Today we can't have an International based on one straight pillar, but only something with much more volume. We have to create force in the convergence of a group of fundamental pillars. One of these is social justice, another ethics, another is anti-neoliberalism. With globalization imposing itself on the world another of these pillars is the fight against ACLA, the fight in defense of national sovereignty, the fight to protect local cultures, ecology. The participants can be atheists or belong to any religious group. What is important is that they have a series of ethical and social principles.

BA What alternatives are there for those who want to defend themselves against the structural crisis of neoliberalism?

FC They say that soon there will be an economic crisis like the one in 1929. It's the same phenomenon. The value of the stock market has been artificially inflated, causing a virtual wealth. I know Ted Turner. I've been friends with him since before he had CNN and three years ago I said "Ted, aren't you afraid that this giant globe is going to deflate and the stock market is going to crash?" He told me, "Of course. Why do you think I gave \$1 billion to the UN?" He is a friendly guy, he likes to hunt and fish with me. We go spear fishing together. Nowadays he owns half of Patagonia and the best river for salmon, which he tells me is near Bariloche. And he's raising Bison in California, for profit. The money doesn't interest him, but he likes to make deals and do business. For the Americans, buying, selling, taking markets from others, becomes a vice. It becomes a sport to them, like other people enjoy playing chess. I'm not going to say that the world is in a structural crisis, but I do say that the situation is similar to 1929, but the conditions are quite different and the repercussions will be much greater.

BA You are an important figure, not just for Cuba, but a great figure of the 20th century.

FC Yes, but my importance is very relative. The memory of people disappears faster and faster these days...

BA But you can't deny your importance as a guide and...

FC OK, but you have to thank the Yankees for this. They were the ones who made me famous as a demon. And there are people who like to talk to the demons. They ask for autographs, a photo and at the same time say, "I didn't think Cuba would be like this. It's so different from what I'd imagined." Look, for advertising and publicity purposes you couldn't ask for anything better. If you have fame as a demon everyone is interested in talking to you.

Tom Frank

Interview by Geert Lovink

During the nineties I only vaguely heard about a zine called *The Baffler*, a cool and rigorously critical theory magazine, coming out of Chicago. It was only when I read the *Baffler* anthology *Commodify Your Dissent* that I got a grasp of what their radical critique of American business culture was all about—and what role Thomas Frank, *Baffler*'s founding editor, was playing in this unique intellectual undertaking.

Late 2000 Tom Frank's critique of the New Economy appeared. In *One Market Under God* he provides the reader with an overall analysis of 90s "market populism." Dotcoms in Frank's view are only a symptom of the belief that "markets were a popular system, a far more democratic form of government than (democratically elected) governments." This particular ideology is not monolithic. Thomas Frank shows that market populism is an idea riven by contradictions. "It decries 'elitism' while transforming CEOs as a class into one of the wealthiest elites of all time. It deplores hierarchy while making the corporation the most powerful institution on earth. It salutes choice and yet tells us that the triumph of markets is inevitable." The explicit contradictory nature of the New Economy tales might explain why this religious system attracted both libertarian progressives and conservatives, all betting on quick success. Only few years later the "greed is good" atmosphere has evaporated. *One Market Under God* captures the millennial rush in a brilliant bitter, detailed fashion, knowing it is all about to tumble. In the following email conversation we are looking at how dramatically the mood has changed since the announcement of the AOL-Time-Warner merger at the height of dotcommania, early 2000. The question of what elements of the New Economy discourse remain uncontested is also put on the table. Thomas Frank is a historian and journalist, writing for *The Nation*, NPR, *Harper's* and other outlets. The interview was originally conducted for the Chicago new media festival *Version >02* (www.versionfest.org) but could not be completed in time.

GL After the NASDAQ crash, the following recession, 9/11 and the Enron scandal, do you believe there is a backlash against New Economy values unfolding? How would you position your own book, *One Market Under God* in the presumed swing of mood against utopian free marketers and unbounded global corporatism?

TF The change has really been staggering. The newspapers have had a field day hounding the celebrity stock analysts of the 1990s. And there is popular outrage against the Enron executives of a sort that we haven't seen in this country for many years. It just seems to get worse as more facts are revealed—today's *New York Times*, for example, affirms what electricity consumers in California suspected all along, that Enron was able to play the deregulated market like a piano.

But by focusing on these two easy targets—Enron and the dot-com boosters—there is the risk that we are missing the larger, systemic problem. It wasn't just Enron that played accounting games and exaggerated earnings and screwed its

employees and used the power of the State Department to further its brutal agenda in foreign countries; it was numerous companies. And it wasn't just analysts at Merrill Lynch and Morgan Stanley who puffed the Internet; it was newspaper columnists and TV commentators and politicians of both parties. My argument is that the New Economy, among other things, was a political maneuver, a claim that free market capitalism automatically expressed the will of the people, and that any force restricting the operations of the free market (government, labor unions) was by definition antidemocratic and elitist. This is what should really be discredited, and along with it the pro-corporate, deregulatory politics of the last twenty years.

But it isn't. There's grassroots anger, to be sure, but it's important to remember when discussing this issue that the biggest institutional boosters of the New Economy—the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes* magazine, the Cato Institute, etc.—are still in business, and they have no intention of shutting up. They are putting everything they've got these days into limiting the damage, into denying any connection between, say, Enron and the larger corporate world. What's more, the biggest individual boosters of the New Economy are discovering that there's no downside at all to having been so wrong. George Gilder is still on TV and at conferences; James Glassman (author of *Dow 36,000*) has written a new book of investment advice and is still a hot item on the right-wing lecture circuit; James J. Cramer and Larry Kudlow, two of the most rabid theorists of market populism, have actually been rewarded with their own TV show on CNBC.

GL Who are the economic advisers of George W. Bush? This is not so apparent to me. Would you say there is an economic policy in this administration? It's so tempting to see a dominance of the national patriotic forces and the Pentagon over a more liberal, Clintonesque globalist agenda in which the USA is not just seen as an old school imperialist but has itself to fit in the capitalist Empire structures (if we want to follow Negri/Hardt's arguments at this level in their book *Empire*).

TF It's a funny thing to say, but it now seems like Clinton was something of an idealist about globalization and the New Economy, at least compared to Bush. He was a true believer in the utopian powers of something really shitty. With the Bush administration it sometimes seems as though there's no program at all greater than simply giving campaign contributors whatever they want, while using whatever popularization tool is at hand to slide it by the general public. Some of his team—Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, for example—are true believers in the most fucked up sense. But by and large, the rule seems to be to

let industry write the laws that affect them—credit card companies get to write the bankruptcy laws, Wall Street gets to write the banking laws, and so on. Vice President Cheney’s deliberations on the administration’s energy plan, for example, merely amounted to a series of meetings with executives from the country’s largest oil and gas companies.

GL What does business culture look like these days? There aren’t that many fancy concepts for sale.

TF I pretty much gave up following management theory when I finished *One Market Under God*. Every now and then, though, I pick up a copy of *Wired* or *Fast Company*, or a hot new management book will show up in my mailbox. “Chastened” seems to be the appropriate word. What’s really sad is how Enron caught them all by surprise. I got a management book in the mail the other day in which the author went on and on about Enron as the most innovative company of all time, comparable to a collection of artists, really. Thanks to the long lag-time of book publishing, this book came out at the most embarrassing moment.

One interesting theme that has started showing up everywhere is the identification of patriotism with big business. Just a few years ago business was equating itself with internationalism, with the gorgeous mosaic of the world. The state was dead. But that is forgotten today as though it never happened. Now, we are told, consumers are buying because they love their country, stockholders are standing pat because they love their country, workers are acquiescing to management because they love their country. The cover of *Fortune* a few weeks ago showed two grimy blue-collar workers holding a pristine American flag between them. The headline was, “The Die-Hard Economy.” See, we’re beating this recession out of sheer love for country. As always, the real purpose is to silence dissent. Equating business with love for country transforms those who doubt or criticize business into something akin to traitors.

GL It is tempting to believe that nothing has changed. Apart from a few new regulatory measures financial markets, consultancy and auditing firms, including their management gurus can’t wait for the economy to pick up again, forget the bankruptcies and losses of previous years and sell some new hype.

TF I was listening to an NPR broadcast this morning in which the reporter interviewed a factory manager somewhere in China, and the guy was using pure, unadulterated New Economy language as though the crash had never happened. And the NPR reporter was simply passing it on uncritically, as though the reason China was building factories and Illinois was tearing factories down was actually the arrival of a “knowledge economy” and so on. As I mentioned before, the institutional puffers of the ideological bubble of the nineties are still in place, still telling the world, still making the same arguments. And they’re not just going to stop because they’re wrong, or because some guy in Chicago historicizes them. As anyone who has ever covered a strike can tell you, being on the right side of an argument just doesn’t matter a whole lot in the land of money.

GL Is there any way that you see a fundamental criticism of market populism can gain a political momentum and achieve something? What do you think, for instance, of the ATTAC movement, which promotes the Tobin tax? I don’t want to ask the old question whether capitalism should be reformed from within or fundamentally attacked from outside. This seems such an outdated choice.

TF Except during the wildest of boom times, unregulated, free-market capitalism has never been a particularly popular social order. Indeed, leaders of business thought like the *Wall Street Journal* are forever worrying about the political dangers (regulation, taxation) that lurk behind each corner. The real question is, how has unregulated, free-market capitalism managed to triumph? Consider what it’s done in America, where it has managed, after seventy years of ideological warfare, to overturn much of the still-very-popular welfare state program known as the New Deal. What an achievement! What interests me is how this

ideological victory was won, and the role of market populism—the equating of free markets with democracy—in winning it.

I don’t know much about the ATTAC movement, but the Tobin tax seems like a good idea to me. As does the estate tax and the progressive income tax. The problem, of course, is not a shortage of good ideas but the absence of a popular, grassroots left movement to insist that they are implemented.

GL What is the role of the cultural critic today? Is there a new breed of “organic intellectuals,” in tune with the Seattle protest movement? Repeatedly you have criticized the academic cultural studies wave as an integrative, politically correct yet powerless force. The only option available in this media age seems to be to accept the role of celebrity thinker. What other strategies do you see emerging? Is it the task of the critic to be negative, no matter what?

TF I would very much like to see a new generation of intellectuals who aren’t strictly creatures of academia. By this I don’t mean celebrity thinkers; I mean people who write for audiences larger than simply their fellow PhDs. And maybe such a generation is coming: After all, the American universities grievously mistreated people who got their PhDs in the 1990s, and gave them every incentive to pursue careers outside the academy. But I don’t know for sure if that’s actually happening; all I have is anecdotal evidence. And, no, critics don’t have to be negative all the time.

GL Could you say something about the influence of *One Market Under God*? There is very little criticism of today’s business culture. We can’t expect much from economists to understand the mythological aspect of guruism. At the same time postmodern cultural studies has walked away from the economy, perhaps in a response to earlier over-identification with Marxist economic determinism.

TF The world of management theory really has gone unscrutinized by academic cultural studies, for precisely the reason you mention. Cultural studies mistakenly imagines that all discussions of this subject must either be mechanically Marxist or else must follow the cult-stud path, must hymn the empowered consumer and find subversion everywhere, etc. And since obviously nobody wants to be a vulgar Marxist, you only have one choice. What this overlooks, of course, is that there is a vast literature that deals with business and American life in an intelligent manner and without making either error. We call it history. My model was Richard Hofstadter’s 1963 book *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, which has always been one of my favorites. I wanted to write the history of an idea—market populism. And I was also taken with the notion of writing an intellectual history of a period of rampant anti-intellectualism.

I will admit that I hoped, in the back of my mind, that business people would pick the book up because they wanted to read a debunking of management literature—a genre which everyone suspects is largely bullshit. I thought they would want to read a book telling them just why it was bullshit, and how it got to be so bullshit. But by and large this didn’t happen. It turns out the business community—regardless of all its propaganda about encouraging dissent and going to extremes and tolerating wacky creative individuals and treasuring innovation and all the rest of it—isn’t interested in seeing itself historicized and critiqued.

Thomas Frank, One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism and the End of Economic Democracy, New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Summer Fun Corner

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