

**Ten days after** the streets of South Africa were filled with inspiration, terror seemed to chase away hope. The crisis that enveloped the US in the wake of September 11 2001 seemed to blast away dreams of a better, saner world. Some Northern activists had identified recent actions in Genoa as being the end of a phase, or the beginning of a new one. The altered political terrain which emerged after the fall of the Twin Towers confirmed that idea.

In the North, activists retreated, pulling out of protests and hunkering down for as long as it took, whatever it turned out to be. Many predicted the subsequent wave of repression: the surgical excising of civil rights, the violence against anyone perceived to be Muslim or Arab, the consolidation of power, the secret detentions and deportations – they came one after the other, a steadily building crescendo, and we couldn't fight back fast enough, couldn't maintain and defend all the spaces we'd opened up in previous years. Many of us despaired. Meanwhile, voices from the South emerged, saying that this 'new' war was nothing new. Telling a Colombian labour organizer, a Guatemalan truth-commission worker, a South African with AIDS who cannot afford the patented drugs, a Palestinian in a refugee camp, a Mexican human rights lawyer that a war was just beginning, (a war which for them has never ended), made as much sense as Bush pretending that his sudden interest in war against Iraq had nothing to do with oil.

Though our movements' work was harder than before, and hate and fear were stalking the planet, curiously, a new space began to open. Suddenly, people in the US were talking about foreign policy and considering the connections between the venerated 'American way of life' and the poverty, violence, and blood spilled across the planet. An unprecedented, pre-emptive world-wide anti-war movement emerged from the ashes of the Twin Towers. Closing the door on an unsustainable paradigm, we began to walk forwards, and in walking, began creating new pathways into another possible world. This piece is not a first-hand testimony, but a reflection on that moment.

## The Altered Landscape

by Jordi Pigem

1973. It's the year when Picasso and Neruda pass away. The year when the last US combat troops leave Vietnam, and Watergate begins to engulf Nixon. The year of the oil crisis: the exporting countries turn the tap off – in protest at the 'First World's' backing of Israel's expansionism – and the breathless modern economy, so reliant on oil, starts to gasp. It's the year of the Wounded Knee uprising: at the site of a callous massacre of their ancestors, a group of Native Americans resist US forces for ten weeks. It's the year when, precisely on 11 September, night falls over Chile, the heartless night of the coup orchestrated by Kissinger and the CIA. In that same year, the jury of an upside-down world condemns Kissinger to the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1973, EF Schumacher publishes *Small is Beautiful*, the first great manifesto for ecological economics, "economics as if people mattered". The architect Minoru Yamasaki proclaims the opposite. He is the father of the Twin Towers, which were baptized on 4 April that same year. Supported by 192,000 tonnes of steel, they were born to be the sturdiest and most impressive buildings in the world. From their sky-high windows, "people looked very small". That is: they did not matter. Those Towers (not the victims who perished with them) symbolized our contemporary economy: awesome concentration of power, striking efficacy, global reach – and as a corollary of that, lofty indifference, the cherished illusion of being above the land and the breathing

beings that walk upon it.

Some of his colleagues called Yamasaki “the architect of terror”, given his taste for bewildering structures that defied common sense. In the 1950s he designed in St Louis the Pruitt-Igoe housing development, which also resembled the contemporary economy: so rational, homogeneous, and decontextualized that it fostered anomie and crime, to the point that it was dynamited as uninhabitable. The moment of its demolition, 3.32 pm, 15 July 1972, is referred to as the birth of post-modernity.

Almost three decades later, Saturn returns to the celestial point it occupied as the Towers were baptized, and now it is exactly opposed by Pluto (symbol of the underworld, of primordial destruction and regeneration). It is 2001, the year of the Human Genome Project, of the Zapatista march to Mexico City, of the brutal repression in Genoa. In September, in Manhattan, the streets of finance and glamour get covered with the ashes of the innocent.

### Rediscovering America

As far as one can tell, no Muslim has any problem with

America. Or does America mean the US? America stretches from Ellesmere Island to Tierra del Fuego. Brazilians, Patagonians and Canadians are as American as any Californian. Its pretension to monopolize the word America was the momentous first colonial act of the nascent United States: you start by colonizing a word and you end up trying to control earth and heavens (Star Wars) and even life’s fertility (Monsanto).

The bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas – a North American tropical city in the Zapatista heartland – condemns the ghastly deaths in the Towers but acknowledges that the policies of the neighbouring country “reap what they had sown”. Many voices, mostly quietly, say the same in the US: “Does anybody think that we can send the USS New Jersey to lob Volkswagen-sized shells into Lebanese villages – Reagan, 1983 – or set loose ‘smart bombs’ on civilians seeking shelter in a Baghdad bunker – Bush, 1991 – or fire cruise missiles on a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory – Clinton, 1998 – and not receive, some day, our share in kind?” asks author Micah Sifry. Back in 1967, Dr Martin Luther King Jr said: “My government is the world’s

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not been paid in six weeks, attack five banks, throwing computers, bookshelves, and office furniture into the streets. Others destroy the façade of the provincial energy company, which had repeatedly raised its rates until they were unpayable.

>> **January 16** >> Despite being declared illegal by the government, a 24 hour general strike in Nigeria paralyzes most of the country’s main cities and brings commercial

life to a standstill as workers protest against an 18 per cent rise in fuel prices.

>> **January 25** >> In Bologna, Italy, an immigrant detention camp under construction is invaded and completely dismantled. Hundreds of activists from the Italian movement of *Disobbedienti* (which replaced the White Overalls), including members of Parliament, take part in the action, which is attacked by riot police who beat up many,

including MP’s and one of the negotiating police officers.

>> **February 1-4** >> Defying 10,000 militarized police as well as those who said that protest couldn’t happen post-September 11, 20,000 people hit the streets of New York City, US to protest the World Economic Forum’s meeting. The action is organized entirely without the support of unions or NGOs, still under the misconception that protest is over. Declaring their solidarity with the people of

leading purveyor of violence.” Noam Chomsky has long been remarking that the industrial-banking-political conglomerate that rules the US is the most powerful terrorist organization in world history. But, needless to say, one kind of terrorism doesn’t justify another.

In 1996, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, when asked on television how she felt about the 500,000 children that had died in Iraq, replied that “all things considered, we think the price is worth it”. If you could add and subtract human lives, half a million children would weigh more than 3,000 adults, although those reckonings would be as heartless as the acts of 11 September or the embargo on Iraq. The point is that those children were not US citizens – and in the Secretary of State’s parlance *justice* sounds like just us.

The problem, though, is not the US, nor even its government: the problem is a system of which we all partake. Only fanatics can rage at whole countries or peoples. To mistake US citizens for their government (most of them didn’t vote for Bush, and the great majority know very little about foreign policy) is as senseless as mistaking poor Afghani people for the Taliban.

### **Dreams and reality**

Before 11 September, the foreign world as seen from the US didn’t seem to be fully real – it looked rather blurry and intangible, like a dreamland that one could visit but was lacking real substance. No wonder its elite refused to sign (let alone fulfill) international treaties on climate change,

arms control, and chemical or biological weapons. No wonder they spurned the UN Conference on Racism in early September and, in spite of their wealth, ran up the biggest debt with the UN. They were aloof, asleep in the ‘American dream’, with little or no awareness that this daydream was a nightmare for people and ecosystems outside (and inside) their borders. The American dream: a somnambulating giant fantasizing it was God in the plastic promised land of technology and consumerism. A reverie as beautiful as it was unsustainable.

Loaded with fuel and fanaticism, the planes crash into the Towers and create hell (temperatures that would melt steel, one hundred floors pulverizing the fire-fighters), and that hell bursts the bubble in which the great somnambulist was floating. Reality, buried for so long, emerges among the rubble and the tears. For the first time, many US citizens start to wake up and realize that they are as much citizens of the world as anyone else, and that their opulence is built with the blood of others – many of whom are aware of it, some of whom won’t forgive it.

But the American dream was also the European and Australian and Japanese dream; it was the dream of the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, the dream of a mentality that longs to be above the earth and life and death. These latest dreams of immortality (biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and nanotechnology) can self-replicate and evict the dreamer from the earth – not to mention from the dream.

## Pacifying the economy

According to Buddhist philosophy, three poisons undermine our lives: greed, ill-will, and delusion. These poisons today reach unprecedented levels while colonizing the very fabric of our world: structural greed in our economic system; structural ill-will in the policies of many states and in the arms trade (thriving as the world sinks into suffering); and structural delusions propagated by the 'infotainment' industry.

Year after year, economic globalization helps to enrich the rich (mainly corporations and people from the North) while impoverishing the poor (mostly countries and people from the South): the richest 20 per cent of humanity is already 80 times richer than the poorest 20 per cent. Mind the gap. Meanwhile the structural greed of the system results, per day, in 24,000 deaths from malnutrition and the extinction of 140 species.

The violence of our economic system is the source of many other forms of violence. The pacification of our world calls for the pacification of our economy and the abolition of the obscene inequalities it creates. It calls for the economy to

be brought down to earth by prioritizing ecological and social concerns over the 'freedom' of corporations. Cancelling 'Third World' debt, taxing capital flows, creating an ecotax for transport: these are steps towards a world of true democracy, with justice and freedom available for all people – rather than for economic abstractions.

## Awakening

The unsustainability of our world is becoming more and more blatant, and the system would do anything rather than acknowledge that, starting by criminalizing dissent and writing off liberties. But crisis also means opportunity. The further we are into the night, the closer is the dawn. Our current predicament is a call to wake up from our personal and collective delusions and to realize who we are, where we are going, and how we are living.

If we look deeply, we know that a lot of what we dislike in others is a projection of what we fail to acknowledge in ourselves, that an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind, and that violence, even if victorious, never leads to peace. We know that only fanatics can believe that whoever is

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Argentina, demonstrators chant "They are Enron! We are Argentina!" outside the offices of Andersen Consulting, (Enron's disgraced accountants), and hold a *milonga* (tango dance party) in the streets, then move on to the Argentinean consulate. "This is a provocation. While thousands of New Yorkers are still burying their dead... the richest and most powerful men on earth have decided to come and party on the wreckage – to celebrate, no doubt,

the billions of dollars of taxpayer money they've just been handed by their respective governments and explore new opportunities to profiteer from permanent global warfare," said the Anti-Capitalist Convergence in its statement for the weekend protests. Referring to recent actions of fire-fighters shut out of the clean up of the Twin Towers wreckage, the statement continues, "As our heroic fire-fighters have shown us, the moratorium on direct action

in New York is over. We are the future and the future is of resistance!"

>> **February 1-5** >> The World Social Forum gathers again in Porto Alegre, Brasil, with 60,000 global activists converging. Even the *Financial Times* is forced to admit, "The strong turnout showed that the movement had regained some of the momentum it had lost after the terrorist attacks in September." Meanwhile, regional social

not with them is against them, that only fanatics demonize their antagonists and instigate crusades to rid the world of evil. Bush and bin Laden share more than they suspect.

We know that a world which is bewitched by symptoms and ignores the context, seeing life in terms of genes and freedom in terms of money, is a sick and ill-fated world. We know that a world that worships Progress, with its trinity of Science (inscrutable and omniscient Father), Technology (Son bringing us closer to deliverance), and the Market (Holy Ghost that blows where it wills) is a world as deluded as it is unsustainable.

Albert Schweitzer, a deserving Nobel Peace Prize recipient, emphasized that we must rediscover a sense of awe in the presence of life, and gratefully revel in its mystery. We need a new vision enabling us to overcome dualisms and to see in every person and every culture a valid source of self-understanding, without renouncing our convictions nor the actions that are born from them. We know we must provide for others what we wish for ourselves, and that integrity is our best protection. As Gandhi taught, the practice of *satyagraha* – clinging to the truths that are born in each of us – will open the paths we must travel. All this we know. Is it not enough?

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**Resources:** » *Another World is Possible: conversations in a time of terror*, ed. Jee Kim, Jeremy Glick. New Mouth From Dirty South Press, 2001

**The third conference** of Peoples' Global Action (Against 'Free' Trade and the WTO), held in Cochabamba Bolivia, began on 14 September 2001 – a dangerous time to be fighting the 'free' trade agenda with one of its most potent symbols – the World Trade Center – in ruins. George W Bush made it clear: you are with him, or with the terrorists. The Governor of Cochabamba District absorbed these instructions rapidly and announced to the press that the PGA conference was a meeting of "international terrorists". On arrival in La Paz, many activists heading for the conference were interrogated and detained by intelligence officials. Dozens were threatened with deportation.

Stanis, an unflappable Papua New Guinean, had the longest, strangest journey of all. It began, in a sense, when he started using the internet, which required walking to a friend's house two hours from his village in New Guinea. In this way he discovered, to his delight and astonishment, that many others around the world are, like him, opposing the policies of the World Bank. After a long trek to the capital, Port Moresby, he took a plane to Sydney. Flight disruption after the 11 September attacks delayed him there for three days, and then he caught a plane to Los Angeles. Despite being in transit, he was held in a hotel under armed guard for two nights by US immigration officials who didn't believe that a large, affable rural Papuan with radical literature in his luggage could be anything other than a terrorist.

Stanis was finally sent on to La Paz, where he was detained for two more days, sitting in a small office in the customs lounge with no bed, no food, and \$10 in his pocket. Having been jailed in the past for organizing protests against the World Bank in Papua New Guinea, he merely sat there and implacably refused their hamburgers. Eventually he was released, and he came to Cochabamba to share his story. This is an edited transcript of an interview.