

A4:1/11

Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
Proximity to Everything Far Away
By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri
From: the distance between New York and L.A

From: Ayreen Anastas

Date: Thu Dec 15, 2005 4:30:58 PM America/New_York

To: Rene Gabri

Subject: fear is somehow our for whom? for what?

Dear Rene,

A funny scene is unfolding in front of me: here in Brooklyn's Williamsburg, same place, having tea, in a freezing December afternoon. Several glass windows are separating and connecting us with a mirror in the background reflecting Bedford Avenue. If I had the camera I would turn it on now. I do not have it therefore I will write.

I hope you managed to catch your flight this morning. I have to say I feel so happy to be in Brooklyn, on land, and not in the air in some chicken/rabbit transporting system. The last trip was not the worst in my life (those are reserved to Ben Gurion Airport, the champion of dreadful experiences!), nonetheless, something about it is bothering me. I cannot locate it.

He is having lunchtime special with miso soup. I am not hungry yet. You had to eat the airplane meal, I imagine. You have no other choice!

In any case, it was a wonder I caught my flight last week, at Schiphol: the women on the airline counter were kind to give me a boarding card and run through the gate with me, despite the fact that I arrived so late. A rare thing in our times.

I arrive at the gate along with the last 8 passengers, to be interrogated and x-rayed. Examining my itinerary: "I see you are traveling a lot! why is that?" I tell her why, explain what I am doing. Interested: "Art means what? paintings?" I start explaining, over explaining. Meanwhile, she goes to her supervisor and talks to him shortly. She comes back: "You are traveling a lot I see! So what do you do for money?" I tell her that I teach. "Aha, and you could be absent for that long?" I say yes, since it was thanksgiving in the US. "I do not know anything about art." I am very patient, and explain what art means and urge her to see the exhibition in Utrecht, Concerning War. "And your name, where does it come from? Russian? And your first name?" I explain some plausible answer(s), improvised to the situation. I get a little annoyed but I do not show it, my name is my name! I ask her immediately "And you, where are you from?" she replies: "Spain, but mixed, mother Belgian" I did not expect her to

A4:2/11

Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
Proximity to Everything Far Away

By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri

From: the distance between New York and L.A

answer. She thanked me for the new things she just learned, about art and who knows what, things she did not know before.

I had a nightmare I do not remember before or after this, that I am at an airport and that my mother and my sister Olivia are calling my name out loud in a big hall and I sit there ignoring them, because I do not want anyone to know my name. I see them and hear them but do not reply because I am scared that someone will find out my name!

Very funny, the girl near me with the yellow shirt is reading a book, on one side I read Page 4 - LANGUAGE on the other Page 5 - NOT SPEAKING AND SPEAKING. Somehow in my memory Roland Barthes must have written, fascism is not "to prevent from speaking", it is rather "to force to speak". or along these lines. Why do I have to be polite and answer such questions! But imagine harsher questioning situations, where you are forced to speak by different means and methods.

Just went to the Bathroom, and saw how the graffiti there is flourishing. I had written a sentence a few months ago, and now I have some respondents. "Je t'aime! moi non plus!" which is from Serge G. song. now someone had written, "I do not love you anymore!" in reply another, "you miss understand me!" another "you miss spell!" with an arrow towards the first "miss" another "there is a whole website talking about this!" in reply "this is the funniest graffiti I have ever seen!"

I imagine the toilet in the plane, I am already getting sick, the most uncomfortable place on earth. Someone must have vomited there before! No smoking! etc. a prison cell in the air. It is not what I feel here. I think I heard some gossip that Virilio does not fly at all. I understand better why now.

Poor Palestinian people: their reputation is always ahead of them. I do not know why I say this, but I guess the association with prisons and planes brings the Palestinians to my mind. It is amusing to speak of oneself in the third person ...

In any case, she was on her way back to New York. She never watches TV, and tries lately to do absolutely nothing on planes. An image catches her eye, looks like an ad or like someone drowning / diving under water. It confirms her decision, one should not watch anything on the plane: it gets inscribed in your brain and never gets out. This is what happened!

He is waking up, astonished, all dressed in white, black stripes to the sides. A drawer full of white sneakers. She remembers Solaris.

She picks up the headphones and the trip starts.

Everyone on this spaceship is dressed up in the same way, except doctors and nurses and people in charge. A huge screen in a common room, announcing periodically the lottery winners who will be transported to the Island! the winner's is shown on the screen, a photo ID in multiple views, front, back sideways, rotating. The happy winner in the common room, everyone congratulating her / him.

A funny doubling of the screen I am watching and the screen they are watching, the space in the plane and the spaceship room: a mesmerizing effect.

The Island, the only place on earth where life exists. An area of no contamination. Only a few are chosen to be sent there, for good.

He is now talking to a doctor, a psychologist, an investigator ... who is asking him about his dreams then later injecting him with some metal granules in his eyes. He screams of pain.

A woman just had a baby, she is happy, the nurse takes the baby, and shortly thereafter the mother gets killed. A tall African American man, (possibly an athlete), who had just won the lottery is being operated ... not quite sedated, he hears someone saying: "All we need are his kidneys." He jumps out of his operation bench, breaking all the attached pipes and devices, running into the hallway:" I don't want to die!!!!!"

Our protagonist is frightened witnessing all this. He understands there is no island. He decides to run away together with a woman who just won the lottery.

They run out of this environment, being chased through all the technical, industrial rooms, out in the desert, in the middle of America. They come to a motel and someone they know there tells them the truth. "do I have to be the one who tells you that Santa Claus does not exist?" "You are not human like me" "You are not persons"

This film is more real than I thought!

He explains that they are clones of rich people, as part of their medical insurance policy: in case they need an organ. The woman says but "I am a person, I have memories of my grandfather and of the farm I grew up in. " "And you had a dog and you did this and that ..." surprised she answers "yes!" "It's an imprint of memory!" he says.

The two decide they need to meet their "sponsors" in other words

A4:4/11

Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
Proximity to Everything Far Away

By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri

From: the distance between New York and L.A

“their doubles” who are residing in LA to explain the situation of all these people who are kept away in that place. Or should I say camp?

The guy explains that it is in vain, that these are rich people who do not care about them. He helps them go to LA and gets killed instantly as a result.

In short they arrive in LA.

I have to stop here, I do not have the desire to continue. She was right, one should not watch anything on a plane, especially if it is too close to reality.

+

Remembering this film makes me sad. I know you are arriving right now in L.A. so please let me know how it is there. I have been to L.A. once, and still the idea of L.A. as I mentioned yesterday is bigger than what I have experienced there. I still dream of L.A. but I do not know why.

maybe you have some explanation, for this film, for this dream, for LA...

xxx

ay

A,B,C,D,

E,F,G,H,

I,J,K,L,E,

N,D,C,A,

P,I,T,A,L,

I,S,M,N,

O,W,P,L,

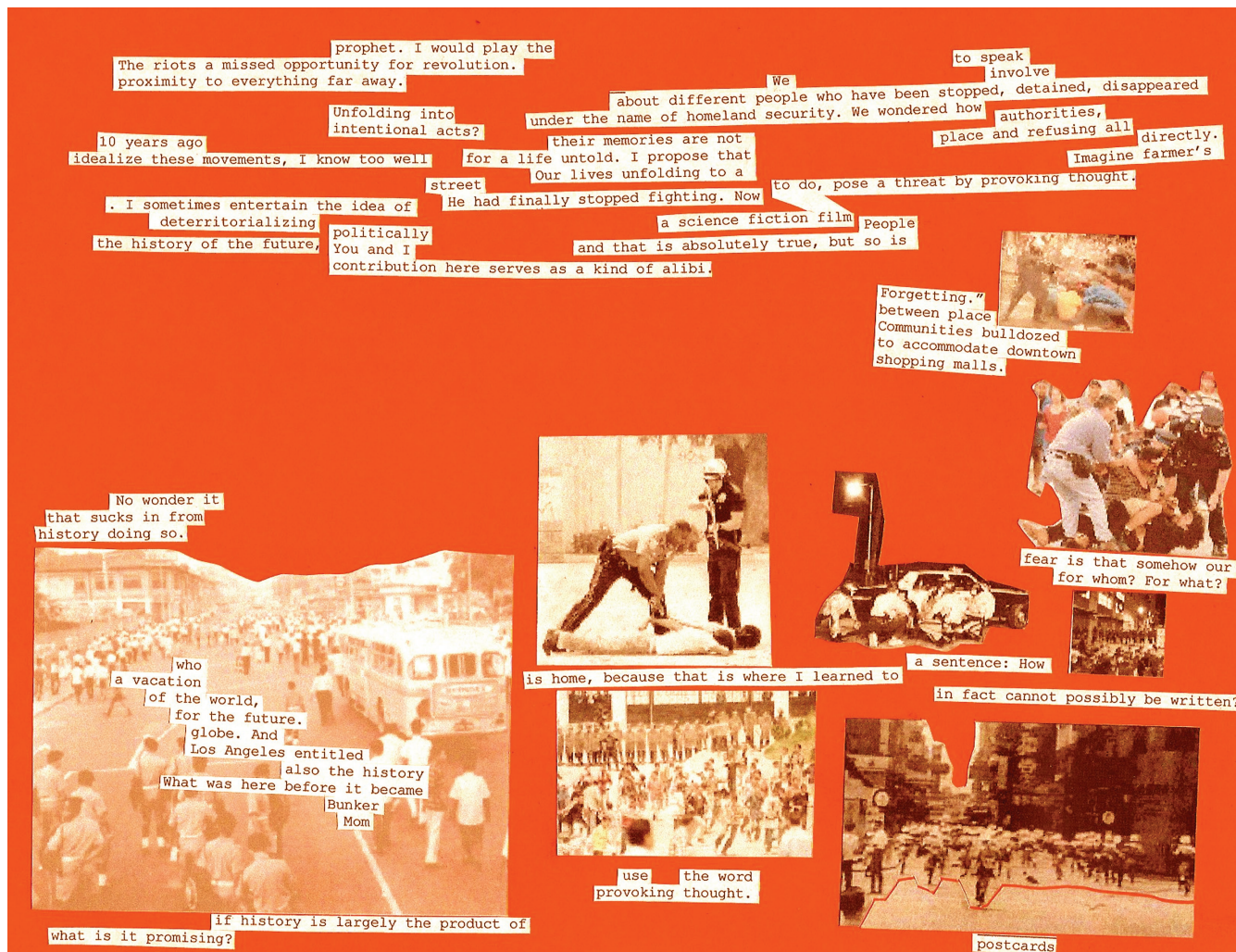
E,A,S,E !

+

A4:5/11
 Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
 Proximity to Everything Far Away
 By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri
 From: the distance between New York and L.A

+

+



Postcard

A4:6/11

Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
Proximity to Everything Far Away
By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri
From: the distance between New York and L.A

From: Rene Gabri

Date: Wed Dec 21, 2005 7:27:46 PM America/New_York

To: Ayreen Anastas

Subject: Proximity to everything far away

Dear Ayreen,

Well I managed to catch my flight so I am writing to you from Los Angeles. There was no meal served on the plane, part of the cutbacks since September 11th. Now you can buy your food onboard or pack a lunch, neither option seemed so attractive. The good news is that we are able to now take nail clippers, scissors, box cutters, and various other previously banned items back on planes. Either the strict rules were an overreaction, a show of security or flights are safe again.

Innocent man shot last week. One scenario is that he was leaving the plane because he feared there was a bomb on it. It was written that he was bi-polar and had not taken his medication. Air marshals shot him while he was exiting the plane in a panic. The first casualty of increased security is almost always an innocent victim.

I have also been thinking about extraordinary rendition. This is the term used to describe the arrest, abduction, interment, torture, interrogation of individuals through a circuit of shadow prisons operated by the US and its allies in the war on terror. I am thinking about the hundreds if not thousands who have suffered the same fate as Khaled El-Masri today. He was the German citizen who was mistakenly abducted, flown to Macedonia, humiliated, tortured, relocated to Afghanistan, placed in isolation, tortured again, interrogated, and finally released after five months in captivity.

Sometimes I feel as though we are living through something similar to the rise of National Socialism in Germany. The ideologies fueling the fear in this case seem to be more pervasive and spread beyond one single border, one single party. For all of the international crimes that the US may be perpetrating in the name of security, there are a host of countries who are assisting or collaborating explicitly or implicitly. That the enemy is represented as being contra the capitalist market seems to be what makes this situation so dire. Like the Cold War, this war is global in scale, economically driven, packaged/distributed/sold via values and culture. Unlike the Cold War, this war can induce fear interminably.

A4:7/11

Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
Proximity to Everything Far Away

By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri

From: the distance between New York and L.A

Yesterday, there was news of the first transit strike in 25 years against the MTA in New York. Many of the news flashes I saw or read online included some blurb equating the strike by transit workers with terrorism. The skilled politicians focused their rhetoric on endangering the safety of millions and the \$400 million lost daily.

It seems if your struggle can be channeled into dollars, by yourself (Commodify Your Dissent) or preferably by large corporations who wield some power, then you are not as likely to be perceived as a threat. Was also thinking here of Bono, of U2 fame, who was recently named Time Magazine Person of the Year along with Bill and Hillary Gates. In the magazine, he is described as a busy capitalist (he's a named partner in a \$2 billion private equity firm), moves in political circles like a very charming shark, aptly named his organization DATA (debt, AIDS, trade, Africa) to capture both the breadth of his ambitions and the depth of research. Note the word trade in the acronym DATA. The acronym itself signifying its investment in the knowledge/information power/economy equation. This is something Brian connected to in one of his lectures in the Continental Drift seminar. As long as your resistance to power happens within the logic of the capitalist marketplace, you are more likely to be tolerated. But it is those that fall outside that line that seem to most under threat.

Not sure if all of this seems superfluous or obvious, but I suppose I am trying to connect this theme of being in transit with what is happening around us. Transit is where many of these nodes of sensitivity around economics collide. On the one hand, disrupting the flow of movement or travel is something that neoliberalism cannot tolerate. On the other, it requires strict border regimes so as to allow control of flows of capital as well as bodies, laborers.

If security is largely a show, it is critical to see a potential attack not in terms of the risks it poses to human life, but the risks it imposes on the economy. Hence the collapse between picketers, eco-activists or terrorists is not all that surprising.

Your experience with the interview was quite close to my own there. Schiphol flights to New York always include this interrogation before boarding. It is part of the price of admission. You talk about this fascist demand to speak, I suppose for me it sometimes feels like being forced into playing a game you prefer not to. To add to the absurdity, you are asked to be serious while playing it. A few weeks ago, a group of Armenian guys were on a plane and as it was taxiing on the runway, one of them jokingly asked the other, do you have the, another said yes, do you have the b...b... as if stuttering, the third replied the bomb? The plane was immediately stopped, all passengers were removed, the plane checked, and the man who said the word bomb arrested.

How many countries did you visit? Where did you stay? What was the address? How do you know your hosts? When did you first meet them? What do you do? What brought you here? What kind of art do you produce? What kind of subject matter? Did you shoot any video on this trip?

As a matter of fact we did shoot some video on our trip. While in Rotterdam, our friends Jos and Liesbeth took us to a non-descript industrial zone in the harbor area. A prison ship which serves as a detainment or holding center for individuals who may have entered Holland illegally. The more expansive the borderless world drawn by neoliberalism seems to become, the harsher the conditions and penalties for those who do not play by its rules.

I know that the barriers and motivations are not just economic. In fact, sometimes I am prone to thinking I am being paranoid. For example, I am absolutely convinced that on my trip from Rome to London this summer, the flight was halted for 30 minutes because of my appearance. Before boarding the flight I had already been hassled twice by airport security for stepping away from my bags. The guy sitting next to me on the flight, who happened to be a CEO of a small wireless internet company, reinforced my suspicions by joking that I may have saved everybody the trouble if I had just shaved off my beard.

Khaled El-Masri. Wrong guy, wrong name, wrong appearance.

I find myself having less and less patience for all of the theatrics of security. Why is it that I can board a train to Baltimore with no bag check, no state issued identification, and yet on a plane with fewer passengers undergo such scrutiny? The whole thing is a circus. All the while there is a theater of cruelty that remains invisible, hidden in our airports, our harbors, emerging in the media from time to time, Abu Ghraib, unregistered CIA flights, disrupting our everyday concerns, reminding us that the show of force also has devastatingly real consequences.

Laws have no meaning without force. Laws are often rendered meaningless with force. I can build a narrative of my own past navigating in response to these two poles. Faceless, expressionless, all words arriving into the same databank screens of some NSA functionary, attempting to discern whether your use of the word bomb poses a threat, provokes thought, or poses a threat by provoking thought. That is what I would like to do, pose a threat by provoking thought.

Even while writing this text, I wonder about how prudent it may be to write such words? Ironically, I find both solace and anxiety in imagining that the context within which this text will be presented will neutralize any threat it may pose.

A4:9/11

Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
Proximity to Everything Far Away

By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri

From: the distance between New York and L.A

You write about watching a science fiction film on a plane in which the main protagonists realize that in fact, they are not human, their memories are not their own, their life a simulation, a script for a life untold. I propose that you and I and many others reading this text have not been far from these protagonists. Our lives unfolding to a script written by others, by individuals far a field. Programming political futures that were outside our own control.

Yet, I also believe that history is largely the product of the unintended consequences of intentional acts. You and I, like those protagonists in the film have the potential to be those unforeseen consequences. Who would have thought that the CIA's involvement in deposing the first democratically elected official in Iran in the 50's would sew the seeds for a revolution a few decades later.

+

Unfolding into a sentence: What potential is there in truly being the unintended consequences of those intentional acts?

And yet on a sobering note, coming back here to LA, where I spent my adolescence after leaving Tehran, is also like taking a vacation from history. It seems unfair for those who live and struggle here, but no place on earth seems as aloof to the rest of the world. A metropolis that sucks in from and spreads to all parts of the globe and fights its own history doing so. Norman Klein wrote a book about Los Angeles entitled "The History of Forgetting." The history of Los Angeles is also the history of the struggle between place and non-place. What was here before it became a shopping center? Communities bulldozed to make way for freeways. Bunker Hill residents displaced to accommodate downtown office towers and hotels. Mom and pop shops for shopping malls. Demolition, trash heaps, recollections, underpinnings of divestment.

+

Shortly after moving to New York in '95 I had the epiphany that Los Angeles was home. I reasoned that it was where I learned to forget, where I learned to bury our past life. I began work on a film that would be about cities and memory. Mike Davis would play the contested prophet. I would play the skeptical apostle or intern. The riots a missed opportunity for revolution. In short, it would be about our proximity to everything far away.

At that point, I took my first trip out of the US since arriving here in October of 1980. And the trips out have increased since then. Yet, I cannot idealize my movements since then. I know too well the limits of this "fluidity." Though it gives one the illusion of freedom, it can be revoked at any moment. We both became US citizens last year and that changed a lot. No more visas, invasive inquiries about our financial status, employment history, insurance status, purpose for journey, letter of invite, registration with local authorities, etc, ... I sometimes entertain the idea of remaining in one place and refusing all movement, deterritorializing from the

A4:10/11

Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
Proximity to Everything Far Away

By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri

From: the distance between New York and L.A

comforts of home, like Gilles Deleuze did. But
frankly that is also a freedom. People write about mobility being a
privilege and this is absolutely true, but so is the choice to remain
in one place.

And what would the clamor of our being offer in the face of this
history of a multiplication of these choices?

Transitional spaces, wars without end, bulldozing other futures,
demolition derbies, illegal combatants and all, knowledge management,
liberation {market} theology, financialization of everyday life, of
life, life as a game, life as allocation of assets, play as work, the
work of life, work as privilege, privilege needing borders, minutemen,
border patrols in a "borderless world", fences, walls, gated
communities, transit as norm, norm as consumption, ideal citizen =
tourist, immigrant = infringement upon my granted privileges. The
future is full of promise, but what is it promising?

+

There is a common project that eludes us: writing on this subject is
not necessarily it. Nevertheless, the topic hits close to the belt.
Spaces of transit are not far from the detainment centers which intern
those not granted the same "privileges" of the free citizens of the
world, those who have the fortune of a politically recognized life.
You and I recently qualified. I suppose the great fear is that somehow
our contribution here serves as a kind of alibi. An alibi for whom?
For what? That I may not have the answer for.

Soon, Rene

+

A4:11/11

Title: Fear is Somehow Our 'for Whom? For What?' /
Proximity to Everything Far Away

By: Ayreen Anastas & Rene Gabri

From: the distance between New York and L.A

Air sickness bag



virgin atlantic 