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The news items in the right column were taken from “la Repubblica”, “The New York Times”, “The Washington Post” and www.truthout.org.

Cover by Sebastiano Buonamico

The pictures on the front and back cover are from a series of watercolours by Mayra Barraza entitled *The Sleep of Reason*. The one on the front cover

was painted to commemorate the anniversary of the massacre at the Central American University (UCA) in San Salvador on November 16, 1989, in which six Jesuits and two women were killed by a right-wing paramilitary group. We would like to thank Mayra for allowing us to reprint them.

This review exists through the voices it gives expression to, in their variety. All contributions are welcome. Please write to **Here -notes from the present, via Bastia 11, 20139 Milano, Italy, phone -fax 0039-02-57406574, email: massimo parizzi@alice.it.**

“Here-notes from the present” is written so that it can be read “as a novel”: from the beginning to the end in sequence. This is **an invitation and an exhortation** to the reader: many diary pages make little sense if not read immediately after the previous ones and before those that follow.

Diary: September to December 2006

Here

notes from the present

San Salvador, September 1

Mayra Barraza

This is a project I am starting today, 1 September 2006. “One hundred days in the Republic of Death” will be an account of people who have suffered violent deaths (not of natural causes nor of accidents, but directly at someone else’s hand) in El Salvador in one hundred days. I will get information exclusively from the two main written media in the country: “La Prensa Gráfica” (LPG) and “El Diario de Hoy” (EDH). [...] I am starting this project in the hope of remembering all the dead, and to arouse at least important questions about what is happening, such as: why? and, how long for?

As I start, I feel I’m doing something which is against common sense. Ordinary people do not pursue death. They shun it. If anything, they pursue life. So do I. But I can’t go on like this. Every day I read the newspaper. From the end to the beginning. “Why?”, my nine-year-old son asks me. I prefer to start from the nicest news, I reply, cultural news. As I get closer to the news items, day after day, I am shocked by what I see: the crimes that are committed, the squalor in what happens, and the flippancy with which everything

piles up into oblivion. As we were talking about what I was going to do, a friend made an interesting remark: “We don’t see the dead, they’re not out in the streets, they’re in the news”. I had my doubts, as if I were about to enter a world of shadows, where one can’t tell reality from illusion. So be it, I’ll run the risk. I want to know...

1. A man’s corpse found in an inn with a cold steel wound in the neck.
2. Two corpses in a mini-bus: José René Merazo Campos, 30, and Guillermo Martínez, 20. They had been shot from the street and then from inside the mini-bus. “A large number of 9mm cartridges” were found.
3. Killed “by firearm shots”: Óscar Salazar, 30. The murder took place in the street near a bus station.
4. Two men killed by firearm shots in the head: Edgar Lovato, 18, and Iván García, 19.
5. Two “characters” enter a scrap iron shop and fire several shots. One dead: Henry Flores Castro, aged 22.
6. Four half-buried corpses: two men and two women. One of the men had a rope round his neck and one of the women fractures all over her body.
7. Mario Alfredo Argueta and Rosario Argueta were killed by gunshots fired by a group of men.
8. “The suspect’s sister declared her brother shot Carlos while he was hugging her, since he was her fiancé.” Dead: Anamín Azael Carlos.
9. Four dead people in La Libertad: Juan Antonio García Mendoza, aged 20: “A *pandillero* [a member of a *pandilla*, a mainly -juvenile town gang] shot him; Francisco Ernesto López Linares, 26,

“shot dead”; Miguel Ángel Molina López, 28, “hit by several bullets”; and Francisco Flores Mejía, 45, shot dead too.

Karkur, Israel, September 4

Liza Rosenberg

Given all of the stress that I’ve been feeling lately, I keep fantasizing about getting away from it all, even if it’s only for a few days. Time away from the politics, the belligerence, the day-to-day responsibilities... My brain is fried and my nerves are close to the edge, and there’s no better remedy I can think of than some time away with a good friend.

What a crazy coincidence! In just over a week, I’m flying to Amsterdam, meeting up for what promises to be a marvelous girly weekend with my eternal partner in crime and all things silly—the fabulous NRG. [...] Friends since high school (despite having gone to different schools), we have seen each other through thick and thin (sometimes thicker and sometimes thinner), good times and bad. I would never have made it through the dark days without her, and I am in awe of all that she has given me over the years. When we are together, I am the “me” that I’d like to be all the time—more confident, [...] and more outgoing. Despite the fact that we haven’t lived on the same continent in more than 15 years, we have remained closer than ever, communicating on an almost daily basis and always keeping each other in the loop of our lives. No one knows me better than she does—she is one of the only people in the world who has ever seen me cry. [...] What started at a mutual friend’s Halloween party when

A few weeks ago, Carl Garrett, a 60-year-old North Carolina resident, was packing his bags to fly to New Delhi and check into the plush Indraprastha Apollo Hospital to have his gall bladder removed and the painful muscles in his left shoulder repaired. Mr. Garrett was to be a test case, the first company-sponsored worker in the United States to receive medical treatment in low-cost India.

Hundreds of uninsured and under-insured Americans have already gone on their own to India for treatments. With medical costs in India routinely 80 percent lower than in the United States, experts predict that globally standardized health care delivered in countries like India and Thailand will eventually change the face of the health care business. With 150,000 overseas patients last year—though only a

started at a mutual friend's Halloween party when we were teenagers, continued through scorpion bowling in Boston's Chinatown (which was often followed by raucous all-night backgammon sessions on the floor outside my dorm room), worked its way through the myriad problems of youth and young adulthood, and finally taking us to where we are today, not seeing nearly as often as we'd like, but using modern technology to stay in closer touch than ever before, while preparing our sons (born just 2 ½ weeks apart, thank you very much) to carry on the tradition. [...]

small fraction of them Americans—India is already the global leader in importing foreign patients for low-cost treatment. (“The New York Times”)

We will probably spend some time discussing politics and religion—two of the only subjects on which we are not more or less in synch with our opinions. [...] We will discuss our lives, our families, our jobs. We will try to figure out what directions we'd like to see our lives take (and I may monopolize this one, given that I've been feeling at a crossroads for some time now), and what we need to do to realize our dreams.[...]

San Salvador, September 4

Mayra Barraza

Amongst the newspaper articles concerning the number of murders in August (380), the parliamentary debate on the need to resume “the disarmament of society” and the cabinet's concern about intensifying detention sentences for the under age, here is a list of names of victims in today's newspapers:

1. Miguel Ángel González, 17, “shot to death with a firearm”.

2. Three people murdered by gunshots fired from a car: Rigoberto Zavala Torres, 17; Nahún Adalberto Pineda López, 27; and Julio Méndez, 50.
3. Miguel Alejandro Chicas Ramírez, 20, “killed by four bullets: two in the head, one in the neck and another in the shoulder”.
4. José Martín Hernández Carranza, 23, “shot dead”. “Over thirty 9mm cartridges and bullets were found on the scene of the crime”.
5. Carlos Mauricio Ayala Rodríguez, 21, “assaulted in the street”.
6. Miguel Alejandro Chicas, 20, “shot dead”.
7. Martín N., “the target of gunshots fired by hooded men”.
8. Pablo Villatoro, 45, “murdered with three gunshots by two men”.
9. “A *pandillero* has died from injuries caused by firearm wounds.”
10. “An unidentified man pumped full of bullets.”
11. Óscar Armando Campos, 36, killed by “firearm shots”.

Shots, guns, bullets. The number of guns in our everyday life is astounding. At the entrances to the supermarket, the bank, the parking area, the kids’ school, the chemist’s, the museum...

A few brief scattered notes:

1. Juan Rulfo. While working on a small water-colour of a head severed from its neck, Juan Rulfo’s voice keeps me company on the CD player. In the middle of the story he’s reading, he asks: and if we leave, who will look after our dead ones? And we, I think, do we look after our dead? This reminds me of a phrase used by José Osorio [a Guatemalan artist known also for his social com-

mitment] at a recent conference of his in Costa Rica. He said: “We stand on the shoulders of giants”. The giants are all those that have come before us; they enable us to lift our hand and touch the stars.

2. The Maya. In a TV programme, someone is speaking about the Maya’s relationship with their dead. The dead were their vital link with their gods. Their gods spoke through the dead. If we listened to our dead, what would they tell us? [...]

Milan, Italy, September 6

Germana Pisa

Luckily today I found Ada’s diary again; I could not have forgiven myself for having, not lost it, but buried it in some inaccessible place. I had long wanted to look for it. Today I started tidying books, records, cassettes, CDs and, as I was handling books and moving them from one shelf to another, my eye rested on an envelope sticking out. I had done the right thing when I put Ada’s diary into an envelope on which I had written “ADA’S DIARY” in big letters. I knew I would eventually have looked for it to copy it, and perhaps make it known. That diary has great dignity and value; it contains a life-history covering eighty years and more, maybe up to the second to last day in Ada’s life. Ada was extraordinary; she was an artist. And she was my mother-in-law. That day five years ago, as she said good-bye to her daughter on entering a hospital ward for some tests, having felt suddenly unwell, she said: I’m dying. Afterwards, Tito brought me her diaries and some things of hers he knew I would

CIA counterterrorism officers have signed up in growing numbers for a government-reimbursed, private insurance plan that would pay their civil judgments and legal expenses if they are sued or charged with criminal wrongdoing. (“The Washington Post”)

be pleased to keep, and that's when I saw the diary with its flowery cover dated 1984 and started reading it from *Monday, 23 January*: "I've made up my mind! I want to write about my life, because it's been long and wonderful, even if sad towards the end. Well... I was born in the first two years of the century in Genoa in that small Via Caffaro where Grandad Borgo had built some houses and the beautiful Paganini theatre, now wrecked...". Ninety-nine years old and she was a young girl. I can almost see her again, smiling, tiny and elegantly dressed in her modest clothes, with her pale eyes, affectionate and lively; she was always busy doing something, whether it was painting, embroidery or writing (she kept up a correspondence with her closest relatives and also with the more distant ones—overseas—up to her last days). She used to say that from her mother she had learnt a life's lesson which, as far as I could understand, she considered the most beautiful and useful: that of always being busy throughout the day, of never remaining idle. I don't know whether she started her diary exactly that day or that year: she used to keep copy-books and diaries she hadn't used in due time, and she might have used that *Agenda di Grazia* now before my eyes only after 1984. In any case, her hand-writing changes, although not markedly, as the diary progresses. It is only in diaries she kept in other copy-books which cover the last weeks, days and hours in her life, that her handwriting is significantly very different. That morning I was very busy at home in Milan when, suddenly, there was a power cut in a section of the electrical system: the washing-machine stopped working and a sort of short circuit fused the electrical switch of the gas

cooker, that is the one which is used to light the burners. That's when I got that phone call from Sestri Levante: Mother Ada had passed away, after having said goodbye to her daughter from the stretcher, as they were taking her into a room for an X-ray. "I'm dying"...

Belàlp, May 7-21, 1999

Bruno De Maria

This afternoon I got a call from Emilia, the daughter of the old man in the mountains who rents me the little apartment in Belàlp over the winter. "My father's dead," she said through her tears. I ask how. You always ask how. They found him this morning, stone dead, his head slumped on the table where breakfast was laid out. "I'll get in the car and be right over!" I said.

From *Diario di una guerra invisibile*, in "Qui - appunti dal presente", 1, Autumn 1999.

"Do you want to see him?" they asked as soon as I got there (eleven-thirty at night). The dear old man was lying on the bed, dressed to the nines, a folded handkerchief stuck into the collar of his shirt, pale, cold, his ears already purple. He would have been turning ninety soon. [...] Downstairs, the townspeople are waiting in line to see him. This morning he was still alive, now he's already wrapped away in the skin of an ancient drum. I touched him. He really was cold. You never quite believe it. Where is the old man now? Sharpened by the chill, he makes his way like a tight-rope walker on the thread of what he thinks he can remember. [...]

There are always intangible consequences when [...] you experience irreversible events that mark off a before and an after. I have to come to terms with the subdued climate of a house where I've

been coming to stay since '92. There was a different girlfriend with me back then, and the place was almost picturesque, it was so ugly. In any case, the benign circle of mountains was perfectly immobile. We knew the slow path of Venus, the first star of the dusk, slanting down towards the northwestern glaciers. I knew every meter of the bristling ridges of fir trees that Venus would leave behind as she vanished into her own setting place. But the next evening it would start all over again. We never stay the same, but we imagine, God knows why, that things very far away do. Distance is a comfort. Even lovers often feel the urge to move apart. Each to their own imperceptible combustion. The old man was part of this recurrent immobility, and I feel his absence. For eighty-nine years, he was a man who stood guard. He would always say the same things. "How's it going?" "Eh! Slowly but surely..." It was this patient lack of haste that gave the impression of slowing life down. The way Venus seemed to be the same planet I gazed at as a boy. [...] I open the window. In front of the old man's house an ugly striped cat is watching me, stock still, then changes its mind and moves off at a leisurely pace along the usual cobbled road that leads to the rest home for the "Poveri Vecchi". This evening we can keep the radio on full volume. No one else is here. There's the instinct to turn it down, but then we let out a nervous laugh: no one is listening; from the floor below (where the old man lived) there's no longer any sign of life. The sky is black and moonless. In the meadows, the first gentians. Through a small rent in the clouds twinkles an anonymous star; the green of the newborn beeches is pale, as tender as lettuce. This

is, I think, the 56th day of the war [NATO against Serbia]. [...] I call Emilia to let her know I'll be there on the late side. She's the landlady now. "How's it going?" I ask. "Eh. Slowly... but surely!" The sky is clear, the half-moon polished to a shine. [...]

Casablanca, September 8

Jihane Bouziane

King Mohamed VI had just gone past along boulevard Zerktouni going I don't know where. We all rushed to the window to see him go by, or rather, to see his car drive past at full speed. Before the procession arrived, there was a young man shouting from a white Mercedes at the corner of the boulevard. The policeman was kindly ignoring him, when all of a sudden a woman got out of the Mercedes holding a little boy by the hand and shouting that the boy was going to die, that he had to be taken to hospital. The policeman blocked the road: the procession was about to pass. The husband couldn't stand it any longer: his wife was screaming, and the boy was crying. He got out of the car and attacked the policeman who did nothing, but straightened up his gloves. People were trying to calm the young man down. The mother was beside herself. Motorbikes preceding the procession darted past, and the husband, realizing his ordeal was about to end, calmed down and urged his wife back into the car. The boy had stopped crying. We watched big cars go past, and seeing a hand making gestures, we all screamed, while people along the street responded to that hand with the same gesture. A second later everything was forgotten and was replaced by a moment of great emotion, wonder, almost magic. Once the proces-

The Ivory Coast government resigns after 550 tons of toxic waste from Europe are discharged into the capital's public dumps. Toxic fumes have killed eight people and poisoned thousands.

sion had gone, the traffic lights started working again. The policeman calmly took down number of the car while passers-by were begging him to understand those two people's behaviour, certainly aggressive, but understandable: they had been thinking of nothing but saving their child. [...]

San Salvador, September 9

Mayra, [...] I truly appreciate your work as an artist and as a human being who is engaged by life, and it seems logical and fitting that you are also so engaged by death. I think that as a natural phenomenon, death can be a very majestic process, but there is something that troubles me in all these tragic and anti-human episodes and outrages; and it is that death has been done violence, which is something inconceivable. I don't usually express myself in writing or in concrete form when it comes to violence, because I don't like to evoke it, and I have been the victim of three muggings at gunpoint, though oddly enough, not here in El Salvador; in Mexico, which has only reconfirmed my feeling that the world is not a safe place, and that to survive such hostility, you must work daily to protect yourself with creative energy. For me, living life every day at this pace, in this state of constant alert, is not an easy thing; I always feel exposed, and I think of myself as a person who is not well adapted to such an aggressive daily existence; the only thing I can do at times to survive is to reaffirm myself symbolically, like when I gave my first child the name Ahimsa, which means "non-violence". They say that all human fears, attachments, defense mechanisms, etc. arise from the fear of death. I think that's true. Otherwise,

A letter from **Alexia Miranda** to Mayra Barraza

A black man living in a high-crime American city can expect to live 21 fewer years than a woman of Asian descent in the United States. The man's life expectancy, in fact, is closer to that of people living in West Africa than it is to the average white American. ("The Washington Post")

United States. Hundreds of prison generated products end up attached to trendy and nationally known labels. After deductions, many prisoners earn about \$60 for an entire month of nine-hour days. In short, hiring out prisoners has become big business. And it's booming. ("Black Voices News")

why do you think that so many people who have no home, no food, affection, clothing, medicine, education, job, and so on, walk the streets like zombies, with their consciousness warped and violated, in an altered state. [...] These “tortured souls” devote themselves to inflicting pain and suffering on other innocent people. I have no words to express my sorrow over the death of innocents, nor have I words to express the repulsion I feel for heartless creatures who cause harm, and deliberately, of their own free will, decide to take the lives of other human beings. But I don’t know where to go with these conflicting feelings of pain and repulsion. What can I do with them? What can I do publicly, aside from keeping up the courage to go on living, to go out in the streets and decide to walk along calmly, alone, though always with this red signal of alert we live with flashing to remind you not to go that way, not to get caught after dark over there, not to roll the window down too far around here, to make sure no one is following or approaching you. But nowadays you can’t even venture any favours at your own front door, if someone shows up asking to make a phone call or drink a glass of water. We’ve been conditioned to live with this paranoia, and I say “conditioned” because they’ve conditioned us, by dint of social structures without form or content, to believe in the cosmetic gloss of progress, burying our heads in the sand and swallowing the bitter pill of everyday reality. [...] I dream of a safe homeland for myself, for my children, and every creature on earth, but we would have to put almost the entire population into therapy, to free people from their neurosis and help them rediscover the life they have before their very eyes. [...]

A Prince

by Michele Zaffarano

Here

notes from the present

1

don't act like wolves
don't act like snakes
don't cry over onions
let yourselves be cuddled by the fog
by many mountains
by scorpions
bathe in your own tears
travel by ship
take short walks
draw giraffes
do the breaststroke
stretch out naked on the grass in the woods
running naked on the grass
play when they cuddle you
be dirty
sing
climb up through the grass through the green
chase squirrels
lions tigers made of porcelain

2

take hot showers
give a hundred kisses on the lips
climb up trees
go to sardinia

cut the cake
eat the cake with whipped cream
don't be more partial to mint
don't let dying nature die
on saturday and sunday
mess up your house
have a warm bed
fool around with flowers
with death and its awful taste
anticipate bad weather
feel like they're laughing at you
go to bed early
sail a boat
eat your spinach full of iron
play by yourselves
cans should be thrown on the ground
take the plane
pull out the grass the dassy violets
pull the problems out of your psyche
take the boat
go up to saturn

3

sit tight on your words
watch the sea
watch plants die
go to the pool
stay in your bed
sweat cause it's good for you
try to out-devil the devil
eat bananas not fishbones
stop pollution
replant trees that are cut down
play with dolls

watch the sun and the moon
then take baked apples cooked carrots
the music of benedetto marcello
then listen to propellers too
go to the sea to look at the view
get gifts from your friends or from your dead friends
buy records by tyrannosaurus rex
be careful of earthworms of birds
make flowers rot
waste nothing of the hog
don't dirty the snow and all those dirty things
don't play at murder

4

look at the trees the butterflies the thorngrass the yellow flowers
enjoy chocolate go sledding be sick
obtain war overnight cream the sky
arm yourselves blow up balloons nature is going to pot

go to the zoo the museum go to the airport
take the train work very little stay out of the wind
ride your motorcycle don't take the highway put off dying
as long as you can let loose the dogs the monsters the witches

spoil the winter the cat all alone swim
go up high hills come down on a sled
pass through the fire pass through the countryside
the chirping of birds the trees in bloom

argue divvy up all the cheese you have
look at the skis the stars the bathroom the cherry trees in bloom
be sad get a thrashing eat your vegetables
travel with dolls with skirts ride a bike

all the animals you have the adventures you have
make faces like snakes the whitetip sharks

act like brickfish take the catfish
the television's on the burglars are in the house

make all the noise you want listen to the spring
act like monkeys cut the fish with scissors
make holes make holes in rafts and other stuff be moles
scream in your language go skiing stay around the house all day

San Salvador, September 10

Miguel Huezo Mixco

Do writers and artists have anything to say about the social violence that is plaguing Salvadoran society? Very little, or quite a bit, depending on your point of view. Very little, probably, if you ask artists to work out programs or policies aimed at preventing or fighting it. Quite a bit, if artists apply their talents to enrich these initiatives with art, if they can make horrid everyday reality pass through the needle's eye of art; a visual or written image, crafted with patience and passion, concentrates a power that overcomes the boundaries of the sayable and the visible. Quite a bit, if the artist's investigation is built around concrete facts and impels us to consider everyday reality from an aesthetic standpoint, that is to say, one that moves us. We have lived with violence, crime, theft, coups d'état, injustice for over thirty years. It would seem that, by living with it so often, death has become our sister. We need to promote a mourning attitude, because there are deaths every day. The mourning the artist suggests, as in the "Republic of Death", consists in thinking about death in a different way, by lending new meaning to the deteriorated language of mass-media; a language which perhaps, as many of us suspect, is contributing towards

Three years into a war in the Darfur region of western Sudan, thousands of villagers have been victimized by government troops and proxy militiamen who killed, raped and looted. The war started when rebels in this impoverished and neglected region attacked government installations in Darfur in 2003. The government responded by sending in regular army troops, employing air power and arming a militia, called the Janjaweed, whose fighters traveled by horse and camel and attacked rebels and civilians. War and disease in Darfur have killed as many as 450,000 people and driven more than 2 million from their homes.

fuelling this violent ecosystem. To fuelling it and often to masking it. What a newspaper headline such as “Violence produces fifteen deaths every day” does is to blame “violence” for real crimes caused by narco-trafficking, the war for the control over territory, jealousy, hatred, desperation or bad luck. We see the daily occurrence of death pass by in front of us just as TV news items or the pages of a newspaper do. Perhaps Art may succeed in moving us more than the disembodied reality of our dead. In this sense, the initiative “One hundred days in the Republic of Death” is an effort the artist is making towards memory. We all keep a box of keepsakes, an album, a trunk, some copy books, and cherish them as part of our personal memory. What is done here is to cherish events and deaths. It is not denunciation, because denunciation in itself does not add anything to what we already know. It means doing a lot with very little: trying to ensure that facts scattered between TV news and crime news—structured as just one part of the entertainment offer among many others—open up a crack in our conscience that burns and poses questions.

San Salvador, September 11

Mayra Barraza

The crack that burns: from my window I can see a woman shopping; behind her are two men in khaki waistcoats and one hand hidden under them. Their eyes betray them. They have the look of a dog that feels threatened and is ready to attack. The woman is walking and they form her double shadow as they exchange looks filling the void

Five years after Arab terrorists attacked the United States, only 33 FBI agents of 12,000 have even a limited proficiency in Arabic, according to FBI statistics. (“The Washington Post”)

with threats. [...] I apologize to all those who ask for suggestions and action: I declare myself incapable and ignorant. My life is full of duties (some of which I carry out happily, while some others I simply have to face), I live on my wage (or rather my children live on it, since I do not care much for it), and until recently I did not know much about the violence overrunning our country. I identify myself as an artist and a mother, a daughter and a sister, a friend (of few friends, unfortunately) and, although I refuse to admit it most of the time, as a Salvadoran. I do not believe either in political parties or in organized religions, and least of all in advertising campaigns. To tell the truth, sometimes I find it really hard to take anything seriously: I can always see the joker laughing in the shade of any form of commitment. [...]

Karkur, Israel, September 12

Liza Rosenberg

The more I hear about Israel's actions in the recent conflict in Lebanon, the more horrified and disgusted I become. How must the world perceive us? How arrogant are our politicians and our military? Our leaders claim to want peace, but sometimes I wonder. Actions speak louder than words, and when we say that our war was not with the people of Lebanon, but it is then revealed that our military may have dropped upwards of 1,800 cluster bombs (which apparently works out to approximately 1.2 million cluster bomblets), it makes me more inclined than ever to question my government's intentions. I cannot imagine any possible scenario in this conflict that could justify

In an academic lecture Pope Benedict XVI quotes a 14th-century Byzantine emperor as saying that the prophet Muhammad brought "only evil and inhuman" things to the world. The reference unleashes a wave of denunciations and protests across the Muslim world.

such action, and it destroys any legitimacy there might be in Israel's desire to demolish the Hizbollah infrastructure.

The arrogance of the upper military and political echelons in this country is driving us deeper and deeper into the mire, and while we certainly have a legitimate right to defend ourselves, we seem to have a talent for disproportionate response that simply boggles the mind, whether it be our actions in Gaza or in Lebanon. While the Lebanese people are busy picking up the pieces of their ruined country, they are surely laughing bitterly at our audacity to claim that our conflict was not with Lebanon itself, and only with the Hizbollah. If I were a Lebanese citizen, I can't imagine that I would believe Israel either. The way this government is handling things, it is slowly but surely destroying itself, rotting away from the top down. Clearly, a serious shake-up is in order, and unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be anyone capable of guiding us towards a better path.

A friend told me the other day that he was done dabbling in local politics in the area in which he lives. His undoing has to do with the fact that he is a good person, one who became involved because he truly wanted to make a difference, one who wanted to improve the quality of his community. He is not sly or underhanded, but rather moral and ethical, and found himself unable to stomach the dirty world of Israeli politics. I can hardly blame him, though I do think that it's a shame. Clearly, we do not have enough politicians in this country who truly care about people, no matter on what side of the border they may be. Instead, we are left with large egos and bank ac-

counts, a morally bereft elite who believe that they are above all others and responsible to no one, doing as they please while running the country into the ground, taking the citizens down with them.

I love my country, but I am sorely ashamed of its leaders, and cannot help but wonder where we will go from here, alternately drifting and careening towards an abyss with no safety net in sight. We have no choice but to change as a nation. Our leaders cannot go around making shady real estate deals, sexually harassing employees and cluster bombing the citizens of other countries. We cannot expect the world to continue tolerating our actions (and indeed, many people do not). If we do not change course, if we do not alter our moral rudder, our situation will only get worse, and it will be no one's fault but our own.

San Salvador, September 14

Mayra Barraza

[...] A nice comment on my blog, today. Anonymous: "Only the dead have seen an end to war (Plato)".

San Salvador, September 15

Mayra Barraza

1. Juan José Martínez, aged 20, and Óscar Ovidio Cruz, 61, "assassinated with a firearm".
2. "The disfigured corpse of a man was found yesterday. [...] The remains were inside two rubbish bags."
3. "A stranger's corpse was found..."

It is difficult to exaggerate the economic collapse of Gaza, with the Palestinian Authority cut off from funds by Israel, the United States and the European

Shocking: dismembered corpses in rubbish bags. What disregard for human life!

At the same time, “freedom to buy” reads an advert in the newspaper today, independence day, and another one in the street announces: “Freedom to phone the United States at just x cents”. One of the serious mistakes made by “entrepreneurial” democracies: we live in freedom because we enjoy a variety of purchasing options. I am free to choose between a Ford and a Toyota, with a minimum wage, of course, which is just enough for the basic basket. Do you know what “basic basket” stands for? More or less Gandhi’s diet at the height of his activism. However, better not to cross this threshold; it is maze with no way out.

Union after Hamas won the legislative elections on January 25. Since then, the authority has paid most of its 73,000 employees here, nearly 40 percent of Gaza’s work force, only 1.5 months’ salary, resulting in a severe economic depression and growing signs of malnutrition, especially among the poorest children. (“The New York Times”)

When Your Child is in Pieces

by Claudia Hernández

Here

notes from the present

Reconstructing the body of a young person (24-25 years old) who left home in one piece, two to six days earlier, is a particularly emotional experience. For this reason, we advise you to keep a package of tissues on hand and avoid smoking during the procedure, so as not to get the delicate pieces damp or damage them with fire and ash. Before you start, we also recommend checking whether all of the components that have been delivered match up with the distinguishing features of your son or daughter and fit together as they should. Visual identification is often sufficient, but

it would not hurt to compare the corpse's teeth with the x-rays kept on file by the family dentist.

NOTE: THESE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES WILL HELP AVOID UNNECESSARY WEAR AND TEAR IN THE EVENT THAT THE PARTS DELIVERED ARE OF THE WRONG LOVED ONE. MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT SIGN THE RECEIPT UNTIL YOU ARE COMPLETELY CERTAIN THAT THE ENTIRE CONTENTS OF THE PACKAGE BELONG TO YOU. NO RETURNS ACCEPTED.

After taking the above precautions, arrange the parts in their original layout¹ and sew them together, keeping the seam at least two centimeters from the edges, so that the pieces do not tear apart when being transported or embraced in a burst of grief.

In large families, the dining room table is usually an ideal place for this procedure; however, in terms of the final effect, the corpse will undoubtedly be shown off to its best advantage in the bedroom your son or daughter had when alive.

TIP: IF YOU LAY OUT THE BODY ON THE BED IN A SUPINE POSITION ON ITS BACK, WITH ONE LEG BENT, AND IN UNWRINKLED CLOTHING, THIS ALWAYS CREATES THE IMPRESSION OF HAVING YOUR CHILD BACK AGAIN, NOT ONLY IN PERFECT CONDITION, BUT ALIVE.

Make sure that the outfit the corpse will be wearing from now on goes together well, because the excessive handling involved in repeated changes of clothing could cause wear and tear to the form that has been obtained, and rarely is there any guarantee that the pieces will fit together again.

Pay particular attention to the hands and feet; to the careful observer, they could evoke visions of the

¹ For those whose outbreaks of emotion make it difficult to mentally reconstruct the image of their child, attached (in Appendix B) is a basic diagram of the human body. Parents with children whose physical injuries have altered the basic structure should consult their family doctor.

pre-death suffering undergone by the loved one in question. To avoid succumbing to the temptation of speculating about such clues and trying to find the guilty parties, it is best to cover them up with gloves and dark cotton² socks. We recommend against shoes, since the weight could put too much of a strain on the ligaments of the legs.

² Avoid synthetic fibers.

Apply a thick layer of makeup—choosing colours that match the skin tone—to hide any bruises that may be on the face. Finally, sprinkle a few drops of water on the face, to simulate the perspiration caused by the heat from the candles around the room.

Show your child to friends and family. Pass around photos of when he or she was alive. Cry every time that name is mentioned.

San Salvador, September 18

Mayra Barraza

[...] Sometimes life is ironical. Yesterday my younger son asked me for permission to buy himself a rifle. “It’s a toy one”, he said. I replied I didn’t want any guns at home, not even toy ones. I tried to explain that guns are made to kill people or animals, and that this is not right. He justified himself by stressing that the rifle he wanted did not shoot, it only made a noise, and that it only cost one dollar and 32 cents. I do not want to be excessively radical or strict, and I think that if he understands the difference between a real gun and a toy one, it is better than nothing. I allowed him to have one, not without feeling the contradiction pull my heart apart. Later on, with a handkerchief covering his face and the rifle in his hand, he explained to me that now he was a bad guy, but later he would betray them and become a good

*September 19. Thailand.
Thai army leaders
deposed Prime Minister
Thaksin Shinawatra.*

one. I looked at him, not knowing what to say. He pulled the trigger, and shot a cork that hang down on a string from the mouth of the rifle. The scene was something between funny and sad. It is just a game, I told myself once again.

San Salvador, September 21

Mayra Barraza

1. Orlando Adonay Hernández, 27, “pumped full of 9mm-calibre bullets. [...] Some unknown people approached the back of the bus on which he was travelling and, without a word, shot him repeatedly”.

2. José Douglas Renderos Cabrera, aged 37, has been assassinated. “The victim was supposedly killed in his bed with cold steel; his body was then set on fire.”

September 22. The hole over Antarctica’s ozone layer is bigger than last year and is nearing the record 11-million-square-mile hole seen in 2000, the World Meteorological Organisation said.

For the first time since I started my project, the photo of a victim appears in the newspaper. Having been killed at home, maybe some personal photographs were found. It is a contrite hatchet face, with a slightly frowning expression and tight lips. He seems to be looking at the camera in an annoyed way, almost as if he had been forced to. He has indigenous features: a dark complexion, a long crooked nose, high cheekbones, slanting eyes, few facial hairs. His hair is casually disheveled and longer than is customary. I can see he is wearing a T-shirt and maybe a sweat-shirt over it. An image is reflected next to him; one would say he was photographed in front of someone’s portrait. The newspaper said he “used to collect empty cans near the river”, since he lived by the riverside. His name was Douglas. “Only names die”, I read somewhere the other day.

Belàlp, March 27, 1999

Bruno De Maria

[...] What is striking about media expressions like “tragic exodus”, “biblical disaster”, is that they refer to something we are already supposed to know. Journalism in the Balkans, since it can see very little, refers to an earlier journalism, which saw events first-hand. It doesn’t matter when, how, or why. This reheated journalism focuses more on the generic than the individual. It nudges and winks, referring to other things. After all, you can always count on the reader having seen a few disaster movies. But the individual? What does it mean for an individual Kosovar to flee through a beechwood, slipping on wet snow, a militiaman behind him with a machine gun? How does he breathe? How do terrified legs work? What does it mean for a single component of the “tragic exodus” to look, for the last time, perhaps, at the crest of the hill, idyllic even under the brutal grey of this forbidding sky? I miss Beppe Fenoglio. “Precision” implies an enduring connection between soma and psyche, between emotion and action. “Generic” is opposed to “ethical”, which is always an encounter with the “face” of the Other.

From *Diario di una guerra invisibile*, in “Qui - appunti dal presente”, 1, Autumn 1999.

At the time of the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, ordered by Milošević.

Pushcha Vodytsya, September 30

Veronica Khokhlova

We are still in Pushcha Vodytsya; the view from one of our windows, the one facing the children’s playground, is still ugly—mountains of sand and clay, kids playing war on top of them, and a few guys still working down in the pits, fixing something, speaking in Ukrainian, cursing in Russian (cursing more than speaking). But we do have hot

September 25. Safia Hama Jan, a leading women’s rights advocate and outspoken critic of the Taliban, was killed in the southern Afghan province of Kandahar.

water now, and life is beautiful. Marta's best friend—Artyom, a 10-year-old boy from the apartment next door—told me that their make-shift football field down in the forest by the lake would soon have the real goals—made from those old pipes they are extracting and replacing right now. Artyom's really happy—and I'm very happy for him and the rest of the boys, too: all they do here is play football and talk about it.

September 26. Japan. Nationalist Shinzo Abe, a proponent of a tight alliance with the United States and a more assertive military, won election as Japan's new prime minister.

Melissa: games 1-5

by Claudia Hernández

Here

notes from the present

Game 1. Four years old. Flowers in her hair. Melissa arrives held by the hand of her father, who's annoyed: he made her stand up in the garden, where she had been waiting for him very seriously, lying on the grass, covered in flowers and with her arms crossed over her chest. She was pretending she was dead, just like her granny a few days earlier. She wasn't in a coffin because she hadn't found a box her size. Daddy didn't like that game. He told her it wasn't funny. Mummy started crying: her mother's death is still very recent. *Game 2.* Lying prone on the corridor floor undressed, with her tongue between her teeth and one of her father's belts sticking out at the top of her legs where she has tied it. She's a cat that's been run over by a car. All around her are broken purple leaves mixed with crumpled-up green

leaves. She wants people to imagine they're the cat's guts. If they want to get by, they have to pass over the cat's corpse, which she is, or walk on her body, tread on her... Anyway, she can't feel anything: the cat, which is her, is dead. They may even pick her up with a broom and a spade, put her into a rubbish bag and throw her into the nearest bin, as their neighbour did with the cat that had been run over in front of his house. Her mummy tells her to stand up immediately, clean up and get dressed. *Game 3*. On the terrace. At lunch time. All of a sudden she falls to her daddy's feet with her eyes wide open fixing him, who is alive and looks at her without understanding. She has to explain to him: she's a pigeon, though not one of those that fly and sing scared; rather one of those that fall to the ground with their neck broken by a kid's stone. Daddy doesn't like that game. He doesn't like to see her on the floor with her neck hanging as if it were boneless. He tells her to sit at the table and eat. She doesn't listen to him. So he asks her to at least close her eyes, so as to look less dead. She doesn't obey: dead pigeons don't close their eye-lids. Daddy stands up and leaves. He doesn't agree with mourning. *Game 4*. She's in her bedroom surrounded by thirty naked dolls. Their faces and bodies are all covered with that talcum powder her mother usually puts on her tummy and feet. It's a mortuary. Ten dolls, the smallest ones, are in drawers. Seven are on the dressing-table, lying on a sheet, waiting for someone to take care of them. The three newest ones are in little bags: they're the ones that have just arrived, and she doesn't yet know what they have died of. The four dolls lying on the bed are the ones ready to be taken away by their relatives. The

six under the table are already buried. Mummy comes in. She looks around. She cuddles her. She says she's sorry for having taken her to collect granny's body. *Game 5*. Plasticine. Figures of animals and things to eat.

Casablanca, October 3

Jihane Bouziane

Our generation, born after the *Marche Verte* [the march of 350,000 Moroccans, led by King Hassan II, to Western Sahara in 1975, under the green flag of Islam, to claim Moroccan sovereignty over the region and demand the withdrawal of Spanish troops] is often charged with "criticizing anything and everything". For being too exigent, without doing our fair share. We are thought of as schizophrenics, halfway between a poorly applied progressivism and a religion that completely escapes us at times. And yes, it's all true... But the problem is that as a Moroccan citizen, the institutions don't speak to me, don't communicate with me. What little communication does exist is simply disastrous. My own failing? I don't keep up, I don't read the papers, I don't watch the Moroccan television channels... I've tried to question my own attitude, and here's the upshot.

October 1. Israeli army withdrew the last of its troops from Lebanon.

1. Every time I've read a Moroccan paper, I've had the impression that the journalist didn't know what he was talking about, or if he did, that he took me for an idiot. Or both. Which has always completely disgusted me. It's too bad, but I'd rather make my daily round of the blogs. 2. Every time I've watched the news on 2M, the second Moroccan TV channel (I don't even venture onto RTM), I've been treated either to a half-drunk commen-

tator who couldn't read the prompter, or a very brisk female anchor whose only job seemed to be to dole out a dry piece of information. So even now, I couldn't tell you what time the news program is on 2M. And just between us, keeping up with the activities of the king and his ministers isn't exactly my cup of tea. 3. The only source of information to which I have a strong, daily, almost vital attachment is the radio, specifically Medi 1. In fifteen minutes I can find out what's happening in the world. This morning, for example, I even learned that they've just discovered that Mona Lisa was actually pregnant, and this must have been the reason for her legendary smile. How do they know? It seems the garment she has on was worn only by pregnant women in that era. Try getting that kind of information on 2M... 4. In the last elections, only one party bothered to come talk to me: the GSU [*Gauche socialiste unifiée*, United Socialist Left]. They explained the voting system. Not that I understood, but at least they took the trouble to do it. [...] Our leaders don't bother to look at the country. From up there in their offices, they think of us all as morons, as they pass out invitations to cultural events. I wish that national television represented Morocco as a whole. That it represented me, and also the housewife out in the middle of nowhere. [...]

Thinking again about Moroccan politics. If I had to judge in terms of a party's familiarity to me, first place would have to go to the PJD [*Parti de la justice et du développement*, Justice and Development Party; Islamist]. Can you believe it? And just because this "accursed" party is everywhere. The PJD knows how to get its message across whenever they have the chance. [...] For every

problem brought up by the media, there they are in the spotlight; they're everywhere, they're formidable. That alone is enough reason for me to go vote. In the '90s, when the FIS [*Front islamique du salut*, Islamic Salvation Front] won the elections in Algeria—which meant the beginning of the civil war—my father said something I'll never forget. "The Islamists all went to the urns. Everyone else was so disgusted with the corruption in politics that they stayed home. So now you know what to do when it comes time for you to vote". Since then, I've always voted, even if I don't believe in one party more than another... though with a certain leaning towards the left, given the lack of choice. But above all, out of fear of leaving the field open for the PJD, which, there's no doubt about it, would trample all over my freedom. I refuse to help them out through passivity.

Durham, North Carolina, October 3

Laila El-Haddad

[...] I'm happy to report I'll be returning to Gaza for a few months in November (assuming the border is open by then). [...] I've been working on updating the Gaza section of a (fabulous) travel guide published by the Bethlehem-based Alternative Tourism Group. It's one of those kafkaesque-type experiences, an exercise in the absurd. I write about all of the wonderful experiences in Gaza, where to stay, what to do, and of course, an update on the humanitarian and political situation; yet as I write I realize in the back of my mind no one can *get in* to Gaza in the first place, unless they have a Gazan, Israeli-issued Palestinian ID or are UN staff or diplomats. And if you try and get a permit

through Israel, you are taken on a wild goose chase where, as in Alice's Wonderland, no one can provide you with clear answers and nothing is what it seems: we aren't responsible for Gaza, and therefore don't issue permits to travel there; yet we still occupy it and control its border—including what and who pass through there. Yet I continue to write anyway, and with conviction at that; Yassine thinks it's an exercise in defiance to the occupation, to the political status quo. I think I agree. [...] I think it's part of trying to psychologically create a reality other than the one imposed upon us. So in a nutshell, that's what I've been up to. [...]

Karkur, Israel, October 4

Liza Rosenberg

[...] Blogging about Israel can be tricky. It isn't always easy to write about a country whose very existence is often questioned, and I've discovered that I must carefully study nearly every word I write in order to ensure that my intended point is coming across. Even so, I've found that in the end, people will see what they want to see, and it may indeed be a far cry from the original meaning. [...] There is clearly something about Israel that brings people to the very brink of insanity, where passions become enflamed to the point of combustion. It doesn't matter where on the spectrum you are, there will always be someone to your right or to your left who will find fault with your words, and thus find it imperative to knock you down. It's astonishing to witness the reaction when the subject of Israel is brought up, and it amazes me to see how many people have

Afghanistan. Between 80,000 and 90,000 people had been displaced by the conflict in the provinces of Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said. The figure brings the total displaced in the area to about 200,000.

chosen the Arab-Israeli conflict as their *cause célèbre*. For Jews and Arabs, I can see the attraction, but what is it about Israel that makes Irish academics feel the need to boycott Israeli universities? What have they to do with me and the country in which I live? Why do people feel this burning need to single out Israel as the focus of their scorn, when there are so many equally if not more tragic situations occurring in many parts of the world? I'm not trying to minimize the gravity of the situation here, but surely, there must be universities to boycott in other countries. [...]

And where does this leave me, an Israeli leftist blogger, as I wrestle with my convictions on a daily basis, as my unwavering love for my country is sorely tested by a dysfunctional government and its questionable policies? Ultimately, as a blogger I write for myself, exercising my mind and my skills, at times working through my frustrations, and often capturing my mood of the moment, whether it be happy or sad, angry or contemplative. Ultimately, I am responsible only to myself and my ability to look myself in the mirror each morning. Unfortunately, the situation is not so black and white, given the speed at which information moves around the world these days, and one must consider the greater implications of one's words. [...]

One cannot foresee in advance where words will go, or which words will make it to which reader. It is this point that leads me to the crux of the matter. What factors must I take into account when writing an entry? If I am being critical of Israel, must I take care to be balanced or less critical, for fear that the piece will end up in the

“wrong” hands, so to speak? Should I be worried about people who might use my words against my people and my country, twisting the meaning to suit their own needs, using my writings as ammunition against Israel or the Jews? Quite frankly, I just don’t know. I am not comfortable with the thought of drawing a line for myself in the sand, a line that I will not allow myself to cross, especially when I believe in what I write. I do not write for those who hate, and do not relish the thought of having to consider their intentions. They will do as they wish, and I cannot control the tools that they use to further their hatred. [...]

Pushcha Vodytsya, October 8

Veronica Khokhlova

Anna Politkovskaya was shot dead Saturday, and it’s sad and shocking, and it’s hard to think of anything to say now. Rest in peace, Anna.

Anna Politkovskaya was famed for her unsparing coverage of abuses against civilians in Chechnya.

Pushcha Vodytsya, October 10

Veronica Khokhlova

There is an incredible stench on the other side of the Russian blogosphere: guys with tiny dicks are celebrating Anna Politkovskaya’s murder. X posts pictures of fireworks; “Happy victory day, Russia,” he writes. Y calls Politkovskaya “the enemy of my people” and writes that although “the death of any person is an irreparable tragedy,” when “there’s one enemy less, it always makes one happy.” [...] A Kyiv acquaintance now living in Canada said over beer a few years ago that Politkovskaya was “a nutcase, a pre-menopausal

October 8. “New York Times”, “quotation of the day”: “I can’t go outside, I can’t go to college. If I’m killed, it doesn’t even matter because I’m dead right now.” Noor, a 19-year-old Baghdad resident.

October 9. North Korea conducted its first-ever nuclear weapons test.

Valeriya Novodvorskaya [former leader of the Democratic Union and member of the Transnational Radical Party].” He’s probably celebrating now, too.

San Salvador, October 13

1. Raúl Antonio Melgar, 59, has been assassinated. “Yesterday a 17-year-old girl stabbed to death a man who was trying to rape her. [...] Melgar [...] stopped and attacked her, the girl reacted and stabbed him. The man died as he was being taken to hospital.”

2. “Eduardo Alexander Roque López, 20, has been pumped full of bullets.”

3. “Douglas W. Castaneda, 18, was killed at 11:35 am on Tuesday at the Arenera, near Río El Molino. He was riding his *mototaxi* m/51314 when he was attacked by some men. According to the PNC [Civil National Police] he abandoned the vehicle and ran away, but the murderers shot him in the head and the back.”

4. The corpse of Nelson Ulises Rodríguez Morán, 28, was found in a “cemetery grave”, “The body had suffered 46 machete wounds. [...] The decaying state of the corpse led police doctors to the conclusion that Rodríguez Morán had been dead for at least 72 hours.”

5. René Mauricio Calderón Hernández, 33, has been killed. “He was driving in the neighbourhood when three strangers approached the car he was driving, pulled out their guns and shot three times. Calderón died outright.”

6. Ricardo Antonio Leiva Sánchez, 19, and José

Mayra Barraza

Bangladeshi economist Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank he created won the Nobel Peace Prize for pioneering work in giving tiny loans to millions of poor people.

October 16. Israeli Police have asked Attorney General Menahem Mazuz to charge Israeli President Moshe Katsav with rape and other crimes against several women.

October 18. President Bush has signed a new National Space Policy that rejects future arms-control agreements that might limit us flexibility in space and asserts a right to deny access to space to anyone “hostile to US interests.” (“The Washington Post”)

Noel Vásquez Sánchez “about 20, shot dead with a 9mm-calibre gun and an AK-47 rifle while they were having dinner.”

7. Rubén Rudi Hernández Ramírez, aged 18, “pumped full of bullets”. “Attacked by rifle-armed men, he was shot with 26 bullets.” “Several AK-47 rifle cartridges were found on the scene of the murder.” [...]

October 19. The number of “dead zones” in the world’s oceans may have increased by a third in just two years, the UN Environment Program said.

Yesterday’s scenario was an atrocious one:

1. I received a message from my children’s school: “Faced with the dramatic increase in street violence, the School is concerned about students’ safety and has taken the following measures...”; then a number of safety measures are listed.

2. I received a group e-mail with the copy of an informative message from San Vicente’s Civil National Police, dated September 2006: “You are instructed to watch over the movements of individuals travelling by car with the intention of depriving underage kids of their liberty in order to subject them to the removal of Organs...” (like that, with a capital “O”).

San Salvador, October 16

Mayra Barraza

[...] For my birthday a few days ago, I got the book *My Name is Red* by Orhan Pamuk, winner of this year’s Nobel Prize in Literature. I open the first page and the first chapter is entitled: *I Am a Corpse*.

“Death Pursues Me” was the title of an installation I did a few years ago in Antigua, Guatemala. I never imagined it would be a sort of omen. At the end of the “Hundred Days”. I have to bury death

October 22. The Israeli government has admitted for the first time that it used phosphorous bombs in Lebanon to attack “military targets”. Previously, Israel had said the bombs had only been used to mark out targets.

end of the “Hundred Days”, I have to bury death and look in a different direction, otherwise I’m afraid I’ll stay trapped here, in this dark place.

Milan, Italy, October 17

Germana Pisa

Tomorrow I have to take my aunt, or rather, what’s left of her—a handful of ashes in place of a beautiful woman—to her last resting place, one of those little temples some families choose to rig up for the sake of appearances, trying to grant a certain formal dignity or elegant facade or what have you to the reality of the dark lady... My stomach knots up at the thought that I will have a little urn next to me all through the long drive, and when I look at it, I’ll imagine how it was *before*, the *thing* inside that wooden box. From the time we begin to reason, to become aware of ourselves, we spend our lives suppressing the idea of death, shooing it further and further from our minds, and yet there is nothing more natural in existence than the end of existence. We are taught not to think about death, about our own death; it shouldn’t concern us. And yet it would be healthier, I think, if we were taught to think of it as the most real reality of all that is real around us. This constant suppression, encouraged by our Western culture, so they say, makes our dismay all the greater when we find it close to us, close to us or *next* to us. Like tomorrow. And yet I thought I knew all this. Or perhaps it is this reduction to dust, in such an immediate way, that is so terribly explicit, to the point that it magnifies the anguish?

On the official web site of Boeing, the world’s largest aerospace company, there is a section devoted to a subsidiary named Jeppesen International Trip Planning. The write-up mentions that the division “offers everything needed for efficient, hassle-free, international flight operations.” Boeing does not mention that Jeppesen’s clients include the CIA, and that among the international trips that the company plans for the agency are secret “extraordinary rendition” flights for terrorism suspects. (“The New Yorker”)

[...] The latest horror is the study published in the “Lancet Journal” concluding that over 600,000 Iraqis have been killed since the war. Reading about it left me with mixed feelings. On the one hand, it sounded like a reasonable figure. It wasn’t at all surprising. On the other hand, I so wanted it to be wrong. But... who to believe? Who to believe...? American politicians... or highly reputable scientists using a reliable scientific survey technique?

The responses were typical—war supporters said the number was nonsense because, of course; who would want to admit that an action they so heartily supported led to the deaths of 600,000 people (even if they were just crazy Iraqis...)? Admitting a number like that would be the equivalent of admitting they had endorsed, say, a tsunami, or an earthquake with a magnitude of 9 on the Richter scale, or the occupation of a developing country by a ruthless superpower... oh wait—that one actually happened. Is the number really that preposterous? Thousands of Iraqis are dying every month—that is undeniable. And yes, they are dying as a direct result of the war and occupation. [...] The chaos and lack of proper facilities is resulting in people being buried without a trip to the morgue or the hospital. During American military attacks on cities like Samarra and Fallujah, victims were buried in their gardens or in mass graves in football fields. Or has that been forgotten already? We literally do not know a single Iraqi family that has not seen the violent death of a first or second-degree relative these last three years. Abductions, militias, sectarian violence, revenge killings, as-

A team of American and Iraqi epidemiologists estimates that 655,000 more people have died in Iraq since coalition forces arrived in March 2003 than would have died if the invasion had not occurred. It is more than 20 times the estimate of 30,000 civilian deaths that President Bush gave in a speech in December. The survey was done by Iraqi physicians and overseen by epidemiologists at Johns Hopkins University’s Bloomberg School of Public Health. The findings are being published online by the British medical journal the “Lancet”. This study is the only one to estimate mortality in Iraq using scientific methods. The technique, called “cluster sampling,” is used to estimate mortality in famines and after natural disasters. (“The Washington Post”)

October 25. President Bush declared today that the United States is winning the war in Iraq. (“The Washington Post”)

sassinations, car-bombs, suicide bombers, American military strikes, Iraqi military raids, death squads, extremists, armed robberies, executions, detentions, secret prisons, torture, mysterious weapons—with so many different ways to die, is the number so far-fetched?

There are Iraqi women who have not shed their black mourning robes since 2003 because each time the end of the proper mourning period comes around, some other relative dies and the count-down begins once again. [...]

And what about American military deaths? When will someone do a study on the actual number of those? If the Bush administration is lying so vehemently about the number of dead Iraqis, one can only imagine the extent of lying about dead Americans...

Milan, Italy, October 19

Massimo Parizzi

Last night Bruno died. Bruno De Maria. A friend. He had collaborated with this review from the first issue. More than half of the first issue consisted of pages from a diary of his about the war in and for Kosovo. That was back in 1999. A strange diary. Or maybe an ordinary one. Strange only because what was (and is) regarded as ordinary seemed monstrous to him. War. The language of politics. Expert analyses. Explanations. He was a pain in the neck. He made me feel uneasy both when he criticized and when he praised this review. Sometimes, when I lifted the handset and heard his voice, I groaned within myself. I knew what he was going to tell me. To leave politics and newspapers alone, but to pursue and practise *idiocy*, as he called it. The look that does not

October 26. A report compiled by WWF UK, the World Conservation Union and representatives from the federal ministry of Abuja and the Nigeria Conservation Foundation has revealed today that up to 1.5 million tons of oil—50 times the pollution unleashed in the Exxon Valdez tanker disaster—have been spilled in the Niger Delta over the past 50 years. (“The Independent”)

understand the rules, rituals and the conventions of this world. The look which is alien to it. That look is the most political, he added. And he would probably have offered me an article which, I knew, would have made me feel even more uneasy. Sometimes I would publish it and sometimes I wouldn't. I did not (and do not) want to sever all ties with my fellow creatures, and with everyone's language. I feared the aristocracy of *idiocy*, its self-sufficiency, and its presumption. However: "I wish there were ever more idiots", I ended up telling him. I was (and am) thinking about a radical look, sensitivity and thought. Radically "other".

Sometimes it seemed to me I found them: in the inhabitants of Gaza who, as Laila told us in issue no. 14 of "Here", "see beauty" among bombs and poverty. Or in Nisio who, travelling through Europe crossed by masses of refugees, at the end of the Second World War, looks at the black and white cows, like those back home, and says: "Beautiful country" (in issue no. 13). So I told Bruno. And he replied: "There. That's it. How wonderful...".

October 26. President George Bush has signed a bill authorizing 700 miles of fencing along the US-Mexican border.

October 29. "New York Times", "quotation of the day": "I don't like it here." Mark Kwadwo, a 6-year-old in Ghana forced to work on a fishing boat seven days a week.

October 29. Russia surpassed the United States in 2005 as the leader in weapons deals with the developing world. ("The New York Times")

For a return to "idiocy"

by Bruno De Maria

Here

notes from the present

[...] There exist unnoticed, invisible—although absolutely visible—everyday events, to which attention is rarely paid. To this end, it is necessary to find innocence again through the constant practice of oblivion. Dostoevskij might have described it as

From *Una lettera*, in "Qui - appunti dal presente", 1, Autumn 1999.

a “return to idiocy”. Etymologically “idiotés” does not mean simply “being out of touch with reality”, but being able to re-discover it. If one trains himself to oblivion, or rather “insanity”, one can open any newspaper and read a headline such as “Bossi is Prodi’s ace up his sleeve”, and see it as if it were written in Sanskrit, i.e. restore its absolute incomprehensibility. Of course here I am not referring to being unable to understand Government intrigues, but not even that worldly, lexical, etc., language, which we are asked to agree with. There is a famous precedent, Wittgenstein, who managed to empty of all meaning even the most obvious propositions. [...] At this point, I have the almost paranoid impression that observation determines the observed phenomenon. [...] Professionally [as a psychoanalyst] I have become aware of a bizarre subversion: that reality is much more incomprehensible than the unconscious. This leads to an escape into the personal sphere, which is dictated by panic. But the personal sphere is the most colonized place, so that it is not easy to discipline oneself into idiocy. Mind you: when I say that one ought to read a newspaper as if it were Sanskrit, I am not preaching any escape into an unstructured language. Schizophrenics already do this, to little purpose. On the contrary, I am searching for a very precise language which pays maximum attention to the unnoticed, the almost invisible. I leave the rest to journalists, to the psycho-socio-something. And I am saying this without expressing any value judgement.

[...] Can anything be done to found a new generation of idiots? Certainly not. This would entail programmes, ideologies, counting-frames, new forms of discrimination, cadastral maps, danger-

From *Diario di una guerra invisibile*, in “Qui - appunti dal presente”, 1, Autumn 1999.

ous humanitarians such as Pol Pot. Let everyone become an idiot by himself, through severe asceticism. Then we can talk about it again. Individual changes are also acts of regeneration of history, a first step towards liberation from a collective model which already produces more worms than a corpse. Can we make it? [...]

The Address Book

by Marina Massenz

Here

notes from the present

This address book is falling to pieces and
I can't bring myself to buy another.
I'll have to mend it, keep
from copying all
the numbers except yours.

The telephone is ringing but the house
doesn't answer. I still find your books
left open, the ashtray full, sunrise
and sunset just like always, amid brawls
of dirty glasses.
You'd think that you just left.
Even your medicine
still on the kitchen table
and on the wall, like trophies,
your rejection notes from publishers.
They gave you a bitter pride.

But the music has fallen silent, in the house
that grows dimmer and dimmer, and the phone keeps on.

Can't even think that it's coincidence
if we haven't talked in quite a while.
The street will be turning grey and vague,
all potholes and rubble. But the tram
will still go by, with its ordinary
clatter. Maybe thousands
of handwritten pages are already
fluttering through the room,
bewildered birds that in time
no one will know how to sort out.

Drifting pages and gyrating jolts
and eddies amid a million words
mixed till they blur together,
with years and lives in the chaotic
somewhat sarcastic hecatomb
of this taut writing of the heart
and mind, leaving just traces, ink
is not indelible, it fades, and as
the phone keeps ringing the house
disappears, then bit by bit, the way.

San Salvador, November 2

Mayra Barraza

1. "Nelson Amílcar García Mancía, 33, was killed yesterday by unknown persons, receiving two bullets to the chest. [...] The victim was attacked near the Gloria River, on his way to go fishing."

October 29. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva wins second term.

2. "Police have identified the body of Carlos Antonio Amaya, 42, who was killed Tuesday [...] on the banks of the Sensunapán."

October 31. "New York Times", "quotation of the day": "Please deliver this message. This city has suffered a lot. These are poor people." Haidar Said, a police officer in Baghdad.

Today is the Day of the Dead. The day we always used to take flowers to my father, who died twelve years ago of a heart attack, and to my paternal grandfather, who lies behind a white marble slab

in the church of San José de la Montaña. I enjoy this visit, the cheerful sight of so many people gathered together in memory of their loved ones, with colourful flowers everywhere—real ones, paper ones, and lately even plastic. One year, when I was living in Antigua, Guatemala, we went to a nearby village where they were celebrating the holiday with huge round kites—they must have been 4 or 5 meters across—made out of all different colours of tissue paper; it took 15 to 20 people to get them up into the air, above the crowded cemetery full of stands. A beautiful sight, amid the columns of smoke rising up from the little incense burners. Another time, I had to go to Mexico, and made my trip fall over November 2 so I could see Mexico City with Day of the Dead in full. It was truly something else. The central plaza was packed with stalls, with things to eat, of course, but also with miniature recreated scenes—cities, landscapes—full of grinning *calaveras*. Every conceivable category of person was parodied there, all dressed up but with the faces and bodies of skeletons: office workers, housewives, politicians, barbers, secretaries, doctors, artists, chubby people, scrawny people, children, and even animals. It was, in short, a jovial celebration of life, a recognition of how ephemeral it can be, an invitation to live it to the fullest, here and now.

Milan, Italy, undated

October 31. Exxon Mobil should stop funding groups that have spread the idea that global warming is a myth and that try to influence policymakers to adopt that view, US senators Olympia Snowe, Republican, and Jay Rockefeller, Democrat, said today in a letter to the oil company. (“ABC News”)

November 3. Bush has named Lee Raymond, the retired chief of Exxon Mobil, to head a key study to help America chart a cleaner course for its energy needs.

Bruno De Maria

[...] Isn't Life Wonderful? [the title of a film by D.W. Griffith] To admit that it means disorder, anarchy, becoming “idiots” again. Where, as seems obvious to me, idiocy is a solitary quality,

From Un intervenuto, in “Qui - appunti dal presente”, 1, Autumn 1999.

a mild refusal of the incomprehensible. Melville's Billy Budd, an innocent newly-born Adam not by chance stutters. He cannot explain himself, and renounces the practice of abstract dialectics; he is an "infans" (lacking language), and compensates for such a gap with a punch that kills a bureaucrat boatswain (was Claggarth his name?), who hates his innocent beauty. Innocence is unbearable, since it questions every "rationality".

A Red Apple

by Michele Zaffarano

Here

notes from the present

1

to have a horse
to be little again
for it always to be summer
for life to be kinder
for all the animals in the world
to be a rock
to go back and forth in time to see primitive man
to have a house made of olive trees
to ride a horse
to sleep on a bed made of spruce
to go to the sea
to go away
to go live in america
to play blindman's bluff
for meteorites not to fall on earth

for life to be made up just of beds
to be friends with all her friends
to live in a huge house with a pool
to live on a galleon
to be a peach tree
a fox
to fly
to learn every language
to be a squirrel
a horse
to go up to the sun

2

to be an eagle
to never go to work
to look at the mountains from afar
to be a tour guide
to look at castles
to look at the houses of being a millionaire
to look in my castle
to be the headless ghost that comes out of the grave
to be the headless ghost that comes out to frighten people
a star to be
to have a magic wand and cast all kinds of spells
to go into outer space
to know German
to have a crocodile around the house
to see people what objects they used for eating
to see people what objects they used for cutting
to see the objects
to be an acrobat
a plane
to live outside with the flowers
and live at the very bottom of the sea
to live in los angeles but also in san francisco

to see tarzan naked
stupid
to come home at seven
the waterfalls
an adventure
for it always to be spring
to stay at home
for kids not to hurt other kids
for nature not to be polluted
to go down a waterfall
a magic horse
to go to mexico
to run around with my friends all night long
to ride a dog
to go on the rainbow
to have a garden full of flowers
a saber-toothed tiger
to be a snake in the jungle
and know how to tell stories
to be an archeologist
a mummy
to swim with the dolphins
to play with dolls
for books to be just pictures
to live in a house in the woods
if she wasn't blond with blue eyes
or she had green hair and red eyes
to have a dog
to go on the high-speed train
to be kidnapped by pirates
to have the sphinx as my house
to go in a time machine and go back to the jurassic era
and i'll take a few of those dinosaurs that are so scary

to jump off a bridge
to be king
to live on a farm
to have a tarantula or a half scorpion
to have a half scorpion half tarantula
to have a stable
to jump down from a castle
to earn five million a year
to be a bird
to go on a cruise
dog horse fairy sun
mouse squirrel
cat a fish
the mama bear
in bed
on the beach
a fish
you me and the sun
play doctor
be a rocket
for it to always be summer
to be with my cat
for spring to stay my whole life long
to be in the circus
and for there to still be dinosaurs
to help animals
to have a telescope
to go to egypt
to visit my sister in munich
to be in the jungle
to climb trees without getting hurt
for everyone to be alive
a bed made of cedar

to go to china
 to be named mohammad
 hero
 to fly a plane
 to sail a boat
 a map from the seventeenth century
 an ice-cream cone
 to do my best job
 to be little again
 to be little
 to be even littler

Baghdad, November 5

R.

Execute the dictator. It's that simple. When American troops are being killed by the dozen, when the country you are occupying is threatening to break up into smaller countries, when you have militias and death squads roaming the streets and you've put a group of Mullahs in power—execute the dic tator. [...] The timing is ridiculous—immediately before the congressional elections? How very convenient for Bush. Iraq, today, is at its very worst since the invasion and the beginning of the occupation. [...] Reconstruction is an aspiration from another lifetime: I swear we no longer want buildings and bridges; security and an undivided Iraq are more than enough. Things must be deteriorating beyond imagination if Bush needs to use the “Execute the Dictator” card. Iraq has not been this bad in decades. [...] It's not about the man—presidents come and go,

Saddam Hussein sentenced to death.

November 7. Midterm elections in the United States. Democrats take control of the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the majority of governorships.

November 8. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, architect of the war in Iraq, is resigning. President Bush's nominee to lead the Pentagon is Robert Gates, former director of the CIA. He may be best known for playing a role in arming Saddam

governments come and go. It's the frustration of feeling like the whole country and every single Iraqi inside and outside of Iraq is at the mercy of American politics. It is the rage of feeling like a mere chess piece to be moved back and forth at will. [...] I just read somewhere that some of the families of dead American soldiers are visiting the Iraqi north to see "what their sons and daughters died for". If that's the goal of the visit, then, "Ladies and gentlemen—to your right is the Iraqi Ministry of Oil, to your left is the Dawry refinery... Each of you get this, a gift bag containing a 3 by 3 color poster of Al Sayid Muqtada Al Sadr (Long May He Live And Prosper), an Ayatollah Sistani t-shirt and a map of Iran, to scale, redrawn with the Islamic Republic of South Iraq. Also... Hey you! You—the female in the back—is that a lock of hair I see? Cover it up or stay home." And that is what they died for.

Hussein with American made weapons in the Iraq's war against Iran in the 1980s, and for advocating a bombing campaign against Nicaragua in 1984 in order to "bring down" the leftist government of Daniel Ortega.

November 8. Nicaragua. Daniel Ortega won presidential election.

Durham, North Carolina, November 8

Laila El-Haddad

"Withdrawing" implies, in whatever vague and euphemistic sense, an end, or at least, a waning of hostilities. But today I woke to discover that the Israeli Army has perpetrated a massacre on a scale unseen in Gaza for a long time: so far, 22 dead. Eight children; seven women. All members of the same family. Please imagine 22 members of *your* family, dead, in one fell swoop, and that the deaths are brushed aside as unfortunate mistakes from an otherwise morally superior, well-intentioned army. There can *be no* good intentions deriving from an Army ordered to fire

heavy-grade artillery shells within 100 metres of civilian areas. None. And I am sick to my stomach. I am sick of hearing the “we regrets” and “sorries” and the empty promises of investigations that never materialize and whose only purpose is to exonerate the accused. I am sick of the well-intentioned “moral” Army of “defence” routine, that only attempts to attack “militants”, as if to imply the entire occupation is justified if sustained by this absurdist rhetoric. I’m just sick of it all. Sick sick sick. We want an end to the occupation. Period. To quote Peace Now, instead of apologizing, *stop your war* against us. So much energy and enthusiasm devoted to death and destruction and debilitation and asphyxiation and occupation—so little devoted to ending it all. If you are in Israel, go join Peace Now’s demonstration *today* (Wednesday) at 17:00hrs opposite the Defence Ministry on Kaplan St, Tel Aviv. If you are not, make some noise. *Contact your government*. Tell them you won’t stand for the slaughter of innocents—don’t recoil in the comfort of your couch, assured that such tragedy is distant and does not affect you. It affects all of us when humans become less human, when their blood becomes worth less than ours. And remember Martin Niemöller’s words: “They came first for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. When they came for me, there was no one left to speak out.” Let us add to the famous poem: “Then they came for the Palestinians, but I remained silent, for I was not Palestinian”.

In April 2006, it was reported that the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) reduced—from 300 meters to 100 meters—the “safety range” between populated areas in the Gaza Strip and the areas targeted for artillery fire. (*B’Tselem*, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories)

A Cry Against Indifference

by Maria Ofelia Zuniga

Here

notes from the present

Which at times can be as murderous as someone who picks a weapon and kills his neighbour.

Some may say that this is just a fact of life; don't I wish it weren't something that touches us directly, forcing us to open our eyes and maybe even think we have a responsibility to do something. I hope you have the time and inclination to read this. If you don't, the world won't come to an end, and if you do, it won't change in any fundamental way. I simply found I had to write it down. [...]

In the name of Cecy, and all the victims of the brutality we are all allowing to take place. [...]

This story is about Cecilia, a young woman just over twenty, who once had been a little girl like any other. [...] Now she's dead. [...] This morning, before seven, my mother went out to the store, and while she was waiting in line, some men holding guns brushed past her. The other women who were also there buying things for breakfast panicked and tried to run away. As they were looking for somewhere to hide, they heard a violent burst of gunfire, and the shopkeeper opened the door of her house so that all of them, including my mother, could take shelter, but before they were even inside

the men came running back. Without a word, with the coolness that is typical of such crimes nowadays, they had just shot Cecilia, point-blank, seriously wounding her niece, who is seven or eight but looks only five because of malnutrition. My mother came home (as best she could after such a fright), and with trembling legs, said: “Did you hear those shots? They say that Rosa’s daughter has been killed”. That’s what people were saying as they began to come out of their houses after the shooting. Rosa is Cecilia’s sister, and her daughter’s name is Daysi. I met Cecilia and Rosa when they were little, very little, in 1986. I was also a child at the time, when her parents came to live in a shack built by a neighbour on the sidewalk across the street from us, a few houses down. It was a two-meter-square cardboard shack at the entrance to the house. We found out about them, or at least I did, when the earthquake came and everyone in the neighbourhood (like almost everyone in El Salvador) had to sleep in the street because of the aftershocks. There, everyone was equal, since all we had was a mattress on the street and the solidarity between neighbours that emerges in this kind of situation. That’s how I met the new family who was living “there”, in those conditions. Time went by, the quakes stopped, we returned to our homes, and they obtained a small plot of land two houses further up, in a place that used to be the neighbourhood dump, but had been cleaned up and had at least three houses on it. With a bit of help they built a shack there, out of tin instead of cardboard, and became just another neighbourhood family. Every day the mother and father went to work and the girls stayed home by themselves, taking care of

each other, I think, even though neither was even old enough to tie her own shoes... But of course that wasn't a problem, because they didn't have any, and it didn't really matter, they were fine on their own. After a few years, their mother died; her job, which was an open secret to everyone in the neighbourhood, led to a premature but predictable death. She died of AIDS, and the family, now only three people, was left in the care of a father who died himself a few years later of throat cancer. So the little girls, now preteens, were left to fend for themselves. The older one found a boyfriend and soon became the mother of Daysi; now there are four little brothers and sisters in all. Cecilia started working, running errands for people, though there were also rumours that she'd followed in her mother's footsteps and that some neighbours would leave their doors open for her at night. I also know that—a victim of the ignorance, illiteracy, structural violence, hunger, loneliness, and lack of guidance to which she was condemned for having been born and raised where she was—she started saying a few years ago that she had joined a *mara* (gang) and had been *brincada* (initiation rite that consists in having sex with a number of gang members at the same time). Anyway, since such things aren't spoken of, because we live in an era where you're better off not knowing, no one knew what else this girl did to get by; no one saw her going anywhere in particular, there were no other signs that she was involved with the *mara*. She was just another impoverished girl. People called her a “public woman”, of course; talk and criticism are cheap, wherever you are in the world. I'd chat with her sometimes when we ran into each other, since she was taking care of

her nieces and nephews and would be up and down the street with them all the time. When I met her she'd show them off with a certain pride, the way anyone would show off their nieces and nephews, eager for everyone to see how beautiful they are. She had a baby herself, but since she knew she couldn't bring him up, she decided to give him away at birth. Many people criticized her for this, but compared with all the crazy things a fifteen-year-old girl can do, I think that in the end it was wise. (Yes, I know, in more developed countries they talk about "putting a baby up for adoption" as part of a teen assistance program, but here, in this underworld, you say "give a baby away".) One time I ran into her and she was filling me in on what she was doing, she said she would have liked to work as a maid in some household and learn a trade so she could earn more money, although sometimes she thought she'd have liked to be a hairdresser. I don't know what she did—though she certainly wasn't a hairdresser—and I don't care if her choices were lousy ones; in the end, she never had anyone to help her out, for better or for worse. So my question, ladies and gentlemen, is: who killed Cecilia? Who's fault is it that Daysi is now at death's door, and her mother Rosa—who works in some far-off place, no one knows where, and can only come every so often to see her kids and leave her sister a little money—has yet to find out, today or next time she comes back, what we already know? When I came out of the house today, the police had cordoned off the entire neighbourhood, as they have several times in recent months, the ambulance was there to take Daysi away, and reporters had come running after the story, which

will undoubtedly be in the news later. In my house, where we'd awoken to the shooting and then my mother's terrified face, we talked about what happened... Someone said "they should all be killed" (who?), that it takes an iron fist, but now, when there's more of an iron fist than ever, my neighbourhood cries out against the injustice. But seeing that family hungry, seeing the mother die from AIDS and spend a whole day on the slab at the town morgue because there wasn't enough money for a coffin, what's that called? Believe me, today I just don't know what to think... I'm not writing these things because I think that other people, somebody, I don't know who, but somebody has to do something, but rather because this morning I was overcome by the doubt, the question: what ought I to do? I admit that I'm overcome by fear, because hearing shots and then finding out that they meant the death of someone who lived close by, whom you always saw around, is painful but also very frightening. Of course, I wasn't responsible... but then who was? This day has shaken me and touched me to the core. Hunger, social injustice, and a poverty that grows deeper every day are carrying off *our young people*. All these people who die, every day, for money, or for being the friends, acquaintances, boyfriends, girlfriends, or relatives of someone who "messed up", or simply found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, *are our people*. [...] Two questions come to me. One at a general level [...]: would Cecilia, and thousands of other people, be dead today if there were real programs for development and prevention, instead of the voracious policies that strangle the poor and weak among 80% percent of the world's population? If instead

of the goddamn walls like the one [...] at the US-Mexico border, [...] which is useless anyway because it won't get rid of the root causes of immigration, which will only stop when people are no longer hungry, when countries like the United States are no longer the last resort because they offer "opportunities" in exchange for cleaning the crap that by birthright their inhabitants are too good to clean, or any other kind of work that yes, will mean a living, healthcare, food, shelter, and clothes for emigrants and their families, because every hour of work represents a income that improves (and is fair), as opposed to what happens in our countries, where work, for most people, is just a means of survival, not gratification or advancement. The other question is at a personal level, but to me is more important: what is it our responsibility to do, each and every one of us? Would Cecilia and so many others be dead today if instead of just thinking about our own safety, fencing off our own little worlds, we had at least tried to help in some way? How? That's the next question, of course, and answering it is everybody's job. I should say right off that haven't found an answer yet. But in case I should, I want to say that my hands are ready and willing; today they are trembling with fear (I have to admit), as well as rage and impotence, but who knows, perhaps even so they could make themselves useful... I don't know, perhaps together we can find a way to change, if not the world, at least the little world around us, can't we? It doesn't matter whether we live in El Salvador or somewhere else, it doesn't matter whether we live in the developed or underdeveloped world. Is it or isn't it everyone's responsibility? To make a clean break with violence, to

assuage hunger, to make sure that children have some kind of opportunity, now and in the future. If the present doesn't change, what future will there be? There are thousands of ways to do something, because there are millions of needs. I'm just asking you to open your eyes and ask the Father and Mother of life for illumination, so that love will make us creative. [...] I refuse to believe that when life has given us so much, these gifts are just for us. Don't you agree?

San Salvador, November 8

P.S.: Cecilia didn't even get a "decent" burial; her sister didn't have enough money, so she signed at the forensics department for her to be buried as "unidentified". The poorest of the poor...

Rome, November 10

Lucianna Argentino

I read and re-read the diary page by Marc Ellis last June 4, in part because I noticed a certain thematic parallel with what I had written the very next day, on June 5. I read it several times, but I'm not sure I fully understand what he was getting at. Moreover (unless I misunderstood), when he talks about charity and justice, I don't totally agree. Ellis says that Christianity's mistake was to put charity over justice, but it doesn't seem that way to me (although if you read chapter 13 of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, it is indeed difficult not to put charity over all things). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled", a beatitude that also happens to

Ellis had written: "...The hungry fed—without mentioning or praising God. The widow cared for, actually provided for—a commandment that is not optional or dependent on any variable, including belief or unbelief. Belief itself a wrong turn, a speculative out, a road unable to be traveled without tending toward the other in need. Personal ministering only as the avenue that leads to social justice. It is within social justice that

shall be filled”, a beatitude that also happens to come before the one saying “blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”; the concept of justice is therefore fundamental in the message of the Gospels, because thirsting after justice means deeply feeling the need to fulfill all your duties towards others. We know how little justice is achieved in this world (although it is so often invoked: everyone who has been a victim of violence, abuse, and crime ask for justice), and this is certainly not Christianity’s fault; actually, I think that Christians, aware of just how little disposed human beings are to justice, try to make up for it through charity. But careful here, one shouldn’t take charity to mean mere alms-giving, but rather, love; embracing love, supportive love, love that listens, love committed to concretely helping those in need, creating the right conditions to foster the autonomous development of work and resources. Of course there are people in this world who have a stake in making sure that the poor stay poor (all the various multinational corporations that have been repeatedly denounced), but not so that they can do charity and save their souls! It doesn’t seem plausible to me that “personal salvation may be dependent on social injustice”, as Ellis writes. Nor do I really understand what he is implying when just afterwards he asks: “How else can charity be distributed as a sign of God’s love?” I don’t understand what charity he’s referring to here, because heaps of charity can be distributed every day even in our affluent cities. I am being charitable—and just—when I offer support to those who are suffering, when I knock on my sick neighbour’s door to ask if she needs anything, when I stop to chat with the old lady upstairs who is all alone,

the personal is viewed; charity for those who are hurt in life, broken by it, in need of an embrace that, for whatever reason, was lacking. That is the Israelite foundation, the Judaic: the person within the larger social order of justice. The needs of the person illustrating the failure of justice. Compassion as leading toward or within a just social order.

The mistake of Christianity as it has come to be: charity over justice. The person in need as the path to God—somehow without the need to establish justice. An act of faith in and of itself. Salvation through the acts of charity as a connection to God, a giving mostly from one’s largesse—the path toward personal salvation. Compassion without a desire for justice as a way to God—self-centered, personal salvation, the wrong turn.

Leaves out the inconvenient truth—that personal salvation may be dependent on social injustice. How else can charity be distributed as a sign of God’s love? How else can the sinner be brought to God? Personal God over the God of liberation. Charity/salvation. Charity/God. The system that produces the poor stays in place.

when I give up my seat on the bus, when I pick up after my dog, when avoid parking on the pedestrian crossing or the sidewalk and making it hard for other people to get past. One might object that this is “merely” civilized behaviour... Sure, but take a look around and tell me if we can consider ourselves civilized people... What is it we lack? I think that every act which demonstrates love and respect for others leads towards justice; love and justice go hand in hand, although at times love may get there first, reaching out where justice cannot reach. The subject of charity and personal salvation also calls to mind a lady who told me she was busy doing volunteer work for her association because, she added, it did her good. I was a bit puzzled by this and thought to myself sardonically, “So in the end you’re doing volunteer work for yourself!” Will this woman, who does volunteer work to save her soul in this world, save it in the next as well? (When you think about it, aren’t volunteer associations, both secular and religious, a sort of “charity” because they try to compensate for the failings of public institutions?). And what difference is there between this woman, who does it for her own good, and those who do it for other people’s welfare? On the surface, none. I mean, not in terms of concrete, visible results. And yet there is a difference. A major difference, a fundamental difference that merits reflection. I love the last lines of Marc Ellis’s diary entry, when he calls Jesus “the great cloak shielding us—through his sacrifice—from God’s judgment.” Is it the love that flowed out of His sacrifice, out of His death and resurrection, that redeems us before God and somehow puts us beyond judgment?

Caring for the poor without the move toward justice: unrevolutionary forgiveness.

I remember one day in class when I first started teaching in Waco, I was speaking about justice. The class was taken aback, and a student, trying to help me out, spoke up and said that we really didn’t want justice. What he meant was that justice meted out by God would be too harsh for us—every nook and cranny of our being if seen by God would be judged inadequate, corrupt, diseased. So, do we need to hide ourselves from God?

Jesus as the great cloak, shielding us—through his sacrifice—from the judgment of God. Taking our sins on his shoulders. The judgment happening through this sacrifice, and we, within him, are thus protected. Jesus as intermediary and protector. Sins forgiven through him. The judgment of God averted—accomplished; our salvation accomplished.”

Casablanca, November 20

Jihane Bouziane

She's discovering the world of work: staying overtime, dealing with demands from one side and criticism from another... She turns to me, asks me for advice and then follows it religiously, [...] and I feel terribly old, even though we're the same age. [...] I started working when I was twenty-one. I understand why some people didn't take me seriously. I think I would have done the same. [...] And now, when I compare myself with this girl who's just set foot in the professional world, I feel sad for her. Affectionately sad. She's entering a world that will allow her to become more responsible, more resilient, more mature, more intelligent, more ambitious... but at what cost? That's the question that saddens me so much. [...] When I spend 70 percent of my waking hours slaving away at projects that could get done with me or without me, I tell myself there's something wrong with the equation... [...] And yet the ambition is still there, I want to stick with it, I want to succeed. But I think back to the same phrase: at what cost? [...] I'm tired of being what I am. Tired.

November 14. The South African parliament approved new legislation recognizing gay marriages. The vote made the nation the first in Africa and the fifth in the world to remove legal barriers to same-sex unions.

President Bush appointed Eric Keroack to serve as the Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services for Population Affairs. This position is primarily responsible for overseeing the Office of Family Planning, which is charged with providing access to contraceptive information and supplies to low-income individuals. Eric Keroack has a long-standing opposition to contraception and abortion.

Milan, Italy, February 17, 2002

Bruno De Maria

[...] Personally, I have nothing but sympathy for whoever is hesitant, scared, for whoever realizes to what degree change means facing up to "disaster", the disaster of what you used to be. But actually, we find ourselves faced with "disaster" whichever path we decide to take. As we go along,

From a letter in "Qui - appunti dal presente", 6, "Sulla porta" (In the doorway), Spring 2002.

we leave familiar things behind us, coming out of the selfhood we know all too well, and we enact a sort of betrayal. What is familiar to us becomes foreign, and this turns reality, as it has been established by the lessons of our cultural framework, into the original experience of self in relation to the world. This is an experience that transforms meaning, creating words of one's own, which, as such, expose us to the experience of mourning. There is a obscure feeling of death, here, tinged with feelings of guilt, of possible recrimination. As a rule, what to us is the experience of an emerging subjectivity, a promise of life, is in other ways a crippling event, crippling the power of our former colonizers. The "door" is the door of death, the place of ultimate surrender. And dying, to me, means getting beyond oneself, beyond one's own rusty substantialities. I think that dreams of death should be seen as an experience of looking over the threshold to glimpse the other-than-self, which is inconceivable, staggering. Of course, you can turn back, close the door behind you and give yourself back over, speechless, perhaps, to the past and to the laws that have already colonized us. In my opinion, this about-face is yet another disaster. But a disaster even worse than the first, because it has no movement or narrative. It has no future. There is no such thing as a future that does not involve the agony of coming to terms with an unexplored region. This brings to mind an old story by Cortázar. A man sticks his head into a sweater he wants to put on and can no longer get it back out, losing it in a thousand nooks and crannies without ever finding the one that fits. Which reminds me of what Nietzsche said: "To have a head, you first must lose it".

From a prison

by Chiara Maffioletti

Here

notes from the present

From Detention Centre II in Milano-Bollate. A roar breaks the silence. It bounces off walls, through rooms and along corridors, inside silent courtyards and in great open spaces: a more powerful and profound roar than the one heard a few weeks ago, when Italy won the world cup. It is July 27. With more than two thirds of votes in favour, the Chamber of Deputies has approved the Pardon Act that reduces by three years all sentences for offences committed before 2 May 2006 with few exceptions. It is a historical day in those individual histories with a lower-case “h”, as it is really going to change the lives of lots of people in here.

Small radios tuned in to *Radio Radicale* broadcasting the Parliament debate live have been resonating everywhere for days now. Over the last three endless days, tension has been sky-high, and many have not even left their cells. Maklouf told me that “if it doesn’t pass this time either, someone will hang himself”. Predictions are being made, but most convicts are silent. In here, silence befits real tension up until that relieving moment: scenes of joy, jubilation and emotion which one can hardly help being overcome by. I can see people rejoicing and embracing one another; those who can are running, shaking hands with their mates, and thanking heaven, the Virgin Mary and politics;

someone is even swearing that from now on he will give his vote to the Communists. Then they all recover their composure and remember that the act has not been passed by the Senate yet. But there's optimism. Convicts are usually unconcerned and detached from politics, but always seem to know what's what when something concerns them, and old connections between politics and the underworld are echoed. Without saying it too loudly, many have long been feeling they had release under their belt. Though better to keep a low profile: before the order of release arrives, or rather before one has crossed the last gate, there is no certainty; moving to larger premises brings rough luck. As was predictable, everything goes smoothly on Saturday 29 July, and the final vote arrives during the day. Once it is published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* [Official Journal], the three-year remission will take immediate effect. Publication appears on Monday 31 July and releases begin on Tuesday morning.

Many have asked me: why not postpone the enforcement of the act, so as to allow people being released to get themselves organized, as well as allowing social services to arrange appropriate support, and families to get ready? In other words, to allow that whole universe of relationships and organizations that revolve around and together with the enforcement of criminal penalties, to re-arrange themselves according to this new perspective? I immediately understood it myself, from those first less tight-lipped "fuck you" addressed towards penitentiary police officers. After final approval, a group of convicts in one of the arms here at Bolate smashed up windows, sinks, furniture and various furnishings, in a mixture of celebration,

insult and revenge. Apart from the extremely scarce sympathy shown towards the convicts remaining behind, a balance was broken, and role masks, which even the most experienced prison workers tend to forget about, were thrown off. Those workers are indeed convinced that jail should try to reduce damage by guaranteeing people's dignity and committing itself to the utmost to the application of the constitutional dictate about the re-educational value of jail sentences; in other words, they believe this kind of jail can, to some extent, produce a feeling of sharing though maintaining and adhering to opposing roles. Perhaps this does happen sometimes, and someone does acknowledge commitment, but this is not enough to make up for the suffering and the feeling that, by being in the clutches of a penitentiary system that does not work, one has turned into being a victim. In short, the idea is that once release has been obtained, a prison can no longer be under control, its rules and discipline fail, and that delicate balance between prizes and punishments, which is an implication of penitentiary law, is baffled. Many convicts leave their job at once or do not work well, those responsible for the cleaning do not clean any more, officers swallow insults and surly looks, and the risk is that small underworld feuds are triggered. So: everyone out as soon as possible. Though releasing about 15,000 people all in one go is not as easily done as said. This has not happened for sixteen years, since the 1990 amnesty. Therefore, delirium is set off, as well as a race against time on the part of the Director and the workers who care for many convicts' ongoing projects, in order not to thwart everything and at the same time to somehow solve the most desperate situations for

those who are released without a home, money or a family. But very few, hardly anyone in fact, are complaining about having no time to get organized. The joy for their regained freedom prevails over everything, at least for the time being. Many, with the usual good amount of recklessness and fatalism, are quite happy about escaping the toils of the variegated network of social support. Some of them don't: they remain hooked, and look for help, tired of their old life and having really caught a glimpse of a different prospect. Once outside, most of them disappear, some because they want to, some others because they need to. Foreign convicts do, because they need to. It is them who will benefit en masse from the pardon. Most foreigners, whose percentage exceeds 50% in many prisons, have been sentenced to less than three years for mild drug pushing, thefts or robberies. But this time foreign convicts are not released with the usual paper asking them to show up at the Police Station. They are taken to the Police Station where their position is checked and practically all of them are notified an expulsion warrant. Then, they may as well leave on foot and by their own means. An excellent prelude to future mass arrests.

On Tuesday 1 August the first orders of release start coming from the various *procure*. The prison's register office clerks are in fighting trim. During the first week's releases they work eighteen hours a day, some of them swearing, because "these people don't deserve anything and you can understand that from the racket they're making". A release is not something you do in a minute; it requires paper-filling, returning documents and personal effects, closing bank accounts and handing back money, as well as calculating possible recompenses (wages against work done in jail) still to

A *procura* is the legal authority responsible for issuing measures restricting personal liberty, the execution of penalties and the supervision of penitentiaries.

ompenses (wages against work done in jail) still to be paid. Little by little they all get out, all those with residual sentences under three years, unless sentenced for excepted offences (terrorism and subversion, mafia, sexual crimes, pushing of substantial quantities of drugs and a few others). But after getting intoxicated with celebrations and joy, every minute spent waiting inside the prison is an endless hell, an intolerable abuse. And it doesn't help to remember the months and years in one's life just won at the lottery: what difference may one more hour, one or two more days make? These gurus of waiting, these models of patience when they know they have to put their hearts at rest, have now turned into childish importunate beggars of *all of it at once*. Therefore, on seeing the first ones leave, instead of cheering up for their own like near fate, those still waiting get worked up, they protest and want to know why their *procura* is not taking steps, why the register's office is not carrying on, or who is plotting against their freedom. Someone threatens retaliation, hunger strikes, or self-infliction of wounds. And there we are, calming things down, dissolving the fumes of conspiracy with obvious common-sense arguments. Now and then names are heard along the corridors, together with the longed-for word... "liberanteee"; it is at the same time a triumph and a knot in the stomach for those who have not heard their names yet. Although I know prison life and those who are convicted there, I really find it hard to understand this angry impatience, which makes one forget that Fortune's wheel has so shamelessly turned in one's favour. But this may provide an idea of the extent to which detention becomes intolerable. Waiting for impending freedom turns into waking up after

This is the name used to refer to a convict who is about to be released at the end of his/her sentence.

a nightmare that leaves you trapped on the edge of it, caught up in its offshoots.

Fabrizio, his whole life spent in Milan's underworld, at fourteen acted as lookout outside gambling clubs. He attempted suicide a few weeks ago, when there was no talking about pardon yet, though his sentence was drawing to an end; one more year to go: nothing compared with all the time he has already spent in prison. He is separating from his wife, who has been waiting for him for years and is now fed up and throws just anything back at him. How can anyone manage all this from inside a prison, during a ten-minute-phone call, or during those six hours' meeting a month? Now he is about to get out and every extra second in jail is torture; he ploughs along the corridor, with his head down and a cigarette between his teeth. Zin Yu has been in for 6 years for extortion and all his family are in Italy. His sentence ends on 9 August. Almost a twist of Fate. I watch Antonio leave with black sacks on his back; he is one of last men left of the Vallanzasca gang (which carried out so many robberies, murders and kidnappings in the seventies to become "the gang" par excellence): he has been in prison non-stop since 1976. Unthinkable: I was just beginning primary school and he was already in prison. There are tears in his eyes. He had a short time left to do, too. Gjita, a crafty wise Albanian with a refined sense of humour, had little less than three years to do and this is net gain for him: three years of his life to fill up. When he arrived in Italy he could work, as he had friends and relatives well under way here, but he chose robbery, because making easy big money, "*bella vita*" as he calls it, was an irresistible prospect. Also Simone, who will have

just under three years to do at the beginning of September, is leaving three years earlier than expected. He is shocked by this. He killed his woman before their daughter's eyes. I wonder how the victim's parents feel, what they think about pardon, and as I ask myself this question, I can't help thinking about the debate over the non-exclusion of financial crimes and crimes against the public administration. Each of us may, for individual—though shared by many—reasons, find themselves in a position to judge one particular crime more hateful and less deserving clemency than another; should therefore law indulge in every personal point of view? I don't think so. Surely, revenge or some moralistic “making someone pay for it” will not solve the problem of corruption in Italy. After all, that would be the same logic as the one lying behind the laws *ad personam* promoted by Berlusconi, when in power, to save this or the other of his devotees (or himself) from court; and such logic is emerging now that the government has changed, when a law *contra personam* is pleaded, so that so-and-sos, just them, will not avoid jail. All the others may as well leave. I found this hard-hat vigour, as well as certain left-wing demagoguery about “letting out the poor devils and not the others”, unbearable. As if all the perpetrators of non-financial crimes were poor devils.

Since I work in a prison, many have asked me what I think about pardon. On a first, purely emotional level I believe what has prevailed in me is the obvious basic sharing of joy with people close to me whom I know well, whom I have spent days and established meaningful relationships with (though on the other side, also a hardly noble pleasure in getting rid of some unbearable mugs). There has

also been a sense of relief from the hard work in jail, and an awareness that this decongestion means all prison workers, directors, agents and social workers will be enabled to work better. Besides these more personal considerations, I regard pardon as not having much sense in itself, but as having been a necessary measure for many reasons; also, it will gain more sense if it is followed by actions and measures on a structural level, although I think it is a basically unfair measure towards all those who have not benefited and will not benefit from it due to a purely accidental factor, i.e. time. However, it will help decongest a clogged system, thus allowing it to function better and making it feasible to carry out reforms. The so-called mildness of the measure has in fact a compensating value and one of restoration of the law, because any detention sentence, which should consist only in the deprivation of liberty, is made heavier by accessory punishments, which in some prisons are close to torture and more generally deeply harmful to individuals' dignity. No one is sentenced to living with other eight or ten people in three-by-four square metres. Just as our Penitentiary System does not contemplate that a convict should wait three years before the centre where he is can provide the *giudice di sorveglianza* [surveillance judge] with a report about him, or that he should wait a year before he can get a reply to his application for leave. How can an institution representing the law be credible if it exercises illegality in the first place? That institution puts itself in the wrong, thus rendering null its already poor re-educational capabilities, because it completely loses proportionality—in itself already extremely hard to be found—between the damage caused by the offence and the damage the offender is inflicted.

Postscript, three months later. That the debate over pardon would have raged for a long time had immediately been clear, right from the days following the first releases, when newspapers had revelled in the pleasure of being able to write about the so-and-so who had stolen a car one minute after stepping into freedom, or that other one who had run home to kill his wife, or yet another one who had got the old gang together and picked up his life-long habits again. But what was hardly imaginable was that, just few months later, the resurgence of organized crime in Naples, as well as the problem of Courts' shortcomings, if not also increased air pollution, in other words everything, would have been blamed on the pardon, and that the very politicians who had passed it would almost have thought they had to say sorry and some of them would even have abjured.

Inside jail, the pardon has already become a reality, and the joy of those who are still in has already been watered, drowned in the difficult everyday routine, although it still emerges upon receiving the notice from the *procura* that confirms the benefit. Outside, disinformation is widespread, as usual. Pardon is unpopular, so better to distance oneself from it. What matters which news items or arguments are pushed forward in order to join the queue of those who opt out? Many politicians vie with one another to see who said more insistently that, together with a pardon, an amnesty was necessary, too otherwise trials are done for nothing. How bizarre that the assessment of responsibility (the most significant result of a trial, I would say) should be regarded as "nothing". The real problem—but this is known only to experts—lies in the fact that amnesty is already there and creeping: the very courts

carry it out by putting off or not fixing hearings for those prosecutions for which a sentence under three years is contemplated.

Figures are always a partial representation of reality, but in the deluge of words that have accompanied the whole matter, perhaps a few figures may partly restore truth. Data concerning the pardon updated on October 25 2006: 24,256 released convicts in total (of which 21,641 with final judgments and 2,615 released thanks to repeal of detention). Besides these, about another 5,000 people benefited from pardon while they were spending their sentence outside. Of all the people released, 1,336 are back in prison, i.e. 5.5% (4.6% if we calculate also those spending a sentence outside).

Karkur, Israel, November 30

[...] For the past few months, my writing has overwhelmingly taken a turn towards the personal and away from the political. There's a part of me that's disappointed in that [...] but to be honest, lately, I seem to have lost my passion for current events issues. The war this past summer sapped a lot of my energy, and I think I haven't completely recovered. It took a huge emotional toll in so many different ways. It affected my relationships, often forcing me to accept certain, difficult, truths about people in my life. Some rifts were reparable while others were not. It affected my feelings about this country, especially those in power. Feelings of great anger intermingled with feelings of frustration, fear and disappointment, all directed in so many different directions. I felt weak on so many levels, weak and disenchanting. Since the end of the war, we've been forced to deal not only with

Liza Rosenberg

November 21. Lebanon. Pierre Gemayel, the minister of industry who had stood against Syrian interference in Lebanon, was fatally shot.

November 22. "Peace Now" has found that 39 percent of the land used by Jewish settlements in the West Bank is private Palestinian property.

November 23. Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian spy and vocal critic of Vladimir Putin, died in a London hospital after being mysteriously poisoned.

our failures vis-a-vis Lebanon, but also the gross dysfunctionality (is that even a word? I don't care—it works for me) of our government and our society. Between the many politicians in various stages of investigation (whether it be fraud, accepting bribes, shady real estate deals, sex-related charges, etc), to military and political leaders failing to take responsibility for their actions, to escaped violent sex offenders [Benny Sela, sentenced in 1999 to 35 years in jail for the rape of 14 women, escaped from two police officers at the Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court], to public-sector strikes, life is just too depressing, and quite frankly, I simply don't have the energy to write about it. Our beloved country is slowly but surely falling apart on so many different levels; it is rotting from the top down, and I often find myself utterly astonished by just how badly things are going for us lately. The people in power seem to be more concerned with saving their own asses than with saving the country, and like many other people I know, I'm tired of watching their pathetic games and power plays. What is perhaps even sadder than being witness to these political antics is having to admit that as disillusioned as we are by our current leaders, there is absolutely no one out there who can replace them, no one who can set us back on the right track. We are, in a sense, stuck with what we've got, and here are no viable alternatives. Judging by how quickly our society is unraveling, I have very little hope for our future. Life goes from bad to worse on a daily basis, and when you think it can't get any worse, somehow, we manage to go even further downhill, sort of like a snowball that goes faster and faster, gathering speed and size as it hurls towards the bottom, only to crash and fall apart.

November 26. Ecuador. Leftist candidate Rafael Correa wins presidential election.

Zimbabwe has found itself at the nexus of an AIDS pandemic, a food crisis and an economic meltdown that is killing an estimated 3,500 people every week. That figure is more than those dying in Iraq, Darfur or Lebanon. In war-torn Afghanistan, where women's plight has received global attention, life expectancy is still above 40, while in Zimbabwe it is 34. ("The Independent")

December 1. World AIDS Day. HIV has killed 25 million people and infected 40 million since the first case was identified. ("CBS News")

These days, I don't really have anything good to say about what's happening in my country, which is why, I suppose, I have chosen to say almost nothing about it at all. I'm burned out, and cannot be bothered to tackle so much negativity. [...] Why would I consciously decide to take myself to a mentally bad place? [...]

Milan, Italy, December 10

Massimo Parizzi

The “Hundred Days in the Republic of Death”, during which Mayra recorded—with tenacity, rage, pity, and at times falling silent—the names of everyone who died from violence in El Salvador, are over as of today. We have reprinted only a few pages from this “diary” of hers. In one that was left out, dated September 9, she wrote, among other things, “Personally, I am reluctant to look at the dead as numbers; I prefer to hold on to a more human standpoint that concentrates on their faces, their names, their ages, their clothes, the colour of their hair.” So do we, so do I. Sometimes, however, numbers can be telling. The violent deaths listed in the two Salvadoran papers that Mayra consulted from September 1 to today, December 10, came to a total of 576. In one hundred days. The deaths of American soldiers in Iraq since the beginning of the war, that is, since March 20, 2003, have numbered almost 3000. In proportion, less than half. And on November 16, Mayra’s diary reads, “The police have reported 33 crimes over 48 hours, writes ‘La Prensa Gráfica’. [...] Referring to those that took place from Monday to Tuesday. But from Monday to Tuesday, the papers only report 13 murders. Turning victims into numbers doesn’t seem ethical to me, but I am troubled by

For many Iraqi women, life has become unbearable. As Islamic fundamentalism seeps into society and sectarian warfare escalates, more and more women live in fear of being kidnapped or raped. They receive death threats because of their religious sects and careers. They are harassed for not abiding by the strict dress code of long skirts and head scarves or for driving cars. (“The Washington Post”)

December 1. Tens of thousands of Lebanese poured into central Beirut for a Hezbollah-led protest aimed at bringing down the Western-backed government.

such a huge difference between what actually happened and what was reported by the media; in this specific case, the reported crimes amount to barely 40% of the actual crimes...”.

Why isn't El Salvador ranked near the top of the list of the world's problems, why isn't it on the front pages of every newspaper? The people dying there, in the words of Maria Ofelia (p. 59), are also “our people”, “our young people”.

In the Italian paper I read every day, “La Repubblica”, I don't think I've ever seen it cited over the last few months. In the “New York Times”, whose archives can easily be consulted online, it has been cited six times since September 1: four times just in passing (on September 10, in an article about a shop in Los Angeles that sells drinks from around the world, including “a cream soda from El Salvador” called Kolashampan; on October 27, when informing us that Nicaragua has eliminated exceptions permitting abortion in cases of rape or when the mother's life is in danger, becoming the “third country in the Western hemisphere, after El Salvador and Chile, to ban abortion without exception”; on November 19, in a letter to the editor from a reader who says that to complain about baggage delivery problems with an American airline, he had called their “representative (at a call center in El Salvador)”; finally, on December 9, in an obituary for Jeane Kirkpatrick, “the Reagan administration's first United Nations ambassador and a beacon of neoconservative thought”, the “New York Times” noted how, among other things, she had “argued for El Salvador's right-wing junta”). Only twice over the same period did El Salvador attract the “Times” attention on its own account rather than in relation to something else: on No-

December 3. Venezuela. President Hugo Chavez won re-election.

December 10. Augusto Pinochet, 91, the former Chilean dictator whose government murdered and tortured thousands during his repressive 17-year rule, died at a Santiago hospital.

vember 30, in reporting that “the Millennium Challenge Corporation, an American foreign aid agency, said it would provide \$461 million to El Salvador over five years for projects across the country’s poor northern region”; and on September 18, in an article entitled “Oh, The Places You’ll Go!”, which said, “Tiny El Salvador is pulling out all the stops to sell itself as the business-meeting hub for Central America. It is pitching itself as an alternative to popular meeting spots like Cancún, Mexico”. “Business travelers,” continues the article, “will find it helpful that the country uses the United States dollar and has one of the best highway networks in Central America. The United States State Department, however, warns that violent crime is widespread and that the homicide rate is among the highest in the world. The police have set up a special force for tourist areas, and hotel managers say that has helped curb street crime”.

The comparison between American casualties in Iraq and murder victims in El Salvador is an inappropriate one, I know. There are important reasons why the war in Iraq is near the top of the list of the world’s problems and on the front pages of every newspaper, and El Salvador isn’t. What is going on in Iraq is a war; it is fought by the world’s only superpower; it is taking place in the center of a world, the Islamic world, that is run through by tensions which have spread to involve the entire planet, and so on, and so forth. Everyone’s fate may be riding on it. In contrast, the increase or decrease of violent crime in El Salvador wouldn’t affect anything elsewhere.

But even more important is the reason why El Salvador *isn’t* near the top of the list of the world’s

problems or on the front pages of every newspaper: because what's at the top of the list and on the front pages is not the preservation, defense, and improvement of the lives of everyone on this planet. It's as simple as that, and we all know it. But are our thoughts and actions in line with this "awareness"?

Gaza, December 11

Laila El-Haddad

It began at about 7 am: continuous machine gun banter, dozens of rounds in a row, and only one street down from our house. More infighting, we assumed, or maybe disgruntled security forces. But it didn't stop. We turned on the local radio and learned that three children had been killed—sons of an intelligence official, Colonel Baha Balousha, loyal to Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah party. They were shot dead in a car outside their school in Gaza on Monday, spilling pools of blood along the street. Balousha, along with Mohammad Dahalan, is known as one of the figures involved in a then Fatah-run Palestinian Authority crackdown against and torture of Hamas members a decade ago, and he has been at odds with Hamas for some time. Hamas denied responsibility and called the crime gruesome. Fatah supporters blocked off main roads in the city with burning tyres, and others called for a general strike, shooting at stores who refused to close shop. They stormed the parliament and called for the Hamas-run government's immediate resignation, shooting wildly into the air throughout the city and making scathing insults against Hamas leaders. Tensions were running very high and threatened to spill over into the streets—everybody wanted someone to blame and

December 15. Opponents of Iran's ultra-conservative president Ahmadinejad won nationwide elections for local councils.

for Fatah, that someone was Hamas. Hamas withdrew its forces to avoid confrontation, and later at night in a show of solidarity, representatives of all the factions, including Hamas, joined forces with Fatah in a candlelight vigil against violence and criminality in front of the father's house. Everyone is mourning and searching for answers and of course for the assailants. No one can comprehend who would commit such a brutal act—which people seem to think was intentional (the targeting of the children) given the time and location. Others say the intended target was the father. But mostly, everybody wants a solution. Today's sad events have triggered widespread fear and uncertainty. The tension is palpable in the air and threatens to boil over at any time. As the florist down the street told me, "I used to say before I was afraid of what is coming. But now, I am *really* afraid. Nobody knows what's going to happen next."

Karkur, Israel, December 18

Liza Rosenberg

Over the past two days, I've been attending various sessions of a conference disturbingly entitled *The Media as a Theater of War, the Blogosphere, and the Global Battle for Civil Society*. When I arrived yesterday after work, I joined a group of bloggers sitting in the back including Lisa (<http://ontheface.blogware.com/blog>), Yael (<http://olehgirl.com>), Rinat (<http://balagan.blogspot.com>), and Allison (<http://allisonkaplansommer.blogmosis.com>). Having communicated with Lisa several times during the course of the day, I had a general idea of what to expect. Nevertheless, I was still shocked—shocked by the bleak outlook being forecasted by the speakers and the negative attitudes they projected.

December 19. President Bush acknowledged for the first time that the United States is not winning the war in Iraq and said he plans to expand the overall size of the "stressed" US armed forces to meet the challenges of a long-term global struggle against terrorists.

Journalists were described by one speaker as being craven creatures, and Israel was consistently portrayed as the innocent victim. It was all deeply unsettling, but nothing compared to the session I attended before lunch today, entitled “Paradigm Shifts: Radical Reorientations”. The whole “Israel as the innocent victim” theme continued to play a large role, but what really made me bang my head repeatedly on the table (not literally, obviously) [...] were the words of panelist Manfred Gerstenfeld, the chairman of the steering committee for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Dr. Gerstenfeld kept referring to the Palestinians as “the enemy”, and made statements such as “incitement to murder is an integral part of Palestinian society” and “fighting a society permeated with genocidal intentions”. He suggested that we must “turn the accusers into the accused”, and that we should “stop being verbal vegetarians”. It was a truly horrifying experience. [...] All I know is that it’s words and ideas like his that have contributed to the overwhelmingly negative world opinion vis-a-vis Israel, and presentations like his that damage our credibility when we are forced to hem and haw our way out of yet another debacle, while at the same time attempting to claim moral superiority. I came away from this conference feeling rather frustrated. Perhaps the sessions that I missed were more balanced (though my sources tell me that they weren’t), but I was given the impression that these speakers essentially felt that there is no hope for peace, and that we would be repeatedly locked in conflict with our ‘enemies’ until the end of time. As I mentioned earlier, a recurring theme was that of Israel as the victim. No one seemed to think that a shift in Israel’s policies regarding its neighbors was re-

quired, and instead focused on the need to somehow put a positive spin on these policies and try to convince the world that we are the party in the right. I found this concept to be utterly maddening and ignorant. It means that there is no hope for the future, and that our attempts to break down barriers and try to achieve a state of normalcy and mutual respect are futile, which is something that I simply refuse to accept. The one shining light in the conference was the session entitled “Cyberspace as a Media Revolution: Implications for Israeli Public Diplomacy”, which featured presentations given by a number of prominent local and foreign bloggers. Lisa and Charles spoke of friendships forged across borders and the importance of these special, fragile connections, and Michael Totten (<http://www.michaeltotten.com>) touched on this subject as well. Charles challenged the audience to start taking a look around the Arab blogosphere, leaving comments and starting dialogs, and part of me hopes that he made these people uncomfortable enough to start thinking outside of their narrow little boxes. [...] Initially, I wasn't sure that I was going to attend any of this conference, but I'm glad I did. Despite the direction taken by many of the panelists, I feel like I've recharged my batteries, reawakened a long dormant excitement for social causes, taking me back to my student days. I'm sure that must sound terribly cliched, and I'm also relatively certain that I'll come back down to earth with tomorrow morning's battle of the train commuters, but for now, I'm feeling good. I attended an interesting, controversial conference with interesting, controversial people, and I did it just for me. And for the free sushi they served at the blogger reception...

Gaza, December 23

Laila El-Haddad

There is a tense calm holding in Gaza. But tense or not, people couldn't care less, so long as they feel safe walking the streets now. Over the past week, street battles were waged with automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenades and even mortars between members supportive of both factions, and often, plainclothes residents with a score to settle, like the Dogmosh family, leaving most residents holed inside their homes or fleeing for safety. Even making it to the corner convenience store became a challenge. Universities cancelled their classes and most stores closed shop. Many parents even stopped sending their children to school. But almost overnight, all this changed, as members of the Hamas Executive Force and Abbas's countless security forces that were previously deployed throughout the city were withdrawn. The question most people on the outside keep asking is: who is fighting whom and why? It's a question whose answer even locals are unsure of. Often the "cards" as it were, are mixed, and those actually doing the fighting are embedded in gang/mafia/clan warfare, with members operating under factional cover, as with the most recent spate of violence. [...] None of this surprises me. We are a failed state, before we can even become a state. Can anything else be expected given the severe conditions under which the society has been placed? [...]

December 20. With the legal fight to be allowed to end his own life undecided, Piergiorgio Welby died after a doctor sedated him and removed the respirator that was keeping him alive. Catholic officials denied rites.

Karkur, Israel, December 24

Liza Rosenberg

Growing up Jewish in the US, come holiday season, it is hard to miss all of the pre-Christmas fes-

tivities. As a child, I sat on Santa's lap quite a few times. I've watched the Christmas specials (including the Christmas episodes of all my favorite shows) attended Christmas parties, helped friends decorate their Christmas trees, and even attended Christmas Midnight Mass once with NRG, just to see what it was like (very nice!). [...] And of course, who could escape the veritable plethora of Christmas songs, given that they were played anywhere and everywhere. Like any other American kid, I knew the words to *Rudolph*, *Jingle Bells* ("Jingle Bells, Batman smells, Robin laid an egg..."), and *Mama Got Run Over by a Reindeer*. I'm not sure why, but for some reason, now that I live in a country where Christmas isn't a national holiday (and this is, of course, despite the fact that Israel is where it all started), I feel rather nostalgic for all that pre-holiday excitement. Not so much the piped-in *muzak* at the malls, but more the Christmassy feeling in the air, the all-encompassing Christmas spirit. It happens every year. To remind myself that other parts of the world are currently in the throes of the holiday season, I keep a selection of Christmas songs on my computer, songs ranging from the Bing Crosby and David Bowie duet of *Little Drummer Boy—Peace on Earth*, to *Snoopy's Christmas* by the Royal Guardsmen, to The Pogues singing *Fairytale of New York*, and many more. My non-Jewish friends are very impressed, while a number of my Israeli friends think it's actually a bit strange (but I am used to that...). When it come to it, though, I'm still an '80s girl at heart. [...]

I just want to take a moment to wish a Merry Christmas to all of my readers who celebrate, and to those of you who don't but still live in countries

December 24. Ethiopian troops attacked Somalia's Islamic Courts movement.

where it's just another day off from work (unlike Israel, where it's just another regular work day), have a great day [...]

Moscow, December 25

Veronica Khokhlova

The first thing I heard as we stepped out of the train in Moscow was an anti-terrorist warning: a recording of a rather melodious woman's voice, saying that as a precaution against terrorism, we should not accept rides from strangers. They've had this recording for a long time, but after a year in Kyiv, it did sound crazy. [...]

The cab driver said Kyiv was beautiful, we said there were too many cars there now, and then he asked this: "What do *khokhly* call those we call 'the new Russians'?" (For those who don't know, *khokhly* is a somewhat derogatory term for Ukrainians—I choke on it but also believe it is often used not to offend, but to avoid sounding too politically correct; "the new Russians"—*noviye russkiye*—are the nouveaux riches.) We laughed and Mishah at first said that there was no special term, but then clarified: "We, too, call them *noviye russkiye*." As we were unloading, the cab driver asked how life was in Kyiv. "It's okay," we replied. "Just like anywhere else." "Good," he said. "Because from what they're telling us on TV, you'd think it's some total nightmare over there." [...]

December 26. Nigeria.
A gasoline pipeline ruptured by thieves exploded in a poor neighborhood, killing at least 260 people.

Moscow, December 28

Veronica Khokhlova

Attempted to go buy some food at the market by Universitet subway station, but got impatient waiting for the trolley, crossed the street and went the

December 28. Somalia.
Ethiopian-backed troops moved into Mogadishu.

other way, to the center. I'm so happy we've moved. I used to love Moscow's center, and I still do, but to live there with Marta would've been a nightmare. Kyiv, no matter how much it's changed for the worse in the past year, still feels like a cosy village compared to Moscow's center. But walking there on my own, without the stroller, I felt that the city was still its usual self: crazy, dirty, noisy—and energizing in a way that Kyiv is not. It feels good to be back, though I know this nice feeling won't last long. Also, there's a new dimension to the fear of getting stuck in a traffic jam now: the image of Marta, hungry and furious back home, and poor Mishah not knowing what to do with her. Like most of them, this fear is irrational—because Marta and Mishah are getting along wonderfully, and there isn't much to worry about here.

Trolley drivers, both males and females, are dressed as Santa Clauses now. One was smoking a cigarette as he drove.

At Ostozhenka, some inner devil pushed me inside an organic food store. I had no idea it was a fancy-schmancy, expensive place, but once I was there, I couldn't resist buying something: a box of *Duchy Originals Orange Biscuits* and a tiny glass can of Masala Chai spices. Cost me slightly more than \$20 (around 600 rubles)—outrageous. [...]

Baghdad, December 29

R.

You know your country is in trouble when:
The UN has to open a special branch just to keep track of the chaos and bloodshed, UNAMI.
Abovementioned branch cannot be run from your country.

December 30. Saddam Hussein was executed.

The politicians who worked to put your country in this sorry state can no longer be found inside of, or anywhere near, its borders.

The only thing the US and Iran can agree about is the deteriorating state of your nation.

An eight-year war and thirteen-year blockade are looking like the country's "Golden Years".

Your country is purportedly "selling" two million barrels of oil a day, but you are standing in line for four hours for black market gasoline for the generator.

For every five hours of no electricity, you get one hour of public electricity and then the government announces it's going to cut back on providing that hour.

Politicians who supported the war spend TV time debating whether it is "sectarian bloodshed" or "civil war".

People consider themselves lucky if they can actually identify the corpse of the relative that's been missing for two weeks.

A day in the life of the average Iraqi has been reduced to identifying corpses, avoiding car bombs and attempting to keep track of which family members have been detained, which ones have been exiled and which ones have been abducted. 2006 has been, decidedly, the worst year yet. [...] What has me most puzzled right now is: why add fuel to the fire? Sunnis and moderate Shia are being chased out of the larger cities in the south and the capital. Baghdad is being torn apart with Shia leaving Sunni areas and Sunnis leaving Shia areas—some under threat and some in fear of attacks. People are being openly shot at checkpoints or in drive-by killings... Many colleges have stopped classes. Thousands of Iraqis no longer

December 30. Robert Fisk revisits the circumstances that resulted in Saddam Hussein's rise to power, and asks, "Who encouraged Saddam to invade Iran in 1980, which was the greatest war crime he has committed for it led to the deaths of a million and a half souls? And who sold him the components for the chemical weapons with which he drenched Iran and the Kurds? We did. No wonder the Americans, who controlled Saddam's weird trial, forbade any mention of this, his most obscene atrocity, in the charges against him." ("The Independent")

December 30. A powerful car bomb exploded in a parking lot at Madrid's international airport. Spain's government blamed the Basque group ETA and suspended plans for peace talks with the separatists.

send their children to school—it's just not safe. Why make things worse by insisting on Saddam's execution now? Who gains if they hang Saddam? Iran, naturally, but who else? There is a real fear that this execution will be the final blow that will shatter Iraq. Some Sunni and Shia tribes have threatened to arm their members against the Americans if Saddam is executed. Iraqis in general are watching closely to see what happens next, and quietly preparing for the worst. This is because now, Saddam no longer represents himself or his regime. Through the constant insistence of American war propaganda, Saddam is now representative of all Sunni Arabs (never mind most of his government were Shia). The Americans, through their speeches and news articles and Iraqi Puppets, have made it very clear that they consider him to personify Sunni Arab resistance to the occupation. Basically, with this execution, what the Americans are saying is "Look—Sunni Arabs—this is your man, we all know this. We're hanging him—he symbolizes you."

And make no mistake about it, this trial and verdict and execution are 100% American. Some of the actors were Iraqi enough, but the production, direction and montage was pure Hollywood (though low-budget, if you ask me). [...] A few nights ago, some American news program interviewed Maliki's bureau chief, Basim Al-Hassani who was speaking in accented American English about the upcoming execution like it was a carnival he'd be attending. He sat, looking sleazy and not a little bit ridiculous, his dialogue interspersed with "gonna", "gotta" and "wanna"... Which happens, I suppose, when the only people you mix with are American soldiers. [...]

Here we come to the end of 2006 and I am sad. Not simply sad for the state of the country, but for the state of our humanity, as Iraqis. We've all lost some of the compassion and civility that I felt made us special four years ago. I take myself as an example. Nearly four years ago, I cringed every time I heard about the death of an American soldier. They were occupiers, but they were humans also and the knowledge that they were being killed in my country gave me sleepless nights. Never mind they crossed oceans to attack the country, I actually felt for them.

Had I not chronicled those feelings of agitation in this very blog, I wouldn't believe them now. Today, they simply represent numbers. Three thousand Americans dead over nearly four years? Really? That's the number of dead Iraqis in less than a month. The Americans had families? Too bad. So do we. So do the corpses in the streets and the ones waiting for identification in the morgue. Is the American soldier that died today in Anbar more important than a cousin I have who was shot last month on the night of his engagement to a woman he's wanted to marry for the last six years? I don't think so. Just because Americans die in smaller numbers, it doesn't make them more significant, does it?

Milan, Italy, December 31

Giorgio Morale

Happy 2007, my friends. And for the occasion, here is a balance sheet in verse by Wislawa Szymborska. It applies just as well to the year that is coming to an end.

From a poem

by Wislawa Szymborska

Here

notes from the present

[...]
Too many things have happened
that weren't supposed to happen,
and what was supposed to come about
has not.

Happiness and spring, among other things,
were supposed to be getting closer.

Fear was expected to leave the mountains and the valleys.
Truth was supposed to hit home
before a lie.

A couple of problems weren't going
to come up anymore:
hunger, for example,
and war, and so forth.

There was going to be respect
for helpless people's helplessness,
trust, that kind of stuff.

Anyone who planned to enjoy the world
is now faced with a hopeless task.

Stupidity isn't funny.
Wisdom isn't gay.

Hope

From "The Century's Decline", in *View with a Grain of Sand*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995, pp. 147-148; translated by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh.

isn't that young girl anymore
et cetera, alas.

God was finally going to believe
in a man both good and strong,
but good and strong
are still two different men.

“How should we live?” someone asked me in a letter.
I had meant to ask him
the same question.

Again, and as ever,
as may be seen above,
the most pressing questions
are naïve ones.

Contributors and translators

Here

notes from the present

Lucianna Argentino was born in 1962 in Rome, where she lives. She has published several poetry collections. Her text was translated by Johanna Bishop.

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Mayra Barraza, born in 1966 in San Salvador, where she lives, has been working in the visual arts for 14 years with her drawings, paintings, installations and interventions. Besides many other reviews, she collaborates permanently with Salvador's art and literature e-zine "El ojo de Adrián" (<http://www.elojodeadrian.blogspot.com>). Her diary pages were taken from the blog "100 días en la República de la Muerte" (<http://republicadelamuerte.blogspot.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. They were translated by Brigitte Ciramella (1, 4, 11, 15, 18, 21 September, and 13 October), and Johanna Bishop (14 September, 13 October, and 2 November).

pp. 5, 8, 21, 24, 27,
28, 38, 39, 46

Johanna Bishop (icchiojo@tiscali.it) was born in Chicago in 1974, and lived in Pennsylvania and New York before moving to Tuscany in 1998. She translates from Italian into English. In this issue she has translated the texts by Mayra Barraza (14 September, 13 October, and 2 November), Jihane

Bouziane (3 October, 20 November), Bruno De Maria (7-21 May 1999), Alexia Miranda, Michele Zaffarano, Germana Pisa (17 October), Marina Massenz, Maria Ofelia Zuniga, Lucianna Argentino, Massimo Parizzi (10 December), Giorgio Morale, and *When Your Child is in Pieces*, by Claudia Hernández.

Jihane Bouziane was born in 1982 in Tangier and lives in Casablanca. She works for a market research company. Her diary pages come from the blog *Jihane* (<http://jihaneducaire.over-blog.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. They were translated by Brigitte Ciaramella (8 September, and Johanna Bishop (3 October, 20 November).

pp. 14, 32, 64

Sebastiano Buonamico lives in Milan, Italy. A graphic designer and a photographer, his photographs have been shown in several exhibitions. He is the author of the covers of this magazine.

cover

Brigitte Ciaramella (brigitte.ciaramella@fastweb.net) was born in 1966 and was brought up bilingual Italian/English. She is a freelance translator with a special interest in literary works. She has translated the texts by Mayra Barraza (1, 4, 11, 15, 18, 21 September, and 13 October), Bruno De Maria (27 March 1999, 17 February 2002, undated, and *For a return to "idiocy"*), Germana Pisa (6 September), Jihane Bouziane (8 September), Miguel Huezco Mixco, Massimo Parizzi (19 October), Chiara Maffioletti, and *Melissa: Games 1-5* by Claudia Hernández.

Bruno De Maria, born in 1933 in Turin, died in 2006 in Milan, where he lived for several years.

A psychoanalyst, he collaborated with several reviews, and with this one from its first issue. He also published the novel *Un'aria d'ombre*, Corpo 10, Milano 1990. His texts were translated by Brigitte Ciaramella (27 March 1999, 17 February 2002, undated, and *For a return to "idiocy"*), and Johanna Bishop (7-21 May 1999).

pp. 12, 29, 43, 47, 64.

Laila El-Haddad, born in 1978, is a journalist and divides her time between Gaza and the United States, where her husband Yassine, a Palestinian refugee denied his right of return to Palestine, resides. They have a son, Yousuf. Her diary pages come from the blog *Raising Yousuf: a diary of a mother under occupation* (<http://a-mother-from-gaza.blogspot.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them.

pp. 34, 53, 80, 84

Claudia Hernández was born in 1975 in San Salvador, where she lives and teaches creative writing. She has published three collections of short stories. *When Your Child is in Pieces* was translated by Johanna Bishop, *Melissa: Games 1-5* by Brigitte Ciaramella.

pp. 25, 30

Miguel Huezo Mixco was born in 1954 in El Salvador. He's a poet and essayist, and participated in the Salvadoran civil war (1981-1992). His text was translated by Brigitte Ciaramella, and comes from Mayra Barraza's blog "100 días en la República de la Muerte" (<http://republicadelamuerte.blogspot.com>). We thank him for allowing us to publish it.

p. 20

Veronica Khokhlova was born in 1974 in Kyiv, and moved from there to Moscow in December.

Her diary pages come from *Neeka's backlog* (<http://vkhokhl.blogspot.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them.

pp. 29, 37, 86

Chiara Maffioletti was born in 1969 in Milan, Italy, where she lives. A Philosophy graduate, she has been a social co-operative partner and worker dealing with prisons and social exclusion since 1999. Her text was translated by Brigitte Ciaramella.

p. 66

Marina Massenz was born in 1955 in Milan, Italy, where she lives. She's a psychomotor therapist and teaches at the University of Milan. She has published a poetry collection. Her poem was translated by Johanna Bishop.

p. 45

Alexia Miranda, born in 1975 in San Salvador, where she still lives, is a poet and visual artist whose work includes installations, videos, performances, and paintings. She has worked with a project to combat juvenile delinquency in rural areas of El Salvador, and holds art workshops for children and adults. Her letter to Mayra Barraza was translated by Johanna Bishop, and comes from the blog "100 días en la República de la Muerte" (<http://republicadelamuerte.blogspot.com>; 9 September). We thank her for allowing us to reprint it.

p. 15

Giorgio Morale was born in Avola (near Syracuse, Sicily) in 1954 and since 1972 has lived in Milan, where he has worked in the fields of journalism, theatre, and cultural promotion. Since 1989 he has been teaching high school literature. He is the author of a novel, *Paulu Piulu*. His diary page was translated by Johanna Bishop.

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Massimo Parizzi was born in 1950 in Milan, Italy, where he lives. A translator, he is the founder and editor of this magazine. His texts were translated by Brigitte Ciaramella (19 October) and Johanna Bishop (10 December).

pp. 42, 77

Germana Pisa was born in 1941 in Milan, Italy, where she lives. She is actively involved in the peace and environmentalist movements. Her texts were translated by Brigitte Ciaramella (6 September) and Johanna Bishop (17 October).

pp. 10, 40

R. “I am 27 years old, I’m a woman who lives in Baghdad. I have a degree in computer sciences but I currently work from the house because it is not very safe in other places. Before the war, I worked for a private computer company.” Her diary pages come from the blog *Baghdad burning* (riverbend blog.blogspot.com). We thank her for allowing us to publish them.

pp. 41, 52, 87

Liza Rosenberg, 38-years-old, was raised in Schenectady, NY, and has been living in Israel for 15 years. She lives in Karkur with her husband and their son, and works as a technical writer in a hi-tech firm. Her email address is mashehu_mashehu@yahoo.com. Her diary pages come from the blog *something something* (something something.blogspot.com). We thank her for allowing us to publish them.

pp. 7, 22, 35, 75, 81, 84

Michele Zaffarano was born in Milan in 1970. He is the editor of <http://gamm.blogspot.com>. He lives, translates, and writes in Rome. The texts published here are from the unpublished collection

Bianca come neve (“White as Snow”). They are translated by Johanna Bishop.

pp. 17, 48

Maria Ofelia Zuniga Platero was born in 1973 in San Salvador, where she still lives. She recently had the experience of working as a volunteer on social programs aimed at helping children in poor Peruvian and Bolivian communities. Now back in El Salvador, while waiting for other opportunities in social service, she manages a shop. Her “Cry Against Indifference” comes from Mayra Baraza’s blog “100 días en la República de la Muerte” (<http://republicadelamuerte.blogspot.com>; 8 November). We thank her for allowing us to publish it. It was translated by Johanna Bishop.

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Subscription

Here

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The cost of a **subscription** to 3 issues, either the Italian or English edition, is 25 Euros in Italy, 30 in Europe and the Mediterranean area, 35 in the rest of the world. However, since these prices are too high for many countries, you may ask for a **reduced-price subscription**. You can subscribe by **credit card** providing us via fax or phone (0039-02-57406574), or email (massimoparizzi@alice.it), with its number, expiry date, and security code (or CVV2: the three-digit number printed in the signature space on the *back* of the card; or, in the case of American Express, the four-digit number printed, not embossed, on the front of the card); or you can send the money through a **postal money order** to “Qui-appunti dal presente”, via Bastia 11, 20139 Milano, Italy; or pay by **bank transfer** on the following bank account registered in the name of “Qui-appunti dal presente”: national bank code (BBAN) V 05584 01624 000000025101; international bank code (IBAN) IT 03 V 05584 01624 000000025101. Please, remember to indicate your name, address, the object of payment and which edition you wish to receive.

Last issues

Number 13, “ordinary life”, February 2006 - 3-5 September: diary pages from the United States (Marc Ellis), France (Maddalena Chataignier), and Italy (Mariela De Marchi) - **The Crack-Up. Francis Scott Fitzgerald and the ‘Jazz Age’**, by Bruno De Maria - **11 September-3 October:** from Iraq (R.), the United States (M. Ellis, Mazin Qumsiyeh), and Italy (M. De Marchi, Marina Massenz, Gianni Meazza) - **The Cucumber and the Cactus. A Palestinian Christian story**, by M. Qumsiyeh - **7 October-11 November:** from the United States (M. Ellis), Italy (Maria Granati, Daniela Di Falco, Germana Pisa, Liliana Ugolini, Massimo Parizzi), and France (Andrea Inglese) - **I was Eighteen Years Old. I got my Call-up Notice and at the Beginning of September 1943...**, by Dionigi Serra, alias Nisio - **11-14 November:** from Italy (M. De Marchi and Paola Turroni), and France (A. Inglese) - **The Davy Crockett Cap**, by M. Massenz - **14 November-30 December:** from the United States (M. Ellis), Italy (Lucianna Argentino and G. Pisa), and Iraq (R.)

Number 14, “happy birthday, Yousof”, June 2005 - 2 January-14 February: diary pages from Gaza (Laila El-Haddad), and Iraq (R.) - **The Praise of Idiocy**, by Bruno De Maria - **23-27 February:** from Iraq (R.) - **One Night (or a Thousand)**, by Roberto Giannoni - **27 February-22 April:** from Gaza (Laila El-Haddad), Israel (Marc Ellis), and Iraq (R.) - **From an Old Man**, by Giorgio De Maria - **22 April:** from Gaza (Laila El-Haddad)

Number 15, “away from home”, October 2006 - 2-21 May: diary pages from Ukraine (Veronica Khokhlova), Israel (Liza Rosenberg), the United States (Marc Ellis), and Italy (Germana Pisa) - **From Slovakia. No Tramps**, by Giorgio Mascitelli - **31 May:** from Iraq (R.) - **Football and the ‘dream of something’**, by Franco Toscani - **World (Cup)**, by Giusi Busceti - **4-10 June:** from the United States (Marc Ellis), Italy (Lucianna Argentino), Ukraine (Veronica Khokhlova), and Morocco (Jihane Bouziane) - **From Vietnam. Speechless glances for glimpsed words**, by Antonio Maconi - **14-19 June:** from Ukraine (Veronica Khokhlova), and the United States (Marc Ellis) - **From Thailand. A Couple of Days in Mer Awng**, by Ken Klein - **22 June-13 August:** from Ukraine (Veronica Khokhlova), Israel (Liza Rosenberg), Morocco (Jihane Bouziane), the United States (Laila El-Haddad and Marc Ellis), and Iraq (R.)

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