

America's Movement

by Javier O'Neil-Ortiz

for Why-War.com

September 4 - Departure

» **Boston, MA**, September 2, 2002

Departing Boston. The center of South Station is defined by an American flag in, strangely, a large white cage, of which the latter can, theoretically, either loan an object the secret power of a relic, or imbue it with an hostile air. The enlightened brother of the fence, the cage, can either exclude entrance to within, or effortlessly entrap, such as the prison - or of course the cage can fulfill both at once. Certainly in at least one sense, all but your eyes are excluded from the flag - you can't touch it, and if it should ever fall you have to skillfully grab the staff, in order to not have to pray it away before bed - but on this site, even if you should dare to touch it, you cannot, thus you might think of its possibility. A wall of suits and briefcases form an eerie human cage about the formal one - two of them at any moment trail their fingers for perhaps a moment on the cage, a casual gesture not one of them will remember. Their eyes are all intent on the posters fastened to one side of the cage, a graphic depiction of Irish recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor. I am reminded of Foucault describing the ubiquity of the modern state's power structures in the words "All and Each", simultaneously totalizing and individualizing. Which brings to mind Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill's comment that all politics are local. Each and every site of the individualization of subjects must be local to its occurrence, if it is a site, an event, if it has physical existence. Subcultures, especially ethnic cultures, must meet with political structures at the site of a subject's presence; it is there that politics can alter, compatibilize, or even eliminate qualities of an identity. Ethnic transnational structures, in their threat to the state's priority in the individual, must be dealt with on a plethora of levels. The Irish built our railroads and met the Japanese halfway in our glorious melting pot, where indeed the vast diversity of ethnic cultures are deemed "subcultures", presupposing the state as anterior to structures which actually precede the state, temporally, historically, with narratives and belief systems suggestive of a legitimacy the state cannot possibly possess - and here I speak specifically of the United States. Our "melting pot" is just that - the dissolution of all transnational structures into a homogeneous neutrality, retaining only the referent of the ethnic structures dissolved. The state, through the sheek form of a poster, defines the Irish in terms of their heroic servitude to the state which banishes that very culture's identity from

the public domain. And, of course, the caged flag and the Irish token are placed strategically on the frontier of South Boston, where the Irish dominate; politics are local indeed, but they are fashioned elsewhere.

A nation's symbol in a cage in the center of a major transportation nexus in a city of that country whose symbol is in a cage before me in the center of a major... The location of the map on the map itself. An object of reverence is a constant an recurring event for the perceivers; it is singular and material, not surprising but worthy of attention, not momentous but sacred. As a memory it will travel from its own site in the minds of its subjects as though it was an undetectable molecule of water moving through the quaint veins of a leaf, from the bough which, as a mere infinitesimal part of the whole, sustains the trunk. All the individualized subjects form, through a uniform message to the many, a totalization. Even in my own mind, the object, the state, has been confirmed, and it is irreversible.

September 5-6 - Clark University

» **Worcester, MA**, September 6, 2002

The train west from the more docile liberalism of Boston first passes through a series of towns - Wellesley, Natick, Framingham, Southborough, Westborough, Grafton - a region serving not so much as a country hiatus but as a reluctant harmony of the rural and industrial orbits displaced from the city they once were so heavily dependent upon. The traintracks west from the coast provide somewhat of a picture show of American flags of varied weathering, all of which, since last September, have literally begun falling apart. Worcester - an industrial satellite city an hour west of Boston - is thus somewhat the extinguished match that still smokes, which, in the dry grass, has a secret promise; Clark University is that promise. Pinched between the anachronistic Holy Cross College and an overwhelmingly working class city - two legions of default patriotism - Clark is the institution of dissent. The activists are active, and the faculty keep pace; working with David Schmidt (dschmidt@clarku.edu) from Clark's Amnesty International chapter, responses to our search for panelists for the September 10 faculty panel were in minutes. So far: Dr. Robert J.S. Ross, Professor of Sociology and Director of International Studies Stream, Eric Gordy, Assistant Professor of Sociology, and Richard Peet, Professor of Geography. And on September 10, Dianne Rochelau (DRocheleau@clarku.edu), Professor of Geography, with Worcester Peace Works, will be holding an anti-war vigil from 4 -6, and on the 11th a session of reflection and remembrance ("to remember ALL the

victims" she wrote me) from 6-8 at the YWCA, then a walk to city hall for a candle-light vigil from 8:15 - 10 with music, poetry, speech, silence. We are working on merging our events. In short, the campus is active - the students especially.

An Another World is Possible sticker is on the fridge; the guy next to me was arrested in China for working with a Fulan Gong revolutionary group. Last year a press conference awaited his return at the airport; the Chinese government had starved him at first, but then he refused to eat, in protest. And everyone I speak to promises attendance at the panel; some admit they have secret narratives they can't wait to inflict on an audience, provoke a response. The war isn't talked about enough in the public domain, even on the most liberal of campuses.

September 7 - Clark University faculty panel, Roger Williams University next

» **Worcester, MA**, September 7, 2002

Spent the day negotiating incompatible documents that won't carry; a slightly awkward version of the original flyer will make do. Spent the day posting them, and Schmidt deployed the word of the panel through as many Amnesty, Government Studies, and International Studies email lists as are accessible. More success than I anticipated, thus it will carry to tomorrow. Still, I do not feel comfortable with flyers and emails as the foundation of advertising an event, so on Monday and Tuesday myself and David Schmidt from Amnesty will hand them out at the high traffic areas at the high traffic hours, and in the evening I meet with Worcester Peace Works. Naturally, human interaction is most effective; the relatively few people I am able to speak with I coerce into attending the Tuesday panel; hand-outs are, by volume, most direct.

Lunch I met with two activists from elsewhere who, by some sort of surprise, met with myself and Schmidt, by his doing. One from Boston College whose level of activity was not clear, and the other disgruntled with the apparent apathy of his school - the Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island. He described the students there as "opposed to thought", and claimed that he could count the activists on one hand, and the actually active activists on none. It was brought up by someone other than myself that I was on some sort of an activist journey, that I was always looking for a receptive partner to work with, anywhere. It is important that I don't bring it up myself, especially when I know that it will be brought up eventually. Schmidt is a friend of a friend and even there I am wary of stepping on his

toes, but regarding recruiting for "Why War?" I have pointed out that Amnesty International won't even let him use their name for our event, that it does not conform with its stringent list of "acceptable" events. The flyers we posted bear credit to "Why War?" and, instead of Amnesty, the International Studies Stream (ISS), a professor-led group of International Studies students with - and the director of the ISS, Robert Ross, is a panelist. Strange, and telling, that the faculty has more flexibility than the main student activist group on campus.

So the activist from Roger Williams University, enlightened to my objectives, prodded me for interest. At first, after my two minute bit, he balked at my confidence in sparking up real dissent and debate on so apathetic and mindless a campus as his. These are the schools that need it most, I said, and are perhaps most starved for political intervention, even on the most minute scale as a faculty panel. Such a small and relatively academic event can prove itself an awakening where previously there was nothing, and from what it sounds like, the Roger Williams University project can be a wonderful test of how effective an action can be when inserted from the outside into a zone of minimal political activity. It could, of course, flop, but there is literally nothing to lose. He agreed and then admitted suddenly his big thing planned, saying that he is starting a Student-Professor Action Committee (SPAC) and that this can be the bang debut.

September 8 - Clark University and the Topology of Flyering

» **Worcester, MA**, September 8, 2002

Contact with a fourth potential panelist - Dr. Dianne Rochelau, Professor of Geography - who has vanished to Cambridge forming a fellowship at Harvard. She is with the Worcester Peace Works, a group of high activity in the Worcester area, and about which the faculty panel is scheduled around. Secondly, the newborn Student-Professor Action Committee at Roger Williams College in Bristol, RI is underway working on a joint faculty panel we are to hold on the projected date of September 18th. I caught several students peering inquisitively at a flyer; one wrote something down. All is well; spent the evening posting flyers thoroughly throughout the dorms - on the bathroom walls, on the callbox doors, flat on a stair, cut in half for the elevator door, on the outside facing in on the treadmills in the gym. Stickers, flyering, posting - these are the soapboxes to preach from in our postmodern world of signs, a world physically compact, that builds up rather than out, and where, most importantly, the eye is plagued as it is with a relentless deluge of signs, emblems, logos, ads, and billboards. The signful activist has no choice but to compete and transcend the

competition. Walking a given area, exploring the architecture and visual landscape - its typical concentrations of the eye, and the frontiers of one's daily sights - the very act of dissecting this field is a practice for only the activist. It is an historically new and fresh practice to partake in and combat a world inflated (and yet reduced) by signs, and where to place a sticker or a flyer requires an artful and insightful selection of an eight and a half inch by eleven inch rectangle of reality - an inversed photography, where, instead of selecting and manipulating a portion of reality and reproducing it separate from its physical location, the ensigner must select a portion of reality and impose a sliver of appealing signs, discourse, and images as a sort of constant event for the perceiver. The object as a constant event.

Where to place the pre-made sign is the priority of the ensigner; and the message itself is the required other. The two together produce effect; any one of them alone is precisely not unlike winking in the dark. The ensigner, the stickerer, the flyerer does not want to have a secret. And it is difficult to know when one's efforts are successful because one cannot monitor each sign, or even know as soon as you turn the corner if someone has ripped it down or not. For instance, I put a flyer on the inside side of the sliding elevator door in the library. The ingenuity of its location is that when one enters the elevator for the eventless and forgetful ride, one is apt to stare at the door - when the door closes, the flyer slides out before the passenger, and, like the bathroom stall, this is a rare period of potential reflection for the perceiver, wholly unlike passing by a posted sign. This location is the ideological confrontation the ensigner seeks for when posting; anyone who enters the elevator is necessarily a perceiver of the message, and must therefor contemplate its meaning. Back to my point: so I posted the flyer and stole off to the bathroom and upon returning, and waiting for the elevator (which is naturally busy), once inside I realize that in the space of several minutes already an angry anti-freespeech citizen patriot has torn down the sign - and was apparently angry in the heated moment of confronting one's enemies. It lay on the floor in large oblong tears, the tape disfigured, twisted round upon itself frustratingly. This casualty cannot be salvaged, though some can. This particular event is an example of a location that is "too good", for not only do the curious confront their possibilities, but so do the brutes of certitude. This event though did produce a thought - I'll dogear a corner of each flyer and print within a distinguished circle pointing to the fold (this seemingly minor note must be made central to its meaning) "Rip off poster HERE for quickest violation of the First Amendment" or something to that effect, in less words.

So the ensigner, the stickerer, the flyerer is reduced to seeking locations not solely based on high traffic, or even on guaranteed attention - there are other elements, more minute and specific. The foot of a water fountain, where, inevitably, the drinker must turn from and for once stare at their feet as two, three drops fall from their lips. Watch them - you will see that their daily acrobatics can be transformed into mandated discourse, communication with their thoughts. The hood of a trashcan, on the glass of a scanner; one must think minutely, literally. Billboards and large neon signs are now as common and sustained as the streets they follow; stickers and flyers deal with the immediate and local - bearing fonts and print you can read three yards back, placed on objects you can touch, and the objects themselves of the most mundane order, yet suddenly transformed into dynamic events of political dimension, intertextual, allusive, and bridging normal human traffic to the larger structures that daily, without rest, shape the topology of the modern mind.

September 9 - Sick

» Worcester, MA, September 12, 2002

Woke up sick. Embarrassed at the gender imbalance of the panel. Have to call Dianne Rochelau tonight - last hope it seems for a female panelist. None of the eight female professors I emailed is able to participate; four did not respond. I had gone so far as to email Holy Cross religion professors, who of course did not respond. Dianne will tell me later, in her living room, that it is simply because "we are more busy". I take lunch late, sick still and unconvinced by nourishment. It is then that a student known as Feinstein, from the Worcester Global Action Network, who I've heard much of as an exceptionally active activist, approaches me and says he is "concerned over the gender balance" of the panel I've arranged. I agree and say I've been on it; frankly, I'm briefly insulted...the assumption, and said cold. I wonder if I'm stepping on his toes - and feel sicker, displaced. He tells me to contact a professor by the name of Dianne Rochelau. It is understandable - his concern. I shouldn't be upset; he is looking out for me, well, for the event. I detect that certain sentiment that is passed around like a hat, not so much like the flu, in that only one can have it any moment.

David Schmidt tells me later that Tom Bentley from Roger Williams College called. I am to be done there on the 18th for an alleged faculty panel. That is not why Tom called; I had quoted him in my September 7 journal entry saying things not kind to his fellow activists. In proposing my idea for an event to the Roger Williams community, one

of these very activists had apparently stumbled upon that very journal entry on the website. He is pissed, Tom said - and Tom himself was not happy with quoting him without telling him. Ironically, Tom's rather broad insult upset only one individual, wonderfully substantiating the comment. I talk to him later and he does not care. I tell him in an email that he said it, so why cannot I quote it? He is indifferent, and still stands by his position. I am starting to like Tom. I can tell he takes heat and does not care for his critics - a subject that turns out to be quite lengthy later.

I speak with Dianne Rochelau; she cannot do the panel. She is bogged down with her own activities with Worcester Peace Works - candle vigils, small marches, grassroots symbolism. The activism I am not fond of, but have come to accept as an important function of the movement, an emotional loci that accentuates more direct actions, and harmoniously coexists beside it. I walk a mile to her house, playing poorly my mini four-note harmonica; I must seem ridiculous to the old man tucked on the stairs I pass. I try to play when no one is around. Even my parents have told me my lips are exceptionally "full", thus the difficulty the harmonica presents is understandable.

She gives me a bundle of material, for the website, hundreds of sheets to flyer for her, for tomorrow - and it is 9 p.m. Alright; after all, I had promised, sick or not. I tell her of the problems with the balance of the panel; she agrees and suggests I go by Professor Cynthia Enloe's class tomorrow morning. She claims she is "the closest thing to a Chomsky on campus". She and her husband, a professor as well, chat with me, tell me of Kenya in the 80's, are intrigued with my journey of sorts, insist I keep in touch, wave goodbye from the foyer timed to my steps down the porch which can only be heard, I suspect - their windows mirrors, infested with the night beyond them. Only I can see them.

I walk back playing the harmonica, random notes and melodies I hear far better in my own head than the listener might. The more I play I wheeze and have to keep stopping to blow my nose, so I just give up really and walk back and go to sleep and now when I write this it is generally a blur.

September 10 - The Panel

» **Worcester, MA**, September 12, 2002

I wake up at 9 to make a phone call; absurd to wake up to make a phone call, instead of having to be somewhere. She - a driver to the Worcester Peace Works vigil - is not there, so I am therefore unable to

attend at four, which I secretly celebrate, given my sickness which is perfectly equivalent to yesterday - no worsening or improvement. Sleep until 10. I catch the end of C.E.'s class, and follow her outside asking her to join the panel on such short notice; it is impossible she says, in such short notice - no preparation, plans already, which is perfectly understandable and what I had anticipated.

Nothing to worry about now, so I go meet R.P., a panelist, at his office. I say I hope this panel is not a self-gratifying event for liberals, there being no clear warmonger, or Republican, or even war-supporting Democrat, on board; he assures me there will be debate. He asks me what my "style" is of moderating. I say a good moderator doesn't have to moderate much; he is satisfied and orders me more or less to not cut him off on his opening position, and cites longwindedly a past panel where the moderator cut off his soliloquy in which the entire audience was enraptured.

D.S. has most of the flyers D.R. gave me last night; he is to place them on the tables for dinner, for the September 11th events. We hang a few up here and there - but I keep the rest to hand out at the panel as students enter; I figure such a pool is the most likely to actually attend the memorial events the following day. At four I catch E.G., a panelist, at the end of his class. He is a Swarthmore alumn, presenting a moot possibility of conversation. He muses on the 11:10 train from Center City to Swarthmore, and its endless limitations on true urban mirth. Still no later train, huh? No, though maybe on the weekends, I can't remember, I say. An awkward silence prevails until I leave. See you at seven, a little before.

At 6:50 the room starts to fill, and by 7:05 there are at least 150 persons in a 120-person room. In the aisles, on the heater along the wall, in the doorway and out in the hall. Once it begins I see some come to the door, look in, and turn back. Each professor gives a ten minute position, starting with R.R., to E.G., to R.P. E.G. opens on a critique of the movement as a political reflex, rather than a political movement. That the movement, in its moral highground and moral superiority, is condescending to the majority.

I start discussion skipping over Iraq, for each panelist had already treated it well enough in their openers - and I begin with media, asking how they view mass media since September 11th, whether or not it differs from before, and to just describe and critique its general behavior. E.G. responds eloquently that there exists a workable alternative for information, better than complaining from the sidelines

about one narrow system. This is a good point and I wholly agree, but still, the "narrow system" requires the diligence for truth that the "sidelines" (alternative media) is based upon. It is an unfortunate fact that the majority of Americans receive their news from the narrow center, which is why it is so necessary to critique and amend that narrow system. A girl in the front stands up and interjects, and asks something to the effect of "If the movement is so condescending to the majority, with a flaunted moral superiority - a political reflex, you said - how is the movement to connect with the majority when the mass media, the venue through which it seeks to speak through, is a forum for warmongering?"

R.R. then spoke intelligently of mass media, two catch phrases I recall being: "ideological reproduction without coercion - it's called hegemony" and later on: "regular news journalism reproduces the system [on which it reports]".

Another student spoke up asking how an individual citizen might begin the transition from blaming an individual or individual government to collective responsibility, a much broader structure, such as corporate capitalism. And then a professor in the crowd spoke so eloquently that the audience actually clapped and roared. He said that, as an immigrant, he has observed American culture since the 80's and that his answer to his old dreams of America as the democratic ideal is that quite simply it is not. I cannot reproduce the flavor of the metaphor he unravelled carefully, but, more or less, he compared the government to the trees and the people to the soil, that the growth and health of the former is dependent upon the fertility of the latter. However, he went on, since the 80's especially, mass media has been employed as a medium for the government for the "packaging of a public discourse" with preconceived limitations, inherent dichotomies, and surgical censorship. E.G. responded that he could go on about Adorno and Habermas, and the decline of the public spirit, but it is so dry and "I don't think anyone wants to hear it." Everyone did want to hear it, thus a wave of suspicion moved through the audience that perhaps he just could not give it. R.P. said his voice was going (which was true), that he had been speaking all day and night, but his response was nevertheless a crafted dodge.

All in all, I found that the audience, the students, were far more acute (though perhaps not as informed) than the panelists. The questions were generational; I felt that E.G. was not as critical of mass media as the student body, but his politics were so well-informed and his analysis so acute in general that whatever criticism I remark upon is

the exception. And R.R. commands a body of experience of activism from his youth, something clearly important to our generation of activists - to emulate what our wise elders have begun. And R.P. summarized a basic truism of the movement in critiquing the current administration: "I think it is necessary to do things like this [track down terrorists]. I just don't think this administration is the agency to do it." I agree, but it is our job to pursue that negation to an affirmation, or look to the sides of the road he is paving. A road, a line of inscrutable logic, is a line; what straddles this is the desert, an endless series of ideological attacks and structures that threaten to break the contiguity. What institutions, and what forms of dissent might produce that future he invokes as a truth?

At 9 pm the room was probably around 90 degrees, people were ready to go. And D.R. from Worcester Peace Works had shown up in the hall motioning to myself to let her talk for a minute after. I nodded. D.R. stole the floor after as people were urgently moving past her. She handed out a couple flyers to reluctant hands; no one wants to get flyers and pamphlets - an eternal problem with activists dispersing information. I took over and the mass of bodies stopped and listened to my schpiel, what I was doing, our organization, to sign up for news, discussion, get involved in producing discourse, etc, but most were trying to leave. The back door exploded pouring bodies out; the original line, or congestion rather, to sign up, diffused after several minutes. Five signed up. I did not have a plan for too many people. Someone informed me then that we had twice or three times the amount at the Robert Reich, gubernatorial candidate, speech. An amazing success, but only if those present are retained, made active. I thanked the professors and left, still quite sick.

September 11 - Departure to Brookline

» **Worcester, MA - Brookline, MA, September 12, 2002**

Curiously feeling no better and no worse than the previous day I wondered if I was in some fragile balance of health. Was going to stay another night but I blew my nose and ate some toothpaste, felt better, so then again decided to go. I packed quickly, felt my pack - the propane tank I discovered to harshly break the symmetry of the whole. I said by to Schmidt, walked down Downing St to Main and just caught the inbound to City Hall. I walked down Front St, through a large vacant mall, out the other side to Worcester Blvd and leaned on the stubby concrete pillars blocking the pedestrian walk from possible motorcycles, contemplating the scenery, determining which direction will likely bring the station. Two towers broke the skyline past an

elevated track, and I faintly recalled a woman on Front St I asked for directions saying "two towers" so I headed for them rolling a cigarette on my sleeping bag slung over my chest; I had not smoked in days but felt somewhat celebratory in departing finally this rather dreary industrial ghosttown.

On the steps of the station two young men approached me motioning for a light, their unlit cigarettes firm in tight lips. The first asked me if I was too coming from the D-Talks. A third joined and the latter two laughed, incredulous that I did not know what the D-Talks were. For drugs, he said. You ever do drugs? he asked. I laughed at the after-school-special quality of this potential exchange, so I asked him what sort of conversation he was trying to have. You do oxy? he replied. I must have looked puzzled. Oxycontin? Heroin? he asked, but I shook my head. The shorter one, with one of those "Fcuk" shirts I've been seeing lately, flashed me his wrists, tender and pink with scars. He said "shit, man, this kid is blessed!" I counted this as the second Abrahamic qualifier I had received in the last day (the first being Professor Ross' deeming me an angel for bringing water to the panel, of which Schmidt was actually responsible for, a fact too inherently verbose to explain in the circumstances), and thus wondered what sort of Flaubertian comedy I had stumbled into. Where are you going? Fcuk asked me, emphasizing 'you'. Feeling somewhat self-consciously pedantic, I seized the moment to explain my travels, why I was here - to open information regarding the war. The three were silent; one went inside for a ticket. I thought of giving them the website address but I assumed that if they ever had a computer, they had sold it a long time ago. For dope. So I went inside to get my ticket, feeling enlightened with pity.

I arrived in Brookline at 5, at my brother's apartment. At 10 I spoke with Tom Bentley at Roger Williams, regarding the progress of the panel. He said it is not possible; beaurocratic tape is too thick. Can't get a room or faculty for a month at least. You don't understand, he said, my school is very messed up. He proceeded to tell me of the past year, how they have doubled the incoming freshman, invoking an unprecedented housing problem, and how the faculty is more a staff, for financial reasons. The President directly censors the school newspaper; two semesters back Tom had apparently led a demonstration, got media from Providence, made a big stink, and really hurt the school. There are select faculty on his side, hence his pet project, the Student-Professor Action Committee. I proposed that this presents a wild opportunity to spark some activism; we can literally present a spectrum from the most local university problems, to

national problems, to international problems - fuse them as they are no doubt inherently fused.

September 15 - Corrections

» **Brookline**, September 15, 2002

I have been in Boston for the past couple days making arrangements with Roger Williams College and Bard College. Before I go into that I will treat a recent event of some significance. I have received criticism from R.R. and E.G. from the panel at Clark University for misrepresentation on the journal. I found this surprising but have complied with their criticism and heavily edited the "September 10 - The Panel" entry, and so I warn those who read it that it is not my journal entry they are reading but instead a grafted alternative. I have realized that there are limitations upon my journal that I was perhaps naively unaware of - that instead of sitting in the bottom drawer of my desk it is on the internet. I have replaced the names of the September 10th entry with indecipherable initials to deter the grade-school reader from dangerous intelligence, to be safe and to not offend, and the name for this journal is not my name anymore. These measures do not have any major negative effect I can think of. I welcome responses at: joneilo1@swarthmore.edu.

September 23 - Swarthmore College

» **Swarthmore, PA**, September 23, 2002

On September 18th I left Boston once again - this time for Pennsylvania. Strictly employing public transportation, I travelled from Boston to Swarthmore: first, the Chinatown special bus from Boston to NYC for \$15, the subway to Penn Station, the New Jersey Transit to Trenton, NJ, the R7 SEPTA to 30th St. Philadelphia, the R3 SEPTA to Swarthmore College - all for \$35, in 8 hours, or \$10 less than Greyhound in the same time. And I prefer to change vehicles as much as possible for the sake of combatting monotony.

The Update: the Rhode Island stop at Roger Williams fell through for now - delayed, really, until 2003. Tom Bentley made the call - he is not ready, and yet I suspect his delay to be somewhat unfounded. He is aware that I will not be in Rhode Island for quite some time, that I can't just stop there while in, say, Nevada. Bard, however, is set for an undefined date in October, which will be difficult to backtrack but worth it. Also, new and exciting signs are unravelling in the Northeast. The Boston-Worcester ring, historically disconnected from the NYC-Philly connection, is not only revitalizing, but spearheading networking

efforts potentially uniting the two above regions. Why do I say this? Boston Mobilization, a young professional activist group in Boston, recently called for an city-wide activist planning session, inter-campus and trans-campus alike. The group is young, fresh, online, networking, and a node in a much larger new movement concentrating on "networking" in conjunction with a sense of locality. And Worcester Peace Works is surprisingly not so grassroots as I originally thought; they are calling for a New England Conference on November 2nd, inviting me to come speak on networking. If the word is properly spread, this conference might just be what the region needs. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend since I will be out west then, but hopefully "Why War?" will be able to send a representative.

In truth, for the past few days I have done very little worth noting. Most of my time has been devoted to mirth - and the rest to an unexciting keyboard activism. This week, when I leave, will mark, according to my intuition, the true beginning of my trip, when I depart for the west - Toledo, Ohio first, where I will surprise the Northwestern Ohio Peace Coalition with my presence, which will hopefully be a good thing. I am always on this particular stressful edge where I must accept that where I should go is where I cannot yet communicate, for if I could communicate then such a place is already reasonably networked. So, by definition, I must go to where I am unfamiliar, and not necessarily welcome - and I should expect failure enough to not be so shy of it.

September 28 - Earlham College

» **Richmond, Indiana, September 28, 2002**

Took a Greyhound from Philadelphia at 7:45 last night, arriving in north Richmond, Indiana - just over the Ohio border - about fifteen hours later, so eleven this morning. The ride was typical of Greyhound, comical delays, such as the Pittsburgh supervisor removing two youths from a bus for swearing on their cellphone. Sat next to a director returning from the New York City Independent Film Festival, apparently he receiving rave reviews for the film he directed; he described it as a schizophrenic horror film in the tradition of David Lynch but with linear time. He gave me his card.

Somewhere in western Pennsylvania saw a fascinating billboard: "Be Nice Today; let someone merge" with an American flag faded in the background. Ahh yes, let's frame our most basic humanitarian gestures in terms of patriotic duty. Next, when you open the door for someone remember the Maine. Perhaps Bush will soon remind us all to

not drink the last of the milk.

I'm trying quite hard to recall the various mundane events of the last day but the three hours of sleep divided six times upon itself does not abide. General confusion is the state of the Greyhound passenger. Most memorable is when they suddenly flash on all the lights and the driver yells 'wake up, wake up. Columbus, Ohio. Everyone off.' So we have to leave our luggage on the bus and watch them drive off - and we are suppose to believe that in a half hour, after servicing the vehicle, we are to get on the same on and our possessions will be there? I have seen things that directly contradict this faith; saw a man and his luggage once go separate ways, and the tragicomedy that ensued, when they realized. The man had only the clothes on his back, and his suitcase was already on the way to Florida. He to Wichita.

I don't care anymore though, and only the "rookies" anxiously watch the bus depart. And of course the non-electronic gate descriptions, painted in the 70's as if permanent assignments of not only routes but which gates serve such, without fail these gate descriptions fail to describe where the bus at that particular gate is going. In fact, one should be worried if the two seem to agree. Take a bus to Dayton, get off for a minute, and you might not notice a secret crew has switched the 'St. Louis' sign on the front of the bus, with, say, 'Phoenix'. But I had to remind myself at various points that if indeed I was on the suddenly incorrect bus, it did not really matter. I had chosen Richmond, Indiana at the last moment, in Toledo's stead, on quite weak criterion. So if I were to find myself in Phoenix then so be not; not as if I had plans or arrangements with anyone. Which is why I eliminated Toledo at the last moment in Philadelphia - I know people there.

And lucky me Earlham College, tucked off in south Richmond, is a small liberal arts Quaker school. Somewhat unlike the rest of Richmond, a city small enough for people to stare at you when they drive by. Upon arriving there I walked a bit to the public library and there filled out several forms promising not to indulge in any "sexuality" on the Internet - image or text. The few I talked to in the city were not very friendly and seemed offended by my presence. From the various parts of Indiana I have been to, I despise the entire state as if it were a person. All the slow-talking slow-thinking pie-eyed folk here, but without the Southern hospitality. A heavy Christian and Catholic pump behind it all I might say; there are government signs that read: "Catholic Church Next Right". And there aren't really any people in the street - perhaps they are all home on a Saturday

cleaning there guns. The whole city is permeated with that dusty smalltown hardware store feeling; the corner guitar store window scant, the objects spread too thin on the old bed sheet, the Guitar in A Day book long faded. Not unlike the people who too seem to be in need of updating.

So I hitched a couple miles to south Richmond, a mile off of campus. Glad to get out - the driver of course a wacked out ex-hitchhiker, harmless. I was holding my knife up my sleeve of course for bravado more than actual consideration of using it. I think I might hold it up if I had to and yell something completely unintimidating without even any swears. But instead he let me out and I hadn't walked ten yards before a truck passed with the droning voice of an apparent college student yelling 'Fairy', to me I suppose. Then I sat down on the campus lawn and cooked up some Ramen with my mini-stove, people eyeing me strangely, then felt quite tired, stood up and the strap then broke on my backpack which is something nightmarish and I now have to fix. I persevered against these great obstacles and moped around the campus library when I couldn't find a computer that didn't need a password. I harrassed the front desk to let me use the computer there; they did but all the contacts on the site graduated of course years ago. Asked around, got some info on a Middle East Action group that might be meeting tomorrow. Tried to get some kid to point out a good lounge for me to sleep in tonight but he got exceptionally nervous and said that he didn't have a problem with it but others might and it didn't matter anyways because he didn't know of good lounges. But I've been working the corners here, snuck onto this girl's account when she thought she had logged out. I've eyed a couple lounges but they're too open, and its quite cold out here so I'll have to improvise. It's Saturday night; there are parties, everyone will be confused and easily pesuaded.

September 29 - Earlham College - Cincinnati

» **Richmond, Indiana - Cincinnati, Ohio**, September 30, 2002

I had come to Earlham College for the sole reason that it fulfills the criterion for the most difficult campus to engage with, due to three standards of practicality the school does not meet:

- 1)not reachable via public or private transportation
- 2)the college website is not up to date with current organizations existence or contacts
- 3)no prior contact established
- 4)no accomodations planned for my visit

Thus networking is most difficult at such a location. When I arrived yesterday, after a comfy Ramen dinner cooked on the lawn, the college library proved unhelpful in having contact information for activist organizations, so I resorted to asking around which was fairly successful. I actually overheard three students debating the Israel-Palesine conflict so interrupted and learned two were members of a Middle Eastern Conflict organization, which was to hold a meeting tonight, which was cancelled. So I instead just met with those two again this morning, exchanged contact information and agreed to constant communication from hereforth, which is exactly the goal of the trip - and so easily accomplished really - just some asking around, some inter-personal communication impossible via the Internet.

Determined to rough it and find a nook to sleep in so that I might not shrink from such situations in the future, I set to exploring the campus thoroughly until one a.m when, it being Saturday night, students might be cleared out fo a lounge where I could sleep. After some hesitation and paranoia of someone secretly seeing me, I stashed my backpack and sleeping bag in a dark bush off in a corner where no one would by chance spot it - and then dozed off on the lawn for a bit, being still tired from my six half-hour naps on the Greyhound. I woke up actually to a skunk rushing me, likely not knowing what I was, so in fear I lept up and ran off, sleep and confused, wandering eventually into a screening of a subtitled Japanese film on 50's monotonous office life. A great movie though I do not know the title.

After fishing my bags out of the bush (a girl on a swing watching me humorously), at about 1 a.m. I spied a vacant lounge and someone let me in, where I started to cook up some more Ramen and then explored the building finding an unlocked storage room by the laundry room in the basement, where I quite comfortably layed out on an old couch, set up an abandoned tv and watched the news until I slept, no one coming in.

After the meeting I walked several miles back to central Richmond to catch a bus to Cincinnati. And the right shoulder strap to my bag had snapped the day before, so it occurred to me suddenly to rig it up with my belt, though at the expense of my pants which now irritably sag. The belt-strap is actually sturdier than the original so I am pleased of course since I thought I would have to just get a whole new bag, a sewing kit being too weak for the weight.

At the pharmacy (where the bus comes) I begin my now constant

cycle of replacing the belt back to my pants when I am free of walking for a bit, and then back to the pack when I have to move. Inside I ask the woman about the anti-Bush political cartoon tacked to a calendar. I prompt her for her opinions on Iraq where I am surprised she openly and certainly opposes "the whole show" as she said, her arm waving up not unlike gesticulations for bombs exploding. The older the person I speak to who opposes the Iraqi invasion, the more vehemently they speak, the more frank, and certainly the more direct, arriving at the very conclusion of the movement but from, I feel, largely different premises. In her fifties, she has experienced the horrors of war as a citizen of the past who is very much still a citizen of the present, despite how tucked away she is an obscure stratification and rather washed out city. She recalls Vietnam, as no one who lived then can dismiss the only experiential association for what looms ahead, and, put simply, that war is an everpresent nightmarish memory in the minds of the Baby Boomers. Unfortunately, mass media utterly fails in picking this rising silent and enormous opposition from the facade of American unity and singularity, thus relentlessly misinforming that very whole. Through this failure, which is deliberate in many ways, mass media individualizes each citizen's dismissal of their own dissent as of the minority, thus unmentionable, thus simultaneously crunching them into a vast majority, eliminating their private dissent as either irrelevant, abnormal, or inconsequential, so the elder civilian is apt to abandon the thoughts that sustain some of the main qualities of a free and present democracy. This is a fact so obfuscated by its lack of acknowledgment, that democracy and media hinge upon each other; when one suffers, so does the other. I think of the media as an enormous mirror that ought to reflect both the events and the perceptions of those events and so nothing is more fundamental to equality of voice than an accurate mass depiction of the multiplicity of voices of the citizens. Can media individualize but not totalize the many into one? I don't know if this is feasible from any one source of information, for there is inevitably a secret assumption at work, an ideology that is behind all the institution speaks so the only way around this fact is for the actualization of a field of many discourse, many institutions, diverse and contradicting with equal public access. Thus it is the highest priority of the movement to detect and publicize the narratives of the many excluded from the public domain. And the independent media movement alone, and as a whole, biased or not, can only serve the larger social function of displaying the very powerful narratives of the many unheard and unseen on the six o'clock news.

I'm off on a tangent. I boarded the bus eventually and backtracked a

bit to Cincinnati, a scenic view save for the multitude of enormous billboards displaced and jutting from endless stretches of farms, tilted such as to transform the highway into a theater of sorts one does not choose to attend, where, one after another, the images and secret commands relentlessly work the brain. You might not even give them thought.

October 1 - Cincinnati

» **Cincinnati, Ohio**, October 4, 2002

I left Richmond, Indiana to step back to Cincinnati to stay with a friend of a friend and plan out the next week. Pulling in I immediately liked the city - a guy with a blues guitar on the train got off with me and at my and the cabbies' demand unsheathed it and played a number on the street. Something so simple that immediately forms an association to the city itself, but something that could not happen in Richmond. So naturally I wonder at the politics here and am always surprised at the space politics inserts into peoples' already condensed city lives. Do international events of great political significance affect even remotely the daily life of say the cabbie on my left? What can reading the paper possible mean to them? Habitual perhaps, but the content and significance of, say, "precision bombing" in northern Iraq, or "collateral damage" (itself a term abstracted and removed from the interpersonal level) must remain a remote event, as if everyone is reading the same novel which continues the next day and not even the writers of it know the sequel. The news cannot possibly even approach the cultural value of, say, Dickens' never-ending tale always on the frontier of completion, stories that occur always next door, to characters not unlike someone you know, in places real and knowable. But the cultural gap is sustained by a variety of sources. The bus driver does not understand the Kurds, or the Palestinians' plight, the pathos produced from a mechanical and heartless army literally plowing parked cars down the street, destroying buildings for fun. I refuse to believe there is some inherent cultural gap where what is on one side is incommunicable to the other. Collateral damage, occupation, quelling, curfew, precision bombing, these words are perhaps the smallest and most effective nodes of control. They are recognizable in their repetition, frequent the pages of daily press, and through a variety of discursive tricks either divert the horror of the referent to something palatable or directly abstract the object to something far removed from the emotional effect the event out to produce in the reader.

So I find that what the movement, in its communication and informing

of the public, must do is overcome the mass media, perhaps the strongest and most powerful institution in the United States. All we have to do is consistently communicate with the public such that when I talk to the person on the street they say 'of course' - and this is the most difficult task for the movement. In every sense, mass media blocks publicity and voice of an overwhelming percentage of the population. Thus the independent media movement should be seen as the impulse of the greater political priority of swaying foreign policy. Professor Gerlach, somewhat the original appraiser of social movement structure, and now seeking to emulate these structures in government organization (he writes for RAND and his perhaps cited in every article or paper on neopolitik, organizational structures, and the changing face of war and conflict) he told me recently via email of a former student of his working on a doctorate thesis on independent media serving as a principal vehicle of networking, and the simplicity of truth of this simple function never occurred to me in so simple and profound terms. Independent media is the waterhole of sorts for inter-organizational relations within the social movement, and likewise, on the other side of the fence, mass media (newsprint, network news, local news, etc. - though there are serious distinctions between the biases of these forms) is simply an enormous vehicle of networking the general public into an organizational structure that is generally hierarchical (though this is changing) which we might roughly call the state and all its appendages. How this general organism operates is far more complex and not so internally peaceful as many within the movement might make it out to be, but the overall point is that information itself is the chief form of organizing subjects - and different forms allow for different degrees of flexibility of how the subject is placed. Now examine the hierarchical structure, where power is isolated, opposed to a centerless network structure, where power is dispersed.

So what are the consequences of encouraging an independent media structure? Well, "Why War?" is underway forming a "swarming network" which is roughly a large database of contacts and organizations accessible to anyone for quickly organizing direct actions. This is an obvious limb of the information tree where not only is the information important but also who is getting it, how quickly, towards what function and purpose. I am in the process of outlining, by geography, a map of listserves, contacts, and organizations that are not readily accessible through convoluted searches on the internet. Studies need to be done on levels of overlap between listserves, how information needlessly repeats itself in poorly organized informational networks, and on what model this is a healthy effect. Could a list, or

group of connected lists, be formed where nearly every group could be contacted for sure within minutes? How coordinated could the movement be?

News, activist news, inter-organizational contacts are all part of the same informational structure which can one day usurp mass media, run leaderless and centerless, and indiscriminately reach everyone, public, private, activist or not. And then I will be able to talk to the cabbie beside me and "collateral damage" will not be the term he associates mass murder with, but instead an emotional and deeply human opposition to murder in general. When he thinks of a whole city in lockdown where they are shot on sight for walking down the street past ten, the comfortable juvenile word - "curfew" - will not come to mind, but instead something far more horrible and personal. And politics will not be a clumsy point of insertion into one's mind but something fundamental to your existence and even "how you feel today".

October 3 - Cincinnati - Toledo

» **Toledo, Ohio**, October 4, 2002

I stayed in Cincinnati for a couple days, outside a bit, in Sharronville, a district of Cincinnati - one of its seven hills, I believe, and grew to like it. Cincinnati is somewhat of a strange break from the dilapidated Ohio cities that surround it - Dayton, for instance, which is one of those smallish cities that is large enough for a mini-airport and a few tall buildings which are technically skyscrapers but still small enough to never want to go there and for nothing to really bring you there. Like Columbus and Toledo, you sort of end up there. But the ride from Richmond, Indiana which is just over the line and you can stand on the border in Richmond which I did and foolishly wondered if I am losing or gaining an hour or embarrassingly wondered for a moment if neither and both apply. But thankfully the passage of time is one of the few things now that the US Government hasn't really invaded and so the border doesn't really exist and truthfully Indiana and Ohio ought to be one state. The ride to Cincinnati was delicious but the ride from Cincinnati to Toledo was a wasteland and speaking to the girl next to me who was going back to school from Nebraska I had said that it is really sad now because there is no way to tell what part of the country you are in anymore but thankfully I'm young and can't mourn over a time when I could. Ford, McDonald's, Jeep Headquarters, etc could be found anywhere really and a highway here is a highway there and she agreed saying the open desolate spaces between were not unlike Nebraska. And what are the distinguishing marks between regions now

other than those corporations you did not know about and the locals might have thought were general all over. Big Boy for instance, and White Castle - I had never seen one before or even heard of one until recently, and the girl beside was surprised such names weren't national. We all now speak the same tongue and the corporate tags are our dialects - how sad.

Though glad to leave Cincinnati, I enjoyed the University of Cincinnati - woven in with an urban life that was somehow not constructed about the students. The ghetto was a block off, and on campus Calhoun St. and Clifton St. met on the corner of it and set a border of small cafes, bars, used book stores, lounges, a milieu of restaurants featuring bands and live DJs. I spent yesterday around the campus, poking around for groups, talking to strangers at night, and then, sitting at a Shell station eating a peanut and butter sandwich three punks came up and one asked me for a quarter which I gave him and we started talking and it came up of course that I was backpacking around and the girl explained she did something like that when she escaped from her foster home and now mournfully she said she was stuck in eighth grade though she's seventeen. The guy who went in with my quarter came out and he then invited me to come along with him to a party a few blocks over in the ghetto. I agreed but the other two said they were going elsewhere and the guy gave the other guy a strange look so then I thought something might be amiss but I agreed to go along to the party, having not been in a social situation for some time. So we walked off down to this apartment and the guy we were apparently looking for wasn't there so we walked off deeper into the ghetto to a bar where the guy ran in looking for the mysterious other and he came out saying that in fact he was where we just were but that his girlfriend had said he wasn't since he was sleeping. This person was suppose to come with us but at this point I was quite suspicious but kept going and we talked of politics I being curious on what he knew and what his position was. He said that he just thought all was bullshit, that the government ain't in the business for justice they's just want take care themselves just like I'm doing, he said. I told him he should come out to a protest some day and say just that but he shrugged and said he worked. So we went back to the place we were at before and he went up and I was suspicious now at the runaround he took me on and he had spoken too long on why I should trust him when I asked him where we were going and why I should follow, and why he was intent on my company, so I had slipped my pocket knife unstrapped into my back pocket, and good thing for then came back down shrugging and pulled out a switchblade which was already flipped open and demanded my wallet. But he wasn't intimidating, the

knife had already been open when he pulled it out so there was no crisp 'chk', and he was a skinny guy with glasses and a limp he had got in construction, so I pulled mine out from where my wallet was which surprised him and I uttered some obscenities and threats holding it in the air backing away and then ran.

So after that I got out of Cincinnati, sleeping on the catwalk of a billboard downtown for a few hours until my bus to Toledo and when I got on sitting next to the girl from Nebraska. We started talking, about the war eventually and impressed with my travels at one point she said I've never met an activist before. There aren't any activists in Nebraska, you know. You should go there, so I agreed and in November I plan on it.

October 3 - Toledo - Flint

» **Flint, Michigan, October 5, 2002**

Today marks one month since my departure though it does not feel that way, twenty three percent complete and that's about the percentage of area of the country I've covered so I'm right around where I should be. So I arrived in Toledo at about four or five a.m yesterday having not slept at all through the night, on account of the frequent stops and the driver flipping on all the interior lights and yelling really into the PA that we were either at a rest stop which is ironic in that most of the passengers are sleeping already, or that we have to get out while they service the bus. Sleepy and confused everyone creeps off and smokes in a safe constellation a few yards off, pacing in small circles, staring at each other, some talking but mostly not. Across the highway is "Adult Books and Videos" and on our side "Gas and Taco Bell" which is unfortunately more accurate than intended if you sit in the back quarter of the bus by the bathroom. One woman once, when going to Richmond, had stood up and stuck an air-freshener to the bathroom door on the bus, and everyone in the back started clapping. She sprayed something too in the air which we all enjoyed. But across the way a long line of trucks surround the porn store, a longer line than here and a man jokes with the driver that he got off on the wrong side.

But once in Toledo I get out and walk to the gas station at the end of the street and look at a map, and start walking the three miles to the University of Toledo, passing a series of abandoned buildings, two Catholic schools for different ages, more Catholic-affiliated buildings, and one that reads in bold letters above it "JESUS SAVES MEN" and wish I had film. I pass a glorious museum that seems uncomfortable

and clearly the product of a much needed urban rehabilitation project. The streets are empty except for a construction crew eyeing me carefully, so I hear the bus a while before it comes, catch it, so it must be past five. Everyone on the bus stares at me as if I am something bizarre, my large pack and sleeping bag cumbersome and irritable to those beside me. And I can't believe the fare is 25 cents, ask for a transfer and the driver looks upset I would think there are transfers in Toledo. He picks me out in the mirror and yells sir, this is where you wanna get out. I catch the next one taking me to the university and I see the girls jeans across from me, marked in black with "No Violence!" and other peace cliches and I think to start conversation but it's too early and quiet, and I'm too tired. And she's reading a book.

I wander campus for a while, looking for a lounge to sleep in, a place to hide my bags, a library with open computers - the three sites I immediately search for at a new place, and often the library is all three. I've made it a policy to travel through the night so I can arrive somewhere early and have the day to nap, scope out the campus, get things together, but I've learned this is not wise. I'm exhausted when I arrive and the day is no time to sleep uninterrupted. Lawns are too open and my bags suspicious. There aren't corners yet dark with night to tuck my bags in, and lounges are still being used. I find the library and there is not one couch in the whole building, nor a covert nook. The tables are all open, no private rooms. After using the computer I sneak into a dorm after timing a student's entrance and find a lounge, shut the shades and doze off with a prop book on my chest, my bags tucked under the couch. Then a group of students come in loudly, wake me, and start playing cards. They talk to me and enquire of my back. I tell them my story, and then they ask me to leave. I'm startled but comply.

I walk around, cook a meal, ask around and no one knows anything about peace groups. Not a single flyer in any major building, but there are numerous over the recent Glamour magazine model scouting. Bible study groups aplenty, but no peace. Should have talked to the girl on the bus. The website is useless - nothing documented, only the fraternities and sororities, and the only political group listed is the Republican group. For the first time I feel defeated and, enhanced by my fatigue, give up at after about twelve hours of deadends. I declare, likely mistakenly, Toledo balancing on the wrong side of the Christian fence. Frats and an iron resolve towards American complacency dominate, buttered up with a Christian will to conform to an unquestioned faith in God and Country. But this cannot be true. I frequently get wind of Toledo actions by mysterious groups

unlocatable, on the Internet, and even on campus.

I make a call and, having not slept in almost two days, work my way back to downtown Toledo to head north a couple hours to Flint, Michigan and stay with a friend's family. On the transit downtown we pass through sidestreets through the ghetto and I witness, sadly, two kids fighting, fourteen years old about. One of them and his friends get on the bus and the rest of us listen to their commotion, the fighter confused as to why the other hit him, a glitch in the voice claiming he didn't care why. And his friend speaking up that good thing he didn't hit him cuz he'd of knocked him out. An old man smiles at my form and bags crunched between them. I smile back and feel suddenly better. Soon I will sleep and will regroup, form a plan of action, rework my strategy. My failure is palatable and my quitting I realize suddenly as a function of a sadness that has been looming upon me, that I frequently force myself to neglect or nurture it for resolve, both mental actions of fear and loneliness that perpetuate its source. Why? I wonder. This life is not hard, so yes I sleep less, I'm hungry now and then, five dollars a day but I am not starving. I think immediately that I must be experiencing some sort of repositioning of myself as a subject, physically, in this world, and thus mentally. Nomadic body produces a nomadic mind, fleeting and unstable at first. What is my changing position, and is the process destructive? Do I have a function I neglect? But these are terms abstracted from the immediate thought, and more importantly from the feeling those thoughts fail to describe. Boris Sidis, an early twentieth century thinker, dropped from the public eye and spent his life wandering on buses and collecting the nearly infinite combinations of transfer tickets, losing his unidentifiable position in the multitude of its possibilities. A subtle order in an undetectable chaos. We are forced to surrender to a function, a habit, an occupation. It is not hard to rebel against the brackets that define it: the dual mechanisms of ordering and dispersing, indiscriminate, but meeting halfway in the subject, the object to order and disperse. Hamlet straddling the grave. Depression as a perpetual analysis, relapsing infinitely on new unquestioned assumptions. Find myself thinking in fragments. Thus it is not hard to find the nihilism in solitude. Hume's infamous passage on paralysis, there not being any reason to do anything, and then he eventually forgets, listens to music, dines.

This mood of desperation, though thoughts I still stand by, took me on the bus and I got back to the Greyhound. Apparently a driver in Florida had been stabbed last night so security checks were doubled up and they took my knife which had saved me in Cincinnati but I convinced

the driver to hold it for me and he agreed. I got it back in Detroit and put it below, the driver believing me harmless. Continued to Flint, Michigan, where I was picked up by my friend's parents and we drove a bit through the country to Grand Blanc where they had towels, soaps, and a bed waiting. And I can recall few moments when I have been as content and relieved.

October 4-6 - Flint and Recuperation

» **Flint, Michigan, October 9, 2002**

In Toledo I found my first mental well. I was not well received and I had come with no connections and failed to make any once there. The university resources proved both outdated and thus wholly unhelpful. Not a single peace flyer on campus, or contact, or even remote hint of activity. So I caught a bus out to Flint, Michigan, two hours north of Toledo and about an hour east of Ann Arbor. For three days I've been rethinking, replanning, and generally relaxing in the unlimited hospitality of my friend's parents. So I've reformed my strategy to almost the exact opposite. Instead of "showing up" unexpectedly, I will seek out internet-posted events of significance, where the unnetworked groups are likely to follow. Thus I've redefined what "networked" means as an adjective. Firstly, no group is wholly unnetworked, for that would require living somewhat in total isolation, which simply does not occur. The activist groups that are unlocatable on the Internet, and thus not known of, still manage to "get word" of events, whether through indymedia sites, word of mouth, or phone. Indymedia sites I find to be most instrumental as a vehicle of networking for groups that are not already solidly networked with other groups, whether intraregionally or extraregionally. Small grassroot groups, or the vigil groups as I think of them, tend to operate solely locally, often with a religious element - yet via indymedia sites are able to learn of significant gatherings, protests, demonstrations. And that is their limit. They cannot be found at conferences, nor have their own website. The Bloomington, Indiana Peace Action group for instance - they do not have their own website, nor do they typically appear at conferences, but they have at least one member on the National Student Antiwar Network, who likely passes along information of major protests. And they communicate that information to other smaller groups in Bloomington which I do not know of but surely exist. Eventually, by rule, these smaller groups will one day appear online. So tomorrow I leave for Cincinnati where President Bush is to speak (though we will not see him), and there I hope to not only find a small unnetworked group in the crowd, but also get myself a place to sleep, the latter being a powerful motivator in of

itself to "network". Else I sleep on a roof, or a billboard catwalk, or on a bus. And I have already slept on a Cincinnati billboard catwalk, and the lights are blinding and the grate as comfortable as your estimation.

October 7 - Cincinnati Protest

» **Cincinnati, Ohio**, October 9, 2002

I left Flint, as conservative Christian as seemingly possible, at about 10am, overhearing two men coerce each other into greater devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ Our Savior. One man admitting he has strayed from the Lord Jesus Christ Our Savior, that once he had had an intimate relation with the Lord, a walk'n'talk'n relation. The other replied that there is never a problem with the Lord, only with Us, pounding his chest, that we have only to realize the Love and the sinner is the saint. I was curious to their politics, whether or not one who is to Love can yet rationalize War - of this I'm sure, hence the Spanish Inquisition, the Salem Witch Trials, but more particularly I would like to hear their own individual rationale. I got my chance; we had a layover in Detroit for an hour and while drifting by the door of the station the man who had spoken of drifting from the Lord approached me and asked me if I smoke. Are you a cop? Oh gosh no, so we took a stroll to an overpass a block off and hung our legs over where he opened his duffle bag revealing the whole volume packed with crop. My, you have strayed from the Lord, I said, and he agreed, then admitting he was absconding from a hearing on "motorcycling" with phony plates. Heading south to Knoxville with two grand to start roofing. Had sold half his crop for the money and took the rest. He didn't believe my story, strangely, that I was travelling, and he asked me what in the hell is an activist. Oh I never gave much thought to the war, guess it's not very nice, my being a man of faith though I've strayed. He asked me what my faith was and I told him that I believe in not believing so I do have a faith of sorts. And if I did believe in a Creator per se, I would never tell anyone; he looked perplexed and noted "smoke'n and think'n". I said travelling is the life and he laughed saying it sure isn't. Feeling foolish before this 50 year old man, I modified: well, it is for now. But roofing isn't the life either. It's hard work, he said, but it's good for you. I don't know - just because it's not bad for you? He had moved a few steps over since my protestation of the Lord Jesus Christ and had grown silent. We headed back and he was completely lost though we were two blocks off; told him to be careful with that bag, that many would kill for it. I was stuck up the other day in Cincinnati for a lot less. He laughed and didn't worry. You sure you're absconding from a phony plate charges, not second-

degree? He laughed, golly no. So how's you shower and sleep and all. I told him. Noooo. Then later: Mexico? Noooo. You going to Mexico? He looked in disbelief of my character, though he of course seems fictional himself.

I got to Cincinnati at ten of eight and was forced to call a cab, costing me five dollars - a day's sum. I told the cabbie to get me to the President as quick as he could. He grumbled and I said, though he is the worst goddamn president we ever had. He agreed, so I asked him what he thought of the war. He said I don't give a shit. It's allll bullshit. Everythang they says is bullshit and all they's ever said's 's bullshit. Cincinnati is convulsing upon itself at this particular moment - racial profiling has crossed the farthest line, a man was shot the other day unarmed, six times. This has produced an activist reaction perhaps wholly unique in its magnitude. Copwatch groups have sprouted all over the city, Urban Justice groups, Black Youth brigades, and they have all fused at least partially with the Anti-War and Anti-Globalization movement, under the Greater Cincinnati Activists Network. The crowds here are more diverse in ideology than perhaps anywhere else.

I got to Union Hall just as the crowd was departing from the frontlines for the rally. About sixty percent of the crowd was non-student, generally families. I walked around the park for ten minutes before I found a student. I was relieved beyond my anticipation to be within a group of likeminded citizens, the first time I recall that I have exceptionally felt a unity with strangers, though slight. Within moments someone handed me a candle and lit it for me. I talked to strangers about what I missed - a couple arrests, and Bush didn't appear of course. Snuck in through the back. Then I spotted a group of students holding a large banner and I approached the four girls, inquiring where they were from. Xavier University in Cincinnati. In all my research I had not heard of a group there. They didn't really have an answer as to what group they were from. I told them my story and immediately they offered me their couch, which I accepted, immensely relieved that I did not have to wander off.

We left together an hour later and I became the token mystery-man activist adventurer. They all lived together, with two other girls, which is relieving as I am extremely uncomfortable around groups of males. They gave me meal credits, offered a key to the room, blankets, food, and we talked till four in the morning of politics and my trip, activism, watched a taping of Bush's address and barked together at it, pausing it each minute to critique, to alternately get upset and laugh at the

absurdity, expand on long soliloquys of how sad it is that such rhetoric is convincing to others.

October 8-9 - Xavier University

» **Cincinnati, Ohio**, October 9, 2002

The activists I'm stayin with are so hospitable and have insisted I stay for as long as I wish to, that I could stay here with them, their friends, etc. for months if I wanted to. I am overwhelmed with a reactionary guilt. But Bess insists that if they wanted me to go they surely would have asked me to. And I believe her - she is a rough no-nonsense type, balking at the notion of indirectness and false sensitivity. So I leave tomorrow, the 10th, for Columbus where there is a workshop on Iraq I am to go to. But yesterday, the 8th, I spent at the Dorothy Day Peace house, getting campus contacts. Apparently there aren't really defined groups on campus; instead, Jesuit faculty and the Peace House facilitate information regarding protests, a setup I think is ultimately negative, but perhaps better than nothing. The school, after all, is a conservative Catholic Jesuit institution. ROTC kids can be seen marching around frequently.

Then at night I went to the faculty panel I saw a posting for. About 30 students showed up, all of them anti-war, and all the professors were anti-war as well. The moderator announced that this event is not designed for debate but rather for exchanging education - a more and more common development on campuses. Academia has become so fused with the movement for peace that teach-ins and faculty panels are more strategic and encouraging than fixated on determining what is the moral duty of the nation. It seems that everyone has already determined that invading Iraq is patently not the moral thing to do, nor the strategic thing to do for the stated objectives.

I talked to one of the professors after, who was involved in the South African liberation movement, and he agreed to write something for the website. And the girl who organized it was very open and we are to meet tonight to exchange ideas, connect, etc.

The rest of the days are spent at the lab trying to form an itinerary for the next week. Organizing my contacts, etc.

October 10-11 - The Ohio State University

» **Columbus, Ohio**, October 19, 2002

Felt I was overstaying hosts in Cincinnati, stretching it out a day over

my intentions so that I could go directly to the Iraq workshop in Columbus. But first I will recount the significant events of the past couple days. Two nights before, I had attended the faculty panel on the looming invasion of Iraq. The session served much for a religious-hued education session, and the moderator precluded the talk with that very statement - that this event is not intended for debate but rather such that we might all learn. Maybe everyone else learned something. Two professors of History, one a reverend I believe, and a third professor specializing in India. Farid Esack, a professor of multicultural studies I believe, proved insightful, but the rest I had heard a hundred times before, which is inevitable I suppose. No debate and yet no discussion over, say, "what to do". Still, the event was a positive one, though the audience numbered under 20, for the school is generally a conservative Catholic school, and the event was hardly publicized. But I spoke to the moderator, Annie, after, as well as Farid, not bothering really with the others. Farid was interested in my trip and agreed to write something for the site. And Annie I spoke to, agreeing to meet up tomorrow. Which we did - we met and went to a small coffeehouse off the ghetto, which had a pleasant atmosphere, one of those bohemian coves where all the lates are alcoholic, the lighting dim, with small racks of independent newspapers at the door. We talked for a while, somewhat fascinated with each other then I left and said well, hope to see you again. Frustrating meeting new people I like for minutes at a time, then gone. So it goes. I had to rush back to a silly birthday party for some girl I didn't know, but I sang Happy Birthday anyway. I left early to wake up early the next day, the 10th, and caught a bus to Columbus.

Somewhat nervous as usual, with that expectant feeling I get when I head off somewhere without a place to stay, wondering what I'll do, if they'll be receptive. Walked a few blocks to High St. which should take me straight to Ohio State University, where I catch a bus asking if it goes to the university. Yes, but it doesn't. I get out a mile east of where I wanted to be, so nervously walked through the ghetto fingering my sweaty knife in my pocket. Guy asks me for a cigarette which I immediately surrender, despite the offer for a quarter. The sky is overcast just like Toledo and just like Richmond, both times of equal situation - forming an unhealthy association with unrelated things. I get to the meeting and as I expected the discussion is faculty-led, only a handful of activists in the room - from a variety of student and local religious groups. I find this arrangement stagnant and inevitably forms a closed system. What I consider the forefront of activism - the new tactic involving informational strategies - seems over the heads of the elderly ex-hippy infrastructure. I speak up of expanding tactics to

include new targets which would carry new metaphoric power, in conjunction of course with petition and media campaigns which are effective over longterm, as any success is. Heads nod in the room, but I had retorted another who insisted door to door flyering is effective. This is patently unrealistic I said. For any effect it would cost hundreds of dollars per week, in which we would literally be paying a hundred dollars per activated citizen, which is unfortunately but likely temporary. I might have insulted him with too thorough of a retort, but the discussion changed nevertheless. I suggested bus advertising, which is cheap and worth an initial experiment, a lowbudget constant stickering campaign, and waves of letters to both local and national media. They adopted most of the plans, and the elderly religious ones in the back came to me after with contact information insisting I send them material to circulate. A success, and now an official strategy to hook into grassroots local groups and insert myself as a member.

I also met Sean Krebs, a unique oldfashioned activist from the campus group Committe for Justice in Palestine. He is the real thing. He is infamous for walking fearless through the ghetto knocking on doors and actually getting people to go to protests. We flyered the next morning for a demonstration we were both going to miss since we both were happening to go to Ann Arbor for the Palestinian Solidarity Conference. But he was a social machine pumping out truths in the most palatable way possible - I think he doubled the crowd for that night, alone. I on the other hand am far too meek to spark a conversation with a stranger with enough spunk to get them to actually go to a protest. That sort of thing takes a level of innate ability. And then that night we rode around on bikes through the Columbus alleys, apparently the most practical route one can take. We stopped in at Muslim and Arab stores - and at one Palestinian smokeshop they all knew Sean, and the forty year old man behind the counter said of course he is going to the protest.

This was the happy part. That night Sean's friend got beaten up worse than I have ever seen someone after a fight. By a Nazi on the adjacent strip in the same quarter of the ghetto. The guy had just had surgery and the man apparently kicked in the same knee. Both eyes swollen shut. And lips I recall perfectly; sealed shut black with dried blood. He did not want to show us his ribs. And the cops had apparently slowed down and drove by. I had to convince him not to go through with his plan to bat the man to death when he had recovered. Amazingly, Sean had "converted" his brother and his friends, the rough types, to see the injustices on the global, national, and local level now; they even attended protests. What a motley group of protestors in Columbus:

ghetto kids and parents, hardened white boys from the projects, jocks even, old Muslims and Palestinians from the Arab quarters, and hardly a student. So the beaten up friend came to see his situation as analogous to any emotional conflict on a national level - what he had come to oppose.

A remarkable night. We left the poor guy and went to an activist party. Some were activists, but all were sympathetic to the cause. I have been cooped up at Swarthmore, an intellectualized environment where the social counterpart does not easily follow; here, in Columbus, on the other hand, the two had naturally developed together.

October 12-14 - Palestinian Solidarity Conference

» **Ann Arbor, Michigan, October 20, 2002**

A national solidarity conference of Palestinians must seem unintelligible to most Americans, for surely they know very little of the "other half", and what they do know is likely a compromise of the truth.

An assembly of the mysterious and exotic Other. Perhaps a hint of the 'barbarian' drifts about the P word, a word which the American mainstream press has successfully transformed into an Israeli suffix. The Israeli- Palestinian Conflict; a certain iambic ring to a cadence no longer too complex to mouth with ease. All those vowels conquered through repetition. Well, its not the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, so the ordering is not temporal, historical. Perhaps it is political.

Terrorism, suicide bombers, buses exploding, these dark, angry, desperate people. They must be strategizing how best to kill innocent Israeli civilians - an anti-Semitic consortium of hate. But a complex library of associations, nearly wholly unconscious, precedes the faintest hint of a thought on the subject; we all have our predispositions. And the largest manufacturer of these political predispositions, these undetectable presuppositions, our assumptions, is the media. Just think about it: try to recall a sliver of political information you've picked up elsewhere. Unless you know Sharon personally, or live in Jenin, or drive buses in Jerusalem, most, if not all, of your information is from the media. If when you hear the word "Palestinian" your mind conjures up a mood, images, associations, fragments of dictum perhaps even slightly tarnished without instant decipherable reason, you are not to blame; if when you hear the word "Palestinians" it is not so difficult to think "terrorism", but when you hear the word "occupation" it is, you are not to blame. There are

people who care more about your mind than you do working on this problem around the clock. So a Palestinian Solidarity Conference is expected to sound a bit like "anti-Semitic consortium" to the disinformed.

Thus, a national solidarity conference of Palestinians must seem unintelligible to most Americans.

II.

Arriving in Ann Arbor on October 12th was somewhat of a mental initiation into the desperate world of the Palestinian plight for liberation that had thusfar been only described to me, albeit thoroughly, via endless newsletters, email, literature, media, and even conferences peripheral to the specific Palestinian "problem". The April 20th march through Washington, D.C. I mark as the cup of water thrown on my sleeping face; thousands of Palestinians had marched in a diversity of age groups that I and the collegiate antiwar movement had been dreaming of, until that cup of water thrown on the face...April 20th displayed two important things to the movement: 1)the rising effect of independent media 2)a powerful and motivated peaceful counterpart to the second Intifadah. Both of these secrets had until April 20th been largely suspicions. And so we come full circle to independent media, how information accessibility and physical coordinated political responses are inherently linked, and, when joined, perhaps show best the face of true democracy, rather than the Janus mask of empire the United States and Israel, specifically, have so well shown it can be twisted into. The world is losing faith. Look at Argentina.

Like any wacked out conflict, the observer must anticipate witnessing, and thus resist participation in, what must be initially described as a collective and social indulgence in emotion. I'm thinking specifically of our own modern brand of this luring phenomenon: nationalism. The concept of nationalism, more ancient than the nation-state itself, is frequently a vehicle for control, and by this vague word I just mean a specific type of relation between groups, identifiable in its occurrence as a general presupposition of an Other, certainly a presupposition required for war. Lewis H. Lapham, in "The Road to Babylon", cites Thucydides' remarks concerning the pending Athenian invasion of Sicily during the Peloponnesian War (an invasion which would prove disastrous): "the few who actually were opposed to the expedition were afraid of being thought unpatriotic if they voted against it, and therefore kept quiet." Although Athens then, and the modern nation-

state now, contrast vastly different circumstances, there is certainly an analogous element: silence in the face of culture flexing itself. The multiplicity of diverse and contradicting discourses, the mark of a healthy culture, can quickly halt, form a singularity, and simply normalize when the power of the state is internally flaunted. I consider this phenomenon fascinating; power is transformed by its bearers into a distinct entity separate from any one who wields it. There is no 'state' without 'people' to fear it, and that IS the state.

This concept of nationalism is often dangerously summoned in the form of a powerful emotion, rather than a realized logical duty like taking out the trash at night. But is nationalism summoned distinct from nationalism provoked? When President Bush utters majestically simple rhetoric, with such concepts as 'duty' and 'country' and 'patriotic', is this the same phenomenon as a culture uniting in resistance of an oppressive nation? I don't think so, though there is certainly a shared element of hastily drawn cultural borders, but the reasons why the United States is suddenly a patriotic state is vastly different from the reasons why Palestinians have turned nationalistic. There is no detectable 'survival' element to American patriotism - it is largely imagined; Palestine, on the other hand, is dying.

Nevertheless, provoked nationalism - though inevitable and necessary for survival, also inevitably conforms to the polemical structure of the aggressor. When you wave your flag, you are not waving everyone else's. It would be absurd to request the Palestinian people to forego any nationalistic practices because it creates an "unhealthy duality". You would be laughed at, and one might say, "A duality? Fool. When they bulldozed my house, THEY formed a duality, whether or not we acknowledge it." I felt uncomfortable - flagwaving is exclusive and alienating, but excusable in this instance, but only logically. But yet the polemic is encouraged. So when Mahdi Bray, the D.C. radio show host and S.Africa liberation activist, opened the conference claiming "I'm not here to engage in the polemics of the conflict, but as a professional agitator," I believed his intent, but his words seemed deflated and hollow, positioned beyond his own utterance of them, by much larger structures that only the greatest of speakers could transcend. Mere minutes before Bray took the podium, we had all waded through a tunnel of angry protesting rabbis and Jews flanking the only entrance to the conference. They held up cardboard signs for us to read: THIS IS A HATE CONFERENCE, chanting "This Conference Supports Suicide Bombers" whenever the cameras were rolling. One rabbi shook a sheet of paper before me, urging me to take it, shouting "Enlighten yourself! Enlighten yourself!" One of the Palestinians I

drove up with from Columbus wore a Palestinian flag as a cape through most of the conference, occasionally yelling "Free Palestine!" through the Ann Arbor streets. Cars of fellow activists would roll by emitting cheers, flashing smiling faces agape hanging out the nearside windows. He was even interviewed wearing the flag by a local TV station; ineloquent and visually indigestible, one can easily imagine the poor metaphor he can easily become if aired on the 6 o'clock news. But by four o'clock the protesting Jews had grown tired; they were silent, some even chatting with Palestinians off to the side, smoking a cigarette. The signs leaned with fatigue on the columns, fingerprinted and torn a bit from all the shaking. Even protesters have to eat; and there are limits. It's hard to hate strangers all day, and after a while you might even find the enemy interesting and not much unlike yourself.

Bray succeeded in introducing the first day of tactly arranged workshops (which were more like lectures) focusing on defining the conflict, the image of it, and articulating through reiteration the complex "illegal entity known as Israel", as one audience member put it. Despite the obvious unification-oriented design of the conference (after all, it is a "solidarity" conference), and despite the overwhelmingly determined positioning of the various speakers' words within the larger matrix, quality analysis ran high.

This larger context - a highly emotionalized duality that preceded analysis, and thus confirmation - departed the counterfeit reality of mass media for a more tangible tension serving as the very metaphorical counterpart to the Middle Eastern struggle itself. In the months preceding the conference a hacker had apparently sent out mass anti-Semitic emails through the conference email, producing an immeasurable torrent of reaction from especially the Jewish and Zionist communities, and the Press. Once the damage was done, the hoax was revealed with a predictably insignificant effect. Corrections might make page 6. And then there was the 1,000 person Jewish-led protest the day before - I've seen the pictures of the army of blue shirts and white stars. Several Jewish organizations attempted pushing a motion through the courts, which failed. And the reprehensible Daniel Pipes of campuswatch.org seems to be raising McCarthy from the dead. The President of Michigan State University, where the conference was held, made several weak statement, prompting Hatem Bazian, a UC Berkeley Islamic Studies professor, to deem him "an obedient servant" in a speech following Bray's. He also thanked the Zionists for all the publicity. The atmospheric dark cloud can not be understressed, but all of this seems partly contrived, expected. The

location seems strategically selected; adjacent to a large Jewish community, Ann Arbor is a city small enough to make a splash rather than a ripple, and there is sufficient parking. The organizers obviously welcomed such negative publicity as publicity, and the tension transformed some speakers to prophets. Rather mundane and academic political analyses were illuminated by a suddenly personal element shoved on the perceiver. With the opening and closing of the doors, at all times one could hear the faltering crescendo of the opposition outside, encouraging the resolve.

Approaching the horror of the occupation is the horror of no one listening. My father use to tell me that the worst thing is when you are telling the truth and no one believes you. So what prevents the world from understanding the oppression of the Palestinians? Various paradigms, diversionary disinformation tactics, unconscious media bias, conscious media bias, all work miraculously together in keeping the American public in the dark. "Calling Israel a democracy prevents examination of what type of democracy it is. Democracy is not immune from oppression." Women until 1921, and still; slavery until 1964, but really until the 60's, and yet still...; South Africa. Bazian is logical; he is talking about "examination", dialogue, open doors. All that is required is open examination in the press, but yet there are paradigms that must be undone like a knot. "The conflict is presented falsely through a paradigm of peace - Israeli vs. Palestinian," Adam Shapiro from the International Solidarity Movement said, "rather, it is a struggle of freedom vs. oppression, and there are many Israelis who want an end to the occupation." It can not be doubted that Israel is an apartheid states; there are specific Israeli laws that make this quite clear. To argue this, would we argue the existence of these laws? Or whether or not laws differentiating and restricting Palestinians within and without Israel is apartheid? Could one argue that such laws are not oppressive, or just that they are justified?

Raif Zreik, the co-founder of Adalah, the Legal Center for Minority Rights in Israel, spent an hour honing the intricate form of oppression the Israeli government has reserved for Palestinians, an evolution of apartheid that is far worse in its effects. "The Palestinian experience is fragmented," he said, thus impossible to categorize. When excluded physically from the state, is that better than discrimination, or worse? he asks. "We have to challenge this complexity, rather than lay things flat." And then he made a comment that I found both extremely psychological and machinatic: "We have to work at understanding Israel as a process" - a process of slow total war on experience, involving each faculty of the oppressive culture, which destroys each

faculty of the oppressed.

A people misunderstood, unrepresented, silenced, dying. Snehal Shingavi, a graduate student professor at UC Berkeley, spoke of the reaction to his class Intifadah Poetry, and the academic criticism that Palestinian poetry is just too simple and unevolved to be taught, and is only being so for political reasons. The fallout is endless. "Incursion, not invasion. Curfew, not 24 hour lockdown...This isn't breaking news. It's slow suffocation..." Dianne Buttu, communications advisor to the PLO, said in the final keynote address.

"Tell Israel they are not above the law and tell Palestine they are not below the law."

October 20 - University of Iowa

» **Iowa City, Iowa**, October 20, 2002

After the conference in Ann Arbor I left on the 14th riding through the night to St. Paul, Minnesota, defying all the natural laws of Greyhound. Left an hour late and arrived an hour early, aside from the time change. But I payed for it, standing in the cold for that first hour, the station being closed for Columbus Day. I basically complained for an hour with a new age hippy backpacker who was heading to Portland and had come from Alaska. Told me stop by when I got out west, which is nice - and he is the first backpacker I've run into. I've thought about that often - assuming that I would eventually meet another backpacker. If you travel around for a hundred and thirty days it is inevitable, but it only took me forty.

In St. Paul for two days I did nothing. Relaxed. Had to see the infamous and reprehensible Mall of America - the largest in the world I believe. The cathedrals of our culture. Our God: \$.

Late on the 18th I got dropped in downtown St. Paul trying to find a library with a computer I could use, and I did but there are half hour limits per day, which is absurd. So I managed to find a cozy internet cafe. At 6 I walked Kellogg St. to its conclusion, across the downtown, over the overpass, a large nameless cathedral looming on the left. Beautiful. Few buildings impress me, but this I would describe as an argument between order and perfection, perched on a hill brooding over the Mississippi.

At 730 I caught a Jefferson bus to Iowa City, but it would only take me to Des Moines, the city of the silent Ss. Jefferson Bus is simply the

bizarro Greyhound - the seats are harder, but recline farther, less legroom, but the arm divide folds down, but the overheads have doors which is a bad thing considering the size of my backpack which is hard enough to squeeze in, and I'm always holding up the line. Much worse than Greyhound, which I didn't think would be possible. Except the driver is far more efficient, quick stops, but no time for cigarettes, until we get to Des Moines where I have to stay for three hours until the 4 am bus to Iowa City. So I cook up some popcorn in the microwave and deny a hundred sly cigarette beggars.

I get to Iowa City and I like it. Its 6am and beautiful for once in the new city; it seems that whenever I go somewhere new the sky is overcast or its raining, which has serious psychological effects. I write in the coffee shop for a few hours until the library opens, where I spend most of the day. Yesterday, a guy came up to me and asked if I was a traveler. Then he asked me straight out if I believed in God; he was holding a biblegateway.com printout. No. Sorry. Than he said Don't be sorry to me. I laughed and said I apologize for preventing his evangelism. He wandered off.

I hadn't slept the night before and was so damn tired, and it was a Friday night so there wouldn't be a lounge open until 3 am and I couldn't make it staying awake for 40 hours after all the travelling and I'm always pretty weary from the backpack, and it's cold, and the walk from the Greyhound in Iowa City to the University was a couple of miles - I'm beat so cave in and get my first hotel room of the trip, but I'm proud I held out so long - 50 days. I walk the stretch along the Mississippi and pass a dam but I can't see much in the night; the next morning I pass back and stop on a bluff smoking and gazing up and down the river for a while, being in no rush. I then notice below me on the rocks a scattering of old men fishing, one boy who suddenly has something, to which the old men give hard looks, silent, no advice. The boy's line snaps and the two old men give each other a passing look and go back to casting.

I cross the bridge and listen to the dam, ineffably loud. I'm in a fantastic mood, and dance a bit to the Belle and Sebastian I'm listening to until a car of college kids whine past me honking.

Today I'm waiting on a meeting for Iowans For Peace at 6 so I have some time still. About an hour ago, the guy at the computer in front of me was arrested by two cops who came in suddenly with a woman and they led the man out to the other room. A girl explained to me that he stole stuff yesterday and again today - he is about fifty years old and

looks confused. They lead him back through suddenly and he's in handcuffs talking amiably to the cop, who is smiling.

October 21 - Iowans For Peace

» **Iowa City, Iowa**, October 25, 2002

Before I left Iowa City I went to the Iowans For Peace meeting - a coalition of local groups, with an organizational structure that thus far seems the ideal of the MidWestern activist organizational brand. The structure and nature of their operations is vastly different from any East Coast entity I've met. The meeting, everyone was over 40 (I hope I am right), one student I believe but she might not have been - in short, the coalition had three qualities that are distinct: 1) Run by middle-aged to senior local religious affiliated organizations 2) Generally women (80% - though some usuals did not attend) 3) A religious (and here, very much Quaker) twist to most of the coalition organizations (met in a church-like building), but this is not manifested in direct religious literature, but is instead reflected in the groups' concentration on substantiating, logically, emotional objections to war, concentrating often on civilian deaths, and the atrocity of war, rather than, say, presenting theories on the failure of nation building; in short, the coalition seemed to lean towards a 'pacifism' rather than an 'intellectual objection'. And this may sound insulting in some way - as if I'm saying that "these religious groups don't think very well" but on the contrary the midwestern brand of structure has developed qualities that the more collegiate East Coast groups perpetually fail to produce. Anti-War Conferences, even the Palestinian Solidarity Conference, somehow mire themselves in bitter ideological infighting. With the exception of some acceptable structural arguments within the collegiate movement, (I'm thinking of the International Socialists Organization's attempt to have a top-down structured movement) there is an unnecessary and, I think, immature fascination with the distinctions between groups' ideologies rather than their sameness. In Iowa you won't hear the word ideology in such a context.

What the Iowans have succeeded in doing is forming a community-oriented activism, rather than a student-oriented activism, but somehow inclusive of it. This is the seed of the ideal grassroots movement (no pun intended) - collegiate focus is empirically narrower, and for a wealth of probably soci-psychological problems college kids can't break out of their cage into the labor, faith-based, and community realms that are simply necessary for a successful movement. Though there was no real student presence at the meeting I went to, I suspect that this is not indicative of their position within

the Iowan whole - speaking to one of the members after the meeting, she explained briefly relations with the University of Iowa groups and a new upstarting student group across the city. But where is their presence? Not a flyer anywhere on campus - only the ISM for their Truth Tour.

After the meeting one of the members was so kind as to drive me around looking for a friend I could stay with. We wound up at an activist married couple's house (a house that was thoroughly activist-oriented, aesthetically - inspiring). I was left there and we talked for a while, at one point of the infamous ISO, how she had once been a member but was turned off eventually - and someone from the ISO narrowmindedly pointed out to her how they have to break out of their vigil mode. This critique is on one obvious level very true, but what is not so obvious is the future development of a community grassroots group, with the help of new information structures, that the ISO - a backwards dinosaur - is unable to fathom. The ISO cannot develop; it already is done developing. Between their horribly written newspaper and their overbearing quest for payed membership, they have much larger and tighter modes to break out of, which will be difficult, considering their nearly hierarchical top-down structure. Comically, the ISO represents, within organizational structure theory, the antithesis of the structural ideal. Iowa is apparently a progressive city - the folks are, perhaps from that religious strain, a bit more open to opposing the war than the east coast yuppie. But, as one coalition member, pointed out - the conservative/liberal duality does not apply. Many here are antiwar, but also antihomosexual. This is a difficult crowd to work with - and, when the coastal activist arrogance is put aside, you see that there just might be an inherent connection between this midwestern brand of structure and the stratification of citizens it targets - there has to be. They are petitioning, demonstrating, writing letters (the first local paper I picked up had an Iowans for Peace letter on the first page) connecting (via phone) their community - and they have completed and Iowa directory of activism - remarkably many phone and fax numbers. How would an east coast intellectual college kid activist begin to comprehend the new strategies that must be employed once a thousand miles off the coast - he or she just might end up with a grassroots community based, semi faith-based, structure.

So the only thing that this form of structure must do is connect to the outside world. When this informational element is introduced, everything improves: dialogue, ideas, new strategies, and well beyond your control. Once the grassroots groups are connected, which is a

long, slow, and unstable process (all the ideal qualities, actually), an infrastructure will be in place which will inevitably evolve, and I think we could ultimately see a level of coordination and organization that would have seemed an absurd dream even a few years ago.

So I stayed at the super-activist house, slept in, walked the mile back to campus, bought a Sigmund Freud action figure to send to a friend (sighted in a window display), and I had actually walked a few blocks thinking about the coolness of the Freud and turned back to buy it. I left then, on the 21st for a meeting in Boulder Colorado but of course I would miss it (Greyhound) by about ten hours, and get off in Denver instead.

October 25 - Entering the West

» **Denver, Colorado**, October 27, 2002

I have found myself forming a narrative of my trip, not only giving meaning to past "phases" (by deeming them "phases", then qualifying them) but have projected into the future what will be my next phase. The first phase was the first two weeks, Worcester through Swarthmore, where I was with people I knew, comfortable and housed. The second phase was departing Swarthmore, going to Richmond, Indiana until I reached Cincinnati, a short period where I first was miserable and teasing regret. In Cincinnati I was with a friend of my brother's so was comfortable and secure. I left Cincinnati for Toledo, and, until I got to Flint, marks the third phase, a period I consider equal in misery to the second one, interrupted only by the pleasant stretch of time in Cincinnati. The fourth phase, however, is interesting. The second and third parts, then, seemed like one chapter divided by a brief satisfaction; and it was then that I completely changed my strategy, and so the fourth phase captures the return to Cincinnati, where I met up with a group at a protest and stayed with them comfortably, then went to Columbus, where again I negotiated a pleasant stay, went on to Ann Arbor, which was even more pleasant (I mean physical comfort only), and from there went to St. Paul to see friends, relaxed, which was a mental goal for weeks I greatly looked forward to, especially in the beginning. St. Paul completes the fourth; beyond it I had not even planned. Thus Iowa marks the most disturbing chapter, mentally at least. I no longer had a goal near enough to painlessly anticipate. In Iowa I broke down a bit, I admit. I got a motel room, and wallowed. I felt more alone in Iowa than anywhere else I think. Which may be why I so thoroughly enjoyed it, for the first time not because of physical discomfort and uncertainty of where I would sleep, but for strictly mental and emotional duress.

Thus, I cannot classify Iowa, and see it sort of as the hinge, or nexus, of my trip. I reached an epiphany in Iowa that continues to fuel me. I had hoped, before I left, that beyond the certain painful solitude, discomfort, uncertainty, there would be an inevitable epiphany spawned that would rise from some new understanding contingent upon the faults.

The Midwest and the western East I was disappointed with on an aesthetic and cultural level - disappointed that everything seemed the same. The only detectable distinguisher between regions was the sudden advent of Big Boy and White Castle signs which sadly marks borders more accurately than any state line. And really, the climate was only vaguely different past Pennsylvania. Michigan and Minnesota were exceptionally cold - perhaps their defining characteristic. The Midwestern cities have their own mark but not far removed on the spectrum from, say, Providence. Clean, wide boulevards. Tall square buildings, the domed Capitol, white imported marble steps, a central park with variations of the fountain (an interesting symbol now, of the state - perhaps because of what one writer in Harper's recently wittily called its "endless monologue"), and always the cathedral on the hill. But when I left Iowa City, the ride through Nebraska (especially western Nebraska) and eastern Colorado finally presented some new material. Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, were generally fields of various crop as far as you could see - if you stand in the road, strangely the sky is visually a dome rather than a plane, which is an odd thing to see for the first time. But Nebraska turning into Colorado turned fields into slightly rolling hills, or bowed plains, somewhere in between, of scraggly low brush, soil half desert, half farmland. Easily the most desolate scene I have ever witnessed. Passed through small towns, like Sterling, Colorado (I love that name and the mood so rightly fit to it) where some roads are still dirt, street signs hang from hooks, actually hand carved a hundred years ago perhaps, and you can tell the weather from how fast they wag.

But in Denver I've been staying in this halfway house/hostel/motel called Newhouse Hotel, a western version of the Chelsea Hotel. The stairs and halls are wide with that early 20th century carpeting, an old architecture out of *The Shining*. 20 dollars a night. Everyone is a drunk or a refugee. Have a small room with a table to read over all night. A grimy lounge downstairs where everyone drinks - this place rings that note of hopelessness most of Russia is familiar with. Very quiet, relaxing, downtown overlooking the Capitol, five blocks from an indy theater, everything perfect, except for the colony of odd looking bugs that wander around the sink. And ha actually I had a dream that night

(I was a little nervous of all the bugs, going to sleep) around everywhere, and finally cornering me, then holding up its two front legs and with two bughands giving me the duple peace sign and walking away. Is that a nightmare or a dream? I don't know. I was more confused than frightened when I woke up.

I was suppose to go to Boulder but there were complications - a 10 hour delay, which would have taken me 29 hours instead of 18 and I would have missed the meeting anyway so I got off early in Denver. I have reached a cool indifference, which is the product of a pride I have developed, which I think is the mark of a twisted solitude. I've developed this defense mechanism where I mentally pretend I'm a wandering harbinger, nobly alone, suffering, determined. These are self-assigned properties, a reaction to the fact that these very qualities are wholly unrecognized by my environment, and I secretly wish they were so, in compensation for my depressing solitude. Thus I equate the two, destructively: I have marked solitude as unrecognition, presupposing the 'ought' to be somehow assuaged by everyone, because they won't. It is ultimately circular.

I've reached a level of organization and efficiency such that most of my former problems no longer worry me. It is no longer physically a problem, really; I live like a king. Staying right now in a fellow activist's house while he is gone for a week in Toronto, with hospitable activists, in a safe and convenient neighborhood, full internet, my own room and bed, own phone, and nowhere to be. But I will back up: I lounged around Denver for two nights in the hostel, frequenting the theater and library, eating lunch on the roof of this 40 story parking garage, giving a clear view of the city, and, yesterday, the fog cleared and I saw the mountains for the first time. On the 24th I got to the Colorado Coalition for Middle East Peace meeting, do my thing, and befriend the man whose house I'm staying in. He is on top of things and is very much into the networking strategy I'm developing, and especially the database. My only worth, and the main reason activists here aren't turned off by my presence, is because I have a lot of information that is valuable to the organizer.

I have adjusted to generally every contingency I am certain to face. I'm less paranoid now as robotically cautious. I leave the motel last night and I look around as I always do, and there's no one there but as I walk I hear footsteps behind me, about 30 feet back I estimate, so I make my way to a phone and make like I'm calling someone and as the man approaches I flash the knives strapped to my belt, he goes to the corner, crosses, and I see him walk back to wherever he was

hiding. This situation is now typical enough that I'm not so much frightened as annoyed. Guy comes up to me on the street and starts talking overly friendly with me. I interrupt him and say 'Hey, I don't have anything before you' before he can get to the question. He stops, smiles, and moves on to the next. Everyone wants a cigarette too. "Hey man, got a cigarette?", "How 'bout a cigarette, bro?", "Yo dude can you spare a bro a butt?". No. "No?" Fucking no, man. I'm should start bumming cigarettes. Had a businessman ask me for a cigarette once. Couldn't believe it.

October 27 - After the Protest

» **Denver, Colorado**, October 27, 2002

The meeting the other night featured an organization that I think has the most versatile structure. Central location in an office, post-student run, young, internet-integrated, and the old attend, participate. They are operating throughout the state - in Boulder especially, with strong relations to state-wide organizations. The meeting was specifically over the tactics and strategy, coordination, for the 26th protest. They did not bail out and send busses to the West Coast, but drew out 5000 in Denver, which is not a protest city. This can only grow. And they share an office with the Denver AFSC branch.

That was on the 24th, after which I switched motels to a better one for the same price, where I stayed until the 26th. I walked a mere three blocks to the protest, but had decided to not really participate, but instead to wander on the outskirts of the demonstration and monitor immediate public reaction. This seems a logical thing to do, considering a demonstration is allegedly seeking to include the public, communicate a specific message. On a street corner across the street from Broadway I hovered, asking one man what was going on over there. He said "a protest against the invasion of Iraq" and he agreed with the message. I asked him if this event made it "easier" for him to oppose. He said he hadn't thought of that, but that it must. A woman who was waiting to cross said she couldn't tell what was going on over there, but then saw signs and said 'oh' and walked away. Some were turned off by the inevitable need for slogans such as "No War For Votes" and "Regime Change Begins at Home". It was peaceful of course, great bands, and after I left with a guy from the meeting, one of the protest organizers, and I'm staying at his house now while he is in Toronto for a week.

November 1 - Resting

» **Denver - Swarthmore**, November 1, 2002

Two entries ago I had prematurely declared a era of good feeling, that I had metaphorically crossed the Mississippi, entered the West; the series of strategic blunders that had defined the first weeks were over; a new strategy had replaced it, bringing general success and stability. The solitude and general anxiety of "not ever seeing someone you know" had seemed to lull as an effect. I knowingly deemed this new development the only consequence of the previous phases, conforming to a specific narrative I had formed, rationalized, perhaps for mental function of just having one, a vehicle of meaning. If reality is ever lacking in decipherable form or meaning, it might be our inevitable reaction to assign it one.

Within hours of writing that entry I began what would be a three day mental breakdown, the main cause something in my personal sphere that I won't discuss, but all the more, all the constant negative qualities of my environment - their effects that I had for so long exerted most of my mental effort combatting, won. I was initially shocked, and the West as liberator quickly became the West as master. It occurred to me that I was quite far from where the faintest node of comfort could be found. Travelling in solitude is a fragile mental state, endurable only in its consist ability to fail you - a state of alarm that can be adapted to. But when an external dilemma is introduced, not only is it magnified in its horror ten-fold, but those once minute threats to sanity cannot be warded off, as if the mechanisms preserving sanity can deal with only several fronts.

Normally, stumbling upon an overly-hospitable fellow activist, getting a private room offered up for a week, is a phenomenal twist of luck. Having a bed, a computer, a kitchen to cook, and for a private week, is typically a blessing. I consider this opportunity an occurrence that is remarkable to happen at all. Unfortunately, this comfortable privacy can quickly become an unbearable solitude. So I left Denver and decided to head south to Phoenix, and start working back east, deciding that I couldn't simply deal with this mental state alone, or if I could that I wouldn't want to try. The effort to do so might just be more destructive than the thing itself. But of course the bad news I had received got worse, which was actually better in that I preferred the clarity to the ambiguity that had until then plagued me more than if what I feared came. Appeased in the worst of ways I turned directly east despite the 45 hour bus ride that was sure to be unbearable in this state, nevermind without.

The 45 hours were therapeutic in a sick sort of way, but upon reaching Swarthmore I instantly felt better. After what was 3 days of new limits of general sorrow and an unprecedented insanity that did not fit the cause, under such circumstances, I feel mentally healed, only a hollow bout of sorrow remains, when I happen upon the thought. Nevertheless, I am to rest here for a week, then continue.

This trip, in the whole, has brought a series of events, mental and physical, that I had not at all anticipated. The whole quality of the trip is vastly different from what I expected. Each of the phases I have encountered I had no prior experiential knowledge. Literally new emotions. And thoughts. I am beginning to feel not unstoppable but very difficult to stop.

November 24-28 - Departure #2

» **Swarthmore, Nashville, Atlanta**, November 28, 2002

I've rode this same path four times now. Last year to Notre Dame, when I first left for Richmond months ago, then backtracking to Cincinnati - and to mention it, I've passed through Dayton and Columbus almost a dozen times - then back again, west to Denver, doubling back through Columbus and Pittsburg. I recognize all the stations ahead of time, and the rest stops - this one in particular approaching Pittsburg, featuring a fantastic buffet, and cheap. No non-smoking section. 24 hours. And everyone is an asshole. Last time I was here I cooked up ramen on the platform for a small crowd soon engaged in dismembering Bush's rhetoric. Now I'm washing my hair in the sink, which smells like wet cats, and the bathroom - rotting eucalyptus and piss. There are never actually paper towells in the dispenser, or soap - and you can gauge the worldliness of the handwasher by his timed ability to reconcile the emptiness of the paper towell dispenser with the absence of an alternative. Usually they'll go through a number of stalls looking for toilet paper, but there isn't any of course. By the time I'm drying my hair he's wringing his hands departing. In a few weeks I almost forgot the merits of Greyhound. Everyone smells bad; people sleep on the floor all the time, they wake up at each sounding of the PA, go back to sleep or get up slowly - efficiency is a distant ideal though everyone seems to be actively pursuing it, and failing. The bathroom is where everyone meets - employees, riders, cowboys. A line of grubby faces picking their faces in the mirror, combing back their slick hair. Swig something discreetly in their coat, sometimes. A few people have actually asked me for disposable razors and I have always given one to them. Everyone asks me for a cigarette - it's how I look, especially now with

my curduroy jackets. College kid seeing the country. But to know that I have a disposable razor, that is perception.

Ohio has been the nexus of most of my travelling. I have to pass through some city in Ohio, it seems, to go anywhere. Going to Nashville I have to pass through Dayton and Cincinnati (as well as Columbus, but passing through Columbus makes a little bit of sense), which ought to give you an understanding of how clumsy and unnecessarily long travelling by Greyhound can be. Western Pennsylvania is very much like Kentucky and Tennessee (and West Virginia) - forests, small rolling hills - but stops suddenly somewhere in Ohio, for stretches of long flat fields, farms. Turning straight south out of western Ohio is a return to the same terrain of the bumpy woods of farther East, but so far west it is a strange break in the midwestern flat farmland that continues south unbroken. Kentucky and Tennessee are series of tractor graveyards and small enclosed plots of land that are as dark, old, and wet as the woods around them and so fade in and out with less effort than anywhere else I've been. But you get near the cities and all the crap starts to roll out - the Safe Auto billboards advertising 'minimum coverage' all across Nashville, with scantily clad women featured with no real relation to the product offered. Strange that this is not strange.

Watching the poor woman explain to the nervous rich woman how she wanted to be a tour guide in Nashville, she knew the streets like the back of her hand, but her husband won't let her and anyway she enjoys washing his socks and ironing she says, doing work around the house. The rich woman does not know what to say - now I enjoy this, a glimpse into the constructed incompatibilities of class divisions. Intra-national travelling is only possible through a small number of private companies, and each, given their respective domains, is significantly divided by economic and class divisions. If you are middle-class and do not fear airplanes then you are likely not on Greyhound, and if you are flirting with the poverty line then you are likely not flying. It is no wonder that everyone I seem to meet has a strong political grudge against the Bush administration. I have been convinced by the right wing and mass media pundits not that I ought to support war but that if I do not support war my conclusions are not obvious, but extreme, dissenting, and contrary to the masses. It is difficult to internalize that my conclusions are fairly obvious. I can trace incompatibilities between myself and a hawk to a small number of points. Why ought I feel reassured in my beliefs by the fact that others' agree? That fact must be irrelevant, but for more practical and psychological reasons this is comforting. There are few moments in

which I've been able to truly identify with a group of people, rather than an individual. I think that most of these moments have been while on my trip.

I got to Nashville late of course and missed the meeting but got the Nashville Peace and Justice Center anyway, to at least drop of material and collect what contacts I could. It seemed the same class of group structures that I found in Denver - small number of young post-college activists organizing what they can, doing well, serious and intent enough on reaching beyond their domain. There have been a number of groups recently that have declared somewhat national conferences focusing on networking. Six or seven groups pushing to host and declare important gatherings is annoying, but this annoyance is an achievement - better than one group declaring a conference. Groups ought to be butting heads. Instability is the key to the movement's structure - there are no borders to what in the moment is the unknowable network of social and political activist organizations, but there are inherent limits to any hierarchical, top-down structure, as RAND has been loyally pointing out to the Bush Administration. For this reason, the ISO was vehemently rejected a couple years ago when they foolishly (and selfishly) attempted imposing a top-down structure on the movement.

In Nashville I got a dumpy hotel room for 15 bucks, which hurts, but while I was at it I toured the Broadway jazz clubs, danced for hours to bluegrass and country, and left with some people I met to the Inferno, a flashy late night techno bar. I left with two of them, well drunk as myself, both former activists (somewhat). We hung out for a while where I was staying (the Regency) until we heard the man next door yelling, and it sounded like some hitting, a woman shouting back, both unintelligible. Thought we heard kids too, but we all got sober real fast. I looked at their room number and we called it, but they didn't pick it up, quieted down for a minute and we could hear it ringing from our room, an odd feeling. I wanted to knock but they wouldn't let me. So we called the cops but it took them 15 minutes to get there and just minutes after we called we heard the man slam the door behind him and we followed him out watching from the glass in the stairs get in his car. A very small man. The cops got there and we listened from the crack in the door - her quite surprised they were there, upset in fact that someone had called. I'm not sure if we had done a good thing, though perhaps the right thing, if that is possible. Everything was fine she said but she spoke low and I think maybe she was really glad they were there, how often she must think of calling. I watched from the hall and we saw each other and I will not forget that

particular moment and the particular form of misery on her face. Lola (what people call her - because of that movie I have not seen) behind me was crying sort of. And this all rightly so put a damper on the evening.

I left Nashville the next day, for Atlanta where I'll be for a few days, where I am now. The drive through Tennessee south had just the flavor of McCarthy's novels, *The Orchard Keeper* in particular. Modernity is slow there in arriving and at points you cannot easily determine the year, it looks like the 30's for long stretches through the backwoods. The highway is two lanes and curving around hills the construction crews of decades ago no doubt could not go through, on each side four or five stories of rock cut into straight down with drill bits and blasting you can still see scarred on each side. Actually saw a man deep in the forest and rocks, on the side walking slowly, no car in sight, no town.

Nov.29-Dec.9 - The South

» **Atlanta, Birmingham, Jackson, New Orleans, December 9, 2002**

It is a shame that after so many months I now, at the end, have command. I'm moving quickly now, through Georgia faster than Sherman; Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, in ten days. Left Atlanta for Birmingham where I stayed in the dumpy National 9. The next morning I walked out to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, wholly empty of activists. Predominantly a medical school. I put up flyers and stopped at Birmingham Copy, the old man not too happy with what I was printing. I flyered for two hours downtown outside a diner, most citizens taking the slip from my hands and dropping it in the trash so I eventually just put the copy box in the trash to reuse the old ones. Took me a while. Two hunters in camo jump suits were fairly threatening, asking me if I was one of them agitators. I was happy to leave, wandering around the industrial parts of the city taking pictures of the decadence. I saw a train rolling over the overpass on 19th street so climbed up the side to the tracks, five or six of them meeting at a point where the sun had set. When the second train came it occurred to me to just hop on it. I was lying under a tractor trailer stacked on the car, one of hundreds - the train miles long. There is no place to hide on the car so when we would roll through Alabama and, later, Mississippi towns, cars on each side waiting for the train to pass, I'd hope none were cops, hope I was not plainly visible lying face down trying to look formless, if that is possible. I didn't know where the train was going, other than west, so I waited for a city large enough for a Greyhound station. In an hour I was freezing, moving through fields, seeing animals' eyes and front legs now and then, at what must have

been 80mph, the wind wild moving under the trailers and I was hoping the metal brace tipping up the trailer level with the wheels on the rear wouldn't snap for some reason and crush me. After three or four hours, in what was Jackson we rolled through at the same speed I got on in Birmingham, about 5 mph, and there I jumped off after my bag (so then I have to jump) and fell a little but walked to a gas station and found the Greyhound, rode the hourly bus to New Orleans, beating the local-bus from Birmingham by hours.

I'm staying at a New Orleans hostel on St.Charles five minutes on the trolley from the French Quarter. Will be meeting with an activist from Tulane, which is five minutes from the hostel, where I am now, past the Garden district and adjacent to Loyola. Spent the last two nights on Bourbon street with a group of travellers from the hostel. Saturday night was a mini mardi gras on Bourbon, where literally everyone is drunk, every block someone is vomiting in the street, which mixes with the horse shit from mounted cops. The streets are crowded with people dancing. You can hear the jazz from as far as the Mississippi five blocks up on the Spanish Plaza. Beyond that is the ghetto. On Bourbon Saturday I met a group activists, one in particular I've been seeing, taking me around the city to cafes and clubs I have to see. On Magazine St, where the ghetto meets the tourists, a small open mic poetry house features slam poetry reconciling ghetto life with the murder rate. All the cabbies are rascist. One tells me Boston must be nice without all those African-Americans - a politically correct bigot.

Leaving tomorrow for Houston.