

HOUSE ORGAN

The Ecological Implications of the Iraq War¹

The title of this presentation requires a brief introductory comment, since the notion of the “ecological implications” of a war—or of anything else, for that matter—is not commonly brought forward. And when it is, the word, ecology, is often confused with the notion of the “environment.” Of course, the two terms are intimately related, each referring to the side of things having to do with our association with nature and the external world; in many instances they can be used interchangeably. But there is a major difference, which has to do with relationship. When we speak of our environment, we signify that which is outside us and surrounds us. When we speak, however, of our ecology, we are talking about a structured set of interrelated elements within which we are a vital participant. Each structured instance of such relationships we call an “ecosystem.” It remains possible to talk analytically of the environment as the set of components and inputs that enter into ecosystems, so long as we do not reduce the ecosystem to the aggregate of its parts, for this would violate the essential interconnectedness of nature. Further, since we are now committed to looking at the pattern comprised by things rather than the things in isolation, the mind, moving between these levels, grasps the relationships as they form a “whole.” And because the relationships between things form a new structure, the whole cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts.

From an environmental standpoint, humanity is essentially separated from nature, which appears externally as resources, or assaults us with storms or tsunamis. But this violates human being, for we are part of nature and nature is part of us. The human body is the physical portion of nature we inhabit, and what we call “mind” is nature’s formativity as indwelling within us. Environmental data are necessary to assess the components of an ecosystem, yet the environmental facts can never account for an ecosystem, which is comprised by its essential interrelatedness. Though the notion is foreign to environmentalism, ecosystems can include human beings and may even be defined as primarily human, according to the degree to which their relationships are irradiated with mental qualities. This enables us to relate society to nature and see our built society as a set of ecological relationships: the human ecosystem in which our lives are lived.

Or, in the case of warfare, destroyed. The goal of war is to dominate another’s society. To do this, armies since the beginning of history have recognized that destruction of the ecosystems upon which life depends is essential to victory. This can occur by disrupting essential environmental inputs like food or by severing the points of connection that hold human ecosystems together, as by destroying communications networks or annihilating cities. But these relationships also include the subjective; and it is here that paradoxical effects can occur, in which the inner subjective elements of a human ecosystem can override the merely physical, environmental determinants. For war is a domain of passion, and a matter of what is called morale, the will to fight and band together for the purpose.

¹ Adapted from a presentation at the World Tribunal on Iraq, in Istanbul, Turkey, on June 26, 2005.

History is full of examples in which an objectively inferior force prevails over a superior one. Thus what is merely environmental cannot predict the outcome of combat, except in the last instance, when vital inputs like food or water are eliminated. Indeed, destruction of the environmental fibers of a society can at times be met by a dramatic recovery of cohesion and wholeness on the part of the victims of invasion. The Nazi attack on the USSR in 1941 was the most wanton exercise of sheer destructivity in history. Yet Russia rallied, despite having suffered the immensity of Stalin's atrocities. Its people refused to become demoralized, they recovered an organic wholeness of purpose, and, at inconceivable cost, succeeded in expelling the enemy. Tolstoy recounted a similar process in *War and Peace*, on the occasion of another invasion of Russia. This is, needless to add, not the province of any one nation or historical moment but an ever-present potential of human nature. In any case, war from an ecosystemic point of view is anything but simple. It brings forth all the intricacies of humanity's relation to nature and exposes a major rift line along the axis of aggression.

A Country Annihilated

The Anglo-American leadership made much of their surgical finesse in waging war on Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Not for them the sacking of Baghdad or the extermination of its people. Bush was to be no Tamerlane, who built mountains from the skulls of his victims and indeed sacked Baghdad at the turning of the 15th Century, nor Rumsfeld a Hitler, who wanted *Lebensraum* for his Master Race on the lands cleared of Slavs by Panzer divisions. No, this was to be new way of warfare. It would build democracy and bring the light of Progress to the Iraqi masses groaning under Saddam's tyranny—and in the doing, would deliver to them the essential feature of progress: an open market society. I believe it was NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw who said that the Americans were going to be very careful in the invasion of Iraq, because, after all, they were about to own the place. Like proper bourgeois in every time and place, they would care for what was theirs. The invasion and occupation thus became a test of the neoliberal principle that ownership and its subsequent commodification is the proper way of protecting ecosystems.

Almost as soon, therefore, as the tank drivers turned off their ignitions, the inspection teams sprang into action to assess prospects for their newly acquired prize. What they found was daunting. The reports, assembled throughout the Spring of 2003, described a country in an advanced state of ruin. Virtually every infrastructural system was in decay: power grids, water pipelines and pumps, sewage systems, industrial facilities, oil wells, railroads, ports, airports, telecommunications, roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, clinics . . . name it, and a report of ruination would follow.

But we were so careful, lamented the invaders. They had a point, though not one they would wish to pursue. Though the "smart bombs" had killed thousands² and caused much havoc besides, the main causes of Iraq's infrastructural deterioration lay in what had led up to the March 2003 onslaught. There has, in fact, been one long Iraq war, beginning with the 1991 campaign and extending over twelve hellish years of blockade and low-grade bombing (including hospitals), the pace of which picked up markedly in the six months prior

² An estimate; the true number will never be known. As the U.S. commander in Iraq, General Tommy Franks, said, "we don't do body counts."

to the actual invasion. Thus even as hands were being wrung over whether Bush/Blair would go to war, they were already at war.

Along with the million and a half dead, including the incomprehensible number of a half-million children, the slow blood-letting leading up to the 2003 invasion introduced a chronic disintegration into the fabric of what had been the most advanced industrial society of the Arab-Islamic world, and softened it for invasion. The city of Baghdad, for example, went from 800 garbage trucks in 1990 to 80 in 2000 thanks to the sanctions. Imagine what this meant for the “quality of life” and the ability to clear out the deadly effluents of advanced industrial society.

An industrialized society is much more brittle and precarious from an ecological standpoint than its “backward” predecessors, inasmuch as progress means an increasing estrangement from nature. This includes the introduction of innumerable artificial boundaries behind which substances that require sequestration are sealed off. Under conditions such as Iraq has endured, these become chaotically thrown into ecosystems—bodies as well as waterways—and destabilize them. War, which breaks down boundaries and the framework of ecosystems, sees to it that these hazards persist long after the actual invasion.³

This point was underscored by the first comprehensive study of the effects of the occupation on the ecology of Iraq, a gloomy assessment (predictably ignored by the major news media) made on June 2, 2005, by Pekka Haavisto, the Iraq task force chairman of the UN’s Environmental Program. Iraq, wrote Haavisto,

is the worst case we have assessed and is difficult to compare. After the Balkan War we could immediately intervene for protection, such as the river Danube, but not in Iraq. . . . more than a decade of crushing sanctions have damaged the environment, including the Tigris and Euphrates rivers where most of Iraq's sewage flows untreated. The situation became worse after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, in which depleted uranium munitions were used against Iraq for the second time and postwar looting and burning of the once formidable infrastructure caused massive spills and toxic plumes. The bombing and war carried a cost but the looting cost the environment more, such as in the Dora refinery or Tuwaitha nuclear storage.

Haavisto refers to the depot on the edge of Baghdad, where 5,000 barrels of chemicals, including tetraethylene lead, were spilled, burned or stolen, and the 56 square kilometer (km) complex south of Baghdad where 3,000 barrels that stored nuclear compounds were looted. Contaminated sites near the water supply also include a 200 square km military industrial complex, torched or looted cement factories and fertilizer plants (of which Iraq was one of the world's largest producers), and oil spills.⁴

³ For “natural disasters,” it is the same, all the more so when, as in the unfortunate case of New Orleans, class warfare, racism and environmental/ecological neglect had primed the city of a thousand toxins for incalculable ecodestruction in the wake of a hurricane like Katrina—which was itself aggravated by global warming. Further, the atrocious degree of vulnerability of the city owed a lot to the shunting of human, material and financial resources away from infrastructural repair to the Iraq war.

⁴ United Nations Environmental Program, “Desk Study on the Environment in Iraq,” Switzerland, 2003; and Khaled Yacoub Oweis, “Postwar Iraq Paying Heavy Environmental Price,” Reuters, June 2, 2005.

Note Haavisto's informed opinion, that looting has been a greater factor in ecosystemic breakdown than direct military aggression. But looting itself is another form of ecosystemic breakdown, now of the codes and internal moral regulations of a society. These, no less than roads and bridges, are torn apart by war, which induces both moral nihilism and its opposite, heroic altruism and sacrifice, according to pre-existing social relations as well as those introduced by war itself. For Iraq, the situation is complicated indeed, combining all the pressures built-in by so pernicious a regime as Saddam's⁵ along with the evils posed by the occupation, which has introduced a second order of invasion, of American capital.

As soon as Paul Bremer (who had been on the corporate board of Bechtel) took command of the occupation, he relentlessly began opening the country to investment. The strategy came to fruition on September 19, 2003, when Bremer issued Executive Order #39, mandating privatization and guaranteeing 100 percent repatriation of profits for 40 years for all enterprises save natural resource—i.e., oil—extraction (though including water). Never has a nation been turned over so swiftly to “Free Enterprise” and rampant profiteering. Only compare the swift rehabilitation after World War II of the national bourgeoisies of Germany and Japan, countries that had inflicted incomparably more harm than Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In the earlier case it was a matter of restoring a global capitalist system that had gone haywire by reconnecting transnational business elites who had been inconvenienced by inter-state hostility. However, Saddam's Iraq, though a client state for the West for some time, had essentially stood apart from global capital except for providing energy resources, and critically, lacked a national bourgeoisie integrable with that of the U.S. and Britain.⁶ Thus it could be scrapped, and at reckless speed, for its geostrategic resources.

The wanton disregard for the autonomy of an invaded nation has no parallel in modern history. Looting is merely the form taken by the great sell-off on the shadow side of things—a composite of the thuggery set free by the collapse of Saddam's authoritarian regime with the rapacity compounded from the aggressive arrogance of the invader's militarism and the greed expressed by its corporate grab of Iraq's economy. It would be interesting to pursue the connections between these currents. Certainly the United States could have prevented much of the orgy of looting—especially of cultural treasures—which followed the fall of Saddam, had it simply posted troops to do so. That it did not (except for—surprise!—the oil and interior, i.e., police ministries) tells us volumes about how looting and normal economic activity converge, the profound contempt held by the invaders for this most ancient of civilizations, and the immense corruption the occupation has spawned.

The old saw about capitalism being organized crime can be extended beyond the domain of looting. The opening of Iraq to U.S. investment also opened it to what capital does ecologically, which is to destabilize ecosystems by commodifying nature on an expanding scale. The drastic consequences are smoothly rationalized as business as usual. To

⁵ Which, it should not be forgotten, was scarcely “environmentally friendly.” Saddam's most notorious ecological crime, aside from aggression against Kurds and Iranians, lay in his wanton destruction of the Southern Marshes, near Basra, home to half a million Arabs. This ecosystem, once thought hopelessly ruined, has actually been making a comeback in the last two years, thus constituting the only environmental advance of the Invasion.

⁶ The efforts of neoconservatives to conjure this up with people like Ahmad Chalabi were simply risible.

cite one example, no sooner had capital established its beachhead in the country than it proceeded to destabilize ancient foundations of Iraqi agriculture. As one study put it:

For generations, small farmers in Iraq operated in an essentially unregulated, informal seed supply system. Farm-saved seed and the free innovation with and exchange of planting materials among farming communities has long been the basis of agricultural practice. This is now history. The [Occupation] has made it illegal for Iraqi farmers to re-use seeds harvested from new varieties registered under the law. Iraqis may continue to use and save from their traditional seed stocks or what's left of them after the years of war and drought, but that is not the agenda for reconstruction embedded in the ruling. The purpose of the law is to facilitate the establishment of a new seed market in Iraq, where transnational corporations can sell their seeds, genetically modified or not, which farmers would have to purchase afresh every single cropping season. While historically the Iraqi constitution prohibited private ownership of biological resources, the new U.S.-imposed patent law introduces a system of monopoly rights over seeds. Inserted into Iraq's previous patent law is a whole new chapter on Plant Variety Protection (PVP) that provides for the "protection of new varieties of plants." PVP is an intellectual property right (IPR) or a kind of patent for plant varieties which gives an exclusive monopoly right on planting material to a plant breeder who claims to have discovered or developed a new variety. So the "protection" in PVP has nothing to do with conservation, but refers to safeguarding of the commercial interests of private breeders (usually large corporations) claiming to have created the new plants.⁷

Mesopotamia is the cradle of agriculture as it is of civilization itself. Thus the Occupation undermines an 8000-year-old form of the Commons and opens it to ravaging by the global Market: liberation, indeed—from the ancient roots of ecological rationality. In other societies of the South, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank use mechanisms of indebtedness to achieve the same result; and perhaps Iraq would have gone this way, too. But this is specifically a product of U.S. warmaking, and it is characteristic of its fourfold phasic pattern of ecological disintegration: first, the pre-invasion softening-up; second, the invasion, proper, as a kind of primary accumulation to turn the national assets over to the invader; third, the occupation as a second wave of invasion, introducing the virus of accumulation into the ravaged nation; and finally, the long-term effects of a “developing economy” once this takes hold.

The damage wrought by these multiple insults to ecological integrity is too extensive for summarization—not to mention, indeterminable, given the chaos. The mere presence of armed forces is an ecological insult, whether in combat or at rest—especially where the U.S. army is concerned, the greatest wastrel and toxic polluter on earth, whose troops live in places like Camp Liberty in Baghdad's “Green” zone enjoying the contents of an average Wal-Mart, while the Iraqis they have liberated go days at a time without water in 50°C heat.⁸

⁷ Focus on the Global South and GRAIN, “Iraq's New Patent Law: A Declaration of War Against Farmers,” October 2004, online at: www.grain.org/articles/?id=6.

⁸ An Abrams tank consumes eight gallons of fuel per mile while in action. Since Bush came to office, the military has won exemptions from parts of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act. In mid 2005, administration officials went back to the Congressional trough

Some additional words about the water situation may be in order. Here the instrument is Bechtel, which along with Halliburton is one of the Big Two salients of capital's invading force and a specialist in water and its privatization (you may remember its exploits in Cochabamba, Bolivia). Awarded \$3.8 billion in a no-bid contract to take care of vital infrastructural needs through December 2005, Bechtel's chief accomplishments have been lame excuses and glossy public relations brochures. Can it be that they are deliberately allowing the system to deteriorate in hopes of creating a market demand for their services? In any case, the water supply is a disaster. No doubt the insurgency plays a role in this; notwithstanding, Bechtel's performance has been appalling. In March and April of this year, it was reported that at least 40 of Bechtel's water, sewage and electrical projects do not work properly. According to an internal memo of coalition officials, throughout Iraq renovated plants "deteriorate quickly to an alarming state of disrepair and inoperability." One U.S. official involved in reconstruction projects estimated that "hundreds of millions" of dollars had been squandered.⁹

Some of the human costs of Iraq's water system are conveyed in the words of investigative reporter, Dahr Jamail, from early in 2004:

Sadr City, formerly Saddam City, a large slum of Baghdad, has a largely Shi'ite population of over 1 million poverty stricken inhabitants. The water situation is at a crisis level. Ahmed Abdul Rida points to his tiny, dilapidated water pump, which sits quietly on the ground in his small home in Sadr City. "We have one hour of electricity, then none for eight hours," he says. "This pump is all we have to try to pull some water to our home. So whenever we get some electricity we try to collect what water we can in this bowl." He points to an empty metal bowl that sits near the lifeless pump. When Mr. Rida and other Sadr City residents do get water, most of the time it is brown water from the Tigris. Due to all of the dams upriver from Baghdad, the volume of flow from the Tigris has dropped from 40 billion cubic meters in the 1960's to 16 billion cubic meters today. So the water Mr. Rida gets during his two and a half hours a day of electricity is a concentrated cocktail of pesticides, fertilizers, heavy metals from antiquated piping, and unknown amounts of depleted uranium, raw sewage and other chemicals released from American and Iraqi munitions from the 1991 Gulf War, and the more recent Anglo-American Invasion. He points to a bottle of the last water they collected to show a sample of what his family has to drink. It has the color of watered down iced tea and smells like a dirty sock. It is no wonder he and his family are constantly plagued by diarrhea, with many of them suffering from kidney stones. And these are just the most obvious effects for the families in Sadr City who drink the contaminated

asking for relief from the Clean Air Act and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, which governs hazardous waste. These exemptions are meant to apply to domestic military bases, 25 million acres of which in the U.S. are home to 131 hazardous waste sites. The Defense Department accounts for more than 10 percent of the country's top-priority Superfund cleanup sites and generated 16.5 million pounds of toxic waste in 2002, according to government estimates. One can only imagine the care with which the U.S. military treats the ecosystems of Iraq, for example, how they "recycle" their wastes. Brad Knickerbocker, "Military Gets Break from Environmental Rules," *Christian Science Monitor*, Nov 24, 2003, online at: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1124/p02s02-usmi.html>.

⁹ Chiefly from the *San Francisco Chronicle* of March 29 and the *Los Angeles Times* of April 10, as summarized in Doug Lorimer, "Iraq: Making a Killing: The Big Business of War," *Green Left Weekly*, online at: <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2005/625/625p20.htm>.

water; heavy metals in their water also damage the liver, brain and other internal organs.¹⁰

The prime horror in the ecological disintegration of Iraq is, beyond doubt, depleted uranium (chiefly from U₂₃₈ and abbreviated as DU) The oxide of that infamous heavy metal has been released in the course of US aggression, and finds its way into the water supply. The United States admits having used DU in the 1991 war—300 tons, according to independent estimates.¹¹ There is no admission of having used it in the 2003 invasion; neither does the United States admit that DU poses a health hazard—although its own training manuals warn troops of toxicity, as does a video made by the Department of Defense (DoD) in 1995. There is no question, however, that an as-yet undisclosed though undoubtedly substantial amount of DU was sown over Baghdad and the Basra region in 2003,¹² nor can it be ruled out to have been used since. The use of this substance in ordnance, chiefly as “bunker-busting” bombs and anti-tank shells, is much cherished because of its superb ability to penetrate even the hardest armor or thickest wall, and then ignite. It is also essentially free and unlimited in quantity, hundreds of thousands of tons having accumulated as a by-product of the nuclear power and weapons industries. With a half-life of 4.5 billion years (roughly the age of our planet), DU takes the prize for radical indisposability; yet the United States has chosen to dispose of it against the purveyors of “Weapons of Mass Destruction,” and it will not be budged in this decision.

The term, “sown,” as a descriptor of how DU has been loosed on Iraq, is morbidly accurate. Because the vectors are tiny dust particles, chiefly of uranium oxide, produced by the ignition of DU munitions; and because these can spread anywhere and are virtually imperishable; and because they can be borne through the air and in the water; and because children play in the dust and in and around the many remaining hulks of destroyed targets; and because the dust has also been ingested though polluted water and air; and because the particles, once in the body, can lodge anywhere and produce a host of diseases; and because they also alter germplasm and so are passed down through the generations; and because health facilities in Iraq have suffered the general ruin of the infrastructure . . . for all these reasons, it must be said that an immense ecocatastrophe has been set loose, manifest in horrible disease and genetic defect that will continue on down the years into an indefinite future. The same curse hovers over military personnel who have been exposed and have gotten ill—and who, although they live in countries with advanced health facilities, have to

¹⁰ For detailed and vivid accounts of the disaster comprised by the electricity-water-sewage nexus, see Dahr Jamail (primary contributor), “Bechtel's Dry Run: Iraqis Suffer Water Crisis,” *Public Citizen*, Spring, 2004, online at: <http://www.dahrjmailiraq.com/reports/>; and Christian Parenti, “The Rough Guide to Baghdad,” *The Nation*, July 19, 2004, online at: <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20040719&s=parenti>. For a more recent survey, see UNDP, *Iraq Living Condition Survey 2004*, Volume II, Analytic Report, April 1, 2005. In June, 2005, Jamail wrote me that “It's safe to say that the water situation is just as bad and probably worse than when I reported on it in January/Feb. 04. In Fallujah now everyone has been instructed to boil their water, and even in parts of Baghdad, particularly Sadr City, there are cholera, hep[atitis]-E, and Typhoid outbreaks. [This information] comes recently from Iraqi doctors I know who are there now.”

¹¹ As well as 90 tons in Bosnia and Kosovo, in the wars against Serbia.

¹² See, for example, the 2004 German-made video by Frieder Wagner and Valentin Thurn, “The Doctor, the Depleted Uranium, and the Dying Children,” (Telepool; available in the U.S. through www.traprockpeace.org). The video shows researchers testing water and dust samples around areas of the invasion, with positive results, not only for U₂₃₈, but also Plutonium and U₂₃₆.

suffer the calculated neglect of a system that cannot admit its crimes.¹³ And, *inter alia*, the same can be said for all of us who are downwind of the particles set loose by the military machine.

Of the particular crimes against nature and humanity committed by the invasion and occupation of Iraq, leading place should be given to the usage of depleted uranium, carried out in clear violation of international covenants against the use of nuclear weapons, and in particular, this weapon. It is necessary to call things by their right names, and the right name for this is nuclear war, which is the supreme dismemberment of ecological relationships that have evolved over 4 billion years. Like the Iraq war itself, this is the responsibility of the United States security apparatus, enforcer of imperialism and scourge to the world. The routinization of nuclear weaponry in the Iraq war will stand forth, I should think, as the gravest of all the crimes committed by the American war machine.

The Stupidity of Power

If there is one advantage gained in this difficult business of assessing the ecological implications of the Iraq war it would lie in the direction of regarding crimes against nature and humanity in the same light. It is high time to appreciate the sufferings inflicted on all creatures, and not just those of our kind, as of legitimate moral concern. By doing so, we move beyond the confines of our species existence, break free of another chain of chauvinism and move toward the universal, which is the actual realization of our “nature.” No longer needing an anthropomorphic God, we can find God in ourselves as the creative power of nature.

This raises the question of Law and its relation to the ecological perspective. It is human nature to refuse the given and to transform nature, thus we always live in a kind of tension with nature and a greater or lesser degree of estrangement from nature that can evolve into the violation of nature. The notion of Law arises out of this estrangement, emerging as a freely chosen reconciliation with nature. The human creature, having broken with the natural order, sets before him/herself a human-made order to be obeyed: the Law. It is essential, however, that this Law transcend its narrowly social origins, or else it succumbs to arbitrariness. That is, unless the Law expresses what is universal in us, which is given by our relation to nature, it is not worth obeying; or from another angle, obedience becomes a mere gesture to avoid sanctions and other forms of punishment. It is scarcely necessary to point out that the actual, particular laws imposed by the state apparatuses of class society fail to achieve universality, even though they may succeed in limiting the damages. By the same argument, the universal expressed as the notion of Law constitutes the moment of our reconciliation with nature. Thus respect for the freely chosen boundaries of Law is also a respect for the boundedness of ecologies. And violation of the notion of Law is a violence against ecosystems and nature itself.

The waging of aggressive war—war inflicted on an adversary who poses no actual threat—is therefore a crime against nature as well as humanity. The United States/British

¹³ See, for example, Juan Gonzalez, “Poisoned? Shocking Report Reveals Local Troops may be Victims of America's High-tech Weapons,” *NY Daily News*, April 3, 2004; “The War’s Littlest Victim,” *NY Daily News*, September 29, 2004.

war on Iraq, a prime example of aggressive war, is *prima facie* an ecological disaster because it sets into motion an expanding and chaotic breakup of ecosystemic relationships. From this standpoint the invasion/occupation and the insurgency against it are both implicated, though not equivalently, as the burden of responsibility falls upon the aggressor who sets the whole catastrophic mass into motion. For this reason, the Nuremberg Tribunal after World War II—even though it, too, was a partial instrument of the victorious armies—was wise to call aggressive war a “Crime Against Peace” and to deem it the supreme offence human beings could commit, a crime that contained all the others within itself, like a generation of monsters within the womb.¹⁴

A half-century after Nuremberg, the judges have become the criminals. But the exquisite barbarism of Bush and his band of gangsters is also an exquisite stupidity, since he who wages aggressive war must become a liar—a phenomenon that scarcely needs elaboration in the present case—and lying to others entails a lying to oneself, all of which is part of the complex called stupidity. The stupidity of invaders has ecosystemic implications. To violate the integrity of ecosystems entails not being able to see or appreciate ecosystems; this includes blindness to the specific ways of being that comprise the cultures and psyches of the invaded. By violating this lived ground, the stupid invader humiliates the invaded and, since functioning humans will sacrifice all to regain dignity, sets the resistance into motion. Conversely, the ground of what is called wisdom is lived appreciation of ecosystemic participation. It is the fathoming of the relatedness comprising the whole, which we may recognize as dialectic.

This stupidity of power is the good news that announces the downfall of imperial invaders. The bad news is that these have arrogated so much power as to postpone their moment of reckoning. Bush is a supremely arrogant man (I cannot bring myself to dignify so banal a figure with the word *hubris*), and this is both the sign of his stupidity and of the Behemoth he serves. A complementary series seems to obtain: ever-greater power wielded with ever-diminishing intelligence. The intricate balance between these sides and their mutual development gives rise to great variations in imperial success. Rome was neither built in a day nor did it collapse in a day. Alexander invaded many a country aggressively and conquered Babylon using as much religious justification as G.W. Bush; yet he also displayed a wisdom, uncanny in one so young, that enabled him to identify with the cultures of those he had conquered and win their loyalty; nor did he try to suck dry their productive base.¹⁵ But Alexander also overreached; and his conquests disintegrated soon after his death.

And the Americans—what accounts for their folly? I should think it is an expression of the larger ecological crisis of which their imperium is the chief manifestation and driving force. The Vice-President’s 2001 “Energy Report” saw the trap ahead: the production of the

¹⁴ Michael Mandell, *How America Gets Away with Murder* (London: Pluto, 2004) provides an excellent discussion.

¹⁵ Alexander issued an edict forbidding his troops to enter the houses of the inhabitants of Babylon, which lies south of Baghdad on the Euphrates. Invading the archeological site that once was the great city 2,334 years later, Americans levelled parts of it to build a landing pad for helicopters and parking areas for heavy vehicles. Prof. John Curtis said that the invaders “caused substantial damage to the Ishtar Gate, one of the most famous monuments from antiquity [...] U.S. military vehicles crushed 2,600-year-old brick pavements, archaeological fragments were scattered across the site, more than 12 trenches were driven into ancient deposits and military earth-moving projects contaminated the site for future generations of scientists [...]” Wikipedia, “Babylon.” See also Rory McCarthy and Maev Kennedy, “Babylon Wrecked by War,” *The Guardian*, January 15, 2005.

energy that propels industrial capitalism is flattening out and will soon begin its inexorable decline, while the demand for energy is bound to keep on rising as a function of capital's insatiable hunger. There is no way out within the terms of the existing reality—and no way, either, for the American rulers to think beyond the existing reality, or even to question it. And so they have chosen the path of delusion, fancying they could conquer, rob, and at the same time be beloved by, the people of Iraq, whose oil wealth would see them through the crisis. A quantum increment in disregard for the Law accompanied this mutation of the imperial mind, accompanied by a cascade of lies and vindictiveness, with desolation to follow.

—Joel Kovel