

CARAC TERES

Estudios culturales y críticos de la esfera digital

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Revista Caracteres. Estudios culturales y críticos de la esfera digital

Caracteres es una revista académica interdisciplinar y plurilingüe orientada al análisis crítico de la cultura, el pensamiento y la sociedad de la esfera digital. Esta publicación prestará especial atención a las colaboraciones que aporten nuevas perspectivas sobre los ámbitos de estudio que cubre, dentro del espacio de las Humanidades Digitales. Puede consultar [las normas de publicación en la web](#).

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ISSN: 2254-4496



Editorial Delirio (www.delirio.es)

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Diseño del logo: Ramón Varela | Ilustración de portada: Claudia Porcel

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Artículos de investigación:

Caracteres

Bringing the Stories Home: Wafaa Bilal's War on the Public Narrative of War

Traer las historias a casa: La guerra de Wafaa Bilal en la narrativa pública de la guerra

James Hicks (University of Massachusetts)

Artículo recibido: 16-9-2012 | Artículo aceptado: 17-10-2012

ABSTRACT: The aim of the present article is to examine some artistic representations that persuade us to read the complexity of the narratives of war. To focus this issue, we will analyze Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension* exhibition, work which could be defined as a translation of war self-experience into an artistic frame. In this context *Domestic Tension* configures a space to examine the effects of war violence in modern societies. Under this perspective, art become more than a simple and empty representation of war, but further more the only possible response to human violence.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo es examinar diversas representaciones artísticas que nos permitan leer la complejidad de las narrativas de la guerra. Para abordar esta cuestión analizaremos la muestra *Domestic Tension* de Wafaa Bilal, que trabajo que puede ser descrito como la traslación de la propia experiencia de la guerra a un marco artístico. En este contexto, *Domestic Tension* configura un espacio que examina los efectos la violencia bélica en las sociedades modernas. Bajo esta perspectiva, el arte se convierte en algo más que una representación vacía de la guerra y, más aún, en la única posible respuesta a la violencia humana.

KEYWORDS: public narratives, Wafaa Bilal, war representation, *Domestic Tension*, Irak war

PALABRAS CLAVE: narrativa pública, Wafaa Bilal, representación de la guerra, *Domestic Tension*, guerra de Irak

The end of history [...] has been for the last half-century a technical possibility. The potential self-destruction of the human kind, in itself a turning point in history, has affected and will affect the life and the fragmented memories, respectively, of all future and past generations—including those “that are past ten thousand years backwards or forwards,” as Aristotle wrote [...] But to express compassion for those distant fellow humans would be, I suspect, an act of mere rhetoric. Our power to pollute and destroy the present, the past, and the future is incomparably greater than our feeble moral imagination.

Carlo Ginzburg

I deeply respect American sentimentality, the way one respects a wounded hippo. You must keep an eye on it, for you know it is deadly.

Teju Cole

In the final seconds of *Kony 2012*, the son of the video's director says, “I'm going to be like you Dad. I'm going to come with you to Africa.”¹ Suddenly the screen is filled by the image of a total eclipse, with the sun just beginning to reappear. Director Jason Russell's voice-over then entones, “The better world we want is coming. It's just waiting for us to stop at nothing.” Viewers are then instructed to do three things: 1) sign a pledge, 2) get an “action kit”, and 3) donate money to the film's advocacy group. And, oh yes, they should also share the video.

¹ A book-length version of this paper appears in *Lessons from Sarajevo: A War Stories Primer*, forthcoming in June 2013, from the University of Massachusetts Press.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>

Isolating this moment—the melodramatic climax of *Kony 2012*, along with the cosmic hook that leads to its final pitch—is a bit unfair, but it does demonstrate one thing: the film could really be selling practically anything. A “better world” is possible, so long as we “stop at nothing.” Then a son tells his father what every father wants to hear: an affirmation of the father’s own choices, a form of immortality. Hard to argue with that. “Africa,” of course, is the odd note here, particularly if you really haven’t seen the rest of the video. And, despite the film’s stated goal (to “make Kony famous”), there are still a few people who haven’t.

Kony 2012 was posted on YouTube and Vimeo March 5, 2012 by an NGO called Invisible Children. Since 2004, the group had been working to make a US public aware of the horrific war crimes perpetrated by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and its leader Joseph Kony in Uganda and neighboring countries. But the fifth of March was a quantum leap, unprecedented in any sort of social networking, and a level of recognition previously inconceivable within the world of human rights organizations. Within weeks the film had been viewed over 100 million times, making it to date the single most viral video in history. I begin by recapitulating this phenomenon for a very simple reason: *Kony 2012* is also a film that Jean-Jacques Rousseau would have loved, and one that Bernard de Mandeville would have loved to hate. In making this video for the Facebook age, Jason Russell and Invisible Children have given incontrovertible proof that sentimentalism, in war stories at least, is as wildly popular today as it was in the eighteenth century.

In his *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau imagined an onlooker who witnesses, and is unable to aid, a mother and child being attacked by a savage beast:

the tragic image of an imprisoned man who sees, through his window, a wild beast tearing a child from its mother’s arms, breaking its frail limbs with murderous teeth, and clawing its quivering entrails. What horrible

agitation seizes him as he watches the scene which does not concern him personally! What anguish he suffers from being powerless to help the fainting mother and the dying child! (68)²

For the French *philosophe*, the spectacle he depicted naturally, and necessarily, displays the expression of sympathy—a sentiment he believed so widespread that it isn't even species-specific. From his comments, however, readers today may suspect that Rousseau found tragedy as much in the “anguish” and “agitation” it produces as in the fate it ascribes to the mother and child.

At least one literary critic has argued that scenes like this one are found throughout the literature of sensibility, in the novels of Rousseau, Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, as well as legions of lesser-known authors. Time and time again the subject positions from this scene are reinstated, always in the same form, though not always with the same effect. Most fundamental is the position that Carol McGuirk calls “the pathetic object,” a fancy phrase for victim; she also notes, however, that the viewer's own role sometimes takes center stage:

Sentimental novelists following Sterne [...] made the presence of an interpreting sensibility seem more important than the wretchedness described [...] The cult of feeling, from [Sterne's protagonist] Yorick on, is characterized by a preference in the sentimental spokesman for props that cannot upstage him. (507)

Value denied to the experience of the “pathetic object,” and value added to the views of the interpreting subject, is indeed the crux of the matter. The third position in staging sentimentalism, in Rousseau's scene at least, is taken up by the beast. Finally, a fourth position—or at least potential position—is made necessary by the prison in which Rousseau's viewer is arbitrarily placed. Although there is none at hand, we may imagine that rescue—and therefore a rescuer—is called for.

It is difficult to describe the characters that populate *Kony 2012* without rehearsing similar issues. The film's titular subject is the beastly war criminal, Joseph Kony, a man who continues to maim and kill, and who also abducts children, forcing them to become soldiers and sex slaves. (“Making Kony famous,” Invisible Children believes, will also make him a marked man, and facilitate his capture.) The film also briefly introduces a young African boy named Jacob, whose brother has been killed by the LRA, and who is himself in danger of being abducted and victimized by them. And then there is the heroic filmmaker, Jason Russell, who witnesses the boy Jacob's suffering and responds by promising that “we will stop them.” But the film's real protagonist—the face with far more screen time than any other—is Russell's son Gavin, a representative of vulnerable children everywhere, but principally a stand-in for the film's audience. If Gavin gets the message, we certainly should.

Critical uproar against Jason Russell and his film came quickly, and with nearly as much creativity and fervor, as the video itself. Within a few days a nineteen-year-old grad student had posted a Tumblr critique of the film, entitled “[Visible Children](#)”; his site quickly received over a million visits. Around the same time, Ethan Zuckerman also composed a thoughtful, evenhanded blog post critiquing the film, ending with this call to both thought and action:

the Invisible Children story presents a difficult paradox. If we want people to pay attention to the issues we care about, do we need to oversimplify them? And if we do, do our simplistic framings do more unintentional harm than intentional good? Or is the wave of pushback against this campaign from Invisible Children evidence that we're learning to read and write complex narratives online [...] Will Invisible Children's

² To my knowledge, the first use of this passage—which has since become something of a touchstone—to unpack the historical import of sentimentalism can be found in Philip Fisher's *Hard Facts* (Oxford UP, 1985). Rousseau's own source for this example, oddly enough, was the satirist Bernard de Mandeville.

campaign continue unchanged, or will it engage with critics and design a more complex and nuanced response? (<http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2012/03/08/unpacking-kony-2012/>)



Fig. 1. Kony 2012.

In the days to come, a wickedly funny drinking game for Kony 2012 would also be posted online, lampooning the film's stereotypes, simplifications, and self-aggrandizement (<http://www.wrongingrights.com/2012/03/the-definitive-kony-2012-drinking-game.html>). The Nigerian-American novelist Teju Cole used Twitter to offer seven pithy comments on the film and what he called the "White Savior Industrial Complex" (<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>; the last of these is cited as epigraph to this chapter). A chorus of critique from regionally-based activists and NGOs arose as well, decrying the lack of African agency in the film as well as its Kiplingesque overtones. More than one also saw ominous implications in Invisible Children's endorsement of American military aid to the Ugandan government as the solution to the Kony/LRA problem. In Uganda itself, a screening of the Kony 2012 reportedly met with anger and rock-throwing, forcing the audience to flee the scene.

Not surprisingly, there was also a pushback against the backlash. Both the New York Times columnist Nicholas D. Kristof and Human Rights Watch came out in defence of the aims, if not the methods, of Invisible Children and Kony 2012 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/15/opinion/kristof-viral-video-vicious-warlord.html>; <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/09/how-catch-joseph-kony>). Those who have for many years worked to lobby powerful nations and their citizens in hopes of aiding (not saving) the less powerful understandably refused to believe that nothing good could come from all this attention and enthusiasm. In response to critics like Cole, Kristof commented,

When a warlord continues to kill and torture across a swath of Congo and Central African Republic, that's not a white man's burden. It's a human burden.

To me, it feels repugnant to suggest that compassion should stop at a national boundary or color line. A common humanity binds us all, whatever the color of our skin—or passport.

On March 15th, the story was complicated further: Russell was taken to a San Diego hospital, after suffering a very public breakdown. A statement by Ben Keeseey, CEO of Invisible Children, attributed the episode to Russell's exhaustion, dehydration and malnutrition. On April 5th, Invisible Children released a second video, *Kony 2012: Part II – Beyond Famous*, its narrative responds carefully to each of the criticisms outlined above. (Russell and son are absent from the sequel, which focuses largely on the African staff and supporters of Invisible Children's efforts.) Nonetheless, the group's attempt to stage a massive, global awareness event on April 20th—where "Kony 2012" posters and messages would blanket the planet—was underwhelming, to say the least.

So what to make of all this? First of all, it is clear that, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the eighteenth century to Jason Russell in the twenty-first, a strong argument can be made for the power of sentimental storytelling; both Rousseau and Russell suggest such power is not only innate, it is evolutionary older than we are. One of the most insistent claims of *Kony 2012*—that human societies are today more closely connected than ever before—is surely incontrovertible, even if increased globalization seems to come hand-in-hand with new (and in some ways more violent) forms of social fragmentation. But the real lesson here is found in the instantaneous reaction against *Kony 2012*, by those who felt excluded and misrepresented by the film, and that this wave of protest was then followed by another. When a twenty-first century war story tries to dress up in eighteenth-century garb, perhaps we won't have to wait long before someone pulls the mask off. The aim of the current essay is to examine a few cases that may encourage us to read, and perhaps to write, more complex narratives—stories that understand their place in history.

That would be the good news. But sometimes, even when the news is good, we really need to start looking deeper. For example, even during the generalized euphoria of the Obama inaugural celebrations, some of the headlines were dark and troubling, at least for observers with a sense of US military history. On January 23rd, 2009, the new President authorized a bombing strike by an unmanned drone in Pakistan. That same day *The New York Times* reported that

American officials believe that the drone strikes have killed a number of suspected militants along the frontier since last year, including a senior Qaeda operative who was killed Jan. 1 [...] But the civilian toll has angered Pakistanis. A senior Pakistani official estimated that the attacks might have killed as many as 100 civilians; it was not possible to verify the estimate. ([web](#))

The following week, this attack served to focus the discussion on *The Bill Moyers Journal*, a PBS news analysis and interview show. Moyers began his program by remembering 1964, when he served as President Johnson's press secretary; he recalled specifically the decision to bomb North Vietnam after the encounter in the Gulf of Tonkin. As the host commented, "LBJ said we want no wider war, but wider war is what we got, eleven years of it" ([web](#)).

In the discussion that followed, Marilyn Young, a historian of the Vietnam war, emphasized what she referred to as "the material meaning" of bombing raids. What missing in the news reports, she noted, is "[w]hat it feels like to be bombed, [...] to be on the ground looking up. And the footage that we have [...] is of someone 10,000 miles away pushing a button and, wham, there it goes. But nobody's sitting there on the ground looking at what happens." Pierre Sprey, a former Pentagon official who helped design the F-16 Fighter and the A-10 Tankbuster, commented,

And what happens on the ground is for every one of those impacts you get five or ten times as many recruits for the Taliban as you've eliminated. The people that we're trying to convince to become adherents to our cause have turned rigidly hostile to our cause[.]

Nearly four years later, it is perhaps still too soon to tell how far the Obama administration will go in repeating the mistakes of the Johnson years—yet drone warfare has certainly become a preferred option for the White House. It also seems clear that an essential theme of this essay—the limitations on knowledge caused by perspective and narrative positioning—will continue to haunt our representations of war.

There can be few people who know this better than Marc Garlasco. During the initial phase of the war on Iraq, he led the Pentagon team which selected bombing targets; two days after Baghdad fell, however, he left the military and became senior military analyst for Human Rights Watch. With his new job, he traveled to Iraq for the first time in order to assess the military effectiveness and human cost of the bombing. As he himself tells this remarkable story, Garlasco emphasizes physicality of his two diametrically opposed perspectives. To Terry Gross, host of NPR's *Fresh Air*, he commented,

I got on a plane, and next thing I know I'm, you know, with a group of folks I'd never met before, and there's an Iranian and a Belgian and a Russian and a French guy and I'm working with an African-American former naval officer and a redhead, and we're going through Iraq. And I'm like, "Oh, my God. Here I am. I'm walking through the streets that I, you know, watched for all these years from above." And all of a sudden I'm walking in the craters that I helped to plan and helped create. ([web](#))

Like Marilyn Young, Garlasco opposes the view from above to on-the-ground reality; he first describes "going through Iraq," then "walking through the streets," and finally "walking in the craters." Yet his most dramatic anecdote comes when Gross asks him to describe a target choice "that didn't go so well." Garlasco recalls an attempt to kill Ali Hassan al-Majid, Saddam's cousin, so-called Chemical Ali:

we put the target package together, and I was actually sitting in the Pentagon with my targeting cell, and we ended up watching it on the computer screen. We had Predator feeds overhead. And, you know, there were two 500-pound bombs that went down on it. First one went down about three blocks away, and oh, we were so angry. You know, how does a laser-guided bomb fall three blocks away? And we were very frustrated with that. But moments later, the second weapon came in; and I'll never forget, I was watching this guy, he was walking outside the building, and we were saying, "Buddy, you are in the wrong place at the wrong time." And moments later, pft, just white. The whole screen goes white because we're watching it in infrared. And so everything that's hot is white, and everything that's dark [*sic*] is black. And for a moment, the sensors on the Predator were basically overwhelmed with the information, and everything's white. And suddenly you can see the picture start to coalesce, there's this huge explosion of fire, and we can see this rag doll, this dark rag doll person just coming down to earth. The legs—I'll never forget—were just flailing in the air, and came down and hit on the ground and bounced. And, you know, I'll be honest with you, we thought we had killed Chemical Ali. And we cheered and patted ourselves on the back, and we even bet breakfast on how many times that person ended up bouncing.

Though dramatic in the telling, this scene can hardly be unique. The US alone now musters many thousands of unmanned drone planes; sport-fan style celebrations by what Singer terms "cubicle warriors" are likely to be increasing every hour.

Less common, perhaps, is a story where a first-person plural viewer—the "we" that watches, then gets frustrated, and ultimately cheers, patting itself on the back—is repeatedly interrupted by a first-person singular fascination with a civilian victim. Garlasco twice comments "I'll never forget," both times in direct reference to the Iraqi man he saw on his screen. Gross asks him if he ever found out who the man was, and Garlasco replies, "No, but I have absolute and total belief that he was a civilian. I mean, I have no reason to believe it was otherwise." His next comment is more personal:

I mean, standing in that crater, there was this little bunny, and it was gray, gray with all of the debris and soot; and it just really hit me because I have these two little girls and, you know, everyone's got a floppy bunny in bed. And it just, it really struck me. It was very difficult at that time.

“Everyone’s got a floppy bunny” ... but not everyone orders bombs to be dropped. What Garlasco was struck by—“standing in that crater”—is that in some sense he now occupies both positions at once.

During a later *Fresh Air* interview with P.W. Singer, Terry Gross replays tape from her interview with Garlasco. Singer, author of a book on the robotics revolution in warfare, notes that Garlasco is hardly alone in being able to watch airstrikes from afar. He comments that

the Iraq War, because of all these systems, is the first one where you can watch but you don't have to be there. And these machines see all. And we're taking these clips and watching from afar, but we're also emailing them around.

We found over 7,000 different clips of combat footage in Iraq, and the soldiers actually call them war porn. And the worry of it is that it connects people to war. They get to see what's happening, but it actually widens the gaps, that is, it creates a further distance. They watch more but they experience less. ([web](#))

People watching more, more and more often, and yet experiencing less ... yep, sounds like porn to me.

In at least one instance, the relation between war porn and actual porn was commercial. In 2003, a 27-year-old Floridian named Chris Wilson opened a website dedicated to amateur pornography (nowthatsfuckedup.com), a site where users could gain access to several levels of explicit content either by paying or by sending in their own photos and videos. At some point in 2004, Wilson decided to grant US soldiers free access to the site, provided that they sent in photographic evidence that they were indeed US soldiers. What followed? Postings of the charred remnants of Iraqis, or of mutilated heads, torsos, or severed limbs, accompanied by cold jokes from photographers and viewers alike³. In February, 2005, the Pentagon attempted to block soldiers from accessing the site, and it was closed down in April 2006. The webmaster himself was briefly jailed, although the 300-odd charges against him related exclusively to sexual imagery, and did not mention the war carnage. In his book investigating this short-lived episode in Iraq War self-portraiture, Gianluigi Recuperati claims that Chris Wilson was the only person ever sent to jail—in either the US or Europe—for a pornographic website not involving minors or other clear illegalities (30). Pressure from the Defense Department, the Italian journalist intimates, may have had a hand in such an unprecedented prosecution.

For Recuperati, though disturbing and distasteful, nowthatsfuckedup.com possesses documentary value; he sees the website as delivering, in general, “what really happens when we write that word ‘war,’” and, in particular, “what really happens when we write that other word, ‘Iraq’” (29-30). As for Chris Wilson, Recuperati calls him “one of the next century’s most paradoxical and viscous characters: the man who bought the truth about war by selling the truth about screwing” (30). The soldiers—and other members of this online community—he describes as hunters: “[These soldiers] go hunting in the various senses which give hunting its grammar, and they offer to the public of their virtual community the best trophies—the rarest, the hardest to pass over” (22); extraordinary situations, “those that tell a story,” are the gold standard for this virtual community (22). Insofar as Recuperati accurately describes the case, the name for Wilson’s website seems to have been prophetic. In the phrase’s literal meaning, “Now that’s fucked up” registers a viewer’s sense that something is badly broken; as a moral judgment, the idiom suggests

³ On the “cold joke” and its prevalence in combat situations, see Jon Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*.

the world shouldn't contain such sights at all. In short, if these are documents, then they are documents of exception—violation, of a convulsive redefinition of both self and world. We're not in Kansas anymore.

Nor are we in the eighteenth century. In the era of Richardson and Rousseau, the language of sensibility and sentimentalism performed its own recategorization of the social order. Our question today is that of Tolstoy, Chernyshevsky, and Lenin: given the world as it now is, what is to be done? Redefining the language for representing war is only a small part of this answer, but it is a necessary part. Where then, as we survey the field, do we find models, stories which do not fall into the trap of giving easy, outdated and sentimental definitions of their subject?

One answer is found in a book where the title meant to make you stop and take notice—it's called *Shoot an Iraqi*. The cover photo is black and white: one shoulder and half the chest of a man wearing a black jacket and keffiyeh. His body tilted to the right side of the page, head nearly outside the frame, only a bit of dark hair. Covering the cheek, ear, neck and shoulder is a circular yellow splatter. Similar but smaller blotches of yellow dot the top edge of the cover and its bottom left corner. The book's subtitle is *Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*; the authors are Wafaa Bilal and Kari Lydersen.

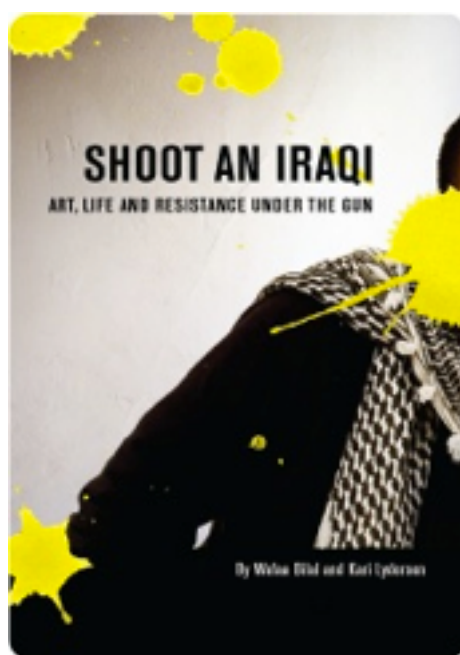


Fig. 2. [*Shoot an Iraqi*](#)

Wafaa Bilal is an Iraqi artist who came to the US as a refugee after the 1991 Iraq war. Kari Lydersen is a journalist and author who reports for The Washington Post. *Shoot an Iraqi* tells Bilal's life story—in the first-person—in order to document a work of performance art staged in the spring of 2007. Its first paragraph offers a concise summary:

On May 4, 2007, I entered FlatFile Galleries in Chicago for a project called *Domestic Tension*, a live art installation. For one month I would live in a makeshift room set up in the gallery, going about my daily routine with a robotically controlled paintball gun aimed at me, which people could shoot live and over the internet, 24 hours a day. (1)

When the month ended, more than 65,000 shots had been fired at Bilal by people from 136 countries (2).

The gallery in Chicago was far from the first place Bilal had turned into a makeshift studio and living space for himself and his art. During his childhood years, his family lived in a two-room house, and, as Bilal summarizes, “My dad lived in one room, and the rest of us—up to eight people as the family grew—living in the other” (7). Yet even in these cramped quarters, he tells us,

I created a little studio of my own under the stairs that led to the roof, so tiny you couldn't stand up in it, but it was a private little place for me to paint. In the summer it was stifling, so I built a crude homemade air conditioner from an old radiator, an air pump, a fan and a tin can I'd fill with water and ice. I like to think of it as my first foray into technological art. When tensions escalated with my father or the bustle of family life became too much, I would slip away to paint and dream there, in my own little world. (31)

We might find in these words a romantic, nineteenth-century portrait of the artist: painting a dream-world, as if art were timeless, something that takes shape in the mind, not in history. Bilal, on the contrary, already sees the studio itself as a work of art, where technology is not support or intrusion, but integral to the work. A world of his own is what he produces, an art environ created in direct response to the forces of the world which surrounds him.

You don't have to be a psychoanalyst to understand that in traditional societies a son's politics tend to be formed in relation to his father. Wafaa Bilal's early life, as recounted in *Shoot an Iraqi*, is dominated by this relationship, so much so that, after a single sentence on his family as a whole, seven paragraphs focus exclusively on the father. To explain his dad's leftist politics, Bilal comments: “Foreigners might not know that Iraq used to have a strong Communist Party—it was a highly literate, educated country, and wherever you have education, you usually have communists” (11). When Saddam Hussein took control of Iraq, Bilal's father, who was a teacher, was forced to betray his intellectual convictions—the Ba'ath Party saw communism as a threat to its hold on power.

From that time on, the family served as an outlet for the elder Bilal's rage. Physically violent towards his wife, he also took her jewelry, and later even sold a home that was built for the family, in order to gamble and chase women. In subsequent pages, we learn that the Wafaas' parents separated many times, actually divorcing officially and remarrying on three separate occasions. We are also told that the father was institutionalized and then “granted disability leave from his teaching job due to his mental instability” (12). Brief acknowledgment is also given of the fact that Wafaas are usually girls. His father initially wanted to have rhyming names for his children, so the first four were named Raglaa, Alaa, Wafaa and Safaa (after the couple remarried, three more boys, Haji, Ahmed, and Asraa were added to the clan).

Despite such treatment, Wafaa spent his youth in close contact with this problem parent. When the elder Bilal retired from teaching, Wafaa even worked as assistant in his new profession of carpentry. As he puts it, “Though our relationship was extremely tense [...], I wanted to learn the trade” (12).

The book recounts only a single physical confrontation between the two; it is also the only direct account of the father's violence:

When I was 13 years old, I made my stand against him. He was in a particularly foul mood that day, and had been hitting my mother and my sister Rajaa. In the evening as he was sitting in the open-air kitchen eating a kabob, we got into an argument. He slowly finished his kabob, eyeing me like an adversary in a boxing ring. Then, with cold and calculated precision, he threw the plate at me. It hit me squarely on the forehead and shattered on the floor. With a throbbing bruise already swelling, I grabbed the ceramic shards and charged

him. He jumped up, startled, kabob remnants cascading off his lap, and ran out onto the street. I chased him to the threshold and then locked the door behind him. (23)

In a figurative sense, this door would stay locked for many years to come. After that day, the two largely managed to avoid each other. The father, no longer wanting to risk a physical confrontation, would punish Wafaa by banishing him from the home; the son, “preferr[ing] not to further humiliate or challenge” his father, “would stoically comply” (23).

In the final third of *Shoot an Iraqi*, the reader arrives at what is, before Chicago, the single most inspiring moment of Bilal’s autobiography, and dedication to art is again the spur to transformative action⁴. By this time, the artist has made it through both the bombing of his hometown and an equally dangerous period at a makeshift transit camp on the Iraq-Kuwait border. He is with his brother Alaa in Saudi Arabia, trying to survive life in a refugee camp with no visible end or exit. He comments, “Like most people, I have an innate repulsion to imprisonment, the feeling of being trapped or under someone else’s control; a refugee camp combines all these feelings” (114). The camp was a brutal place, full of personal, religious and tribal feuds, and a near Hobbesian level of anarchy reigned. Bilal recalls that:

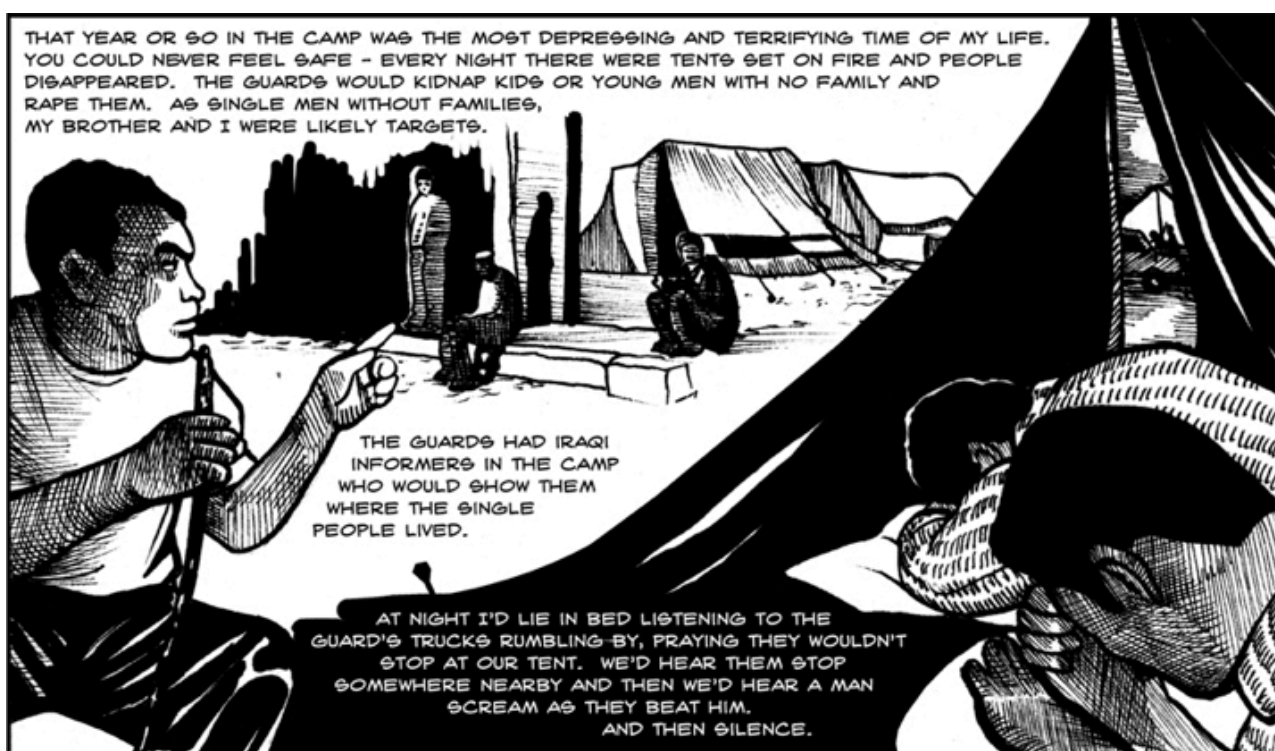


Fig. 3. Comic image (1)

Given these hellish conditions, it is hard to imagine how Bilal could have ever endured that five-year limit which, upon arrival, he vowed was the most he would stay. Five years, he said to himself, he “could use [...] to mature artistically and intellectually: a sort of self-imposed training camp.” After that, he “would do whatever it took to leave. Any option would be open” (114).

With money earned picking up trash and disinfecting toilets, Wafaa bought art supplies and continued to paint. Still, the frequent sandstorms that ripped through the tent city, strong enough to endanger the lives of the elderly and people with asthma, also destroyed his paintings. One day

⁴ This episode from Bilal’s biography has been illustrated by the graphic artist Summer McClinton in the *Massachusetts Review* 52.3/4 (2011). pp. 756-61.

he decided to build himself an adobe hut; he began mixing run-off water from the camp kitchens with clay to make bricks. As he tells it,



Fig. 4. Comic image (2)

When winter came, the same doubters returned to ask Bilal for instructions and “[s]oon people were making bricks all over the camp” (133).

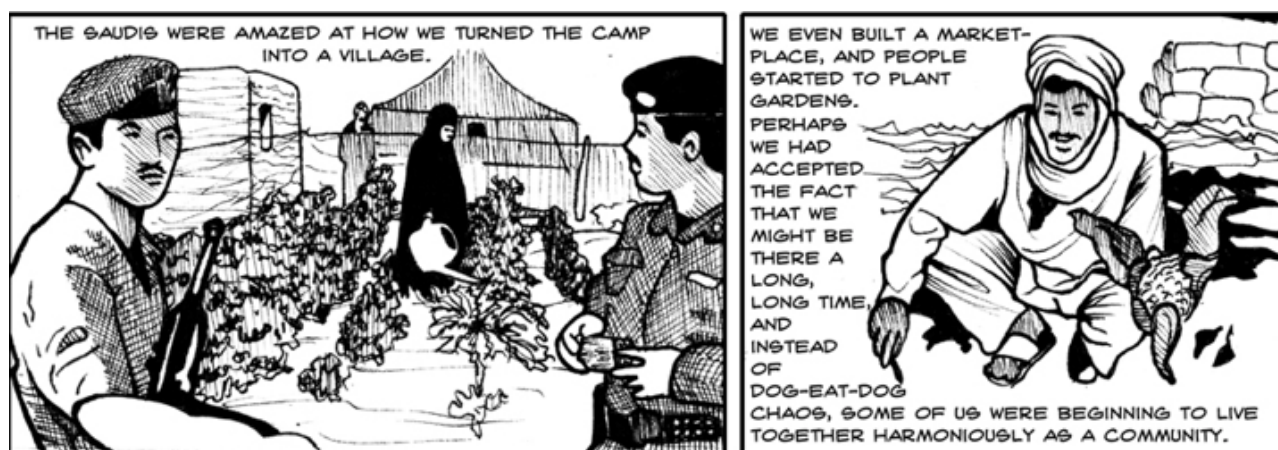


Fig. 5. Comic image (3)

Bilal's home became a studio and literary salon, frequented by other artists and intellectuals day and night; together they built an additional wall in order to display their artwork. Such efforts, he comments, “helped us keep our dignity, intellectual spark and humanity while we were treated like animals by the uneducated guards” (133).

The second paragraph of *Shoot an Iraqi*, which I haven't yet cited, gives a simple, moving summary of the motivations and intentions behind Bilal's gallery exhibition in Chicago:

I had conceived of the project early [in 2007], a product of my grief at the deaths of my brother [Haji] and father in my hometown of Kufa, Iraq (a holy city near Najaf) in 2004, and my intense need to connect my life as an artist in the comfort zone of the United States to the terrors and sorrows of the conflict zone in which my family and so many others were living out their daily lives. (1)

The story of these two deaths is recounted in full only late in the book, sandwiched between its description of the horrors of refugee camp life and the tale of the Saudi camp's transformation into a village. After a double-spaced line break, this new section begins, "Again, my mind turns to Haji" (123).

In the US since 1991, Wafaa knew his brother only when Haji was young, and through family members' stories about him. He describes him as follows:

[Haji] was tough and fearless, much more so than I or my other brothers were. He walked with a swagger and literally had a gun on his hip at all times. During the embargo my family's neighborhood became very rough; it made the south side of Chicago look like a picnic. Even before the war, you would see people shot and slaughtered there on a regular basis. You had to be tough to survive there, and Haji was one of the toughest. (124)

Having said this, Bilal quickly qualifies his description. His insight here is essential:

Though I detest machismo and male bravado, I had to admire Haji's toughness. His was not an aggressive, flamboyant show of strength, but an iron fearlessness and refusal to back down. If he believed in something, he would stand up for it no matter what. I feel I have this quality intellectually and artistically, but Haji translated his strength into a physical manifestation and bravery very different from mine[.] (124)

That Wafaa has zero tolerance for male swagger is clear on every page of *Shoot an Iraqi*, no less so than his artistic and intellectual courage. The twin losses of brother and father allowed him to see the violence during his childhood as influenced by cultural strictures which are placed on all Arab men. He comments that

People see Arab culture as a patriarchal system that oppresses women, which it is, but men are also oppressed—they oppress themselves with the rigid expectations and roles they must fill or else be shunned. In this vise-like social grip, my father repressed all his frustrations and shattered dreams and humiliations, ending up with nothing but the cruel and crazy outbursts. (127)

After the second death, the gathering of family at his brother's home encouraged him to do what is inevitably a difficult task; he spends time "thinking about [his] father, not in relation to [him]self, but as his own person, as an Iraqi, as a man" (127).

From conversations with his mother and his brother Ahmed, as well as his own telephone call to Haji, Wafaa became convinced that his brother was close to the insurgency, specifically to the Mahdi Army of Moqtada al-Sadr. One day, as US troops closed in on Kufa, al-Sadr's men came to pressure Haji; they wanted him to help man a checkpoint at the Kufa Bridge—the same bridge that Wafaa had spent hours painting during Operation Desert Storm, and where he witnessed the bloody aftermath of a bombing which destroyed an Iraqi wedding party. Ahmed and his mother are unable to stop Haji from leaving, and Haji is not one let them do so. When the two stand in the doorway to block him, he tells them, AK-47 in hand, "If you don't move out of my way, I'm going to shoot you" (125). That very night, around 2:00 a.m., he is killed in an explosion.

Haji's friends said they were all at the checkpoint, and when they saw a U.S. unmanned drone fly over taking pictures, they knew a bomb would be coming. So they ran, except for Haji—he was so defiant. He wanted to show he wasn't afraid of anything. Sure enough an American helicopter flew over and dropped explosives on the checkpoint, blowing everything to pieces. (125)

As described here, I imagine this event falls into the category of what the US military terms "a good kill." According to Bilal, shrapnel from the explosions blew a fist-sized hole directly through Haji's chest.

And their father died two months later.

He dropped from 250 pounds to a skeleton of a man, so light that Ahmed could easily carry him. It was a slow, painful process. As they say in our culture, the grief ate him alive. And his slow wasting away was a daily reminder to my family of my brother's death, so they could never put it behind them. (126)

In writing, lack of a transition can be a sign that, for the author, there is no space or difference between two things—the prose equivalent of an arithmetic equation. The next paragraph in *Shoot an Iraqi* is only a single sentence, a jump-cut from his father's grief to his own. He tells us, "I only talked to my father three times after I left Iraq" (126).

When the deaths of two family members come close together, they are experienced as a single uncanny event. Wafaa describes the paintball project as "a product of my grief at the deaths of my brother and father"; this complex drives the work, and the project itself is an act of mourning. Like Orpheus in hell, Bilal uses his art to transmute and transform loss. With his voluntary, month-long descent into the psychical and emotional realities of life under siege, the artist stages an experience which invites in equally enemies, comrades and those who stand outside, the witnesses. Aggressors, heroes, and observers—the choice is deliberately left open.

It is also true that most of those who came to the paintball project during its thirty-one day run had little or no knowledge of the biography which the preceding pages summarize. Nor should they, some would say. Critics and artists alike frequently claim that any real work of art must stand on its own; the relative autonomy of art is perceived as its holy spirit, as if the minds of artist and audience alike hold only immaculate conceptions. Bilal puts it somewhat differently: he himself comments that it doesn't matter what you've lived through, only what you've made of it. In effect, the entire book-length narrative of the paintball project is a sustained argument against the cult of art-for-art's-sake. To make that argument, in marked distinction from its presentation here, *Shoot an Iraqi* shuttles back and forth between the artist's life story and a diary-like narrative of his show in Chicago.

In this essay, by giving you the life first, the goal has been to make it impossible for you to see the paintball project as anything other than the culmination of a life lived around, in, and passing through war. A product of grief, yes, yet "Domestic Tension" was also the instinctual expression of physical, intellectual, and emotional reflexes honed by a single idea—that art is the only truly human response to violence.

The space used by the exhibition measured 32' x 15'; it resembled a well-furnished prison cell, or perhaps a college dorm room: bed, desk, computer, lamp, and coffee table. There was also an (unused) exercise bike, several plexiglas screens or shields, a mock door frame, and, of course, the robotically-controlled paintgun at the threshold of Bilal's living space.



Fig. 6 Wafaa Bilal, "Domestic Tension" exhibition. Used by permission of the artist.

A small viewing area for visitors and a computer from which they could fire the gun was provided as well. The webcam interface for the project was intentionally left bare: its image was a grainy black and white, streamed without sound. Each day Bilal also recorded video, editing it down and posting it on YouTube. In addition, the website had a chat room where shooters and watchers alike could interact with the artist, and a software program recorded the IP address and geographical location of each computer operating the gun. Bilal spent the entire month in the building, though he did occasionally leave his cell to nap, shower, use the bathroom, get food and give media interviews. "Aside from those brief respites," he comments, "I spent the majority of my time in the range of the gun as an available target" (2). "[He] wore a paintball vest and goggles throughout the exhibit, along with [his] trademark keffiyeh" (3).

The low-quality website imaging, Bilal comments, was "an intentional decision to heighten the sense of remoteness and detachment" (3); it also, one suspects, made the shooting easier. The chat room and YouTube videos, on the other hand, seem to balance or even counteract this distancing effect. The videos were in color, and Wafaa sometimes used the camera to record conversations with his visitors; most often, however, he spoke directly to it—a means of addressing his audience and of recording his emotional state and physical condition through the month-long ordeal. The chat room was intended as a space for direct interaction between artist and audience, yet it too could become a battlefield, an arena where words were hurled, not exchanged. Given the video diaries and chatting, the remote-control gun and even remoter image may be seen as something of a trap, or perhaps a gamble—intentionally bringing in the hunters in hopes that they can be turned.

On occasion it worked as planned. On Day 15, shots were fired for over four hours straight by someone in Columbus, Ohio. People in the chat room told him to cool it, but he wouldn't reply. Just kept shooting. When Wafaa got his dinner and sat down to eat, the paintballs continued to

shatter on the wall behind him and splatter everywhere. Fed up with this behavior at last, he looks into the webcam and protests, “Hey Columbus, I am having my dinner and your paintballs are falling into it.” At last a response. “[The shooter] types back, ‘Ouch, sorry about that,’ and he stops shooting. He tells me that his name is Luke” (79). Bilal comments, “I feel like my interaction with Luke is a real victory” (79).

Minutes later, however, all hell breaks loose. Hackers have managed to turn the single-shot paintball gun into an automatically-firing machine gun. At the same time, chat room comments start flying with equal speed. Bilal describes their tone and intent,

They are no longer philosophical, analytical and flirtatious like before; they are increasingly aggressive, obnoxious and sexual. [...] I wanted to use the internet to reach people outside the gallery and established art worlds, and I wanted to democratize the process of viewing and interacting with my work. But I didn't know how brutal the anonymous internet culture could be. (78)

What has happened is Digg.com, a website which ranks stories published on the internet. A Chicago Tribune article from the previous day has put the paintball project on this site's front page. Though Bilal has a tech-savvy helper, Jason (an early viewer of the project who became a valued member of the team), it does no good to ban the hacker. The code is then posted for anyone to use; when consecutive multiple shots are banned, the hackers begin using botnets, a network of computers that allows them to shoot automatically from a variety of locations. Jason stays up most of the night to ban the bots, but the words keep coming, and the sound of the shots, hour after hour, is maddening.

Shoot him again for Jesus.
Send him to Guantanamo.
Stone this infidel.
Ohshit its that guy that's on the run with bin laden.
Can you jump around a little?
Lyndie England where are you?
I'm touching myself.
It's a trap! Mossad put bullets in your gun.
I'm going jihad on your ass. (80)

Wafaa:

They want to kill me. I feel a weight on my chest as if someone's sitting on it. I can't breathe. [...] I'm losing it. Every sound and every small movement of the gun feels like an attack on my already taut nerves. I have to get away.

‘I'm going to get a glass of wine and lay down,’ I tell the camera in a shaky voice. (80-81)

What was intended as democratization has become mob rule, and, on this day, there will be no heroic magistrate to stand up against depravity.

Except that Bilal himself doesn't stay down for long. Obsessing over the irrationality and ignorance of this flood of anonymous hatred, he decides to take control of the situation with a bit of street theater. First he disconnects the compressed-air canister to stop the paintballs from shooting out. The gun continues to move, and the trigger continues to fire; with yellow paint covering everything, it seems impossible that the shooters would notice. The act goes on:

I move about the room, pretending to be dodging and ducking and flinching in fear as the gun keeps popping. I speak into the video camera for tomorrow's YouTube clip. “Digg.com, this is very disturbing, very disturbing,” I say. I ramble for a few minutes, my eyes darting right and left. “Very disturbing, Digg.com, this

is very disturbing.” I’m sure I am giving an Oscar-worthy performance and that once I post it on YouTube, it will change their minds to see the level of terror on my face. (81)

Months later, the artist would watch this video again. In the moment, he notes, he believed that he was in control; later he has trouble even watching the manic, strung-out man on the screen —“spouting one fevered monologue after another, eyes glazed and constantly staring at the ominous clicking gun” (85).

And it doesn’t end there. Wafaa next engages a shooter who accuses him of fraud. Apparently, this guy Eric has tried to fire at a white spot on the wall, and saw no result. In this moment of weakness, Bilal starts a macho pissing contest: “I challenge him to visit me, to spend a day with me in this room. I tell him that someone like him has never been in a situation like this before. He claims he has. From San Diego, maybe he’s in the military” (82). Even after a phone call, this exchange goes nowhere, and Wafaa isn’t the kind to put up with this for long. He tries again to shut them out, to read a little, have a glass of wine.

Which doesn’t work either. Unable to find peace, unable to relax, he eventually returns to his art:

Click click click They want to see me suffer, so I decide to give them what they want. But on my terms—I’m not their clown. I’ll act the part of the “stupid Iraqi” so they will think that they’ve won, that they’ve defeated me [...]

I step in front of the camera and tumble to the ground, face down. I want them to think I’ve been hit. I was a soccer player, so faking a dramatic fall is no problem—we’re always doing that to get the penalty kick. While I’m on the ground I make sure to rub some paint on the side of my head and goggles so it looks like I’ve been hit. All I can think to myself is: I’m finally having fun! I’m their stupid Iraqi! They’re shooting at me, they hate me. They may be having fun, but I’m having more fun! (83)



Fig. 7. Wafaa Bilal loads the paintball gun. Used by permission of the artist.

Any knowledgeable student of US cultural history should be amazed at the spectacle reproduced here. Though Wafaa Bilal came to the States only in 1992, after just fifteen years in country, he already managed to channel what many historians agree is the mother root of all authentic US culture—of our theater, our music, and even of our nation’s perpetually childlike sense of self. I’m

speaking of course about that minstrel tradition which arose out of slavery, spawned in white supremacist caricatures of African American behavior, and which was in turn mastered by blacks themselves—in order to (as Ralph Ellison so memorably put it) “change the joke and slip the yoke.” By playing “the stupid Iraqi,” Bilal follows in the footsteps of the most influential artists this nation has ever known, and, like them, he does so in order to maintain his sanity, to survive. As he himself summarizes:

The trigger of the gun keeps wildly clicking. The eye of the camera keeps searching me out. But I have won. I have outsmarted them all. I turn my phone off and lie down to get a little sleep, giddy with exhaustion and the exultation of fooling my tormentors. They came at me with machine guns firing, but they have not defeated me. I have survived—I survived Digg Day. (84)

It may well be that some readers—like Eric the shooter—would question Bilal’s actions that day. When the artist turns off the gun, when he shucks and jives for the camera, isn’t he counterfeiting? doesn’t his art depend on the truth of blood, of pain—isn’t his body on the line? We need to recall, however, that the near-insanity which Digg Day created wasn’t an isolated incident; this reaction came from a man who had already survived violence in the home, confronted a murderous political regime, escaped the bombing of his hometown, and transformed one of the hellholes we reserve for refugees. We should wonder what would have become of us. Bilal’s body is not all that the paintball project puts on the line, though it is certainly does that too. It is Wafaa’s sanity, it is, in a word, his humanity—and ours—that is first and foremost in play.

And once we’ve gotten that far, there is a last step to take. On Digg Day, as you will have noted, the enemy is clear—there can be no mistaking who is the aggressor. Torture uses pain as an instrument, a limit case of how technology can reduce people to objects. Meditating on the actions of Wafaa Bilal on that day, on his emotions, his intellect, and his actions, we eventually realize that he, like his brother Haji, had the courage to stay and face down a robotic and faceless foe. John Henry. No turning away, and no turning back.

And, fyi, the technology which enables a paintball gun to take orders off the internet is in fact the same EZIO circuit board which allows cubicle warriors to operate Predator drones. In other words, the connection between these two events is no metaphor, it is literal. We must imagine Haji in his last moments, hypervigilant, staring fixedly at the black sky above, muttering to himself in rage, firing his machine gun blindly. Knowing what will happen, though not knowing when. The difference, of course, is that Wafaa’s weapon of choice was his art. And he survives.

With only a week left in his cell, Wafaa records a meditation on hope, a reflection based on records generated from his chat log. In the pages of *Shoot an Iraq*, this is the only the second moment where the voices of his audience are cited at length—the other registers the vitriolic onslaught of hatred on Digg Day. The word “hope,” Bilal notes, occurs in the log roughly 300 times. In some instances, the term betrays the very sentiment it expresses (“I hope your mother dies of vaginal cancer” 129); other comments are, he notes, “pedestrian or indecipherable” (“Hope you’re recycling”; “Hope someone builds an ark for this bible flood” 128). Simple questions, or simply empathy, are also expressed as hopes. Bilal remembers as well that a number of messages register a hope for change, and, in the last instance, he himself mentions those that give him hope. Summing it up, he remarks, “Seeing how many people invoke hope in the chat room, I am convinced that it is not just empty rhetoric or my lofty idealism. Despite all that’s wrong in the world, people do have hope. I feel lucky to have given them a platform to share it” (130).

As the month-long paintball project ends, a truly great, spontaneous irruption of hope takes shape in both behavior and language. With only a few days left in the project, during a dark hour where the shooting has once again reached an unbearably high frequency, a former art student and

watcher finds a way out. She realizes that the project's website controls can be used not just to target Wafaa, but also to protect him. By sending repeated commands to turn the gun to the left, she can manage to block the shooters, so long as her clicks outnumber theirs. She organizes others and, out of the watchers and shooters, a group of protectors is formed. They call themselves the Virtual Human Shield. Working together, they set up shifts and manage to shelter Wafaa for the duration. Rousseau's imprisoned man pushes at last on the door, only to find it has been unlocked all along.

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Juan Carlos Cruz Suárez. Doctor en Filología Hispánica por la Universidad de Salamanca. Su área de especialización es la literatura española del Siglo de Oro, especialmente la producida en el período barroco. Dentro de este campo ha publicado varios artículos y ha participado en numerosos congresos, seminarios y simposios. Ha sido profesor visitante asociado en la Universidad de Aarhus (Dinamarca), institución en la que en la actualidad -además de impartir docencia- realiza un proyecto de investigación post-doctoral dentro del campo de los estudios de la memoria y la literatura española actual, específicamente la novela.

Carmen Fernández Galán. Doctora en Humanidades y Artes por la Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas. Es integrante del Sni. Autora de la edición crítica de *Syzigias y cuadraturas lunares...* (Factoría-UAZ, 2010) y de *Obelisco para el ocaso de un príncipe* (UAZ, 2011). Como docente investigadora de la Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, sus líneas de investigación son hermenéutica, filología y literatura del siglo XVIII.

Pedro García-Guirao. Licenciado en Filosofía por la Universidad de Murcia (España). Entre 2007-2010 ejerció como Profesor Colaborador en el Instituto Cervantes de Praga (República Checa), donde también llevó a cabo trabajos de investigación sobre Federica Montseny. En la actualidad disfruta de un puesto como Teaching Assistant in Spanish en la School of Humanities de University of Southampton (Inglaterra) donde combina las clases con sus estudios de doctorado en torno al exilio del ministro anarquista Juan López Sánchez. Ha publicado en revistas como *Historia Actual Online* y en la *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest 1500-Present* (Blackwell/Oxford). También es miembro del grupo Anarchist Studies Network.

Maddalena Ghezzi. Licenciada en Lingue e Letterature Straniere por la Università degli Studi di Bergamo (2007) y en Filología Hispánica por la Universidad de Salamanca (2010), en la que cursó también el Máster oficial “La Enseñanza del Español como Lengua Extranjera” (2009). Actualmente es becaria de investigación en el marco del “Doctorado en Lengua española: investigación y enseñanza”. Sus líneas de estudio se centran en la fraseología, la sociolingüística y la lingüística aplicada. También trabaja como creadora de materiales de ELE en el proyecto del Campus de Excelencia Internacional Studii Salamantini de la Universidad de Salamanca.

James Hicks. Licenciado por la State Michigan, obtuvo el título de doctor en 1992 en la University of Pennsylvania. Es director del programa de licenciatura en Literatura Comparada de la University of Massachusetts. Sus investigaciones incluyen estudios culturales y la representación de la guerra, así como la narrativa modernista y la teoría literaria. Es el editor de la revista *Massachusetts Review* y publicará en 2013 el libro *Lessons from Sarajevo: A War Stories Primer* en la editorial de esa misma universidad.

Ioana Juncan. Doctoranda en el programa "Theatre and Performance Studies" de Brown University, donde prepara también un Máster en Filosofía. Sus publicaciones recientes incluyen "Performing the Accident: Through Richard Maxwell's Ode to the Man who Kneels" (*Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*), "Losing the Temper of Reason: Self-reflections out of Time" (*Parallax*) y "An Experience of Thought: Measure for Endurance" (*Transmediale Resource Berlin & Aarhus University*). Investiga la intersección entre el teatro y la interpretación, la filosofía y los medios. Es cofundadora y directora artística del *Listening LabOratory* de Brown.

Gonzalo Lizardo Méndez. Es narrador e investigador literario. Doctor en Letras por la Universidad de Guadalajara y docente investigador de la Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas. Fue becario del Fonca, así como del Snca. Ha publicado ensayos como *Polifoni(a)tonal* (UAZ, 1998) y novelas como *Jaque perpetuo* (Era/Cnca, 2005) o *Invocación de Eloísa* (Era/UNAM, 2011).

Álvaro Llosa Sanz. Doctorado por la University of California - Davis, está centrado en la actualidad en el estudio de la representación de la fantasía y la magia en las obras de ficción hispánicas, tanto en España como en América. Asimismo, ha explorado el modo en el que las tecnologías digitales influyen en el entendimiento de la lectura y en la publicación de textos. Su investigación ha incluido publicaciones en diversas revistas académicas de alto nivel europeas y estadounidenses, como *Hispanic Review*, *Cervantes*, *Quarterly Review*, *Revista Iberoamericana* o *Revista de Literatura*.

José Martínez Rubio. Licenciado en Filología Hispánica por la Universitat de València. Máster en estudios hispánicos: investigación y aplicaciones (UV). Diploma en Teoría Literaria y Crítica Cultural (UV) Actualmente, realiza su tesis de doctorado en el campo de la narrativa contemporánea, estudiando las novelas de investigación que combinan temas de la memoria, del periodismo, de la política y de la historia, entre los siglos XX y XXI, abarcando el ámbito hispánico, europeo y latinoamericano. Colabora como investigador en el proyecto ARTELOPE de Teatro de los Siglos de Oro (TC/12 - CONSOLIDER). Colabora como crítico en el suplemento cultural *Posdata*, del periódico *Levante*. Ha publicado y editado, en colaboración con Manoj Aryal, la novela *Memoria de España*, de Lain Singh Bangdel Desde 2010 es director de la revista de Jóvenes Investigadores de la Literatura Hispánica *Cuadernos de Aleph*.

Genara Pulido Tirado. Especialista en Teoría de la Literatura, Literatura Comparada y Estudios culturales. Ha publicado 18 libros como autora y editora y un centenar de artículos. Entre sus publicaciones se cuentan el vol. colectivo de 2003 *Estudios culturales*, donde estudia su trayectoria desde el nacimiento en Gran Bretaña en los años sesenta hasta el año 2000. Entre sus artículos, ha dedicado más de 10 al tema de la literatura y nuevas tecnologías. Es investigadora Principal del Grupo de Investigación "Estudios Literarios e Interculturales".

Alberto Santamaría. Profesor de Análisis del discurso artístico y literario y Arte Contemporáneo en la Universidad de Salamanca. Es autor de libros de poesía como *El orden del*

mundo (Renacimiento, 2003) y *Pequeños círculos* (DVD ediciones, 2009). Ha publicado los ensayos *El idilio americano. Ensayos sobre la estética de lo sublime* (Universidad de Salamanca, 2005) y *El poema envenenado. Tentativas sobre estética y poética* (Pre-Textos, 2008). Ha realizado la antología *El hombre que comía diez espárragos* (El olivo azul, 2010), con los textos de viajes de Leandro Fernández de Moratín.

Carlos Santos Carretero. Licenciado en Filología Hebrea y Árabe por la Universidad de Salamanca, está realizando su estudios de posgrado dentro del programa de doctorado de la misma universidad en torno a la literatura apócrifa hebrea. Trabaja como traductor de árabe, hebreo, inglés y español y como redactor en publicaciones electrónicas de ocio y tecnología, como Tallon4 y Ociomedia.

Rosanne Caroline Tertoolen. Licenciada de Filología Hispánica (2009) y en Translation Studies (2010) en la Universidad de Utrecht (Países Bajos), realizó su tesina de máster sobre la traducción automática enfocando a los problemas acerca de la ambigüedad. Actualmente trabaja como profesora en una escuela primaria.

Alfonso Vázquez Atochero. Licenciado en Antropología y Doctor en Comunicación Audiovisual por la Universidad de Extremadura y Máster en Dirección estratégica y Gestión de la Innovación por el Instituto Universitario de Postgrado. Pertenece a la Unidad Experimental de Antropología Oncológica de la Uex y a la Fundación Centro de Estudios para la Nueva Civilización. Es autor de una decena de libros centrados sobre todo en las nuevas tecnologías y la comunicación en red y ha publicado numerosos artículos en revistas. Dirige el proyecto Ciberantropología.org y colabora con Comunicación Extendida.

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Noviembre de 2012. Volumen 1, número 2

<http://revistacaracteres.net/revista/vol1n2noviembre2012>

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