

Preemption, Perpetual War, and the Future of the Imagination

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At an October 2003 Washington conference on alternate national security strategies, former National Security Advisor Sandy Berger noted several alarming features of the “Bush Doctrine.” One was the abandonment of deterrence in favor of preemption, in which uncertainty becomes a reason for action.¹ The “fog of war,” rather than leading to caution, became

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1. In a speech delivered on October 9, 2002, Senator Edward Kennedy drew the distinction between preemptive war and preventive war, noting that the Bush administration was deliberately confusing the two: “Traditionally, ‘pre-emptive’ action refers to times when states react to an imminent threat of attack. For example, when Egyptian and Syrian forces mobilized on Israel’s borders in 1967, the threat was obvious and immediate, and Israel felt justified in pre-emptively attacking those forces. The global community is generally tolerant of such actions, since no nation should have to suffer a certain first strike before it has the legitimacy to respond. By contrast, ‘preventive’ military action refers to strikes that

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now an imperative for action; the abandonment of the commitment to act on hard empirical evidence is the fueling point for a particular kind of Imagination. Preemption had for its goal the maintenance of hegemony. Bruce Cumings concisely articulates the interdependency of force and hegemony: "Hegemonic power is ultimately conditioned by technological and industrial power, which helps us understand its beginnings; that advantage is locked in by military power, which helps us understand the long middle years of a hegemonic cycle; and the requirements of military supremacy and a (probable) later tendency toward financial speculation and resultant capitalist torpor helps us grasp its decline."² If Cumings is correct, then, in the latest manifestations of required military supremacy, we can postulate a subtext of weakness and vulnerability. Yet in the case of preemption, another sort of speculation also fuels the compulsion to display power and exercise it emphatically and even hyperbolically.

As Richard Falk notes, "pre-emption . . . validates striking first—not in a crisis . . . , but on the basis of shadowy intentions, alleged potential links to terrorist groups, supposed plans and projects to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and anticipation of future dangers. It is a doctrine without limits, without accountability to the UN or international law, without any dependence on a collective judgment of responsible governments and, what is worse, without any convincing demonstration of practical necessity."³ Nevertheless, an inescapable contradiction abides—as a doctrine, preemptive force in the service of hegemony must always seek out threat in order to reanimate itself. It must imagine always a potential state of (its own) weakness as a pretext to reassert its strength. It lives, therefore, in the gray zone between the empirical and the possible, shuttling between reaffirmations of both strength and weakness, of both invincibility and vulnerability. The main point of this essay is that in the tortuous playing out of these contradictions, recent U.S. foreign and domestic policies have appropriated and instrumentalized the basic humanistic and ethical character of the Imagina-

target a country before it has developed a capability that could someday become threatening. Preventive attacks have generally been condemned. For example, the 1941 sneak attack on Pearl Harbor was regarded as a preventive strike by Japan, because the Japanese were seeking to block a planned military buildup by the United States in the Pacific" (<http://www.antiwar.com/orig/kennedy1.html>).

2. Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American–East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 205–6.

3. Richard Falk, "The New Bush Doctrine," *Nation*, July 15, 2002, www.thenation.com/doc/20020715/falk.

tion as found in Kant. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that what we find in today's U.S. program of preemption and perpetual war is no less than a perverse, pathological recoding of the entire sphere of the Imagination.

The notion of preemption in U.S. policy is not new. John Gaddis has pointed out that the twentieth-century precedent for Bush's policy is Pearl Harbor:

The basis for Bush's grand strategy, like Roosevelt's, comes from the shock of surprise attack and will not change. None of F.D.R.'s successors, Democrat or Republican, could escape the lesson he drew from the events of December 7, 1941: that distance alone no longer protected Americans from assaults at the hands of hostile states. Neither Bush nor his successors, whatever their party, can ignore what the events of September 11, 2001, made clear: that deterrence against states affords insufficient protection from attacks by gangs, which can now inflict the kind of damage only states fighting wars used to be able to achieve. In that sense, the course for Bush's second term remains that of his first one: the restoration of security in a suddenly more dangerous world.⁴

To make the world safer required "that shocks be administered in return, not just to the part of the world from which the attack came, but to the international system as a whole. . . . Shock therapy would produce a safer, saner world."⁵

What we find now is a perpetual production of "shock" to the world body, a conjoining of active and reactive violence that is at once philosophically, psychically, and politically/militarily manifested. In this machinery, the very capacity to imagine, to feel, to empathize, indeed to register the world is instrumentalized, and "security" is founded upon a belief that the therapeutic effects of shock are guaranteed in the long run. And yet this Shock and Awe therapy requires moving from an assumption of universal humanity to a static and deadly balance between two halves of a world—of power and of weakness, of dominance and submission, of life and death.

4. John Gaddis, "Grand Strategy in the Second Term," *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2005), 2. In his book *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), Gaddis traces preemptive strategies back to the Monroe Doctrine, and even before that to the preemptive invasion of Spanish Florida in 1818 by General Andrew Jackson.

5. Gaddis, "Grand Strategy," 15.

There are three parts to my essay: first, I briefly note how two key eighteenth-century documents—one literary and one military—each diagnose a particular pathology of the Imagination. Next, I will show how this pathology can be linked to the perversion of the Kantian notion of the aesthetic Imagination. I want specifically to explain how this perversion decimates the Kantian notion of the aesthetic as that which postulates a transcendental human community founded upon an assumption of common affect and empathy, what Kant calls *sensus communis*. Instead, today we find the deployment of Imagination for particular, antihumanistic purposes that channel the Imagination into specifically strategic and destructive modes of thinking, even while appropriating the rhetoric of the aesthetic. The essential point to bear in mind is that this strategic thinking would be far less lethal and much more contained without the compelling force of the humanistic Imagination behind it. Finally, I give two examples of this phenomenon in contemporary U.S. political and strategic discourse.

To make this clearer, think of the term *Shock and Awe*. The subtitle of the document that first proposed a U.S. tactic of Shock and Awe is especially germane, for it forms the link between the aesthetic and the strategic that is at the core of my thesis. The subtitle to the pamphlet that proposes Shock and Awe is “achieving rapid dominance.”⁶ The violent aesthetic of Shock and Awe, the terrifying appropriation of the Sublime, is thus materialized in emphatically pragmatic and lethal ways, and put to a specific strategic purpose: it enlists a particular brand of imagining the shared effect of terror on civilian populations, transforming civilians into weapons of psychological and political warfare.⁷ It counts at once on an aesthetic *affect* of horror and demoralization, which in turn forms its corresponding strategic *effect*. In this regard, Edmund Burke’s conceptualization of the Sublime, which links the effects of the Sublime specifically to the production of terror and “astonishment,” adds an important element to our discussion of affect. According to Samuel H. Monk, “the keystone of Burke’s aesthetic is emotion, and the foundation of his theory of sublimity is the emotion of terror.”⁸ For Burke, sublime ideas include “obscurity, where darkness and

6. Harlan Ullman and James P. Wade, with L. A. “Bud” Edney et al., *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1996).

7. For an interesting set of meditations on Shock and Awe during the Iraq War, see Breggie van Eekelen, Jennifer Gonzalez, Bettina Stozer, Anna Tsing, eds., *Shock and Awe: War on Words* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: New Pacific Press, 2004).

8. Samuel H. Monk, “The Sublime: Burke’s *Enquiry*,” in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Norton, 1970), 27.

uncertainty arouse dread and terror; power, where the mind is impelled to fear because of superior force; privations, such as darkness, vacuity, and silence; vastness, whether in length, height or depth; infinity, or any object that because of its size seems infinite.”⁹ In producing terror, sublime objects produce as well the emotion of astonishment, “that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror. . . . The mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object that employs it. . . . [The Sublime] hurries us on by an irresistible force.”¹⁰ It is precisely this invasion and overwhelming of the mind itself by the terrible object of contemplation, and this compulsion past reason, that characterize the effects and affect of Shock and Awe, the immediate effect of overwhelming force compounded by uncertainty, the power of a superior force, an infinite dimensionality. I develop the relation between Shock and Awe and the Sublime later in this essay; here I wish to isolate the phenomena of terror and the absorption of the mind by the object of contemplation that we find in Burke, and relate them to the pathology of the Imagination. I then link that pathology to the perversion of Kant’s aesthetic and its ethical ramifications.

In the late eighteenth century, we find the Imagination evoked in two very different texts. Despite their differences, each text not only articulates a similar sense of the power of the Imagination but also acknowledges and analyzes its pathology. The two contemporaries I refer to are Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Karl von Clausewitz. Coleridge’s conceptualization of the Imagination is inward turning. In its healthy form, the Imagination is “that Sublime faculty, by which a great mind becomes that which it meditates on.”¹¹ This description of the Imagination echoes Coleridge’s characterization of

9. Monk, “The Sublime,” 34.

10. Monk, “The Sublime,” 33, quoting Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London: n.p., 1759), II, 1.

11. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), chap. 4, 85n3. Subsequent references to Coleridge are from this work and are cited parenthetically. On this subject, his most famous comments include the following: “The Imagination . . . I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify” (chap. 13, 305).

the transcendental philosopher's "dual capacities": one "tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity" (chap. 13, 297).¹²

But what happens when it goes too far? What happens when its remove from the empirical world and its inward scope become excessive? One recalls that Coleridge uses Fancy as a countermeasure to the Imagination. Fancy is the lesser form, an activity best characterized by the haphazard yoking together of random elements. In contradistinction, the Imagination is creative, vital, shaping, rather than merely inventing. But if the Fancy is less creative, it is also correspondingly less dangerous: "The excess of fancy is delirium, of imagination, mania. Fancy is the arbitrary bringing together of things that lie remote, and forming them into a unity. The materials lie ready for the fancy, which acts by a sort of juxtaposition. *On the other hand, the imagination under excitement generates and produces a form of its own*" (chap. 4, 84n2; my emphasis).¹³ In terms of today's perpetual war, this "form" is intimately connected to a corresponding term: *terror*. It is real, it is imaginary, and its uncanny duality fuels the perpetuation of uncertainty, and fuels an excessive expansion *and* interiorizing of the Imagination. And the response to uncertainty has been to try to achieve, by any means necessary, the end of terror.

But once one embarks on this flight of the Imagination, there can be no end. Coleridge notes the almost facile manner in which a poet can produce fear by tapping into the "invisible world":

The fear of the invisible world is the most dazzling. Its influence is abundantly provided by the one circumstance, that it can bribe us into a voluntary submission of our better knowledge, into suspension of all our judgment derived from constant experience, and enable us to

12. In the thirteenth chapter of the *Biographia*, Kant is a conspicuous presence, evoked and praised for his application of the "intuitive" art of geometry to philosophy. Coleridge refers to the "Sage of Koenigsberg," his "enlargement" of "the discoveries of geometry to the philosophical subjects" (chap. 13, 298). This is "intuitive" rather than "discursive" (i.e., empirical). "Geometry is always and essentially Intuitive" (chap. 10, 174, note to epigraph).

13. Coleridge continues, "You may conceive the difference in kind between the Fancy and the Imagination in this way,—that if the check of the senses and the reason were withdrawn, the first would become delirium, and the last mania. The Fancy brings together images which have no connection natural or moral, but are yoked together by the poet by means of some accidental coincidence. . . . The Imagination modifies images, and gives unity to variety; it sees all things in one." By a "sort of fusion" it forces "many into one" (chap. 4, 84n2).

peruse with the liveliest interest the wildest tales. . . . On this propensity, so deeply rooted in our nature, a specific *dramatic* probability may be raised by a true poet, if the whole of his work be in harmony: a *dramatic* probability, sufficient for dramatic pleasure, even when the component characters and incidents border on impossibility. The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream. (chap. 23, 218)

This critical and timely note on improbability and obsession also fascinates Clausewitz. One of the central innovations of Clausewitz's theory is the notion that modern wars are increasingly beyond the reach of the mathematical exercises in symmetry and logic that informed prior war strategizing. Instead, for Clausewitz, modern wars are a matter of chance, fear, and mere probability (the term *fog of war* is attributed to him, though he actually never used those precise words; I will argue that what he actually said is much more specific and interesting). Modern war could thus most properly be situated within the realm of the Imagination, which then opens the door for obsession.

First, Clausewitz removes war from the realm of animate, moral forces, and places it not only into the realm of the uncertain but also into a broad spectrum of scale, signaling its amorphous and hence eminently imaginative character: "The art of war has nothing to do with living, moral forces. It therefore follows that it can nowhere attain the absolute and certain; there remains always a margin for the accidental, in great things and small."¹⁴ Again, in a passage that strongly echoes Coleridge's remarks on the imaginative power of fear, and the one to which the "fog of war" is attributed, Clausewitz takes us into the spectral environment of "mere twilight": "The great uncertainty of all data in war is a characteristic difficulty, because all action must be directed, to a certain extent, in a mere twilight, which in addition not infrequently—like the effect of fog or moonlight—gives to things an exaggerated size and grotesque form" (*WPP*, 155).

Nevertheless, not only do we not back away from such uncertain chasing of phantoms, we become obsessed with fixing the unfixable, drawn away from the search for clarity and instead toward deeper and deeper uncertainty, taking pleasure in the excesses of Imagination, echoing again Coleridge's statements on the pathologies of the excessively inward-turning, self-productive manic Imagination: "Although our intellect

14. Karl von Clausewitz, *War, Politics, and Power*, trans. Edward Collins (Chicago: Gateway, 1962), 82. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *WPP*.

always feels itself urged toward clarity and certainty, our mind still often feels itself attracted to uncertainty. Instead of threading its way with the intellect along the narrow path of philosophical investigation and logical deduction, in order, almost unconsciously, to arrive in strange and unfamiliar territory, it prefers to linger with the imagination in the realm of chance and luck. Instead of being confined, as in the first instance, to meager necessity, it revels here in the wealth of possibilities" (*WPP*, 80). Finally, this mania takes us well beyond logic, the empirical world, and reality altogether: "What this feeble light leaves indistinct to the vision, talent must discover, or it must be left to chance. It is therefore again talent, or the favor of fortune, on which we must depend, for lack of objective knowledge . . . talent and genius would act *beyond the law*, and theory would be the opposite of reality" (*WPP*, 155–56; my emphasis).

To sum up, then, what we find in these writers is a critical questioning of the points of transit between the empirical world and the interiorizing movements of the subjective Imagination. The inward movement, which then articulates a vision of the Imagination, can linger too long in the terms of its own making.¹⁵ Strikingly, in a similar movement, for both Coleridge and Clausewitz, the particular effects of a fearsome work of art can result as well in carrying "talent and genius" "beyond the law" of nature. It is now clear how the pathology of the Imagination mentioned in Coleridge and Clausewitz may be linked to the removal of the Imagination far away from the empirical world—in its self-generating frenzy, unchecked by the otherness of the external world, the Imagination becomes "manic." Add to that the specific element of fear or terror and we have an unlimited force, a perpetual machine of Imagination. It should be obvious how this would link up with the notion of preemption, which adds the distinct feature of motivatedness—we wish to imagine terror, for it is a matter of survival, on the one hand, and, more importantly and immediately, hegemony, on the other. These pathologies may be read psychically and subjectively, but they should be read socially and politically as well, and it is here that Kant's notion of the aesthetic Imagination is crucial.

15. In his essay "The Internalization of Quest-Romance," Harold Bloom remarks on the double bind of the Romantic poet, compelled away from the social and yet finding himself compelled equally toward a nihilistic inwardness. "The Romantic movement is from nature to the imagination's freedom (sometimes a reluctant freedom), and the imagination's freedom is frequently purgatorial, redemptive in direction but destructive of the social self." The individual ego must thus "search for an anti-self consciousness, a way out of the morass of inwardness." In Bloom, *Romanticism and Consciousness*, 6.

If for Coleridge and Clausewitz the countervailing force to the free flight of the Imagination is the empirical and rational world, in Kant's treatment of the aesthetic Imagination we find the Imagination grounded by two elements. First, by a force called "understanding," that is, the conceptual and rational operations of the mind. More important for this essay is the second, which involves an assumed universal common sense, an assumed shared *affect* upon being stimulated by the aesthetic. Not only is the beautiful assumed to register similarly across a universal human category, but this universal affect is best assumed if one stands outside one's subjective position and assumes that of the Other. We would call that "empathy." I will argue that Shock and Awe and the McNamarian deployment of "empathy" provide two exemplary instances of the hijacking of the sphere of the Imagination. Let me first briefly go through the significance of affect and empathy in Kant's aesthetic.¹⁶

First, as stated before, the Imagination stands in a particular relation to nature: "The imagination (as a productive faculty of cognition) is a

16. One of the chief advocates of American empire today is, of course, Robert Kagan, whose use of Kant is well known: in formulating essentially different positions and world-views of Europe and the United States, Kagan argues that Europe is "entering a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Kant's 'Perpetual Peace.' The United States, meanwhile, remains mired in history, exercising its power in the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might." Americans "tend toward unilateralisms," and Europeans "insist they approach problems with greater nuance and sophistication. They try to influence others through subtlety and indirection." America therefore lives in a chaotic Hobbesian world where the raw exercise of power is the only *modus operandi* (but nonetheless a "behemoth with a conscience"); Europeans are enjoying the peace brought about by U.S. might: "What this means is that although the United States has played the critical role in bringing Europe into this Kantian paradise, and still plays a key role in making that paradise possible, it cannot enter this paradise itself. It mans the walls but cannot walk through the gate. The United States, with all its vast power, remains stuck in history, left to deal with the Saddams and the ayatollahs, the Kim Jong IIs and the Jiang Zemins, leaving the happy benefits to others." All references here are to Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review*, no. 113 (June & July 2002): 3, 4, 25. These ideas are later elaborated in *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003). Yet Balibar and many others have pointed out how selective and imprecise Kagan's use of Kant is. This fact only goes to support my general claim here—that the current regime of dominance has instrumentalized and colonized all manner of ethical and aesthetic discourse. See Etienne Balibar, "Whose Power? Whose Weakness? On Robert Kagan's Critique of European Ideology," *Theory and Event* 6, no. 4 (2003), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v006/6.4balibar.html.

powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by nature . . . the material can be borrowed by us from nature in accordance with the law, but be worked up by us into something else—namely, what surpasses nature.”¹⁷ In this surpassing of nature, the Imagination “spread[s] over a multitude of kindred presentations that arouse more thought than can be expressed in a concept determined by words” (*CJ*, 177). “In a word,” Kant summarizes, “the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, annexed to a given concept, with which, in the free employment of the imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found in it” (*CJ*, 316).

The key question in *The Critique of Judgment* is, however, how would we recognize, how would we know, if what we were experiencing as a beautiful or pleasurable representation of the Imagination were shared, verifiable, given the necessary absence of a definite and defining concept? In answering, Kant evokes the second maxim of common human understanding: “to think from the standpoint of every one else”—a man of “enlarged mind” “detaches himself from the subjective personal conditions of his judgment and reflects upon his own judgment from a *universal standpoint* (which he can only determine by shifting his ground to the standpoint of others)” (*CJ*, 153).

In turn, Kant resorts to the notion of a *sensus communis* that is difficult to translate fully but that might be called a common sense (*not* “common sense”): “For the principle [of *sensus communis*] while it is only subjective, being yet assumed as a subjectively universal (a necessary idea for every one), could, in what concerns the consensus of differing judging Subjects, demand universal assent like an objective principle, provided we were assured of our subsumption under it being correct. This indeterminate norm of a common sense is as a matter of fact, presupposed by us” (*CJ*, 85). As Antoon Van den Braembussche argues, “Kant tries to construct *sensus communis* as an operation of reflection which enables us to free ourselves from our own prejudices by comparing ‘our own judgment with human reason in general.’ . . . We compare our judgments not with the actual but rather with the merely possible ones of others in order to put ourselves in the position of everyone else.”¹⁸ It is, in short, a particular form of empathy that tries

17. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 176. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *CJ*.

18. Antoon Van den Braembussche, “*Sensus Communis*: Clarifications of a Kantian Concept,” <http://home.concepts-ict.nl/~kimmerle/framebraemb.htm>.

to intuit the universally shared affect of a work of art: “we introduce this fundamental feeling not as a private feeling, but as a public sense.” One’s disinterested free play of Imagination is thus an image of the morally good; the *sensus communis* is connected to acting in such a way that one’s actions can be the basis for a universal order. In short, the private is thus connected to the intersubjective and the public.¹⁹ Taking up these key elements of the aesthetic Imagination and its social aspects of community, affect and empathy, the very core of being together via the Imagination, we find their perverse appropriation in today’s political discourse, and this, I will argue, accounts in no small way for the effectiveness of the propaganda machinery of the state.

How has the security state construed the public? How have policy-makers and pundits such as Robert S. McNamara instrumentalized affect and empathy, and put the Imagination to deadly use? In preemption, the Imagination is retooled to serve a pathological purposefulness that exploits the fearsome elements of an obsessive use of Imagination.

Now, certainly, it might well be said that every war deploys the Imagination in just these ways—harnessing the human capacity to envision various future scenarios and to neutralize potential dangers.²⁰ In politics in general, affect and empathy have been evoked to sway public opinion. Indeed, in his seminal work of 1922 entitled *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann noted in his chapter “The Enlisting of Interest” that “the idea conveyed [by pictures and words] is not fully our own until we have identified ourselves with some aspect of the picture. The identification, or what Vernon Lee has called empathy, may be the most subtle and symbolic.”²¹ And as for affect, Lippmann writes, “If among a number of people, possessing various tendencies to respond, you can find a stimulus which will arouse the same emotion in many of them, you can substitute it for the original stimuli. If, for example, one man dislikes the League [of Nations], another hates Mr. Wilson, and a third fears labor, you may be able to unite them if you can find some symbol which is the antithesis of all they hate.”²² Thus, in what Lippmann calls “Transfer of Interest,” the shaper of public opinion can find ways to consoli-

19. I thank Regenia Gagnier for discussions on the Sublime and the Beautiful.

20. There is, of course, a huge literature on this subject. What is especially fascinating are examples of counterintuitive game strategizing, Nixon’s “madman strategy,” for instance, of the argument proffered by the military *against* developing a civil defense system (I thank Kenneth Arrow for informing me of the second example).

21. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 105.

22. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 132.

date opinion from diverse populations if he can find a universally affective symbol. John Dewey makes similar points in his book *The Public and Its Problems*.²³

Nevertheless, the present situation exhibits three rather new characteristics: first, the interpenetration of formerly separate (or more distinct, in any case) spheres, or Habermasian “worlds.” If modernity is marked by increased bureaucratization, specialization, and rationalization, and human action is parceled out accordingly into these differentiated spheres, then in the United States today, these borders have become extremely porous under the imperatives of our current foreign and domestic antiterrorist policies. This means that the realm of the aesthetic and the Imagination is appropriated to the service of the new security state on a scale unheard of previously. Not only does it seem that every facet of human life is touched upon by the Imagination, but it is touched upon by a particularly instrumentalized Imagination. Second, this instrumentalized form of the Imagination is not only found in texts and documents and policy papers but is now widely dispersed and disseminated extensively by multiple media, including the Internet, and that lends it a particular reality effect. Third, I argue that this brand of the Imagination has a particularly distinct feature—its ahistoricity. If before we were used to the rhetorical appeals to the past and traditional values, in today’s Imagination we have a very singular point of historical reference—September 11th, and not much else. This means that the empirical counterweight to the Imagination is even more fully absented. It also means that “terror” has but one point of historical reference, and a seemingly unlimited horizon before it.

Consider how this positive capacity of the human Imagination is commandeered to the service of efficiently waging war. Think of the fact that McNamara’s first “lesson” in the film *The Fog of War* is that we have to empathize: “We must try to put ourselves inside their skin and look at us through their eyes. Just to understand the thoughts that lie behind their decisions and their actions.”²⁴ More specifically, this is geared to waging war in a more efficient manner: “In the Cuban missile crisis, at the end, I think we did put ourselves in the skin of the Soviets. In the case of the Vietnamese, we didn’t know them well enough to empathize. And there was total misunderstanding as a result. They believed that we had simply replaced the French as a colo-

23. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Swallow Press, 1954), 153.

24. *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, directed by Errol Morris (2003).

nial power, and we were seeking to subject South and North to our colonial interests. And we, we saw Vietnam as an element of the Cold War. Not what they saw it as: a civil war." While several people have commended McNamara's "lesson," arguing that empathy here is meant as a deterrent to war (if we had only understood the Vietnamese as well as we did the Soviets, if we could only have put ourselves in their place), I think that is an overly generous reading of McNamara. I find in his remarks, rather, the disingenuous transcoding of the aesthetic imaginary, its deployment in a particularly narrow set of applications in the political imaginary of the modern United States, and a consequent rescripting of the terms of a global community.

Now what does *empathy* actually mean? According to the *OED*, empathy is "the power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation."²⁵ But for McNamara and James G. Blight, this "power" is only useful if strategically deployed to certain ends. In their book *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing, and Catastrophe in the 21st Century*, the authors set forth what they call "The Empathy Imperative": "The West, led by the United States, must seek by all possible means to increase its understanding of the history, culture, religion, motives, and attitudes of those who have declared themselves to be its adversaries. This effort should begin by developing empathy toward the Islamic fundamentalists, specifically those groups allied with, or sympathetic to, the international terrorist network known as al-Qaeda. Empathy does *not* imply sympathy or agreement; it *does* imply curiosity, leading to deeper understanding of an adversary's mindset, as a prerequisite to resolving differences and eliminating threats to peace and security."²⁶ The slip-pages here are both obvious and telling, and the imperative to "secure" the nation carries with it the imperative and license to deploy shocking and awful force.

McNamara and Blight then pose and answer the question: "Why empathy? And why now? Because the 9/11 attacks were unanticipated, even *unimaginable*, to Americans before they occurred" (234; my emphasis). In the face of the manifestation of the unimaginable, empathy is marshaled for-

25. For the aesthetic application of the term, see Rebecca West, *The Strange Necessity* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1928), 102. West remarks on "the active power of empathy which makes the creative artist, or the passive power of empathy which makes the appreciator of art."

26. Robert S. McNamara and James G. Blight, *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing, and Catastrophe in the 21st Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 234. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically by page number only.

ward as not only “realistic understanding” (236) but also as a “*preemptive strategy*” (237; my emphasis). Importantly,

we believe it is urgent that the connection be made between the deployment of empathy toward the Great Powers, and toward the Islamic fundamentalists: whereas empathy can and should be deployed preemptively with the Great Powers to prevent dangerous crises from arising, we are, in fact, already in a deep crisis with committed, organized, well-subsidized adversaries whom we do not understand, who appear to be convinced that the United States and the West are responsible for their long and dire list of grievances, and who are actively seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons—not for deterrence, but for use against targets in the United States and the West generally. . . . In this case, empathy must be deployed urgently and massively, but not to prevent a crisis. It is too late for that. (237)²⁷

The interpenetration of the “applied Imagination” and the public sphere is nothing new, nor is the particular enlistment of fields such as psychology and anthropology. But, again, what is noteworthy is the appropriation of the aesthetic to both reinforce and mask. This is a more obvious and limited example of the strategic instrumentalization of the aesthetic, of empathy, and of affect. A more dramatic, massive, and violent case is the one I alluded to at the beginning of this essay, that of Shock and Awe.

As a doctrine of warfare, this Shock and Awe was introduced in a 1996 book by military strategists Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, and published by the Command and Control Research Program (CCRP) within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense of the United States. We can sense the weird and certainly unpremeditated appeal to the aesthetic embedded in the most germane passage from this text:

27. McNamara and Blight also have something to say about how this might affect our own universities and colleges: “How does a society close an ‘empathy gap’ with another, alien, and (at the moment) hostile society—or possibly a cluster of societies? A successful strategy must emphasize the critical significance of an intensified focus on the language, culture, history, religion, and psychology of those who pose the threat. These areas were left to languish in the years following the Cold War era, as such programs were cut in colleges and universities and in the U.S. State Department and Foreign Service as well” (239). “This time, cultural ‘ju-jitsu’ [a kind of asymmetrical applied cultural knowledge] and its prerequisite, empathy, must be practiced even by the conventionally powerful if disaster is to be avoided” (239).

The basis for Rapid Dominance rests in the ability to affect the will, perception, and understanding of the adversary through imposing sufficient Shock and Awe to achieve the necessary political, strategic, and operational goals of the conflict or crisis that led to the use of force. War, of course, in the broadest sense has been characterized by Clausewitz to include substantial elements of “fog, friction, and fear.” In the Clausewitzian view, “shock and awe” were necessary effects arising from application of military power and were aimed at destroying the will of an adversary to resist. In Rapid Dominance, the aim of affecting the adversary’s will, understanding, and perception through achieving Shock and Awe is multifaceted. To identify and present these facets, we need first to examine the different aspects of and mechanisms by which Shock and Awe affect an adversary.²⁸

Now we come to the most explicit appropriation and perversion of Kant’s notion of a universal *sensus communis*: “One recalls from old photographs and movie or television screens, the comatose and glazed expressions of survivors of the great bombardments of World War I and the attendant horrors and death of trench warfare. These images and expressions of shock transcend race, culture, and history. Indeed, TV coverage of Desert Storm vividly portrayed Iraqi soldiers registering these effects of battlefield Shock and Awe.”²⁹

According to Gaddis, the deployment of Shock and Awe was multi-valent and not limited to enemy soldiers. Indeed, his broad and multiple uses of the term come to a point of confusion. After the initial instantiation of Shock and Awe, there were secondary instances, perpetrated indeed by the enemy itself, but the effect was to be the same—democratization. “The shock and awe that accompanied the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were meant to begin the process [of democratization], but Bush and

28. Ullman and Wade, *Shock and Awe*, 45.

29. One should note that in 2003, upon the Bush regime’s attempt at enacting this doctrine, Harlan K. Ullman wrote an opinion piece in the *Baltimore Sun* (April 1, 2003) chastising the poor performance of the war, calling it “Shock and Awe Lite.” It simply did not go as planned: “The aim was to win decisively, rapidly, with little loss of life and limited damage. To achieve that, shock and awe were employed to influence and control an adversary’s will and perception and, therefore, behavior. Using all elements of psychological and physical power, the adversary was to be rendered so vulnerable and intimidated by our capabilities that resistance would be regarded as futile. From the outset, military leadership and forces as well as the political levers of power such as Baath Party headquarters were to be hit hard. But there are no guarantees in war.”

his advisors did not rely solely on military means to sustain its momentum. They expected that September 11 and other terrorist excesses would cause a majority of Muslims to recoil from the extremists among them.” But even beyond that, “the president and his advisors seem to have concluded that the shock the United States suffered on September 11 required that shocks be administered in return, not just to the part of the world from which the attack came, but to the international system as a whole. . . . Shock therapy would produce a safer, saner world.”³⁰

At the beginning of this essay, I remarked that Shock and Awe has instrumentalized the Sublime. Let me return to that concept to comment on Gaddis’s seemingly circular descriptions of the phenomena of Shock and Awe. The Sublime has two facets—first, the encounter with an unrepresentable, unabsorbable force that exceeds one’s capacity to master it perceptually or conceptually. Second, and crucially in Kant, there is the reassertion of the ego (individual or national) after its dissolution in the face of power or magnitude. Kant notes, “The feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination” (*CJ*, 91).³¹ In this regard, what we have historically, then, is the encounter with shock, belittling and humbling force, only to produce the resurgence of force. What is interesting in this last instance is the added combination of psychic and political therapy for an unbalanced world, made possible by this aesthetic and material assault.

What I have been interested in here is not only the retaliatory strategies and tactics of Shock and Awe that have commandeered the Sublime but moreover the enlistment of the Beautiful, with its deep connection between private experiences and the acting of the individual toward collective moral good via *sensus communis* and empathy. It is the dynamic between the terrible and legitimized application of material force and broad, often fatal affect that is at work in Shock and Awe. The very receptivity toward sensation and the capacity to empathize with others is cynically and brutally exploited, and legitimized in the interests of hegemony, that legitimation, of

30. Gaddis, “Grand Strategy,” 14.

31. For excellent applications of the Sublime to American nationalist ideology, see Donald Pease, “Sublime Politics,” *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (Spring/Fall 1984): 259–79; and Rob Wilson, *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

course, taking the logic of national security, noblesse oblige, and the imperative to spread democracy. The logic of the immediate post-9/11 United States and the United States going to war in Iraq is of the same strategic trajectory as the current applications of democratization. And let us not lose sight of the actual material forces needed to achieve such a massive affect: “Late in 2002, the Pentagon built four maintenance hangars at a cost of \$2.5 million designed to house as many as sixteen out of the total fleet of twenty-one B-2 Stealth bombers. Along with the B-52s and B-1s, Diego Garcia’s [naval communications facility] B-2s led the ‘shock and awe’ bombing attacks on Baghdad on March 22, 2003, dropping 4,200-pound ‘bunker busters’ on the essentially undefended city. It was the first time in history that all three types of American long-range strategic bombers targeted the same place at the same time.”³²

We attribute this strategy to the current regime, but its specific articulation goes at least as far back as 1937, and it is worth both excavating that history and marking a particularly weird case of instrumental historical amnesia. It was in Spain, in 1937, that we find the first modern instance wherein civilians were deemed proper targets of war—they were given the status of enemy combatants because, in this theorist’s mind, their fear would be an effective weapon against their own troops. On April 26, 1937, one hundred aircraft of the German Luftwaffe’s Legion Condor, under the command of Major General Hugo Sperrle, with Lieutenant Colonel Wolfram von Richthofen serving as his chief of staff, conducted a three-hour bombing attack on the city of Guernica, then held by the Loyalist Republican Army. Participating units included Bomber Group K/88, Fighter Group J/88, Experimental Squadron VB/88, and two Italian fighter squadrons.

What does this have to do with the current enactments of Shock and Awe? On February 5, 2003, the day Colin Powell was to appear before the UN Security Council to make the case for a war with Iraq, UN officials had covered the tapestry reproduction of Picasso’s depiction of the bombing in his famous painting *Guernica* in a blue shroud. UN officials claimed that the (literal) cover-up was simply a matter of creating a more effective backdrop for the television cameras. “When we do have large crowds we put the flags up and the UN logo in front of the tapestry,” asserted Stephane Dujarric, associate spokesman for UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. *New York Newsday*, however, reported that “diplomats at the United Nations, speak-

32. Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (2001; repr., New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 222.

ing on condition they not be named, have been quoted in recent days telling journalists that they believe the United States leaned on UN officials to cover the tapestry, rather than have it in the background while Powell or other U.S. diplomats argued for war on Iraq" (February 6, 2003).

This account is corroborated by Chalmers Johnson, who points out that "in autumn of 2001, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld created within the Pentagon an 'Office of Strategic Influence' with the function of carrying out what defense planners call 'information warfare'—disinformation and propaganda against foreign enemies as well as domestic critics who do not support presidential policies. Only when it became clear that the new office's operations would include funneling false stories to the American news media did Rumsfeld say that it was all a mistake and officially shut the operation down." Johnson continues: "Nonetheless, the idea did not go away . . . [and] on January 27, 2003, the government arranged to have a large blue curtain placed over a tapestry reproduction of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* hanging near the entrance to the UN Security Council. . . . The government decided that the carnage wrought by aerial bombings was an inappropriate backdrop."³³ Thus, this particular, concrete act of the Imagination was not appropriated, but ex-appropriated, erased entirely. What possibilities exist, therefore, to restore or reinvent the Imagination outside these circuits of domination and revisionism?³⁴

Coda: Back to the Futures

John Gaddis ends his assessment of the first Bush II administration with a critical caution: "Some such therapy [Shock and Awe] was probably necessary in the aftermath of September 11, but the assumption that things would fall neatly into place after the shock was administered was the single greatest misjudgment of the first Bush administration." What the Bush administration should have done, according to Gaddis, was to ask one basic question of the dead—more precisely, of the first practitioner of Shock and Awe: "What would Bismarck do?" That is, what follows Shock and Awe? Gaddis then uses Bismarck as an example of someone who, after applying

33. Johnson, *Blowback*, 298–99.

34. On his Web page, the comic book artist and political satirist Tom Tomorrow posted a "restored" image of the event that never took place. Unfortunately, according to the artist, that image was made for the occasion; he has since removed it from his Web page. Readers interested in viewing it may download it from www.stanford.edu/~palbolliu/tomorrow.jpg.

Shock and Awe, properly embarked on “the careful, patient construction of a new European order.”³⁵

The move toward patient rationality after furious applications of shock is reflected bizarrely in the Terrorist Futures episode. During his tenure as under secretary of defense, Paul Wolfowitz referred to an act of the Imagination that seems to bring this all together—the infamous “Terrorist Futures Market,” or, as it was more benignly named, the “Policy Analysis Market” invented by the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA). Its premise was that multiple knowledges, manifested in market investments, could best predict the likelihood of acts of terrorism. It was initially heralded by Wolfowitz as “brilliantly *imaginative*.” Later, upon public outcry, Wolfowitz conceded that DARPA “got *too* imaginative.”³⁶ We should not be complacent or self-congratulatory about the withdrawal of the program; we would do well to recognize not only just how deep-seated the logic of preemption has become, but also how it relies on a self-generating manic Imagination that seems—and I would underscore “seems”—to have hijacked our notions of the future.

But to end on a less depressing note, I want to recall that almost immediately after the news of the Terrorist Futures Market was leaked, both politicians and other public figures responded with such intuitive disgust and horror that the plan was scuttled immediately. Does this mean that some political and social facet of the Kantian *sensus communis* still exists? Despite the hurried rationalizations by military, administration, Defense Department spokespeople, and economists, the “public” had such an automatic and vocal response that the plan was defeated. A small victory, indeed, but one from which we should learn and develop into a politics of the future, fueled by an Imagination of another kind of world in which affect is not exploited for the sake of terror, and empathy is directed precisely to reaffirm the possibility for being together in the world. We need to discover what, if any, possibilities exist for tapping into this still extant (or residual) form of human community.

35. Gaddis, “Grand Strategy,” 16.

36. “Amid Furor, Pentagon Kills Terrorism Futures Market,” www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/07/29/terror.market (posted July 30, 2003); my emphases.