

Letter from the Editor



In August of 2001, the previous editor of *Canon* and I were discussing possible themes for that semester's issue—without much success. Should it be "The Kerrey Crisis"? "The Senses"? "The Public Intellectual"? Then the events of September 11th thrust our theme inevitably upon us. It was impossible *not* to write about the violence of the towers' destruction, the sudden onset of war-mongering and patriotic feeling, the proliferation of American flags in the windows of every house, business, and taxi cab in New York even as the ash still fell south of Canal Street. Most of all, however, there seemed to be a general feeling of confusion. The Trade Center attack was bigger, or at least more in our face, than anything Americans had had to deal with in recent memory, and we lacked the proper perspective to understand it in all its past, present, and future implications.

One year later, and we are still at a loss. The flags have gone down; September 11th, 2002 came and went with little more than a blink and a few parodies in the *Onion*. But the concrete results of this past year have been dire. The United States has moved from its campaign in Afghanistan (where, as a friend of mine who works for an NGO near Mazar-al-Sharif tells me, chaos, destitution and oppression reign as much as ever) to calmly and publicly propose what was outlawed by the Versailles Treaty and the U.N. Charter: declaring war on another country without its yet having attacked us. Anti-U.S. sentiment has gone beyond mere distaste for Brittney Spears and a certain native brand of bombasticism to full-

fledged (and quite possibly justified) political anger and disgust. Meanwhile, as this most recent election showed, the electorate, in a potent wartime blend of fear and arrogance, moves farther and farther to the right. Our historical memory seems to be shrinking in indirect proportion to our tolerance for the logically absurd.

We at the Graduate Faculty are both privileged and disadvantaged in this regard. Privileged, in that perhaps at no other major school in the country is gathered an international student body so committed to social justice and to both imaginative and rigorous thinking about the way the world works; disadvantaged, in that this relative—I say, relative—concord can blind us to the very world we want to understand.

It no longer seems an exaggeration to say that we are living through a crisis moment in history. We have a chance as never before to increase our store of knowledge about the world, to understand other perspectives, and to make changes in the way we look at things—in the very way we live. Whether or not we will rise to the challenge is an open question.

Enjoy this issue of *Canon*. 🌐