

## **Panarticon**

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“The hordes will descend, black with the expectancy of bitter grief and brilliant triumph, thirsting for the reproduction of an image—anywhere, on paper, a billboard, a radio or television—seeing themselves infinitely reflected in a dizzying Borge’s library—we will be much older—*Discorder* aged seven years more, my friends, even if we exist & even if these words be remembered—paste these to your wall—for this is the past!—calling to you & asking to remember *our* robots: what ridiculous fantasies did we tread on the blacktopped garbage waste, EXPO Ernie in tow!” —*Late night reminiscent & drunken words recorded @ “the exiled” poetry gathering, Montréal*

### **24 Months of Panarticon**

Indeed. Peak around that seven-year corner & see the perma-grin of the Olympics, while here at Panarticon Headquarters, we are celebrating our 24th missive: two years of mangled politics, littered art, and blasphemy through which no less than four Editors have crawled. Six years since I began writing for *Discorder*—which means we are almost at the fulcrum between APEC and the Olympics. A balancing act, writing Panarticon is. Is this column monitored by Gov’t Intelligence, I wonder? All politically engaged bodies ask these questions in moments of smoked paranoia, and even though CiTR reporters were granted the honour of CSIS records for their independent coverage of APEC ’97, I queried myself today on the increasing potential for Free Speech in the light of Sherman Austin’s imprisonment.

### **“You Never Know Who's Listening”**

“Sherman Austin, webmaster of RaisetheFist.com, was sentenced today, August 4, 2003, to one year in federal prison, with three years of probation. Judge Wilson shocked the courtroom when he went against the recommendation of not only the prosecution, but the FBI and the Justice Department...”- Raisethefist.com

Guilt by association is coming to the fore—a vicious tactic—and by this I mean that today one can be prosecuted with “Intent to harm the State” (conspiracy) by simply linking or hosting information that could be used for dangerous acts—like creating explosives. Which is what has happened to Sherman Austin. After an “unnamed poster” uploaded information on explosive-making to Austin’s political site, Raisethefist.com, an FBI squad team surrounded and raided Austin's house. From there it was all over (suspicions remain, of course, as to why the poster has not been pursued...). The issue is not, technically, linking or hosting such information—but rather conspiring to use with *intent*, for Google caches contain, host and link such information, as do libraries and (untouched) religious and conservative militias. While Austin's rhetorical intent is confrontational, there is no evidence that he was planning or even approving of violence wrought by explosives. In fact, his website is only a degree more direct than many other websites critiquing US policy and Government with an ear to considering alternate political systems—Austin's political system of choice being, not surprisingly, “anarchism” (a debated alternative, in theory and application, on Zmag.org, Nettime.org

and Indymedia.org, as well as in *PostModern Culture & Autonomedia.org*).

I don't support Austin's "anarchism," but it's *something*, and it remains startling if not ironically close to the politics of Thomas Jefferson, of "Declaration of Independence" fame (which one poster described as "an anarchist rant"—& it is for these same reasons that I would be weary of "anarchism," for its acceptance of a liberal humanism, inheriting a legacy that requires some thought, including "liberation" and other violent methodologies which, at their limit, mimic salvatory structures). But it shows that the very usage and mention of the word today—anarchism—is looping the circuits. The linking of "Tactical Post-Structural Anarchism" to Hakim Bey as well as Foucault, Lyotard and Deleuze (see Michael Truscullo, *PostModern Culture* 13.3, [www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/](http://www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/)) will have a double-effect: of at once aligning poststructuralism with a movement often shunned by the Left and philosophy in general for its apparent naïvety, and at the same time, in the eyes of the Right, confirming their long-held suspicions that "French Theory"—if not intellectuals and academic knowledge in general—are The Enemy.

The resampling of "anarchism" makes both Left and Right uneasy. The State has clearly acted with aggression against Austin. *Noam Chomsky is unlikely to be arrested. But the upcoming generations of political thinkers and activists are.* The waves of fear spread. So does the discussion of anarchism.

Austin's case also means another dangerous US legal precedent: that webmasters are responsible for *all* content on their websites. This would entail what an anonymous poster might write in the Comments field of a blog, for example, or in a guestbook. Are webmasters now responsible for what *others* say, think and write? And what of Google ads that rotate generated content? Is the webmaster now responsible for, simply, all volunteered, provided, generated, and linked information? What of RSS Feeds? How and where does a website end, in this situation, when hyperlinking has also proved to be a legal act of association?

For example, by even linking to Raisethefist.com in this journalistic context as well as in the mode of critique & citation, it could be claimed, under this unjust precedent, that one supports the site's aims of conspiratorial intent ("intent" which has been "proved" in the same manner). And so on—which leads us to (wrongly) conclude entire swaths of the Net, if not discourse in general, as matrices of culpability. Will we live to see the time when, in its final bid for supremacy, hegemonic power attempts to eradicate not only the presence of such information but all the participants and agents in and of its relay? It's not too fantastic to suggest that the current tactics of the RIAA—in arresting MP3 filesharers accused of minor infractions of outdated copyright law—are beginning to test the limits of such "outreach" tactics of State & Corporate interference to what what can be termed "inward" aggression. These are the tactics of, to put it mildly, "shock & awe."

We resist with an openness to debate, to discussion, to writing-as-polylogue, to dropping the in-fighting and presenting a show of hands when needed (& *we need this in the case of Austin*). But beyond this frontline support, the issue at hand is one of knowledge itself:

of the way we know things, cite things, learn things. This is not only about Austin, but about the power politics of information—& thus our dreams & our realities.