

Parallel sites : USA and the Gulf

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Parallel Sites

USA and the Gulf



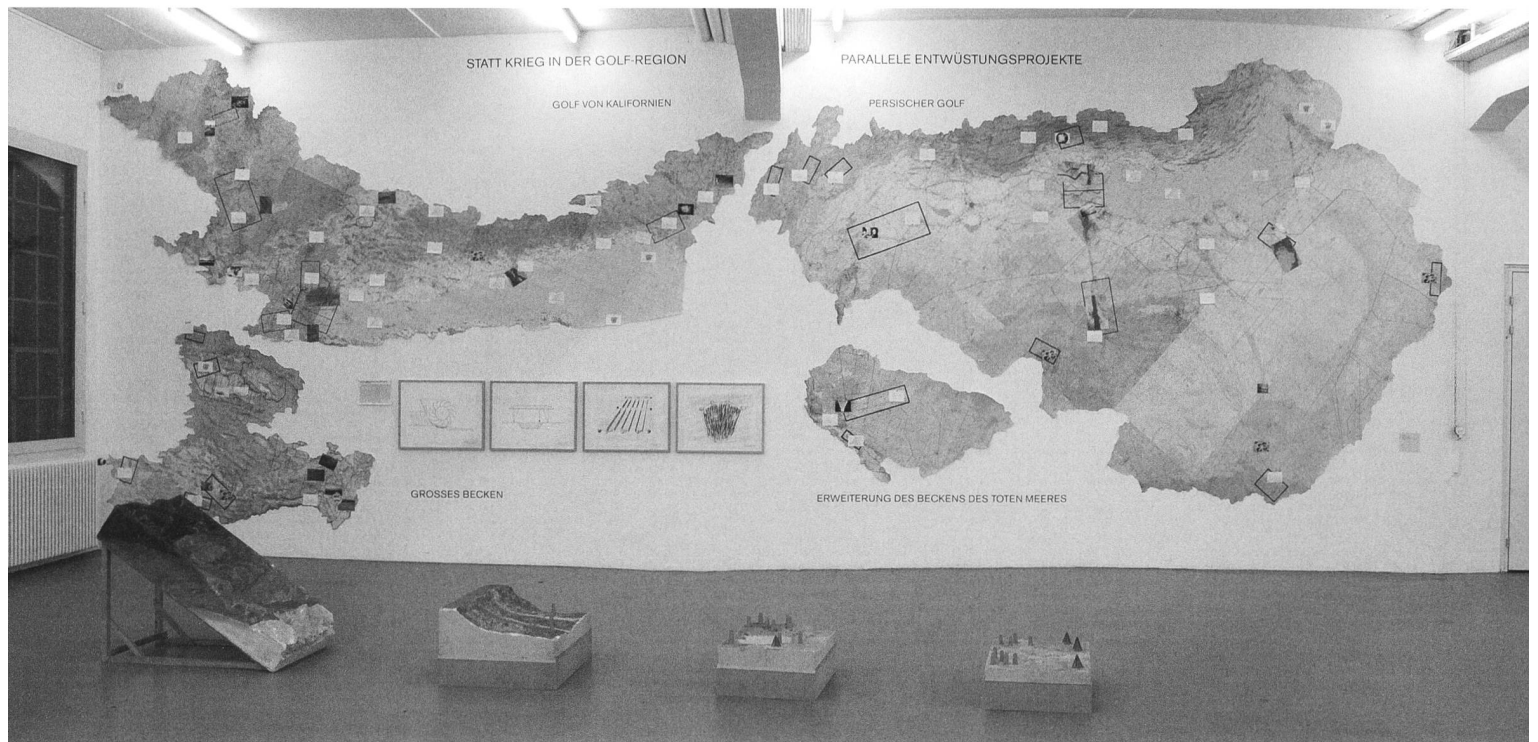
Marcel Duchamp, *fountain*, urinal, 1917. It was judged in a 2005 world art history conference to be the most influential artwork of the 20th century. How 'influential'? In being a paradigm for territorial planning, e.g., the Gulf.

The parallel I drew on 10 January 2002 between two regions demarcated by the British Colonial Office, one in 1664 and the other in 1921, results less from my personality than from growing up in 20th-century United States. My childhood, the first twelve years of school and political formation, were similar to those of persons with whom I bonded in my late 20s. We were all of about the same age and had all been through the same education in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with strong images of World War II, worries from the Korean War, and – soon to come – severe disenchantments with the Vietnam War. The persons include members of the Offices, Fitzgibbon, Holzer, Nadin, Prince & Winters, all born ca. 1950. They also include those who formed the global-media practice with satellites which led, through decades, to an acute geographical understanding of the Persian Gulf, leading, for example to the chart. They are Taro Suzuki, Joan Waltemath, Eve Vaterlaus, Glenn Steigelman, Wolfgang Staehle, Coleen Fitzgibbon, Bill Dolson Win Knowlton, all born around 1950 and 1955. All of us were US citizens. The one exception soon to become one, and all of us were from relatively-recent immigration backgrounds, back one or two generations, such that we were more intensely inclined to believe in the American Dream, founded on the *Declaration of Independence* and the *United States Constitution*, with the first ten amendments as a *Bill of Rights*. These documents of the United States are taught early at school. They reinforce the teachings of how all the wars we have fought or will fight are meant to preserve the existence of the rights and freedoms anchored in these documents. They even become the basis for dissident practice, such as protests against the Vietnam War or, nowadays, globalization. The dissidents do not subscribe to foreign beliefs, like socialism or communism, but rather to the principles enshrined in the documents taught to all United States citizens.

In Spring 1979, on Stuyvesant Square, I came across Taro Suzuki in front of a well-known hardware store, one often used by artists. He asked me to come over to his studio on 10th Street, to talk about starting an “art air force”. I was immediately interested. We met in his studio, where much of Suzuki’s art work was visible, and we discussed the idea of an art air force. My father had been in the US Air Force, and I had grown up in a General Electric research town with the world’s first commercial TV station, a children’s program on that being *Satellite 6*. I had already used satellite imagery in my art works, including the first public release of Meteosat geostationary-satellite imagery for a show at Caltech in 1978, so I responded dialectically to Suzuki’s initiative with the term *Space Force*. We immediately agreed, and Taro and I then coined the phrase “Television Government”, as something to be achieved with a merger of space technology and television.

Within a few weeks, Taro and I were meeting with other artists. They included Joan Waltemath and Eve Vaterlaus, who in 1977 had organized an art show at Brown University and Rhode Island School of Design including works of now well-known figures like Jeff Koons and Dennis Oppenheim, called *Space Window*. Joan and Eve had befriended powerful people inside NASA who helped us at the beginning. Later these people become vital for our access to satellite data and satellite data-processing facilities we used for our *Space Force* projects. Others, each with their own background in space-data work, were photographer Glenn Steigelman, video producer Colleen Fitzgibbon, structuralist film-maker Paul Sharits (admired for years by Steigelman, Fitzgibbon and me), sculptor Win Knowlton, and – through long friendship with me and interest also in group practice – Wolfgang Staehle. In all cases, except Staehle, we were Americans. And in all cases, we had resolutely independent habits. None of us was part of the Establishment, nor wanted to be. Eve had turned down a chance to attend Wellesley; I had turned down several Ivy league choices to attend a school more known for its independent thinking; Glenn had been through the Whitney Program and Yale Art School but made a point of investigating how Jasper Johns had falsified the dates on his paintings, Paul was famous in the art-world for his wild behavior and self-determined streak, Win was unique in coming from an Establishment background, but he had broken away to study art in Vermont. All of us, indeed, wanted to succeed in life on our terms, with our own ideas and abilities, as promised in the USA. In part, this resulted from our ties outside the United States. Eve had a Swiss father and was once married to an Italian. Joan frequently visited Germany and Austria, speaking the language of her immigrant ancestors. Colleen emphasized her Irish and German roots as grounds for defiance of the Anglophile Establishment. Paul was Yugoslav by ethnic background, and had a Yugoslav wife. Glenn emphasized his working-class German background. Taro, of course, had a Japanese legacy, complete with the WW II internment camps, so he was even more intensely interested in asserting his rights as an American citizen. Bill Dolson, of diverse ethnic background, had also come from a very diverse academic background. Wolfgang, as we know in the art world, has become bi-national, both German and American.

Within this mentality of freshly-American aspiration, this attitude which the *International Herald Tribune* would describe as “naive“, this climate of belief in not being just an artist but also exercising the rights and duties of the American Republic, we formed a group, meeting several times monthly, producing cable TV broadcasts also monthly, earning no money yet, but seeking an economic place in the world with a civilian version of *Space Force*.



Peter Fend, *Parallele Entwüstungsprojekte*, Installation at the Migros Museum, Zurich, 2002.

In the *United States Constitution*, in the *Bill of Rights*, Article Two, one of ten amendments we all had learned in school, is written this assertion: A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

We half-dozen artists, seeking without articulated reasons to build a *Space Force*, were acting upon on what had been drilled into us in grade school: that we had a right, a duty, even to form a militia and to be able to keep and bear arms, such being necessary to the security of our United States.

“Arms”, we surmised, did not mean hand-guns. They did not even mean the weapons used by soldiers. They meant the apparatus of military technology now most in development, now most determinative of who is on top, now able to guarantee the security of a free state against invasion and damage: space technology.

We did not consciously think of the Constitution. Rather, as events transpired and we encountered difficulties in publishing our views and our work, we thought of the *Bill of Rights*, in Article One, which says, “Congress shall make no law” abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. As we encountered difficulties with military agencies and secret police from various “free Western” countries, such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, we thought of Article Four, which states: The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated.

Space Force became incorporated in a business called Ocean Earth Construction and Development Corporation, and – after two years of cable TV shows and smaller exhibitions – achieved art-world recognition with two well-publicized exhibitions in Manhattan: *Art of the State* at *The Kitchen*, and *Global Survey* in *Chase Manhattan Plaza*. In these exhibitions, it displayed in video and photo form what the public could see with civil satellites. In May 1982, *Space Force*, this militia of some half dozen artists, became very real; it became capable of acquiring and distributing information with military value. The site of action was the Falklands.

With the Falklands surveillance using civil-grade Landsat data, all of us in the lab – the two *Space Force* associates, the newscasters from the BBC and NBC, the satellite data-processing experts, the military analyst brought in as an advisor – were astonished by what multi-spectral data, when processed with the methods of structuralist film-makers like Paul Sharits and Stan Brakhage, could reveal. We were astonished to find out facts about the site that not even high-resolution military grade satellites then could do. Unlike military satellites, designed to spot details, we could sort out differences in surface colors, using the different spectral frames of viewing, and we could find, for example, the hydrocarbon slicks that indicated where Argentine Pucara aircraft were landing. Most importantly, we could make out the type of beach sand and nearby soil most suitable for landing tanks in an invasion. The site singled out came to be one of those used in the British landings.

One could go on. Let just this telex from a later associate in *Ocean Earth*, Ingo Gunther, describe. He wrote in June 1985: “For the last three years we have for instance scrutinized Beirut, the Falklands, Central America, and the Iran-Iraq war. We correctly predicted the route of the Israeli attack (in Beirut studies, for CBS News, July 1982), the British attack on the Falklands, and we have analyzed Iraqi construction and strategy in the war zone.” *Space Force* was in action. It worked. It was functioning through a business corporation selling to worldwide media outlets exercising the “right of the people to keep and bear arms”, those “arms” being tools of military intelligence. And all this was done merely with civil-grade satellite data, which is by law available to anyone with the required cash as part of a Congress-mandated policy called *Open Skies*.

But history has been entirely otherwise. On the night of the Falklands survey, which was broadcast on the BBC and NBC, armed British and US naval officers entered the laboratory and forced us to leave, and seized all the satellite data and related documents we had used. Protests at offices of the US Navy were in vain. In the lobby of those offices, very large, was a portrait of Margaret Thatcher: the US was plainly not neutral. The Argentine Embassy in Washington was informed, to maintain a stated neutrality of the United States and its citizens, but the FBI chastised us nonetheless. In the end, we were not free to proceed as a militia, informing our fellow citizens of what is going on, and we were not free even to act independently of the violated neutrality of our government.

Thus began for me a decades-long train of doubts about the independence of the United States from Great Britain. Thus began a decades-long investigation of the British secret services, the history of British war plans, notably those of the two World Wars leading to the present structure of global mineral-fuels industry, and the systematic violations by Britain of US independence in its for-

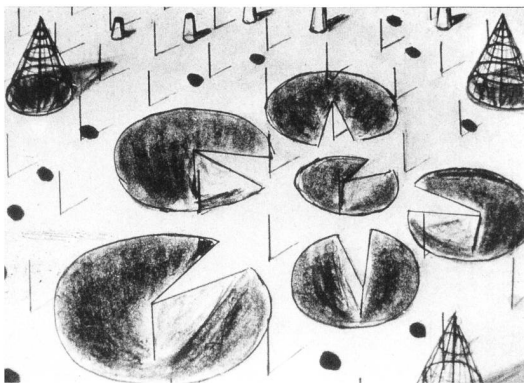
eign policy. A summary of twentieth-century history would be this. (1) in 1917 the US lost its independence and became a bully-boy for the British Empire; (2) US entry led, in turn, to a grossly unbalanced situation in the European war, with an abusive outcome at Versailles, which spawned a bizarre revolt of the defeated (Germans) and cheated (Italians) by Hitler and Mussolini.

As a result, the US became ever-deeper entrenched in Mideast oil and gas; the result now appears as troops and billions of dollars of costs in Iraq and Afghanistan, with the US becoming one of the most reviled countries in the world. The scale of abuse by the British became apparent as I investigated how come news story after news story in the British press, be it in *South Magazine* or in *The Observer*, got cancelled, twisted, or 180-degree rewritten by people later found out to be spies. (South was controlled by the BCCI, discovered later to be a money laundry for US–UK spy operations, and duly enough, a cover story slated for there was entirely, abruptly cancelled, with a ensuing staff shuffle. At *The Observer*, the man who rewrote our article to make it say Iran was building a large multichannel canal, not Iraq, thus making our chronicle impossible to follow, was arrested some months later in Iraq as a spy, and was hanged.) In the investigations, often just conducted in state libraries in Holland or Australia, I found out, for example, how the secret British war plan of 1918 was for them to abandon the Western Front on January 1st, 1919, leave the Americans and French to sort things out with the Germans, and to occupy the Persian Gulf with all its oil riches exclusively for themselves. Also, I discovered that, as Churchill wrote, the Battle of Paaschendale, which cost well over 900'000 German and British lives, was meant simply as a “distraction” of German attention away from where the British were marching in: the cities of Jerusalem, Damascus, Baghdad, and Basra. So, sacrifice in futile conflicts is okay. What are hundreds of thousands of lives if a monopoly over fuel can be won?

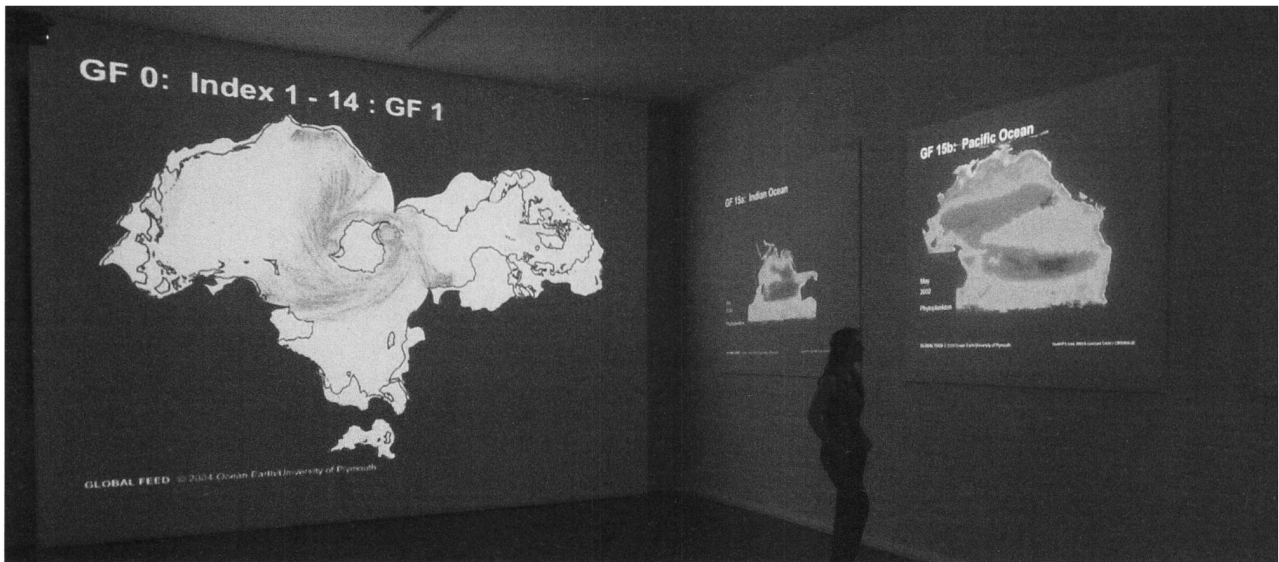
The British were not alone. In France, border police seized all videotapes they could find of our Chernobyl investigations and forced me to stand up through the night, systematically asking me questions and making jibes. In Germany, agents of the secret police “helped” with an expedited non-delivery of our newest Chernobyl tapes, then informed us that we were not qualified to do our work, and finally – after slowing us down vis-a-vis several media deadlines – informed us that, well, all the data tapes and data processing, then in Munich, would be a service by us to the German state. \$30'000 in data were gone, along with all processing results, except for what imagery were already in our possession.

In Holland, Italy, Switzerland, and Sweden, similar episodes occurred, but not so flagrantly as a violation of Amendment 4 of the US Constitution. In the United States, the problem was more simple: the secret authorities, namely the FBI and CIA, first told laboratories not to work with us, forcing us to work overseas, and then told our clients, like ABC’s John McWethy, not to buy from us. What was being “infringed”? With such experiences, with such a memory of how the US Constitution and US Declaration of Independence are systematically violated, I therefore was not surprised with the loss of our studio in the already-threatened World Trade Center, on September 11, 2001.

During the September 11 attacks, and for nearly two weeks thereafter, I was in Britain. I was not shocked, not upset, not frightened. I was, rather, amused. The people were getting newspapers at zero cost, all with giant headlines and photos, and no one was looking at who was to blame: the oil industry. I quickly put together an attack on the oil industry, starting with a phrase, “To get beyond the present impasse, one must go beyond petroleum.” Some months later, BP, by coincidence?, began copyright use of this term, “beyond petroleum”. As if they own what everyone knows is the future.



Peter Fend, *Marsh Array*, Pencil and ink on paper, 1978, part of the sequence *Earth Net. An Economic System*, exhibited as photograph at the California Institute of Technology, 1978.

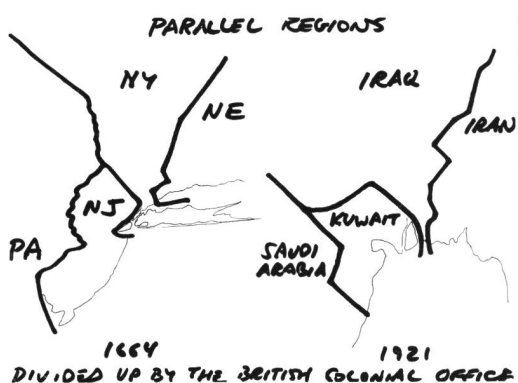


The World Trade Center studio had been awarded to *Ocean Earth*, the same entity which mounted the *Art of the State* and *Global Survey* shows of 1982. The studio was then full of our plans for the Western Hemisphere, while we were negotiating with the Venezuelan Consulate about displaying them in their large viewing space across from Rockefeller Center. I would speak with Hugo Chavez about this, not as someone endorsing all his policies but as one seeking a New World, Western Hemisphere praxis independent from Britain or anyone else in the Old World, or Eastern Hemisphere. The studio had been awarded somewhat anomalously. It was to be an “office” for reviving the then-dead efforts from 1983 of the NY Sea Grant Institute for a broad, multi-billion-dollar US-China initiative on replacing fossil hydrocarbons with methane from marine algae. During the artists’ presentations in the World Trade Center program, I explained this renewable-resource effort, as a form of architecture, to be conducted by a team of artists, including George Chaikin, Eve Vaterlaus, Joan Waltemath, Sara Peschel, and myself in collaboration with Dennis Oppenheim. One person came up to me with strong objections. He told me that art should have nothing to do with geopolitics or issues like energy. This one person was in the World Trade Center when it was hit, on our floor, by an airplane: geopolitics had something to do with him.

But when I returned to New York, I was surprised to hear artists, including my colleagues in the World Trade Center, talking about a “clash of civilizations” and “global terror”. I was wondering, when do we stop abusing other people and burning up the scarce oil? I was also wondering why everyone was so traumatized: Things far worse go on regularly in other parts of the world, like Yugoslavia, so The word went out that we WTC artists were supposed to exhibit in the *New Museum*, and maybe also PS 1, but the word also went out, as asserted loudly by Alanna Heiss at PS 1, that nothing was supposed to be displayed regarding the recent events. That is, don’t show art about what is going on.

I could not resist doing otherwise. The result was predictable: we could not show. True, there were other factors at play, like the irregularity of an office instead of an individual artist, or of the publicized views by colleague George Chaikin winning attention. Chaikin typically penetrated the veil of political correctness. He saw the darker forces behind. In 1982, when I took up Wolfgang Staehle’s proposal to sell the Falklands surveillance to the BBC, Chaikin – who had joined *Space Force* earlier that year – said, “don’t do it”. He foresaw

Peter Fend, *Global Feed*, 2004, *Viewing Station* in the exhibition “Reverse Global Warming”, Spacex, Exeter/UK, 2004.



Peter Fend, cartographic diagram, analysis revealing the master plan, January 10, 2002.

that the British would abuse it. And events proved him right. So, just as I was doing, but with more rhetorical force, he was focusing the blame on Anglo-American energy geopolitics. He noted that fair warning had been given about the World Trade Center attacks, and that the US had done nothing to heed the demands of the warning parties. But people like George Chaikin and I were rather alone then, in our suspicions about what was really going on. We were rather alone in our distrust of the hysteria and outrage. We were, some might say, cynical. But events have borne out our disbelief in what the authorities would say. Events have shown that, yes, this catastrophe served well to send troops into the oil fields of the Middle East.

On January 10, 2002, after years of study of the Head of the Persian Gulf, conducted largely through maps and satellite photographs, considering Bin Laden's complaint about the Arabian territory having been carved up "80 years ago" (or 1921), and remembering the film *Lawrence of Arabia* from my childhood, which foretold long-term troubles if the Arabians in the Gulf do not get their land as one whole, I recollected that Greater New York and Greater Basra have about the same size, with the same demarcations of territory. I drew this up. I submitted it for exhibition. The work was of course unsuitable. And we of *Ocean Earth* were already somewhat unsuitable. A few days later, when asked to give a talk for an exhibition at the *Museum Ludwig* in Cologne, I mentioned this drawing, sent a fax copy of it, and was immediately asked to participate in the exhibition there. The drawing, with its text translated into German, has since appeared in five museums throughout Europe. This contrast between US and European venues towards images of what is going on strongly pushed me to move my family to Europe. I have left the country where I learned about the *Declaration of Independence* and the *United States Constitution*, with its *Bill of Rights*, because those documents have become systematically disregarded. The ban on showing art about what is going on was widespread. Many artists complained about it. Many artists found themselves having to modify what they were showing, sometimes to the point of opacity.

But with this drawing, which in early 2002 directed attention to a correspondence between the financial hub of New York and the fossil oil hub of Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, centered in Iraq, one could predict events. Just over a year later, an attack was launched by US and UK forces on Iraq, from *Camp New York*, *Camp Pennsylvania*, and *Camp New Jersey*. Curious: the same geographical references I had made were also being made for the joint US-UK attack. Unwittingly, with my map of correspondences, I had exposed a manner of code-naming a military operation. The code-naming, one could surmise, came from the British. So, who's making the decisions?



Peter Fend, *Death Array*, model, Gallery Metropol, Vienna, 1994.

Regardless, the powers that be don't want people, including citizen-artists, to be predicting events. They don't want people to see anything. For if the people see what is going on, and if they follow through with tools like civil satellites and resources like history books, and then use of logic and a bit of spymaster's psychology, then we, the people, can foretell precisely what they, the establishment, are trying to do. And if we can see what they are trying to do, then maybe we can stop them.

My drawing of January 10, 2002, if widely published in the United States, would have directed public attention to a sort of "exchange", a Lawrence Weiner "object tossed from one continent to another," between New York, the financial capital of the Anglo-American petroleum alliance, and the Head of the Persian Gulf, centered in Iraq. Public attention could then have been alerted to any military planning concerning Iraq. It could even have helped effect another scenario, or at least a stronger base of objection. Given that very few perceptions got through to a public caught up in fears about global terror, only one US Senator voted against what transpired in just over a year after January 2002: an attack on Iraq. That one Senator has since died. And when he died, that was just before he would likely have won his Senate seat again, with the of shifting the Senate into a majority against the Administration. But the war in Iraq had already begun.

Almost no one noticed this correlation I pointed out between Iraq and New York State, Kuwait and New Jersey, Saudi Arabia and Pennsylvania, or Iran and New England/Connecticut. Therefore no one, even I for a while, had a chance to notice that the Anglo-American attacks on Iraq were launched from three camps, named Camp New York, Camp New Jersey, and Camp Pennsylvania. Inadvertently, I had cracked a code. I had cracked a code used for labeling military operations in the Gulf. The code, given its source in the British Colonial Office from 1664 and 1921, was British. Therefore, the plans were British. The US, we can conclude, is just a pitbull on a leash. If the United States were to re-assert its *Declaration of Independence* and its *Constitution*, with the *Bill of Rights*, what would happen?

Would *Space Force* go back into action, and would *Ocean Earth* do its work? Would artists, coming together of their own volition, in free association, fully imbued in American ideals about freedom and self-reliance, be able to function? Now, all that we sought to achieve in our late 1970s is crushed, and acting as a US citizen, in accordance with the *Constitution* and *Congressional laws*, becomes a crime.

Peter Fend is an artist. He is living in exile; currently in Berlin.