

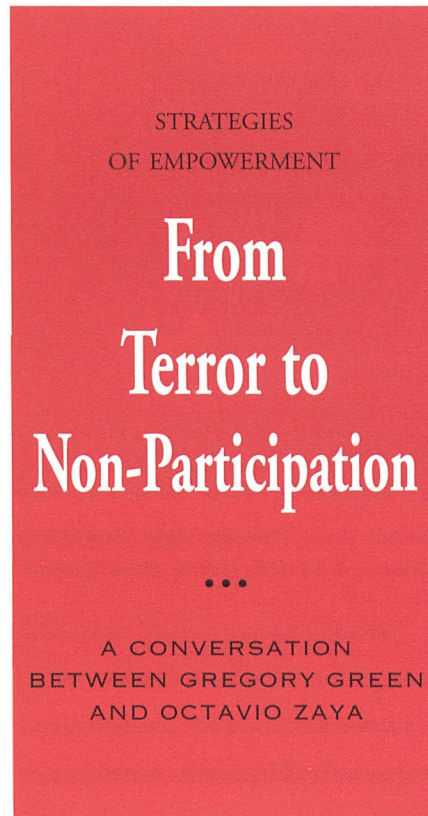
# TERRITORIES

**Octavio Zaya:** I recently read that the police have been at the gallery (Max Protetch) asking some questions about your work.... Has this recent experience been different in nature from the famous incident that transpired in Chicago when you presented your liquid LSD piece? How do you deal with this kind of obstruction?

**Gregory Green:** The works have always been sort of on the edge of legality. To a certain extent, it's almost like I'm fishing, almost like the works are bait. This sort of teasing has been very successful at times: for example, in Potsdam (Germany) in 1993, a curator and one of his assistants were arrested for a drawing that I did. But, when that went to court, it was immediately thrown out and the police department was severely reprimanded by the court.

**O.Z.:** What was the content of the drawing?

**G.G.:** The drawing was called "How to Make a Molotov Cocktail;" it's the same drawing as the one which is used on the invite for the show at Max Protetch. I have also been investigated by the Dutch



police and to a lesser extent by the British police. These investigations lead to nothing more than a couple of conversations. More recently, the postal police received complaints about the invite for the show here (Max Protetch), so they came and interviewed Xavier LaBoulbenne, the director of the gallery\*, about the mailing and about my work. One of the things that concerned them most, was whether or not I was doing anything on the Internet. That seems to be one of the most common questions from authorities when they speak to galleries about my work. *This is interesting, because the Internet is still essentially unregulated, and they've yet to figure out exactly how*

to control it, so it's a great concern for them.

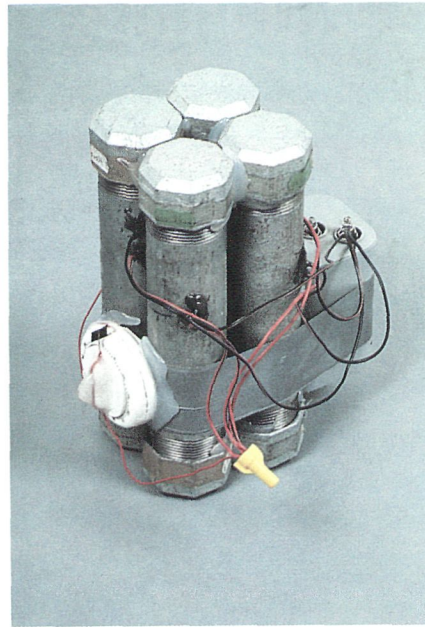
**O.Z.:** The authorities are already maneuvering politically and legally for control of the Internet....

**G.G.:** They'd like to expand their control, but literally don't know how to yet, which is what frightens them! Other forms of police action in response to my work have always been sort of predictable, so I always consider which rules to break and how far I should push the rules, very carefully. I'm very aware of these issues. They are reflected, to a certain extent, in the strategies of some of my earlier works, including the bombs, which essentially replicate terrorist strategies in a conceptual way. The simplest way to define terrorism is to think of it as spectacle that creates a forum for public discourse. Airline hijacking is the classic example of this. My own work also has that element of spectacle, and the potential to draw both public interest and the consequent reactions from the police. I have a tendency to draw fascism out by means of event-spectacles: this gives me the opportunity to speak about the issues that interest me.

**O.Z.:** Are you concerned that the sense of spectacle, the sensational value of the work, might somehow tame or obscure the message?

**G.G.:** Yes and no. But, primarily no. I think that the society that we live in and our role in it has changed. Our global society is really built around spectacle now. If you look at the media, it continues to get more and more spectacular, faster and faster. I think that spectacle is the language which we speak now. I do get some minor criticism about the degree to which spectacle overshadows the potential message of the work, but it comes mostly from those who are invested in a previous age, a previous kind of approach to the idea of aesthetic communication. I mean, I listen to music that has 240 beats per minute (or more) and I constantly participate in the society of the spectacle. I'm simply using the language of our society to speak to that society. For some people, this might overshadow the message of the work, but I think my use of the spectacle generally allows me to access a greater audience.

**O.Z.:** The works on this show (at Max Protetch) are from seven different and ongoing projects in which you are, in a way, trying to discover an archeology of the use of violence as a vehicle for change and empowerment. For example, there's *The Terror Group*, a body of works that reproduces the tools and tactics of low-tech terrorists, as you call



Gregory Green. *Pipe Bomb 101 (Nice)*, 1993. Courtesy of Kimliskt Gallery, Peter Muscato.

them. But then there are also missiles, recipes for making bombs, a radio station and your project for the creation of a new country. Could you elaborate on the various strategies that you deploy, and the concepts behind them?

**G.G.:** Of the seven basic groups that I divide these works into, the first is called *The Terror Group*, the second *Sabotage*, the third *Information and Technology*, the fourth *Alternative Systems*, the fifth *Group Organization*, the sixth *Passive Resistance* and the seventh *Non-Participation*. These groups represent both a historical development of strategies of empowerment and my own personal ethical relationship to violence. The first group of strategies, *The Terror Group*, is the one that I support least, and the last, *Non-Participation*, is the one that I support most.

**O.Z.:** Are you taking a moral stance in these works?

**G.G.:** Yes, in the overall structure of the groups. The seven groups are like seven different chapters of a novel, and in their entirety, they talk about my moral beliefs as well as what I see as a historical progression of strategies of empowerment. I'm also working on an essay that surveys the last 250 years of revolution and change in the world. In the essay, I trace and illustrate what I see as the very fast-growing trend of non-violent change in the world, through historical events. The essay concludes by predicting that in the far future, violence as a strategy of empowerment will essentially become defunct or obsolete. Even now, alternative strategies to violence are constantly being sought and used (though the world often falls back into utilizing violence). For example, compare the original Russian Revolution with the recent break-up of the Soviet Union. The Russian Revolution was incredibly violent - it was the kind of change that was grounded in the utilization of violence. In contrast, the break-up of the Soviet Union (which was a much larger state, and which also had a much more pervasive governmental structure, and a much larger control structure), was essentially peaceful. There were instances of violence, but if you compare it quantitatively to the original Russian Revolution, the nature of the change is very different.



O.Z.: Technology and information have been major factors in that change, haven't they?

G.G.: Yes, I think that both of these aspects have contributed to the lessening of violence. In the technological global society that we are creating, we are becoming so interdependent, that an incident of violence in one part of the world could have dramatic consequences for the entire world, and thus it is in the interests of the world as a global culture to encourage the suppression of violence. We are in the midst of this change, but full change will take quite a while.

O.Z.: Violence can also be perpetrated by information technology....

G.G.: Sure, there are many ways of defining violence: there is conceptual violence, emotional violence, information

violence and so on. But I am investigating violence in the most traditional sense of the word. When I say "violence," I am referring literally to cases in which one individual or one State uses a weapon of death against another. I'm not talking about how an individual perpetrates emotional violence on another individual. I'm more interested in the relationship between the individual and the State.

O.Z.: Let's discuss the relationship between the different sections of the exhibition a little more....

G.G.: Sure. There's a series of bible-bombs and suitcase-bombs and a pipe-bomb: these are the most traditional objects, which make up *The Terror Group*. Then we move away from *The Terror Group*, to the nuclear bomb and the large missile *Big Bertha*, although

these could also fit into *The Terror Group* in a sense. But they really start to move (through the second group, the idea of *Sabotage*) into the third group, *Technology and Information*, because they are objects that individuals usually assume they can't access. (However, through my research, it has become obvious to me that anybody can access this equipment.) The works involving radio stations and the creation of a new state, as well as the computer viruses, start to move into *Alternative Systems*. Computer viruses would also fit into the categories of *Sabotage* and *Technology and Information*. But, in general, these objects move into an area in which violence is not perpetrated against the population as such, but against the infrastructure of the System. The radio station in particular, is an *Alternative Systems* idea. Information is one of the most important and most powerful things that exists now. It is also one of the newest commodities. Those who control information will ultimately control the way society thinks. The possibility of setting up an *Alternative System*, a pirate radio station, is an alternative approach to acquiring power, an approach which is much more positive and productive. It's my impression that the only context in which the utilization of violence still maintains any sort of moral credence is A) when it is perpetrated by a major power (and then I'm not even sure whether the act itself actually has credence, or whether it's just that major powers control enough information to



Gregory Green. *Suitcase Bomb 30 (NI)*, 1996. Max Protetch Gallery, New York.

tell people what is morally acceptable); or B) when a previously unrecognized or unknown group uses violence to announce its presence and the fact of its oppression (but, if this utilization of violence is continued in the traditional terrorist mode, the group will very quickly lose its moral advantage globally, and undermine its position).

**O.Z.:** What was it that first got you interested in these issues? Is there a relationship between your work and the inherent violence of American culture?

**G.G.:** In terms of American culture and its relationship to violence, the American entertainment system is basically ninety-percent centered around violence. I'm very critical of this, and I think it's one of the country's major problems. I hope that my spectacular presentation of objects of potential violence mimics this glorification of violence to the point of parody and criticism. In front of the objects and images which I present, people are forced to confront their own relationship to the question of violence. When we see these images in the entertainment industry, we tend to completely overlook them as part of the entertainment, without considering the issues at stake. My works are not things that you would normally see in the gallery environment, and because they're out of context, you're forced to reexamine them.

**O.Z.:** What distinguishes the strategy of

the Bible-bomb or the recipe for the Molotov Cocktail from that of the pirate radio-station?

**G.G.:** Through my international career over the last seven years, I have been playing the role of the stereotypical American to a certain extent, particularly in terms of the *Terror Group*. This country is a very violent, power-oriented country, and I am sort of creating a microcosm of it within myself and by means of my bodies of work. Of course, I'm opposed to violence being utilized against the population, whether it is the military or the civilian population. But I would definitely support the utilization of violence in alternative ways, in the broader sense of what violence might mean. If you were to define a pirate radio-station as a strategy of violence perpetrated against established structures, then yes, it is a form of violence that I would support. There should be as many independent voices in the world as possible. That's one of the only ways to guarantee our security in the future. One thing I'd like to add: if I don't morally or ethically support a particular strategy or a particular kind of object which is presented in the show, then that object is always left incomplete; there's always one thing that somebody else has to do to complete the object in order to make it functional. The works within the show which are complete are the pirate radio-stations, the project for the creation of a new country (which is a complete and real process) and the computer viruses.

The viruses are based on various existing viruses but have been altered to do different things. As for *Big Bertha*, it is mechanically complete, and includes the electronics that are required for it to function, but the fuel-containers for the rocket are missing. If these were added, then it would actually function. Just like the nuclear bomb: if the plutonium and the plastic explosives were added, it would work as well. But, in the case of the radio-station, the only thing you have to do is to turn on the switch and it will be ready to go. In relation to the Molotov Cocktail, I don't think I'm teaching people how to make this weapon: everybody already knows how to make a Molotov Cocktail. The Molotov Cocktail is one of the things that I referred to before as "bait," like the worm on a hook. It's both bait for the authorities and a way to lure you, as viewer. It doesn't provide illegal information, although it looks a little threatening.... If authorities have a tendency towards repression, they're going to repress something that looks a little threatening.

**O.Z.:** Your exhibition also makes clear the fact that a frightening amount of military power is available to anyone with the right materials and information. The development of electronic forms of communication such as the Internet is giving people access to different systems of information. Do you think that it is contributing - to a degree - to the dissemination of a culture of violence?



**G.G.:** We seem to be waiting, in a sense, for the first completely terrorist use of nuclear material. Last year, the leader of Chechnya threatened to explode the pipe-bombs he had placed around Moscow. This was the first use of radioactive material in a terrorist situation. Interestingly, he was using the same radioactive material that is used for x-rays. It was more of a conceptual threat, because the amount of actual damage that the pipe-bombs could have done was negligible. But now, with the great gap in the Eastern Block and the newly discovered availability of nuclear materials, there's got to be some point soon when terrorist organizations start building a nuclear bomb or decide to contaminate an area with nuclear material. During my research, I discovered how amazingly simple it is to build a nuclear bomb.

**O.Z.:** Considering your disapproval of the potentially dangerous consequences of such acts, to what extent is the show exploring our responsibilities within this situation?

**G.G.:** The whole body of work collectively tries to explore that responsibility, particularly by means of illustrating the accessibility of these things. The first question raised is, what is the responsibility of the artist? Is it responsible to make these things? And, if these materials are so accessible, then what is the responsibility of the general population, what is their responsibility



Gregory Green. *Big Bertha*, 1996. Max Protetch Gallery, New York.

in responding to the information that I'm giving them access to?

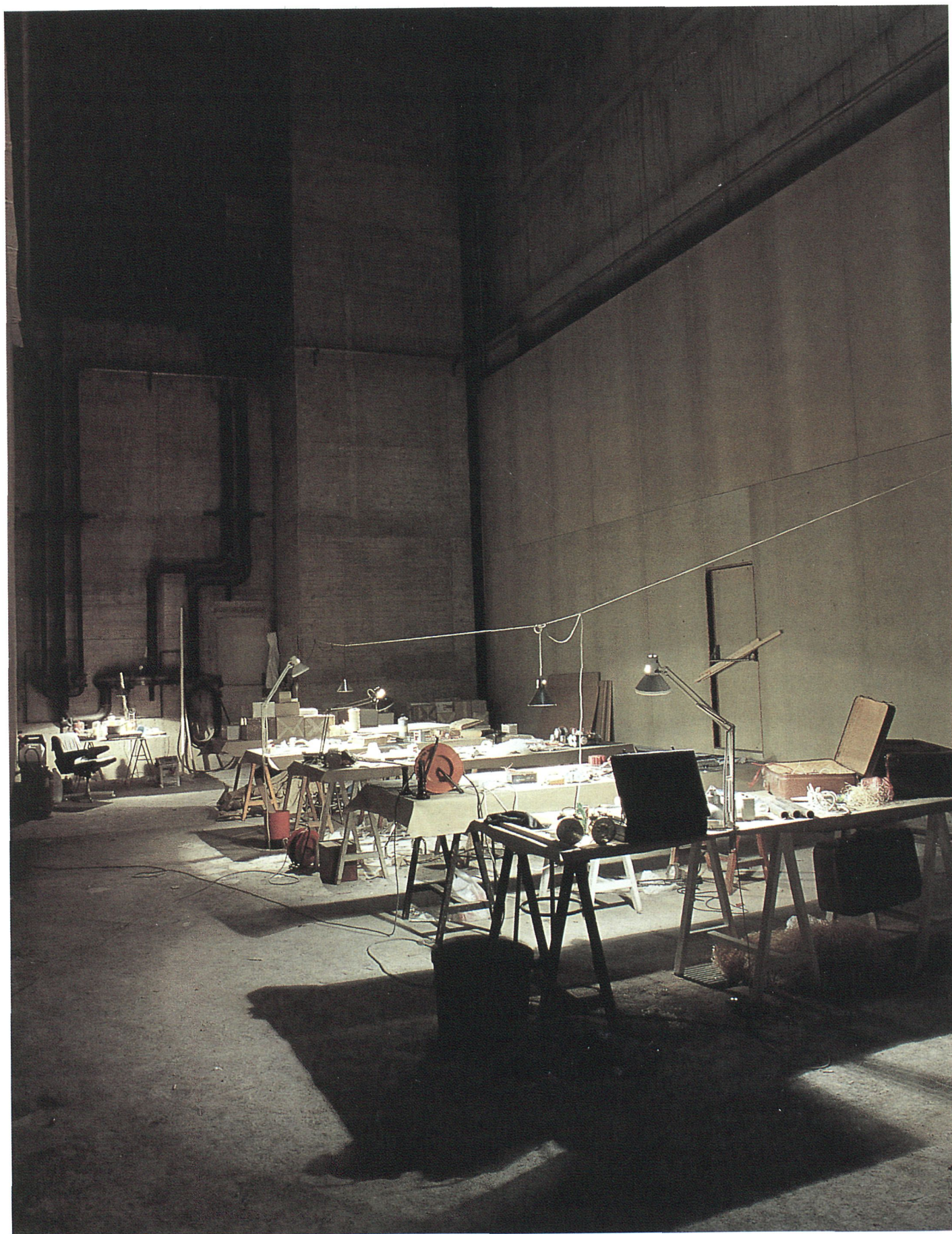
**O.Z.:** What is your personal position in relation to these questions?

**G.G.:** I'm against the curtailing of information. Once you start censoring information, where do you stop, and who has the right to decide what is censored or not? I would approach the issue more in terms of discussion around the adequate control of plutonium, the elimination of nuclear programs, etc. A lot of countries are starting to back away for their nuclear programs and look for alternatives. So, in my opinion, we may be moving in the right direction, that being the elimination of the whole system which allows these things to be created in the first place. But we also have to deal with the issue of what to do with the existing plutonium and existing

nuclear weapons. The whole de-armament program that the US and the Soviet Union have been in the process of negotiating is farcical to a certain extent, in that they may well destroy the mechanisms for the warheads which they already have, but they could easily re-make them in a week. And, they don't destroy plutonium, because you can't - they're just sort of stuck with it. So, they may destroy a thousand nuclear bombs next year, but they can make a thousand the month after that, because the key materials already exist. Of course, I don't have all the answers around the issue of responsibility, but I'm trying to raise a lot of the questions.

**O.Z.:** You have said, elsewhere, that "as a communication strategy," terrorism has been exhausted, and, you also imply that terrorism is disappearing. Haven't we actually been seeing more terrorist





Gregory Green. *Work Table*, 1993.



acts, precisely as a result of the fact that information has been more readily available, and that access to materials has become easier? The Internet, for example, has been successfully used by ultra right-wing militias in their anti-governmental strategies, and by neo-Nazis to disseminate hate-culture and to strengthen their sense of autonomous community through electronic information. Instead of the disintegration of this culture of violence, aren't we rather witnessing its perpetuation and even its enhancement?

G.G.: Speaking specifically about the US., where the Internet is most advanced at this point, I don't think that it has had an effect on the amount of terrorist acts that are taking place here. In the '60s, we experienced a whole series of terrorist acts that were perpetrated primarily by the extreme left. Starting in the '70s, terrorist acts started coming from the right, primarily the religious right and the anti-abortion right. These events were occurring monthly in the late '70s and the '80s, though this was downplayed by the media. When terrorist acts started to result in death, they began to get more attention. At the moment there's a bit of hysteria in the US. around the question of terrorism and the utilization of violence by extreme groups, a hysteria related to the obvious marketability of acts in which large groups of people are killed. The Oklahoma bombing was a perfect example of this hysteria. The

media must have made an incredible amount of money through the coverage of this event: this is classic media spectacle. I'm not sure where the person responsible for the Oklahoma bombing actually got his information, but I'm familiar with a number of different publishers in the US. that have published material from which he could have assembled the bomb, like Loompanics and Palladium Press. These groups have been publishing since the '60s and are a primary source of this kind of information. Right-wing militia groups are known to access their information either through ex-military sources or from these mail-order sources. Maybe a few more people (especially children) are going to find this kind of information on the Internet, and then try to produce these objects.... But, I have been showing this kind of work for about six or seven years now, and throughout that time-period, it has been common for people to approach me and tell me about their bomb-making experiences. They're often children or teenagers, and when I ask them where they get their information, I always get the exact same answer: "from my school science books." I've looked at some old school science books and they tell you exactly how to make black powder. They also tell you exactly *what not to do* with black powder, which is basically the same as telling you exactly *what to do* with it. Furthermore, the library is full of books on how to make this drug or that weapon. So, the world is already inundated with this sort of information,

even in societies where information tends to be more controlled. The Internet is just a quicker and more convenient way to access it, a resource which simplifies the research.

O.Z.: It has been argued that violence is constitutive of our human will to power and domination. Why should we be different from the animals we come from? The history of culture could be read, alternatively, as the progress of violence, since all power is exerted with violence. Do you think that there is real reason to believe that we are approaching a more horizontally-organized society in which destructive attitudes and intolerance will become obsolete?

G.G.: I would agree that we are inherently or genetically predisposed to violence. It is part of the primitive animal state within all of us, and is reflected in many different ways. However, I think that if we were to compare the thinking of an average, well-educated individual in 1896 to the thinking of an average, well-educated individual in 1996, we would find that - over a century - people have come to find violence far less acceptable, morally and ethically (whether it is cultural, emotional or physical violence). A hundred years ago, wife-beating was not only common, but was also considered an acceptable way of maintaining marital and domestic harmony. Today, it is an offense that is prosecutable. This is an example of the shift in our

relationship to violence. Of course, very little change happens over two or even three generations: I think that the sort of changes that I'm talking about are more along the lines of genealogical change than generational change.

**O.Z.:** What about violence that is perpetrated by well-educated individuals like the Unabomber?

**G.G.:** The Unabomber reached the point of feeling total alienated from his society. I don't know much about him, but from what I understand, he was involved in a number of different organizations that were fighting for the basic ideas that are elaborated in his *Manifesto*. He later left those organizations and isolated himself from potential avenues of change in society more and more, to the point where he was so disenfranchised that he saw the utilization of violence as his only way of having a voice. One of the things which I find so interesting about his utilization of violence, is that he committed terrorist acts for ten to fifteen years before he actually made a statement as to why he was perpetrating them. So, I think that he's probably a bad example, since other things must have been going on there. He literally lost touch with reality. I think that he was more of a man with a thirst for vengeance than a man on a crusade. If he was a true crusader (which he liked to think in his later years as a terrorist), he would have associated his acts of terror with his ideology from the outset.

**O.Z.:** Speaking of isolation and losing touch with reality brings to mind the North American militias and other similar autonomous groups. These armed organizations isolate themselves from society, although for reasons that differ from those of the Unabomber. Couldn't we view your creation of a new country, "The New Free State of Carolina," as falling prey to a similar rhetoric?

**G.G.:** To a certain extent perhaps.... Isolated groups of people can display the same dysfunctional behavior as isolated individuals. Some militia groups are acting out a similar kind of dysfunctional behavior to that of individuals like the Unabomber. Any form of isolation hold the potential for dysfunctional behavior, including the formation of "The New Free State of Carolina." (although I set it up so that I

would have no control over it from the outset). It involves a political and governmental system which is so difficult to actualize, that it will probably collapse into itself and be a total failure. The government takes the form of an anarchist system which is based specifically on a number of different anti-nuclear and environmental groups on the West Coast: these groups rely on open forums of discussion and a unanimous voting structure (no decision can be made unless every member agrees on it), with no hierarchy amongst their individual members. What's interesting, is that the groups tend to function only when they consist of at least eighty-five percent of women. With more than fifteen percent of men in a group, it just doesn't function... except in a prison situation, where no individual has an individual cell, and the group is held in a large, open yard.



Gregory Green, *WCBS Radio Caroline 3, The Voice of The New Free State of Caroline*, 1996.



(It has to be an *outdoor* yard too; it can't be an *indoor* yard.) So, anyway, the idea of "The New Free State of Carolina" is sort of set up to fail; but even if it doesn't, I have no idea of what it might become, because I have no control over it.

**O.Z.:** Besides this intentionally self-defeating venture, do you foresee other more successful alternatives to the violence of power, to the dominant system of our culture?

**G.G.:** Passive resistance has been successful in a number of situations in the Twentieth Century. Gandhi is a classic example. The civil rights movement in the US. involved activities of non-participation and of passive resistance. Tiananmen Square is an example which was unfortunately a failed attempt at non-participation, though it probably would have been successful if it had been better organized. The strikes in France over the last winter are another example of a way of attempting to change the government through non-participation. Unions throughout the world are a good example of how popular power-bases can effect change. I also think that the break-up of the Soviet Union involved - though it was to a certain extent unplanned and unorganized in nature - a general social non-participation system, which eventually caused the system to slow down, and eventually, to crumble. Recently, non-participation has become a critical and major force; it is

the strategy which I see as being most powerful at this point. As for alternative systems, Act-Up is an alternative system that's now become a global community which is both actively and passively initiating and encouraging change. I think that the creation of new and more states is certainly an option, but it is more of a symbolic option. I think that it's actually the wrong way to go. Buddhists believe that there won't be peace in the world until there is one nation, one race and one religion, and to a certain extent I believe this too.

**O.Z.:** On the one hand, your entire project seems to involve the articulation of a didactic project, an illustration of the problematics of violence or an archeology of violence. On the other, it seems to aspire to, or at least to be subsumed by, a nihilist rhetoric.... What can we expect next?

**G.G.:** I will probably continue to work with these issues for a while, though I'm starting to move away from the bombs. The major project that I am developing in the studio, is the *Gregnik Project*, for the purpose of which I intend to reproduce the Soviet Union's Sputnik Program. In building the larger rockets, I found out that it will actually be possible for me to build a booster rocket that will be large enough to put a small satellite into orbit for a month or two. I already have funding from the United States and England, which I will use to begin building prototypes for the satellite. The project has a lot to do with

the possibility of redefining the role/position of an individual within our global society, just as the original Sputnik Program redefined the role of the State and its potential for violence within global society as a whole. The Sputnik established the Soviet Union's ability to send nuclear bombs to any continent in the world, and that changed our whole view of the world. To think that, forty years later, some yahoo from Brooklyn could begin to change our understanding of the role of *the individual* within the global society! The other major project that I'm working on involves expanding the broadcasting idea from the domain of simple broadcasting into television broadcasting. For example, I'm working on *Motarbu* (which stands for Mobile Television and Radio Broadcast Unit), which is essentially a trailer unit that can be towed behind a car. It includes a television broadcasting system and a radio broadcasting system which enable you to drive into any neighborhood and over-ride the existing radio and television broadcast systems within about a five kilometer radius. So, you could turn on ABC and find "Greg's World," for example, as opposed to what you might normally expect. With these projects, I'm expanding both the role of art, and the role, responsibility and identity of the individual.

---

\* Since then, Xavier LaBoulbenne has opened his own gallery in the Chelsea district of Manhattan.