



Source: Doreen Carvajal, 'In getting voice out, Islamic radio stutters', *International Herald Tribune* online, 02/08/06.

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'I am going to describe what is possibly the greatest postmodern image ever made. And to state that, Pierre et Gilles are not responsible for the non alignment of Iranian propaganda to western eyes, however, I blame them in the absence of anyone else to blame. But what is clear and present is that for the dozens of righteousness postmodernism will not work.'

I couldn't write anymore, it was late and my head was pulsing with ideas but not good ones: wasteful ones, ideas I had better forget before I am locked up. I was crazy, mad as hell. The money was still to come through and the bills were piling up, I had just told the boss to 'get fucked'. I was a mess.

It was May 2006. I was flicking through the laptop pages. I had a few hours to spare and read several newspapers click to click. *The New York Times*, *Irish Times*, *The Age*, several others and one of my 'favourites': *The Islamic Republic News Agency*; IRNA. I was amazed to have such control, scribble emails off this way and that to friends... 'see what I've read while you were asleep!' In truth, I don't, didn't, couldn't do that; the content is usually too shocking. Dazed by the men with beards strutting their stuff, articles on goodwill, manners and logic balanced by a section on justice, hand-cutting for thieves and so on, I was stuck. But when I saw the image I moved, I went outside, sat down on a stack of bricks and lit a smoke. 'That's Amore' sung by Dean Martin filtered over a neighbourhood fence. In the image, the leader poses amidst an impossible number of microphones replacing the roses, flowers and other framing devices usually associated with images of popular heroes. With a smile and enough suggested compassion to launch or maybe sink a thousand ships, I imagined a happy place. Blue skies with puffy white clouds and doves also frame the man. I thought, 'I can trust this man, he could be my friend'. Within the image a disembodied hand from the bottom right corner reaches diagonally to the sky and grips the sun symbolising the new power, the new way. I did not feel comfortable or secure. Knowing the image had not been produced by Pierre et Gilles I wondered by whom? Didn't they know the implied irony? What could I do about this? My stomach was aching. I doubled over wanting to vomit.

I started to write, 'The image talked to me about comfort, security and leadership. Produced in a style usually reserved for the confident contemporary artist from the flowery side of the street of hope, irony, beauty, but this is not a work by a contemporary artist, rather, a government.'

I kept thinking of Pierre et Gilles, I went back to the web, checked the spelling of their names and flicked through their images on Google. It occurred to me that I could be the only person in the world to make this association. Perhaps I could ring them and talk about it, surely they

would want to know. Should I tell them straight up or keep them guessing? Perhaps they would invite me to Paris, first class on a big jet. I was starting to feel better. Proud to be Australian, I went back to the IRNA site but could not return. I was blocked by an 'invalid response from an upstream server'. Was it all beginning to lose sense?

Unperturbed I returned to write: 'There is something of John Heartfield as well as Pierre et Gilles in this image. It is propaganda but this time in the age of Photoshop. Anything is possible in both the means of production and the intended message. Welcome to a nu—clear day!' I liked that last bit so much I went outside to the bricks and lit another.

Logic puzzled me now more than it usually does. I was thinking about the relationship of flared pants and this image. I mean I won't wear flared pants. I never did. I wondered if Mahmoud Ahmadinejad knew what I knew about the image. He wants it to cast a spell. Maybe I could get that popular nice guy truth out there to the populace. Maybe I should ring him. Tehran, first class; unlikely! But it wasn't about the money and it wasn't about me being right. It was about the truth, truth in advertising and truth in postmodernity...no, no too complex, too many mixed metaphors. Perhaps superiority in this case means denying that you never wore flares. Most will understand that to appreciate a well-cut, raised two-button suit jacket with smart slacks you will have, at some stage, worn flares but one does not promote flares as the 'new way'.

The writing continued in my head as I tried to sleep. Late now, just the drunks to be heard shouting garbage at the night: 'I knew with a certainty equal to an American carpet bombing campaign and with a similar accuracy that these spin doctors have a great deal of work to do. Their masters abhor images as being unrighteous. The propagandist artist must be in a quandary as to how to depict the dear and wholesome leader, how to make an image when it is unholy to do so?'

More images—one, a stained sandal amid a pile of rubble. The bigger story the nexus of two worlds that believe in freedom and justice. A strategy that believes one can blast the truth into being. If the odds were not so great, if there were not people dying and the moon really was a pizza pie I could consider the first image as a bit of fun for me to play with, a dash of sincerity that only the naïve can muster. Dogma understands there are many things that do not matter, they're just in the way and you remove them. Glossed over with a soft blur, the victim doesn't know the speed and silence. The velocity is extreme, the noise devastating. The solution complete in one act repeated forever in the mind of the victim.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Derek Kreckler.*