

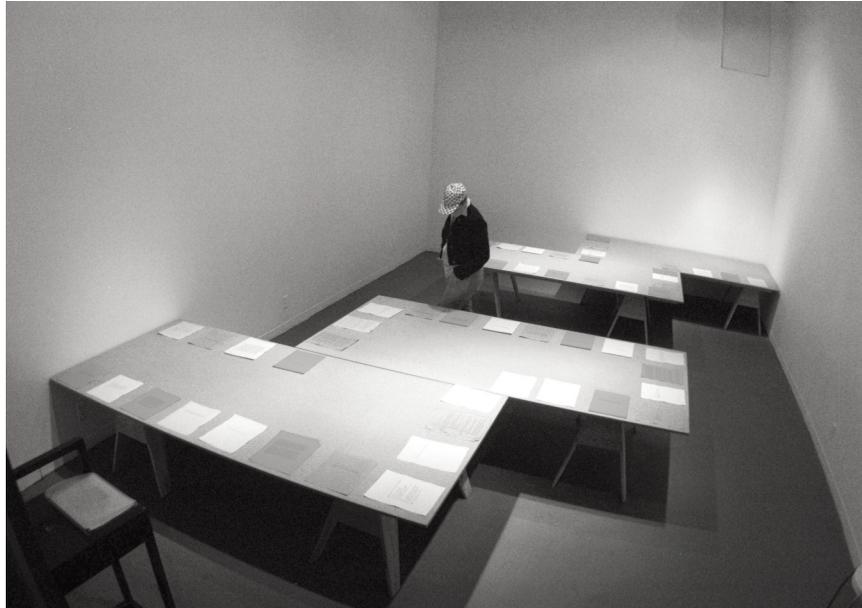
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**54 questions that will
not be answered by the White House**



This project began in 2005 at the invitation of Carol McDowell and Asher Lauren Hartman to create an installation for Crazy Space gallery, at the 18th Street Arts Complex in Santa Monica, California. Originally printed on single sheets of paper and laid out across tables, this booklet form was then compiled for the exhibition, "I Beg Your Pardon, or, the Reestablishing of Cordial Relations," at the Vera List Center for Art & Politics, New York, curated by Andrea Geyer.

In September 2005, we extended the following invitation to friends, colleagues and family members:

1. Think of something that describes how you, in particular, live right now (the roles you play, the jobs you perform, the possibilities and limitations that structure your life);
2. Express this 'something' in the form of a question addressed to the White House;
3. Submit your question on-line to the "Interactive White House" web page:
www.whitehouse.gov/interactive
4. Forward your question to us.

Ashley Hunt and Taisha Paggett

Dear White House:

Do you ever lie awake and wonder? Do you have
doubt? Do you ever feel ambiguity and
contradiction?

i have no questions for the white house.

An interesting proposition. Unfortunately, I do not believe there is a possible dialogue with the White House, evidenced best by the town hall meetings, the loyalty oaths and the beatings/arrests of those who did manage to raise critical questions or voice differing opinions. Furthermore, I believe that now more than ever before, any criticism posited via email will result in a cataloguing of names, email addresses and who knows what else that can be shared with any number of governmental and corporate (nearly one in the same these days) offices that can make life difficult. Call me paranoid ... I don't mind.

It's all cybernetic these days. There is only a message, evidenced by the polarization.

Hate-mongering has become a social more.

1) Do you think that witchcraft should be made illegal?

2) Does freedom of religion extend to satan-worship?

3) Do you think you're doing everything you can for developing alternative energy sources and conserving existing resources?

4) Should tax-breaks for people buying "Hummers" be repealed?

5) If you are talking to God everyday, is that the same thing as having voices in your head (telling you to kill?)

6) If a country loses a war, is that evidence that God is not on that country's side?

7) Is there a difference between what you watch on television and what is happening in the world?

What do I have to do to be among those bodies that count?

If I'm black -- will I drown?

If I'm poor -- will I drown?

If I'm queer -- will I drown?

If I'm not from here -- will I drown?

If I'm off the grid -- will I drown?

If I know better -- will I drown?

If I tell you what I think of you -- will I drown?

Should I just get over myself and worship god your way, support your war, take to high ground, have 2 kids a dog a house a fence, get a credit card, live in debt and drive an SUV? Could it really be that simple?

Maybe you could send me the instruction manual. I'm a quick study.

Dear Mr. Bush,

I understand that you're a man of faith.
What would it take for you NOT to believe in God?

The one and a half terms of this administration have overseen and authorized multiple international deaths. From people jumping from 100 story burning buildings to babies in Baghdad incinerated by bombs, the very meaning of death has been expanded, distorted, perverted and minimized by the sheer power lust of the Bush family and all who support it. Given death's multiplicities, how would you, as a member of this administration, a political and spiritual citizen, like to die? And when do you think you might?

1. Dear White House, How many lives lost in Iraq will it take for you, Mr. President, to say, "Enough is enough?"

2. Dear President Bush, what keeps you up at night?

3. Dear President, If you were given the chance to go back in time, what would you do differently?

4. Dear President, How do you plan on cleaning up the mess made to date during your presidency? I would like you to tell me how you will make things better for the poor, for women, for children, for soldiers, for the country's health, for the flora and fauna, for small businesses, for our freedom of speech, for community voice . . . in the remainder of your final presidential term. Please give concrete examples. Thank you.

5. Dear White House, what would it take to get a question to actually reach the President?

Dear White House:

Can you sleep on your stomach with such big buttons on your pajamas?

At the tip of a hummingbird's feather to its body, it ceaselessly flaps around keeping warm and never sleeping which is my way of asking you if you have a grip on the amount of blood-horror you have spent out in this puddleworld and how many "ludes" do you take to sleep? I like vampires too.

Dear President Bush,

In 2003, I read in USA Today that you "gave up sweets" before the Iraq invasion. Have you resumed eating candy yet?

-o**

I know that we like things to be black and white, really clear, without a lot of grey. we want stories with good plot lines, clean narratives, heroic characters. we like our bad guys and bullies without vulnerabilit-ies, who can't love, who are never afraid. so, what is the story you would tell, what would you tell us, if you told the story with the subplots, the nuances and ambiguities, what if the heroes had too much pride, had lots of fear, were too arrogant, and if the bad guys were wise as well as bad? what story would you tell? could you tell it to us?

dear white house,
fooling around aside, what would you have me believe in?

dear white house,
tell me about your god, and i will tell you about mine.

dear white house,
do you want to have dinner with us? we eat at 7p.m. Come over early for drinks and grown up talk. say, 6ish?

do you have any dietary restrictions?

Do you believe in the power of art to set people free? Can freedom of expression be preserved or are you bent on silencing all the voices of the world, including mine?

What I'm trying to say is that being queer and expressing that sexuality freely is not something I could do in Ecuador. But being in the U.S. is also difficult, especially those times when I get a snowball to the back of my head and am told to "fucking go home," you know what I'm saying? And yes, I tell them to fuck off, and you know why I love boxing? Because it teaches me how to fight, how to take a punch and survive, and if I can do that, then who are all of these racist motherfuckers to stop me? So I guess that's my question to you, Mr. President: Who are you to stop me?

Sincerely,

Dear Mr. Bush,

How do you explain the fact that you talk so much about the need for sacrifice in the war in Iraq, while at the same time holding the all-time record for presidential vacation days?

Dear White House,

Do you ever wonder why you can feel so completely connected to the tragedies of the world in one moment, and then in the next moment you wonder what is for dinner? Does that kind of cognitive dissonance ever make you incredibly frustrated with the limitations of the human spirit? I look forward to your response.

more extreme. Jessica, the woman who performed the piercing, said that most people get one ring at a time because they can't handle a second needle immediately after the first one. The adrenaline rush provoked by the initial piercing creates momentum for subsequent ones to produce more pain; that is, to be felt more intensely. I got my right nipple pierced exactly eight minutes after the left one. I was instructed to inhale and then exhale deeply, the puncture coming in as I breathed out. The pain was excruciating, and therefore, fantastic. Jessica admonished De--who had held my hand during the process--to keep the rings clean: "No foreign substances or fun bodily fluids for a few days." As soon as we got home, we went up to the roof to take pictures. Bald and bare-chested, with dried blood on my wounds, I felt sexy and dangerous like David Wojnarowicz cruising the piers.

What do you and Laura do in bed? You had a reputation for partying hard; I imagine that there were a lot of orgies at the keggers you attended in college. Yet you two seem so tame. According to her, you're in bed by 9pm, your nighttime reading lulling you to sleep. (Is Where's Waldo? really that tedious?) I wonder if your early morning jog is a way to channel your sex drive away from your librarian wife. If so, oh man...

Myself, I'm an archivist obsessed with boxing. But I'm going off topic. I promise there's a question in here, somewhere.

Ecuadorian community. I'm heir to a decreasing family fortune, with no known queers. The only gays we knew were hairdressers, dancers, and prostitutes. Lesbians? Only rumors about the Ecuadorian folk singer.

You see, I wanted to stay in the U.S. after my student visa expired. I sought every possible legit avenue because I knew that living undocumented was hardly living. I had enough of a difficult time being questioned about my "accent," or followed around in stores by suspicious owners. My immigration status had to stay legal. So what did I do? I got married, of course. To a man. To a lovely, truly patriotic fag. I femmed out for our civil ceremony, but still managed to trip and fall on my face wearing the platform shoes I bought at Payless that same morning. We celebrated our seventh anniversary last March (well, my girlfriend and I did--he had to be reminded of the date, just like a real husband!).

I don't want you to get the idea that my life has been bliss since, however.

But I guess you don't see.

Oh yes, my question.

Seven years ago, I got nipple rings because I wanted to feel sexual all the time. (Usually, rings are meant to increase sensation wherever they are inserted.) Sex up to that point had been satisfactory, but I was ready for something

- Was it successful to enter Iraq? Are USA going to bomb Iran too?
- Why are USA working against and delaying UN? I'm thinking that USA doesn't pay their charge to the UN and not in time.
- Why are USA working against a indigenous declaration in the UN?
- Are USA supporting the Saami people in their struggle to have their right of self-determination?

dear white house,

thank you for this most convenient way to interact with you. me a real person of the people, to you magnum monument of domestic security.

my question, white, is in regards to power. please outline the ethical management of international fiscal, ideological, and imperialistic power. personally, i am interested in gay power. i thought that i could learn a strategy or two from your successful deployment of unequivocal power over the globe, even reaching spheres morally and historically outside your jurisdiction.

oh yeah, what about your hot ally preacher Robertson saying we should assassinate the President of a sovereign nation! hot news. really then, let's talk about that!

also, power talk, from intimidation to compliance in a few easy steps. i've seen you do it before. and yes, many of us are watching...

(see that's why i went for the money, I'm not fucking around with ditzy questions about the branches of the court. i wanna know how 'bizness' gets conducted in your neighborhood.)

well, thanks white house. look forward to hearing back.

Mr. President,

I understand this is titled "Ask the White House," but you know how in Oprah an audience member will raise her hand to ask guests a question, then preface her query by stating that she has a comment first followed by a question? Well, she is not really that interested in asking anything. Rather, she wants to tell Oprah (and Tom, and Katie, and Brad, et al.) something about herself that will make the guest relate to her on an even plane. She'll have an anecdote, or a childhood story, that sort of thing. You know what I'm talking about, Mr. President?

Sure you do.

You see, the reason I left Ecuador and came to the U.S., ostensibly, was to study fine arts at an American college. At the time I graduated high school, my hometown did not have any universities that offered art as serious a course of study. But it was only after my female T.A. called me on the phone to ask me out that I realized I was queer. Great thing I was in California then. I was out of the closet, but not for long.

You see, I am a big flaming faggot genderqueer trannyboi who longs for hot smartypants flat-chested artsy women. It's a great thing, but a fetish I can only practice in the U.S.

You see, my family is Catholic--a family of math geniuses, highly-esteemed in the Chinese

Dear Mr President:

It hit me when the stories started leaking about Condi possibly being on a shoe shopping spree on New York's vaunted fifth avenue while our American brethren and sistren were being washed through the levee strangled streets of New Orleans. You must be mighty fond of that particular colored girl, I thought. And affection usually is of a particularized nature; you (and I specifically mean you, Mr. President) can't go extending that affection to a whole race... Well, actually you could and much more, that's a part of my question.

Why is it that the United States, the exemplar of democracy, has a lower literacy and higher infant mortality rates than a totalitarian state such as China?

But I'm wondering before I get to that: Since most likely you're going to defend Condi. You'll point out that she was not shoe shopping during a national tragedy because such calamity would not befit your Secretary of State. Or you'll remind us that even if Madame Secretary were in fact shoe shopping that she's not some callous wretch willing to bounce and strut in stilleto heels, that she definitely has compassion for those people -- putatively her own people.

Some joker once said for all intents and purposes Clinton was the first black President. That was damn funny (the former President's gentrifying residence in Harlem aside). But, I really do believe, Condi has actually become a white man. And not just any white man, but an extraordinarily privileged white man, a powerful white man like you, Mr. President.

And I guess that is the heart of my question: Did you all (meaning you, Mr. President, and the

rest of the organized Right) set out to achieve such a grand order of dissemblance? I mean you've done an unimaginably good (or bad) job of perverting leftist visions of social change. I'm not only talking about a black woman from the apartheid U.S. South who thinks and acts like your ilk (and no, her possibly shopping for high heels does not give the scene its lie; it heightens its absurdity), but also your ability to act like a working class, aw-shucks-just-give-me-Bud kinda white guy whenever it suits you. There's also that war against gay and queer folk with the ostensibly Sapphic Mary Cheney at the helm and her daddy Dick looking all dignified and lovingly protective (rather than bigoted and homophobic) whenever the topic came up during the presidential debates in 2004. Your assertion of a Christian love ethic, while you kill with the death penalty, militarization, no health insurance, no welfare state (I know you didn't do that, but still), lack of opportunity, egregious environmental policies, and so on... It's a wonder, Mr. President.

And, I can't help but imagine, that someone of your intelligence and occasional criminality (those unfortunate DUIs and that coke problem, Mr. President) would be rendered ineffective (if not a priori dead) were you suddenly to become a poor black man or God forbid a black woman, like Condi used to be. But then you would be invisible (or expired) and my point would be moot. But Condi's hypervisibility as a white man is killing, too. And I'm wondering if her mostly unfettered existence, her assumption of the free-floating artifice of whiteness and masculinity doesn't necessarily form a moiré pattern that fits the various and insufferable

Dear Lynne Cheney,

I recently reviewed the "We the People Bookshelf" you compiled of 15 books on the theme freedom, for students. It's a great project, thank you so much for your efforts on behalf of our nation's children. I was so happy to see, among others, George Orwell and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's books on your list. For George Orwell, I noticed that you included "Animal farm," a great book on the dangers of totalitarianism and a personal favorite. Did you know that George Orwell wrote an introduction to animal farm called "literary censorship in England." The essay argued that though thought control and censorship and subservience to state power are most obvious in totalitarian societies like the soviet union, the situation is not that different in supposedly "free" societies such as England. For some unknown reason, Orwell's introduction was dropped from the US and UK edition. Whether we as Americans agree with Orwell's idea or not, in a society based on freedom of expression, don't you think it is important to publish the author's personal introduction? Will the edition you are recommending for students include Orwell's personal introduction as a celebration of freedom of expression and to rectify the earlier omission?

Thank you very much,

indignities enacted by the state upon the poor American residents of New Orleans and the coastal towns of Mississippi.

I'd truly like to know, if your plan were to fully pervert social agendas that were anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-homophobic into tiny blips of sordid success, to condense it to the narrowness of the unforsaken one when so much more originally was assayed. And if so when does that vision become too perverse, too anti-human, too sickening even for you to countenance it. Or will it ever be that? Please let me know? Soon.

Truly yours,

Why is it that these united States of America have been in a constant 'National State of Emergency' since 1933? And why do so few people know about it? How can we have the Constitution these united States restored? Because everybody should be aware that in a state of emergency there is no constitution... we're under military rule, right?

To the White House,

Will more funding be designated for the arts soon? The reason I feel this is important is because young people need the creative out-lets that classes in the arts provide.

I was wondering why arts education is not considered a funding priority and why standardized testing is considered more valuable for the education of children? Why is it so hard to be an artist in this country? Why is choosing to labor as an artist not considered "real" work? Mr. President, what was your first experience making art and what do you think makes art worthwhile?

dear mr. president,

how could we do better---as a country
and as a people?

how could you do better---as a president
and as a man?

Dear White House,

What does it feel like to draw such a bold line between good and evil in a world where the definition of terrorism depends on which side of the line you look out from? How does it feel to redefine democracy as coercion to your point of view? When did the president become a cowboy prince? Is your family and your buddies making enough money on this war? Do you sleep well at night?

Sincerely,
a dissenting patriot

Dear Mr. President,

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. When it comes to politics, do you usually think of yourself as extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal; moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely conservative, or haven't you thought much about this?

How certain are you of this? Very certain, pretty certain or not very certain?

Would you say that OVER THE PAST YEAR, it has gotten harder for people across the country to find enough work, stayed about the same, or gotten easier for people to find enough work?

Do you personally, or jointly with a spouse, have any money invested in the stock market right now -- either in an individual stock or in a mutual fund?

There's been some talk these days about different social classes. Most people say they belong either to the middle class or the working class.

Do you ever think of yourself as belonging in one of these classes?

Next I am going to read you a list of federal programs. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you would like to see spending increased or decreased. The first program is:

How are we to live in the knowledge that innumerable people are dying at home and abroad because of how the government has chosen to direct its concerns and allocate its resources in the name of all Americans?

My question to The White House:

Several weeks ago my husband and I went to downtown Los Angeles to see a play at the Los Angeles Theatre Center on South Spring St. It was our first time to this theatre, we passed by the parking structure and because the street was one-way, we had to go around the block to come back to it. We turned left and then left again onto Los Angeles Street and we both gasped -- "My god!" Lining both sides of Los Angeles Street for several blocks were what seemed like hundreds of homeless men and women, sleeping in cardboard boxes and in wheel-chairs, lurking in doorways, some crowded in groups on the sidewalk, others clinging to their shopping carts with their few precious possessions. I have been haunted by the images of those forgotten ones, many of whom represent the most vulnerable in our society -- women and children, the mentally ill and the elderly. They are abandoned and alone on city streets and in shelters -- 90,000 of them in Los Angeles alone. Surely the richest country in the world can do better for it's citizens -- I ask you, Mr. President, what is your plan to help the homeless in America?

WELFARE PROGRAMS.

What about SPENDING ON AIDS RESEARCH?

What about FOOD STAMPS?

Should federal spending on AID TO POOR PEOPLE be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

What about SOCIAL SECURITY?

What about ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION?

What about PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

What about CHILD CARE?

And HEALTH CARE?

And PUBLIC HOUSING?

And AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

Some people prefer to solve simple problems instead of complex ones, whereas other people prefer to solve more complex problems.

Which type of problem do you prefer to solve: simple or complex?

Some people like to have responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, and other people don't like to have responsibility for situations like that. What about you?

Do you like having responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, do you dislike it, or do you neither like it nor dislike it?

I'd like to read you a few statements about public life. Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each of them.

"I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics."

Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?

I apologize for being so tardy in replying to you. I've read through your material and it's clear that you don't have any belief in transparent communication here -- which is right: I initially thought this might be implied by your proposal -- nor do you want an open letter (which is what I guess what you were implying the response had been from a few in your last email). So you're asking people to be creatively critical and think more about the gallery than the president himself, if I get your drift....

Still, I balk at it. In part, I think this is structural: to reinforce the theatre of representational democracy (even with fingers crossed or formed into the birdie as it were) is something that I've always resisted. Part of me wants to say, "the president, who?" (though you could say this is just being in denial). Then I think there's an even more dubious motivation of not wanting to engage in a communicative situation (however artificial and merely apparent) with the president. (Call this the fear of stain, of "mains sales.") So I understand some of the problems with my own hesitation, but am still stuck for now...

Dear White House,

My boyfriend is dark skinned and dark haired;
he is often searched and his luggage examined by
police at airports.

My sister was held for some hours at a L.A.
airport because she had carried an apple in her
hand bag some days ago, a police dog sniffed it.
But as it couldn't talk, it wasn't clear what it
had smelt and they thought she was carrying
drugs.

Are we really "safe"? How likely is it that we
will be arrested, harassed, detained and held
incommunicado when we travel to the U.S to visit
our friends, participate in an art show or give
a lecture?

Yo White House --

What the fuck is the matter with you?

Dear Mr. President,

Recently a friend of mine from Japan was denied entry in Canada for possessing on his laptop downloaded pornographic images of adult Japanese women, dressed as school girls. He has been detained in a correctional facility in Vancouver ever since. These charges sound ludicrous to me and absolutely disregard significant cultural differences. Now you may ask, what does that have to do with the USA? His lawyer thinks that he is being detained because his name is the same as one listed on a terrorist watch list and that the United States are presently putting pressure on Canada to prevent these individuals from gaining access to the continent, hence these unbelievable charges. Truthfully, could the USA really be behind my friend's surreal predicament??

Impatiently awaiting your answer,

A concerned Canadian citizen working in the USA

White House,

We are indivisible. My body intertwines with yours. No barriers. No borders.
No boundaries.
Where does your body begin and mine, end?

Dear White House,

If we are indivisible, our bodies must intertwine without barriers, borders and boundaries.
Do you know where your body begins and mine, end?

Dear Mr. President,

You have been quoted as saying "I think there is a Trojan horse lurking in the weeds trying to pull a fast one on the American people" (from a live radio call-in). Let's say, hypothetically, that the Trojan horse is gay. Do you think this horse should have the legal right to marry the horse of his choice and if so will this right also be extended to straight Trojan horses?

TO THE PRESIDENT:

HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO WIN FRIENDS AMONG MUSLIM STATES WHEN A HUNDRED THOUSAND IRAQIS HAVE DIED AS A RESULT OF YOUR INVASION AND OCCUPATION? DON'T YOU KNOW THAT VIOLENCE IS CONTAGIOUS? I HOLD YOU PERSONALLY RESPONS-IBLE FOR THE RECENT EVENTS IN LONDON AND ESPECIALLY FOR ANY FUTURE CATASTROPHES IN THE U.S.

Dear White House,

Once my daughter is off to college,
should I go be a monk in Tibet?

Thanks in advance for your advice.

Sincerely,

Dearest White House,

If you have so much faith,
why do you live in fear?

1. I would like to know when there will be an increase in grant funding from the government to help emerging choreographers?

2. I want to know why my tax dollars are used to create death and spent on a war that kills men and women everyday?

3. Is there going to be the creation of a National Park during Bush's presidency?

Dear White House,

Do you sometimes lay awake at night or have nightmares? Do you get depressed regarding the current state of affairs and contemplate suicide?

To the White House-

President Bush has recently expressed: "Plan Colombia enjoys wide bipartisan support in my country, and next year I will ask our Congress to renew its support so that this courageous nation can win its war against narco-terrorists". Has the congress dis-cussed the means through which this "war" is being fought? Entire communities are pre-senting permanent health problems due to chemical irrigation, cultivation and produc-tivity have decreased dramatically, all in the name of a just and democratic action. Do you think that social/economic justice is dependent on military technology and interven-tion? Who are you really protecting?

Dear Mr. President: Yesterday I was at the supermarket to stock up on some supplies and I ran into a slight problem that tested my resolve to live within a budget. I got confused when I tried to figure which selection offered would best support my effort to live within my means. First I went to the toilet paper section and had to make a choice between Eight "Giant" Rolls of QUILTED NORTHERN (440 2-ply sheets per roll) at \$7.99 per package; and the CHARMIN, which contained 24 regular rolls (179 1-ply sheets per roll) that sold for \$9.99 per package. How could I make a well-informed decision? What would you have done?

Next, in an effort to bring home some liquid laundry detergent I encountered TIDE with a 100 fluid ounce pour-spout plastic bottle boasting of "Fabreze Freshness." The TIDE product sold for \$9.69. One spot over on the shelf (with a similar bottle) was 80 ounces (also fluid) of CHEER, that had "Advanced Colorguard," but sold for only \$8.79 per bottle. Is twenty ounces of TIDE worth 90 cents or not? Maybe the "Fabreze Freshness" stuff is reflected in the TIDE price and if it is, maybe I should spring for that. I looked, but I couldn't determine if there was even a small amount of "Fabreze Freshness" in the CHEER. Please help me and other consumers: If you were at your supermarket, how would you have chosen the packages that would be best for an American that can only spend what he has? Feel free to use a pad and pencil.

With so many terrorists operating freely in Iraq since the downfall of Saddam, do you think the Iraqis, and the world, are safer?

How long until people in need of welfare, healthcare and/or decent education in our country are properly assisted and enabled to overcome the hardships of their day-to-day existence? How long (if ever) until GLBT people go from being barely tolerated (if at all) to being fully accepted by the current administration? How long until Artist is no longer a four-letter-word?

Dear White House,

if in the 15th century the Catholic church considered an indigenous person in the Americas to worth 1/5 of a human being, and in the 19th century, Whites in the U.S. considered a Black person to be worth 1/3 of a human being (1/3 of a vote),

(1) today in the 21th century, how much would you consider to be the human worth of people who work for American corporations around the world, which pay their workers pennies for the same work done in the U.S. for up to 100 times more pay?

- a) 1/25 of a Human Being
- b) 1/10 of a Human Being
- c) Nothing
- d) Don't Care

(2) today in the 21th century, how much would you consider to be the human worth of women, immigrants, and people of color who work in the U.S. for significantly less pay for the same work done by their White male counterparts?

- a) 1/8 of a Human Being
- b) 1/2 of a Human Being
- c) Some but not Sure
- d) Don't Care

it, answer it. this seems to work as a collective process of witnessing an answer. it sometimes operates successfully. people get famous for these operations like woodward and bernstein in the watergate affair. but often enough even this has no effect. concerning the question about weapons of mass destruction, the right questions were asked, some shocking answers were witnessed and it didn't have any consequences.

the scope of our participation in democratic processes seems very narrow. if we stick to the given representative structures we will continue to feel disempowered and mislead. it seems very important to me to practice dissent and build and support non-representative structures that allow questions that have no prepared counterpart. this also means installing and working such structures in our heads. the governmentality that reflects our position within representative structures otherwise does not allow for emancipatory thinking and action.

can you think of a such a practice, such a structure?

in germany, where I am allowed to vote, but it doesn't feel like a choice nevertheless. many people i know boycott elections because they try to show their dissent with the question they had been asked. their answer: "no answer". I guess the fear of a conservative, militaristic and chauvinistic government is so overwhelming that in some cases people want to believe that the other option is at least a little less militaristic and chauvinistic. which was probably also the case in the last US elections. but it never feels like being able to answer correctly the question that was asked.

here again you could get the impression that questions are only asked when the answer is already known. two options for answering are given because it makes people believe they had a choice. so the answer to the question why people voted for a government is: they were supposed to. you could name other examples of the fake-choice. choosing between cnn and fox or choosing between low fat or no fat. it's your choice. we asked you and your answer was no fat. hurray question and answer. when does it become a different game? when do questions become a tool of discussion. when do they address an unknown answer that might change the perspective of the involved. when do questions become important? is it when you create a situation of public attention and by that, put pressure on the addressee? I guess you call that investigative journalism. but even they mostly know the answers to their questions before. they just need the right person to publicly say it, admit

Dear George and Laura,

I want to tell you about a really cool friend of mine. This friend is an immigrant from, let's say, Canada. Not really Canada, but I get the sense Canadian immigrants get more respect than immigrants from the Southern third of the North American continent. Anyway, this friend is HIV+. In Canada, he wouldn't be able to access the life-saving drugs that he needs. The Canadian government tells the UN and the World Health Organization that people with HIV and AIDS have unrestricted access to Highly-Active Anti-Retrovirals, but this is not true (well, in fact, it's true of Canada, but you understand we're not talking about Canada).

Now my friend is a very successful professional. He works as a Creative Director with an advertising firm that targets other non-English speaking Canadians living in Los Angeles. He makes lots of money doing a job that few to no American-born national could do. Now, through his job he gets a fairly handsome healthcare package. The problem is, he can't disclose his HIV status to his employer or he would lose the job. Rather than take advantage of the health coverage he gets at work, he has used a fictitious Social Security Number to register with ADAP (AIDS Drug Assistance Program) so he can access those life-saving drugs he can't get in Canada (well, he could get them in Canada, but you understand my point). Furthermore, when his employer recently helped him secure Green Card status making him legal to work in the US,

he had to fudge the part where it asks if he has any infectious diseases, like HIV. If my friend had said, yes, he would have lost his job, been deported back to Canada and denied access to those drugs that keep him alive.

So here's his dilemma. My friend is a professional, working at a job that only he can perform. He has to lie about his HIV status in order to work that job legally. But at the same time, he can't access the health care coverage provided by his employer because that will cause him to lose his job and be shipped back to Canada. So he accesses the States assistance program with a fake ID.

You can see how my friend's situation is a real conundrum. He lives with so much anxiety, and that anxiety isn't good for him. Doctors tell him his viral load is directly connected to his stress.

Anyway, I wanted to tell you about my friend. Just so that next time you think about either the subject of immigration or people living with HIV and AIDS, you think about how the two policies might actually be related in people's lives. At least, they're related in my life and the life my friend from Canada (whose not really from Canada, but you get the point).

Regards,

PS. Please stop using the excuse of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to cut vital public

follow that maneuver at every press conference that a member of a government or military is attending. they will ignore questions that they didn't plan to answer, that are not in the script, and they will get angry if the questioner insists. he or she will be unmasked as 'the trouble maker'. journalists who want their questions to be answered have to stick to that rule of the game. curious or clever ones develop techniques of questioning in ways that force the politician to answer by accident. but both sides have studied the rules of the game and experienced politicians know how to handle these attacks.

so how to ask questions? what are the circumstances where asking questions makes sense? how to address a question?

I was in the US during the last presidential elections. elections, I guess, are a procedure of addressing a question to the public. who do you want to govern you and the country you live in? in a situation where this question would be for real you would expect to have a choice. in this case it seemed as if people i met were in the miserable situation of having to choose the lesser evil. they felt forced to answer the question that was addressed to them in order to prevent more damage, not in order to choose someone they would vote for. this makes the question and answer process of an election quite tiring if not frustrating. interestingly it just reminded me of every election that I had been involved in. there are a couple of more parties

or to dissolving it and having new elections. this time the chancellor knew already which answer he wanted and worked hard on everybody in his party to answer 'right'.

the right answer to the question 'do you still trust me' would be 'no'. it seemed absurd that the chancellor asked his own party members, the members of his government to say "no" to him when he asks whether they trust him to be able to lead the government. but his plan was not to give up his position and let someone else do the job. on the contrary, he believed that this was the only way to save his job. his party would reject trust to him, the government would be dissolved and there would be new elections very soon which they would win and govern again. this is a highly complex legal process. so complex that even now after the procedure 'question and its successful answer' was completed, it is still not certain whether it was a legal procedure or not. still the preparations for a new election are on their way and the chancellor is optimistic to win.

questioning when already knowing the answer is a tricky manouver. how do you know the answer? how can you be sure? you're either in totalitarian structures or in a happy family where everyone has the same opinion as you. both do not sound very democratic. nevertheless it appears as if politicians in democratic systems tend to only ask questions that they know the answers to. and they are only willing to listen to questions that they have prepared answers for. you can

programs like HIV and AIDS funding. Especially since we all know those billions of dollars going from social services to the war effort are really just lining the pockets of your military industrial campaign contributors. I mean, that sort of thing is deserving of tyrannical despots, not a democracy.

to whom it may concern

I am asking this question to you as I am not going to ask the american government. the government has never asked me any questions and I would like to believe they hadn't asked anybody else apart from the lobbies that support them. if they had, a lot of things wouldn't have happened. it was quite obvious with their aggressive and confrontational foreign policies and their decision to illegally attack other countries. it might be less obvious with decisions they make within their own borders, but the patriot act, other anti terror measures and disempowering policies that divide decision-makers from regular people were obviously installed to be able to act with even less of an obligation to ask before acting.

no more questions to the defendant! asking questions either happens out of curiosity, out of common interest or in the cause of investigating a crime. no more questions can mean that the accused has revealed his or her guilt, is lying anyway, or for strategic reasons. if a government gives people the chance to ask questions that will be answered by high ranking people in the government, it claims to be democratic. what makes a democracy work? just recently germany went through an interesting questioning process. the german chancellor gerhard schroeder asked the parliament for their trust "vertrauensfrage". it is a democratic process that should either lead into the strengthening of the government and its leader

Dear White House,

Why can't I make money being an artist?

I am a cocktail waitress with a Master's degree.

I don't have health care and I live in a dangerous area of town.

I am poor.

Do you have advice or suggestions?

Alas, I'm having a hard time coming up with a question. What is frustrating me lately is how crazy it is that we have to build entire organizations, with funding, and staff, and all the rest of it, to attempt to accomplish things that seem maddeningly common-sensical. We already know what needs to be done to solve each of the major social problems of our time. Everybody knows what we need in order to have safe, healthy, vibrant people and communities, and yet, neither the white house, or any other governing body, is willing to do what it would take to make things right even though it's not hard, or expensive, or complicated in any way.

I thought about this especially in talking with my mom recently, who was saying that Canada's gang-related homicide problem is on the rise, and that they are looking to the U.S. to figure out what to do (even though the U.S. has had zero success in solving this problem). No one in the Canadian news of course was asking WHY more and more Toronto youth are joining gangs, they were only speaking of how to respond, i.e., should Canadian cops start to carry guns?!

Some people in power are plain evil power mongers, who know exactly what they're doing, but so many others just seem so stupid -- this is what's bothering me, that thinking humans can't figure out the most obvious dilemmas.

I don't want to ask a "why" question of the white house, because we all know already that the reason WHY they don't fix the problems is

Dear White House,

Are you aware that many people that I grew up with, including me, were always really scared of you?

(Not anymore though, now we understand)

because many of them benefit enormously from the suffering and misery of others but I also believe that most of them don't even know that about themselves or their agencies -- they actually think they DO want to solve these problems.

So maybe my question could go something like this:

Dear bureaucrats: Do you ever get bored spending so much of your time, and so much of our money, rearranging deck chairs on the titanic? Don't you ever want to just STOP, and consider the possibility of actually solving a problem like ill health, poverty, or violence?

system of justice. As an artist I recently had the experience of teaching in a juvenile detention facility. In a city whose black residents made up 30% of the total population, the black population represented 80% of the poor and 90% of those imprisoned. We're a growing gap between educated and un- or under-educated, rich and poor, healthy and sick. I am a member of the shrinking proportion of people in the middle class. And what is happening in this country, what our government does and what it fails to do, scares me.

How can it not frighten you?

And, given how poorly we care for our own citizens, how is it that we feel we are in a position to tell other governments and cultures how to run their countries?

White house,

How is it that so many of our citizens are:

Undereducated?

I am a full time artist working part time in a private, college prep school. The opportunities my students have are staggeringly out of proportion to those available to public students, but what strikes me is that so many of the "advantages" enjoyed by my students are what every student in this country should have:

- No more than 15 students to a class
- Teachers who are teaching in the discipline they mastered in, no Masters of Education, but rather Masters & PhD's in History, Literature, the sciences.
- Clean facilities
- Computer access
- Civility between students, their parents, faculty, administrators and staff

Not covered by health insurance?

See Malcolm Gladwell's recent (08-29-2005) New Yorker article, The Moral hazard Myth, or the recent NY Times series August on the abysmal state of health care in this country.

Imprisoned?

How does the three strikes relate to the 8th amendment to the constitution's stipulation against cruel and unusual punishment?

How do we as a country continue to ignore the overwhelming class and race disparity in our

One of the main points of Jesus' message was 'love your enemy.' how does GBush practice this message as president and Christian?

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*Teq peaq pewobn awkuehe.

Can you please tell me why you think that lying,
stealing, poisoning, and killing are preferable
to listening, sharing, breathing and healing?