

PEACE IS INDIVISIBLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH STUDS TERKEL

BY RICHARD STEELE

The following edited transcript is excerpted from an interview with Studs Terkel recorded for 848; a radio show on Chicago's WBEZ.

Over the years, we've heard scores of Studs Terkel's conversations gathering the thoughts and experiences of others. But this time, we wanted to hear Studs' own reactions and analysis of the tragic events of September 11.

My first reaction was horror, horror—the tragedy, of course. Naturally, this has been well-covered by the press, the TV and radio. But my first reaction was one of: It happened. The United States is no longer an impregnable fortress that it always thought it was.

How do you feel about comparisons made between what happened and the World War II bombing of Pearl Harbor?

You can't compare that act with World War II. Einstein, the man I'd love to quote right now—I love to quote Albert Einstein because no one dares contradict me—Albert Einstein was *Time* magazine's cover boy as the "man of the century." Einstein, the man who split the atom, said, "The whole world since the atom's been split, since Hiroshima, the whole world has changed irrevocably—except for one thing: The way we think."

We still think in those old terms of wars, of boundaries, of us as the righteous ones. When we bomb people, it's for the good of the world and for the good of themselves. And he said unless we think anew, peace is indivisible. What happens in Guatemala or in the Middle East affects us. It hasn't really affected us as persons. Shortly after the bombings, we were on the 55th floor of Bank One [in Chicago]. My son had to see a lawyer. And we were practically the only ones on the floor. And all I saw were these long corridors, empty—it was out of a Bergman film, surreal. And down below, all the people, all crowded, all jamming, all going home. They just wanted to go home. As though they were refugees. We see refugees. It has no effect on us. We're used to them, there—the distant country, but not us. And now the lesson to be learned is that peace is indivisible.

One of the things that Bush has said, I'm paraphrasing now, "It's very black or white. There is a good guy and a bad guy. We've got to get the bad guys." Do you think that's a simplification?

I think it's horrendously simplistic. The bad guys, that's the point: the good and the bad guys—who are the bad guys? I pick up the papers and unanimous letters to the editor: "Let's go. It's war. Let's go. Pearl Harbor."

Who are the bad guys? They are obviously nutty, loony, vile individuals. Massive retaliation, is that it? Should we bomb Iraq (as we've been doing, by the way)? Who do we bomb? Do we bomb the Afghans? They were our allies, by the way. They were our heroes during the Cold War. ... Who do we bomb? Who do we hit? Are we so hungry to hit somebody rather than face the situation? What caused the situation to enable these madmen to do what they did?



What do you think a 20-year-old today might think about this compared to how you felt as a young man when America was engaged in World War II?

That's what I mean by having a national Alzheimer's disease. The young need to be told about what led to World War II to begin with, the war that had to be fought against fascism, of course, and I was patriotic and I was stateside—limited service for a year—but many of my colleagues and friends were in it. That had to be fought. To compare World War II with now makes no sense, because the world has been altered considerably since. We were the only country in the world that was not affected by the war, and until this moment we never thought about being invaded.

So how will this series of tragic incidents affect the American spirit?

I think the American spirit is strong. It has always been there. The American spirit I think is as rich and vital as ever. We're facing a certain challenging moment as though it were a test for us, a test of our intelligence as well as our, may I use the word, humanity. And that we should recognize as a nation of humans that not everything our government does is right. When we go to war it's us, we got to go. "My country right or wrong" is not right. There is an old saying: "My country right or wrong, but if it's wrong, let's set it right." And that's what Americanism is really all about. ■

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Metaphors of Terror

By George Lakoff

As a metaphor analyst, I want to begin with the power of images. The images we see and recall interact with our system of metaphors. The results can be powerful.

There are a number of metaphors for buildings. A common visual metaphor is Buildings Are Heads, where windows and doors are openings in the head like eyes, nose and mouth. For many people this metaphor interacted with the image of the plane going into the South Tower of the World Trade Center, producing via visual metaphor the unconscious but powerful image of a bullet going through someone's head, the flame pouring from the other side, blood spurting out.

Tall buildings can, via visual metaphor, be people standing erect. For many the falling of the towers activated this metaphor. Each tower falling was a body falling. We are not consciously aware of the metaphorical images, but they are part of the power and the horror we experience when we see them.

Each of us, in the prefrontal cortex of our brains, has what are called "mirror neurons." Such neurons fire either when we perform an action or when we see the same action performed by someone else. There are connections from that part of the brain to the emotional centers.

Such neural circuits are believed to be the basis of empathy. This works literally—when we see the plane coming toward the building and imagine people in the building, we feel the plane coming toward us; when we see the building toppling toward others, we feel the building toppling toward us. It also works metaphorically: If we see the plane going through the building, and we unconsciously metaphorize the building as a head with the plane going through its temple, then we sense—unconsciously but powerfully—being shot through the temple. If we metaphorize the building as a person and see the building fall to the ground in pieces, then we sense—again unconsciously but powerfully—that we are falling to the ground in pieces. Our systems of metaphorical thought, inter-

acting with our mirror neuron systems, turn external literal horrors into felt metaphorical horrors.

Here are some other cases:

- **Control Is Up:** You have control over the situation; you're on top of things. This has always been an important basis of towers as symbols of power. In this case, the toppling of the towers meant loss of control, loss of power.
- **Phallic imagery:** Towers are symbols of phallic power and their collapse reinforces the idea of loss of power. But another kind of phallic imagery was more central here: the planes as penetrating the towers with plumes of heat. The pentagon, a vaginal image from the air, penetrated by the plane as missile.
- **A Society Is A Building:** A society can have a "foundation" which may or may not be "solid" and it can "crumble" and "fall." The World Trade Center was symbolic of society. When it crumbled and fell, the threat was more than to a building.
- **We think metaphorically of things that perpetuate over time as "standing."** Bush the Father in the Gulf War kept saying, "This will not stand," meaning that the situation would not be perpetuated over time. The World Trade Center was built to last 10,000 years. When it crumbled, it metaphorically raised the question of whether American power and American society would last.
- **Building As Temple:** Here we had the destruction of the temple of capitalist commerce, which lies at the heart of our society.

Our minds play tricks on us. The image of the Manhattan skyline is now unbalanced. We are used to seeing it with the towers there. Our mind imposes our old image of the towers, and the sight of them gone gives one the illusion of imbalance, as if Manhattan were sinking. Given the symbolism of Manhattan as standing for the promise of America, it appears metaphorically as if that promise were sinking.

Then there is the persistent image, day after day, of the charred and smoking remains: It is an image of hell.

The World Trade Center was a potent symbol, tied into our understanding of our country and ourselves in a myriad of ways. All of what we know is physically embodied in our brains. To incorporate the new knowledge requires a physical change in the synapses of our brains, a physical reshaping of our neural system. The physical violence was not only in New York and Washington. Physical changes—violent ones—have been made to the brains of all Americans.

The Bush administration's framings and reframings and its search for metaphors should be noted. The initial framing was as a "crime" with "victims" and "perpetrators" to be "brought to justice" and "punished." The crime frame entails law, courts, lawyers, trials, sentencing, appeals and so on. It was hours before "crime" changed to "war" with "casualties," "enemies," "military action," "war powers" and so on.

This situation does not fit our understanding of a "war." There are "enemies" and "casualties" all right, but no enemy army, no regiments, no tanks, no ships, no air force, no battlefields, no strategic targets and no clear "victory." The war frame just doesn't fit. Colin Powell had always argued that no troops should be committed without specific objectives, a clear and achievable definition of victory, a clear exit strategy—and no open-ended commitments. But he has pointed out that none of these is present in this "war."

Because the concept of "war" doesn't fit, there is a frantic search for metaphors. First, Bush called the terrorists "cowards"—but this didn't seem to work too well for martyrs who willingly sacrificed their lives for their moral and religious ideals. More recently he has spoken of "smoking them out of their holes" as if they were rodents, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has spoken of "drying up the swamp they live in" as if they were snakes or lowly swamp creatures. The conceptual metaphors here are Moral Is Up; Immoral Is Down (they are lowly) and Immoral People Are Animals (that live close to the ground).

The use of the word "evil" in the administration's discourse works in the