

*P*January 22, 2008
Version 1.0

ARTICULATING WHAT WE MEAN BY “TRANSFORMING COMMUNICATION”

A REPORT OF A WORKSHOP

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On Friday, January 11, 2008, twenty people gathered in the Fess Parker Doubletree Resort in Santa Barbara, California, for a three-hour workshop titled “The theory and practice of transforming communication.” Participants¹ included Jan Elliott, Ellen Raboin, Jeannie Mintz, Pat Weiland, Cate Creede, Linda Blong, Sara Orem, John Baugus, Liz Clark, Gregoria Smith, Mary Jean Vignone, Cheri Gurse, Anne Acosta, David Parkes, Paige Marrs, Paul Caccia, Alberto Mendoza, Eduardo Villar,² Sheila McNamee,³ and Barnett Pearce. Don Bushnell and Jeannie Mintz’ mother joined for part of the discussion.

The workshop was part of Fielding Graduate University’s annual winter session and was facilitated by special guest Sheila McNamee and me. The first part of the workshop was very rich, and we chose to spend all of our time on the “theory” of “transforming communication” – that is, articulating what we mean by the concept -- and to postpone attention to “practice” for some subsequent opportunity. This document is based on my notes and the flipcharts from that meeting, and is intended to carry forward the work we did there into a larger conversation about the topic.

THIS SESSION WAS PART OF A LARGER PROJECT

The continuing staggered roll-out of the “Transforming Communication Project” (TCP) in Fielding’s Institute for Social Innovation was the proximal reason for choosing this topic. Some of the text promoting that Project⁴ claims that “never before have we known so much about how to transform communication, and never before have we known how important transformed communication is.” To back up this claim, the text points to the large and increasing number of groups involved in dialogue, deliberation, public engagement, organization development, and other change processes. However, as scholars and as practitioners, we want to do more than point; we’d like to have the abilities to articulate what we are talking about (that’s the ‘theory’ referred to in the title of the workshop) and identify and develop skills (that’s the ‘practice’).

Some of the developers of the TCP enjoy the equivocation in the term “transforming communication.” It permits us to move our attention among these closely interrelated but not quite identical questions:

- 1) Are there knowable patterns of communication that have transformative effects?
- 2) In any given situation, are there things that a change agent can do that have the effect of transforming the existing pattern of communication? And,
- 3) What are the characteristics of communication that has been successfully transformed?

¹ This list compiled from my notes and memory. I apologize for any mistakes.

² Alberto Mendoza and Eduardo Villar work with Sistemas Humanos in Bogotá, Colombia.

³ Professor, Department of Communication, University of New Hampshire.

⁴ This text is unpublished at the time in which this document was written; it may find its way into the TCP website.

WE WORKED WITH THREE SETS OF DOCUMENTS PERTAINING TO “9-11”

In this workshop, we examined the three sets of documents attached as Appendix B to this report: President Bush’s public statements immediately after “9-11” (an event that we think is the most important turning point of this century, at least so far); letters that President Bush received in the week after 9-11 advising him of how to act into the situation; and an alternative speech written within a week of 9-11 as an alternative to those given by the President. We made the assumption that the second and third sets of documents had the characteristics of “transformed communication” and that the first set displayed those characteristics that we have set ourselves to transform.

Working in small groups, we addressed the question of how we would name the differences between the first set of documents (two of Bush’s speeches) and the second (two letters from world leaders to Bush) and third (the alternative speech about responding to terrorism). We hoped that these distinctions would help us articulate the vectors of change that we hope to bring out in the Transforming Communication Project.⁵

OUR WORK TOOK “THE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE”

Those of us in the TCP use the phrase “the communication perspective” to denote a particular philosophical and methodological orientation that results in looking at communication rather than (just) through it. That is, we take the patterns of turn-by-turn conversations to be real and consequential, not simply expressions of or causes of other things; we assume that we live in communication, and the forms of communication in which we live comprise the social worlds in which we live, move and have our being.

Drawing on the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM), we were guided by these questions:

- (About existing things:) How were they made? That is, what patterns of communication constructed this, out of all of the infinite possibilities?
- (About current acts:) What are we making together?
- (About desired futures:) How can we make better social worlds?

In this workshop, we made the assumption that a “better” social world would have been made had President Bush’s responses to the events of 9-11 been more aligned with the advice he received from the letters we selected from other world leaders or with the alternative speech that we considered. We did not seek to support or defend this assumption; that would have taken our work together in a different path. Rather, we used the assumption to focus on the characteristics of the documents we selected.

WE USED SOME ANALYTICAL TOOLS IN DOING OUR WORK

⁵ While writing this Report, I found that the Generative Change Community had done a similar project. The link to their website and the summary of their work is attached as Appendix A.

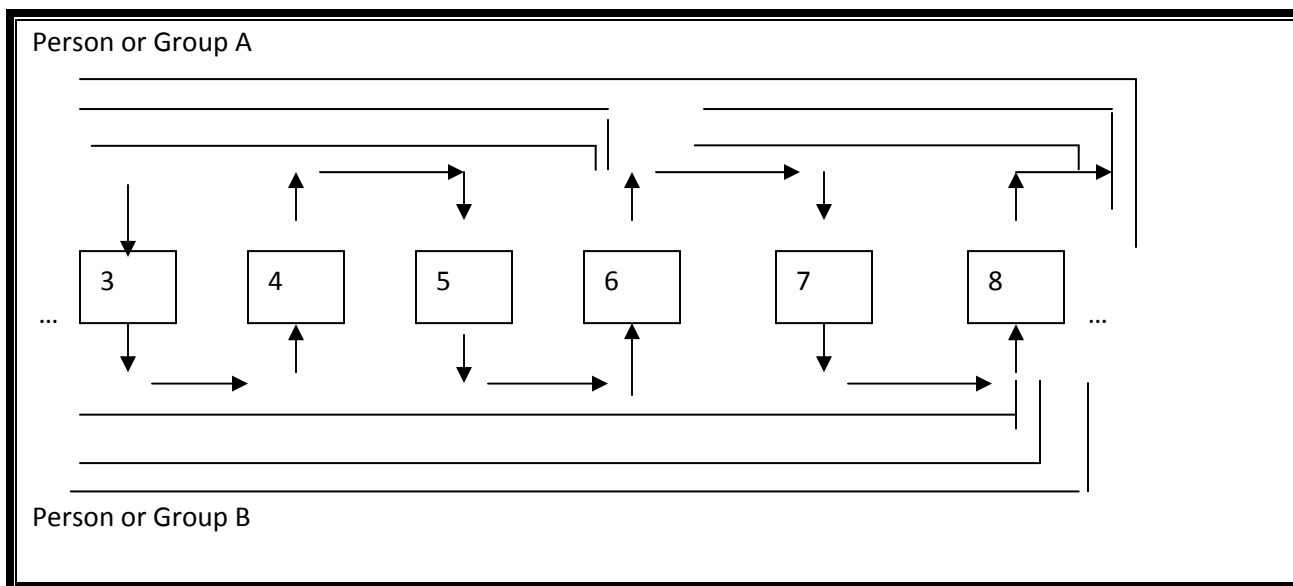
Each group proceeded as it deemed best, but before starting our work, we shared some thoughts about how to go about it. Specifically, we looked at some analytical tools from the theory of CMM as a way of providing a vocabulary for answering the question of “what” might be transformed.

CMM invites us to think about communication as the process by which we make the events and objects of our social worlds, including ourselves. In so doing, it radically shifts the concept of communication from the idea that communication is primarily “referential” (that is, it works by indexing or describing things outside communication itself and is a means of transferring information from one mind or one place to another) to the idea that communication is primarily “performative” (that is, it is more about “doing” things in the social world than talking “about” them).

But doing what? Following John Shotter⁶ (among others), we assume that each communicative act both comes “out of” a set of contexts and is performed “into” a set of contexts. CMM’s hierarchy model of actors’ meanings provides a vocabulary for naming and sorting through the various stories/narratives that comprise these contexts. For example, and it is just an example, a particular act may be described as coming “from” the speaker’s set of stories about the culture, self, relationship and episode of the speaker that define it as a generous gesture but entering “into” the listener’s set of stories – also about culture, self, relationship and episode -- that define it as an insensitive insult.

Following Changsheng Xi’s⁷ concept of the “conversational triplet,” we view each communicative act as bracketed between preceding and following acts, such that it is simultaneously a “response” to the preceding and a rhetorical “invitation” (or instruction, command, request, etc) for other people or groups to respond.

These concepts are embedded in CMM’s serpentine model shown below.



⁶ Shotter, J. (1993). *Conversational Realities: the Construction of Life through Language*. London: Sage.

⁷ Changsheng developed this concept in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and I’ve lost the bibliographic information. I hope to supply it in subsequent versions of this document.

This model invites us to explore the meaning of (for example) turn #5 in at least these ways:

- It is a “response” to turn #4 (and to the other preceding turns);
- It is an “expression” of person/group A’s social world (described in the hierarchy model above it in the figure);
- It is a “summons” to the other to adopt a world view that interprets it in the way it was intended;
- It is “understood” in terms of person/group B’s social world (described in the hierarchy model beneath it in the figure); and,
- It “elicits” the next turn (in this figure, turn #6) and continues or changes the pattern in the sequence of turns.

For the purposes of understanding transformational change, we might focus on turns #5 and #6. Let us assume that turn #5 is the hijacking of four airlines and the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (as well as the intended target of the fourth plane that crashed in Pennsylvania). This act may be seen as “expressing” a polarized worldview of “us” and “them;” a concept of “good” and “evil” that distinguishes sharply between them but makes no further discriminations within them; an affinity for violence as a means of accomplishing political purposes; a story of self as the victim of the other’s actions; etc. Let us further assume that this act “summoned” those attacked to live in a world view that has a similar structure; that is, a polarized world view, etc. etc. If so, then their response in turn #6 is likely to be one that “fits” the pattern established in the previous turns and moves this pattern forward untransformed. This pattern might be described as “you hit me first, so I have no choice except to hit you back and to hit you harder than you hit me, if I can.”

Note: this is a very barren description of the situation offered for illustrative purposes. In real life, people usually develop eloquent explanations and justifications for their actions. In this case, both the attackers and those attacked have been able to construct convincing narratives in which they are the virtuous responders to unethical acts by the other. Now, add to that a mutual disregard for the narratives of the other and the pattern of actions can continue for many years.

However, it is possible that person/group B has a social reality that enables them to interpret turn #5 in such a way that they can act in a surprising and – in a specific sense – inappropriately manner in turn #6 so as to transform both the pattern and, possibly, the social reality of person/group A. In this case, turn #6 has the effects of calling into being a new pattern of action and of changing the stories about culture, relationship, self, and episode that comprise person/group A’s social reality.

The transforming effect being described here should be recognizable to any adult who has been slapped in the face by an infant and, rather than slapping back, has taken the baby’s hand and kissed it while restraining the baby from continuing to slap. In the world of adult relationships, the abstract model above recalls moments when human beings are functioning at unusually high and sophisticated levels such as forgiveness, reconciliation and peace.⁸

For the purposes of this workshop, we assumed that act #5 included the hijacking of four airliners and flying them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. We assumed that President Bush’s speeches

⁸ E.g., events and relationships such as those described by Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2004). *A human being died that night: A South African woman confronts the legacy of apartheid*. Mariner Books.

(turn #6) in the hours immediately following these events changed the events and objects of the social world by setting the United States (and the rest of the world through the various webs of globalization) on a particular course, but that this change was not “transformational.” In an act of imagination, we treated the letters addressed to the President and the alternative speech written for him as turn #6 and assumed that, had he committed himself and his administration to these policies, this would have initiated a “transformed” pattern of communication.⁹

Using these conceptual tools, we posed the questions:

- How would the alternative turn #6 differed from the actual one?
- What differences would it have made? That is, what social worlds would it have summoned and how would these have differed from the events and objects conjured by the President’s actual speeches and policies?

WE RECOGNIZED THE SOCIAL WORLD IN BUSH’S SPEECHES

The events and objects “expressed” and “summoned” by President Bush’s speeches were all too familiar. They included sharp divisions between “us” and “them” and easy associations of “us” with all that is “good” and “them” with all that is “bad” and “evil.” We noted an affinity for easy answers – that is, for easily determining what we should do even if the implementation is difficult. In fact, the difficulty of the implication is seen as somehow justifying the decision.

WE FOUND IT POSSIBLE TO DESCRIBE VECTORS OF CHANGE IN TRANSFORMING COMMUNICATION

We spend a good bit of time constructing a pattern that described the vector of change from the world view expressed and summoned by Bush’s speeches and that expressed and summoned by the other documents (in Appendix B). Here are some of these vectors:

Epistemology (story about how we can/should understand the situation):

- from a simple assessment of the situation to a more complex one;
- from a view of a knowable, finite way of thinking to a provisional, open, contingent one;
- from “certainty” in one’s own understanding and affirmation of its completeness to openness, tentativeness, explicit acknowledgement of the “localness” of one’s own understanding and of the existence of alternatives;
- from treating reality as “solid” or stagnant to treating reality as fluid, with us as the potential alchemists who can change it;
- from a categorical description of the situation (everyone and everything fits neatly into previously established and named categories) to one which recognizes the limits of discourse and linguistic descriptions;
- from a story centered in the speaker to one involving many participants in the co-creation of the story, including specific invitations to others to contribute.

⁹ The serpentine model unrealistically suggests that the conversation involves only two persons/groups. While this is sometimes a convenient fiction, at other times we need a more complex concept of the situation. One way of employing these ideas is to locate turn #5 in the center of CMM’s “daisy model” and to envision each of the relevant persons and groups as one of the petals of the model. Then we can imagine a serpentine model within each petal of the daisy model. In this view, turn #5 would be surrounded by many turn #6’s, some of which – like those from the writers of the letters to President Bush – might be “transformational” and many of which would not.

Relationships (story about who “we” are):

- From polarization to inclusion;
- From creating boundaries to creating bridges;
- From proudly defiant to humbly vulnerable;
- From an assumption of monolithic, irreconcilable differences to a commitment to opening doors and exploring alternatives;
- From distancing “us” from “them” to a call to be “with” those who are not like us;
- From a sharp division of we (“good”) and them (“evil”) to a much more inclusive definition of common humanity and shared participation;
- From a theological identification of “us” with God and them with “Evil” to a call to explore the conditions and causes of the situation that implicate and affect us all;
- From a “we” based on those who support “me/us” to a much more complex definition of “we” who have different agendas and perspectives;
- From little or no expression of empathy or understanding for others who are “not us” to a deeply expressed empathy with and compassion for many if not all people;

Summoning the next act:

- From a call to a simple next act to a call for a much more complex and nuanced response;
- From a reaction (based in fear; controlled by the brain stem/reptilian part of the brain) to a free choice (in which the limbic and neocortical parts of the brain are integrated with the reptilian);
- From obeying a leader (what “I” or the Presidential “we” have decided) to a more mutually determined response;
- From an invitation to respond linearly to an invitation to respond reflexively;
- From a completed decision-making process to a process that explicitly involves curiosity, reflection, deliberation, and a quest for good judgment;

WE REFLECTED ON WHAT WE DID

Some groups found it useful to apply a “developmental” lens in understanding the differences made by transformation. Using formulations such as Robert Kegan’s, it was tempting to see these vectors of change as moving “up” the developmental process. This both provided us a vocabulary for making some perspicacious distinctions and troubled us because it was 1) too neat a fit; and 2) we didn’t want to take on board some of the assumptions that are embedded in this work. However, the affinity between what we described and this literature is striking.

We were troubled by the extent to which the contrasts looked like a dichotomy. Although this was set up in part by the design of the workshop (e.g., comparing sets of documents and looking for the differences among them), we took the issue further.

- We acknowledged that the vectors described above are not a list of attributes that can be mechanically produced in a text that will make it “transformed.” To the contrary, in the words of one of the participants, “transformation starts with us.” Another quoted Gandhi’s call for us to “be” the change that we would see in the world. Another said that our goal required us to include and transcend the false dichotomies of these ‘from-to’ vectors, not to treat one as “good” and the other as “bad.”

- Although we used arrows on the flipcharts to indicate the differences between the nontransforming communication in Bush's turn #6 speech and the transforming communication in the other documents taken as turn #6's, we recognized that the arrows should move in both directions and as it continues to do so, the items in the left column (the characteristics of transformed communication) are themselves given new meaning.
- We noted how difficult it is to act in the ways described in the "transformed" column when we are in crisis mode or fearful. This led to a conversation about the need to be "mindful" when we are engaged in transforming communication – recognizing patterns and making decisions about how to act rather than responding "appropriately" to the summons of previous acts. We noted how "seductive" it is to act in ways that reproduce patterns of untransformed communication, and we played with the metaphor of how we could "seduce" others into transformed patterns of communication. We reflected on the importance of being able to identify those aspects of the 'grammar' of the situation in which we are able to join and those aspects that we cannot/should not join. We also reflected that these considerations can devolve into a "strategic" thinking that is incommensurate with the sentiments expressed in the first bullet point above.

A FINAL OBSERVATION

I think it fair to say that all of us in the room thought that this was a useful workshop. We know that the topic is important. As one participant put it, we all know the patterns of communication that moves us from "all of us" to "us versus them;" it is the dominant or default pattern of communication in all too many important parts of our lives. The challenge is to become equally aware of and skilled in those patterns of communication that invite us to curiosity, reflection, and solidarity.

We all felt that the conversations about transforming communication was more challenging, and at a deeper level, than we expected. We thought that the list of characteristics of transformed communication that we produced was good and useful, but that it must not be taken as just a list of characteristics. Something more important and less easily expressed is also involved. In her concluding comments, Sheila raised the question of whether what we were doing was "beyond codification" – something ineffable. Reflecting, she said that our conversation posed three questions:

- How do we (those who set ourselves to transform communication) position ourselves in relation to others?
- How do we position ourselves in relation to the answers to the questions we are posing? And,
- How can we listen generously to others, including those who reproduce untransformed patterns of communication?

Finally, we did not feel that our work ended the conversation. In fact, we were disappointed that we did not have the opportunity to turn our attention to issues of "how" to transform communication. We look forward to continuing the conversation.

APPENDIX A

THE GENERATIVE CHANGE COMMUNITY'S DESCRIPTION OF GENERATIVE DIALOGIC CHANGE

Source: http://www.generativedialogue.org/documents/GCC_description_August_2007.pdf

The thread that holds the GC Community together is a shared belief that what we call *generative dialogic change processes* are critically important to *all* disciplines and fields that aim to bring about positive societal change.

Our working definition of generative dialogic change processes is as follows:

Processes are dialogic when they involve people coming together seeking to make positive change through conversation and agreement. Dialogic processes are generative when participants experience a mutual shift in awareness regarding their relationship to others and to the issues at hand. This change leads them to co-create positive outcomes for themselves, the people they represent, and the larger whole of which they are a part..

This definition emerged from conversations in a series of case teleconferences in 2006. The cases we discussed included a multi-stakeholder dialogue to develop an irrigation project in Nepal; a “shuttle dialogue” in Northern Ireland; an ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue initiative to bring peace to the province of Sulu, Philippines; a national dialogue on the Millennium Development Goals in Mauritania; and a national dialogue on education in Guatemala. Based on these cases, we provided more concrete definition of the concept, agreeing that the shifts produced by generative dialogue move people in the following ways:

From:

To:

Seeing others as separate and different, defined by their roles, their positions on the issues, or their place in a hierarchy	Seeing others as fellow human beings; “we’re in this together;” and all have something important to contribute
Seeing oneself as separate from the problem situation, looking for others to change in order to resolve it	Seeing oneself as part of the system that sustains the situation, accepting responsibility for changing oneself
Disconnected relationships within stuck problem systems	Creative relationships energized by mutually owned ideas for addressing problems
Acceptance of dysfunctional societal structures and systems	Commitment to promoting change toward healthy societal structures and systems

APPENDIX B

MATERIALS USED IN THE WORKSHOP

(Note: these materials were used with permission from Kimberly A. Pearce (2007) CMM and Social Evolution. Unpublished paper, Second version.)

Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation, September 11, 2001, 8:30 P.M. EDT

Source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>.

THE PRESIDENT: Good evening. Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.

The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong.

A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.

America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.

Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America -- with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could.

Immediately following the first attack, I implemented our government's emergency response plans. Our military is powerful, and it's prepared. Our emergency teams are working in New York City and Washington, D.C. to help with local rescue efforts.

Our first priority is to get help to those who have been injured, and to take every precaution to protect our citizens at home and around the world from further attacks.

The functions of our government continue without interruption. Federal agencies in Washington which had to be evacuated today are reopening for essential personnel tonight, and will be open for business tomorrow. Our financial institutions remain strong, and the American economy will be open for business, as well.

The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice.

We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.

I appreciate so very much the members of Congress who have joined me in strongly condemning these attacks. And on behalf of the American people, I thank the many world leaders who have called to offer their condolences and assistance.

America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism. Tonight, I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."

This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.

Thank you. Good night, and God bless America.

Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People (excerpts)

Retrieved September 5, 2007 from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09>.

...

Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what they see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. They want to drive Israel out of the Middle East. They want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa. These terrorists kill not merely to end life, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us, because we stand in their way.

We are not deceived by their pretenses to piety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th Century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions—by abandoning every value except the will to power—they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that part all the way, to where it ends: in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies....

Americans are asking: How will we fight and win this war? We will direct every resource at our command -- every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war -- to the disruption and to the defeat of the global terror network.

This war will not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion. It will not look like the air war above Kosovo two years ago, where no ground troops were used and not a single American was lost in combat.

Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. (Applause.) From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.

...

Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice—assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America.”

A letter to President Bush from Nobel Peace Laureates Nelson R Mandela, F W de Klerk, D M Tutu, South Africa, 19 September 2001:

The terrorist attacks in the United States of America last week shook all of humanity. It starkly reminded us again of the depth to which we can sink in our inhumanity towards one another.

It was a source of encouragement to note that almost the entire world responded with utter revulsion to such cowardly acts that cruelly and horrendously took the lives of so many innocent people merely going about their ordinary daily lives. Amidst the indescribable tragedy the overwhelming decency of human beings the world over found expression in the unreserved condemnation of those terrible deeds of cruelty.

To that we wish to add our collective voice of condemnation of those acts and to express our deep felt sympathy to the American government, people and particularly those who lost family and friends. We share in their sense of loss and can only trust that they will take some sustenance from the knowledge that so many people all over the world mourn with them.

The events of last week are also a renewed call to rid the world of the scourge of terrorism. Those acts emphasised that we are all vulnerable to terrorism. We hope that the culprits will be identified, apprehended and severely punished.

This is a time that the world should stand together in pursuit of those objectives. Terrorism seeks to put itself above and outside of the law. Our steps against terrorism should studiously be within international law and the charter of our world body.

We need wise leadership and statesmanship in this period of looming crisis. The actions taken should not deepen tensions and further divide the world for it is in those circumstances of strife and division that terrorism finds fertile ground.

The recent history of our own country has taught that negotiation is the surest means of finding lasting solutions to even the most seemingly intractable political problems.

In combating and seeking to eliminate terrorism we must address the root causes of problems around the world and find just solutions to them. In the Middle East, particularly, efforts at arriving at a just and peaceful settlement should be redoubled.

If out of the tragic events of last week the world can find a renewed will to co-operate in finding just solutions to the problems that threaten the safety, security and well-being of us all, the highest tribute would have been paid to those who lost their lives.

A letter to President Bush from Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Goodwill Ambassador of the Culture for Peace, Mexico City, September 11, 2001

After careful consideration of today's events, I would like to share the following thoughts:

1. I firmly condemn the horrible terrorist attacks that have taken thousands of innocent civilian lives and have provoked an unpredictable spiral of violent consequences. Terrorism, wherever it may come from, is a politically unjustified and morally unacceptable behavior.
2. I express my profound condolences and solidarity with the victims, their families and the American people.
3. I call upon serenity and wise judgment to avoid a rushed and insensate response that could only result in an offensive revenge that only would feed an escalation of violence, that although knowing how and where it begins, nobody could predict when it is going to end.
4. *I call upon the use of all available resources leading to a dialogue in order to build a world based on a common understanding, a fair acknowledgement of the problems that the international community faces, the existence of international law and an institutional framework, and the way the existing - selective and unilateral- hegemonic system affects a peaceful cohabitation.*
5. *I exhort the international community not to fall in a logic of war, seeking retribution for old and new controversies among nations and justifying actions against groups and sectors that have not found a pluralist disposition for the recognition and respect of their individual expressions in the existing institutional frameworks.*
6. *I call upon the media to avoid alarmist sensationalism based on interpretations of strong ideological bias that only increases the confusion and feeds the ghosts of intolerance.*
7. *Finally, I call upon the world's civil society, Nobel Prize Laureates, and all world leaders, not to rush to conclusions on today's events conforming instead a wide FRONT FOR WISE JUDGMENT in order to stop the cowardly use of violence and avoid further suffering to humanity.*

“Our response to terrorism” – an alternate version of the President’s 9-11 speech

Source: http://www.pearceassociates.com/essays/analyses_menu.htm.

Today, my fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes or in their offices. Secretaries, business men and women, military and federal workers. Moms and dads. Friends and neighbors.

Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.

The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger.

Making all of this worse, at this moment, we don’t know who is responsible or why such savagery was directed at us. But we will find out, and we will respond.

Our first response is to prevent additional attacks. Your government, law enforcement, and military forces continue to operate, and we are taking every step possible to protect our citizens and our country from further destruction.

In addition, we are meeting the needs of those injured in these attacks. I immediately implemented our government’s emergency response plans. Our emergency teams are working as I speak in New York and in Washington, D.C. to help local agencies in their rescue efforts.

We join in grief those families who have lost loved ones. Nothing we can do is enough to console those whose parents, friends, children, brothers or sisters are missing or have died, but we can and will join them in their sorrow. We are all bereaved; we are all shocked; we are all saddened. Let us comfort and support each other in this time of tragedy.

While we protect ourselves, care for the injured, and grieve for our dead, we are also searching for those who did this horrible thing. We will find them and bring them to justice.

And, we will do more.

We Americans like to think of ourselves as a good and generous people, and so we are. Nowhere has this been shown more clearly in the courageousness of those who have rushed into burning buildings to save others; the concern of those who have given blood and donated skills and supplies; and the compassion of those who treated wounds and embraced those who are hurt and hurting.

But we live in a complex and dangerous world. And in this world there are people who are not like us; who do not like us, and who seek to harm us. Some of these people think that whatever they can do to hurt us is right.

The fires and chaos in New York and in Washington are unprecedented – and yet they remind us of images that we have seen from other places: among the Palestinians and Israelis, from Beirut and London, and, I say with deep regret, from many other places around the world.

For many years, our intelligence and law enforcement officials have successfully protected us from attacks such as we have seen today. For many of us, terrorism has been something that afflicts other people or affects us only when we travel to other countries. And we have been generous in our support for the victims of terrorism as we have of natural disasters. We have given food, clothing, equipment; many of us have gone to the sites of terrorist attacks and offered medical help. But until today, most of us had not experienced it ourselves.

But now we, too, are the victims. This is not the first terrorist attack on U. S. soil, but it is the most heinous. And it ends our ability to rest comfortably behind our own protective walls in such a dangerous world. It sets before us a daunting task – a task different from those that confronted other generations, and one to which we must rise.

This terrorist attack, like all the other ones that have occurred during the past decades, does not come out of nothing. Our stories about the world, and about our place in the world, will have to become more complex. If we are to understand why people hate us so much, we will have to understand how the world looks from their perspective. And if we are to respond effectively to protect ourselves, we must understand those whose sense of history and purpose are not like our own.

It is tempting to see this vicious attack as the result of madmen trying to destroy civilization, and our response as a war of “good” against “evil.” But if we are to understand what happened here today, and if we are to act effectively in the days to come, we must develop more sophisticated stories than these about the world, about our place in it, and about the consequences of our actions.

This is a terrorist attack. If we are in a state of war, it is a different kind of war than we have ever fought before. Terrorists are not capable of occupying our country or meeting our armies on the field of battle. They hope to destroy our confidence; to disrupt our way of life. They hope that we will destroy ourselves by the way we respond to the atrocities that they commit. Our first reaction, that of wanting revenge, to lash out at those who have injured us so, is almost surely the wrong response because it makes us accomplices of what they are trying to achieve.

Instead of the doing the obvious thing that they are trying to provoke, the more difficult task before us is to work on two levels simultaneously. First, we will identify, seek out, and punish those who did this horrible thing. As President Kennedy said in a different situation: let the message go out from this place that we will pay any price and bear any burden to prevent and punish those who make war on our citizens and our country. Let there be no uncertainty, no room for ambiguity, no doubt about that. We have enormous resources on which we may draw, and we will use them.

But no matter what we do in retaliation and prevention, it will not bring our dead back to life; it will not heal our wounds; it will not wipe the tears from our eyes. And if only our grief and our pain motivate us, we run the risk of becoming that which we hate.

Let us today renew our commitment to our highest values – what President Abraham Lincoln called “the higher angels of our nature” – and resolve that we will not defeat ourselves by becoming indiscernible from terrorists as we battle against terrorism.

So the second level of our task is to identify and seek to change the conditions in the world that call forth such hatred and permit it to flourish. Even as we struggle with our grief at the wounds inflicted on us as a nation, I call us to a renewed effort to achieve peace and justice throughout the world. The world is now too small, too interrelated, and too complex for us to hope that we can insulate ourselves from those who hate us, or to ignore the consequences of our actions that cause grief and pain to others.

In the next few days, I will set into motion two initiatives.

First, I will support the initiative already in Congress to create a cabinet-level Department of Peace. We now know a lot about peace, and we know that it is not simply the absence of war. My charge to this Department, and to the Secretary that I will name to my cabinet is a formidable one: To help create a world in which hatred and terror has no place. And I pledge my full support to this good work.

Second, to help create a world in which hatred and terror has no support or places to hide, I will ask for all nations of the world to join us in a campaign to identify and prosecute terrorists, to deny them support and materials, and to coordinate efforts to maintain the freedom of citizens throughout the world to live and move about in safety.

Almost forty years ago, a great American stood not far from where I now sit, and said that he had a dream of “the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, “My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.”

Today, as our nation rebounds from this vicious attack, I have a dream of the day when all of God's children will be able to sing, with full meaning, that their country is a “sweet land of liberty” and that from every mountainside in every country, freedom will ring. And as Martin Luther King, Jr., told us: “When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, -- and, yes, Muslims and Buddhists and Hindus and agnostics and all the rest -- will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!””

My fellow Americans, let us accept the task that has been so tragically thrust upon us, to bind up our nations' wounds and to work together to create a world in which such wounds are not inflicted on anyone.

Thank you, and good night.”