

Target

I met poet Jena Osman at the Djerassi Resident Artist Program in California in 2001. When I asked her for texts, she sent me a number of recent poems, two of which I used to create *Target*, a political commentary on U.S. military intervention abroad.

The first text is entitled *Twister*, which Osman describes as “playing off of the exchange or possible confusion between a military formation and a Wall Street ticker tape parade.” I used the two stanzas of the poem as the first and last songs in the piece. In my setting, the *Twister* songs are the most direct in their emotional impact, evoking the apprehension and violence contained within the text.

The other three songs are settings of found poems—every sentence comes from other sources that Osman excerpts and rearranges. The texts used for *Leaflet I* and *Leaflet II* consist of language taken from leaflets that were dropped on Afghanistan after 9/11. The text used for *PsyOps: Know Your Target* uses as its source descriptions of military psychological operations written by a former U.S. army officer. These texts illustrate how a colonial/imperial mind frames and dehumanizes the “other,” as well as how the language strategies of military invasions are closely tied to the language of advertising. What these found texts reveal is that every war on some level must be a war of words.

Twister I draws the listener into the coercive mindset on which the piece as a whole hopes to serve as a commentary. In *Leaflet I*, the singer is trying to sell the text, in a grossly simplistic, singsong manner. *PsyOps: Know Your Target* is a soliloquy of a mind deranged by its attempts to control others, and is the dramatic pivot around which the entire piece revolves. In *Leaflet II*, the false sincerity of the first leaflet is replaced by a mechanistic grimness. *Twister II* concludes the piece, giving voice to feelings of exhaustion, fear, and fragility. Although the music overall speaks on a raw emotional level, it offers the hope that a critical perspective on words is a powerful starting point for resistance to their misuse.

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Keeril Makan
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