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Introduction

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Introduction

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1. The aesthetic and the terrorizing–opening Pandora's terror box with aesthetic tools

The publication of a special volume on such a thorny and controversial topic as the affinity between aesthetics and terrorism is not just timely but long overdue. The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed the steep rise of terrorist occurrences, that is, cases of extreme, asymmetric (so-called political) violence inflicted against innocent, unsuspecting people, while the current decade, drawing rapidly to its close, has raised the bar for terror to unprecedented heights, with terrorist strikes reaching global, epidemic proportions. Undoubtedly, it was 9/11 that opened the Pandora box, ushering humanity into the new era of fundamentalist–mostly religious–terrorism and subsequently spawning counterterrorist agendas inspired by War on Terror dogma. Eighteen years have gone by since that watershed event, but the dust does not seem to have settled yet, given that the repercussions have dramatically and increasingly affected people's daily routine on many different levels.

Still, what is of more importance is the realization that terrorism, today, is felt as something that has somehow assumed a life of its own, growing independently of any potential "initial" root cause that ignited the terror epidemic in the first place. It is a shocking fact that there was a tenfold rise in the number of victims of terrorism worldwide between 2000 and 2014, while in Europe alone, terror attacks increased by almost 40% after 2013.[1] Of course, one cannot possibly ignore or forget that the military action taken against Iraq and Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11, however well-intended, ended up fanning the flames of fanaticism and terror, thus backfiring on Western

counterterrorist practices and leading to a spiral of violence. On the other hand, the escalation of the phenomenon in the twenty-first century has created the suspicion that political and rationalistic discourse probably does not suffice to fully comprehend and effectively confront terrorism. As the papers in the present volume demonstrate, a more imaginative and, indeed, aesthetic approach is needed, given that terrorism is an issue the treatment of which frequently, if not always, verges on imagination, the mythological, the unknown, or even the unreal.

The analysis of terror and terrorism could not be more dependent upon aesthetic investigation and reflection. By "aesthetics," here we do not necessarily mean the beautiful or even the artistic. The term, in this context, is more broadly conceived to signify sense perception and focused sensibility. Such an interpretation of aesthetics encompasses the entire range of human activity. The element of "feeling" as sense perception is crucial for comprehending how terrorism works through shock and fear, how it imposes its terrible immediacy upon the subject of terror, and how it is represented, understood, and used by media and other cultural and political formations. The foundation of an aesthetic approach is aesthetic appreciation, and by this we do not mean admiration or acceptance of violence. The papers in this volume testify to the decisive role of aesthetic appreciation in comprehending, evaluating, and, potentially, countering terror. Aesthetically appreciating terror entails understanding it with our senses and grasping it through various non-instrumentalist faculties, the activation of which leads, for instance, to empathizing with those in pain or abjection. As I have argued elsewhere, aesthetic judgment "yields alternative or additional insights into a terrorist incident that reason, alone, cannot account for and helps retain an ethical . . . stance towards terrorism."[2] The ethical element, that is, is already built into aesthetic appreciation or, as Arnold Berleant supports in his paper for this volume, an engaged appreciation of violence is "a humanizing force by giving negative testimony to the moral import of aesthetic experience" and an act of sensitizing and chastening those who encounter violence.[3]

Terrorism is, almost by definition, aesthetic, insofar as it appeals to the senses not only of those who are directly affected by it but, more importantly, of those who constitute its real "audience," to whom the perpetrators are sending a message via a specific act of extreme political violence. The aesthetics of a terrorist act is discernible in the fact that when one addresses terrorism one is not just grappling with the terrorist act per se; to think about terrorism is also to reflect on the images it produces, the ways it is represented by the media, the narratives of victims, the discourse and language of the

perpetrators, the assumptions and policies of counterterrorism, and even the narratives of fear about the future created in the collective imaginary.

The fear of terrorism in popular imagination is not connected exclusively with a single act of terror that takes place at a certain moment or took place in the past, but rather with the possibility of follow-up attacks that will potentially occur in the future. People become so much affected by terror psychologically and emotionally because they anticipate the advent of something unimaginably worse than what has already befallen them, and that element adds to the mystery of or, at times, even fascination with terrorism. In this lens, terrorism, in the collective unconscious, is about the future, not the present. As Michael Frank explains, the fear of or anxiety over an imminent attack bears on the tendency of the individual imagination to fantasize about disasters and, in fact, constitutes the basic justification for extreme counterterrorist practices verging, at times, on the irrational: "Terror involves intrusions of the (imagined) future into the present, in other words, 'flashforwards'. [It] is the fearful anticipation of future violence–based on, and initiated by, the occurrence of violence in the past."[4] Imagination resides at the core of the aesthetic of terror. And how could it not, since it is precisely the counterterrorist imagination that, through self-fulfilling processes (and prophesies) and with the help of the media, creates, in advance, the circumstances of terrorism by inculcating in citizens' minds the fear of a *future* attack, even when there is no logical justification for such fear, thereby inevitably keeping entire populations in a state of emergency and materializing the so-called state of exception. In fact, the post-World War II nation-state admittedly appears to regularly exempt itself "*from the rule of law*: it gives itself permission to do whatever it deems necessary to crush the enemy, and it, the state, alone will decide when it is safe to return to normality."[5] In sum, counterterrorist and counterinsurgent policies fantasize about the hovering presence of an invisible other that could strike at any moment and, intentionally or not, encourage the assumption that "attacks can trigger more attacks *by themselves*, in an automated, self-propelling cycle of violence," states Thomas Renard.[6]

If it is accurate that anti-state terrorism is contagious, in the sense that terrorist groups learn from, or imitate each other,[7] then, the feeling of fear, of the very threat of terror in the future is unquestionably contagious too, in the sense that it quasi-magically spreads among the people like a virus, thereby normalizing an ambience of insecurity and irrational but ubiquitous terror about one's own survival. Is this "collective psychosis" the new normal? "The perceived ubiquity of the

terrorist threat . . . is further reinforced by the security-focused political discourse. The communication of threat levels by the authorities is somehow institutionalising–almost normalising–the threat perception," as observed by Renard.[8] This kind of overreaction on the part of the state is very much desired by terrorists, whose propaganda taps into the mass-hysteria concerning terrorist violence. One thinks that terrorism feeds upon aesthetics to spread its messages by making an individual feel that his or her life is in danger, without being able to explain this feeling rationally.

2. Definitions, characteristics and conventions

Although attempting to define terrorism is a tricky business–there are over a hundred different definitions of the term–there being always the risk of sweeping statements leading to overgeneralizations and, eventually, misconceptions, one of the few definitions of the term doing justice to the very nature of the phenomenon is the definition given by Igor Primoratz. According to him, terrorism is "the deliberate use of violence, or threat of its use, against innocent people, with the aim of intimidating some other people" into a course of political action "they otherwise would not take."[9] Primoratz insinuates that terrorism is not about the perpetration of political violence; rather, it is about the threat of perpetrating it. Intimidation speaks volumes to the hearts and minds of people, particularly those that have witnessed a terrorist attack or heard of it, who feel that they might be next on the hit list. Psychological coercion is the immediate objective of a terrorist group that wants to cash in on the paralyzing terror felt by those who haven't been hit *yet*–rather than those directly affected. Thomas Hobbes, reflecting on life during wartime, observes that there is nothing worse than living in "continual fear and danger of violent death," and as long as this fear exists it would be impossible for the individual to focus on anything else.[10] Hobbes calls attention to the inevitable fact that the daily routine of the paralyzed, terrified subject is completely shattered because the feeling of helplessness conquers the person(s) in utter distress. Of course, Hobbes is here referring to wartime conditions. However, it is likely that a violent strike during peace, which is when terrorism usually irrupts, like an anomaly, would far more traumatize the subject because it would be experienced as something unexpected and "irrational."[11] The main constituent of the concept of terrorism, lying at its core, is the ingredient of terror, which entails that an act of terrorism, in the mind of the perpetrator, derives its supposed value from its ability to terrify; if it can't do that, it cannot possibly succeed in coercing its audience–witnesses and distant others–into taking a certain kind of action it would otherwise not take.

A second and just as important point made by Primoratz hinges on the idea that terrorism always has an audience that needs to be "persuaded" about the legitimacy of its political cause and the righteousness of its acts. To achieve their goals, terrorists usually inflict violence upon innocent noncombatants to send a dramatic message to their real audience: politicians, governments, institutions, and so on. In other words, the theatrical element is already inherent in how terrorists communicate their purposes, while rhetoric and symbolism permeate their communication with those in authority, usually the target group called upon to decipher the meaning behind a terrorist strike and successfully predict the place and time of a next attack. Intriguingly, it may also happen that there is no message or meaning behind an attack, in which case one might consider the possibility that terrorism creates its own realities or, better, "its own (hyperreal) *circumstances*," as Robert Appelbaum argues in the volume, drawing upon Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality: "In sending messages, terrorist violence engages in theatrics. And its theatrics is not merely an effort to influence public opinion; it is to change the circumstances of and for public opinion. That it comes with disruption, death, and destruction is part of the strategy or tactic."[12]

Terrorism derives its efficacy from its very suddenness. As I have argued elsewhere, an act of terrorism "associates itself with political agendas and motivations (or at least, it claims it does); moreover, its intention is to take a society (community, group, entity, etc.) by surprise as an imponderable, asymmetric factor that disrupts the normal cycle of human activity, an extremely violent *otherness* that feels 'unprecedented' to the human mind."[13] Terrorism is not an ideology but a tactic or methodology of which a terrible characteristic, especially in the post 9/11 era, is not just its abruptness but its irrationality, in addition to its non-fastidiousness in terms of the frequently random selection of the victims, what Berleant has called a "vicious lottery" in order to describe the haphazard nature of recent attacks related to Islamic or anti-Islamic fundamentalism. [14]

An act of terrorist violence relies heavily upon the images it creates. In fact, one could safely claim that in an age of unprecedented visuality–television, internet, social media, and the like–terrorism is constituted by its very image. If the image produced by the terrorist act is not shocking enough to not just grab the attention of the viewers but also horrify them, then the terrorist will not be able to communicate his or her message and affect (or manipulate) public opinion, one of the main targets of terrorism in the modern age. The unbelievable footage from the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks exemplifies

the primacy of the shocking image in the eyes of the terrorist and its dramatic impact upon distant viewers. Perhaps the most stunning and visually shocking terrorist attack in history before the September 11 horror was the Munich Olympics attack in 1972 perpetrated by a relatively new, at the time, Palestinian group called Black September. After a raid on the Olympic village, Black September killed two athletes of the Israeli Olympic team and captured nine more, in an attempt to shift the attention of Western audiences and governments to the Palestinian problem and demand the release of 234 political prisoners. The hit was unprecedented not only because it was carried out during the Olympic Games, a symbolic period of ceasefire and peace among nations, but mainly because it was widely televised. More than 800 million spectators were watching the games live when the attack occurred. All those distant, yet awe-struck viewers were called upon to make sense of what was going on, using their imagination while trying to process all the information coming from the media and the various journalistic narrativizations of the event.

By the late 1960s, the power of television to inform, influence, and, more seriously, shape public opinion was evident. Terrorists around the world were quick to grasp the significance of the TV in publicizing an issue, not to mention its ability to create an aesthetic spectacle connected with that issue through drama and narrativity, thereby giving terrorists the opportunity to mystify viewers and gain their favor. Publicity is terrorists' "life blood and their oxygen. No other medium has provided more oxygen to terrorism than television because of its ability to report the news instantly, nonstop, and in visuals and words from any place to all parts of the globe, a facility that has affected the reporting patterns of other media as well."[15] It could be argued that the media are very important not just in disseminating news on terrorism, but, ironically, in creating the circumstances for the terrorist incident. In essence, a "successful" attack is one that is witnessed by a global audience. In other words, there is complicity between media and terrorist groups to the extent that the terrifying images transmitted through the TV sets call attention to the political propaganda of the terrorists by appealing to the sensibilities of spectators. The aesthetics of terrorism "lies largely in its bizarre drama, its deliberately staged theatricality."[16] As Appelbaum contends, "the agents of terrorism are in a strange alliance with the witnesses of terrorism. An event occurs; the mass media respond; and a new, largely theatrical dialogue ensues, where the media mediate the meaning of what has occurred."[17] He refers to how sportscaster Jim McKay, looking as if he were not able to withhold his tears, addressed the audience thus: "We just got the final word . . . you know, when I was a kid, my father

used to say ‘Our greatest hopes and our worst fears are seldom realized.’ Our worst fears have been realized tonight.”[18] Despite the utter “materiality” of the event–the terrorist attack did happen–the drama unfolded in highly aesthetic terms. The journalist recalls his childhood, unconsciously asking his audience to become emotional and also fearful of the inconceivable. It is interesting, to say the least, that the audience is made to feel the full-blown reality of the Munich Olympics attack by means of an aesthetic (hence, somehow, fictional) presentation of the whole story.

In essence, the TV became the platform for the internationalization of terrorism in the 1960s. Terrorism turned international when terrorist organizations decided to step up their campaigns by rendering what used to be seen as a local cause into something much broader. Hijacking aircraft and capturing passengers as hostages internationalized their cause by involving also countries and citizens that were often irrelevant to their purposes. The more irrelevant the target, the more irrational the strike, hence the more horrifying and convincing the message behind the strike. Attacking noncombatants and hijacking commercial airliners internationalized terrorism and put a lot of psychological pressure upon governments, given that Western media were now taking much more interest in terrorists and their demands because the theater of operations was larger. Before the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a branch of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), took over an aircraft of Israel’s national airline on 22 July 1968, it used to unleash, together with the PLO, terrorist violence against the Israeli military infrastructure. But the world was hardly interested in military operations in remote, non-Western areas. Allegedly, with the new tactical change that involved innocent noncombatants, the international community would be forcibly re-sensitized to a serious problem of injustice. People around the world could not look away also because the feeling that nobody is safe anywhere would be overwhelming. A year later, in 1969, the PFLP hijacked a TWA flight taking off from Rome, diverted it to Algiers, evacuated it and blew it up on live TV. Regardless of the physical distance between the plane and the TV viewers, the latter could not help but witness in awe the unprecedented image of destruction, an aesthetic image that would undermine their sense of personal safety and unconsciously evoke the feeling that a change of political perspective was needed. The majority of the papers in this volume emphasize the dubious role of the image as propaganda either for terrorism or counterterrorism. We will see, for instance, how Palestinian TV programs use visual aesthetics to

"turn" the sensibilities of children and make them embrace the fight against Israel.[19]

Agents of terrorism frequently resort to symbolic and almost literary language to explain their actions. Admittedly, a terrorist usually attacks institutions for symbolic reasons, expecting that there will be collateral deaths in the process. We should not forget about one of the earliest twentieth-century terrorist occurrences in America, the Wall Street bombing in 1920, allegedly carried out by Italian anarchists, during which thirty-eight people were killed. While a strike is usually symbolic, it seems that the symbolism spills over into the terrorist's after-the-fact justifications for perpetrating the attack. Those justifications turn out to be really crucial, insofar as they unconsciously legitimate their horrific act in the minds of both terrorists and spectators. The Munich Olympics attack was indeed symbolic and highly innovative, since taking Israeli athletes as hostages on German territory could be interpreted, as it indeed was, as an act of equating the Israeli forces in Palestine with the Nazi occupiers in Europe in the Second World War.[20] Yet, the symbolism of an act is not the only thing that matters to perpetrators, who tend to aestheticize or represent through metaphor the outcome of their actions in order to legitimate their cause, attract new members, or even ingratiate themselves with the public. A few days after the Munich horror, there was a communiqué in a Beirut newspaper issued by the terrorists themselves, who celebrated their "achievement" thus: "A bomb in the White House . . . [or] an earthquake in Paris could not have echoed through the consciousness of every man in the world like the operation at Munich. . . . The choice of the Olympics, from the purely propagandistic view-point. . . was like painting the name of Palestine on a mountain . . . seen from the four corners of the earth."[21] On a similar note, Fatah leader Salah Khalef once declared that "we are planting the seed. Others will harvest it. . . ."[22]

3. The return to the material

Intriguingly, there is a paradox underlying such statements as the ones above, and that paradox is an intrinsically aesthetic one insofar as it bears on an unconscious negotiation between the literal and the metaphorical, both in terms of language and of praxis. Whereas terrorists frequently argue for the need to shake off people's political apathy by going back to the real and the literal, they ironically cling to the theoretical and the metaphorical to inspire the masses and ignite a revolution. It is important to remind ourselves, at this point, of one of the main pillars of terrorist (or "freedom fighter") mentality throughout the ages: the principle of the propaganda of the deed. That principle was first articulated in the nineteenth century by Carlo

Pisacane, an Italian anarchist, who expressed the idea that the masses needed to be inspired by a sensational hit against society rather than by theories and revolutionary pamphlets: "Propaganda of the idea is a chimera. The education of the people is an absurdity. Ideas result from deeds, not the latter from the former. . . . The only work a citizen can do for the good of the country is that of cooperating with the material revolution."[23] Pisacane thought that action would motivate the people to educate themselves and side with the revolution. Theory could not possibly lead to practice, while violence, by itself, was educative because of its didactic and moral aspects: "People would not be educated till they were free, and education did not precede freedom. In other words, physical violence was, by itself, a political language that could be spoken and understood."[24]

The propaganda of the deed called for the prioritization of materiality and a return to the real. In essence, this was an attempt to show the superiority of deeds over words, and that claim was also made by several other terrorist or revolutionary groups, including leftist organizations in Western democracies, such as the RAF in West Germany, the Weatherman in the US, and jihadist organizations like ISIS. Khalef's statement concerning Palestine is indicative of an equivocal concentration on "beautiful" language and aesthetics on the part of insurgents. Such a concentration is not necessarily exclusively attributable to a desire to fashion themselves as "artists" or to a spontaneous outpouring of enthusiasm about their own actions, but also to an attempt to attract future recruits by luring those into embracing their allegedly just, ethical, and, therefore, in their eyes, beautiful cause. Katya Mandoki, in the special volume, explains how aesthetics can easily slide into an ugly propaganda for a political, or other cause and how the abuse of aesthetics and a perverted sense of aesthetic education are signs of a radical unfreedom: "[B]eauty . . . can be used to incite violence. . . ." Aesthetic materials at the hands of terrorism might turn into "vehicles for glorifying murder and destruction."[25]

Aesthetic means are always important for the self-fashioning of terrorists, and also for the illustration of the superiority of their revolutionary or radical vision. More specifically, the aesthetic aspect of terrorist declarations and proclamations cannot be disengaged from the feeling that their call for a return to the palpable and the *real* amounts to a call for retrieving the "aesthesis" of things and materiality. That call assumes various forms in the agenda and politics of the majority of terrorist groups from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, probably constituting the through-line connecting a wide array of terrorist waves. Anarchist violence from the second half of

the nineteenth to the first two decades of the twentieth century prioritized action, for instance, political assassinations, for its sheer physicality and deep-seated irrationality. The appalling act of terror is a message in itself, the loud articulation (or, rather, "detonation") of which enables every citizen to wake up to a new and authentic reality.[26] While anarchism was on the wane after the end of World War I, it was anti-colonial and nationalist struggles that addressed the necessity of reattaching oneself to a palpable reality of essential freedom, as posited by Indian freedom fighter Bhagwati Charan Vohra in his book *The Philosophy of Bomb*,[27] or, just as significantly, by Ramdane Abane, the leader of the FLN in Algeria, who understood that revolutionary struggle would be effective only if it was transferred to civilian, non-military areas, so that it could dramatically affect the lives of innocent noncombatants, thereby shocking the international community by speaking to its heart and sense of humanity.[28] A reawakening of the senses and the retrieval of sensibility figured prominently in the demands made by leftist terrorist groups in Western democratic countries during the 1960s and 1970s. The Red Army Faction (RAF) in West Germany, for example, prepared every terrorist strike in such a way as to be received as primarily an aesthetic assault–an unannounced strike at the heart and the senses. At the same time, they perceived the human body to be a weapon against hypocrisy and the basic tool for redefining the human. For them, destruction was a new mode of celebrating humanity.[29]

The decline of nationalist and leftist terrorist violence towards the end of the 1980s was quickly followed by the rise of religious terrorism and, more particularly, Islamist fundamentalism in the 1990s, almost in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism, a turning point in recent history that resulted in the establishment of a single capitalist world order, synonymous with what we today call "globalization." There are various reasons for the rise of Islamist fundamentalism, and analyzing its historical or even sociological underpinnings does not fall within the scope of the present volume.[30] What is very significant for us to see is how the aesthetics of Islamist terrorism ties in with its political and religious expressions, interpretations, and representations. For the religious terrorist, violence is a "sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative. Terrorism thus assumes a transcendental dimension, and its perpetrators therefore often disregard the political, moral, or practical constraints that may affect other terrorists."[31] Terrorists inspired by religion view themselves as outsiders aiming at transforming the existing order, while "this sense of alienation also enables [them] to contemplate far more destructive and deadly types of terrorist operations than secular

terrorists."[32] Religious terrorists usually commit blind acts of terror against greater masses of people, mostly because they are under the delusion that they only answer to God, who has given them the authority to dispense justice as they think fit, a very empowering and aesthetically appealing picture to them, indeed. To render their messages as convincing as possible by appealing to the sense of horror, they prefer killing people, including themselves during suicide attacks, to taking hostages. In their mind, there are no innocent noncombatants; there are only soldiers at war, and urban areas are their battlefield.

Indiscriminate Islamist violence was unleashed, in a spectacular mode, by Al Qaeda, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, raising the bar for terror and simultaneously challenging the exceptionality of the West. The very images produced by the 9/11 attack were deemed so impressive and spectacular that they were associated, consciously or not, with cinematic fiction. Some thinkers and critics went as far as to claim that the impossible images evoked a sense of the sublime through their capacity to repulse and attract at the same time, while others took the opportunity to explore the limits of art in conjunction with terror, both as an event and a representation.[33] Kelsie Donnelly, in one of the essays for this volume, touches upon how performance art taps into such ambivalent feelings to make a statement on the precariousness and terror of the human condition, while Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, borrowing from Derrida, comments upon how representation, artistic or other, can be overcome through cruelty.[34] Jean Baudrillard, in his analysis of the spectacle of September 11, did not differentiate between the strike and its aesthetic aspects, holding that the terrorizing impact of 9/11 was inextricably bound up with the images produced. In other words, he meant that the terrorist attack at issue would be almost nothing without the images accompanying it, and it was obviously orchestrated in this way by the Al Qaeda terrorists. In fact, its symbolism was so great that its depiction as a "real" event has to be challenged:

> The collapse of the . . . towers is unimaginable, but that is not enough to make it a real event. An excess of violence is not enough to open on to reality. For reality is a principle . . . and it is this principle that is lost. . . . [T]he fascination with the attack is primarily a fascination with the image. . . . We try retrospectively to impose some kind of meaning on it . . . [and] there is none. And it is the radicality of the spectacle, the brutality of the spectacle, which alone is original and irreducible.[35]

4. Art, media, and counterterrorism

The violence unleashed by Al-Qaeda is symbolic, spectacular, and, as observed earlier, hyperreal, as contrasted to the practices of ISIS or the Islamic State, as we will see later.

Compared to the unprecedented image of 9/11, US counterterrorism, or the so-called War on Terror, has failed miserably:

> Subsequent attempts by the United States to stage spectacular events have failed. For example, the US effort to transform the military strategy of Shock and Awe into a spectacle, as it invaded Iraq in 2003, inflicted devastating human suffering but failed aesthetically. Live images like those shown on CNN were far from iconic and had relatively little visual impact.[36]

One may easily draw the conclusion that what is at stake is a war of images; indeed, an aesthetic rivalry that prevails over and, at the same time, determines, politics and ideologies. Al Qaeda's most impressive terrorist act represents a new kind of ultra-terrorism that combines accuracy, efficiency, inventiveness, and great lethality. It sent 3,000 people to their deaths and communicated a powerful and threatening message to viewers around the world, including citizens of the US, who were now experiencing for the first time on American soil what a massive terrorist strike felt like. Up until that point, for the majority of Western citizens, terror was just a remote image on the TV set that had hardly anything to do with their own personal lives.

Aside from the sensational, fiction-like, but bloodless image of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center (we never saw the actual killing of the people inside), there was some absolutely horrific footage of bloodied people in despair and horror having to decide, in a split second, whether to jump to their death from the World Trade Center or burn inside it. In the aftermath of the attacks, those images of "falling men" were quickly censored and hidden from view, not only because they defied the sense of decency, morality, and humanity, but, more significantly, because they undermined the narrative of the invulnerability of the American nation and, by extension, the image of robustness traditionally associated with Western Christianity. Donnelly emphasizes the utter state of abjection in which those victims found themselves, suspended between life and death, and clarifies that the very image of abjection went against the American dogma of innocence and the exceptionality of the American trauma. However, if politics and institutionalized media discourse blur the memory of horror by removing images of agony and mourning solely over American trauma, which will eventually heal because the nation is supposedly strong, it is radical art, or abject art, that can preserve the memory of the atrocity by presenting the forbidden image and showing the persons in complete abject-hood.[37] The abject artist is emblematized in novelistic writing by Don de Lillo's "falling man," the performance artist irregularly

re-enacting the real fall of those trapped in the WTC. The artist functions as a kind of terrorist, who "does not obliterate the boundaries between life and death, or victim and terrorist, but refigures them instead through the affective response that his art elicits."[38] Arguably, radical art is in a position to blow the cover not only of conventional art, but also of hegemonic and polarizing narratives, such as the counterterrorist narrative of good versus evil. In this context, the image of the artist/terrorist is paradoxically a positive and benign one, in the sense that it serves as an ethical reminder of the inescapability of death and ever presence of terror in dangerous times, in the face of optimistic and sanitizing counterterrorist myths that obfuscate the reality of tragedy and trauma.

But if radical art is capable of disrupting the sanitizing narrative of the War on Terror via the forbidden image of the abject's body, institutionalized art, such as TV shows about crime and terrorism, like *CSI* or *NCIS*, for instance, exposes viewers, via its wound aesthetic, to all the gory details and graphic scenes that they were spared during and the immediate aftermath of 9/11, thereby appearing to critique the entire logic of the War on Terror based upon the principle of non-vulnerability, as Chris Davies argues in the volume, thus, unknowingly "responding" to Donnelly's paper. On the other hand, as Davies observes, such TV shows, ironically, end up reasserting the counterterrorist, neoconservative discourse "with consistent, late-narrative reorientations of the wound that draw audience attention *away* from the body and onto the accuracy and reliability of advanced scientific technology," thus providing "a recuperative narrative about the State's ability to respond to political violence."[39] An unwavering reliance upon the power of science and technology is a structural element of both forensic dramas treated in this volume, *CSI* and *NCIS*, and an integral part of their counterterrorist aesthetics, but the important element herein is that in both shows that reliance, which is accompanied by suspicion of conventional narration, serves to eliminate the uncertainty of the post-9/11 world and temporarily eradicate the fear of death by terrorism.[40] Television forensic drama oscillates between showing and simultaneously withholding images of violence reminiscent of both the 9/11 terror and the War on Terror. Spectators are required to aesthetically "appreciate" the carnage, but without immersing themselves in it for too long. Nonetheless, as Davies insinuates, even scenes of graphic violence and dehumanization did not seem to subvert the dominant counterterrorist discourse after 9/11. Real images of falling men, construed earlier as radical witnesses to human abjection and the brutality of violence, were readily exploited by institutionalized discourse and the entertainment industry as signifiers of the heroism, rather than abject-hood, of the victims.

5. Jihad, imagination, and the aesthetics of brutality

Writing on modernity and Islamism, John Gray makes the claim that "Islamist movements think of violence as a means of creating a new world, and in this they belong not in the medieval past but the modern West."[41] Bornstein makes the very interesting allegation that ISIS is actually a futurist, or futurist-like, movement, inspired by modernist Italian Futurism and the latter's fascination with the machine and material reality. Early twentieth-century Futurism was a utopian optimistic movement that had a deep-rooted faith in creating a better future society. As Bornstein argues, by contrast to postmodernity's dystopian and profoundly pessimistic, or nihilistic, dismissal of the authentic and the real in favor of the virtual, the ironic, and the spectacular, Futurist modernity developed an unswerving faith in the palpable, the material, and the analogical, and it was precisely that faith that attracted ISIS fighters and supporters.[42] The "culture" of ISIS seems to revisit twentieth-century terrorism's fascination with violence, cruelty, and materiality as true signs of an authentic existence and real humanity. Let us be reminded that various groups of the previous century had already resorted to terror as a means of shaking the crowds out of their apathy and indifference and awakening them to the necessity of revolution for the sake of regaining the aesthesis of reality. What is more, in the case of ISIS, "a new category of propaganda of the deed arises since the brutality of the terrorist act is prioritized over the religious principles the act is supposedly founded upon: the real emerges as something which is above rational or religious explication of any kind. . . ."[43]

Jihadism, as an aesthetic entity or even "a magical" or "catch-all phrase point[ing] to the embodiment of an apocalypse, [and] the sublime realization of God's will at the expense of . . . nonbelievers" lies at the center of the Islamist terrorism of ISIS.[44] Islamist radicalism lapses into terrorism once the religious element is transformed into a political message or, to employ the terminology we used earlier on, when metaphor turns into sheer literarity. They "will go for dogmatism and not for irony."[45] Desperate to find real-life examples for the metaphorical and metaphysical lessons extracted from the Quran, and eager to adopt an exclusivist rather than pluralist reading of the holy book, Islamists throw themselves into terror to be able to connect their own system of beliefs to actual reality. This attempt could be seen as motivated by an aesthetic kind of morality; that is, by a set of transcendental ideas–the virtue of jihad, Islamic paradise, the coming of the caliphate, or the superiority of the sharia law–that are already shot through with an aestheticized vision of oneself as someone who, by "sacrificing" himself in a suicide attack, is given access to a

material paradise with seventy-two virgins awaiting him: "the reward must always be aesthetic even if the narrative, excuse or ideal is presented as moral," as Mandoki argues.[46] In a similar tone, Bornstein holds that "religious fanatics are puritans whose minds are attuned to what they think of as transcendental ideas. . . . However, even though they aspire to a metaphysical world, quite paradoxically it is concrete corporeal pleasures that allegedly await them in the metaphysical afterlife."[47]

The very notion of jihad plays into the fantasies of both the Islamic constituency and Westerners wishing to experience a supposedly authentic experience, an adventure, away from the apathy, consumerism, and complacency of living in the West. Taking "jihad" literally rather than metaphorically, namely, as a physical rather than spiritual struggle, entails the annihilation of all infidels and the realization of an essentially utopian as well as non-traditionalist society ruled by brutality:

> [Right after they established the Caliphate] [t]hey began to impose their strict fundamentalist vision: . . . "infidels" (non-Muslims, those who refused to publicly endorse their ideology and even those accused of petty crimes like drinking alcohol) were tried and, in many cases, executed; women were forced into marriages and then raped; Christians were publicly crucified and left to die slowly over the course of several days. . . .[48]

ISIS' preference for the "real" and the material was exemplified more recently by the shift from "corporeal" terrorism, like lynching and ritualized executions staged for the camera, to a more "quotidian," or casual, as I have called it,[49] type of "pedestrian" shootings–the November 15, 2015 multiple killings in Paris being a case in point–that typically constitute one-off events, snapshots of which are disseminated by social media arresting "a sense of frequency of violence" and breaking away from the sublime and spectacular aesthetic of the 9/11 type.[50] If, as we noted in the beginning of the introduction, terrorist abnormality is the new normal, then the shift to casual or quotidian terror shows that normality is the natural background of contemporary violence.

ISIS has proven its ability to inspire terrorism on a global level more than Al Qaeda did in the past. Understandably, news of the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of ISIS, on 26 October 2019, a few days before the publication of this volume, was largely received with feelings of relief. ISIS had managed to recruit at least 30,000 foreign citizens, 5,000 of whom were from the European continent, while in 2014 there were up to 70,000 active Twitter accounts used by ISIS sympathizers, which demonstrates the organization's keen recruitment and propaganda strategies.[51] ISIS' purpose was multiple: ignite a feeling of fear and insecurity, provoke extreme counterterrorist

reaction, thus uniting Muslims in an anti-Western cultural or civilizational war, and, finally, inspire additional attacks by various sympathizers, who would try to imitate or outbid the terrorists by mimicking or improving their techniques. All those objectives have a bearing on the aesthetic, rhetorical, symbolic and communicational aspects of ISIS terrorism. When it comes to ISIS, the widely circulated idea that terrorism is contagious is perhaps not as serious as the idea that it is actually fear of terrorism that is contagiously spreading around the globe; in essence, what is at issue is fear of the future itself: "The danger comes less from ISIS actions than from our own (over)reactions."[52] Arguably, the declaration of war against terrorism and the adoption of measures of exception are two sides of the same coin. Counterinsurgent action and state terrorism are frequently complementary to each other, or, to put it better, there is an extremely thin line between counterterrorism and the stifling of the individual instinct for liberty. In times of terror like ours, governments pose a critical dilemma to the people, asking them to decide what they value more, freedom or safety. It's up to the people to demand both.

This special volume of *Contemporary Aesthetics* presents a fascinating diversity of themes, demonstrating the various ramifications of terrorism as an aesthetic and affective experience and navigating a wide spectrum of the aesthetics of terror and terrorist, and also counterterrorist, activity from the perspective of media, philosophy, literature, and art. Without a doubt, to talk about aesthetics and terrorism in the same breath may be a serious cause of misunderstanding. In his important critical intervention in this volume, Berleant asks that we remove Kantian disinterestedness from the act of aesthetically appreciating terrorism because, as he insists, only an engaged, rather than disinterested, kind of appreciation can do justice to the horror of terrorist atrocity insofar as it testifies to the "moral significance of aesthetic experience."[53] All papers in this volume attend to the need to respond to the question of terror and terrorism through aesthetic approaches that do not preclude but rather ensure the activation of the instinct for ethics and individual and social responsibility. Opening Pandora's terror box by aesthetic means is a risk, yet one that is worth taking. After all, according to the myth, hope, in the sense of "expectation," was the only element that remained inside the box.[54]

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Endnotes

[1] Interestingly, that increase followed a steady decrease of terrorist incidents in the period 2007-2013. For more on this, see *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report: TE-SAT 2016*, The Hague: Europol, 2016; the *Global Terrorism Database* (GTD) https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd, accessed July 25, 2019; and also, *Global Terrorism Index* 2015 http://globalterrorismindex.org, accessed July 26, 2019.

[2] Emmanouil Aretoulakis, "Aesthetic Appreciation, Ethics, and 9/11," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, vol. 6 (2008), section 3. https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=510&searchstr=aretoulakis, accessed July 29, 2019.

See also my book, *Forbidden Aesthetics, Ethical Justice, and Terror in Modern Western Culture* (Lanham: Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), for a discussion of such alternative insights.

[3] Arnold Berleant, "Reflections on the Aesthetics of Violence," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Special Volume 7: "Aesthetics and Terrorism" [2019]), sections 1 and 4.

[4] Michael C. Frank, "Conjuring up the Next Attack: the Future-Orientedness of Terror and the Counterterrorist Imagination," *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 8,1 (2015), pp. 90-109.

[5] Gene Ray, "History, The Sublime, Terror: Notes on the Politics of Fear," in *Signals in the Dark: Art in the Shadow of War*, ed. Seamus Kealy (Blackwood Gallery/University of Toronto, 2008), p. 26. Actually, as is well-known, the very origin of modern terrorism is the Terror imposed by Robespierre upon his own subjects in the aftermath of the French revolution.

[6] Thomas Renard, "Fear Not: A Critical Perspective on the Terrorist Threat in Europe," *Egmont Security Police Brief*, 77, September 2016, p. 5. http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2016/09/SPB77.pdf?type=pdf, accessed June 15, 2019.

[7] It is an established fact that members of the Red Army Faction were trained in PLO paramilitary camps in Jordan in 1969, and that the PLO was partly indebted to the FLN Algerian Independence movement and the Cypriot EOKA for its methods and tactics. The two examples prove that terrorist organizations admired and imitated some of their colleagues and predecessors, and yearned to be like them.

[8] Renard, p. 1.

[9] Igor Primoratz, *Terrorism: A Philosophical Investigation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 24.

[10] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.89.

[11] Terrorism does not thrive during war. The natural "habitat" of terrorism is peace. In the case of anti-state terrorism, extreme violence creeps surreptitiously into the established order and provokes chaos, whereas in the case of state terrorism, violence silently infiltrates the social body in order to preserve the established order.

[12] Baudrillard's idea is that we are living in an age of simulation and the problem now is not message sending and receiving in a given reality, but that there is "no reality apart from hyperreality," where "message-sending-and-receiving has taken on a life of its own." See Robert Appelbaum, "The Aesthetics of Terrorism and the Temporalities of Representation," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Special Volume 7: "Aesthetics and Terrorism" [2019]), section 1; and also Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant (Los Angeles: Sage, 1993).

[13] Emmanouil Aretoulakis, *Terrorism and Literariness: The Terrorist Event in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries*, Athens: Hellenic Academic Libraries, 2015, https://repository.kallipos.gr/cloud-reader-lite/index.html?epub=exports/5120/unzipped, Introduction, accessed September 3, 2019.

[14] Arnold Berleant, "Art, Terrorism and the Negative Sublime," *Contemporary Aesthetics* 7 (2009), section 2. https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=568&searchstr=berleant, accessed September 2, 2019.

[15] Brigitte L. Nacos, "Terrorism as Breaking News: Attack on America," *Political Science Quarterly*, 118, 1 (Spring 2003): 23-52, 30.

[16] Berleant, "Reflections on the Aesthetics of Violence," section 4.

[17] Appelbaum, section 1. The author explains also that the way we represent terrorism through media, film, or narrative comes in at least four temporal modes: we describe it as something that happened, that has happened, that is happening, or, simply, that happens (Appelbaum, section 3). The modality of "it happened" probably subscribes to the concept of terrorism as something totally unaccounted for.

[18] *Ibid*., section 2.

[19] Katya Mandoki, "Letters on the Aesthetic Deformation of Man," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Special Volume 7: "Aesthetics and Terrorism" [2019])

[20] This is similar to what had happened three years earlier in Germany, when the leftist terrorist organization called RAF put a bomb at a synagogue on the anniversary of the 1938 Crystal Night in Nazi Germany, during which there was a pogrom against Jews. By this act, RAF, which was affiliated with the PLO and PFLP, wanted to show that the Israelis had now taken the place of the Nazis in illegally occupying a land. There is an unquestionable aesthetic dimension in terrorist groups' preference to communicate an idea in a dramatic or theatrical fashion before they articulate it with words in the form of a communiqué.

[21] Al-Sayad, September 13, 1972. Quoted in Guy R. Sanan, "Olympic Security, 1972-1996: Threat, Response, and International Cooperation" (Ph.D. diss., St Andrews University, 1997), p. 77.

[22] Jim Hoagland, "A Community of Terror," *Washington Post*, 15 March 1973, pp. 1. Fatah's previous name was the Palestinian National Liberation Movement and has been closely associated with its founder Yasser Arafat.

[23] Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism 1864-1892* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 13.

[24] Emmanouil Aretoulakis, *Terrorism and Literariness: The Terrorist Event in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries*,

Athens: Hellenic Academic Libraries, 2015, https://repository.kallipos.gr/cloud-reader-lite/index.html?epub=exports/5120/unzipped, chapter 1.2, accessed September 3, 2019.

[25] Katya Mandoki, "Letters," section 5, and Conclusions.

[26] Check out Johann Most's and Peter Kropotkin's ideas, for instance, in W. Laqueur, and Y. Alexander, eds., *The Terrorism Reader: A Historical Anthology*, rev. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1987), pp. 105-6.

[27] In his treatise, Vohra elaborates upon how terrorism "shatters the spell of the subject race in the eyes of the world, because it is the most convincing proof of a nation's hunger for freedom. . . ." See Laqueur, *The Terrorism Reader*, pp. 137-40.

[28] In other terms, the French-speaking community and the European colonists in Algeria "had to be dragged out of their cosmopolitan indifference by being forced to feel, rather than understand on an intellectual level, that they did not belong there." See Aretoulakis, *Terrorism and Literariness*, chapter 3.1. Check out also Frantz Fanon's theorizing of the importance of the Algerian revolution (1954-1962) as a means of establishing a sense of national, and subsequently cultural, identity and awareness. See Frantz *Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 244-245.

[29] One can get a taste of the fusion of aesthetics and politics in leftist organizations from the following passage: "For them, there is no connection between the vision that drives them and the existing reality that, they feel, keeps them in chains; therefore destruction is the only form of freedom they can accept. . . . [T]he decision to become revolutionaries is the beginning of becoming human. . . . They are fascinated by the magic of the extremes, the hard and uncompromising either/or, life or death . . . 'pig' or man–with nothing in between." See Gunter Rohrmoser, *AnalysenzumTerrorismus*, vol. 2 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1981), p. 87. Quoted in Konrad Kellen, "Ideology and Rebellion: Terrorism in West Germany," in *Origins of Terrorism. Psychologies, ideologies, theologies, states of mind*, ed. Walter Reich (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1990, 1998), pp.43-58, p. 50.

[30] Those historical reasons are certainly connected with the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and also the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the same year when Arab mujahedeen, trained by United States forces, organized and resisted the invaders, thus foreshadowing the global wave of jihadism in the years to come. It would be useful for our discussion to say that the kind of religious fundamentalism we are grappling with, as it evolved at the end of the twentieth century, is probably not a revival of

older fundamentalisms, insofar as it does not call for a return to traditional values, but rather represents a force of resistance to globalization, which is a recent phenomenon. More information on this in Peter R. Neumann, *Old and New Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), pp. 93-94.

[31] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p.88.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 89.

[33] Arnold Berleant explores the 9/11 images as instances of a negative, rather than positive, sublimity in his "Art, Terrorism and the Negative Sublime" cited earlier, whereas my own take on the attacks hinges upon the idea of an evocation of the forbidden, but paradoxically ethical, feeling of the beautiful in the face of terror. See Aretoulakis, "Aesthetic Appreciation, Ethics, and 9/11," cited earlier. For insightful analyses of the aesthetic resonances of 9/11, check out Roland Bleiker, "Aestheticizing Terrorism: Alternative Approaches to 11 September," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 49,3 (2003): pp. 430-445; Frank Lentricchia, and Jody McAuliffe, "Groundzeroland," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101, 2 (Spring 2002): pp. 349-59. For an exploration of the artistically possible in reference to terror and violence, check out Damien Hirst, Interview, from *The Guardian*, 11 September 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/sep/11/arts.september11, accessed October 10, 2019; and, of course, Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Attacks Called Great Art," *New York Times*, September 19, 2001, https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/arts/attacks-called-great-art.html, accessed September 1, 2019.

[34] Kelsie Donnelly, "The Power of Horror: Abject Art and Terrorism in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Special Volume 7: "Aesthetics and Terrorism" [2019]); and Thorsten Botz Bornstein, "ISIS and Futurist Terrorism Versus Cyberpunk," *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Special Volume 7: "Aesthetics and Terrorism" [2019]).

[35] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 28-30.

[36] Marshall Battani and Michaelyn Mankel, "Terrorist Aesthetics as Ideal Types: from Spectacle to 'Vicious Lottery,'" *Contemporary Aesthetics* 15 (2017), section 4. https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article

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