



The Conflation of Terrorism and Literature:

9/11 and the Aesthetics of Horror and Terror

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ABSTRACT

Our era seems to have indeed become marred by the sweep of diseased ideological politics, widespread violent acts and the outbreak of the plague of terrorism. As a result, terrorism established a stronghold on the minds of artists, authors and intellectuals. In fact, many of those who write about terrorism, art and literature address a perceived link between them in the realm of aesthetics. Critics see modern terrorism as not just a political phenomenon but also as an act that incorporates aspects of media, aesthetics, performance art, and symbolism. Though criticizing the similarities between literature and terror is not new, it has become particularly exaggerated since the events of the 9/11. The terrorist attacks on the American soil, which are considered as the most important event in the new millennium, have led to resume the old disputes concerning the conflation of terrorism and art. Therefore, this paper shall look at the mode in which literature responds to the narrative challenges of portraying violence and atrocities after the 9/11. This paper will thus examine the aesthetic and structural similarities between terrorism and literature that are highlighted in recent readings of terrorism to clarify the challenging role of novelists writing terror and to explain the problematic state in critics' eyes in which artists find themselves vis-à-vis terrorism.

الدمج بين الإرهاب والأدب : أحداث 11

سبتمبر وجماليات الرعب والإرهاب

الملخص

يبدو أن العصر الحالي أصبح مشوها بالسياسات و الأيديولوجيات العقيمة، و ظواهر العنف المنتشرة و وباء الإرهاب المتفشي. نتيجة لذلك أحكم الإرهاب قبضته على عقول الفنانين والمؤلفين والمتقنين. في الواقع العديد من أولئك الذين يكتبون عن الإرهاب والفن والأدب يرون أن هناك علاقة بينهم في مجال الجماليات. يرى المنتقدون أن الإرهاب الحديث ليس مجرد ظاهرة سياسية بل أيضا هو كفعل يتضمن مظاهر من وسائل الإعلام و الجماليات وفنون الأداء والرمزية. سوف تدرس هذه المقالة أيضا التشابهات البنيوية بين الإرهاب والأدب التي قد ألقى عليها الضوء في القراءات الأخيرة للإرهاب و ذلك لتوضيح الدور الصعب للروائيين وشرح الحالة الجدلية المطروحة من طرف النقاد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإرهاب، الجماليات،



Introduction

Our era seems to have indeed become marred by the sweep of diseased ideological politics, widespread violent acts and the outbreak of the plague of terrorism. As a result, terrorism established a stronghold on the minds of artists, authors and intellectuals. Thus, this paper will examine some critical voices in order to better portray the problematic history of the connections between terror-wreaking and novel writing.

In fact, many of those who write about terrorism, art and literature address a perceived link between them in the realm of aesthetics. These critics such as Lentricchia Frank, McAuliffe Jody and Looney Mark Einer see modern terrorism as not just a political phenomenon but also as an act that incorporates aspects of media, aesthetics, performance art, and symbolism. They argue that terrorists and artists are similar because they both understand how to create dramatic, symbolic events that have a profound effect on their audiences. Both groups are skillful at the use of media, images, language and rhetoric. Indeed, numerous new literary theories were born from the ashes of the twin towers on the 9/11. The power of international terrorism indeed puts the uses of literature into question.

Therefore, this paper shall look at the mode in which literature responds to the narrative challenges of portraying violence and atrocities after the 9/11. Actually, plotting terrorism in popular culture is troubled with moral and artistic complications. It might reopen the silent wounds as it might legitimize it. At this juncture, it is worth noting that authors who write about terrorism have fallen prey to much criticism. Critics typically ask what sort of violent destructive desires of the author are given voice in his/her portrayal of terrorism. However, it is thought that the representation of trauma, horror and terror contains the power to derive pleasure from the aesthetic form.

This paper will thus examine the aesthetic and structural similarities between terrorism and literature that are highlighted in recent readings of terrorism to clarify the challenging role of novelists writing terror and to explain the problematic state in critics' eyes in which artists find themselves vis-à-vis terrorism.

1. Terrorism as Avant-garde Art: The Aesthetization of Violence

The German critic Mark Einer Looney claims that the conflation of terrorism and art often occurs because there are, on certain levels, similarities between the two; however, the extent of the similarities is more structural than ideological. A second possible connection between literature or art and terrorism comes from a similar line of thinking, which sees in acts of political violence the realization of *avant-garde* artists' – especially the Surrealists– desires to break down the barrier between art and life, between word and deed, between the symbolic order and the real world (4-6).

In fact, the roles of art and literature are questioned after fearsome acts of terrorism such as genocides during the World Wars or any other enormities. Echoing Theodore W. Adorno, who argued: "*writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,*" how could any of us entertain an "*aesthetic*" after witnessing terrorism first-hand or feeling its horror? What possible spectacle could art give us that even comes close to the power of moments of terror, awe and grief? Adorno's widely publicized view that there should be



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no poetry after Auschwitz has caused a good deal of mischief. Adorno did not mean, of course, that no poetry could be written about the holocaust. His fear was precisely that the poets, by bestowing form and meaning upon the atrocity and acts of terror, would thereby seem to justify them (Ziolkowski 135).

In any artistic portrayal of terrorism and real atrocities, there are many risks. There is the risk of trivializing human suffering in the name of art or, worse still, entertainment. There is the risk of presenting what Susan Sontag calls a “*terrible distinctness*” in the artistic portrayal of such “*unnecessary, indecent information*” (56). There is the risk of fueling an abhorrent fascination with, or a chilling indifference towards, bodily suffering. There is the risk of resorting to implausible happy-ever-after outcomes quite at odds with the traumatic horrors of war or genocide. Lawrence Langer, writing about Holocaust literature, asks:

How should art – how can art – represent the inexpressibly inhuman suffering of the victims, without doing an injustice to that suffering? [...] There is something disagreeable, almost dishonorable, in the conversion of the suffering of victims into works of art (Blundell, “Literature of Atrocity”).

However, on September 16, 2001, Karlheinz Stockhausen, the German avant-garde composer, a pioneer of electronic music, and a figure of international renown, was asked at a news conference in Hamburg for his reaction to the terrorist strikes in the United States. He responded by calling the attack of the 9/11 as “*the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos*” and went on to speak in apparent awe of the terrorists’ achievement of “*something in one act*” that “*we couldn’t even dream of in music,*” in which “*people practice like crazy for ten years, totally fanatically for a concert, and then die*” (Lentricchia and McAuliffe 06).

Stockhausen’s fascination is all about the transformation of the World Trade Center into a narrative of spectacular images; i.e. terrorism for the camera. However, Stockhausen is not interested in the images only. It is the event itself that entrances him. The event itself is what he means by “*the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos.*” His incendiary artistic analogy is seriously intended, and he pursues it: “*You have people so concentrated on one performance, and then 5,000 people are dispatched into eternity, in a single moment.*” In the face of such achievement, might Stockhausen be the lesser artist? A touch of envy —envy of terrorism—appears to creep in. “*I couldn’t do that. In comparison with that, we’re nothing as composers*” (Ibid.). It could be said that not only Stockhausen is captivated with the 9/11 attack, because the New York site of the attack became “Ground zero land,” a Mecca for tourists.

For Karlheinz Stockhausen the origins of modern terrorism lie in the aesthetic protest of a group of long dead artists. For that reason, he felt compelled to examine terrorism not as citizen or political commentator but as a specialist in the world of the aesthetic. His comments signaled a new socio-cultural paradigm turning terrorism into a culture.

When Stockhausen says that what happened in New York on September 11 “also” may happen in art, or art is worthless, he tells us that his intentions as an artist are as ambitious as those of the terrorists, that he wants art to have that kind of force. The



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terrorists achieved what Stockhausen's kind of artist aspires to. They seized and transformed consciousness (Lentricchia and McAuliffe 11). As the American writer, Don DeLillo puts it in his novel *Falling Man* (1992): “*What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought*” (157).

The case is then often made that, in regards to their broadest goals, terrorists are creators of images to form aesthetic experiences in their “audiences” that should, they hope, be marked by fear and shock. In more traditional terms, the American authors and critics Lentricchia Frank, and McAuliffe Jody stated that there were authors (bin Laden, Atta, etc.); there was a plot—a structure of events with deep narrative inevitability; there were thousands of characters—but with no choice in turning down the role, with no knowledge that they had been cast to die. Besides, there was an audience with no choice but to experience terrorist narrative once that narrative found its true medium of communication, the media without which terrorist art is ineffective and which complicitously completes its totalitarian trajectory (14).

For instance, as Mark Juergensmeyer has argued that terrorist attacks are “dramatic events” intended to impress for their symbolic significance; their deeds are not just violence, but performance violence designed to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect (123-24). He added that the point of terrorism is not just publicity but to have a specific effect on the act's witnesses: “*terrorism without its horrified witnesses would be as pointless as a play without an audience*” (139). Consequently, terrorists often direct their attention toward targets that are deeply resonant. As Joseph Conrad's Russian diplomat in *The Secret Agent*, Mr. Vladimir, noted in his lecture on “*the philosophy of bomb throwing,*” for maximum effect the violence should be directed against the ideological heart, or “sacrosanct fetish,” of the day; for Conrad, that “fetish” was “science,” hence Vladimir's directing Verloc to blow up the Greenwich Observatory (24).

Therefore, terrorist acts offer, for the “target audience,” an *aesthetic experience*. This is because “successful” terrorist acts are, on a structural level, products of and in a medium; this necessary prerequisite of a medium is paralleled in works of art. In this way, a terrorist attack is not greatly different from a movie, TV show, or performance art piece. Bruce Hoffman describes the structure of a terrorist attack from a political science perspective:

The modern news media, as the principal conduit of information about such acts, thus play a vital part in the terrorists' calculus. Indeed, without the media's coverage the act's impact is arguably wasted, remaining narrowly confined to the immediate victim(s) of the attack rather than reaching the wider “target audience” at whom the terrorists' violence is actually aimed [...] “*Terrorism is theatre,*” Brian Jenkins famously declared in his seminal 1974 paper, explaining how terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of



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the electronic media and the international press
(Looney 08).

Indeed, we have always been fascinated by cultural depictions of terrorism. Terrorism is like destruction contains what William Butler Yeats famously calls a "terrible beauty." We need to complicate the analysis of this specific kind of beauty by thinking of representations of terrorism as narrative form, as a specific manifestation of culture's attempt to narrativise the relationship between our existence and the external world. Terrorism is not just terrifying, but the spectacle of terrorism, its overwhelming power and potential for radical change, has a distinct aesthetic, sublime appeal.

In order to flesh out the idea of terrorism as an avant-garde art, it is worth to refer to the history of the *avant-garde* to clarify the similar line of thinking, which sees in acts of political violence the realization of *avant-garde* artists'. It has been Avant-garde artists who for more than a century have called for the violent destruction of existing aesthetic, social, and political systems. Of French origin, *avant-garde* _cognate to *vanguard* and *van_* has been used in English since the end of the fifteenth century. The Oxford English Dictionary states that the *avant-garde* is "[t]he foremost part of an army" but also refers to being "ahead" or "first" in any number of circumstances. At the start of the nineteenth century, the term was taken up by social activists, Utopians and artists to signify those ahead of the rest of society. The word kept its militancy, especially among artists.

Here are a few exemplary quotations, roughly decade by decade, from a large repertory: 1909, from F. T. Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto": "*Beauty exists only in struggle. There is no masterpiece that has not an aggressive character. Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man. . . . We want to demolish museums and libraries. ... For art can only be violence, cruelty, injustice*" (Quoted in Schechner 1821). 1918, from Tristan Tzara's "Second Dada Manifesto": "*[W]e are preparing the great spectacle of disaster, conflagration and decomposition. Preparing to put an end to mourning, and to replace tears by sirens spreading from one continent to another*" (Ibid.). 1938, from Andre Breton and Leon Trotsky s manifesto Towards a Free Revolutionary Art: "*[T]rue art is unable not to be revolutionary, not to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society*" (Ibid.). In fact, these manifestoes disappeared and artists stopped advocating violence more likely because of World War II, the atomic bombs and the fears engendered by the cold war; calling for violence no longer seemed wise or ethical.

In addition to that, a similarity between terrorists' plots and a sinister artistic avant-gardist genre, namely, *Theatre of Cruelty* can be deduced. This genre is an experimental theatre that was proposed by the French poet, actor, and theorist Antonin Artaud and that became a major influence on avant-garde 20th century theatre.

Artaud sought to remove aesthetic distance, bringing the audience into direct contact with the dangers of life. By turning theatre into a place where the spectator is exposed rather than protected, Artaud was committing an act of cruelty upon them (Jamieson 23).



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A largely movement-based performance style, *Theatre of Cruelty* aimed to shock the senses of its audience, sometimes using violent and confronting images that appealed to the emotions. Text was given a reduced emphasis in Artaud's theatre, as dance and gesture became just as powerful as the spoken word. Piercing sound and bright stage lights bombarded the audience during performances. Artaud experimented with the relationship between performer and audience, preferring to place spectators at the very center of a performance surrounding them. His intention was to trap the audience inside the drama as hostages.

Indeed, in the present days, the walls between the real and the virtual have crumbled, the theatrical and the actual have merged. What terrorism offers everyday is a spectacle of cruelty in the Artaudian sense par-excellence. Artaud's importance to avant-garde theater is canonical, but he might also be writing a scenario for al-Qaeda or ISIS:

The Theatre of Cruelty proposes to resort to a mass spectacle; to seek in the agitation of tremendous masses, convulsed and hurled against each other, a little of that poetry of festivals and crowds when, all too rarely nowadays, the people pour out into the streets. The theatre must give us everything that is in crime, love, war, or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity. ... Hence this appeal to cruelty and terror ... on a vast scale (85-86).

Additionally, at least since 1971, when Chris Burden, an American artist, had a friend shoot him in the arm, many performance artists have wounded themselves, opened their veins as art, suspended themselves from hooks, slaughtered animals, and in manifold ways used real violence in the arts. Rituals _arts close relation_ include flagellation, scarring, circumcision, subincision, and so on. Popular culture is full of tattoos, piercings, and cosmetic surgeries, which, whatever their psychological and sociological meanings, enact the desire to be beautiful. Aestheticizing and ritualizing violence, not as representations (as in the visual arts, theater, or other media) but as actual acts performed in the here and now, are widespread. But, you might argue, except for the rituals, the manifestos, performance art, and violent practices of popular culture are largely a part of Western civilization, a system that Osama bin Laden and his allies explicitly despise, stand apart from, and wish to destroy (Schechner 1822).

In addition to that, the German philosopher Thorsten Botz-Bornstein thinks that ISIS's use of modern high tech strategies to spread its ideology is paralleled with the Italian avant-gardist artistic movement *Futurism*. Thorsten assumes that the Islamic State does not only excel through the extensive use of high-tech weapons, social media, commercial bot, and automated text systems; by putting forward the presence of speeding cars and tanks, mobile phones, and computers, ISIS presents jihad life as connected to modern urban culture. His study shows that the aesthetics of the Islamic State is "futurist" by comparing it with Italian Futurism. Futurism glorified cars, industrial machines, and modern cities while praising violence as a means of leaving behind imitations of the past in order to project itself most efficiently into the future. A profound sense of crisis produces in both Futurism and jihadism a nihilistic attitude toward the present state of society that will be overcome through an exaltation of



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technology. The futurist project to integrate life and art is paralleled by ISIS's desire to integrate life and religion. In both cases, the result is achieved through violence. In the end, a nihilism towards life leads both futurists and ISIS to a curious "death-style" philosophy (Botz-Bornstein 11).

On the other hand, *New York Times* classical music critic, Anthony Tommasini, wrote a particular scathing potent response to Stockhausen's remarks in his article about the aesthetics of terror and the intersection of art and violence: "*Art may be hard to define, but whatever art is, it's a step removed from reality. A theatrical depiction of suffering may be art; real suffering is not*" ("The Devil Made him Do it"). Therefore, the images of death, bloodshed, destruction, blazing buildings, mutilation, however horrifically compelling, are truth, not art.

Indeed, Anthony Tommasini thinks that there is something despicable about translating real terror and violence into art. As Robert MacDonald says in his introduction to Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* in 1970:

The position of the artist in dealing with material of this nature is particularly difficult. As the one man whose imagination should be capable of mastering such material, he is necessarily compelled to try to do so. Yet it is the nature of artistic experience that, if it cannot be directly absorbed as being immediately relevant to its audience, it will inevitably degenerate more or less into a purely aesthetic stimulus, exciting or depressing as this case may be... The danger inherent in this view is that it is all too easy to begin to appreciate the play of colour, light and form in the mushroom cloud, as it hangs over the stricken city, because the enormities that are taking place below it are no longer possible to grasp (ix).

In fact, when the avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen called the destruction of the World Trade Center towers the greatest work of art, he was labeled by Frank Lentricchia and Jody McAuliffe as an artistic extremist and fanatic: "*Like terrorists, serious artists are always fanatics; unlike terrorists, serious artists have not yet achieved the "greatest" level of art*" (Schmidt and Randy 36). However, no one criticized the 1997 Nobel laureate in literature, Dario Fo, who circulated an e-mail message stating

The great speculators wallow in an economy that every year kills tens of millions of people with poverty _so what is 20,000 [sic] dead in New York_ Regardless of who carried out the massacre, this violence is the legitimate daughter of the culture of violence, hunger and inhumane exploitation (Quoted in Steven "Voices of Opposition").



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By mainstream American standards, the 9/11 attack was evil. Thus, it is understandable that Stockhausen's remarks were met with outrage. But, why did Fo's even more harsh opinion regarding the United States and the victims of 9/11 hardly cause a ripple? Because Fo was not talking about art. He situated 9/11 within the sphere of politics, ideology, and war. Stockhausen placed 9/11 within the art world. Moreover, art is not as serious as politics; art is play, secondary, a representation. However, from the perspective of performance studies, the attack on the World Trade Center was a performance: planned, rehearsed, staged, and intended both to wound the United States materially and to affect and infect the imagination. The destruction of two iconic buildings, and the murder of so many people in one fell swoop, was intended to deliver a very specific message about the boldness of the jihad and the vulnerability of the United States (Schechner 1825).

Yet, in looking away are we not abdicating the responsibility to address such acts of terror? In shutting our eyes to terror or in relegating such events to the stone cold basement of history or the insubstantial domain of memory are we not in league with those who perpetrated such crimes in the belief that their acts will be left unaddressed? Perhaps this is the biggest lie of all, when we allow such travesties as war, genocide or slavery to fall off our cultural radar altogether. For instance, Joseph Conrad, J. M. Coetzee, André Brink and Martin Booth join other writers in refusing to close their eyes to such violence. Writing on the barbarity of slavery, the genocide in Namibia and the horrors of World War I Coetzee in *Foe* (1987); portraying the horrors of Belgian imperialism in the Congo in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1901), Brink in *The Other Side of Silence* (2003) and Booth in *Islands of Silence* (2003) acknowledge that the appropriation of pain through literature can itself be a further act of violation. Rather than looking away, however, they use a range of modern techniques to negotiate these challenges to literary representation (Blundell "Literature of Atrocity").

Time and again, concerning the creation of art, people fail to see that many marvelous artworks are not the products of free will. Some art hide gruesome horrific facts behind its realization. Consider the pyramids of Egypt and Teotihuacan, Mexico, generally regarded as architectural masterpieces. The Egyptian pyramids were constructed by slaves, and the Teotihuacan pyramids and surrounding ceremonial site show that human sacrifices took place. Time washes the blood off the stones; the magnificent stones remain unstained by what once were the immediacies of experience. But, can we consider acts of terror such as the 9/11 or others as art? Of course not, even terrorists do not think of themselves as actors. If there is art in such acts, it is in the perception of the aftermath, how media, cinema, authors, artists and writers respond the terror events through "art." This is not new; even Shakespeare, Dickens, Homer, Hemingway, Tolstoy and Picasso made masterpieces from the terrors and horrors of war.

2. The Theatre of Terrorism

Dramatic theory from Aristotle through the eighteenth-century made terror one of the salutary emotions (along with pity) ideally evoked in tragedy; and in Edmund Burke's highly influential theory, adapted from the Greek writer Longinus, terror was a prerequisite of the sublime in painting and other art forms. Edmund Burke was a pioneer in the investigation of terror as an aesthetic response, and his essay "*On the*



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Sublime and Beautiful” (1757) furnishes a number of curious associations between terror and kingship.

It is worth noting that the term ‘terrorism’ first entered the English lexicon through Edmund Burke’s usage to describe the revolutionary violence of the French Revolution. It was Burke's belief that the merely beautiful could never induce a disjointed aesthetic effect of this nature. His notion of the sublime, however, flourishes where the traces of beauty and atrocity are left intact, where the specter of terror is present, but kept at a watchful distance. Riveting the senses, it impresses upon the mind the passions of fascination and revulsion, which in turn proceeds to revel in the delights of a latent sense of pain and danger, without ever actually enduring them. In this vein, Vernon Hyde Minor notes:

We are drawn to disasters not because of some perverse pleasure in others' pain, but because we cannot be of a caring disposition unless we find something agreeable in astonishment, something satisfying about the horrible ... we are quite naturally aestheticized _rather than anesthetized_ by horrific events of great historic significance. . . . The vast, powerful, terrifying forces un leashed by ill-used human technology over whelms our cognitive faculties, revealing to in gut-wrenching terms our inability to grasp, comprehend, or _and this is particularly challenging for an artist_ to accomplish anything of such magnitude (Schechner 1825).

Besides, it was Friedrich Nietzsche, above all, who argued that it is the actual acts of violence and suffering that constitute the tragic in tragedy: terror is the tonic for tragedy as a work of art (Bohrer, Nye and Felski 40). The theatrical metaphors suggest that life is a form of art and that violence graduates them to tragedy and a special kind of beauty. The art of W. B. Yeats’ “Easter, 1916” for example memorializes the violence which inspired it: “*All changed, changed utterly. A terrible beauty is born.*”

At this juncture, it is worthy to distinguish between horror and terror. People experience “horror” when they see or read about something bad happening to someone. However, they only experience “terror” when they feel the horror is happening to them (Foertsch 285). Terrorism narratives or narratives about terrorism thus play upon fear and horror to haunt and terrorize people. They attempt to hold the audience captive in the theatre of terror. For example, the post-9/11 catch phrase: “*It was just like in the movies!*” expressed the Americans’ shock that they understood the language of 9/11 as their own. The terrorists had turned technology back on them, and it seems that fiction has become real: “*The harsh truth is that the style of al-Qaeda's attacks [...] - and the whole theatre of modern terrorism - is familiar to us*” (Jung 13).

Indeed, there is a persistent trend of fascination with terrorism as spectacle. One does not want to turn away from the horrific scene, one wants to watch, one wants to experience this ‘aestheticized violence,’ a term used here to mean both violence offered to an audience’s senses and violence made beautiful through choreography and



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composition. Hence, scenes of mangled bodies and exploding buildings are – no matter if the medium is a literary text or a blockbuster film – the ingredients for a popular work. Perhaps terror acts such as the 9/11 were intended as a thrilling performance art to raise funds and inspire future acts of terrorism. Earlier, Brian Jenkins had coined the phrase "*terrorism as theater*" (Cowen 233).

Besides, art and terrorism are – structurally – comparable in their reliance on and use of a medium to create their “work” of providing perceptual input to their audience. “*The event is not what happens,*” Allen Feldman asserts, “*The event is that which can be narrated*” (14). Both art and terrorism also require reception and interpretation in order to be understood. An act of violence is, like every other signifier, in itself absent of meaning: why it happens and what its results should be are always products of interpretation; without the determining powers of language, violence remains an incomprehensible signifier. In this way, an act of violence is given meaning only in relationship to and inside of a much larger act of signification and consequent interpretation (Looney 09).

In other words, the witnesses, like obedient spectators in a theater, were encouraged to suspend their disbelief. Terrorism draws on the theatrical propensity simultaneously to bind the audience and to paralyze it. Theatrical convention allows for mass splitting, enabling the audience to respond either emotionally or intellectually to the action it sees onstage without responding physically. Terrorism sometimes pushes this convention further, to atomize the victimized population and to preclude the possibility of solidarity and mobilization; everyone is vulnerable, the unexpected attack may come anytime, from anywhere. All this is not to suggest that terrorism is essentially representational. Terrorism is not theater or magic, but it was designed to look that way. It is an act of deliberately orchestrated violence set in motion to destabilize the audience.

Terrorism deconstructs reality, inverts it, transforms it into a grotesque fiction. The theatricality of terrorism exceeds the mechanics of staging atrocious acts. Terrorism, the tour through this haunted house shows, functions like a social transformer. As the audience walks down the dark corridors, it becomes clear how terrorism manipulates social fears and inverts cultural symbols. In the audience, stumbling in the dark, up and down stairs, we realize that terrorism plays with potent images of the unknown, the pit, darkness. It capitalizes on infantile fantasies; the torturers exploit fears of destruction, dismemberment and suffocation.

The screams resounding through the loud speakers emphasize that this kind of destabilizing violence works through amplification; twenty victims can hold an entire society hostage. And, by representing the violence through the theater, which is always involved on some level with the buying and selling of pleasure, is not, inevitably, falling into the trap of rendering violence pleasurable, perhaps even pornographic? The theatrical act by definition skews the process of victimization, the actors playing victims in a play are there of their free will; real torture victims are not. Does not the theatrical event, then, necessarily add the element of consent which differentiates theatrical violence, or even sexual sadomasochistic violence, from torture? (Taylor 173)

Therefore, terrorism, with its scenes of torture and abductions, proved highly theatrical both on a practical and on a symbolic level. Terrorists dressed their parts and



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set the drama in motion. The victims, like actors, stood in *_albeit unwillingly_* for someone or something else. Antagonists appeared on the scene as if by magic; protagonists "disappeared" into thin air. The revelation of corpses at the appropriate moment was as typical of terrorism as of the Elizabethan stage. Crimes became "*unreal,*" invisible in their theatricality (Ibid. 165).

3. Writing the Unspeakable

Authors have responded to the rising tide of terrorism and its continuing reverberations, they indetifies, problematizes and analyzes horror and terror to throw up a key to better understanding the overall cultural and ideological fabric of our era. Terrorism is, then, material for literary processing because it offers a contemporary set of symbols for age-old, tried and true themes of human history. In the figure of the modern terrorist hide the basic elements of the traditional (anti)hero. Seen in this light, terrorism is not a new phenomenon but just the most recent version of human and social issues that art has always dealt with.

Indeed, while writing about terrorism, writers and terrorists encounter each other. Authors who claim that they know evil, and that they are able to get inside the terrorist's mind to understand his desires, anger and fears, maybe they are evil themselves. Can we differentiate between the author, the narrator and the terrorist character in the novel? It is the same as the *Frankenstein effect*. Sometimes, the author is the terrorist double and self-reflection. As in the common mistake of not distinguishing Dr.Viktor Frankenstein from the monster he creates —the monster is often called Frankenstein—.

At this stage, it is worth noting that there are terrorists who have produced pieces of writing. In fact, they intend their story to be understood by those who watch, by the "readers" and voyeurs of terror's moment, not by their first-line victims only. As Theodore John Kaczynski,¹ also known as the "Unabomber", an American anarchist and domestic terrorist, puts it:

To make an impression on society with words is... almost impossible for most individuals and small groups. Take us for example. If we had never done anything violent and had submitted the present writings to a publisher, they probably would not have been accepted. If they had been accepted and published, they probably would not have attracted many readers, because it's more fun to watch the entertainment put out by the media than to read a sober essay... In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression, we've had to kill people (Lentricchia and McAuliffe 23).

Thus, the man known as the Unabomber, Theodore John Kaczynski, who tells us that what he desired was not to kill people but "to make an impression on society with

¹ A mathematical prodigy, he abandoned a promising academic career in 1969, then between 1978 and 1995 killed three people, and injured 23 others, in a nationwide bombing campaign targeting people involved with modern technology



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words,” surely irrefutable evidence of Kaczynski’s total madness. The Unabomber would have preferred (like Wordsworth) to initiate radical change with his writing. He came quickly to understand that violent acts are now necessary if the “inner life of the culture” is to be seriously affected. Once its attention has been commanded by his violence, the culture might be ready to read him seriously, and in large numbers, and then, and only then, under his writerly persuasion, sweep away the advanced technological conditions of production. Kaczynski is a “literary” man in an older sense: a man of words, with educative designs on his society, who would influence the shape of things to come. The surest way, in Unabomber logic, of recapturing the serious artist’s ideal of the writer as a culture-shaping force is to do spectacular serial murder, for the purpose of becoming America’s most famous terrorist within. As a media star, however dark, publishers would be eager to take him on, and they did, though under heavy humanitarian cover. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published his small book, *Industrial Society and Its Future* (1995), they said, in the hope of saving lives (Lentricchia and McAuliffe 23-24).

The story of Theodore John Kaczynski, the Unabomber, recalls the case of Adolf Hitler. The young Hitler was wild for Wagnerian opera, stately architecture, and inventive graphic art and design. In *Mein Kampf*, he recalled, “*For hours, I could stand in front of the Opera, for hours I could gaze at the parliament; the whole Ring Boulevard seemed to me like an enchantment out of the 'Thousand and One Nights'*” (Schjeldahl “Hitler as Artist”). The Nazi leader has thirteen paintings some of which were sold at auction recently. Richard Westwood- Brookes, Mullocks auctioneers’ historical documents expert, said:

It's curious to say the least how an artist, whose interests at this stage of his life should be in such peaceful and bucolic subjects, could turn into the monster he became in later life. There's absolutely nothing here to suggest how his mind could have turned in such a way (Wilkes “Face of a Monster”).

Indeed, art is the greatest thing humanity has created; however, the second world war atrocities are a terrifying low point, a nightmare that still recurs all over world culture. Therefore, how could these equal and opposite paradigms be united in just one man’s mind? How could someone have both painterly and genocidal aspirations? We have seen all the BBC report about the music of Jewish French singer Enrico Macias that was the only pop music found in the collection of 1,500 recorded speeches, discussions and religious music left behind at Ben Laden’s Afghan compound in 2001 (Fenton-Smith “Osama Bin Laden's Tape Collection”). Strange indeed how can malevolence and beauty occur together!

3.1. Terror and the Author’s Role

There is a troubling trend in the typical discourse surrounding literature and terrorism that portrays the two as being in competition with each other. For critics, both authors and terrorists want to wield influence over the public mind; but terrorists, who use newer media, produce a stronger effect on their target audience and are better at using shock and fear to bring about an aesthetic effect in their audience. Artists who prefer a more traditional medium such as literature are worried – so it is said – that their



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abstracted words on paper cannot sufficiently reproduce spectacular or violent events and thereby satisfy the demands of their paying customers.

In the same vain, DeLillo's hero in his novel *Mao II*, Bill Gray, speaks with longing, as he thinks back on the role of the artist in society:

There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose power to shape and influence... Years ago, I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated... News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative (Roberts 48).

The statement above reveals literature's loss of relevance in the world of politics, which seems to be the only important world; the aesthetic realm apparently is no longer a desirable stomping ground for these thinkers of literature. For Baudrillard, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 for instance constituted a "singularity," a kind of "avant-garde" artwork that made a stunning raid on human consciousness. If Don DeLillo finds resistance in the symbolic processes of art, Baudrillard attributes symbolic power to the terrorist rather than the artist (Wilcox 101).

The alternative vision of the novelist, a would-be raider of consciousness, once reshaped our thoughts and feelings about the world in place, the world that the transgressive artist would violate in order to remake. But no more. In the advanced technological culture of the world now, the writer is rendered impotent by virtue of his being consumed by the image factories of electronic capitalism, whose most duplicitous agent is commercial publishing, which would make the writer a famous effigy. "The secret force that drives the industry," writes DeLillo, "is the compulsion to make writers harmless." Bill Gray believes —ten years before September 11— that our new tragic narrative "involves midair explosions and crumbled buildings." It is the terrorist, "the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith," who shapes the way we think and see: it is the terrorist that in the West is taken seriously, not the celebrity-writer, who has been appropriated by the culture of capital (Lentricchia and McAuliffe 29).

Furthermore, DeLillo argued in his novel *Mao II* that novelists and terrorists play a zero-sum game. In Bill's words: "What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they represent equals our failure to be dangerous" (157).

To sum up, authors' purpose was not to conquer or occupy territory, or even slaughter as many civilians as possible, but to stage a stunning media event, photo op, and real-life show, a terrifying, sublime event. Novelists, like terrorists, are solitary and obscure agents, men in small rooms, preparing symbolic provocations to be unleashed on the public with a bang. Of course this could refer only to a certain kind of novelist, starting perhaps with Flaubert and ending with Beckett, whose work could be taken as



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an indictment of an entire civilization, and whose authority when it came to that civilization was paradoxically derived from his appearing to stand completely outside it.

Again, by juxtaposing terror-wreaking and novel writing, terror seems to be instantaneous, where the novel asks for patience. Terror, for its spectators if not for its direct victims, is a visual phenomenon, where the novel is verbal and interior. And then the novel _ as goes without saying, but is most important of all _ does not kill anyone (Kunkel "Dangerous Characters").

Indeed, readers of G. K. Chesterton may recognize echoes of Lucian Gregory in Bill Gray's assertions. In *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), Gregory, the anarchist poet, famously equates anarchists and artists:

An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. ... The poet delights in disorder only. If it were not so, the most poetical thing in the world would be the Underground Railway (10).

In a nutshell, terrorism represents a complex of individual and especially collective agents and acts of violent repression and in particular sheer violence, destruction and war. Terrorism has generated far-reaching questions in literary narrative practice. The plethora of literary texts that reflect upon terrorism tell a tale that help the reader make sense of the world we live in. In this paper, we attempted to explore the nature of art, literature and terrorism not to validate or excuse terrorist actions or insult any memories of the dead but we tried to clarify that terrorism like art is a damage of minds and emotions rather than a physical destruction. That is to say, the destruction is the means toward the end of creating terror, which is a state of mind. Enormities of terror are of what Burke and Kant called the sublime, arousing in some, if not most, spectators the Aristotelian tragic emotions of pity and fear.

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