Arts and Terror

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

The theme of terror has invaded today's cultural space and the arts are not exempt from this invasion. Yet even a brief look at the history of various art forms shows that the phenomenon of terror is by no means new to them. From Homer's depiction of the sack of Troy by Achaeans to Francis Bacon's shocking images artists in all art forms have confronted terror – as an emotion, violent action, and state of the world. Still one cannot deny that in recent years art's engagement with terror has undergone a considerable change. The nature of this change is not easy to define but it certainly calls for the philosopher's and art lover's attention. This volume presents a series of philosophical reflections on various manifestation of terror in the arts, from Antiquity to the present day. The authors' subject-matter and approaches vary greatly, encompassing diverse choices of works, artistic practices, and interpretative perspectives. What unites them, however, is the underlying conviction that artists' engagement with the theme of terror merits our close attention and is relevant both to artistic expression itself and to art's often tangled and sometime tortuous relation to life.

V. Marchenkov

ART, TERRORISM, AND THE NEGATIVE SUBLIME

ARNOLD BERLEANT[1]

> "In due time, the theory of aesthetics will have to account not only for the delight in Kantian beauty and the sublime, but for the phenomena like aesthetic violence and the aestheticization of violence, of aesthetic abuse and intrusion, the blunting of sensibility, its perversion, and its poisoning."[2]

Terrorism and Aesthetics

It has become increasingly clear that the arts, and the aesthetic, more generally, occupy no hallowed ground but live on the everyday earth of our lives. Recognition is growing that the aesthetic is a pervasive dimension of the objects and activities of daily life.[3] Perceptual experiences that possess the characteristics of aesthetic appreciation are marked by a focused sensibility we enjoy for its intrinsic perceptual satisfaction. We typically have such experiences with works of art and with nature, but they are equally possible on other occasions and with other kinds of objects. Such experiences engage us in an intensely sensory field in which we participate wholly and without reservation, as we customarily do with works of art. The objects and occasions, however, may be ordinary ones, such as eating, hanging laundry, engaging in social relations, or operating a perfectly functioning automobile or other

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[1] This has appeared in my book, *Sense and Sensibility: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010), 175-192, and earlier in *Contemporary Aesthetics* Vol. 7 (2009). I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for *Contemporary Aesthetics* for their helpful comments on this essay.

[2] Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Plan of Culture and Social Identities* (Ashgate, 2007), p. 42.

[3] Recent work includes Katya Mandoki, *op. cit.*; Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).); *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, ed. Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

mechanism. The range of such occasions is limitless, and this adds to the significance of the aesthetics of the everyday.

Such an expansion of the aesthetic has important consequences. Perhaps the most striking is the need to acknowledge that the range of aesthetic experience includes more than the appreciative engagement with art and nature. But not only does the aesthetic extend to the uncustomary; it encompasses the full range of human normative experience. Experiences of the aesthetic include not only the elevated and noble but the reprehensible, degrading, and destructive. This is so not as the result of an arbitrary decision to include them, but from actual experience and practice. The aesthetic offers a full and direct grasp of the human world. That it may include violence and depravity is not the fault of aesthetics but of that world.

A salient symptom of that world is terrorism. Its wanton violence and uncontrolled destruction are appalling. But easy moral outrage offers no understanding, and only by grasping the meanings and significance of terrorism can we hope to deal with it effectively. Let me begin with the Happening, for the Happening can provide a forceful illumination of the aesthetic of terrorism.

Not that Happenings took negative form. A syncretic, visual-theatrical artistic development of the 1960s, Happenings were a deliberate artistic innovation intent on transgressing all the hard boundaries that protected the arts and made them safe. In Happenings audiences became the performers, no clearly circumscribed object could be identified as the work of art, aesthetic distance was relinquished to the active engagement of the audience, artistic genres were fused into unrecognizable combinations and, most significantly, the boundary between art and life disappeared. Happenings were often playful, even festive occasions that danced over the pieties of conventional artistic axioms.

Some commentators quickly recognized that the importance of the Happening lay beyond its iconoclasm and entertainment value. One of them was Régis Debray, a young French radical intellectual, who "regarded a revolution as a coordinated series of guerrilla Happenings. Some of his admirers, in fact, took part in Happenings as training for future Happenings when they would use guns and grenades."[4] What many had considered a bizarre exaggeration following the dismissal of traditional artistic forms turns out to have been an uncanny pre-vision of the world half a century later. The net of terrorism in which the world is

[4] Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1992), p. 40.

now enmeshed is all-enclosing. But how can terrorism be considered in the same sense as art? The question itself seems outrageous.

Happenings made a radical break from the aesthetic tradition by denying that art occupies its own exclusive realm separate from the world outside. Yet it was not only Happenings that rejected this tradition; many other artistic developments in the twentieth century deliberately crossed that boundary. The presumptive difference between the world of art and the world of daily life lies at the source of such perennial problems in aesthetics as the status of truth and illusion in art, the moral effects of art works, and the nature of artistic representation. Such continuing issues, all of which can be traced back to Plato, find in artistic autonomy the domain of human freedom, as Kant had claimed.[5] Yet at the same time, separating the arts from daily life establishes an autonomy that, by philosophic decree, vitiates the force of the arts and ignores their power.

The tradition of restricting and removing art from the world of daily life dates from Plato's suspicion that the arts can have a morally degenerating influence. Expressed most famously in *The Republic*, it led him to advocate strict controls on the use of the arts in education and to propose censorship.[6] This, of course, was related to Plato's mistrust of sense experience, which he considered the source of illusion and false belief. These views were reinforced and enlarged by Kant, who claimed early in the modern period that the autonomy of judgments of taste is entirely independent of the existence of the object of our satisfaction and is not bound up with practical interest.[7]

The effect of these ideas on the history of philosophy has been profound. Plato's mistrust of the senses and artistic independence and his failure to recognize the imaginative contribution that the arts can make to education and moral development joined with Kant's denial of full aesthetic satisfaction to the interests of daily life. Together they functioned effectively to muzzle the power of the arts. Yet once we recognize the active interplay that occurs between art objects and activities and the world in which they exist, we find vast new opportunities for power and influence.

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[5] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, (J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951) §4. See A. Berleant, "Aesthetics and the Contemporary Arts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXIX, 2 (Winter l970), l55-l68. Reprinted in Arnold Berleant, *Re-thinking Aesthetics, Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), ch. 4.

[6] *The Republic* Bk. II, 377A-382; Bk. III, 376E-403B.

[7] Immanuel Kant, *op. cit.* , First Book, §2-5.

The force inherent in this relation has not been lost on the modern state. For philosophical aesthetics deliberately to ignore the political potential and use of the arts is to hand that power over to others whose values, standards, and behaviour are often ignorant, manipulative, and self-aggrandizing. The traditional separation of aesthetics from daily life has freely allowed the political appropriation, often the misappropriation, of the arts. That is why governments practice “news management” and other forms of censorship, why they “stage” conferences, rallies, and other political events, why they promote “official” art, and why they persecute artists who do not conform to their purposes and destroy their works. Art is dangerous, and Kant got it backwards when he placed morality and art in separate domains.

In the interpenetration of art and the human world are the grounds for a new aesthetic vision and the need to articulate it.[8] When Happenings fused art with the everyday world, they did so as art. But what about presumably non-art objects that are directly perceived as art? There is, of course, *found art*, where an object is extrapolated from the everyday world, segregated, and framed: a piece of driftwood, a bouquet of field flowers, and, of course, the perennial urinal. Art is claimed where none was intended. Some instances of found art are benign, some provocative, others deliberately inflammatory. They say nothing about the motives of those who did the making and for whom the idea of art was probably far from mind. What found art does do is center our attention on an object or event in a way that resembles the intense focus we give to things designated *as* art by an artist, an institution, or the art world. Like Happenings, found art places art squarely in the ordinary world. Can this apply to acts of terrorism?

Some of the most striking claims of art for things outside the art world were responses to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen called them "the greatest work of art ever….the greatest work of art for the whole cosmos," "a jump out of security, the everyday." And the British artist Damien Hirst excluded art from all moral judgment, arguing that the violence, horror, and death associated with Ground Zero (the name given to the site of the demolished New York World Trade Center) do not rule out the possibility that film footage of the

[8] Developing such an aesthetic has been the incentive of most of my previous work. See especially *Re-thinking Aesthetics, Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), and *The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Springfield, Ill.: C. C. Thomas l970). Second (electronic) edition, with a new Preface, 2000.

attack could be "visually stunning" and resemble works of art.[9] Indeed, perceiving that footage as art may be the ultimate act of framing. Whether these events can be considered found art can be debated, but the label we give them is incidental. Of more concern here is the claim that they *are* art or *like* art.

Attributing artistic achievement to the perpetrators may seem revolting, but it would be arrogant and myopic to blithely dismiss statements like Hirst's and Stockhausen's. For we must take care not to confound the aesthetic with art or to consider either of these necessarily positive. To call the film footage of the attack visually stunning acknowledges their aesthetic impact. Many art works could be described in similar terms but yet reflect different content and moral meaning. Frederick Edwin Church's "The Icebergs" (1861) is visually stunning; so are Turner's "The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons" (1834) and Mathias Grünewald's "Crucifixion" (1515).

But so also are many natural events: sunsets, the full moon in the night sky, the sea in a great storm. But perceptual force alone, while aesthetic, does not make art. It may lie in the subject-matter of an art work but as part of the whole it is something different. There is a sense in which Stockhausen's comment can be taken literally by regarding the 9/11 terrorist attacks as theater. Stockhausen himself composed musical works with dramatic venues and enormous scale, so his calling the attacks "the biggest work of art there has ever been" was not entirely unpredictable or out of character.

But how can we respond to these comments? Is it possible to disentangle the aesthetic from the moral in such a highly charged situation or does the moral issue entirely overpower the aesthetic one? There are no unequivocal answers and perhaps the consideration of Happenings, transgression, and violence can help us make these assertions understandable.

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[9] Stockhausen, cited in Emmanouil Aretoulakis, "Aesthetic Appreciation, Ethics, and 9/11," *Contemporary Aesthetics* Vol. 6 (2008), sect. 1. Hirst, a British artist, called the September 11th terrorist attacks "a visually stunning artwork." *Loc.cit.*. Aretoulakis argues that "there is a need for aesthetic appreciation when contemplating a violent event such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks. What is more, appreciation of the beautiful, even in case of a 9/11, seems necessary because it is a key to establishing an ethical stance towards terror, life, and art. It should be stressed that independent aesthetic experience is not important in itself but as a means to cultivating an authentic moral and ethical judgment." My discussion of terrorism was stimulated by Aretoulakis's thoughtful and balanced consideration of the aesthetic significance of the 9/11 attacks.

They may suggest a way of grasping them that is not immediately obvious. But first, however, is the matter of terrorism, itself.

Simply to list the definitions of 'terrorism' would take pages. What they have in common is the use of violence or the threat of violence.[10] Most often added to the definition is that terrorism focuses on a civilian population with the intention of creating widespread fear, and that it is motivated by political or ideological objectives. Terrorism also carries an element of the unexpected. An element of chance enters into its choice (if we may call it that) of victims and sometimes in the determination of specific time and location, and this adds greatly to the fear that acts of terrorism evoke.

It is interesting to consider that this combination of elements that define terrorism – violence, civilian victims, fear – does not specify the perpetrators. These may be indifferently radical groups of the right or left, military, paramilitary, governmental, or non-governmental organizations. The media unquestionably play a central role in promoting such fear. When fear-mongering is deliberate, the media that practice it could themselves be considered terrorist organizations, just as could other fomenting organizations, such as government bureaus (what Badiou calls "bureaucratic terrorism"[11]) and *ad hoc* groups of individuals who may be the perpetrators, as in the Oklahoma City bombing. It is important to recognize the scope of terrorism, since labeling organizations as 'terrorist' because they use or threaten violence toward a civilian population, regardless of their place in the social order, is revealing and sobering: they are not necessarily marginal. Recognizing the wide range of sources of terrorism helps avoid self-righteous exclusions.

It is important to realize that the use of terror is not confined to Asia or the Middle East. Terror, in fact, has become a standard practice at the present stage of world history. Totalitarian states know well that terrorizing a population is the most effective way of controlling it, far more potent than overt force. We can recognize the climate of fear and terror that has spread not only throughout regions in the African, Asian, and South American continents; it is being deliberately implemented in Western industrialized nations, as well, by the use of so-called national security measures. Indeed, if state terror were made visible, it would

[10] See Walter Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press), 1998.
[11] Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy* (London & New York: Verso, 2008), p. 92.

obscure the individual acts of terror that have achieved such notoriety today.[12]

Acts of terrorism are appallingly inventive and their range is extreme. They extend from suicide bombers in the Middle-East and the release of the nerve gas sarin in the Tokyo subway by the religious cult Aum Shinrikyo and its attempts at biological terrorism to the 9/11 suicide plane crashes perpetrated by Al Qaida. But we cannot exclude state terrorism in this portrayal: the use of overt police action and military force to control social activities, gangs dispatched to foment social violence, and secret police to instil fear. And there is also the increasingly sophisticated propagandistic use of the media—magazines and newspapers, TV talk shows and news broadcasts—to proliferate false information, obscure and distort current events, and instil insecurity. This is no reign of terror; we are living in an age of terror.

Can terrorism be justified?

The scope of terrorism is, then, surprisingly large and its definition surprisingly inclusive. At the same time it is important to recognize the difference between terrorism and terror and not to confuse the two. Terrorism is, as we have seen, the calculated use of violence or threat of violence against a civilian population with the intent of causing widespread fear for political purposes. Terror, on the other hand, is the overpowering *emotion* of intense fear. More about this later. What I am concerned with just now is terrorism, not terror, as such.

Can terrorism ever be justified? What makes terrorism so morally appalling is that its victims are circumstantial, uninvolved, and oblivious of what is happening. It is a vicious lottery with equal opportunity to lose. The devastating results of terrorist acts are not much different from the so-called “collateral damage” suffered by civilian populations throughout the whole history of warfare. Violence visited deliberately on an innocent, circumstantial population condemns it as one of the most heinous social wrongs, irrespective of any self-justifying motives. For this reason terrorism can never be vindicated, and terrorism practiced by a state is no more exempt from moral condemnation than when used as a tactic by a political or religious group.

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[12] One is reminded of Hobbes' characterization of the nature of war as not actual fighting but "in the known disposition thereto," a description that applies not only to what has been called a "cold war" but equally to a society in a state of continual fear and thus easily moved to violence. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1660), ch. 13.

But apart from the question of whether terrorism is ever justifiable, it must nonetheless be recognized and understood. Visible and bold acts of terrorism force us to acknowledge that such acts of violence are not aberrations committed by deluded individuals but social actions deliberately perpetrated by groups and for clear reasons. They may be the arms of state oppression or they may represent political opposition to what is perceived as correlative injustice. Terrorist acts are often committed in response to the social violence of exploitation or oppression of one population group by another. Yet one form of violence cannot be selectively justified over against another. By being directed against unwitting victims, all such actions are morally flawed. A violent act committed in response to other acts of violence is not thereby exonerated: both are equally condemnable. Can terrorism be considered morally justifiable if it is the only available means to a political or ideological end when there is no alternative way to redress an injustice? This is the critical moral question and central to understanding terrorism.

The question of the justifiability of terrorism does not, however, answer the *aesthetic* question: are aesthetic values present in terrorist acts? Is there an aesthetics of terrorism? What, indeed, has terrorism to do with aesthetics at all? It is necessary to confront these questions because acts of terrorism make effective use of the techniques and skills of art and possess aesthetic force. Yet how can we speak of political acts such as terrorism in the same breath as art and the aesthetic? Must art that uses violence to convey a moral message and make a moral judgment be condemned when that message could not be made in any other way? We arrive again at the same moral dilemma. This is a question that must be faced by any argument for true democracy, the political form that claims to provide means for peaceful social change.[13] Democracy or terrorism?

The use of terrorism as a political act thus raises difficult aesthetic as well as moral issues, and it is important to understand terrorism, not just to condemn it. Indeed, considering terrorism from an aesthetic vantage point can cast considerable light on such acts. For these events are perceptually powerful, engaging not only the visual but all the senses. They are aesthetic because of their sensory force. These are desperate acts committed in order to make a moral and political statement through their aesthetic, that is, their sensory impact. Moreover, their inherent political import is a dramatic rejection of the traditional difference between art and reality, a feature they have in common with the modern arts.

[13] This is a problem that stands apart from the aesthetic questions I am dealing with here and clearly requires its own separate treatment. As a version of the means-end problem, it has a long history of philosophical debate.

Since aesthetics centers on direct sensory perception, it is clear that acts of terrorism have powerful aesthetic force. All those who experience the effects of terrorism – its chance victims, their relatives and associates, the organizations and institutions that are damaged, the general public, the social order – all can attest to its aesthetic impact. Human values – and the value of humans – are at stake, but we cannot measure such value quantitatively. How is it possible to compare or judge experience? Is a physical act of terrorism such as a suicide bombing worse than the repression of a whole population by a government policy instituted in the name of security, causing widespread fear and requiring overt acts of brutality to enforce it? Is a deliberately planned riot designed to manipulate a population less terrifying than, say, an attempt to poison a public water supply? Here, I think, differences in conditions, means, and consequences need to be identified and each situation appraised on its own terms and not by some general formula. At the same time and more important, such alternatives are morally unacceptable as well as rationally irresolvable. There is no choice between Hitler and Pol Pot.

Unlike acts of sabotage, acts of terrorism have no direct military target. Perhaps it can be said that in this respect they mirror the largely self-contained character of art. And what sort of aesthetic value can terrorism have? "[T]he tragic in real life will necessarily have an aesthetic dimension as long as the sensibility of the subject comes into play by judging something as being 'tragic'."[14] Is there art in terrorism? It cannot be denied that much of the political effectiveness of terrorist acts comes from their carefully planned aesthetic impact. Indeed, their effect is primarily, often spectacularly theatrical. We can in fact say that such actions are deliberately designed to be high drama. In this sense, then, is theater any less appropriate a way to describe a spectacular act of terrorism than it is to designate military activities? Perhaps it now becomes understandable how an artist could consider a terrorist act a work of art.

Can terrorism have positive moral value? Simple ascriptions of positive and negative value no longer fit. Such morally complex situations demand a different kind of analysis. If a terrorist act contributes to achieving social justice, can we even ask whether it is morally positive or negative? A Kantian analysis would find it negative, for such actions cannot be universalized. A utilitarian analysis might find it positive to the extent it contributes to political or social reform, if it does indeed have that consequence, rather than the redoubled use of state terror. But can we even

[14] Mandoki, *loc. cit.*

presume to balance immediate pain, death, and destruction against future benefits?

Neither of these analyses resolves the issue. Universalizability is an ethical principle and a logical desideratum but it is not axiomatic and exempt from critical reflection. And to consider consequences only selectively is effectively to disregard their wide-ranging fallout. Moreover, failing to acknowledge the full scope of consequences continues the common practice of hiding behind moral principles at human cost. Most important is the further consideration that means and ends are never separable. What kind of society can emerge from terror-induced change? Though the intent of terrorist action may be the goal of human liberation, the short-term effects are unavoidably negative. And its long-term effects?

It is clear that the moral issues terrorism raises are complex. In traditional terms the judgment may seem clear, but under full consideration it becomes ambiguous. As in warfare where everyone claims right, justice is on every side – and so, too, is injustice. The pain of an enemy is no less great than one's own. Life lost is lost life, no matter whose life it is.

Is a spectacular terrorist act aesthetically negative or positive? It must be considered positive because of its dramatic force. If, however, fear and terror overpower perceptual experience, not only in its unwilling "participants" but also in its larger "audience," so that they feel in actual danger, a terrorist act exceeds the possibility of aesthetic experience and so is aesthetically negative.[15] So aesthetically, too, terrorism is indeterminate. Such situations seem, then, to be ambiguous both morally and aesthetically.

How a terrorist act can be morally positive in any sense may be difficult to see. We must acknowledge that the strategy of the acts and the motives of the actors may be guided by the goals of liberation, of a more just social order, of an end to oppression and exploitation, and other humane objectives. But they may also be guided by the intent to preserve power and the social and economic privileges that accompany it. Do any ends ever justify terrorist means? Their morally reprehensible effects are so blatant that it seems inconceivable that any goal, however noble, could exonerate them. One cannot choose between two incommensurable wrongs. At the same time, even if a terrorist act could claim to be morally positive -- which I do not believe is possible, does this justify its aesthetic negativity? Morality and aesthetics are not easily distinguished here. Pain and delight are both inherently moral and aesthetic: The same act can be both morally and aesthetically positive or negative, for the moral and the

[15] Both Burke and Kant noted the impossibility of experiencing the sublime when one's safety is at risk. Cf. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §28.

aesthetic may be fully interdependent, inseparably fused. The very perpetration of a terrorist act is at the same time both aesthetic and moral, spectacularly destructive in both respects.

Generalities pale before the intense particularity of terrorist acts. Every incident has its unique conditions and no logical decision procedure seems possible. Does the sheer scope and force of a terrorist act place it in a new and different category? Just as we cannot measure aesthetic pleasure or grade works of art, fear and terror are not truly quantifiable. Nor are consequences fully determinable. And because both their scope and their intensity cannot be specified precisely, they are truly inconceivable. There is a concept in aesthetics that denotes experience so overwhelming that it exceeds comprehension—the sublime, and it is worth considering whether the sublime could conceivably be applied to acts of terrorism.

The Negative Sublime

The sublime is a theory that reflects on a distinctive kind of aesthetic experience. While the sublime became prominent in the eighteenth century as a key dimension in the development of aesthetic theory, it has become increasingly important in recent aesthetic discourse. The starting point is usually Kant's account, although Kant was not the first to elaborate a theory of this distinctive mode of aesthetic apprehension. Burke's discussion of the sublime had come half a century before,[16] and while Kant's formulation has dominated subsequent discussions, Burke's observations are particularly germane to the present one. For according to Burke, the central feature of the sublime is terror. The most powerful passion caused by the sublime in nature, he states, is astonishment, a state of mind with an element of horror in which all other thoughts are suspended. Fear at the prospect of pain or danger freezes the capacity to reason and act and evokes the overpowering feeling of terror. As "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling," Burke maintained that the feeling of terror is a principal source of the sublime: "[W]hatever is qualified to cause terror, is a foundation capable of the sublime…." [17] And, "Indeed, terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or

[16] Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Burke did not originate the concept; a treatise *On the Sublime* is attributed to Longinus, in the third century CE, although its authorship and date of composition have been contested.

[17] Burke, *ibid.*, Part One, Section VII; Part Two, Sections I and II; Part IV, Section III; pp. 36, 53-54, 119.

latently the ruling principle of the sublime."[18] Burke described many emotions associated with the sublime and the conditions under which the sublime may be experienced, and he cited many instances of terror incited by fear. His analysis, however, did not proceed beyond such descriptions.

Kant, too, recognized fear as a feature of the (dynamical) sublime.[19] In contrast with Burke, Kant developed an elaborate theory illuminated by a distinction between the mathematical and the dynamical sublime. In the first, the magnitude of the absolutely great is a measure that the mind cannot wholly encompass.[20] Applied to a terrorist act, its effects and consequences cannot be fully described or even mentally encompassed and are incommensurable. Its material consequences in the form of physical destruction and social disruption, the scope of the human anguish inflicted, and the protective measures and reciprocal violence wreaked upon society in reaction can never be fully enumerated. Its human consequences are immeasurable because they are incalculable. We may indeed say that we cannot quantify the destructive force of a terrorist attack: it evokes the mathematical sublime.

The second, Kant's dynamical sublime, concerns the fear we feel in response to the enormous might of nature, although we must nonetheless feel personally secure and unthreatened, able to rise above that fear and not be subject to it. Ironically, even war, Kant avers, has something sublime in it if carried on with order and respect for citizens' rights,[21] presumably by protecting non-combatants. In the place of might in Kant's dynamical sublime, the sublime in terrorism is present in the intensity of physical force, in its engulfing emotional power, in the overwhelming psychological pressure of the situation.

Like Kant's dynamical sublime, the effectiveness of terrorism lies in its potential threat to safety and in the very insecurity and social instability that result. In terrorism safety is especially equivocal: while there may be non-combatants, everyone is vulnerable. The actual victims are but sacrificial lambs for their effect on the larger population. Another important similarity is in the fact that, like the quantitative forms of the Kantian sublime in which both magnitude and might (as force) seem to be

[18] *Ibid.*, Part Two, Section II, p. 54.
[19] *Critique of Judgment*, §28.
[20] *Ibid*., §27.
[21] *Ibid*., §28. "War itself, if it is carried on with order and with a sacred respect for the rights of citizens, has something sublime in it, and makes the disposition of the people who carry it on thus only the more sublime, the more numerous are the dangers to which they are exposed and in respect of which they behave with courage." p. 102.

immeasurable, the intensity of the terrorist sublime is also immeasurable and its dimensions indeterminate. And it results in consequences that are qualitatively indeterminable and thus incomparable. Only in their circumstances and means are the acts and effects of terrorism distinguishable. Since both the scope and the intensity of terrorist attacks are beyond conception, both morally and aesthetically, we need a new concept, the "negative sublime," as their truest and most eloquent identification.

Because acts of terrorism elude meaningful quantitative determination, we must further acknowledge their *moral* and *aesthetic* incommensurability, indeed, their very inconceivability. Perhaps the only concept that can adequately categorize them is the negative sublime. Like the aesthetic, the sublime is not necessarily a positive determination but a mode of experience. Hence to consider acts of terrorism instances of the negative sublime is not an oxymoron but the recognition of negativity whose enormity cannot be encompassed in either magnitude or force. The uniqueness of such extreme actions renders them capable of description only. One might claim that an act of terrorism exemplifies the post-modern sublime as Lyotard described it, in making the unpresentable perceptible.[22] And because the moral and the aesthetic are inseparable here, the negative sublime incurs identical aesthetic and moral value. That the moral is also aesthetic makes it even more intolerable. Death is the ultimate human loss, and body counts and statistics are deceptively specific and impersonal. Such qualitative consequences as the human suffering from extreme acts of terrorism are beyond measure. "After the first death, there is no other."[23]

Acknowledging that there may be an aesthetic in acts of terrorism, even a positive aesthetic, does not condone or justify such action, for in terrorism the aesthetic never stands alone. Recognizing its presence may help us understand the peculiar fascination that the public has with such events of world theater. These are indeed acts of high drama that fascinate us by their very sublimity.[24] But the theatrical forcefulness that impresses

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[22] There is a resemblance here to Lyotard's characterization of the sublime as making `the unpresentable perceptible. "The art object no longer bends itself to models, but tries to present the fact that there is an unpresentable…." Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 81; "The sublime and the avant-garde," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Blackwell: Cambridge, MA, 1989), p. 207.

[23] "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London," in *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas* (New York: New Directions, 1957), p.112.

[24] "…far from articulating the need of personal expression on the artistic level, art becomes fully politicized as an agency that acts on its own in the social sphere,

us with their image is indissolubly bound up with their moral negativity, and identifying them as the negative sublime is to condemn them beyond all measure. As an agent here in the social sphere, art affects the world directly. Indeed, "by attacking reality, art *becomes* reality." [25]

Terrorism dramatically exposes the inseparability of the moral and the aesthetic, yet this is an extreme form of what is always the case. Utopian thought, to turn to the other side of the normative ledger, also has a strong aesthetic component. Utopianism is pervaded by moral values of social and environmental harmony and fulfilment. Its goal of facilitating living that is deeply satisfying through the fruitful exercise of human capacities is as aesthetic as it is moral.[26] To conform to the tradition that separates the aesthetic from the moral mirrors its segregation from everyday life and constricts its force. Let us see the picture whole and not in parts.

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thus enabling itself to interact with and affect the world directly." Artetoulakis, *op. cit.*, sect. 4. Again, "If we do not merely settle into thinking of art as personal expression within the canonically bounded domain of the aesthetic, and we ascribe to art an active involvement…then we better be ready to come to terms with art as a realm in which humanity exercises its utmost creative/destructive potential, and not in the so-called (since Hegel) world of the spirit but in the world itself." Stathis Gourgouris, "Transformation, Not Transcendence," *Boundary 2* 31.2 (2004): 55-79. Quoted in Aretoulakis, *op. cit.*

[25] Aretoulakis, *op. cit.*, sect. 5. Katya Mandoki saw it plainly: "What must be noted is that art and reality, like aesthetics and the everyday, are totally entwined, not because of the explicit will of the artist, but because there is nothing further, beneath or beyond reality. Even dreams are real, as dreams. The effort to unite art-reality is, therefore, unnecessary. Moreover, when art manifests itself as a mechanism for evasion or for emancipation … they are fatally and irremediably immersed in reality, whether indexically pointing at it by the evasion itself (silence is very eloquent) or by assuming particular sides for criticism or emancipation. Mandoki, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

[26] I have called such a joining of the aesthetic and the ethical "humanistic function." See my essay, "Aesthetic Function," in Arnold Berleant, *Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

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LOOKING AT TERROR WITH THE GHOSTS OF BAUDRILLARD AND BEUYS IN DELILLO'S FICTIONS AND LAURIE ANDERSON'S SPECTACLES

LESLIE STEWART CURTIS

Terrorism of the Word: Artists' Statements

Shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Swiss authorities apprehended, detained, and questioned a suspicious character whose name showed up on a terrorist watch list. The suspect turns out to have been none other than the famous composer and conductor Pierre Boulez who had made the watch list because back in 1967 he had said "All of the opera houses should be blown up . . . because they are full of dust and excrement."[1] On one level, what Boulez said is typical of artists' statements that attack tradition and suggest ridding the world of the old in order to make way for the new. For example, in much the same spirit at

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[1] This is how Boulez's famous statement was translated for a story on National Public Radio about the composer's eightieth birthday. "At 80, Boulez makes a Grand Tour," transcript from an interview with Vivienne Goodman, hosted by Jennifer Ludden. Aired May 22, 2005. The original statement was made by Boulez in an interview with the editors Felix Schmidt and Jürgen Hohmeyer, in *Der Spiegel*, no. 40 (September 25, 1967). The article was translated into English and published as "Opera Houses? – Blow them up!" by the journal *Opera* 19, no. 5 (June 1968): 440-450. The translation actually reads: "The most expensive solution would be to blow the opera houses up. But don't you think that would also be the most elegant?" Only later, when speaking about the Paris Opera, does Boulez speak of it being full of "dust and crap." On the detainment of Boulez, see James Coomarasamy, "Conductor held over 'terrorism' comment." *BBC News*. December 4, 2001.

the beginning of the twentieth century, Maurice de Vlaminck was quoted as saying "I wanted to burn down the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with my cobalts and vermillions."[2] He was one of the artists who were given the label "Les Fauves" (or wild beasts) and thus was associated with one of the first avant-garde "isms" of the twentieth century. Vlaminck's statement would seem to distinguish him somewhat from his fellow Fauve Henri Matisse who stated his aesthetic a bit differently: "What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which might be for every mental worker, be he businessman or writer, like an appeasing influence, like a mental soother, something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue."[3] That Boulez would not agree with Matisse's approach is made clear in his remark that "comfort is the worst enemy of art."[4] Another statement by Vlaminck would seem to complicate matters, however. He also is quoted as saying: "Painting was an abscess which drained off an evil in me. Without a gift for painting I would have gone to the bad. . . . What I could only have achieved in a social context by throwing a bomb . . . I have tried to express in art."[5] Upon closer comparison of Vlaminck's statements with the ideas of Matisse, it becomes clear that both take an approach that suggests art has a civilizing, even soothing effect that might serve as a "counter" to terror. Thus it seems that there are at least two very different directions implied by these various statements. On the one hand, we find the artist who wishes to emphatically challenge an entrenched tradition by whatever means necessary, even if it requires destruction of the traditional forms. On the other hand, we find the idea that the arts have the power to subdue the effects of terror and to serve a therapeutic purpose.

The first tendency (suggested by Boulez's comments) can be seen in the declarations of the Italian Futurists. For example, F.T. Marinetti, writing in the 1909 *Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* declared that the Futurists would "glorify war – the world's only hygiene" and in a slightly later treatise wrote: "We Futurists, who for over two years, scorned by the Lame and Paralyzed, have glorified the love of danger and violence,

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[2] Maurice de Vlaminck as quoted in Jean Leymarie, *Fauvism: A Biographical and Critical Study*, trans. James Emmons (New York: Skira, 1987; first published 1959), 49.

[3] Henri Matisse, from "Notes of a Painter," 1908, quoted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1968), 135.

[4] "At 80, Boulez makes a Grand Tour," National Public Radio, May 22, 3005.

[5] Maurice de Vlaminck, quoted in Joseph-Emile Muller, *Fauvism*, trans. Shirley E. Jones (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1967), 71.