Reaching the Place Where the Poet Last Stood | introduction

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Prelude: Art, Terror, and the Power of Crowds

"There is nothing man fears more than the touch of the unknown. He wants to *see* what is reaching towards him, and to be able to recognize or at least classify it. Man always tends to avoid physical contact with anything strange. In the dark, the fear of an unexpected touch can mount to panic."[1] With these contentions, appearing under the heading "The fear of being touched," Elias Canetti opens his landmark sociological study *Crowds and Power*. In tracing the creation of all our artificial boundaries back to this fear, Canetti makes it possible for certain affinities to be formed between different categories of human enterprise. Take, for example, art and terroristic violence: whereas these were once activities that occupied completely separate spheres of public inquiry and action, the past couple centuries have provided an increasingly steady flow of incidents causing the violent insurgent to be compared to the practitioner of radical aesthetics. When either of these types begin from what Canetti calls "the violation of generally established and universally visible and valid distances,"[2] both the aestheticization of terror and its inverse become possible.

Canetti identified the incorporation of vulnerable individuals into crowds as a way of escaping this fear, while another renowned writer, Tolstoy, identified artwork as a particular force that could provide this sense of communal security within a virtual space: art had the potential to melt away these fears of the unknown, joining humans "together in the same feeling" as it were. Terrorism, meanwhile, has gained its tactical longevity and enduring place in the public imagination through its regular assaults on the very crowded spaces that we have deemed to be a means of security: it has generally sought to exploit the public 'lowering of the guard' that we experience as equal contributors to the growth of a crowd, blasting and bombing us into a counter-intuitive state whereby that which we felt to be an enveloping benevolence is the very condition which increases our chances at becoming the victims of indiscriminate retribution. Various strains of radical artwork, meanwhile, have done the same for the sense of security provided by the communal experience of aesthetics, aiming at their own kind of undifferentiated, unequivocal and immediate reactions. That many in the artistic avant-gardes have also rhapsodized throughout history about the cleansing fire of violence, if only for the way in which it provides another form of "togetherness" - togetherness in agitation and fear - is widely documented and hardly refutable.

The origins and full extent of this art-terror pact will be explored in these pages in much greater detail, but for now, please indulge me a brief detour to the more recent history. On moving into my college dorm room in 1990s Chicago, one of my first impressions came from the previous resident's own lasting "impression" on my inherited writing desk: a warning that YOU MADE A MISTAKE LIVING HERE savagely carved into the soft composite material of the top desk drawer. As fate would have it, my very public-facing job at a media supermarket eventually gave me occasion to meet this would-be Jeremiah (whose gift of prophecy was right on the money in this instance), and to learn some intriguing factoids about his background. Along with looking and dressing something like a French touring cyclist, and having the rushed and filler-free conversational demeanor of an emergency medical technician, he self-identified as an "industrial noise terrorist," a designation that still had some currency to it before the humorous self-effacement and cynicism of Generation X was replaced by something much nastier at the beginning of the new millennium.

Indeed, the popular culture and even "underground" culture of the 1990s was such that you could easily intuit an "industrial noise terrorist" as an aesthetically aggressive but otherwise benign sub-species of electronic musician; someone likely capable of building an analog kit synthesizer but not necessarily skilled in the use of Semtex explosive or sarin gas. In fact, one of the most notorious of "industrial noise terrorists" lived within walking distance of my Lincoln Park workplace[3], and some of the items to be found on the shelves there included a CD compilation with the punning title *Guitarrorists,* and a manifesto by anarchist author Hakim Bey that bore the subtitle "Ontological Anarchy and *Poetic Terrorism* [italics mine]". The looming Global War on Terror may have erased such wordplay from the self-promotional vocabulary of those who don't wish to be banned from commercial air flights, but the actual mystique of art rising to the status of "terrorism" - and vice versa - is far from being vanquished.

In fact, when that new period of geopolitical conflict began in earnest, it took not long at all for the wildfire of speculation about such associations to spread, and to eventually flame out with no clear resolution. One particular incident in early 21st century intellectual discourse exhibited the degree to which "terrorism" was no longer a term to be bandied about in a self-effacing manner nor spoken about in the abstract; this being a provocative statement from the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen after the September 11 attacks – one that would sadly eclipse much of his actual musical accomplishment. Naturally, for those with no inclinations towards avant-garde culture whatsoever, this was effectively their introduction to the composer, and the inscrutability of his work to non-initiates can only have helped to make him a pariah at a time when many were also groping to understand the reasoning behind an unprecedented act of destruction. In short, Stockhausen's claim that the defining act of 21st century terrorism was "the biggest work of art that has ever been" (later stated as "Lucifer's greatest work of art") was misinterpreted by some observers as an actual

endorsement of the attacks. The resultant media scourging and public disavowal of one of the 20th century's most innovative composers was a bellwether of a more wide-ranging hysteria to come, but this would only be a deterrent for so long. Somewhat more awkward expressions of sympathy for legitimately recognized terrorists - if only for their generic portrayal as dramatic "tragic figures" - would surface in later years. Events such as singer Amanda Palmer's poem dedicated to Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, and the contemporaneous *Rolling Stone* magazine cover granted to the same (in which the young zealot was cast in the brooding "sensitive male" mold of a young Johnny Depp) almost immediately resulted in a flurry of clarifications, retractions, and apologies. However, no amount of bowing and scraping could retroactively nullify the original flash of inspiration behind these actions, and as such, the question of a mutual embrace between art and terrorism remained.

Murderous Passions

From the evidence available, the modern cultural imagination has consistently entertained the thought that both artists and violent criminals are ruled by their passions, and that there is a common calculus of intensity and un-compromise shared by these personality types. Such thinking has already been canonized in 19th century satires such as de Quincey's "On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts," and has been carried earnestly and effortlessly into the present. One popular line of thinking is that stifled or frustrated creative energies will find a way to reassert themselves in destructive activity, and that the greater the passionate spirit of the rejected creator, the greater their likelihood of their lashing out with an unprecedented violence whose inventiveness betrays a familiarity with conventionally recognized criteria of aesthetics. In fact, the concept of violent criminality arising from public *indifference* to one's art is nearly a book unto itself: see for example the tragedy of Andy Warhol's would-be assassin Valerie Solanas, who shot the Pop Art impresario in 1968 on the grounds that "he had too much control over my life,"[4] i.e. he had neglected to do anything with a screenplay that she had given him. Elsewhere, perennial American boogeyman and pop culture icon Charles Manson was routinely portrayed in mass media as a two-bit con man whose shift towards apocalyptic criminal mayhem stemmed from his misfortunes as a singer-songwriter (particularly when "Cease to Exist," the composition he had written for the Beach Boys to record, was drastically altered by that group and eventually saw the light of day as the bowdlerized "Never Learn Not to Love.") lastly, fictional criminal antiheroes like Hannibal Lecter, and the sort of characters who make gruesome tableaux and reliquaries out of their victims' remains, have also achieved their hold on audiences' imaginations through their portrayal as cultured aesthetes, to the point where real-life villains like "Moors Murderer" Ian Brady may have been inspired to adopt and project a Lecter-esque self-image (notably in his own book-length analysis of the phenomenon of serial killing).[5]

Having established that creative passions can cause psychopathic serial killers and other "lone wolf" social deviants to occasionally identify as "artists" or to view their crimes through an aesthetic lens, would it be that much of a logical leap to suggest that art can be the province of those using extreme violence in the service of socio-political struggles? Would it be that outrageous to consider how the adoption of the "creation through destruction" ethos by terrorists occasionally provides them with artistic objectives, and gives them an urge to have their works judged not only in terms of their operational efficacy, but also in terms of their art-historical relevance? Certainly an individual like Stern Gang (a.k.a. Lehi) recruiter / propagandist Geulah Cohen would not balk at this: Cohen proudly self-identified as a "woman of violence" while also rhapsodizing about how "eventually […] the soldier would reach the point where the poet last stood, and […] would hear echoes of the poet's song […] from these echoes he would start a conflagration."[6] This book will illustrate how such thinking is not an anomaly, and furthermore that select "poets", or artists in numerous different media, also take very seriously the potential for their work to be judged not solely on art-historical merits, but for its ability to supply these very "echoes" which spark "conflagration".

An Attempt at Definitions I: Terrorism

Composing this book was a daunting task when considering that "art" and "terrorism" remain perhaps two of the most highly subjective, contested concepts in the English language. If any solid consensus ever existed on the meanings of these terms, it continues to unravel at an astonishing pace. Beginning with "art": at least among those engaged in what might be called a professional "art world", the term has long since ceased to refer to the purely representational and decorative artifacts that most of the non-specialist population still associates with this term, and the more cynical among us might say that "art" has come to more or less encompass any action that said "art world" acknowledges by fiat as being such. The more charitable might observe that all "modern" art attains that status not by rising to a more or less universal standard of beauty, but by meaningfully commenting upon the history of art itself. Whatever the case, those who still take offense at Marcel Duchamp's century-old piece *Fountain* - the elevation of a signed urinal to a legitimate object of aesthetic inquiry - will not be comforted by further developments mentioned in this book, which include the elevation to art-ness of empty gallery space, the sky as "signed" by an artist, and canned fecal matter (the man responsible for this last artifact, Piero Manzoni, is helpfully noted by avant-garde historian Richard Kostelanetz as being a confidant of the artist Maurizio Catelan, whom he describes as, yes, a "satirist / terrorist".)[7]

"Terrorism," meanwhile, is a term that may have once referred to a limited type of violent action carried out by a similarly limited segment of the total politically engaged citizenry – say, the famous "bomb-throwing anarchists" of the late 19th century. Like "art," however, the increasing emotional resonance afforded

to the term has guaranteed its misapplication to anyone who is simply a tenacious enemy of the speaker or writer, and this generic application to any and all negatively perceived individuals betrays just as much ignorance of history as when a well-to-do teenager in the American suburbs declares his parents "fascist" for denying him his weekly allowance. Indeed, as terrorism scholar Louise Richardson has poignantly noted, "the only universally accepted attribute of the term 'terrorism' is that it is pejorative".[8] So, pairing these two concepts is likely to raise the semantic confusion exponentially if there is not an immediate attempt on my behalf to define my use of these terms, and so I will do this now.

Most introductions to this subject proceed by using a series of comparisons to whittle down the larger scope of military conflict until we are left with a passable definition of terrorism, and I see no need to break with this tradition here. In the past I have found the term "asymmetrical warfare," in fairly wide use among scholars of the subject, to be a convenient enough alternative, as this term unlocks other key facts about the history of the practice: it blunts some of the emotionally charged, discourse-denying quality of "terrorism" proper, and correctly implies that the combatants designated as terrorists are non-State actors compensating for their inferior force projection with unconventional means of attack. However, while semantically shifting to this term can be useful in distinguishing terrorist methodology from the actions of professional State armies who inspire their own form of terror (and who almost always hold monopolies on the legal initiation of violent force), it is not exactly airtight. For one, the layperson is likely to imagine that the "asymmetrical" warrior earns that designation solely by having deficiencies in manpower and firepower; if this alone were the case then they would more properly be defined as a guerrilla army. The term also fails to suggest one of the most important aspects of terrorist activity, namely that it is almost purely political in nature; even acts such as bank robberies are carried out by terrorists in order to fund politically motivated campaigns rather than for simple self-enrichment. With all this in mind, it is worth discussing some of the distinct forms of "asymmetry" at play that distinguish a terrorist from a "conventional" combatant.

One of the most salient "asymmetries" is the deliberate targeting of civilians with violent action, in attacks that are frequently but not always accurately described as "random." Although the choice of terrorist targets, from shopping malls to discos, is rarely ever decided by a roll of the dice (and the precise targets mentioned often gain an extra desirability as such given what they represent, e.g. "Western decadence," "capitalist excess"), the aimed-at impression is that the targets may as well be randomly chosen, and that no subject of a state hostile to the terrorists' objectives is safe anywhere or at any time. One of the most common observations to follow upon this explanation of terrorist methodology is that "official" militaries engage in similarly indiscriminate behavior: one of the most regularly cited examples is the British and American firebombing of non-strategic targets during the 1945 air raids on Dresden. However, while such a hellish event almost certainly filled its victims with profound feelings of terror, it took place in an inter-state conflict in which the entire territory of the targeted enemy state was assumed to be hostile. We can contrast this with most

terroristic acts acknowledged as such prior to 9/11: in most of these highly publicized cases, attacks were carried out by naturalized citizens of the state being targeted: the 1995 OKC bombing, the Tokyo sarin gas attacks of the same year, as well as the protracted 1970s campaigns of far-left terrorists in West Germany and Italy, all involved perpetrators native to the "target" state. As such, the civilian populations of these countries did not have an immediate understanding that they were "at war," and required the terrorists' own war declarations to reach that understanding. The victims of inter-state war crimes, and those unfortunate enough to be sacrificed as wartime "collateral damage", required no such clarification.

Another difference between the terrorist and the conventional combatant is the former's acting independently of the State (being "sub-state" actors in Richardson's reckoning). As with "random attacks," this too leaves a stream of caveats in its wake. If terrorists are in fact "sub-state" actors, then what about the actual State support given to terrorist groups when convenient, such as the Spanish government's questionable use of the GAL [*Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación*, "Antiterrorist Liberation Groups"] death squad against the militant Basque separatists ETA [Euskadi ta Askatasuna, "Basque Homeland and Liberty"] from 1983-1987? What of the U.S. support for the Iranian Mojahedin-e Khalq; an organization that would typically meet all the legally stated benchmarks for a terrorist organization, but which the State Department nevertheless de-certified as a terrorist organization in 2012? Perhaps these concerns can be best addressed by simply stating that violent and/or criminal groups may enjoy the boost in force projection that comes from having a state sponsor, but that they are not obliged to continue taking marching orders when it is no longer convenient for them. Speaking of *mujihadeen*, the more famous group of guerrilla fighters to use that title while battling the Soviet Union in Afghanistan provide an interesting, and poignant, demonstration of this fact. The training and material support provided by the United States to the *mujahideen* paved the way for the rise of Osama bin Laden and his 1996 *fatwa* / declaration of war against his former sponsor, the results of which are well known enough not to repeat here.

Once all the above factors are accounted for, we arrive at one of the most important factors distinguishing terrorists from conventional combatants and standing armies, namely that terrorists tend to rely upon the general non-combatant population finishing the job they have started. Put in a different way, Charles Townsend succinctly notes how the terrorist program differs logically from State violence: "war is ultimately coercive, terrorism is impressive,"[9] and we will see soon enough how this inadvertently outlines ways in which both radical art and terrorism can both function. This statement can be elaborated upon by what is maybe one of the most enduring, reliable synopses of the terrorist ethos: Johannes Most's 1880s anarchist tract *The Philosophy of the Bomb,* in which "outrageous violence" not only becomes a phenomenon that will "seize the public imagination," but which will also "threaten the state and impel it to delegitimizing reactions," and consequentially cause the people to "reject the government and turn to the 'terrorists'". If this seems at the outset like a ludicrous strategy, we will encounter several examples over the course of the book in which it has

achieved exactly the objectives that the strategists desired to achieve. Suffice to say that, had there not been at least *some* major successes to point back to, violence of the "delegitimizing" and "outrageous" type would not remain a part of the insurgent's toolkit to this day.

In conclusion, it has to be mentioned that *legal* definitions of terrorism are subject to change based on the shifting priorities of nation states, and thus can make attempts at differentiating terrorist activity from other forms of criminality or warfare frustrating, causing seasoned experts in the field throw up their arms in exasperation (just ask Walter Laqueur, who sifted through a triple-digit number of "definitions of terrorism" to find the majority of them in disagreement with one another). For example, acts of the U.S. Congress such as the Military Commissions Act of 2006 provided notoriously vague definitions of an "unlawful enemy combatant" (read: terrorist) that would have arguably placed non-aggressive anti-war protestors in the same company as those who had committed legitimately violent acts against person or property. Much more recent invocations of emergency powers in Canada, in response to the 2022 "Freedom Convoy" trucker protests against forcible vaccination mandates, have achieved largely the same – taking the broad "pejorative" quality that Richardson mentions and using it as a cudgel against virtually any group that opposes State orthodoxy, regardless of their actual threat level.[10]

An Attempt at Definitions II: Art

Terrorism is a relatively new concept within the larger history of military conflict. As noted by historian Michael Howard[11], only recently have wars expanded beyond inter-dynastic territorial disputes, and as such largely spared civilian populations from being subject to the same explosive violence as frontline combatants. The system of expression we know now as art, of course, is a much older affair, popularly dated back to the pre-historic cave paintings at Lascaux, where renderings of wild animals were assumed to be projecting a kind of "sympathetic magic" into the environment of their creators. The paintings were discovered in portions of human dwellings that were seemingly not meant to be inhabited, and thus these works were more likely to be used as a ritualistic means of domesticating an otherwise hostile terrain teeming with formidable beasts. As that domestication process became more successful, and the first large human civilizations began to flourish, art continued in its attempts to commune with the natural and with the sacred as well, with the artist becoming a sort of intermediary between worlds.

However, the artist acting in a capacity as a social commentator, or even social influencer, is still a relatively new phenomenon when taking into account the span of Western history in particular: Jacques Barzun, in identifying the Renaissance as the period when this transformation from *artisan* to *fine artist* took place, notes

some attributes of this nascent social type which are intriguingly close to those adopted by the would-be martyr in a terrorist cell: they were "destined to be more and more extraordinary, more and more exempt from convention and the law."[12] Also of interest is the fact that the then-new concept of the *uomo universale,* better known to English speakers as "Renaissance man," demanded a holistic knowledge that took into account not only aesthetic concerns but also the whole of the natural sciences and subjects now existing in university curriculae as "humanities" (philosophy, theology, history). Requiring an artist to become a repository of all human knowledge, rather than a pure specialist, was a dramatic step towards enabling our present reality, in which artworks were often intended to precede critical dialogues on social change rather than exist simply as objects of contemplation. The American artist Mike Kelley succinctly stated this shift in public perception of the artist when noting that art was a sort of "ritual activity parallel to culture".[13]

Upon the expansion of the artist's toolkit and recognition of their material independence (e.g. their newfound ability to choose their own patrons, and even rebuke the patron who "tries to inject his ideas into the design and is told not to meddle in affairs which he does not understand"),[14] it was inevitable that numerous artists would seize upon this newfound upgrade in status in ways that would identify them as rebels or subjects in revolt. In particular, the artistic school of Romanticism (and slightly later, Symbolism) sprang up as a reaction or counterweight to entrenched Enlightenment attitudes, as well as to the creeping standardization of life borne on the wings of the Industrial Revolution. When it did so, the artist was elevated to a kind of spiritual compass for society as a whole, more or less completing the transformation of artist into "influencer" rather than mere documentarian. This state of affairs would eventually be given serious intellectual support, most passionately by Friedrich Nietzsche, who declared that life was only really made livable once the aestheticization of life's inherent tragedy made it so. Against the philosophical inheritance of Socratic rationality, Nietzsche pined for a revival of the Greek antiquity that shut its front door on Socratic thought and which evaluated individuals' educational attainment not on their competence with science and mathematics, but on the basis of their proficiency in aesthetic disciplines. Among the many Nietzschean proclamations that speak to his fixation upon art as the guarantor of real / authentic life, there is this from his pugilistic *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*:

> Every art and every philosophy may be regarded either as a cure or as a stimulant to ascending
> or declining life: they always presuppose suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of
> sufferers: those that suffer from overflowing vitality, who need Dionysian art and require a
> tragic insight into, and a tragic outlook upon, the phenomenon of life, and there are those who
> suffer from reduced vitality, and who crave for repose, quietness, calm seas, or else the
> intoxication, the spasm, the bewilderment which art and philosophy provide.[15]

More notably, the philosopher makes a statement in the same text that seems to at once justify the actions of aesthetic extremists, and the "propaganda by deed" of terrorists mobilized in actual warfare:

> The richest creature, brimming over with vitality, the Dionysian God and man, may not only allow himself to gaze upon the horrible and the questionable; but he can also lend his hand to the terrible deed, and can indulge in all the luxury of destruction, disaggregation, and negation — in him evil, purposelessness and ugliness, seem just as allowable as they are in nature — because of his bursting plenitude of creative and rejuvenating powers, which are able to convert every desert into a luxurious land of plenty.[16]

The Romanticism in which this sort of intensity flourished was nevertheless succeeded by Modernism, and with it the more openly militant (and, indeed, military strategic) concept of an "avant-garde" that was necessary to re-shape the whole material and mental landscape. With the introduction of this ideal, the interchangeability of terrorism with art became a proposition that, for those familiar with the original 20th century avant-gardes, should not even be that controversial anymore, and is not purely a residue of the provocative spirit of those movements. Whether or not they personally participated in the type of random violence that has typified international terrorism since the time of Bakunin, a significant portion of the artistic avant-garde was seized with a "burn it all down" or "collapsist" fervor that hardly discouraged these actions. This attitude was easily discernable in statements like this one from Dada poet Richard Huelsenbeck: "we were against the pacifists, because it was the war that had given us the possibility to exist in all our glory. We were for the war, and today Dada is still for the war. Things have to collide: the situation so far is nowhere nearly gruesome enough."[17]

"Not All Artists…" / "Not All Terrorists…"

While the actual methodology of terrorism does maintain a high degree of consistency from one manifestation to the next, the motivations for engaging in terrorism are decidedly more varied, particularly when considering that some organizations struggle towards spiritual liberation and others towards the settling of material and territorial grievances. Apocalyptic, millennial cults like Japan's Aum Shinrikyo aimed at an ideal world very different from the one that animated the struggle of groups like the German RAF, Italian *Brigate Rosse*, and other representatives of the 1970s heyday of leftist "urban guerrilla" terrorism. Given this wide

divergence in the reasons for radicalization, it is only natural that a similarly broad spectrum of attitudes towards art would exist in the terrorist milieu. It is important to admit that total antipathy towards art is one of these, and to therefore rule out the idea that art and terrorism will subsume one another completely in the near future.

Consider the case of Theodore Kaczynski a.k.a. "The Unabomber," who based his postal bombing campaign upon an anti-technological, "deep ecologist" ethos that essentially implicated all manmade art as being an inferior abstraction from natural phenomena. His erstwhile defenders like author John Zerzan, in affirming this opinion, saw avant-garde tendencies towards destruction in art to therefore be in keeping with the remainder of art history, rather than being exceptional moments.[18] Other incidents, notably the 2015 Al Qaeda-affiliated attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris and the ISIL-affiliated massacre at the Bataclan concert hall from November of the same year, made it a point to directly target institutions of the arts, with at least the first of the two attacks being an unequivocal attempt to negate the expressive freedoms granted to such institutions.

Groups like the RAF, as glamorous and telegenic as some of their membership may have appeared, eventually demonstrated that the life of the "urban guerrilla" was one accompanied by intense privation and secrecy (constant changes of address and forged identity documents, etc.), to say nothing of an ethos of sacrifice that would often demand individual martyrdom, in the form of imprisonment or death, in order to keep the collective fighting for another day. In this context, leading member Gudrun Ensllin's statement that "we don't want to be just a page in the history of culture"[19] makes more sense as a command to other RAF cells than as an opinion on a matter that they had any choice in. Manuals for likeminded terror groups such as the East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front (extant 1972-1975) also hammer home the need for operational secrecy with a succession of stern and didactic bullet points, including the perennial buzzkills "guerrilla soldiers don't drink" and "you should be cautious about using cafes" – yet even while delineating a program for enforced austerity, the same manual interestingly makes appeals to a sort of warrior-poet ethic, reminding that the guerrilla soldier also embodies "craftsman-like proficiency […] as well as artistic passion and creative originality."[20] As this story unfolds, we will see more such appeals to aesthetic and poetic sensibilities, coming from unexpected sources. The oddly chilling quote from Cohen above will be revealed to not be the only one of its kind.

Nevertheless, we also need to immediately dispense with the idea that a majority of self-identifying artists wish to be the "poets" waiting on the threshold for men of violence to embrace them and somehow certify their work. How often, for example, can it really be said that present-day artists view de-legitimizing the State as one of the *primary* objectives of their work? If we merely look to the sacrosanct value that so many artists place upon the receipt of government grants for said work, then that is already highly dubious. When arts funding in my current home (Austin, Texas) was slashed a few years back, the local reaction was as if art *itself* had been mortally wounded, rather than that particular State-sanctioned fraction of all creative output.

The arts community in the U.S. has been generally ineffective — or merely unwilling — to critique certain of the State authorities' claims to power (i.e. the aforementioned monopoly on legal initiation of violent force), and it should not be seen as overly cynical to question the role that dependency on State funding plays in neutering these critiques.

Other more a-political circumstances have contributed to a situation in which impressive political violence is not on the menu for the great majority of artists. Significantly, the effect of digital communication's omnipresence has been to force artists into an increasingly anxious struggle to map out the coordinates of ontological concepts like "authenticity." While this process was already in place well before the 5G era, being ratified by events like the Turner Prize nomination of Tracey Emin's *My Bed,* this thematic takeover of contemporary art by self-focused, confessional works is far from breathing its last. As the glut of digital communication backed much of the art world into a corner, it has been forced to play the game of legitimizing itself and therefore giving an outsized market share to self-referential artworks, with the end result that there is precious little time to mount serious campaigns for de-legitimizing other forces – least of all ones that can retaliate in lethal ways. In the present 1st-world "entertainment economy", where the production and marketing of holistic *experiences* has long since outpaced the production of industrial commodities, that creative force which "joins humans together in the same feeling" has to compete with a proliferation of entertainment phenomena (i.e. online personae) that instead divide humans into ever more narrowly defined style tribes and cultural cliques.

So, again, this book will make no bold pronouncements about a *total* incommensurability of art and terror. I feel, however, that their reinforcing of one another at least meets the threshold of historical and present significance to warrant an examination like this one. With all the above in mind, this study will be comprised of several different modes in which art and terrorism either overlap or make explicit reference to one another. I will mainly be focusing on each of the following:

> 1. Artwork created by actual participants in terrorist activity. This category consists mainly of artworks acting with a propagandistic intent, or addressing themes of political struggle, rather than works by terrorists that treat other subject matter.
>
> 2. Artwork created by "civilian" / non-combatant actors that a.) is explicitly intended to achieve the same effects as an act of terrorism or b.) has been interpreted by critical communities as having such an intent.
>
> 3. Acts of terrorism *as* artwork. This essentially inverts the 2nd list item here. This category encompasses actions committed by those identifying as members of officially designated terror

cells, which were not proclaimed by them as "art" but nonetheless were imparted aesthetic qualities by notable public figures, or came to be discussed in the language of the art world rather than that of warfare.

4. Artworks intended as broad critiques of terrorism, either positive or negative: e.g. works that condemn its efficacy or irrationality, or works which allude to its necessity in sociopolitical situations where other means of redressing grievances are no longer possible.

I anticipate that discerning readers already understand these categories are not fully self-contained, and that there will be a good deal of correspondence between them. If that is in fact the case, I feel it does lend some credence to one of the principal arguments being advanced here, i.e. the aestheticization of political violence and the political radicalization of art are phenomena which cannot help eventually merging into one another, resulting in an increasing number of instances in which clear categorical distinctions are difficult to apply.

Artwork falling into the first category may also include works created by sympathizers who otherwise do not have a place on any terrorist organizational chart. Certainly there is a high degree of congruence in the messaging and outward presentation when comparing the art of terrorists to that of their sympathizers, and often works are released to the public with no clear attribution. One example might be the aestheticized videos of actual attacks carried out by LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] suicide bombers, as well as music "tribute" CDs to these martyrs, which could be purchased in Tamil-controlled areas during the Sri Lankan conflict. The well-known murals of imposing masked commandoes scattered throughout Belfast are another such phenomenon, in this case serving not just the propagandistic purposes of morale-raising or possible recruitment to the cause, but having a functional purpose as well, i.e. the demarcation of territory being claimed by the respective parties to the local conflict. Some of the questions surrounding this category or art include the question of whether these works appeared as a result of being commissioned by terrorist sponsors or as a wholly "volunteered" action, and also the question of whether or not the artistic avant-garde would have any use for such simplistic messaging and often amateurish execution. The creation of unambiguous agit-prop by avant-garde luminaries is not, after all, unprecedented: tracts such as the composer Cornelius Cardew's *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism,* which upbraided poor Karlheinz long before his 9/11 comments, show that uncomplicated (in this case Mao-ist) sloganeering and exhortation are not beneath artists who would otherwise be acknowledged as formal innovators.

Artwork from the final category, though it will certainly advance such cautionary narratives as the irrationality or needlessness of terrorism, will nevertheless also come from perspectives that some (particularly government apparatchiks) could confuse as being "propagandistic"; proposing terrorism as the inevitable result

of chronically marginalizing or unjustly defaming groups that have no other means to prevent their eventual liquidation. We must remember that employing such concepts as "blowback"[21] to explain the sudden emergence of terrorist violence is often construed as being an apologia / defense of the terrorists' activities rather than an attempt to lay out the epidemiology of terrorism. Within this context, there unfortunately need to be frequent reminders that artistic character studies of terrorists and their actions can be done for other than propagandistic reasons. Take, for example, the case of martial composer David Woodard, who composed a "prequiem" for Timothy McVeigh to be performed prior to his state execution as decreed for his role in the 1995 destruction of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City (the work in question was apparently done at McVeigh's direct request). If we take the composer at his word that this was done with the intent of "caus[ing] the soul of Timothy McVeigh to go to heaven" following his execution, serious questions must be asked about the genuine usefulness of such a piece for energizing the actual or prospective followers of a terrorist organization. Though it is doubtful such a piece would have been composed without the composer being inspired in some way by McVeigh's actions, and therefore sharing his declared enemies – especially when considering the composition's salutatory title of *Ave Atque Vale* – there is nevertheless no evidence that the piece aims at a result other than the spiritual one Woodard states above.

Within this same category, literary works dealing with terrorism are abundant, with canonical contributions in this genre coming from authors like Joseph Conrad (*The Secret Agent*), Martin Amis (*The Second Plane*), Doris Lessing (*The Good Terrorist*) and Heinrich Böll (*The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*). The modern cinema of the world is also not short on works that fall into this category (to the point where yet another disclaimer needs to be added here about how a study of this phenomenon is a "book unto itself.") Ambitious works such as the 1978 *Deutschland im Herbst* [Germany in Autumn] complicate matters yet further by being absorbing multiple directorial viewpoints on the RAF terror campaign and state response, offering as thorough a summation as possible of all the different attitudes towards the events. Again, it is a work that could be interpreted in places to be providing moral support to terrorists (via sequences which, for example, imply a sort of continuity between the fallen RAF comrades and socialist martyrs Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht), though these sequences are countered by others which seem to imply a generalized sense of heightened confusion and anxiety arising from *both* the possibility of terrorist attack and of state reprisal. Incidentally, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who directed one such portion of the film, was also responsible for directing *Die Dritte Generation* [The Third Generation], a film which caused some controversy by suggesting that terrorists were the dupes of less idealistic, more amoral forces (in this case, arms dealers).

The Terror of Transitions and the Art of Anxiety

At the time of originally drafting this work, news coverage of both terrorism and artistic production steeply declined in order to continue providing coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet it did not take that long for at least the issue of terrorism to return to the fore. Given that State reactions to the virus in many cases involved sweeping extra-legal "emergency powers" and the concurrent suspension of civil liberties, dissent at some level was an inevitability, and with that the familiar refrain of dissenters being themselves a sort of "terrorist", even when said dissenters' actions did not rise to the level of political violence without the fundamental definition of violence itself being irresponsibly altered. Such reactions were one of many manifestations of the pandemic acting as an extreme accelerant of existing social and cultural divisions – particularly within the U.S. – to become far more pronounced than at any time in recent history, with an unprecedented number of polled respondents defining members of opposing political persuasions with language such as "enemy." In this intensifying climate of mutual hostility, the State itself has not been let off the hook, with bodies such as the U.S. Congress continuing their descent to the basement of single-digit percentages of job approval (had a terrorist group actually claimed responsibility for the outbreak of the virus, they could have reasonably claimed one of the most successful "delegitimizing" operations in history).

To be sure, the menu of individual and collective grievances within the United States has likely never seen such variety as it does now, and the roster of social categories claiming to be marginalized has expanded in turn, to the point where one should never rule out the possibility of new terrorist challenges to the State. Meanwhile, as the body of human activities constituting art continues to shift its fluid boundaries, and as its increasingly participatory nature reduces barriers to entry or creates communities parallel to that of the "official" / institutional art world, I believe we will be confronted with a growing amount of overlap on a Venn diagram whose component circles are labelled "artists" and "those aggrieved to the point of initiating violence". It is very possible that this would be the case even without the globally distributed accelerant mentioned here, but, naturally, a plague of fear and helplessness blanketing most of the planet has helped nudge this from possible to probable.

With this, we come full circle to Canetti's thoughts on fear and the fragile state of protection offered to us by the crowd. Both the forces of terror and art achieve their greatest successes during those transitional periods of public anxiety that arise when social conditions unexpectedly change, or accelerate at a rate which the public is largely unprepared for, and which again cause us to question whether our innate need for

"togetherness" will save us or annihilate us. We can take, for example, the "economic miracle" of post-war Italy, which scholar Alessandro Orsini cites as being a disorienting period in which thousands of individuals radicalized into the *Brigate Rosse* terror cells.[22] During essentially the same time period in Italy, Giovanni Lista notes how the radical artist group *Arte Povera* was created for almost identical reasoning as that which motivated that moment of terrorist radicalization, e.g. the disapproval of a "society absorbed by the pursuit of consumerism and technological expansion"[23] (considering the infamy earned by the *Brigate Rosse* in the so-called "Years of Lead" of the 1970s, Lista's invocation of a contemporaneous "mood of dissent"[24] reflected by *Arte Povera* is something of an understatement). We can continue going down the line towards subsequent epochs of post-industrial anxiety, particularly our own etherealized age of internet omnipresence, to find that this trend has continued unabated and has continued to spawn phenomena that function both as acts of aesthetic contemplation and of destructive confrontation: the naïve, prankster artistry of "memetic warfare" and acts of legitimately recognized "cyberterrorism" have both been highly effective in implying a State too incompetent to defend itself against novel threats, to a point where it is worth asking how important it really is just *what* these nuisances to the State call themselves.

As we begin this journey in earnest, we will see that the seeds for a hybrid form of art and terror have begun germinating long ago. Even with such warnings from the past, though, this cross-pollination will likely still bear fruit the likes of which will catch both intelligence agencies and cultural critics off their guard. We will see that "the place where the poet last stood" is not difficult to find for those with some persistence and, more importantly, flexibility of mind. Yet it is precisely that flexibility and adaptability which the power establishments of the world often lack. This portends their continuing inability to resolutely and fully defeat "impressive violence" with "coercive violence", and to suffer future, greater humiliations at the hands of meagerly funded and numerically inferior forces.

[1] Canetti, E. (1984). *Crowds and Power.* Trans. Carol Stewart. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Peter Sotos, then of the "power electronics" group Whitehouse.

[4] Colacello, B. (1990). *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up.* New York: HarperCollins.

[5] See *The Gates of Janus*, most recently re-printed in 2015 by Feral House Books, Portland OR.

[6] Cohen, G. (1966). *Woman of Violence: Memoirs of a Young Terrorist.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

[7] Kostelanetz, R. (2019). *A Dictionary of the Avant-Gardes.* Oxford / New York: Routledge.

[8] Richardson, L. (2007). *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat.* New York: Random House

[9] Quoted in Townsend, C. (2002). *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction.* New York: Oxford University Press.

[10] For more on this issue, see contemporaneous statements from the Canadian Civil Liberties Union on PM Justin Trudeau's invocation of the national Emergencies Act, i.e. "The *Emergencies Act* can only be invoked, according to its own terms, when a situation 'seriously endangers the lives, health or safety of Canadians and is of such proportions or nature as to exceed the capacity or authority of a province to deal with it,' or 'seriously threatens the ability of the Government of Canada to preserve the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Canada' and when the situation 'cannot be effectively dealt with under any other law of Canada.'" https://ccla.org/press-release/ccla-statement-on-the-emergencies-act/. Retrieved 2/19/2022.

[11] See Howard, M. (1976). *War in European History.* Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press.

[12] Barzun, J. (2000). *From Dawn to Decadence. 1500 to the Present: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life.* New York: Perennial / HarperCollins.

[13] Kelley, M. (2003). *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism.* Ed. John C. Welchman. Cambridge / London: MIT Press.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Nietzsche, F. (1911). *Nietzsche* Contra *Wagner.* Trans. Anthony M. Ludovici. Edinburgh / London: T.N. Foulis.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Quoted in Dickerman, L. (ed.) (2005). *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris.* New York: Naional Gallery of Art, Washington / Distributed Art Publishers Inc.

[18] See Zerzan's "The Case Against Art" in *Apocalypse Culture,* ed. Adam Parfrey, 1990. Los Angeles: Feral House.

[19] Quoted in Aust, S. (1987). *The Baader-Meinhof Group: The Inside Story of a Phenomenon.* Trans. Anthea Bell. London: Bodley Head.

[20] Res, M. (2019). *Anti-Japan: The Life and Death of the East Asia Armed Front.* Available at theanarchistlibrary.org. Accessed 2/19/2022.

[21] This being an "intelligence community"-rooted term referring to the unintended consequences arising from intelligence agencies' covert operations. It has also become more broadly applicable to unintended consequences arising from *overt* interference, e.g. sanctions regimes.

[22] Orsini, A. (2009). *Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mindset of Modern Terrorists.* Ithaca / London: Cornell University Press.

[23] Lista, G. (2006). *Arte Povera*. Milan: 5 Continents Editions.

[24] *Ibid.*