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The comedy of (t)errors

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The exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: It confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception. (Schmitt 1985: 15)

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. (Benjamin 1992: 248-9)

The horizon of terror is the absolute fear of catastrophe: an enigmatic fear, a radical uncertainty, which ruptures and disturbs the usual flow of time, setting it out of joint. This is also how Albrecht Dürer's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (from 1498) depicts the terror of catastrophe. The "four horsemen" are the direct causes of this terror: the Conqueror, arrow poised in his bow; to his right comes War wielding his sword above his head; then we have the portly figure of Famine, swinging the upturned scales of Justice; and slightly forward of the other three, we have the emaciated figure of Death, pitch-fork in hand. The Four Horsemen surge forwards trampling people beneath them. And above them, peering through the clouds is a smiling Angel, its right hand held as if in benediction. What Dürer conjures in his woodcut is terror *in extremis*, terror as exception, coming from nowhere, with no reason and no warning. As an exceptional event it has no origin in the frame of the picture itself, yet precisely for this reason it shatters the frame, the everyday life of the people. From the point of view of the trampled people, the "casualties", the terror depicted is a traumatic event that cannot be symbolized – hence it is sublimated in Dürer's print.

But let's imagine the picture once more, for what becomes interesting when we come to it with our modern eyes is what Dürer cannot imagine: the becoming rule of exception, of terror. Indeed, with the quick but decisive move from 9/11 to the politics of security, terror (and the war against terror) has become the most important factor of sociality, which sustains, rather than shatters, the "business as usual". Since 9/11 many commentators have pointed out that terror has social origins in globalization, in economic and social injustice, that global society itself produces terror. Equally significantly, however, today terror produces society. In the aftermath of 9/11 terror is no longer merely an "exceptional" (real or imagined) catastrophe but has become a dispositif, a technique of governance which imposes a particular conduct, a new model of truth and normality, on contemporary sociality by redefining power relations and by unmaking previous realities.

In the contemporary frame, the four horsemen are not the symbolic horsemen of the apocalypse, but the U.S. Army in Iraq. The Conqueror wields not a bow and arrow, but "brings democracy"; War comes in the guise of Peace; Famine is packaged in humanitarian aid and "infinite justice"; and Death is biopolitics. When the U.S. Army airplanes arrive at their destinations, nobody knows whether their cargo is aid or bombs: here the conqueror, the sovereign, delivers both, and at the same time, because, in this frame, aid and war serve the same ends, with the result of a revamped, self-referential Orwellian language – "peace is war" and "war is peace". The unimaginable, for Dürer, becomes our reality. We bear witness to the real catastrophe – when terror as exception and terror as the rule become indistinct. That is, in the modern frame the social world is shattered as terror is deployed as technique. It is no longer an exceptional terror from the outside, it is terror within, terror which occupies an ambivalent zone between, or rather, disrupts the dialectic of exception and the rule. Indeed, "it is as if the final result of civilization were a return to the terrors of nature" (Adorno & Horkheimer 1997: 113.)

I. Apocalypse now – and permanent

“In its first phase,” wrote Ulrike Meinhof, “the guerilla is shocking” (2001: 278). The aim of the shock, which she was dreaming to bring forth, was to capture the imagination of the public through sabotage, to introduce a catastrophe into the functioning of the capitalist society so that people would “act without being determined by the pressure of the system, without seeing themselves with the eyes of the media, without fear”. She was, as with her “comrades”, spectacularly unsuccessful.

Bin Laden, in contrast, achieved spectacular success by reversing the tables: he had nothing against the system as such (he is himself a capitalist) and further he used the most lethal weapon of the system, the media, against the system itself by creating a “theater of terror” with the whole world a captive audience (Burke 2004). Indeed, terror seems to exist in so far as it can become a media explosion (see Lotringer & Virilio 1997: 174).

So true is this that it is advisable not to be in a public space where television is operating, considering the high probability that its very presence will precipitate a violent event. The media are always on the scene in advance of terrorist violence. This is what makes terrorism a peculiarly modern form – far more modern than the “objective causes to which we seek to attribute it: political, sociological or psychological approaches are simply not capable of accounting for such events (Baudrillard 1994: 75-6)

So true is this that terror seems to be a continuation of Hollywood movies by other means. *Fight Club*, for instance, a Hollywood “terrorist blockbuster” from 1999, is framed by the fantasy of undoing the social, destroying consumerism and exploding the American paranoid fantasy of suburban security. In the final “romantic” scene the protagonists walk hand in hand, while behind them is performed an orgy of devastation as buildings explode and collapse. With the collapse of the World Trade Center, this fantasy is realized, and violence, as if it directly emerged from the TV screen, returned in the real, transforming the WTC into the symptom of the contemporary network society, paralleling the manner in which the Titanic had become the symptom of industrial society (Žižek 2002: 15-16). On September the 11th the fantasy of violence, that is, the image of violence without the real event, coincided with its exact opposite, that is, the unimaginable, sublime event, or the event without an image: terror as “the greatest work of art imaginable”. Or, in other words, with contemporary terror the real enemy is our own desire, ourselves, our own fantasies. Compared to Meinhof’s strategy of sabotage, Bin Laden’s is viral – it kills from inside.

Meinhof aimed, through sabotage, at provoking state terror, hoping that through its escalation “the enemy betrays himself, becomes visible” (Meinhof 2001: 279).

Again, Bin Laden was better at provoking the state. Thus, only five days after 9/11, Dick Cheney explained to an NBC interviewer how the Bush administration would proceed to deal with terror attacks, blatantly declaring that the administration would “work through, sort of, the dark side” (quoted in Conrad 2005). “Dark side” meant the suspension of *habeas corpus* and of the international laws regulating the treatment of prisoners of war.

Operating through the “dark side”, in an illegal framework, is not new. There has, so to speak, always been a difference between the foreground (the legal façade) and

background (the illegal “dark side”). What is new is that the difference between the foreground and the background seems to have disappeared today, that the “dark side” is legalized, or normalized, in the war against terror. In the twentieth century almost 200 million people were killed through state terror, primarily aimed against its own populations. In the twenty first century state terror is called politics of security, which justifies itself with reference to and thus mirrors terror. Thus it can curb citizenship rights to save democracy, kill people to protect them from despots, and legalize torture to preserve human dignity.

The thought of security bears within it an essential risk. A state which has security as its sole task and source of legitimacy is a fragile organism; it can always be provoked by terrorism to become itself terroristic. (Agamben 2001)

Security can easily turn into a perversion, that is, terror. When the difference between terror and state disappears, they start to justify each other, terrorizing the political itself. In this sense, both terror and the politics of security tend to transcend politics in a “dark” pact. The obscene/off-scene reality behind the politics of security is that “security” brings with it more terror. Obsession with security, that is, living in permanent fear, is the real victory of terrorism (Baudrillard 2003: 81).

The state in which we live now, in the ‘war on terror’, is one of the endlessly suspended terrorist threat: the Catastrophe (the new terrorist attack) is taken for granted, yet endlessly postponed. Whatever will actually happen, even if it will be a much more horrible attack than that of 9.11, will not yet be ‘that’. And it is crucial here that we accomplish the ‘transcendental’ turn: the true catastrophe is already this, life under the shadow of the permanent threat of a catastrophe. (Žižek 2003: 143)

The ultimate catastrophe, emerging from the war against terror, is the disappearance of politics. In a sense, therefore, it is deceptive to speak of a “politics” of security for the difference between “normal” politics and politics of security is not a quantitative but a qualitative difference. The difference is between politics as such and a politics, which consciously rejects the political nature of given questions. The antagonism is thus not between those who say the world today is secure and those who say it is not. Rather, the antagonism is between those who would consider it a problem within the horizon of politics of security and those who would not. In other words, the antagonism is between security and asecurity, not between security and insecurity (Wæver 1997). Politics of security is, above all, about finding apolitical solutions to political problems. War, said Clausewitz, is the continuation of politics with other means; the war against terror, or the politics of security, seems to be the continuation of transpolitics (or the lack of politics) with other means.

II. Security as *dispositif*

In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault contrasts biopower, which he also calls “the *dispositif* of security”, to disciplinary power (2003a: 242-3). The “life” relevant to “biopolitics” is the life populations, of man as a species. As a *dispositif*, security constitutes the abstract assemblage of strategies of power which replace the disciplinary strategies. Foucault mentions already in *Discipline and Punish* a “tendency” of disciplinary *dispositif* to become “de-institutionalized”, that is, to escape the disciplinary confinement and “circulate in a ‘free’ state” (Foucault 1991: 211). It is this image that Deleuze (1995) employs to discuss the emergence of post-disciplinary “societies of

control”, in which the geographical/institutional delimitation of discipline, that is, the inside/outside distinction, has become obsolete. As against the persistent image of discipline as an “anti-nomadic technique” (Foucault 1991: 215, 218), power in control societies goes nomadic. One no longer moves from one closed site to another (family, school, barracks, prison, etc.) but is increasingly subjected to free-floating forms of power (Deleuze 1995: 178). In this sense control is a mobile form of discipline, a discipline without walls. Moving from discipline as an exercise of power in enclosed, “exceptional”, sites to an exercise of a “generalized surveillance” (Foucault 1991: 209), control generalizes discipline; “exception” becomes the “rule”. With intensified and direct access to biological life, control “knows no outside” or no exception (Hardt & Negri 2000: 413).

It is in relation to this “life” relevant to biopolitics that Foucault asks: “how will the power to kill and the function of murder operate in this technology of power, which takes life as both its object and its objective” (Foucault 2003a: 254)? How can death or killing contribute to life? It can, when one form of life is perceived as a threat to another (ibid. 256). In this context Foucault’s example is racism, but the war against terror could do equally well as an example. He writes, when racism is inscribed in state power, its form changes; it becomes an instrument of biopolitics and turns into state racism (ibid. 254; Foucault 1980: 55). What is at stake here is defending society, the social body, against biological threats (2003a: 62). “Society Must be Defended!” by the state, which now starts to act as if it were in a state of war, not against other states but against all that which threatens the population’s biological well-being. The state exists to protect the race. To protect the race, it must kill the other. “If you want to live, the other must die” (2003a: 255). Thus the enemy ceases to remain a political adversary but becomes a biopolitical threat. Killing is no longer perceived to be murder but becomes a kind of cleansing activity, the elimination of a danger. Concomitantly, wars turn into struggles for existence, the instruments of which are “exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on” (ibid. 256). As a result, death becomes a statistical death outside the realm of the law:

death now becomes ... the moment when the individual escapes all power, falls back on himself and retreats, so to speak, into his own privacy. Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death. (ibid. 248)

In short, the dispositif of security leads to the fragmentation of the biopolitical field between those who deserve to live and those who are to die (ibid. 254-5). It introduces a binary rift between “us” and “them”, between the “normal” and the “abnormal” (see Foucault 2003b: 316-7). What is decisive here is not only that the “abnormal” makes possible the definition of and sustains the “normal” but also that this biopolitical rift, the exception, is made possible by the law itself. In this sense the logic of security as a dispositif is similar to Schmitt’s “state of exception” in which the law paradoxically suspends itself. Likewise, the dispositif of security is about legitimizing the state of exception, or, to normalize what is exceptional. In this process, the distinction between war and politics tends to disappear and war increasingly becomes the foundation of politics itself (Hardt & Negri 2004: 12, 21).

In this sense, the spaces created by the war against terror are, above all, spaces in which the exception (war) is the rule, or, has become permanent. The notorious prison Abu

Ghraib, for instance, is an exceptional space in that the status of the inmates is that of “illegal combatants” exempted from the law and thus humanity. Reduced to *homo sacer* (Agamben 1999), the “enemy” is simply evil, inhuman, which became obvious especially in the scandal that followed the release of the soldier’s “trophy pictures” where the inmates parade naked outside their cells, are exposed to attacks of dogs, are forced to perform rape, oral sex and masturbation on each other, and so on. In a nutshell, the pictures blur the distinction between the animal and the human, and strip from the prisoners the status of citizen or of legitimate enemy, reducing their life to *homo sacer*’s bare life in an exceptional space, a “porntopia”.

Seen from this perspective, whole countries, e.g. “rogue states”, can resemble the Abu Ghraib prison. The concept of “rogue states” condenses a negativity that emerges through the logic of dichotomies between order and disorder, normality and perversion, the law and unlaw (despotism) and so on. However, the difference between “US” and the “rogue states” is not merely a dichotomic difference, that is, a difference between elements within the same symbolic economy. Rather, the “rogue states”, the space of despotism, signifies what is prior to difference as such. The difference here is that of between difference and the lack of difference. Hence the image of “rogue states” functions as an apolitical category that points out the lack of form rather than another political form. As such, “rogue states” constitute a fantasy space, a pre-social “state of nature”. They are, in other words, constructed as the zero-degree of sociality, as a simulacrum, in which there are no differences. And precisely as such, as a fantasy space, the “rogue state” is a symptom of Western democracy; what the war against terror does is to externalize its own perversion, that is, its own unlaw (sovereignty, despotism), to the “rogue states”, denying it a constitutive power or a dispositif in its own structure. In other words, the concept of “rogue states” hides its own performative function, the fact that “rogue states” which is actively created as a “necessary” effect of the war against terror, as an excess of the world (dis)order itself.

Foucault showed that the panopticon emerged as an exceptional space but later it became the rule, that is, the whole society worked according to the logic of the panopticon. Indeed, paraphrasing Baudrillard, one could say that the panopticon hides the fact that the rest of the society is a panopticon. By the same token, one could say that the concept of “rogue state” or Abu Ghraib prison, the exceptional spaces of the politics of security, hide the fact that the rest of the world – the American Empire – is a rogue state. Indeed, even though the public is invited to believe that the Abu Ghraib torture pictures misrepresent what the war against terror stands for (democracy, freedom, et cetera), isn’t there more to them? What if the pictures are not an exception but the rule? The striking familiarity of the pictures is more terrifying than what they depict precisely because, as Susan Sontag (2004) put it, the pictures are a testimony to the extent of voyeurism and brutalization present in today’s society. “Considered in this light, the photographs are us” (ibid.). The pictures signify a normalization of what has hitherto been an exception.

It is hard to measure the increasing acceptance of brutality in American life, but its evidence is everywhere, starting with the games of killing that are the principal entertainments of young males to the violence that has become endemic in the group rites of youth on an exuberant kick. From the harsh torments inflicted on incoming students in many American suburban high schools ... to rituals of physical brutality and sexual humiliation to be found in working-class bar culture, and institutionalised in our colleges and universities as hazing – America has become a country in which the fantasies and

the practice of violence are increasingly, seen as good entertainment, fun. What formerly was segregated as pornography, as the exercise of extreme sado-masochistic longings – such as Pasolini's last, near-unwatchable film, *Salò* (1975), depicting orgies of torture in the fascist redoubt in northern Italy at the end of the Mussolini era – is now being normalised, by the apostles of the new, bellicose, imperial America, as high-spirited prankishness or venting (Sontag 2004).

So, insofar as they were subjected to insult and torture, the prisoners in Abu Ghraib tasted a dose of the “downside” of American culture, which constitutes the necessary supplement to the proclaimed values such as democracy, freedom, personal worth, et cetera (Žižek 2004). With the decisive difference, though, that without needing political correctness anymore the “downside” tends to become the upper, “normal” side.¹ This normalization is characteristic of security (or terror) as a *dispositif*. Today war is fast becoming a “general matrix” for social relations, “a regime of biopower, that is, a form of rule aimed not only at controlling the population but producing and reproducing all aspects of social life” (Hardt & Negri 2004: 13). As such security/terror joins the previous *dispositifs*, sovereignty, discipline and control. In contrast to discipline and control, which operate, respectively, in terms of enclosure and flow, terror functions against the background of fear related to uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety. It immobilizes through fear; that is, it is disciplinary without the spatial confinement of discipline and the functional regularity of flows.

Discipline worked by creating exceptional zones of confinement. Control changed this, realizing the fantasy generated by the disciplinary society, that of breaking through the wall. Speed became an imperative and controlled “freedom” of movement (along regulated flows) came to coexist with disciplinary or sedentary confinement. Thus the utopia generated by “control society” is that of an unregulated, anarchic flow. Terror in this sense is a utopia specific to control society, its line of escape. It invests in insecurity, uncertainty and unsafety, and turns the citizen into hostage, to *homo sacer*. In the transpolitical war against terror, the state extends exception through the politics of security; exception becomes permanent. The fantasy generated by terror is, in other words, security.

III. From tragedy to comedy

Indeed, whereas religion could “explain” natural catastrophes with reference to a transcendent God's will or the devil's work, in today's society terror is a stand-in for what goes wrong. The “terrorist” is the new “devil”; equally non-existent, equally

¹ Thus, even after the picture scandals, *Front*, a British “lad magazine”, published a “war issue” proclaiming that:

It's the glory of charging into battle, the thrill of earth-shuddering explosions and the general hardness of everything. So it's with this in mind that we've hammered together The War Issue, to awaken the sleeping soldier in you. From teaching you how to 'deal' with terrorists with your bare hands to showing what a 500lb warhead can do to you if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, it's all here.... Fire in the hole!” (Luke Gosling, Editor, p. 3, *Front* Volume 81, April 2005).

One is no longer engaged with preparations for war/terror attacks as a reality but as a simulation. But precisely as such, war achieves its own discourse, its own process of normalization. The more it becomes a simulacrum, the more it penetrates different domains of life.

functional. As such, fear finds a materialized enemy in the terrorist and in situations, when *sicherheit* is reduced to safety, that is, when political problems are recast as military necessities.

The most sinister and painful of contemporary troubles can be best collected under the rubric of *Unsicherheit* – the German term which blends together the experiences which need three English terms – uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety – to be conveyed.... In a fast globalizing world, where a large part of power, and the most seminal part, is taken out of politics, ... institutions cannot do much to offer security or certainty. What they can do and what they more often than not are doing is to shift the scattered and diffusive anxiety to one ingredient of *Unsicherheit* alone – that of safety, the only field in which something can be done and seen to be done. (Bauman 1999a: 5)

The state washes its hands of the casualties of the market economy, and, reducing its involvement with social security to a minimum, moves “from social states to security states” (Bauman 2004: 87). What is significant in this context is that all threats against a society can be experienced as terror. As Baudrillard writes, even natural catastrophes can be perceived as a form of terrorism not only because big-scale technological accidents have similar effects to terror, but also because terror groups could take responsibility for any catastrophe, any plain crash. What is characteristic for irrational events, after all, is that they can be ascribed to everything and everybody. There is no limit to what can be seen as a criminal intention (Baudrillard, 2003: 98-99, note 1).

And crucially, even the apparently “dysfunctional” aspects of the politics of security perform an indispensable function in this respect. Torture, an extreme actualization of terror as a dispositif, is a good example of such dysfunctional functionality. Thus CIA director Porter Goss can tell that torture “doesn’t work. There are better ways to deal with captives” (quoted in Klein 2005). What is, then, the use of torture, what is the reason for its increasing popularity? The answer comes from an unexpected source:

Lynn England, the fall girl for Abu Ghraib, was asked during her botched trial why she and her colleagues had forced naked prisoners into a human pyramid. ‘As a way to control them,’ she replied. Exactly. As an interrogation tool, torture is a bust. But when it comes to social control, nothing works quite like torture. (Klein 2005)

That is, torture works not in spite of but rather because of its “dysfunctional” aspect. Like all machinic assemblages, technologies of security work by “breaking down” (see Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 8). Which also explains why the whole “war against terror” increasingly resembles a comedy of errors: no weapons of mass destruction is found; Bin Laden is not caught; Afghanistan seems to be more deserted than ever; democracy has not arrived in Iraq, and so on, but everything goes on and on. As Marx said, history always occurs twice; first as tragedy then as comedy. If 9/11 has the structure of tragic event, the war against terror has the structure of a comedy, a non-event. It is so in at least three senses. Firstly, in contrast to tragedy, its narrative structure is parasitic on the expectation of happy endings (democracy, reconciliation, etcetera). Thus, secondly, and again in contrast to tragedy, which necessarily cause disharmony and disruption by “changing everything”, comedy builds upon harmony and consensus; it produces non-events within the confines of a given hegemonic discourse. And thirdly, the only subject position comedy allows for is that of “types” whose actions are a direct outcome of their social positions rather than of individual (“tragic”) choices. It is striking, in this respect, to observe the parallel between the infantilized subject of security and the frightened subject of terror, the hostage. The hostage is an anonymous figure, a naked, formless

body, which is absolutely convertible: anybody and everybody can be a hostage (Baudrillard 1990: 34-5). Likewise, the politics of security redefines the citizen as a fearful subject to be protected, like a child. Anybody and everybody must be protected. Consequently, both the enemy and the friend are de-subjectified; while the “enemy” is reduced to an illegal combatant or a fundamentalist, the “friend”, the subject of security, becomes infantilized.

IV. Post-Oedipal – and terrorized

Precisely as such terror is the solution for a fundamental problem in the contemporary “post-Oedipal” society in which symbolic authorities collapse but freedom is not experienced as emancipation but as a burden complete with anxiety and uncertainty because the “free” subject has to use his freedom without ontological guarantees. Since there is no master in charge who can bear the burden of choice and take the blame, the reflexive subject has to make decisions without a symbolic authority. Discipline, and control, was about the reproduction of power through “strategies without subject”. Today we are confronted with the exact opposite situation, subjects caught in the consequences of their actions without a master that regulates their interactions (Žižek 1999: 340).

The subject produced within the disciplinary dispositif was that of the prisoner, whose mobility was constrained through confinement, stigmatization, and so on. With control, we have the “dividual”, the subject controlled on the move, through multiple systemic inscriptions and codes. Today’s paradigmatic – increasingly infantilized – subject, which the politics of security gestalts, resents not the fall of the symbolic authorities but their lack of authority. It feels an omnipresent fear for its security, not necessarily because of being more threatened than before (e.g. terror is closer) but because risks to security are perceived and experienced as something essential, and because the subject has lost the belief that the state can guarantee its security. As with caffeine-free coffee, the subject desires both security and freedom, both democracy and a strong state, which can act as an ersatz father. In the first modernity the subject referred to needs: “I am hungry”. As the community of need is being transformed into a community of fear, today, the contemporary subject cries: “I am afraid” (Beck 1997: 67).

The subjectivity relevant to terror and security can no longer be related to the idea of freedom based on individual responsibility (discipline) or to the instances of security based on risk management through “objective systems” (control). In stark contrast to both situations, terror and politics of security do not place responsibility in a definite actor or system. The convertibility of the hostage and the infantilization of the citizen bring with them a new constellation of responsibility. Baudrillard’s example is illuminating: a car, for instance, emerged as an instrument that promises individual freedom and demanded individual skills and responsibility (discipline); later, with the increasing number of cars, driving necessitates planning and responsibility takes on a collective meaning (control). Finally, with more and more cars produced, the system of planning tends to collapse and mobility turns into its opposite: the driver is stuck in a traffic jam, and nobody gets anywhere on the motorway (terror). This interplay of different co-existing tendencies is the topic of many popular films. In Cronenberg’s films such as *Existenz* and *Videodrome*,

for instance, everything starts as a game that promises fun if the rules are learned (discipline). Then, the “game” becomes a commodity, whose circulation necessitates a supra-individual, collective regulation (control). And finally the moment of terror comes when the “crash” or suicidal revolt becomes the only way to escape the system.

To put it in other terms, the tendency of discipline is control, and the tendency of control is terror. It is in this context that the contemporary politics of security transforms the processes of post-panoptic “control” into a form of sociality, a lifestyle. In this process, the different dispositifs of sovereignty, discipline, control, security/terror seem to co-exist, overlap and clash, containing within themselves elements of one another. The logic at work here is that of the series: 1, 1+2, 1+2+3... The accumulative character of security inspires and encourages the coexistence of different dispositifs.

V. Techno camps

Enter the Ford SYN^{US} vehicle, one of the latest design attempts that transforms the car into a shiny, tail-finned “techno sanctuary” mirroring a brutalism characteristic of most new 4x4 vehicles. A “rolling urban command center”, the Ford SYN^{US} looks bank-vault tough on the outside, even more intimidating and outrageous styling than General Motor’s Hummel.

When parked and placed in secure mode, SYN^{US} deploys protective shutters over the windshield and side glass. Small windows on the flanks and roof are non-opening and bullet-resistant. The SYN^{US} concept also signals security through its use of a driver-side dial operated combination lock on the B-pillar. Flat glass in a slightly raked windshield furthers the armored-car look of this concept. Bold wheel arches make a design statement as well as accommodate the vehicle's exceptionally wide track. (see Ford 2005)

What is most interesting in the design is the reference to naked power, individual freedom, control and security at once. The car becomes a tank (sovereignty), a space of confinement (discipline), a network of communication (control), and an instrument of unilateral bullying (security/terror). In so far as its brutalism turns the street, the “agora”, into a zone in which the main concern is survival, the SYN^{US} is a testimony to a Sadist “polis”, which prescribes security as a lifestyle, an environment, in which the “citizen” only can assume the passive role of the Sadean victim. In the politics of security there is

an aggressive assertion of something beyond human control: a restless, if impersonal hostility, an antagonism whose source cannot be located entirely in the human, in the common antagonisms of social life. It is as if we were suddenly placed on the side of *Das Ding* and viewing human life ... with respect to the Real. But where lies the inhuman *Das Ding*, there is always its human agent. Lacan called it ‘Sade’.” (MacCannell 2000: 67-8).

In the war against terror, the polis (city, civilization, the law) turns into a “jungle”, assuming a capacity beyond human control. The “city” becomes a space of transgression trampled by both terrorists and soldiers. In this “urban jungle” the citizen meets *homo sacer* in a struggle for survival. Here is a description of Baghdad: “Shot, stabbed, blown up, burnt: the bodies of Iraqis killed in Baghdad lie piled in overcrowded refrigerators at the city’s mortuary, their ever-increasing number overwhelming both staff and storage space in a wave that marks the city’s descent into a Hobbesian world of crime and brutality” (Loyd 2004).

VI. Indistinction

Bin Laden's terrorism has so far forced the Western democracy to "betray itself" but this did not, as Ulrike Meinhof envisaged, "make the masses rise" and "allow contradictions to escalate" (Meinhof p. 279). Why? The answer is transpolitics, which cancels out differences, upon which politics is based: an obscene system in which dialectical polarity no longer exists, a simulacrum, where acts disappear without consequences in indifferent "zero-sum signs" (Baudrillard 1994: 16, 32). Contemporary terror is transpolitical in the sense that it is a product of indifferent forces rather than political antagonisms. Hence it is "viral" in the sense that it emanates in the form of metastasis and remains indifferent to discipline and control, bringing with it transparency (disappearance), a flattening process characterized by the exacerbation of indifference and the indefinite mutation of social domains (Baudrillard 1990: 7, 50). When everything becomes political, politics disappear; when everything becomes sexual, sex disappears; when everything is social, the social disappears, and so on. Transpolitical society is a "one-dimensional society" in which the distinctions have disappeared and the opposites are united.

Hence the obscene indistinction between terror and the war against terror, which, for all their enmity against each other, resemble twins: they share the same logic on the basis of contradiction and disparity, simultaneously expressing convergence and divergence, similarity and difference, without, of course, perfect identity. Both depict a world of either/or and world politics as a clash between McWorld and Jihad. Both speak in absolutes. Both fetishize their own "way of life" (religious orthodoxy, and security as a new religion). And finally, both have their own priests. Like the twin towers of the WTC, terror and the war against terror mirror each other, confirming the irrelevance of distinction and opposition in a postmodern world.

Terror is part and parcel of the movement from politics to transpolitics. It is in this movement that distinctions such as reality/representation, biology/politics, terror/the war against terror tend to disappear today. Transpolitics is the condition in which the dialectic of exception and rule ceases to function. Ours is a society in which exception and normality enter into a zone of indiscernibility. Of course the law is always posited in a negative way; the rule is known through its transgression, a state through its exception, normal through the pathological and so on. To understand normality one has to understand what it excludes. Or, in Schmitt's allusion to Kierkegaard, exception "explains the general and itself" (1985: 15). But this ontology presupposes the presence of normality as a background against which the exception can prove itself to be an exception. Transpolitical society is one without such a background, a society in which exception is the rule, in which normality is a life-strategy amongst others. When everything exceptional is "normalized", when the society has absorbed every exception, it becomes impossible to decide whether the exception is the residue of the social or the social itself becomes an exception. Which signals not only the disappearance of the society but also of the remainder: "there is 'virtually' *no more remainder*" (Baudrillard 1994: 144-5). When exception becomes the norm, the norm disappears. But when the norm disappears, exception disappears too. In a sense, therefore, there is no more exception: all society today is organized according to the logic of exception. "End of a

certain logic of distinctive oppositions, in which the weak term played the role of the residual term. Today, everything is inverted” (ibid.).

In this context the question of “how such terror is possible in the twenty-first century?” is a false question. Contemporary terror is not an archaic form of violence. It is not a violence that emerges from passion but from simulacrum, an implosive form assumed by an absence of events in transpolitics. The obscenity of terror is the obscenity of transpolitics itself. Terror exists in order to hide that transpolitics itself is terroristic in spirit. The apocalypse that was unimaginable to Dürer is a world in which McDonald’s can campaign against obesity, the politics of security can fight against terror, the war against terror can claim to bring democracy to the people it tramples, the “victim” goes berserk and kills even more people than terrorists, and so on.

VII. Critique

Towards the end of *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky’s terrorist, Raskolnikov, dreams of a horrible “plague that was spreading from the depths of Asia into Europe. Everyone was to perish, apart from a chosen few, a very few. Some new kind trichinae had appeared, microscopic creatures that lodged themselves in people’s bodies ... Fires began, a famine broke out” (quoted Wood 2005).

Raskolnikov’s fantasy targeted bourgeois resentment and the banality that characterizes the modern society. He wanted to kill to escape from being an average person. However, unable to escape the terror of banality (society) through terror, he is drowned in his own banality, which is what makes him a tragic figure: transgression ends up affirming the law (Gurbilek 2001: 76-93). Raskolnikov’s society was a different society, though. The contemporary society, in contrast, provokes and promotes the “dark forces”, including violence, in a culture of exception. It accommodates violence, transforming terror into a public spectacle. The problem of critique in a society in which transgression has become a rule is not to jump over one’s shadow, to transgress, but to have a shadow, a remainder, in the first place: “how can you jump over your shadow when you no longer have one” (Baudrillard 1994: 144)? How can one take an ethical position in transpolitics, in which the absence of critique results in an inability to see the evil as an internal force?

In relation to the biopolitics (of terror and security), a categorical, Kantian ethics cannot be sufficient. The crucial question is no longer the content of an ethical stance but, rather, the decision as to who counts as a subject worthy of ethical concern in the first place. What counts is, in other words, the right to have rights, the right to belong to a common humanity. Against the sovereign exception, a truly universal ethics is one which can testify to the face, to the nakedness of the subject of biopolitics. But then how can one move from the other’s “face” to the society as the other? From unconditional responsibility towards the other to the other other, to the Other as the Third, as society (Bauman 1999b: 153)? Or, in other words, how can one go from ethics to politics? How can the spectator become an actor, a transformation, which is “the political moment par excellence” (Boltanski 1999: 31)?

Let’s recall Bourdieu at this point. He states in an interview (Pecséli 1995) that he is sure that Jacques Chirac has read *The Weight of the World*, where Bourdieu deals with the

issue of precariousness in a sociological context. But Bourdieu is equally sure that Chirac has done nothing about the “precariousness” depicted in the book. *This* cynical reason, knowing but continuing to do otherwise, lies at the heart of the moral/political problem of precariousness or *unsicherheit*. Transpolitics means the disappearance of the link between critique and action. Which is also to say that the relationship between critique and the war against terror is a political problem, a problem of action, not only an epistemological problem. Watching on television those people held in Abu Ghraib we can be shocked but this in no way guarantees commitment. In such situations, indifference to distant others is an easy option and moral commitment has a weak chance to materialize. If it does materialize, however, it often assumes the form of denunciation (for instance, denying that British soldiers can torture their enemies) or sentimentalism (which has been the main response to both 9/11 and the war against terror for the majority of people so far) (Boltanski 1999: 32). It is significant in this context that when it was revealed that the “torture pictures” published by the Daily Mail were fake, its editor, Piers Morgan had to resign. Shortly after, however, we got the real pictures but with no consequence.

How can one, then, dare to cast eyes on the evil without the imaginary benefits of denunciation and sentimentalism? A form of commitment, related to trust in the power of speech, is the only realistic basis for political action informed by morality, a “politics of mourning” (see Butler 2004). That is, pity can become a political issue only through dialogue and engagement, only in the public sphere. However, as Butler shows, the de-socialization of the public sphere, and concomitantly, the banishment of mourning (through the reduction of the enemy to the evil, inhuman), are the trademarks of biopolitics today. If speech and recognition are necessary for the possibility of mourning, for a morality that can have consequences, our problem is that we are today witnessing the demise of confidence in speech; we are losing the faith in the effectiveness of speech, because we are losing faith in the effectiveness of the political act (Bauman 1999a; Boltanski 1999: 186).

The face urges one to make an exception to the established ethics. For Antigone it was to bury her brother even though this act was against the law. In Nazi Germany hiding a Jew was an ethical/political act par excellence. What is the equivalent of an ethics of exception today? How can one make an exception to the state of exception? It is telling in this respect that some of the perpetrators of the torture scandal claimed that they were “just playing” with Iraqi prisoners (Allen-Mills 2004). What was the reason for such play? According to documents published in the aftermath of the scandal, it is a poisonous blend of sadism, entertainment and boredom; US torture guards were “bored” (*ibid.*). Boredom?

We are sitting, for example, at the tasteless station of some lonely minor railway. It is four hours until the next train arrives. We do have a book in our rucksack, though – shall we read? No. Or think through a problem, some question? We are unable to. We read the timetables or study the table giving the various distances from this station to other places we are not otherwise acquainted with at all. We look at the clock – only a quarter of an hour has gone by. Then we go out onto the main road. We walk up and down, just to have something to do. But it is no use. Then we count the trees along the main road, look at our watch again – exactly five minutes since we last looked at it ... and so on. (Heidegger, quoted in Agamben 2004a: 63-4)

This being left or abandoned is the essential experience of boredom, in which surroundings become indifferent to us, while at the same time, having no possibility of action, we cannot free ourselves from them (ibid.) Being bored is being held in suspense. As such boredom reveals an unexpected proximity of human and the animal:

the man who becomes bored finds himself in the 'closest proximity' ... to animal captivation. Both are, in their most proper gesture, open to closedness; they are totally delivered over to something that obstinately refuses itself. (Agamben 2004a: 65)

However, boredom paradoxically brings with it a possibility, a potentiality for being (Dasein), which has within itself a potential-not-to (ibid. 67). In other words, the "proximity" at issue is also a potentiality for the human for distancing itself from the animal. Suspending his animality, man can thus "open a 'free and empty' zone in which life is captured and a-ban-doned {*ab-bandonata*} in a zone of exception" (ibid. 79). Animal is, precisely, defined by the impossibility of such suspension, of breaking down its relation to its environment. Human, in turn, is human because it can non-relate to itself. In intense boredom, man can risk himself suspending his relation with the environment; the world becomes "open" only in non-relating (ibid. 69-70). Through this suspension of the "environment", one can relate to the face. Which is exactly what the torturers could not, cannot do. At worst, they could not suspend their perverse desire or "relation" to the Iraqi prisoners. At best, they "only did their job", failing to suspend the orders of their commanders.

Defined as such, as the suspension of the relationality between the law and its suspension, face-to-face morality as an ethics of exception remains a revolt as an individual act. But how can the "nonrelation" to, the deviation from the established ethical codex, have a political relevance? To avoid ethics becoming a transpolitical solution to a political problem it is necessary to think politics in an indistinct, ambivalent zone between the face as a gesture of revolt and human rights as a political line. The task, in other words, is to bridge singularity (face) and collectivity (politics), linking presentation and representation together (see Agamben 2004b: 121). Politics (the "party", the "agora", ...) is necessary to transcend the singularity and, by the same token, singularity ("class", "flight", ...) is indispensable for the production of ethical experiences that can be translated into a political language (see Bauman 1999a: 87; Agamben 2004b: 121).

However, the face that has become iconic of the war against terror is not the Levinasian face but the face of the "Marlboro man" – the soldier "smoking while Iraq burns":

Reprinted in more than a hundred newspapers, the photograph shows Miller 'after more than 12 hours of nearly non-stop, deadly combat' in Falluja, his face coated in war paint, a bloody scratch on his nose, and a freshly lit cigarette hanging from his lips". (Klein 2004)

Interestingly, Klein notes that the face of the Marlboro man has become an "icon of American impunity". This impunity relies "on the idea that authority is conferred (only on) those who speak from the position of the *victim*" (Žižek 2003: 143). What is hidden away in this self-righteous ideology is of course American aggressiveness, or, its "werewolf complex" (Duclos 1994). The myth of the "mad warrior", based on the arrogant habit of going berserk without distinguishing between war and a taste for killing, is especially interesting in this context. The contemporary culture of exception is profoundly inspired by the exceptional killer for it sees in him its own image.

What if, therefore, a course change is imperative? Not, that is, necessarily of the terrorists' but our own heading? Let us conclude by re-appropriating Derrida's expression "The Other Heading", which suggests that it is necessary to change direction. It entails changing goals, deciding on another heading, or changing captains (Derrida 1992: 14). Facing the necessity of finding another heading, let us end with a military joke about a radio conversation of a US naval ship with Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland:

CANADIANS: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

AMERICANS: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.

CANADIANS: Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

AMERICANS: This is the captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

CANADIANS: No, I say again, you divert YOUR course.

AMERICANS: This is the Aircraft Carrier US LINCOLN, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic Fleet. We are accompanied with three Destroyers, three Cruisers and numerous support vessels. I DEMAND that you change your course 15 degrees north. I say again, that's one-five degrees north, or counter-measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

CANADIANS: This is a lighthouse. Your call.

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