

Trial on T/Error:

A Review of Jeremy Fernando's Reflections on (T)error

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Jeremy Fernando, *Reflections on (T)error*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008. ISBN: 978-3-8364-3781-3.

A spectre is haunting the “Western world”: the spectre of terror/ism. With the dawn of yet another Hegelian *Weltgeist*, the end of history is finally over as we return back to the roots: back to metaphysics. After its decline, the war against terror/ism might be a last living *sign* of the long-disabled “Us”.

Jeremy Fernando’s ambitious Reflections on (T)error demonstrates that it is precisely terror/ism that renders globalization and capitalism possible. By means of de-fining the problems of confining terror/ism within a logic of exchange, Fernando leaves the all too pleasant path of easy 'answers', instead trying to 'question' the very notion of terrorism itself (i.e. “the refusal of globalization to accept the complete and total flattening out that globalization itself entails, ... the complete and utter triumph of the logic of the capital.” (17) Evidently, this logic requires an adversarial and exchangeable other, around which this very logic of re-territorialization will revolve. The narration of the nation only works with and through enemies that are outside the state and must be brought back under its control.

Accordingly, terror/ism is “an attempt at the eternal distancing from the orgasm of totality that is globalization” (17) The terrorist is nothing but this Other — an Other

that must remain *other*. In order to prevent terror from being a totalizing concept itself, terror must remain an enigmatic, singular, and unknowable event that must never be subsumed under a logic (viz. of exchange); terror must remain terror.

Consequently, Jeremy Fernando argues that it is only by “allowing the Self to be consumed by the (Absolute) Other that will grant us our freedom from terror. In some sense, the slogan to live by now is not ‘to be afraid of nothing’ but rather ‘be afraid of absolutely everything, for fear will set you free.’” (58) Thus, the “real” terror of terror might be the “fact” that “terrorists” do not share “our” frames of fear. For Fernando, the reason “why the suicide bomber remains such an enigma for us” is that “we can no longer conceive of anyone that is willing to believe in, let alone give up her/his life for, anything.” (51) In this way, the terrorist act actually negates the actual threat of death, at least virtually. Contrariwise, in capitalism, every act has to have a motivation and value; every act has to be justified and, at the same time, brought back to a possible exchangeability.

Yet, suicide bombing is an impossible exchange, and “it is this impossibility that guarantees its singularity. It is also this impossibility that haunts us.” (34) The “revenge of capital on terror” is to remove its singularity, to make it a mere unit of exchange and, therefore, explicable. We desperately try to *understand*, to identify it and subsume its phenomenon under, what Deleuze would call, our “Image of Thought”. (Deleuze, 2004) As a result, the perfect signifier is an empty signifier, a signifier that can be filled with any meaning:

Al-Qaeda— “with full potentiality to be impregnated by any and every signified.”

Osama bin Laden— the “perfect brand”; the incarnation of an Absolute Other.

September 11— the date as a signifier, as every other year has lost this very date.

(Fernando, 14)

Exchange becomes an ultimate signifier, a self-fulfilling prophecy into which every thing is inscribed. To provide terror — “a pure effect sans meaning” — with meaning “has this consequence: when a state encounters the death of a ‘terrorist’[...], what other recourse is there but to increase the deaths on their own side (in an exchange, one must always match with a surplus). We see this very logic playing out in Iraq and Afghanistan: you kill one of ours, we kill at least 2 of yours[...].” (49)

According to Fernando, an attempt to 'cure' the violence of terror would only lead to more violence, and it is this that we must avoid. (54) Rather, in order to separate terror and violence we should take terror to its extreme, for Terror is not enough: we need hyper-terror to take place. "We must allow terror to consume us to such an extent that it no longer consumes us." (57)

By allowing terror to utterly consume us "we do not drown in violence and death, but rather seduce terror with its very own rules: utter and complete meaninglessness, a meaninglessness that is not empty, but that is precisely too much." (59) A "too much" that is every- and no-where at the same time. "When one can no longer tell who the monster is, the monster is everywhere and everyone (yourself included)." (46) For example, in the world of news, the currency of terror circulates because of its ubiquity. In mass media, one cannot deny the omnipresence of terror and the fact that the media is now engaged in a "discourse of terror" (13) that affects our daily lives.

Along with this spectre of terror, the simulacrum returns. Terror has no sources, it is its own simulacrum, (6) existing only in the realm of re-presentation: "the ghost that cannot be exorcised, for there is no body to exhume in the first place"; terror as a "corpse-less corpse: forever (un)dead: infinitely (brought) alive." (16) There is no possibility, no need whatsoever to differentiate the medium from the message. The actual is absorbed by the virtual, and vice versa: hoaxes are real; jokes can lead to your arrest.

The regime of terror has dawned, and with it, the reign of security — a security that we cannot not want, but have to agree upon. This is an utterly consuming logic, revolving around empty — and therefore perfect — signifiers, like 'security', 'terror', and 'terrorist'. With it, may "come a generation that had got beyond facts, beyond impressions, a generation absolutely colourless, a generation *seraphically free from taint of personality*, which will see the French Revolution not as it happened, nor as they would like it to have happened, but as it would have happened" (Forster, 1909)

But this just might be another (end of hi)story.

Notes

Deleuze, Gilles. "The Image of Thought" in *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Continuum Books, 2004.

E.M. Forster, "The Machine Stops(1909)": <http://emforster.de/hypertext/template.php3?t=tms>

Reflections on (T)error is available for purchase at Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/Reflections-T-error-Jeremy-Fernando/dp/3836437813/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1246887854&sr=8-1

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