THE CONCERNS OF A PUBLICATION ENTITLED "Art in an Age of Terrorism" might, on one level, seem reasonably clear. How is art responding to, what is art *doing* in light of the world's high alert on global terrorism? However the construction "art in an age of terrorism" does more than simply force art into a rapport with those issues felt to be particularly urgent at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Rather it returns us to questions so often dealt with in twentieth century criticism and earlier—questions regarding the nature of the relationship between art and culture, or between art and society. We must it seems, answer again to

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Terrible Beauties [1]

Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted reproach that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."[2] It is almost as though the caption "art in an age of terrorism" is silently preceded by the question "*What is the fate of?*" Art, it appears, has constantly to be checked and monitored so that its concern for *itself* does not exceed its concern for (or proper place in) *society*. In such a way then (or at such times, as it might be more accurate to say) art is asked to demonstrate its relation to, its *care for society*. And it is compelled to do so in a paradoxical way—addressing the definition and conditions of its practice only *by way of* a concept of or response to *terrorism*.

To approach art in this way is problematical. For on the one hand, it means that art cannot, as Adorno also insisted, confine itself to "self-satisfied contemplation."[3] But on the other hand, art can never be equal to this task to which it has been set: i.e. to define itself by virtue of its relation to that which (presumably) it is *not*. Consequently it might be argued that art is here framed in such a way as to be viewed from the perspective of its having been already *overcome*.

However, it is by no means clear that to encapsulate art in this way, to explore its fate in an "age of terrorism," is to reverse it *into a theoretical (or a practical) cul-de-sac*. It could also be argued that art—and not just *recent* art—has in fact often defined itself precisely in relation to terrorism, terror and/or the terrible. The notion, for example, of the *sublime* was famously outlined by Edmund Burke as an *aesthetic quality or object* "fitted to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or *operates in a manner analogous to terror.*"[4]

Alternatively, it could perhaps be argued that too much slippage has occurred here between the terms "terrorism" and "terror." This would not however, be the position of the *Oxford*

[1] The title of this essay is derived from WB Yeats' poem, "Easter 1916," in which he writes that "All is changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born." The poem's title refers to the Easter Rising of 1916, wherein Irish nationalists (the leaders of whom were known to Yeats personally) launched an unsuccessful revolt against the British government. For a short, conventional account of the rising, see Mark Tierney, Modern Ireland since 1850 (Revised Edition), Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1978. Tierney places the number of casualties at approximately 450 killed and 2,600 wounded, with the majority of these, being civilians. He describes the centre of Dublin as being "ruined" and reports total damage to property as in the region of £2.5 million. In an atmosphere of public hostility, the "insurgents" were denounced as "evil-minded men." (After the failure of the rising, 1840 of these evil men were sent to England for internment.) Britain, at war with Germany was in no mood to tolerate Irish "agitation" for independence—which was supported, for obvious reasons, by Germany. As a result, a number of leading "insurgents" were executed. Éamon de Valera, a senior commandant in the Easter Rising, escaped execution only because of confusion over his nationality and was later...

...*elected to be first president of the* Irish Republic. This poem makes for a useful point of departure for several reasons. Firstly, in referring to the Easter Rising, it forces us to recall the volatility of terms like "insurgents"— who were contemporaneously described as both "evil-minded men" and as "patriots." Secondly, it links notions of the terrible with that of beauty—a connection which will be returned to below in relation to the history of aesthetic theory.

2 T.W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 1995), p. 34.

3 Ibid.

4 Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime Beautiful*, edited by Boulton, J.T. (London: Blackwell, 1987), p. 39. Burke's thesis was of course founded on a Greek work, 'On the Sublime', written in the first or second century AD and conventionally ascribed to *Longinus*. As Robert Wilkinson points out in Theories of Art & Beauty, Longinus' treatise 'was translated into French and then into English near the end of the seventeenth century and the concept of the sublime gradually gained importance during the eighteenth century as a label for a type of aesthetic object and experience very different from the beautiful but no less valuable.' See Robert Wilkinson, ed., (*Theories of Art & Beauty*) Open University Press: Milton Keynes, 1991), p. 62.

5 Robespierre's work in the National Assembly, his participation in the creation of a French constitution grounded in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, his fight for universal suffrage, his passion for liberty etc., ended of course in the 'swift harsh and inflexible justice' that was the Reign of Terror. The obvious irony that the English term 'terrorism' thus originated out of the prototypical struggle for democracy will undoubtedly not be lost on readers.

6 Paul Wood, ed., *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 36.

7 Renato Poggioloi, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (London: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 27.

8 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by M. Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Originally published in Germany in 1974.

English Dictionary (1989) which concurs with such a link in etymological terms and lists its first definition of a "terrorist" as: "a political term: (a.) applied to the Jacobins and their agents and partisans in the French Revolution, esp. to those connected with the Revolutionary tribunals during the 'Reign of Terror'." In this way then, the English term "terrorism" is shown to originate in "*le régime de terreur.*" Not only this, but its etymological link with art and the aesthetic is brought full circle again when the OED discloses that it was the same Edmund Burke—parliamentarian and philosopher of the sublime— who widely influenced common usage of the term in describing Robespierre's Jacobin party as "*terrorists.*"[5]

It would appear then that the establishment of a connection between art and "terrorism" is not just a contemporary malaise. The emergence of an "artistic avant-garde" from the milieu of *revolutionary* politics[6] has for example, often been noted—as have the military connotations of that term.[7] Thus the historical avant-gardes are typically defined as those which "cause a break with tradition and a subsequent change in the representational system."[8] This kind of definition relies heavily on notions of artistic avant-gardism as *revolutionary*— that is, as a set of practices thought to be *violently disruptive* of the conventions of the status quo. And if one were to refer back to the etymology of the term "terrorist," again according to the OED, one might note that the dictionary definition has recently been broadened to include anyone who tries to "awaken or spread a feeling of terror or alarm." It is just such a point which Paul Virilio makes in his short book *Art & Fear*, when he claims that:

> Avant-garde artists, like many political agitators, propagandists and demagogues, have long understood what TERRORISM would soon popularise: if you want a place in "revolutionary history" there is nothing easier than provoking a riot, an assault on propriety, in the guise of art.[9]

Art and Fear was published after the events of September 11, 2001. Originally delivered as two lectures, Virilio makes a number of points worth summarising here for the ways in which they develop the current theme. For example in setting out his position on the connection between art and fear, Virilio describes the subject of his paper as "the pitiful or pitiless nature of 'contemporary art'."[10] To support his argument, he then shoots off a rapid-fire history—from Nietzsche to Hermann Nitsch—that would seem to demonstrate how artists have in their works, been attracted to war, (notions of) cruelty and/or "terrorism." He points for example, to the "First Futurist Manifesto of 1909" and its slogan—*War is the world's only hygiene*. Such an approach to art, he claims, led "directly, though thirty years later this time, to the shower block of Auschwitz-Birkenau."[11] This example

The "elasticity" of this "age of terrorism" has already been suggested above. For example, Virilio, as already seen, goes at least as far back as the writings of Nietzsche. However, the same point is made in a more general way by Walter Laqueur in his essay, "World of Terror." He writes:

> As the new century began, an epidemic of terrorism spread panic around the globe. In world capitals, leaders fortified their security and curtailed public appearances. Ordinary citizens felt unsafe walking the streets of major cities ... Terrorism became the preoccupation of police and politicians, bankers and business leaders. Headlines screamed out news of the latest outrage: "WASHINGTON STUNNED BY THE TRAGEDY" in one paper, "IN GREAT PERIL" in another. One horrific September terrorist attack in the United States sent the stock market reeling and sparked anti-immigrant sentiment. Another attack, in Madrid, plunged Spanish politics into turmoil over issues of war and peace. Politicians in the US took to describing the war on terror as a struggle of good versus evil, while some religious leaders, quoting scripture, proclaimed that the end of the world was at hand. The year was 1901.[21]

Laqueur thus graphically illustrates that the "age of terrorism" is more difficult to pin down than might first be assumed. And, to further support his theme, he draws a short chronology in which previous waves of international "terrorism" are tracked. Thus, opening with the Sicarii (or Dagger Men) of the first century AD,[22] Laqueur proceeds through the centuries by way of the *hashshashin* (an eleventh century Islamic sect)[23]; the Boston Tea Party in 1773 (the latter of which falls within the FBI's definition of terrorism which includes property destruction as a means of political coercion);[24] the death of Tsar Alexander II in 1881; Ferdinand of Austria in 1914; the Ku Klux Klan; the capture of nine (and subsequent beheading of two) Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics; the suicide bombings in Beirut by Hezbollah; Timothy McVeigh's attack on Oklahoma City's Murraugh building in 1995; the release of nerve gas into the Japanese subway by religious cult Aum Shinrikyo in 1995; the beheading of South Korean hostage Kim Sun-il by insurgents in Irak, 2004. And for good measure, Laqueur also throws in Peru's Shining Path, the Irish Republican Army, the Basque separatist group ETA, the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, and the Zionist groups: Irgun and the Stern Gang.

Thus, on the one hand, the "age of terrorism" can be seen to recede, at least as far back as the first century AD. On the other hand however, by extending the "age of terrorism" into such distant past, one must ask whether or not, art "in an age of terrorism" can be said to be an actual "state of affairs" at all? In other words, if the "age of terrorism" is so expansive as to coincide with any or all other "ages" since the first century AD, then what possible use can it have as a potential category for understanding, or as a means of identifying a paradigmatic change in our times? The very enormity of such "an age" would seem to suggest that it can have little value as a

[21] Walter Laqueur, "World of Terror," *National Geographic* (November, 2004), p. 74. The events described in the passage refer to the murder of Tsar Alexander II by Russian revolutionaries in the late nineteenth century; the assassination in 1894 of French president Sadi Carnot by an Italian anarchist; the assassination in 1897 of the Spanish prime minister, just as Cuba's drive for independence was boiling over; the assassination in 1901 of American president William McKinley, by anarchist Leon Czolgosz and finally the assassination 13 years later, of Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria which triggered the outbreak of World War I.

[22] These Laqueur describes as a "hard core of Jewish Zealots, opposed to the Roman rule of Judaea in the years preceding the levelling of the Jewish Temple and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The group also murdered both Roman officials and high-ranking Jews whom they considered enemies of the fight to liberate the Jewish people from Rome" See Laqueur, p. 74.

[23] According to Laqueur, this group had its strongholds in Syria and present-day Iran. The name *hashshashin* was given it by its Arab enemies, for their rumoured use of hashish. A variant of the group's name has of course now entered the vernacular with the term assassin.

[24] According to both the American Department of Defence (DOD) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), terrorism is "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives." The DOD definition adds that a goal of terrorism can be "inculcating fear" (thus giving it a psychological dimension), while the State Department is more elaborate, specifying that terrorism "may include the use of biological, chemical or nuclear devices as well as the act of assassination."

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means of tracking *shifts* occurring in art over time. Consequently, by encapsulating art in this way, one might merely be producing a certain kind of viewing assumption about certain artworks—rather than creating a useful framework through which to understand that work.

This elasticity in the *age* of terrorism is, however, further compounded by the elasticity and uncertainty of the *interpretation* of the term *terrorism*—the latter of which even today (perhaps especially today) lacks any universally accepted definition. This is not to suggest however that the difficulty here is solely a "semantic" one. Rather, the problem goes to *the core of all attempts to identify even the occurrence of* "terrorism" (quite apart from dealing either with its *nature* or *effects*). The complexity of the problem is thus clearly to do with differences in ideological assumptions. For example a critique of Laqueur's essay might well ask why he omits any mention of American support for a mercenary army to attack Nicaragua—even providing it with a printed manual of recommended arts of sabotage and murder at the cost of more than a thousand lives.[25] Indeed Noam Chomsky has made the point that Nicaragua then went to the World Court where:

> *The US was condemned for international terrorism,* for "unlawful use of force" and for violation of treaties. It ordered the US government to terminate the crimes and to pay massive reparations. The US responded by instantly escalating the war (with bipartisan support, incidentally) and, for the first time, giving official orders to attack what are called "soft targets"—health clinics, agricultural cooperatives and so on. This went on until finally the population voted *for the US candidate and the terror stopped in* 1990.[26]

And in like manner, one might also ask why any the following were omitted from Laqueur's list: the Black Panthers, the Weathermen, the Red Brigades, the Baader-Meinhof gang, the Ulster Defence Force, the Chechen rebels, the Kurdish insurgents, David Koresh's cult, *Combat 18 and any number of oth*er parties who have in the past used violence to meet their ends.

Indeed the problem of finding an adequate definition for the term "terrorism" and the absurdity of the definitional system is made crystal clear by the UN's series of *unsuccessful* attempts to do so. Its first attempt to arrive at an internationally acceptable definition was made under the League of Nations and the convention was drafted in 1937. However, the convention never came into existence and UN Member States still have *no* agreed-upon definition. Terminology consensus would obviously be necessary for a single comprehensive convention on "terrorism," which some countries favour in place of the existent *twelve* piecemeal conventions and protocols.[27]

[25] See Edward S. Herman, "Power and the Semantics of Terrorism" in *Covert Action: The Roots of Terrorism*, edited by E. Ray and W. H. Schaap (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2003), p. 40. Noam Chomsky makes the same point when he states: "The US attack against Nicaragua was quite serious. It led to tens of thousands of people killed, and the country virtually destroyed. It's now the second poorest country in the hemisphere, and it may never recover" (Noam Chomsky, *Power and Terror: Post-9/11 Talks and Interviews*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003, p. 49). Herman also mentions here, the American government's "unstinting support of the apartheid government of South Africa" which "organised its own mercenary armies again at the cost of many thousands of lives" (Herman, p. 40).

[26] Chomsky, p. 50. Chomsky also cites Guatemala and El Salvador as examples of American "state-sponsored terrorist atrocities." But he adds, the "worst of them by a huge *margin was the Israeli invasion* of Lebanon in 1982; it ended up killing about twenty thousand people" (Chomsky p. 52).

[27] It may however be useful for the reader to note some of the existing definitions proposed for the term "terrorism." Here I include some of those most frequently relied on. The first is that mentioned above—i.e. the definition put forward by the League of Nations Convention in 1937 which defines "terrorism" as: "All criminal acts directed against a State and intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public." ("Definitions of Terrorism," United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 1988, http://www.unodc.org/unodc/terrorism_definitions.html. Accessed December, 2004.) A kind of working definition is also implied by UN Resolutions 51 and 210 made in 1999. Here the UN states that it:
1. Strongly condemns all acts, methods and practices of terrorism as criminal an unjustifiable, wherever and by whomsoever committed.
2. Reiterates that criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical,...

There is not sufficient space here to fully track the whole history of those (failed) attempts to define the term "terrorism"—even if such a history were to be confined to the twentieth century. However, if the elasticity of the *age of terrorism* is caused, as the above sketch would seem to suggest, by *ideological* rather than by semantic difficulties alone, then any discussion of art practices in an "age of terrorism" must necessarily be equally compromised. My method here is not however, to argue as to whether the term "terrorism" ought to be confined to say, attacks on military/non-military targets, or alternatively, to the actors and actions of states/non-states—though I state frankly that it is my belief that the term *can* characterise the use of intimidation *by* governments as well as in opposition to them. Rather my intention has been firstly to show how short-term and erratic our frames of reference have become since the events of 9/11 and secondly, to draw attention to the absurdity of those definitional systems relied upon in debates of this kind. For only by demonstrating the complexity of the concept "terrorism" is it possible to think through the nature of its relationship with *art*. It was, after all, the lack of just such complexity which lead Virilio's *Art and Fear*—a paper which might otherwise have had much to recommend it—to fall into vagueness and rhetorical cant.

Similarly, it is only when the complexity of the term *terrorism* is laid open, that it is possible to conclude as I do here, that there are many contemporary artworks conceived of *and* understood precisely in relation to "terrorism" and/or notions of terror and/or the terrible. Furthermore, it is argued here that such works as operate in this way have bound themselves to the (thought-to-be) practices or principles of *terrorism*, not to reduplicate its ends, but simply, to *refuse* the separation between the "aesthetical" and the "ethical." That is to say, artworks may borrow the tactics of "terrorism" even as they redeploy its ends—seizing on the strategies of "terrorist" organisations in order to put into question the (dis)connection between "aesthetics" and "ethics."

The question of the relationship between the "aesthetical" and the "ethical," has of course been debated for centuries. One needs only evoke the major works of (amongst others) Kant, Heidegger, Ruskin, Fry, Bell, Benjamin, Adorno, Greenberg and Danto, to see that this is not an issue which can be quickly or easily resolved. However the intention here is not to "reveal" the theoretical nature of that relationship (between the "aesthetical" and the "ethical"), but simply to mark the refusal of so many of the art practices since the 1960s, to separate the two.

A short digression is therefore necessary to clarify this point before returning to the specific relationship between art and "terrorism." It is important for example—in light of contemporary refusals to disconnect art practices from ethical beliefs—to remember that one of the central tenets of mid-twentieth century "High" Modernism revolved on just this issue. That is to say, it was popularly supposed at that time that it was both *possible* to hold the "aesthetic" apart from the "ethical" and/or "political," but also that it was *proper* to do so. Indeed, such a view, commonly associated with the writings of Clement Greenberg, became hegemonic in the US and Europe in the immediate post World War II period. Of course, the notion that "art" and "life" occupied two profoundly different realms was loosely derived from

...ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them. (PBS 2004)
A short legal definition of terrorism was proposed by A. P. Schmid to United Nations Crime Branch in in 1992. This definition proposed simply that acts of Terrorism were "the peacetime equivalent of war crimes." Prior to this Schmid had given the following definition described as the Academic Consensus Definition: Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby—in contrast to assassination—the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organisations), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought. (2004 Janes Terrorism and Insurgency Centre. http://jtic.janes.com/public/jtic/terrorism_definition_noscript.shtml. Accessed November, 2004)

Kant's writings.[28] However, for mid-century modernism, the writing of English critic Roger Fry made for a more readily accessible source. Here, Jaime Stapleton's recent essay on the "aesthetics of political economy" is useful for the way in which it synopsises Fry's attempt to privilege the "aesthetical" over any "ethical" preoccupations:

> Fry suggested that "actual life" presented an individual with real dilemmas that required them to make ethical choices. In contrast, the life of the imagination was free from such responsibilities. In consequence, art, as the central organ of the "imaginative life," was a place apart from "the binding necessities of actual existence." The first conclusion to draw from such a position was that true art could not be judged by its fidelity to "actual life." Fry's second conclusion however, was more radical. Since it was only in the imaginative realm that one's mind was cleared of the clutter of everyday experience and ethical necessity, it was better that "actual life" was judged for its conformity to the model presented in the "imaginative life."...

Modernist ideology reversed the prevailing assumptions of "reality" and "representation." Life did not set the critical standard by which aesthetic production was to be judged; rather aesthetics set the "ethical" standard by which life was to be judged.[29]

To return then to Virilio's contradictory assertion that art in "an age of terrorism" is both "passive" and "voyeuristic," such an assertion must be seen in light of the twentieth century preoccupation with the nature of the relationship between the aesthetical and the ethical. And, though Virilio clearly doubts the value of most contemporary art practices, by aligning them with "terrorism," he nevertheless bears witness to the continued anxiety around this unresolved issue as to the "proper" relationship between aesthetical and ethical concerns. Of course, by comparing such practices to "terrorism," Virilio's intention was clearly to dismiss contemporary art practices as being either sadistic, or pointlessly brutal, or both. However in drawing the two themes together, he has unwittingly made a valid observation about certain contemporary art practices—some of which have precisely sought to identify themselves with "that which operates in a manner analogous to terror."

Such a claim can however, only be demonstrated with reference to specific practices. The latter part of this essay is therefore given over to examining some of those artistic practices which might legitimately be seen as "terroristic" in their methods—i.e. practices that envisage art as a kind of stage or a structure upon which to explore all kinds of different "ethical" and "political" concerns. By way of elaboration here, I will draw on a number of disparate practices that have occurred since the 1970s. Needless to say, such a selection does not presume to be representative. It does however suggest the continuation of a kind of tradition in which art and terror(ism) might be seen to share certain values with one another. The Guerrilla Girls for example, are now a well-established model of practice for a younger generation of artists intent on exploring the relationship between art's "aesthetic" and its "ethical" concerns. Others like Oreet Ashery, Runa Islam, Rod Dickinson, or the artists at www.irational.org point to the existence of a younger generation of artists who seek to examine their own practices under precisely that rubric of "art in an age of terrorism." It is to these practices then that we must turn in finally exploring the relationship between art and terror(ism).

The Guerrilla Girls make for an obvious example from which to begin this investigation. Now infamous, this group of artists has since the 1980s, aspired towards the condition of

[28] In fact Kant, in common with eighteenth century German usage, gave the term "aesthetic" two different meanings. The first usage refers to the "science of a priori sensibility" and the second, to the "critique of taste" or "philosophy of art." The aesthetic as the "science of a priori sensibility" prevails in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" in the Critique of Pure Reason and the second—that of the aesthetic as a philosophy of art is the subject of his "Critique of Aesthetic Judgement" in the Critique of Judgement.

[29] Jaime Stapleton, "Black Shoals: A Meditation on Cosmology, Artificial Life and the Aesthetics of Political Economy,"http://www.blackshoals.n et/textpages/JamieText.html (accessed January, 2005).

"cultural terrorists" rather more than they have towards any (presumed to be obsolete) role as defenders of "civilisation." Formed in 1985, the Guerrilla Girls' practice coincided with that of the Reagan administration, which had first come into office announcing that the focus of US foreign policy would be a "War on Terror." In the words of Secretary of State George Shultz, "the evil scourge of terrorism" was a plague spread by "depraved opponents of civilisation itself."[30] Chomsky adds that "Shultz, who was considered a moderate within the Reagan administration, went on to say that terrorism had to be *dealt with* by force and violence."[31]

It was at just this time that the Guerrilla Girls were becoming known for their "depraved" attacks on "the male establishment." Routinely described as "feminist terrorists" or as a "militant feminist clan,"[32] the Guerrilla Girls employed a full gambit of "traditional" "terrorist" tactics to take issue with the New Right—a solidification of religious and conservative groups that began during the Reagan era. Like many "terrorist" organisations, they wore masks and remained anonymous. They started a steady stream of propaganda to agitate for the justice of their cause. Calling themselves "the conscience of the art world," they were filled with the conviction of the righteous (a characteristic typical of any "terrorist" groups you might care to mention). The Guerrillas declared a ("terrorist") war on sexism and racism. In particular, it was the larger museums, galleries and dealers that came into the firing line for their exclusionary politics. The Girls wanted "action" as opposed to "consciousness raising"[33] and consequently many dealers referred to them as "Nazis," or alternatively as "the art police."[34] They infiltrated conventional art establishments, posing as journalists in order to gather statistics for their poster campaigns, which they described as "public service messages"[35] and meanwhile, they gave out no information about their own membership.[36]

The Guerrilla Girls still operate in a more or less opaque way today.[37] However, theirs is now a "convention" of "terrorism." Their attacks on the apparatus of the art world are now less rigorous—thanks to their having been increasingly adopted for both exhibitions and awards by that very apparatus. Ironically of course, the fate of the Guerrilla Girls is in this matter perfectly consistent with that of many politically successful "terrorist" organisations, whose successes serve to absorb them into the very state institutions against which they once raged. And, if the Girls have not (so far as we know) committed any actual violence against their targets, nevertheless the extent of their intellectual identification with the strategies of "terrorist" organisations is clear. Furthermore it is precisely these strategies which encouraged them to refuse any demarcation between "aesthetic" and "ethical" practices in the art-world.

The continuation of a kind of convention in which art and "terrorism" are routinely connected, is obvious in the practices of many other artists since the 1960s. Such practices do not necessarily have to militate in favour of a particular cause. They may merely demonstrate their fascination for the *situation* of particular "terrorist" groups— with whom they, again like the Guerrilla Girls, continue to identify intellectually. For example, in the week following the FBI's siege on the Branch Davidian religious sect in Waco, Ronald Jones and Michael Joo debated the recent events with the writer Pamela Lee. Their discussion was subsequently published in *Flash Art* under the title "Learning from Waco."[38] As is well known, the siege of Waco resulted in a fire which consumed not only the entire architectural

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[30] Chomsky, p. 48.

[31] Ibid, p. 48.

[32] Elizabeth Hess, "Guerrilla Girl Power" in *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, edited by N. Felshin (Washington: Bay Press, 1995), p. 324.

[33] Ibid, p. 313.

[34] Ibid, p. 316.

[35] Ibid, p. 319. One of the Guerrilla Girls' most infamous campaigns was directed against Senator Jesse Helms who was given ten reasons to back off the obscenity issue—among them the fact that the "majority of exposed penises in major museums belong to the baby Jesus" (ibid., p. 321).

[36] Even today, the Guerrilla Girls refuse to say how many of them there are and if asked, will return their stock reply: "Thousands."

[37] For example, they still refuse to be interviewed as a group or to allow journalists to attend their meetings.

[38] Pamela Lee, "Learning from Waco," *Flash Art* XXVII (1994): pp. 72, 82-83.

complex but over eighty members of the cult as well. The government's actions were jus-
tified by Attorney General Janet Reno on grounds of accusations of child molestation, ru-
mours of suicide pacts and the size of the arsenal of weapons which the cult was said to
have amassed. (The US government's own tactics were, at the time, themselves debated
as to whether or not they could be considered to be "terrorist" tactics). In this discussion
with Joo and Lee, Ronald Jones proposed reframing David Koresh and his society as "a
variation, say, on the Barbizon School." Koresh and his followers, stated Jones:

> Abandoned conventional norms to establish a self-made rural community where they
> could be introspective and stand apart from a society that would do no more than pay
> lip-service to fierce individualism ... I do respect the kind of fierce independence he
> managed to carve out of an otherwise oppressive society. Compare it to what passes
> from the individualism of the artist today ... What artists and thinkers can gain from
> Koresh is two-fold: first he managed to jump out of his own skin, that is, he found a
> real alternative; and second, he knew it was "real" by virtue of the fact that he pre-
> pared himself and his followers to defend what their society stood for, to defend the
> degree of difference they had created. Koresh provides us with an all too rare con-
> temporary example of difference potent enough to gag the dominant culture: a de-
> gree of difference that couldn't be named or defined. Koresh offers us something of
> a clue as to what it may take to find an alternative version of what it is to be an artist,
> to guarantee the right to free expression.[39]

This fascination with Waco and more particularly with that which appears to "sub-
vert" certain nationally or institutionally-endorsed beliefs, is again apparent in Rod Dick-
inson's recent *Nocturne: The Waco Re-Enactment*. On September 16, 2004, a bus brought
150 people from the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, to a "secret" location
surrounded by wire fencing and bright floodlights. Here, artist Rod Dickinson reconstruct-
ed the FBI's 51-day siege of 1993. Dickinson's interest in the siege was focused on the psy-
chological warfare employed by the US troops—itself variously described as "assault"
and/or "terrorism." As is now well known, the FBI subjected the cult to a continuous bar-
rage of sound—the latter of which was said to measure 110 decibels, or the equivalent of
a jet taking off. White noise, rock music, the sound of babies crying, circling helicopters,
high-pitched rabbit screams, Tibetan chanting, dentist drills, Nancy Sinatra singing "These
Boots Are Made for Walking" and recorded phone taps of Koresh speaking to FBI nego-
tiators, were amongst the sounds pumped into the complex.[40]

Dickinson's performance recreated the US military's "audio siege" and then posted the
results on the Internet for fifty one days following September 16 (2004). By appropriating /re-
creating what themselves might be either "terrorist" tactics and/or the tactics of the US mili-
tary in its "war against terrorism," Dickinson thus asks us to question our assumptions as to
precisely who the WACO "terrorists" were. But he goes farther
than this too. He claims that his "aesthetic" re-enactment was
intended to give a "better understanding of the way modern
war is conducted."[41] The "re-enactment" was thus not mere-
ly an "aesthetic" recreation of the past but, as his ICA press re-
lease put it, it also "had clear references to the recent incidents
of torture and abuse during the ongoing conflict in Irak." And
in co-opting the "terrorist" tactics of the "anti-terrorists" into
an "aesthetic" regime, Dickinson thus mimics, uses and at the
same time critiques commonplace understandings of both
"terrorism" and "art"—at once showing how differing sys-
tems of belief both bear upon and also come into conflict with
one another. He does not bother to set down the precise na-

[39] Ibid., p. 82.

[40] In 1989, when General Noriega
was subjected to a similar sound bar-
rage, the favoured choice of music in-
cluded tracks by Rick Astley and Ju-
das Priest.

[41] Rod Dickinson, "Nocturne: The
Waco Re-enactment," ICA 2004,
http://www.wacoreenactment.org/in
dex2.php?section=1&page=pressre-
lease (accessed November 2004).

ture of the relationship between the "aesthetical" and the "ethical" realms, but simply acts as if to mobilise and engage in all (aesthetic, social, religious, political) spheres at once. His work leaves little scope for the division and specialisation of artworks into different "forms" or "fields." In fact, it can be seen as implicitly critiquing the notion of the "work-in-itself"—the artwork which thought itself capable of disengaging the "aesthetic" from social, religious or political spheres.

Such practices do not merely associate the "poetical" and the "political." They traverse such "regimes" insisting on art's validity as a place where thought can proceed in whatever direction it wishes, but also in a manner that is somehow different from other structures of thinking. Of course, one must tread carefully here. I am not suggesting, for example as Félix Guattari does, that such practices exist in a perfect "ethico-aesthetic paradigm"[42]—that is, in a broadly "aesthetic" paradigm which has primacy over scientific, moral, religious or other paradigms. That theory has in any case too complex a connection with the reinvention of the subject to be fully recounted here.[43] Nevertheless, I see such practices as significant, not for their particular politics, but for their insistence that art is a domain of thought in its own right—one which co-exists with but is nevertheless somehow different from other forms of thought. In other words, it is not simply the subject matter of art that is of concern in these works, but the analytic system that they have in part developed, which assigns to the "aesthetic" a significant capacity for ethical and/or political agency. The movement towards a "new aesthetics" is of course quite diverse and it is important to avoid over-generalising about what is in fact a disparate set of approaches located across a range of different disciplines. However these approaches are united by a concern to re-claim the efficacy of the "aesthetic," and to understand its political and ethical implications. In other words, the "aesthetic" is seen in these practices as an instance of, a dimension of the ethico-political (and vice-versa)—not a mere schema which lies helplessly detached from "proper" political spheres.

To further explore such concerns, one must however return to specific practices. In a recent exhibition held at the John Hansard Gallery (Southampton, England) a number of artists responded specifically to the US' post-2001 "war on terrorism" and this therefore makes for a useful example as to, firstly, how artists have continued to make connections between art and "terrorism," and secondly, have viewed the "aesthetic" as having room for ethical and political dimensions.[44] The exhibition is also particularly useful in that it does not offer a single perspective of "terrorism." Indeed, as a whole, it offers a visual critique of the philosophical, social, political and cultural interventions that the "war against terrorism" has created. Seeking to unite artists of ethnic diversity, to emphasise their individual responses to the psychological, historical and ethical implications of the "war on terror," the exhibition thus also deliberately ought to disavow the "us and them" dichotomy that Bush had at that time introduced in his response to the events of 9/11. It did not seek to dis-engage "aesthetical" from ethical (or indeed political) preoccupations. Rather it reflected a desire for "aesthetics" to re-claim its political and ethical dimensions by fostering inter-racial dialogues between varieties of world perspectives, while at the same time avoiding—and this is crucial—an ideological instrumentalism which would have that art speak from a single "political" source.

For example, in *Why Do You Think I Left?*, Israeli-born Oreet Ashery made a DVD work in which she interviewed members of her extended family, asking them to recount their

[42] Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethic-Aesthetic Paradigm*, translated by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Sydney: Power Publications, 1995), pp. 98-103.

[43] Such a connection might at least be attested to however, in Guattari's assertion that "The work of art, for those who use it, is an activity of un-framing ... which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject itself" (Guattari, p. 131).

[44] Intervention, curated by Kathy Kenny, John Hansard Gallery, 30 September—15 November 2003. The artists included in the exhibition were as follows: Ron Arad, Oreet Ashery, Gordon Cheung, Shez Dawood, Ron den Daas, Julie Henry and Giles Perry (together with Darren Southee of Brunel University), Foreign Investment, Runa Islam, Bo Myers, Jaimini Patel, Vanda Playford and Kathy Kenny, Rashad Salim and Eva Weinmayr.

own versions of why she left Israel. Far from promoting a single ideological position, the resulting work demonstrated the artist's *split* loyalties. It produced irresolvable conflicts in her attitudes towards the "occupied territories," towards Israel's role in the "Palestinian crisis" and indeed towards her own family history—on one side of which was a seven-generational family of indigenous Jews and on the other, a line of Eastern European Jewish extraction. In the DVD work, the artist herself holds her tongue, staging a struggle between "personal" and "political" as played out across the "aesthetical." Thus ethico-aesthetic concerns are combined in a single modality—an event in which aesthetical and ethical considerations are held up together—both partial and open at the same time.

In comparison with Ashery's work, Runa Islam, another artist in the John Hansard Gallery exhibition, uses BBC news footage of the collapse of the World Trade Center. Slowed down and shown in reverse, the back-to-front collapse of the towers acquires a strange and *terrible* "beauty." The viewer is forced to contemplate events in a manner which is very different from any earlier responses they might have had to the ubiquitously shown news footage. The "sublime" quality of the panorama is dealt with in such a way as to make the viewer ask if Karlheinz Stockhausen wasn't perhaps touching on some unmentionable aspect of any viewer's experience in describing the collapse of the World Trade Center as "the greatest work of art ever"?

The relationship between art and "terrorism" is more complex than Stockhausen's remark would have us believe, however. This is clear when one considers the works described above for example. The enigmatic opacity of these works—their resistance to any claims for transparency—makes the nature of that convergence between "art" and "terror" highly elusive and difficult to pin down discursively. The viewer is as much engaged with the "terrible" as they are with the "artistic" and for this reason, the work avoids becoming mere political "instrumentalism." In other words, the opacity of the connection between the work of "art" and the work of "terrorism" is concentrated in a direct engagement with the viewer—but only such that the viewer's responsiveness is split and/or doubled as a necessary condition of that encounter. Thus as these works demonstrate, it is not a matter of art merely appropriating and/or aestheticising "terror," but of art's capacity to form an aesthetico-ethical merger—a single *event* which retains a *partial* autonomy in that it introduces the viewer to an extra-discursive mode of experience but also manages not to *renege* on the ethico-political implications of such an "aesthetic."

One final example worth citing is that of irational.org (one "r" not two), an artists' group/network which unlike the earlier examples proffered, delves into the realms of so-called "cyber-terrorism" and "bio-technology." Describing itself as:

> An international system for deploying "irational" information, services and products for the displaced and roaming. Irational.org supports independent artists and organisations that need to maintain mission critical information systems.[45]

Irational.org runs a number of projects—the methodologies for which are often based on those of "international bio-terrorists" and "computer hackers." It builds on the writings of Hakim Bey and in particular on his *TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*.[46] For example, one of irational.org's projects is that of *The Cultural Terrorist Agency* (CTA):

> A funding agency committed to supporting contestation of property and representation. CTA turns its enemies' best weapon, that being investment, back onto itself ... We provide tactical finance support for combatant individuals and groups from our central fund, made up of combined multiple pledges. This highly mobile central fund can be deployed immediately to areas of conflict with capitalist fundamentalists.[47]

45   irational.org, "Biography," http://www.irational.org/cgi-bin/cv/cv.pl?member=irational, (accessed November, 2004).

The CTA claims that *"since mass insurrection against the dominant forces of oppression, in most parts of the world, is currently out of the question, the next best strategy is one of concession forcing terrorism."* It continues:

> Artists and cultural workers are being forced to choose between a path in the capital defined categories of commodification, crime or terrorism. CTA is determined to *support individuals and organisations that, if are not already will soon be, branded as terrorists.*[48]

The CTA focuses on intellectual property rights in biotechnology—dealing specifically with conflicts related to the food chain and organism non-reproduction. In a fusion between intervention and activism, they target corporations "whose stated aim is to irreversibly insert themselves in the food chain." They claim to wish to forge links with "similarly minded organisations, with interests in property and representation, including Islamic fundamentalists and anti-capital anarchists."

Many of the CTA's past activities have centred on their campaigns against "capital fundamentalists" including Adidas and Nike; Glaxo; Tesco; Sainsburys; 7-Eleven; American Express, Monsanto and the art market. For example, the CTA appropriated Sainsburys and Tesco loyalty cards for their website, re-working these and other company trademarks. Legal proceedings were initiated against them for "trade mark infringement," "passing-off" and breach of copyright. In like manner, the agency launched its *Natural Reality SuperWeed kit 1.0.* "a low-tech DIY kit capable of producing a genetically mutant superweed, designed to attack corporate monoculture." The kit consisted of:

> A mixture of naturally occurring and genetically mutated (GM) Brassica seeds (Oilseed Rape, Wild Radish, Yellow Mustard, Sheperd's Purse). It was claimed that if these seeds are allowed to germinate and cross pollinate, a Super-Weed would be created that will be resistant to current herbicides (e.g. Roundup), thus not only threatening the profitability of conventional and GM Brassica crops, but also of herbicide production and distribution as well.[49]

The website also invites users to create their own propaganda campaigns threatening biotech corporate interests with this genetic weapon:

> By releasing SuperWeed 1.0 into the environment long before biotech companies have a suitable fix, you will contribute to large losses in their profitability, thus causing them to reassess their future strategies and investments ... If you believe that there will be no GM crop ban you could choose to cultivate SuperWeed 1.0 and release it into the environment immediately.[50]

The artists also threaten that, should a ban *not* be enforced, they will not hesitate to escalate "conflict further by manufacturing and distributing SuperWeed Kit 2.0 containing many more offensive capabilities."[51]

These and indeed all of the artworks cited above are "terroristic" in that they demand a turning point, but they do so intimately, in the midst of the viewer's encounter with the "aesthetic." They are thus *contingent* on realisable-unrealisable social conditions but not *reducible* either to those conditions or to any historical descriptions of them. By stepping into the no-man's land between the "ethical" and the "aesthetical,"

[46] Hakim Bey, "The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism," *TAZ,* http://www.hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html (accessed November, 2004). Poetic terrorism is here described as "an act in a Theatre of Cruelty which has no stage, no rows of seats, no tickets and no walls. In order to work at all, PT must categorically be divorced from all conventional structures and from art consumption (galleries, publications, media). Even the guerrilla Situationist tactics of street theatre are perhaps too well known and expected now."

[47] The Cultural Terrorist Agency, irational.org, http://www.irational.org/cgi-bin/cta/about.pl (accessed November, 2004).

[48] Ibid.

[49] Heath Bunting, "Natural Reality SuperWeed Kit 1.0" *Absolute One,* http://absoluteone.ljudmila.org/heath_bunting_en.php (accessed November, 2004).

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Ibid.

the fate of art in an "age of terrorism" is therefore to cast art out of the relative isolation of the art world and to subject it to all kinds of intellectual, political and aesthetic scrutiny—to enact in other words, a syncopation between the "ethical" and the "aesthetical" realms.

UNITED KINGDOM TERRORISM ACT 2000 (SELECTIONS FROM)

Terrorism: interpretation

(1) In this Act "terrorism" means the use or threat of action where...

(b) the use or threat is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and

(c) the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political,religious or ideological cause.

(2) Action falls within this subsection if it:

(a) involves serious violence against a person,

(b) involves serious damage to property,

(c) endangers a person's life, other than that of the person committing the action,

(d) creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public, or

(e) is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt anelectronic system.

(3) The use or threat of action falling within subsection (2) which involves the use of firearms or explosives is terrorism whether or not subsection (1) (b) is satisfied.

(4) In this section:

(a) "action" includes action outside the United Kingdom,

(b) a reference to any person or to property is a reference to any person, or to property, wherever situated,

(c) a reference to the public includes a reference to the public of a country other than the United Kingdom, and

(d) "the government" means the government of the United Kingdom, of a Part of the United Kingdom or of a country other than the United Kingdom.

(5) In this Act a reference to action taken for the purposes of terrorism includes a reference to action taken for the benefit of a proscribed organisation.

englishversion

Los trabajos de proyecto de la presente publicación han contado con una ayuda de la Dirección General de Cooperación Cultural del Ministerio de Cultura.

The work involved in the present publication has depended on aid from the Department of Cultural Cooperation of the Ministry of Culture.

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA   MINISTERIO DE CULTURA