RIOT OF THE UNHEARD: A GENEALOGY OF DIS/CLOSIVE TERROR

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, grounded in the literary concerns of speech and narrative, poses alternative theoretical modes of understanding the "terrorist's" utterance, or disclosure, through a critical appropriation of J.L. Austin's speech act theory and the Foucauldian revision of classical claims for the *parrhesiast*. In so doing, it more fluidly integrates the performative inscriptions of ritualized atrocity and the existential register of "truth telling" that underlie the proliferating narrative accounts of terrorism into a framework for understanding the mechanisms animating this explosive phenomenon. This work takes as its subject a terroristic pattern that has emerged in recent decades constituted by 1) an act of irruptive, spectacular, violence that 2) prompts an investigation and engagement with a manifesto, and 3) results in agonistic rituals of adjudication of truth that are rarely convergent with the original disclosure. This phenomenon, I argue, can be productively thought of as a failed ontological disclosure enunciated by the perpetrators. Such a failure is not the simple matter of an uncompelling rhetorical claim, or the unsuccessful transmission of information. The terrorist act succeeds, in fact, in a kind of seduction that prompts an investigation around which tremendous resources are expended. Such acts seek to catalyze a kind recognition of being that is never fully realized. The existentially underwritten disclosure is doomed to be passed over unheard, and yet its inherent infelicity makes it recognizably terrorism, as such.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION
WHAT DO WE WANT FROM A TERRORIST?

A disclosure is an enunciative moment, a gesture that leverages extra-semantic meaning. It can be carried out successfully with no guarantee of reception or even audience. But people can also disclose something about themselves inadvertently, outside of their conscious control or volition. Thus, the interpretive structure of such disclosures can operate from both the poles of transmission and reception of an utterance and yet remain aporetic.[1] This is familiar territory for literary studies. In fact, such disclosures are a principal condition of operation for literature.

This work takes as its subject a terroristic pattern that has emerged in recent decades constituted by 1) an act of irruptive, spectacular, violence that 2) prompts an investigation and engagement with a manifesto, and 3) results in agonistic rituals of adjudication of truth that are rarely convergent with the original disclosure. This phenomenon, I argue, can be productively thought of as a failed ontological disclosure enunciated by the perpetrators. Such a failure is not the simple matter of an uncompelling rhetorical claim, or the unsuccessful transmission of information. The terrorist act succeeds, in fact, in a kind of seduction that prompts an investigation around which tremendous resources are expended. Such acts seek to catalyze a kind recognition of being that is never fully realized. The existentially underwritten disclosure is doomed to be passed over unheard, and yet its inherent infelicity makes it recognizably terrorism, as such. It is, therefore, in this way all the more tragic and repellant for its squandering of human life and property.

[1] I intentionally avoid the term "communicate" here to further highlight the ambiguity of the disclosure's reception, its status as a complete speech act that does not necessarily reflect a transfer or communication of content.

Terror and Ontological Commitments

Surely the return of the words ontology and phenomenology in this text might be a jarring occurrence worthy of some situating and discussion. Ontology is admittedly a blunt instrument intended here as something of a placeholder for a more protracted engagement of the legacies of deconstruction and of phenomenology, one that has in fact been already unfolding in recent years in other venues.[2] More accurately, the term represents a broad category placed in question during the heyday of the deconstructionist movement. It is the appropriate category, however, because while the present project defers a commitment to a particular account of the conditions of the possibility of human existence and the experience of interiority (*e.g.* as outlined in such varied frameworks as Husserl's Transcendental Ego, Sartre's Existential Ego, Heideggerian *Dasein)* the term holds open a space of meaning that is constitutive of a person's being in the world that is *a priori* to the norms and conventions of sociality.[3] In short, I invoke ontology here to differentiate a particular set of considerations that I am drawing out in relief from epistemological concerns, or the knowledge that has been categorized and compounded by organizing discourses. One biproduct of this approach is the consequent gathering together,

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[2] Julia Jansen, "Phenomenology and Critique: On 'Mere' Description and Its Normative Dimensions" in *Phenomenology as Critique: Why Method Matters*, eds. Andreea Smaranda Aldea, David Carr and Sara Heinämaa (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022).

I am generally referring here to intellectual strains such as, for example, so-called "post-phenomenology" and hermeneutics. This work was well underway even before the apogee of the American reception of deconstruction. The Aldea *et al.* book is indebted to many others that seek to acknowledge the deconstructive critique but exhume some of the productive methodologies of phenomenology.

[3] Aldea *et al.*, 3. We should note, however, that the distinction "*a priori*" might not be properly phenomenological, as many in this tradition "do not accept the Kantian dichotomies of apriority/aposteriority and necessity/possibility but, instead, operate with neo-Aristotelian and neo-Cartesian concepts of intentionality."

through the limit case of the terroristic disclosure, of the materials for a deferred re-reading of deconstruction. Within the scope of this project, however, my critical appropriation of ontology is intended to intervene in the much more granular conversation of the instrumentality of language, reference, and representation, rather than, directly, in the structures of being. To this end, I leverage the tools of literary analysis that may be understood as more at home in comparative literature.

Certainly, a superficial post structuralist reading, often conveniently saddled on Foucault (vis-à-vis Althusser), for example, elides and thereby collapses what I am calling ontological concerns by arguing that our experience of being is inextricably constituted by norming and conventional forces—particularly those of language. In short: we have our experience of the world through language and cannot have it otherwise. This would be in contradistinction to Husserl's version of intentionality, which accounts for our experience of the world through "meant" objects rather than objects experienced as meaningful by virtue of language. Husserl's intentionality is not dependent on linguistic or representational mechanisms for meaning.[4] My inclination would be to think of such post structuralist frameworks as, if not largely caricature, then effectively accounting for only one facet of existence, albeit a very central aspect, more akin to the recently ascendant term "social ontology" rather than an account, in totality, of the structures of human existence and meaning making. A more sophisticated reading of Foucault's work by, for example, Axel Honneth, highlights the implications of Foucault's shifting analytic of power, even if it finds it ultimately lacking in accounting for the continued development of neoliberal power structures. In Foucault's work from *Discipline and Punish* onward, Honneth

[4] Steven Galt Crowell. *Husserl, Heidegger and the Space of Meaning: Paths Toward Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: IL., 2001).

See Crowell's discussion of the spaces of meaning in Heidegger and Husserl.

argues, Foucault is "no longer interested in the abstract genesis of the concept of subjectivity in the modern sciences; now he is interested in the practical genesis of the modern representations of the subject and morality within the context of strategies of social power".[5] I argue in the later chapters of this dissertation that those strategies of social power ultimately lead back to considerations that are personal and existential.

The idea that language is socially constituted, in the present era, would provoke little controversy, even if philosophers like John Searle are interested in ascribing a slightly different, what he terms "biological," impetus for language.[6] For our purposes, the tensions between the accounts of a social ontology and the post-structuralist subject do not necessitate an insistence on a particular commitment for the validity or insights of our investigation. In fact, I find it productive to bracket such categorical debate and factional dogmatism regarding the status of the subject by way of allowing the emergence of otherwise foreclosed resonances.

Indeed, in conversation with deconstruction as channeled through the work of Barbara Johnson and Shoshana Felman, who represent two leading proponents of deconstruction in its

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[5] Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory,* trans. Kenneth Baynes, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). 177.

[6] John Searle, "What is Language? Some Preliminary Remarks" in *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, XI 1 (2009),173-202.

See for a discussion of language as both representative of an external "reality" and generative of new realities. Searle characterizes language as "a natural extension of non-linguistic biological capacities" (174). He notes its "prelinguistic intentionality." Seeing language "naturalistically" for Searle means seeing the meaning of sentences and speech acts "as an extension of the more biologically fundamental forms of intentionality that we have in belief, desire, memory and intention, and to see those in turn as developments of even more fundamental forms of intentionality, especially, perception and intentional action. Among the most basic forms of intentionality, the most biologically primitive, along with hunger, thirst and sexual desire, are perception and intention-in-action" (174).

American reception, my inquiry revisits Foucault and demonstrates that his aggressive stance against the phenomenological subject was at odds with the long arc of his oeuvre. While his posture effectively foregrounded the discursive relationships that were at the core of his intellectual program, his later work, as I will discuss extensively here, ultimately returned to questions of being that, in my reading, use different language to explore familiar ontological territory.

Part of ontology's ambiguity is the sheer abundance of its definitions and appropriations, including in such appellations as "linguistic ontology" and "logical ontology." In the academic institutional context, the term has also been appropriated by both the analytical and continental traditions in philosophy and deployed in a dizzying array of applications, especially since it and the word phenomenology were discovered by the social sciences. It would be productive, therefore, to position this usage of the word in a tradition that helps to better consolidate the salient field of inquiry and its attendant citationality.

One touchstone for my use of ontology is folded into what has been called the tradition of "existential phenomenology." It is important to note, however, that I have been careful to deploy ontology in ways that do not limit its features to the mainline of this tradition. While phenomenology is generally understood as inaugurated by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century, the "existential" modifier, which emerged in the tradition at mid-century, denotes a project that ranges far beyond Husserl to consider not just the transcendental structures of the conditions of consciousness and knowledge, but also signals a scope that extends into the conditions of the possibility of being (as explored by Heidegger), perception (as explored by Maurice Merleau-Ponty), ethics (as explored by Simone de Beauvoir and Levinas). Such thinkers have come to represent so-called "classical phenomenology." The tradition continues with rich re-appropriations of phenomenology as a methodology and philosophers who wish to focus on

features other than the often misrepresented "universal" or transcendental structures. One notable example is Sara Ahmed, who explores "orientation" as a way of putting "queer studies into closer dialogue with phenomenology."[7] The classical current produced a number of tributaries including, for example, hermeneutics (as exemplified by Gadamer), anti-colonial political philosophy (as exemplified by Fanon). Relevant to the work at hand, it is also useful to point out that Judith Butler's thinking has in myriad ways leveraged this phenomenological tradition to describe social and political being particularly around performative speech acts. Butler critiqued Foucault, for example, for not adequately acknowledging embodiment as constitutive of being and subjectivity.[8]

In this phenomenological tradition Husserl is generally regarded as the initial point of departure, although the work of Friedrich Nietzsche is often invoked as a precursor for the tradition's turn toward being. Husserl's project, however, is not properly one that is concerned with ontology. Instead, it is preoccupied with epistemological concerns. In addressing the "crisis" in Europe prompted by the rapid expansion of modernization and the development of myriad novel epistemes, he seeks to establish apodictic foundations for inquiry and categorization of the sciences. Husserl's project is to build a method of inquiry of phenomena that avails itself first and foremost of the structures of human consciousness, namely intentionality. While objects may (or may not) have some objective status in "reality," for Husserl it is the intended or meant

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[7] Sara Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology" in *GLQ* 12:4. (Durham: Duke U.P., 2006).

[8] By way of indirectly addressing the various critiques of phenomenology has sustained over the decades for its supposed "universalizing" or colonizing tendencies, Aldea *et al.* note that contemporary phenomenology "studies human subjects not as bodiless spirits or empty ego-poles, but as embodied and communalized persons who interact in a common world. Accordingly, it is able and bound to explicate and criticize these subjects' assumptions and dogmas as socially and culturally inherited commitments" (Aldea *et al*, 3).

experience of objects that is actually relevant to our experience of them. He argues that our structures of knowledge, specifically the sciences, should be based on the indubitable evidence of the transcendental structures of human existence. To do this he proposes a methodological bracketing called the epoché, and later, the phenomenological reduction. An ontological inquiry, in the Husserlian project, would likely require the development of something like a "science of being," an Aristotelian notion, that identified the transcendental structures of being by virtue of the apodictic foundations of consciousness. This was not, however, the focus of Husserl's project.

In a foundational way, Heidegger picks up this program and takes it in another direction. He reframes the contours of intentionality and substitutes human existence for consciousness as the apodictic foundation of human experience of the world. Where Husserl's pursuit is knowledge, Heidegger's is existence—finding oneself thrown into the world—as experienced by the kind of being for whom existence is meaningful, which he calls *Dasein*. Writ large, Heidegger's reframing of the notion of being is a critique of Platonic ontology, which shaped Western Philosophy from its nascence. Heidegger sees a circular logic to the positioning of God/the Good in relation to the status of being. He calls this problematic arrangement "ontotheology," a term he critically re-appropriated from Kant. Such ontotheology is evident when a "metaphysics relies on an account of ultimate reality… [that] combines—typically in a confused or conflated manner—two general forms of metaphysical explanation that, taken together, aim to make the entirety of reality intelligible to human understanding."[9] Bernasconi sees Heidegger's elucidation of ontotheology in Heidegger's "The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics" as a way of also differentiating himself from Hegel. The centrality of ontology to philosophers following

[9] Matthew Halteman, "Ontotheology" in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Taylor and Francis, 1998). https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/ontotheology/v-1.

Heidegger, however, generally recedes. Bernasconi suggests, for example, that although Derrida saw his own appropriation of the Heidegger's words *Destruktion* or *Abbau* as a revision of the latter's approach to ontology, "the differentiation of standpoints was very much at the root of philosophical work for Heidegger in a way it is not for Derrida."[10]

Some provocative interpretations of Heidegger argue that his early work before *Being and Time* was actually on track to deconstruct his own even earlier metaphysical preoccupations.[11] Crowell, however, interprets Heidegger as more closely aligned with Husserl because of the centrality he notes of a transcendental space of meaning in both. In essence, Crowell sees these provocations as an attempt to show Heidegger as a proto-deconstructionist, when in fact, he argues, Heidegger has more in common with Husserl's phenomenological methods.

In general, Heidegger's way of thinking about ontology shifted over time. His later work, for instance, marks redoubled engagement with language and art. This dissertation operates against the background of the work of later Heidegger in *Poetry, Language, Thought* in which ontology has become more obscure. The parameters of Heidegger's project in that text are such that he does not merely concern himself with the aesthetics of "literature," arguing that this pursuit is potentially caught up and distorted by the literary "industry" among other "functionaries. . . [of] public civilized opinions"—an association he also makes with art in "The Origin of the Work of Art." In the essays "Poetically Man Dwells" and "The Origin of the Work of Art" he is careful to distance himself from the sorts of naming and classification with which art historians or literary critics are interested. Following this line of thinking, in this dissertation I

[10] Robert Bernasconi, "Seeing Double: Destruktion and Deconstruction" in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989). 235.

[11] Crowell (referencing Van Buren), 8.

yoke the analytical tools of several disciplines by way of reclaiming a form of inquiry proper to the study of literature while not being fully circumscribed by a "literary industry."

Heidegger is primarily concerned in "Language" and "Poetically" with supporting his postulation that "language speaks" and in that "speaking" the nature of things can be revealed to us. Such an account of language opens a space of the revealing of meaning within a broader linguistic theoretical discourse traditionally dominated by the notion of language as a symbolic register of communication and (re)presentation. All of these contentions hinge upon Heidegger's three-part critique of the problems with the characterization of speech as a physiological action that audibly expresses and communicates human feelings accompanied by thoughts. Such a view, he suggests, assumes first the notion that language as expression presupposes something internal that externalizes itself through speech. This, he argues, relies on the vocalization to explain something happening internally. Second, if speech is an activity of man, man speaks, and always speaks some language, then we cannot say that "language speaks." Such a position would indicate that language brings man into being and thus "man would be bespoken by language." Finally, such a physiological/communicative view takes for granted that human expression is always presenting or representing the real and the unreal. Instead, he posits that the nature of language includes more than such expression. That role, he argues, is merely one among many. The essence conveyed by excellent art or language, according to Heidegger's model, is a truth is an expression of being, which is to say always at stake and relative to the revealing of its measurement. This should be, after all, the aim of the knowledge-seeker—to understand truth.[12]

[12] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 190.

Deconstructing Being and Language

Yet the approach of this dissertation is not properly Heideggerian. It also deploys deconstructive methods at several points to further phenomenological goals. We should, therefore, perhaps tarry on Derrida's thinking for a moment to draw out some important inflections. Recent reevaluations of deconstruction, now some five decades into its American institutional reception, illustrate its frequent divergence from Derrida's own program. Cusset, for example, argues the reception of Deconstruction and its institutional destinies in the United States, and Derrida's work specifically, was highly idiosyncratic and shaped in peculiar ways by the contingencies of its initial framing. Indeed, Cusset notes the particular "modalities by which a certain Derrida was first *constructed* in the United States" were heavily influenced by Gayatri Spivak's important translation and lengthy introduction to *De la grammatologie* [Of Grammatology] published in 1976. Spivak, in her preface, "defines the sign as the impossible adequation of the word to the thing, the very 'structure of difference,' hence truth's status as 'metaphor.' She then clarifies the book's philosophical references, its double horizon: to surpass a Heideggerian 'metaphysics of presence' and to carry out a Nietzschean 'undoing of opposites.'" Consequently, the tendency in the American context was to see Derrida "less as the heterodox continuation" of the Western philosophical tradition and more as "its sublime end point."

As a cultural phenomenon, especially in the academic institutional context, it was a putative threat to the whole Western philosophical tradition. It was also the impetus (or catalyst) for the proliferation of novel epistemes structured along the lines of identity and ideology.[13] In

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[13] François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, (Minneapolis: MN, 2008). 109-112.

Cusset credits as small group of scholars, the so-called Yale School, with earnestly engagement with a version of "deconstructionism" rather than "Deconstruction." This more measured engagement "had no need to derive a battle plan from this new elasticity of meaning,

view of this historiographic note, this dissertation stages a reading of the discursive and performative qualities of terrorism—a Derridean move—yet it sidesteps protracted engagement with Derrida's work itself. Instead, I find it more productive, in a milieu still overdetermined by Derridean influence, to engage his absence and rely instead on the formidable insights of the deconstruction projects of Johnson and Felman. This is all the more crucial because of Johnson and Felman's extended critiques of Austin, who figures prominently in this work. Additionally, I include sustained annotations about the work of John Searle, who famously tousled with Derrida over the status of the performative and of authorship. Searle objected on logical and formal grounds rather than ontological or phenomenological concerns.[14] Yet his critiques have implications for how one might conceive of terrorism as performative speech.

If pressed, the Derrida I would say I am most in conversation with can be found in *The Gift of Death*, specifically, in "Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)." In that chapter, Derrida's methodology could be characterized as both phenomenological and deconstructive.[15] The status of ontology is not central to his analysis of "trembling" in this chapter, which is apropos for this dissertation because it is related to (in fact, an effect of) terror. The filiation

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to call for an upheaval of the world based on the incoherencies of the text—in order to appease the academic's guilt over his or her disconnection from the 'real world.' Fewer in number, these subtle theoreticians of reading did not make as much noise as the strategists of decentering, the bards of the new crusade against 'logocentrism.' But they left a more lasting mark in the history of criticism." This group included Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller.

[14] See, for instance Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL. Northwestern U.P., 1988).

This text chronicles the debate in the late 1970s and reprints the texts of Derrida and Searle initiated by the publication of Derrida's "Signature Event Context" and followed with Searle's reply "Reiterating the Differences."

[15] Jacques Derrida, "Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)," in *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills, (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 2008), 55.

between Derrida's analysis of trembling and our analysis of disclosive terror is most apparent here. Of trembling, Derrida notes,

> We tremble in the strange repetition that ties an irrefutable past (a shock has been felt, some trauma has already affected us) to a future that cannot be anticipated; anticipated but unpredictable; apprehended, yet, and this is why there is a future, apprehended precisely as unforeseeable, unpredictable; approached as unapproachable.[16]

Derrida, in this passage, emphasizes the disorienting circularity, if not synchronicity, of the source of trembling. It is both a reaction and an anticipation. It "exceeds my seeing and my knowing [*mon voir et mon savoir*]" despite concerning "the innermost parts of me, right down to my soul, down to the bone."[17] This is the evocation of what I have been calling an ontological concern. For Derrida, trembling is indicative of the body trying to "say" something that exceeds knowledge, in what he dubs the *mysterium tremendum*, within the context of an Other as God that is ultimately absent and that does not communicate his reasons. In this concept of the Other, of course, we should note the influence of Levinas.[18]

Derrida frames this phenomenon with death, vis-à-vis the apostle Paul, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger and the evocation of "fear and trembling." He points to Heidegger's emphasis on the point that each of us takes death upon himself, in Heideggerian vernacular *auf sich nehmen*. No one

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[16] Jacques Derrida, "Whom to Give to"

[17] Derrida, 55.

[18] Simon Critchley, "Leaving the Climate of Heidegger's Thinking," in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 2014).

Underlying this evocation of Levinas is the latter's critique of Heidegger. In Levinas' "Is Ontology Fundamental," Levinas "engages in a critical questioning of Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology." Levinas argues that "fundamental ontology is fundamentally ethical" (297).

can stand in for us. This yields a kind of singularity and space of decision. He notes, however, that "as soon as one enters the medium of language, one loses this singularity" and, consequently, "the possibility or the right to decide."[19] Here we arrive at an ethical paradox: "One always risks not managing to accede to the concept of responsibility in the process of *forming* it."[20] This aporia at the heart of the ethics of responsibility is resonant with Derrida's view of language writ large, in contradistinction from, for example, Gadamer. Both Derrida and Gadamer take Heidegger's "recognition of the priority of language" and develop it in different ways.[21] Derrida "remains continually on the alert as to how otherness lurks within meaning" and how there may not be any way to decide truth or authenticity between competing meanings. Whereas Gadamer stresses the "unity of and in meaning," which depends on the willingness of the discursive participants and can lead to "a strengthening of tradition and an emphasizing of the authority and truth of texts."[22]

Despite the generativity of deconstructive analyses of literature in humanities disciplines, and particularly English departments, phenomenological inquiry has maintained throughout that it offers a special proximity to literature that deconstruction does not fully account for. In Derridean lingua, something remains after the blink of an eye. Perhaps more appropriately, there is a way in which phenomenological readings are productively complicated by deconstructive strategies. More recent work on Derrida's thought on the status of the event and poetry illustrates

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[19] Derrida, 60-1.

[20] Ibid, 62.

[21] Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer, "Introduction" in *Dialogue & Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989).

[22] Ibid, 2.

the complexities of the relationship between Deconstruction, as a project, and ontology.[23] The status of the event in Derrida's thinking, for example, engages with a performative mode of speech act in the "poetic attestation" to the centrality of death to our conceptualization of the event—an ontological question.[24]

Indeed, present conversations about classical phenomenology are reevaluating Husserl's critical approach as neither metaphysical nor epistemological. As Carr notes, "He seeks neither to affirm or reaffirm, nor to deny, nor even to doubt, the thesis of the natural attitude. Suspension is different from each of these things."[25] In other words, there has been an effort to read Husserl's phenomenological project as a method of critical descriptive inquiry, which would

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[23] See, for instance, Harris Bechtol, "Event, Death, and Poetry: The Death of the Other in Derrida's 'Rams'" in *Philosophy Today* 62.1. (Winter 2018).

Bechtol argues, "Derrida's careful consideration of our experience of the death of the other for his account of the event shows that the ontological questions at the foreground of recent focus on the event are part and parcel of ethical and existential concerns that confront us in the everyday, in the most ordinary, and, particularly, in the fact that those around us die," 254.

[24] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, (New York: Columbia U. Press, 2003), and Emily Apter, "Afterlife of a Discipline" in *Comparative Literature* 57.3. Responding to The Death of a Discipline: An ACLA Forum (Summer, 2005).

In terms of the institutional destinies of deconstruction and phenomenology, one helpful analog may be found in the work Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was engaged in the early 2000s to reconceive the foundations of Comparative Literature, a discipline that has found itself both in and outside of English departments in the United States. It is possible to see this dissertation, through that lens, as a means of demonstrating an unconventional form of "translation," one that is inherently literary. Instead of translating specific languages, while trying to critique their national contexts, this dissertation works to translate across epistemological discourses in a way that identifies and works around not just national political frameworks, but also political semiotic frameworks. In short: the act of terror, as a speech act, shifts semiotic modes and therefore can best be elucidated through this comparative work of translation.

[25] David Carr, "Phenomenology as Critical Method: Experience and Practice" In *Phenomenology as Critique: Why Method Matters*, eds. Andreea Smaranda Aldea, David Carr and Sara Heinämaa (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 13.

bring it into a similar mode as Critical Theory, for example. In broad strokes, this characterization of "critical" phenomenology de-emphasizes the kinds of work "that might be seen in conflict with critical, politically engaged philosophy while holding on to phenomenology's commitment to first person accounts of experience."[26]

Back to the Terrors Themselves

To be sure, we once again find ourselves in a proliferating moment of epistemic development, an intellectual crisis catalyzed by the exponential expansion of the Internet, novel fields of knowledge and coincident expertise. Once again, the resources of phenomenology, as a methodology, are acknowledged as important forms of inquiry for a variety of "social and political critique and figure in many communitarian, neo-pragmatic, and critical-theoretical arguments."[27] It is evident in the theory undergirding contemporary psychological and social science. Phenomenology is much nimbler than its cursory readings or misconceptions would warrant, particularly around its transcendental, eidetic, and egological commitments. It has been misconstrued as inescapably tied to historical (read colonial) contingency, that it is individualistic and incapable of theorizing intersubjective or communal situations, and that its transcendental orientation renders it "otherworldly—or worse—unworldly."[28] "Thus understood, phenomenology emerges as a multi-dimensional critique, diverging from the traditional

[26] Julia Jansen, "Phenomenology and Critique: On 'Mere' Description and Its Normative Dimensions" in *Phenomenology as Critique: Why Method Matters*. eds. Andreea Smaranda Aldea, David Carr and Sara Heinämaa. (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 44.

[27] Aldea *et al.*

[28] Ibid., 7.

alternatives of German Idealistic, neo-Kantian, neo-Hegelian reflections but also both challenging of and complementary to Foucauldian, critical-theoretical, and neo-Marxist counterparts as well as analytical and post-analytical forms of critique."[29] As Carr nicely frames the phenomenological pursuit:

> While metaphysics asks what exists, how it exists, and sometimes whether it exists, and while epistemology asks how we can know what exists, phenomenology asks, of anything that exists or may exist: how is it given, how is it experienced, and what is the nature of our experience of it?[30]

The crucial caveat, however, that I insist on in this dissertation is that, like Heidegger, we divorce this analysis of "infinite tasks" from the progenitor for whom it is meaningful.

Terrorist Literature

The convergences of literature and terrorism are manifold and unruly. There is certainly an abundance of literature about terrorism, in which terrorists and their acts are taken as the subject of, for example, novels and stories. There are also the epistemologically ordered literatures of terrorism, that is, the organized fields of knowledge about terroristic phenomena from various disciplinary perspectives, found in, for example, counterterrorism, sociology, and political science. Among these various literatures, however, is another form of "terrorist literature," a moniker used, in this case, to characterize a variety of modern and postmodern works and their authors that contest language's instrumentality. The central feature of this literature is not the subject of the work so much as the acts it performs. As a material constitution

[29] Ibid., 6.

[30] Carr, 29.

of signs, such a literature is not said to function *like* terrorism but has been attributed the ability to call language itself into question by, among other strategies, moving between semiological modes.[31] It is thus operating not by mere analogy but arguably as a kind of terrorism in itself.

This is a productive point of reference for the inquiry that I am inaugurating here, not because it is the focus of the subsequent chapters—my work explores the inverse: terrorism viewed through the lens of literature—but because this form of "terrorist literature" is closer to the considerations that guide my analysis than the more conventional discussion of the communicative or rhetorical qualities of terrorism. Both this "terrorist literature" and the literary reading of terrorism that follows foregrounds a horizon of performative acts of speech against the ground of language that is always inadequate by itself in disclosing truths of being.

Perhaps the most apropos touchstone of this form of "terrorist literature" occurred in the French interwar period in which a group of so-called "terrorist" writers became ascendant. The longtime editor of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (*NRF*), Jean Paulhan, reappropriated a pair of terms during this time and set them in what would become a signature opposition: "Rhetoric (a love or trust for words, roughly speaking) and Terror (a contempt for *mere* words: the Terrorist is a *misologue*)."[32] Paulhan supported a "temperate Rhetoric." Jean-Paul Sartre, who was initially ushered to notoriety with Paulan's help, traces the nascence of this terroristic movement in

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[31] Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature, from Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*, (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2002).

In his book, Houen discusses several of these terroristic threads in modern and postmodern literature. He notes "the literary writings on terrorism are no less experiments in the force of literature itself" (20). Made possible by the phenomenological proximity of art, and literature specifically, the writing of some modernist and postmodern writers has been called terroristic writing.

[32] Jonathan Doering, "The Linguistic Terror in France according to Jean Paulhan and Jean-Paul Sartre" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 83.4 (October 2022). 555.

literature to immediately prior to World War I.[33] Yet it is Paulhan's 1941 book *Les Fleurs de Tarbes ou la Terreur dans les lettres* that elaborates most thoroughly on the dialectical distinctions he seeks to make. As one recent study has characterized the difference:

> Terrorists seek to liberate the writer from language and its ever-accumulating baggage in hopes of accessing the raw materials to which language might refer. On the other hand, the Rhetoricians deal in templates and toolkits, stock phrases and reliable patterns: they attempt to carry the "flowers" of Rhetoric, as per the book's title, into literature, yet are forbidden from doing so by Terrorist decree.[34]

The irony and real insight, for Paulhan, is that the two ends of the spectrum (which are not mutually exclusive) are both ultimately preoccupied with language. In fact, he argues, despite the Terrorists' fervent effort to push beyond 'mere words,' they doth protest too much, "no writer is more preoccupied with words than the one who at every point sets out to get rid of them, to get away from them, to reinvent them."[35] I leave open, for now, the question of literature's ability to constitute a terroristic act, which is only adjacent to my inquiry. Clearly, if done carelessly, there is a danger in introducing such relativism at the risk of diminishing the very real material harm of terroristic violence. But such an elision, at present, also serves my aim of trying to better understand the reverse, the ways in which material acts of terror evoke and invoke some of the basic categories of the literary: narrative, representation, and discourse. We recall, for instance,

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[33] Doering has helpfully constructed a list. He points out that writers at various times were associated with both sides of Paulhan's dialectic: "A scene of intellectuals emerged who adopted (or were adopted by) Terror or Rhetoric at various junctures: Alain (Émile Chartier), Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, Julien Benda, André Breton, Maurice Blanchot, Roger Callois, Albert Camus, Paul Éluard, Jean Genet, André Gide, Michel Leiris, Brice Parain, Francis Ponge, Raymond Roussel, and Paul Valéry. Allegiances readily shifted" (560). The surrealists were one group that received this moniker.

[34] Doering, 564.

[35] Paulhan qtd. in Doering, 565

the shared construct of terrorist and literary "plots," which in both cases functionally unify discrete actions into a narrative whole while offering a sequence against which individual components can be accounted for.[36] It has become something of a truism that literary plots and terror plots mirror each other in chronology. The plot of a novel is the entirety of its story while the plot of a terroristic act culminates in the attack itself.

More useful to the work at hand is the dialectical opposition of terrorism to rhetoric, the idea that one seeks meaning through ritualized or conventional speech, and the other by trying to violate such conventions. Paulhan's dialectic reminds us of literature's ability to gesture outside of the conventional "flowers" of language and thereby evoke truths that elicit the raw ontological material of our existence. It also reminds us that the actions of these terrorist "*misologues*" are transgressive of our modal categories for literature, art, and other performative acts. Their very excess is what makes them terroristic.

This dissertation pursues a different group of *misologues*, those for whom the force of truths carried by language are insufficient or unsatisfactory. I proceed on the assumption, resonating with Paulhan, that the "terrorist" shifts semiological modes from language to acts of spectacular performative violence to leverage a disclosive character in the illocutionary force of those acts. By disclosure, I refer, provisionally, to an intentional act of speech, a performative act, that seeks to communicate a truth value to an audience and signals an existential underwriting of the statement. The "truth" of such disclosures is not the analytical veracity of statements, or their empirical accuracy or verisimilitude. Instead, by truths I am mapping broadly the semiological

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[36] Cole, Sarah. *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2012).

Both Houen and Sarah Cole explore these convergences and the significance of various forms of plot extensively through their readings of the literary representation of anarchist violence, and terrorism.

ways people make meaning of their existence and try to better understand themselves and others. It is in this way that Paulhan's insights about the raw ontological material literature seeks to access can be inverted to powerful effect.

To this end, I leverage the tools of literary and philosophical analysis, particularly by engaging with discussions around speech acts, to better understand violent acts that claim to *say something*. This dissertation, grounded in the literary concerns of speech and narrative, poses alternative theoretical modes of understanding the "terrorist's" utterance, or disclosure, through a critical appropriation of J.L. Austin's speech act theory and the Foucauldian revision of classical claims for the *parrhesiast*. In so doing, it more fluidly integrates the performative inscriptions of ritualized atrocity and the existential register of "truth telling" that underlie the proliferating narrative accounts of terrorism into a framework for understanding the mechanisms animating this explosive phenomenon.

Languages of the Unheard

The idea that we should look to literary modes of understanding for a kind of act that has been described as "war by other means" is a sobering acknowledgement of the renewed salience, indeed the necessity, of a critical understanding of one of the most foundational qualities of language: the mechanisms by which we disclose truths. As a methodology, such an approach seeks to redress the problem of narrative saturation in public culture observed by literary critic Peter Brooks.

Indeed, this project finds itself navigating the complex currents of a broader seascape of narrative oversaturation. As Brooks characterizes it, "A pervasive narrativism dominates our culture," even if, as he contends, such use of story has increasingly become an "abuse" in place of

other "forms of exposition and self presentation."[37] He argues that we rely on narrative to present and understand things when sometimes, maybe, we should not. In its constitutive excess, terrorism is a manifestation of this narrative oversaturation *par excellence*. After an attack occurs, scraps of information are monstrously joined into narrative arcs imposed on the perpetrators. But this initial narrativizing is only the most visible of innumerable other discursive sites in the milieu that import indiscriminately from the various literatures of terrorism to leverage additional explanatory power.[38] Consequently, if we live in a world in which the facts of our reality are eminently framed by the literatures of our existence, an echo of Hayden White's "fictions of factual representation," it is essential to understand the thematic and tropic ways in which these literatures open up new insights about the meanings of acts of speech and performance.

Yet, by thinking of terrorism as a disclosive act, it is precisely this narrative oversaturation that becomes the salient object of inquiry. How does the disclosive act materially constitute story? What stories does it inaugurate or intervene in? In instances such as the Boston Marathon

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[37] Peter Brooks, *Seduced By Story: The Use and Abuse of Narrative* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2022), 12-14.

Brooks, as a literary critic, notes that since the 1970s he and others in the field, have been arguing and teaching that "narrative is in fact key to our understanding of self and surround: that we live in and by what the psychologist Jerome Bruner later labeled the narrative construction of reality." Since that time, however, he realized that he was part of a broader movement, a "narrative takeover," that now permeates politics, advertising, psychology, philosophy, and many other facets of life. He laments, "It was as if a fledgling I had nourished had become a predator devouring reality in the name of story." He sees in it "the seeming obliteration in the public sphere of other forms of expression by narrative" which "suggests that something in our culture has gone astray." He asks, "do we really want all our understandings to be expressed in narrative terms? Isn't there a risk of making 'story' an excuse from other kinds of understanding?" (18).

[38] In this way we see fiction rendering terrorism in, for example, John Updike's *Terrorist*, Karan Mahajan's *The Association of Small Bombs*, and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. We also see literature being imported into news reporting of factual events in, for example, David Filipov, Sally Jacobson and Patricia Wen, "The Fall of the House of Tsarnaev" in *The Boston Globe*, (December 15, 2013), a multi-chaptered investigative profile that imposes familiar literary motifs on the Tsarnaev family beginning with its titular reference to Poe.

bombing, we see a discursive situation in which the imprint of narrative is tread on every surface, yet the explanatory power of other tools of available epistemologies can shape, or at worst distort, interpretation through the narratives of specific disciplinary frames without regard for how those narratives influence the analysis. In fact, it is in the investigation, specifically, that the problems Brooks points out come full circle. The attempt to narratively index the known attributes and activities of a person, under the auspices of objective fact finding, yields results that are ultimately infelicitous, to anticipate a term that we will discuss extensively.

Such narrative saturation is obviously multifarious, visible across every aspect of the conception, perpetration, and reception of the acts. It is evident in the interreferentiality of the rap lyrics quoted on social media by Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev before the bombing, as much as in the manifold references to the Quran in his manifesto. It is also fundamentally operative in the many problematic narratives invoked to explain the act's motivation, the stories both humanizing and demonizing that proliferated following the explosions. It is equally visible in the oral histories of the survivors and their testimony, the turns of language both verbal and gestural marshaled to evoke for themselves as much as for their audiences the lived experience of the explosions and their own existential precarity.[39] In the aggregate, these narratives constitute a different sort of literature of acts of terrorism, a descendant, I argue, of the crime literatures Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*. Thinking of such narrative saturation in terms of the work of discursive genealogies provides a means of analyzing continuities and discontinuities across discursive sites and situations while maintaining a kind of disciplinary pliability that productively resists the overdetermination of other methodologies.

[39] I use the words "gesture" and "gestural" in a phenomenological sense that I will outline more fully in the first chapter.

In contrast to Brooks, this inquiry is untroubled by the idea that people understand their existence largely through narrative, because it is so eminently clear that the acts of terror I seek to analyze are intended as discursive interventions, imbrications, indeed, invocations of narrative. Part of the terroristic act's failure, however, resides precisely in its inability to predicate the story it ultimately tells. This failure is attributable, in part, to the general poly-narrative and polysemic quality of identity, to echo Brooks. But it is more fundamentally attributable to the nature of the act that this dissertation takes as its unit of communication in advance of and disruptive to narrative closure: the disclosure.

In the context of such narrative oversaturation, however, such an inquiry must begin modestly with an even more basic unit of analysis than narrative or plot: the terroristic disclosure itself as an act of speech. These violent acts of disclosure, as I have set out to examine in the work that follows, despite their irruptive enunciation, remain inchoate, even while they anticipate the investigation and its putative forensic exhumation of "truths." The subsequent investigations, after all, follow the directed construction of still other narratives, rather than engage with the terroristic disclosure's constitutively personal narratives of being within a hostile social order.

To be sure, despite a broader cultural oversaturation of story, it would not be wise to elide the tools of narrative analysis, to bypass the mode of meaning making deployed intentionally in the act itself. Brooks would likely agree. Even if, as Jacques Derrida has argued, the context and intention of particular acts of speech can never be fully known, analyzing acts of terrorism as a form of cultural inscription, a disclosure that, like a literary text "calls forth acts of reading" and incites a confrontation of broader regimes of truth, helps add valuable dimension to our understanding of terrorism.[40]

[40] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Such narratives are not mere abstractions. Their salience has become visible in, for example, the agonistic struggle over the narrative definition of the identity of the "terrorists," their mental states, and the interpellation of the perpetrators into subject narratives that are evaluated for their validity. To offer one memorable example, there was a palpable sense of accomplishment when civilian internet detectives discovered the meandering manifesto of Dylann Roof, who executed nine people at a church in Charleston, South Carolina in June 2015. By unearthing Roof's white supremacist, neo-Nazi diatribes, in which he extensively outlines his justification for murdering people of color, these lay investigators celebrated the act of preempting an insanity plea.[41] The forensic prize of their research was the assurance of an agonistic confrontation at trial, rather than allowing such a ritual to be circumvented by the summary judgement of insanity. Their discovery highlighted a central legal paradox: As far as the code of law was concerned, Roof's heinous actions, outside of the state's permission to execute violence, were understood to be abnormal in any sense but the legal. Consequently, for legal purposes, he acted rationally, leaving the public to reckon with the pernicious logic of a

[41]Scott Neuman, "Photos of Dylann Roof, Racist Manifesto Surface on Website" on *NPR.org* (June 20, 2015), and Jacob Seigel, "How Twitter Sleuths Found Dylann Roof's Manifesto" on *TheDailyBeast.com*, (April 14, 2017).

From Neuman's article: "It took two independent writers working together on Twitter and $49 to make what could be one of the biggest discoveries yet in the case of Dylann Roof." We should note that it was the work of two "independent writers," which is not to say that such a discovery would not have emerged in the trial anyway, but this was the product of an extra-judicial investigation. From Seigel's article: One of the "independent writers" said she saw it as her duty. "As a communist," Quangel said, "it is my duty and obligation to spend at least $49 to help ruin this guy's insanity plea." This occurred before Roof had entered a plea. People were speculating before he was caught about his mental state and the possibility of an insanity plea. The revelation of the manifesto torpedoed that.

narrative arc that cements both the legal situation and the explanation for the seemingly senseless act of what one article called "A Most American Terrorist."[42]

A similar reckoning was set in play after the unprecedented police manhunt and arrest of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev following the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013. Much public attention was paid to a paragraph long "manifesto" discovered on the panel of a boat in which he was captured.[43] The words, which had been shot through with bullet holes and were speckled with Tsarnaev's blood, evidenced a sober, yet repellant, logic. As one CNN headline summed it: "Tsarnaev's 'manifesto': OK to kill civilians." According to the scrawl, Tsarnaev felt that he was acting in accord with Allah's wishes, because he was retaliating for the mistreatment of the Muslim *Ummah*, therefore he was ethically permitted, albeit somewhat regrettably, to kill innocent people. The manifesto garnered all the more attention because of Dzhokhar's abstention from testifying in court proceedings, thus, his "own words may determine whether he lives or dies, even if he never speaks a word at his trial."[44] As far as the public knew, he had offered no substantial statements supplementary to the act, to clarify, justify, or otherwise elaborate on the inchoate disclosure of the act itself. The written text is here aggregated into a complex of gestures and recorded utterances, ultimately distilled and evaluated during the trial for its "conviction," to reappropriate an apt pun from Brooks. The trial was the site of judgement for not only Tsarnaev's responsibility for the attacks, but the question of his continued conviction,

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[42] Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist: The Making of Dylann Roof." on *GQ.com*, (August 21, 2017).

[43] See for instance: Mike Hayes, "The Note Dzhokhar Tsarnaev Wrote While Hiding Is Revealed" on *Buzzfeednews.com* (March 10, 2015) and "Boston bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev left note inside boat" on *FoxNews.com* (November 30, 2015).

[44] Ann O'Neill and Wayne Drash, "Tsarnaev's 'manifesto': OK to kill civilians" on *CNN.com* (March 11, 2015).

his commitment to the regime of truth that catalyzed the violence. The manifesto effectively supplants the less articulable disclosure at the heart of the attack. In other words, the narrative text is not a mere artifact, but becomes the enunciation itself. When Tsarnaev unexpectedly chose to speak just before he was sentenced, the manifesto was also the text against which his verbal statement, framed as an apology, was read.

In fact, I would proffer that it is the Boston marathon bombing, specifically, despite the devastating abundance of public violence in recent decades, that provides the clearest rendering of the disclosive qualities characteristic of a recent era of terroristic public violence. It also demonstrates the essential interleaving of the literary and the act of terror, a set of convergences that are intertextual as much as they are co-constitutive. This pattern has become hauntingly familiar to the point of metastasizing into a kind of macabre grammar. Here we are not embarking on an exposition of the state sponsored terrorism of tyrants and dictators, or the atrocities of totalitarian governments against invented evils. Even if, truly, this form of non-state terrorism "claims to be imitative: to meet state violence with private reprisal… aimed at preventing further victimization through a demonstration of strength and agency," as Marian Eide has keenly noted, its disclosure is of a different species.[45] This form of disclosive terror ultimately is only cousin to the unconventional violences of revolutionary struggle; it may be more accurately thought of as heir to the racial terrorism that defined the late modern period.[46]

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[45] Marian Eide, *Terrible Beauty*. (Charlottesville, VA: U. Virginia Press, 2019), 77.

[46] David Boyns and James David Ballard, "Developing a Sociological Theory for the Empirical Understanding of Terrorism" in *The American Sociologist* 35.2. (Summer 2004), 10-11.

Some sociologists call this "counterhegemonic terrorism" as opposed to "hegemonic terrorism." "Terrorism is often a powerful response to powerlessness, regardless of how it is conceived by the powerless (Boyns and Ballard, 10-11).

The use of acts of terror to *say* something, to disclose something in a mode underwritten by the lives of the perpetrators and victims has reified into a recognizable model of its own, and avails itself of a carousel of lethal instruments—bombings, mass shootings, cars driven through crowds of people. The inventiveness of the terroristic disclosure is ultimately unencumbered by the constraints of specific tools of violence; its *techné* remains functionally the same.

"Who Are They? What Were They Saying?"

A few months after the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, the "Health + Wellness" Editor for U.S. News wrote that people were asking the wrong questions following events of public violence.[47] Such acts differ in contingency but are all designed to shock, disorient, and evoke terror. The editor laments, if only people had the training to identify the warning signs.

> After every shooting incident and act of public violence, we tend to circle around the same questions: "Who was he? What was her motivation?" In trying to untangle the mystery, what we're really asking is if anyone saw this coming…But in the rush to get answers, we don't often glean much insight.[48]

[47] Here the category "public violence" also subsumes "terrorism," and gestures broadly at the bombings, stabbings, shootings, and manifold other atrocities staged in public spaces. In the interval between the Boston bombing and the article, a man had killed 12 people and injured three others at the Washington Navy Shipyard. Meanwhile, pretrial preparations were underway for another shooter who killed 12 people the year before at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. Indeed, it had not even been a full year since 26 elementary school children were massacred by yet another shooter in Newtown, Connecticut. And lest we pass over the dozens of less widely reported incidents in the United States and abroad that might rise to the level of mass shootings, bombings, and other forms of terrorism, depending on how those categories are constituted. Worldwide, in the years just prior to the Boston incident, there had been several such attacks every month, among them the atrocities of 22 July 2011 in Norway, which began with a bombing in Oslo and ended in the deadliest mass shooting to date.

[48] Rachel Pomerance, "To Stop Mass Shootings, Family and Friends Must Notice Signs" on *NYDailyNews.com* (October 15, 2013).

The public needs to be trained in "threat detection," according to the author, citing the commentary of a few security experts and a psychiatrist, so that when individuals start behaving in troubling or erratic ways, those around them can "see something, say something" to authorities.

One key indicator of such disturbing behavior is confused or delusional speech, according to the article, which circulated on dozens of online news sites. That the logic of speech would be cited as an indication of a propensity to future acts of spectacular violence is perhaps no shock. There is a persistent cultural tradition in the West of associating the putative irrationality of madness and the threat of its expression through violence. The supposed "senselessness" or illogicality of language is believed to reflect a break with rational behavior, and thereby our governing social conventions.[49] It is evidence that the tether has come loose. Yet our assessment of speech reveals our duplicitous relationship with madness. Despite its ostensible irrationality, there is also an identifiable cultural preoccupation with madness' oracular wisdom. This is the paradox of the Weird Sisters in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* become manifest, in which the sisters may be judged mad, but are listened to for the "truth" of their prophecy. What we wish to dismiss as irrational persists and ultimately underpins our narrative frame of self-understanding. The result is the uneasy seduction by supposedly irrational acts, such as spectacular public violence, in an effort to understand "what *they* were trying to say" by or through the act, what it portends. To this end, there are mechanisms by which the public seizes upon and analyzes the textual artifacts

[49] Even though, according to a source in the article itself, those who have diagnosably delusional are a very small proportion of the overall population, and an even smaller proportion of those commit violent crimes of this sort. We see thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Shoshana Felman arguing against the tendency to think of madness as irrational, that in fact madness has its own kind of logic.

left by the perpetrators, their manifestos, their social media posts, the traces of life that can be most readily arranged into a narrative context for their actions.

As the U.S. News editor suggests, in the echoes of public discourse following each event is the central question: "Who are they?" I would add, however, that we are by now primed to ask "What were they saying?" as a prelude to what I see as the dependent question, "How can we prevent this in the future?" A whole industry thrives on providing the answers to questions of prevention—security, counterterrorism, risk management, even, as is apparent in the news article, psychiatry. For the "who" and "what" questions, there are ritual mechanisms that have been developed for forensically reconstructing and indexing, in microscopic detail, the taxonomy of pathology through the detritus of malignancy. Still, for all of the sophistication, the techniques of investigation, there is barely a functional consensus on what terrorism is, and persistent debate about which acts meet this definition. Scholars have contributed theories of terrorism, its characteristics and mechanisms, from dozens of epistemological perspectives, marshaling the signature tools of a variety of academic disciplines. Analyses of terrorism as a broader phenomenon, as well as specific acts of terror, have proceeded through the conduit of rhetoric, aesthetics, sociology, gender studies, political science, anthropology, criminal justice, communications, and even by way of the development of novel epistemes such as "terrorology," terrorism studies, and counterterrorism.

Unbelievable Terrors

Certainly literature and the literary mode offer a unique phenomenological proximity to the "who" that is coincident with the terrorist. Literary writers seem to have a perennial interest in rendering the terrorist on the page, across genres. Paulhan's formulation of terrorist literature

is instructive for conceiving of its inverse, a revised reading of terroristic acts. Such a revised reading that privileges the disclosive aspect of terrorism can also be instructive for engaging with terrorism as it is rendered in literature. Along these lines, there has been invaluable work done to analyze and critique the many ways terrorism appears in fiction, poetry, and other literary genres.[50] An extensive survey of such a literature falls outside the scope of this work, but I hope to demonstrate, by way of brief digression, the roughest of contours for how the framework of disclosive terror may serve future readings.

In reading fiction through the framework of disclosive terrorism, we see new dimension in the literary text's positing of acts of terror that, in a reverberation of the French literary terror of the interwar years, calls into question the constitution of "terrorism" itself. I am reminded here of the character Martin Ridnour, in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, who we are told was part of the radical leftist movement of the 1970s in Germany and Italy, perhaps even as far as participating in terrorism himself. His fictionalized reaction to the September 11, 2001 attacks raises the question of the possibility of invoking the hyperbolic ever again. "Nothing seems exaggerated anymore. Nothing amazes me" he says.[51] How could future terrorist attacks be possible without an operative hyperbole? In Martin's view, apparently the terrorism of September 11th achieved something the terrorism of earlier eras fell short of. Such excessive acts would seem to henceforth be unrecognizable as such or would demand a new appellation completely in the dissolution of the possibility of hyperbole. In Martin's response, we see the novel pose the ultimate infelicity for

[50] This observation is preceded by several important works, cited earlier, that take up the subject much more extensively, including: Sarah Cole's *At the Violent Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland*; Alex Houen's *Terrorism and Modern Literature: From Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*; and Marian Eide's *Terrible Beauty: The Violent Aesthetic and Twentieth-Century Literature*.

[51] Don Delillo, *Falling Man*. (New York: Scribner, 2007), 41.

a terroristic act, one that denies it the signature register of its own utterance. This, of course, parallels the broader academic and philosophical question raised after the attacks regarding whether September 11th was singular in its status as historical event.[52] In DeLillo's novel, however, we also see the terror act played out again and again in the miniature of the performance artist. In other words, despite Martin's affective malaise, the novel gestures at the persistence of the hyperbolic. It raises the question of the obliteration of the terror act even while it demonstrably maintains the possibility of future attacks. In the ostensibly non-fictive world of "real life," there have indeed been more attacks since the fall of the World Trade Center towers, dozens in fact, including the Boston Marathon bombing. If anything, the attacks of September 11th reified a pattern of disclosive terror that was to proliferate for decades.

To be sure, we should recall that Martin's disaffected musings are largely ancillary to the more central storylines in the novel, or at least function as thematic echoes of them. The foregrounded narratives are the uncanny renewal of the relationship between Keith and Lianne after the fall of the towers, the account of quotidian life of one of the hijackers preparing for the attacks, and the startling appearances of the eponymous "Falling Man" performance artist. Among these, the novel has been critiqued most consistently for its voicing of the hijacker, even while it is simultaneously acknowledged as a work that explores the "unthinkable," a dramatized account of the "defeat of the interpreting, analyzing mind." Of the narrative focalizations of the hijacker, one critic writes "This is literature's terrorist, talking like a novel." This critique is held in contrast to other points in the narration of, for instance, the internal focalizations of Keith, who ultimately finds a kind of stasis in playing poker tournaments and the attendant circumscription of a rule-governed realm. The critic comments that, unlike the hijacker's voice,

[52] See, for instance, Gionvanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 2003).

Keith's voice "is not literature's poker player, and he thinks the way DeLillo writes at his best."[53] In short, DeLillo writes post traumatic middle-aged male ennui better than the quotidian life of the final days of a soon-to-be hijacker.

Intriguingly, two other novels about terrorism receive variations of the same basic critique: the terrorist's voice is not believable. In the first case, John Updike's novel *Terrorist* was widely panned by critics for many reasons, including "never really [fitting] together as a meaningful story."[54] If that were not condemning enough, however, some critics claimed that its characterization of Ahmad, the earnest young would-be terrorist, and his family was tantamount to "racial profiling." More akin to the measured reception of DeLillo's novel, Karan Mahajan's *The Association of Small Bombs*, was met generally with admiration with the caveat that perhaps the voice of his terrorist bombmaker was a bit too literary.[55] When, for example, Shaukat "Shockie" Guru, a Kashmiri terrorist, arrives in Delhi, he marvels at the city's vibrance. The focalized rhapsodic description sounds to one reviewer "more like Christopher Isherwood absorbing the atmosphere of nineteen-thirties Berlin than like terrorists' usual rhetoric about the corrupted decadence of the places they seek to destroy."[56] Like DeLillo's terrorist, Mahajan's "Shockie" was apparently too literary to be believable, as if a literary inflected understanding of the world was

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[53] Michael Wood, "Picture of a Gone World" on *Bookforum.com* (June-August 2007).

[54] Peter Herman, "Terrorism and the Critique of American Culture: John Updike's *Terrorist*" in *Modern Philology* 112.4 (May 2015) for an account of the critical reception of Updike's *Terrorist*.

[55] I have selected these texts because they were published between the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the January 6, 2021 insurrection, not because those dates mark the stable boundaries of a specific period, but because the texts themselves participate in a discourse with the particular disclosive inflection that I think is most salient to this discussion.

[56] Alexandra Schwartz, "Blast Radius: A novel of terror and its aftermath," on *TheNewYorker.com* (March 28, 2016).

incommensurate with committing acts of mass public violence. Whereas, as I observe above, literature has been seen to function not just in the service of making narrative meaning of terror, but in its disturbing semiological disruptivity, its ability to call its own instrumentality into question. In short, to be classified as terrorist.

But where, after all, are these expectations of the terrorist's voice coming from? What appears to be happening is something hauntingly analogous to the broader phenomenon that is visible after a terror attack: a compulsion to interpellate the perpetrators into specific subject categories. Considered against our framework of acts of disclosive terror, however, new analytical inroads open. We see, in fact, that we stand at the intersection of literature's crossed purposes. If, down one path, the measure of literature is its verisimilitude, (which I am not advocating for) the critic's claim is that the language of DeLillo's hijacker is not believable of a particular kind of person, it does not map onto some collection of preconceived notions about a specific subject identity. In short, this is not the way a terrorist talks and thinks. We also see that Updike's would-be terrorist is not believable because he is a racially marked, overly simplified, rendering, which according to critics is indicative of prejudice rather than a believable subject identity. And by not utilizing the "usual rhetoric about corrupted decadence," neither is Mahajan's bombmaker, Shockie, fully believable. How could the lyrical insights of a person like Christopher Isherwood be reconciled with the decision to commit atrocities?

Down another path, we see DeLillo using the features of the novel to explore the disclosure at the core of his character's intention, the "saying" that motivates his decisions to carry out the attacks. As with all artistic pursuits, there is a constitutive element of craft that risks failing to reach fruition—a kind of infelicitous meta-layer to the performative act of creating fiction. Yet what is visible through this revised framework is the novel's attempt at constructing the atmosphere under which the ontological disclosure condenses and precipitates. From this

angle it is easier to recognize that the characters' internal language and life cannot be hermetically sealed off from the novel's global thematic and tropic concerns. The success or failure of the character's voice, then, does not hinge on whether this is "literature's terrorist, talking like a novel," but the critic's predicating point, whether the literature of terrorism can actually get us closer to understanding an "unthinkable" disclosure.

In her critique of Mahajan's rendering of terrorism, one critic notes:

> Historical and sociological and political explanations, necessary as they are to making sense of terror, don't capture the tiny, intimate urgencies that power the life of a person caught in their web. Mahajan can't explain the grand structures of violence any better than the rest of us can. But he brings us close enough to feel the blast.[57]

What she earlier faults in Shockie's literary rhapsodizing can also be understood as how the novel makes it possible for the reader to gain proximity to the thing that ultimately produces the "blast." That the author of a terroristic attack might also compose language in such a way that it discloses truths about the experience of existence is perhaps the least shocking revelation of all.

Verisimilitude is insufficient in Harry Kunzru's *Transmission*, which is praised for its characterization of Arjun Mehta, even while, at least one critic notes, it plays a game of ephemerality with the contemporaneity of its subject. Arjun releases a computer virus that wreaks havoc on the world, causing death and cataclysm by exploiting the global network of online connectivity. It is an act of the preservation of a narrative self. The virus is born of the passions of Arjun's despondence over his impending firing, his hapless attempts to find companionship with women, the foundering of the dreams that drove him to leave his family in India for the flashiness of the California tech industry. Arjun's story, among the novel's several characters that are

[57] Alexandra Schwartz, "Blast Radius: A novel of terror and its aftermath."

ultimately drawn in tightly by the thread of the virus, is "one very good one," according to one critic. In other words, I would argue that here we have a novel that convincingly renders a terrorist, despite never really calling him by that name.

By any account, in Arjun we clearly find a character who commits a form of spectacular violence, through the composition of a performative act (the coding of the virus) with a disclosure at its core. Kunzru's coup is that Arjun's story is quintessentially terroristic but through a combination of humor and the elision of the familiar discourse of terrorism he largely sidesteps the critique of his character's believability as a terrorist. We do not see, for example, the "usual rhetoric about corrupted decadence," even though the story is full of Arjun's disenchantment with the American mythos. There is no Islamic radicalization, no hate fueled white supremacy. Kunzru, provocatively, even permits his character a kind of final apotheosis into myth by story's end.

Yet, interestingly, one common critical response to the novel is that it is written skillfully but is eminently forgettable. The novel's ephemerality, like the digital culture of the day in which it intervenes, "dissolves back into random electrons the moment one turns it off." It would appear, through our revised critical framework, however, that this half-life is actually a quality that resembles the infelicity of the terroristic disclosure that it represents textually. Like Arjun's computer virus that takes as its identity the seductive simulacra of the dreamy Bollywood actress Leela Zahir, the reader is drawn into a performance that promises much and after its revelations is ultimately infelicitous. The critic sees in the novel the unfortunate eventuality that, while the reader may leave the book "impressed by Kunzru's verbal agility," he will ultimately,

> …pick up his remote, switch on the news, and out will billow the great gray cloud of war footage, food safety warnings and terrorist threats. Novelists just can't compete. And can't not try.[58]

[58] Walter Kirn, "Dateless in Seattle: Transmission" on *NYTimes.com* (May 23, 2004).

But in these anxieties of the problems of literary *Kairos* and their material constraints, it is easy to lose sight of which characteristics are attributable to the novel as a text and which are ultimately attributable to the phenomenon it textually represents. That acts of terroristic disclosure are displaced rapidly in public consciousness is a concern frequently lamented in public discourse, if little understood. One possibility is that we are perhaps more saturated in acts of terroristic disclosure than we recognize. Another is that the interpretive mechanisms we have constructed to understand such disclosures are not designed to recognize or confront them but operate perpetually in parallel.

Languages of the Unheard

In the interpretation of these fictional renderings of terrorists and terrorism, we also see the centrality of belief in the literary possibility of their disclosures. That is, the ability of such acts to disclose ontological truths has everything to do with the legitimacy of the performance. Interpreting "real world" terror acts in a literary genealogical mode foregrounds the conditions of the possibility of a kind of disclosure at the core of acts that are widely, but poorly, understood to be "performative." These violent acts are not argument for argument's sake, rather they leverage the rituals and mechanisms of specific discursive contexts to engage in what we could think of as *rhetoric by other means*, and it is the existential underwriting of these performative speech acts that signals a shift in reception and interpretive register. The overlay of literary modes of meaning making on these attacks also highlights the significance of the genealogy of the discursive situation as such. By better understanding the narratives, read as ritualized performance, that are constitutive of the way certain acts of terror are made meaningful, it is possible to foreground

novel histories of "terrorism" that help to clarify what it is we really mean when we use this designation. The purview of this inquiry, however, is not necessarily the global consideration of a discourse of "terrorism," which necessarily includes related epistemologies of counterterrorism, terrorism studies, etc. Nor does it, like trauma studies, largely shift the analytic gaze away from the spectacular violence itself toward the witness' mentation of traumatic memory and the task of working through. The speech situation, considered fully, does not relegate the victim to the object of violence, and the perpetrator to a pathologized deviance.

The resulting methodological gain is to avoid the constraints of an epistemological taxonomy of deviance as the generative principle of the acts. While the actions of so-called "terrorists" are reprehensible, simply categorizing their deviance is reductive and can also produce dissonance in situations such as revolutionary terrorism. "Terrorism" is a tactic of the revolution, when it is a cause we believe in, and the product of pure evil when it is not.[59]

This literary framework also brings into relief the prescience of those who recognized the disclosive force of acts of violence, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. In a September 1966 interview with Mike Wallace, King was asked about his view on the so-called "race riots" then plaguing major cities. King replied, "I think that we've got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard." King had experienced the terrorism of white supremacy and was equally familiar with the convulsive debates over the ascendence of a black militancy, read by the dominant white culture as terroristic. He said he would never advocate for violent protest, but his

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[59] Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

In such cases, as has been often noted, today's evil terrorists are tomorrow's revolutionary heroes. We find a memorable example in Frantz Fanon's articulation of the Algerian revolutionary terrorism of 1956, for instance. After Algerian civilians had been massacred in the mountains and cities and direct confrontation with colonizer forces proved hopeless, "the revolutionary leadership found that if it wanted to prevent the people from being gripped by terror it had no choice but to adopt forms of terror which until then it had rejected" (54-5)

acknowledgement of such "unheard" languages makes clear that he recognized a truth at its core. In the inquiry to follow, I seek to understand how it is possible for a form of disclosure that does not exist without being known publicly, that is constituted by a performative spectacle and a putative response of terror from its victims, and that is widely transmitted and represented, ultimately goes unheard.

A Genealogy of Dis/Closure

I begin this dissertation by elucidating a representative pattern in the first chapter, "Making Sense of Terror"—as exemplified in the Boston Marathon bombing—through a phenomenological examination of how meaning may inhere in such attacks almost to the point of constituting something of a grammar of atrocity. The "lone-wolf" attack, the machinations of a "terror cell," the so-called non-state actor, these are characteristically different from other kinds of violence that have previously fallen under the category of "terror" or "terrorism." Particularly relevant seems to be the kind of figurations ascribed to the attacks and their hyperbolic character. Yet the primary yield, appears not to be a kind of communication so much as a residual fascination that prompts investigation.

Such attacks have been described using literary-adjacent theories before, including the notion of performativity. In chapter two, "Explosive Performativity," I seek to clarify the ways in which these acts of terror "misfire" or remain inchoate. As acts that carry disclosive value, identifying the affinities they have with performative speech acts generally, and specifically the ways that performatives can be "infelicitous" should provide a more nuanced understanding of their mechanism.

Yet the performative features of such terroristic disclosures are often multivalent or nebulous, even if, when they occur, they are recognized as "terrorism." In the third chapter, "Terror from the Sovereign to the People," I seek more rigorously to outline a genealogy of terror—beyond the widely known affective state—to situate these violent disclosures in the ritual contexts in which they participate. If, by analogy, performative speech acts require conventionalized or ritualized settings in which to operate, drawing fuller contours for terror as a ritualized act will help clarify its topography as a site of disclosure.

Terroristic acts such as the Boston Marathon bombing generally have an attendant manifesto that supplants the intended disclosure of the attack, as I argue in the fourth chapter. The structure of a written declaration of "truths" with the existentially underwritten act of violence has a mirror like quality to *parrēsia*. The latter is a valorous quality in Western culture, while the former is generally considered deplorable. In "True Terror" I disentangle two forms of the disclosure of truths. By counterposing these two ritualized forms of disclosure, the constitution of political and personal action emerges in its complexity.

Finally, it is imperative to directly acknowledge the limitations of this work. My hope is to introduce new frameworks to ossified problems in the hope of identifying productive distinctions and convergences. This work pursues a fuller understanding of a mode of speech act that constitutes a language of the unheard.

CHAPTER II: MAKING SENSE OF TERROR

"I understand a fury in your words / But not the words." *Othello*

"Language as gesture creates meaning as conscience creates judgment, by feeling the pang, the inner bite, of things forced together," R.P. Blackmur, *Language As Gesture*

The front page of *The Boston Globe* reported that two bomb blasts "rocked the finish line" and "shattered the bliss" of the 117th running of the Boston Marathon. The *New York Post*, for all of its signature hyperbole, used the same word—that the explosions "rocked" the marathon. In the *New York Times* the bomb blasts "shook the street"; in the *Los Angeles Times* they "ripped through crowds." There was a more expansive survey in a *Washington Post* story: "two bomb blasts released orange balls of fire into the air, lifting runners off their feet, killing at least three people, injuring more than 130 others, and driving Boston and the nation once more into the grim work of responding to terror."

The irruption in daily life caused by two explosions is catalogued in these initial drafts of history, first and foremost, by its verbs.[60] Setting the social media and digital environments aside for a moment, these news ledes offer a relatively stable report of the previous day's events summarized according to a set of news values.[61] They employ verbs of the past and past

[60] In fact, the Boston Marathon has a mixed status of a sort of ritual and exceptional event. The race, which is always held on Patriot's Day, has been held annually since 1897. There is a mix of ritual for both runners and residents, which gives it a sense of the daily. But there is also the elite aspect of the race itself, which presents a high barrier to entry for participants.

[61] "Lede" is a deliberate spelling of the opening sentence or paragraph of a news article. Its conventional purpose is to summarize the most important and "newsworthy" aspects of the story. Among the factors that editors use to determine "newsworthiness" are perceived reader interests/values, timeliness, and historical scale.

progressive to evoke a sense of the extent of the explosions and the continued response. Once the print on the pages dried, this collection of inscribed reports offered one set of discursive translations of what had transpired. Despite the larger cultural and economic context of the displacement of print media as the primary site for news consumption, for the few readers who may have been otherwise unplugged from the vast digital proliferation of news, the reports could have even engendered the existence of the explosions. The reports themselves may have had irruptive force.

This is dually true of the more expedient web and TV environments. Visual mediums transmitted and replayed photographic and videographic footage from the scene, framing it discursively. News websites were updated mere minutes behind emerging developments. Survivors of the bombing describe holing up in nearby buildings and learning from web and television news the details of the attacks they had just experienced. News of the event, in these formats, was delivered predominantly in verbs of being. A CNN network anchor, for example, during her breaking news interruption, established simply that there "has been" an explosion near the finish line of the marathon. A correspondent at the scene revised that statement to say that they knew now there had been, in fact, "*two* explosions."[62] These variations were repeated subsequently in essentially equivalent verb phases, such as "exploded" and "went off." The written reports on various news websites also updated recursively with the latest information. In the initial reporting, by and large, the action was attributed to the bomb rather than to a person. The phrasing, if not in an expressly passive voice, was at least framed as a set of actions not yet attributable to a specific human actor. The reports generally culminated with a verb phrase in the present progressive—the authorities *are investigating*, for example.

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[62] My emphasis.

It was not until sometime later that the burden of representation, or at least its emphasis, shifted from verb phrases to a different sort of evocation. When camera crews asked witnesses to describe what happened, for example, and much later, when the oral histories of survivors were recorded, the specter of war, and the accidental terrors of quotidian life insinuated themselves into the representations. "It felt like a huge cannon," one witness told CNN.[63] Others voiced myriad initial interpretations—a falling JumboTron, a power transformer explosion, a dropped dumpster.

While seemingly straightforward, these descriptions, which are also interpretive acts, quickly complicate the way terrorism, as a phenomenon, is understood discursively. There is, for example, an impulse among experts who participate in the public discussions around such events to immediately channel them into the discourses of statehood and revolution.[64] Considered in light of some commonplaces in scholarship on terrorism, *i.e.* that terrorism is "low intensity or preliminary revolutionary warfare," or that it is a form of persuasion that is "often ineffective due to logical fallacies," or that it is a "speech act" of sorts, one problematic theme that emerges is the general sense that the discursive aspects of terrorism are essentially transactional.[65] In other words, due to the attack, it will be generally known by the public that this act is a revolutionary

[63] It should be acknowledged that there are structural factors at play here. The professional conventions of print news encourage reporters and editors to load verbs with meaning rather than to use figurative language because the former is seen as better writing craft, and the latter is thought to be construed as too evaluative. The use of figurative language, such as simile or metaphor, is most often reserved for quotes from eyewitnesses and other sources. It also occurs in news analysis and opinion writing.

[64] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism: Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: U. Columbia Press, 2006).

[65] James McClenon (citing McCuen, Paret, Thornton, Leech, and Oakley), "Terrorism As Persuasion: Possibilities and Trends" in *Sociological Focus* 21.1 (January, 1988).

salvo, or that it constitutes an articulable persuasive claim, or that through the explosions and subsequent damage, the terrorists have transferred some identifiable unit of content.

The complexity of news and witness accounts, however, suggests that if acts of terror are transactional, there is no universal schema through which people immediately understand what is actually being transacted. There is not even an immediate recognition that it is an act of intentional violence. This may, in part, contribute to the difficulty, not only of understanding what motivated a particular attack, but also arriving at a common definition of terrorism itself, which has stymied scholars and governments alike. While revolutionary organizations, like the Red Army Faction or ISIS, have used terrorism as a strategic element supported by coordinated communications to promote particular political aims—almost to the point of developing a syntax or a grammar for sustained terror campaigns—recent acts of terror from disaffected individuals or groups often have no explicit state-level aspirations, and in some cases lack any sort of concerted communications strategy.

Yet there are identifiable patterns even among such non-revolutionary acts of spectacular violence, despite apparently wide contextual and ideological dispersion. A macabre archive of manifestos left by terrorists on the web and in ink speaks to the notion that terrorists see their actions somehow as a mode of disclosure to a broader public, if not the instrument or means of affecting socio-political change. In framing acts of terror in this way, I intend to make a subtle but important distinction between transactional speech acts and disclosure. By way of analogy, terrorism from this perspective would be in the vein of the Arendtian articulation of violence as distinct from power—*i.e.* that violence requires instruments as a means and power does not. Power (or disclosure, in my analogy) would amount to the general or original impetus, and violence (transactional speech acts) would be the specific instrumental manifestation. I argue, to

belabor this analogy, that terrorists intend to disclose power, but that the disclosure is foreclosed by the form it takes, terrorism.

While each terror incident has its own contingent characteristics and offers its own collection of horrors, the Boston Marathon Bombing most clearly demonstrates a tragic but instructive pattern of contemporary terrorism as a kind of disclosure that, fundamentally, should be considered beyond its transactional or instrumental features; one that is intended to "say something" yet exceeds the scope of speech itself and perhaps even the concept of the "speech act" as it is conventionally used to describe such acts.

Among the dozens of contemptable attacks generally considered acts of terrorism in the United States over the last few decades, it is the Boston bombing that exemplifies this pattern and its attendant progression, along with the accompanying discursive significances, that are set in motion by an explosion and carried forward by a series of representations. While such contemporary terror attacks operate in a performative register, a point that is widely acknowledged, it is imperative to recognize that they attempt to perform a disclosive gesture that is received bodily as well as intellectually, yet the so-called "content" of the disclosure remains inchoate despite its excess, not by virtue of a logical fallacy as has been argued, but by the failure of a disclosure of the existential concern at the core of its intentionality. Though the act of terror and its associated disclosure would seem to take advantage of all manner of communicative elements and forcefully command the attention of an audience of witnesses and survivors, examples such as Boston show that the act-as-disclosure fails if left to its own devices.

To more fully explore this line of inquiry, it is first necessary to elucidate the phenomenon as it appears and then extrapolate some theoretical contours from it. This approach is in tension, but not altogether discordant, with the proviso offered in Walter Laqueur's foundational terrorism studies text when he begins "To understand terrorism, one ought to investigate its roots

rather than deal with its outward manifestation." Laqueur does not intend this statement at face value. Indeed, he and other scholars explore terrorism's outward manifestation in voluminous detail. He is instead voicing his criticism of investigations of "roots" that are mere justifications for a variety of "hobbyhorses." What Laqueur and other scholars consider roots, however, still falls short of the existential concerns I intend to focus on here. I propose to begin a phenomenological investigation of terrorism precisely with its outward manifestation *in order to* exhume its roots. Terrorism, as a phenomenon, seems to say something and carries discursive force, yet the analytical tools deployed thus far to explore it discursively leave something to be desired. In the nomenclature of speech act theories, for example, acts of terror straddle the distinctions between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary, which may in part explain the trouble it has posed for this form of analysis. A phenomenological approach can provide an ontologically grounded perspective that illuminates precisely how such spectacular and existential violence can "speak." It would be valuable, then, to return to what might be, for now, considered the annunciatory origins of the disclosive act by briefly analyzing the character of explosions, before proceeding to grapple with the posture of the Boston bombing's most proximate survivors.

Experience and Epistemologies of Explosions

The bomb explodes. The way to convey to another person the shock and disorienting immediacy of that experience would be to detonate another bomb. Although even then, the odds seem exceptionally remote that two bombs would ever explode in the same way, and in any case, it would still amount to being only "like" the first bomb to the extent that the first bomb was "known."

What was it, after all, the bomb? How do we make meaning of it? To what degree is an unexploded bomb still a bomb? And how can we account for the immanence of its threat? Is there a sense in which "bomb" can truly be thought of outside its potential threat to humans? In a strict sense, only the first of these questions might fall within what John Searle has called the ontologically objective—the description he uses to characterize truth claims about an item's existence that do not depend on a human experiencing them. A bomb, unlike "pains, tickles, and itches," has physical properties that exist independent of the experience of a person's particular subjectivity.[66] But, in this vein, would such an ontologically objective experience of the bomb-as-object really constitute the "bomb" as we know it in everyday experience? In other words, if one were to characterize the bomb in ontologically objective terms, would such a description map onto the everyday experience of "bomb"?

To be sure, if one were to consider it in an ontologically objective frame, the essential characteristic of a bomb is that it is an implement, constructed by someone, to explode and cause the destruction of material items or of people. Such a definition would be true of dynamite used for demolition. It is perhaps somewhat useful, if only mere scientism, to observe that, as an implement, the bomb produces an inherently value-less phenomenon called an "explosion"—something that can be described by its physical and chemical properties. The idea, however, that such an implement is always associated with dis-corporating an otherwise unified thing—a

[66] I'll set aside, for the moment, the problem of the origin of a bomb being a distinctly human project or rearranging and organizing a set of natural elements. In other words, Searle's shorthand distinction of molecules/mountains versus pains/tickles is especially clean because these items are not organized by a set of human values in the way that anything engineered or designed by humans is.

building, a body, the bomb itself—is to already ascribe a certain historically informed "bomb-ness" to a hypothetically valueless phenomenon of explosion-maker.[67]

One way of extending this kind of thinking would be to examine the established knowledge of bombs, in other words, continue the inquiry in an epistemologically objective frame. Such an inquiry could be approached generally through scientific analysis and categorization. An experimental examination of the bomb device, its component parts, could be said to constitute a science of bomb making (or bomb un-making, as it were). Such a science, would reveal that the explosion of a bomb, as it turns out, is not even a singular event—consider the multiplicity of parts, the timer, the ignition of a fuse, the rapid (but still quantifiable) chemical reaction, the propulsion of chaffe and shrapnel, etc. One could say, accurately, that a bomb is frequently (if not always) at least two explosions, that of the blasting cap, ignitor, or detonator, and that of the main charge.[68] Yet, the phenomenon of the bomb, especially its explosion and its interaction with the immediate environment, still appears to exceed any existing scientific models that may try to predict the yield of a particular sum of components or techniques.[69] In other words, there is a "known" measure of unpredictability that must be accounted for in any epistemological schema.

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[67] One may perhaps argue that "objective" here means that individuals share an understanding, *i.e.* that a bomb's essential work is the destruction of a unity, and that this shared essence is what makes it ontologically objective. I would argue, however, that the concept "destruction of a unity" is understood through the subjective frame of bodily discorporation.

[68] See Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, (New York: Knopf, 1992), for a lyrical exposition of this line of thinking in the context of fiction.

[69] This granular exposition of bomb making can be seen in the imaginative exposition of the character Viswa in Mahan's *Association of Small* Bombs, when he describes it as the bomb "unfolding like a flower." Such a figuration illustrates that there is a germinative property contained within the notional bomb and that the unfolding can occur at a controlled disassembling pace, or at the volatile speed of an explosion. The bomb is only unified as its nominative, it is otherwise a hasty and secretive assemblage.

Indeed, the physical sciences purport to describe the detonation of "energetic materials" as a rapid chemical reaction that generates a shockwave, which can be registered by the senses or by instruments.[70] Such a wave of energy manifests as a loud noise and disturbance of the air, and kinetic projectiles following mathematically describable trajectories. Yet, this does not capture the full force of either an exploding bomb or an unexploded bomb; it provides only an abstraction of the explosion's physical potentiality or a forensic *ex-post facto* account of its detonation. What grows abundantly clear in such analyses is that the term "bomb" is irreducibly connected to the human physical or psychical experience of the threat or actualization of such a detonation.

Fundamentally, while explosions are rare but present in the natural world, a history of the development and use of explosives shows that bombs have always been about attempting to harness (make useful and direct) a natural force that is only notionally ever under control. That is to say, exploration of the materiality of the bomb itself, unsurprisingly, fails to yield additional insights into its instrumentality in terror attacks except by virtue of its cultural and subjective valences. At the same time, as Sarah Cole notes, "the explosion of bombs is an inescapable feature of the contemporary world" to the extent that "our era seems unthinkable without such destruction."[71] Even the most rigorous and enlightened accounts of how bombs became instruments of terror ultimately tell a social history of the bomb and its uses, or they invoke a classical sense of sublimity to tell a transcendental or metaphysical story of the bomb.

One such example can be found in the work of Alex Houen, who in a book-length study of terrorism in modern literature, explores the cultural significance of the development of

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[70] See, for example: *Forensic Investigation of Explosions, Second Edition*, ed. Alexander Beveridge, (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012). 20.

[71] Cole, *At the Violent Hour*, 83.

dynamite and submarine warfare as signals of a concealed threat of destruction.[72] Houen points out that,

> What was terrifying about dynamite-terrorism was not simply its propensity to kill. It was also its impersonal randomness, which revealed to people that they were *already living as potential statistics*, already living as anonymous figures in a crowd. Dynamite's explosivity underscored the fact that instead of death and its significance being managed and contained within specific private and public spaces—such as the family home, the battleground, hospital, church, and cemetery—death could break into any space at any time.[73]

In other words, it is this unpredictability or ungovernability that is partly constitutive of a bomb's "bombness."[74] The perspective of the natural sciences may not warrant such an ascription of value to the material object, yet in everyday experience this is perhaps the most salient aspect of the bomb as an implement in terror attacks. That is to say, a bomb's ultimately ungovernable physical processes are deployed in the service of physio-psychical ends. As Houen points out in his reading of 19th century news commentary about dynamite attacks, the terror was attributable to three main factors:

> 'By the belief that numbers must die', which is the 'secret of the panic in individuals caused by cholera'; second, by the 'horror' of

[72] Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature*.

[73] Houen, 25-27.

[74] Even if, mistakenly, I think, the very real materiality of a bomb is posited not as such but instead as ultimately a symbol, it is merely a symbol that signifies its own destruction and discorporation. This is a sort of violence that, while perhaps attractive to a particularly postmodern sensibility, can't quite say what it means. After a bombing, if one were to return for a moment to Arendt in thinking that violence requires implements, a bomb-as-symbol would equate to describing an implement that no longer exists. The actor and referent, in this circumstance, would have literally obliterated itself. In a sense, this resonates with the post-bombing experience. News reports, for example, are not capable of offering a description of the bomb immediately. That can only come later, after investigation, when such a description can be constructed or reconstructed from the bomb's residual, its imprint.

> 'unaccustomed modes of death' whereby 'improbable possibilities' are countenanced by individuals; third 'by the absence of personality in dynamite. We expect it to explode. . . without any man there and then manipulating it.'[75]

Cole extends this sentiment to describe dynamite's association with anarchism and its contribution to melodrama by virtue of its hyperbole and excess.

There is a related notion of sublimity at play here, *i.e.* a metaphysical state, something that can overwhelm, by force, an individual's will and the available strength of an individual's body.[76] The personification of the Boston bombings "ripping" through the landscape can be thought of as one such example. The sublimity of spectacular violence and of the terror attack has been discussed in Kant, Burke, Schopenhauer, Lyotard, and by many others. To say it another way, there is something about the potential explosion that signals the presence of a power capable of violating an individual's control and, perhaps, comprehension. It is this set of sensibilities that the scientific paradigm attempts to check and yet must tacitly account for because of its inability to fully capture what will occur when "energetic material" is let loose.

That is not, of course, to minimize the extensive insights yielded by scientific and forensic investigations into bombs and explosions, which have made it possible to draw distinctions between devices, techniques, materials, and offer instrumental evidence about how an attack was carried out. But, as the eyewitness accounts of the Boston Marathon bombing make clear, there is another "how" question that the material construction of the bomb can only partially address. Such epistemologically objective considerations fall short of describing the character of the experience of the explosions. This is especially certain in view of other instruments of spectacular

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[75] Houen, 25.

[76] See: Christine Battersby. *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (London: Routledge, 2007).

violence that are also described as acts of terrorism, and the immense variety of instruments that people have wielded terroristically—most recently, airplanes, cars, knives, bulldozers, and guns. In other words, unsurprisingly, the real power of terror in the bomb has more to do with the human construction of values around it rather than any inherent material quality. Therefore, an epistemology of the bomb as it is used in terror attacks, for our purposes, must be grounded in human experience and, frankly, must view distinctions between devices, techniques, and materials, as only one element in a much larger complex of considerations.[77]

As the eyewitness accounts of the Boston Marathon bombing demonstrate, the experience exceeds, many times over, any neatly categorized conveyance of facts or qualities. Though there are indeed aspects of the materiality of the bomb that can be discussed in both an ontologically and epistemologically objective register, those that are most salient to making the attacks acts of "terror" are perhaps not best accessed in either manner. Even attempting to describe the embodied experience of the Boston bombings directly is evidently not sufficient—there is a need for figurative language, and specifically, simile. What is most striking about the attempts to characterize the experience of this sort of violence in both media reports and survivor accounts is the bare necessity—indeed, the compulsion—of translating it for others.

Witnessing the Explosions

The phenomenon of explosions such as those at the Boston Marathon, first comes to presence[78] in the public consciousness by its direct and material impact on the survivors. These

[77] That is, of course, not to say that the bomb hasn't served its purpose particularly effectively, and may have even been foundational in generating a discourse of terror.

[78] *i.e.* becomes present

individuals constitute the initial public. Though digital venues and smartphones have asymptotically reduced the time lag between the experience of those who were standing at the finish line and the innumerable witnesses in remote and virtual locations, there remain obvious fundamental differences in embodied experience between these groups. The precise character of these differences is a bit afield of this inquiry. Yet, even a superficial comparison offers a glimpse at the subtle complexities of what might be considered (in rather uncomfortable nomenclature) the receptivity of the witnesses to a disclosure through an act of terror.

To be sure, the experience of witnesses varies tremendously depending on the physical and material features of their proximity. Marathoners who were mere blocks away from the site of the explosions experienced them as distant concussions and an ensuing public disturbance (the traumas of public chaos) rather than the physically devastating and life-altering effects endured by those closer to the blasts (the traumas of bodily harm). One significant feature that emerges from the oral histories, and is worthy of note, is that proximity was only one of several axes that influenced the affective and physical impact of the explosions on the witnesses. Another axis stemmed from the witnesses' relation to others, specifically the care and concern of friends and family. This concern motivated waves of phone calls, text messages, and social media posts emanating from, and also directed back toward, the scene. Such a recognition complicates the pattern of dissemination of the news of the event and certainly the interpretability of any sort of potential disclosure.

To borrow, for a moment, the tools of rhetorical analysis, it is clear from the oral histories that the witnesses had their own complex exigencies for the dissemination of the news of the explosions. The survivor accounts reveal that these communications were not a matter of reporting the fact of the event for the fact's sake, although that may have been true of others further removed from the scene. It was instead clear that the event was intimately, and often

traumatically, tied up with the search for loved ones and friends who may have also been impacted by the explosions. In other words, the explosions were the impetus of the communication, but the existential concern of their intimates was the real exigency.

A different exigency motivated news platforms following the explosions. Unlike the oral histories, the extant news reports reflect an identifiable and understandable progression from establishing the existence of the event to describing its nature.[79] The first reports must do the work of bringing to public consciousness the presence of a previously unassociated feature on a temporal landscape. As an array of facts, it must be acknowledged that explosions have occurred before in history, and two of them must now be indexed to the contingency of 15 April 2013. The initial language has something of a binary on-off character—to use an overly schematic figuration—the data point "explosion" has been switched to the *on* position for this particular context.

While such indexing simultaneously begins the work of meaning making, any specific meaning intended by the terrorist, by way of the attack, remains inchoate. One reason this is so may be because, in both the news and witness contexts immediately following the explosions, citational features were as yet only implied, not explicit, as a result of the absence of reportable details. An explosion that reportedly "shook the street" was perhaps only conceptually grouped with other explosions or phenomena capable of such earth moving power. While references to previous explosions or events may have been present in the initial reporting, the Boston bombing demonstrates that citational information was not the predominant feature of the discourse as compared to the insistent and recursive impulse to establish and reestablish the basic fact of the

[79] Here "event" describes the occurrence of a constellation of actions as they are presented in a narrative. In other words, "event" as it is used here is discursive.

explosion.[80] Indeed, the language of the initial newspaper and TV reports illustrates this tendency to restrain explicit citational phrasing, which I would argue is a normative function attributable to a waning set of traditional United States news conventions.[81] The tendency to reserve citational language differs from later accounts, including those of the oral histories of the survivors, in which simile and other figurative language become prominent.

Despite differences in the character of the dissemination of the fact of the event, scholars of terrorism have long understood—though it has not necessarily been voiced in this way—that the process of emanation, relay, and repetition constitute the terror event's real existential moment (*qua* terrorism).[82] This understanding of terror's propagation has prompted countless criticisms aimed at news outlets for enabling or amplifying acts of terror, or at the very least, serving as a ready conduit by which terrorists carry out their aims. Perhaps such a critique is apropos when the terrorists' motives are concertedly revolutionary or proto-revolutionary. While it is clear that the media is actively involved, I hold open the question, however, of its precise role in terrorism in which there is no explicit call for revolutionary action, such as the Boston Marathon Bombing.

Whether the aims are revolutionary or not, at a basic level, people must know that the explosions occurred, and as expediently as possible that the explosions were an intentional act of terrorism for the acts to sufficiently evoke a sense of terror.[83] The precise character of that "sense

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[80] We should note a feature that evokes the kind of repetition described by Trauma Theory.

[81] The byproduct of these "waning" news conventions can be seen clearly in the erroneous reports disseminated during the ensuing manhunt.

[82] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* presents an especially salient discussion of the role of dissemination of the terrorists' actions, specifically through the media.

[83] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

of terror" will be explored further in subsequent chapters of this inquiry. Meantime, it is worth noting that Boston highlights the fact that the dissemination of information about the bombing did not merely originate from the survivors and emanate outward. It also complicates the notion that the terrorist originated a message and disseminated it as a decipherable speech act. Witnesses recount receiving news and details of the event while still at the scene through their communications with loved ones and friends and via media.[84] As it turns out, the Tsarnaev brothers, who perpetrated the attack, were doing the same thing. To put it simply: they were learning about what they had just experienced (or perpetrated) from external sources. This complicates any purported annunciatory origin from which a disclosure can emanate.[85] Just as, in a former time, a newspaper retrieved from the doorstep might have had irruptive force for a reader, the recursivity and proliferation of the current news landscape created a multiplicity of irruptive origins. It suggests that, if there is anything unifying about the event of the bombing when viewed discursively, it is that the essential role of the explosions was to catalyze these utterances. To say it another way: the mechanism of such terroristic acts is ultimately that they interject a discursive exigency, a call to investigate.[86]

Though the bombing may catalyze discourses, one conspicuous absence from both the descriptive language featured in the news reports and in the witness narratives is any sort of

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[84] One example can be found in Cary Willardsen, "Boston Marathon 2013" in the *StoryCorps Archive* (January 15, 2019).

[85] Such added complexity does not exonerate media sources for potentially being complicit or instrumental in the aims of terrorists.

[86] That is, of course, not to say that they originate discourses or even that they open up new lines of discourse.

disclosive value linked to the explosions themselves.[87] Nowhere in the witness accounts reviewed for this project was there mention of a message being communicated by the bomb or bomber; there were no reports of recognition of a statement, the presence of a thesis, or any information delivered. If recognition featured at all, it was in the form of the witnesses reacting to the material impact and affective responses of other victims—wounds, panic, chaos. These effects were framed as having happened without mention of a terrorist or original enunciator. Despite being saturated with meaning, for all intents and purposes, the explosions did not figure as discursive acts in these witness narratives.[88]

In the initial news reports, the extended *Washington Post* lede comes perhaps the closest to recognizing a sort of disclosure, when it reports that the nation has been "driven" once more "into the grim work of responding to terror." Here "responding" has both discursive and punitive connotations—it could mean that the nation is attempting to engage in a conversational exchange with the terrorist, or it could signal a punitive cause and effect relationship where in place of authentic conversation there is a mechanical trigger. Its ambiguity obscures whether the "response" is to this particular act as the disclosure of an individual, or to terror as a genre or category of violence. What is at stake here is whether the various publics of the bombing have actually understood anything about the "why" of the terrorist from the explosions at this early stage. I would argue, based on the context in which it appears, that "responding to terror" is

[87] I have in mind here language that, while often trivialized on sports pages, gestures at an existential condition: *e.g. "the underdog"*

[88] Of course, it could be rightly argued that these witnesses were part of the performative spectacle, not the intended audience. This view casts the victims as a sort of collateral damage, which is a kind of framing that fits neatly into a martial worldview, thus, is somewhat suspect when we are considering these acts outside of a "war by other means" framework. From this perspective, it is important to note that the performance did not carry particular communicative value in this way.

indicative only of the recognition of a response to a form or category of violence. It is citational in that it evokes a history of other instances of spectacular violence that may fit this category—*i.e.* the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001. It is this categorical response that betrays its generic or epistemological mode.

Neither do the later witness narratives reveal a sense of recognition of any form of communication from the terrorist. They are, however, notably rich in other forms of citational and descriptive language. It is clear that such language attempts to elicit for its audiences a sense of the initial experience by pulling from a culturally contingent repertoire. One survivor recounts:

> When the blast went off we were facing the runners... when the first blast happened, it sounded high to me, like above my head, almost like a flare gun, you know, like signaling something, but it was an echo, so it was high and then it sort of like went off, and I thought to myself 'What the...?[89]

While it is tempting here to read the phrase "like signaling something," as the recognition of some sort of disclosure, such a reading leads ultimately to a cul-de-sac. The *something* it heralds is only the coming recognition of its associative identity with the explosion—a recognition that the hearer ultimately reconciles as more congruent with the facticity of the situation than their initial speculative identification.

On the metacontextual level, such phrases demonstrate that the survivors, well after the fact, have clearly integrated some aspects of their initial experience into a narrative thickened by repetition.[90] Yet these instances of representation are slippery. The initial speculative

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[89] Brittany Loring and Hafsa LaBreche, "WBUR Oral History Project: Brittany Loring and Hafsa LaBreche Clip 1" on *Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive*, ed. Joanna Shea O'Brien. (April 26, 2014).

[90] This is not to argue that this is necessarily the first point of narrativization, just that there is an identifiable characteristic of certain language following such an event that operates in a citational register.

identification is not forgotten. It remains prominent even in later narratives. It is evident in the recordings, for example, that there remains an itinerant ambiguity around the meaning and intended audiences of the survivors' account of the event. While elements of the initial meaning-making experience appear, the audience ambiguity is reflected in the survivors' modulating use of figurative language. They move back and forth between similes of their initial interpretation of the explosions and later attempts at reformulating them.

The similes that feature prominently in these narratives, while sometimes clearly rehearsed, are often revised mid-utterance, suggesting a multi-layered process of meaning re-making, or to borrow from Toni Morrison, "re-remembering," that is simultaneously linear and reflexive.[91] The speaker tries to represent memory, while the listener experiences the simile, *e.g.* "almost like a flare gun," and then immediately afterwards, "like signaling something." Since the entirety of the listening audience is not present, the audience is to some degree projected, looming behind the microphone or interviewer, which builds in additional self-conscious ambiguities about, not only the speaker's initial interpretations of the explosions, but how they should navigate their projected audience's culturally contingent repertoire.[92]

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[91] What is the opposite of reflexive? The concept here is one that begins from one person and extends outward in one direction. Linear comes to mind, but even that, properly speaking can move in two directions. A ray is more accurate, but the adjective form of "ray" is not familiar to me. The term *Aufhebung*, as it appears in Hegel, comes to mind here in thinking about the instantaneity and mediating force of simile.

[92] Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric,* Vol. 1 (1968), 1-14.

As Bitzer might say, it has a particular set of constraints for this Rhetorical Situation. Yet Bitzer's model leaves a connection to memory wanting.

Simile: "This Isn't Exactly It"

In fact, among those who survived the explosions first-hand and recounted their experience in oral histories collected over the years following the incident, the two explosions were characterized using an astonishing array of simile. Some said they recognized immediately that the explosions were caused by bombs; many others had no such realization until learning details well after the fact. One runner who had finished and was waiting for friends described hearing "a couple of bangs... [that] sounded like when you drop big trashcans on the floor...like when the big trashcans at a Seven Eleven are dropped."[93] Another witness thought the initial explosion sounded like "the JumboTron collapsed" (Coombs); another thought it sounded like a flare gun (Hafsa); to others it "was maybe a crane that fell over" (Colson) or "like a semi-truck that maybe had been in a wreck and fallen over" (Pilcher). Two other spectators nearby thought it was an electrical transformer, similar to a recent substation explosion that blacked out a portion of the city. A young woman who was gravely injured in the blasts thought a window washing scaffold might have fallen, and later that airplanes were dropping bombs.[94]

Any revisions of simile mid-utterance could then be thought of as both for the benefit of the speaker and the (potential) listeners, as a navigation of constraints. The rhetorical models of Lloyd Bitzer and other rhetoricians provide useful outlines of how speakers navigate rhetorical constraints in relation to their intended audiences, but they have their limits.[95] Such models do

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[93] See: Maiella, WBUR Oral History Project.

Based on the context, the second reference to "trash cans" is likely intended as a reference to the metal dumpsters commonly found outside of convenience stores. I have included the second part of the description to call attention to its recursivity, and its ambiguity.

[94] I will address the lack of traditional "like" or "as" grammar in another section.

[95] See, Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation".

well to note that there are factors that influence what is said and how it is received that remain outside of the speaker's control. Unfortunately, such factors may also lie outside rhetorical theory's purview. These models, for example, are not especially concerned with memory or ontological considerations. This is ontology in the Husserlian sense, rather than the truth category outlined by Searle. The inherent properties of simile, the recursivity of its use, and its relationship to memory suggests, however, that it is precisely something ontological that is at stake here. The witnesses are trying to express a kind of truth about their existence and experience, rather than a truth that can necessarily be verified by others, although they are clearly searching for intersubjective validation.

It is the witnesses' reliance on simile, specifically, that illuminates a central property of that particular form of figurative language, *i.e.* that ambiguities are constitutive of simile itself.[96] As a language of "like" or "as," simile is a complex form that admits from the outset its own inadequacy. Unlike metaphor, which says "this is" something else, simile says "this isn't exactly it," thus alleviating the onus of mimetic representation that binds by convention the lived experience and the utterance, and all but absolves the speaker of the responsibility to accurately characterize the experience—whatever "accuracy" may mean here. Such definite ambiguity is evident in the account of a restaurateur who was standing on a patio about thirty-five or forty feet from the explosion when he says:

> It was just an enormous explosion that you could feel, like standing in front of a giant speaker, maybe, that kind of feeling. But it was like nothing I ever heard before... just an enormous "boom." We could feel it like a wave of air pushing across us. It was delayed.

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[96] It is important to note that these similes occur in the oral histories rather than in a news article. Those formats add a layer of authorial aesthetic organization to it.

> Then smoke started to come maybe three or four or five seconds afterwards. That's what it sounded like... Everyone froze.[97]

There is little confusion, in phrases such as "like standing in front of a giant speaker" and "like a wave of air pushing across us" that the speaker is searching for a fitting representation rather than merely characterizing some sort of sonic misunderstanding. The witness doesn't think there was literally a giant speaker responsible for the movement of air. Indeed, it was just "that kind of feeling." And, while the "wave of air" description is one that resonates with the scientific account of the movement of fluids (like air), it is framed grammatically with "like" to suggest that the word "wave" does not here belong to a scientific or technical lexicon, but is used to evoke a more naïve or generalized sense of the word, particularly in conjunction with the personified verb "pushed."

In other examples, such as the witness who thought the JumboTron had fallen, an argument could be made that this was a case, not of figurative language but, in fact, that the witness was simply and literally describing what they thought had happened, which I am going to continue to call a "sonic misunderstanding" for now. I would point out, however, that the distinctions between sonic misunderstandings and simile remain nebulous and have not received much theoretical attention.

In fact, even the distinctions between various forms of the word "like" in this context stand to be clarified. There are, for example, strong affinities between the simile form of "like" and the disfluent form of "like," as in the above quoted "then it sort of like went off." Both of these also have affinities with the quotative form, as in "I was like, 'It's time to go'" (my example). In the same vein as simile, the latter two forms seem to have the effect of signaling "this isn't

[97] Mark Hagopian, WBUR Oral History Project.

exactly it." Their inflection, however, is perhaps more accurately voiced as "it wasn't just that, but much more," as in, "It wasn't just time to go, but it was *really* time to go."

To summarize, there are at least four forms of "like" at play here that, I would argue, serve similar ends but need to be distinguished. What they all share is that they try to evoke "that kind of feeling." Since the use of simile has a comparatively long history dating back to the Greeks, it is perhaps reasonable to outline its definition before accounting for the other forms of "like."

One challenge to this approach, however, is the traditionally subordinated status of simile compared to metaphor in existing theories. Simile has not generally received the same level of attention as metaphor in philosophical, rhetorical, or literary theoretical writing. Scholars such as Catherine Addison, who have set out to remedy this imbalance by specifically describing the literature and theory of simile, have noted the centrality of metaphor, over simile, in twentieth century thought across a variety of academic disciplines, including the natural sciences.[98] [99]

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[98] Catherine Addison, "From Literal to Figurative: An Introduction to the Study of Simile." In *College English* 55.4 (April 1993), 402-419.

Sam Glucksberg and Catrinel Haught, "On the Relation Between Metaphor and Simile: When Comparison Fails" in *Mind and Language* 21.3. (June 3, 2006), 360-378.

Walter J. Ong, "Metaphor and the Twinned Vision (The Phoenix and the Turtle)" *The Sewanee Review* 63.2 (1955), 193–201.

[99] Addison highlights two major traditions of thought regarding the relationship of simile to metaphor: the first is that there is a hierarchical relationship between metaphor and simile; the second is that simile and metaphor operate in two completely different registers. In the former relation, thinkers modulate between the Aristotelian position that metaphor is the general term and simile is the more specific form, and an opposing view held by Cicero and Quintilian, that simile is the genus and metaphor is the species. Addison associates modern theorists such as I.A. Richards, Walter J. Ong, Max Black, and Paul Ricoeur with Aristotle's view that metaphor is the more general form and simile a derivative form. Addison also points out that the Ciceronian inverse view, that simile is the genus and metaphor the species, is often implicit in the perspective of twentieth century cognitive psychologists such as Aos Tversky and Andrew Ortony—she points out that George A. Miller makes his subscription to this view explicit in his work (402).

Sorting through a variety of conceptualizations of simile for a definition, Addison finds in the extant literature some common themes. Simile, she points out, both joins/fuses and disjoints. This tension by itself, she argues, is ambiguous and is insufficient to help distinguish simile from metaphor. One characteristic that much more effectively and commonly identifies simile, however, is its grammar. Simile's most conventional identifier in contemporary discourse is a particular grammatical construction that includes "like," "as," and "just as…so." When taken together, the grammatical construction and the joining/disjointing tendency can account for a large swath of simile. Yet, if the definition were to stop there, it would exclude many of the epic similes employed by Milton, Homer, Tasso, Spenser, and Keats. Such classical uses expand the grammatical forms of simile to include the "[like, but] greater than" form.[100] In other words, these classical similes are structured to show inequality. They aim to illustrate that something is "unlike" or "like something else, but greater than." By including these descriptions of inequality in the definition, simile "can express any among an infinity of degrees of likeness and unlikeness" even if it "cannot actually express identity or opposites." Furthermore, "both terms of the comparison are present and stated" and "the nature of the terms is not limited, either absolutely or in relation to each other."[101]

The second theoretical framing of metaphor and simile formally divorces one from the other. It is a view, oddly also stemming from Quintilian despite an apparent contradiction in his thinking, that "sees metaphor as existing not at the level of statement, which is where simile exists, in the comparison or equation of two things or ideas, but at the level of language, in the substitution of one word or term for another within the sentence" (402-3). This is a view, Addison argues, that has proven popular among "grammarians, structuralists, and semioticians, including Christine Brooke-Rose, W. Edell Stanford, Roman Jakobson, David Lodge, and Jacques Derrida" (403). It is also one in which simile, though formulated differently, is again not especially prominent.

[100] Addison, 403.

[101] ibid, 404.

The resulting, more inclusive, definition complicates the ostensible simplicity of the contemporary "like or as" grammatical form of simile. It also suggests, I would argue, a classical precursor for the disfluent and quotative forms of "like" mentioned above. In light of epic simile, the vocalization "it wasn't just that, but much more," (that I associated with these two forms) appears to carry a similar sense to Addison's articulation of the epic simile form of "like something else, but greater than." In other words, speakers who use "like" as a disfluency or as a quotative are literally drawing a comparison, while figuratively gesturing beyond it.

By expanding the contemporary conventions around simile to encompass these earlier epic forms, and I would argue, extending them to cover quotative and disfluent forms, it is possible to better understand the purposes for and by which simile is constituted. These characteristics combined, suggest that:

> The world of simile is a familiar one to the non-analytic or impressionistic eye; it is a world in which things are not simply 'the same' or 'the opposite,' but similar—or dissimilar—in infinitely subtle ways. In it, things may '*be* like' or they may merely '*seem* like' one another, depending on whether perception and knowledge are in harmony or at odds. In the same way that 'like' and 'seems like' shade into each other, so 'as' modulates with 'as if,' a copula which extends perception and knowledge into the realms of the hypothetical, the imaginative, and the fantastic.[102]

I read in Addison's observations an argument for simile as a fundamental discursive means of processing ambiguities. In the inquiry at hand, it is brought into sharp relief by the limit situation of witnessing an act of terror. After all, for whom is the condition of meaning making after an explosion anything but non-analytic and impressionistic, except for a 1) people who were raised in environments in which terror attacks were frequent, and 2) experts or practitioners of terror attacks? Simile is the interpretive tool *par excellence* that shapes meaning by reference, like a

[102] Addison, 404-5.

hand plane's blade levels the organic undulations of wood by reference to its flat metal sole. Indeed, simile may lack the definitive-feeling categorical performance of metaphor, yet it brings to presence similarity and dissimilarity between conditions in "infinitely subtle ways," as Addison points out. It is also able to suggest, in the manner of epic simile, that what is being described is simultaneously similar to, and yet in excess of, the description, *e.g.* the sublime. To say it simply: a simile may appear indefinite but its yield is intensely specific. It is in this sense, and perhaps in this sense only, that the Aristotelian tradition gets the genus-species distinction correct. In light of the terror limit case, however, it would seem that simile formally precedes and supersedes metaphor as the materials for later figurative constructions, as the planning and preparation of lumber precedes the building of a table.

Ontological Gestures

Such an understanding of simile, when mapped onto the Boston Marathon bombing oral histories, illuminates further the extent to which these are truly accounts of the "non-analytic or impressionistic eye." Witnesses are working to articulate meaning from a form of spectacular violence that fundamentally exceeds everyday categories of interpretation for most people.[103] The shifting similes not only suggest the speaker's dissatisfaction with a stable descriptive formulation, but also that simile may actually constitute a *de facto* language of terror. To frame it in the nomenclature of speech act theories, the perlocutionary effect of this terror bombing, as reported by the witnesses, tends to take the form of simile. How, after all, can an individual account for

[103] See also, Eide's *Terrible Beauty*, 26-28.

It is clear that it exceeds everyday interpretive categories because few, if any, of the witnesses are satisfied with the description "explosion," "went off," "boom" or other such descriptions. Their manifest desire to further explain the experience speaks to the insufficiency of these standard linguistic categories.

"that kind of feeling" when it violates familiar categories of perception, exceeds knowledge, and evades description? Such a pursuit leads to linguistic transience or a shift to the "hypothetical, the imaginative, and the fantastic." In other words, the witnesses continue to search for fitting language to account for such excess or, one might infer from Addison's discussion, may pivot instead to art, literature, or another form of aesthetic representation. In either case, there is an insistent and recursive impulse to articulate the meaning of the experience even if language, on its own, falls short.

Alex Houen similarly frames language's limit in addressing, defining, and otherwise accounting for terrorism. Rather than simile, however, it is "hyperbole" and "the figurative" that he identifies as "imbricated in terrorism's events and history in complex, material ways" (6). For Houen, hyperbole is a term that signals excessive meaning in both the discursive realm and the world of things. He sees the attacks on the World Trade Centers in 2001 as a moment of multiple transferences "*between* discourse and material events."[104] The hyperbolic, he argues, is evident in the shocking scale of the terror attack, and also in the disproportionate declaration of the "War on Terror" by the U.S. and NATO countries in response.

As a term, hyperbole signals the transgression of boundaries and categories. As it is used by Houen, however, it also betrays an ethical sensibility underlying an intrinsic measure of proportion. In other words, whereas Addison's explanation of simile shows that it formally relies on the transgression of syntactic categories and commonly carries a particular grammatical form,

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[104] Houen, 5, original emphasis.

Houen points out: "The etymology of 'hyperbole' splits the word into a number of different directions: in Greek the verb *huperballein* has several meanings: 'to overshoot', 'to exceed all bounds', 'to go on further and further', and 'to pass over, cross, or traverse (mountains, rivers, etc.)' (LSJ). The history of 11 September along with the subsequent 'war against terrorism' waged in Afghanistan by US and British forces is a history of the hyperbolic in all these senses" (5).

the semantics of hyperbole require a similar recognition of category transgression in addition to a normative sense of asymmetry. It is necessary, I would argue, for hyperbole to reference a set of external standards of measure to determine whether something is truly hyperbolic. "I drove a million miles a minute," for example, is hyperbole not because of a category transgression—a rate of speed is the appropriate measure—but because it violates the norms of proportion as they relate to current vehicular technologies.

I would note that there is significant overlap between hyperbole, simile, and metaphor in common usage. "I was as hungry as a horse," for example, is both simile and hyperbole by virtue of its grammar and category transgression. In another conventional structure of hyperbole, for example, we see that "It was raining cats and dogs," which is a figuration that is evocative of metaphor. In another, we see that "He was skinny as a toothpick," which is syntactically indistinguishable from simile. Some speakers, however, would take issue with the latter example constituting hyperbole because it uses "like or as" in its construction. One version of the traditional distinction between simile and hyperbole excludes any phrase with the grammatical form of simile. To make that exclusion, however, restricts hyperbole far beyond its common usage. This differentiation is additionally complicated when considering Addison's broader definition of simile, which includes the "like but greater than" structure stemming from epic simile. Through this lens, the phrase "I was as hungry as a horse" signals that my hunger exceeded a human's conventional hunger, but instead of gesturing into the infinite—as it might with the "like but greater than" form—the speaker instead adds a referential boundary, *i.e.* hunger that is like that of a larger animal, a horse. In other words, in this case, the hyperbole has a more definite boundary than the epic simile, which might otherwise say "My hunger was greater than that of a horse."

To be sure, hyperbole, even more than simile, evokes the holistically transgressive and excessive attitude of terrorism, since hyperbole always transgresses categories and simile only sometimes does. The hyperbolic, in fact, is evocative of the classical sense of the "sublime" or the Dionysian, a sensory violating experience that exceeds rational comprehension. Yet as is demonstrated above, while it violates some categories of understanding, it is still bounded in a way that sublimity is not. I was, after all, hungry as a horse, not in a manner that exceeded all rationality.

As Houen aptly illustrates, however, hyperbole is certainly consistent with the notions of superseding everyday experience and provoking expressions of outrage, such as the disproportionate political response of the U.S. and NATO to the attacks on 11 September 2001.[105] It is in this sense that the attacks of that day were not just "experienced as hyperbole, but in some ways took place as such." In fact, he argues,

> It appeared to be unanimous: unless you were one of the victims, the terrifying reality of the events could only be experienced and expressed *as hyperbole*—as surpassing the normal limits of experience and expression. All of a sudden, then, the figurative, if not the fictional, was at the very heart of the disaster.[106]

Something in Houen's observation feels true, aside from the slippage in the phrase "surpassing the normal limits of experience and expression," which appears to be incongruent

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[105] Houen, 5.

He writes, for example, that "In this sense, the hyperbolic was implicated in the events in a number of ways: in the massive devastation (physical *and* symbolic) and loss of life caused by the plane attacks; in the physical shock of the attacks transmitted through televisual images; in the contagious impact of the terrorism spreading into areas of economics, politics, and culture worldwide; and in the political rhetoric that helped to legitimize and precipitate the subsequent war against terrorism waged amidst Afghanistan's mountain ranges" (5).

[106] Ibid., 2.

with the transgressive-yet-bounded conventional usage of the concept of hyperbole. Perhaps more problematic is the caveat "unless you were one of the victims," which introduces an untenable distinction. At its base, there is a problem of needing to distinguish "victims" from "non-victims" in an event that even Houen attributes with worldwide impact and multiple valences of witnessing and victimization.

More in line with the present inquiry, however, there is a problem illuminated by the Boston bombing oral histories, and even the newspaper ledes, in which there is such a visibly earnest attempt to reckon with the meaning of the attack. Is it the case that a newspaper lede stating that the explosions "ripped" through streets, yet largely devoid of other citational information, is engaging in hyperbole, while a witness who states that the explosions pushed a wave of air "like standing in front of a giant speaker" is not? Are they both? Such questions suggest that as an analytical tool, identification of hyperbole requires a delicate selection of values and inherently leads to victim policing.

I find it more useful to think of hyperbole as a manner or attitude of speech rather than a discrete form of figurative language. Such an attitude has an affinity with grammatical moods that describe verb categories. Rather than the indicative or interrogative mood, for example, it might be useful to think of the "hyperbolic mood" in which a statement is made that grammatically resembles a conventional statement or question but where the facts are intentionally out of proportion relative to the contingent expectations. The form of hyperbole, therefore, does not fit the conventional understanding of the term, yet describes a kind of ritually transgressive mode of address that has come to signal "terrorist" discourse.

In a hyperbolic mood, several forms of figurative language can be deployed. In fact, the symbolic valences of the 11 September attacks that Houen discusses can be seen more clearly in this way. Houen puzzles over apparent inconsistencies in a passage by Osama Bin Laden in

which the latter characterizes the attacks figuratively as both the destruction of "America's icons" as well as a "copy of what we have tasted."[107] The passage is far more consistent when considered in light of a hyperbolic mood of analogy. Bin Laden is arguing that America will experience the same and more—an analogous form of violence that will take place in a manner that hyperbolically assails its symbolism.

Grammatical parsing aside, my intent is neither to adjudicate whether hyperbole or simile is better suited to describing terrorism, nor to referee whose narratives qualify as hyperbole. Both concepts seem to capture aspects of the perlocutionary character of the Boston bombings, *i.e.* that the experience oversteps conventional language categories and perhaps itself. Both also fall short as analytical tools. The shifts in figuration and mood signal, however, that the manner in which witnesses grapple with the excess of meaning of the experience may be more aptly described by a concept that foregrounds the semantic context rather than merely the syntactic.[108] I would argue that "gesture" would serve well here because it immediately conjures both linguistic and extra-linguistic elements. While gesture, too, has been taken up by rhetoricians and applied linguists, I argue that many rhetorical and linguistics frameworks, even when they purportedly analyze

[107] Ibid., 3.

[108] Excess is the appropriate word here because of its etymological root "ex-" or "out of." Sense is truly a coming out or emanation of the utterance.

gesture, tend to eschew the ontological concerns interwoven in these accounts in favor of more pragmatic formal or epistemological yields.[109] [110]

The "gesture" invoked here is constituted at the nexus of experience and representation. It is primarily verbal, but it is a form of response that is in excess of, or in complement to, spoken language.[111] I contend that a phenomenological reading of gesture highlights ontological concerns that remain inaccessible by other readings. Gesture is attended by a "sense," as it has been described by mid-20th century thinkers, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (as a critical appropriation of Martin Heidegger). This use of gesture and sense also has affinities with concepts explored in the criticism of R. P. Blackmur in his elucidation of poetry and art. Gesture, here, captures language's ability to throw itself beyond its own instrumentality; "sense" is a way of naming the difference between the instrumentality of an utterance and the excess of its reception. It is through this gestural framework that simile can be understood, along with the richness of linguistic play and extra-linguistic play, as a certain promiscuity of figuration and slippage between the elements of an utterance. It is a type of play that is especially evident when

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[109] Reading both the witness accounts and the act of terror itself in a rhetorical sense, for example, de-emphasizes ontological concerns. The yield of a formal or epistemological analysis in the limit case of terrorism, tends to be something on the order of categorizing terrorist acts as "logically flawed" communicative acts. There is an analogous intellectual cul-de-sac in categorizing a survivor's use of simile as a claim or an argument. To be sure, I would certainly not contend that acts of terrorism are normatively "logical" or that they are not "flawed." Yet, I would argue they are flawed for reasons that are more existential than, even prior to, their epistemological organization. Thinking about them in terms of gesture helps illuminate this.

[110] Gesture has also become the focus of research in the field of second language acquisition. In this context, it is concerned with the holistic communication of both textual and body language. This use of gesture is perhaps related to the way I use it here, but relies often on observable signs of body language, which are not accessible in the circumstances of terror I have been analyzing here.

[111] Since the subject of analysis of this study is a collection of oral histories and written texts, the gestural concerns of body language are not taken up.

a witness uses a particular simile, then shifts to several others (even if one figuration is permitted to thicken for pragmatic or performative purposes).[112] It is also evident in the palimpsestic persistence of the initial meaning making experience in subsequent tellings.

Through an abundance of simile, I argue, the witnesses are gesturing at an embodied ontological experience that remains outside the epistemological register—the latter being a register which is more readily accessible by the literal language of categorized things. Here we are operating at the limits of what Paulhan sees as the terrorist's evocation of "raw" being, as I discussed in the Prologue to this work. Gestures can certainly take the form of physical and bodily expressions, but the focus of my analysis is their literary manifestations. Witnesses are using words to try to represent to assumed audiences, not just a collection of facts about the experience, but the sense that accords with it. It was after all, as the witness quoted above said, "like standing in front of a giant speaker, maybe, that kind of feeling. But it was like nothing I ever heard before" (Hagopian). How does one categorize something that one has never heard before and that has a force that exceeds the audible and all prior categories of interpretation? Through likeness and reference. But what if one's audience has never stood in front of a giant speaker, or survived an earthquake, or heard a construction crane fall over? How can they understand such category-assailing magnitude? One must gesture, like sketching an outline, in a manner that gives shape to the experience based on other points of reference. Such sketch work is visible even in the most seemingly conventional of similes. The witness who was standing behind a barricade near the finish line explains, for example:

[112] This shifting of simile is also present in descriptions of other moments in the oral histories. One witness, for example, rather graphically describes the wounds of a victim injured by the explosion as he came to her aid (O'Hara). He shifts between food-related similes to evoke a sense of the uncanniness and atrocity of the explosions' effects on victims' bodies.

> Then we heard the first bang and it really didn't register with everybody it was a bomb. And two seconds later you could feel the vibration. And it was so strong. It was like an earthquake."[113]

The reference to an earthquake, while perhaps a simile that one might anticipate hearing in reference to an explosion that vibrated the ground, illustrates precisely the fraught ontological concern at hand and a sense of the witness' gesture. Though the word "earthquake" is commonly associated with the epistemological register of scientific disciplines and is commonly used in association with Richter scale measures and other scientific knowledge, as a portmanteau that characterizes a natural disaster, it remains a fundamentally existential experience for people. In other words, for this witness, the threatening character and sheer force of the experience of the earth vibrating necessitates three sentences to even approach linguistically, plus the apparently insufficient inclusion of the concept "earthquake" as a gesture. The simile follows an explicit admission that people at the scene did not yet know what had happened. It is notable as well that even though the witnesses' initial understanding (or lack of understanding) of what caused the event has since been clarified with additional information (that it was, in fact, a bomb), yet the seemingly tentative phrase "like an earthquake" still persists in their narrative.

In addition to the ontological concerns that prompt the witnesses' pivot to simile, questions remain about whether there is evidence in the witness accounts of any of the *terrorist's* ontological concerns, which may have ultimately motivated the attack. This is a question that speaks to the intentionality of the disclosive act. Does the earthquake-like effect of the bomb constitute a message or part of a statement from the terrorist? It seems a trite question in light of the very real material damage and human casualties, but did the terrorist intend to communicate "earthquake-ness" to the witnesses? To ask another way, does this particular form of spectacular

[113] Morawoski qtd. in Montopoli. This particular account was offered as testimony during Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's 2015 trial.

violence provide a possible conduit, a mimetic communicative value, or a communicative transfer from the terrorist to the witness? In the ten Boston bombing survivor accounts reviewed here, evidence of this kind of communication was certainly not apparent.[114] If it was present at all, it was difficult to distinguish from citational information that the witness picked up subsequent to the bombing. As established previously, the act of terror ultimately served as the exigency for many utterances, and most importantly, a series of investigations. It may be intuited that if communication from the terrorist is being registered by anyone, it is perhaps by someone at a further remove from the event, someone interpreting the bombing via an already established set of assumptions, or someone who has prior contextual knowledge at the time of the explosion (*e.g.* a scholar, a counterterrorism law enforcement officer, etc.).

Instead, the post attack narratives suggest that it is gesture and sense, rather than a particular message, that is the operative mode of propagation of the experience of the bombing for witnesses, if not for the dissemination of the "terror" itself (a concept I will examine more closely in Chapter 3 but leave uninterrogated for now). Further, it is clear through the analysis of these witness accounts that any discursive meaning intended by the terrorists and associated with the attacks remains at stake even among the individuals most directly impacted by the event, and

[114] Slavoj Zizek and others have pointed to spectacular violence (as a means) as having a communicative value, but what I am suggesting here is not an observation of the form, but of any visible communication occurring through the spectacle. I will discuss terroristic events as speech acts more thoroughly in subsequent chapters, but for now, wanted to take up the question of an osmotic transfer of a message. To that end, I should acknowledge that there are innumerable factors that could be at play here, even in the origin of the narratives that are the subject of study here. The oral history project followed a semi-structured interview process, which may have directed the survivor accounts intentionally or inadvertently. The mental milieu of the survivors themselves, where they were in their personal recovery process, for example, may have shifted their focus. Conversations in preparation for the interviews may have primed their answers. My contention here is not meant to be definitive but suggestive. The presence of some kind of communique from the terrorists by way of the bombing was conspicuously absent from the survivor accounts.

especially at a temporal remove of many years. In other words, in the Boston situation, in which there was not a coordinated communications campaign appended to the attack, if the terrorists were trying to communicate something through or by the act, the meaning of that something remains inchoate indefinitely even among those who survived it. Even, and especially perhaps, after the conviction of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. Journalists, policymakers, scholars, and members of other publics that might be considered third-party may have attempted, and perhaps succeeded, in incorporating the event into a broader political or social narrative, yet those who experienced it have no such consolidation of the event's meaning.[115] [116]

To be sure, unlike some other forms of trauma, terrorism is of a class that relies on a sudden spectacular irruption of violence and the expedient propagation of its narrative for socio-political force. That irruptive force, some have argued, constitutes the "message."[117] It is an irruption that creates witnesses of various publics that generally have little initial context for what has happened. If there is a transaction that takes place (in addition to catalyzing utterances), I would argue, it is that the act of terror marshals an investigative impulse among those publics

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[115] This somewhat intuitive point is often overlooked, I think, because of the assumption that the casualties an act of terror are collateral losses, therefore not the direct audience.

[116] The modulation of simile found in the witness accounts would perhaps come as no surprise to someone familiar with the literature of trauma or psychoanalysis. The reception of the act of terrorism, which has been described here by way of a peculiar philosophy of language, is more familiarly accounted for by schemas of sublimation and patterns of a survivor's inability to integrate a traumatic event into a stable sense of self.[116] I offer no trauma studies critique here, as it would draw the inquiry away from the dialogical structure that has motivated this exploration between the intentionality of the terroristic act and the witness account. It bears repeating, however, that these various models of trauma yield an impulsive and recursive re-experiencing of the traumatic event.

[117] See, for instance, Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, (New York: Verso, 2013) and W.J.T. Mitchell, "Word and Image in a Time of Terror" *ELH* 72.2, Essays in Honor of Ronald Paulson (Summer, 2005) 291-308 for various ways of considering the spectacle as the message.

that proceeds backwards toward the intention of the perpetrator, and then redoubles outwards and beyond to articulate the act's reception. In other words, one contextual element that is known as soon as the explosion is determined to be an act of aggression, is that the actor intended it to be public. It is not of a class of hidden horrors sequestered indoors or in a remote location away from the eyes of witnesses. A recognition of the public intentionality of the event, considered discursively, offers only some generic information. When analyzed as a phenomenological and aesthetic appeal, however, its yield is richer in meaning.

The sequence of the explosion sending the witnesses back toward an ostensible source resembles the "violent aesthetic" framework explored by Marian Eide in her 2019 book *Terrible Beauty*.[118] In that book, Eide extends Kant's and Burke's accounts of the aesthetics of beauty and the sublime, respectively, to formulate the idea that the beautiful pleases, the sublime terrifies, and, she argues, the violent shocks into fascination.[119] Eide is explicitly concerned with spectacular rather than more insidious forms of violence. She is also careful to position such an aesthetic response at a remove from the immediate violence. The parable of Leontius serves as the guiding pattern. It is Leontius who experiences both a compulsion to look and shame as he passes recently executed criminals on the path up to town. What he experiences in this combined and complex response, Eide argues, is fascination.

The fascination evoked by the shock of violence prompts moral contemplation, she argues. Despite terrorism's nominal alignment with an exploration of sublimity, Eide's important insight about the fascination with violence speaks more directly to the contemporary experience

[118] Eide, *Terrible Beauty*.

[119] Ibid., 18.

of terrorism, which is perhaps a limit case of such spectacular violence.[120] The discursive analysis already underway here, however, may best be situated as an extension of her insights to include the presence of a frustrated ontological disclosure that is prior to the evocation of a moral contemplation that she so clearly describes. In fact, Eide's framing of poetry and poetic language pairs nicely with such an ontological disclosure. Both kinds of language could be seen as a form of repetition, rather than reporting, of the violence.[121] Where I have explored journalism as a "first response" to the traumas of terrorism and then pivoted to the individual accounts, she maintains a more focused scope on the individual's poetic repetition of the event in the search for representation and the construction of a self by virtue of others, following Kelly Oliver.[122]

The explosions, in this case, impel themselves into presence in the consciousness of various publics. For many, however, it is not the explosions that are directly experienced but a discursive irruption catalyzed by those explosions. Yet, the Boston bombing coverage illustrates, to appropriate Eide's frame, that the initial yield of the explosions really occurs just prior to the pivot to moral contemplation. This intermediary step, I would argue, is evident in a general and problematic response that assumes the act of terror is "saying" something and that various

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[120] See: Mikko Tuhkanen, "The Most Fascinating Medium" in *Postmodern Culture* 30.2, (January 2020) for a rigorous and insightful exploration of "fascination" in the cinematic context and in conversation with Jacques Lacan's understanding of ego and subject formation.

The connections between fascination as a concept in theorizing cinema overlaps intriguingly with Jean Baudrillard's provocative argument in *The Spirit of Terrorism* that everyone in Western society has imagined such attacks as those on September 11, 2001. For Baudrillard, movies (*i.e.* action movies) are evidence of a cultural response to the overwhelmingly oppressive power such as that symbolically represented by the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon. People imagine destroying such power, and this is our collective "terroristic" imagination, he argues. For a discussion of fascination in literature, see also Sibylle Baumbach, *Literature and Fascination*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[121] Eide, 33.

[122] Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: U. Minnesota Press, 2001).

investigative narratives of the act will eventually be able to exhume its communicative content. News reports and law enforcement investigations, for example, are thought to have the power through investigative force to present truths about *who* the terrorist was, *what* they were saying, and *why* they acted in such a way. In other words, the act of terrorism provokes the public search for answers to ontological questions first, then, frustrated by an unsatisfactory ability to access such a disclosure, the search pivots to a moral and epistemological register. If such an ontological exhumation ever occurs—which would amount to a recognition of the terrorist's ontological disclosure—its site is certainly neither the initial news reports nor the later witness accounts. I leave open, for now, the possibility of subsequent journalism, the reading of manifestos, police investigations, and court proceedings as possible sites for the disclosure of such ontological concerns.

A Peculiar Performance

One thing is immediately certain among the complexities of this system of representation: the material referent—the bomb—and the ephemeral materiality of the explosion, is long obliterated even if the resultant physical and psychical imprints remain. Like an utterance, the temporally contingent unity of the bomb has been destroyed. It is, as the nomenclature suggests, an "energetic" thing that is now expended. Such an event, therefore, is not merely an explosive spectacle, but also the equally spectacular disappearance of the instrument of terror itself. This fleeting temporality, according to a traditional understanding of the phenomenon, is part of what produces a sense of disorientation, impotency, and terror among the witnesses.

Houen, for example, identifies a similar sense in one fictional characterization of dynamite terrorism, "what is terrifying about the dynamite is its effect of rendering violence an

immaculate deception," which is to say that it seems to appear from nowhere, execute its deadly purpose, then evaporate, leaving behind its terrible imprint.[123] Eide's framework for understanding the appeal of violence is instructive here because, while terror bombings are fleeting, their impact, evidenced by the Boston witness accounts, is protracted and involves moral and ethical grappling. Eide's argument that the violent shocks into fascination draws emphasis to the legacy of such an "immaculate deception," that is, it is a reminder that fascination calls a person (or a public) back repeatedly to investigate the phenomenon they experienced. Such fascination is also consonant with the expressions of simile employed by the witnesses. Survivors attributed the detonations to a variety of things, but even when they later learned precisely what had caused them, the initial impressionistic account persisted. In fact, more often than not, they recounted their initial interpretive simile when telling their stories, then updated it with additional information, arguably because they were still grappling with meaning-making. The witnesses' initial interpretations can be dismissed as mere misparsing of the sound they heard—sonic misunderstandings—but to do so sidesteps an influential aspect of the meaning they ascribe to it later. To abstract it further, it could be said that the imprint of the explosions in many cases was not the imprint of a terrorist's aggression but an earthquake-attack or big rig-attack.

In short order, the explosions functioned as the impetus for exploring a set of associated truth claims. While an unattended power substation can explode, for example, and have no inherent value, even as it sends shards of metal and other materials flying and produces smoke and fire. It precipitates an investigation and a subsequent ascription of value. There is a financial value, for example, a cost of repairs or material damage. The explosion may cause a variety of value-laden problems through injury, power outages, etc. It may also later be determined that the

[123] Houen, 31.

circumstances are accidental and not an intentional act of destruction; this would add a value of "non-aggression" (or something of the sort) to the event. Non-aggression, I would argue in this context, is another way of saying "non-violence," which is to indicate that there is no apparent hostile intent or actor behind the event—even if ultimately there is someone or something deemed responsible *i.e.* a negligent repairman, an infrastructure or economic arrangement that privileges the lowest bidder and dubious quality.

The value ascription of "violence/non-violence" is especially salient here, I would argue, because it activates a different mode of social response to the event, one that at its center is motivated by a search for a "who" that, since the broader public does not have access to the "who," instead shifts to the more readily accessible search for "what." That is to say, spectacular violence tends to prompt a search for a perpetrator, which can be thought of as both a person (a person with a consciousness organized around the concept of "I"), and a subject (a thing, a perpetrator). A search in the epistemological register would result in the description of the person as an interpellated subject *e.g.* a white-nationalist terrorist. A search in an ontological register would be one in which the existential concerns of a person are foregrounded in a way that evokes a recognition of the other as a being.[124]

This leaves us with the seemingly straightforward question: Why is it that violence so immediately prompts a search for a perpetrator? The answer, I would argue, is more complex

[124] This is, of course, not the only means of activating this search for a "who," as evidenced by the need to identify a negligent repairman or other so-called "cause" of an accidental explosion. Empirically, it is clear that the search for a negligent party does not emphasize "motive" in the same way as a search for a perpetrator connected to a violent act. In large part, negligence, by definition, is assumed to be a motive in itself because it describes a behavioral failure in reference to a contractually prescribed duty—*i.e.* someone is paid or expected to do particular work and does not. The assumption of negligence is vaguely tautological, *i.e.* that a negligent person acted in a negligent way.

than it appears. To return again to Hannah Arendt's distinction between violence and power, *i.e.* that power uses violence as a tool and that violence depends on implements like bombs and guns while power does not, it follows that the search for the "who" behind the violence is an attempt to associate the violence as a particular exercise of power.[125] While the rhetoric around the search for the bomber may be in the register of prevention and punishment, the investigation is actually an address to power in the Arendtian sense. Here violence serves as a way of revealing power because it functionally "says" something about the status of power (*i.e.* in whom power is in that moment manifest). An investigation seeks to establish whether instrumental violence is the annunciation of a collective power, a challenge to the prevailing regime of truth.

To draw these disparate threads together, it should be recognized that all of this discursive language here is, of course, problematic because it begs for a clearer understanding of the ways in which power can be "said," and muddies the distinction between verbal and nonverbal registers. Based on traditional distinctions, there would seem to be a need to interrogate whether a bomb can properly "speak" at all, or whether this so-called "speech" is simply a metaphor for some other process of meaning making. A particular strain of classical thought might argue that setting off a bomb is clearly an action, not a kind of speech. Such a view might demand an ethical interpretation of a perpetrator's actions rather than their speech or anything that would suggest something that is "said." In the present example of the Boston Marathon bombing, however, the citational nature of the meaning-making after the events, I would argue, combined with the distinct feature of the search for a perpetrator that hinges on

[125] One might argue that the search for a perpetrator responsible for violence is a biological response that is evolutionarily conditioned to help the human species quickly identify threats as a survival mechanism. In other words, the response would be "who is threatening me? And can I flee or fight them?" While this is not the response I'm interested in here, it is not incongruent with my inclination to think about the response in terms of a search for the state or locus of power.

finding written or spoken evidence of "who" they are, suggest that there is a character to the explosions that is more appropriately treated as discursive. This is congruent with recent inquiries in Political Science that approach terrorism using Speech Act theory as a frame.

I would offer the caveat, however, that analyzing the coverage and witness accounts of such events does not constitute a rhetorical analysis so much as a literary analysis in a gestural mode—it amounts to an inquiry into the sense of an action. Along such lines, it should be recognized that, while bombs do not communicate anything inherently, there is an expectation of such an intention both when they have been found undetonated and after they have exploded. Additionally, the bomber's actions suggest that he or she thinks the public will recognize something by virtue of the bombing. The public and personal discourse following a bombing indicates that witnesses and the broader public expect for something to be disclosed or communicated.

It is also notable that there is a haunting incongruence (in the non-material impact of the bombing) between the definitive report of the explosive blast and the shifting excesses of the survivors' experiences and narrative accounts. Blasts are commonly framed in rhetoric and literature as a sort of punctuation that divides the everydayness of life into discrete forms, a way of breaking up what came before from what comes after. Contemporary philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard have pointed to the myopia of such neat punctuations. He argues, for example, that Western society, particularly the United States, has primed itself throughout its recent history and across its media for just such an event.[126] That the event, in other words, is long in the unfolding.

[126] See: Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*.

Perhaps it is this priming that fuels the expectation that such explosions are "saying something." Yet the way in which a bomb could speak at all remains elusive and worthy of further investigation. How can such a thing be expected to speak? In what way does it speak? Is it mere analogy, or is there a mechanism by which such disclosure can be actualized?

At a foundational level, the asymmetry of the blast and the associated narrativizations discussed above, share a conceptual kernel with the schema outlined by J.L. Austin in his exploration of performative utterances. In the broader literature of terrorism studies, the term "performative" is often used in tandem with the word "spectacle" to emphasize the visual character of the attacks, as if on stage—this connotation of the word is, of course, of importance to theorists of aesthetics, literature, and rhetoric as well. While that set of considerations can be useful, in fact, quite compelling in framing a kind of political theater of terrorism, the question of performativity as a linguistic phenomenon is more closely aligned with the present inquiry. In fact, as a limit case, terrorist acts offer a particularly frustrating, yet productive, test of Austin's early taxonomy of performative utterances. Specifically, they foreground the problems of finding sustainable differentiations between linguistic statements and speech acts, and therefore deserve more focused attention. While illuminating, an exploration of performative speech also shows the difficulty of truly making sense of terrorist acts.

CHAPTER III: EXPLOSIVE PERFORMATIVITY

"Literary critics are perhaps better placed than linguists to recognize how misleading it is to think of representative discourse as only a matter of language molding itself to the world, and to think that true-false are adequate parameters for characterizing such discourse." Mary Louise Pratt, "Ideology and Speech-Act Theory" in *Poetics Today (1985)*.

Terrorist attacks have been characterized as performative and as speech acts. These two classifications are related but mark some divergence in conceptual implication. For the purposes of the present inquiry, it would be useful to take them one at a time, to first explore the performativity of language as a means of illuminating how an explosion, which some commentators have read as performative, may be expected to disclose something. Then, in conversation with the discourse of speech acts, which owes its origins, in part, to theories of performative language, further elaborate the character of whatever such a performance discloses as speech.[127] A guiding question for this inquiry may be voiced as "How are things *said* by explosions?" meaning, what are the conditions of the possibility, and the character, of such acts as speech? And, as our investigation in the previous chapter raises, how can such a thing as an explosion be thought to "say something," yet may yield such multiplicity of interpretation in terms of its disclosure?

Any exploration of performative speech should acknowledge J.L. Austin as an important touchstone. The analysis of a kind of language that performs an action when it is uttered is

[127] See, for example, Pattwell, Mitman, and Douglas, "Terrorism as Failed Political Communication," in *International Journal of Communication* 9 (2015), 1120-1139 and James McClenon, "Terrorism As Persuasion: Possibilities and Trends," *Sociological Focus* 21.1 (January 1988), 53-66.

Extant scholarship on the performative character of terrorism rarely distinguishes "performative acts" from "speech acts."

perhaps Austin's best-known contribution to the study of language. His most familiar work is compiled in the edited collection of his lectures titled *How To Do Things With Words*. Austin's initial project is to describe a class of utterance that *performs* an action rather than simply *reports* it. The latter is the case in what he calls "constative" language. In other words, the mere utterance of a "performative" actually makes an event happen—*e.g.* a judge sentencing a convicted person, or the christening of a ship.

Austin's effort to outline the general contours of such performative utterances succeeds, while his overall project of drawing clear formal distinctions between performatives and other kinds of utterances is admittedly unsuccessful.[128] Ultimately, he abandons the binary analytical frame of performative/constative language because he recognizes that all manner of linguistic formulations can be, to some degree, performative and the necessary condition that the utterance makes something happen is highly contingent.[129] But before he jettisons the initial binary, Austin identifies some useful characteristics that allow utterances to either come off successfully or not,

[128] John Searle points out that Austin's claim of being able to list over 1,000 such performative verbs is dubious because, he argues, that Austin includes words that aren't actually uttered as part of the action, *i.e.* "threaten" or "insult." As in the fact that nobody says "I threaten you" or "I insult you."

[129] Shoshana Felman and Barbara Johnson independently echo this point. Felman writes, for example, "For although linguistic criteria that might formalize the distinction do exist, they prove to be neither exhaustive nor at all absolute. The principle grammatical criterion is the asymmetry that occurs, in certain verbs (henceforth recognized as 'performative verbs'), between the first person of the present indicative, active voice, and the other persons and tenses of the verb: whereas the first person, by uttering the verb in the present tense, effectively carries out the designated act … But this criterion is insufficient, for we find other expressions that do not include an explicit performative verb and yet still belong to the category of the performative because they too accomplish an action and lie outside the reach of the truth/falsity criterion" (Felman 7). Johnson's discussion can be found in: Barbara Johnson, "Poetry and Performative Language," *Yale French Studies* 54, (1977).

which he terms *felicitous* or *infelicitous*. This is a way of characterizing the circumstances that can make the performative utterance effectively carry out the speaker's intention.[130]

To be sure, there are specific exclusions from Austin's field of view. He is explicitly not interested in poetic language in these initial discussions of performatives—something for which other scholars, including Barbara Johnson and Shoshana Felman, have taken him to task. He does not, in any way, that I am aware of, take up the question of terrorism as an act of speech. So why would it be of interest to think through a terrorist explosion in terms of performative speech? Is this even the proper jurisdiction, so to speak? I would argue that Austin's elucidation of two key aspects of performatives, their felicity/infelicity and truth/falsity, prove insightful in understanding the structure of how forceful acts of disclosure can work, or more appropriately, how they fail. I will not here argue that terror bombings are performative acts of speech as they are understood within the current traditions of Speech Act theory.[131] I have already discussed, specifically, that terror bombings fail to successfully complete their intended disclosure, but I have yet to establish the structure and mechanism of that disclosure in any real detail—something I intend to begin to do here by interlocution with the traditions of performative speech and Speech Act Theory. Since these two related traditions are among the most detailed accounts

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[130] Felman, in her comparative reading of Mallarme's *Don Juan* against Austin finds that the fundamental gesture of both "consists in substituting, with respect to utterances of the language, the criterion of *satisfaction* for the criterion of *truth*" (her emphasis, 41). This is true in both the subject of Austin's research—the performative speech act—and also in the Austinian research project as a whole. She sees Austin's acknowledgement that his initial attempts are "unremunerative" to be "subversive of the very opposition that it institutes and that constitutes it, subversive then, in the last analysis, of the constative authority of language" (46). The Austinian project "does not manage to eliminate the scandal of failures, of misfires," something that Benveniste will be uncomfortable with and try to rectify" (46).

[131] See Pattwell *et al* for an example of an application of Speech Act theory to terrorist "communication."

of language that "acts," they offer analytical tools that can be put to work effectively to our end.[132]

In that spirit, I would submit, as a starting point for analysis, that one possible way to read a terror explosion would be to borrow Austin and Émile Benveniste's understanding of performative utterances, which is to say that a performative functionally names its task (e.g. *You are hereby [sentenced] to 20 years in prison*).[133] Since terror attacks are extra-lingual, however, one could only hypothesize that such an act initially "says" a number of things, including, "You are hereby [terrorized]," or "You are hereby [bombed]," to whatever audience and for whatever purpose. More accurately, based on the Boston Marathon Bombing witness accounts, there are an interwoven matrix of statements and the speaker is not immediately identified, which puts the question of intentionality at some remove. The temporality of any "statement" creates proliferating sites of utterance.

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[132] We should bear in mind that, as noted by Mary Louise Pratt in "Ideology and Speech-Act Theory," which appeared in *Poetics Today* 7.1 (1986), pp.59-72, Speech Act theory, writ large, moved in the direction of analytical philosophy and focused on propositions (she references Bertrand Russel for example). Here I intend to return to the initiating moment in Austin because I think there are valuable insights to be gained. In other words, the trajectory of the theoretical inquiry (as Pratt incisively points out) moved afield of what she considers to be a good theory because it came to describe too many features in negative constructs or as unconventional speech-acts, *i.e.* fiction, and any format in which the speakers were other than rational and cooperative. Pratt also points out that the speech act tradition is founded on the faulty assumption of a one-to-one interaction as the basic unit of analysis—a critique that Searle seems to have acknowledged in his later theorizing of the social import of language (see Searle's "What is Language? Some preliminary remarks" for an example). In our particular application, we leave the question of such theoretical foundations very much open and ask instead whether Austin's insights illuminate new facets of the terror bombing as disclosure while acknowledging a plurality of audiences.

[133] The verb voices the action but also names the performative. "Promise," for example, is the name of the performative and the verb (See lecture series given by J.L. Austin in Sweden, (October 2, 1959), part 1, *YouTube*, Harvard Philosophy Department, 23:51.

Interrogating such statements in light of the analysis of the witness accounts offered in the previous chapter, then, should direct us first to Austin's discussion of performative utterances that tend to fail or to not fully "come off."[134] Such tendencies become even more discernable in his analysis of explicit and implicit formulae of performatives, which is ultimately where his efforts to distinguish performatives from constatives fallows. He notes, for example, that explicit performatives generally include a verb in the first person singular (or impersonal third), present indicative, active voice which possesses 'an asymmetry of a systematic kind [with respect to] other persons and tenses of the *very same word*" (*e.g.* "I order you to shut the door").[135]

Implicit performatives, in contrast, can take the form of commands (*e.g.* "Shut the door"). They are also commonly used in passive voice constructions that, Austin suggests, can frequently be recognized by testing to see if the word "hereby" can be successfully added into the construction, a formulation that appears often in legalese, as in the second person passive indicative phrase "you are hereby warned…"[136] The implicit forms are highly contextual, and I would emphasize, may have less to do with a particular syntax and more to do with contingency and context. I would add to this the specific (if neglected by Austin) contextual elements of

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[134] While it could certainly be argued that a terror bombing succeeds as a performative act in the manner that it commands an audience "[You] hereby feel terror," we have yet to unearth "terror" as an experience, as we will in subsequent chapters. Counting it as a success in this manner would indicate that the terrorist's whole disclosure has been fully discharged by prompting the experience of terror, rather than prompting such terror to a particular disclosive end. In other words, such a framework falls flat when compared to the phenomenon as it actually appears (the pattern that I proposed as an archetype in the previous chapter). The pattern I have outlined suggests that the terror bombings are construed by the terrorist as a way of telling or saying something that is either appended to or constitutive of the act of bombing. In fact, as I have noted, there is also a correlated expectation of such a disclosure in the various witnessing publics.

[135] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975) 63. Brackets added by Barbara Johnson.

[136] This material comes from Austin's October 2, 1959 lecture.

gesture and sense, by way of reminding us that there are elements proper to everyday language that are co-constitutive of speech along with utterances.

Thinking along with Austin, the sort of performative truncating that occurs between explicit and implicit performatives and is increasingly context-dependent can be illustrated by the sentence "I order you to close the door," which can be shortened to the command "Close the door," which can be further shortened to a one-word directive, "Door."[137] The recognition that, depending on the context, any of these forms could effectively function as a successful performative utterance leads Austin to acknowledge that the longer, more explicit, "preferred standard forms" of performatives are not a necessary condition for the construction of successful performatives. In fact, he finds,

> Any utterance at all is apt to be made into the issuance of a warning or a threat or an order simply by our issuing it in a certain tone of voice or accompanying it by a certain gesture. Or even more simply still, simply by virtue of the circumstances in which it was issued being what they are.[138] [139]

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[137] Austin, (26:50).

Austin uses the word "bull" as it is written on a warning sign in a field to show that it is performing the act of warning people about a bull.

[138] Both Johnson and Felman note that Austin changes the direction of his inquiry after reaching an impasse in finding specifically linguistic criterion with which to identify performatives. Felman observes: "If this logic is followed, imperatives can be seen as truncated performatives, thus naturally demonstrating that there are a whole class of implicit performatives in addition to the explicit performatives. The addition of implicit performatives, however, 'makes it difficult to find any sentence that would not fall into this category'" (Felman 8, quoting Austin).
[139] Searle later recategorizes several of these features into five general categories of speech acts: 1. Assertives, including statements, assertions are expressions of beliefs and are supposed, like beliefs, to represent how the world is and thus they have the *word-to-world* direction of fit; 2. Directives: including requests, orders, commands, are expressions of desires and so have the *world-to-word* direction of fit; 3. Commisives, including promises, offers, are expressions of intention and so have the *world-to-word* direction of fit (180); 4. Expressives, including regret and gratitude, are expressed in their performance. They are forms of desire based on the presupposition of the truth of the belief (181); 5. Declarations, speech acts that makes something the case by declaring it to be the case, *e.g.* adjourning a meeting. Of these, his category

The way Austin thinks about gesture, however, varies a little here. He seems to differentiate initially between gesture and utterance, particularly when he specifies that such a threat can be "accompanied" by a "certain gesture."[140] Yet his thinking, in this excerpt, ends on the recognition that the circumstances alone are sufficient to render the threat performative. It could be inferred from this subtle recognition, I would argue, that the necessity of explicit verbalizations has an asymptotic relationship with the foregrounding of contextual significances. In other words, there are situations in which the context is sufficiently rich that performative utterances can be highly truncated yet remain effective and forceful. Considered practically, this means that the assumption of an identifiable distinction between the lexical and gestural aspects of a disclosure is ultimately unsustainable.[141]

What is at stake then with such truncations is not their status as performatives, but the disclosure's precision. The explicit formulae make an utterance more precise, Austin argues. The "more primitive" forms of these expressions are "equally performative" but "will be vaguer, not necessarily in a derogative sense, but still vaguer." Austin speculates that the longer, more explicit formulae are attributable to the evolution of the forms of society and the need for language to keep pace with society's increasing complexity. With more complexity comes "different forms of

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"declarations" has the most in common with many of Austin's examples of performatives (*i.e.* christening of a ship, a judge sentencing a convicted person). This category, according to Searle, has "no echo in prelinguistic thought" (181). The present example "I order you to close the door," is a better fit for the category of directives. See: Searle, "What is Language? Some Preliminary Remarks."

[140] Searle opts for using the word "token" as a complement to "utterance" (188). This word would seem to encompass spoken, written, gestural, and other possible forms of utterance.

[141] I resist using the word "semantic" here, though I will use it later, and opt instead for gestural to highlight the possibility of a disclosure effectively occurring without lexical content.

juristic and other acts [that] will need to be carefully and precisely distinguished… and this demands the invention of explicit performative formulae."[142]

There is an attractive kernel in this idea that would seem to describe, for example, the brute force of a person in power ordering a subordinate to close the door by nodding and issuing the curt utterance "Door," or merely nodding. In such an example, let us say, in the office of a corporate CEO, one could hypothesize that there is an oversaturated contingency of signification at play that signals the speaker has dispensed with institutionally circumscribed power (which, according to Austin's theory, would normally yield a formal and explicit performative construction) and has pivoted to a more rudimentary, if ambiguous, exercise of power. To say it another way, in such a situation, the CEO drops the formal explicit constructions that would be "appropriate" to their role, *i.e.* within the boundaries of corporate legal liability, to signal to an employee that the speaker has power that transcends such conventional limits. It is a display of power that carries with it an existential threat for the employee both as an interpellated subject of labor (status as a worker) and ontologically (the threat of physical harm)—a show of brute force.

When considered in concert with the performative and communicative characteristics of terror bombings such as we previously discussed regarding the events of the Boston Marathon bombing, Austin's "probable conjecture" about late stage explicit formulae for performatives is provocative. What it would suggest is that bombing as a performative speech act or, as I have

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[142] Austin, (29:00).

Searle amends Austin's speculation to make an argument for such explicit performatives as essentially representing the major distinguishing feature of human languages over prelinguistic or animal languages. He argues that "In human languages we have the capacity, not only to represent reality, both how it is and how we want to make it be, but we have the capacity to create a new reality by representing that reality as existing. We create private property: money, property, government, marriage, and a thousand other such phenomena by representing these phenomena as existing" (198).

been referring to it, a disclosure, (see introduction) should be among the most communicatively "primitive" and "vague," if not altogether infelicitous to begin with. On the spectrum of context-dependent and lexically-dependent, it would clearly occupy a position at the limit of the context-dependent scale. The attendant vagueness could be another way of describing what we have thus far referred to as inchoate communication. In other words, the communicative disclosure could actually be complete, but its rendering remains so vague that it carries a meaning that is not immediately (if ever) discernable.[143]

An Unhappy Performance

Yet the question of infelicity embedded in the above "if" statement—*if* terror bombings are not altogether infelicitous to begin with—is no small item and is worth working through before proceeding to analyze the relative completeness or discernibility of bombing as a performative speech act. To phrase this as a question: If terror bombings are indeed a disclosure vis-a-vis performative speech act, are they capable of "coming off" successfully *qua* performative? If not, then perhaps we have identified a fundamental character in bombings that summarily nullifies any applicability of Austin's analysis and requires that we change the path of inquiry altogether.

The most universal criterion Austin lays out for performative utterances is that, in order to come off successfully, they must be "issued in the right circumstances."[144] A true performative

[143] This characterization also resonates beyond the context of a terror bombing in the far less catastrophic scenario we outlined earlier in which a corporate CEO issues an imperative with a tacit existential threat underlying it. In such a case, the rendering of the performative threat is intentionally vague, yet is still forceful. In other words, it is characteristically vague ("Door") to keep the threat simultaneously plausibly deniable and still threatening.

[144] Austin, *Sweden Lectures*, 9:20.

utterance precludes its being issued "under duress, or by accident, or owing to this or that variety of mistake, say, or otherwise unintentionally."[145] Austin seems to be discussing both the circumstances of the speaker and the audience here, but these criteria seem especially applicable to the person actually performing the utterance (*e.g.* that the speaker is not being forced to speak, or accidentally speaks).[146] In our application, the circumstances seem adequate for the issuance of a performative as the Boston Marathon bombers, for all intents and purposes, seemed to be acting by their own volition and certainly not by accident or mistake.[147] The circumstances were planned and public.

Beyond these broad considerations, Austin identifies what he thinks are the most characteristic infelicities (acknowledging that there are many possible others). Ultimately, he elucidates the ways in which performatives can fail if they are offered disingenuously (insincerely), nonsensically, are self-contradictory, or are void for other reasons. It is worthwhile comparing these infelicities against the terror bombing exemplar to see what additional contextual facets they illuminate.

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[145] Austin, *How to do things…*, (21).

[146] A note about methodology: Searle and others have taken to this kind of stipulating as a way of sidelining critics who would derail the conversation he wants to have about everyday language. It is clear from the attention Searle pays to such caveats that he anticipates all manner of objections seeking to show inconsistencies in his definitions or examples. Both Austin and Searle explicitly address the notion that there is value in drawing synthetic patterns from idealizations, even if such generalizations do not neatly apply to all cases at all times. For our inquiry, however, the caveats themselves are actually rather illuminating because our aim is to describe a limit case. Such stipulations open up a space for better understanding why and how the limit case necessarily differs from a mainline generic case.

[147] Indeed, there is evidence in court documents, journalistic interviews, and the utterances of the bombers themselves to support the fact that they perpetrated the bombing willingly. One could imagine a situation in which a person was forced to perpetrate a bombing or act of terror. While this would be worthy of exploration, it is tangential to the exemplar we're exploring here.

Disingenuous / Insincere

Austin observes that when someone utters a performative insincerely the form of the utterance has been "abused." It is not simply void in the manner of an on/off switch (valid/void), as might be expected. Austin leaves the measure of such abuse somewhat ambiguous, but characterizes the aggrieved utterance as a verbal formula that has been "used contrary to the intention of those who invented it."[148] To be sure, the "those" to whom the invention of the phrase is attributed must be a mere playful turn of phrase because it does not carry a specific analytical value—there are no specific individuals we can identify to better understand the salient associated conventions. Nevertheless, in keeping with the spirit of Austin's description of insincerity as an infelicity, this notion of insincerity offers a fairly clear illustration of the generalized public and conventional nature of performative speech. In other words, there is a particular *way* to use performative language, and that way necessitates sincerity.[149] A normative structure may even provide some manner of sanction against those who abuse performative

[148] Austin, *Sweden Lectures*, 13:50.

[149] Searle updates this, taking into account an objection from Strawson, to say that such sincerity is a form of "taking responsibility" for the promise (see: *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1969). In fact, he later expands the idea to account for a critical form of commitment that embodies the essence of performative speech acts. He describes, this form of speech act is "more than just the expression of an intention or the expression of a belief. It is above all a public performance…I am not just telling him that I have a belief or that I have an intention; I am telling him something about the world represented by those beliefs and intentions. By committing myself to the conditions of satisfaction of the belief I am telling him that this is how the world is, by telling him about the conditions of satisfaction of my intention I am telling him what I am actually going to do… I do not just promise to do something, but in so doing, I promise to *do* it because I *promised* to do it" (196).

speech (*e.g.* someone is viewed as no longer trustworthy because they have made too many broken promises).[150]

It is worth attending to Austin's extended explanation of insincerity because he identifies a particular affective response to such abuse. In stating or asserting something, Austin argues, there is a promise operative, albeit tacitly, that the discourse will follow a shared set of beliefs and procedures. These beliefs and procedures are not only applicable in the linguistic register but also are binding for other actions.

> If we don't hold beliefs or have intentions consonant with the content of our actions then there is [in the] exact same way, in either case, insincerity and abuse of procedure. If we actually announce that we do not have the requisite beliefs or intentions in the very same breath as we purport to assert or purport to promise, then there is a kind of self-stultification which gives rise to our feeling of outrage. [The] feeling of outrage in the "cat is on the mat, and I do not believe it is," is in my mind identical with the feeling of outrage when somebody says "I promise to be there tomorrow, and I have no intention of being there tomorrow.[151]

Austin's use of the word "outrage" here identifies, I would argue, the affective corollary to the form of transgression in a language game that threatens the very existence of the game.[152] To be

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[150] This idea has corollaries with other models of discourse. Habermas sees a form of sincerity as necessary to any communicative speech situation. Lyotard accounts for ruses in language games in which a movement outside of the established rules of a game can change the game, but a form of sincerity is necessary to play any such game. Insincerity threatens the validity and, for all intents and purposes, the existence of a particular language game. Searle sees the entering of particular language games as including a tacit "sincerity promise."

[151] Austin, *Sweden Lectures,* (41:53).

[152] For Lyotard, the transgression of a game's rules can constitute either a failure to play that game or the setting up of a new game. The games are incommensurable. If a transgression threatens the ability of one of the parties to play the game (or the existence of the game itself) it is terroristic. Similarly, if a player is merely using the other player as a means in another language game, that is terroristic. These forms of terrorism, I would argue, evoke outrage. As Samuel Weber captures in the afterward of *Just Gaming*, Lyotard's distinction is that "It is thus necessary

sure, outrage is associated with a terroristic threat; it is also the feeling of the aggrieved after a terror event. In both cases, following Jean-François Lyotard, there is the shared recognition that one of the players in the game, by failing to adhere to the prescribed rules of the game—a form of insincere play—is threatening the whole game. But the character of this terror-inspired outrage differs somewhat from the outrage felt by the mere recognition of insincerity, as I will subsequently argue, because acts of terror have a specific existential valence that transcends (or encompasses) all games. Such a transcendental character can be better understood by exhuming the genealogy of the concept "terror," as I will show in a later chapter.

For now, however, it is worth simply noting that sincerity arises among the questions prompted by a terror bombing.[153] This kind of sincerity, however, is not of the same order as Austin's example, in which a speaker promises to be somewhere and in the same breath declares that they have no intention of being there. On first blush the question of sincerity regarding a bombing seems almost nonsensical, particularly before dimensions of the act's political intentionality are understood. How can an exploded bomb be insincere or disingenuous? The bomb's explosion is neither properly sincere nor insincere. Per the earlier discussion of the epistemology of a bomb, however, it is clear that the bomb itself is a proxy for value associations, perhaps even including sincerity. The presence of a bomb in an otherwise everyday context

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to be able to distinguish between [*trancher entre*] the violence of the imagination, which produces not only new moves, situated 'at the limits of what the rules permit,' but also engenders 'new rules and therefore new games'—it is necessary to be able to distinguish between this violence, in some way legitimate and necessary, and 'terror' described as the attempt to reduce the multiplicity of the games or players through exclusion or domination" (Weber's afterward to *Just Gaming*, 103)

[153] Is it even possible to have an insincere terror bombing? What does one make of the dozens of "joke" bomb threats that have made headlines in recent years in which someone, often a school age child, calls in a bomb threat to authorities? Aren't these the true "insincere" speech acts? Literature, on the other hand, is often intentionally insincere.

triggers an investigation into associated value claims. In the immediate aftermath of such events, however, there is often a debate over the possibility of the incident as a "false flag" attack, in which the actors perpetrate violence on members of their own group for some political end under the guise of enemy aggression—*e.g.* the persistent discourse about the September 11, 2001 attacks actually being an "inside job" coordinated by the U.S. Government in the service of foreign and domestic policy agendas.

To return to the question at hand, we can ask in light of Austin whether a terror bombing, as a performative speech act is rendered infelicitous because it is read as insincerely abiding by the conventions of social discourse. This would be along the order of Jürgen Habermas' context for Communicative Action, in which moral consciousness can be effectively discussed only under specific conditions.[154] A breach of such conditions would essentially invalidate any disclosure meant as a validity claim (*i.e.* a terrorist makes an argument for a change in the moral status quo), or at least would violate the structure of action that is "oriented toward reaching understanding."[155] In short, this form of insincerity is a type of coercion.[156] In fact, in Habermas' model, the terrorist is doubly removed from his or her ability to effectively disclose something meant as a validity claim (i.e. a white supremacy motivated bombing) because this violates the precondition of a " 'real' process of argumentation in which the individuals

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[154] See: Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

[155] Ibid., 19.

[156] Habermas sees "everyday communication" as an alternative to coercive actions. It "makes possible a kind of understanding that is based on claims to validity and thus furnishes the only real alternative to exerting influence on one another in more or less coercive ways." He sees this view as the fusion of the pragmatist and hermeneutic perspectives. "The validity claims that we raise in conversation—that is, when we say something with conviction—transcend this specific conversational context, pointing to something beyond the spatiotemporal ambit of the occasion" (19).

concerned cooperate" and part and parcel to that cooperation is the lack of coercion, which facilitates a "reflexive attitude with the aim or restoring consensus."[157]

Such insincerity would be evidenced by the bombing's provocation of feelings of outrage. Yet, while the question of sincerity is certainly salient to the overall characterization of the terroristic event, particularly in terms of its political and historical rendering, the present inquiry has already established that there is an associated notion of responsibility that such a bombing carries, whether it is an accident, an act of terror, or a "false flag" attack. To be sure, regardless of the mental commitment of the bomber, the character of such events is such that sincerity is ascribed to the act long before further information about motive is even available. In other words, the bombing is necessarily "sincere" because the bomb has already exploded, the performative enacted.[158] In the case of a "false flag," there is no real question about the sincerity of the bombing, just the political and social faults at play.[159] Similarly, the bomb of a "practical joker" would be no less sincere than a terrorist's bomb. In short, the performative character of the explosion is not inhibited by the infelicity of insincerity.

Nonsensical

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[157] Ibid., 67.

[158] It is in the already enacted explosion that Searle's understanding of commitment is provocative. I would argue that terror attacks publicly signal a sort of commitment in the way that performative utterances do. The question remains, however, whether such acts map onto prelinguistic forms of intentionality, as Searle claims other forms of speech acts do (with the important exception of declarations, which he believes are of specifically linguistic origin).

[159] Which, of course, does not preclude the ascription of insincerity, it is the political act in the service of which the bombing was the implement. The scandal of the "false flag" attack, for example, is precisely its insincerity. Just as the scandal of terrorism is its taboo or bluff. See, for example, Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: the follies, fables, and faces of terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

As Austin illuminates in his discussion of insincere performatives, a related infelicitous construction is one in which the verbal statement simply does not compute with the hearer. A random assortment of sounds, for example, that offers no discernable organization or relation to present circumstances, could be considered nonsensical. Yet, the notion of "nonsense" is clearly more complicated than the lay connotation may suggest. Considering our earlier exegesis of Austin's analysis regarding the arrangement of explicit performative utterances and gestural context on a kind of spectrum, I would argue that one key revelation is that the failure to follow conventional syntax, word choice, or even the complete absence of articulated words, would not necessarily constitute "non-sense." Indeed, it is conceivable that an apparently nonsensical string of sounds could still be mediated by gesture and an associated sense in such a way as to successfully carry off a performative speech act (*e.g.* our corporate CEO curtly utters an exasperated sequence of fricatives culminating in the pseudo-word "Floncus" and nods toward the door to signal "Close the door").[160]

The rub, for our purposes, really hinges on the root "sense" of non-sense. This root provides some additional analytical traction. As we have laid out previously, "sense" is a way of naming the difference between the instrumentality of an utterance and the excess of its reception.[161] The combination of "non" and "sense" properly, would signify the absence of the

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[160] This sequence is notably "exasperated" because the CEO's body language can be read as well as, ostensibly, the predicating circumstances.

[161] OED defines "sense" as:
1. "a. the meaning of a more or less extended sequence of written or spoken words (as a sentence, passage, book, etc.). Also: any of the various meanings of such a sequence of words" and "b. The general or overall meaning of written or spoken words; the gist, tenor, or essence of a book, letter, conversation, etc."
2. Chiefly with preceding modifying adjective, as *literal*, *moral*, *spiritual*, etc. Any of the various distinct meanings of a word or passage of the Bible. Also occasionally in extended use with reference to any text, verse, etc. Now chiefly *hist.* According to the principles of patristic exegesis, the Bible was interpreted as having a deeper or spiritual sense in addition to its literal sense. From

attendant character of language that actualizes the utterance above its rudimentary instrumentality. This is crucial to our exploration of terror bombing. As we have seen, such acts are interpreted in large part by their attendant sense because there is essentially no lexical material to interpret.

Interestingly, in the context of a terror attack, the descriptor "senseless" is often used, particularly in the phrase "senseless violence." This phrase, too, is about the sense such an attack inspires rather than its literal lack of sense in the way "non-sense" tends to be understood. Used in a strict fashion, the descriptor would describe a kind of violence that is so random and unexpected that it lacks any of the context generally provided by sense—a true random act of violence. Colloquially, however, the phrase "senseless violence" is not used in this way. It is used to describe a violent event that is particularly surprising, shocking, or egregious and attackers motivated by especially non-normative values.[162] As Bruce Hoffman has aptly summed it, despite many differences "all terrorist groups have one trait in common: they do not commit actions

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the 5th cent. onwards in the West this approach was elaborated into the doctrine of the four senses: *literal*, *spiritual*, *moral*, and *anagogic* (other terms are also used). This method of interpretation was criticized in the Renaissance and Reformation, but has found favour again since the latter half of the 20th cent.
3. The meaning intended or conveyed by a writer or speaker; the meaning, substance, or import of the writing or speech of a particular person. *Obsolete*.
a. The meaning of a written or spoken word, compound, or short phrase. Also: any of the various meanings of a word or short phrase; the meaning of a word in a particular collocation or context. In later use frequently with preceding adjective, as *modern*, *exact*, *general*, etc.

[162] "Ban calls Boston marathon bombing 'senseless, appalling' act." on UN News. (April 15, 2013.)

In a 15 April 2013 address, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the Boston Marathon bombing and its "senseless violence… all the more appalling for taking place at an event renowned for bringing people together from around the world in a spirit of sportsmanship and harmony."

randomly or senselessly."[163] To say it another way, a terror bombing relies on "sense" for its effect—once again, one aspect of its sense is to posture as the harbinger of open violence.

For example, within minutes of the explosions at the Boston Marathon, witnesses at the finish line and news organizations were beginning to fit the explosions into a pattern recognizable as terrorism. The sense that they began to ascribe to the act was one of aggression and conflicting socio-political values. The precise axis of opposition was unknown, but the bombs initiated a search for the meaning intended by the perpetrators, which was assumed to be the true "sense" of the act. The most proximate witnesses, too, experienced an abundance of sense—the event was supersaturated with sense. Such an act is quite different from an act of truly "senseless" violence, even while its contingent ambiguities keep the specific disclosure intended by the bombers obscure. Here again, regardless of the way in which the word "sense" is qualified, it is clear that the performative act of a terror bombing is not made infelicitous because it is nonsensical. In fact, it is quite the opposite. If anything, such acts rely profoundly on sense.

An objection could be raised here that just because such acts rely on sense doesn't necessarily mean that they are coming off sensibly or successfully. To which it would be important to recall that the witness accounts and, in another register, the journalistic accounts, are all working with a constellated and more or less identifiable notion of the sense of the event. This notion includes, for example, the non-everydayness of the explosion, its material force and intensity, its effect as evidenced by human physical and mental suffering. In other words, whether the event is initially received as a power transformer explosion or an act of terrorism, it already carries with it a sense of emergency, a physical sense of threat, an affective sublimity, and, I would add, a sense of attendant responsibility that motivates a search for the "Who" behind it. As

[163] Hoffman, 173.

we discussed previously, one can see evidence of the sense of such attacks as witnesses pivot to figurative language and other means of trying to articulate the felt sense of the experience. It appears, therefore, that there is ample evidence that such events have an abundance of sense, rather than constitute any sort of nonsense.

Self-contradictory

The notion of responsibility is particularly salient in understanding the dynamics of performative speech acts. Underlying many, if not all, forms of performatives is a set of tacit or explicit commitments, promises, or assurances that the speaker makes. Austin notes that in performatives, like in constatives, self-contradiction effectively undermines such commitments. He argues that performatives are susceptible to the infelicity of self-contradiction in essentially the same way as statements.[164] There is an expectation, he argues, that an assertion will commit the speaker to particular forms of behavior later on. The temporal aspect of this consideration, I would highlight, makes at least two subtle variations of self-contradiction possible. One occurs when within the original utterance there is an explicit contradiction—what philosophers like Searle might categorize as an analytical contradiction. The second is more closely dependent on future utterances and actions. Austin explains:

> We may regard the assertion, such as 'all men blush,' as committing us, once made, for the future in more or less stringent ways to certain behavior – more particularly and obviously, to certain behavior with respect to future utterances. If having said 'all men blush' I subsequently make assertions inconsistent with this

[164] Searle will later argue, as a way of integrating the objections of Austin's critics that performatives can still be statements. The more critical feature is that "the utterance creates desire-independent reasons for action, and these are then recognized by the collectivity" (198). At issue is that their truth value is summed up as "I believe this to be true," even while the utterance itself may have another explicit illocutionary effect.

> one, contradictory of it, then there is a breach of commitment at least comparable to that which occurs when having said 'I promise to do so and so,' I subsequently do not perform the thing or do something different. It seems to me that self-contradiction is simply one case which has deservedly been specially studied of breach of commitment.[165]

The point of note here is that there is a kind of commitment or promise operative that is perhaps even more rigorously policed than the tacit promise of "sincerity." Saying something or behaving in a way that is inconsistent with that promise creates a problem down the line. The temporality of this formulation begins with the initial utterance and binds subsequent utterances and behavior to it. In the context of a bombing as utterance, there could be myriad ways in which the subsequent behavior of the bombers or the responsible parties could apparently contradict the initial explosion—behavior that could, in Austin's conception, break the correlative promise.[166] But what is the promise? More violence? Is the binding "terror" of the bombing the threat of committing future bombings? Open violence? We must return to this question.[167]

One manner of self-contradiction along such lines could play out, for example, if a known perpetrator denies that they were responsible for the incident. In such a situation, what is at stake is not the bombing as performative act, which, in the manner of any completed performative utterance has already been enunciated, but the act's instrumentality as part of broader socio-

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[165] Austin, *Sweden Lectures*, 44:40.

[166] The "promise" of an utterance itself is a concept that has received more extensive analysis by, at various points, Felman and Johnson.

[167] Searle's speech act typology does not help much here. There is a way in which the terror bombing, as disclosive act, can be (and has been) conceived of as an assertive (expression or statement of belief), a directive (order or command as an expression of desire), a commissive (a promise of future violence), an expressive (akin to an animal growling to show aggression), and a declaration (a declaration of war on *e.g.* an imperialist nation).

political commitment *e.g.* the staging of a revolution. One simple example would be a scenario in which a terrorist group with a stated agenda perpetrates an act in furtherance of that agenda and then refuses to acknowledge that they are responsible for the act.[168]

There are potentially internal problems with this line of inquiry, however. The very effort to apply Austin's version of the self-contradictory infelicity to a bombing event, overdetermines the connection between bombing and a narrativized political agenda for such an act of terrorism. While I am not arguing that a terrorist act should be considered apolitically or without its attendant socio-political valence, which would be sort of nominal contradiction itself, I am suggesting that immediately assimilating the act into a discourse of global security and issues of the State risks begging the question of a terroristic telos.[169] Our present inquiry seeks to better understand the ontological disclosures at the heart of such acts. Did subsequent aspects of this bombing "utterance" contradict earlier aspects of this utterance? We can't be sure, because the fullness of any intended ontological disclosure eludes us, especially when we substitute the disclosure for an epistemological rendering of socio-political goals. We could, perhaps, search for inconsistencies in aspects of the utterance that we can roughly identify, *e.g.* inconsistent gestures or sense, but those registers, as we have discussed previously, are the workshop of inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities. Self-contradictions are constitutive of reception and

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[168] I am keeping this example necessarily vague and leave open, for now, the question of whether there is something self-contradictory or otherwise infelicitous in the structure of a terrorist attack in general. Such a question is slightly afield of our present inquiry but will be salient later as we explore whether there is not something structurally contradictory in perpetrating violence on a non-military or non-governmental target as a means of catalyzing a governmental or socio-political change.

[169] Zulaika and Douglass have more thoroughly articulated various discursive proclivities in the media, government, and broader culture that ultimately distort rather than clarify acts of terrorism.

recognition,[170] therefore, they offer little stable lexical material from which to identify analytical contradictions.

Be that as it may, there is an observable and understandable impulse to process such attacks by virtue of their relationship to other "utterances" in a larger socio-political narrative, particularly in the media. Often this means reporting on terrorist group statements, manifestos, propaganda, as well as previous attacks. In that vein, the notion of self-contradiction by virtue of its temporal considerations, unlike the previous two infelicities taken up by Austin, encourages a historical revision and narrative overwriting of the way the act was initially received by those most proximate.[171] In other words, the idea that the explosion was understood initially as a dropped dumpster is passed over and no longer the most salient organizing feature. These initial descriptions are dismissed, or are illegible, as naïve or ignorant in light of later significations. Kelly Oliver, by framing the work of Dori Laub, has illustrated such initial understandings are persistent and essential to being able to recognize and witness. They remain like pentimento in a painting. This, again, highlights the importance of exploring both the initial reception of the most proximate witnesses, as well as a simultaneous analyses of the media discourse. Taken by analogy with Austin's self-contradictory infelicity, I would argue that, to this point, there is no internal contradiction; there is instead a sort of narrative colonization.

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[170] See Kelly Oliver's insightful *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* for a fuller discussion of the often-contradictory character of reception and recognition.

[171] Interestingly, the idea that the explosion was read first as a dumpster being dropped and later as a terrorist bomb, does not appear to constitute self-contradiction. Such a read, one could suppose, would not be of the same order as the classic example of self-contradiction, "The cat is on the mat, but it is not." To constitute self-contradiction of this sort, the bombing as utterance would have to say something along the lines of, "Hereby feel terror, but do not."

From that perspective, the narrativized bombing—codified later as an act of terrorism—is the basis from which future actions may be judged contradictory. One specific venue for such adjudication is any subsequent criminal, journalistic, governmental, or pseudo-governmental investigation. As we have just suggested, however, these later explorations have practically pivoted to a different set of analytical considerations that put paradigmatic distance between the ontological concerns of the bombers, the experiences of the witnesses, and the understanding of broader publics. In short: terrorism begs for an unrequited investigation. I would argue that, properly, the infelicity of self-contradiction does not impinge on the bombing as a performative act until it has been flattened and consolidated as "terrorism" in a historical narrative. Even if the ontological disclosure, as I have discussed, remains inchoate, a performative utterance is not impeded because it is received in the epistemological register. People are successfully married, judged, nominated, and christened all the time without regard for their ontological status. Once the intention of the bombing is known to be terroristic in nature, however, a host of other possible contradictions are suddenly foregrounded.

There exists a much more limited set of possibilities for self-contradiction until such terroristic identification has occurred. The logic for such a contradiction would have to be a sort of bombing/non-bombing or bombing/un-bombing, which apropos of this discussion, would appear to be a contradiction in the "utterance" itself (*e.g.* "the cat is on the mat and it is not"). In simple terms, the contradiction would need to occur in a limited timeframe—one that ends before the act is fully assimilated into a grander socio-political narrative. A scenario could theoretically exist, for example, in which the perpetrator's political intentions were nullified by a logical contradiction internal to the performance itself.[172] Such a contradiction in behavior, has

[172] In a way, Don Delillo's 2007 novel *Falling Man* anticipates this. The performance artist who dangles from concealed restraints in public spaces echoing the photographed "falling man"

in other discourses, been associated with a form of madness, *a la* Michel Foucault's epistemological inquiry in *Madness and Civilization*.

One way of imagining such an internal contradiction would be to think of an act (of terror) that would seem to logically contradict the explicit aims of the actor. It would thus make the actions of the perpetrator interpretable as a kind of mad subject. A revolutionary who bombs a military target would not, in the abstract, be interpretable in this way. From an oblique angle, however, a suicide bombing could be said to fit this description. In such a case, the performative act negates any future acts from the same speaker. This sort of logic fits an epistemological characterization of madness *par excellence*. In fact, the self-contradiction then becomes the most salient feature of the performance. It is this very contradiction that renders the act so extreme, and also, as I will discuss in a later chapter, part of how Foucault's work can be made to account for the affective production of "terror." Yet, one biproduct of a suicide bombing is that it also accomplishes the near complete subjectification of the actor, effectively and preemptively shifting the public's interpretive schema from a search for a "who" to a search for a "what." In other words, through this lens, the self-contradiction appears to almost completely efface any ontological inquiry related to the actor. There is no longer the need for a wide-scale investigation into who the bomber was and what it was they were trying to disclose, although such investigations do take place in the name of State security. What remains salient is how those aspects reflect on a group, institution, or ideology that remains and to which the bomber was an interpellated subject.

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of the September 11, 2001 attacks at the World Trade Center is a kind of utterance (art piece or token) that un-does itself. It creates an event that intentionally creates a narrative that is ultimately contradicted by news reports and revealed as art.

To return for a moment to the question of sense and senseless violence, a perpetrator who is considered "mad" could, according to the prevailing norms that define madness in the West, be the only source of intentional (rather than accidental) senseless violence. In this, it is important to recall Foucault's elucidation of the outsized influence of capitalism on the interpretation of madness—that non-normative subjects who are unable to fit desired labor patterns of industrializing societies of the West were increasingly the subjects most susceptible to being marginalized and institutionalized as "mad." This particular style of interpellation complicates the picture of the perpetrator because it seems to suggest that anyone who acts to disrupt the capitalist enterprise through bombing is already interpreted as self-contradictory, thus mad.[173] Taken to the limit, this would once again suggest that a subject associated with the perpetration of a terrorist event would not be interpretable as anything else but mad—a foreclosure of any ontological concerns for that individual.

In effect, there are multiple ways in which any disclosure intended by the bomber, deploying a bombing as utterance, can be viewed as self-contradictory in an ontological register. The foregoing analysis highlights, however, that there are a host of epistemological interpretations that are ready substitutes for the ontological. The key general observation here remains that the initial act—the bombing—does not fail completely by what Austin describes as an infelicity of self-contradiction. It does, however, illustrate the propensity of a broader audience to pivot to an epistemological register. Such a register is structured by categorization and ruled

[173] There are additional complications inherent here, because this line of reasoning assumes that terror events are, in fact, detrimental to the capitalist enterprise, a conclusion that a mounting body of research questions. There are several inquiries that demonstrate that such attacks can actually be profitable, particularly in the development of a security state or in supporting the expansion of insurance/risk profit opportunities.

by norms. Such categorical and normative conventions also constitute the conditions for their own transgression, which is a fundamental part of the next infelicity.

Void

Of those that Austin takes up, the remaining infelicity is the speech act's validity and propriety. If the utterer is not the "fit and proper" person to carry out the performance, for example, or if the object is not the "fit and proper" object for the utterance to be performed upon, the performative is void. Merely by uttering the words, the utterer does not succeed in performing the act, they have only "gone through the form" of performing the act. This would be the case when a person tries to marry but is already married, or in the christening of a ship by someone other than the person appointed to carry it out.[174]

There is also a way in which the performative can be "void for want of reference," which has some affinity with the earlier discussion of self-contradiction. Such a situation arises, for example, if a person gifts a watch when they have no watch to give, Austin says. From this scenario, Austin describes that a performative utterance "presupposes the existence of the things referred to in it" in the same way that a statement does.[175]

Among all of the infelicities discussed here, an inquiry into whether a bombing is "void" from the outset is perhaps the most intriguing. Acts of terror would seem to be, by design, invalid and improper. The terrorist's subject position is precisely not the "fit and proper" perpetrator of

[174] The word "ritual" comes to mind here because of the thickened rules of proper procedure. These rituals, however, have often been codified in law, but that is not a necessary prerequisite.

[175] Austin, *Sweden Lectures*, 40:12.

violence.[176] The acts of terror, however, still "go through the form" of a performative. The terrorist positionality is what makes the person identified in that role a "terrorist" rather than a sovereign actor who has the authority to perpetrate violence at its discretion (*i.e.* the Sovereign or a nation state under particular circumstances). Additionally, the object of the performative—here the unsuspecting Boston Marathon participants—is precisely not the "fit and proper" object of such an act (*i.e.* non-combatants). Yet, there is a whole tradition of theory, including the work of Foucault, that establishes that "fit and proper" is a determination made by dominant groups, which is to say that there is no objective corollary to such a designation, only a dynamic relationship of power. Such a tradition would lead us to believe, then, that there would be little likelihood of a permissible form of violence against any dominant interests. To say it another way, the forms of violence that are permissible are circumscribed by dominant institutions and their power.

There are layers of complication that become particularly apparent in Austin's observation that the mere utterance of the words, (or in this case, the exploded bomb), does not ensure the success of the performative, only that the actor has "gone through the form" of committing the act. This would seem to suggest that the bombing is merely a form (of violence, of disclosure) and, applying the Foucaldian insight, that the success of the performative may be voided by the subject's positionality. In other words, by virtue of their invalidity in terms of perpetrating violence, the "terrorists" as a subject position have something in common with the "madman."[177]

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[176] Taking a cue from Foucault, it would be the State or the sovereign that is the "fit and proper" perpetrator of violence.

[177] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

Yet it is not so clear, even then, that the performative has been fully voided. For Foucault, the discourse of madness in the West maintains a root in which madness, or folly, while denounced, "defends itself by claiming that it is closer to happiness and truth than reason."[178] In other words, terrorists, though marked by "madness," may through terroristic acts argue that their worldview is truer than reason.

Even this latter possibility, in a way, remains consonant with Austin. After all, to return to Austin's example, a person who is already married and who illegitimately marries again prompts a sense of outrage and sanction. If the prompting of such outrage is intentional, (*e.g.* the person's intentions are malicious) then some sort of act has succeeded but, to be sure, the performative "marriage," as speech act, has failed for lack of sincerity. In other words, the unit of analysis necessarily shifts when an alternative intention is identified. There is a way in which an act of terror, bombing or not, contains this sort of shifting of the unit of analysis. It puts in question what kind of speech act is operative. In the example of the bombing we have discussed, there is little doubt of the act's sincerity. There is also little doubt that one intended perlocutionary effect is to prompt outrage. The salient speech act, then, is precisely one that is sincerely intended to prompt outrage, and the "terrorist" is the categorical designation for the right and proper subject position for that act, regardless of its abhorrent moral valence.

In the limit case of terrorism, the tidy contrast between successful and unsuccessful performatives itself becomes rather nebulous because of the question of salience. According to

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There are rings a disturbing resonance with the Foucauldian conception of madness manifest in art. He identifies the "ruse and new triumph of madness" as "the world that thought to measure and justify madness through psychology must justify itself before madness, since in its struggles and agonies it measures itself by the excess of works like those of Nietzsche, of Van Gogh, of Artaud. And nothing in itself, especially not what it can know of madness, assures the world that it is justified by such works of madness" (289).

[178] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 14.

Austin, when a performative has been uttered felicitously, it "takes effect," and "by this we don't mean that any actual events are brought about as consequences of the issuing of the utterance, we mean that as a result of the act having been performed, certain events in the future, if they occur, will be in order, and certain other events in the future, if they occur, will be out of order."[179] In the example of the successful christening of a ship, if anyone does refer to the ship by the name given, they will be "in order." If they refer to it using a different name, they will be "out of order." If a person makes a promise and in the future they carry out what they promise, they are "in order." If they fail to carry it out, they are "out of order." A failure in this respect constitutes a breach of commitment. It is "out of order" in view of the act successfully performed in the past.[180]

The bombing, as performative, I would argue, is the initial act upon which subsequent validity judgments are predicated. To be sure, the contemporary terrorist subject position is one that is at this point, by default, the fit and proper perpetrator of a genre of terroristic violence with specific and identifiable attributes, even if "terrorism" as such eludes a tidy definition. Consequently, by naming the subject position, a set of categorical conventions are codified for certain behaviors—narratives are reified through media and institutions are organized to investigate terror subject behavior, *i.e.* counter-terrorism units. In fact, the last several decades have seen terrorist groups assuming more overtly this subject position through their

[179] Austin, *Sweden Lectures*, 14:40-15:04.

[180] Searle refines this point and understands it to be central to the essence of the distinction between human language and *e.g.* animal languages. Humans are the kind of species that can "develop a set of devices, the production of which will be the imposition of conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction, *by convention*" (190). In other words, the creation of performatives is an additional layer removed from the production of language based on animal intentionality.

communication strategies and seeking to define or re-define their positionality. In short, as has been argued in many places, terrorism is a discursive activity.

Scholars of terrorism have identified a historical progression, most observable between the 1970s and the present that begins with the "Old Media's" indulgent behavior that capitalized on its ability to gain access to terrorists, which has since morphed into a "New Media" pattern of terrorists building sophisticated networks of communication and disseminating their own information.[181] In other words, terrorist groups now formally occupy a discursive position in the media landscape and can make the case that their performative (terroristic) act has "taken effect" and is "in order." Using this communicative position, "The insurgents' intent is to explain and legitimate their use of violence (employing theological arguments and treatises, for example, to differentiate between 'illicit terrorism' and 'licit terrorism' and thereby justify their attacks)."[182] To use Austin's example, this would be similar to someone marrying twice and then claiming the legitimacy of the second marriage by arguing for the validity of polygamy on theological grounds. One such attempt for validation was the paragraph-long manifesto written on the inside of a boat in Watertown in which Dzhokhar Tsarnaev hid during the manhunt that ensued after the Boston Marathon bombing. Tsarnaev claimed that the attack was in retaliation for the United States' actions against Muslims (this will be further discussed in subsequent chapters).

While there is something that remains "improper," not to mention egregious, about the terrorist subject position that we have yet to explore here, the mere presence of such a position is undeniable and suggests that terrorist acts are not properly void. Such acts, because they kill or threaten to kill from a position that is not validated by dominant power or sovereignty, create

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[181] As exemplified by the coverage of the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 by Lebanese Shi'a terrorists in 1985 – See discussion in Hoffman.

[182] Hoffman, 228.

outrage among dominant institutions yet remain at stake and subject to some degree of interpretation by others. In short, the act may be interpreted as void for certain audiences but not for others. If the act is later tied to a revolutionary struggle, for example, the interpretive frame can shift to support the terroristic act's validity, depending on the politics of its reception.[183] To say it another way, the validity of the performative is not void by default, but is eminently tied to the sway of power. There appear, then, to be two axes along which the validity of such acts are evaluated. The first is the act itself, the explosion, for which we have established that the status of "void" is essentially irrelevant. The second is the contingent interpretation of the validity of such acts as part of a larger socio-historical narrative, which clearly hinges on the judgement of the act as being what we might call "in the true," or outside of it.[184]

Truth and Falsity

The question of whether a bombing is inherently void as a performative, then, hinges on truth. Returning for a moment to Austin's initial inquiry, we are reminded that performatives often have the grammatical arrangement of statements, and that one traditional delineation of statements from other verbal formulations is the ability to judge them to be true or false. A parallel consideration regarding our own inquiry into the communicative value of terroristic acts would be worthwhile considering the generalized expectation that such acts are often "making a

[183] See for instance Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*. (New York: Verso, 2009).

[184] "In the true," by reference to Foucault, is a way of accounting a shifting locus of power and dominant epistemes that influence the interpretation of truth.

statement." In other words, it would help to understand more about how performative acts can be judged as true or false.[185]

Austin picks this up, to some extent, in his lectures and subsequent discussions. Performatives, in fact, are never false, according to Austin. They can be disingenuous or infelicitous in other ways, but it is "utterly nonsensical" to try to judge the utterance of an apology as false. Judging one "true" is somewhat more complicated. In general, the fact of the utterance's occurrence falls outside of this true/false evaluative schema. Our earlier analysis of the epistemology of terror bombings demonstrated a parallel scenario. While the motive of the bombing is at stake and may be subject to all sorts of value judgements, the fact of the explosion is neither properly true nor false. To suggest otherwise would be to speculate or to alter its emphasis.[186]

If performatives cannot be judged true or false, one might surmise that there would be an observable dichotomy between performative utterances and statements. Austin illustrates, however, that while performative utterances cannot be judged true/false, they are still subject to analogous "forms of appraisal" that make a clear dichotomy ultimately untenable.[187] I would argue that these analogous forms of appraisal are quite useful for the present inquiry.

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[185] Searle has argued that performatives, and numerous other syntactical formulations can be reformulated in a variety of ways to get at their "propositional content." For example, questions like "How do I get to the store?" are actually commands that say "Tell me how to get there." He also addresses, as discussed above, the classical distinction of statements as being judged true or false by arguing that there is an underlying commitment to the truthfulness of each utterance—statement or otherwise.

[186] This movement parallels Searle's concept of commitment. The explosion, as performative act, is "true" in the sense that the perpetrator is saying "I believe this to be true to such a degree as to take or threaten lives."

[187] Austin, *Sweden Lectures*, 50:30.

To illustrate his point, Austin offers the example of utterances such as "I advise you to do so and so" or "I warn you to do so and so." Aside from the questions of infelicity and sincerity, such statements often carry with them attendant questions of "whether the advice was good and justified advice, whether the warning was a justified warning, whether certain such another performative utterance was sound or fair and the like." In these questions Austin sees a "second dimension" in which an assessment or appraisal takes place. He observes that "We compare the utterance issued with certain facts—generally, I think, facts obtaining at the time of the issuing of the utterance but sometimes, additionally, facts that occurred subsequent to the issuing of the utterance." These facts are considered when a performative is judged to be "fair, or sound, or justifiable, or right, or correct, or so forth." Austin admits that the word "truth" is not used to identify the appraisal of the utterance, but a variety of other labels are used, which "have to do, in some way, with the confrontation of the performative utterance with facts."[188] The resultant appraisal in both constative and performative utterances is similar, yet the yield is highly varied. With performatives the yield is rarely a clear distinction between true and false, but rather a nuanced alignment of various elements of the utterance with fact.[189]

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[188] This confrontation with the facts, he thinks, "is enough to make it plausible that this kind of appraisal is something like the appraisal that we use in the case of statements when we confront them with facts—if we are still allowed to say this in our old-fashioned way—in deciding whether they are true or false" Austin, (55:00).

[189] Searle, following Frege, has generated a means of classifying by virtue of "direction of fit," as discussed above. Such factual alignment can be voiced as a "word-to-world" or "world-to-word" fit. The class of "declarations," which Searle sees as the true "performatives" that Austin initially sought to identify have a "double direction of fit, both *word-to-world* and *world-to-word*" in the same speech act. He clarifies that this double fit goes both ways at the same time, in for example, "the meeting is adjourned." This is among the most important powers of human language. It is "the power to create a reality by declaring it to exist" (184). He notes that "[Declarations] are performative utterances; and all performatives are declarations (though not all declarations are performatives). In these cases we have the double direction of fit, because we make something the case, and thus achieve the world-to-word direction of fit, by representing it as being the case, that is by representing it with the word-to-world direction of fit" (184).

To return to our inquiry regarding the pattern of terror bombings outlined earlier, such assessments appear to occur in several venues. While an explosion itself cannot be judged true/false, such acts beg for investigation. Thinking alongside Austin, such investigations, from a discursive perspective, prompt appraisals and confrontations with the facts of the situation. But, as the preceding discussion of infelicities would seem to suggest, the explosion is only rudimentary in its ability to communicate. It carries an ambiguous meaning accompanied by a sense that includes characteristic violence and terror that often (if not always) overshadows the nuanced process of aligning the utterance with facts.[190]

We learn from Austin, however, that such a loss of nuance does not necessarily preclude the success of an utterance. In fact, he cites a common situation in which a speaker distorts language in such a way that the nuance is intentionally sacrificed. Austin is recorded as briefly defending in his lectures a nebulous proposition that there is a sort of language he calls "rough, or ball-park description." Such language is neither properly true nor false. Austin characterizes it as a roughness that gets at something beyond the literal and conventional meanings of a set of words. Such language also makes space for exaggeration without any of the specific inaccuracies that occur in the utterance rendering it completely invalid.

For Austin, this sort of language is a "rough," "skewed," or "loose" manner of looking at the facts. The alternative would be a "black and white set of words" for true and false that ultimately obscures the "multiplicity of meaning" present in everyday language. This rough language is more than mere variation in phrasing or word choice, it is foundationally representative of a "multiplicity of relation to the facts" commonly recognized by speakers of a

[190] Even in the contemporary conceptualization of Speech Acts, such a terroristic disclosure seems to short-circuit Searle's typology, as referenced above. It can be viewed simultaneously as an assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and a declaration.

language and allowed for.[191] There is, he argues, a satisfactory roughness and an unsatisfactory roughness in language. Some exaggerations are a little too far outside of the facts.[192] The natural question extending from the present inquiry is whether violence is interpreted along a similar spectrum.

True and false aren't then "a couple of labels for two simple contradictory properties, one of which every statement possesses." Instead, Austin sees them as a "very abstract label for a whole dimension of assessment of these utterances exactly as we have in the case of the performatives." If the relation of statements to facts is explored earnestly, and not restricted to "assertions which are idiotically simple or ideally simple," then it becomes difficult to "disentangle some simple truth and simple falsity from considerations of what is fair, or equitable, or exaggerated, or precise, or general."[193]

For Austin, the question of an utterances' relation to facts demonstrates the inaccuracy of having two separate classes of utterance—constative and performative—because such a dichotomy ultimately elevates the status of statements to an "isolated preeminent place." Instead, Austin concludes that "What we want to realize is when I issue an utterance, there is always the question of what speech-act I was performing in issuing it."[194] Thus he resituates his inquiry to experiment with a tripartite analytical structure of speech acts that includes the *locutionary*,

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[191] Austin, *Sweden Lectures*, Part II, 36:35.

[192] In presenting this proposition in his lectures in Sweden, Austin met some resistance. A few attendees of the lectures insisted that such formulations were merely evidence of the imprecise use of language.

[193] Ibid., 1:00:00.

[194] Ibid., 1:00:40.

illocutionary, and the *perlocutionary*. These correspond to the sound/sense/reference, the intentional/conventional force, and the actual effect of the utterance, respectively.

Terroristic Poiesis

Austin's arrival at a concept of rough language is demonstrative of an utterance's contingent relation to facts that are constituted and interpretable *vis-a-vis* a set of latent or explicit conventions. The circuitous route of his inquiry is made all the more scenic by virtue of his self-imposed parameters and the tacit assumptions of the initial framework. As Barbara Johnson points out in one of her incisive critiques of Austin, perhaps the most troubling of all of the infelicities of speech acts, as Austin describes them, is the foreclosed status of everything that is essentially performative, *i.e.* poetry, theatre, jokes. In an effort to focus on a very specific subset of utterances, Austin excludes all of these so-called "parasitic" or non-"serious" forms of language.[195] Yet it seems to be precisely poetry, and other forms of "etiolation" (in Austin's words) that consistently preempt his inquiry.

[195] Austin is initially quite specific in his focus. In a footnote, he reminds the reader of certain forms of language that he is decidedly not focusing on: "we shall not always mention but must bear in mind the possibility of 'etiolation' as it occurs when we use speech in acting, fiction and poetry, quotation and recitation" (92). Such are situations in which "the normal conditions of reference may be suspended, or no attempt made at a standard perlocutionary act, no attempt to make you do anything, as Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar" (112). It is not difficult, however, to recognize that these so-called etiolations are at their foundation performative, *i.e.* acting, recitation, and in other places in the book, jokes. That list certainly includes fiction, poetry, and other inscribed (or transcribed) forms of language. Indeed, Austin's initial caveats allow him to focus analytical attention on performative formulations in language that may otherwise lay unexamined as minor artifacts scattered in the periphery of an *Ars Poetica*. By shifting his gaze and refusing to look at what Aristotle, Burke, Blackmur, and many others chose to explore in poetry itself, he rather foregrounds these everyday exemplars in his linguistic analysis. That said, his apparent dismissal of poetry and other more overtly performative modes as not "serious" doesn't do him any favors among his critics.

Johnson's critique shows that these forms of performative language are not actually "parasitic" except when thought of completely outside of their locutionary context, which is somewhat ironic because Austin uses precisely their context as a way of disqualifying them as un-serious. Instead, Johnson argues that a poem, such as Mallarme's *La Declaration foraine*, which chronicles the rather ambivalent recitation of a sonnet intended to appease, as much as seduce, a beloved, does not merely report on "some ideal and statuesque Concept, but [is] a function of a specific interlocutionary situation," a speech act, and it can be understood as generative rather than parasitic.[196]

I would note that one biproduct of her analysis is a set of insights for the consideration of terrorism as a disclosive act. Her work, in this instance, makes no such explicit connections to terror, yet there are resonances that are provocative when considered alongside our present inquiry. Specifically, Johnson opens up a much more inclusive conceptual field of performatives that disclose by virtue of the occasion of their creation. The two essential operative elements, she argues, are "audience and violence."[197] While the nature of this violence is somewhat ambiguous, it seems to describe the act of intentionally breaking silence with a disclosure—choosing (or not) to disclose.

She outlines the contours of modes of performance and speech that create *fictions* as a way of gesturing at a semantic meaning. I would argue that, like poetry, speech in a hyperbolic mood would fit this description; it is the creation of a fiction, in this case an exaggeration, that signals a transgression of norms intended to draw emphasis to the excessive character of an experience or disclosure. By extension, acts of terror, which are frequently characterized as hyperbolic, seem to

[196] Johnson, 142.

[197] Ibid, 143.

share this quality. They are associated with hyperbole, in part, because through spectacular violence they create the fiction of a coordinated, overwhelming, broadside attack—a fictional heralding of the onset of open violence.

Yet there is some further exegesis necessary regarding the status of *fiction* as it is used here. The idea of a real and material terroristic event somehow being characterized as a fiction is, of course, repellant. Yet, Johnson's analysis of the status of poetry helps us see that there are institutionalized, as well as individualized, fictions that precede and anticipate the communicative or disclosive aspects of acts of terror. Such fictions are structurally embedded in the intentionality of the act as well as its epistemologically framed reception. At base, she reminds us that creating a poem is a speech act that frames a disclosure within a particular mode of interpretation.[198] Where Austin elides poetry because it creates fictional worlds, Johnson recognizes that such worlds are no more contrived than the circumstances of the boardroom or the ceremony, *i.e.* the institutional fictions that constitute and structure social life.[199] In a way, this turns Austin's words back on himself. When Austin points out that a performative utterance "presupposes the existence of the things referred to in it" in the same way that a statement does, he is trying to show how felicitous performatives keep from being void for want of reference.[200] In Johnson's hands, however, she points out that a judge who sentences a convicted person is also validating the very institutional fiction that grants her the power to do so. In Mallarme's poem, Johnson

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[198] Choosing to write a poem, or in Johnson's *mis-en-abyme* example of the narrator in Mallarme's poem, the composing of a sonnet, is a speech act that already frames the message in a sensible framework, a framework for interpretation, it tells people that they should look for certain features. For example, poetic language can shift a tautological statement into something deeply meaningful, whereas the same phrase in a philosophical register would be dismissed as tautological.

[199] Johnson, 151.

[200] Austin, *Sweden Lectures*, 40:12.

argues, it is the occasion of the recitation or composition of the sonnet that discloses something about the relationship between the poet and the beloved.[201]

In terms of terrorism, we have mentioned but not yet extensively discussed, the various fictions undergirding the bomber's intentionality. We have explored the initial "sonic misunderstandings" of the witnesses, the personifications in the news media, the fiction of the "terrorist" as a subject position, and the various narratives that are ascribed to the act along the way, many of which turn out to be fictions. We have also pointed to several of the epistemological explanations, *i.e.* institutional fictions, that are mapped onto the explosion after the fact to assimilate it into socio-political discourse.[202] Johnson's analysis is particularly compelling when she argues that the performative "automatically fictionalizes its utterer when it makes him the mouthpiece of a conventionalized authority."[203]

This recognition resonates with another of Austin's quite useful and foundational observations that only people in specific subject positions can felicitously utter performatives that

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[201] Johnson, for example, heartily objects to Austin's sidelining of poetry. She argues that any class of language ostensibly described as "performative" in character, should include poetry. She recognizes in poetry a form of performative speech act *par excellence*, and she displays this through a reading of Mallarme's *La Declaration foraine*.[201] What Johnson's argument highlights in treating Mallarme's poem, which tells the story of a lover/poet composing a sonnet, is "the question of the poem's referentiality" (142). Though the beloved's hair would seem to occupy the position of a symbol, "whatever may be said about the lady's flaming mane, it is not the hair or any of its symbolic substitutes which is being discussed in the concluding dialogue of the piece, but rather the conditions of possibility of the emission and reception of the sonnet itself" (Johnson 142).

[202] For an extensive discussion of the interplay of fiction and other narratives, see Zulaika and Douglass' *Terror and Taboo.*

[203] Johnson, 151.

Johsnon offers a tidy synopsis: "Behind the fiction of the subject stands the fiction of Society, for if one states that Society began with a prohibition (of incest) or a (social) contract, one is simply stating that the origin of the authority behind a performative utterance is derived from a previous performative utterance whose ultimate origin is undeterminable" (151).

"come off," providing they are in the appropriate social contexts (or fictions, in Johnson's parlance). In other words, the poet *qua* poet is the fit and proper subject position for the performance of poetry in the poetic mood. This sentence surely sounds rather silly and tautological except as a way of understanding why poetry's perlocutionary effect can yield such gravitas, pathos, humor, because the reader adopts a disposition that is attendant to such evocations. It also explains why poetry can be un-serious, self-contradictory or otherwise infelicitous, by Austin's standards, yet resonate profoundly with truths of human existence.[204] In other words, there is a way in which poetry, from the outset, shifts the interpretive register and signals such a shift to the reader. This modulation and its constitutive disclosures are both aspects of the poem as speech act.

While I hold open, for now, the extent to which "terror" or "terrorism" can also function as an interpretive register, we have already established that, following the explosion, aspects of the act's intentionality are quantized to fit epistemologically framed questions about conventional subject positions, *i.e.* "the terrorist," and how this may obscure or exclude the *fictions* that voice the ontological motivations or intentions of the bomber.[205] Among the questions this precipitates is "Was the person responsible for this bombing the fit and proper *performer* or *actor* of violence?

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[204] By extension, this leads to the uncomfortable association of the terrorist with the poet. The terrorist, as we have identified, is the subject position associated with spectacular forms of violence that perform "terror," yet fail in some way to make clear their disclosure. This association has a well-established tradition in Western Literature, including some artistic movements that more or less explicitly viewed themselves as terroristic in nature. I am reminded here of Andre Gide, Jean Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, and Antonin Artaud, who all sought to explore in various ways the disruptive or terror-producing character of literature and performance. In the history of Western philosophy there are also myriad explorations into the production of terror and other associated experiences, one that comes immediately to mind is Fredrich Nietzsche's discussion of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

[205] María del Rosario Acosta López, in a Spring 2021 seminar "Grammars of Listening: On Memory After Trauma" at Université Paris 8, has presented on her concept of "Grammars of Listening" that provides a richer theory of such interpretive registers.

Which is actually asking, "Who is responsible for the enunciation of this power, and is that person *allowed* to perpetrate violence?" These questions are closer to the order of the concerns that Austin was truly after, according to Johnson, the underlying power relations of performatives. We will turn, in the next chapter, to a more thorough inquiry into the nature of power enunciated by terror. For now, we should recognize that such bombings, as disclosures, share a critical parallel with poetry in terms of referentiality.

To understand the status of the referent, it is necessary to recognize the poem's gestural significance. The poem, as poem, signals the modulation of locutionary registers and, I would argue, also performs a particular disclosure in the poetic mood. In a way, this alerts the reader to the idea that the gestural referent may be meta- or extra-textual and likely does not appear in the syntactical content of the utterance. Johnson addresses, for example, John Donne's "Go and catch a falling star." Everyone agrees the imperative is literally impossible. Austin dismisses it from his analysis because it is not meant "seriously." Johnson, however, sees it as a "*rhetorical* imperative" (her emphasis), that functions in a similar manner to a rhetorical question, to "elicit an impasse without naming it."[206] It is the imperative's non-seriousness, she argues, that makes it so meaning-laden. Johnson paraphrases, "if finding a faithful woman is like catching a falling star, according to Donne's poem, this is apparently very serious indeed."[207] In other words, Donne is using a formulation that intentionally gestures beyond what is literally possible when the utterance is appraised in light of the facts. The yield is a sense that is an affective combination of desire, desperation, humility, and pathos. It also invokes a corporeal, as much as a cognitive,

[206] Johnson, 150.

[207] Ibid., 150.

sense of impasse by harkening to the experience of falling short on something of metaphysical proportions that ultimately disintegrates.

The critical repetition of "fall" here is also significant.[208] The term contains an internal telos that culminates in death. There is an embedded existential urgency. If the narrator in Donne's poem misses the fall, the star is irrevocably lost. The image reinforces the recognition that beyond the syntax and *logos*, there is an embodied experience of "impasse" that Johnson notes. The ultimate impasse is death. In another place, Johnson characterizes this sort of gesture as an attempt to "make explicit not the reference itself but the *sense* of the reference—what the poem is *saying* about the woman."[209] Such gesturing through rhetorical imperatives, I would add, is familiar in poetry but not exclusive to it.

It is increasingly clear, then, that there are various modes of performative speech acts that are available across many subject positions by virtue of the speaker signaling, with the use of recognizable gestural conventions, that they are switching into a particular performative mood. When they do so, the locution's relationality to the referent is at stake. We could imagine an extensive list of such moods—perhaps, the poetic, the comedic, the juridical, and the existential among others.[210] To be sure, the rule-governed constructions that Austin outlines are not altogether irrelevant across these. Instead, they would seem to be operative by reference rather

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[208] In a future work, I intend to argue for the centrality of "falling," "flying," and "fleeing" as the correlative verbs that voice the experience of terror because, among other things, they are associated with the experience of being beyond willful control and subject to overwhelming forces.

[209] Johnson, 153, her emphasis.

[210] It is, of course, easy to conceive of situations in which power dynamics or other influential factors would render some of these modes normatively "off limits" *i.e.* race, class, power, privilege, etc. These factors would functionally truncate what moods of performance were available to a particular speaker. Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* comes to mind as one powerful exploration of this phenomenon.

than by rule. In other words, the rules for one mode obliquely help define the rules for others, *e.g.* a comedic mood can overtly operate by parodying an institutional or juridical mood.

Such language rules, often described in terms of language games, have been central to the contemporary philosophical accounts of language, articulated by Wittgenstein, Lyotard, Chomsky, Searle, among diverse others. Yet perhaps one underappreciated aspect of these discussions is that the failure to adhere to the rules of a particular game can actually help the operative rules of another stand out in greater relief. In other words, it is not necessary to adjudicate whether such performatives are felicitous according to Austin's taxonomy, but to recognize that, for example, hyperbole is infelicitous according to the prescribed rules of the juridical mood but proper to the poetic, comedic, or existential moods. As Johnson's poetic analysis shows us, this means that the status of the referent in such utterances is more complicated.

To return once again to hyperbole (and perhaps simile and other figurative language as well), we see the shift of referential emphasis away from the syntactical subject toward a disclosive one. As we have discussed, hyperbole functions like a grammatical mood in which an utterance has the syntax of a conventional statement or question but the facts are intentionally out of proportion relative to the contingent expectations. There is more to understand here than a mere sort of "rough" or "skewed" language that Austin identified. Whereas the poet writes, "Go and catch a falling star," the everyday subject, using less poetic diction, might say "finding my partner was like catching a falling star," which takes the form of simile in the hyperbolic mood.

As Johnson points out, however, it is not the "falling star" or, in Mallarme's poem, the lady's "flaming mane" that is the true subject of the poem, but "rather the conditions of

possibility of the emission and reception of the sonnet itself."[211] Meanwhile, the stated referent of the poem, the lady, is elided. In the unfolding of her argument, Johnson notes that, while the beloved is the ostensible referent of the poem, the poem is actually referring to its own referencing—the occasion of its own creation. In the poem,

> …reference is not, however, denied: it is problematized beyond reconciliation. The lady remains the referent of the poem, but only insofar as the poem says absolutely nothing about her. The moment she begins to stand for anything, including herself, she is no longer a referent but a sign. We can thus only see her as the poem's referent at the moment she ceases to be the poem's referent.[212]

There is a striking parallel here to our previous exposition of a bombing as a disclosive act. The explosion, as a high-energy chemical reaction, says absolutely nothing about the intentional referent of the act, except that it gestures at a sense. Yet, Johnson's analysis prompts the question of whether, like the lady in the poem, the moment that the explosion begins to stand for something it, too, becomes a sign. In any case, like Mallarme's poetics, the explosion produces "mutually exclusive readings." To a terroristic in-group, it can validate a real or perceived struggle against an enemy. To witnesses and victims, it is a transgressive act of violence and an existential threat. In the poem, the poet recites a sonnet rife with contradictory affirmations. This, according to Johnson, is what constitutes Mallarme's "break with referentiality" and is what makes his poetics so revolutionary. She notes:

> Reference is here not denied but suspended. The sonnet simultaneously takes on and discards meaning only to the extent that its contact with the lady's presence is contradictorily deferred. The '*poeme tu*,' the Book of relations, is not a simple absence of meaning, it is the systematic, dynamically self-subverting

[211] Johnson, 142.

[212] Ibid., 155.

> juxtaposition—'*rime*'— of what becomes 'true' only through its radical incompatibility with itself.[213]

Johnson here provides additional dimensions to our understanding of the notion of contradiction. Austin's description, when considered through terrorism as a limit case, offers only an ambiguous sense that terror bombings are not exactly contradictory, yet leaves us questioning whether it is merely by virtue of the dominant power structures or something inherent in the act. Johnson's description is strikingly apt when reflecting on the reception of a terror bombing. Like the poem, the explosion is "not a simple absence of meaning" but may systematically subvert its own meeting. To be sure, in the case of terror bombings, too, the referent would seem not to be "denied but suspended." In such a suspension, the investigation is catalyzed.

Ultimately, however, we might characterize what is actually at stake in the poem as whether Mallarme's poet is willing to rise to the occasion of reciting a poem at all, and if so, if the words he is able to conjure on short notice satisfactorily fit the beloved's poetic expectations on this occasion—even better if they inspire some transcendent response, *e.g.* awe, wonder, or swooning. Without coming to terms with the conditional "audience and violence," the poet may 'perhaps, who knows? Not have introduced the pretext of formulating' his poem into the silent, isolated togetherness of the rocking coach."[214] [215]

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[213] Johnson, 156-7.

[214] Ibid, 143. Here Johnson appropriating a line from the poem.

[215] This occasional exigence has a striking resemblance to Lyotard's conception of narrative games discussed in *Just Gaming,* only the emphasis is not on the violence of the act, but of its "ruse." Like Johnson, and Derrida for that matter, Lyotard holds that "these stories have no origin. They treat origins in terms of stories that presuppose other stories that in turn presuppose the first ones" (40). These narrative language games are idealized as a sort of masking of the narrator. He argues that "if the privileged pole of this relation is that of the narrated, it is not because these people are concerned only with the contents of what they tell, but because the one

But what of the isolated togetherness of our lifeworld? To be sure, audience and violence are the preconditions for any act of terror. Yet "terrorism" and "violence" would seem to be characteristically different somehow. What conditions prompt a person to "introduce the pretext of formulating" a terroristic attack? Does their intentionality actually distinguish violence from terrorism, or is that left up to the act's reception? In light of Johnson's critique of Austin, we could perhaps even rephrase this inquiry to ask about the nature of a terroristic "rhetorical imperative"—perhaps even more fitting: *disclosive imperative*. Is it the case that, like language, the disclosive or illocutionary force of bombings can become conventionalized? Are terroristic acts "subject to the same kind of temporal fading and conventionalizing that produces 'dead' metaphors and clichés?"[216] Or is there something about an act of terror that characteristically sets it apart from other kinds of disclosive acts?

Through Austin and Johnson, we are left with the useful clarification that terrorism is a particular sort of performative that functions as a disclosive imperative. Yet, the conditions of the possibility of a particular form of disclosure being interpreted as "terrorism" rather than another form of violence remain nebulous. One key feature that we have neglected to this point is embedded in the very appellation. What about these acts inspires "terror"? To address this question, our inquiry must necessarily pivot to an analysis of the evolution of the concept of terror with an eye to the underlying power relations that are ultimately at the core of the terroristic performative.

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doing the speaking speaks in the place of the referent" (41). Though the narrator is "narrated as well" by the story, they have the ability to "ruse," which is to offer a variant in form or of the story itself while maintaining something critically recognizable about the story. '

See: Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud. *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis, U. Minnesota Press, 1985).

[216] Johnson, 157.

CHAPTER IV: TERROR FROM THE SOVEREIGN TO THE PEOPLE

In the months following the Boston Marathon bombing, an intriguing narrative coalesced around the surviving suspect, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. "Jahar," as he was known to friends, was "charming," attractive, and "chill." When he was identified publicly as a suspect in the bombing, his friends, former teachers, and others in his life struggled to make sense of competing realities. In a notable *Rolling Stone* profile of Tsarnaev, his former high school wrestling coach comments that "I knew this kid, and he was a good kid, and, apparently, he's also a monster." According to the coach, Jahar's concealment of his monstrous interior life was "seamless, like a billiard ball. No cracks at all."

Part of the shock of the marathon attack was the perceived absence of a satisfactory understanding of the intended disclosure at the heart of the attack, despite the presence of several stated justifications. To put it simply, the justifications, channeled primarily through Dzhokhar, left fundamental questions about why the brothers chose *this* act at *this* time.[217] What were they trying to say? The representational connections between the marathon and specific grievances were always somewhat elusive, despite the clearly stated connection to the killing of Muslims by the United States abroad. The venue, a widely known athletic event, lacked the iconic representation of, for example, the World Trade Towers, which was the symbolic heart of U.S.

[217] Jean Baudrillard in "The Spirit of Terrorism" argues that the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon were akin to the "'mother' of all events" in art because the "unbearable power" of the U.S. and globalization invite the "terroristic imagination which dwells in all of us" and that "everyone without exception" has dreamt of such an event (5). The Boston bombings, on the other hand, seemed to be interpreted in a different way, without this collective imagination of the symbolic destruction of such power. The Boston bombing, despite being rather straightforward, maintained a sense of "pure accident, a purely arbitrary act, the murderous phantasmagoria of a few fanatics" which, as Baudrillard suggests, leaves only the need to eliminate the fanatics.

commerce.[218] The Tsarnaevs were not verifiably acting on behalf of known extremist groups. No legitimate communication from such groups was circulated following the attacks to take credit for them. Even the most compelling declaration, Dzhokhar's written statement found when he was captured, was interpreted in conflicting ways—for some it was an agonal confession; to others, evidence that he had been brainwashed by his brother or was otherwise not in his right mind.

To be sure, it is hard to imagine a more compelling set of circumstances for an authentic existential disclosure. Tsarnaev, hiding from the concerted forces of an unprecedented police manhunt, in a pool of his own blood, scrawled a paragraph manifesto in pencil. On the bullet riddled walls, dripped in blood, he wrote "God has a plan for each person mine was to hide in this boat and shed some light on our actions."[219] The explicit message clearly tied the bombing of the marathon to the treatment of Muslims by the United States. The manifesto declared that the "government is killing our innocent civilians" and that an attack on one Muslim was an attack on all. Tsarnaev could not "stand to see such evil go unpunished…we Muslims are one body…Fuck America."

Yet, even if the attack had been intended as a definitive riposte to American actions against Muslims, no doubt interpreted clearly as such by some (perhaps by those who, interestingly, had the least context for Tsarnaev's actions), it was anything but definitive for those closest to him. The narratives among friends and relations and, consequently, the media,

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[218] That is not to say that a high-profile athletic event in a city that served as the cradle of U.S. nationhood is without symbolism. There are perhaps too many layers of possible representation.

[219] Lindsey Bever, "Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's scrawled message: 'We Muslims are one body, you hurt one you hurt us all" in *WaPo.com* (March 11, 2015).

This quote appeared in numerous news sources. It was taken from a forensic photograph circulated across several platforms during the sentencing phase of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's trial.

remained confounded, disoriented, because they were unable to square his personal comportment with the supposed disclosure at the heart of the act of terror.[220] This is a form of disorientation that differs, and yet evokes the directional chaos emanating from the bombsite. Tsarnaev's acquaintances simply could not reorient themselves to the markers of a new reality; they could not believe that the person they knew would act in such a way for such a reason.

The cover of the *Rolling Stone* issue was one site of contention over these discordant presentations. The magazine was ardently criticized for making Tsarnaev look like a rock star or martyr. As a point of reference, one Massachusetts state police officer felt compelled to respond to the magazine piece by breaking protocol and releasing photos of Tsarnaev, bloodied and weak at the scene of his capture, because he believed they would help counter the rock star romanticism. In other words, *Rolling Stone*, by aesthetically rendering the image of Tsarnaev, the "monster," as a "chill" 19-year-old, in a certain way reproduced and perpetuated this disorientation in all of its equivocality.

In the *Rolling Stone* profile and many other published accounts, people who had known Tsarnaev described a common phenomenon. They said they poured over the images of Tsarnaev they saw in print and on TV for some semblance of the person they knew—a person they recognized. In terms of disclosure, in the case of Boston, those who had the most context for understanding what it was that Tsarnaev may have been trying to say were possibly the most shocked and disoriented.[221] If such disorientation is instrumental in constituting the terror in

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[220] The court case is yet another matter subject to its own system of utterances and narratives, and worthy of its own exploration. In thinking about acts of terror in terms of disclosure, it is worth staying focused for the moment on the initial disclosive aspect that play out in public.

[221] This is, of course, not to overlook that people were far less surprised that his Dzhokhar's brother, Tamerlan, was involved.

terrorism, then Boston is instructive in pursuing how certain performative acts underwrite terror and shape their interpretation as terrorism. We have previously argued that a key feature of terrorism is an inchoate ontological disclosure that is only ever interpreted epistemologically. I argue here that it is, in fact, this failed disclosure that is the most salient among other features, in allowing the terrorist act to be visible, as such. Yet, it remains necessary to explore the mechanism for the production of "terror" in any of these acts.

Terrorism is notoriously difficult to define. Its political, juridical, and communicative valences have been amply discussed to little apparent definitional consensus. As a discourse writ large, Zulaika and Douglass in their book *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism*, have marshalled a formidable challenge to the very salience of the word "terrorism" in its current usage to describe the phenomena to which it is commonly ascribed.[222] Even from their milieu before the attacks of September 11, 2001, they argue that the word is often a political bludgeon wielded to expand and protect bureaucratic budgets or used in the service of a variety of ulterior agendas rather than serving as a stable analytical category or instrument. Three decades on, Zulaika and Douglass' observations seem prescient in the American context, especially in view of a protracted set of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other hostilities broadly justified under the banner of a "Global War on Terror."

As they point out, whether it appears in a state-sanctioned form, or in the context of an illicit non-state actor terrorist "cell," terrorism's primary character as an overall discourse is paranoid and secretive. Yet, it is simultaneously a discourse of global reach and conspiracy. It is the heir apparent, Zulaika and Douglass argue, to the perverse and pervasive contagion of Cold

[222] Zulaika and Douglass note, for example, "In the chapters that follow we will present our own arguments as to why 'terrorism' is analytically far more of a hindrance than an aid to understanding political violence, and why there is no need to posit such a discursive first premise for writing about it" (60).

War communism. In this way they anticipated the "Global War on Terror" and other political reactions to the kaleidoscopic "terrorist threats" of the early twenty-first century.

Zulaika and Douglass' work, in a mode by turns a Foucauldian genealogy, rhetorical analysis, and ethnography, is particularly illuminating in its expansive reach and extensive explication of how, for example, scholarship, media, and governmental discourse are instrumental to validating and magnifying certain acts of violence and their threat beyond any realized material implications.[223] They also trace the development of novel epistemes, such as "counterterrorism," which, they argue, only practically names, and expands the scope and objects of the discourse, *i.e.* violence or threatened violence that prompts the label "terrorism." Such epistemes justify the christening of new disciplines of study and new bureaucratic entities.

While their analysis compellingly illustrates the contours of the broader discourse of terrorism, our inquiry has rather intentionally sought to return to an example of the phenomenon itself—in this case the bomb blasts at the Boston Marathon and the patterns of representation surrounding Dzhokhar Tsarnaev as a terrorist. Zulaika and Douglass explicitly eschew this methodological approach (although their ethnographic work provides specific anecdotal and contextual narratives). Indeed, they recognize that "terrorism discourse provides a grand example of the primacy and centrality of writing in both its literal and 'grammatological' senses." Consequently, they choose to focus their "attention at the level of discourse rather than upon a single text" by way of "grant[ing] precedence to the signifier rather than the signified" (60). Such focus allows them to grapple with the discourse writ large, particularly as it motivates

[223] It should be clear by now that phrases like "threat beyond any realized material implications" is not a way of minimizing the significant and tragic deaths of three individuals and the wounding of several hundreds more as was the case in the Boston Marathon bombing. It is, instead, a way of foregrounding the fact that there is an important distinction to be made between the number of casualties and the extent of property damage in most terror attacks, compared to, for instance, a full-scale and/or protracted war.

structural socio-political development, despite the vacillations of any particular anecdotal circumstances.

Reading at the level of discourse, however, does not necessarily negate a more granular phenomenological reading, though it should be acknowledged that an analysis of the phenomena of a single event and a broader discursive genealogy may at times be in tension. In fact, with this perspective in mind, a return to the phenomena productively complicates the seemingly dichotomous semiotic categorization of signifier/signified that too easily can collapses the kind of nuance that Zulaika and Douglass are generally at pains to preserve. In fact, it is clear that even at the level of the discourse as they outline it, certain kinds of texts/acts, or acts with certain characteristics, are co-opted more readily than others as "terrorism."[224] Subsequent analysis, then, should proceed in two major movements. First, it should be assumed, after Zulaika and Douglass, that the discourse of "terrorism" is used to describe and justify all manner of political and social acts and is, therefore, not a nominally reliable indicator of the characteristics that are proper to the designation. The second is that there remains something persistent, if not consistent, in the kinds of acts that evoke the moniker—*i.e.* certain kinds of spectacular violence.[225]

Zulaika and Douglass conceive of the terroristic act in terms of ritual, but as our prior inquiry has demonstrated, there is also a way of thinking about such acts as a disclosure in a particular mood, attitude, or disposition, regardless of their status in, or of, ritual. In short: such readings can be complementary but further exploration is warranted to see if they are mutually

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[224] Bombings, suicide bombings, hostage taking, etc. almost constitute a genre of terrorism. Yet they also evolve in response to technological, cultural, and other contextual contingencies.

[225] Here I use the word "consistent" and not "restrictive" to highlight that the perception of these characteristics is conventional in nature.

exclusive. The notion that terrorist acts can function in ritual does not necessarily mean that they are constitutively ritualistic. It is also necessary to shore up the feeble distinction between terrorism and other forms of life-threatening violence.

As our foregoing discussion outlined, terror in such acts is not purely engendered by the explosion. While an explosion has become an emblematic terroristic instrument, it is the disclosive imperative at its core that underwrites this kind of violently interjective performance.[226] Thus, the signified, here, is something other than the more global signified of the discourse as a whole. That said, the explosion in many cases does appear closely akin, on first inspection, to the ritual bluff or threat that Zulaika and Douglass posit as a way of understanding the terroristic form. This bluff is part of a ritual, they argue, that is intimately related to the various fictions that societies live by. For us, this echoes Austin and Johnson in our previous exploration of the performative qualities of terrorism as rudimentary speech. Yet, we are left with the necessity of identifying how such an instrument or ritual act has anything to do with "terror" to begin with, other than nominally, and then how "terror" and "terrorism" actually relate to each other.

It is commonplace, for instance, to see parallels to animal behavior of other species, males in particular, performatively threatening their rivals in what is often called a "bluff." But does a sort of animal-like bluff necessarily inspire terror when successful?[227] It would also seem that such a bluff aims to accomplish an identifiable end—access to a mate or food, etc.--whereas the ends of contemporary terrorist acts are eminently more nebulous and highly contextual dependent. What would have been considered a "success" in the Boston bombing outside of merely carrying

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[226] See Cole's *At the Violet Hour* and Houen's *Terrorism and Modern Literature* for extensive discussions of explosions.

[227] This prompts dozens more questions, including, can an animal feel terror (as humans would define it)? If that's the case, is there such a thing as animal terrorism whereby animals use spectacular shows of force to cause

out the act? While "bluff" seems to capture some facet of the asymmetry of violent force—*i.e.* a spectacular display that yields comparatively minimal material damage—it also carries a diminutive connotation that can too easily abbreviate an analysis of its constitutive structures and why such a bluff might be compelling, or more fittingly, what happens when the bluff is not a simulated parry, but a consummated attack carried to completion—when it is an end in itself.

It would seem a characteristically different sort of bluff for two brothers to plant homemade bombs at a marathon, than for a global superpower to attack civilians with drones in another country. We should, of course, acknowledge, as W.J.T. Mitchell points out, that both kinds of attacks share "shock and awe," which

> Are the tactics that unite non-state with state terrorism, and in both cases the traumatic spectacle [can] be rationalized as a humane act of restraint. Instead of killing large masses of people, it is sufficient to 'send them a message' by subjecting them to shocking displays of destruction.[228]

The actions of the two brothers, framed in terms of bluff, are a kind of ruse that magnifies their limited individual power within a compressed timeline. In the case of a nation with a standing military, however, the ruse is based on substantiated violent power over an extended timeline. Both may exploit the psychology of disorienting spectacular violence and other affective features of terrorism, but their role in ritual, as "bluff," is fundamentally different. The stakes are clearly different. It is at our own peril that we lose a sense of proportion by way of an insidiously hegemonic and duplicitous perspective—that terror is at the same time a kind of warfare and yet only a bluff; meanwhile, the same goes for state-sponsored unconventional warfare, which is, in one way of thinking, merely a bluff and not "real" war. We can, by turns, dismiss the import of both.

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[228] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Word and Image in a Time of Terror" in *ELH* 72.2. Essays in Honor of Ronald Paulson. (Summer, 2005) 291-308.

This speaks to the necessity of reconciling one particular observation: that "terror" as an act, involves at least two different schemas. The first is in reference to a sovereign power, and the second is in reference to the acts of individuals and small groups (*i.e.* state terror and so-called non-state actors respectively). How do these schemas affect the character and the specific disclosures associated with these acts? Do the networks of social fictions that organize contemporary human lives change the nature of ritual, and thereby terror? Most importantly to the current inquiry, does the disclosive imperative need a ritualized space for actualization? Such questions seem, at best, adjacent, to the prevailing currents of novel epistemes of "terrorism studies" and "counterterrorism," yet in terms of tracking an inchoate disclosure that constitutes these sorts of performative acts, they are crucial.

Our foregoing exploration of the performative aspects of terrorism as speech, foregrounds the status of power—social and individual—in systems of terror. It is no leap to next interrogate the mechanics of terror as a concept in terms of such power. Taking a lead from Zulaika and Douglas, whose work is in conversation with, among others, Michel Foucault, I would argue that by looking at the evolution of "terror" as a concept in Foucault, from the sovereign terror of the scaffold to the terrors incorporated in the literatures of crime, an important genealogy can be identified. Specifically, the movement from the ritualized terrors of the scaffold to the generic contours of a literature of criminal terrors, informs the phenomenological reading of contemporary acts of terrorism, such as the Boston Marathon bombing, by making visible the shifting locus of truth for such disclosures. To put it another way, what we expect from a terrorist is a function of how we believe we can access and understand the truth at the heart of terrorism's disclosure.

Sovereign Terrors

Michel Foucault should be the theorist of "terror" *par excellence*. Not only does he track the flow of power in the terrible spectacle (as exemplified by the scaffold) to illustrate his thinking about Western socio-cultural life, but the rise of the contemporary discourse of terrorism reaches fruition during his most productive periods.[229] His critical appropriation of Bentham's panopticon, as discussed in *Discipline and Punish* had an outsized influence in a certain era of cultural studies and other strains of so-called human sciences in understanding the evolution of power from the iconic scaffold into a social and institutional knowledge-power. In terms of his own work, Foucault's reframing of power as a kind of "micro-physics" constitutes an arrival at a conceptual framework, via Nietzsche, that he had been exploring through analyses of discourse for much of his career.

Consequently, not only in Foucault should we expect to find tools to exhume the social and discursive past of terrorism, but we would also expect to see evidence of the recursivity often noted in relation to terrorism as a phenomenon, in which public discourse shapes the act itself.[230] If terrorism is a product of the late-stage evolution of social structures, Foucault's schemas should ostensibly be better positioned than most to account for it. Notably, *Discipline and Punish* has been characterized as "a return, after the 'interdiscursive' analyses of *Les mots et les choses* and *L'archeologie du savoir*, to the single discourse/institution study as exemplified in *Histoire de la folie* and *Naissance de la Clinique"* (Sheridan 135). Yet unlike some of the earlier single discourse analyses, *Discipline and Punish* benefitted from a deeper well of developed ideas about the nature of discourse and power,

[229] I am specifically thinking of the emergence of the discourse of "international terrorism" as discussed in Hoffman's *Inside Terrorism* (and referenced extensively in my previous chapters).

[230] See Zulaika and Douglass' *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* for an insightful discussion of the role of theory and scholarship in co-constituting the discourse of terror, including page 24.

including the discursive insights mapped out in Foucault's "The Discourse on Language" (1971). But at first glance, there is little explicit reference in any of these works to the form of terrorism that we have been tracing thus far, or the rest of Foucault's catalogue for that matter. This complicates, by extension, how we might understand the status of the "disclosive imperative" in reference to the social and discursive forces Foucault foregrounds.

In terms of historiography, it is on Foucault's account of the spectacular punishment of the regicide and the social internalization of the normative forces of surveillance that other thinkers pin arguments regarding performativity, embodiment, sovereignty, and, like Foucault himself, the structure of social institutions. As Alan Sheridan reminds us in his commentary on *Discipline and Punish*, "It is Foucault's thesis that our own societies are maintained not by army, police, and centralized, visible state apparatus, but precisely by those techniques of dressage, discipline, and diffused power at work in 'carceral' institutions" (Sheridan 136). Yet, for as near at hand as terror and terrorism should be in the systems of social interaction that Foucault analyzes—a period that spans, chronologically, the terrible power of the sovereigns, to *la Terreur* that marked the end of the *Ancien Régime*, through modern "terrorism"—the terms themselves appear rarely and, when they do, often slip by uninterrogated. In fact, there are fewer than a dozen uses of the word "terror" and a similar scarcity of the word "terrible" in the English translation of *Discipline and Punish.*[231] The word "terrorism" does not appear at all in the English translation. Indeed, in the relatively few extant uses, it would seem that "terror" as a concept is presupposed and not derived in much of this and Foucault's other work. In broad strokes, terror appears to have always already been present in the spectacle of the scaffold but ultimately recedes

[231] My argument here, is not that the quantity of mentions of the word "terror," its derivatives or superlatives, is the most significant lack, but that Foucault's centerpiece of *Discipline and Punish*, which would be perhaps the most fitting place to discuss terror and terrorism, does not make much of either.

in subsequent punitive and disciplinary models. This is perhaps counterintuitive in our contemporary era marked by such discursive oversaturation with acts of state and non-state terror and terrorism, not to mention the "Global War on Terror."

By attempting to articulate what "terror" is and where it might "go" in the later period of Foucault's work, I think it is possible to illuminate additional dimensions of terror as an essentially linguistic socio-cultural phenomenon—which would permit an articulation that resides somewhere between the global features of discourse analysis offered by Zulaika and Douglass and their ambiguous association with its constitutive "ritual bluff." This analysis seeks terrorism's underlying ontologically disclosive motivation and its operating mechanisms. As we will explore, however, it is by reference to the disclosive imperative that acts of terror, as a limit case, help illuminate the existential tie that binds together ontological and epistemological concerns within the context of social structures and the aporias between these two registers.[232]

To this end, this inquiry embarks on an extended exegesis of "terror" as it appears in *Discipline and Punish* in conversation with Zulaika and Douglass' compelling argument for terrorism as a sort novel epistemology that takes as its object something akin to a ritual bluff. I

[232] What I have set out to do here is largely speculative. I believe, however, it is productively so. We hold in suspense John Searle's critique of Foucault (and Habermas and Bourdieu) when he says "they think of themselves as acutely conscious of language and its importance for society, but they do not ask, What is language? In a way that would enable them to ask, How exactly is language constitutive of society?" (John Searle, "What is Language? Some Preliminary Remarks" in *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, XI (2009) 173-202). It's also engaging earnestly with Mary Louise Pratt's point about Speech Act theory referenced in Chapter 1, in which she critiques it for using one-to-one communication model as the basis for analysis. This is a way of thinking through its socio-cultural influences. Meanwhile, Zulaika and Douglass hold that terrorism is a discursive phenomenon and is best understood in terms of ritual. In other words, it is language enmeshed in cultural action, but this is not necessarily Searle's understanding of the character of language and how it constitutes society, stemming from some sort of biological impetus. Searle's claim, as it relates to the inquiry at the core of the present project, suggests that if we want to understand acts of terrorism as disclosive, it would serve us well to clarify the character of "terror" and "terrorism" as they are co-constitutive factors of social life.

will argue here that the term "terror" is multivalent in Foucault and that, while it can be understood as interwoven into his broader project, the concept also admits important complications that go largely unaddressed. *Discipline and Punish* usefully plots a handful of landmarks that ultimately become more meaningful with the addition of Foucault's later work on governmentality and self-care, which I will explore in a subsequent chapter. Yet, even the oblique engagement with terror in this book reveals contours that continue to shape the phenomenological topography of terrorism today.

Disciplinary Terror

"Terror" is colloquially understood as a description of a feeling—an affective state.[233] As is clear, Foucault tends to operate at some remove from specific descriptions of feelings or perceptions as a way bringing into focus larger structural concerns. In this epistemological register, the decentering of the subject is also apparent, as well as Foucault's general orientation away from what might be construed as a phenomenological approach, which was then the

[233] The conventional definition of "terror" can be described as the affective state of overwhelming fear—as it is related to trembling. I have in mind, particularly, this word's relation to "terrorism". The OED identifies an eighteenth century meaning that points to excessive government force, and later meanings that suggest the use of unauthorized violence or intimation by clandestine or expatriate forces. Foucault uses the word "terror" to describe, for example the "free terror of madness" that was exchanged with "the stifling anguish of responsibility" through the advent of asylums like Samuel Tuke's (*Madness and Civilization*, 247). Foucault argues that "Tuke now transferred the age-old terrors in which the insane had been trapped to the very heart of madness." In his concluding statements, which position the work of art *vis-à-vis* madness, Foucault remarks that "Artaud's *oeuvre* experiences its own absence in madness, but that experience, the fresh courage of that ordeal, all those words hurled against a fundamental absence of language, all that space of physical suffering and *terror* which surrounds or rather coincides with the void—that is the work of art itself: the sheer cliff over the abyss of the work's absence" (287, emphasis added). Here Foucault presents terror as an affect adjacent to suffering and linked to the vertiginous quality of being engulfed in a void—quintessentially disoriented.

dominant Continental tradition of philosophical inquiry.[234] In short, Foucault's project is to draw epistemological, not ontological, distinctions, which leaves affect to be described ontically.

One grounding observation for this inquiry is that the status and structure of "terror" in *Discipline and Punish* is dynamic throughout the arc of the book. If terror could be said to emanate from a source, the source remains conditional.[235] Specifically, the locus of "terror" moves between language and materiality *vis-à-vis* performative acts. In this way an individual can ostensibly feel terror at the sight of spectacular violence; a group of people can be affectively moved by terror in a similar way. It is also clear that terror can be wielded as a performative, if latent, threat by those who are in the sway of power—including both the sovereign and concerted masses of people. To use Searle's "direction of fit" terminology (via Friege), as outlined in the previous chapter, "terror" seems to move between "world-to-word," and "word-to-world" fits.[236] To overly simplify, the sovereign and masses of people, occupy two nodes in a network of

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[234] When asked about his "dispute with the phenomenological subject, and the psychological subject" Foucault responds: "We have to make distinctions. In the first place, I don't think there is actually a sovereign founding subject, a universal form of subject that one could find everywhere. I am very skeptical and very hostile toward this conception of the subject. I think on the contrary that the subject is constituted through practices of subjections, or, in a more anonymous way, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity, starting of course from a number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the culture" (Foucault in interview, "Aesthetics of Existence" collected in *Foucault Live*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996) 452.

[235] This leaves even a close reader asking questions like: How does "terror" relate to violence? War? Juridical power? In Foucault's Archaeology or Genealogy, is it a concept, a discourse, or something else altogether? How does it relate to language? Is one who experiences terror interpellated into the role of "terrified-subject" and does the individual maintain any agency in this role? These questions are not directly addressed in the text and must, for the moment, merely underlie our reading.

[236] As discussed more extensively in the previous chapter, Searle classifies these performative-like utterances into five general categories of speech acts: 1. Assertives, including statements, assertions are expressions of beliefs and are supposed, like beliefs, to represent how the world is and thus they have the *word-to-world* direction of fit; 2. Directives: including requests, orders, commands, are expressions of desires and so have the *world-to-word* direction of fit; 3.

power, across which terror can modulate through physical spectacular acts and explicit or implicit words that threaten or perform these kinds of acts.

The most visible example of "terror" is perhaps in the familiar sections of *Discipline and Punish* that address the spectacle of the scaffold. It is in these sections in which Foucault observes that the public execution "made people aware that the slightest offence was likely to be punished" and also through which the sovereign inspires "feelings of terror by the spectacle of power letting its anger fall upon the guilty person."[237] Here, fundamentally, terror is associated with power, anger, and transgression. This anger, in light of our exploration of Austin's performative speech acts in Chapter 2, may be specifically understood as a prototypical form of outrage at the transgression of a social convention, at this point primarily the will of the monarch, in many cases defined by the sovereign's laws and theologically justified.[238]

According to Foucault's analysis, the prevailing historical frame was that the relationship of power between the sovereign and the criminal should be war-like and overwhelmingly in favor of the king. Punishment could take the form of the "ritual of public torture and execution" or in

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Commisives, including promises, offers, are expressions of intention and so have the *world-to-word* direction of fit (180); 4. Expressives, including regret and gratitude, are expressed in their performance. They are forms of desire based on the presupposition of the truth of the belief (181); 5. Declarations, speech acts that makes something the case by declaring it to be the case, *e.g.* adjourning a meeting. I would point out that terrorist attacks could, as disclosures, could be variously categorized as assertives that are attempting to express a belief, as well as a kind of modal declaration, which is to say that they are performatively representing the world/declaring the world to be "at war" for instance. See: John Searle, "What is Language? Some Preliminary Remarks."

[237] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 58.

[238] Sheridan, 146.

Sheridan notes that society, later in the chronology, inherits "the role of the king as the affronted party."

later, more sophisticated methods, "addressed to the soul."[239] [240] In the existential physics of spectacular demonstrations of power, therefore, the conflict between the sovereign and an offending subject was agonistic. Any subject who affronted the monolithic law of the sovereign provoked outrage. The sovereign's duplicated body—as both the State and the ruler—maintained a right to punish that was

> An aspect of the sovereign's right to make war on his enemies: to punish belongs to 'that absolute power of life and death which Roman law calls *merum imperium*, a right by virtue of which the prince sees that his law is respected by ordering the punishment of crime (Muyart de Vouglans, xxxiv).[241]

It is also personal retribution for a display of contempt. The king's warlike retaliation, read punishment, should restore and reaffirm the appropriate hierarchical relationship as framed by the predominant ideology of the divine right of sovereignty. Foucault sees this, notionally, as a "reconstitution" of the sovereignty by its spectacular manifestation and display of power.[242] In

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[239] Foucault, 28.

He marks a progression, a "growing belief, which began long before the change in practice, that to insist on the punishment exceeding the crime in savagery was, in a sense, to repeat the crime" (Sheridan 136). Punishment gradually became the most "hidden part" of the process, shifting attention from "the execution to the trial and sentence" (Sheridan 137).

[240] The soul has a particular valence for Foucault and is constituted as a locus of social (primarily religious and political) forces. The soul is produced within a subject's body by the powers of punishment, most distinctly by those of supervision (29). Knowledge is the mechanism by which power exercises itself and will later become the primary tool of surveillance and institutional purview. In this way, there is a transition into forms of discipline in which the "soul is the instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (30).

[241] Foucault, 48.

[242] Ibid.

our broader exploration of terrorism, this war-like description of the agonistic relationship between sovereign and condemned resonates with the contemporary impulse to think of terrorism as "war by other means," a reference to Clausewitz's persistently misquoted dictum that "war is politics by other means."[243] Yet, thinking along with Foucault, this assessment of terrorism would appear to have been anachronistic from the outset. W.J.T. Mitchell seems on the verge of this recognition when he points out that "the whole notion of a conventional, military 'war on terror,'… is quite incoherent," although he still suggests that it is a matter of "confusing one kind of war with another."[244] In fact, these actions fall short of war for both parties, yet terrorism shares with war a desired end: to establish singularity. Jean Baudrillard captures this in *The Spirit of Terrorism* when he recognizes that "violence in itself may be perfectly banal and inoffensive…only symbolic violence is generative of singularity."[245]

Foucault describes the public spectacle of the scaffold as a ritual that could be classed with coronations, for example, as a performance of the eclipse and restoration of power. Such a ritual foregrounds the dissymmetry of power through a display of the sovereign's overwhelming strength.[246] In punishment, specifically, this strength is materialized on the body of the offender. There is a corporeal interaction here in which the sovereign, by proxy at least,

> Beat[s] down upon the body of his adversary and master[s] it: by breaking the law, the offender has touched the very person of the prince; and it is the prince—or at least those to whom he has delegated his force—who seizes upon the body of the condemned

[243] One example of the implications of thinking of terrorism as "war by other means" can be seen in Yoo, John. *War By Other Means: An Insider's Account of the War on Terror*. Atlantic Monthly Press. 2006. For a discussion of Clausewitz's persistently misquoted dictum, see Holmes, James. "Everything You Know About Clausewitz is Wrong." *TheDiplomat.com*. Nov. 12, 2014.

[244] Mitchell, 299.

[245] Baudrillard, 29.

[246] Foucault, 48-9.

> man and displays it marked, beaten, broken. The ceremony of punishment, then, is an exercise of 'terror.'[247]

The "touching" of the bodies of the offender and the king as articulated here is worthy of note. It speaks to the corporality of the experience of terror and also how it is bound up with the writ of law as a kind of corporeality—a *body* of law that is also *embodied* in the prince.[248] While the offender has only "touched" the prince, the prince's response is a kind of overwhelming power exercised specifically on the offender's body. In fact, it is power that manifests on the soul that it co-constitutes through the body, it differs from a later exercise of institutional power on the soul through mechanisms like discipline.[249]

One feature, then, of this "touching" is the asymmetrical application of force by the sovereign and the domination that ultimately changes the comportment of the offending person. Not only is it the deprivation of liberty, it is "touching" in a hyperbolic mood, to borrow a phrase from our first chapter. The force is disproportionate in the sense that it transgresses an understood or intuited measure, which here is indexed to the will or agency of the offending Other. It is, perhaps, counterintuitive that the subjugated Other in a monarchial structure would

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[247] Foucault, 49.

[248] I am reminded here of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" in which the offense is literally inscribed via the "harrowing machine" into the body of the condemned. Kafka presents the narrative of public torture from the perspective of the experiencing consciousness, a fascinating correlative precursor to Foucault. We also see an example of the sort of material organization to the discursive that is noted in Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech*, which we will explore further in s subsequent chapter.

[249] As Sheridan summarizes, "The disappearance of public punishment marks not only a decline in the spectacle but a slackening of the hold on the body. Physical pain was no longer a necessary element of punishment. The body was touched as little as possible and then only to reach something other than the body, what might be called the 'soul'. The expiation that was once inflicted on the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the mind, the will" (Sheridan 137). This tracking of the status of the "modern soul" is a correlative thesis in *Discipline and Punish* for Foucault because it is the locus of various techniques for the exercise of power.

be granted will or agency to begin with. We are reminded elsewhere by Foucault, however, that the fullness of the Other's subject status is contingent, yet even at its most bestial, the transgression and subsequent punishment ritual has granted the offending person some individuation by virtue of becoming the subject of retaliation.[250] It is the delimiting of their will by the sovereign—the usurpation of control over their body, and more importantly, of their own death—that produces terror here, but it is through the empathy of the public that it is actualized. Scenes of torture, for example, are demonstrations of the sovereign's ability to bring the condemned person to the edge of death and then capriciously preserve their life.[251] Foucault's concern is not really in the effect of terror for the individual, but in the way their behavior in the terrible crucible of torture and its public reception functions in the larger ritual act.

The mechanism of public torture and execution, as Kafka makes so plain in "In the Penal Colony," is not just a hunt or a form of animal submission. The prince does not simply kill the offender—and certainly not in private. It is essentially a "marking" or inscribing of power. The strength of the sovereign is not manifest in the silencing of the condemned by death, but in the demonstration of the inscription of guilt on the offender's body. Such a ritual, both juridical and political, "was a means of publishing the truth of the crime" and not just "an uncontrolled expression of anger."[252] Key to this ritual was the ascription of "truth" through the *supplice*, or torture that preceded the execution that was meant to prompt a confession. The sovereign

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[250] See: Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. (New York: Vintage, 1965).

[251] There is also a kind of foreshadowing at play here, in that the capriciousness of public opinion, as well as that of the sovereign, was another existential precipice for the condemned. They too, could spare the life of the condemned.

[252] Sheridan, 140.

ostensibly demonstrates to an audience the veracity of the conviction. Tacit, however, is the understanding that the condemned person's will can also be overwritten. The sovereign is the preeminent arbiter of truth. When they care to do so, they can conceivably force a subject to represent themselves in a particular way. They are an existential marionette to the extent that the public will allow them to perform unchecked.

There is a prismatic effect of the spectacle at play through which the supposed "witnesses" feel the presence of the sovereign's power and its threat—a threat which appears to express itself discursively as binding on the body (corporeal) and oriented towards death. This power operates in a twofold mode, as both material (as actualized by the executioner or other proxies) and ritualized (which emphasizes the political or representational figuration). Such a structure is appropriate to the "double-body" of the king as an affronted individual and as The Crown. Yet this hyperbolic system appears to be subject to a sort of Aristotelian adjudication of moderation grounded in public perception. What remains unclear is to what extent the adjudication of power's moderation is ultimately an aesthetic practice, as Foucault's later work on self-care might suggest.[253] As the phenomenologists might ask, "how does one have the experience of the sovereign's transgression of moderation and excess of power?"

One implication of the purported extent of this excessive power is that all of the instances in which the sovereign is not deploying the power, are ripe for subjects to act in ways that run afoul of the sovereign's proscriptions. If, as Sheridan sums it, "the law represented the will of the

[253] Indeed, Foucault expounds upon several incarnations of theory regarding the use of appropriate power in punishment, citing numerous 18th and 19th century theorists, but the theory is oriented toward appropriate governance, it is a better description of a government's strategy than of the reaction among a mass of people. Besides, he ultimately suggests that the art of punishment ultimately comes down to an art of representation.

sovereign" that meant that "all crime was treason."[254] This made even the most mundane illegalities affronts to the sovereign. Foucault illuminates a related implication:

> By placing on the side of the sovereign the additional burden of a spectacular, unlimited, personal, irregular and discontinuous power, the form of monarchical sovereignty left the subjects free to practice a constant illegality; this illegality was like the correlative of this type of power.[255]

Tabling, for the moment, Foucault's broader point about illegality, it should be noted first that he adds here another feature to the spectacle; it is "irregular and discontinuous." There is an affinity in this characteristic to our previous discussion of terror as an event, and by extension the disruptivity of terror. Apparently, terror, as it is relates to the spectacle, is constituted irregularly and chronologically in terms of scope. The spectacle, as a performance, with a beginning, middle, and ending, takes the form of an event that is perceived as disruptive to the flow of everyday life; so, too, is the terror that it inspires.[256]

Terror and Atrocity

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[254] Sheridan, 141.

[255] Foucault, 88.

[256] The temporal characteristics of both of these, however, are still rather ambiguous. Yet, so much about this particular characteristic speaks to descriptions of terror and terrorism outside of this text, especially in conversations about contemporary terrorism. As Derrida and Habermas have discussed more directly, terroristic acts are often problematically interpreted as events. I wonder, too, about phrases such as *reign of terror*. The implication of this phrase is either that the whole *reign* constitutes an event, or that the regime's actions are so egregious or frequent (or both) as to blur the distinction between a series of discreet events. Among the many questions this raises is to what extent "terror" persists after the spectacle or is present before it. In fact, it is not yet clear whether terror is conceivable in the absence of a spectacle—something, perhaps, akin to the so-called "long violence" discourse.

Yet in all of this discussion of terror and while it echoes genealogically with contemporary discourses of terrorism, there remains an absence in the text of the appellation "terrorism," which leaves open the question of the relation between the two terms. There is, consequently, more to clarify regarding the nominal way of referring to the mechanism which may cause the affect "terror." Thus far, "spectacle" has carried the rhetorical weight of much of the act of inspiring terror, but this seems inadequate and somewhat imprecise because of the plurality of forces at play in any number of conceptualizations of spectacle. To frame this observation as a question, if public execution relied so heavily on the production of terror, why wasn't the sovereign's act, which inspired feelings of terror, simply called "terrorism" or a similar nominative form?[257] "Terror" itself is a term that is quite old and easily contemporaneous with all of the juridical anecdotes Foucault analyzes.[258] The same may be asked of the condemned, *i.e.* the regicide, why is he not a "terrorist" for having committed such an ostensibly heinous affront to the sovereign? What feature was required, or acquired, to earn this designation, which ultimately seemed to blossom during *La Terreur* of the French Revolution? Foucault's text is understandably silent on this question, which is after all tangential to the account of penal procedures underway and admittedly anachronistic (*i.e.* the question itself is tautological because terrorism, as such, did not yet exist). There is, however, a related term in Foucault that operates intriguingly along these lines, joining the sovereign and the criminal *vis-à-vis* "atrocity."

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[257] As a point of reference, the Oxford English Dictionary cites the first known English usage of "terrorism" in a speech by Thomas Paine in 1795—contemporaneous with the *Reign of* Terror. Other iterations of the word also appear in the mid 1790s. We should also bear in mind that there is a reluctance even now to call state-sponsored acts of terror by that moniker, but much less reluctance to label an offender.

[258] The Oxford English Dictionary notes use of the word in English in the 15th century. It was derived etymologically from Anglo-Norman and Middle French, so it was in use in that context prior to that time.

The concept of "atrocity," according to Foucault, is what really underlies the "economy of the public execution in the old penal practice."[259] It is striking to note, in fact, that "atrocity" was the very characteristic that The Enlightenment condemned in torture and public execution, yet was also a:

> . . .characteristic of some of the great crimes: it refers to the number of natural or positive, divine or human laws that they attack, to the scandalous openness or, on the contrary, to the secret cunning with which they have been committed, to the rank and status of those who are their authors and victims, to the disorder that they presuppose or bring with them, to the horror they arouse.[260]

While the word "atrocity" is freighted with a referent that is eminently complex and still difficult to cleanly identify, to my mind, this description is deeply resonant, indeed virtually synonymous, with the definitional concerns associated with "terrorism" as we have been discussing them here. Atrocity, in Foucault's terms, appears to be a crucial mechanism in the discourse of terror/terrorism.

In its "scandalous openness," "secret cunning," and "horror," for example, we are reminded not only of the hyperbolic mood, but of Zulaika and Douglass' characterization of the discourse of terrorism, whether state sanctioned or regarding non-state actors, as being characteristically paranoid, secretive, yet of global reach and conspiracy. It is no surprise, then, to see in a press conference following the Boston Marathon bombing, law enforcement officers

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[259] Foucault, 56.

It is difficult to follow in the text of *Discipline and Punish* whether "atrocity" functions more regularly as a noun or as a nominal adjective. Certainly, in English, there is no verb form (that I am aware of) that allows the sovereign to "atrocize" someone.

[260] Ibid.

pledging to go to "the ends of the earth" to pursue the responsible individuals.[261] While such an investigation turned out, in fact, to span multiple countries, the deployment of this specific hyperbolic phrase taps into an anticipated global and conspiratorial vein. An abundance of similar rhetoric was used to justify the "Global War on Terror."

More broadly, it is no accident to find that contemporary "terrorism discourse is characterized by the confusion of sign and context provided by the deadly *atrocity* of apparently random acts, the impossibility of discriminating reality from make-believe, and text from reader."[262] It is through this "queer" phenomenon that the discourse imposes a frame that insists "'this *is* real war,' 'this *is* global threat', 'this *is* total terror'" rather than the more materially-evidenced framing of "this is an *as-if* war."[263] In the contemporary account, as in the historical one, atrocity is the name of the act that ultimately yields the affect—a spectacular amalgamation of excesses that produces disorientation and outrage. Foucault insists broadly, in numerous places, that discourses are both productive and restrictive, here we can see the productive yield of

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[261] Richard DesLauriers Special Agent in Charge of the Boston Office, appearing in *Marathon: The Patriot's Day Bombing*.

[262] Zulaika and Douglass. *Terror and Taboo: the Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism*. (New York: Routledge, 1996) 29. Emphasis added.

Zulaika and Douglass note, for instance, "The experience of real terror is intimately tied to the breakdown of all norms (moral, legal, military) epitomized by the specter of terrorism and the utmost confusion of contexts invoked by it. It is by abandoning a reified, near-magical notion of uniform terror extending its tentacles through the hidden networks of 'international terrorism' that we begin to see its play with blurred contexts and ritual premises—deceptive posturing, the psychology of threat, a logic of chance, the shock of innocent victimology. The grip that terrorism discourse holds upon the collective imagination is far beyond what the phenomenon would merit in strictly military or destructive terms; the subjectively experienced potential terror becomes 'real' independent of the actual violence" (29).

[263] Ibid.

terror/atrocity. The phenomenological question of how an individual has this experience of atrocity, however, remains wanting.

In the political economy of the public execution, torture and punishment must "take responsibility for this atrocity," bring to light its concealed truths, and provide a site for the sovereign to annul it by an excessive display of power. In this way, atrocity functions as a challenge that requires the sovereign "make a reply" on the body of the offender.[264] It is, therefore, characteristically discursive, and occupies a "double role" as the "principle of the communication between the crime and the punishment" and also as "the exacerbation of the punishment in relation to the crime."[265] Here again, there is a hyperbolic doubled form at play—really two iterations of atrocity—in the crime and the punishment. The expiation of the reciprocated punishment, however, is the ultimate union of the sovereign and the condemned.[266]

Consequently, this was a punishment that was "not in the least ashamed of being 'atrocious,'" although it was ultimately replaced with a regime of punishment that called itself

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[264] Foucault, 55-6.

There is important existential context informing this particular view of the pre-industrial and pre-commercial body, when the body had a different value. Foucault reminds us: "Moreover, this 'contempt' for the body is certainly related to a general attitude to death; and, in such an attituded, one can detect not only the values proper to Christianity, but a demographical, in a sense biological, situation: the ravages of disease and hunger, the periodic massacres of the epidemics, the formidable child mortality rate, the precariousness of the bio-economic balances—all this to make it acceptable to give a meaning to its permanent aggression" (55). Yet, this shouldn't be taken for a chronological development, a linear easing, or pacification, of penal practices. In fact, the period leading up to the French Revolution saw, if anything, a more aggressive public penal practice (55).

[265] Foucault, 56.

[266] One striking similarity between this *ancient regime* form of terror/atrocity and the contemporary "terror cell" discourse of terrorism, is that the presence in both of the double atrocity—a kind of retaliatory structure of escalating acts of spectacular violence often articulated to some degree in a manifesto or decree.

"humane." It was legitimated by the public—the actual presence of people—because this element was intrinsic to the punishment itself. In fact, as Foucault sees it, "the main character was the people" and, as we have already alluded, the main character was prone to equivocation.[267]

Terror As Public Phenomenon

The signification produced by the ritual of punishment was not fundamentally intended for the criminal him/herself but for the sovereign's subjects at large.[268] The criminal, regardless of how spectacular or egregious the torture prior to the execution, would never experience the aftermath of their own death—the fullness of the "example" or the culmination of the "terror" of the spectacle.[269] But Foucault also suggests the audience might not experience the spectacle in its fullness either, only for another reason entirely.[270] Foucault argues that people "never felt closer" to the criminal than through this ritual, which was intended to exemplify the exercise of power "without moderation or restraint."[271]

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[267] Foucault, 57.

[268] Here we are reminded of the kind of triangulation of audience/participants exemplified in Jean-Francois Lyotard's contemporary schema of terrorism in *Just Gaming*. The intended perlocutionary effect is directed at a third party, public perception/opinion.

[269] In fact, there is an argument here for a living death being a fuller example of the sovereign's power than biological death. The sovereign has the godlike power to bring a tortured person back from the edge of death—ultimate domination of the living because it fully frustrates their ability to choose whether they live or die. The account I offer here is, of course, privileging secular political behavior that omits religiously framed punishments that threaten to continue after death.

[270] Foucault, 58.

[271] Ibid., 63.

To be sure, people must witness the execution because "they must be made to be afraid" and to be the guarantors of the punishment. The converse would be a hidden execution, thus a "privileged execution."[272] Yet there are other ways in which a public execution could be infelicitous, to ironically borrow a term from Austin. Foucault mentions an execution in Paris in 1775 in which the authorities posted two ranks of soldiers between the scaffold and the crowd. In the festering pre-revolutionary milieu, the authorities were concerned about a potential riot. In this arrangement, "contact was broken: it was a public execution, but one in which the element of spectacle was neutralized, or rather reduced to abstract intimidation."[273] In other words, what becomes visible is a kind of variable of proximity involved in the actualization of the terror-spectacle.

There is a familiar corporeal "touching" at play here that is interrupted when "contact was broken." If, as Foucault suggests, atrocity is the underlying mechanism of this form of spectacle, and atrocity operates by the sovereign acting bodily on the condemned, how has the audience, that is materially present and can largely still see the execution, become alienated from the incarnate terror? Is it that the audience, too, must "touch" the spectacle? It is tempting to think that there is some physics of spatial degradation at work here, or a calculus of line of sight and proximity. Yet, it seems more congruent, in this Foucauldian mode, to explore the structural arrangement of the "micro-physics of power."

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[272] Ibid., 58.

[273] One cannot help but think about latter day pseudo public executions (e.g. Sadaam Hussein, Timothy McVeigh) and whether these, too, constitute mere "abstract intimidation." In fact, issues of proximity, as discussed in Chapter 1, seem to be a crucial point of future inquiry. In the Boston Marathon Bombing, for example, did the spectators who were several blocks from the explosions experience something on the order of "abstract intimidation" as a function of their proximity?

I would interpret the situation, in this light, as the presence of the guards displacing the role of the people as the guarantors of the execution—not that the guards were completely absent previously, but that their role is foregrounded in a show of force. In this case, the imposing intervention of the guards displaces the locus of the sovereign's exercise of power. The sovereign's force is configured in a way that threatens the audience directly as the object of atrocity rather than obliquely by reference to the exemplar of the condemned. As Foucault notes, this arrangement takes the form of intimidation of the spectators rather than, I would suspect, a ritual demonstration that may in fact bring some cathartic pleasure, drama, or entertainment to the audience.

In theatrical terms, it is the doormen standing on the proscenium during the stage play, interrupting the spectators' suspension of disbelief. By design, in its intended arrangement, the audience should tacitly consent to participate in the drama by abstaining from leveraging its power to halt the execution. In that way, the audience discursively co-constitutes and affirms the terror inherent in the sovereign's actions by playing a part that modulates fluidly between the audience and a participatory Greek chorus in the ritual of power.[274] When the sovereign turns the existential threat on the chorus, the dramaturgical mirror is fragmented.

[274] It is useful for the sovereign to have the public think that terror can only emanate from the Sovereign and the writ of law, combined in the complex of the Crown and supported by divinity or other ideology. In a way, both Searle and Austin subscribe to the idea that with the development of more complex social structures come the development of more sophisticated referential structures in language. For Searle, for example, it is the development of the ability of language to refer to purely linguistic references. One could imagine an argument that described "terrorism" as a discursive construct that was only ever referencing the socially derived/contrived fictions (as Johnson says). In other words, terror could only become terrorism after it was pluralized. So-called state sponsored terrorism is only a thing because it is acting on behalf of the plurality. It is terrorism by proxy, but in that case, so is white supremacist terrorism.

This, once again, echoes Zulaika and Douglass in their commentary on 20th century terrorism when they comment that terrorism as a discourse balances on a precipice of imagination. The threat of terrorism relies on a fictional amplification of imagined threat; when the fiction reveals itself as such, however, the "fear dissolves into 'as-if' terror."[275] In the spectacle of the public execution, it was perhaps the imagined threat of the omnipotence of the sovereign, in response to the amplified atrocities of the condemned, that produced terror. Which is, of course, not to say that the sovereign's power was not materially great and far reaching, but that the ritualized performance relied on that kernel of facticity to proliferate a ritual of inflated symbolism and omnipotence. Perhaps counterintuitively, without the validation provided by the assembled public chorus, in the latter unsuccessful case under threat of the guards, the fiction of omnipotence revealed itself to be vulnerable, threatened, and thereby only 'as-if' terror.

Indeed, such undermining of the fiction of terror occurred more frequently on other occasions when the audience simply did not play their role amicably, thus rendering the sovereign's re-inscription—or one might say, disclosure—of power infelicitous in other ways. The audience readily undermined the spectacle's ability to produce terror at all. The executions, in the last resort "did not, in fact, frighten the people" but as often as not created resistance and solidarity between the condemned and the audience, petty criminals, vagrants, others on the margins of society. At its most extreme, the spectators banded together to intervene in the execution and attack the sovereign's proxies, turning the tables on the guards and the now "terrified executioner."[276]

[275] Zulaika and Douglass, 29.

[276] Foucault, 60.

This was one of the first bases cited by the reformers of the 18th and 19th centuries in demanding the abolition of such spectacles.[277] They were concerned that the executions incited solidarity between criminals and all manner of dubious elements of the broader population. According to Foucault, the scaffold was generally inconsistent and unreliable as a means of producing terror. Paradoxically, in fact, "the terror of the public execution" had the result of creating "centres of illegality."

> In these executions, which ought to show only the terrorizing power of the prince, there was a whole aspect of the carnival, in which rules were inverted, authority mocked and criminals transformed into heroes... On execution days, work stopped, the taverns were full, the authorities were abused, insults or stones were thrown at the executioner, the guards and the soldiers; attempts were made to seize the condemned man, either to save him or to kill him more surely; fights broke out, and there was no better prey for thieves than the curious throng around the scaffold.[278]

In these expressions of illegality and solidarity was also the undercurrent of insurrection.[279] With the French Revolution rapidly approaching, it was less the case that people were awed by the sovereign's display of power and instead felt the impinging threat of legal violence without moderation and resisted it in all manner of ways. Consequently, police repression and penal practices shifted to confront this burgeoning solidarity because it was more likely than sovereign power to "emerge with redoubled strength" from these ritualized acts.[280]

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[277] Foucault, 63.

[278] Ibid. 61-3.

[279] Sheridan notes, for instance, "The spectacle of the scaffold was seen more and more as a potential occasion for a confrontation between the violence of the king and the violence of the people. In this violence tyranny confronts rebellion: each calls forth the other. Instead of taking revenge, justice should punish" (Sheridan, 143).

[280] Foucault, 63.

Gallows Speeches, Broadsheets, Novels

Yet, as Foucault makes so clear, the sovereign's inscription of truth on the body of the condemned was never the only discursively salient feature of the public execution, nor were the public's vacillations necessarily spontaneous. Interwoven into the ritual, often crucially responsible for the turn in the role played by the public, were the various texts circumscribed around the condemned. The gallows speeches, in particular, offered a venue for the condemned to speak, to validate the conviction or to reaffirm their innocence, to incite the public to intervene or to provoke ire. While it was required by law that the condemned should "authenticate in some sense the tortures that he had undergone," such discourse was always equivocal.[281] This is part of what constitutes the attendant discursive, perhaps more precisely, gestural, excess in and above the sovereign's punishment. Tracking these excesses is the singular most salient feature in understanding the loom and shuttlecock that weaves terror into the fabric of the later surveillance society.

Two emblematic genres of such excess were the broadsheet and the death song that, for Foucault, functioned as a sequel to the official trial and the conduit of an articulation of truth.

> They pursued that mechanism by which the public execution transferred the secret, written truth of the procedure to the body, gesture and speech of the criminal. Justice required these apocrypha in order to be grounded in truth. Its decisions were thus surrounded by all these posthumous 'proofs'.[282]

In this way, the heir to the terror spectacle can be traced in language. Foucault cites examples of the gallows speeches, the *amende honorable*, fictional speeches, published accounts, broadsheets,

[281] Foucault, 67.

[282] Ibid., 66.

pamphlets, almanacs, adventure stories, and the literature of crime as constituents of this literature and their relation to the "'disturbances around the scaffold.'" In fact, this was evidence of the generation of a "whole mass of discourses" as a result of the surplus of power that the ceremony of the execution failed to contain within ritual.[283] This speech and literature pursued the "same confrontations" as that of the failed spectacle. Even if it ultimately makes claims which affirm the justice of the penalty, it simultaneously valorizes the criminal, according to Foucault. Such was the allure to the readers of broadsheets and the objection of the penal reformers to all of these essentially uncontrollable perlocutionary forces. Purely by discussing the infamous criminal, there is an implicit elevation of his or her status—an individuation. In this way "the condemned man found himself transformed into a hero by the sheer extent of his widely advertised crimes, and sometimes the affirmation of his belated repentance."[284]

An undercurrent of public "curiosity" often drove the proliferation of these stories, a factor that, Foucault reminds us, is essentially political.[285] These critiques persist today despite some important developments in the structure and propensities of the sites where this discourse takes place. The *Rolling Stone* piece is a particularly apt example of an instance of this variety of public ambivalence. Readers were simultaneously intrigued and repulsed by the journalistic profile of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev because, while it addressed the fundamental curiosity about the

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[283] Ibid., 68.

[284] Ibid., 67.

[285] Foucault also makes clear that these modes of narrative dissemination, *e.g.* broadsheets, folk songs, and later the mobile spectacle of the chain gang, were shaped by social class. Their interpretation, then, was eminently influenced by contextual factors such as the prevailing perception of policing and penal practices, *i.e.* perceived sovereign overreach, in addition to general sways in public interest. It is notable that the material dissemination and the specific generic tastes of the public changed with the evolution of economic forces and social class structures.

bombers, it also offered a privileged singularity to its subject. One common critique of the profile was that it made Tsarnaev look like a "rock star." This critique seems rather natural considering the profile was published in a periodical best known for its coverage of popular music and musicians. Reading along with Foucault, however, foregrounds the aesthetics of class politics at play—a politics of curiosity. Part of the repulsion to the presentation of Tsarnaev as a rock star was undoubtedly the complex class signification of rock stars in general, which is, after all, a designation that suggests success, creativity, and often, a trajectory from working class to elite status. It also legitimates some level of misbehavior under the premise of a kind of artistic non-normativity. A mis-ascription of the rock star label, therefore, presents a threat across all social classes.

Foucault reframes the emergence of this "literature of crime" as neither "a spontaneous form of 'popular expression,'" nor as a concerted "programme of propaganda and moralization from above; it was a locus in which two investments of penal practice met—a sort of battleground concerning the crime, its punishment and its memory."[286] In the historical sense of the scaffold it is yet another corporeal confrontation and adjudication between the "body" of sovereign writ and the literary corpus. Since publication was under strict control by virtue of tight limitations around printing and distribution, these publications were ostensibly meant to be ideologically filtered, which is to say, under a kind of perlocutionary control. This literature, however, proved perennially difficult to wrangle. A story about an infamous crime could transform into a myth of peripeteiac penitence or the subject's Homeric endurance under torture, all within the sovereign's general ideologically constrained narrative, but inspiring sympathy rather than affirming justice. It should be noted that the narratives had the power of

[286] Ibid., 68.

creating a subject identity of its own—heroic, mythic, or otherwise—independent of how accurately it mapped on to the individual it took as its referent. In other words, it was not just the sovereign's attempts at inscription that were thwarted, but the condemned person's attempt to articulate their own identity.[287]

For the purposes of our inquiry of terrorism, it is most notable that this account of the evolution of crime literature not only suggests the experience of terror became mediated by print discursivity, but that the various disclosures are ultimately adjudicated in a public space that is diffuse and at stake. Tracking along with Foucault, we move from the spectacular public inscription of power through torture into, ultimately, crime novels in which identity and motive are concepts to be reconstructed or, in a particular sense, reconstituted through the powers of investigation. This is primarily by way of the internalization the "hundreds of tiny theatres of punishment" that are created by the diffusion of the spectacle in the Panoptic society. They are "theatres" because the spectacular punishments remain visible in the imaginary. As Foucault conceives of it, "From where the public is sitting, it is possible to believe in the existence of certain cruelties which, in fact, do not take place."[288] For that reason, this kind of "terror" is diffuse in that it operates in microcosms of plurality. It is not, however, diminutive in its potency but carries an exponentially magnified reach. In fact, for Baudrillard, it is precisely this

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[287] We can, of course, see evidence of this today in contemporary events, most notably perhaps, the Red Army Faction's extensive propaganda and Al Qaeda and the ISIS's sustained and concerted public communications campaigns, among many others. The notion of "public relations" being integral to terrorist intentions remains somewhat out of step with the idea of terror attacks being perpetrated as a rudimentary communication or a display of brute force. Yet, these coordinated communications strategies have been a fully realized aspect of such groups since at least the 1970s. In conversation with Foucault, it is clear that they are an attempt, as politicians are often fond of phrasing it: control the narrative. In our context, it is a way of framing the perlocutionary contexts.

[288] Foucault, 113.

imaginary—a space for fantasy fueled by images in the media—in which the September 11, 2001 attacks were rehearsed in the collective Western consciousness prior to the attacks taking place. Such images of destruction are provoked, he argues, by the "unbearable power" of the United States as a Superpower, or more accurately, any hegemonic power. For Baudrillard, this is the "terroristic imagination which dwells in all of us."[289]

There is a peculiar caveat to the ground-shifting changes that Foucault notes, however. Amidst the multiplicity of the tiny theatres of "everyday punishment" something akin to the old spectacle was reserved for especially atrocious crimes, such as parricide, that filled the place formerly occupied by the "regicide." In other words, though it is no longer the dominant mode of punishment, terror does not go away with the spectacle of the public execution. It remains, however, integral to the whole system and functions as a kind of keystone. Foucault is careful to note the nuanced way in which the spectacle continues to undergird the system of laws. A reactivation of power still occurs during punishment, he argues, but instead of the sovereign it is the reactivation of the code of laws.[290]

In terms of governance, the transition into a later form of surveillance society, then, was a movement away from a "policy of terror," which was never just a "lingering hang-over from an

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[289] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 5.

[290] A byproduct of this shift can be seen in the figure of "delinquents" and, I would argue, its correlative figuration of the "terrorist" as a fearless and faceless enemy. Consider, for example, a modern expression of these fears around, specifically, juvenile "superpredators" of the 1990s in the United States. Foucault argues that 19th century newspapers and newly founded crime periodicals served to justify the enhanced surveillance and partitioning of society. Though Foucault does not use the word here, it is clear that the abundance of such stories manifested an overwhelming threat—a sort of "terror." This proliferation of texts "recounts from day to day a sort of internal battle against the faceless enemy; in this war, it constitutes the daily bulletin of alarm or victory" (286). If this is indeed a "war," it is a peculiar one. Foucault is interested in the way that society defines the "faceless criminal" as not of itself, which is echoed by Zulaika and Douglass when they point out that in the discourse of terrorism, "oneself is never a terrorist."

earlier age" but an "entire practice" of "terror…inscribed in the penal system."[291] The new approach, as exemplified by the writings of the *Idéologues*, strove to become a

> Sort of general recipe for the exercise of power over men; the 'mind' as a surface of inscription for power, with semiology as its tool; the submission of bodies through the control of ideas; the analysis of representations as a principle in the politics of bodies that was much more effective than the ritual anatomy of torture and execution.[292]

Along with the advent of a sophisticated body of common law, the bourgeoning crime literature was integral to this development. It served as a venue for a "whole aesthetic rewriting of crime." This process made possible the revision of "the monstrousness of the strong and powerful" in "accepted forms."[293] It also marks a change in the mode of confrontation from the coupling of the sovereign and criminal to that of the "investigation" in which "two pure minds—the murderer and the detective—are pitted against each other" by the mechanism of a "slow process of discovery" rather than confession.[294]

As is apparent, part and parcel to this shift is the transposition of the spectacle to a higher social class in whose norms an attempt is made to contain it. This is resonant with several

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[291] Foucault, 49.

[292] Ibid., 102-3.

[293] This sounds rather Nietzschean and also, strangely, this idea resonates with a character of language that the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls attention to in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. In his discussion of gestural speech (which is very much the expression of an existential subject) language (*langue*) is a way of bringing the nascent language (*paroles*) of being into existence in the world.

[294] Foucault, 69.

It is easy to see a link here to Zulaika and Douglass's point that this is also the genesis of all manner of fields of study and organizations to combat various threats, *i.e.* counterterrorism.

comments of Austin and Searle's including those regarding the development of a more sophisticated discursively referential performative language as social structures continue to grow more complex. It also speaks to Austin's understanding of the sense of outrage prompted by the transgression of social and performative norms. Here the public is primed to be outraged in literature as well as in what we might problematically call "real life," although, since the emergence of myriad social institutions that tend to sequester transgressive behavior, the public is ostensibly more likely to encounter outrages in the pages of a novel or magazine than in the street—that is, until the upheavals of modern wars complicated the experience of atrocity. To the criminal outrages, society develops formulas for excluding the criminal. One such formula is the sequestration of criminal terrors by attributing them in the literature to subjects who were Othered from society. In such sequestration it is easier to see the Boston bombers as radicalized Muslims or mentally ill people rather than legitimate members of society.

Let there be no misunderstanding, the ascendance of this crime literature did not mark the end of atrocity. In fact, with capital punishment, atrocity remains the keystone of the criminal justice system.[295] To be sure, as Houen and Cole and others point out, this industrializing period is also the ground for the emergence of dynamite violence which gives rise to anarchists, and ultimately, terrorists. Even with the state-sponsored acts of execution removed largely out of sight, terror inspiring acts continue to occur and loom large in the social imagination. In fact, even with the proliferation of this crime literature, as a discursive implement, terror acts maintain the character of a blunt instrument.

[295] Not to mention the tacit public acceptance of extra-judicial or perhaps more accurately, pre-judicial police killings and state sponsored assassinations of civilians in other countries.

The persistence of atrocity at the heart of the penal system raises questions about the extent to which contemporary acts of terrorism are harkening back to some kind of historical ritual of atrocity and punishment, or whether the discourse of terrorism is so eminently tied to present contingencies that the earlier rituals are no longer the most salient precursor. In the former arrangement, we could imagine a kind of trans-historical multiplier of ritual signification in which the *as-if* war signaled by the attack is read as especially heinous because of the deployment of an ostensibly archaic form of violent barbarism. In the latter arrangement, it could be imagined that contemporary terrorism is not, in fact, a kind of outmoded ritual violence but is primarily participating in present discourses of violence, which would mean, for instance, that the force of the attack on the World Trade Centers can be read as a mimetic symbol of current Western capitalistic and imperialistic violence. There is, of course, no dichotomy necessary here—it is not simply that such attacks are either harkening to earlier ritual violence or not. To be sure, there would be no contemporary discourse of violence devoid of ritual and history. We observe, however, that insofar as we see contemporary terrorism as operating in the mode of ritualized violence, *i.e.* warfare, there is a tendency to elevate the means-ends aspect of the spectacle rather than better attending to the disclosures at hand. Interpreting in the mode of warfare, for example, tends to lead to the analysis of strategy and tactics, which may conflate ends relevant for nation-states with the intentions of an individual.

There is certainly a shocking disruptivity shared by contemporary acts of terror contingent upon localized context. We might consider Roy Boyne's tidy summary of Foucault, for instance, when he notes that the surveillance society is marked by the "continuous" exercise of disciplinary power rather than an intermittent spectacular display of power. Such mechanisms offer the illusion that spectacular violence has been all but eradicated, which we know is not true. We can then infer that the disruptive event-like feeling of terrorism stems from its incongruity to

these continuous disciplinary modes that society is trained to expect.[296] This character is endemic in the interplay of terrorism's fictions and its narrative tropes, as pointed out by Zulaika and Douglass.[297] They see "much of what passes for terrorism" as best "typified as ritual expediency and bluff within a highly symbolic context, rather than as something that functions in strict means-ends terms."[298]

Yet, if ritual is a kind of conventionalized act or practice that has a prescribed order, then terrorism, through the lens of ritual, would seem to be a known move that threatens the whole order. Baudrillard, then, offers a corrective to Mitchell when he points out that acts of terrorism are not at all unthinkable or unspeakable, but regularly imagined. By extension, insurance companies, emergency responders, as well as counterterrorism agents intentionally imagine such attacks. We could once again entertain, for a moment, Jean-François Lyotard's game-based understanding of terrorism in which he argues:

> By terror I mean the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him. He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened. [299]

This leaves the status of the terroristic move in rather ambiguous territory. It is, in effect, a move of last resort yet maintains dubious validity. But in the case of the Boston Marathon bombing, for instance, it is hard to imagine the bombers expecting to prompt a sudden shift in the United

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[296] Roy Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The other side of reason* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990) 110-111.

[297] Zulaika and Douglass, 65.

[298] Ibid., 66.

[299] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: U. Minnesota Press, 1984) 63-4.

States' actions against Muslims because, applying Lyotard's schema, there is no existential threat of elimination for the U.S. In fact, according to Lyotard, the government is not even properly the object of the attack, but instead the public. There is only, I suppose, the distant hope on the part of the bombers that the symbolic meaning of the attack would galvanize others and precipitate a Holy War. This aim, however, is not supported by extant information about the bombers' motivations.

W.J.T. Mitchell offers a more productive observation, however. Terrorism, for Mitchell, not only has a sense of "overdetermined symbolic significance," but its perceived randomness and unpredictability, produce a kind of disorientating "battlefield" that "has no front or back." Despite the unfortunate war metaphor, he effectively points out that terrorists "deterritorialize violence, making it possible for it to strike anywhere."[300] This deterritorialization echoes the disorientation of the attack and should be extended beyond Mitchell's point regarding the futility of protracted "wars" against terror. The terroristic move is precisely an attempt to use spectacular violence to disrupt sovereignty by the radical interjection of a disclosure of singularity through the deterritorialization of the matrix of hegemonic truths. In terms of atrocity, the would-be terrorist seeks to claim individuation in the tradition of the agonistic confrontation between the sovereign and the criminal. But, as Foucault shows us, in the panoply of modern social institutions there are myriad diffuse sites of power.

Literatures of Terrorism

Foucault notes the development of one multi-valent site of power in the emergence a new literature and aesthetic of crime. This literature marks the ascension of discovery as a means of

[300] Mitchell, 299.

exhuming "truth." Narratives in this new literature function as a site for a modified ritual, formerly carried out in the flesh, to be encoded in language and disseminated along with the law. In fact, in the "quiet game of the well behaved," as Foucault describes it, the truth of the crime is no longer revealed by the confession, although there is still a ritualized space for this form of utterance. Instead, it is a matter of reconstructing the crime to understand and exhume the inner life of the criminal. In this new form,

> Crime is glorified, because it is one of the fine arts, because it can be the work only of exceptional natures, because villainy is yet another mode of privilege: from the adventure story of Quincey, or from the Castle of Otranto to Baudelaire, there is a whole aesthetic rewriting of crime, which is also the appropriation of criminality in acceptable forms. In appearance, it is the discovery of the beauty and greatness of crime; in fact, it is the affirmation that greatness too has a right to crime and that it even becomes the exclusive privilege of those who are really great…[301]

The criminal, as a subject, is elevated in this literature to a kind of artisan. While their agency is often shaped by some ostensibly discoverable evil—a bad childhood, a traumatic event, a psychological disorder—their crimes are capable of rising to the level of dastardly genius. As Foucault points out, this is no longer a man of the people, but a more complex and exceptional character.

The desire for such complexity remains evident in contemporary profiles of terrorists. The Boston Marathon bombing produced several examples. One notable rendering stemmed from the piece mentioned above, "Jahar's World" in *Rolling Stone*, which elicited both strong criticism and praise for the rigor of its profile of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. One consistent pattern or representation of the "terrorist" as a subject is established almost immediately: the insidious

[301] Foucault, 69.

timebomb. The article's subheading reads: "He was a charming kid with a bright future. But no one saw the pain he was hiding or the monster he would become."[302]

A similar theme is evident even in shorter journalistic works after the Boston bombing. In a column by Charles M. Blow in *The New York Times*, the headline purports to present what is in "the mind of the terrorist." The piece analyzes Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's Twitter posts leading up to the bombing.[303] Reports in other news outlets had previously characterized Tsarnaev as "smart" and "sweet" while simultaneously demonizing his older brother Tamerlan, who was generally presented as the more volatile of the two and the leader. In the tweets, Blow tries to make sense of Dzhokhar's "bifurcated mind—on one level, a middle-of-the-road 19-year-old boy, but on another, a person with a mind leaning toward darkness." Among the items that were indicative of the former were his "misogynistic and profane" tweets—a mix that was at times rude and at other times respectful, his pride in his Muslim faith, and his "jumbled politics."

Evidence of the latter was to be purportedly found in a collection of tweets Blow groups thematically as about "crime," including the tweet "i won't run i'll just gun you all out #thugliving" and "I don't like when people ask unnecessary questions like how are you? Why so sad? Why do you need cyanide pills?" The first part of Blow's assessment seems fitting, *i.e.* that the tweets show a "middle-of-the-road 19-year-old boy," which is not to dismiss or minimize the extant misogyny, whatever actions would garner the need for cyanide pills, or all of the unfortunately quotidian violent rhetorical bluster. In fact, I would argue that the tweets Blow quotes in the piece are lamentably average for a 19-year-old American man struggling with identity in the early 2000s milieu. Most of those cited in Blow's piece are direct quotes, or at least

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[302] Janet Reitman, "Jahar's World," *Rolling Stone* (July 17, 2013).

[303] Charles M. Blow, "The Mind of a Terror Suspect," *NYTimes.com* (April 19, 2013).

very close references, to music, videogames, or other popular cultural touchstones. They are not exemplary for their originality or provocation. To find evidence suggestive of duplicity, one needs the violent outcome overlayed on top of these, and even then, there is not some clever trail of breadcrumbs.

The tweet that says, "i won't run i'll just gun you all out," for example, is very likely a mis-rendering of a rap song called "Outta Control" by 50 Cent. In the song, which is about the narrators having "what it takes to make the club go outta control," the rapper Prodigy, who has the most aggressive verse in the track says:

> I'm cool, I'm calm you looking real stressed
> I'm strapped I'm armed kid, hold your head
> I'm known for gat popping, when I got problems
> I don't run, I just gun you all up
> But we ain't come here to start no drama
> We just looking for our future baby mamas…[304]

In other words, even in this violent braggadocio there is a kind of effacement of conflict and not necessarily, as Blow suggests, "tweets that in retrospect might have raised some concerns," at least not concerns about an immanent terror attack.

What is most visible in "Jahar's World" and "The Mind of a Terror Suspect" is the journalistic, and ostensibly, public, desire for a certain kind of duplicity in the criminal/terrorist—the ascription in retrospect of a series of missed clues that reveal a deliberate, secret, conspiracy that was previously hiding in plain sight. In the investigative reconstruction of the "terrorist" as a subject, we see the unfolding of a process indicative of "the radical extent to which terrorism discourse constitutes its object."[305] Perhaps most visible, is the recourse to

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[304] 50 Cent feat: Prodigy, "Outta Control," *The Massacre* (Interscope, 2005).

[305] Zulaika and Douglass, 16.

specific tropic resources equally at home in a detective novel as they are in a journalistic profile.[306]

Part of the complexity of such constitution is that the terrorist's agency is known only in by virtue of the temporality of the *ex post facto* construction of the criminal act. In other words, investigations into their actions prior to the attack are filtered through assumptions about what constitutes terrorism, *i.e.* that it is secretive, conspiratorial, duplicitous. It is understood that the extent of the criminal's actions, the full expression of the individual's agency, would not be known were it not for the virtuosic technique of the investigator—detective, journalist, outstanding citizen. Such a structure positions these investigators as the interpreters of truth, authors of factual narratives, and the translators of cryptic disclosures. Here emerges the dyad: investigator/criminal, journalist/public figure, protagonist/nemesis, artist/critic. Through this work, the investigator simultaneously co-constitutes the criminal and is also the intended object of the criminal's disclosure. It is to the call of this intentionality that the *Times* and *Rolling Stone* pieces respond, in which the journalists work to decrypt Tsarnaev's "mind" and reconstruct his "world."

One critical characteristic of this "world" is Tsarnaev's superficial performance of innocence. Contrary to the axiomatic legal presumption of innocence, the nature of the terroristic investigation holds the appearance of innocence to be a marker of a "successful" terrorist. In reviewing 70 terabytes of images following the Boston explosions, for example, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies sought to distinguish innocence from guilt visually. As

[306] I say "tropic resources" and hesitate to merely call them "tropes" here because I do not want to suggest that there are a delimited set of classical tropes at play.

Kieran Ramsey, Special Agent with the FBI's Boston field office put it, "What's an anomaly in a crowd of 10,000 people? Somebody that's wearing a hat that says, 'I'm a terrorist'?[307]

Paradoxically, while investigation is the mechanism for discovering truths about terrorists, it is not possible for an investigation to discover innocence, at least not in the legal purview, only the lack of guilt in relation to the investigation's specific objective, its *raison d'être*. To say it another way, the 9,998 individuals who were not named suspects after the bombing are not conclusively innocent; their role in the bombing or other forms of terrorism, however, has either not yet been discovered or was not properly the object of the investigation. The residual of such truth-seeking is a sense of residual evils that simply fall outside of the purview of the investigation and are left to manifest later. In a sense, we can see here the residual of the "constant illegality" Foucault notes was fomented by the sovereign's discontinuous application of law. It is, as Baudrillard phrases it, "the faultless mastery of this clandestine style of operation" that is "almost as terroristic as the spectacular act," because it means that "any inoffensive person" could be a potential terrorist. This is the "source of an even more subtle mental terrorism."[308] Indeed this also manifests in one additional byproduct of the investigation: the erroneous attribution of guilt, as evidenced by at least one instance of mis-identification of an individual following the Boston bombings.

Returning to the literatures of crime, and terrorism as a limit case, this new aesthetic and mechanism ensures that acts of terror will be earnestly investigated with an ever more

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[307] We can see echoes in this statement of Foucault's note regarding public executions creating centers of illegality. In a crowd of 10,000 spectators, there are likely all manner of people. Many long time Boston residents and marathon spectators have described the event as a "party" atmosphere, which is suggestive of a similarly carnivalesque atmosphere. For a discussion of this, see the documentary *Marathon: The Patriot's Day Bombing*.

[308] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 20.

sophisticated *techné* in an attempt to construct the truth. As one high level FBI official said in a press conference following the Boston bombing "This will be a worldwide investigation, we will go where the evidence and the leads take us. We will go to the ends of the earth to identify the subject or subjects who were responsible for this despicable crime."[309] In communicative terms, what better assurance for an engaged reception to an utterance than such a willingness to "go to the ends of the Earth" to understand one's meaning? Only, it is precisely the "meaning" of such an act that is already, in a way, uninterpretable within the modal frame of such an investigation.

Here I offer an alternative interpretation of what W.J.T. Mitchell has called the "unspeakable." For Mitchell, terror is "the deliberate combining of the semiotics and aesthetics of the unimaginable with those of the unspeakable." Terrorists, in other words, do things that are ostensibly unthinkable as a way of prompting "shock and awe" through the "image of destruction or the destruction of an image, or both."[310] But as Baudrillard argues, regarding the September 11, 2001 attacks, "we have dreamt of this event… everyone without exception has dreamt of it—because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree."[311] For Baudrillard, and in conversation with our present Foucauldian reading, "terrorism is the act that restores an irreducible singularity to the heart of a system of generalized exchange."[312] Even within this broader socio-economic and socio-cultural commentary is visible the palimpsest of the individual singularity of the condemned criminal on the scaffold. The gallows speeches were a venue for disclosure, even if their interpretation was always at stake.

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[309] Richard DesLauriers Special Agent in Charge of the Boston Office in *Marathon: The Patriot's Day Bombing*.

[310] Mitchell, 298.

[311] Baudrillard, 5.

[312] Ibid., 9.

They have since evolved into a complex network of crime literatures that are sites for investigative co-construction of the subject.

This construction, however, is now eminently fraught and is framed as a forensic "reconstruction." In the Boston incident, despite what officers called a "big crime scene," they nevertheless immediately began to "document the scene." The word "document" is fascinating in this light because, despite its clinical and objective connotations, there remains an implicit "textualizing" work at its core. The contemporary technical resources supporting this effort are tremendous. As Ramsey characterizes it, "Short of a nuclear bomb going off, if you blow something up, chances are we're going to be able to pick up the pieces and kind of reassemble it back together, figure out what the bomb is made of." But, of course, the reassembly does not stop with the bomb. It extends to the reconstitution of the subject's actions, the subject's interactions, the subject's history, and the subject's aggregated imprint across every recordable datum. The audience for this co-authored work is the criminal courts, the court of public opinion, and history itself.

In this process are deep echoes of the earlier doubled forms of atrocity. If the spectacle of the scaffold was to "take responsibility" for the atrocity, bring to light its concealed truths, and provide a site for the sovereign to annul it by an excessive display of power, the state's proxies—the investigators—now answer the terrorists' bid to "make a reply." They have at their disposal a kind of excessive power of investigative techniques, amplified by the plurality of sites of investigation and surveillance, including the efforts of police, journalists, citizens (on the Internet, for example), and corporations. The power of such investigations does not always immediately act on the body, although in the case of a manhunt, it certainly can, but works to control the subject's identity presentation through an interpellative function and ultimately transforms the subject's embodied material circumstances. It seeks to aggregate evidence to support the

exclusion of the subject while re-activating the corpus of law. Since, according to Foucault, society's main mechanism for dealing with criminals is expulsion, the battle is one of re-inscription of hegemonic truths to show that the perpetrator resides beyond the pale of legitimacy. We can see a precursor to this battle for legitimacy in Foucault's anecdote, discussed earlier, of the public execution in which ranks of guards stood between the public and the scaffold. The sovereign power risks mere "abstract intimidation" if the figurative "chorus" of the public spectators fails to legitimate, indeed to participate in, the excessive re-inscription of power.

To say it simply, we have arrived at a situation in which the adjudication of truth hangs in the balance of the investigation, and the legitimation of the investigation *vis-à-vis* public participation and support. In the American court system, this adjudication ostensibly occurs in the courtroom. In practice, the weight of investigations—specifically forensic science investigations, but also media reports—and their power to establish truth creates tremendous momentum and inertia in disproving.[313] For Boston, as in many other cases, this yielded a pair of "guilty" subjects on the run before law enforcement knew their names, precisely the extent of what they had done, and certainly what they were trying to say in having done it. It is also the force behind the misidentification of subjects and extrajudicial killings.

The intertwining of fictional and factual narratives in this literature of terrorism, as Zulaika and Douglass point out *vis-à-vis* William Hayden White, creates a nebulous context in which it is fitting to consider the "fictions of factual representation." Indeed, it is precisely the

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[313] This phenomenon has been commented on numerous times, most recently in terms of the "CSI effect" in which jurors expect DNA evidence for even petty crimes and believe it to be indisputable. Meantime, in the court of public opinion, even the existence of an investigation is often interpretable as guilt. In fact, in a way, terrorism reveals the present predicament of the *investigation ad absurdum*, or better, the *mise-en-abyme investigation*. When, for instance, the veracity of the initial investigation is in question, there is a recourse and demand for another investigation *i.e.* an internal affairs investigation.

creation of this literature that makes terrorism visible *as* terrorism.[314] This is the mechanism that would-be terrorists specifically activate in an attempt to author their own truths. If one ritualized aspect is now clear in this vein, it is that law enforcement, journalists, and others in the investigative mode will leverage all manner of implements—including literary and rhetorical devices, folklore, psychological and sociological frameworks—to map narrative meaning onto the event and its associated subjects. The seduction for the would-be terrorist is that such overwhelming resources would be devoted to engaging with their disclosure. There is, however, a fundamental infelicity here. The aim of the investigation is not to understand the terrorist's truths and communicate them with fidelity, but to define the contours of a particular offending subject, categorize its characteristics, surveil broader behavior, and preemptively neutralize and institutionally exclude other like subjects from society.[315]

This investigative motivation was apparent following the Boston bombing, even outside of the law enforcement discourse. David Filipov, a long time Boston Globe writer, who extensively covered the bombers mused,

> Why did we do this story? Because we had to figure out what's next and how do we prevent this from happening. And the only way to do that is to figure out who these people are. And we failed because

[314] One of the implications of Foucault's account of truth in the time of psychoanalysis is that truth needs to be revealed through an expert conduit and is only truth when it was originally not visible to us. The terrorist investigation and disclosure appears to fit this pattern. The interpretation relies on this channeling through this expert mechanism and if it is overt/explicit it is not seen as true.

[315] Society expels those who have committed crimes and mourns their loss. It makes them producers of labor and simultaneously signs of the code of law. The signification of this kind of mourning in the "punitive city" takes the form of signs, posters, placards, symbols, as well as stories, poetry, and song. Yet for the purposes of our present inquiry about terror, there is an important caveat in this account. Foucault notes that the publicity of punishment must not have the physical effect of terror; it must instead "open up a book to be read" (111). It must be a "legible lesson", a "ritual recoding" that can be consulted by the spectators and the guilty person. The spectators must "be able to consult at each moment the permanent lexicon of crime and punishment" (111).

> we didn't get the moment when he said 'Okay, I'm going to blow up the Boston Marathon.'[316]

To be sure, the assumption of the journalistic responsibility to intervene in a person's decision to commit a violent act is somewhat puzzling for its zealousness. It is, however, indicative of the sort of responsibility of social policing suggested by Foucault's articulation of the panoptic society. More apropos of the current inquiry, the phrase "who these people are" is the critical fulcrum in this statement. While it could be interpreted as a question of ontological concern, the statements that bookend it suggest that the phrase actually yields something equivalent to "the kind of subjects these are." In other words, it is an interpellating frame in the epistemological register.

Here, journalism performs a similar labor to other policing efforts as a mechanism of ritual identification and exclusion. There is some facet of this that should strike us as counterintuitive for a literature which claims space for artful expression and purports to maintain moral tensions with law enforcement. In fact, in a way, long form journalism and non-fiction would seem to be ideally suited to representing the disclosures at the heart of such attacks—a fusion of art and research. At best, they are genres that purportedly hew to factual representation guided by an ethic of verifiability. Their artful presentation is, ideally, calibrated so as not to distort or mislead.[317] Indeed, for all of the expressive weight attributed to written genres, one might be inclined to think of the journalistic work as a possible venue for the authentic exploration of "who these people are" in an ontological sense and what they are trying to say. Certainly, the criticism about the media's role in disseminating accounts of terrorists' acts,

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[316] From *Marathon: The Patriot's Day Bombing*.

[317] I recognize that this is an idealization of journalism. My argument is not that this is how journalism is practiced, but that, among other representational modes, there is reason to think it has qualities that would lend themselves to such meaningful presentation.

thereby amplifying them, suggests that the power of these genres to get to the heart of such disclosures is feared for its efficacy. "Terrorists" themselves use such genres as a fundamental tool in representing their aims.

Yet, it is clear that by and large, even long form journalistic narratives are shaped by interpretive forces that overlap with those of law enforcement. The inquiries differ, of course, in structural ways. There is also a different character to the product in that journalists are more demonstrably influenced by artistic and literary forms, including the crime novel.

One particularly apt example is the Boston Globe's *The Fall of the House of Tsarnaev*, a multi-chaptered profile, complete with a list of *dramatis personae*, illustrations, and photos in the mode of a graphic novel.[318] The homage to Edgar Allan Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher* is overt. The reader, from the start, expects to embark on a horrific and thrilling mystery, but they also expect some cryptic ambiguity. Equally overt is the tropic framing of the individuals in the family and their roles in the bombing. Among the bulleted list of summary statements at the beginning, is the claim that the story "fundamentally recasts the conventional public understanding of the brothers, showing them to be much more nearly coequals in failure, in growing desperation, and in conspiracy." In other words, this teases to Dzhokhar, as a character, moving from dupe to duplicitous conspirator. The writers also discovered that Tamarlan was not directed by jihadist revolutionaries as law enforcement had suggested, but by "someone far more menacing: himself," a reference to the "two voices" he reportedly heard in his head. In other words, the story promises a pair of characters that falls into familiar crime novel tropes.

These conclusions are among a host of possible explanations offered in the piece for the actions of the men. All yielded periodic authorial shoulder shrugs, such as this:

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[318] Patricia Wen *et al*, "The Fall of the House of Tsarnaev," in *The Boston Globe*, (December 15, 2013).

> *If the truth is* that Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his rangy teenage brother acted out of private motives, reinforced by the fervent entreaties of the Muslim militants whose voices and images boiled on their computer screen, they would join the ranks of homegrown murderers such as the Colorado movie theater shooter and the Oklahoma City bombers.[319]

Yet, there is intrigue in insinuating that the brothers were, for example, genealogically predisposed to atrocity. They were, after all, "heirs to a pattern of violence and dysfunction running back several generations." Similarly, we can see a socio-psychologically infused speculation that the "turbulent collapse of their family and their escalating personal and collective failures" ultimately motivated them. A political register is invoked with the supposition that the family shouldn't have been admitted to the country based on the probable fabrication of their asylum application.

One peculiar feature of the reception of *The Fall of the House of Tsarnaev* that complicates the Foucauldian account of the gallows speeches or later literatures of crime, however, was the visible disengagement of a segment of the population from the whole story. In the months following the bombing, people grew tired of hearing about the Tsarnaevs. Some vociferously expressed their opposition to more stores. The oversaturated readers even threatened the journalists in an attempt to silence them on the subject. Patricia Wen, co-author of *The Fall*, captured the shift when she said: "A large segment of the population around here did not want to know anything more about the bombers." In one sense the resistance grew from moral indignation. Her co-author Filipov said journalists got hate mail that accused them of exploiting the bombing and being too sympathetic to the bombers. Some suggested "You have no idea what if feels like. I hope the Muslims blow one of your loved ones up," and similar sentiments, Filipov said. In fact, Filipov had lost his father in the attacks on the World Trade Centers on

[319] Filipov *et al*, my emphasis.

September 11, 2001. He had, in fact, experienced such loss. His commitment to the coverage of the Boston bombing was personally inflected. In a way, in Fillipov we see the historical convergence of a particular dynamic of reception; the authors of this crime literature were not operating from some abstract naivety as yet unadulterated terror attacks or their subsequent investigations.

The Fall was part of the Boston Globe's "exhaustive and empathetic coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings and the ensuing manhunt that enveloped the city, using photography and a range of digital tools to capture the full impact of the tragedy."[320] It was perhaps a correlative sense of "exhaustion" that the public signaled when they balked at further coverage. The Globe, after all, was only one news outlet. The journalistic narratives were reported and magnified by thousands of other outlets across the globe and the Internet. These were compounded by investigations from dozens of national, state, and local law enforcement and intelligence agencies that aggregated and scoured untold numbers of records, photos, videos, databases, and other forms of evidence. All of this was prior to two subsequent years of Dzhokhar's high-profile trial, which unspooled another skein of narratives and revisions. It is difficult to imagine a correlative situation in the spectacle of the 18th or 19th century scaffold—the ability to supersaturate the consciousness—the "tiny theatres of punishment"—of the populace was simply not yet feasible to this extent. What remains is to better understand, in an age marked by frequent mass shootings, several notable bombings, and other terror attacks, how it is that such acts continue to usurp our attention at all. To that end, it would be necessary to further explore the nature of the underlying bid for singularity that is the subject of the terrorist's disclosure.

[320]As articulated by the Pulitzer Prize Committee, https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-year/2014.

CHAPTER V: TRUE TERROR

As the trial of Dzhokhar "Jahar" Tsarnaev commenced in 2015, proliferating investigations initiated by the attacks at the Boston Marathon were already well underway.[321] If a common intent of terror attacks is to catalyze such investigations and seduce the recognition of a kind of singularity for the individuals responsible through the mechanism of disclosive atrocity, the attack was deplorably effective. If it was intended to achieve the recognition of an ontological intentionality at the core of the disclosure, it largely misfired. Once their names were disseminated, Dzhokhar and Tamarlan Tsarnaev would indeed become the objects of immediate and intense scrutiny. It remained unclear, however, precisely what they were trying to "say" with the attacks. Yet, there were myriad attempts to fit the act into familiar discourses and the subjects into epistemological categories. If this was an act, for example, that would advance the righteous cause of the mujahedeen, as Dzhokhar referenced in his paragraph long manifesto scrawled on the boat in which he was captured, it had failed to rally a holy war. If it was intended as a way of shaming the United States for its treatment of Muslims, it yielded no identifiable political change of ethics.

Megan Garber, a writer for *The Atlantic*, cautioned in the days following the attacks that early reports on who was responsible were based on "provisional facts. . .products of the chaos of breaking news, and may well also be the products of people who stretch the truth—or break it—in order to play a role in the mayhem."[322] She notes the apparent need to fit these provisional facts into rote subject identities. Garber warns:

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[321] There have been several reported spellings of Tsarnaev's name. Because of the centrality of the trial, I have opted to use the same spelling as U.S. court documents.

[322] Megan Garber, "The Boston Bombers Were Muslim: So?" on *The Atlantic.com* (April 19, 2013).

> Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev are not simply "the Marathon bombers," or "murderers," or "Chechens," or "immigrants," or "Muslims." They might turn out to be all of those things. They might not. The one thing we know for sure is that they are not only those things. . . We seek patterns, so that we may find in them explanations. We confuse categories -- "male," "Muslim" -- with cause. We focus on contradictions: He had a girlfriend, and killed people. She was a mother, and a murderer. And we finally take refuge in comforting binaries—"dark-skinned" or "light-skinned," "popular" or "loner," "international" or "homegrown," "good" or "evil"—because their neat lines and tidy boxes would seem to offer us a way to do the thing we most crave right now: to put things in their place.[323]

Indeed, theories proliferated about possible Islamic radicalization of Dzhokhar and his older brother Tamarlan, who was killed in the ensuing police chase, and other potential motives that all seemed to gain rhetorical momentum when scarce extant details fit well-worn categories. In the two years leading up to Dzhokhar's trial, there was the public expression of anger, frustration, and mourning, and some of it found an outlet through narratives spun from the dubious information making the rounds on the internet and in the media. There were also numerous vibrant strains of all out conspiracy theories spinning off from monstrously combining the same limited details with other, likely unrelated information.

The criminal trial putatively promised a fuller understanding of what had actually happened and what the brothers were trying to say with such a heinous attack. Patricia Wen, a Boston Globe writer tasked with investigating and writing a profile piece on Dzhokhar articulated the allure of the situation as a desire to unravel a mystery. Her interest, she said, was piqued by the equivocality of Tsarnaev's whole presentation.

> I was covering the trial every day because I thought, you know what, I'm going to learn more. This will help me figure out the

[323] Garber, 2013.

> psychological mystery of Jahar Tsarnaev. But after listening to every word of testimony, I still couldn't really figure out how a kid who had a potentially promising future could commit such a horrendous violent act. What was that tipping point?[324]

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's arrest followed an unprecedented manhunt that had been the manifestation of an initial investigative wave. In the interstices between the bomb detonations and Dzhokhar's capture, not only did the FBI pursue leads from material evidence recovered at the scene, but a tsunami of leads from the public also flooded in. Analysts scoured massive quantities of photographic surveillance evidence, much of it submitted by the broader citizenry. Although it was the police who dramatically swarmed the Watertown neighborhoods in tactical gear and vehicles of war, this police action was enabled by the investigative actions prosecuted by local residents, journalists, victims' families, armchair detectives, and the public at large, as much as any law enforcement agency.

It was in the contingency of this public court that the constitution of several discursive sites of adjudication formed, sites that collectively could be thought of as a matrix for emergent "truths."[325] While prosecutors prepared the formal case against Dzhokhar for trial, a parallel investigative effort continued unabated. Individuals continued to comb the internet, surveillance footage, school yearbooks, public records, travel documents, and hundreds of other sources for signs of the brothers Tsarnaev.

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[324] Wen, *1:32:00.*

The mystery was exacerbated by Tsarnaev's apparent docility during the proceedings matched against a scandalous sequence revealed in the sentencing phase in which he was caught on closed circuit footage flipping off the camera. All of this was catalogued and sorted in a moral compendium—a notional book of public judgment.

[325] The word "matrix" here is an appropriation of Michel Foucault's "parrhessiastic matrix."

With the selection of a jury and the beginning of testimony, Dzhokhar, the surviving brother who had already once disclosed the impetus for the attacks in a paragraph-long manifesto on the blood smeared panel of the boat in which he was captured, would have to formally speak again to the atrocities he and his brother committed. Yet, he would not properly speak, in the verbal sense, throughout the entirety of the trial until the conclusion of the sentencing phase when he would deliver a surprise statement that included an apology. Since Tsarnaev opted not to testify in his trial, there was no formal corollary or supplementary utterance to the written manifesto, no dialogue by way of cross examination, no venue for the clash of ideologies and justifications.

Throughout the proceedings, however, he was studied as if his every gesture and action was a direct address to the questions at hand. His demeanor was publicly evaluated, including notable disagreement about whether his face betrayed a "smirk" or a "grimace" as he sat in his orange jumpsuit during the arraignment.[326] One writer, reporting on the early formal hearings, noted that some of his movements seemed "unnecessary." His gestures had become "uncool."[327] Plus, he struggled to grow a beard that was more than "spotty," which apparently reflected both his immaturity and the aging he had already undergone in confinement. Several journalists noted that his few utterances were short and hushed, purely in response to questions put to him by the presiding judge. In question, too, was the thick Russian accent of his first court date that seemed to have dissipated by this later appearance, only to return at the conclusion of the trial during the

[326] Masha Gessen, "Dzhokhar's Tsarnaev's Pre-trial Hearing" in *The New Yorker*. (December 18, 2014).

[327] Ibid.

sentencing hearing—at that point sounding again heavily Russian, or according to one commentator, perhaps Arabic.[328]

To be sure, what was clearly being judged was the character of the 19-year-old man (variously referred in the media by the diminutive "boy") and what classical rhetoric might call his ethos, or in another register, his mode of being.[329] The close reading of his body redoubled during the jury trial and reached its apogee during his controversial apology, which he read aloud immediately prior to being sentenced to death.[330] By the end of the trial, the general question of his mode of being had turned to the specific question of "renunciation." After all that had emerged about the impact of the attacks, the harm he had inflicted, the stories of the victims' lives tragically interrupted and changed irreparably, did Tsarnaev renounce whatever belief compelled him to attack?[331]

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[328] See differing interpretations in, for example:

David Boeri and Kevin Cullen, "Tsarnaev Apologizes Before Judge Sentences Him To Death." *Finish Line: Inside The Boston Marathon Bombing Trial*. WBUR, (June 24, 2015).

Richard A. Serrano, "'I am sorry,' Dzhokhar Tsarnaev tells Boston Marathon victims at his sentencing." *LATimes.com* (June 24, 2015).

[329] Obviously the question of a linguistically marked Other rises here. There is an insistent description of Dzhokhar in alternately foreign and familiar terms, as a someone who spoke in a non-native accent and also, for instance, prattled on in social media posts like any other American 19-year-old. These considerations are important, but we leave them aside for the moment in the service of more fully developing the broader milieu first.

[330] Interestingly, the judge's choice not to allow photographers into the courtroom, but only a courtroom artist may, from this perspective, placed an additional aesthetic interpretive screen that may have shaped public perception of Dzhokhar's ethos. In other words, an artist was responsible for judging and representing key gestural moments in the trial, and rendering and disseminating those to media outlets.

[331] As David Boeri noted on WBUR, for instance, "Remember, the statement we have, the explanation we have for why he did what he did, is on the panel of the boat in which he was found, and that still is his most forthright statement. So, you would think that an apology, saying sorry, if in fact he is sorry, he is remorseful, he needs to renounce what he wrote in the boat."

Emphatic Truths

I have discussed previously how, by invoking a form of ritual atrocity, the terroristic disclosure inaugurates a challenge to hegemonic regimes of truth by courting a kind of investigative attention. The illocutionary force of the disclosure and its attendant seduction is existentially underwritten by the perpetrator and the victims of the attack. I have also discussed this mode's debt to the penal rituals of consummation of sovereignty, and its consequent provocation of a reciprocated bodily inscription from the sovereign (in our contemporary milieu: the role of the sovereign is inhabited by the state and institutions).[332] It is not difficult to see that, for the Tsarnaevs, the atrocity, the marathon bombing, was emphatically a way of telling a truth—this much was spelled out explicitly. Dzhokhar's manifesto, found on the boat, was presented by prosecutors as a confession. It begins:

> God has a plan for each person.
> Mine was to hide in his boat and shed some
> light on our actions I ask Allah to make me a
> shahied (iA) to allow me to return to him and
> be among all the righteous people in the highest levels
> of heaven.[333]

The choice of this phrasing, to "shed some light," combined with a reference to Shahid, which in Islam signifies a person who dies for a holy belief, makes this truth-telling situation fairly

[332] In contemporary contexts, this structure is complicated by the Foucauldian observation that power is now dispersed across an institutional landscape.

[333] Denise Lavoie, "Jury In Bombing Trial Sees Photos of Note Tsarnaev Left in Boat." *The Associated Press*, (March 10, 2015).

explicit.[334] [335] While there have been extensive explorations of the relationship between, for instance, the words Shahid and martyr, it is sufficient here to point to the basic idea that these are holy "truths" that certain people are willing to die for.[336] To be sure, both Shahid and martyr can function in defensive and aggressive ways—someone who endures something as much as someone who acts on behalf of a regime of truth.

What we described previously as hyperbolic about such terroristic "utterances" is embedded in the ritual quality in such acts that binds the life of the "terrorist" to the disclosure at the heart of the spectacular act of violence. In the terms that we have laid out here, this constitutes a form of inchoate disclosure with an existential risk at its core. It also shows that they are conceived intentionally, and fundamentally, to distinguish themselves from utterances that might fall under the rubrics of classical rhetoric (*i.e. ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, *kairos*). Instead, they function in a "hyperbolic mood" to generate a different discursive force than even the most impassioned rhetorical appeals. Indeed, this is rhetoric by other means.

Considering the structure of the discursive sequence initiated by the marathon bombings and extending to the corresponding verbal performative speech act of the apology, three key features stand out. The first, as I outlined in the previous chapters, is the disclosure at the heart of the attacks—a discursive imperative that signals a will-to-singularity and provokes investigation. This, I would argue, is what the public ultimately desires the perpetrator to renounce, even if

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[334] For a comparative discussion of the English *martyr* and its "near Arabic equivalent *shahīd*, see Sandy Habib (2017) Dying for a Cause Other Than God: Exploring the Non-religious Meanings of *Martyr* and *Shahīd*, Australian Journal of Linguistics, 37:3, 314-327, DOI: 10.1080/07268602.2017.1298395.

[335] As far as what is known publicly, even after the trial, there were no other stated motives.

[336] Just to be abundantly clear, I am intentionally conflating "beliefs" with "truths" because beliefs are supported by contingent regimes of truth.

they are not able to recognize or fully articulate the meaning of the disclosure itself. The second is the manifesto, in Dzhokhar's case, the paragraph he wrote on the panel of the boat in which he was captured. In the manifesto we see the verbalization of a constitutive part of the total disclosure—an existentially underscored articulation of believed "truths" that is functionally substituted for the disclosure. The third is the public interrogation of Dzhokhar's mode of being, which consists of the comparison of his subject performance to recognized categories of subject identity. Taken as a larger pattern, these three features, in the abstract at least, paradoxically share a similar set of concerns with *parrēsia*, to the extent that drawing some distinctions seems not only warranted, but crucial.

In Western cultural traditions, *parrēsia* is an admirable trait that signifies frank speech, or freespokenness. It is exemplified by the situation of a court advisor speaking a difficult truth to the sovereign. The concept is most extensively elucidated by Michel Foucault in his lectures at the College de France in the early 1980s. In broad strokes, Foucault identifies *parrēsia* as a mode of speech in which someone speaks a truth that 1) she believes to be true, 2) puts her at risk because of the unpredictable response it might provoke and 3) in so doing underwrites that utterance with her life. It is through *parrēsia* that "uncomfortable insights are broached," yet in a particular way, "when the *Parrhesiastes* presents those in power with difficult truths, her own moral practices are open to scrutiny."[337] For *parrēsia* to come off successfully, the character of the *parrhesiastes,* must be impeccable. This is achieved through various techniques of self-care and the maintenance of "good living," which is an aesthetic and ethical form of existence of both "conscious and consistent" practices. There is also a personal understanding for the *parrhesiastes*

[337] Marian Eide, "Otherness and Singularity: Ethical Modernism" *A Handbook of Modernism Studies,* First Edition, ed. Jean-Michael Rabeté (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 317-8.

that their subject performance is that of a "truth-teller" and in a kind of alignment with the truth rather than living falsely.[338]

The subject position "terrorist," as it is understood conventionally, would seem to be at odds with the *parrhesiastes*, if not its diametric opposite. Yet, as we have discussed previously, the term "terrorist" is highly malleable. Its only consistent quality appears to be that it signifies debased morality, *i.e.* an evildoer. Thinking of terrorism as a discursive act, however, the features of *parrēsia* are provocatively resonant with the features of the terroristic disclosure. From the perspective of the "terrorist," for example, one could imagine seeing such deplorable actions as 1) the attempt to disclose a kind of "truth" that they believe to be true 2) an act that puts their lives at risk because of the response it provokes and 3) in so doing the existential underwriting of the act of disclosure.

To be sure, the notion of the necessity of the maintenance of "good living" for the *parrhesiastes* is also peculiarly fitting. The Tsarnaevs had their own ideas about the maintenance of particular aesthetic and ethical forms of existence—a kind of culturally and religiously contoured mode of being they associated with "good living." Tamarlan, for instance, was presented in many media profiles as a former boxer who dressed in flashy clothes; he was arrogant, but also ambitious, talented, and grew to take his role as heir to the family seriously. It was also widely reported that Tamarlan had recently begun to embrace Islamic fundamentalism and abused his wife and sisters to maintain what he believed to be proper pious behavior from them. In a different manner, yet still in the same vein, it was reported that Dzhokhar posted often on social media about his desires to have fancy cars and attractive women. He was represented as a

[338] Ibid., 3.

likeable young man with a lot of potential, who began to think of fundamentalist Islam as a way of finding an organizing principle for his life.

The argument here is, of course, not that their behavior, for either man, constituted a kind of lifestyle that was virtuous. However, the fusion of the Tsarnaev's ethnic background, religion, and the patriarchal Western consumerist values of wealth and success, could make it possible for them to perceive themselves as appropriately within some kind of standard of "good living." In other words, actions like Tamarlan's violent policing of the women in his life are repugnant, but they also fit within the lamentable patriarchal privilege of fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and certain veins of the broader Western patriarchal culture.[339]

A perception of virtue could certainly have been amplified by the brothers' embrace of aspects of Muslim ascetism in the period before the marathon bombing—the transposition of a consumerist aesthetic of "good living" with a doctrinal replacement. In other words, despite the ultimate depravity of their actions, there are identifiable markers of the maintenance of their own particular aesthetic and ethical forms of existence, even if the practice of such was inconsistent.

I am not arguing here that terroristic attacks, including the Boston Marathon bombing constitute *parrhesiastic* speech. To be abundantly clear, *parrēsia* is a virtue; terrorism is a repugnant malignancy. It appears, however, that the distinctions between the two are, while seemingly intuitive, not actually that clear and hinges on a general commitment to specific regimes of truth. Consequently, the ritual overlap between these modes of existentially underwritten speech—terroristic disclosure and *parrēsia*—necessitates further exploration. It would be prudent to outline the specific characteristics of *parrēsia* and better understand how it differs from the inchoate

[339] For an extended argument about the links between patriarchy, narcissism, and terror, see Abigail Esman, *Rage: Narcissism, Patriarchy, and the Culture of Terrorism* (Sterling, VA.: Potomac Books, 2020).

terroristic disclosure that has been the object of this inquiry thus far. Because *parrēsia* is theorized in contradistinction to performative speech acts, however, that also means revisiting performatives in a more focused way. To phrase this line of inquiry as a question: in terms of the terroristic disclosure, what are the fundamental differences between admirable *parrēsia* and reprehensible acts of spectacular disclosive violence?

Speaking Frankly

Throughout the lectures of 1982-3 compiled in *The Government of Self and Others*, Michel Foucault extensively examines *parrēsia*, the name of a concept constellated by frank speech, true speech, and freespokenness. In the previous years' lectures, he analyzed *parrēsia* as it is interlaced with the genealogy of confession in the pre-Christian and Christian eras. Both confession and *parrēsia*, he argued, were linked in an ethic of care-of-the-self that is situated at the border of virtuous individual life and political engagement. In a characteristically Foucauldian way, using the analysis of continuities and discontinuities in the discourses of historical texts, he also simultaneously extends the inquiry of J.L. Austin and Émile Benveniste by suggesting that *parrēsia* is yet another category of utterance that carries illocutionary force derived from extra lingual circumstances. Foucault is careful to note, however, that *parrēsia* is fundamentally different from performative speech acts—a crucial thread for the present inquiry that will be taken up here after drawing some initial contours.

The trajectory of Foucault's broader oeuvre, at the time of the lectures, which appeared to be ultimately motivated by a desire to better understand the movement of power, had by this point linked the concepts of knowledge, truth, and power. In fact, it has been noted that

Foucault's opening lecture in 1982 interpreting Kant's text on the Enlightenment "takes on the appearance of an overall reevaluation and balance sheet of his work since *Histoire de la folie*."[340] In these lectures, one can see that the groundwork for a particular understanding of self-care that will be further developed in the *History of Sexuality* series is already well underway. In other words, Foucault is clearly concerned with tracing the points of contact and infiltration of the ethics of personal and political life.

In *parrēsia*, Foucault, finds a mode of speech that is structured specifically around truth telling—an ethics of "true discourse"—that has both political and psychagogic valences and ultimately influences the governance of both. A person who speaks frankly—particularly to the Prince—is being an admirable individual as well as aiding the greater good of the city-state. But it is also essential for good leaders to speak truthfully and for their courtiers to be able to speak truthfully. Thus, it is desirable to cultivate this quality in leaders, and to extoll it as a political virtue.

While he notes its appearance at several historical and cultural moments, exploring the different inflections of its contingency, the constitutive feature of *parrēsia* that distinguishes it from other speech acts is the presence of a "double pact" in which the speaking subject assumes risk, even death, to speak truths, the act of which inherently makes the outcome of the situation uncertain. This sort of speech act, Foucault argues, can occur in a variety of structures of governance, including monarchical tyrannies, but is crucial to the operation of democracy; reciprocally, democracy presents fertile ground for *parrēsia*.

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[340] Frédéric Gros in "Course Context," appended to Michel Foucault's *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982-1983*. Ed. Frédéric Gros. Trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2011). 378.

In the lectures collected in *The Government of Self and Others*, Foucault largely focuses on recounting and analyzing *parrēsia* as it appears in texts of Greco-Roman antiquity; he notes a subsequent hiatus of the theme during the early Christian period, and he identifies its later influence in the conception of modern philosophy as critique. Through these texts, Foucault describes *parrēsia* as a mode of speech that is not purely demonstrative, rhetorical, pedagogical, or eristic. He notes, however, that it can have similarities to each of these modes at times.[341] Neither is *parrēsia*, a performative speech act, which as will become clear, is a claim worthy of extended analysis. Foucault also notes that *parrēsia,* at the time of these lectures, had not been well studied, and it is not a concept solely associated with a specific theology or philosophy but, instead, operates across doctrines.

In the texts that Foucault analyses, despite significant differences in political context and even in the specific denotation of the word, he finds four common elements in representations of *parrēsia*:

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[341] Foucault later traces *parrēsia* as it appears in Plato's *Phaedrus*, *The Apology*, and *Gorgias*. In these works he observes this practice moving out of the political realm of "the Assembly, courts, and all those decision making sites" and into philosophy as an "influence" (340). He identifies a "gradual diversion of at least a part and a set of functions of *parrēsia* toward and into philosophy" (341). Yet he is quick to caution that *parrēsia* persists in the political realm to some degree. Foucault is ultimately interested in critique as a specific form of philosophical *parrēsia* that occupies and should remain, he argues, exterior to politics. It is both distant from and correlated to politics (351). Foucault derives his position from a study of the opposition of philosophy and rhetoric in Plato's *Phaedrus*. He points to Socrates' method of defining philosophy in opposition to rhetoric in that dialogue. Philosophy, in this way, "demonstrates, asserts, and constitutes its permanent connection to the truth" (352). This is confirmed, Foucault argues, by the increased power of Socrates' speeches on Phaedrus as his utterances stand increasingly in the true. In his subsequent analysis of *Gorgias*, Foucault proceeds to trace the influence of philosophy as psychology, or "the action on souls, the government of others, the direction and conduction of the other person" (352). He concludes in a rather rare moment of direct address, that philosophy should necessarily remain outside of politics. Philosophy, in fact, uses politics as a measure of its purported position in truth.

> First, parrēsia is played out and unfolds in a constituted political space. Second, parrēsia consists in a particular kind of speech which claims to tell the truth and in which the person who tells the truth also proclaims that he is telling the truth and clearly identifies himself as the enunciator of this true proposition or these true propositions. Third, what is in question . . . is the ascendancy which will or will not be assured by the person who speaks and tells the truth… and finally, the fourth common element . . . is the risk taken, that is to say, the fact that the leader, the person responsible, the person who has spoken may be regarded or punished by the people or by the Prince according to the success of the undertaking, the result to which his truth-telling has led, or just simply according to the humor of the Assembly or Prince.[342]

To demonstrate the common features of *parrēsia*, Foucault first explores what he calls an "average" sequence in Plutarch's *Dion*, found in *Lives*, written around the first half of the second century C.E. The scenes are a retelling of events that reportedly occurred in the first half of the fourth century B.C. In the sequence, Plato and Dion are at the Sicilian court of Dionysius the Younger. Plato has come to visit at Dion's request to help "form the soul" of Dionysius, who was ruling tyrannically. On one of Plato's previous visits, Dion had become an acolyte after hearing him speak. Dion, who was Dionysius' nephew, hoped that Plato would also prevail upon Dionysius and help shape him into a more ethical prince, easing the tyrannical rule under which the city was suffering. In this era, the court was reportedly opulent and yet filled with fear. Foucault focuses on two particular sequences in the play. In those scenes Dion and Plato demonstrate *parrēsia* through their discourse with Dionysius. In fact, because of its various layers, Foucault comments that the play demonstrates a kind of matrix of *parrēsia*.[343]

In one exchange, Dion and Dionysius are having a conversation at court about virtue, particularly courage. Plato chimes in with a lesson illustrating that "tyrants were anything but

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[342] Foucault, *Government*, 192.

[343] Ibid., 50.

courageous" and that "the life of the just man was happy and that the unjust was unhappy."[344] The courtiers are charmed and applaud the speech; Dionysius grows upset because he feels like he is the target of Plato's derision. Enraged, he asks Plato why he has come to Sicily. Plato replies, "I am looking for a good man," suggesting that Dionysius is not a good man.[345] Dionysius angrily replies, "By the gods it is clear you haven't found one!" and proceeds to put Plato on a ship that was taking the Spartan, Pollis, back to Greece. Dionysius secretly tells Pollis to either kill Plato *en route* or sell him into slavery.[346]

Taken as a kind of parrhesiastic archetype, there are qualities of Plato's *parrēsia* that, in a limited way, resonate with the terroristic disclosure. The central act is one in which Plato makes a statement that, in itself, seems like an independent ethical statement. It is essentially didactic, although, as Foucault reminds us, it is not simply "a matter of teaching him…there is a rough, violent, abrupt aspect of *parrēsia*, which is completely different from a pedagogical approach."[347] The context of the delivery in the court of Dionysius gives it an irruptive quality that "flies in the face" of the tyrant. It is, in fact, because of the tyrant's unrestrained capriciousness that the statement can have such a resoundingly risky effect.

Roughly speaking, there is also a way of thinking of the terroristic disclosure as a kind of ethical statement. Before continuing, however, it is worth pausing to note the self-defeating problematic of atrocity being a conduit for the exposition of ethical propositions.[348] There is no

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[344] Ibid., 49.

[345] Ibid.

[346] Ibid.

[347] Ibid., 54.

[348] I see a parallel here to the vehement conversations in the post-World War II milieu regarding the means-ends rationality of revolutionary violence. I am reminded here of the

mistaking that Plato himself did not threaten or deploy violence to impose his ethical principles on Dionysius, which would amount to its own sort of microcosmic tyranny. The Platonic speeches are predicated on the pursuit of a kind of rationality that cannot actually be achieved under the threat of violence. Foucault picks up a related theme in later explorations of the relationship between freedom and *parrēsia*. The presence of coercive violence is a crucial difference that, as we will discuss further, produces a kind of "bad" *parrēsia*. Still, in the Boston Bombing, there were explicit ethical claims made in justifying the attacks and that similarity is worth tarrying on for a moment.

The manifesto that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev left behind on the boat makes explicit that the act was perpetrated as a statement against the treatment of Muslims by the United States. The paragraph, (including a variety of incomplete words and uncorrected misspellings) in its entirety reads:

> I'm jealous of my brother who
> ha (hole) ceived the reward of jannutul Firdaus (inshallah)
> before me. I do not mourn because his soul is
> very much alive. God has a plan for each person.
> Mine was to hide in his boat and shed some
> light on our actions I ask Allah to make me a
> shahied (iA) to allow me to return to him and
> be among all the righteous people in the highest levels
> of heaven.
> He who Allah guides no one can misguide
> A (hole) bar!
> I bear witness that there is no God but Allah
> and that Muhammad is his
> messenger (bullet hole) r actions came
> with (hole) a (hole) ssage and that
> is (hole) ha Illalah. The U.S.
> Government is killing our innocent
> civilians but most of you already
> know that. As a M (hole) I can't
> stand to see such evil go unpunished,

published debates of Camus, Sartre, Fanon, and Arendt around both the question of revolutionary counter-imperial violence and the Soviet project.

> we Muslims are one body, you hurt
> one you hurt us all, well at least that's
> how Muhammad (pbuh) wanted it to be (hole) ever,
> the ummah is beginning to rise/awa (hole)
> has awoken the mujahideen, know you are
> fighting men who look into the barrel of your
> gun and see heaven, now how can you compete
> with that. We are promised victory and we
> will surely get it. Now I don't like killing
> innocent people it is forbidden in Islam
> but due to said (hole) it is allowed.[349]

In this manifesto the United States figures as a singular entity, capable of "evil" acts. Critics of the country's various global actions have said it exudes a power that is unconstrained and, at worst, perhaps even tyrannically capricious.[350] Tsarnaev's manifesto could be conceived of as the statement that is true outside of the prevailing regime of truth operative in the United States. In fact, testimony during his trial showed that Tsarnaev was likely familiar with stories such as that of Anwar Al-Alaki, a U.S. born Imam who was the first non-combatant reportedly killed by a U.S. drone strike in Yemen under President Barack Obama.[351] If "our innocent civilians" is in reference to Al-Alaki, there is a certain factual accuracy evident here.

Yet, the nature of Plato's statement, in contrast to Tsarnaev's, is clearly not punitive or retaliatory. Plato's speech relies on the conventional discursive framing of the pedagogue delivering truth statements, which should rhetorically disarm any incongruities between the listener's mode of being and the claims of the statements. In the pedagogical mode, there is room to recognize the error of one's ways and fix them. Foucault reads Plato's statement, however, as

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[349] As reprinted in Lavoie.

[350] One critique this vein contemporaneous to the marathon bombings can be found in Greenwald, Glenn. "The Boston bombing produces familiar and revealing reactions." *The Guardian* (April 16, 2013).

[351] Trial transcript, Day 39, page 56, line 11.

anti-pedagogical. Here there is no Socratic irony that leads the student to formulate what he did not know he already knows. Instead, in *parrēsia*:

> The person who tells the truth throws the truth in the face of his interlocutor, a truth which is so violent, so abrupt, and said in such a peremptory and definitive way that the person facing him can only fall silent, or choke with fury, or change to a different register, which in the case of Dionysius is the attempt to murder Plato…the person addressed is faced with a truth which he cannot accept, which he can only reject, and which leads him to injustice, excess, madness, blindness… We are dealing here with an effect which is quite precisely not only anti-ironic, but even anti-pedagogical.[352]

In other words, Plato is not speaking in a pedagogical mode, not wholly at least. The statement, in context, is a provocation in the form of an ethical lesson. The tyrant's unchecked power leads him to interpret the statement as an affront, a challenge, and "change registers" to orchestrate violence. According to the logic of tyranny, for the tyrant to be wrong would be to cede power to the one who identifies the error.[353] As a result, Dionysius seeks to silence Plato not through ritual demonstration of violence but away from the audience at court.[354] In fact, the audience at court

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[352] Foucault, *Government*, 55.

[353] While it would seem accurate to say that Dionysius does not win a victory of *logos*, I would argue it could still be said that he wins a victory of discourse. To return momentarily to an earlier Foucauldian lexicon of truth and knowledge, Dionysius is able to "subjugate" truth even though he is not "in the truth". His actions neutralize Plato's burgeoning intervention in the discourses that co-constitute Dionysius' rule. The catalyst for Dionysius' response—which, we should note, actually was expressed through verbal orders—appears to be the recognition of Plato's mode of being as that of a *parrēsiast*. I would even go so far as to say that both Plato and Dion, as *parrēsiasts*, challenge forth Dionysius' relation to his own being in such a way that constitutes an existential threat. Even if we are careful to keep such a notion of "being" in the Foucauldian sense of co-constituted object of discourse, this seems to hold. It is not that their activities will necessarily kill him but that, by being in the truth, they stand capable of causing him to recognize his impoverished (or nonexistent) relation to his own being (his living or actual death). In other words, they threaten the very discourse through which he is constituted in his power and its correlated relationship to truth.

[354] As Foucault summarizes the materialization of the risk opened by *parrēsia*: "On the one

figures prominently in the situation. This is not a discursive context in which there are only two parties squaring off. There is an audience of courtiers whose attitude toward the scene is malleable and also the site of the negotiation of power.[355]

As has been amply discussed, the fundamental mechanism of terrorism is also leveraging the public as the site of negotiation of power. Despite the implication in Tsarnaev's manifesto of the desire to teach those who had been killing innocent Muslims a lesson, the terroristic disclosure, like Plato's lesson, is more provocation than pedagogy. One fundamental complication in teaching people a lesson through a terror attack—this putative punishment of "evil"—is that the modern nation-state is so decentralized that the intended audience for any such pedagogical or punitive statement is ambiguous at best, even in the hands of more rhetorically sophisticated terrorist groups such as the Red Army Faction. In a pluralistic, representatively governed, republic, in whose face, precisely, does the statement fly? For whom is the violent disclosure intended? To whom is Tsarnaev's paragraph addressed? Who is the "you" that is hurting "one" and, thereby, "all" Muslims, and yet is also part of the group who apparently already knows that the U.S. is killing "innocent civilians"? Such fundamental ambiguity largely nullifies any pedagogical or punitive force that may have been intended in this register.

Plato's exchange with Dionysius, however, is only the first layer of *parrēsia* in the play. In another exchange, Dionysius mocks a previous ruler, Gelon. The courtiers are laughing at his puns and wordplay. Dion interjects, "'Nevertheless, you are a tyrant thanks to Gelon, who

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hand, Plato teaches. Dionysius is neither persuaded, nor taught, nor defeated in a debate. At the conclusion of the teaching, Dionysius substitutes for language, for the formulation of the truth in language, a victory which is not the victory of *logos*, of discourse, but the victory of violence, and of pure violence since Dionysius has Plato sold as a slave in Aegina" (Foucault 55).

[355] Foucault, 64.

inspired a confidence from which you have benefitted; but after having seen you at work, no one will be trusted again.'"[356] Despite such a direct critique, Dion maintains the favor of Dionysius. In fact, Foucault points out that Dion is one of the few individuals at court who was able to speak truthfully without provoking the tyrant's retaliation.

Foucault argues the defining characteristic of this sort of frank speech in the classical era is the presence of the double-binding pact of the speaker. The pact consists of: 1) the speaker's relationship to the truth—namely that she believes what she says to be true, and 2) the speaker's affirmation of the act of making the statement. The result is a speech act that constitutes a risk for the speaker because of the uncertainty it opens in terms of response from their interlocutors, particularly when the latter is in a position of power. The limit case of such a situation is one in which the speaker's life is at stake. In Plutarch, Plato directly faces the threat of death, and Dion is spared.

Here, too, we see some resonances between the mechanisms of *parrēsia* and the terroristic disclosure. In the latter, despite the structurally antagonistic orientation of law enforcement (as a proxy of the state) in relation to an accused terrorist, there is still, like the tyrant, a possibility of multiple outcomes. For the perpetrator of a bombing, like Tsarnaev, there is the possibility of incarceration and death. In much rarer circumstances, however, there is also the possibility of the act being validated and the bomber vindicated by a newly installed regime through a kind of revolutionary terrorism. One might recall, for instance, the discussion of terrorism by Frantz Fanon in the context of the Algerian revolution in texts like *The Wretched of the Earth*, in which

[356] Foucault, 49.

there is the palpable prospect of a revolutionary government coming to power on the heels of an extended terrorism campaign.[357]

In other words, had the Boston bombing actually precipitated a fundamentalist Islamic revolution of sorts, the actions could have been judged "in the true" because the essential interpretive context of the utterance, the parties evaluating it, would have shifted. The fact that the "you" to which the manifesto is addressed vacillates, betrays the absence of committed participation in a specific revolution already underway; the warring parties are amorphous. The text does not know who it is addressing. It therefore functionally resigns itself and the attacks to a kind of solitary event and does not presume a place in the revolution, even while it signals a broader threat of the rising "ummah" and the awakening of the "mujahideen," who are "men who look into the barrel of your gun and see heaven." This disengagement from a larger movement is even evident at the sentence level in the odd shift to a sports register, "now how can you compete with that[?]." The clause has the character of a pre-game taunt of an opponent, or perhaps more fittingly, a statement that one player might say to the opposing team after scoring an impressive goal. The effect is not to drive further downfield—it is not in the service of advancing the game—but to try to force a kind of acknowledgment of superiority from the opponent. This acknowledgement is a form of recognition of a "truth."

To pull these various threads together, one could say that Tamarlan and Dzhokhar wanted a lived truth to be recognized—a truth grounded in their particular way of being-in-the-

[357] As of this writing, there is also the continued unravelling of the investigations regarding the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the United States Capitol Building in Washington D.C. The discussion of "domestic terrorism" has once again been foregrounded, particularly in the hearings of the U.S. House committee tasked with leading the public investigation. One relevant area of interest is whether then President Donald Trump promised, or tacitly promised, presidential pardons for some key instigators of the mob. Regardless of the materialization of actual pardons, the situation keenly reminds us that the adjudication of "truth" can also be short-circuited through various political means as well as by the shifting winds of public opinion.

world. Their disclosure, in a hyperbolic mood, through the excessive gesture of spectacular violence, was existentially underwritten. In short, they were willing to die for it. The act effectively seduces engagement with the truths of the intended disclosure by prompting investigations. Since the U.S. is structurally a representative democracy, the intended audience for this disclosure is more complicated than the archetypical courtier/sovereign exemplar.

Matrices of Truth

The inflection of *parrēsia* changes, however, across various epochs and so do its resonances with terroristic disclosive acts. Foucault analyzes shifts in texts from two later representative periods, the Euripidean play *Ion* and several Platonic dialogues.[358] He gestures at the valences accrued as the word continues to evolve into the modern era. Among his various observations in *Ion*, for instance, he tracks novel dimensions in the representation of *parrēsia* related to the truth telling of a subordinate to a person in power. As in Plutarch, however, Foucault finds a matrix of *parrēsia* in the play across multiple characters, particularly Creusa and her orphaned son, the eponymous Ion. Creusa was raped and impregnated by Apollo. She birthed a child and attempted to kill him by exposure. The baby boy, *Ion*, survived and was raised by a priestess at the Delphic Oracle, later to return to rise to power and create the tribe the *Ionians*.

Among the key parrhesiastic themes Foucault notes in the play, are the imprecations of mortals to the gods, as demonstrated in Creusa's return to the oracle. Here he makes particular note of the imprecation and the confession—two threads that will diverge in later epochs. Creusa

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[358] Richmond Lattimore, "Chronological Note on the Plays of Euripides," *Euripides V*: *Electra, The Phoenician Women, The Bachae*. Eds. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: U. Chicago Press, 1959). The composition date of *Ion* is thought to be between 413-410 BCE, noting that there is a "reference to Athens as a city where people are frightened (especially people who cannot demonstrate their right to citizenship)" (227).

not only rebukes Apollo directly, "I accuse you in the full light of this day that shines on me!", but also later confesses her secret trauma regarding Apollo, her truth, through a question-and-answer dialogue with a sympathetic old man. This unburdening of the truth of her "faults" to someone who could guide her is the prototype for a mode of confession that will further develop during the Christian period.[359]

Apollo, who among other things is the god of truth, does not have to speak for his own actions, a quality characteristic of the gods generally. He is not obliged to respond to Creusa. Foucault notes "the god is always free to be silent."[360] It is left to mere mortals to "flush out the truth and practice truth-telling."[361] These are the speech acts "by which someone weak, abandoned, and powerless proclaims an injustice to the powerful person who committed it."[362] Foucault asks, referencing Creusa's imprecation, "What can the poor, unfortunate, weak, and powerless do, those who have only their tears…they can do only one thing: turn against the one with power."[363] This is a ritual speech act of the weak that Foucault sees as related to other "not necessarily verbal rituals" including hunger strikes and "some forms of Japanese suicides"[364]. It is

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[359] Foucault notes the religious destinies of this parresiastic mode of confession: "And then this notion is also found in the field of religious experience and the religious theme where there is a very strange and interesting change, a slippage, almost a reversal of the poles of this notion of *parrēsia.* To start with we find *parrēsia* meaning that the master is obliged to tell the disciple all the truth that is necessary, and then we find it again with the idea that it is possible for the disciple to tell the master everything about himself. That is to say, we pass from a meaning of the notion in which *parrēsia* refers to the master's obligation to tell the disciple what is true, to a meaning which refers to the disciple's obligation to tell the master the truth of himself" (47).

[360] Foucault, 87.

[361] Ibid.

[362] Ibid., 133.

[363] Ibid.

[364] Ibid.

a ritual discourse of "the weak telling of the injustice of the strong" that is "an indispensable condition for the strong to be able to govern in accordance with human reason."[365]

This concept of the imprecation to the gods also finds some corollary in the terroristic disclosure. It is important here to harken back to our earlier discussion of a few key structures of terroristic acts, namely state sponsored acts of terror and individually (or non-state affiliated) acts of terror. Such a binary is, of course, overly reductive by way of shorthand. Hannah Arendt, for instance, adds additional distinctions between totalitarian terror and tyrannical terror (the terror of dictators).[366] Acts such as the Boston Marathon bombing, however, are clearly perpetrated by individuals who share highly asymmetrical power dynamic with the state. In short, it is a position evocative of the mortal to the gods. In both instances, the mortality of the individual is assured, whereas the mortality of the law-giving institution, the regime of truth, is indefinite.

In his manifesto, under duress, hunted by militarized police, Tsarnaev is careful to bookend his justificatory statements in obligatory pieties. In this mode he frames his statement within the parameters, the rules of engagement, so to speak, of the fundamentalist Islamic regime of truth. He anticipates and preempts the question, religiously filtered, of the moral righteousness and permissibility of the killings. After beginning with an expression of religious humility regarding his brother, he offers the invocation: "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah / and that Muhammad is his / messenger. . ." In the next line, although it is interrupted by bullet holes, it is likely that it should read "[ou]r actions came / with a [me]ssage and that / is […]ha Illalah" (my additions in the brackets). It is unclear exactly what the final words of the line are, what the message is precisely, possibly some version of "la ilaha illalah" a transliteration of "there

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[365] Foucault, 136.

[366] See: Hannah Arendt, "Mankind and Terror" *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (Schocken Books: 1954).

is no deity but Allah."[367] Tsarnaev concludes the paragraph with, "Now I don't like killing / innocent people it is forbidden in Islam / but due to said (hole) it is allowed."[368] The bullet hole in this instance completely obscures a space large enough to accommodate several words.

What is clearly at play here, is the performance of piety offered as a prelude, an interpretive frame, for the delivery of an accusation, the telling of a kind of truth. Its function is analogous to Creusa's imprecation, "I accuse you in the full light of this day that shines on me!" But it is also, like Creusa's confession, framed as an outburst "of the truth only in shame, humiliation, and anger."[369] This discourse of humiliation is one in which Cruesa does not seek "to turn the situation to her advantage," but "in order to draw to herself, to summon around herself, all the misfortunes and injustices of which she has been the victim."[370] Tsarnaev rhetorically positions himself as the among the aggrieved, among those "who have only their tears," and confesses his own killings while accusing the United States of killing innocent Muslim civilians. This imprecation, contextually, assumes that the nation-state, like the gods, does not have to speak for its own actions and rhetorically places Tsarnaev as a teller of truths.

The Pursuit of Ascendancy

But the pieties that framed the statement are also suggestive of a second, and more problematic, consideration examined by Foucault in *Ion*, that of "ascendancy." Returning to the

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[367] Abdulla, Ahmed. "la ilaha illallah muhammadur rasulullah Meaning, Pronunciation, and Best Calligraphy." MyIslam.org.

[368] See: Lavoie.

[369] Foucault, 120.

[370] Ibid.

text of the play, Foucault notes that ascendancy is foregrounded and can be traced as outlining a kind of personal and political mode of being, particularly in a democracy. Ascendancy, here, gestures at the idea that, in the Athenian context of the play, there are various strata of individuals in the city. The virtuous group, politically, are those who engage in a kind of good spirited competition of thoughts and ideas, as well as political action—they seek in this way a public ascendancy or the demonstration of superiority. In the Assembly, in particular, such ascendancy is necessary because this valorous competition ultimately benefits the city. It creates a dynamic and fertile field of political discourse.

The pursuit of ascendancy, initially, and in *Ion* specifically, is practically impossible for those not born of the land (Athenians) because they are not granted the same rights to free speech under the law.[371] Ion, at the start of the play, believes he is a foreigner to Athens, thus does not have a right to *parrēsia*. When he learns the secret that his mother, Creusa, was in fact Athenian and his father was Apollo, he is able to exercise this birthright. The right to speak is a necessary conduit to be among those at the "front rank" of the city. *Parrēsia* is thus the agonistic game of those who are in the front rank, the ambitious and engaged, as they continue to animate and guide the city. It is shown primarily playing out in the democratic venue of the Assembly. Here, according to Foucault, is a scene of leading citizens assuming risk to try to convince each other to act in particular ways that are in accord with the truth. Such scenes are indicative, however, not merely of the use of rhetoric as a means of persuasion, but of rhetoric as an instrument of parrhesiastic speech. The Assembly, as a site of power negotiation, also creates novel perversions

[371] Such limitations on the right to free speech granted to so-called "foreigners" seems strikingly persistent. While such rights are putatively guaranteed by law, the application of the law is persistently variable. See, for instance Ilya Somin "Immigration Law Defies the American Constitution," *The Atlantic.com* (October 3, 2019).

of *parrēsia*, such as the kinds of speech that pander to the prevailing public opinion or otherwise lead to ill-founded conformity.

Foucault's observations regarding the themes and structures of ascendancy are numerous and detailed, in large part, because they are central to the focus of his research program of exploring the borders and reciprocities of public and individual modes of being. They are also specific to their Greco-Roman contexts. As could be anticipated, the character of ascendancy is grounded in local values and evaluative judgments of a speaker's individual *ethos*. It is a question superiority initially granted by "those old ancestral rights of birth and especially of belonging to the soil—of the nobility but also. . .of the small peasants" and then later shifting to encompass "personal qualities, moral qualities of integrity, intelligence, devotion, and so forth."[372] This transition, however, does not manifest as a necessarily celebrated shift in the texts he analyzes. The texts demonstrate that it opens wider the possibility of perversions of ascendancy in which people in the front rank let wider public opinion determine the "truths" that they speak.

The yield of Foucault's analysis of these features is a "sort of constitutive rectangle of *parrēsia*" that may be more generally applicable. The rectangle consists of democracy (freedom of everyone to speak), the game of ascendancy or superiority, truth-telling (as the operative *logos*), and finally, the moral condition of "courage in the struggle."[373]

Because of its localized character, mapping the concept of ascendancy onto contemporary terroristic disclosures is somewhat unwieldy. Tsarnaev's bid for ascendancy, for example, is overly determined by his religious rhetoric, but it is also complicated by the ambiguity of the intended audience(s) of the disclosive acts, the indeterminate "you." We are left,

[372] Foucault, 182.

[373] Ibid., 173.

instead, with questions about the relevant "publics" addressed. As we chronicled early in the chapter, media reports provided a near continuous stream of observations and tacit appraisal of Tsarnaev's *ethos*. Compounding this was the emergence of information about his other known activities, various subject roles, such as his Chechen ethnicity, his attendance at a university, his drug dealing, and his likeable persona on a high school wrestling team. Judgements about such activities and his comportment, led to the saturation of the narrative that he was "a kid who had a potentially promising future," as Patricia Wen of the *Boston Globe* phrased it. In other words, there was indeed a kind of ascendancy, or proto-ascendancy, associated with Tsarnaev, but only insofar as it was a foreclosed potentiality.

One could, however, also frame his ascendancy in terms of his declared faith, a reading Tsarnaev himself encourages rhetorically in his manifesto. The incorporation of the Arabic terms and doctrine of Islam and the specific reference to martyrdom are a way of explicitly signaling a kind of religious ascendancy. To import some language from Foucault, Tsarnaev portrays himself as among the "front rank" of Muslims, in step with the Mujahadeen and in the mode of the Shahid, willing to risk his life in the fight against evil in the name of Allah. Yet, it would seem that the recognition of ascendancy by others is more salient than the evocation of it in the statement itself. In a more technical way, one could see this as necessarily perlocutionary rather than illocutionary. In the manifesto, for instance, Tsarnaev makes something akin to a claim to ascendancy through invocation of religiosity. It is impossible by virtue of the sheer multiplicity of the task to gauge the force with which the claim compelled various publics to view him with the kind of attendant superiority that is necessary for such an act to be considered "courageous" rather than repugnant. What is known, however, is that Muslim communities across the nation,

for a variety of reasons, were quick to denounce the act.[374] If his status was viewed as ascendant, it was altogether absent from the mainstream discourse.

Truth as Resistance

While it is clear that Tsarnaev is not functionally perceived as embodying ascendancy, perhaps there is a way of reading the terroristic act as a mode of parresiastic resistance. The text of Tsarnaev's manifesto, in conversation with Plato's pedagogical *parrēsia* in Plutarch's play, highlighted its ethical objection to the killing of innocent Muslims. Marking the chronological endpoint of Foucault's analysis, however, he explores *parrēsia* in its function as a mode of resistance against an unethical government. He takes as his texts several Platonic dialogues, specifically *Phaedrus*, *The Apology*, and *Gorgias*.

In the Socratic demonstration of *parrēsia*, an ethic of good living is fundamental because the way of living of the individual is the analog of the way of living of the city—the soul of the democratic man corresponds to the soul of the democratic city. Despite the necessity of an ethic of good living, importantly, *parrēsia* is not an avenue toward attaining a conformity of opinion, but instead "it is the guarantee that each will have his own autonomy, his own identity, his own political singularity."[375] There is a necessary "differentiation of true discourse" at stake here to the proper guidance of the city. Conformity leads to the worst outcome for the city. Anarchy in the city, by extension, occurs because *parrēsia* has been somehow foreclosed. *Parrēsia* is "that by which the caesura of true discourse will be produced and that through which the ascendancy of

[374] See, for example: Max Fisher, " 'Please don't be a Muslim': Boston Marathon Blasts Draw Condemnation and Dread in Muslim World." *The Washington Post* (April 15, 2013).

[375] Foucault, 199.

rational men over others will be brought about."[376] In other words, it is a kind of speech act that yokes together the necessary and sufficient form of existence that sustains democracy. A speech act that for Plato exceeds rhetoric.

The setting, for Socrates, in *The Apology* is a political context of bad *parrēsia*. The majority opinion rules in Athenian democracy. Foucault notes "Socrates has no desire to incur the danger associated with *parrēsia* in bad democracy" he abandons the Assembly to its own devices (316). He has also refused to prosecute the duties of the rotating offices he must assume within his tribe because he opposes the orders he would have to carry out. Such orders, he believes, would force him to commit an injustice. In these instances, Socrates does not engage in verbal speech so much as performatively act. Notably, he abstains from coming forward to "explain to the people why it was unjust. . . He confined himself to showing it." In the text, as interpreted by Foucault, he says: "I risked my life *ergō*, and *logō* (not by discourse but in fact)."[377] Foucault emphasizes that for Socrates it is not by word so much as *ergon*, what he has done, that he asserts the truth.[378]

In Socrates, a kind of disclosure through action is evident. He abstains from engagement as a means of communicating an ethical truth; it is a kind of performative gesture that discloses both the ethical proposition and Socrates' existential commitment to it. He risks his life, not recklessly by provoking a confrontation, but by opening himself up to the judgment and punishment of the bad parresiasts in political power. Indeed, this performative action results in his trial and death. Underlying Socrates' abstention, however, is a particular ethical conviction

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[376] Ibid., 200.

[377] Ibid., 319.

[378] Foucault continues "this philosophical *parrēsia* does not necessarily or exclusively go through *logos*, through the great ritual of language in which one addresses the group or even an individual. After all, *parrēsia* may appear in the things themselves, it may appear in ways of doing things, it may appear in ways of being" (320).

grounded in rationalism. It is the tremendous Platonic tradition that will function at the core of the Enlightenment.

For Tsarnaev, there is obviously no abstention from action but quite the opposite. The commission of atrocity against the city works contrary to the very freedom that Socrates is expressing. In the terms constitutive of *parrēsia* proffered by Foucault, Socrates' behavior is indicative of moral courage; Tsarnaev's is indicative of moral coercion.

The Socratic archetype of *parrēsia* is important for Foucault's project because it shows the conduit to modern philosophy as critique. For the purposes of the present inquiry, it serves to highlight a specifically non-verbal form of *parrēsia*, a performative speech act of sorts that is characterized by its disclosive quality.

The Performance of Truth Telling

Despite the presence of a performative character in *parrēsia*, such as that demonstrated by Socrates' recusal as a form of ethical refutation, Foucault strikingly and emphatically delineates *parrēsia* from traditional performative speech acts from the very beginning of the lectures because of the performatives' reliance on ritualized convention. In fact, he argues, *parrēsia* is the performative's opposite or counter example. The import of such a distinction would seem to be fairly limited and technical, except, as we will begin to parse here, what quickly appears at stake is that when comparatively analyzed against the terroristic disclosure, distinctions such as those between the illocutionary and perlocutionary, dramatically change our understanding of the mechanism of specific speech acts. One crucial repercussion is the designation of which acts should be legally protected and those that should not. It can, for instance, also shift the agency of a locution from the utterer to those receiving it, thus shifting the onus of responsibility and the recognition of victimization.

Here, again, my argument is in no way that terrorism is valorous or should be legally protected. However, recent events, such as the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the United States Capitol Building demonstrate that there is a pressing need for a more nuanced understanding of the distinctions between the exercise of provocative speech acts and acts of terrorism.[379] While the Boston Marathon bombing is a limit case that clearly constitutes a terroristic act, other acts in a bitterly politicized milieu are prone to being labeled terroristic with dubious justification.[380]

For Foucault's purposes of drawing the contours of *parrēsia*, insisting on such a distinction between the performative and a performative mode of truth telling makes sense to some degree. Overlaying the disclosive features of terror attacks on Foucault's interpretation of performative speech acts, however, opens a space precisely where the discursive force of terrorism becomes visible, and renews the questions of the ritualized nature of terrorism that we have already begun to take up here, in relation to the investigation.

From the outset of his discussion of *parrēsia* in the Greco-Roman "golden era," Foucault seeks to outline a distinction between *parrēsia* and performative speech acts proper.[381] He

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[379] Here I am also thinking of "passionate speech" and "excitable speech" among other contentious forms of the addressing of grievances.

[380] This dubious appropriation of the label, terrorism, is not merely limited to political protest but extends to other discursive venues as well, including art and literature. I am reminded here of Don Delillo's novel *Falling Man* in which a performance artist suspends himself from the sides of buildings and various other elevated places and scandalizes commuters. The art mimics the famous photograph of the "falling man," who fell to his death from the World Trade Center towers shortly after they were attacked on September 11, 2001. In the novel, the artist's aesthetic tactics provoked shock and outrage, two affective responses often associated with terrorist attacks. See: Delillo, Don. *Falling Man* (New York: Scribner, 2007).

[381] Gros sees the lines of engagement between *parrēsia* and the performative speech act in terms of the discourse between analytic and continental philosophy: "Foucault begins by formalizing the notion of the basis of a contrast with the *speech act* of the English pragmatists (the essential references here seem to be Austin and Searle). The dialogue with the analytical tradition had already begun in *The Archeology of Knowledge*. In 1969 however, it was a matter of contrasting two definitions of the 'statement (*énoncé*)': either, for analytical philosophy the statement as a

references J.L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* and Austin's particular notions about a class of utterances that look like statements but may not be intended to report or describe the facts of a situation and cannot really be judged true or false. Instead, utterances such as the ethical propositions we have discussed here, may be "intended, solely or partly, to evince emotions or to prescribe conduct or to influence it in special ways."[382] In other words, they accomplish the action they invoke.

This is not as straightforward as Foucault presents it in the lectures, however. The first level of complication is the source text of the reference. Austin's work in *How To Do Things With Words*, is characteristically tentative. His inquiry proceeds by making admittedly rough assertions, then testing them. Consequently, not only does he jettison his whole initial schema and reimagine it midway, but his second schema leaves ample room for multiple justifiable classifications for any particular statement. But this is the nature of the natural speech situation he takes as the subject of his analysis, he argues.

Austin lays out the primary categories of the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. The difference between these is that the locutionary is simply saying something, a statement that is meaningful; the illocutionary is a statement that Austin previously called the "performative speech act," in which someone effectuates the thing they say by saying it; and the perlocutionary, which is the effect the utterance has when uttered. Since Austin's focus is on statements that "do" something, he spends most of his time analyzing the differences between the

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sequence of possible combination of language (*langage*) for which one defines the rules of production, or, for archeology, the statement as a sequence really inscribed in the cultural archive for which one defines the conditions of reality. In 1983 it is the subject's ontological commitment in the act of enunciation that distinguishes *parrēsia* from speech acts, the former being characterized as the public and risky expression of personal conviction" (Gros 379-80).

[382] Austin, 12-3.

latter two classes. He notes, for instance, illocutionary acts are "the performance of an act *in* saying something" as opposed to the perlocutionary act, which is "the performance of an act *of* saying something."[383]

Parrēsia, like the illocutionary utterance, Foucault argues, is a way of effectuating things, "a way of telling the truth, but what defines it is not the content of the truth as such. . . [it is a] particular way of telling the truth."[384] However, it yields an "open" situation, rather than one in which the outcome is "ordered in advance" or "codified," as he characterizes the illocutionary. In this way, Foucault sets the two modes of speech in opposition. Revisiting Austin's work, Foucault recounts two key conditions of the illocutionary, namely that they must take place in an institutional or codified context and that the speaker must have an appropriate status (must be permitted by the situation to speak with such a status). This is, for the illocutionary, exemplified by the familiar situation of a chairman in a meeting calling the meeting to order. Under these conditions "the utterance is performative inasmuch as the enunciation itself effectuates the thing stated."[385] The chairman calls the meeting to order and merely by saying it, it is done. Foucault adds the example of an apology, to show that performatives can also occur in what he calls a "weakly institutionalized context, but one which nevertheless implies a set of rituals and a well-defined situation."[386] Like other illocutionary acts, the apology "effectuates what is stated, namely that someone has apologized to someone else." In an editorial footnote in Foucault's original

[383] Austin, 99.

[384] Foucault, 52.

[385] Ibid., 61.

[386] Ibid., 62.

manuscript he offers a tidy summation, stating "The performative is carried out in a world which guarantees that saying effectuates what is said."[387]

It should be noted that Austin readily, and frequently, says that speech acts can actually function across multiple categories, and also that both the illocutionary and perlocutionary can both involve convention and ritual. Much of this ambiguity stems from how the analytical and temporal lines are drawn, specifically which subsequent actions or reactions are considered "consequences." Though Foucault does not directly address whether *parrēsia* falls into the category of perlocutionary, scholars such as Daniele Lorenzini, extending the work of Stanley Cavell, have argued that it does. [388]

If one considers the exemplar in *Dion*, the perlocutionary character becomes clearer. Even if the Prince does not appreciate being called out by the philosopher, his response is provoked by the utterance; the utterance has an effect, a consequence. Since the identifying principle of *parrēsia* as a mode of speech is that "one constitutes oneself as the person who tells the truth, who

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[387] Foucault, 61.

In another place, Foucault says essentially the same thing, "In a sense, therefore, it [*parrēsia*] is the opposite of the performative, in which the enunciation of something brings about and gives rise to a completely determined event as a function of the general code and institutional field in which the utterance is made" (63).

[388] Indeed, Daniele Lorenzini argues that *parrēsia* should be considered one of several forms of a class of utterances in Austin larger perlocutionary category. Considering the work of Stanley Cavell on "passionate speech," he notes that *parrēsia* is a form of speech that can be added to "moralistic abusiveness," "hate speech," and "political oratory." Of these, Lorenzini suggests hate speech is "especially important and complex" (255). Cavell outlines passionate speech as a way of providing a "systematic recognition of speech as confrontation, as demanding, as owed. . ., each instance of which directs, and risks, if not costs blood" (Cavell qtd in Lorenzini 254). See: Daniele Lorenzini, "Performative, Passionate, and Parrhesiastic Utterance: On Cavell, Foucault, and Truth as an Ethical Force." *Critical Inquiry* 41.2. (Winter 2015), 254-268.

has told the truth," as Foucault suggests, this form of utterance would seem to be dependent on a perlocutionary consequence, even if it is undetermined, in the subject's very self-constitution.

Conventions and Consequences

This granular classification, however, does not really contradict Foucault's schema so much as open more nuanced lines of questioning for our inquiry into terroristic forms of disclosure. Returning to Austin, it often appears that he considered the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary in a structure more closely analogous to nesting dolls. In introducing the perlocutionary, for example, he begins "There is yet a further sense in which to perform a locutionary act, and therein an illocutionary act, may also be to perform an act of another kind," and continues:

> Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them; and we may then say, thinking of this, that the speaker has performed an act in the nomenclature of which reference is made either. . . only obliquely, or even. . . not at all, to the performance of the locutionary or illocutionary act. We shall call the performance of an act of this kind the performance of a perlocutionary act or perlocution.[389]

In Foucault's analysis, it is first and foremost the constraining force of convention that distinguishes *parrēsia* from the illocutionary, an observation he borrows from Austin, who certainly recognized the centrality of convention to the illocutionary act. In fact, Austin offers a rough delineation between "conventions" and "consequences," to denote the illocutionary and the perlocutionary respectively.[390] Foucault's insistence on the notion that the illocutionary

[389] Austin, *Doing Things*, 101.

"guarantees" a certain response is a bit too definitive, however, and the description of the apology as an example of an illocutionary act in a "weakly" institutionalized context is likewise a bit too vague. Our observations regarding the disclosive acts of terror demonstrate that much of the interpretive machinery hinges on the presence or status of "ritual" and its associated institutionalized contexts. The hyperbolic mode, the figurations of the descriptive language, the evocation of terror, the associated threat of future violence, the investigation, the reading of the manifesto, the adjudication of ethos, these are all, by now, at least *weakly* ritualized features of the contemporary act of terrorism. But does this response rise to the level of a known or pre-determined outcome of the utterance? I would tentatively argue, no. Like *parrēsia*, despite these ritualized features, the outcome of such an act remains radically open, perlocutionary.

Returning to the scenes in Plutarch's text, Foucault acknowledges they have "an element in common with performative utterance," which is to say that "we find ourselves in a typical, familiar, and institutionalized situation of the sovereign," a kind of "classical scene" present in other texts, such as *Oedipus the King*.[391] He argues *parrēsia* does not need such a codified situation, nor does it yield a codified result. In fact, in its essential form, it operates in contexts in which the interlocutor is not bound by codes or rules at all and exercises absolute power. Such a situation, as he will reiterate throughout the lectures, constitutes an unspecified risk.

The danger in Plutarch, for example, stems from the tyrant Dionysius' power and the capriciousness of his passions. In short, he could respond in any way to Plato or Dion's utterances—including by ordering their death, as he does for Plato. Foucault suggests, however,

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[390] To this end, Austin writes: "It will be seen that the consequential effects of perlocutions are really consequences, which do not include such conventional effects as, for example, the speaker's being committed by his promise (which comes into the illocutionary act)" (102).

[391] Foucault, 62.

that "even when it does not involve a tyrant with the power of life and death over the person who speaks, what defines the *parrhesiastic* statement, what precisely makes the statement of its truth in the form of *parrēsia* something absolutely unique among other forms of utterance and other formulations of the truth, is that *parrēsia* opens up risk."[392] This form of speech has the quality of being "thrown" in the "face of the interlocutor," and it can be so "violent" or "abrupt" that "the person facing him can only fall silent, or choke with fury, or change to a different register."

The second fundamental difference Foucault notes between *parrēsia* and the illocutionary is that in the *parrhesiastic* statement, the speaker does not have to have a particular institutional status. What must be present is only "a pact of the speaking subject with himself" (64). For performatives, the person delivering the utterance must have the appropriate status and authority to, for example, call the meeting to order. The material power of the utterance is functional because of the speaker's institutional status and the codification of behavior that should follow the utterance. If a speaker were to say the appropriate words to call a meeting to order, for example, but is disingenuous, their subject position enables the meeting to begin, or an apology to be performed. Foucault notes, "what makes 'I apologize' performative is not at all the subject's sincerity when he says 'I apologize.' It is just that he utters the sentence, even if he says to himself: 'I'll wait for my chance, and then you'll see.'"[393] *Parrēsia*, requires sincerity because it is constituted by two levels of truth, according to Foucault. These layers have the effect of "constituting oneself as a partner of oneself when one speaks."[394]

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[392] Foucault, 63.

[393] Ibid.

[394] Ibid., 64.

The third characteristic Foucault offers in contradistinction to the performative is that *parrēsia* is a game in which courage and not "the subject's social or institutional status" is the determinative factor.[395] *Parrēsiastic* courage is necessary to ensure that nothing gets in the way of speaking what one thinks is true.[396] Unlike the performative utterance in which there is a definite "game in which the status of [the] person speaking and the situation in which he finds himself determine precisely what he can and must say," *parrēsia* requires the freedom to speak the truth and the ability to freely bind oneself to the truth she speaks.[397] Distilled, herein lies a fundamental philosophical question about freedom. It is through the analysis of these specific elements of discourse, different from those considered by the pragmatics of discourse, "which show how the very event of the enunciation may affect the enunciator's being."[398] Such analysis prompts the question "How is [the fact of] binding oneself to the truth (binding oneself to tell the truth, binding oneself by the truth, by the content of what one says and by the fact that one says it) actually the exercise, the highest exercise, of freedom?."[399]

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[395] Ibid., 66.

[396] Ibid., 372.

[397] Ibid., 66.

[398] Ibid., 68.

[399] Ibid., 67.

To understand the structure and mechanism of these interactions, Foucault argues that one must move methodologically from the "pragmatics of discourse" to what he calls the "dramatics of true discourse" (68). The former analyzes the discursive situation to understand how the speaker "modifies the value of meaning of the discourse." By switching frames to the dramatics of true discourse, Foucault seeks to highlight discursive facts which are the reverse or "the mirror projects" of the pragmatics of discourse. In *parrēsia*, what modifies the value of the statement is that the speaker has, through the sincerity of binding herself to the statement and the associated assumption of risk, determined or clarified her "mode of being insofar as [s]he speaks" (68).

This reference to "mode of being" is striking here and it is worth noting, once again, Foucault's longstanding opposition to the idea of a universal or phenomenological subject. He specifies that this references the mode of being of the subject as a subject who speaks. Read in the spirit of his earlier work, Foucault can be understood as discussing modes of being and techniques of the self that are not reduced to a universal subject.[400] Still, such ontological concerns have far more in common with the philosophy of the phenomenological subject than many of Foucault's previous points of inquiry. In fact, it is the existential risk on which *parrēsia* is predicated that challenges the distinction Foucault seeks to maintain throughout his work between "modes of being" and phenomenological ontology. We are reminded here, for instance, of the phenomenological work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who theorized speech as a creative gestural act that "accomplishes thought" and is a way of appropriating things—of recognizing and owning them, of "gearing" into the world.

Indeed, performative speech acts, have the appearance of emanating from a singular subject, according to Shoshana Felman in her book *The Scandal of the Speaking Body.*[401] Felman bases her observation on the structure of promises and seduction, which she sees as the

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[400] As noted in the previous chapter, Foucault said quite unequivocally, "I don't think there is actually a sovereign founding subject, a universal form of subject that one could find everywhere. I am very skeptical and very hostile toward this conception of the subject. I think on the contrary that the subject is constituted through practices of subjections, or, in a more anonymous way, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity, starting of course from a number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the culture" from the interview "Aesthetics of Existence" collected in *Foucault Live* edited by Sylvère Lotringer, 452.

[401] Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin or Seduction in Two Languages*, trans. Catherine Porter. (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2003). (This was originally published as *The Literary Speech Act*, its first English translation, in 1984).

performative mode *par excellence*. Such modes are constructed ostensibly as the expression of intention. As Judith Butler characterizes Felman's insight:

> Something is said, and it appears that an intention is being represented in speech, that correspondence is intact, that the sovereign 'I' is the ground of the utterance. But the speech act is a form of address, and it is addressed to one who is not transparently there, who is known only in profile or through the voice, someone never properly introduced. Thus a statement about the 'I' is offered into this scene, though every statement is also a way of asking, 'Who are you?'[402]

Translated into an act of disclosive terror, it is in this provisional intending that the mechanism of the terrorists' disclosure is most visible. The will-to-singularity that compels the existentially underwritten act of spectacular violence performs both a promise of future violence and an act of seduction that prompts an investigation. It mirrors the parrhesiastic ritual of disclosing existentially underwritten truths, except its ethical propositions are in a different register from the dominant regime of truths and the atrocity itself negates the requisite freedom for the act to do anything but misfire.

Such misfires, which are comparable to the failure of the terroristic act to convey the ontological disclosure at its core, are not evidence of an ill-fitting speech act category. As Felman, Butler, and Barbara Johnson all seem to recognize in different ways, the prospect of failure (or infelicity) of performative utterances is indicative of their grounding in the body. This is certainly not incongruent with Austin's understanding. He recognized that all performative utterances were subject to infelicity. But this sort of misfire, for Felman and Butler specifically, extends further. It is true for all performatives but especially salient in promises. In fact, they see the failure of Austin's initial research program not as evidence of a null finding, but of the exhuming

[402] Judith Butler, "Preface", *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin or Seduction in Two Languages*, trans. Catherine Porter. (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2003), 120.

of a characteristic and constitutive feature of the body's involvement. The fundamental failure of the body is its eroticism, and the erotic is always a kind of failure, argues Felman.

Benveniste's corrective to Austin, then, is in this view a positivist linguists' effort to resolve Austin's research into felicitous categories rather than embracing its functional misfire as an eminently performative quality. As Felman notes, this move turns the performative into a kind of constative. Her fundamental insight is that performatives subvert or deconstruct themselves. I would extend this to the analysis of the terroristic disclosure, which, through the mechanism of its multivalent promises, the atrocity of its corporeal violation, and the unconsummated seduction of the investigation, deconstructs itself like the bomb that is its instrument.

In Felman's juxtaposition of Austin's work and Mallarme's *Don Juan*, she identifies the ways in which "the proposal functions in the service of an infinitely promiscuous seduction that never materializes in marriage."[403] Austin, too, uses marriage as one of his first demonstrative performative examples. The "scandal" Felman identifies is the "incongruous but indissoluble relation between language and the body and the "*seduction* of the human body insofar as it speaks" as much as it is the scandal of the promise of love insofar as this promise is *par excellence* a promise that cannot be kept."[404] Felman shows that the performative offers no "guarantees that saying effectuates what is said," as Foucault claims, only a promise that is always in question as to whether it will be kept.

Butler, reading Felman, notes the "instead of binding the body of the speaker to the one to whom the promise or vow is made" the promise "prefigures the possibility without ever

[403] Butler's afterward for Felman, 118.

[404] Felman, 5.

making good on what it produces as pure possibility."[405] There is, after all, always the possibility of the intentions being interrupted and "derailed along the way."

The act of terror, in every way a corporeal act of disclosure, sets in motion a chain of broken promises. It poses as an utterance of a sovereign subject but fails to deliver its message. It seduces an investigation that elides the truth of the very subject it pursues. With the return of everyday life, the victims themselves are promised the singularity of the attack, and yet the trauma returns.

Truth on Trial

Perhaps the most visible seduction is that of the criminal trial, which is predicated on the putative discovery of truths. There is an expectation that the exceedingly conventionalized courtroom rituals will reveal, in a neutralizing process, the truth of the terroristic disclosure, which in this venue is called "motive."[406] That is, I would argue, why it may be disappointing in situations like the Tsarnaev trial when the defendant chooses not to take the stand, or indeed, when the defense puts up a case that commentators collectively call "weak" and "ineffectual." This stimies the ritual of the reinscription of power on the corpus of law through its ability to establish truths.

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[405] Butler, 119.

[406] We can see the literary counterpoint to this idea of the trial as the venue for the discovery of ontological in *Native Son*, when his lawyer presents a deep, compelling, and largely sociological explanation of Bigger's circumstances. Despite its well intended genesis, the narrative mischaracterizes Bigger and also fails to convince the jury. It, in so many ways, attempts to get at the ontological situation of Bigger, yet not only does it fail, but the brilliance of the novel is that it is able to demonstrate how purely adjacent the lawyer's narrative is to the lived experience of Bigger.

Still, the performance of the trial itself, as an event, is strikingly complex in light of the various layers of truth outlined here. Documented as a kind of background to the proceedings from the very start of Tsarnaev's trial was another kind of court that had coalesced around the courthouse. Tsarnaev had garnered something of a following. Among the cortege were "Truthers, Occupiers, and Dzhokhar groupies, all of whom appear to believe… that the Tsarnaev brothers were framed."[407] Many held posters. According to one report: "The simplest one, held by one of only two men in the group, said "*TRUTH*" in foot-high letters, with a smaller afterthought below: "We gotta get all we can get." The message echoed various conspiracy theories about the dubious involvement of the U.S. Government with the Tsarnaevs. Theories ranged from full on False Flag accusations, claiming that the government was responsible for the attacks, to the much more measured, and plausible, theory that the government may have been leveraging citizenship for Tamarlan for some kind of information.[408]

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[407] Among the posters were also some that referenced the death of another man, Ibragim Todashev, killed recently by an FBI agent. Todashev was friends with Tamarlan Tsarnaev. The FBI suspected the two had been involved with the murder of three other men in Waltham, MA on September 11, 2011. An FBI agent shot Todashev as he was purportedly completing a confession. The agent reported that Todashev attacked him. Todashev's mother-in-law flew in from Atlanta to attend Dzohkar's court appearance. She was removed from the courtroom after she stood up and yelled her support for Dzhokhar, in Russian. He was "loved" and "innocent," she shouted. As she was being escorted out by U.S. Marshals, she screamed, "I am an American citizen, and I have the right to say what I think!" (Gessen). The presiding judge, U.S. District Judge George O'Toole, Jr. did not allow the defense to admit evidence of the Waltham murders.

[408] See, for instance, a WBUR report titled "Unanswered Questions About Tamerlan Tsarnaev" from July 10, 2017 that quite soberly steps through the peculiarities around Tamarlan's desire for citizenship and the federal government's records, which are, at best, inconsistent.

Jamie Bologna and Meghna Chakrabarti, "Unanswered Questions About Tamerlan Tsarnaev" *WBUR.org* (July 10, 2017). The conspiracies are wide ranging, see Robert Beckhusen, "False Flags, Fake Blood, and Michelle Obama: A Guide to the Boston Marathon Conspiracies". *WIRED.*com (April 23, 2023).

These courthouse scenes could be dismissed as journalistic color, animating a kind of milieu around the criminal proceedings playing out on the mainstage. Beyond a doubt, for protestors, there is something inherently attractive about such a notable trial as a venue, a guaranteed source of widespread media attention for any cause. Yet, extending our foregoing discussion regarding the centrality of disclosure at the core of terrorist attacks, the persistent evocation of "truth" and its disclosure supersaturating the trial illustrates its power of seduction. To be sure, this discourse of truth was made especially visible because of the void left by the anticipated courtroom dramas yet to come—a promise of a formal and institutional ritual of the adjudication of truth.

In excess of the rituals of the courtroom, the larger event is clearly imbued with additional valences for individuals who wish to disclose or telegraph difficult truths of their own. These valences propagate from the investigation of the inaugural terror attack in a kind of chain reaction. Notably, the truths motivating these disclosures are different from the initiating act.[409] In other words, they are protests that are attempting to disclose something else entirely.[410] They were not in any prevalent way about the treatment of Muslims by the United States or any other grievance articulated explicitly by Dzhokhar in the manifesto. Instead, they used meme-able catchphrases, pathos, and sometimes humor, to make ethical statements that might rally public influence or trigger investigations into other cases. Among the most contextually relevant protests

[409] As a rhetorician might put it, a la Bitzer, these are different rhetorical situations, replete with different audiences, modes of address.

[410] There is no mention of overwhelming support among the protestors for something akin to Dzohkar's intended disclosure. One might expect, for example, a group that echoed Tsarnaev's critique of U.S. treatment of Muslims. To be clear, I am not suggesting that an ontological disclosure would fit on a protest sign, merely that such a disclosure would speak how it was that Dzohkar existed in the world and felt compelled to attack.

were those that stated truths meant to call into question the validity of the proceedings themselves.

While these protests can be disruptive and can, ostensibly at least, existentially challenge the validity of the proceedings, such verbal and printed utterances are not usually understood as terrorism.[411] They have more in common with *parrēsia*. To be sure, there is a way in which these protests, as speech acts, fall generally under Lyotard's schema of game-threatening moves. In other words, they challenge the validity of one of the players, *i.e.* the proxies of the state responsible for the indictment and execution of the trial. The protests are not physical violence themselves, however, and therefore they reside within permissible spaces inside what is understood as the language games of democratic discourse. Their threat is, perhaps, bracketed by the supposition that the discourse they are truly intending to participate in is that of Justice itself based on the establishment of truth, which resonates with the *parrēsia* demonstrated by Socrates. In other words, considered in the most generous light, what these utterances intend to disrupt are the collection of performative speech acts that constitute the trial ritual, rather than the pursuit of truth and justice *per se*.

In the context of a trial, the very premise of the ritualized sequence of events exists to establish facts in such a way that a jury and judge can determine the accused's culpability in the commission of a crime. As prosecutors so often remind jurors in the proceedings, the question is twofold: What is the law? And did the accused act in a way that transgressed the law? In practice, even this is an aspirational construct. It is also a different question from—a sidestepping of—the truth of the accused's original disclosure. It is a way of redrawing the lines of the discursive

[411] This seems to hold true, rather peculiarly, even in the age of protestors and "defenders" armed with AR-15s outside of Black Lives Matter events or other ideologically specific rallies where the armed presence itself functions as a the threat of spectacular violence.

conflict in favor of the state. It is rarely about whatever the accused was trying to say; it is putatively the simple matter of laying out the lines and seeing if the accused transgressed them. It is in this way the re-inscription of the corpus of law.

Though the web of proliferating investigations was inaugurated by the act of terroristic disclosure and its attendant manifesto, the trial is an infelicitous inquiry into truth. In fact, the formal conventions of the Tsarnaev trial did not actually provide many additional opportunities to hear anything further from the accused himself. Tsarnaev opted not to testify, even if it would seem like taking the stand would provide precisely the kind of opportunity for disclosure that had been inaugurated by the attack.

Yet, in this trial, Tsarnaev did ultimately choose to speak in a surprise address on the final day of the sentencing phase. The day had been filled primarily with victim impact statements, which are generally a feature of the trial in which the victims publicly (and ritually) voice the damage that the accused has inflicted on their lives. It is a time not only to offer a final push to influence the judge and jury's decision about the extent of the punishment, but to confront the person who was responsible for hurting them. The defense announced that Tsarnaev was going to deliver a statement, which was generally unexpected. The statement turned out to be something of an apology, bracketed once again in religiously infused language, just like his manifesto. Tsarnaev confessed publicly to committing the attack and then offered a religiously barbed apology: "The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said that if you do not — if you are not merciful to Allah's creation, Allah will not be merciful to you, so I'd like to now apologize to the victims, to the survivors." He later suggested that Allah ensures "no soul is burdened with more than it can bear" despite the testimony that the hurt and loss he had caused was "unbearable." At the end of the statement Tsarnaev asks Allah to have mercy on him and his

brother, and those present. He adds, however, "Allah knows best those deserving of his mercy," a pivotal phrase that many listeners interpreted as countermanding all that had come before.[412]

As one pair of news commentators on a WBUR podcast interpreted it, a felicitous apology, according to the victims and the wider public, would have effectuated a renunciation. Their exchange reads:

> Boeri: The statement has a huge missing hole in it, doesn't it?
>
> Cullen: He certainly didn't renounce the motive that drove him to this. He didn't raise anything about that. You know, I talked with a number of the victims after and it was really a split decision as they would say. One said she didn't buy it at all. In fact, she said, it sounded pretty good and then at the end "and Allah knows best those deserving of his mercy." That felt like he pulled the rug right out from under them. They took that implication being it wasn't them, it was him.[413]

That is to say that Tsarnaev carried out the illocutionary act of the apology when the ritual of the court proceedings demanded yet another promise.

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[412] From "Read Boston Bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's Full Statement," *Time.com*, (June 24, 2015).

[413] David Boeri and Kevin Cullen, "Tsarnaev Apologizes Before Judge Sentences Him To Death." *Finish Line: Inside The Boston Marathon Bombing Trial*, WBUR (June 24, 2015).

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION
A GENEALOGY OF DIS/CLOSURE

At the 2022 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), hosted in Dallas, Texas, one panel received inordinate attention, its title: "We are all domestic terrorists." The name was meant to be "tongue and cheek" according to panelist Julie Pickren, a Houston-area state board of education candidate. In her opening remarks she claimed, "Nobody in this room is a domestic terrorist." Yet at the convention there were several individuals who had been instrumental in the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol Building, among them several Proud Boys prominently making the rounds in uniform.[414] These were individuals whose involvement in a violent public spectacle of political intimidation continues as of this writing to be prosecuted in federal courts. The participants in the events at the Capitol Building that day chanted for the deaths of sitting members of Congress as they stormed and plundered congressional offices. They carried weapons and bludgeoned police officers who testified later that they thought they were going to be lynched. As the formal investigation into the events unfolds, it is increasingly apparent that there was significant prior coordination. In short, this was a form of terrorism by even the most conservative definitions—the only definitions on which, after all, there is real consensus. It was also an event intimately enmeshed in a movement that claimed the right to make itself heard by any means necessary. The ruse of the day appears to have been the contrived narrative of protestors stirred by the passions of their message into spontaneous revolutionary action. As a spectacular performative act with a disclosure at its core, existentially underwritten, the event is an occasion for the necessary engagement of the disclosive terrorism I have outlined here.

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[414]Michael Hardy, "In Dallas, Donald Trump Provided a Violent Blueprint for Seizing Power" on *TexasMonthly.com* (August 8, 2022).

Some commentators have noted, however, the government's hesitation to levy charges of domestic terrorism, the so-called "terrorism enhancement," despite rhetorically labelling the events as such. As a writer for *Politico* notes:

> In front of judges and in court filings, the Justice Department is engaged in a delicate rhetorical dance on the domestic terrorism issue. Seeking to satisfy a large swath of the public outraged by the Jan. 6 riot, prosecutors have declared that the event "certainly" qualifies as domestic terrorism. But they've kept their powder dry thus far on invoking the terrorism sentencing boost — potentially because its impact can be so severe.[415]

Instead, dozens of January 6 participants have been convicted or are currently charged with various counts of assault, destruction of federal property, interfering with police officers during a civil disorder, obstruction of an official proceeding and other lesser crimes. As of this writing, the "terrorism enhancement," which would trigger an additional sentence of 15 or more years, has not been used, but it has reportedly been leveraged frequently in plea deals with defendants.

The CPAC panel's gesture at solidarity with the insurrectionists marks one way in which the terror discourse has continued to evolve since I began drafting this inquiry into the disclosive qualities of terrorism. While the events of January 6th were shocking in their vitriol, and uncanny in the sheer vacuity of a manifestation of violence grounded so self-assuredly on malignant falsehoods, in retrospect, the possibility of its occurrence could be seen escalating in plain view. With Donald Trump's ascendancy to the presidency came an attendant invocation of hyperbolic political discourse—the hallmark of the terroristic mode. Key to this shift was not only the dropping of the veil of hateful speech acts under the auspices of "truth telling," but also the

[415] Josh Gerstein, "Why DOJ is avoiding domestic terrorism sentences for Jan. 6 defendants" on *Politico.com*, (January 4, 2022).

signaling of an inversion of the conventional rituals that traditionally serve as a kind of metric for transgression. In other words, public support for Trump's authoritarian aggression against normative constraints created a kind of loss of traction for conventional forms of outrage. There were plenty of voices speaking out against Trump's actions, but those voices seemed to wallow in churlish discursive seas without making real headway. The violence of January 6th postured as the crest of a revolutionary wave that would consummate this agenda. It was, however, Trump's words and actions that directly spurred the violence, not a spontaneous uprising. Members of his administration were complicit, if not responsible, for the riots. The insurrection claimed to represent not only the voters who supported Trump, but to be the vanguard of purported deep ranks of Americans who would bring about the restoration of what was right and proper to the revolutionary founding spirit of the country, hence the unironic "We are all domestic terrorists."

In many ways, this would seem to be the materialization of the phenomenon discussed in this inquiry thrust nakedly on the proscenium: an act of disclosive terrorism. To be sure the perpetrators of the January 6th attack had much to say. They chanted, held signs and banners, livestreamed videos narrating and recording the events. The day was eminently documented, producing a voluminous literature. Yet under closer scrutiny, a key inflection distinguishes the insurrection from what we have been discussing. It raises the question of whether we are now witnessing another turn in the discourse, the rise of the next era of terroristic violence. The impetus for the insurrection was the desire to maintain a putative continuity. Its claim was the restoration of a hegemonic regimes of truth, a nostalgia for patriarchy, white supremacy, in some cases the Confederacy, and in others, Naziism. Participants were responding to what they perceived as an existential threat to those regimes, even though the actual incitement of the day was founded on baseless claims.

In contrast, acts of disclosive terror have a discontinuous inflection. The perpetrators tend to be under no illusion that things are going to change but are compelled to register their truths anyway. In this manner, acts of disclosive terror share some features with parrēsia and testimony. By introducing such a dichotomy, we might anticipate the objection that a desire for continuity in the hegemonic regime of truth would seem to be the nature of many, if not all, ideologically conservative acts of political violence. But the relevant question here is not the particular truths at stake, or the maintenance of a specific regime, so much as whether the act of terror is conceived as a *telos* in itself.

There remain many commonalities between the two. Like disclosive terror, the posture of the January 6th attack was the promise of sustained future acts, the harbinger of possible unbridled violence. But it is distinct from disclosive terrorism in that the actors lampooned a kind of revolutionary terrorism, a type of violence more likely to follow through with the threat of sustained acts than a so-called "lone wolf" or "terror cell." It is, after all, a simple matter of numbers, revolutionary terrorism holds a larger group in reserve able to continue the campaign.

For some, no doubt, their participation in the insurrection was merely vindictive, an opportunity to punish the legislators who represent ways of being they despise. In this manner, those particular participants share a common *telos* with the Boston Marathon bombers; those who may have been intent on consummating revolutionary action, however, appear through this analysis to be working toward a distinctly different end. Regardless of what they thought the day's events would be or how intentional they were about sustained revolutionary action, however, their posture toward the subsequent investigation differs significantly from that of the disclosive terrorists. The riot on the steps of the capitol was a group action in which one might expect some anonymity in the chaos—the notion that the sheer number of participants would be overwhelming, and their cause, after all, endorsed by the administration. Perhaps they believed

there would be no practical means of identification or consequences after the fact. To put it in the framework we have utilized here, the terroristic mechanism of the insurrection was not intended to seduce a kind of engagement through the investigation it provoked. For these individuals, the investigation was notionally foregone and seemingly irrelevant. To invoke a literary term by way of extension, in revolutionary terrorism the explosive act is only one element of the plot; in disclosive terrorism, the plot culminates in the singular act itself (even if there are multiple points of engagement).

For these reasons, the Boston Marathon bombing remains a schematic exemplar of the terroristic pattern I sought to outline here. The fate of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is still being buffeted about in the courts, his death sentence at this point having been overturned and then reinstated. Meantime, the country has been ushered from one terroristic act to the next before the first can even make it to trial. To be sure, the legacy of the attacks themselves continue to be felt most acutely by the victims and their families. One startling repercussion the Boston bombing, aggregated along with the hundreds of other attacks that have occurred over the last few decades, is the creation of a whole class of victims, an ever-widening public, who share the lived experience of surviving terror attacks. This phenomenon was already evident in reported overlaps of those impacted by the September 11, 2001 attacks and the individuals who experienced the Boston Marathon bombing. Memorably, Boston Globe editor and writer David Filipov, whose coverage of the Boston attacks along with his colleagues won a Pulitzer Prize, lost his father in the September 11th attacks. Whereas the conventional understanding of terrorism is that it directly impacts very few individuals but signifies an outsized public threat, acts of terror are no longer abstract for a growing segment of our society. As J.P. Norden, a Boston bombing survivor put it, "We now have this very strange expertise of being blown up. So when this

happens to someone else, I hope I can contribute to their healing in some way."[416] Unfortunately, he has had several opportunities to do just that.

On the Subject of Terror

I set out in this piece to better understand the mechanisms of disclosure in acts of terrorism. Naively, I planned to move expediently through a discussion of performative speech acts and the genealogy of terror, to engage ultimately and most thoroughly with a novel phenomenological reading. But as is now clear, given some air, that planned sequence was destined to unfold like a set of bellows, leaving the present work only prelude to further inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of having the experience of terrorism. This unexpected accordianing is attributable in part to my initial assumption that theories of the performative were more settled than they are, which, in hindsight seems like a quality that is only too fitting. We are reminded of Felman's point that the feature of the performative that is truest to its essence is its failure. It is also its most generative feature.[417] This infelicity makes Benveniste uncomfortable, and is also the factor that Butler sees as originating in and of the body.[418]

What was unanticipated about the yield of this analysis was the way in which the act of terror, a disclosive act, illuminates new facets of the performative and its interrelation with literature. As a kind of performative, the act of terror is read as a promise of future violence and of a disclosure, two qualities that are also insights about literary acts. We anticipate in the novel,

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[416] From the documentary film *Marathon: Patriot's Day*

[417] Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body.*

[418] See for instance: Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971) and Judith Butler, "Afterward" *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin or Seduction in Two Languages* (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2003).

for instance, a roughly ritualized promise of fictionalized acts of violence that have a disclosive meaning—experiential truths made fictionally manifest. By traditional convention, we might expect a plot in which an internal conflict rises to a climax before revealing its truths in the denouement. There also may be the expectation of an ontological disclosure that inheres in the work itself, what we might call a kind of literary imperative, to once again echo Barbara Johnson.[419] In simple terms, we come to the novel expecting to find truths about existence, regardless of the generic apparatus. And like the terroristic disclosure, the work of literature constitutively risks failure; in fact, we hear the reverberations of Felman, in the recognition that it is assured to fail. The failure results in seducing us to investigate further, to seek an understanding of the *who* in the viscera of a corporeal act that never fulfills its promise. We must recognize, however, that terrorism fails in essential ways that have materially devastating consequences, that claim the lives of people who are subsumed unwillingly into a disclosive ritual. This is a kind of coercion, or tyranny, that we now see as the Janus face of parrēsia. For truth telling to be recognized as such, to allow parrēsia to actualize its potential for the good of the state, people must be able to engage with its truths freely. The same would appear to be the structure of its pernicious other, and by extension literature as well.

The recognition that acts of terror operate both in ritual and that failure is part of their corporeal constitution returns us to ontological questions. Ironically, throughout our analysis it is Foucault who brings us back to being. Despite his aggressive stance against the phenomenological subject, his own project is the site of the startling materialization of the language of "modes of being," and parrēsia's conceptual reliance on the existential underwriting of the speaker. After Foucault's redrafting of the map of subjectivity, he arrives by way of a

[419] Barbara Johnson, "Poetry and Performative Language," in *Yale French Studies* 54 (1977).

different route back to questions that look familiarly ontological. Such an arrival prepares the way for a re-envisioned encounter with phenomenology in a subsequent work.

Dis/Closure

Another theoretical starting point, and a promising avenue for future research is that such forms of disclosive violence have developed a kind of grammatical conventionality that now necessitates better tools to recuperate meaning. The sheer polyphony of their violent disclosive propagation has made any one act all but unheard. The necessary corollary to this study is an exploration of how we listen, properly, how to hear, the disclosures identified here. We can see such work already underway in diverse discussions of what is audible in testimony, what is grievable, what is visible in atrocity. In addition to the phenomenological reading I have proposed here, thinkers such as Maria del Rosario Acosta Lopez have offered adjacent avenues that address these questions through aesthetics. Lopez, for instance, is interested in "Grammars of Listening."[420] Grammar, she argues, is a "framework for understanding," which means it is positioned to filter what is interpretable and legible. She seeks to hear the testimonies that are silenced through such an interpretive filter. Judith Butler, in *Frames of War*, works along these lines as well, to understand what can be "seen" and thus grieved.[421]

Through this inquiry into disclosive terror, it is clear that the twinning of literature and terror are an inextricably interconnected conduit for any of these intellectual programs and an irreplaceable component in the effort to better understand, and thereby preempt, the

[420] Lopez has a forthcoming book: *Grammars of Listening: Thinking Memory in the Aftermath of Trauma* (Fordham U. Press), expected 2023.

[421] Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009).

proliferation and malignancy of terror attacks. Like the truth-telling mirrored in parrēsia, the disclosures at the heart of terror are potentially productive if they were to manifest instead as free speech—that is to say, speech that allows its audience to engage freely with its truths without the coercive threat of death. We must be attentive, however, to the literatures that we choose to invoke by way of understanding so that we do not inadvertently collapse the explanatory power we are trying to maintain. Felman shows us the real insights are to be garnered from the moments of failure and infelicity.

As I cited in my chapter "True Terror," at the conclusion of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's trial, U.S. District Judge George O'Toole Jr., just before handing down the death sentence, invoked Shakespeare. "One of Shakespeare's characters observes: 'The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones.' So it will be for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev."[422] The reference was a prelude to O'Toole's own summary rendering of Tsarnaev's story. Tsarnaev, he recounted for the record, had "succumbed to that diabolical siren song" of the preaching of radical Islam, and had ultimately tried to justify his actions as righteous. With a metaphysical flourish, the judge referenced Verdi's opera "Otello" in which the evil Iago "tries to justify his malice" by singing "*Credo in un Dio crudel*," "I believe in a cruel god." O'Toole adds, "Surely someone who believes that God smiles on and rewards the deliberate killing and maiming of innocents believes in a cruel god." But it is not in this pastiche of literary references that we see the traces of the terroristic disclosure, even if it is ultimately this battle of "good" and "evil" that is committed to the official record of "truth." The truer articulation of O'Toole's speech, follows in the contingent literatures of a truth telling that is ultimately infelicitous

[422] "What The Judge Said As He Sentenced Tsarnaev To Death" on *WBUR.org* (June 24, 2015).

> You [Dzhokhar] tried to justify it to yourself by redefining what it is to be an innocent person so that you could convince yourself that Martin Richard was not innocent, that Lingzi Lu was not innocent, and the same for Krystle Campbell and Sean Collier and, therefore, they could be, should be killed. It was a monstrous self-deception. To accomplish it, you had to redefine yourself as well. You had to forget your own humanity, the common humanity that you shared with your brother Martin and your sister Lingzi.[423]

The revised framework for terrorism I have offered here foregrounds the immediate need to understand in more nuanced ways the "monstrous self-deception" and redefinition of the self that is antecedent to the triggering of a disclosive imperative and the ignition of the act of terror. The exigency is all the more urgent as we find our society stultified by the cross currents of manufactured truths and the violence that such truly monstrous self-deceptions engender. Yet it also illustrates the necessity of moving beyond the imposed (and supposed) clarity of epistemology to preserve the complexity of our own humanity and ensure that our understanding exceeds the mere Manichean in an effort to better hear the disclosures at the beating heart of the unheard.

[423] Ibid.

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