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‘Be quiet!’ Terrorism and Trauma in Paul Greengrass’ *Bloody Sunday* and *United 93*

Abstract: This article traces the history of terror and terrorism from the French Revolution to the present day in order to describe its rhetorical dimension. From the 1790s onwards, a key rhetorical element of terrorism is the creation of an effect of silence and speechlessness which is closely connected with the philosophy and psychology of the sublime. The second half of the paper investigates how Paul Greengrass’ films *Bloody Sunday* and *United 93*, which both deal with the topic of terrorism, transform the rhetorical dimension of a terrorist outrage, the main thesis being that the films appropriate the dimension of silence and speechlessness in order to become monuments of commemoration.

1. Introduction

The films *Bloody Sunday* and *United 93*, directed by Paul Greengrass, can both be seen as attempts to explore the nature of terrorism.¹ *Bloody Sunday* depicts events taking place on 30 January 1972 that ultimately led to the escalation of violence in Northern Ireland between the 1970s and the 1990s. During a peaceful march organised by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in Derry, soldiers of the British Army opened fire on the peaceful protesters, ultimately killing thirteen people. The film treats this fatal day as a point of origin that eventually led to the rise of the IRA as a paramilitary organisation, thus turning the Northern Irish Troubles into an underground war characterised by terrorist acts. *United 93*, on the other hand, describes the hijacking of the one airplane that did not hit its intended target on 11 September 2001.

Both films aim at establishing a realistic atmosphere by applying traits of the documentary genre which Greengrass also makes use of in his mainstream Hollywood films such as *The Bourne Supremacy* or *The Bourne Ultimatum*. Focusing on historical facts, *Bloody Sunday* and *United 93* avoid an overtly teleological narrative, although both feature central characters as protagonists. However, in spite of the documentary style the films do not become any more realistic. Paradoxically, their documentary style even heightens the movies’ symbolism and arbi-

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¹ Greengrass also co-produced a third film concerned with terrorism, *Omagh*, which narrates the events taking place after the last major terrorist attack organised by the IRA during which a bomb exploded in a busy main street of the eponymous Northern Irish town on 15 August 1998.

trariness whilst shedding light on the necessarily aesthetic and rhetoric quality of the attacks themselves.

In the following article, I will argue that the logic of terrorism follows a certain set of rules: as the main aim of an attack is not to kill but to shock or convince a wider public, they are in essence rhetorical. Against this backdrop I will investigate how both *Bloody Sunday* and *United 93* face the rhetorical potential of terrorism. Both films, I will argue, turn out to be meta-rhetorical: by rhetorically commenting on the rhetoric of terrorism they ultimately transcend the logic of a terrorist outrage.

2. A Theory of Terror

A terrorist attack is always a rhetorical act (see Tuman 2010). Yet, as opposed to an act of murder, the victims are not its primary targets. Rather, an act of terrorism always aims at reaching a wider public with the help of the various forms of media available. In the 21st century, the new media and especially the internet have gained momentum in this context:

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, terrorism has proved to be pervasive in terms of the incidence of terrorist acts, the pretensions to legitimacy of terrorists, the prominence of a few individual terrorist leaders, and, more significantly, in the way it has invaded our consciousness, permeating society with fearful awareness. [...] There is no terrorism without communication, and this success has been enabled in part by clever use of new media, principally the numerous tools provided by the internet. (Seib / Janbek 2011, iix)

The public is usually divided into two factions: on the one hand, there are those who are appalled by the assassin's actions. It is not the terrorists' aim to convince them but rather to force them to carry out a certain set of actions – such as a retreat from (assumedly) occupied areas or the release of political prisoners usually belonging to a minority. On the other hand, a terrorist outrage aims at convincing a much smaller group of people of one's own political goals or even at recruiting them to join the paramilitary movement.

Despite the prominence of the new media in the recent discussion, terrorism has a much longer history: “the practice of terrorizing for political, ideological, religious, and/or economic purposes extends back many thousands of years and across many different cultures” (Tuman 2010, 2). The term as well as the philosophical foundation of terrorism, however, are of a much more recent date: they have their origin in the writings and actions of the Jacobins in the wake of the French Revolution (see Tuman 2010, 4-5). In order to investigate the rhetorical form of terrorism as it is treated in Greengrass' films, I will look at this historical origin of modern terror and terrorism.

2.1 The Principles of Modern Terror

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term *terror* as follows:

1. The state of being terrified or greatly frightened; intense fear, fright, or dread [...].
2. The action or quality of causing dread; terrific quality, terribleness; spec. this action or quality in fiction, esp. in novel (or tale) of terror [...].
4. Reign of terror, a state of things in which the general community live in dread of death or outrage; esp. (with capital initials) French Hist. the period of the First Revolution from about March 1793 to July 1794, called also the Terror [...].

In the present context, three aspects are of relevance: first, the state of being intensely frightened, second, the aesthetic quality of narrative works that are able to produce this fright, and, third, the historical reign of terror in post-revolutionary France under Maximilien de Robespierre and Antoine de Saint-Just.

The foundations of the modern notion of terror are therefore to be found in the years immediately following the French Revolution. Terrorism can thus be seen as the antipode of democracy and republicanism. In her book *Terror and its Discontents*, Caroline Weber has investigated the impact of Jacobin terror on language and especially on the freedom of speech. In order to oppose destabilising forces during the 1790s, terror was a means to sacrifice individual freedom to the general benefit. This ideal of the general good, she concludes, goes back to Rousseau's *Social Contract*:

This unifying principle, drawn from the pages of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, held that all intersubjective differences, all personal opinions and desires, had to be sacrificed on the altar of the common interest: freedom in such a schema meant the equal and selfless devotion of all citizens to the revolutionary cause. (Weber 2003, xiii-iv)

Rousseau's social theory established the philosophical basis as well as the justification for state-induced terror. The social contract as defined by Rousseau and interpreted by the revolutionaries is universal in nature and leaves no room for dissent:

If therefore we set aside everything that is not essential to the social pact, we may find that it may be reduced to the following terms: *Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and we as a body receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.* (Rousseau 1994, 55; emphasis in original)

The imagery of the body stresses the nature of the general will which cannot accept that any of its parts disagrees with the whole. Weber concludes that, despite the fact that the ambiguity of language is widely discussed during the 18th century, any vagueness has to be excluded from society in order to prevent dissent. Commenting on Rousseau's vision of a uniform society, Weber states:

Although it is founded on an originary alienation, on the negation of private reservations and demands, the Rousseauist polity is presented here as a world without difference. [...] For as it has become a commonplace of contemporary literary theory to observe, and as the *philosophe* himself demonstrates quite clearly in his theoretical writings on language [...] heterogeneity and difference are constitutive features of linguistic ex-

pression. By dint of its homogenizing or totalizing nature, then, the discourse of civic goodness would logically appear to eradicate the need for language as such. Rousseau postulates that once alienated from his anterior mode of being, the citizen has nothing left to ask for, nothing left to protest [...]. (Weber 2003, 2)

This is also the reason why the sovereign is able and justified to force the individual to be part of the community, as Rousseau famously states: “that he will be forced to be free” (Rousseau 1994, 58).

Rousseau’s *Social Contract* as a founding document gives evidence to the inherent tensions of modern republicanism, with terrorism as one of its – albeit hidden and subdued – facets. To conclude that Rousseau wrote a manifesto of totalitarianism that necessarily also engenders terror and terrorism would obviously be wrong. In *The Social Contract* Rousseau declares that he is opposed to the use of violence and defends the freedom of opinion. Nevertheless, the treatise *can* be interpreted as the basis for a totalitarian republic. At least, this is what Robespierre and Saint-Just obviously did under the political pressure setting in in 1793. Since Robespierre founded his philosophy of terror on the Enlightenment ideal of freedom, he was able to declare in a famous speech held before the national convent on 5 February 1794 that terror was nothing else than an “emanation of virtue”:

If virtue be the spring of a popular government in times of peace, the spring of that government during a revolution is virtue combined with terror: virtue, without which terror is destructive; terror, without which virtue is impotent. Terror is only justice prompt, severe and inflexible; it is then an emanation of virtue. (Robespierre 1794, 10)

All this indicates that originally the philosophical justification of terror was based on a vision of common welfare dictated by a centralised political power. This version of state terror thus goes back to an idea of a general benefit that the individual merely has to be convinced of. To threaten the individual or to act out violence is therefore considered to be a justified means to achieve a state of general welfare. Rhetorically speaking, terror in the wake of the French Revolution is an act meant to convince the people of something for their own good which they simply have not understood yet.

On a more general note, this idea is applicable to all forms of terrorism and the terrorists’ fundamental convictions. At first glance, contemporary terrorism with its paramilitary structures and underground form of organisation seems to be diametrically opposed to the Jacobin form – the state is not the origin of terror but rather its main aim –, but nevertheless there is an important parallel: the acts of terrorism are always motivated by the belief that they are absolutely justified. The fact that the majority of the people do not necessarily share this conviction serves less as an argument against terrorism but rather as an argument for the use of drastic violence. The majority, in other words, has to be convinced of some basic truth, and the psychological state of terror violence produces in them can be compared to the passions aroused by a rhetorical speech.

2.2 Terror and the Media

As Caroline Weber has shown, French Revolutionary terror is also an assault on language, the freedom of expression and any general form of linguistic ambiguity. In her study, she demonstrates how terror tears down the walls between figurative and literal speech:

Terror is after all a catachresis: an expression founded in a metaphor (the program known as Terror is "like" psychological terror in that both phenomena [...] have something to do with fear) but lacking a "literal" counterpart (there is no alternative word for the Robespierreists' enterprise). In its rhetorical essence, the term *Terror* thus attests to the impossibility of maintaining strict boundaries between figurative and literal reference, between otherness and sameness, between multiplicity (the Terror is comparable to something else) and unity (the Terror is equivalent only to itself and brooks no difference). (Weber 2004, xvii)

To be rhetorically effective, a terrorist outrage has to be a balancing act between eloquence and silence. Silence, especially in the context of terrorism, has a terrifying effect. It is therefore quite fitting that the execution of Louis XVI, which marks the beginning of the regime of terror, was performed without one word of explanation. Silence is always a trope, be it the silence of the assassin, the silent reaction to the outrage, or silence as part of an aesthetic approximation to terrorism. In other words, terror is an extended ellipsis, i.e. a form of speechless rhetoric.

The theory that lies at the bottom of all this is the sublime. The 18th-century concept of the sublime has its origin in the reception of the ancient treatise *Peri Hypsous* written by Ps.-Longinus. In the course of this reception, the primarily rhetorical concept is turned into an aesthetic philosophy which is opposed to and thus complements the aesthetics of beauty. The most important philosophical work in this context is Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, where he describes the circumstances producing the affect of *terror* – i.e. frightful emotions verging on pain. This form of terror he considers a source of the sublime:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke 1990, 36)

The more realistic a work of art becomes, the more convincing is its effect:

In imitated distresses the only difference is the pleasure resulting from the effects of imitation; for it is never so perfect, but we can perceive it as imitation, and on that principle are somewhat pleased with it. And indeed in some cases we derive as much or more pleasure from that source than from the thing itself. But then I imagine we shall be much mistaken, if we attribute any considerable part of our satisfaction in tragedy to the consideration that tragedy is a deceit, and its representations no realities. The nearer it approaches the reality, and the farther it removes us from all idea of fiction, the more perfect is its power. (Burke 1990, 43)

On the other hand, this means that the authenticity of an event is created by its mediation in the first place. Furthermore, without a recipient, both a work of art and an act of terrorism would be meaningless. This is the basic difference between war and terrorism, the one is an assault with the aim to conquer or destroy the opponent whilst the other is a symbolical act of destruction with the intention to produce an effect on a third-party audience, as W.J.T. Mitchell points out:

Either way, the point of terrorist violence is not the killing of the enemy as such, but the terrorizing of the enemy with a traumatizing spectacle. “Shock and awe” 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. Terrorism, then, is a war of words and images carried by the mass media, a form of psychological warfare whose aim is the demoralization of the enemy, and not the direct destruction of military personnel or equipment. (Mitchell 2005, 298)

Rhetoricity and mediality do not only characterise a terrorist outrage, they create it in the first place: only in its mediated form does it exist and only in its rhetorical dimension can it be understood. As such, the modern form of terror is a product of 18th-century psychological and aesthetic theories.

2.3 The Medium and Reality

The philosophical, rhetorical and aesthetic debate around 1800 that builds the foundation of our current understanding of terrorism is coexistent with the emergence of a fundamentally new concept of human nature – and the two are in fact closely related to each other. The wholly immanent understanding of human nature, which is established in the early decades of the century and which is investigated in the new scientific discipline of biology, finds its counterpart on a political level in the notion of bare life. In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben states:

When its borders begin to be blurred, the bare life that dwelt there frees itself in the city and becomes both subject and object of the conflicts of the political order, the one place for both the organization of State power and emancipation from it. Everything happens as if, along with the disciplinary process by which State power makes man as a living being into its own specific object, another process is set in motion that in large measure corresponds to the birth of modern democracy, in which man as a living being presents himself no longer as an *object* but as the *subject* of political power. (Agamben 1998, 9; emphasis in original)

According to Agamben, the “fundamental categorial pair of Western politics” is that of “bare life/political existence” (Agamben 1998, 8). If the emergence of modern democracy around 1800 is based on the human as both subject and object of politics, the bare life of the biopolitical body becomes the quintessential aim of a terrorist attack. On the basis of Agamben’s distinction, terrorism can thus be interpreted as a radically modern form because it originates simultaneously with the modern concept of politics. The suicide bombers therefore are the logical outcome of this origin and subsequent development: with their bare lives they become both the subject and object of their own attacks. Against this background it becomes clear

how terrorism works with a form of political symbolism that by far exceeds the fear inducing form of guerrilla warfare it is built upon.

Jean Baudrillard has stressed the immensely symbolical force of suicide attacks:

The radical difference is that terrorists, while having at their disposal all the arms of the system, have also another fatal weapon: their own death. If they limited themselves to fighting the system with its own weapons, they would be immediately eliminated. If they did not oppose the system with their own death, they would disappear as quickly as a useless sacrifice; this has almost always been the fate of terrorism until now (thus the Palestinian suicidal attacks) and the reason why it could not but fail. Everything changed as soon as they allied all available modern means to this highly symbolic weapon. The latter infinitely multiplies their destructive potential. It is the multiplication of these two factors (which seem to us so irreconcilable) that gives them such superiority. Conversely, the strategy of zero death, of a technological, "clean" war, precisely misses this transfiguration of "real" power by symbolic power. (Baudrillard 2002, 20-1)

The fact, in other words, that modern terror and modern terrorism originate at the same time as the modern concept of the human and modern democracy is no accident. The human with its bare life is situated at the centre of the political system, being both subject and object, delinquent and victim. But paradoxically, the symbolic force of the immediacy of the sacrificed biological body that bestows the effect of absolute authority upon attacks like those of 9/11 can only be attained in a mediated form: the effect of immediacy and authenticity is based on its direct opposite, i.e. mediation:

Rather than the violence of the real being there first, and the *frisson* of the image being added to it, the image is there first, and the *frisson* of the real is added. [...] The terrorist violence here is not, then, a blowback of reality, any more than it is a blowback of history. It is not "real." In a sense, it is worse: it is symbolic. Violence in itself may be perfectly banal and inoffensive. Only symbolic violence is generative of singularity. (Baudrillard 2002, 29)

Considering fictional filmic renderings of historical terrorist attacks, this medial re-creation of an attack is necessarily characterised by a fundamental paradox that is inherent in any terrorist outrage. On the one hand, the attacks of 9/11 had such an immense effect because they relied on their very *reality* – the twin towers simply do not exist anymore –, but on the other hand, this very same effect is based on the distribution of the images via mass media. In other words, terrorism can only come into being if it is mediated, or, to be more precise: it can only exist in and through a medium. This paradox situation is very aptly described by Slavoj Žižek in his essay *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*: the effect of fundamentalist terrorism creates an "*effect of the Real*" that is, in turn, based on a "passion of the real" (Žižek 2002, 9-10; emphasis in original).

Considering the rhetorical dimension of terrorism, the aforementioned effect of silence is of utmost importance in the medial form of an outrage. This effect is also described by Richard Kirkland:

[T]errorism has consistently been perceived as an act that defies the realm of civic discourse. Indeed, it has been the traditional role of language in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist atrocity to present itself as unable to capture the overwhelming materiality of the event itself. What, so the argument runs, can words offer in the face of such violence? Understood as such, every terrorist outrage becomes unspeakable. (Kirkland 2003, 77)

The failure and ultimate collapse of language in the face of terrorism has nowhere been more obvious than in the endless television repetitions of the collapsing World Trade Centre or George W. Bush's silent face after the news had been delivered to him. The silence finds its apt counterpart and expression in the cultural artefacts that try to deal with terrorism:

A similar paralysis can be found in the realm of cultural production. When surveying the now extensive tradition of cultural representations of Northern Irish violence it is noticeable that the individual terrorist act is often identified only by the traces it leaves behind [...]. (Kirkland 2003, 77)

It has to be stressed, though, that speechlessness is only an effect and in no way contradicts my thesis that a terrorist attack is first and foremost a rhetorical act:

It is important to state at the outset that the categories of the unspeakable and unimaginable are anything but fixed and determinate limits on the domain of words and images respectively. They are, rather, rhetorical tropes that simultaneously invoke and overcome the limitations of language and depiction, discourse and display. The invocation of the unspeakable is invariably expressed in and followed by an outpouring of words: it is a strategy, as Derrida put it in the title of a classic essay, of "How to Avoid Speaking," while of course failing to avoid speaking, and succeeding in saying a great deal. (Mitchell 2005, 293)

The effect is a fundamental paradox. Since its origins in the wake of the French Revolution, a terrorist attack is not mainly aimed at its actual victims but at the spectators which, at least in the 20th and 21st centuries, can only be reached via modern forms of media, be it print, television or the internet. That is also to say that silence, the unspeakable or speechlessness are only possible in discursive form.

The question arising now is how an aesthetic, especially a cinematic treatment can explore and do justice to the rhetorical qualities of terrorism. It is my thesis that the fundamental paradox of the terrorist attack, characterised by both reality and mediacy, has an immediate impact on the form of the films concerned: as fictional artefacts they try to be as authentic and realistic as possible, yet it seems almost inevitable that this semblance of the real is actually the result of an even heightened use of filmic effects – handheld camera, lack of a musical score, retro-active change of light and colour, etc. – and are thus the effect of an increased – and not a decreased – mediacy.

Paul Greengrass' films are perfect examples of this cultural phenomenon. Both *Bloody Sunday* and *United 93* create the semblance of reality and authenticity by making use of all the technical possibilities of the medium. But, and this is the fundamental difference between the rhetorical outlook of a terrorist outrage and

that of its exploration in film, their rhetorical *function* is fundamentally different. What this actually means, I want to explore discussing both films.

3. Terrorism in Film: Authenticity, Truth and Fiction

How does art, especially film, explore this fundamental paradox, how does it explore terrorism's non-discursive discursiveness or its speechless eloquence? One answer to this question is that the films *Bloody Sunday* and *United 93* hide their narrative structure, or even pretend they do not have any. This is an effect created by their hyperrealism: both films try to bridge the gap between documentary and fiction and thus also attempt to transgress and blur the borderline between art and reality. Both films pose the question of how to approach the subjects of terror, terrorism and terrorist attacks in artefacts. It is my main thesis that it is not the actual staging or screening of an attack but the function of a film that is fundamentally different from the real event. And this function is actually the result of their rhetorical effect: films turn into monuments of things past; they serve, in a way, as memorials. The films achieve this function by actually re-creating the same effect as the outrage, namely speechlessness. The silence and the speechlessness of a film and a film's effect is in turn the repetition of the speechlessness of the attack; it is therefore the meta-rhetorical reflection of the immediate effect of an outrage.

3.1 *Bloody Sunday*

Bloody Sunday deals with the events that took place in the Northern Irish city of Derry on 30 January 1972. On this day, 13 civilians were killed on a peace march through the Bogside, a Catholic area in Derry, organized by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). This date marks the crossroads between the Civil Rights Movement and the *Troubles*, the violent radicalisation of the Northern Irish Conflict and the terrorist attacks committed by the Irish Republican Army. The movie's protagonist is the Northern Irish politician Ivan Cooper, who had organised the said peace march in a Catholic community in order to defend Catholic rights. As a Protestant and British Member of Parliament in a thoroughly Catholic community, Cooper is torn between Catholicism and Protestantism and thus symbolises the deeply torn nature of the country as well as the opposites that the Civil Rights Movement intended to reconcile. Next to Cooper, the two other central characters are Gerard Donaghy, a young Catholic in love with a Protestant girl who had spent some time in gaol due to his anti-British rioting and who therefore also represents the schizophrenic and paradox situation of the country. Furthermore, there are Soldier 027 and Brigadier Patrick McLellan. Thus, the film does not pretend to have no central characters or no narrative at all. Nevertheless, it creates the effect of being an immediate document of reality. Stylistically and technically, this effect is created by the handheld camera and the close and yet unfocussed vicinity to the events that the spectators find themselves

in; effects that are actually created through a heightened use of media techniques rather than through the absence of the medium:

The filmic style presents a realistic depiction of the events surrounding Bloody Sunday (the preparations for the march; the press conferences; the march itself and its aftermath); the occasional lack of focus, the unsteady camera, the movement between different groups – the conversations are “overheard” as we often join the conversations midflow – and the rapid fades, all heighten the verisimilitude, suggesting the camera is on the scene, recording the events for posterity. (Alcobia-Murphy 2007, 46-7)

This is further stressed by the fact that many of the actors are not professionals but amateurs; in fact, the soldiers are played by actual soldiers who were stationed in Northern Ireland:

We’ve all seen films with actors playing soldiers in them, and it’s very hard to get them, an actor to move/think/feel like a soldier. So when we decided to use real soldiers, people who’d actually served in Northern Ireland, and had their own memories of the conflict, and had lost friends, it gave it a reality and it gave the whole piece an edge [...] and for both these groups of young boys and those soldiers, at some level, I don’t think it really was acting, it was a sort of, some quality of reliving it [...] that gave this film an edge of authenticity that people respond to. (Greengrass, qtd. in Blaney 2007, 128)

The effect is simple yet impressive: *Bloody Sunday* gives the spectator the idea that a story is being followed which yet is not narrated. Narratologically speaking, the narrator of the film moves almost completely into the background while the images are almost exclusively presented through focalisers or focalising instances.

The storyline created through these focalisers then abruptly ends with the beginning of violence. Once the British Army opens fire on the marchers, chaos breaks out, mirrored in the disruption of the story; the narration, which was only in the background anyway, seems to stop entirely. While the opening scenes of the film concentrate on the preparations of the peace march and on certain key characters, the beginning of the open conflict immediately changes that: a general confusion sets in. The film therefore brilliantly reflects the confusion and hopelessness of the marchers after the first shots had been fired. At the beginning of the conflict, there is only a clash between the soldiers and those protestors in support of violence, i.e. those who are attacking the soldiers by throwing stones. The situation escalates as soon as the two different groups of protestors – peaceful marchers and the more radical youths – are united again after a brief separation on their route through the town. Soldiers shoot people in the back, singular shouts that demand that the killing should be stopped (“cease fire!”) die away in the increasingly confusing and chaotic excess of violence. A helpless man lying on the ground is executed and another man who wants to help the injured is shot as well: he is shown with his hands up waving a white handkerchief. People are fleeing aimlessly away from the soldiers, and the handheld camera that runs away with them creates an effect of immediacy and authenticity.

Immediately after these scenes a complete silence sets in. The men in the police station are utterly shocked as they hear the news on the telephone: they remain silent. The immediate witnesses on the street are speechless as well. After the dead and the wounded are dragged into a house, singular shouts after a doctor can be

heard but a few scenes later, Ivan Cooper passes by the dead, unable to utter one word. All the other characters are silent as well. Violence, the film tells us here, creates speechlessness.

This speechlessness creates a void that is, in turn, filled by terrorism with its non-discursive discursiveness. The future escalation of violence in Northern Ireland is further anticipated by a brief dialogue between the British soldiers. The more moderate soldier introduced at the beginning accuses another soldier who boasts of having killed the people on the street:

Soldier 1: "I saw it. I saw you shoot civvies."

Soldier 2: "They're no civvies, they're terrorists, mate."

Soldier 1: "Terrorists? I never even saw a gunman."

Soldier 3: "They were shooting. You were there with us."

Soldier 1: "I saw what happened."

Soldier 2: "Be quiet."

(*Bloody Sunday* 2002, 1:15:10)

Critical voices are effectively silenced while dominant voices in favour of violence prevail. The soldiers thus create a narrative, ending again in silence, that distorts and even justifies the events and the escalation of violence. This narrative is one side of the upcoming violence of the Northern Irish troubles. It is accompanied by the silence of the British authorities preventing a fair and quick analysis of the events. This narrative finds its counterpart on the side of the increasingly radical republicans. The film shows how members of the IRA immediately begin to recruit new members who will then be responsible for the terrorist attacks of the following decade – *silently* handing out weapons. The film ends with a text the historical Ivan Cooper read out at a press conference in 1972 which now sounds like a prophecy:

This afternoon 27 people were shot in this city. 13 of them lie dead tonight. They were innocent, we were there. This is our Sharpeville. This is our Amritsar massacre. A moment of truth and a moment of shame. And I just want to say this to the British government: You know what you have just done, don't you? You have destroyed the civil rights movement and you have given the IRA the biggest victory it will ever have. All over this city tonight, young men, boys, will be joining the IRA. And you will reap a whirlwind. (*Bloody Sunday* 2002, 1:35:22)

But next to the danger of the rise of terrorism another aspect of the unnameable and unspeakable is referred to in the film. The medium of film is able to create another effect of speechlessness which is in no sense an effect of the sublime. The aesthetics of the film does not follow the rules of the sublime but rather does something radically different by showing the effect violence has on the spectators, the terror and lack of words it creates. Thus, *Bloody Sunday* is able to transcend mere documentation by adding a level of reflection. The camera makes the audience complicit with the victims and the immediate witnesses, and it therefore relates the immediate affect of terror to the reflexive passion the spectator experiences. The movie thus performs a remarkable feat: by self-reflexively commenting on the medial and rhetorical quality of violence it itself becomes a memorial. Through this aesthetic function the film turns into a site of memory aiding viewers and especially victims

to come to terms with traumatising past events: “the film performs an ethicopolitical function – that of working through historical trauma” (Blaney 2007, 119).

3.2 *United 93*

United 93 is quite similar in this sense. The film tries to capture the events taking place on 11 September 2001 aboard the eponymous flight of United Airlines. This is the plane which ultimately never reached its target and crashed into an open field. The film begins by separately showing the hijackers and the other passengers as they slowly approach each other and meet while checking in and board the airplane. The passengers remain relatively anonymous; there is no central character, not to mention a hero. The effect is again the same as in *Bloody Sunday*: the relative distance and seeming arbitrariness renders the passengers as realistic as possible. This impression is increased by the fact that all the actors play real persons and that, whenever this is possible, they utter the exact same words the real passengers used – for instance, as documented in registered and recorded phone-calls. But this appearance of distance and anonymity is also characteristic for the fictitious genre of the disaster movie in general:

Indem die Reisenden in ihrer Vielfalt gezeigt werden, präsentiert der Film ein mikrokosmisches Abbild der Gesellschaft und verweist darauf, dass die gesamte Bevölkerung betroffen ist. (Schneider 2008, 69)

The other actors were also cast according to the principle used in *Bloody Sunday*: pilots and stewardesses were played by real members of the airline, and the members of the ground personnel working on 11 September 2001 actually played themselves. Finally, the film is shot in real time. All this creates an effect of authenticity.

Nevertheless, as hard as the movie tries to reach this aim, it cannot be totally neutral. The spectators know that the terrorists are in fact terrorists before the other passengers can be aware of this or even sense the danger they are in. Furthermore, the real reason for the eventual crash of the machine into an open field near Shanksville remains as unclear as the aim of the attack – presumably the White House. So, the film has to make a choice: *United 93* narrates the widely known thesis that the passengers prevented the attack in an act of heroism by stopping the hijackers. Furthermore, the hijackers, especially their leader Ziad Jarrah, are doubt-ridden and shown to be hesitating. This form of hesitation is moving the film psychologically into the vicinity of the expectations of a typical Western audience rather than keeping a neutral eye on the events.

The reality effect the film had on its first audiences was immense. People were generally shocked by what they saw; they cried and had to leave the theatre. Generally, the press praised the film for its authenticity and realism, but Daniel Mendelsohn, in an article published in the *New York Review of Books*, criticizes the film for exactly the same reason:

Indeed, in the case of *United 93*, there is no apparent “dramatization” at all: as far as the audience knows, the film, which often has the flatly passive, affectless feel of home movies, simply, and with apparent scrupulousness, reproduces what we know of the sequence of events that day. (Mendelsohn 2006, n.p.)

Mendelsohn claims that by neither dramatising nor narrating the events the film only has an effect on actual witnesses – in other words, on our generation that can still vividly remember 9/11. Future generations no longer familiar with the events would only be baffled by the film, it would have no effect at all, which is the reason why this film, he claims, differs from a classical Greek tragedy that has an effect to this very day.

Although this form of criticism is justified to a certain extent, Mendelsohn overlooks one crucial aspect. The lack of narrative structure and the non-discursive discursiveness are the logical consequence of the rhetorical structure of an assault. Since terrorist outrages fundamentally depend on the rhetorical and sublime effect of speechlessness and silence, a film dealing with terrorism somehow has to come to terms with this effect. The proclaimed absence of heroes or a narrative structure reflects this rhetoric and transforms it into the film's own form. The function is, again, rhetorical: the acts of terrorism on film are transformed into *imagines agentes*, into rhetorical topoi of memory: they become monuments of commemoration. The effect of the real and the authentic, in turn, changes them into awe-inspiring aspects that result in speechlessness. This speechlessness rejects any form of hermeneutic interpretation which would be a form of understanding and appropriation Greengrass' films try to avoid. In order to work against the sublime effect of the original attacks, Greengrass uses the same technique in *United 93* that he applied in *Bloody Sunday*; he takes up the speechlessness created by terrorism but undermines its effect of the sublime by creating a silent monument of memory which is part of the historical work to overcome a severe trauma.

3.3 Metafictional Realism

To come to the conclusion that Greengrass' films achieve this effect of authenticity by somehow naïvely ignoring the medium or the form would be utterly misleading. Both films are highly self-referential, reflecting the medial possibilities to approach their subject matter to an astonishing degree. In other words, Greengrass introduces a level of reflection indicating that a movie can never approach reality immediately.

In *Bloody Sunday*, this medial element is a street map hanging on the wall of the central police station. Using this map, the policemen try to figure out where exactly the people are marching this very moment and where the policemen should be. They get their information via telephone and try to give directions back. Within the police station, nobody has an immediate access to reality, yet it is here that decisions should be made. Furthermore, the entire situation at the station increases the film's play with multiple perspectives. More moderate policemen and soldiers,

trying to calm down the situation, are right next to hardliners willing to use violence from the very beginning. Yet, their only instrument is a map on which the incoming news are drawn and written down. Thus, the map becomes a symbol of the abstraction introduced by the use of media, and it shows how this abstraction ultimately hinders the policemen to reach out and fully grasp or even understand the events.

United 93 makes use of a very similar symbol. The people working at ground control can only see what is going on in the air as little symbols of airplanes on their screens. In other words, they can only follow the events in the most abstract manner possible. The horror of the personnel who have to realise that several planes have been hijacked and eventually crashed into the World Trade Center is translated into these little symbols as they vanish from the screen one after the other. Both the map in *Bloody Sunday* and the screens in *United 93* therefore become metaphors for the medium of film itself. Thus, both movies self-referentially show that the medium of film can only offer an approximation to historical events, it can never fully capture them.

As I have shown at the beginning of this article, it is central to the structure of terror to seem most authentic and real. Yet at the same time, terror can only achieve its ends if it is the very opposite: if it is mediated. The rhetorical means of the terrorists as well as the rhetorical effect on witnesses is identical: speechlessness. Paul Greengrass makes use of this silence, appropriating it and thus turning the film into a site of memory. Yet, both movies reflect this condition. By being consciously self-referential, the films prevent their actually having the same effect as the real – but nonetheless mediated – terrorist attacks. Both the map and the screens symbolically refer to the fact that one cannot get beyond the media when considering terrorism. Both of these elements undermine the effect of the real.

Furthermore, silence and speechlessness are introduced to the films themselves. By showing how the immediate witnesses of the events fall silent, the spectators are asked to put themselves into perspective. Therefore the spectators are enabled to understand the events of the films as historical. The audience and the spectators can regard the film as a monument of the past, enabling the audience to actively absorb the rhetorical effect of the films and turn it on its head: *Bloody Sunday* and *United 93* can therefore be interpreted as part of the work against the impact of sublimity, transforming traumatising historical events into monuments of memory against historical trauma.

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