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The problem with a new type of terrorism, a new type of violence that has emerged along with the events of 9/11 in America has led to ample discussions on the definition, significance and ways to understand the phenomenon. The things people held true about terrorism until that day (the difference between it and other types of violence; its apparent coverage of only national or local areas; the conviction that the attacks can't be hugely destructive) proved simplistic and outdated. After the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 the world seems different. And so does terrorism.

What is interesting about terrorism, among other things, is that there are over 100 definitions for it. Every governmental institution, every security organization and every author that writes on politics or violence, accentuates a very different set of characteristics of terrorism and understands differently its goals and its impact. When it comes to philosophers, terrorism is a conceptual dilemma, an ever self creating puzzle that can't be confined to only one symbolic system. This doesn't mean that terrorism isn't thought of, discussed or written on. On the contrary, its plural nature, its history and present day relevance make it a perfect philosophical subject.

Terrorism nowadays is a new expression of violence. Historically speaking, there are several contentions about its origins. Some place it in Antiquity; some say it is a product of the Russian Revolution. Still, its modern character comes now from its up-to-date use of technology, its international means of financing, the way it uses the mass-media and its profound understanding of international politics. All these are part of its strength and make it a dangerous enemy for anyone. Violence has been defined from a various points of view, whether be they legal, political or philosophical. Its links with ethics, religion and politics has made it into a very interesting and researched subject and there is a lot of literature on it. But we believe that terrorism changes the way violence can be understood after 9/11. Because by making it a media event, violence now becomes one of the main subjects of the philosophy of communication. Due to its heavy broadcasting and to the spread of images of the Twin Towers burning, of the Pentagon's partial destruction and of shocked and horrified witnesses, 9/11 has been inscribed in our collective memory as the first historical media event. Everyone present

at the crime scene or witnessing the events on TV or through the internet was aware about the magnitude of the event.

9/11 was not over when the victims had been buried and commemorated. It was the trigger that set off an enormous amount of anger, frustration and in the end, action from the political powers of the world. This new type of violence doesn't cause destruction just in what concerns the terrorist act itself, but is also responsible for every reply from the victims and all those involved. In this particular case, for example, the Twin Towers were held as symbols of democracy, of economic and political stability. The impressive number of human lives lost in the attack made America very popular, which made people all over the world to be sympathetic and understanding with its loss. People couldn't just stay indifferent.

We started our research from the idea that the relationship between terrorism and mass-media must be at first deconstructed in order to get a better understanding of its components and its mechanism. We found out that the interpretations given to terrorism are either superposed or inherited and they only make sense in what concerns one thing: the communication of information about it. There are all sorts of interpretations that circulate around the media, some are expert opinions or some are just opinions, some are conveyed in news bulletins and some in talk shows. Unfortunately, we believe they rarely meet the criteria of objectivity which means that the public is usually being influenced or manipulated by politicians, journalists and other types of political specialists.

That is why we wanted to find and advance a solution to this problem and we searched it with the help of the philosophy of communication in order to see if it can offer one. The first chapter of our paper focuses on the Frankfurt's School ideas, especially on Jürgen Habermas and his reinvention of the Critical Theory. For him a fact can be conveyed and received in a correct manner only under certain circumstances. These circumstances can only be met in an ideal situation of communication. The German philosopher got inspired by the pragmatists for rethinking the Critical Theory but it has become rather unclear today what it is and what it can be used for. This must be fixed. There are many references to Habermas as being the most important contemporary critical theorist. He manages to synthesize linguistic, phenomenological and pragmatic themes into Critical Theory, and he does so despite the fact that the early critical theorists were skeptical about such an approach. Maybe that is precisely why Critical Theory seemed to fail at first. The subjects it focused on (the decay of the

historical subject, the critique of the industrial culture, the critique of technology, science and domination) became the favorite topics of social theory. Thus it became rather unclear what the distinctions between the two types of theories were. Also, the 20<sup>th</sup> century world Adorno and Horkheimer inhabited looked a lot different from the one of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The latter is dominated by an ever accelerating globalization, the domination of information and of changes in political and economic power.

Habermas is trying to revive Critical Theory and with it modernity's enterprise, by mobilizing the idea of reemploying the public sphere, invigorating the access to public discourse and expression and the involvement of people in political matters. The theory of communicative action relies on the rational potential of the human being in order to find a solution to the problem of getting to mutual linguistic understanding. This is the basis for a critique of domination without turning to a historical subject. Although there are those who criticize this theory of communicative action, Habermas makes his point in arguing that our time, determined by and interpreted through new means of communication needs the updated Critical Theory. It is, together with the theory of communicative action the necessary tool to help us understand our context and environment. But as it has well been already pointed out several times, the ideal communication situation is a utopia, it cannot be reached. Nevertheless, Habermas's definition is far from being superfluous: by understanding its goals and by pursuing them we can better manage the flow of information.

We centered the second chapter on the relationship between mass-media and its public, a relationship that clearly gives us the reasons for which we need to use Critical Theory today. The incredible emergence of violence in television programs since the 1950s convinced George Gerbner, an American communications' professor to engage in applied study of its reach and effects. One of this projects outcome was coming up with the term and concept of *mean world syndrome*. Gerbner and his team claim that people's view of the world is informed and impressed by what they watch on TV. The amount of violence the public gets from television programs makes this view rather negative and grim. The Frankfurt's School Critical Theory had made an impact on Gerbner and he himself called his method of research *cultivation theory*. By this the researcher established a method that, although worked differently from the way Critical Theory worked, obtained similar results. Gerbner wanted to measure television's impact on the viewers' perception of the world.

For Gerbner television is the medium that has committed itself to telling the cultural American, and even global, story. He is interested in finding out who exactly is behind the telling of the story and who the story is really about. During the time Gerbner argued that television is an important factor in peoples' lives, psychologists held that the things influencing behavior were the environment and the ongoing or concluded wars.

But the American researcher did not agree with this oversimplified view on things so he continued his work and managed to prove with his team that watching long hours of television does have negative consequences. The study showed that most people who watched TV 4 hours a day or more were immune to shocking images of violence and cruelty and truly believed them to be part of reality, of their surroundings. And, also, that they themselves would be subjected to it someday. This is due to the fact that we get almost all of our information from the mass-media, they are the ones that present us with news from all over the world, important information that gets to us instantly. And that is vital to the democratic process itself: the fact that everyone can have access to information and dispose of it as they wish, the fact they can reflect upon it and express their opinions concerning it makes the communication tools prerequisite of the democracy we know today.

Although necessary and maybe irreplaceable, we can still see the internal contradictions eating mass-media away. The conflict we chose to reflect upon in our paper is that between mass-media and contemporary terrorism. And this means looking into politics and communication as well. We saw how terrorism changed and developed through history and we went over the lack of a singular definition problem in order to show that it is far from being an anachronic subject. What's more, when we saw the interaction between it and the media, we understood the current need for a philosophical approach.

The third chapter analyses this particular relationship and it goes even deeper to see how this form of violence works today and how we can and should interpret and understand it. Terrorism finds itself in the middle of a complicated web of definitions, opinions, explanations, neither of which is truly capable to fully convey its essence. Two of the capital characteristics of terrorism are goal and the point of view from which it is defined.

The perpetrators of terrorist acts usually say that they had no other way of putting their message across. This message may consist of a wish to impose a set of

beliefs, whether religious or not, the rejection of a certain ideology or the fear of retribution from those that don't see eye to eye with them. The terrorists define their acts as freedom actions, as a consequence. On the other hand, when it comes to goals it's a question of whether they can ever be considered legit. Can we believe that the terrorist cause is a just one? Which would be the characteristics of a freedom fighter and which of a criminal?

What we assert in our paper is that everything comes down to a question of interpretation. The one that collects all interpretations is the mass-media which is not just an innocent reporter of facts, but a vehicle of political views. It usually serve one kind of power or the other and objectivity is just a long-forgotten ideal. In this case, the solution we suggest is using Critical Theory as a method of understanding, a tool for keeping alert and rational, one that demonstrates why the philosophy of communication is so relevant nowadays.

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