Fear and Anxiety in the Dimensions of Art

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ABSTRACT

In the paper I am concerned with various manifestations of aesthetic fear and anxiety, that is, fear and anxiety triggered by works of art, which I discuss from aesthetic as well as anthropological perspectives. I analyse the link between fear and pleasure in *catharsis*, in Edmund Burke's notion of the sublime, and in reference to Goya's *Black Paintings* and to Paul Virilio's thought. Both aesthetic fear and aesthetic anxiety exist alongside other emotions, such as pity and sadness, and, most notably, alongside pleasure which is autonomous or which arises from a fascination with evil.

KEYWORDS

On a map of human emotions fear and anxiety must be placed among the most fundamental of feelings: each of them may trigger the most extreme emotional states; they have both individual and communal aspects, and although they belong to the active, bright side of life, they can also manifest themselves in the domain of the night, of dream and of disease. Here I am predominantly concerned with fear and anxiety as aesthetic phenomena, that is, the way in which they are evoked by works of art, or as they are expressed through or represented in works of art.[1] What links the various perspectives and angles from which fear and anxiety are presented or described in a number of different fields is certain

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[1] This is an extremely broad issue, even more so if we assume that art, apart from its purely aesthetic aspect, also has cognitive, psychological or religious functions. I use the terms fear, anxiety, dread, horror and terror more or less interchangeably, since although it certainly is an oversimplification, to specify each term would require me to considerably expand the scope of this paper.

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ambiguity inherent in these phenomena: fear may be provoked by something which is frightening in itself,[2] and the most dramatic effect can be achieved if both the subjective feeling of fear and the fear-inspiring quality of the object are combined. Fears and anxieties might, to a great extent, define a person and characterize the world in which he or she lives, sometimes binding the two with inextricable ties through the cruelty and suffering to which the individual is subjected and to which he or she succumbs. In the optimistic days of the Enlightenment it was believed that fear and anxiety could be conquered; now, however, we seem to have come to terms with their inevitability and tend to focus on determining their varieties, characterizing their manifestations and recording their changeable forms so that if not a cure then at least some sort of treatment or therapy can be found.

Fear and anxiety manifest themselves in all spheres of human life. The biological manifestation of fear constitutes the 'wisdom' of nature, which, according to Antoni Kępiński, in providing us with advance warning enables us to avoid potentially dangerous situations (KĘPIŃSKI 1995: 33). Such low-amplitude fear is an evolutionary mechanism, whose purpose is to help us surmount obstacles and barriers and to adjust to new conditions as well as stimulating activity. Thus a certain measure of fear is necessary for further development. Although both fear and anxiety are accompanied by somatic symptoms, they are by no means limited to biology. Apart from energy metabolism Kępiński identifies information metabolism, which he sees as a uniquely human way of creating warning systems. The iconosphere facilitates our orientation in every sphere of cultural reality, enables us to communicate with one another and to adapt to our surroundings. From this perspective the modern culture of images, including popular culture as well as the fine arts, composes a network of meanings with an emotive tinge, by means of which both individuals and communities are able to make sense of their world, act in it and cooperate. Kępiński points out, however, that people with their ability to abstract fear from its particular circumstances are able to rise above a specific situation in their minds, thereby releasing the content of the fear and shifting it in time and space. Warning signals and stimuli, originally meant to keep an individual from danger, become autonomous. Having lost its biological functions fear takes on the amorphous shape of meta-anxiety, 'liquid fear' (BAUMAN 2008: 8–9). This is the kind of anxiety that populates people's minds with images of improbable catastrophes and may cause neuroses and aberrations, so it is vitally important to diagnose and offer treatment to people suffering from it so that they can function normally in their everyday lives. The sphere of social life constitutes a vast area generating meta-anxiety and fear, with the media reports on economic recession, wars,

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[2] Kierkegaard discusses subjective and objective anxiety (KIERKEGAARD 1996: 67–74). Karl H. Bohrer points to two ways in which anxiety manifests itself (BOHRER 2003: 39).

natural and man-made disasters and new diseases being used to manipulate the public. Paul Ricoeur claims that the communal side of human existence, "the public part, cannot raise itself above the fear", that society as a whole cannot be freed from fear, so we must try to overcome it individually (RICOEUR 1986: 45). The existence of meta-anxiety directs us towards the spiritual. Søren Kierkegaard describes the spiritual, existential anxiety which has its origin not in any external circumstances but in the tension brought on by the discord between the constraints imposed on a person by their corporality and temporality and their dynamic and free self. Yet anxiety with its potential for self-reflection "allows a human being to sense his or her higher-order relationship to being. It is the anxiety of the mind" (ROHDE 2001: 194). Throughout history people have undertaken numerous attempts to prevail over fear and anxiety and have come up with a wide range of ways to cope with them through rationalization, extraction, sublimation or compensation. Art has played a significant role in these endeavours thanks to its capability to operate across the psychological, social, spiritual spheres and the fact that, as a consequence, it requires an anthropological perspective. The aesthetician is mainly concerned with the artistic qualities of a work of art, its formal and expressive features. The anthropologist, on the other hand, sets out to explore the practices in which artworks participate and, in doing so, attempts to answer the questions: what is expressed through a particular work of art, what is its function in human life? Since mental states such as fear and anxiety are notoriously difficult to describe, a consideration of both of these perspectives might prove productive. Hans Belting appears to provide a helpful pointer when he maintains that creating images is a basic human need and, consequently, rejects the claims made by theoreticians that various forms of creating images should be treated separately. He dismisses as irrelevant not only the division between painting, photography and mass media pictures but also between religious, artistic and documentary images. Mental, notional and oneiric images all originate in the body and the body is their primary and fundamental site. We create images and we like having them around because of our corporality, and the corporal aspect of human existence is continually affected by time, space and death (BELTING 2007: 13). Following these three body vectors contained in images can help us find out how fear and anxiety are expressed.

In religions based on myth and ritual fear constitutes an integral part of sacrificial rites, whose aim is to restore the cosmic and communal harmony. This mythical, archaic fear is explained by myth, so perhaps the term 'awe' would be more appropriate. By linking suffering to a flaw, to the transgression of a law, causality is established in the process which Ricoeur sees as a rationalizing schema, the 'rationalization' of the evil inherent in suffering.[3] Such sacred fear belonging to the religious realm is an essential part of communal experience, yet it can also

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[3] Ricoeur also uses the term 'ethical terror' (RICOEUR 1986: 32).

be experienced personally as the *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinans*, introducing an individual into the numinous order, implying "that the mysterious is already beginning to loom before the mind, to touch the feelings" (OTTO 1999: 20). Many commentators see the Aristotelian notion of *catharsis* as an exemplification of just such a sacral dimension of an archaic myth, where an individual is inseparably tied to the community (KOLANKIEWICZ 1999: 186–189). The new elements emerge, however, as the fate of an individual comes to occupy the dominant position and the one who feels fear is a tragic hero. Moreover, fear is accompanied by another emotion, pity: the feeling of fear is the consequence of the feeling of pity (δι ἐλέου καί φόβου) (ARYSTOTELES 1965: 10). The experience of *catharsis*, that is, the release of emotions, offers no moral lesson, nor does it lead to any reflection,[4] it can simply be evoked by listening to a dramatic narrative,[5] while the fact that it is precisely determined what art forms are required to evoke pity and fear must be recognized as the literaturization of myth, with myth being employed for the purposes of art.[6] For Mircea Eliade the direct consequence is the lack of continuity between myth and art and the loss of the sacred dimension in art, which is supplanted by another kind of experience. In other words, what is lost is this aspect of fear which united a human being with the cosmic rhythm. Karl Heinz Bohrer, on the other hand, welcomes the emergence of literary (aesthetic) fear which, in his opinion, is possessed of more valuable qualities due to its autonomous character, its independence from the historical and social context. In Greek tragedy he finds the origins of the aesthetics of terror (BOHRER 2003: 47). Bohrer, therefore, is a proponent of the unique experience which is available to us through a work of art. These positions — emphasizing continuity or departure, dependence on the context or autonomy — defend different causes, and yet in a sense they overlap. The conservative one stresses the liberating aspect of art grounded in anthropology or religion. The one advocating emancipation highlights the evolution of new forms of expression and practices which cannot be compared with anything existing before (Eliade). And finally Bohrer puts emphasis on the transpsychological dimension of aesthetic fear but at the same time he dissociates himself from either anthropology or religion. It seems that the images inspired by fear — those which provoke fear as well as the ones which show the atrocities of suffering and cruelty — are not exclusively contextual and some of them might have the capacity to direct our reflection beyond the historical literalism of the work. From the anthropological perspective there is no conflict between history and autonomous aesthetics, since in different historical periods the stress was placed on different aspects of fear. Modernity gives priority to the autonomous value of

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[4] On the categories of songs: ethical, practical, enthusiastic, cf. ARYSTOTELES, *Polityka*, Θ 7, 1341 b 32–1342 a 16.

[5] ARYSTOTELES, *Poetyka*, 1453b5.

[6] ARYSTOTELES, *Poetyka*, 1454a11.

an artwork and experience, whereas postmodernism, as exemplified by Lyotard, recognizes an artwork as both autonomous and context-dependent: a work of art becomes a double agent, characterized by ambivalence as it both detaches itself from the world and helps to establish a community.[7]

Thus the pity and fear of ancient tragedy, being undeniably aesthetic phenomena achieved by purely artistic means and occurring in the space-time continuum of a work, must be placed on the borderline between physical sensations and moral experiences. Tragedy's arousing and subsequently purging of fear results in a pleasure of a special kind ensuing from 'pity and fear', bringing relief tinged with delight and harmless enjoyment to people.[8] It seems that considering *catharsis* in terms of ethical understanding, or, as Ricoeur proposes, a mode of understanding, must be recognized as a modern reinterpretation of the notion of *catharsis*.[9] Unquestionably, the relationship between fear and pity determines the quality of pleasure. Furthermore, aesthetic fear is invariably complemented by another emotion and only combined can they accomplish whatever the artist has intended. Fear by no means precludes us from experiencing beauty, since in contemplating tragedies from a distance we can admire the beauty of the plot or the poetic song of the chorus. As far as aesthetic theories are concerned, this complex relationship between fear, aesthetic pleasure and beauty presents a great deal of problems for philosophers: some of them choose to separate the pleasure ensuing from fear from beauty, others bring them together. Nonetheless, two vital components of aesthetic fear need to be highlighted here: the fact that it is never pure but invariably coupled with another emotion, and that its outcome is a pleasure in a very special sense of the word.[10] And finally the one who feels fear is not some model of universal man, but a specific real person who possesses his or her own mental, social and spiritual life.

In Christianity the entire conception of the world undergoes a complete change; the quality of being tragic no longer causes fear, since guilt is seen in a different light. Still Christianity and Greek tragedy concur with each other in that guilt and creativity are inextricably linked (NIEBUHR 1985: 110). They both grapple with the situation of an individual at the mercy of the powers beyond his or her control, powers which can neither be predicted nor controlled.

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[7] This ambivalence can be found in the writings of Friedrich Schiller, Theodore Adorno and Jacques Rancière, although their theoretical perspectives differ substantially.

[8] ARYSTOTELES, *Poetyka*, 1453b10; ARYSTOTELES, *Polityka*, Θ 7, 1342 a 16.

[9] It must be noted that Ricoeur does not refer to Aristotle's *Poetics*, but discusses Aeschylus' tragedies, among others. He proposes his own conception of purification and reverses the order of the emotions: for him pity proceeds from fear. *Catharsis* does not have to be linked exclusively to fear and tragedy (RICOEUR 1986: 231). See among others DZIEMIDOK 2002: 181–235.

[10] Burke talks about delight as opposed to the pleasure evoked by the beautiful, Kant defines the sublime as a negative pleasure, Bohrer refers to a pleasurable sensation. However, it is always the kind of fear which does not relate to any real danger.

In the Christian theological interpretation at the end of one's days death and suffering will be conquered, the world redeemed and trespasses forgiven, albeit only in the case of reformed and repentant sinners. Fear belongs to this world, to mortal life; however, the sinner's fear differs significantly from the saint's, since the former can be healed by an act of contrition whereas the latter can find no relief. The spiritual fear reveals the duality of the human condition defined by corporality as much as by spirituality, "I shudder, inasmuch as I unlike it; I kindle, inasmuch as I am like it", Saint Augustine confesses (AUGUSTYN 1987: 279). And lastly God himself feels fear as he stands defenceless against human violence and cruelty.[11] Throughout the centuries the intensity of fear has varied and, as a result, its presentation has been subject to periodic changes, which is perhaps best illustrated by the artistic portrayals of the notion of eternal damnation and hell, that is, the fear of eternal fear. The Last Judgement was carved on the tympana of Romanesque churches and depicted on Italian frescoes by Paolo di Neri and Botticelli. It constituted a prominent theme in the works of the Early Netherlandish masters, van Eyck and Memling, as well as in Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* with its gruesome imagery. However, its popularity declined at the beginning of the 17th century.[12] In modern times Jean-François Lyotard forged the term 'unpresentable' to refer to the imposition of restrictions, voluntary refrainment from any attempts at presentation in order to leave space for the inexpressible mystery, although admittedly for Lyotard the term had no religious or sacred connotations. Interestingly, however, it was at the end of the 20th century, the age of genocide, that Hans Urs von Balthasar reintroduced Origen's conception of *apocatastasis*, the early Christian belief in universal reconciliation, the unity of the world and God with no dualistic divisions, thereby consigning hell, along with the fear it strikes into people's hearts, to the sphere of human activities.

While contemplating medieval portrayals of the torments inflicted upon the damned, we must not forget that they constitute merely a component of the universal order and are meant to represent the ideas of justice. Therefore, they should perhaps be regarded in the contexts of the depictions of the tortures which martyrs were subjected to. In this case the deliverance from fear is made possible by the belief that cruelty and death are an intrinsic part of an ethical and sacred order in which suffering acquires mystical meaning and metaphysical validation. The expression of horror on the faces of the damned as well as the calm countenances of the tormented saints show fear but the fear is at the same time transcended and redefined. The transition from psychological to spiritual fear is grounded in and guaranteed by theology. This was a hierarchical world of

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[11] "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say; Father save me from this hour", Christ's prayer, John 12:27, Holy Bible.

[12] At the same time witchcraft trials and animal trials subsided, Galileo's works were published and modern science was born.

unity, which Michel Foucault calls 'the space of emplacement', underlining the fact that everybody and everything occupied their proper places (FOUCAULT 1986: 22). That world regarded ugliness as complementary to beauty while evil and suffering were but transitory states on the road leading to universal good. The overall structure of the spiritual order, in which the plan for eternity was of crucial importance, remained inviolate.[13]

In the age of Enlightenment fear was rationalized by means of science, which legitimised the institutions of the secular state. Scientific methods and the results of scientific research determined public discourse to be the only source of valid meanings. Other forms of rationalization, including religion, were relegated to the private space, while the scope and subject matter of any artistic endeavour was subject to the verdict of the Academy.[14] Art museums carefully selected only those artworks which were deemed perfect to be displayed and placed them in chronological order so as to illustrate the historical development of styles and types of beauty; the systematisation and aestheticization of art left viewers with the impression of the clarity and continuity of historical processes. The faster the process of modernization was progressing in real life, the greater was the significance attached to historicization, which afforded a sense of security, and emotional and material substance for both individual and national identity and a sense of continuity. Karl Pazzini maintains that although nobody associates the museum with death, it still becomes "a testing ground for the denial and the defence against death […] the museum helps us to suppress the fear of death".[15] The public viewed death masks, dissected human corpses, biological specimens and works of art in a state of immutable timelessness. Aestheticization, the manner in which exhibits were constructed, their appearance adjusted to conform to the requirements of perception, prevented the process of decay from entering the social consciousness. Although the knowledge of the world was expanding and the world was being put into order, fear was never far away, the fear that the stability of life might be lost. The fine arts helped, as they made it possible to enjoy one's freedom and offered relief by granting protection from the confusion brought about by innovations and technology. The same era that revived the ideals of classical antiquity, and delighted in the radiant images of Arcadia and the Apollonian representations of ancient myths, witnessed the parallel emergence of the sublime, as aesthetic fear was reinterpreted and associated with the new forms of expression. Edmund Burke no longer found deeper meaning in the pictorial

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[13] What needs to be emphasized here is that the mere presentation of ugliness is far from a sufficient reason to talk about horrifying pictures; on the contrary, ugliness can serve as a defence mechanism against fear (ROSIŃSKA 1985: 168).

[14] It can be said that since the times of Vasari, the history of art has been the imposing of rationality on works of art; Didi-Huberman asserts that it "ignores the dark influences of pictures, this economy of obsession and fear" (DIDI-HUBERMAN 2011: 148).

[15] Pazzini calls museums institutions of safe presence (PAZZINI 1990: 85).

representations of hell. He regarded them as a sign of artistic failure, a source of ridicule with its proper place in the realm of the grotesque rather "than anything capable of producing a serious passion" (BURKE 1937: 54). What proved more appealing to the modern imagination was the situations characterized by ambiguity, mystery and certain darkness, not only in music and poetry but also in the visual arts. That the content of a work would be frightening was less important than the fear-inspiring artistic devices: the ways of creating horror had to be terrifying in themselves.[16]

Francisco Goya, recovering from a near-fatal illness, which coincided with the political turmoil in Spain, created a series of prints called *Los Caprichos*, the most famous of which is the etching of a sleeping person surrounded by owls and bats poised to attack. The print is provided with a caption, reading, "The sleep of reason produces monsters". Another set, *The Disasters of War*, comprises 82 small prints, each with a caption or title: *Barbarians!*, *A Cruel Shame!*, *What Madness!*, *This is the absolute worst!*. The viewer, confronted with the image and its equally shocking caption, is rattled, incapable of adopting a visual distance or a disinterested, detached stance. According to Susan Sontag, "with Goya a new standard for responsiveness to suffering enters art" (SONTAG 2004: 45). The fourteen works known as the *Black Paintings*, which Goya painted directly on the walls on both storeys of the house he bought outside Madrid (Quinta del Sordo), share a similarly haunting tone.

Goya's works have been extensively commented on and several distinct interpretational threads can be distinguished. The artist's experience of insanity and anxiety, and above all the illness he never completely recovered from, altered the mood of his painting. He still accepted commissions from the nobility and royalty, but at the same time he painted madness, cruelty and the monstrosity of man. However, Ortega y Gasset argues that it was not a conscious departure from the principles of the fine arts, but rather failed, flawed works, indicating creative deficiency. "The truth is that Goya's work did not originate in conscious reflection: it must be seen as either common craft or the vision of a somnambulist" (ORTEGA Y GASSET 1993: 282). Nevertheless, these lesser artistic forms, the caprices, the etchings and the murals later transferred to the Museo del Prado, make us see Goya as an unquestionably modern painter, critical, revealing the destructive power that the faculty of reason is capable of — an artist-philosopher. And most importantly, he exposes the hidden aspects of human nature, the madness which he himself succumbed to:

> Madness has become the possibility in man of abolishing both man and the world — and even these images that challenge the world and deform humanity. It lies deeper than

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[16] This distinction is made by Goethe, and Bohrer considers it to be a good diagnosis of the modern approach to fear (horror) in art (BOHRER 2003: 63).

dreams, well below the nightmare of animality, a last resort: the end and the beginning of all things (FOUCAULT 2006: 531).

Chaos constitutes the latent possibility within the rational order and no efforts are capable of diminishing its power. Goya's works unveil "the night of classical unreason" (FOUCAULT 2006: 531) they present the pessimistic vision of humankind and the world we have created. Anxiety and fear are brought to light. Other interpreters notice the moralistic intent of the artist, who depicts "The horrifying portrayal of the world plunged into chaos and inhabited by despicable human monsters whose base instincts [...] he laid bare" (HONOUR and FLEMING 2006: 650). The dark sketchy paintings bringing to mind shadow painting and Robertson's phantasmagoria were meant for a limited circle of viewers (MULLER 1984: 207–238). The artist wanted them to provoke fear and horror and, in doing so, educate, expose the dark side of the Inquisition and the secular authorities. The sketchy character of the scenes, reminiscent of optical theatre, suggests light-enhanced images (MULLER 1984: 211, 213). They cannot be categorized as *terribilità*, which characterized the emotional and dramatic pictorial compositions of Mannerist painting. The viewer was assailed from each side by the shapes trembling in the dark (e.g. *Saturn Devouring his Child* or *Judith and Holofernes* on the side wall of the second storey), "whose effectiveness was intensified by incorporating the horrific, the terrifying and the Sublime" (MULLER 1984: 233). And although the line between the thrill of entertainment and education is fine and easy to cross over, Muller substantiates the moral message of Goya's works by referring to Burke's conception of the sublime and his views on the French Revolution.

According to Burke's philosophical thought, aesthetic fear is autonomous with regard to morality as well as cognition, despite triggering the same response in the body as if a person experiencing it was actually in a life-threatening situation. Its autonomous character results from the fact that it leads to a pleasure derived from the experience of the sublime, and is followed by a reflection tinged with pathos and deference. Its additional outcome is the boost in vital force. If fear is provoked by an artist's work, the distance is kept, and artistic devices aimed at the reduction of the distance can only simulate a threatening situation. However, in the case of natural phenomena as well as the spectacles of history, such as the French Revolution, the distance is not sufficient to completely eliminate the danger, the real threat to a person's life. The key issue here is the manner in which fear is approached. Burke himself views the Revolution as a spectacle arousing natural feelings and stimulating reflection (danger and sympathy have the power to purify our souls), but it is also a work of art likened to a drama staged 'by the Supreme Director' (BURKE 1937: 119).[17] One possible approach

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[17] In another place Burke writes about a paradoxical and mysterious work of art which provokes the state of suspension and amazement, quoted after SHAW 2006: 64.

to the Revolution is not with fear or the sense of the sublime but the contempt for 'base criminals' (BURKE 1937: 101). According to Hayden White, Burke drew a radical distinction between the sublime and historical events (WHITE 1982: 124–125). Burke indeed distinguished between the false sublime (when the danger is real) and the true sublime, in which the phase of fear is directly followed by delight and reflection. This distinction, however, did not apply to the Revolution, since Burke himself at one moment apparently distressed by the events, which, luckily, did not concern Great Britain, subsequently "elevate[d] terror to the dignity of the sublime" (SHAW 2006: 70), or made ironic comments on the Revolution. Thus it seems legitimate to say that Burke's understanding of the sublime and fear allowed him, under certain circumstances, to view wars and revolution from the perspective of aesthetics and experience the sublime,[18] but also burst the boundaries of the autonomy of art and, as a consequence, experience artworks from the perspective of political events. Perhaps this is what Muller has in mind when he underlines the educational aspects of Goya's work. We have to assume, however, that the traumatic experiences of the viewers triggered by the works ultimately result in critical reflection. In Kantian transcendentalism, on the other hand, there is nothing to prevent a real war from inspiring the sense of the sublime, since sublimity concerns not an object but the ideas of the mind; fear stimulates the mind which becomes aware of its superiority over nature and of the ideas it possesses.[19] Therefore, aesthetic fear as defined here belongs to the transcendental realm (thus it is spiritual): a human being is not afraid of the threat (war) but of his or her own inner mental state, of his or her own inability to represent ideas; reason is superior to sensuality.

Arnold Berleant applies Burke's and Kant's notion of the sublime to current events in order to demonstrate elements of spectacle in terrorist acts, their aesthetic aspects. The immoral — evil — dimensions of terrorism, however, make him term it the negative sublime (BERLEANT 2011: 203–205). Yet he ignores the philosophical differences between the two stances; and, moreover, he uses them with regard to the aesthetic qualities of contemporary events disregarding the fact that now the notions of aestheticism and the sublime have acquired a completely different meaning. The postmodern sublime has little to do with subjectivity, autonomous art or the ideas of the mind; neither does it refer to the Kantian conception, where it was capable of according a sense of freedom and dignity to a human being (WHITE 1982: 126). It must rather be associated with trauma: it is the political sublime in the times of global anxiety and the mind disgraced by the Holocaust (RAY 2005), where the threat, whose measure

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[18] It can also be applied to the melancholic sublime as well as the Nero complex.

[19] "Sublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us (as exerting influence upon us)" (KANT 1986: 163).

is the image of the genocide, has become a permanent backdrop for human life. Artists and theoreticians (Joseph Beuys, Christian Boltanski, Damian Hirst, Mirosław Bałka among others) are attempting to address such issues, as are the curators of the exhibitions in the museums of terror, war and the Holocaust. Remarkably, however, despite the great number of artistic works and exhibitions, graphic representations or processes intensifying negative emotions are notably absent, apparently deliberately avoided, perhaps because the weight of the problems would be beyond the capabilities of any literal portrayal to bear. Paul Virilio's position appears symptomatic, as he links fear and art directly and, since he considers a different aspect of the relationship, he can dispense with the old concept of the sublime. He states that the avant-garde artists' involvement in political movements and their participation in the transformations of social life makes them directors of social projects. Artistic strategies draw on warfare for will power and creative ideas. It takes place in the order of the manifested tasks which are assigned to the art which Virilio calls 'A Pitiless Art' (VIRILIO 2006: 15–34), as the artists make no attempt to hide the violence with which they want to assault the audience. The confirmation can be found, for instance, in the declarations of the futurists ('war is the world's only hygiene'), or Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. This artistic stance is directly translated into the order of artistic devices: state-of-the-art technologies enable artists to reach the highest emotional registers, comparable to those experienced by the victims of real-life catastrophes, such as the sinking of the Titanic, the Holocaust or the Chernobyl disaster. From the times of Baudelaire, Kokoschka and the futurists to BioArt and the virtual world of avatars, art has been reinforcing anxiety through its connection with the unknown, with speed, with disappearing (of images, bodies, communities). In a different context, Virilio refers to accursed art (*art maudit*): our sensitivity to evil is destroyed as a result of the changes in perception (VIRILIO 2006: 16). The piles of glasses and shoes in Auschwitz are seen as the artefacts of modern art, which for a long time has been transforming ready-made objects into artworks. Virilio quotes Jacqueline Lichtenstein who maintains that artists "had won since they'd produced forms of perception that are all of a piece with the mode of destruction they made their own" (VIRILIO 2006: 15). The fact that the boundaries between art and everyday life have become blurred, that the images requiring concentration have been intermingled with the trivial, random ones, as they frequently are on all kinds of websites, has completely altered the nature of aesthetic fear or anxiety as well as the accompanying emotions.

The union of art and fear posited by the philosopher is based on a certain conception of progress, in which its only measure is the efficiency and speed of the implements of war; it is no longer governed by *telos* but by the madness of rationality, and stagnation means death — it is the only law ruling the world (VIRILIO 2008: 90). The killing machines as well as the images of terrorists'

acts and disasters combine the aspects of spectacle with the fear of a real danger. He writes about the media coverage of 11th September 2001:

> And so this dramatic portrayal has created, in televiewers, a twin fear, a stereo-anxiety. Alarm over public insecurity has been topped up with fear of the images of 'audiovisual' insecurity, bringing about a sudden highlighting of domestic terror, designed to intensify collective anguish (VIRILIO 2007: 21).

Yet this is the world arranged by men and for men, the world where only the things which can be used as a form of transport have the right to exist: from a woman (a man's first vehicle) through warhorses and other animals used in warfare, to machines and nuclear weaponry. This reductionism exposes the social and political context of fear and anxiety, and at the same time it aspires to exclusivity and, in doing so, makes further debate impossible.[20] From this angle, both fear and anxiety are artificially induced by the blind desire for change, the human condition is determined by his or her social circumstances locked in the present, which leaves no room for distance. This does not mean that such fear or anxiety are not accompanied by pleasure. Although Virilio does not mention it, it follows from his reflection as an inevitable consequence. Such pleasure is fuelled by curiosity and fascination, speed and evil (destruction, cruelty, death).[21] The philosophy of art has attempted to transfer the pleasure resulting from fear outside the realm of everyday life, to tie it to artistic qualities, which is not to say that such a pleasure derived from the fascination with evil is a unique characteristic of our times: it was present long before. Now both tendencies are equally prominent. There is no denying that a contemporary inhabitant of a city (which constitutes the space where messages are intensified) is confronted with an excess of violent images (showing victims of wars, famine and violence) — the images which cannot possibly be taken in, absorbed or experienced. This excess does not necessarily provoke fear, it might rather result in desensitization, as a kind of self-defence mechanism. The images of the macabre can satisfy curiosity, but art can also provide a cure for fear and anxiety. In a letter to his son, dated 28th December 1944, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien wrote:

> But if lit[erature] teaches us anything at all, it is this: that we have in us an eternal element, free from care and fear, which can survey the things that in 'life' we call evil with serenity (that is not without appreciating their quality, but without any disturbance of our spiritual equilibrium) (TOLKIEN 2010: 179–180).

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[20] Virilio lists the names of artists, artistic trends and political events (Turner, Futurism, Duchamp, Chaplin, Bonnard, Grünewald, von Hagens, Faiyum mummy portraits), which unless properly analysed can illustrate any conceivable theory.

[21] Struk writes about the pleasure and satisfaction which could be experienced while looking at photographs from Auschwitz (STRUK 2007: 281).

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