Terrorism as Media Event

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Abstract: Proving that terrorism should be seen as a media event (as defined by Dayan and Katz) after 9/11 and treated accordingly. We have turned to the work of Dayan and Katz and George Gerbner's for a definition of media events and of violence in the mass media. This paper is a hermeneutical interpretation of the concept of terrorism and its relation to communication. We have put forward a better understanding of the complex concept of terrorism and its definitions in the mass media context. Terrorism nowadays should always be defined within its inherent relation with the media. The article is the first to define terrorism as media evenit in Dayan and Katz's terms.

Keywords: George Gerbner; mass media; Cultural Indicators Project; manipulation; violence

1. Introduction

The way we perceive mass media nowadays is the result of the last two or three decades in which the political, social and economic context of the world has survived dramatic changes, crises and conflicts. All the events were broadcasted by the mass media which seek to make them available to the largest audience possible through all their channels. The mass media have spread largely in the last few decades, so we can see now that every means of communication and every mode of distributing information is part of them. I believe that the 21st century has put forward a concept that everybody was happy to adhere to: interactivity. It is connected with the most important criteria by which we evaluate the media: trust. Through the interactivity of the internet, the media has regained the public's interest and trust.

Being able to have an opinion about news stories, checking different sources to find out all the possible details and facets of an event has become very important to people. We have seen social networks and blogs develop and steal the thunder of

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the press. Or at least it could seem that way. The truth is that the media, by moving all their resources to the internet have made the best strategic move possible. Had they stayed away from the internet, they would have probably become obsolete very fast. Still, although the internet is perhaps the main reference point in the life of anyone who owns a computer, the primary news distributing media channels have not become extinct. On the contrary, we will talk about the one which we believe uses the weaknesses of its audience in such a skillful way, that it is still as popular as the internet. This is television.

2. Television, Violence and Manipulation

Television delivers its audience almost exclusively an entertainment based content, which distinguishes it significantly from the Internet. Almost every piece of news, every movie, show, talk show etc, contains a dose of gratuitous sexuality and violence. Due to the heavy TV watching people have done for a while now[1], this kind of content has managed to penetrate the conscience of people a lot more than before. And one of the channels that can translate and let people know what these statistics look like is, ironically, television. A problem then raises, taking the shape of a vicious circle and is explained by Pierre Bourdieu in his book, *On Television*:

Then there is the fact that television more and more defines what Americans call the agenda (the issue up for discussion, the subjects of the editorials, important problems to be covered). In the circular circulation of information (...) television carries decisive weight. If the printed press should happen to raise an issue – a scandal or a debate – it becomes central only when television takes it up and gives it full orchestration, and, thereby, political impact(Bourdieu, 1998)

George Gerbner, the communications specialist I would like to introduce further, was the first who understood the need for an applied case study, designed to make observations about the effects of television, and especially televised violence, on those who spend a lot of time watching TV, so he lay the basis of a study called The Cultural Indicators Project.

The first thing we think of when talking about the negative impact media has on the public is manipulation, the act of presenting the viewer with a subjective point of view, one that has a very different scope from the one expressed. It is not new,

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[1] 22.1 hours per person per week is the weighted average for 14 countries as consulted on http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/med_tel_vie-media-television-viewing on 15.05.2012.

unique, unknown. On the contrary, manipulation has been studied and theorized alongside mass media since their inception. It is related to seduction and persuasion, but is separated from both when it comes to goal and means. The purpose of manipulation is always hidden, concealed, and it can shift during the process of communication, if the momentous interest requires it. It usually seeks and accepts the most generous offer, economically or politically speaking. Its means are a mix of characteristics of seduction and persuasion, a formula that relies both on reason and emotion to convey its message. Still, exploiters know they have to put more emphasis on emotions and thus confuse reason by triggering immediate reactions. The kind of reactions that ignite rapidly and are short lived but are strong enough to make the receptors respond to the message and, sometimes, to make them decide hastily. Therefore, we should look into how manipulation works, what are its means and motives.

There is more than one type of manipulation to be found within the mass media. We can operate from the outset with one important distinction in what concerns manipulation: it can be intended, directed toward something and expecting something in return; and it can also be unintentional, which happens due to the fac that the media promotes a certain idea, product or individual. The latter can be asocciated with influence, due to the lack of evidence to condemn it as manipulation. But by getting people to act against their better judgement, I believe this type of influence is less than innocent.

To support this statement, I have looked into George Gerbner's[1] study of media consumer behavior which claims that stereotypes have great authority when it comes to shaping the public's opinions and beliefs. But before getting to that, let's look into Duncan Watt's three patterns for explaining how the media works:

1. The pluralist model - based on the idea of absolute democracy in which the market economy functions as a regulator. If the transmitted information doesn't please the public, the media isn't backed economically anymore and it withers. The consumer's acceptance is the message regulator in this particular case.

2. The manipulation of the masses model - this second one sees the consumer as a victim of the media, meaning that the public is presented with very few choices and it has to take what information it is given without being able to intervene in the

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[1] George Gerbner has developed in 1968 a study of the impact of television presented violence on the public, called The Cultural Indicators Project.

selection process. The media are seen as an extension of the rich and powerful who use it to further or keep their position and wealth.

3. The hegemonic model - this last one stands at the confluence of the first two, stating that we shouldn't believe there is bias in the mass media. The media should be analyzed in terms of a self-regulating world of opinions promoted by fervent supporters. And these opinions are different amongst themselves, can challenge each other, which still doesn't mean their promoters have a hidden agenda. But if that would be true, Watts says, how can we explain advertising and the fact that it uses media channels as its vehicles? (Watts, 1997)

Each of the three models sheds light on possible views of the media world and studying each of them would hold some significance, but I'm interested in looking only into the manipulation of the masses model, as I consider it responsible for the way we understand terrorism nowadays.

One notable early forms of manipulation that we can associate with the press, is image retouching. It was not long after the invention of photography, with all the controversies and scandals that it stirred up, then the methods of modifying the content of an image were created. This happened partly because it was a development in photographic technique, and partly because there is always a demand for sensationalism.

At the beginning of the twentieth century photography started accompanying text in the newspapers, replacing the drawings and engravings used before. The reason being that it is considered an exact copy of reality and, compared with those before it, an advanced form of delivering a real message. But the people's confidence in it was short lasted, as various interests started dictating what should be shown through photographs and press. Mass media and its channels were becoming the main sources of information for the masses, but this information was being altered in order to achieve certain goals. Media people excuse themselves by saying there can never be a perfectly accurate rendering of facts and issues, that journalists are prone to subjectivity and even mistakes. And though that is true, we can still see intention and knowledge in many a form of manipulation.

Among those who have studied photography and its retouching techniques, I find Roland Barthes's explanation of the way this medium works very comprehensive and thorough. The author found in photography in general, and particularly in photojournalism, a very complex structure in terms of the stratification of denotation and connotation. He noticed that the paradox lying within the

64

construction of a photograph is easier to deconstruct than that of any other new medium (Barthes, 1977). The source of this paradox is the claim that photography is completely objective due to its being a copy of reality. But in creating the image there are elements which, at a closer look, reveal that there is less objectivity in photography than we first think. The message the public gets is almost always handled in more than one way to ensure its reception is very close to the way it was drafted by its broadcasters. So the problem the author finds here is that we create a culturally coded message over an uncoded image.

Barthes wonders how that is possible, how the photographic image can be both empty of meaning and saturated with signs? Filled, at the same time, with denotation and connotation? Though there is no perfect answer to these questions, in order to untwine this issue, the author concludes that only a special code created for deciphering photography can surpass this paradox. He places this special code at the center of his philosophical interest and he chooses semiotics as method for his analysis.

Barthes mentions a number of tools for *reading* the features of a photograph, organized into two distinct sets: on the one hand, elements of illusion, the pose, the placement of objects, on the other hand, the enhancement of photogenic traits, aestheticism, and syntax. By using these methods of intervention in the picture, the press can manipulate the public with its messages sent through retouched images. There are famous cases of falsification of reality throughout history, but also cases that have never been disclosed.[1] However, the use of technological gimmicks is not new, it is not a dated practice, nor will it ever be.

Manipulation is a method that goes well with broadcasting a message through the media. A message continuously reproduced over a long enough period of time, will lead to action and the strength of the manipulators is mostly a result of this. The media is best suited to accomplish this because it can transmit repetitive information across multiple channels, covering a very large area. These things make it the most effective modern tool of manipulation. Historically speaking, manipulation is an advanced, updated form of persuasion. To determine people to act in accordance with the truth and values of each era, politicians' speeches, for example, should be built, ideally, on strong logical assumptions and rational arguments. But these would not suffice to secure a desired outcome, so rhetoric

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[1] *Stalin routinely air-brushed his enemies out of photographs* as consulted on http://www.fourandsix.com/photo-tampering-history/

makes an appeal to emotions, making sure the speech is successful and the public adheres to the cause. Persuasion in communication is, on the one hand, necessary, and on the other inescapable. Communication cannot happen without persuasion while it intends to send a message. This message must penetrate the consciousness of the receiver and produce a change in his perception in order to trigger some kind of action, even if this only the production of feedback.

The ancient Greeks were the first to be interested in influencing convictions, attitudes and actions or human behavior through communication. In the ancient Athenian society, power and power relationships began to be negotiated through communication. This means that through communication, convictions and attitudes, and, as a consequence, decisions, actions and behaviors, were influenced more or less explicitly, but consciously. This is what is called persuasion: the modification of convictions and attitudes through communication, with the purpose of influencing decisions, actions and behaviors corresponding to the intentions or interest of the persuading speaker – but only with the participation of consciousness, that is by assuming freely and consciously the responsibility.(Codoban, 2006)

But when opinion leaders, be they politicians, public figures, economic factors, etc., want to receive an immediate response or the public's trust they need to use various forms of manipulation, as appeal to rationality is not the most solid route. Lonely, anonymous and impressionable people make easy targets of such methods and there are a lot of them in front of the TV.

They receive a lot of information but are not able to discuss it with anyone, they have nothing to compare it to, and, worst of all, they come to believe that what they are shown is the truth. Since the 1950s TV has become the main communication channel. In the last sixty years it has been the one that provides us pictures, documentaries, movies and talk shows from all over the world. We look for certain structures in the entertainment we watch on TV and that's why, the same as in market economy, we can find here the demand-supply model. However, television critics warn us constantly that although not always obvious, media people put forward a subjective message, one designed to influence the public's opinions, beliefs or values.

We can talk about the age of globalization as one in which people have better understanding of the way international relations, the interests and struggles for power behind them work, but most of all, the fact that they directly affect the life

and decisions of every man. Thus, people start comprehending who says what and why. Hence there is need for continuous and apparently unmediated connection with the latest social, political and economic events. Events such as wars, riots, financial decline, global crisis, terrorist attacks are writing history in front of large audiences, live (Dayan&Katz, 1994). The most on hand sources of information are media channels, whether we think of television, print or digital. But my research interest lies with television due to its controversial potential and the nature of its broadcasts, which are filled with violence and a grave view of the world. George Gerbner accurately detected this pattern in the media in the 60s and he decided to found a project to study the effects of televised violence.

3. Cultural Indicators Project

Gerbner's Cultural Indicators Project was a pioneer project and it still is a point of reference to all communicators and researchers in areas that deal with studying the effects of television audiences. At the time when Gerbner raises the question of television as factor of impact on crowd psychology, psychologists assert that disturbing images of destruction from the recently concluded wars could explain human behavior, nothing else. But Gerbner doesn't believe that so he assembles a team of scholars to start The Cultural Indicators Study. It says that we must question the impact of television on peoples' lives, however ludicrous and insignificant it may seem to some.

Television is a centralized system of storytelling. Its drama, commercials, news, and other programs bring a relatively coherent system of images and messages into every home. That system cultivates from infancy the predispositions and preferences that used to be acquired from other "primary" sources and that are so important in research on other media. Transcending historic barriers of literacy and mobility, television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (usually cloaked in the form of entertainment) of otherwise heterogeneous populations. We have now reached an unprecedented juncture at which television brings virtually everyone into a shared national culture. Television provides, perhaps for the first time since preindustrial religion, a daily ritual that elites share with many other publics. As with religion, the social function of television lies in the continual repetition of stories (myths, "facts," lessons, and so on) that serve to define the world and legitimize a particular social order.(Gerbner, 2002)

The surveys in the project sought to find out what traces countless hours of watching violence leaves on audiences and how that changes their perception of the world. Answers revealed that most people who watched TV at least 4 hours per day were immune to scenes of cruelty, believing that such things are part of reality. So it makes sense they are shown on television. Individuals of this group of respondents thought they themselves would at some point become a target of a violent attack or the victim of some fatality.

One example of this is what we have called the "mean world" syndrome. Our message data say little directly about either the selfishness or altruism of people, and there are certainly no real-world statistics about the extent to which people can be trusted. Yet, we have found that long term exposure to television, in which frequent violence is virtually inescapable, tends to cultivate the image of a relatively mean and dangerous world. Responses of heavier compared to matching groups of lighter viewers suggest the conception of reality in which greater protection is needed, most people "cannot be trusted," and most people are "just looking out for themselves". (Gerbner, 2002)

The problem of course lies in the fact that TV seems to present reality, even if it is actually all fiction. Whether in the movies, TV series or in the news, reality is highly distorted. The 5-minute news journals cover only part of the things that happened within one day, more often than not, the negative ones. For those who spend a great deal of time watching TV, the world is a mix of political and economic strife, armed conflict, crime and overt sexuality. Gerbner called this *the mean world syndrome* and deemed it symptomatic for a great number of people. Panic and fear make these people reclude themselves in their homes, unaware of how exposed they actually become to the unilateral messages of the media. The state of siege and fear as prevailing sentiments among the public are skillfully used by those who need to be in control. They use information as commodity and communication as a tool.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, the West has heralded a new enemy, terrorism, a seemingly more harmless form of violence than war, but harder to control. With roots in the ancient and medieval times, terrorism has become global, and, what's more, a media event after 9/11. But what kind of media event do we speak of when it comes to terrorism? Which is its target audience? What are its goals and, finally, what is its relationship with mass media?

The effectiveness of terrorism consists of the fact that perpetrators believe in the success of their actions from the beginning. Most of the terrorists, if not all of them, achieve at least one significant result: every time they attack, especially if they organize a dramatic event, their actions are provided with massive media coverage. And this holds the attention of the public and of government officials. Moreover, given the global nature of communication systems, those who commit acts of international or national terrorism come to be recognized through the media and thus get the attention of audiences and governments beyond the ones they first had in mind. Margaret Thatcher, former British prime minister said at one point that publicity is the oxygen of terrorism. Although advertising is not their ultimate goal, terrorists acknowledge that it is the easiest means by which they can make themselves known and they can promote their political and religious goals.

Tuesday, September 11, 2001 began as a beautiful, sunny day. In a forty-two minutes span, the United States suffered a series of synchronized attacks which constituted the most fatal phenomenon and disaster in the history of terrorism. This meant more than three thousand deaths and incalculable damage to property, businesses and economic conditions in the United States. Although the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center had already pointed to Americans that their country is not immune to terrorist attacks, U.S. citizens were stunned by the rapidity and the aggressiveness of the assault of 9/11. Millions of Americans heard the appalling news on television, radio and internet. In fact, shortly after the first plane hit the first tower, televisions and radios were already reporting that there had been an explosion at the World Trade Center, then they broadcasted live the second plane hitting the second tower and a little later, part of the Department of Defense headquarters, the Pentagon, that had fallen and was surrounded by a thick curtain of smoke. At least part of the ongoing appalling events was being watched live by millions of Americans, and viewers worldwide. And the irony of this is that the images of massive destruction were familiar: Hollywood movies had been filled with similar scenes and scenarios. Thanks to the violence in this popular culture, Americans were no longer able to distinguish between reality and fiction. And the ironic thing is, these terrorists who hated American pop culture for being decadent and damaging morality, had just turned Hollywood's horrific fantasies into reality and had even managed to exceed them. From the standpoint of terrorists the attack on America was a perfectly orchestrated theatrical production made to capture the attention of the Americans and of the world. Although the metaphor of terrorism as theatrical act is strong enough on its own, there is another one we can think of:

terrorism as television show, the greatest and deadliest kind of entertainment. And, opposed to most of the successful theater productions, the attacks had a great and lasting impact, as their audiences were no table to forget the images they saw on 9/11.

From the standing point of those who staged this unprecedented performance, the media coverage of this event was of crucial importance, as for every other terrorist action. Whether we're thinking of a fire started by an organization consisting of amateur environmentalists or about a planned mass destruction by a professional terrorist network, the marketing goals are the same: terrorists aspire to be recognized in order to be respected and legitimized in their various target audiences. There is the notion that contemporary religious terrorists, unlike secular terrorists (like the Red Brigade and Marxists or Palestinian and Basque nationalists) want nothing more than to kill and to cause a great amount of damage without having a clear target and wanting only to express their wrath. But even if this could be a part of the complex set of motivations that animate terrorists, there is no doubt that their actions are planned and executed keeping the media in mind. The psychological impact of these violent images on the masses, on the political leaders and decision makers are always part of the plan. Unlike secular terrorists, religious terrorists want to cause maximum suffering through their actions but they also want the whole country and, in the case of international terrorism, the whole world, to bear witness to their deeds, to understand the origin of their anger so this way they can consolidate their position in their groups and maybe gain some new supporters.

Certainly, advertising through mass media is not an end in itself. Most terrorists have specific purposes for the short and the long run, some of which overlap. The long term goals and the short-term ones of those who planned and executed the suicide missions against the United States are not difficult to imagine. Even before reliably determining the accountability for what had happened on September 11th, the mass media, the policy makers and the general public, both in America and around the world were discussing possible reasons for the terrorist acts. On short term, those who orchestrated and implemented those attacks wanted to show the weaknesses of a great world power against terrorism, to scare people, and to stimulate a weakening of the civil rights and liberties in America. And on the long run they wanted to discourage the U.S. foreign policy and presence in the Middle East and other areas with Muslim populations. Any immediate or future objectives pursued by those who had planned the attacks, the criminals were aware, as all

political criminals, that the media is essential in promoting their objectives. In the absence of the frightening reportages and shocking images, the impact on America as well as the whole world would not have been as instantaneous and intense as it was with them. So what does this mean? Most of the times, media critics have wondered and documented media's appetite for violence and they analyzed the effects this media content has on individuals that watch it regularly, one of these critics being, of course, George Gerbner. While criminal violence is also being massively reported, terrorist incidents are provided the longest hours of reporting and debate and they fall in a completely different category media wise. With rare exceptions, ordinary criminals do not commit those acts to attract the cameras, the microphones and recorders. But advertising is essential for terrorists. No other medium has provided more coverage to terrorists. Partly because it has the ability to report news on the spot, nonstop by broadcastimg from all over the world Television is the device that changed the way every other medium understood news reporting.

When commentators characterized the terrorist events of 9/11 as being the Pearl Harbor of the XXI century, or the second Pearl Harbor, they were ignoring a fundamental issue that distanced the surprise attack of December 7th 1941 from that of 9/11: the enormous differences among the communication technologies. Three hours had passed since the first bombs had fallen on Pearl Harbor and the time when mainland Americans learned the news on the radio. Sixty years later, the terrorist attacks were widely covered on television, radio and the Internet and disseminated repeatedly over the following hours, days, and weeks. And this occurred thanks to the technological advancement and to the competition in the media between television, the radio and newspapers, so that the press in general had become more concerned with the exploitation of criminal violence and terrorist violence in the hope of increasing its circulation and rating. As a result of this, contemporary mass media, especially television, has started to dedicate much of the news space to broadcasting big and small acts of violence, thus meeting the media critics who say that the media makes it easier for terrorists to achieve their advertising ends. . Even if not the authors themselves, surely the architects of the terrorist action anticipated the immediate effects: extensive coverage of the event not only in the U.S. but also in other parts of the world. How could the terrorists achieve their goals better than by getting the attention of their target audience? Surveys revealed that literally all Americans followed news about the attack from the start watching TV and listening to the radio and broadcasts. Also about one

third followed events through the Internet. This universal initial interest in news about terrorism did not decrease too fast. More than 90% of the public closely monitored the news about terrorism for at least six weeks after the events of September 11th.

Political leaders have also watched the original report about the terrorist acts and all critical reporting and replays that followed. There is no doubt that the terrorists who orchestrated the attacks on America have captured the attention of all Americans, of overseas public and of leaders all over the world. Those who staged the attacks of September 11th were pleased with the level of coverage they achieved and bin Laden said about the authors that they are the vanguard of Islam and by capturing such a great deal of attention, they managed to show that terrorism can be a great tool for sending out messages.

Either as a result of watching newscasts, sportscasts or entertainment shows, Americans have had a hard time forgetting about terrorism. While most would agree that the television programs about the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were frightening and depressing, many people claimed that they couldn't stop watching the news. And clearly, as a result, the ones watching the news continuously were more frightened by the prospect of history repeating itself than those who were not addicted to them. Not just Americans, but also those from abroad have learned quickly about the terrorist attacks on the United States and they were affected by what they saw, heard and read. Reactions around the world were very similar to those of the Americans and were taking place as quickly thanks to the incredible dispersion powers of the media, which did nothing less than to prove its force.

Terrorism has set the agenda for the media, for the public and for the Government. For terrorists, capturing the general attention was nothing short of a complete victory. Before the 9/11 news from the Middle East and other Islamic regions were episodic and focused on particular events which were more often than not about violence and extremisms. During the Cold War there was a shortage in foreign news in the West, and especially thematic reports and stories about the Muslim world. The horrors of September 11th sparked media's interest for exploring the area in a new way, as terrorists managed to force it to examine their complaints and give voice to their people. Bin Laden was portrayed as the absolute villain, the number one enemy, getting on top of the list of most wanted criminals in the world. However, from the standpoint of terrorists, that did not matter. Marginalized, condemned and threatened by world leaders, Osama bin Laden was present in the

news as frequently as any of them. And this in itself was a huge success from the perspective of bin Laden and his associates because the media keeps saying that not only America is concerned with terrorism, but the entire western world.

4. Terrorism as Media Event

9/11 is a historical media event, the first of its kind. But the connection between terrorism and the media is not a partnership, it's not an agreement or a mutually convenient deal but rather it should be regarded as juxtaposition of convenience in which terrorists need the coverage from the media and the latter need shocking, dramatic news to support them and increase their ratings and circulation.

Dayan and Katz eliminate terrorism from their definition of media events, believing that only positive events, which disrupt the rhythm of everyday life in order to celebrate, not to convey a message of terror, can fall under this category:

The media events of democracies – the kind we consider here – are persuasive occasions, attempting to enlist mass support; they take the form of political contests or of the live broadcasting of heroic missions – those that invite the public to embrace heroes who have put their lives and reputations on the line in the cause of a proposed change. The ceremonies of totalitarian societies are more commemorative. They also seek to enlist support, but for present and past; the First of May parade was a more characteristic media event in post war Eastern Europe than a space shot. Terrorist events contrast with both of these in their display not of persuasion but of force, not of majesty but of disruption and provocation. (Dayan & Katz, 1994)

But September 11 2001 overturned this definition, as the whole world ended up thinking of the attack as the most important media event of the early 21st century. And this is due both to the target of the attack, the United States, as well as the advanced level of technology that connected the whole world live to what was happening. What 9/11 taught us, as George Gerbner had anticipated, is that violence is a very good attention catalyst.

Anyone who stood in front of a TV that day recalls perfectly the morbid details of the incident and his or her feelings about what was going on. The fact that the ceremonial spirit, the organization, and the solemnity of the proceedings were not present at first because they had to leave room for shock and anguish is not a good enough reason to downgrade 9/11 as a minor media event. Debates about what had

happened in New York and at the Pentagon were heated and long lasting, and worldwide people thought at that time that terrorism was escalating and was becoming a type of violence that everyone should fear starting with the 21st century.

In the seventies and eighties, international terrorism seems to have differed in structure from modern-day terrorism because modern terrorism is more global and more capable of unified action. The present day terror network covers the entire world and allows decentralized collaboration between friendly terror groups and cells. Therefore, leaders can plan and execute parallel operations at the same time in different parts of the world. (Weiss, 2006)

George W. Bush's statements, hours and days after the attacks, were focused either on declaring war or at least on giving an armed response to the perpetrators and their leaders because now, he said, not only the security of the United States was threatened, but that of the entire modernized world. By stating democracy along with its values were under attack, Bush was making an appeal to the emotions of the audience, not to their reason, and expected people to support him in declaring war on terrorism.

In fact, a major act of violence was transformed by statements and continuous media debates in motivation for the American intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. And if a media event aims to facilitate the masses' adherence to its cause, this one is a very good example of how it can be done. Although the Al-Qaeda movement as the acknowledged author of the attacks managed to attract the world's attention to its message for a short while, the ones who really took advantage of the situation were the Americans, when they released the armed offensive in Afghanistan in October 2001 to capture the terrorists.

The whole world supported their initiative, both morally and economically. And this world was made not only of presidents, business leaders and military strategists, but also of a series of anonymous individuals who regarded themselves overnight as potential victims of terrorism. Even after the attack, televisions around the world would constantly rerun images of the twin towers collapsing, of terrified witnesses from the scene, and the life stories of those in the airplanes and the World Trade Center, so we could say panic levels were kept constant for a while among the public. And this, as I mentioned before makes people easy to manipulate, changes their options and drives them to act hastily, even irrationally. Anyone who would have been asked at that moment if he or she agrees with

declaring war on terrorism would certainly have said yes, because it was supposed to bring peace and security worldwide. At least that was what American officials professed.

5. Conclusions

Therefore, September 11th 2001 marked the transformation of terrorism in media event material for two reasons: firstly because it attracted a huge audience, unparalleled for this kind of violence on the long run. And secondly because the outcome was not that intended by terrorists because it was altered by media's interpretation. I won't be judging the United States' decisions and actions after 9/11, that's not the purpose of this paper. What I wanted to point out is that violence has always been a favorite subject matter for television and the consequence of constantly exposing the public to it may be a general distorted understanding of the world. And also, more importantly, that terrorism, as a real or fabricated global threat, is a phenomenon we should accurately analyze. This can be done only by placing it next to the mass media and by extensively interrogating not solely its goals and intentions, but also the objectives of those who interpret and criticize it.

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