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## **Surprise! You're Dead: On Jeremy Fernando's *The Suicide Bomber; and her gift of death***

**by A. Staley Groves**

Do not judge a book by its cover! However, what covers a book if not a title? Thus, by virtue of its appellation *The Suicide Bomber; and her gift of death*, recently published by Atropos Press, promises much by calling judgment right to the front of thinking. Yet this work goes deeper than mere provocation. Fernando appeals to configurations of the suicide bomber not by the final judgment, nor the terrorist per se, rather, a gift of death by its pedagogical task one is called to engage within and without the limits of judgment and reason.

Fernando defines terror as the attempt to "efface" the site, "the illusion...the medium between reality and ourselves...the space, the gap of negotiation." The gift of death is thus a work of *confusio* against *ordo*, that is, the aporia between persons (if only between one-self) and the access to uncertainty taken for granted in late capitalism. Working primarily with Jean Baudrillard and in other instances the mystical humidity of sex-death master Georges Bataille, Fernando works toward a novel "exchangeability" previously dominated by Christian and capitalistic frameworks now taken to the limit of limits. A work between order and chaos moves toward a possible, novel-self, "when she straps the bombs to herself, she is already dead," that is, already effaced by terror, thus reason is indeed terroristic. Preconceptions of the gift-bringer are ultimately shaded into ideological structure, our own 'self', thus a motif on self referentiality occurs toward this novelty of I, yet further discussions of technologically influenced subjectivity do not appear.

Any attempt to psychoanalyze the actor is indeed assigning meaning where there isn't one. In terms of effacement, nationalistic definitions contra the terrorist use terrorism as that which fundamentally reshapes the nation as a whole. The possibility of meaning is already effaced by the assigned rationale of terrorism which squares with Fernando's primary thesis. Thus the nation-state and its media apparatti and the implementation of terrorism is turned on its head. (161) For example, the highly politicized suicide bomber post 9/11 was termed by right wing Fox News as the "homicide bomber" (Fox made the appeal to be factual and pro-American, taking the emphasis away from the suicide to a murderer.) The "homicide bomber" in such depiction is purely other, knowable by their intention to kill others, not by the fact they started with themselves, i.e. "already dead." Thus Fernando's work does have a political impetus. And certainly the reason one kills is not an easy configuration, yet a commentary on the limits of knowing exchanges between a supposed bipolar world and the subject appears to emerge.

The bomber opens the possibility of exchange thus the trans-gendered conceptualization nearest this site of negotiation: "Every time a suicide bomber offers her-self, she is offering us the possibility of singularity, the possibility of remaining unknowable, enigmatic, and in full potential. At the instant she becomes a suicide bomber, (s)he offers us the gift of her death: we reciprocate, we return the gift, with our lives." (185) This exchange operates by opening binaries, such as the of fixity of gender which has dominated biology. In this exchange, biology reinscribes gender, proximate to the gift, which can be also be read as an event "we are always stricken with death...a death from within that remains unknowable" (16) for which the bomber brings forth in us, immanent to ourselves. The delivery of a complex reworking

of gender is indeed deceptively easy to breeze through, but it openly obscures its actual close-reading of identity and gender whispering forth.

The gift is the non-anthropocentric blip of poesy, or blast-error within all truths. The flesh pelted marketplace of ideas means the bomber is the non-actualized poet among us, actualizing if only for a moment. The task is to understand this ourselves. In the vibrancies of living the gift is an appeal to live. How Fernando establishes this novel self comes by the complex phrasing of “an ‘I’ that is in alterity with itself; a self that is other to itself...[a]nd this is the position of being other to one’s self that we may find some hope” leaves a more decisive conclusion for another day. (215) In its moment and its event, the expanse of a possible terrain of becoming we are tasked with: the uncertainty of understanding and welcoming the other. Terrorized by reason masking uncertainty, the explosions of poetry in a life we have yet to see, means sight takes much for granted which pulls forth an intuitive read on Levinasian ethical optics. Happening all around us poetry as the exploding gift repulses common sense only to establish a new possible ground. Other in this sense is the symmetrical alignment for the murder, the final judgment surpassed, which in the operation of other and self have no further distinguishing elements. We may only meet each other in oblivion. This new self is not one who grasps the mini-sun, the bomb, who pulls the trigger and destroys the marketplace, it is poetry, the pure, open negotiation.

Though we can read a grasping of technology in the bomb the residue of design in this case is not a luck we can properly judge nor a proper subject of the future, rather, the non position of “perhaps” of both Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacques Derrida who reign supreme in this text. The explosion could speak more about the artist’s impact on the structure of society as purely a production of negation either emerging or shrinking back from the atomic age and apocalyptic thematics.

Fernando does offer a bridge in this text between politics and philosophy, that is, a

meditation of “I” in contrast to the split androgyne featured in one of the more successful vignettes. Tracing back the bifurcated one and third position of the body (less we read it politically or sympathetically,) we gain a moment to understand life at its limit, reaching toward living. How one understands the suicide bomber requires meditation on the validity of the subject in relation to technologies, its models in late capitalism long dominated by outmoded post-colonial studies and the programmatic identity politics of diversity. The question emerges: Could we finally abandon the dogmatic fixity of political identity as merely individual?

A work for every level of interested readers, Fernando’s uncommon ease with the often over-obfuscated tenants of continental thought make this work accessible and pleasurable. Stylistically this work employs several intimations or vignettes which act as a commentary on the work but in some instances feel as if missing the pressure they are supposed to invoke. This is done, however, with pristine clarity, which makes his conclusions vulnerable to criticism but also ripe for exchange, if not the same sort of exchange he critiques with acute skill. The question concerning style could be contrasted to the later Gilles Deleuze and Jean-Luc Nancy, there is a certain authority in the way in which a text is written. And for this reason, there are numerous instances where Fernando displays a developed and deep intuition of his subject matter, not as sheer indulgence, rather, a broad knowledge of literature and philosophy which is tactfully woven. One should read him carefully not on the terms of difficult language but for the subtle exchange he offers.

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