

Permanent Ignition: Stuttgart-Stammheim

– Public Presentation, C.CRED [Collective CREative Dissent]

Introduction

We were trying to locate a starting point, a beginning if you like, for this discussion, for our discussion today, but also for the organization or construction of an archive that would claim, or reclaim, this history, the history of this notion of terrorism or the terroristic, but that in doing so would remain affirmative and productive in itself of a political expression, a practice, a future practice or a potential practice, perhaps. We wanted to reclaim this history, these histories – or, at any rate, features, components, elements, functions *within* these histories – as a way to link aesthetics and politics, via a kind of ethics situated within or in relation to this notion of “the terroristic,” in a form or mode of practice or, better perhaps, expression that would, on the one hand, take militant activism beyond the hopeless morality into which it is too often read and beyond any simplistic reading of its violence, and that, on the other hand, would open up to a creative, aesthetic form of political expression beyond the representational political space of capitalist-liberal democracies.

But, of course, we quickly realized this task may be more difficult than we initially thought. For many reasons, one of them being the complexity of the very term “the terroristic” and the various practices and histories to which it refers. It is hard, impossible perhaps, to construct a coherent narrative beginning at one point, ending at another; beginning with “the terrorist” ending with a concluding terrorist event. It is hard to locate an origin, any kind of point of departure, in its history as well as in its function. Do we begin with the definitions, discourses and the rhetoric that defines terrorism, that constitutes its validity, that groups together various practices emptied of political and ethical content under one functional legal umbrella? Or do we begin with *the event* of terrorism, the complexity of its violence, but also, and more importantly today, its function, its mode of operation, its productivity beyond its violence? Or do we begin with its *ethics*, or its *ethico-aesthetics*, the forms of life-practice, political practice that informs and feeds into the event, that is, in fact, expressed in the event of terrorism? Or do we perhaps begin with its futurity, the way in which it presents us with alternative models of living, the ways in which it calls precisely for new forms of social intercourse, a new society, a new social modality, a new form of social, and political, life?

Of course, all these elements will have to be part of a serious engagement with any aspect or moment of the terroristic. They all must be part of an attempt to ‘map out’ the event of terrorism, so to speak; in drawing the diagram that links its space, the space of terrorism, with its function. They can, in a sense, not be separated or seen as distinct, and none of them can take precedence: *the event* is an expression of an *ethics* that involves an *aesthetic* model and a call for a new mode of life. *Ethics* and *aesthetics* are linked with a kind of *technology* of *the event* in the politics of the terroristic.

This, then, will be the point of departure today, not an origin, not a narrative, or even a history *per se* – although it will involve a history – but the *complexity* of the moment of the terroristic; the *complexity* of that point of intersection and expression.

But let's begin with the case, or a case: the moment that feeds into our counter-monument project.

Let's begin, in fact, by juxtaposing two moments:

Firstly, the US Army Base in Heidelberg 1972, following the detonation of a bomb planted at the site by members of the 1st generation of the militant, left-wing guerrilla cell the Red Army Faction.

Secondly, Stuttgart-Stammheim, October 1977. Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe are found dead in their cells. Irmgaard Moller, the fourth member of the 1st generation of the hard-core of the RAF, is found seriously wounded with a stab wound to her chest.

These two moments, in their interrelation, constitute a terroristic event that comprises precisely this kind of complexity and that links a particular *ethics* and an *aesthetic*, to a *politics* and a *technology of the event*. And it does so, it links these elements, by two *prophetic* functions, by two *prophecies*.

Let us talk you through this event using precisely those terms:

The First Prophetic Function

The first prophecy of the terrorist event is located in its *ethics*. *Ethics* – in Spinoza's sense, that is. As a kind of *ethico-aesthetic*. Or at any rate, an *ethics* that is closely linked to an *aesthetic*. This is an ethics grounded in an essentially *relational* universe, a universe constituted by *relations* between singular bodies in increasingly complex aggregates, relations ranging from a molecular level to the level of global politics.

In such universe any given *relation* – that is, any difference, any sociality, any politic – and any given *affect* – that is, the affect two or more bodies have on each other in a relation – becomes a direct expression of a *power* that is prior to all difference and that all existing bodies share, the power of life, of being in the sense of a totality.

Though we're really doing Spinoza a huge injustice in reading him so briefly, we want to move on immediately to talk a little about what we see as two of the main implications of this theory of univocity. To me this means two things:

Firstly, it means that at any given state, an individual body is already collective. You are not a coherent and unified subject but a set of relations. The affects you experience are not *yours*, they are not personal, but grounded in relations, generated by relations, across a social terrain. Every experience is necessarily collective. All history is collective history.

Secondly, it means that although all relations are expressions of the same power or potential, they are not relations between equals, but between different degrees and modes of expression of that power. The relations that constitute the universe, that constitute collective experience and history, are not universal but distinct. On a molecular level the relation your organs form with a poison will be bad, negative relations, producing only bad affects. In the same way, the relation you form with an enemy will be a negative relation. On the other hand, the relations your body form with, say, food or that you form with a friend, with someone you love, are essentially positive, affirmative relations, affirmative affects.

And this is precisely the position of Spinoza's *ethics*. It is not morality – there is no judgement, no categorical imperatives. It is not law. It is a question of health. You seek to create only affirmative relations and encounter only good affects.

Now, in Spinoza this stands in direct correspondence to larger social bodies (remember, it is always a question of a collectivity, of collective experience, of a shared constitution and a shared history). We then find that a social body, or relations between social bodies, can be essentially bad, negative, and frail, generating poisons, affects that are essentially repressive distributed across a social field so as to reproduce a corrupt constitution. Collective experience and the sense of history that a social body produces, then becomes warped, fraught by contradiction and isolation, exploitation and repression. On the other hand, of course, a social body can be essentially good and strong, comprising mainly affirmative and productive relations, generating mainly healthy affects. In such social body, experience is collectivized and adequately historicized.

A Spinozist *ethics* in this respect, stands in direct relation to a radical politics: If you find yourself part of a social body that is composed of bad relations, bad configurations of affects, a bad distribution of affects, then it is your ethical and political task to do what you can to overthrow the various regimes that prevents that social body from reconfiguring itself, from reconfiguring the relations of which it is composed, from seeking a new health and living up to its full potential. It also stands in direct relation to an *aesthetic*, not a universal categorical aesthetic, but an aesthetic as a creative engagement with the relations and affects that constitute life, an aesthetic as a way to actively and creatively engage with the conditions and relations in which you exist in order to produce new forms of relations, new conditions, new social and relational modalities. You act on your conditions and your experiences. You act on the collective history of which you form part. Freedom, as they said, is not given, it's taken. And it is precisely this "taking" that is at stake here.

To bring this back to the case, when the RAF in 1972 attacked the US military base in Heidelberg, that event was a direct *expression* and an *articulation* of an *ethics* and an *aesthetic*. It was a way to act on the conditions of West-German, and global, politics. It was a way to act on, and against, the Vietnam war and other US military strategies and campaigns, against the 'economic miracle' of West-German capitalism within the context of a parent generation that built Auschwitz.

It was an attack on a certain configuration of social and political relations and the affects generated and distributed *by* and *within* such configuration. It was an attack on a frail, exploitative and repressive social body; an attack on a kind of depoliticizing, consumerist Disneyland distribution of affects; an attack on what they saw as the increasingly global poison of imperial capitalism.

Against this global poison, the RAF posed an alternative model, an alternative set of relations and configurations of affects based precisely on an *ethics*; a collectivization of experience and history, the political becoming of the individual and a mode of direct action or expression. In a 1974 manifesto they wrote:

'Man and woman in the Guerilla are the new people for a new society, of which the Guerilla is the "Breeding cell" because of its identity of power, subjectivity, a constant process of learning and action (as opposed to theory). Guerilla stands for a collective process of learning with the aim to "collectivize" the individual so that he will keep up collective learning. Politics and strategy live within each individual of the Guerilla'.

This is an *ethico-aesthetic* model of collective living, learning and action, an experiment with relations and configurations of affects; a becoming political of the individual, or a mode of political subjectification, in what Ulrike Meinhof once referred to as *'a permanent integration of subjectivity and political identity'*. An *ethics* and an *aesthetics*.

It is within the context of this collective experience, this sense of a collective history, that we must locate the Heidelberg attack as an *expression* and *articulation* of this *ethico-aesthetics*. An *expression* of an *ethical* trajectory, of a style of life, of a model for living *ethically*. And an articulation of an *aesthetics* in a call for a future society, for new modes of social intercourse, a future social and political organization, for a collectivization of life and for a new kind of health, for a future community. Again, in the 1974 manifesto, they write:

'The guerilla acts upon facts which people experience every day: exploitation, media terror, insecurity of living conditions despite the great wealth and refined technology in this country - the psychic illnesses, suicides, child abuse, distress within the schools, the housing misery. What shocked the imperialist state about our first action was that the RAF has been perceived in the consciousness of the people as what it really is: the practice, the thing, which results logically and dialectically from the present conditions. Action returns dignity to the people and meaning to their struggles, enabling the people to have a consciousness of their history'.

From a frail social body, fraught with contradiction; from the misery of an exploitative and repressive social constitution emerges a new form of life, precisely as an *ethics* and an *aesthetic*, *expressed* and *articulated* in the terroristic event.

This is the *first prophetic function* of the terrorist event, it expresses and articulates a sense of futurity, a model and a call for a future form of life, for a future health, for a liberation and expression of being beyond the forms that constitute the present state of our realities.

The Second Prophetic Function

The *second prophecy*, the *second prophetic function* of the terroristic is located more precisely in the event itself, in the *technology of the event*. This technology, or function, can best be described perhaps in terms of a *repetition*, but with repetition we do not really mean two or more similar occurrences. Rather, we want to use it in the sense of a virtuality, in the sense that Gilles Deleuze may be suggesting in *Difference and Repetition* when he writes that,

'It is not the Federation Day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille that celebrates and repeats in advance all the federation days'.

It is *the event* itself that incorporates the *virtuality* of its *repetition*. The event contains the *potential* of its *return*, its *repetition*. This is precisely the function, one of the functions, of the terroristic event. It is singular, it is only that *one* act, but what distinguishes it from other occurrences is that it produces a break-down of relations that generates an affect that spreads outwards from the localized event across an entire social field, and it does so precisely by the potential of its repetition; by fear and trembling, by a kind of socio-political paralysis. Every statement uttered *after* the event, every bit of rhetoric, remains a *repetition* integral to the *event* itself in precisely the same fashion as the federation day is a repetition that was incorporated in a virtual sense in the fall of the Bastille. Every utterance repeats it. Every time we say the word, we repeat the event.

It is, then, by generating an *affect* that cuts across the relations and configurations of affects that constitute a social body, or a social order, that the terroristic operates; by producing an affect that threatens or breaks down the relations that constitute an order or social body; by reclaiming a violence that is prior to any sense of sociality and that threatens the very fabric of social constitution that the terroristic functions. It is by cutting, in the sense of this repeated cut, to the limit of an order, a constitution, or a law; by cutting to the limits of the legal, that the terroristic becomes essentially *productive* of an intensification of a crisis or conflict, it puts the constitution under threat by producing its limit, in various forms, thus producing an intensification of an already existing crisis or contradiction.

Again, to return to the case, the stated intent behind the RAF and operations such as the 1972 attack on the US Army Base in Heidelberg was precisely to generate a solidification of what they perceived to be an existing crisis; a frail, exploitative and repressive social body. By producing an explicit limit to the constitution itself, the event would generate an implicit authoritarian, fascist response within the social body. And so through what they saw as *'the pressure of the worsening,'* the intensification of a crisis, a protest movement would emerge capable of overthrowing, or at any rate, challenging the capitalist West-German state.

Conclusion

And in a way this is precisely what they did. The event did generate an affect across a social body, an affect that repeated in advance, that foretold, or foresaw in a *prophetic* sense, an entire series of future developments in German legislation (emergency legislation), politics (a shift towards extreme measures and a certain conservatism, but also the generation of a kind of counter-politics on several levels), and modes of social and political control (surveillance, change in legislation, development of methods of subjection, etc.). This quickly led to the capture of the 1st generation of RAF militants and the construction of the prison at Stuttgart-Stammheim, which is where Andreas Baader, Jan-Carl Raspe and Irmgaard Möller allegedly committed collective suicide in 1977 after three years of isolation, sensory deprivation and around the clock surveillance.

What we find here then is a *second prophetic*, and productive, function of the terrorist event. A prophecy in the sense of the production and foretelling of a future state of the capitalist regime, of a future crisis. In the sense of this second prophetic function, the attack on the US Army Base in 1972 *already* incorporated the Stammheim suicides in 1977. The detonation of the bomb in 1972 foresaw, or foretold, the suicides of 1977. The destruction of the US headquarters was the construction of Stammheim. The dead bodies of three American soldiers, were the dead bodies, also, of Baader, Raspe and Ensslin. To read the often traumatic memories of the violence exercised in the events described above is not to condone it, to commemorate the terroristic event is not to senselessly legitimize it – it is to open up to a conversation about where dissent can be located; how, under extreme circumstances, it functions; and what its future may, or may not, hold in store.