

## Minor Literature: Case Study: the *Red Army Faction*

Man and woman in the Guerrilla are the new people for a new society, of which the guerrilla is the 'Breeding cell' because of its identity of power, subjectivity, a constant process of learning and action (as opposed to theory). Guerrilla stands for a collective process of learning with the aim to 'collectivise' the individual so that he will keep up collective learning. Politics and strategy live within each individual of the Guerrilla.<sup>1</sup>

The guerrilla organisation, in this case the Red Army Faction (RAF), has both a centrifugal and a centripetal force.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand its activities are obviously directed to an outside. Indeed, it is this that defines the guerrilla; it is directed against and in opposition to that which surrounds and paradoxically produces it.<sup>3</sup> The guerrilla is in this sense essentially *parasitic*. The RAF saw themselves in this light, as conducting a war on capitalism-imperialism (which amongst other things had produced the nightmare of Vietnam) from behind enemy lines.

However there is also a force directed *within* the guerrilla, a force that operates on the members of the guerrilla group themselves. We might call this force a kind of alternative *production* of subjectivity. Put simply, the guerrilla, in the relations and alliances it produces, and in its relative isolation from 'the world', produces a 'becoming political' (a *politicisation*) of the individual. As well as being parasitical, then, the guerrilla can also be thought of as having a *germinal* function - as being involved in the production of something 'new'. We might also configure this latter function as a *becoming minor*, in fact the guerrilla cell as a form of minor literature. A productive exercise might then be to apply Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's three criteria of/for a minor literature (from their book on Kafka) - or the conditions in which a literature becomes revolutionary - to the RAF. This is not to diffuse or efface the avowed centrifugal political intent of the RAF (its force directed *against* the state) nor to make an apology for the fear generated by their actions. Rather, it is to see whether there is something we can take, something productive (for an engaged art practice perhaps?),

---

<sup>1</sup> Meinhof 2001a, 63.

<sup>2</sup> In what follows I am attending to the first generation of the RAF, specifically the grouping of Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin, Horst Mahler, and Jan Karl Raspe.

<sup>3</sup> Capitalism-Imperialism 'produced' the RAF in the sense that it produced the conditions for the latter's emergence - in the form of a subjectivity 'brain washed through the media, consumerism, physical punishment and the ideology of non-violence' suffering from 'depression, sickness, declassification, insult and humiliation' (Meinhof 2000b, 276). Capitalism had produced an exploited third world but also an alienated 'metropole individual': 'He or she comes from the process of decay, the false, alienated surroundings of living in the system - factory, office, school, university, revisionist group, apprenticeship and temporary jobs' (ibid., 275). In such a situation the westerner is doomed, as Debord might say, to be a spectator on his/her own life, thus the 'shock' of the RAF's first action which, according to Meinhof, was nothing other than the shock of people acting 'without being determined by the pressure of the system, without seeing themselves with the eyes of the media, without fear' (ibid., 278).

from this particular history of guerrilla warfare so that a group such as the RAF are not merely identified with the black hole of terrorism that their practice, at least for some, inevitably announced and still announces.

**1. A minor literature should deterritorialise the major language.<sup>4</sup> Such a deterritorialisation involves a neutralisation of sense, or the signifying aspects of language, and a foregrounding of the latter's asignifying, intensive aspects. This involves a kind of stammering and stuttering - or 'becoming a stranger' - in ones own tongue. Deleuze and Guattari give the example of Black Americans 'use' of English (as well, of course, as Kafka's own 'use' of German). A side effect of this is that a minor literature operates to counteract the transmission of 'order words', and the exercise of power this entails - 'to hate all languages of masters' as Deleuze and Guattari remark.<sup>5</sup>**

A *stammering* from within the major language. The slogans, proclamations and manifestos of the RAF have often been highlighted as a key characteristic of the group and, on a literal level such communiqués did involve a kind of stammering. In fact, their literary output had the character, as Thomas Elsaesser has pointed out, of a kind of 'literary *avant-garde*'.<sup>6</sup> Elsaesser quotes Dietrich Diederichsen who wonders:

where are we to locate the symbolic rupture between the early enthusiasm of Ensslin or Vesper for modern poetry, and the full-blown RAF diction, present in the lower-case type written messages, influenced by sub-culture colloquialisms, shaped by decisionist rhetoric, and celebrating orgies of one-line sententiousness?<sup>7</sup>

The language between members of the group might also be seen as a becoming minor of typical bourgeois strategies of avoidance - involving as it did a directness and apparent political incorrectness; the RAF were it seems intuitively aware of the inherently political nature of language.<sup>8</sup> We might note here the general predicament and thus general strategy of those who must use a language that is not their own; they must use it in such a way so as to make it their own.

In fact the RAF's deterritorialisation of the major language went further. Their very actions and modes of interaction involved and 'effected an aesthetic break' with previous 'political'

---

<sup>4</sup> K 16.

<sup>5</sup> K 26.

<sup>6</sup> 1999, 290.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 290.

<sup>8</sup> For a vivid display of this 'use' of language by the RAF see the film *Stammheim: the Trial of the RAF* (Aust 1985).

actions and organisation, belonging as it did to the emergent 'culture of the happening, to graffiti art and fluxus events, to street theatre and the Living theatre'.<sup>9</sup> We might also note here the RAF's utilisation of that other aspect of a minor language, its intensive or *affective* quality - 'Oppose a purely intensive usage of language to all symbolic or even significant or simply signifying usages of it'.<sup>10</sup> Here is Elsaesser again, this time quoting Michael Dreyer:

For Dreyer, the RAF's street violence was not only street theatre, it was a kind of 'music' ('no more/mere words'). He felt their political violence as a percussion cutting into the monotone of his everyday, a form of 'bodily' sensation which, rather like rock music, delivered non-verbal expression and opened up a new subjective space.<sup>11</sup>

Of course the RAF cannot be passed off as purely aesthetic movement - after all there notoriety arose from their acts of violence. We might however want to enquire into what this violence entailed; was there a sense in which their violence was itself a deterritorialisation of the major language of the state premised as the latter was, and is, on violence? The RAF might be seen as twisting and folding - stuttering - the major language back on itself. A terror turned against the terror of the state and specifically the state sponsored terrorism of Vietnam. We might want to go further than this and note that many of the targets of RAF actions involved those who had risen to power during the Nazi era. The RAF's actions might then be seen as an attempt to make manifest the violence that lay beneath the apparent luxuries - and 'peace' - of a US consumerist hegemony. As the RAF themselves remarked:

These are the strategic dialectics of anti-imperialist struggle: through the defensive reactions of the system, the escalation of counterrevolution, the transformation of the political martial law into military martial law, the enemy betrays himself, becomes visible.<sup>12</sup>

We might also want to approach this issue of violence in a different, even more *affirmative* manner. Violence as an inevitable factor of breaking with mainstream society and typical subjectivity (the bourgeois individual). A form of violence at once removed from 'state' violence, in fact a violence aimed at undercutting the premises of the state. We might call this the violence of collectivity, or of *fraternity* - a violence specifically orientated against notions of individualism. This amounts to saying that the RAF was nothing other than the sharp end of a war machine, the latter understood here as the specifically collective uprisings of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Elsaesser 1999, 284.

<sup>10</sup> K 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>12</sup> Meinhof 2000b, 279.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Negri has said something similar when asked in interview about the *Brigate Rosse*:

**2. In a minor literature everything is political.<sup>14</sup> Political in the sense that the lives and individual concerns of the characters are always linked to the larger social milieu (and not, for example, fixated on the familial unit). It is in this sense that a becoming animal is always political, a line of escape (for Kafka's Gregor for example) from conjugality and the nuclear family. This links up with (1) above: the animal cry - as sound, as a deterritorialised noise - operates to neutralise sense, to neutralise the habits of representation, of 'being human'. Asignification here takes on an explicitly political function: it disrupts dominant systems of signification and representation.**

A becoming political. As Meinhof remarks in the quote that begins this case study, the guerrilla was the site of the 'becoming political' of the group/individual. Meinhof herself might be seen as a case study of this, turning her back as she did on her family and her bourgeois upbringing and hence precipitating a process of politicisation and a kind of collectivisation of her identity. This disavowal of amongst other things the nuclear domestic set up invariably involved the affirmation of other types of alliance, other modes of being (and other types of sexuality), as well as announcing a break in certain signifying/subjectifying regimes - specifically those regarding women. Indeed Meinhof's 'becoming guerrilla' operated as a rupture in typical narratives of capitalist subjectivity (girl, wife, mother...). The media at the time picked up on this but also, and at the same time, reterritorialised Meinhof around the sign 'terrorist'.

This collectivisation/politicisation of the individual continued in Stammheim prison via letters surreptitiously passed between members of the group. This was carried out against the backdrop of what we might see as the prison's major function in relation to the RAF: the interruption in the continuing collectivisation of their subjectivities. Hence the prisoner's constant complaints about their isolation.<sup>15</sup>

---

One must be careful not to think of the Red Brigades as making up the whole of the movement of the 1970s, and of this movement as a historical parenthesis, an absolutely isolated, singular, separate term; in reality, the movement was a path in life, one taken by a great many of my generation (2004, 31).

<sup>14</sup> K 17.

<sup>15</sup> Meinhof's prison letters are especially revealing about how this isolation produced *self*-criticism. Meinhof ended up questioning her own relationship to Baader and Enslinn. She saw herself as 'toadying' - or 'treating them like cops' - and thus, in her words, becoming a kind of cop herself (See Aust 1985).

**3. That a minor literature is always collective.<sup>16</sup> Collective in the sense that a minor literature works as a collective enunciation. There is less emphasis on individual authors and talents, which are at any rate scarce within a minor literature, and more on the collective production of work (its always already collaborative status). It is in this sense that we can see the artistic production of statements as a kind of precursor of a community (and often a nation) still in formation. This is the utopian function, specifically immanent, of a minor literature. A minor literary machine prepares the way, in fact in many senses calls into being, the revolutionary machine yet-to-come - 'we might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature'.<sup>17</sup> If there is a gathering of a 'new people' then what they will have in common is their stuttering and stammering, their failure (intentional or otherwise) to 'live up' to the models offered (in fact forced upon them) by the major.**

A future orientation. The RAF was a practice of dissent, of refusal, but it also inevitably involved a celebration of spontaneity, of action, of *life* (the centripetal, *affirmative* aspect of the cell accompanying the latter's centrifugal *negative* critique of the state). In this it called to a future and to a people-yet-to-come. In a sense all guerrilla warfare involves this double aspect; the violence is a means to an end, a precursor to a something that is yet-to-come (this is the guerrillas' prophetic aspect). We might also say that the very form of the organisation of the group cannot but help foreshadow what is being hoped and fought for. Indeed the cell operates as a fragment of the future society projected backwards into the current state of affairs - although the cell is also prone to the very fascism, in a concentrated sense, that the cell orientates itself against. Hence, in a band without leaders, Andreas Baader seems to emerge as the charismatic 'leader' of the group. We might also note here the power of the Baader/Enslinn couple, which did so much to attract Meinhof to begin with. How to understand this apparent charisma and leadership especially of Baader? Was it indeed a micro fascism within the group (indeed did the group at times operate as a micro state machine)? Or was it the projection of an anxious state? (Certainly the RAF's trial foregrounded the latter's desire to identify and isolate the 'ringleader', and no doubt the media did much to effectuate the fascination and seductive power of Baader, Meinhof, Enslinn, and the rest).

We can however also think of Baader as a kind of *exemplar* (a forerunner of the people-yet-to-come). Hence Meinhof's comments:

---

<sup>16</sup> K 17.  
<sup>17</sup> K18.

The function of leadership in the guerrilla, the function of Andreas Baader in the RAF is orientation: not just to distinguish the main points from the minor ones in each situation but also to remain with the entire political context in all situations; to never lose sight, among technical and logistic details and problems, of the aim, which is the revolution.<sup>18</sup>

We need also add here that there is often - *on the face of it* - a very thin line between this affirmative, productive leadership - and something more negative, more destructive. Which it to say there is a million miles - but also a hair's breadth - between fascism and a genuinely new people. Of course being able to tell the two apart is as crucial as it is difficult. Certainly the RAF, its organisation and its 'leadership', involve a complex and grey history. It is not always clear whether Baader, and the RAF in general, were fascist *or* revolutionary. Perhaps one is always between the two? Certainly a minor practice will always involve mistakes, and indeed run the risk of flipping over into the very form it organises itself against.

A final word of caution then. There are two moments in a minor literature: one of dissent and one of affirmation. In a sense each begs the other: to dissent means invariably to affirm other modes of life, in affirming these one cannot but help dissenting from the norm. However dissent in itself can operate as a purely reactive mechanism. Here dissent is a form of resentment, Nietzsche's bad conscience. It is this kind of resentment that produces violence as a kind of reactive end in itself (a resenting subject will always blame - and attack - anything and everything). Nothing creative can come from this (as the saying goes there is no way that an angry man can be happy). Important then is what Deleuze - following Nietzsche and Spinoza - might call one's *style* of life, one's way of operating in, and attitude *to*, the world. This is prior to any political strategy.

#### References:

Aust, Stefan (1985), *Stammheim: the Trial of the RAF*, dir. Reinhard Hauff, Berlin.

(K) Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari (1986), *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

---

<sup>18</sup> Meinhof 2000b, 276.

Elsaesser, Thomas (1999), 'Antigone Agonistes: Urban Guerilla or Guerilla Urbanism? The Red Army Faction, *Germany in Autumn* and *Death Games*', *Giving Ground: The Politics of Propinquity*, London: Verso.

Meinhof, Ulrike (2001a), 'Armed Anti-Imperialist Struggle', *Hatred of Capitalism: A Semiotext(e) Reader*, ed. Chris Krauss and Sylvere Lotringer, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e).

Meinhof, Ulrike (2001b), 'Armed Anti-Imperialist Struggle (and the Defensive Position of the Counterrevolution in its psychological Warfare Against the People', *Hatred of Capitalism: A Semiotext(e) Reader*, ed. Chris Krauss and Sylvere Lotringer, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e).

Negri, Antonio (2004), *Negri on Negri*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, London: Routledge.