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OUR  
THEATRE  
OF  
CRUELTY

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# I. MOGADISHU

In the terrorist act there is a simultaneous power of death and simulation which it is intolerable to see confused with “the morbid taste of death” and with the frenzy of the “morbid” and the “spectacular.” Dead or living, it is elsewhere that terrorism wins out. At least by this single fact: it alone makes the event, and thus returns the whole “political” order to its nullity. And the media, all the while orchestrating the victory of order, only makes evidence of the opposite reverberate: that terrorism is burying the political order.

The media are terrorists in their own fashion, working continually to produce (good) sense, but, at the same time, violently defeating it by arousing everywhere a fascination without scruples, that is to say, a paralysis of meaning, which retracts to a single scenario.

Terrorism is not violence in itself; it is the spectacle it unleashes that is truly violent. It is our Theater of Cruelty, the only one that remains, perhaps equal to that of Artaud or the Renaissance, and extraordinary in that it brings together *the spectacular and the challenge at their highest points*. It is a model of simulation, a micro-model flashing within a minimally real event inside a maximal echo chamber. Like a crystal thrown into an unstable solution or an experimental matrix, terrorism is an insoluble equation which makes all the variables suddenly appear. Terrorism offers a flash, a scenario, a condensed narrative - opposing the purest form of speculation against every event said to be real. It is a ritual, opposing political and historic models in the purest symbolic form of exchange.

Terror is a strange mix of the symbolic and the spectacular, of challenge and simulation. This paradoxical configuration is the only original form of our time, and subversive because insoluble. There is neither victory nor defeat: no sense can be made of an event which is irremediably spectacular, or irremediably symbolic. Everything in terrorism is ambivalent and reversible: death, the media, violence, victory. Who plays into the other's hands? Death itself is undefinable. The death of the terror-

a load of rubbish. A death is romantic or it is not. And in the latter case, there is no need for revenge; it is of the imaginary order. What non-sense to fall back on the reality of a contract of revenge and equivalence! The avengers are worthy of the moralists: always evaluate the price, and have the just price paid. It matters little that the “reality” of this death (the truth about...) is stolen from you. Since it is not of the order of the real, therein lies its force. You are the one who depreciates it by wanting to institute it as fact, as capital with the value of death, and to exhaust it in death. Whereas this death at full price, not liquidated in the equivalence of meaning and vengeance, opens a cycle of vertigo in which the system itself can only come to be implicated in the end, or brutally, through its own death. Against this vertiginous death the system defends itself by setting in place an inverse cycle - a recycling of the truth against the insoluble cycle of death. Such is the inspired maneuver of the German government, which consists of delivering through its “calculated” errors an unfinished product, an unrecoverable truth. Thus everyone will exhaust themselves finishing the work, and going to the end of the truth. A subtle incitement to self-management. The government is content to produce an event involving death; others will put the finishing touches on the job. The truth. Even among those who revolt at Baader's death, no one sees through this trap, and all function with the same automatism at the edge of open complicity which all intelligent power contrives to spread around its decisions.

Apart from Baader's death, the flaws of Stammheim stem from a strategy of simulation by the German State, which alone would merit analysis and denunciation. An amoral strategy of sacred union against the terrorist violence, and much more profoundly, a sacred union in the production of truth, of the facts, of the real. Even if this truth explodes (if in fifteen years it is finally established that Baader was coldly liquidated), it will hardly be a scandal. No power will be frightened by it. If necessary, the crew of leaders will be changed. The price of the truth for power is superficial. On the other hand, the benefits of general mobilization, dissuasion, pacification and mental socialization obtained through this crystallization of the truth are immense. A smart operation, under which Baader's death threatens to be buried definitively.

only makes its expansion accelerate. Here, the virulence comes from the implosion. And the death of the terrorists (or of the hostages) is of implosive order: the abolition of value, of meaning, of the *real* at a determined point. This point can be infinitesimal, and yet it provokes a suction, an absorption, a gigantic convection, as was seen at Mogadishu. Around this tiny point, the whole system of the real condenses, is immunized, and launches all its anti-bodies. It becomes so dense that it goes beyond its own laws of equilibrium and involutes in its own over-effectiveness. At bottom, the profound tactic of simulation (for the terrorist model is very much a matter of simulation, and not of real death) is to provoke an excess of reality, and *to make the system collapse under an excess of reality*.

Paradoxical sleep is the edge of sleep where one does not really sleep, but where one dreams. Paradoxical death is where the reality of death is suspended, this edge where it acquires the status of a challenge that is symbolic *before becoming real*, a residue, the real always being only the residual principal of death's degradation and what's left over.

If it is possible then to think that the hijackers have acted purposefully in order to meet their death, this paradoxical death which shines intensely for a moment before falling back up on the real, it is possible to think inversely that the German government itself did not commit so many errors in the Baader affair; that they moved towards a well-defined end, even without desiring it. The government was able to stage Baader's death neatly - he did not do it. Far from seeing it as a secondary episode, it must be seen as the *key* to the situation. By sowing this doubt, this deliberate ambiguity concerning the facts, the government insured that the truth about this death, and not the death itself, became fascinating. Everyone exhausted themselves in argument and attempts at clarification - clarifications reinforced by the theatricality of the event which acts as a gigantic dissuasion of the terrorists' execution - everyone, and above all the revolutionaries who wanted strongly to have it that Baader has been "assassinated." They too were vultures of the truth. What's the bloody difference, anyway - suicides or victims of liquidation? The difference, of course, is that if they were liquidated and it can be proven, then the masses guided by the truth of the facts, would know that the German State is fascist, and would mobilize in order to wreak revenge. What

ists is equivalent to the death of the hostages. In spite of all efforts to set them into radical opposition, fascination allows no distinction to be made. Rightly so, because power makes no final distinction either, but settles its accounts with everyone, and buries Baader and Schuyler together at Stuttgart, unable to unravel these deaths and rediscover the fine dividing line, the distinctive and valid oppositions which are the secret of law and order. Nor is it possible to reclaim a positive use for media, or a transparency of repression; the repressive act traverses the same unforeseeable spiral as the terrorist act; no one knows where it will stop, nor all the setbacks and reversals that will ensue. There is no distinction possible between the spectacular and the symbolic, no distinction possible between the "crime" and the "repression." *It is this uncontrollable eruption of reversibility that is the true victory of terrorism.*

This victory lies not at all in the fact of imposing a negation and forcing a government to capitulate. Besides, the objective - usually to liberate imprisoned comrades - is typically a zero sum equation. The stakes are elsewhere. And if power wins out at the level of the objective, it loses at the level of the real stakes. It loses its political definition, and is forced to accept, all the while trying to thwart, this reversibility of all the actors in the same process. Terrorist, killers, hostages, leaders, spectators, public opinion - there is no more innocence in a system which has no meaning. No tragedy either (despite the Baader group's ideology, and the pedagogy of terrorists worldwide). The force of the terrorists comes precisely from the fact that they have no logic. The others do: it is quick, effective, flawless, without scruples: it is why they "win." If the terrorists had one, they would not make the errors that they do, but they would no longer be terrorists. To demand that they be at the same time illogical, which gives them their power, and logical tacticians, which would make them successful, is absurd - again a fantasy of synthesis, and of defense on our part, which allows us to recuperate in the fury of defeat.

Hence the stupidity and the obscenity of all that is reported about the terrorists: everywhere the wish to palm off meaning on them, to exterminate them with meaning, which is more effective than the bullets of specialized commandos (and all the while subjecting them elsewhere, in the prisons, to sensory deprivation). It is still this rage for meaning which makes us,

with the best will in the world, treat them like idiots incapable of going all the way and blowing up the airplane and passengers, which makes us want them not to have “won.”

Not only have they not won, but they have inordinately encouraged the sacred union of all the world forces of repression; they have reinforced the political order, etc. Let's go all the way - they have killed their Stammheim comrades, since if they had not launched and then botched this operation, the others would still be alive. But all this participates in the same conspiracy of meaning, which amounts to setting an action in contradiction with itself (here to ends that were not desired, or according to a logic which was not its own). Strangulation.

## II. STAMMHEIM

The insoluble polemic in the way in which Baader and his comrades died is itself obscene, and for the same reason: there is an equal obscenity in wanting to forcibly impose meaning on the hijackers' act and in wanting to restore Baader's death to the order of factual reality. Principal of meaning as principal of truth: there you have the real lifeblood of State terrorism.

Thus, the German government's strategy attains perfection in a single blow. Not only does it link - in an almost improvised manner - the bungled taking of hostages with the immediate liquidation of the prisoners who disturbed it; it does so in a manner (coarse, equivocal, incoherent) that traps everyone in a hysterical search for truth, which is the best way to abolish the symbolic futility of this death.

The hijackers made so many errors at Mogadishu that one can only think they were done “on purpose.” They have finally attained their objective obliquely, which was the challenge of their own death, summing up the virtual one of all the hostages, and more radically still, that of the power which kills them. For it absolutely must be repeated that the stakes are not to beat power on its own ground, but to oppose another political order of force. One knows nothing about terrorism if one does not see that it is not a question of real violence, nor of opposing one violence to another (which, owing to their disproportion, is absurd. All *real* violence, like real order in general, is always on the side of power), but to oppose to the *full* violence and to the full *order* a clearly superior model of extermination and virulence operating through emptiness.

The secret is to oppose to the order of the real an absolutely imaginary realm, completely ineffectual at the level of reality, but whose implosive energy absorbs everything real and all the violence of real power which founders there. Such a model is no longer of the order of transgression: repression and transgression are of the old order of the law, of the order of a real system of expansion. In such a system, all that comes into contradiction with it, including the violence of its opposite,