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THE BLACK LIBERATION ARMY & THE PARADOX OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

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A BREAK IN THE ARC OF AUTHORIZATION

On October 22, 1970, the Black Liberation Army detonated a timed-release antipersonnel bomb at the funeral of a San Francisco police officer. This, according to the Justice Department and BLA sanctioned literature, was the first of their forty to sixty paramilitary actions launched between 1969 and 1981.¹ Even though they probably never numbered more than four hundred insurgents, nationwide, working in small, often unconnected cells, their armed response to the violence that enmeshes Black life was probably the most consistent and politically legible response since the slave revolts that occurred between 1800 and 1840.

Twenty years after the Black Liberation Army launched its first attack on the state, Toni Morrison, appearing on Bill Moyers' PBS talk show *A World of Ideas* was queried about the moral ground which Sethe stood on when she killed her child, Beloved, in order to save her from slavery. What right, in other words, did she have to offer her child death as a sanctuary from bondage? Herein lies the paradox of political engagement when the subject of politics is the slave. "It was the right thing to do," Toni Morrison said, "but she had no right to do it."²

The analogy between on the one hand, Sethe and Beloved, and, on the other hand, insurgents from The Black Liberation Army is a structural analogy which highlights how both the BLA insurgents and Toni Morrison's characters (Toni Morrison herself!) are void of relationality. In such a void, death is a synonym for sanctuary. When death is a synonym for sanctuary, political engagement is, to say the least, a paradoxical undertaking.

The political communiqué is that text which the revolutionary offers the world in order to make her/his thought and actions legible to all, if acceptable only to some. The political communiqué attends to the legitimacy of tactics ("the right thing to do"), and it attends to the ethics of strategy ("the right to do it"). It can only succeed if its author has a "right" to authorization. But Blacks do not have a right to authorization because our status as beings who are sentient but socially dead means that our "everyday practices...occur in the default of the political, in the absence of the rights of man or the assurances of the self-possessed individual, and perhaps even with a 'person,' in the usual meaning of the term" (Hartman 65). This means that our existence is not *our* existence, but is embedded in "the master's prerogative" (Hartman and Wilderson 188).

To the extent that the arrangement of domination in the antebellum south (and in the one-thousand-three-hundred-year enslavement of people who, through slavery, became known as Africans (Anderson *The Black Holocaust for Beginners*)) is to be thought of as history, it should be thought of as “a history of the present” (Hartman and Wilderson 190); as a schematization of Black life which changes in important but ultimately inessential ways.³ Literary and cultural theorist and historian Saidiya Hartman writes, “If slave status was the primary determinant of racial identity in the antebellum period, with ‘free’ being equivalent to ‘white’ and slave status defining blackness, how does the production and valuation of race change in the context of freedom and equality?” (118) The question, of course, is rhetorical; its purpose is to alert us to the blind spots which critical theorists have when thinking relations of power through the figure of the Black, the Slave: the end of the chattel technologies of slavery is often transposed as the end of slavery itself; which, in turn, permits the facile drawing of political analogies between Blacks and workers, and between Blacks and postcolonial subjects. Hartman goes on to highlight the theoretical pitfalls which result from this ruse of analogy.

Legal liberalism as well as critical race theory, has examined issues of race, racism, and equality by focusing on the exclusion and marginalization of those subjects and bodies marked as different and/or inferior. The disadvantage of this approach is that the proposed remedies and correctives to the problem— inclusion, protection, and greater access to opportunity—do not ultimately challenge the economy of racial production or its truth claims or interrogate the exclusion constitutive of the norm but instead seek to gain equality, liberation, and redress within its confines. (Hartman 234)

This explains why the Slave’s political communiqué raises a specter of something far more portentous than the call to arms of a revolutionary Marxist or postcolonial political communiqué. In this essay, I argue that Marxist and postcolonial armed struggle, though radically destabilizing of the status quo, are also endeavors which, through their narrative capacity to assimilate “universal” frameworks of liberation and redress, unwittingly work to reconstitute the paradigms they seek to destroy. They interrogate and attack the violence which constitutes bourgeois modes of authorization in the hopes of instantiating analytic modes of authorization. A Black Liberation Army political communiqué becomes symptomatic of an undertaking that threatens authorization itself.

The arc of an emancipatory progression which ends in either equality, liberation, or redress, in other words, a narrative of liberation, is marked by the three generic

moments that one finds in any narrative: a progression from equilibrium (the spatial-temporal point prior to oppression), disequilibrium (capitalist political economy or the arrival and residence taking of the settler), and equilibrium restored/reorganized/ or reimagined (the dictatorship of the proletariat or the settler's removal from one's land).⁴ But this generic progression, which positions the *Human* subject within a dynamic, dialogical context (a terrain pregnant with uncertainty and multiplicities of outcomes, a terrain on which one is not merely an object of uncertainty but a subject of it) fortifies and extends the *Slave's* "carceral continuum,"⁵ the time of no time at all. This is why the Black insurgent's communiqué is a torturous clash between, on the one hand, an unconscious realization that structural violence has elaborated Blacks so as to make our existence *void of analogy* and, on the other hand, a plaintive yearning to be recognized and incorporated by analogy nonetheless. Black Liberation Army member Assata Shakur's "To My People" communiqué is illustrative of this paradox.

Assata Shakur was captured on the New Jersey Turnpike in 1973, during a shootout with state troopers that left one BLA paramilitary dead and one police officer dead. She was shot in the chest and then dragged into the roadside and kicked and punched by police officers who demanded to know in which direction her comrade Sundiata Acoli had fled. She spent four years in and out of court on trumped-up charges for a series of so-called crimes, such as bank expropriation. She was acquitted on all charges except for the murder of a New Jersey state trooper. Forensic evidence showed that she could not have fired a gun that evening; and the trajectory of bullets that are, to this day, still lodged in her chest indicated that when the police shot her, her hands were in the air in a universally recognized sign of surrender. (Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*, 3-4, xix, xi-xviii)

Assata spent her first month in the Middlesex County Workhouse hammering out a communiqué intended to counter the police and press campaigns portraying her as a common criminal "going around," she wrote, "shooting down cops for the hell of it. I had to make a statement" (Shakur, 49). Her attorney, Evelyn Williams, who was also Assata's aunt, smuggled a tape recorder into the prison; and, on July 4th, 1973, America's Day of Independence, her communiqué was broadcast on many radio stations.

It begins like this:

Black brothers, Black sisters, i want you to know that i love you and i hope that somewhere in your hearts you have love for me. My name is Assata

Shakur (slave name joane chesimard), and i am a revolutionary. A Black revolutionary. By that i mean that i have declared war on all forces that have raped our women, castrated our men, and kept our babies empty-bellied.

I have declared war on the rich who prosper on our poverty, the politicians who lie to us with smiling faces, and all the mindless, heartless robots who protect them and their property.

I am a Black revolutionary, and, as such, i am a victim of all the wrath, hatred, and slander that amerika is capable of. Like all other Black revolutionaries, amerika is trying to lynch me.

I am a Black revolutionary woman, and because of this i have been charged with and accused of every alleged crime in which a woman was believed to have participated. The alleged crimes in which only men were supposedly involved, i have been accused of planning. They have plastered pictures alleged to be me in post offices, airports, hotels, police cars, subways, banks, television, and newspapers. They have offered over fifty thousand dollars in rewards for my capture and they have issued orders to shoot on sight and shoot to kill.

I am a Black revolutionary, and, by definition, that makes me part of the Black Liberation Army. The pigs have used their newspapers and TVs to paint the Black Liberation Army as vicious, brutal, mad-dog criminals. They have called us gangsters and gun molls and have compared us to such characters as john dillinger and ma barker. It should be clear, it must be clear to anyone who can think, see, or hear, that we are the victims. The victims and not the criminals. (Shakur 49–50)

The conscious declarations of Assata's communiqué—its Marxist/postcolonial intention⁶—struggle to assert something within Blackness that is prior to the devastation that defines Blackness (Judy); but the force of the repetition compulsion with which the communiqué lists, illustrates, and returns to this devastation is vertiginous. "i am a victim of all the wrath, hatred, and slander that amerika is capable of...amerika is trying to lynch me...The pigs have used their newspapers and TVs to paint the Black Liberation Army as vicious, brutal, mad-dog criminals" (Shakur 49–50).

The communiqué contains few narrative fragments which can be cobbled together with enough muscle to check this devastation, to act on it in a contrapuntal way: This is not a case of the “compulsion to repeat,” which Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, whereby the repetition is “something that seems [...] more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides” (Freud 23).⁷ Assata Shakur’s communiqué contains no political strategy or therapeutic agency through which the violence which engulfs her flesh can be separated from the text’s compulsion to repeat that violence.

In a “normal” situation, a therapeutic and/or political intervention could be made to help, in the case of therapy, the subject become aware of a distinction between the violence she may indeed encounter from the state and a range of psychic alternatives to letting that violence consume her unconscious; and, in the case of politics, the vision elaborated by a movement could help the subject imagine a new day, and thus imbue state violence with a temporal finitude (“our day will come” as Irish Republicans used to say, and, so it did), even if the subject doesn’t live to experience that finitude. But recourse to political and therapeutic resources presumes a potential for separating skeins of unconscious compulsion (the compulsion to repeat) from the violence whose incursions are being compulsively repeated. This presumption only works for Human subjects, subjects whose relationship to violence is contingent upon their transgressions. The Slave’s relationship to violence is not contingent, it is gratuitous—it bleeds out beyond the grasp of narration, from the Symbolic to the Real, where therapy and politics have no purchase.⁸

In declaring “i have declared war on all forces that have raped our women, castrated our men, and kept our babies empty-bellied,” she claims, for herself and for Black people, in general, a gendered integrity which the unconscious symptoms of her text (the violent swirl) indicate are *not* recognized by the world in which she lives. It is as though, by positing these horrific sexual violations in a manner which is properly gendered, one which relegates castration to Black men and rape to Black women, the communiqué offers her (and her Black readers) the protection of a sanctuary that they otherwise might not have. It is not, of course, sanctuary from actual rapes and castration but the sanctuary of gendered recognition and incorporation which emplotment in a narrative continuum provides: the event of gender (equilibrium) is now being violated, by rape or castration (disequilibrium), and this turn of events is the essence of agency, through which equilibrium can be restored. But “if the definition of the crime of rape,” as Hartman argues:

relies upon the capacity to give consent or exercise will, then how does one make legible the sexual violation of the enslaved when that which would constitute evidence of intentionality, and thus evidence of the crime—the state of consent or willingness of the assailed—opens up a Pandora’s box in which the subject formation and object constitution of the enslaved female are no less ponderous than the crime itself or when the legal definition of the enslaved negates the very idea of “reasonable resistance”? (80) We might also consider whether the wanton and indiscriminate uses of the captive body can be made sense of within the heteronormative framing of sexual violation as rape. (74)

By parceling rape out to women, castration to men, the political communiqué offers the Black author and the Black reader a sense that their political agency is something more than mere “borrowed institutionality.”⁹ And it saves the Black insurgent from the realization that the dust up is not between the workers and the bosses, not between settler and the native, not between the queer and the straight, but between the living and the dead. If we look closely we also see that gender itself cannot be reconciled with a slave’s genealogical isolation; that, for the Slave, there is no surplus value to be restored to the time of labor; that no treaties between Blacks and Humans are in Washington waiting to be signed and ratified; and that, unlike the Settler in the Native American political imagination, there is no place like Europe to which the Slave can return Human beings.

DEATH AND DIALOGUE

Assata Shakur begins her communiqué by declaring her love for Black people; but there’s a note of uncertainty as to their love for her: “i hope that somewhere in your hearts you have love for me.” This is an early example of something that troubles the communiqué from beginning to end: that there is no third term, no “mediating objects” which can be called upon as third-term semiotic markers in self-representation (Raggatt 401). In, for example, her explanation of the change of her name from joanne chesimard to Assata Shakur, the third-term semiotic marker, the mediating object, is slavery, which is to say the abyss of social death, as opposed to a site of culture or economic plenitude, like a lost nation. In other words, the signifier that mediates this aspect of a presumed relation to a presumed people is really the absence of signification, rather than an event – or a place within

signification. “it is a “trace[...] of memory [which] function[s] in a manner akin to a phantom limb, in that what is felt is no longer there. It is a sentient recollection of connectedness experienced at the site of rupture, where the very consciousness of disconnectedness acts as a mode of testimony;” and as such it cannot function as a catalyst for a “return to an originary plenitude” (Hartman 74). Nor, as we scale up the ladder of abstraction, do we find the plenitude of mediating objects which most postcolonial and Marxist paramilitaries would take for granted.

In “The Dialogical Self and Thirdness: A Semiotic Approach to Positioning Using Dialogical Triads,” Peter Raggatt reminds us of Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic deployment of the idea of “‘Thirdness’ as the influence of one subject on a second mediated by a third.” “Third-term mediators are distinctive,” Raggatt argues “because they have a doubled quality, defining both similarities and differences between opposing positions” (401). Land, labor-power, and culture artifacts (such as language and customs) are often the third-term mediator as we move up the scale of abstraction in paramilitary political communiqués. The Black Liberation Army did, in fact, take positions on the land question, in which they demanded that most of the Southeastern United States, what’s known as “The Black Belt,” be given to the descendants of slaves to form an independent country called New Afrika.¹⁰ I want to bracket the objection that this land belongs to the Cherokee and other so-called Civilized Tribes, and it wasn’t the BLA’s land to claim or reclaim. While one can only agree with that argument, I think it misses the point. The point is that social death is a condition, void, not of land, but of a capacity to secure relational status through transindividual objects—be those objects elaborated by land, labor, or love. My argument is not that the BLA’s politics were ethical or unethical, but that the genome of political discourse is *inherently* anti-Black. The inherent anti-Blackness of political discourse can be discerned by discovering the anti-Blackness of narrative itself, by examining how the ontology of basic elements which constitute narrative are themselves constituted by the violence of slavery and how and why the narrative elements cannot be assimilated by genealogical isolates.

In a postcolonial political communiqué (a communiqué written by an insurgent who is not Black), Assata’s phrase, “I have declared war,” would typically function as a chronotope, a spatial-temporal fragment. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin writes:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are [...] expressed in literature. [In the chronotope, time]

thickens, takes on flesh, becomes [...] visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the chronotope. (Bakhtin 84)

The Bakhtinian chronotope is one narrative element whose ontological status is ruptured when it is deployed as an element in the Slave's narrative. When the Slave is the primary figure in narrative (such as the discourse of liberation), a thirteen-hundred-year carceral continuum incarcerates and suppresses the elements which are deployed to produce what Bakhtin called the dialogic imagination. Reciprocation, reversals, hybrid amalgamations—all this becomes unsustainable when the figure in the narrative is Black. We should note, however, that before the chronotope is manifest in discourse, and before it is refashioned and deployed in the narrative of liberation, its assumptive logic comes to us with capacities the Slave does not possess: the capacity to transpose time into event, and the capacity to transpose space into place.

Assata's communiqué is not a postcolonial or Marxist political communiqué, even though its narrative intent aspires to recognition and incorporation by way of its assumptive logics. We see that even though the chronotope of "resistance time" is repeated several times, it cannot establish a relay between itself and a *mediating object* (such as land or labor power) which can be recognized and incorporated as an object of loss.

For Bakhtin, the integrity of the chronotope depends on its being *delinked* from certainty. "Resistance time" should not be embedded with the certainty of victory but with an *uncertainty* which rests upon the labors of Human agency. Its life force is *not* contained in the realization that the postcolonial subject will get her land back eventually, but in the realization that the outcome of the conflict is up for grabs. The guaranteed return of the land is not what imbues a people with their collective sense of futurity. On the contrary, it is the knowledge that the outcome is not known. This heightens their sense of urgency, intensifies their experience of themselves as beings who are alive, whose agency might fail or succeed in their efforts to remake the world. Bakhtin writes, "nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future" (Bakhtin 166).

In “The Chronotopes of Humanness: Bakhtin and Dostoevsky,” Gary Saul Morson amplifies Bakhtin’s assertion that the dialogic situation does not “follow any preset path”; it “does not ‘unfold,’ it ‘becomes’”; because “[t]he same conversational starting point can always lead to multiple continuations” (Morson 94). “For life to be meaningful,” Morson continues:

[t]he world must really be uncertain in this sense *and* we must experience it as such. Determinism destroys uncertainty, while capital punishment destroys the sense of uncertainty. The horror of absolute certainty explains the remarkable image of a man begging for mercy even after his throat has been cut: the victim may know that he is sure to die, but so unacceptable is that knowledge, that he acts as if his throat were only just about to be cut. He manufactures suspense. (Morson 104-105)

David Marriott is a critical theorist whose psychoanalytic explanations of the role mutilated, dying or dead Black men play in the psychic life of culture clashes with the idea that all lives can be made meaningful, as Morson’s vignette of a dying man suggests. There are profound ways in which Marriott agrees with Morson: Marriott would concur that determinism destroys uncertainty; and that capital punishment destroys the *sense* of uncertainty. But Marriott would choose a different image to illustrate what Morson calls the horror of absolute certainty. Instead of borrowing Morson’s image of a man whose throat had been slit, Marriott borrows Assata Shakur’s image of castration. Once this happens the analogy breaks down; the ontological implications of the two men bleeding to death cannot be reconciled. Compare Morson’s dying man...“The horror of absolute certainty explains the remarkable image of a man begging for mercy even after his throat has been cut: the victim may know that he is sure to die, but so unacceptable is that knowledge, that he acts as if his throat were only just about to be cut. He manufactures suspense” (105)... to Marriott’s dying man. Marriott begins by quoting from a 1934 book titled *The Lynching of Claude Neal*: “After taking the nigger to the woods ...they cut off his penis. He was made to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked it” (Marriott 6). These are the words of a White man who was there and probably partook in the “festivities.” Marriott continues:

The act of forcing a man to ‘fuck’ himself to death with his own excised genitals, to feed and gorge himself on his own violating (violated) pleasure, may well have been hugely satisfying to those assembled—especially when the man got to confess his own (seeming) enjoyment.

To hear him desire his own death—and so turn their terrible pleasure into his own violent wish—was to construct a vision of a castrated black man as one actively seeking the pleasures of castration. (Marriott 6, 9)

The determinism that Morson laments in his cautionary tale about how life goes askew when conditions necessary for Bakhtinian dialogue are corrupted is a determinism which is situated in the realm of experience. We know this because even as the man with the slit throat is dying he still has a hand in the tyranny of closure that will end his life and, also, end his sense of life. Morson calls the injunction that prevents a dialogic situation “capital punishment”; in other words, we have arrived at this moment of the slit throat because the victim has transgressed some code, some law, for which he is being punished. But the lynching victim in Marriott’s example is not being punished. Even if the lynchers claim the he is. Marriott implies that punishment is a ruse, a secondary consideration at best. What the scene is really about is the lynchers’ ritual of self-making; through this ritual they fashion themselves as selves. The man being lynched has “no ontological resistance” (Fanon 110) in their eyes; which may explain why he, unlike Morson’s victim, doesn’t waste his last precious moments manufacturing suspense. Morson’s victim finds the knowledge of his certain death, the determined end to a life of uncertainty, to be “unacceptable.” Marriott’s man knows that such a posture reeks of agency, reeks of entitlement, reeks of a man who may be dying but who will carry his unconscious to the grave with him. In contradistinction, the lynching ritual demands of its victim much more than death. The violence is all around this victim, *but it is inside him as well*. His psychic capacity to manufacture suspense, to possess, that is, his own desire has been usurped by the desire of his lynchers. No executioner makes such demands on behalf of the state. As Marriott writes, “he must turn [the lyncher’s] terrible pleasure into his own violent wish.” In his dying moments he must pursue White pleasure through his own castration. Something more profound and ineffable than “determinism” is at work here. Determinism implies a temporary injunction against narrative sequencing, and by extension against political activity; an injunction against what Bakhtin calls the “dialogic situation.” What Marriott is describing is a permanent injunction against ontology—whether that ontology is experienced as the determinism of capital punishment or as the uncertainty of the dialogic situation. The sentient being in Morson’s cautionary tale enters the event of capital punishment as a subject, and he takes his Human inheritance with him to the grave; his neurotic machinations are proof of this. The sentient being in Marriott’s example—the slave, the Black—cannot even savor some form of neurotic pleasure in his own annihilation. The photographs of Assata

that she writes about in her political communiqué—or of some Black women who may or may not have looked like her—are photographs which graced post offices, airports, hotels and banks, and labor like the photographs of lynching victims which became post cards to be circulated well beyond the time and place of the ghastly event. The photographs of Assata were not photographs whose main purpose was to catch a so-called political terrorist. That would be too simple; that would be too Human. They were photographs in which she, like the lynched man above, became a “figure in a public event”; a figure whose political agenda and motive will was never under consideration; a figure who is always already an implement to help the Human (and I need to be clear here: by Human I mean not only Whites, but Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and non-Black women of color—Whites and their junior partners) fashion selfhood, to help them secure the integration and closure of their bodily schemas; to help them facilitate the identification with their fellow citizens whom they may never meet: nonetheless these dead implements and the images of them which circulate in all their mutilated splendor are the genetic material of civil society, the DNA of Human life.

A GATED COMMUNITY

Postcolonial and Marxist paramilitaries are assimilated by a range of transindividual icons, images, and concepts which secure their communiqués’ coherence. Consider Seán Mac Stíofáin’s (first chief of staff of the Provisional IRA) message printed in *Hands Off Ireland!*

[T]he *nationally minded*, the Irish-minded people of the North know that the IRA is their army, is the revolutionary army of the Irish people, and they know that many IRA volunteers have died fighting in defence of their areas. They know they will never be able to lead a normal, peaceful and happy life until the British imperialist presence has been removed from this country. (O’Boyle 32)

Land, as a transindividual third term, mediates a dialogical situation, one which implies a rich field of semiotic play at a level of abstraction which is higher than Assata Shakur’s level of abstraction. Mac Stíofáin’s communiqué enables him to enter the lists of similarities and differences more indicative of the Symbolic push and pull of hegemonic struggle, over, for example, the status of national identity,

the value of political martyrdom, and the restoration of civil society; all of which grounds his discourse in a kind of political *sanity* which is indicative of how well the Symbolic push and pull protects him from the Imaginary's collisions of murder and absolute identification found throughout Assata Shakur's communiqué.

His communiqué can enter into the realm of politics, a world of surprise endings and possibilities; the narrative will not fold in on itself—it can escape the loop of repetition; a loop that would otherwise crowd out politics because it crowds out agency. The political agency resides in the uncertain outcome of the struggle over transindividual objects—transindividual because they secure political ontology for the British *and* the Republicans alike. The question Mac Stíofáin's communiqué poses is who will prevail at a conceptual level, not the question of who is alive and who is dead, as in the case of the Human and the Slave.

Assata Shakur's political communiqué starts much closer to the body than the IRA or Red Army Faction communiqué (below). When she says she hopes that her people love her, she is intimating something deeper than a question of affection—there is a paradigmatic, ontological, question here as well. There is no need for Seán Mac Stíofáin to solicit Catholic working class affection because the question of love has already been mediated through/by the concept of land. In other words, it is not a question of *Mac Stíofáin's subjectivity* which is at stake. Affection is not so mimetic in his situation as to make it an all or nothing proposition. Land acts as a third term, a grounding wire which *shifts the affect from one of immediacy to one of mediacy*; it takes the neurotic charge out of the question of love, it makes love a symbolic, and therefore negotiated, endeavor, one which has a range of possible outcomes and interpretations, rather than a precursor to the confirmation or denial of his existence. Mac Stíofáin, the paramilitary author of the communiqué, has no need for the reader to recognize and incorporate his psychic presence through a declaration of love, because his psychic presence has been secured, *a priori*, by his—and his readers (be they friend or foe!)—shared capacity to inhabit and transform meaningless space into meaningful place. Mac Stíofáin is a person, and the Irish are his *people* because they are always already cartographically located; even at the time of the communiqué's release (when their land is occupied by invaders). And this is where temporality and spatiality cross: there was a time of place, even though it was almost a thousand years ago; therefore, there can be a time of place again, when the British are driven away. Equilibrium. Disequilibrium. Equilibrium restored.

Peter Raggatt's third-term mediators facilitate narrative progression, even when they do not bear the tactile solidity of spatial metaphors. The narrative arc of *equilibrium, disequilibrium, equilibrium restored* still maintains its moorings in the realm of the Symbolic; that is to say, it and its author are protected from the ravages of the Imaginary even though the event of equilibrium restored promises the restoration of an abstraction whose referent is hard to concretize. (The olive tree is a common symbol of a Palestinian third-term mediator but no two artists would paint the same portrait of lost labor time or labor time restored.) Ulrike Meinhof's Red Army Faction communiqué of third-term mediators is able to work temporally, without, to a large extent, the tactile solidity of spatial metaphors.

Three years before Assata Shakur's "To My People," Ulrike Meinhof issued one of the first Red Army Faction communiqués, in which, on behalf of RAF paramilitaries, she argued that urban guerrilla warfare represents "the only revolutionary method of intervention available to what are on the whole weak revolutionary forces."

To this extent the urban guerrilla is the logical *consequence of the negation of parliamentary democracy* long since perpetuated by its very own representatives; the *only and inevitable response to emergency laws and the rule of the hand grenade*; the readiness to fight with those same means the system has chosen to use in trying to eliminate its opponents. The urban guerrilla is based on a recognition of the facts instead of an apologia of the facts. The urban guerrilla can concretize verbal internationalism as the requisition of guns and money. He can blunt the state's weapon of a ban on communists by organizing an underground beyond the reach of the police. The urban guerrilla is a weapon in the class war. The urban guerrilla signifies armed struggle, necessary to the extent that it is the police which makes indiscriminate use of firearms, *exonerating class justice from guilt and burying our comrades alive unless we prevent them [...]*. The urban guerrilla's aim is to attack the state's apparatus of control at certain points and put them out of action, to *destroy the myth* of the system's omnipresence and invulnerability.¹¹

Meinhof's political communiqué asserts the ethical necessity of urban guerrilla activism as though there was consensus on this point within the West German Left. But the fact that not everyone on the West German Left supports RAF tactics, and that the West German Right has an economic analysis which cannot be reconciled with hers, does *not* throw into crisis the temporal logic, the Human

community's assimilation of the communiqué's third-term mediators. A common orientation to a call to arms is not what secures and stabilizes the coherence of a political communiqué. The communiqué's coherence is secured and stabilized because Ulrike Meinhof and her readers are assimilated by the event—not by this or that event but *by event as a formal instantiation of Human endeavors*. It must be re-emphasized that the *event* is not in service to political agreement; it is in service to symbolic exchange, to the elaboration of dialogic context. Where the transindividual modalities of cartography labored to this end in Seán Mac Stíofáin's political communiqué, Ulrike Meinhof's communiqué is anchored by its transindividual inheritance and heritage.

The working day swans throughout Meinhof's text without needing to be named. The character of the working day is what the RAF and the capitalist struggle over—not the coherence of labor-time itself. To be sure, this is a high-stakes struggle (as the violence of the state and Meinhof's counter violence indicate) over the character and ownership of labor time (will it be exploited by those who consume or will it be exploited by those who work); but it is not a struggle over the narrative coherence of labor-time itself. Though the RAF and the capitalist are locked in mortal combat over economic supremacy and symbolic hegemony, this combat is *not a struggle between species*. They both belong to the Human race. The transindividuated nature of the working day as a third-term mediator secures the political integrity of their species, just as the more generic capacity to produce, distribute and consume (or be assimilated by) third term mediators secures the integrity of their mutual Humanity. It also—and this is key—is what separates them from the dead (i.e., Assata, the BLA, and Black people at large).

Political agreement is secondary to species consolidation; in fact, we could say that the political disagreement might consolidate the Human species more effectively than political agreement. The temporal shifts in class relations which Meinhof's communiqué reports on, i.e., the "*negation of parliamentary democracy*" which led to "emergency laws and the rule of the hand grenade" are not, as Meinhof and other Marxist and postcolonial writers aver, indicators of temporal shifts in species relations. Put differently, the violence which enables and maintains these shifts cannot be analogized with the violence which enables and maintains Assata Shakur's subjugation. Class warfare marks important shifts in *intra-species* relations, not essential shifts in relations between antagonists. Meinhof is wrong: the bosses are not her antagonists. Mac Stíofáin is wrong: the British are not his antagonists. They and their oppressors have a common antagonist, the Black.

The mediating objects of cartography and the event, which Meinhof and Mac Stíofáin possess not as a result of their labors but which are, rather, bequeathed them as Human inheritance, stabilize the political communiqué in those moments when they must legitimize political violence. Mac Stíofáin asserts the goal is to remove British “presence” from Ireland and to die, if necessary, in the process. The imposition of a British cartography inhibits the restoration of Irish territorial integrity—from the corporeal to the nation. But the corporeal and the national are not threatened as *schemas*; symbolic resonance remains intact.

Ulrike Meinhof extends Mac Stíofáin’s cartographic mediation by invoking the temporality of narrative itself: revolutionary violence will “destroy the myth of the system’s omnipresence and invulnerability” and “exonerate[e] class justice from guilt.” In other words, RAF violence is in service to a project which infuses chronology with ethics; a violence which enables a pilgrim’s progress from mystification to clarification. This makes urban guerrilla warfare something very different for Meinhof and Mac Stíofáin than it is for Assata Shakur. What Meinhof’s communiqué is saying is that urban guerrilla warfare is that force which contributes to the unmasking of capitalist social relations. The crisis in civil society which this brings about will catalyze a more essential unmasking of the commodity form’s circuit of displacement, substitution, and signification. Meinhof and Mac Stíofáin think they will undo the world in this way and bring about a new paradigm, but by leaving the violence of Black revolt out of the equation, their proletariat and postcolonial violence “destroy[s] the myth” of a capitalist or colonizing “omnipresence and invulnerability” (Meinhof), while it simultaneously reinvigorates the generative mechanisms of Human life (i.e., the Symbolic Order), mechanisms which are not available to the Slave.

Revolutionary strategies, which unmask the hypostasized form that value (i.e., the commodity) takes as it masks both its differential and social relations, experience the humiliation of their explanatory power when confronted with the Black. For the Black has no social relation(s) to be either masked or unmasked—not, that is, in a structural sense. Social relations depend on various pretenses to the contrary; therefore, what gets masked by Meinhof’s and Mac Stíofáin’s revolutionary violence is, as we will see, the matrix of violence that makes Black relationality an oxymoron. To relate, socially, one must enter a social drama’s *mise-en-scène* with spatial and temporal coherence—in other words, with human capacity. Shakur is not so much the antithesis of human capacity (for that might imply a dialectic potential in the Slave’s encounter with the world) as she is the absence of Human capacity.

There is no shortness of breath, no unmoored flights of impressionism in Meinhof's¹² and Mac Stíofáin's legitimization of terror, not because they are brave and committed but because, compared to Assata Shakur, the spatial-temporal context from which they espouse terror is not so terrifying. Everywhere you look, the terror they describe and the terror they unleash has symbolic resonance and legitimation. Therefore terrorism, as a way of characterizing IRA violence against the British, or RAF violence against the West German upper class, loses its universal horror and is made relative by how one Human lives her symbolic presence with, through, and against the symbolic presence of another Human. This shared context of symbolic resonance and legitimation, a dialogic context, continues to exist once the state has quashed non-Black paramilitaries.

Dennis A. Pluchinsky, an analyst who, in 1993, worked for the U.S. Department of State, Office of Intelligence and Threat Analysis, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, characterized the final communiqués of the RAF as documents “that reflect the RAF's ideological fatigue, strategic confusion, and organizational isolation” (Pluchinsky 136), but his gloating obituary of the RAF also reveals the degree to which the RAF existed in a dialogic context with the state it sought to destroy, as evinced in prison reforms and prisoner releases which came about as a result of armed assaults against the state *and* as a result of discussions between the RAF and the government, reflected in the “Kinkel Initiative,” named after Klaus Kinkel, the then-Minister of Justice in West Germany.

Government sanctioned intellectuals like Pluchinsky see the demobilization of groups like the RAF as a failure of political discourse when, in point of fact, the ability of a handful of paramilitaries to “occup[y] the European stage for over 22 years” (Pluchinsky 136), bring one of the strongest police states in the Western world to the negotiating table, secure better conditions for some of their comrades and, from 1992 to 2011, the release of virtually all of their comrades (Assaf Moghadam “Failure and Disengagement in the Red Army Faction” 172-173) could just as readily be characterized as the *success* of RAF political discourse, and of a certain amount of “ideological fatigue, strategic confusion, and organizational isolation” (Pluchinsky 136) on the part of the government.

The most important intervention to be made here is not, I am arguing, one which takes the form of a corrective to the neoliberal agenda of state sanctioned intellectuals like Pluchinsky and Moghadam who denounce armed struggle on the left and characterize its aftereffects as political failures. Nor is my project one of shoring-up the revolutionary backbone of more left-leaning intellectuals who

misconstrue tactics for strategy, and thereby produce scholarship which anguishes over questions such as “how to judge [60’s- and 70’s-era left wing violence] in political and moral terms” (Varon “Refusing to be ‘Good Germans’...29) and, as soon as they ask the question, turn around and answer it with a lament that left wing political violence of the era “irrespective of [its] grandiose goals of advancing ‘revolution,’ contributed to a domestic climate of chaos that imposed a political limit on the length and intensity of the Vietnam War” (Varon, *ibid*, 33-34)¹³. Both projects, though at opposite ends of a political spectrum, are enmeshed in the same project of civic (Human) stability and monumentalization.

The left liberal *Weltschmerz* over tactics is, perhaps, the most pernicious because, compared to the straight-ahead condemnation of political violence from scholars like Pluchinsky and Moghadam, it more successfully reproduces networks of “connections, transfers and displacements” (Miller and Rose 1994: 31), in short, articulations, between members of the Human family (articulations which, I am also arguing are both necessary for Human renewal and for the ontological isolation of the Slave). Varon’s epilogue to an anthology on the RAF’s cultural impact is a case in point. He writes:

States combating terrorism typically claim to defend not simply their legitimacy and the well-being of their political community, but the values of the civilised world—civilisation itself—against a resolutely evil foe. The “terrorists,” by contrast, declare the wholesale illegitimacy of the power they oppose. Claiming the mantle of freedom fighters, agents of liberation, or holy warriors, they see their violence not simply as a grim political necessity but as virtuous and even, in many cases, explicitly sacred service to some grand narrative of emancipation or moral cleansing. The public—the vital “third term” within terrorism—is drawn not only into the material drama of strike and counter-strike, but into a larger discursive battle of the conflict itself and the broader social realities. (Varon “Stammheim Forever and the Ghosts of Guantanamo... 2008b, 303)

Here, the paramilitaries and the state exist in a macabre exaggeration of the Lacanian Imaginary, a neurotic and deadly dyad of mirror images which impoverish the collective psyche of the Human family. But “the public,” as a third-term mediating object, stands as that entity which triangulates the exchange and provides the Humans with a path from the Imaginary to the Symbolic: “the fusion of structures of representation and institutional structures, as in Levi-Strauss’s linguistic model

of kinship systems” (Feldman 289). Though Varon’s assessment is moral, intended to labor in the realm of experience, it unintentionally demonstrates how Human capacity functions and is authorized in its more formal dimensions, thereby giving us insight into the divergence between Human ontology and the Black’s ontological void. It allows us to segue into an explanation as to how intra-Human violence functions as the rebar of relationality rather than the wrecking ball of relationality, as both the liberal left and the neo-liberal right would have us believe.

The pageantry of “strike/counter-strike” intensified White Germans’ proclivity to imagine political conflict, which is to say “affilial” struggles, through filial frames. Throughout the critical and journalistic literature, the “Good German” dilemma raised by the strike/counter-strike violence, questions of citizenship and state power which would ordinarily be categorized as affilial dilemmas involving “transpersonal forms of authority...such as...class...and hegemony¹⁴, are displaced onto the good wife dilemma (to be or not to be), the dilemma of the good daughter, the good son, the good father or the good mother, questions which would ordinarily be categorized as filial, involving “natural forms of authority...involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict.”¹⁵ The violence wove a tapestry of articulations, “connections, transfers and displacements” (Miller and Rose 31), between affilial frames of reference and filial frames of reference (some were rational and level-headed, others quite bizarre) *in which the filial frame was, primarily, hegemonic*, for the simple reason that it orients and grounds the scholarship and journalism in the manner of a faith-based initiative: without the need for an justifications for, or explanations of, its deployment.

The three phases of RAF armed insurgency are referred to as “generations” regardless of whether the writer is hostile to the groups or in some way sympathetic. What the framing allows for is a deeper, more unconscious saturation of Human authority because this framing naturalizes state authority as family authority. “[C]haracteristics of the family environment are projected onto the social environment” in such a way as to allow for “no disproportion between family life and the life of the nation” (Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks* 121-122).

Generational framing consolidates the orientation of criticism,¹⁶ and it overdetermines the way visual representations of the RAF-era are curated. “The most striking example of this is the use of a pram as memory object at the permanent exhibition of the German History Museum...Germany’s controversial terrorist past is represented by an object associated with woman’s cultural role...reduced to a pram carrying weapons...blamed on phallic women... and ‘effeminate’ men such

as Baader who allow such women to dominate” (Bielby 137, 138, 147)

One of the more bizarre examples of what I am describing is to be found in the visual artist Jutta Brückner’s comments about her video installation, *Bräute des Nichts: Der weibliche Terror: Magda Goebbels und Ulrike Meinhof* (Brides of nothing: female terrorism: Magda Goebbels and Ulrike Meinhof), in which she asserts an “unprecedented connection between Magda Goebbels and Ulrike Meinhof”; a connection which “allows a different, female story of modern times to be told.” “I understand Magda Goebbels and Ulrike Meinhof as women who, each in their own way fought out the battle between old and new forms of politics through the medium of their bodies.” These assertions are crowned by the declaration: “Magda Goebbels could have been the mother of Ulrike Meinhof” (Quoted in Bielby, 145-46).

A less peculiar but no less instructive example of filial authorization manifest as the foundation for state authorization—resultant from the pageantry of RAF and government violence—occurred in the West German state of Bremen when, during the 2007 parliamentary elections, it was discovered that Susanne Albrecht, a former RAF paramilitary who participated in the July 1977 attempted kidnapping and subsequent slaying of Dresdner Bank chief Jürgen Ponto, was teaching English in a local public school. The Christian Democrats (CDU) said they didn’t want terrorists teaching children. The Social Democrats (SPD) argued Albrecht had served her time and renounced terror and was no longer a threat, but a citizen with rights like everyone else. The parents weighed in, issuing a statement saying, “They were outraged that Albrecht’s past was being used as a campaign issue in the Bremen elections. Albrecht ‘should continue her very successful work with the children of our school.’” (*Deutsche Welle* staff / DPA (tt), “Ex-Terrorist Becomes an Issue in German State Poll” May 12, 2007). The heat of this exchange is not to be found in the disagreement over the safety of “our” children; but rather in the unspoken consensus of the *status* of “our” children. Again, intra-Human political violence has such a disruptive effect in the realm of experience (people are injured and many die) that it can harden political and social attitudes for years; but it is also a balm, a means of relational therapy which elaborates strategies for Human renewal, and these strategies are themselves the effects of the fusion of symbolic resonances through which relationality and subjectivity, as formal entities, are constituted.

The thing to bear in mind here is how profoundly unmarked a Black paramilitary’s plight is by this messy and contrariness of civic recognition, incorporation, and

renewal. The pageantry of “strike and counter-strike” between the BLA and the state never elaborated—never *could* have elaborated—such a renewal of Human kinship; at least not one in which the Black paramilitaries in particular and Black people in general could be imagined as members of the Human family. It did not promote civic debate about the affilial isolation of Black people with respect to civil society and political economy; nor did it facilitate a reimagining of Black people as *people*, as Human kin.

Sundiata Acoli, Assata Shakur’s co-defendant in the New Jersey Turnpike shootout, had been a computer programmer for NASA prior to joining the BLA. He was an accomplished mathematician who wrote software for the USA’s first lunar landing. This aspect of his biography does nothing for him when he comes up for parole. He cannot be re-construed as former contributing member of society who helped put a man on the moon. Instead, he has been denied parole at least nine times in forty years. In 2010, at the age of seventy-three, the parole board gave him a ten year hit which means he must serve an additional six years. He will be seventy-nine years old when (if) he gets out.

In 2012 Assata Shakur, a sixty-five year old grandmother and political exile living in Cuba with three bullets in her chest, a member of a routed paramilitary organization, someone who is so isolated that she often has to go underground in Cuba to evade bounty hunters who slink from Key West to Cuba in light sea crafts in hopes of capturing her and cashing in on the now two million dollar reward, became the first woman to be added to the FBI’s Most Wanted Terrorist list.¹⁷ American civil society has not argued over her fitness as a mother, her rebirth as an educator, or whether her femininity should be compared with fascists or saints. And William Rosenau, a government sanction analyst like Pluchinsky and Moghadam, consoles his readers by claiming that today the USA faces no clear and present danger of another Black American paramilitary offensive which occurred in the 1970s.¹⁸ Per capita, more young Black men and women are in chains and cages than at the height of chattel slavery. Government assisted drug trafficking has decimated the Black urban landscape. Fewer Blacks are enrolled in tertiary educational institutions than there were prior to the advent of affirmative action. And the White American radical “allies” who in the sixties and seventies wanted to change the world, succumbed to ennui and changed their minds. At whatever scale of abstraction one might want to consider the FBI’s adding of Assata Shakur to its list of Most Wanted Terrorists, it would be hard to see the logic in it. That’s because it is not logical, it is prelogical; prelogical in the sense that the collective unconscious of law enforcement, as an integral part of the collective unconscious

of the socius, understands that Assata is a symbolic threat, but not in the same way that Ulrike Meinhof is a symbolic threat. Meinhof is a threat to stable arrangements of symbolism: both filial, the wayward daughter with a gun who threatens to unhinge The Name of the Father; and affilial, the wrathful anti-imperialist with a gun who threatens to unhinge capitalist hegemony. Assata, on the other hand (and the gun she *used* to wield), threatens not symbolic arrangements—she is not recognized and incorporated by such arrangements—but the Symbolic Order itself. A workers’ revolution blows the lid off the economy. A postcolonial revolution blows the lid of the colony. A Slave revolt blows the lid of the unconscious. The slave does not threaten capitalism with a new economic order, or filiation with a new nonpatriarchal order. The Slave threatens Order itself, whether manifest as an economic struggle between the capitalist and worker, or as a generational struggle between parent and child. Assata is a threat to the symbolic legibility and psychic coherence of Humanity writ large.

Though Klaus Kinkel and Margaret Thatcher might never have admitted it, the common relationship to symbolic presence, which they share with their RAF and IRA paramilitaries, takes the terror out of terrorism by restoring relational logic to terror, thereby ratcheting the scale of abstraction downward from terror to fear. The so-called terror of the communist, the post-colonialist, and even the jihadist labor as modes of articulation with the terror of the state; their terror constructs and conserves: it guards a *gated community* known as the Symbolic Order; gated because it keeps the Slave from entering; community because it secures a spatial-temporal context which allows for “relational positioning and articulation of identities between subjects and between subjects and objects [...]. The symbolic order is the representational limit formed by institutionalized closure that allows codes to operate, relationality to take place, and commensurations to be stabilized” (Feldman 289). “[T]he symbolic order is formed by the convergence between linguistic and social symbolism [...] that is, the fusion of structures of representation and institutional structures, as in Levi-Strauss’s linguistic model of kinship systems” (Feldman 289).

The homologous character of linguistic symbolism and social symbolism derives from the fact that both are structures of oppositional elements capable of being combined, that both establish the possibility of *recognition between subjects*, and, finally, that both necessitate the passage from *immediate “dual” relationship to a mediate relationship through the intervention of a third term*: the concept of language, and the Ancestor, the Sacred cause, the God or Law in Society.¹⁹

What Feldman is describing by way of Lemaire is a matrix for relational status of which a genealogical isolate like Assata Shakur cannot avail herself. She is an *object* of “structures of representation” and “institutional structures,” but she cannot be a subject of them, whether filial or affilial.²⁰ Her communiqué cannot “mediate relationship[s] through the intervention of a third term,” and thereby establish “recognition between subjects.” The violence which elaborates and sustains her haunted presence (if presence is the right word) allows for no “passage from [an] immediate ‘dual’ relationship to a mediate relationship.”

The textual heat of Assata Shakur’s communiqué is not cathected by transindividual concepts like land and labor power, but instead is dispersed throughout an array of bodily violations, horrifying images indexical of a structural rupture of her capacity to lay claim to transindividual concepts, to mediating objects. In Assata Shakur’s communiqué, we do not get a picture of someone whose native land has been stolen, whose labor power has been usurped, or whose culture has been quashed and corrupted. Instead, we get a picture of someone whose condition of possibility is elaborated by violence too comprehensive to comprehend: violence without analogy, violence so totalizing it prevents the closure of her bodily schema.

This comes through most poignantly in the repetition and intensity with which she invokes rapes, murders and castrations that she and her people have experienced—the violence that prohibits the closure of her bodily schema. In the one of the few places where she invokes politically coherent transgressions committed against her and her people, “the rich who prosper on our property,” we find that the cathexis is not located in the *idea* of capitalist accumulation (à la Meinhof), but in images of capitalist physiognomy: the faces, hearts, and minds of the rich and powerful—images of sentient being rather than the drama of value which that being dominates and controls.

At the lowest scale of abstraction she cannot lay claim to a proper noun, a form of unique conceptualization; nor, moving up the scale, can she lay claim to a common noun, a form of conceptualization which is collective. Therefore, her “political” violence, the armed struggle which Black Liberation Army paramilitaries embarked upon, is characteristic not of noun-possessed subjects who use violence to change the conceptual context in which they are named, i.e. political, national, and economic status, but of a nameless object fighting for *the status of subjectivity itself*;²¹ which is what makes the threat of Black armed insurrection terrifying in a way that Marxist or postcolonial and IRA insurrection could never be.

This is why civil society is so genuinely *terrified* by the prospect of Black paramilitary terror. Everyone knows (if only instinctively) how all-encompassing and timeless the terror which subsumes Blackness is. When civil society is stable, this knowledge can be a comfort, for it helps non-Black people fashion self-hood (David Marriott's lynchers) by way of a comparative calculus which reveals to them that they are safe on the shore of contingent violence rather than adrift in a sea of gratuitous violence; that even when "terror" engulfs them violence can still "mediate relationship[s] through the intervention of a third term," and can harvest symbols which restore their lives to relational logic. But when the Black paramilitary picks up the gun, the crisis on the horizon is not one of a radical shift in the temporal drama of value (as Meinhof would have it) nor one which portends a new and disorienting map (new for Mac Stíofáin, disorienting for Thatcher). It is not a crisis which looms, what looms is a catastrophe of symbolic capacity, for no symbols can represent what Black violence portends. No rational assessment of the objective conditions can soothe the nerves. This is what the phrase, "fear of a Black planet" really means: the fear of no planet at all, the fear of living one's life like a Black. A life in which there is no civic, no society, in which death is a synonym for sanctuary.

Throughout Assata's communiqué there is a stark collapse between what Antonio Gramsci calls political society ("the pigs") and civil society (newspapers, TV, hotels, subways, airports) (Gramsci 1971). The pigs have used their newspapers and TVs to paint the Black Liberation Army as vicious, brutal, mad-dog criminals" (Shakur 1987, 50)—as though it would be unimaginable for her to have had an experience in the domain of respite, civil society, that is qualitatively different from the violence she experiences in prison, political society. This absorption of civil society by political society resembles a violent totality that Allen Feldman describes in *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. He argues that violence has become "a dialogic situation" unto itself. Violence is no longer an effect of a prior, originary narrative.

Feldman's study of paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland from 1969 through the 1980s provides us with an important corrective to the cognitive map of postcolonial studies. His aim is to help us view paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland as a "political technology of the body connected to paramilitary practice both inside and outside the prison"; and to analyze violent episodes "within the general framework of the *cultural* construction of violence in Northern Ireland" (231). He urges us to think of violence *itself* as a cultural construction, rather than thinking of violence as an *effect* of, or in contingent relation to, cultural (meaning ideological)

constructions. Violence, Feldman argues, begets its own semiotic structure, it is not the product of a (non-violent) semiotic arrangement; in other words, it is not an effect of ideological imposition. He argues that the postindustrial context of economic relations, otherwise known as globalization, has subsumed all of civil society by the command modality of capital.

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin provides Feldman with the theoretical license he needs to argue that violence is not a subtracted effect from an originary mise-en-scene (Britain's ideology of domination): in a postindustrial world, where all of civil society, to echo Hardt and Negri,²² has been subsumed by command, violence has become a dialogical situation in its own right. "The dialogical situation," which violence itself can now constitute, without the aid of narrative, Feldman writes:

is one in which two or more conflictual heterogeneous, or polarized social codes are present in the same set of signifiers. These composite signs trace a history of desemantization: their incomplete detachment from prior references and their realignment with new meanings and inferences. (284)

Now that the global economy has been unhinged from production and from the gold standard, Feldman argues, violence has been unhinged from its discursive moorings. Violence forms a dialogical situation all its own; it has its own grammar, with its own heterogeneous and conflictual codes; and though this postindustrial violence bears the traces of prior references (i.e. the trace of ideology). What is equally important to our understanding violence on its own terms, to our theorizing it as a dialogical situation, is the radical implications of this detachments *from* those prior references: the realignment of its codes through new meanings and inferences means that political logic which underwrote Meinhof's and Mac Stíofáin's political communiqués has lost a great deal of its explanatory power, as the condition of the subjects on whose behalf they wrote has radically changed for the worse.

Though for Feldman's Northern Irish men and women, topos has now been subsumed by violence, the same is not true for Assata and Black people on whose behalf she fights and writes. The subsumption of their topography by violence is the very condition of Black emergence, it was *not* contingent upon shifts in global economic relations, and it did not start when Nixon took the dollar off the gold standard. We cannot even say "it goes back" to the Arab slave trade which started in 625 (Anderson; Lewis) because this would imply that there was a figure called the Black or the African who was enslaved first by the Arabs and

then by the Europeans. In other words, the idea of “going back” imbues Black suffering with a temporality that it doesn’t have; emplots the slave in the arc of equilibrium, disequilibrium, equilibrium restored; when, in point of fact, Blackness and Slaveness are coterminous.

The total subsumption of civil society by the violent command modalities of capital rob the Irish and the working class of the narrative coherence that Meinhof’s and Mac Stíofáin’s political communiqués take for granted—a totalizing violence that delivers their revolutionary heirs (for example, the third generation of RAF fighters and the IRA Hunger Strikers led by Bobby Sands) into what might be called a context of terror. Because the third-term symbolic mediators of this *new* dispensation have been so deracinated by new formations of violence, it *appears* as though the worker and the postcolonial have been repositioned as beings upon whom violence acts in accordance with its own necessity, a world in which violence is not contingent upon narrative acts, a world very much like the Slave’s. It would be tempting to end here, link arms and sing Kumbaya. If not for the fact that even this tectonic shift, this shift from the supremacy of narrative to the supremacy of violence on its own terms is predicated on a narrative progression.

Again, Blackness cannot be disimbricated from slavery, in the way that Irishness can be disimbricated from colonial rule or in the way that labor can be delinked from capital. The violence which subsumes the Irish has temporal limits (the time of the Troubles, from the late 1960s to the “Good Friday” Agreement of 1998) as well as spatial limits (the urban North). Not only is there no punctuation in the temporality of the violence that subsumes Assata, but furthermore, no cartography of violence can be mapped, for that would imply the prospect for a map of non-violent space. To the contrary, Assata Shakur’s political communiqué demonstrates that she and other Black people are in the throes of what historian David Eltis calls “violence beyond the limit” (1423), by which he means (a) in the *libidinal* economy there are no forms of violence so excessive that they would be considered too cruel to inflict upon Blacks; and (b) in *political* economy there are no rational explanations for this limitless theatre of cruelty, no explanations which would make *political* or *economic* sense of the violence she describes (as, for example, Ulrike Meinhof does). Whereas the Human’s relationship to violence is always contingent, triggered by her transgressions against the regulatory prohibitions of the Symbolic Order or by macro-economic shifts in her social context, the Slave’s relationship to violence is open ended, gratuitous, without reason or constraint, triggered by prelogical catalysts which are unmoored from her transgressions and unaccountable to historical shifts. In short, the violence of Assata Shakur’s

communiqué is not the effect of symbolic transgressions, nor is it the result (as Allen Feldman would have it) of a new, global shift in political economy—it is simply an extension of the master's prerogative.

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NOTES

1 The Justice Department-LEAA Task Force report on BLA activity records sixty BLA actions between 1970 and 1976. In the past, this report has been reproduced on BLA sanctioned websites and, most recently, in a book of essays by Jalil Muntaqim, a Black Liberation Army prisoner of war. See *We Are Our Own Liberators: Selected Prison Writings*, pp. 29-34. The University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database puts the number at thirty-six. Whereas the GTD includes BLA bank expropriations, it does not, unlike the BLA-reproduced Justice Department report, include prison escapes (successful and unsuccessful). <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?page=2&search=Black%20Liberation%20Army&expanded=no&charttype=line&chart=overtime&ob=GTDID&od=desc#results-table> (accessed July 26, 2013)

2 Toni Morrison. "Toni Morrison: Part 1 – On Love and Writing." On *Bill Moyers A World of Ideas*. Broadcast March 11, 1990. <http://billmoyers.com/content/toni-morrison-part-1/>. Accessed July 18, 2013.

3 Blackness, then, predates the Middle Passage and reconceptualizes enslavement history to include the Arab slave trade. In other words, the time of Blackness, is the time of the paradigm; it is not a temporality that can be grasped with the epistemological tools at our disposal. The time of Blackness is no time at all, because one cannot know a plenitude of Blackness distinct from Slaveness. "Historical time is the time of the worker, the time of the Indian, and the time of the woman—the time of analysis. But whereas historical time marks stasis and change within a paradigm, it does not mark the time of the paradigm, the time of time itself; the time by which the Slave's dramatic clock is set. For the Slave, historical time is no more viable a temporality of emancipation than biographical time—the time of empathy. Thus, neither the analytic aesthetic nor the empathetic aesthetic can accompany a theory of change that restores Black people to relationality. The social and political time of emancipation proclamations should not be confused

with the ontological and epistemological time of modernity itself, in which Blackness and Slaveness are imbricated ab initio.” My argument, below, is that one kind of sentient being (the worker and the postcolonial) experiences violence within historical time (a temporality that can be known as temporality); whereas another kind of sentient being, the Black-qua-Slave, is constituted ontologically by violence. One should be alive to the oxymoronic, indeed, paradoxical nature of this claim—a violence that makes for ontological is like no ontology at all. The Black is constituted by a “violence that separates ontological time (the time of the paradigm) from historical time (the time in the paradigm).” Wilderson, 339-340.

4 What distinguishes the bourgeois narrative from the Marxist narrative is the decision regarding to whom and how causal agency is to be ascribed; the “because” principle of why things happen. “A particularly strong feature of the classical [bourgeois] narrative,” says Wayne, “is the way it locates causal agency [...] at the level of individual characters. The characters with the most strongly defined goals are the characters who are charged with the causal principle of making things happen, of pushing the narrative along” (Wayne 152). The revolutionary writer would locate causal agency at the sites of collectivities in revolt and antagonisms at the site of institutional forces rather than interpersonal encounters with lovers, villains, and foes. But the story of love lost and found again, and the story of a social formation in revolt rely on the same tripartite progression.

5 “Soon the black ghetto, converted into an instrument of naked exclusion by the concurrent retrenchment of wage labour and social protection, and further destabilized by the increasing penetration of the penal arm of the state, became bound to the jail and prison system by a triple relationship of functional equivalency, structural homology and cultural syncretism, such that they now constitute a single carceral continuum which entraps a redundant population of younger black men (and increasingly women) who circulate in closed circuit between its two poles in a self-perpetuating cycle of social and legal marginality with devastating personal and social consequences.” (Wacquant, 52-53) Wacquant’s definition of the carceral continuum is helpful, even though his explanation of its generative mechanism is weighted heavily within the logic of political economy. By weighting my analysis of the Black condition on an interrogation of political discourse and the Symbolic Order, I am arguing that the carceral continuum describes the essential nature of a Black person’s life whether she is in the ghetto or the White House.

6 Primary texts which show how the BLA adapted Marxism and Postcolonial logic to a Black American context included: *Black Liberation Army Co-ordinating Committee*, eds. (197?, 2005) *Black Liberation Army Political Dictionary* [pamphlet] Montreal: Kersplebedeb Publishing; Jalil Muntaqim (1979, 2002) *On the Black Liberation Army* [pamphlet] Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit;

and *Revolutionary Armed Struggle* [pamphlet] Abraham Guillen Press/Arm the Spirit—a handbook on revolutionary armed struggle written by an anonymous Black Liberation Army soldier in the 1970s.

7 “[T]he compulsion to repeat is an ungovernable process originating in the unconscious. As a result of its action, the subject deliberately places himself in distressing situations, thereby repeating an old experience, but he does not recall this prototype; on the contrary, he has the strong impression that the situation is fully determined by the circumstances of the moment. (Laplanche and Pontalis *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 78)

8 But I should make it clear that this does not mean that the Black has no inner life and that psychoanalysis is of no use to us in thinking about that inner life. It just means that such a journey involves both a symptomatic analysis of the text anal (and, by extension, the Black’s inner life), as well as an epistemological critique of psychoanalysis itself—which does not involve a wholesale rejection of it. This dual intervention has been the focus of David Marriott’s work and, of course, of Frantz Fanon’s work as well. See Marriott’s “Frantz Fanon’s War,” in *On Black Men*.

9 Jared Sexton, private conversation.

10 The late Safiya Bukhari, a Black Panther turned BLA paramilitary writes, “The Republic of New Afrika was founded in the right of self-determination of Black people in the United States. Its name refers to the five states in the South (Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina) that Black people developed and enriched with their labor and where they have lived for more than four hundred years. Because of this history, these states form the land base of an independent nation for whose liberation Black people fight.” (Bukhari, *The War Before... 42*)

11 Attributed to Ulrike Meinhof, “The Urban Guerrilla Concept,” 1971. In O’Boyle 32–33. (Italics mine)

12 This is also true of the latter communiqués, such as the April 1992 RAF communiqué which announced a ceasefire in exchange for the release of prisoners and the easing of draconian living conditions for those who would remain behind bars.

13 Jeremy Varon’s work is characteristic of a uniquely American way of raising tactics to the level of a principled concern. He is also amongst the most prolific. See his *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, The Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*.

14 Edward Said 1984, p. 20.

15 Said, *ibid*, p. 20.

16 See, for example, Neal Ascherson’s “The Wife Who Became Public Enemy No. 1”; Eric Kligerman’s “Transgenerational Hauntings: Screening the Holocaust in

Gerhard Richter's October 18, 1977 Paintings"; Sarah Colvin's "Ulrike Meinhof as Woman and Terrorist: Cultural Discourses of Violence and Virtue"; Julian Preece's "The Lives of the RAF Revisited: The Biographical Turn"; Gerd Koenen's "Armed Innocence, or 'Hitler's Children' Revisited." A notable exception to the interpretive frame which exhibits an ease of transfers and connections between filiation and affiliation culminating in the subordination of the latter to the former, is Joanne Wright's *Terrorist Propaganda: The Red Army Faction and the Provisional IRA, 1968-86*. It is a book of the 1980s, not of the 21st century. So it does not ooze with affect and melancholia which typifies someone looking back on their youth (or the youth of their parents). However, the last section of the book, titled "Propaganda," Wright inevitably fortifies and extends the authority of the Symbolic Order, by way of a triangulation between The Uncommitted Audience, the Sympathetic Audience, and the Active Audience, which has strong resonances with Jeremy Varon's state, terrorist, and public triangulation. Even though her points of attention diverge from Varon's, authorization is still vouchsafed via third term mediation. See Wright pp. 73-173.

17 In addition to being the first woman named as a Most Wanted Terrorist, Assata Shakur is only the second domestic terrorist to be added to the list. <http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2013/may/joanne-chesimard-first-woman-named-most-wanted-terrorists-list> (Accessed August 3, 2013)

18 Rosenau is an analyst for the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), a federally funded research and development center which has served the Navy and US intelligence agencies since its founding in 1942. He works in CNA's Strategic Studies division where all of the analysts are American citizens and have security clearance. On the one hand, Rosenau's article "'Our Backs Are Against the Wall': The Black Liberation Army and Domestic Terrorism in 1970s America," labors as an obituary of what he describes as "a once-notorious but now largely forgotten terrorist group" (177) — à la Pluchinsky's obituary of the RAF. But it also labors as a cautionary tale, imploring law enforcement not become so fixated on Islamic fundamentalist that they take their eyes off of Black folks here at home. To this end, he reminds his readers that "the BLA was directly responsible for at least 20 fatalities, making it far more lethal than the WUO [Weather Underground Organization] or SLA [Symbionese Liberation Army]. Among the most notorious BLA's actions were the 1973 killing of a New Jersey state trooper and the prison escape in 1979 of BLA leader Joanne Chesimard (also known as Assata Shakur) who had been convicted of the murder and today remains a fugitive in Cuba" (177).

19 Lemaire, Anika. *Jacques Lacan*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977: 55–56. Quoted in Feldman 289.

20 Filial: any community one is born into: nation, religion, ethnicity, family. Affilial: a voluntary association, a community one chooses to enter. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Edward Said describes affiliation as “the transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world-vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship, which I have been calling affiliation but which is also a new system. Now whether we look at this new affiliative mode of relationship as it is to be found among conservative writers like Eliot or among progressive writers like Lukacs and, in his own special way, Freud, we will find the deliberately explicitly goal of using that new order to reinstate vestiges of the kind of authority associated in the past with filiative order. This, finally, is the third part of the pattern. Freud’s psychoanalytic guild and Lukacs’ notion of the vanguard party are no less providers of what we might call a restored authority. The new hierarchy or, if it is less a hierarchy than a community, the new community is greater than the individual adherent or member, just as the father is greater by virtue of seniority than the sons and daughters; the ideas, values, and the systematic totalizing world-view validated by the new affiliative order are all bearers of authority too, with the result that something resembling a cultural system is established. Thus if a filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority—involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict—the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into what seem to be transpersonal forms [for our purposes, mediating objects]—such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class and the hegemony of a dominant culture. The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of “life,” whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society.” (Said 19-20)

21 This may seem paradoxical given my earlier assertions that the slave is barred from subjectivity. I am not going back on that here, but it must be remembered that though the slave stands in no dialectical relation to the Human subject, s/he facilitates, makes possible, the legibility of that very subjectivity from which s/he is barred. As Hartman writes, “The slave is the object or the ground that makes possible the existence of the bourgeois subject and, by negation or contradistinction, defines liberty, citizenship, and the enclosures of the social body” (*Scenes of Subjection...*p. 62). And, the political and interpersonal striving for that very subjectivity which is unattainable characterizes the conscious intentionality of the Black political communiqué (as well as of Black love songs) even though (or perhaps because) a Hegelian outcome is impossible.

22 For a critique of Hardt’s and Negri’s notion of the withering away of civil society, from a Black perspective, see my *Red, White & Black*, 247–284.

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If we look closely we also see that gender itself cannot be reconciled with a slave's genealogical isolation; that, for the Slave, there is no surplus value to be restored to the time of labor; that no treaties between Blacks and Humans are in Washington waiting to be signed and ratified; and that, unlike the Settler in the Native American political imagination, there is no place like Europe to which the Slave can return Human beings.