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Me, you, and Mia Holl the subjects of Normalization

Normalization through representation – implications of normalized protest suicide

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Opening Remarks – Context

How political moments are experienced dictates their impact the meaning they are able to convey. The majority of us experience many political moments solely through their representation, typically through traditional media outlets. However, other mediums also contribute to representation; of particular interest are those more creative portrayals. Precisely because such representations are consumed more for pleasure than education, their educating functions cannot be ignored. In them wait countless perspectives, values, or political ideologies, which begin to act on the audience mind during consumption. Those messages conveyed through a creative text, be it film, novel, or something else entirely, inform us of political moments past, but also what they ought to mean to us both politically and emotionally now. Creative representations enjoy the added benefit of more accessible consumption to a broader audience. But, despite this potential digestibility, the politics portrayed in these mediums continue to relate to broader issues of massive societal and political significance.

Addressing the relationship of popular representations and their ability to convey important meaning to broader publics, Sasha Torres analyzes fictional television representations of one of contemporary American politics' most contentious issues, the prison at Guantanamo Bay. Her discussion focuses upon two contrary examples, an episode from the show *Threat Matrix* and another from *Criminal Minds*. The selected episode of *Threat Matrix*, bearing the title 'Alpha 126' "concerns an assassination plot, an Algerian terrorist held at Guantanamo, and an interrogation gone wrong" (Torres 52). During his interrogation inmate Alpha 126 is tortured to death. Torres flushes out the subtle distinctions this representation makes between terror suspect and federal agent.

Although their emotional expressions are teasingly similar these figures mean very different things for the American public: “While […] Frankie and the assassin seem strangely similar, the assassin is responsible for our sleepless nights, while Frankie allows us rest” (56). Torres’ analysis of ‘Alpha 126’ concludes that in this representation a perspective supporting the political decisions and actions of the political elite, the Bush administration, speaks. Her counter example ‘Lessons Learned’ of *Criminal Minds* creates, “a polemic against torture…the episode condemns CIA-style torture and risks imagining a range of affective responses to terrorism” (Torres 56). Again confronting terrorism, specifically an imminent terror attack, the agents and the terror suspect portray and engage in a vastly different emotional exchange. Rather than attempting to draw a distinction, shared emotional experience creates a moral ambiguity leaving the viewer to question how we treat those charged with the crime of terrorism, and how our own reactions to such crimes dictate the evolution of politics and society.

This example demonstrates the link created between an audience and a charged political situation through representation. Simultaneously, the example suggests the impact such a representation has on shaping the emotional affective response to this moment, perhaps even shaping the moment itself. For, as Torres remarks, referencing Stewart, the ‘fictions’ of television, “whatever they are, [they] are not mere representations of a situation, but participants in it, makers and transmitters of ‘the sensation that something is happening, something that needs attending to’” (51). This observation points to the true power and importance of a representation. Representation does not merely recreate a moment, but rather injects meaning and perspective into a moment, guiding the viewership’s perspective and creating meaning. This ability to

influence and manage a wider public's understanding of the political situation illustrates the political function of representation. Tapped into, creating, and informing a mass consciousness, yet almost unnoticeable as a result of their ubiquity, representations are an important plane of political confrontation, one we cannot overlook.

Although working with a particular example, Torres' observations are useful for this analysis. Her work suggests the importance of considering representation in the political, and further how this representation affects the emotional condition of its audience. Importantly, Torres demonstrates how a representation might shape viewer thought and perception, which grants considerable power to their creators. Such power may shed light on otherwise unnoticed politics, but conversely (and more sinisterly) may undermine the ability of subversive political forms to find expression and have effect.

Of the innumerable subversive political expressions, protest actions represent perhaps the most familiar. Ranging from sit-ins to mass demonstrations to marches, protest constitutes a fundamental element of democratic life. However, the confrontation of the social and political status quo in protest often places it at odds with power holders and widely accepted social values. The resulting threat to status quo leads power to attempt a neutralization of threatening entities. Embodying perhaps the most extreme form of protest, protest suicide allows a unique opportunity to consider the interplay between political resistance and normalizing forces in representations. The broader public generally experiences incidents of protest suicide secondhand, and much like the televised portrayals of Guantanamo discussed by Torres they are accessed through their representations. Harmless as a medium of representation may seem, all texts be they film, photographs, novels, news reportage, and countless others come together to form

the basis of a broader consciousness. Unlike an individual, whose consciousness is housed within the mind, a society, and its collective consciousness requires some form of physical manifestation in order to mold cultural practices, beliefs and values, and assumptions. Meaning, "[C]ollective memory is necessarily a mediated memory" (Assmann 55), and mediation filters out certain realities while stressing others.

Perspectives favouring maintenance of the status quo infiltrate representations of contentious politics, like protest suicide, and their foci and omissions normalizing the content of representations. Such aesthetic decisions play into the complex emotional experience of consuming a representation. The powerful feelings called forth introduce another plane to experiencing the political. Together a broader audience, who is emotionally connected, makes representations an important site of power and control. While identifying the invested parties responsible for any representation may prove an impossible task the fact remains that the manipulation of emotion functions as a powerful political tool: "Those seeking power and control sometimes can bypass the realm of ideas and attempt to influence, manipulate, or harness affective states to the desired objectives of a leader, the state, capital" (Gould 33). Without a discussion of feelings the potential of normalizing representations or tendencies within representations to influence political decisions misses a crucial point – emotions drive all kinds of politics and representations influence the creation and bent of such feelings.

To develop an understanding of the power of normalization to neutralize protest suicide within representation I will use a combination of methodologies. Of particular importance are close reading practices typical of German Studies, which will be employed in the analysis of the three central texts. The political dimensions of this

project have been informed by political theory, particularly work concerned with political emotion. Brining an intensely political issue, protest suicide, under the purview of literary work creates a unique opportunity to gain new insights. In engaging with these texts the operating assumption of German Studies that texts speak for themselves will be followed, and author intent is not a guiding principle. Drawn from these backgrounds, German Studies and Political Science, the resulting work belongs more to the realm of Cultural Studies. While contributing to discussions of political emotions, where they come from and what they mean for political life, this paper also hopes to add a new facet to the discussion by considering normalizing discourses in representations as its own plane of politics.

Each with its own unique story to tell the primary texts that inform this study - *Corpus Delicti: Ein Prozess (2009), Hunger (2008),* and *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex (2008)* - illuminate the immense power of normalizing discourses in representations through the example of protest suicide. Revealing the complex expressions, tactics, arguments, and relationships of such discourses to their subject a complex picture unfolds. Throughout this paper I will turn to these texts at different moments to address certain concepts that help develop an understanding of normalization. Discussed not in isolation, but rather in conversation with one another, I use the selected texts to create a fuller argument and description of normalizing discourses. Grounded within tangible experiential texts the concepts of normalization and power become more relatable. But, normalization fails to remain on screen or page, it reaches out to pull the audience in, making the audience as much the subject of normalization as the represented content. Whether subtle or blatant, whispered or screamed, the messages of normalization

originating from representations serve a pedagogical purpose. By teaching audiences, the broader public, about power and dissenting discourses, they influence political attitudes and thoughts, perhaps even behavior. Ultimately, this same influence cripples the creative potential of protest while simultaneously reinforcing existing power structures.

The paper opens with a discussion of how protest suicide has been conceptualized then moves into a discussion of normalization. From there the chosen texts are applied in discussions of: collective consciousness and media, aesthetics, and relationship between viewer and representation. Ending with a discussion of the emotional and affective experience of normalizing representations, the intensely personal experience of witnessing a representation of normalized protest suicide is used to consider how political emotion is harnessed to instruct and control.

Defining Protest Suicide

"Aber er muss sich wohl damit abfinden, von den Hinterbliebenen neu interpretiert zu werden. Das ist der Preis des Nicht-mehr Mit-spielens" (Zeh 80)

Issuing a direct challenge to the existent political and social order protest produces tension, tension between protestors and a powerful elite, between different segments of society. Ramping up the intensity of this tension, protest suicide selects a medium whose culturally determined inherent value strikes at the level of the most deep set beliefs. Whether the witness of a protest suicide is a protagonist, antagonist, or wholly ambivalent to the politics of the suicide, this act forces its audience to grapple with political and social issues and re-conceptualize the meaning of death. Latent with symbolism and symbolic potential protest suicide is an ideal political instance through which to consider normalizing discourses in representation. Before useful analysis may

begin I consider a definition protest suicide, its relation to symbols, and the physical and psychological realities of its reception.

Employing the termination of human life as a political medium protest suicide has an intimate relationship with death. Many western cultures, certainly our own, develop a collective aversion (at times fear) of death, and it is understood solely as a terminus. However, to understand the political use death, death must be re-envisioned. In this context death, "ist kein destruktiver, sondern ein produktiver Akt" (Graitl 299). Rather than a snuffing out, a terminal moment, or a removal, death becomes in this context the soundboard for a political message. However, though sharing important characteristics, protest suicide must not be confused with suicide attacks. Occurring with relative frequency, suicide attacks also harness human life as a political medium, with one critical difference, for a suicide attack, "zielt…nicht nur auf die Beendigung des eigenen Lebens, sondern auch darauf, eine möglichst große Zahl von Andern mit in den Tod zu reißen" (Graitl 287). The claiming of victims introduces another complicating dynamic and these examples remain beyond the scope of this paper.

Protest suicide takes many forms and the manner of death affects important political and logistical realities. Better-known forms of this protest are the hunger strike and self-immolation. Stretched over a longer period of time the decay of a starving human body creates a powerful image. Practically, an extended death grants the actor a "chance to exert a certain control over the communication process, which she has set in motion with her fast" (Andriolo 103). Before death there remains time to confront trivializations of the protest and take part in creating the reception on the protest. For this advantage, a protestor trades the heightened attention of other protest suicide forms. A

logistical drawback of the hunger strike being its comparable invisibility: "A body slowly consuming itself, a spectacle locked away inside of the body does not attract continuing notice" (Andriolo 103). By comparison self-immolation is vivid and intensely dramatic. This "destruction by fire" is "flamboyantly visible" (Andriolo 103). The tradeoff here is its instantaneousness. For an individual who chooses death in this, or a similar, fashion there exists no opportunity to protect the "integrity of his message" or influence "its dissemination" (Andriolo 103). Regardless of the strengths and weaknesses of any particular form of protest suicide they all breath life into a political message.

For a protest suicide, death (and the process of death) of the actor enables the protest's message to come to life. As Andriolo succinctly explains, "Protest suicide is dying with a message, for a message, and of a message" (Andriolo 102). Rather than being senselessly destructive, protest suicide make a calculated exchange of life for a political cause. Like other forms of protest, protest suicide concerns itself with moral arguments and righting wrongs, "[p]rotest suicide attempts to draw the attention of others to something that, in the suicide's perception, constitutes a wrong of moral, political, or economic dimension, a wrong that affects the lives of many" (Andriolo 102). Embodying the effects of these observed wrongs, a protest suicide symbolizes and acts out injustices through death. Dying, "einmal im realen und einmal im symbolischen" (Graitl 290), the lifespan of the protest's message extends far beyond physical death. Martyrdom cannot guarantee an eternal life to the politics of a protest, but the resulting symbolism resonates deeply in a collective consciousness. Highlighting, as it does injustice, "Protest suicide implicates the powerful," (Andriolo 103). Those responsible for the creation and maintenance of the status quo are transformed into murderers. Karin

Andriolo cites the example of a South Korean farmer, who protested against the World Trade Organization for decades. In his final protest, "Lee Kyung Hae stabbed himself to death with a Swiss Army Knife" (Andriolo 102). Protest suicide, then, may function as the microcosmic expression of the suffering caused by structures of power. A lingering specter, death creates a powerful symbolism that can be endlessly relived within the consciousness. Of course the image that remains within the imagination of the individual or collective is determined in large part by the nature of the portrayal.

Although relievable in the imagination, protest suicide is unique in its finality. Once carried out the protestor can no longer speak on her behalf, and the fate of the message (of the politics really) relies upon the manner of its representation. As such this form of protest has a unique relationship to representations: without them the message, the protest, disappears. This reality of protest means that dependent upon the perspective from which the protest is depicted an entirely different discourse emerges. Certain portrayals may conceptualize these figures as a "(säkularen) Heiligen" others denying the protest entirely by painting the death as "die irrationale Tat eines Wahnsinnigen" (Graitl 294). Each of these extremes, and all other points along the continuum, represents the fierce emotional impulses vying for expression and attention. Permeating both the intensely personal and public realm protest suicide spills over with potential leading to, "friedliche Demonstrationen oder gewältige Ausschreitung auslösen, Aufmerksamkeit auf ein bestimmtes Problem lenken und gesellschaftliche Hegemonien verschieben“ (Graitl 293). But, all this potential can be lost to the influence of normalizing representations. How convincing a representation is in its telling may be as significant as the validity of the protest itself. By exploring how normalization appears in

representations of protest suicide this unnoticed plane of politics becomes better illuminated, and a discussion about the reach of its influence can begin.

Diverse in style and focus the unifying trait of the three texts examined in this paper is protest suicide. Whether the central focus or of secondary importance, explicitly shown or carefully concealed, protest suicide is present. Set in the near future Juli Zeh's novel, *Corpus Delicti: Ein Prozess,* envisions the evolution of society. In certain respects a utopian state, the society of *Corpus Delicti* is free of any ailment. Achieved through meticulous surveillance of each citizen, the price for an illness free society is the totalitarian state that emerges. Complex and extreme, the monitoring system allows power holders to track physical as well as psychological adherence to society's organizing principle, the METHODE. Following the progression of Mia from stalwart believer of the METHODE to political dissident, this representation illustrates the lengths power will go to silence resistance.

After the wrongful conviction and subsequent suicide of her brother Moritz, Mia undergoes a philosophical transformation that leaves her at odds with conventional belief and practice. Mia's very personal rejection of the METHODE resonates broadly, becoming the basis for a potential revolt. Ultimately, this status makes her a real and present threat for the METHODE, which attempts to neutralize her protest. Offering her a plea bargain, vindicate the METHODE's narrative of "Mia the terrorist," the METHODE hopes for the easy normalization of her protest. However, Mia refuses and opts for the alternative, state execution. Her decision embodies the characteristics of a protest suicide and is read in this research as such. In the final moments of the novel, the METHODE denies Mia's protest suicide by allowing her to live, thereby normalizing her

and the intended political act. While protest suicide is not the central thematic of the novel, it stands always in the background. The political dynamics at play, particularly those between a dominant discourse and a dissident voice make *Corpus Delicti* a highly pertinent text.

Representing a historical instance of protest suicide, *Hunger,* from director Steve McQueen tells the story of Bobby Sands. Political activist to some, terrorist to others, Sands was a member of the Irish Republican Army. In 1981, he led a prison hunger strike to death. Though part of the broader political struggle, the main goal of this strike was the achievement of formal political status from the British State, and the differentiated treatment associated therewith. Answering the rhetorical story told by the British government, which dismissed these protesters as manipulative or mentally unstable, the film forces audiences to consider the politics and motivations of protest suicide.

Intensely personal and aesthetically powerful, the film depicts both body and mind of Bobby Sands, to the end of connecting to the body and mind of the viewer. In many ways the film stands for the subversive possibilities of representations. Normalization is not necessarily a force operating in a single direction, and some representations subversively apply this disciplinary force. Important for understanding the biopolitics at work in representations, which implicate the viewer, *Hunger,* creates powerful aesthetics to speak to an audience.

Charting the history of the Red Army Faction (RAF) the film *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* represents more than a historical account. Establishing a version of events occurring in the late 1960s and 1970s in West Germany and the meaning behind

them, the film becomes an important part of a broader contemplation of the impact texts can have on their audiences. In this film and keeping with much rhetoric since their activities members of the Rote Armee Faktion have born the label 'terrorist'. Certainly, acknowledging the use of violence, at times violence against civilians, is crucial in a full understanding of this group; however the almost exclusive application of the terrorist label robs history, society, and in this instance a viewing audience of vital nuance. Lost to a familiar rhetoric of violence and extremism, the resistance and protest of the Red Army Faction are not asked to speak.

The treatment of hunger strikes in the film provides an excellent example of normalization. An important political tool of the RAF this method of protest suicide is excluded or normalized by this representation. A natural question may be, does such an omission truly matter? Such an omission, though potentially innocuous, has great impact in this context, for "the history of the Red Army Faction is the history of its representation" (Collenberg 31). How the story is recounted can reshape the perception, beliefs, and thoughts of a single viewer, or many. *‚Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* presents a history of the RAF, which normalizes protest suicide elements of the group by way of medicalization, alienating the viewer from onscreen figures, and undermining the discourse of protest suicide within the organization.

Together these texts form a sample that allows for a multifaceted exploration of normalization. At times the texts enact normalization, struggle against it, or offer theoretical insights into normalization.

Normalization – Vertreter der mächtigen Interessen

"[N]ormalization means the retraining of deviant bodies for incorporation into a specific discursive status quo" (Smith-Prei in Relevant Utopian Realism: The Critical Corporeality of Juli Zeh's Corpus Delicti 115).

Used in many disciplines to convey, at times, vastly different meanings normalization needs some explanation. Encompassing many processes and intents normalization appears as many things, making its identification at times a challenge. Its consistent defining feature is a relationship to the status quo and representatives of power. A tool of power, normalization is used to organize, categorize, and control society. Of particular interest to this study is its manifestation in representations of protest suicide and the inferences that may be drawn there from. Therefore the clarification given here focuses on normalization's treatment of dissent and power through the example provided by *Corpus Delicti.*

Describing the organization of the Ecole Militaire, Michel Foucault addresses normalization, albeit in a sideways manner. The analysis of the disciplinary structures of the organization reveals a complex system of discipline that exercised total control over pupils:

> This hierarchizing penalty had, therefore, a double effect: it distributed pupils according to their aptitudes and their conduct, that is, according to the use that could be made of them when they left school; it exercised over them a constant pressure to conform to the same model, so that they might all be subjected to 'subordination, docility, attention in studies and exercises, and to the correct practice of duties and all the parts of discipline'. So that they might all be like one another. (Foucault 182)

Normalization, like discipline, arises from the synthesis of many applied expectations. Students were expected to act out normal behaviours, normal, in turn, coming to embody a useful or desirable quality. Beyond its usefulness, this disciplinary structure demands conformity to the established normal, with those students failing to comply facing punishment. Severely punishing, normalization requires an adherence to, and respect, for normal (acceptable) practice; however failures are not necessarily abhorrent. Rather they can be exceptionally useful in the application of normalizing expectations. For, like a system of discipline such as the rank Ecole Militaire that used shame and eroded prestige, those at the bottom, those outside the charmed glow of acceptance serve as a cold reminder of what happens to those who fail to normalize.

Those punished by the system encourage deeper commitment among those 'within' the system to maintaining the order, for finding one's place within it. There can be no escaping such a totalizing control, partly because it acts in so many ways: "The perpetual penality that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes" (Foucault 183). Both the instrument of discipline and its effect, normalization wields considerable power. Part of daily interaction and at a more abstract level, in upholding the status quo, its relationship to power breaths the political into it. Those who benefit from the existent system, the powerful, can and do in various ways ensure its survival. Power plays may be more obvious, an influential firm buying a media company or governments attempting to choke labour unions' right to strike, but at times they are barely noticeable.

Coming from nowhere and everywhere normalization in representation creates and instructs. Subsumed then by broader societal narratives normalizing representations modify the story told by omission or stress of particular details. The story of how things are and should continue to be is taught from the medium of creative works. Instruction from such texts might train the audience in the expectations of their life or have a theoretical bent.

A ubiquitous concept the particulars and implications of 'normal' often go unnoticed. However, controlling their definition and dissemination is accompanied with an almost unparalleled degree of influence. Noted above, the pursuit and maintenance of individual and societal health is the organizing principle of the society in *Corpus Delicti*. The result is a conceptualization of normal bound up in discourses of the healthy body. Echoing Foucault's description of a disciplinary system using the body as the benchmark of normalcy creates a political system wherein citizen performance is scrutinized:

> [T]he body is the tool for measurement; the body represents all norms of health and all deviations […] The METHODE uses the body for moral and political measurement of its citizens' achievement of normativity, but also as a measurement to assess failure. The body therefore works as a tool for normalization of the offender and the maintenance of the status quo (Smith-Prei 115).

Integral to the construction of normalizing discourses, embedding this conceptualization of healthy bodies in the legal framework grants it judicial authority. The society found in

Corpus Delicti exemplifies this, entrenching this vision in the preamble to a constitutional document: “Gesundheit ist das Ziel des natürlichen Lebenswillen und deshalb natürliches Ziel von Gesellschaft, Recht und Politik” (Zeh 7). Elevated to the status of law, health becomes an untouchable ideal. Of course the legal system offers only a single example of the power structures and institutions ideals of normal invade. Connected to power this now untouchable ideal not only defines, but also metes out punishment. A healthy body and the unyielding belief in the imperativeness of health have tangible practical effects, but in terms of establishing a normalizing discourse they also expound powerful normative ideas. Pursuing health certifies one’s status as a functioning normal member of this society. Constructing a normalizing discourse also requires a meaningful connection to daily life and a successful normalizing discourse seeks to outline ‘factual’ normalcy as well as those normative dimensions. Normal has, then, two defined prongs, “was der Fall ist, das Gegebene, Alltägliche“ as well as “etwas Normatives, also das Gewünschte” (Zeh 145). Combined these prongs have massive potential to control because they outline what is and how it should be. Seen politically, normal marries the concepts of the natural and the ideal to create an unquestionable ideology. Applied through a normalizing discourse this ideology outlines behavioural expectations and further rationalizes the system, which sustains this created normalcy: “Wohlbefinden zu erreichen und Schmerz zu vermeiden. Nur ein System, das diesen Zielen dient, ist legitim” (Zeh 39). Because Die METHODE pursues and protects the health of society it is legitimate. Because it upholds normalcy it is correct. This relationship to a politically powerful normal allows Die METHODE to claim a monopoly of legitimacy, and this legitimacy, as explained above, extends to every societal

institution imaginable. Discursively, this legitimacy means only the discourse born of the accepted normal holds authoritative weight. Entrenching its self as the singular discursive option, normalizing discourse views alternative perspectives as politically dangerous in that they are a threat to the established order. The swift reaction of the system in neutralizing such discursive threats relies heavily upon the conceptualized normalcy, as exemplified by the political system imagined in *Corpus Delicti.*

Relying upon this established normal, a dominant discourse (a dominant system) perpetuates this normalcy and its privileged power position through the normalization of alternative discourses. While the particulars of execution are not identical in each case, the end goal of normalizing a dissenting voice remains the same: to neutralize the threat it poses to the power status quo. The treatment of a protest group Recht auf Krankheit (R.A.K.) (Right to Illness) in the world of *Corpus Delicti* by state sanctioned media exemplifies such a process. Speaking on behalf of the state, the prominent figure of Heinrich Kramer forwards a normalizing argument. Well-known, state-sanctioned, and a staunch believer, Kramer's association with power means his analysis of the R.A.K. carries within it legal, political, and moral judgments. Stripping the group of any legitimate basis for protesting the state of affairs, the dominant discourse (as spoken by Kramer) forces it into the mold of normalcy: "Die Angehörigen der R.A.K. sind keine Geisteskranker. Nicht einmal Außenseiter, Gescheiterte oder Unterprivilegierte. Wir haben es mit normalen […] Menschen zu tun" (Zeh 83). As normal individuals, members of the R.A.K. have no excuse for rejecting the ideals, which govern society. Here their normalcy makes them deplorable in their failure to conform. Normalization extends further to undermine the motivating forces of the R.A.K. Rather than

acknowledging the genuine complaints of this protest movement, they are cast as cynical reactionaries (Zeh). The beliefs and politics motivating the R.A.K. arise from misguided individuals and therefore their protest does not warrant deeper consideration.

Met more quietly than the war promised to the R.A.K. (Zeh), the normalization of Mia's protest suicide relies on similar principles of her intrinsic normalcy and selfish confusion. Mia's example illustrates another powerful process and outcome of normalization: reintegration of the subversive discourse. The system's ultimate refusal to allow Mia to follow through on her decision to commit suicide by execution fails to leave her truly free, and like her, her political message is reworked to fit the trappings of the METHODE. The "Psychologische Betreuung," "Unterbringung in einer Resozialisierungsanstalt," and "Alltagstraining" reintegrate not only Mia, but also her dissenting voice (264). Fitting her (and her message) back within the operating framework of the dominant discourse completely normalizes her. Not acceptable, but not cause for fear, the status quo remains unaltered. By normalizing dissenting voices, like Mia or the R.A.K., the system removes danger while appearing to accommodate protest. Reintegrating, erasing, or forgetting dissent, for *Corpus Delicti* a popular movement and threatened protest suicide are redefined by power to support it, demonstrating how protest can be tolerated even accepted without requiring the power structures to adopt any meaningful change.

Collective consciousness and media's messages

"Das Auge der vierten Gewalt schläft nie." (Zeh 16)

Although the consequences are of particular relevance to the political sphere, in the process of normalization media and the political collide, as normalization depends on the skillful manipulation of representations.

Creative representations, such as in literature or film, connect discourses to the public at large, and through this connection, ideals, values, and norms are transferred. All of the pent up potential of normalizing discourses transitions from the abstract to the concrete when expressed in representation. Because of the connection to a broader audience the impact upon the collective consciousness becomes relevant to a discussion of normalization in representation.

Jockeying for expression in representations, different discourses compete to monopolize influence (or at the very least basic acknowledgement). Each discourse speaks from its perspective and therefore the ideologies or beliefs behind them colour the arguments made. No representation, regardless of any claim made to neutrality or scientific approach, communicates solely fact. In the case of normalizing discourses the interests expressed are those of power. With this in mind, examining the role of media in presenting normalizing discourses and conflicting perspectives, like those of a protest movement, grants insight into effects of normalization. As an extreme example, protest suicide, intensifies the dynamic between privileged power and dissent.

Each of the three texts comment upon media and normalization and raise some interesting points. Their mediation of historical or social-political events connects them to the collective consciousness. *Corpus Delicti* provides a demonstrative/theoretical example. The films *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* and *Hunger*, both representing

historical events, further illustrate media impact, the former in how normalization succeeds and the latter in a subversive application of media to non-normalizing ends.

Collective incarnations of those most personal processes of the consciousness like memory and imagination exist at a collective level as well. Of particular interest for this paper is such a collective consciousness at a societal scale, a concept that continues to be the subject of some debate. Aleida Assmann, a scholar who has engaged extensively with the topic, contests arguments made by Susan Sontag, who rejects the assertion that a collective memory exists: “According to Sontag, a society is able to choose, to think and to speak, but not to remember” (Assmann 50). Perhaps no biological equivalent of a brain can be found for a collective, but our memories are created, transcribed, immortalized, and finally passed from one generation to the next. Absence of such a facility of memory does not hinder a collective memory, and only requires that, “a collective memory is necessarily a mediated memory. It is backed up by material media, symbols, and practices which have to be grafted into the hearts and minds of individuals” (Assmann 55). Representations of an event, an emotion, or a history shape the memory that creates the collective memory. Part of the moment and constitutive of it, representations’ influence commands attention. We feel, remember, process, and internalize together through representations.

With or without our realization of their presence, representations play a necessary role in the construction of our shared social beliefs. Connecting collective memory to the concept of ‘social frame,’ Maurice Halbwachs believes, “No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections” (Halbwachs, as qtd. in Assmann 51). Collective memories cannot extend past the

"implicit or explicit structure of shared concerns, values, experiences, [and] narratives" (Halbwachs, as qtd. in Assmann 51). Part of a cycle of creation and reinforcement cultural products, like film and novels, take part in shaping how we think and believe together. Through them our learning of not only group history, but also group attitudes takes place. Unfortunately, the ability to access collective memories is limited. We "can only use those occasions of remembrance which are available in the media" (Zierold 405). Truly a synergistic relationship norms feed into those cultural objects that create collective memory, which in turn reinforce cultural norms. Dominant collective norms enjoy preferential expression in representation and their messages repeat with greater frequency. Dominance of the representative sphere affords serious political advantage for dominant discourses promote their position, crowding out smaller subversive voices thereby ultimately, defining the collective consciousness. Aleida Assmann elucidates the potential problematic through a discussion of the connection between history and memory:

> The intimate link between memory and history shaped the accounts of the past in a specific way…only such events were selected that supported the opinions and interests of the ruling class. In other words: the identity between history and memory was guaranteed by the reference to a collective identity enforced by a specific power structure that was itself confirmed, legitimated, and perpetuated in the process. (58)

Privileged to power certain discourses can dictate the beliefs, expectations, and preferences of their captive audience, the society programmed by the existing social frames and inundated by cultural objects that affirm those frames. Harnessing the potential of representations, dominant perspectives guarantee the creation of a collective consciousness that reinforces their privileged position. Eventually control becomes a subtle normalized element of daily life by way entrenching the beliefs, values, and objectives of dominant discourses.

The example offered by *Corpus Delicti* grants a unique opportunity to observe the interplay of consciousness, representation, and power and how the resulting normalization can be crushing in its control.

Control of the collective processes in Mia's society is achieved through a shrewd use of an extensive media network. In this text representations come from the mass news media, but the tendencies present in these examples have implications for representations generally. Embodying the connection between representation and audience, media personality Heinrich Kramer, stands for far more; the METHODE appears within the text through him, imbuing him with power. Kramer's character demonstrates the connection of representation to consciousness and the normalizing edits it utilizes.

Responding to the social unrest and eruptions of anti-METHODE protests, Kramer appears on television to direct the collective consciousness. Tapping into shared feelings and memories, his objective is the normalization of Mia. His medium of choice, a spot on the popular televised talk show "Der gesunde Menschenverstand", reaches a wide audience under the banner of representing 'the healthy common sense.' Though not repeated verbatim by the narrator, the descriptive summary of Kramer's talk hones in on

important implications of this moment. A process impossible to observe in real time, the omnipresent narrator of this scene describes the event of innumerable minds connected to the same representation:

> Kramer spricht zwanzig Minuten und schaut dabei weiter reglos in die Kamera. Seine ernste Miene spiegelt die Bedeutung des heutigen Auftritts. Wer jetzt wagte, vom Bildschirm aufzustehen und ein wenig durch die Stadt zu schlendern, würde die Straßen leer gefegt finden […] Da aber niemand bereit ist, Kramers Stellungnahme zu verpassen, bleibt die Menschenleere draußen mit sich selbst allein. Das ganze Land hängt an Krammers Lippen. (Zeh 200)

Bolstered by the authority of the system, Kramer's audience knows to perceive his message as truth. Kramer's connection to power, in combination with his constant presence in media, allows him to function as a representation of the dominant discourse. Kramer the man becomes a symbol for far more. Acting as a channel through which power may speak, his words enjoy the ability to suppress protest. Speaking with the familiar doctrine of the state and all its attendant guarantees and promises of safety, Kramer manipulates familiar rhetoric to stifle the resistance Mia created: "Heutzutage, sagt er, bestünden die gefährlichsten Viren nicht mehr aus Nukleinsäuren, sondern aus infektiösen Gedanken" (Zeh 200). By tapping into the standard dichotomy of the METHODE against subversive and anti-state discourses, Kramer defines a clear 'us' and 'them' dynamic. His succinct statement also moves the realm of political offense to the

mind, revealing a fundamental goal of power – the ultimate control of the psychological realm. Simultaneously validating the METHODE by way of creating a threat, "infektiösen Gedanken" and threatening his audience with expulsion from the graces of power Kramer outlines clear, "principles of inclusion and exclusion," (Assmann 51) of their society. His representation exploits the powerful desire to belong (or at the very least to be accepted), and presents the potential for power to work through media to capitalize on the emotions of the collective (and individuals) to political ends. Kramer accesses the attachment individual citizens have to the maintenance of the state, preying on the collective understanding that without the METHODE, individuals (and the group) are at risk. In other words the collective consciousness/memory, trained through exposure to media representations, is reminded of the necessity of existent power structures, and is persuaded to reject Mia's protest.

Again our narrator enables us to observe the psychological defeat of dissent at the collective level: "Es gibt niemanden, der die Bedeutung seiner Worte nicht verstanden hätte. Sie markieren den Anfang vom Ende im Fall Mia Holl" (Zeh 201). Kramer's representation of the current state of affairs ends with a clear message: victory of the state can be expected and further this victory in support of the status quo is legitimate. The strength of this approach is two fold, those who believe in the METHODE see their belief reaffirmed and those with doubts realize that their hope for meaningful protest, for resistance will come to nothing. Simultaneously uplifting and demoralizing, manipulation of media representation keeps the discursive debate within a realm the dominant discourse controls. Essential to the success of systems of power is an extensive reach, touching everything from politics to media to collective and individual emotions.

Media representations, in this case televised mass media, become a sounding board for the perspectives of dominant discourse by facilitating control.

Following a proclamation, which rejects the METHODE and all it stands for, Mia is arrested. Initial response to the arrest sees the galvanization of the public, who take to the streets. Her body becomes the site of crystallization, her subversive political discourse a battle cry, and for this reason the METHODE normalizes her image to undermine her thoughts. Acting through a familiar channel, mass media, the METHODE, as symbolized by Kramer, transforms Mia into a terrorist. Elaborate and detailed his story misrepresents the entire situation: “Dem Methodenschutz ist es gelungen, Moritz Holl als Anführer einer Widerstandszelle zu identifizieren, die unter dem Namen Die Schnecken agiert. Man traf sich regelmäßig am Flussufer im Südosten der Stadt” (Zeh 208). Part of a scheme to overthrow the METHODE, Moritz and Mia planned together Moritz’ wrongful conviction and suicide as a scheme to overthrow the METHODE. This active treachery is only one factor that normalizes Mia. Kramer stretches truth further claiming that Mia overtook leadership of this terrorist cell after Moritz’ death (Zeh). Recasting Mia as a terrorist, the METHODE frames her dissent in the struggle between legitimate and illegitimate power. Capitalizing on the programmed response of trust or faith in the status quo, the METHODE intensifies normalization by labeling Mia as a threat. A headline read aloud to Mia exemplifies this: “Neue Erkenntnisse im Fall Holl…Botulinum–Fund wirft ein neues Licht” (Zeh 223). The abstract threat on the systemic power seems to resonate less profoundly with most people and the turning point occurs with the implication of individual bodies.

Entirely fabricated the stories of Mia's terrorist actions gain traction among the public. Never directly shown, the reading audience catches a glimpse of the normalizing impact of media through the example of Mia's lawyer, Rosentreter. His relationship is a casualty of this ongoing media campaign. His partner's caustic anger conveys the hold Kramer's story has: "Keine Liebe der Welt…rechtfertigt die Verteidigung einer Terroristin" (Zeh 227). Rosentreter's resolution to defend Mia becomes an irreconcilable difference because of his association with an individual, more importantly a kind of thought, which may cause harm. The introduction of a discourse of terrorism numbs the collective (and individual) mind to the impulse, which leads it to question societal organization. Treatment with this discourse erases protest, in this case Mia's attempted protest suicide, through the representation of fear. Media stirs the deep *Angst* attached to one's physical safety, and protest disappears.

An ever more common practice, the denouncement of a group as 'terrorist' normalizes it profoundly. Applied to the Rote Armee Faktion, particularly through the media, discourses of terrorism changed their memory among the collective forever. The late 1960s mark a turbulent time in Germany's history. Growing discontent crystalized in a younger generation as demonstrations against American imperialism, contemporary fascism, and capitalism. In short this movement (and others like it) took issue with the inequality and deep-seated corruption of western society. *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* wishes to capture the tension of this important historical era. Frustration, anger, hope, and injustice combine to recreate this Zeitgeist. The opening sequence brings us into the midst of a student demonstration at which the visit of the Shah of Iran to West Berlin is

protested, and in the composition and content the scene represents the power structures, politics, and atmosphere, which inspired the political radicalization of the RAF.

Separated by a row of police officers, supporters of the Shah and demonstrators chant messages of opposing politics. Posters held by demonstrators are written with messages of “Freien Staat” and “Mörder raus aus West Berlin,” (00:05:13) and act as snapshots of the worldview of a disenfranchised generation. Ultimately tension builds to the point of explosion, and what follows must be described as a scene of horrific and excessive violence. The resulting image, though embedded in a fleeting moment, issues an impactful accusation, one the RAF repeated over and over throughout its existence. Rather than holding supporters of the Shah back, police officers turn around and stand as if reinforcement for them. The police are the agents of power not justice. As an account of this era in German history, the scene provides viewers necessary context, but it is the following media analysis of the demonstration that introduces us to the powerful normalizing discourses, which sought to define this movement.

Following the demonstration a televised panel discussion debates the meaning and the resulting political outcomes. Ulrike Meinhof takes up the perspective of the student protest. Her arguments grapple not only with the state reaction to the movement, but also that of the press. Meinhof sees a powerful voice seeking to brand these students and rob them of their politics: “Vor allem der Springerkonzern versucht in seiner Zeitung die kritischen Stimmen der Studentenschaft als Randalierer und Krawallmacher zu verteufeln” (00:08:46). The scene functions as a plot point for the film, offering a glancing view of a media machine whose considerable involvement influences public reception of this demonstration and later the actions of the RAF. Providing an insight

into normalizing discourses, their methods and aims, this scene encapsulates the immense power they command. In the example at hand, media makes demonstrators into violent rioters, the outcome of which is a leaching away of the movement's central political motivations. But this scene does not reflect the focus of the film and acts not as a satirical reflection of the film itself. It merely occurs and passes. However, the offered micro case study of normalizing discourses alerts one to their prevalence and might as well as their subtlety. Normalization exists at times in a single word "Krawallmacher" yet the effects may determine collective understanding. Altering, erasing, modifying political acts, normalization may be as omnipresent as it is unnoticeable.

Representing the effect of media in a vastly different way, *Hunger* subverts normalizing media discourses, producing text resistant to normalization. The film reverses power dynamics creating a text that normalizes powerful discourses rather than the subversive, and as a result demonizes the logical framework of the British government and not that of a protest. No empathetic connection forms between viewer and the dominant discourses, and the audio clips used fill in the gaps left by the film's visual representation.

A short radio commentary is heard almost as background noise in the film's opening sequence. The host of this obviously political programming objects to the demand for political status by incarcerated members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) (00:04:39). Much like the examples discussed above, media outlets in this film often align with the powerful and popular political agenda. Our first exposure to the perspective of power is to the disembodied voice of Margaret Thatcher. Violently against the politics and practice of the Irish Republican Army, in her role as Prime Minister she

exercised power to undermine and delegitimize their politics. While her voice is the very voice of power, her statement reflects an unwillingness to understand and address the politics of the IRA, “There is no such thing as political violence, political bombing, or political murder; there is only criminal violence, criminal bombing, and criminal murder. We will not compromise on this” (00:09:14). Her remark, a normalizing expression that divides and ostracizes, would have the audience reject the politics of this alternative discourse as being apolitical and merely the work of criminals. However, the situating context of the film contradicts this perspective. The directly quoted speech of a politician speaks to the ‘political’ of the conflict. Rather than implicate the activists, this moment shows the unwillingness of the political system to consider even seeing the world from another political perspective, a rigidity that reveals the biased starting point of the system. With its almost irrational unreasonableness and intolerance, the position of power falls flat. Evidencing the monopoly of control over defining the political realm, this representation highlights the political inequality power creates and perpetuates through a refusal to include contending politics.

Not only paramilitary activities are dismissed by power, but protest as well. In another radio broadcast by Thatcher the hunger strikes are pigeonholed and reduced to an emotional campaign. Ignoring the politics of protest the system reduces the hunger strike to an attempt to play on public emotions of pity and empathy (1:12:50). Raising questions of what the political is, this normalizing discourse implicates its speaker(s) rather than the protest. In an attempt to invalidate the use of a hunger strike Thatcher’s statement suggests that only state approved forms of protest are legitimate. Furthermore, the rejection of emotional arguments ignores a crucial characteristic of protest. At the

moment of this utterance the audience is aware of the emotional but nevertheless rational calculations of the inmates. Vindicating the protest through a rejection of its validity, the use of rhetoric here paradoxically evidences the power typically enjoyed by dominant systems. Interestingly, the integration of media samples into the structure of this representation enables the representation to appropriate the power of representative control. A subversive use of media opens a realm of possibilities for political resistance, providing subversive discourses with a foothold in power.

By subversively using this rhetoric in the context of this non-normalizing text, the paradigm of the system shatters. Such rhetoric relies upon the assumption that the system enjoys a monopoly of truth, and as culture and politics grow around power this assumption is not entirely false. The subversive representation of media clippings exemplifies this. In *Hunger* we see that an ideology is followed to serve particular ends, here the neutralization of a protest movement, not the truth, a crucial realization, as normalizing rhetoric relies heavily upon its identity as truth. Through the alteration of the clippings' context a vastly different aesthetic emerges, one also with naturally vastly different implications for viewers.

Aesthetics and implicated bodies

"Aesthetics gestured thought towards [...] the bodily creature; the paths of often unruly emotions; the whole sensual world in all its baseness and brilliance." (Highmore x)

Aesthetic plays an integral role in the normalizing influence of a representation. Far more than visual appearance, aesthetics encompasses the entirety of the sensual experience evoked by a text. Through an engagement with our senses texts unleash physical and mental responses. Whether in the form of clearly definable emotions or more vague affective sensations, our relationships with texts originate with their

aesthetics. This connection instructs and controls; aesthetic normalization implicates both subject and viewer.

Bodies of both are the first sites of aesthetics. Immediate and tangible physical engagement with them permits entry to the immaterial realm of thought, for bodies form the gateway to the mind. Aesthetic representation of protestors' bodies naturally speaks to the condition of their minds. Of interest here are the aesthetics choices that undermine the politics of protest suicide in representation. Beyond representations, the bodies and minds of viewers are similarly affected. How the audience aesthetically experiences protest affects not only their perception of protest, but may hones and directs their behaviour.

I begin the analysis of aesthetics with the prison setting of *Hunger*. Moving on the personal relation of protestor to the body set for destruction is discussed, and from there I explore the concept of 'embodied viewing'. Finally, this section considers the aesthetic styles that normalize protest suicide in representations, engaging in biopolitical discourse that act on subject and audience.

Aesthetics carries a meaning in colloquial use that fails to capture the full weight of this term, reducing it to describing taste or the appreciation of art, of beauty. By using a two-pronged definition of aesthetics, the door to its political applications swings open. Apt for the analysis carried out here, an explanation found in Carrie Smith-Prei's work *Revolting Families* speaks as if directly to the three texts of this paper: "[A]esthetics in these literary texts work[s] both as the unification of the senses – or the physical, emotional, and visceral experience of objects and others – and as the narrative-poetic production of literature" (Smith-Prei 23). Aesthetics are the processes and the result of

literature. A central purpose of aesthetics, their ability to draw us into the fold, relates consumer to the 'viewing' object, and suggests the externality of psychological life. The subjective experience of one's own thoughts and emotions produces a feeling of insulation, but "aesthetics posits emotions and affects as social, collective and exterior" (Highmore 9). Our internal lives may not be as solitary as we believe. This suggestion hardly shocking, points to the influence representations have on internal life. The manner in which representations aestheticize protest suicide directs audience response. Because of such aesthetic capabilities we must understand "'style' as something deeply social and significant" (Highmore 11). Distinct objects that are physically removed from our bodies, representations give the illusion of maintaining distance between themselves and the viewer, but aesthetic experience of representations means the audience is always present within them.

The prison setting, common to each of the texts, determines the aesthetic affect of each, albeit with different effects in each. What these different representations have in common is how the setting crystalizes questions of power and normalization. Housed almost entirely in the prison, *Hunger* displays 'prison' most prominently, of the texts discussed here.

The opening of the film grounds the audience in the historical moment, revealing only minimal information. These few details inform the viewer of the efforts already undertaken by prisoners to secure political status and its attendant rights. Up to this point they have tried the "no wash or dirty protest," "the blanket protest," (00:01:26), and an earlier hunger strike (00:51:40). In the few moments the words remain upon the screen one immediately understands the lengths to which the prisoners have gone to achieve

political status, and from here the viewer infers that the government of England and its penal system refuse to compromise. With only a few sentences the film situates viewers in a power system that forces radical action.

The Maze Prison, where members of the Irish Republican Army are held, stands for power itself, thus mirroring the broader social context. Shrinking an intensely complicated historical-political conflict into the walls of this disciplinary institution one witnesses how power disciplines and normalizes dissent. Treated as criminal prisoners the system refuses to acknowledge the politics present. Normalized as deviant, prisoners are depoliticized and demonized. By incarcerating them under a criminal label the political system represented here hopes that they will be perceived as mere lawbreakers. An anti-normalizing representation itself, *Hunger* inverts this intended goal using the prison to characterized the abuse and violence of the power status quo. Imagery employed by the film makes the brutality of the prison synonymous with the brutality of the political system. In a pivotal scene the film recreates a violent and degrading process by which prisoners are searched. Naked, they are beaten by riot guards then aggressively probed orally and anally (00:21:34). The accusation is made relying solely upon the visual and the naturally occurring sounds; the violence of the prison wardens becomes the violence of the political system, which sanctions such behaviour. Abuse meted out within the prison physically represents the intolerance of the political system, ironically casting the perpetrators of violence as criminal rather than the inmates. In fact the inmates are more personalized than wardens, offering a reversal of a prison culture. Avoiding facial close ups and the use of names of prison administration blurs these

characters together, each is experienced as the other by the viewer. In a scene depicting a prison visitation, the circulating guard is shown only from the chest down (Hunger).

Brining the audience into the physical and mental experience of protest suicide, the depiction of the experience of prisoners determined to use the destruction of their bodies politically forms the basis for a powerful aesthetic experience. In *Hunger* the achingly slow depiction of Bobby Sands' death creates an important aesthetic experience, while demonstrating how aesthetic implicates the audience body.

The final third of *Hunger* follows the painful death of Bobby Sands as he conducts his hunger strike. His decay begins and accelerates rapidly. Pained movements laden with effort convey his weakness (1:15:07). Unsettling as images of his protruding rib cage and bloodied bed sores are, they make bodily suffering an experience for the audience. Succinctly, a prison doctor informs Sands' parents about the condition of his health, "And from week one there's been a gradual deterioration of liver, kidney, and pancreatic function. Also the bone density decreases drastically because of calcium and vitamin deficiencies" (1:13:47). Although, taking place within a hospital wing and being attended by doctors the setting is not used to normalize. Sands' death is made comfortable, not prevented. Together the visual presentation and medical description of Sands' body produce a powerful sensory experience in the audience. Included in these excruciating moments the viewer is forced to live them with the on-screen character.

Such aesthetic choices suggest the massive presence of viewers in representation and raise questions of the true subjects of representation. Linda Williams[1] considers how

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[1] In *Screening Sex* Linda Williams explores her concept of embodied viewing as part of a discussion of onscreen sex.

aesthetics affects audiences: "Much has been written about the way we lose ourselves or identify with those glorious, magnified images of human bodies in movement on the 'silver' screen, much less has been written about the ways we reencounter our own bodies…in that process" (1).

Coining the term "embodied viewing" (Williams 2), she argues for the viewer's physical involvement in representations. Counter intuitively representations, "distance us from the immediate, proximate experience of touching and feeling with our own bodies, while at the same times bringing us back to feelings in those same bodies" (Williams 2). Perhaps we might escape by watching a movie or reading a book, but our bodies create distinct limits as to how far we can run. If embodied viewing indeed occurs then the aesthetics of a representation take on even greater significance. For, in some strange way our bodies, not the in text content, are their primary subjects.

Unlike the moments drawn from *Hunger* those selected from *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* have normalizing tendencies that also implicate viewers in an interaction characterized by control. Although hunger striking was an important political tactic used by the Rote Armee Faktion, these strikes are largely absent from this film. Hunger striking provided the unique opportunity for resistance and physical actualization of the group's politics for, "hunger formed the basis for an RAF strategy to counter the medicalization of terrorism and allowed RAF prisoners to literally embody their established rhetoric of 'anti-fascism' and 'anti-imperialism'" (Passmore 33). Personifying their politics meant that RAF hunger strikers could exhibit solidarity with those who suffered injustice under fascism or capitalism, as well as all other RAF prisoners. Associated strongly with the first generation of the RAF, the practice of protest

by hunger strike remained within the culture years after, “Der Hungerstreik ist eine Reaktion der Gefangenen auf die zerstörerischen Haftbedingungen, denen sie zum Teil seit 18 Jahren ausgesetzt sind” (RAF). Harnessing the methods of protest suicide was central to the practices of this organization, yet somehow *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex* reduces the subject to a fleeting scene sequence: Ulrike Meinhof in her cell, an announcement of the hunger strike, and the leadership planning the execution of the strike. Perhaps its bit appearance can be explained by some well-intentioned rationale, but the fact remains that reducing the hunger strikes and pulling focus to the terrorist actions of the group produces a warped perception for its audience.

Brevity alone does not explain the extent to which the RAF hunger strikes are normalized in this representation. Medicalization of the protest and members of the movement enters the realm of the biopolitical, with normalizing implications for content and viewers.

Situating the hunger strikes within a medicalized context, the scene preceding their introduction establishes the tone. Brought into the isolation cell of Meinhof, the viewer witnesses her burgeoning madness. White walls surround us. An overhead fluorescent bulb flickers. And Meinhof grimaces, her wide almost hysterical eyes say more than her words could as she describes the psychological experience of solitary confinement, “Das Gefühl es explodiert einem der Kopf” (1:27:22). With a single scene, the film casts Meinhof in the role West German media created for her over a period of years: “The RAF and its sympathizers indeed saw the reporting as a coherent and coordinated campaign across the entire spectrum of commercial media […] to ‘make’ Meinhof a mad person in the public consciousness” (Passmore 48). Crucial to the off-

screen history of the RAF, media latched on to Meinhof's health as a way of explaining her actions as a member of this organization. At an almost cellular level powerful discourses defined not only Meinhof, but also the meaning of her political engagement, "In 1962 Meinhof underwent brain surgery to remove what was thought to be a brain tumor, and both the scientific community and sectors of the commercial press actively sought to present this as a potential cause for Meinhof's radicalization" (Passmore 45). Now medically defined and thereby made more controllable, Meinhof was pegged in the role of the 'crazy terrorist' (Passmore 45). Powerful discourses converged upon Meinhof's body and undermined her politics. Here in the prison setting we see the culmination of a societal evolution postulated by Foucault[2]. The disciplinary structure becomes more than an institution to house the criminal, but participates also in the "stripping of Western thought of its recognition and responsivity to the voices of unreason" (Nadesan 142).

Within a normalizing context politically subversive voices receive the same treatment. Sequestered in normalizing representations the profound and powerful political meaning is lost. Retuning to Meinhof, the biopolitics enacted upon her both in a real world setting, and more importantly for this discussion, in representation made her protest and resistance ignorable (in addition to criminal). Onscreen her portrayed madness colours her and the RAF hunger strikes, normalizing both. Aggression, hopelessness, and the implied despair of Meinhof's transfer to the hunger strike to become its motivating rationale rather than a political struggle. Meinhof's medicalization

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[2] Foucault's discussions of normalization in *The History of Sexuality* provide important insights into society's growing use of biopolitics. In further research of normalization a deeper analysis of biopolitics would be useful.

takes over centre stage and pronounces for viewers that here exist patients not a protest movement. The conflation of protest and psychological disturbance relies on the stigma associated with mental un-health to scare audience members away from such lines of thought.

The correlation between mental instability and protest suicide is neither new nor exclusive to creative representations. Bound up in discourses of mental illness, suicide bears the stigma of an act of supreme sickness, one's own rejection of life. Those who commit suicide are ill and furthermore they violate culturally sacred values. Moral arguments made against protest suicide are familiar, resonating on an easily accessible level. Beyond these arguments, but also born of them, a medical gaze cast upon this political form exercises a more totalizing control. Medicalizing protest suicide – by defining it through the lens of psychiatry by treating it, preventing it through force feedings – fundamentally changes the meaning of the protest. It re-envisions protest as a medical phenomenon, one that can be treated, cured, prevented in the future. Protest falls away and what remains is a problem for which a system of correction already exists. Grotesque and upsetting a scene depicting a force-feeding of Holger Meins in Der *Baader Meinhof Komplex* speaks to this. Strapped to a gurney Holger Meins struggles as a team of medical professionals force a tube down his throat, into his belly, preparing him for feeding. Representing a pivotal legislative change the scene depicts a real world application of biopolitics, "1977 saw medical treatment against the wishes of [a] prisoner, including force-feeding, made mandatory when a prisoner's life was threatened" (Passmore 36). Targeting the body rather than mind, force-feeding of hunger striking prisoners quashes protest at an intimate level. Here the state forbids the individual from

sacrificing life for their belief. Maintenance of life means a negation of protest, which was the intended effect of the policy. By holding these protesters among the living, “the state went a long way to nullifying the strategy” and showed “a new resolve not to allow the state to be blackmailed” (Passmore 36). Disciplining these bodies and minds the representation is truly normalizing, but the effects upon the viewer may be of greater significance. The aesthetic experience of representations pulls audiences in and acts upon them, normalizing them to a similar or greater extent.

Connection and Distance – Relationships and normalization

“Alle Skeptiker, Unzufriedenen und Andersdenkenden, die ein Leben lang geglaubt haben, mit ihrem Zweifel allein zu sein, erleben plötzlich das beglückende Gefühl der Gemeinsamkeit.” (Zeh 198)

Creative texts draw their audience in by building a relationship between the audience and characters. Whether the feeling is one of disgust, camaraderie, or ambivalence the success of a text in establishing and nurturing this relationship affects the success of a text to communicate its message. Identifications between the two may by extension lead to identification with certain ideas. How we feel about those we experience in representations opens another dimension along which normalization may act. Again serving as a counterpoint to a normalizing text, *Hunger* relates viewer to the characters and their politics by making them a central moment of the film. Normalizing in the extreme *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* distances audience from onscreen figures, hurting perception of the people and their politics.

Hunger grants the audience a unique opportunity to hear directly from an individual, who understands protest may claim his life. In a fifteen minute long scene the revelations of Bobby Sands connect viewer to him and his willingness to die. For this moment we are alone in a room with Sands and a priest. A stark contrast to normalizing

representations, this film engages directly in conversation with political motivations of activists. Coupled with the emotional intensity of this scene, the direct engagement makes possible a learning experience for viewers, one that does not make political subversion invisible.

Speaking on behalf of this protest is Bobby Sands, as portrayed by Michael Fassbender, and in conversation with a local priest he discusses the politics and expectations of the hunger strike. With a chilling clarity Bobby explains that the coming hunger strike will claim the lives of strikers, indeed they will begin without the intention of breaking the fast “This time out the men will start consecutively two weeks apart, when somebody dies they’ll be replaced” (54:54). Experience has taught these men that all other negotiating chips are easily disregarded. They recognize the need to utilize the powerful symbolic of sacrificing human life to break the will of the political system against which they struggle.

Without direct recognition of this fact, the intent to die (before dishonor) shows a rational intensification of the existent protest of the prisoners, “10, 000 people marched for the seven hunger strikers last May, international pressure on the Brits and all that…but it all came to nothin” (51:40). The next step, a protest in which those engaged refuse to yield before their demands are met, reflects the responsibility these men feel they have. Indeed Bobby remarks, “We’re on the front line, we created the protest it’s our responsibility” (51:40). Beyond responsibility these protestors feel a moral duty to put their lives on the line for their beliefs. If freedom and love of life are the most sacred beliefs than sacrificing life is the ultimate gesture to be made, “My life means everything to me. Freedom means everything […] Putting my life on the line is not just the only

thing I can do, it's the right thing" (1:01:45). Rather than depicted as terrorists, enemies of the state, or criminals the audience is shown individuals prepared to take their beliefs to drastic but also reasonable measures. Against the might of Great Britain's government their deaths should function as the scream of injustice. Importantly, the exchange explores the implicating effect of protest suicide upon a system of power; it can be harnessed to create a physical manifestation of the guilt of a system. Sands explains, "you're calling it suicide, I'm calling it murder" (58:20). Using destruction of the body to evidence this guilt produces not only a powerful physical symbol, but also resonance within a collective consciousness. Sands' remark indicates a desire to communicate the injustices of the system using a powerful medium - life. In this fifteen-minute scene protest suicide is depicted as a rational, powerful, and moral-political tool.

By engaging with these politics through the perspective of someone committed to this form of protest (protest suicide), it escapes normalizing explanations, which allow it to be dismissed without a thought. Instead of an oversimplification the complexities are teased out, and the emotional or affective experience of Sands enables the viewer to connect more profoundly to him. Cutting through the state's rhetoric a space opens up in which to consider the arguments expounded by this subversive political element. Portrayed in an accessible manner, the effect is two fold. Importantly, the content (the protest suicide and the protesters) avoids normalization, as does the audience experience. This interview scene reveals these political actors to the audience, as they perceive themselves. Their complaints, feelings, and politics are not ignored or erased, but rather assembled to resist normalization and teach the audience something entirely different about control.

In the film, *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* the relationship between viewer and character also comes into play, to a different effect. Turning the group's internal dynamics against them the emerging dynamic distances them from viewers. Confronting the romanticized conceptualization of solidarity among protest movements, the film focuses on the hate and petty resentments of the core leadership, accentuating them until they are all that exists; the interaction of Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof spearheading this normalizing approach. In prison their relationship deteriorates rapidly, as shown in a scene of them working together. Ensslin's description conveys her discomfort, frustration, and disgust, "Ulrike's zweimaliges Gelächter während der Arbeit noch […] eindeutig gegen mich. Obwohl ich immer noch sage im Grunde nicht gegen mich, sondern dich" (1:45:09). Her description pits the core leadership against one another, creating clear sides within the group itself giving the impression that their central concern is not protest, resistance, revolution, but rather an internal power struggle. Note must be taken of the problematic of this presentation, for while it injects dimensionality into these relationships, the result is not a questioning of the figures themselves but of the politics they stood for and the protest they engaged in.

It is in the final minutes of the film where the rift between viewer and characters, already established, explodes, leaving a distance seemingly impossible to close. Though not the direct addressees of the speech made by Kommando Ulrike Meinhof, her emphatic message reaches out to an audience dragged through the onscreen demise of the RAF. Following the failed attempt to free the leadership and their subsequent suicides a generation of believers despairs at the their failure and loss. Having been told that these iconic leaders were murdered the Kommando Ulrike Meinhof reveals they in fact took

their own lives, “Sie sind keine Opfer und sind es nie gewesen” (2:19:43). The effect takes hold immediately, as the faces of those present collapse into dismay and hurt betrayal, a betrayal that is also felt by viewers. Beginning with the death of Holger Meins the film stresses the fabricated nature of the leaders’ deaths “Falls ich vom Leben in den Tod komme, war es Mord” (1:30:03). Repeating this motif serves to build mistrust between the viewer and the members of the RAF. Beyond building mistrust the treatment of the tendency of RAF protestors to name suicide as murder destroys a powerful symbolism of protest suicide. True the actor takes her or his own life, but with the clear belief and message that this death originates with and happens at the hands of those implicated by the act. Culminating in this single line, protest suicide is reduced to a lie. More than a discretization the statement refuses to acknowledge the victimization of subversive political discourses at the hands of a dominant one.

Returning to the brightly lit room where a core of RAF members grapple with the revelation that their leadership committed suicide, the closing remark drives the point home. Crushing in its claim to a more authoritative understanding and thus truth the command resonates with those on screen and viewers, “Hört auf sie so zu sehen, wie sie nicht waren” (2:20:44). Rather than recognizing the protest of their deaths and fostering greater connection and even identification with these figures, the debunking of the ‘myth’ of their deaths labels them as the deviant other. They were criminal, terrorists, and ultimately took their lives because of despair - let go of how you saw those people, their goals, protest, resistance were not as they seemed. Dispelling any lingering doubts the final scene hammers this point home. The brutal unemotional portrayal of an assassination forcibly informs the viewer which side stands for ‘good’ and which for

'bad'. Murders and terrorists, the RAF's protest, of hunger and of suicide vanish, more than that they are erased. Any memory of legitimate and necessary protest is lost to violence, while the state retains its iron grip on power and, perhaps more importantly, legitimacy. Certainly, the distance makes identification challenging and undesirable, but the warning in the representation is for us as well. Subversion, no matter the degree, is neither reasonable nor tolerated.

Feelings and Affect - Contentious politics and representations that control

While vastly different texts, those examined here share a certain emotionality, and for both text and audience emotion figures enormously in the process of normalization. Protest generally, and protest suicide particularly, has important emotional dimensions, therefore making it an ideal medium through which to examine normalizing forces and their relationship to our feelings.

Feelings, though central to the human experience, are often disparaged in political discussions. Attached to protest as a stigma they endanger the reception of this political act:

> Psychologically reductive accounts that pathologize protest and protestors did not die out in the nineteenth century but rather continue to circulate widely today. The corporate media, politicians, and others with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo frequently describe social justice activists as driven by emotion and protest activities as irrational and childish (Gould 19).

Seen not for their generative capacities feelings embody the antithesis of rational political thought, and thus their significance is underestimated. Making the case for

feelings, especially in contentious political forms, Gould argues that emotional experience acts as a necessary component of political life. Their ability to, "temper and intensify our attentions, affiliations, investments, identifications, and attachments" (Gould 33) means they are bound up in our decisions about how to engage with our world. While an important motivating force on an individual and collective level, emotions are often experienced at a level below conscious recognition as affective states. As if existing in a transient in-between place before being assigned to defined emotion affect describes "nonconscious and unnamed, but nevertheless registered experiences of bodily energy and intensity that arise in response to stimuli impinging on the body" (Gould 26). Similar to the sensation of failing to find the words with which to voice thought, affect is perceptible but not necessarily nameable. Assailed constantly by input any range of affective states may simultaneously be in play within a single person or collective, guiding their politics. Without the push of affective states crystalized into a single, or a collection of emotions, protest loses its amazing emotional push. As noted above these same emotions are frequently used against protest, normalizing protest by perverting one of its most necessary and productive attributes: feeling. Also noted above academia, popular media, and politicians perpetuate this discourse. Naturally this discourse invades all forms of representation, especially those we do not immediately fault for trying to manipulate us. Tucked into each of the texts examined throughout this paper the confrontation between the validity of emotion and its utter dismissal rages, and in different ways emotion either serves as a normalizing discourse or turns it on its head.

In the case of *Hunger* the audience connection to those engaged in protest, their motivation, drive, their feelings, insulates this protest from the attack of trivializing

emotion. From Sands himself we know that his intense love for his own life means protest suicide is his only option: " My life means everything to me. Freedom means everything…but having a respect for my life, a desire for freedom, an unyielding love for that belief means I can see past any doubts I may have" (1:01:45). The intensity of his feeling has shaped his political response and shapes the viewer's response. Following the onscreen 'launch' of the hunger strike a voice over of Margaret Thatcher, disembodied and absent as she may be, wields traditional conceptualizations of emotion as a normalizing howitzer: "[T]he men of violence have chosen in recent months to play what may well be their last card. They've turned their violence against themselves through the prison hunger strike to death. They seek to work on the most basic of human emotions, pity" (1:12:48). Situated in the context of a clearly powerful feeling, this reductionist-normalizing tactic fails. The emotional intent is not to inspire pity, but to serve their political beliefs. Attempting to diminish the experience the sample of Thatcher neglects the complexity of political affect. Gould reminds us that, "[p]olitical emotion often is less tied to conscious, cognitive, rational assessments […] and [is] messier – more ambiguous, ambivalent, contradictory, non-coherent, undisciplined, and surprising" (24). Protest suicide inspires a host of contradictory and intense feelings, whose successful transmission relies upon representation of this complexity. *Hunger* frames normalizing discourse, as represented by Thatcher, in a relatable powerfully complex emotional experience. Rejecting an oversimplification of emotional protest the film empowers viewers to experience the range of feelings it stimulates. Providing the onscreen antidote to normalization of feeling grants space for a different discourse to grow; one that embraces the, "nonrational not irrational" (Gould 35) elements of contentious politics.

A counter point to the example of *Hunger,* the tendency of *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* is towards normalized representation of protest and the attendant emotions. The reduction of this protest movement begins very simply in the language that the 'state' uses to label it. Not unlike popular media in the meetings of the law enforcement assigned to [stop] the Red Army Faction they are consistently labeled as "Kriminell" (1:30:11) or "Terroristen" (1:28:41). As suggested by Gould, a characterization of the RAF activists in the film harnesses their affective (emotional) politics to ends contrary to their goals. The methods of the RAF complicated their public reception, as is portrayed in this film, and the use of physical violence detracts from their broader political social message. Interestingly, in this film, audience focus is drawn towards this spectacle of violence against the public, while the violence against the self, the hunger strikes, is glanced over. In fact the emotional experience of the strikes passes by with astonishing rapidity. So hidden is the suffering that the audience experiences it only in the decay of Holger Meins (59:12). Impossible to adequately describe, due in large part to its absence, *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* witnesses the transformation of a protest movement into a terrorist group, full stop. Audience affect is rather harnessed to witness the injustice and unfairness of attack against innocents; the effect being that any protest of the RAF falls upon deaf ears. Emotionally, within this film, the RAF is lost to the represented atrocities they committed against the public and with them the representation and engagement with their protest is also extinguished.

From the analysis I have conducted emerges the powerful conclusion that representations can and do capitalize on our affective states, particularly in regards to contentious politics, with the end of winning points for one or the other side of the

normalizing debate. Furthermore, the influence is not blatant or easily detectible, taking place, as it does, on a plane before cognitive recognition.

Cruel representations – Final thoughts

Ultimately, my affective experience of the texts reviewed motivated my research, truly driving my purpose and sense of urgency. My desire to understand the politics of protest, the role of protest in society, led me to cruel optimism. A confusing combination of concepts, Berlant explains that, "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1). Immediately protest springs to mind. Intrinsically hopeful, the impetus of protest is the belief that the status quo is alterable. Whether for a better or simply different world, resistance precedes change. Built into democratic culture the belief in protest is intensified. Inculcated into our consciousness, the expectation that systems of power heed demands for change may prove to be the tumbling block of that change. Oxymoronic as they may seem cruel optimisms become extremely natural. They guarantee our ongoing attachment to them, "insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is…profoundly confirming" (Berlant 2). Entwined in our emotions and expectations these optimisms are not easily cast aside. Like affective states these optimisms, along with instances of transmission, may not be cognitively recognized. A challenge to traditional conceptualizations of protest, cruel optimism, like other political emotions, permeates all planes of life, including the representative place.

Central to this research the personal experience of cruel optimism, illuminates characteristics of the relation between representation and this cruel feeling. Moments

within each of the analyzed texts either embody Berlant's description of cruel optimism or have brought my own optimisms to my attention. In particular, *Corpus Delicti* speaks to this concept and thus provides the basis for my exploration of it in representation.

The representation of protest suicide found within *Corpus Delicti* typifies Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism. Mia's belief in the power of protest ultimately leads to the failure of her resistance. By engaging in protest Mia plays into the hands of power, which, in response to her protest, normalize her. Having resolved to die by state execution rather than accept a plea bargain, Mia hopes to create a symbol of resistance: "Sie hat ernsthaft geglaubt, die METHODE würde Sie zur Märtyrerin machen. Dabei schenken nur unfähige Machthaber dem nervösen Volk eine Kultfigur…der Tod verleiht dem Einzelnen Unsterblichkeit und stärkt die Kräfte des Widerstands. Das wird Ihnen nicht passieren, Frau Holl" (Zeh 263). Personifying Berlant's argument, Mia's willingness to die in protest led her to a point where the state could redefine her protest act and her resistance more generally. Rather than experiencing a 'flourishing' of Mia's protest we witness its demise, and yet I am still persuaded to hope that something beyond the cruelty of this moment exists.

Kramer's final words on Mia's unrealized protest suicide have placed me on a path towards new ways of considering the conditions my political life. I am forced to recall his remark each time I experience representations of protest, and to reflect upon how normalization acts to influence my reading of the world. When considering his final words I imagine Mia sitting in the execution room immediately after her acquittal. In a single moment both trapped by the METHOD, which has denied her protest and in other ways supremely free. In a discussion of normalization, the former is responsible for the

gnawing sensation that has remained in the pit of my stomach since my initial reading. Quiet and surreal the moment following her release recreates Mia as the subject to be normalized, “Bestellung einer Aufsichtsperson. Unterbringung in einer Resozialisierungsanstalt. Medizinische Überwachung. Alltagstraining” (Zeh 264). Here, in the final moments I spent with Mia Holl, this representation of protest suicide adopted its most important meaning for me; however not for the answers it gives, for there are none, but for its questions.

My affective state, my mental state, appears to me as Mia Holl sitting on the gurney in the execution room, clutching a pack of contraband cigarettes in her hand. Consumed by the uncertainty, the ambivalence of this moment, my most effective coping mechanism has been to ask questions. In my daily life, the sensation has caused me to doubt the system in which I live – the very political structures I was groomed to trust, the power structures, seen and unseen, particularly how these entities are represented alongside protest. By asking these questions of myself I created a paper that led me to question something I believed to be of only marginal importance. A paper I thought was about the effect of depictions of protest suicide on a collective consciousness actually chased a cluster of tendencies that produced normalization. Even while hunting the sexier story of ‘the man’ vs. protest, I found myself consumed by the smaller question of how this thing I call normalization slips into representations. How it creeps into the telling until the story looks very different. I must also ask why or whether struggling against normalization is important or possible.

Central to my original research interest yet far from confirmed is the lingering sensation that behind my smaller question remains the might, the crushing control of the

values, institutions, and patterns of power that implement and perpetuate processes of normalization and keep the 'normal' in place. Through engagement with these texts my awareness of an incredible and unnoticeable plane of politics grew. Of course I cannot claim to know where normalizing forces originate, the entire scope of their cultural significance, and crucially how their communication through representations shapes individual and collective understanding. These are questions for another time, for now I find it sufficient to arrive where Mia did, trapped in a moment both profoundly sad and bursting with potential.

Yet, in spite of the potential the niggling uneasiness cannot be fully quieted. The sensation conjured by the image of Mia is the same as the sensation that settles over me as I read the final words to appear on the screen in *Hunger,* "In the following days and months the British Government effectively granted all the prisoners' demands but without any formal recognition of political status." (1:32:02), as I recall the closing remarks of *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*, "Hört auf sie so zu sehen, wie sie nicht waren" (2:20:44). Drawn from different contexts, from texts, whose relationships to normalization vary, all whisper to me that disquieting allusion to the futility of all protest, suggesting the futility of rebellious thought. In each of the texts I reviewed it is normalization that makes my belief in protest, my desire for a different, ideally better system, cruel.

At the close of this paper I find myself confronting a whole new set of questions. Primarily, the question of how to better understand normalization. Distilled from my exploration is a heightened awareness of normalization as a cultural and political force and actor. I do not argue that normalization must be perceived as inherently negative or

destructive. Instead, normalization reflects a multitude of creative processes, touching innumerable institutions, individuals, and representations. Cultural and political consciousness often relies upon products with strong groundings in normalizing discourses, therein pointing to the danger of normalization. Its discourses and its incessant presence in representation frequently align with powerful interests and crowd out all others. As such, normalization limits creative possibilities in individual and collective life, particularly in regards to the political sphere. In a world saturated with creative texts and increasingly connected by new mediums, power conducts its lessons in obedience to an ever-growing audience. It is my belief that a more thorough understanding of normalization can assist in freeing subversive/alternative politics from the neutralization normalization can cause. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a greater awareness of normalization might facilitate more freedom for our politically subversive individual and collective thoughts.

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