The Art of Hunger: Self-Starvation in the Red Army Faction

Leith Passmore

The longest period of fasting was fixed by his impresario at forty days, beyond that term he was not allowed to go, not even in great cities, and there was good reason for it, too. Experience had proved that for about forty days the interest of the public could be stimulated by a steadily increasing pressure of advertisement, but after that the town began to lose interest, sympathetic support began notably to fall off.1

Franz Kafka, A Hunger Artist

H. str. situation:
7 still in Berlin. In addition, 4 are still starving in Cologne, 1 in Wittlich, 2 in Zweibrücken, 1 in Gotteszell! Except those in Berlin, everyone is more or less regularly force-fed.
Baader, Braun, Grundmann, Goergens, Mahler, Hoppe have interrupted the strike for health reasons—unbearable pain—colic etc.—with the intention to start up again when better. I have no details of the others Baader is for stopping
1. because nothing of any significance is afoot outside any more2

RAF ‘newsletter’, dated 16 June 1973

Dear ..
We, that is, the lawyers and the hunger strikers in Berlin, assume that the strike will end on Friday once the press conference in Paris has taken place.3

RAF entry in the info, dated 28 June 1973

On 16 April 1981, Red Army Faction (RAF) member Sigurd Debus died in a Hamburg prison as a result of sixty-eight days of prolonged self-starvation, yet leafing through the pages of history books for reference to Debus is like scratching around at the bottom of Kafka’s cage. By the time of his death, the RAF strategy of the prison hunger strike failed to elicit the sort of response the carefully choreographed spectacle of hunger had done during the incarceration of the first generation of the RAF from 1972 until 1977.
This paper examines the construction of self-starvation in the hunger strikes of this first generation as performative moments within a broader understanding of terrorism as a complex of representation and counter-representation. First, the investigation outlines

the strikes and the factors behind the demise of the strategy. Second, it examines the networks that enabled communication both between group members within the prison system, and between the imprisoned RAF and its audience(s) on the outside. These internal and external prison communication networks made the coordination of the hunger strikes and the dissemination of the accompanying texts possible. Third, it examines the discursive role of hunger as supported by these networks, and reveals it to have served different functions internally and externally. It is argued that RAF self-starvation was constructed as ‘holy’ within the prison network and was integral to the internal group dynamic and discipline structure. Externally, however, hunger formed the basis for an RAF strategy to counter a medicalization of terrorism and allowed RAF prisoners literally to embody their established rhetoric of ‘anti-fascism’ and ‘anti-imperialism’.

Understanding the significance of the RAF strategy of self-starvation, and the hunger strike more generally, requires a conception of the starving body as encoded or enmeshed with, while also shaping, social discourses. Whether the food practices of medieval spirituality; the demonic self-starvation of the Reformation; the eighteenth-century naturalization of hunger with the rise of empiricism; the spectacle of ‘hunger artists’ and ‘living skeletons’ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; the emergence of a medicalized anorexia nervosa in the late nineteenth century; or the particularly twentieth-century phenomenon of the political hunger strike, self-starvation has been successfully approached as a symbolic language, a performative

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4 Both Maud Ellmann in her study of twentieth century anorexia nervosa and Allen Feldman in his work on the political hunger strikes of the IRA employ the metaphor of inscription from Kafka’s Penal Colony to describe the enmeshing of the body with social codes and cultural discourses, while Feldman explicitly frames this encoding as not merely expressive of a given discourse, but as an affective process that can shape social and cultural reality, see Maud Ellmann, The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment (London, 1993); Allen Feldman, Formations of Violence. The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland (Chicago, 1991). In prison, Meinhof also draws on the same Kafka metaphor when writing down comparisons and concepts that come to her when she thinks of her time in Cologne-Ossendorf Prison, see Hamburg Institute for Social Research (Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung) (HIS), RAF Collection (RAF-Sammlung) (RAF), File (F) Me,U/009,002.

5 In her 1987 study of the food-practices of Medieval women, Caroline Walker Bynum frames fasting – as male Saints or female ‘miraculous maidens’ – as central to the spirituality of the period. While acknowledging the co-existence of supernatural – holy and demonic – and natural paradigms of hunger in the Medieval period, she argues that Medieval food abstinence was a particularly female concern, a source of power, and a way of experiencing (even becoming) God. The argument rests on the medieval conflation of the female body and food; see Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley, 1987). In their histories of anorexia nervosa, Walter Vandereycken and Ron Van Deth, and Joan Jacobs outline the religious significance of self-starvation as the most prominent form of asceticism and expression of religious devotion in the Medieval period, see Walter Vandereycken and Ron Van Deth, From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls. The History of Self-Starvation (London, 1996); Joan Jacobs Brumberg, Fasting Girls. The History of Anorexia Nervosa (New York, 2000). While the idea of an unholy hunger co-existed with the miracle of food abstinence since at least the Medieval period, the Reformation saw a female self-starvation viewed increasingly as the work of the devil rather than that of God. Once ‘miraculous’, females – in particular – who renounced food were considered possessed, heretical or insane, see Bynum, p. 195; Vandereycken and Van Deth, p. 33; Brumberg, p. 49. By the eighteenth century, an increasing focus on empiricism saw an increase in the skepticism surrounding self-starvation. This development also meant physicians sat alongside the clergy as appropriate experts in cases of food renunciation: this marked the
act within a specific cultural context. The cultural context for RAF self-starvation is the period of West German terrorism that emerged from the radical periphery of the waning student movement of the 1960s. By 1969 students began returning to their studies or taking jobs to begin the ‘march through the institutions’ and elements largely from the edges of the movement stepped violently, and clumsily, into the limelight. The Baader-Meinhof Group or, as they referred to themselves, the Red Army Faction, was born in the aftermath of the 1970 liberation of Andreas Baader. For a little over two years the group existed ‘underground’, robbing banks and carrying out bombings, before the leaders were arrested separately but in quick succession in June 1972.

The years between the arrest of the RAF leadership group and the 1977 deaths in the Stammheim prison are a complex yet distinct period in the broader history of the RAF. The first generation spent more than twice as much time in prison as it did evading police. During this time the group was tried in the most expensive and extensively reported trial in recent German history, with the RAF campaign continuing from prison. In fact, the approximately five-year incarceration of the first generation proved a far more effective period in terms of self-promotion and public response than the two years underground, and central to this was the practice and discursive construction of self-starvation in the RAF hunger strikes.

Prison Protest: The Hunger Strikes

Towards the end of 1972, Andreas Baader took the stand in the trial of fellow RAF member Horst Mahler and was prompted by the defence to comment on the prison conditions: ‘from today, I won’t eat any more until the prison conditions are changed.’ Baader’s words appeared the next day in newspapers and a statement

beginning of the slow medicalization of self-starvation, see Brumberg, pp. 51-57; Vandereycken and Van Deth, p. 51. Empirical skepticism also saw raw sensation begin to supplant religious wonder and saw food abstainers not only as something to test – patients – but something to behold – freaks. ‘Hunger artists’ (those who starved themselves in public as entertainment) and ‘living skeletons’ (those who displayed their emaciated bodies as entertainment) toured the fairs and carnivals of Europe even in the early years of the twentieth century. However, the high point of this form of entertainment – hunger as a spectacle – was during the final two decades of the nineteenth century, see Vandereycken and Van Deth, pp. 76-88. The gradual (yet incomplete) shift from sainthood to patient-hood, allowed for the emergence of anorexia nervosa in around 1870, see Brumberg, 61. Vandereycken and Van Deth’s, and Brumberg’s histories have contemporary anorexia nervosa as their endpoints – both frame the condition as a cultural construct limited to its specific context. Despite tales of self-starvation to achieve societal or political goals from Lycurgus to Clare of Assisi, the hunger strike is generally considered a twentieth century phenomenon, see Vandereycken and Van Deth, pp. 74-75.

Vandereycken and Van Deth, and Brumberg trace the cultural construction of hunger. Bynum frames food practices as a source of power and method of expression. In her study of anorexia, Maud Ellmann writes of hunger as a form of speech and starving flesh as inscribed with social codes, see Ellmann. In their studies of prison protests in Northern Ireland including hunger strikes and the so-called dirty protests, Allen Feldman and Begoña Aretxaga argue within a Foucaudian paradigm for an understanding of encoded and textualized bodies, see Feldman; Begoña Aretxaga, ‘Dirty Protest: Symbolic Overdetermination and Gender in Northern Ireland Ethnic Violence’, Ethos, Vol. 23, No. 2 (June 1995), pp. 123-148.

6 Vandereycken and Van Deth, and Brumberg trace the cultural construction of hunger. Bynum frames food practices as a source of power and method of expression. In her study of anorexia, Maud Ellmann writes of hunger as a form of speech and starving flesh as inscribed with social codes, see Ellmann. In their studies of prison protests in Northern Ireland including hunger strikes and the so-called dirty protests, Allen Feldman and Begoña Aretxaga argue within a Foucaudian paradigm for an understanding of encoded and textualized bodies, see Feldman; Begoña Aretxaga, ‘Dirty Protest: Symbolic Overdetermination and Gender in Northern Ireland Ethnic Violence’, Ethos, Vol. 23, No. 2 (June 1995), pp. 123-148.


8 Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 281.
was distributed by RAF lawyers Becker, Lang, Croissant and Groenewold on 17 January 1973. While individual prisoners had used the tactic previously, the strike announced by Baader was the first major public hunger strike of the RAF, and would only end on 16 February 1973. Forty prisoners joined the strike and the RAF lawyers also went on a much shorter, symbolic hunger strike in front of the High Court (Bundesgerichtshof) from 9 until 12 February. The goal was the abolition of the oppressive prison conditions, and although a concession to the strike saw Meinhof transferred out of the ‘death wing’, she was soon returned to her original cell once the prisoners were eating again.

Eighty prisoners—both RAF members and sympathizers—embarked on the second major hunger strike on 8 May 1973. The demands of the strikers were outlined in a declaration composed by Meinhof, circulated widely and in great numbers, and printed in the alternative media. The strike ended on 29 June 1973, after fifty-two days and largely due to fading public and media interest. It was during this second strike that force-feeding was used for the first time. The process was extremely painful and had remained largely unchanged since the beginning of the century. The prisoner was strapped or held down, or both, and a mouth-piece with a hole in it was placed in his or her mouth (making the practice of removing teeth redundant). A greased tube was then passed through the hole and down the throat into the stomach (one advance was the use of a stethoscope to prevent the lungs being pumped full of food) and a thick liquid was then forced down the tube. Vomiting afterwards was both a normal side-effect and a frequently self-induced means of resistance. Consequently, RAF members were often left strapped to the table for an hour after the procedure to allow for some digestion. Shortly after the second strike, and with it the force-feeding, came to an end, a search of Meinhof’s cell on 16 July 1973 turned up a manual for starvation. The five-page document described the symptoms associated with self-starvation, provided the ideal daily weight loss, and even outlined the critical phases of the body’s deterioration: pulse less than 60 or 50, blood protein level of 3–5g%, a shift in the pH of the blood.

10 Gudrun Ensslin, for example, went on an individual and private hunger strike shortly after her arrest over access to her defence lawyer Otto Schily, see GFA, H B 362, F 3155.
12 Peters, Tödlicher Irrtum, p. 316.
13 ID-Verlag, Rote Armee Fraktion, p. 187.
14 Kristin Wesemann writes of eighty prisoners in Ulrike Meinhof. Kommunistin, Journalistin, Terroristin—eine politische Biographie (Baden-Baden, 2007), p. 392; Stefan Aust had earlier written of 40 participants, see Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 293; Butz Peters lists the dates, see Peters, Tödlicher Irrtum, p. 316.
15 Published, for example, by the Information Centre Red People’s University (Informationszentrum Rote Volksuniversität, IZRU), Red Aid (Rote Hilfe) and the Committees Against Torture [Komitees gegen Folter], see HIS, RAF, F SO 09/004,002, p. 104.
16 Peters, Tödlicher Irrtum, p. 317.
18 GFA, H B 362, F 3370, P XIV/33. In January 1975 the court ruled on the steps doctors could take to preserve the lives of prisoners against their will. Each contingency was listed and the authorised measures meticulously outlined, see GFA, H 263, F 3172, ‘Verfügung des Vorsitzenden vom 30. Januar 1975’.
The prisoners prepared themselves mentally for the strikes, during which they suffered extreme weight loss and were at times very ill, but it was the third strike that would claim lives.

The third and longest hunger strike was launched on 13 September 1974 by Ulrike Meinhof during the Berlin trial relating to the 1970 liberation of Baader. She was visibly ill and spoke for forty minutes in a soft, languid voice before declaring the RAF was entering its third hunger strike. Meinhof’s declaration, which was also circulated in the courtroom in print form, listed an array of demands which centred on prison conditions, but also included demands for pensions and social security for all prisoners, prisoner access to doctors of choice, unobserved sexual contact and the abolition of mail censorship. Eighty prisoners joined this third strike, and it was always intended that some would not make it. By the time the strike was called to a halt 145 days later on 5 February 1975, two prisoners were dead, including Holger Meins. A tall man, Meins died weighing only 39 kg.

The effectiveness of the RAF strategy of the hunger strike steadily eroded after this third strike and there were a number of significant factors behind its demise. Perhaps most important was the evolution of the official response to hunger. Changes made to paragraph 101 of the Prison Act (Strafvollzugsgesetz) in 1975 sought to clarify when and how medical treatments could be administered against prisoners’ will, reducing room for negotiation and therefore emotional extortion. The legislation, however, was a hurried compromise, which allowed for neither absolute rights for prisoners nor unreserved obligations for prison doctors. Further amendments in 1977 saw medical treatment against the wishes of the prisoner, including force-feeding, made mandatory when a prisoner’s life was threatened, and illegal otherwise. By clarifying the expected response, the state went a long way to nullifying the strategy, as strikers could no longer reckon with their health being artificially maintained. This clarification effectively called the long-standing bluff of the prisoners and was representative of a new resolve not to allow the state to be blackmailed. This had an effect, too, on the reaction among sympathizers, as

19 Psychiatrist Wilfried Rasch attested in September 1975 that all four prisoners (Baader, Meinhof, Ensslin and Raspe) were underweight, see Martin Jander, ‘Isoaltion. Zu den Haftbedingungen der RAF-Gefangenen’, in Wolfgang Kraushaar (ed.), Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus, 2 vols, vol. 2 (Hamburg, 2006), p. 982. Baader, for example, also developed kidney stones, which doctors assumed were the result of water being withheld during a strike, see GFA, H B 362, F 3370, P XVI/21 RS.

20 Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 297; Peters, Tödlicher Irrtum, p. 317.


23 Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 297.

24 Aust, p. 296. A recent article in Der Spiegel suggests forty prisoners participated in the strike, see Michael Sontheimer, ‘Terrorzelle Stammheim’, Der Spiegel, 41 (2007), 100. However, a state of solidarity [Solidaritätsbekundung] signed by ‘80 prisoners in Stammheim’ who joined the strike on 18 November 1974 exists, see GFA, H B 362, F 3363, and this greater number is also in line with RAF policy to strike only in numbers between fifty and one hundred, see GFA, H B 362, F 3172, ‘2. Strafsenat Verfügung vom 19. Dezember 1974’.

25 Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 303.


the loud protest against solitary confinement and torture were conspicuously absent during subsequent strikes, although this could also have had a lot to do with a less quantifiable exhaustion among both sympathizers and lawyers. Further to this, the roundly condemned assassinations during the German Autumn and the Stammheim deaths robbed second-generation strikes of the level of public sympathy that had previously existed, and of the attention generated by the personality cult that had surrounded the first generation. These broadly contemporaneous developments mean the three major hunger strikes were performed in a unique legal and social context (that coincides with the incarceration of the first generation) and form a contained object of analysis.

 Allegations of ‘fraud’, which recall those levelled at ‘miraculous maidens’ and ‘hunger artists’ of previous centuries, have subsequently been used to imply that the strikes and, importantly, the suffering of the prisoners were not ‘real’. Such allegations are based on the fact that the prisoners hoarded food in their cells and secretly ate during the strikes. While we cannot presume to know the reasons or motives for eating, there is medical evidence that suggests the feeling of hunger disappears (as is stated in the RAF starvation manual) after a few days. Eating was instead used during the third hunger strike to manage the rate of deterioration and ensure RAF prisoners starved in a predetermined order allowing for a staggered yet constant stream of prisoner deaths.

 Dogmatic adherence to the argument of torture and dismissive allegations of fraud may be understandable symptoms of the historical immediacy of West German terrorism and a severely polarized debate, but they both miss the point. The ‘reality’ of the hunger strike lies in the discourses provoked, not in the flawless adherence to food abstinence. The construction of hunger and the starving body were very real, and they served important functions, both within the RAF and in the public realm. The strikes were part of an internal group dynamic, and of a wider symbolic assault on the West German state, both of which were directed from prison via complex yet effective communication networks.

 Communicating the Hunger Strike: The ‘Info’ and the ‘Out-fo’

 Among the East German military magazine *militärtechnik*, individual *Spiegel* issues and countless other publications that were prevented from entering the prison system, was issue 20 of *We Want it All*. This particular magazine was stopped before it reached Meinhof, the intended recipient, because page 10 included an RAF hunger strike declaration. The declaration, written by Meinhof, had circumvented the prison measures to prevent information getting out, only to be halted on the way back in. The

28 ‘Schmeckt wieder’, *Der Spiegel*, 37 (1977), p. 34.
29 ‘Schmeckt wieder’, p. 34.
30 Kurt Oesterle describes the necessary realism of the strike as descending into farce when the prisoners ate during strikes, Oesterle, *Stammheim*, p. 128.
32 ‘Wir wollen alles’ was produced monthly from 1973 until 1975 and enjoyed circulation throughout the entire Federal Republic, see http://projekte.free.de/ldada/dada-p/P0000596.HTM (accessed 24 Oct. 2007).
fate of issue 20 is representative of the frontline in the penal system: behind the debate which framed the harsh initial prison conditions in terms of either ‘security’ or ‘torture’ raged a battle for the control over the flow of information.

The initial prison conditions experienced by the RAF leadership group were severe. After her arrest on 15 June 1972, Meinhof was placed in a cell in the otherwise empty psychiatric wing of Cologne-Ossendorf prison. Among the numerous ‘special instructions’ (besondere Anordnungen), it was stipulated that the lights should be left on day and night, and that neighbouring cells should be left empty. Solitary confinement was also standard for most RAF prisoners, and especially for the leaders, who were spread across penal institutions throughout West Germany: Baader was sent to Schwalmstadt; Raspe to Cologne; Meins to Wittlich; and Ensslin was housed in Essen.

Over the course of the five-year incarceration, prison conditions were highly fluid. There were differences between prisons, and prisoners were moved between facilities. Ensslin was transferred to Cologne-Ossendorf and a cell next to Meinhof in February 1974, before the two of them were moved to the seventh floor of the purpose-built Stammheim facility near Stuttgart in April. Baader and Raspe arrived at Stammheim in October 1974, but Meins’ health had—as the result of a prolonged hunger strike—deteriorated so drastically that moving him from Wittlich was not an option. Conditions were also subject to change as a disciplinary measure, or due to shifting ‘security needs’.

Against this background of fluidity a general but slow trend of relaxing conditions can be noted, though the commentary on the conditions often succumbs to the traditional rut of RAF historiography of defending one or the other (and here there are only the two) political perspectives. Anecdotal evidence is also wide-ranging and at times highly contradictory, without necessarily being untruthful. It is evident, for example, that towards the end of their lives the RAF prisoners lived in larger than normal cells, which more closely resembled academic offices than prison cells, were allowed to spend much of the day with each other, and had access to books and individual televisions, conditions not enjoyed by other prisoners. It is also clear, however, that they suffered terribly under earlier prison conditions: in February 1973 one of Cologne-Ossendorf prison’s own medical experts, Dr Goette, found that ‘in the case of Ms [Meinhof], whom I have twice examined, the limit of her resilience, in psychiatric terms, has now been reached’. Dr Goette’s recommended easing of the conditions was not immediately, or even quickly,

34 GFA, H B 362, F 3168, pp. 89–92.
36 Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 301.
38 Examples of the extremes are an unpublished letter of complaint by a female inmate in Stammheim (a barely literate American petty criminal with apparently little vested interest in either domestic German politics or world-wide revolution), see GFA, H B 362, F 3481 Part II, and the published recollections of Horst Bubeck (from 1972 to 1986 the acting prison warden [stellvertretender Vollzugsdienstleiter] of Stammheim prison), see Oesterle, Stammheim.
implemented by prison authorities because it was deemed to pose too great a risk to the control over the flow of information between RAF prisoners and their ‘helpers’.\textsuperscript{40} For the purposes of this paper and the investigation into the construction of hunger, it is more beneficial to consider the motives behind the prison conditions rather than seek to judge the merit of them.

The flow of information became an important battleground during the incarceration of the first generation of the RAF. The official legal reason given in 1972 for the heightened Untersuchungshaft was the ‘danger of suppression of evidence’ (Verdunkelungsgefahr).\textsuperscript{41} This was to prevent communication with the outside world and therefore interference with the criminal investigation. Visiting, and incoming and outgoing mail, were restricted to defence lawyers and immediate relatives. Packages and letters within this scope were also subjected to differing levels of censorship.\textsuperscript{42} Prisoners could only receive newspapers and magazines requested through the prison administration, and those publications approved were then appraised on an issue-by-issue basis.\textsuperscript{43} Radios were also withheld from prisoners until—in Meinhof’s case at least—late 1972,\textsuperscript{44} and the use of cassette recorders was likewise highly regulated.\textsuperscript{45}

The constant emphasis on the control of the flow of information, which was behind many of the fluctuating prison conditions, meant that the prisoners and lawyers were constantly attempting to circumvent the measures imposed. In early efforts of this kind, messages were smuggled—presumably by individual lawyers—from prisoners to other individuals, but information also needed to flow the other way. In March 1973 Baader demanded that the lawyers ‘build an info-system’,\textsuperscript{46} which from May became highly organized.\textsuperscript{47} A text found in Meinhof’s cell summarized the internal prison discussion as it stood on 25 May 1973 and described how any texts a lawyer received were to be delivered to the Hamburg office of RAF lawyer Kurt Groenewold, or ‘central contact’,\textsuperscript{48} before being collated, copied and disseminated to the RAF prison population.\textsuperscript{49} This became known as ‘das info’, and it was received by a regular group of around thirty prisoners.\textsuperscript{50}

The info was a flexible system that could easily deal with prisoner transfers and changes to prison conditions. It relied heavily on the relatively easy passage of material marked ‘defence mail’ (Verteidigerpost) between prisoners and lawyers. The rules governing

\textsuperscript{40} GFA, H B 362, F 3168, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{41} GFA, H B 362, F 3168, p. 93. The other reason also given for the conditions imposed on RAF prisoners was that they would attempt to escape [Fluchtgefahr], see GFA, H B 362, F 3168, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{42} GFA, H B 362, F 3172. This file includes lists of censored letters and the reasons for censorship.
\textsuperscript{43} GFA, H B 362, F 3166, pp. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{44} The concerns were twofold: first, prison authorities were worried tools to aid escape could be hidden inside radios, see GFA, H B 362, F 3168, p. 152. Second, authorities refused to allow radios which had a large high-frequency range including the infamous 27 MHz at which members of illegal groups had been known to transmit messages, see GFA, H B 362, F 3167, pp. 218-20.
\textsuperscript{47} Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{48} Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 290; Peters, Tödlicher Irrtum, p. 307.
\textsuperscript{49} GFA, H B 362, F 3132, p. 268; GFA, H B 362, F 3370, P XVI/13.
\textsuperscript{50} Wesemann, Ulrike Meinhof, p. 389.
‘defence mail’ were, however, detailed and subject to change, and therefore packages were often subject to search and censure. So the system was not perfect, but given the efforts to stop communication between prisoners it was relatively reliable. The info was also highly hierarchical and after initially being two-tiered, it soon had three levels. Prisoners who received the info at level I also received levels II and III. Those who entered at level II, also received level III, but not I. Level III was the lowest degree of access. Anyone could contribute to the info, but final decisions on the content and stratification were made by Baader and Ensslin. The info functioned well as a prison communication system, but it also helped maintain a sense of group identity; a strictly hierarchical structure, and a certain discipline. However, another network was required to communicate with the outside world.

Meinhof saw the RAF’s ‘central problem’ as the ‘dissemination [and] publication of [its] ideas’, and the system subsequently developed for communicating RAF ideas from prison to the wider world was built on the logistics of the info. The immediate contacts remained chiefly RAF lawyers, but instead of turning the flow of information back in on itself, communiqués were passed on to a variety of organizations. This system, referred to here as the out-fo, became more than a line of communication between comrades; it evolved into a network of publication and event management.

Some avenues of publication were extensions of those used in the underground, such as the relationship with Red Aid (Rote Hilfe). The Red Aid organization was an arm of the Communist Party of Germany (Development Organization) [Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Aufbausorganisation)] (KPD/AO) and published leaflets and a magazine: hunger strike declarations, written by Meinhof, appeared unedited in the magazine. Red Aid also organized demonstrations and teach-ins. The cooperation stretches back to before the group’s arrest when Red Aid published RAF declarations and ran a teach-in, in May 1972, in Frankfurt at which a cassette recording of Ulrike Meinhof from the underground was played. Once in prison Meinhof wrote of her hope that Red Aid would perhaps develop into an ‘organization of the political prisoners, of the prison politics of the guerilla’. The Information Centre Red People’s University (Informationszentrum Rote Volksuniversität, IZRU) also printed RAF texts, texts from the RAF

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52 Peters, Tödlicher Irrtum, p. 309; HIS, RAF, F Me,U/004,004, p. 380.
53 Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 290.
54 ‘das zentrale problem ist verbreitung, veröffentlichung unserer ideen’, see GFA, H B 362, F 3133, ‘schweigen und handeln’.
55 Letter by Meinhof demanding her text be sent to ‘Red Aid’ only after being read by her fellow prisoners, GFA, H B 362, F 3369, P IX/15-IX/17; a handwritten note by Meinhof to RAF lawyer Becker, asking for a particular text now not to be delivered to ‘Red Aid’, GFA, H B 362, F 3370, P XV/46; prison officials also found in Meinhof’s cell a ‘Red Aid’ booklet entitled ‘Rote Hilfe Dokumentation. Protest vor dem BGH gegen Psychoterror in deutschen Gefängnissen’. This booklet was put together by Meinhof’s sister, Wienke Zitlaff, and included handwritten corrections by Meinhof, see GFA, H B 362, F 3370, P XV/113.
56 For example in ‘Rote Hilfe Nr. 19 Mai 1973’, see GFA, H B 362, F 3477, P XII/3; and in ‘Rote Hilfe Nr. 11’, 2 July 1973, see GFA, H B 362, F 3370, P XIII/24.
57 GFA, H B 362, F 3164, p. 224. The recording was also distributed as a printed text by ‘Red Aid’ as part of ‘neues vom sozialstaat’, GFA, H B 362, F 3164, pp. 225-306.
58 ‘bis viell. mal ne rh als org. der poli.gef der knastpol. der guerilla rausspringt’, see an info entry found in Meinhof’s cell on 16 July 1973, GFA, H B 362, F 3369, P X/5.
lawyers, and hunger strike declarations, both in its magazine *Red People’s University* and in leaflet form, as did as the Information Service for Suppressed News (Informationsdienst für unterbliebene Nachrichten, ID).59

Perhaps the biggest single development in terms of the out-fo, however, was the founding of the Committees Against the Torture of Political Prisoners in the FRG (Komitees gegen Folter an politischen Gefangenen in der BRD, Committees). The appeal to the public to form committees was drafted by lawyers in consultation with RAF prisoners,60 and Committees soon appeared in twenty-three West German cities.61 The groups attracted around 450 people in their first year;62 however the most active members remained the RAF lawyers and relatives of prisoners: in July 1974 Wienke Zitlaff wrote of the Committees’ work as being done by a couple of people in Hamburg and Heidelberg.63 Many of the young Committee members thought of themselves as the ‘legal arm of the RAF’,64 the expressed purposes of which were to ‘inform the public’, ‘mobilize liberals’ and ‘raise funds’.65 These very active groups published leaflets and booklets, they led demonstrations, held press conferences, appeared on television, collected money and organized teach-ins.66 In total, they held no fewer than seventy-five ‘information events’ in the year following their formation.67

The printing of unedited RAF texts, and the frequent cross-publication of texts and images, produced a common vocabulary of phrases, slogans, photos and cartoons, and a surprisingly homogeneous message, in these alternative publications. The prison texts that were published on the outside were composed by Meinhof in her cell, with Ensslin and Baader exercising scant editorial veto via the info.68 In a prison letter, Ensslin conceded that Meinhof ‘was, is and will be’ the voice of the RAF.69 The strikes, and more importantly the external protests and events coordinated via the out-fo, were designed to also capture the attention of the commercial media,70 which tended not to publish RAF texts or report the self-starvation of prisoners as an event in itself.

59 See, for example, *Red People’s University*, 10 (1973); *Red People’s University*, 11 (1973); an A3 IZRU leaflet from May 1973, see HIS, RAF, F SO 09/003,003, P VII/2; GFA, H B 362, F 3369, P VII/2, ID, 10 August 1977, see GFA, H B 362, F, 3283.

60 HIS, RAF, F SO 09/004,002, ‘Auswertungsbericht vom 18.4.74 über das am 16.7 bzw. 18.7.73 in den Zellen von 8 RAF-Gefangenen gefundene Beweismaterial’, pp. 95-6.

61 Wesemann, *Ulrike Meinhof*, p. 381.


63 HIS, RAF, F Me,U/012,006, ‘Zunächst ist es irre …’

64 ‘legaler arm der raf’, HIS, RAF, F Me,U/012,006, ‘Zunächst ist es irre …’


66 A 1972 info entry describes local Committees with stands on busy street corners handing out 20,000 leaflets every weekend, see GFA, H B 362, F 3370, P XV/42 and GFA, H B 362, F 3363; booklets such as ‘Der tote Trakt ist ein Folterinstrument’ (43 pp.), ‘Die Systematik der Folter’ (35 pp.), ‘Der Kampf gegen die Vernichtungshaft’ (285 pp.), see Peters, *Tödlicher Irrtum*, p. 314; for details of demonstrations and teach-ins see GFA, H B 362, F 3363; For press details of press conferences and television appearances see GFA, H B 362, F 3370, ‘NUR ZUM INTERNEN GEBRAUCH’.


68 This conclusion is also drawn by Alfred Klaus in his report on material found in RAF cells. Klaus cites an info in which Meinhof describes Ensslin as having the ‘Schlusseredaktion’, see HIS, RAF, F SO 09/004,003, p. 151.

69 Report by Alfred Klaus on material found in RAF cells, HIS, RAF, F SO 09/004,003.

70 Martin Jander writes of the strikes being constructed as hooks, a strategy borrowed from the advertising industry, see Jander, ‘Isolation’, p. 979.
The commercial reporting of the strikes tended instead to gather around three areas. First, a relative suppression compared to the alternative media: in a rare interview conducted via correspondence and published in *Der Spiegel*, the RAF leadership group denounced what it termed a ‘news boycott’ (*Nachrichtenboykott*) and the role Meins’ death played in breaking it. Second, a number of long-standing themes, such as the fitness of the prisoners to stand trial, the role of the defence lawyers, and the extended debates over the ethics and medicine of force-feeding. These debates represented the in-house discussions of politicians and medical professionals and they addressed the strikes to the extent that they encroached on their immediate professional responsibility. Prisoner texts appeared here in articles, but these were almost exclusively originally intended as internal correspondence and were cited as part of these self-contained debates among lawyers, politicians and doctors. The third node of reporting were the external events staged in support of the strikes and it is here that the event management of the *out-fo* ensured a media presence for the RAF construction of hunger.

Perhaps the most prominent of such events sanctioned and designed by prisoners to attract publicity was Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1974 meeting with Baader in Stammheim. Meinhof penned the invitation to Sartre and drafts that circulated via the *info* reveal the clear intention behind the visit to create media hype capable of ‘transmitting political content’. The visit, or more accurately the subsequent press conference with the French philosopher and the domineering RAF lawyer Croissant, provided the RAF with the platform it sought, as it was reported widely by the domestic and international press. The West German newspapers presented the visit predominantly as foreign interference in the internal affairs of the Federal Republic, but also gave column space to RAF accusations of ‘torture’ and ‘fascism’ with terminology such as ‘solitary confinement’ (*Isolationshaft*) and ‘extermination’ (*Vernichtungshaft*) finding their way into articles in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Spiegel*. Baader’s own words from his conversation with Sartre were even reported in the FAZ, albeit via a prison interpreter, Sartre himself and then a second interpreter at the press conference.

This level of abstraction is representative of the route RAF slogans and phrases took to make it into the pages of commercial publications. Protests in the aftermath of Meins’s death, for example, saw RAF words reported verbatim: the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported the slogan ‘Holger Meins—murdered by bourgeois class justice’, as it appeared on wreaths laid at his funeral, and ‘Fight the bourgeois class justice’, ‘Fight Holger Meins’ murderers’, ‘Freedom for all political prisoners’ as was plastered across placards after the funeral. A similar sentiment was relayed by pictures of, and articles on, graffiti that appeared on West

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72 See, for example, ‘Es werden Typen dabei kaputtgehen’*, *Der Spiegel*, 47 (1974), pp. 29, 30, 33; ‘Wir oder sie auf Leben und Tod’*, p. 32.
73 See HIS, RAF, F Me, U/015,001.
76 See ‘Sartre ruft Böll zu Solidarität auf’, p. 4.
German churches: the *Süddeutsche* printed a photo of the spray-painted message ‘Holger Meins murdered in prison’, and cited similar graffiti such as ‘Holger Meins starved to death—amen’ in the caption.⁷⁸ Pictures of a protest by RAF lawyers outside the Federal Court (*Bundesgerichtshof, BGH*) showing, among others, posters painting the justice system as fascist (‘BGH = Brauner Gangsterhaufen’) appeared in the *Spiegel*.⁷⁹ While such Nazi analogies, accusations of murder, and the preferred terminology of the RAF were unlikely to make it directly from prison to the newspapers, it regularly did so via the subterfuge of the reporting of protests and demonstrations either directed from prison via the *out-fo*, or sprouting organically from the supporter milieu maintained by it.

By circumventing the prison conditions imposed on them, RAF prisoners maintained contact with each other and allowed their texts and rhetoric to filter out of the prison system and into the alternative and commercial media. These networks enabled the RAF to (re)shape both its internal dynamic and its external rhetoric from prison via its construction of hunger and the starving body.

**Constructions of Hunger: Holy Hunger and Counter-Medicalization**

The importance of the public debate and campaigns surrounding the prison conditions and the RAF hunger strikes can scarcely be over-emphasized. They were, after all, the catalyst for radicalizing underground members of the Socialist Patients’ Collective (*Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv, SPK*) and many young Committee members, giving rise to the second generation of a group which was at the very least on its knees after the arrest of its leadership.⁸⁰ Within this context, the RAF construction of hunger and the starving body served very different functions internally compared to externally. Internally, hunger was part of the psychological discipline exercised by RAF leaders on the rest of the group, and helped foster the martyrdom necessary for people to put their lives on the line. Externally, however, hunger was central to a medical discourse which was capable of carrying already established RAF themes by enabling prisoners to occupy the twin victim statuses of their rhetoric: the object of Nazi atrocities and the colonized third world.

Contemporaneous examples of prison hunger strikes were at hand for the RAF, most notably a successful Irish Republican Army (IRA) strike just prior to the first major RAF strike. In 1972 IRA prisoners in Ireland launched a successful thirty-seven-day hunger strike to attain the status of ‘political prisoner’, which also became an important campaign for the RAF. In 1974 the Price sisters went on strike demanding repatriation, after being arrested in London for their part in a series of car-bombings in March 1973. This strike lasted for over 200 days and was sustained by force-feeding.⁸¹ A later 1981 hunger strike would claim the lives of ten men.

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⁷⁹ ‘Kassiber mit Skizze’, *Der Spiegel*, 9 (1973), 64; ‘Mord beginnt beim bösen Wort’, 54. The text of the posters was also reported, see for example ‘Es werden Typen dabei kaputtgehen’, 32.
⁸¹ The force-feeding of the Price sisters was reported in the *Spiegel* and placed directly in the ‘long tradition of force-feeding in Great Britain’ and specifically in the context of the food abstinence of the suffragettes, see ‘Stopfen oder Nudeln’, *Der Spiegel*, 7 (1974), p. 92.
Unlike in West Germany, the hunger strike had a long history in Ireland, and these Irish examples have been placed in a tradition of self-starvation in Ireland that can be traced back to pre-Christian oral legal codes allowing an aggrieved party to ‘fast against his debtor’.\textsuperscript{82} The Irish hunger strike, some argue, has also attained unique importance in Irish Christian traditions and taken its place in a history of religio-political martyrdom.\textsuperscript{83} Allen Feldman argues, however, that while the hunger strikes of the IRA have been interpreted as acts of ‘religious transcendence’, this has more to do with their reception outside of prison. He writes—relying on extensive interviews with former prisoners—that striking prisoners insisted theirs was a secular hunger strike with political goals, but they were well aware of the sacralization of the hunger beyond the prison walls.\textsuperscript{84} Such ‘holy hunger’ led to a rush of support and grief, on which the strikers seized for their own political ends. Nevertheless, a clear line remained between the internal conception of hunger and the construction of it outside the prison. The distinction between internal and external also exists in the case of the RAF, but the group reversed, in some senses, the Irish logic.

The RAF prisoners were well aware of the IRA and its hunger strikes, indeed a history of the IRA outlining its struggle, its long history, and the ‘torture and extermination camps’ in Ireland circulated via the info from 1973 to 1974.\textsuperscript{85} In an info entry from November 1974, and in a conscious reference to the IRA rhetoric, Baader refers to the hunger strike as “the holiest weapon” as the ira says.\textsuperscript{86} The term was adopted days later by Ensslin in another info entry, in which she also kept the quotation marks.\textsuperscript{87} In addition, an unsigned info (most probably written by Raspe) hails the Price sisters as living for ‘10 times 10 times 10 thousand years!’\textsuperscript{88} The Price sisters were at this stage not dead, in fact both Marian and Dolours Price are alive today and still politically active. It must be remembered that these appropriations of Irish hunger with their connotations of virtue, sacrifice and holiness were introduced into the info system in late 1974, in the early stages of the third RAF hunger strike, and only weeks after the death of Holger Meins.\textsuperscript{89} It was this third hunger strike that was intended to cost lives. As early as February, Baader wrote in the info: ‘I think, this time we won’t stop the strike. That means people will break’.\textsuperscript{90} In March 1974, Meinhof wrote in the info of the hunger strike needing to be backed up with sick and even dead prisoners.\textsuperscript{91} Ensslin also made specific suggestions as to the timing of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[84] Feldman, Formations of Violence, p. 219.
\item[85] HIS, RAF, F RA 02/006,002, ‘essen—an alle / aus “die IRA, Sinn Fein, sondernummer: folter und kz’s in irland, dokumentation”’.
\item[87] Bakker Schut, das info, p. 212.
\item[88] ‘die price sisters, sie leben 10 mal 10 mal 10-tausend jahre!’ , see HIS, RAF, F RA 02/005,004, ‘zum ein- + vierzeiler.’.
\item[89] Meins died 9 November 1974. Baader’s ‘info’ was 27 November and Ensslin’s was 31 November 1974, while the reference to the price sisters was undated but can be narrowed down to late 1974.
\item[90] ‘Ich denke, wir werden den Hungerstreik diesmal nicht abbrechen. Das heißt, es werden Typen dabei kaputt gehen’, Baader in an ‘info’ entry, see Aust, p. 296. The ‘info’ was from 4 February 1974, see GFA, H B 362, F 3480 Teil I, ‘Vorsitzenden des 2. Strafsenats des OLGs Stgt from 25 September 1975’.
\end{footnotes}
prisoner deaths; she argued that deaths needed to be accepted, and proposed a staggered programme of self-starvation, which would see one death every third week (or second or fourth: on this point she was flexible). The prisoners were able to, and did, eat by storing food when not on strike and later resorting to these hidden hoards, meaning the policy of staggered deaths was manageable. Though they starved themselves, the RAF leaders were never part of the programme of death by self-starvation.

The importance the leadership group placed on other prisoners putting their lives on the line was matched by the need for numbers of participants. An internal communiqué regarding the planning of the third strike clearly states that strikes should only take place if supported by a large number of prisoners: between fifty and one hundred. Elevating self-starvation to a pseudo-religious practice also helped to maintain a group sense of purpose, particularly as the group members were isolated from each other.

The appropriation of a discourse of virtuous and holy hunger to foster a sense of duty and willingness to be sacrificed complemented the group structure and disciplinary system already in place within the RAF. Verbal abuse and peer pressure were integral to the group dynamic of the RAF from the moment it went underground and entered the public consciousness. Baader was the leader and cult figure around which the RAF gathered and while underground he wielded his power largely via verbal abuse, humiliation and cultivating cumulative peer pressure. Baader’s verbal abuse of those who stepped out of line continued in prison via the info. He threatened, for example, to excommunicate Astrid Proll from the info when she discontinued her hunger strike, a threat followed up by Meinhof who warned Proll she could be thrown out of the RAF altogether. This threat was carried out in the case of Margrit Schiller, who was banished from level I of the info during the third hunger strike and responded in desperate terms: ‘send me 1 again immediately. I need it, to stick with the hs [hunger strike] and particularly the ts [thirst strike] until the end’. Meins also attacked Manfred Grashof after the latter broke off his strike: ‘you stupid idiot. / start again immediately and continue—if you haven’t already done so. that and nothing else … the only thing that counts is the struggle’. During the third strike lawyers reported the weights of striking prisoners to Baader who would then admonish those he thought were not fasting quickly enough.

92 GFA, H B 362, F 3283, p. 100.
93 Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 305.
95 Klaus Rainer Röhl describes how Meinhof was also on the receiving end of one of Baader’s verbal tirades, see Klaus Rainer Röhl, Fünf Finger sind keine Faust (Cologne, 1974), p. 419.
96 Aust, Baader Meinhof Komplex, p. 291.
97 GFA, H B 362, F 3369, P XI/11.
99 ‘du blöder idiot. / fängst sofort wieder an und machst weiter – wenn du das nicht sowieso schon gemacht hast. das und nichts anderes. […] das einzige was zählt ist der kampf’, see HIS, RAF, F RA 02/005,004, ‘du blöder idiot’; Bakker Schut, pp. 183-186. Sections including insults such as ‘arschloch’ were omitted from Bakker Schut’s edited collection. Olaf Gätje has argued that the editing of Bakker Schut’s collection renders the source unsuitable for his linguistic study of the ‘info’ system, see Gätje, p. 716. However, the collection remains a valid source for the purposes of this paper.
In addition to the peer pressure and unquestioned common goal, the prisoners received regular collections of letters written by other prisoners under the heading ‘critique and self-critique’,\textsuperscript{101} which served as a type of confession. Prisoners could confess as to how they had failed to adhere to the particular brand of revolution the RAF had developed.

The sacralization of hunger was a pseudo-religious tool and an integral part of the internal group dynamics of the RAF. It provided an important basis from which numbers of strikers could be maintained and a willingness to be sacrificed exalted, but it never left the internal info system; externally hunger was referred to as a weapon, but never a ‘holy weapon’. The RAF drew on a history and construction of hunger—that of the IRA—reversing the logic of the Irish strikes: the external discourse of hunger in the Irish case was used by the RAF to support an internal holiness and a martyr complex. If the internal dynamics of the RAF were the playground for the domineering Baader, the external discourses of hunger were the domain of Meinhof, the RAF scribe.

Externally, hunger formed part of an intense effort to counter a discourse of terrorism that married contemporary scientific thinking on terrorism with the construction of terrorists in the commercial media. Although the latter was at its most severe during the incarceration of the RAF members, it began well before the hunger strikes, or even the arrest of the first generation, and had a lot to do with the high-profile Ulrike Meinhof.

In 1962 Meinhof underwent brain surgery to remove what was thought to be a brain tumour, and both the scientific community and sectors of the commercial press actively sought to present this operation as a potential cause for Meinhof’s radicalization. Meinhof’s surgery was widely reported at the time and her medical history was even written up in 1968 in a medical journal, where her operation appears as one of three case studies.\textsuperscript{102} In 1970, her estranged husband Klaus Rainer Röhl publicly linked the operation with Meinhof’s slide into terrorism when he cited a severe change in personality—a sudden callousness and sexual distance—as both resulting from the surgery and potentially causing Meinhof to go underground.\textsuperscript{103} In 1972, issue 26 of the weekly magazine *Stern* printed the article ‘The tumour in Meinhof’s brain’, complete with Röhl family portrait and the 1962 brain X-ray.\textsuperscript{104} The conception of the crazy terrorist was only reinforced by the decision to keep her not in prison, but in a prison psychiatric wing. It was here that identifying Meinhof also became an issue for doctors. No fingerprints existed on file for Meinhof, and the prisoner refused to cooperate with police, or even acknowledge her name. So the decision was taken to X-ray her head and compare the results with the now famous 1962 X-ray. The search for the terrorist became a matter for medical experts charged with identifying the terrorist deep within the body of the accused.

\textsuperscript{101} Aust, *Baader Meinhof Komplex*, p. 291.


\textsuperscript{104} ‘Der Tumor im Gehirn der Meinhof’, *Stern*, 26 (1972). Issue 26 of the *Stern* magazine from 18 June 1972 was among the items found in the apartment, in which Meinhof was arrested, see GFA, H B 362, F 3078.
In line with this wider trend of doctors being the accepted experts to assess terrorists, the search quickly extended to psychiatrists, who were charged with assessing the criminal responsibility of the prisoner. At the beginning of 1973 and in the context of the first hunger strike, the chief medical officer (leitender Medizinaldirektor) Bernd Goette used the 1962 surgery to justify his finding to Federal Prosecutor (Bundesanwalt) Peter Zeis that ‘according to the results of the inquiries conducted to date, an impaired criminal responsibility for the accused Ulrike Meinhof’ between June 1970 and her arrest cannot be easily ruled out’.

The role of the psychiatrist would soon shift again to assessing the damage, if any, to the prisoners’ mental health as the result of the prison conditions. It was the common assessment of prison doctors that the physical and mental wellbeing of the prisoners was suffering and already damaged, but these concerns were deemed subordinate to security needs.

Even the deaths of the prisoners were part of this process as the debate surrounding the deaths in Stammheim, particularly Meinhof’s, proceeded in terms of conflicting sets of medical evidence: the 1979 report by the International Investigation Commission countered the official autopsy, concluding that ‘the results of investigations suggest, in fact, that Ulrike Meinhof was dead when she was hanged and that there is alarming evidence that indicates the involvement of a third person in this death’. The identification of the terrorist, the cause of his or her actions, the conditions of his or her incarceration and even the nature of his or her death were all to be understood through the gaze of the doctor.

In response, the prisoners armed themselves for the prison experience with a manual for countering diagnosis and treatment. Removed from Meinhof’s cell in 1973, this seven-page text lists the tools of diagnosis and treatment—from observing speech and interactions and performing X-rays to hypnosis and carotid angiographies—as well as methods for sabotaging such attempts, including remaining silent, thrashing around to guard against needles, or tensing and relaxing muscles and yawning through the nose to sabotage electroencephalograms.

The body developed as the front line not only inside, but also outside the prison system, with the medical or scientific construction of the terrorist feeding off the science and continuing in its own right in the press. Meinhof’s brain became a defining image of West German terrorism.


106 Prison doctors Goette, Allies and Jarmer reached similar conclusions, GFA, H B 362, F 3168, p. 280. For ruling recognising but not implementing the medical recommendations see, GFA, H B 362, F 3168, p. 290.


108 A carotid angiography is a procedure in which a catheter is used to inject dye into the carotid artery (artery in the neck that supplies blood to the brain) allowing the artery to show up clearly on X-rays.

In August 1973, shortly after the second hunger strike, *Der Spiegel* published the article ‘Clear-headed or sick?’ (Fig. 27.03), which included the 1962 X-ray of Meinhof’s brain.\(^{110}\) The *Frankfurter Rundschau* of 16 August 1973 ran a similar piece with the article ‘Fight surrounding the head of Ulrike Meinhof’, which also included the X-ray.\(^{111}\) The medicalization, or, as the prisoners and sympathizers often wrote, the ‘psychiatrization’ (*Psychiatrisierung*) of the prisoners in the media did not go unnoticed or unanalysed. Red Aid published a 192-page book that included a review of the reporting on terrorism and cited examples from the time of the arrests such as: ‘Ulrike Meinhof, a “severe psycho”, who has lost touch with reality (*Welt*, 19.6.72)’\(^{112}\) and: ‘The fear of the nation—a case for psychiatrists? That’s the way it is! (*Bild*, 5.6.72)’.\(^{113}\) The RAF and its sympathizers indeed saw the reporting as a coherent and coordinated campaign across the entire spectrum of the commercial media: in a letter of April 1974 to fellow RAF lawyer Heinrich Hannover, Lang writes of what he sees as a prolonged, almost two-year campaign to ‘make’ Meinhof a mad person in the public consciousness.\(^{114}\) It was the job of the defence, Lang wrote, not to let this happen.

Meinhof wrote of the ‘scientification’ (*Verrissenschaftlichung*)\(^{115}\) of the public discourse on terrorism as a tool of domination being used to replace all political concepts with


\(^{114}\) HIS, RAF, F Me, U/012, 007.

\(^{115}\) This was part of a discussion between Meinhof and Croissant probably in late 1973 or early 1974, see HIS, RAF, F Me, U/012, 001, ‘und eben auch die idiotie des spk’. 
scientific terms.\footnote{She also led the way in showing how this was to be countered: by its appropriation and subversion. In a letter to the lawyers, Meinhof demands that they ‘finally bring the committee arguments onto the same scientific level that the pigs [Bullen] have, and onto the political level of the RAF’ (The RAF leaders made no distinction between the police, the ‘pigs’, and the spread of publications in the commercial media).\footnote{Meinhof’s comments are indicative of the shift undertaken as the RAF embarked on creating its own scientific discourse of terrorism. The group shared the view of the Red People’s University that ‘Science is political and politics is scientific’.}\footnote{From prison, Meinhof regularly edited Committee texts and gave directions on press conferences to be held by the Committees or the RAF lawyers.\footnote{In this manner she was able to insert desired terms and phrases, such as ‘brainwashing’, which Meinhof demanded be added to Committee publications and included at lawyer press conferences.\footnote{A 1975 written interview with the leadership group printed in \textit{Der Spiegel} is likewise laden with the term brainwashing, apparently irrespective of the question posed.\footnote{Meinhof also suggested recruiting the expert opinion of Dr Jacques Hassoun, and that Dr Hassoun use the word ‘brain’ instead of ‘personality’.\footnote{The appropriation of the discourse of science proceeded, then, by lacing texts and speeches with a medical and scientific language.\footnote{Perhaps the most famous linking of the RAF prison experience to the human body is a canonical Meinhof poem, which was the basis of much of the campaign and which was reproduced completely or in part in almost all texts produced in the cloud of activity surrounding the RAF.\footnote{The poem was presented as a personal account of Meinhof’s time in the Cologne-Ossendorf prison under the heading ‘letter from a prisoner in the death wing’, and draws much of its impact from this intimacy. However, the \textit{info} of 1974 includes a discussion}}}}}}}}

\begin{itemize}
\item the feeling, your head is exploding (the feeling, your skullcap will actually rupture, chip away)—
\item the feeling, your spinal cord is being pressed into your brain—
\item the feeling, your brain is gradually shriveling up, like dried fruit, for example—
\item the feeling, you’re always and imperceptibly live with electricity, that you’re being remote-controlled
\end{itemize}

The poem was presented as a personal account of Meinhof’s time in the Cologne-Ossendorf prison under the heading ‘letter from a prisoner in the death wing’, and draws much of its impact from this intimacy. However, the \textit{info} of 1974 includes a discussion

\footnote{Such coaching on the use of specific terms was not limited to the ‘scientific’, with Meinhof, for example suggesting the use of the term ‘stille Abteilung’, see a Meinhof letter to RAF lawyer Stroebele from 13 July 1973, GFA, H B 362, F 3369, P I/1.2.}

\footnote{Meinhof’s comments are indicative of the shift undertaken as the RAF embarked on creating its own scientific discourse of terrorism. The group shared the view of the Red People’s University that ‘Science is political and politics is scientific’.}

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\footnote{\textit{Die Wissenschaft ist politisch und die Politik ist wissenschaftlich’}, \textit{Red People’s University} (April 1972).}

\footnote{See HIS, RAF, F Me,\textit{U/008,002, ‘croi-stroe-be-kg’}, p. 7; HIS, RAF, F Me,\textit{U/008,002, a letter to lawyers.}}

\footnote{See HIS, RAF, F Me,\textit{U/008,002, ‘croi-stroe-be-kg’}, p. 10; HIS, RAF, F Me,\textit{U/009,005, ‘kg-croi-becker-preuss’}.}

\footnote{\textit{Wir werden in den Durststreik treten’}, p. 52–7.}

\footnote{\textit{His, RAF, F Me,\textit{U/009,005, ‘preuss –’}.}}

\footnote{\textit{Camera Silens’}, p. 1005.}

\footnote{\textit{Das gefühl, es explodiert einem der kopf (das gefühl, die schädeldecke müßte eigentlich zerreißen, abplatzen)—/ das gefühl, es würde einem das rückenmark ins gehirn gepreßt—/ das gefühl, das gehirn schrumpelte einem allmählich zusammen, wie backobst zb—/ das gefühl, man stünde ununterbrochen, unmerklich, unter Strom, man würde ferngesteuert—’}, see HIS, RAF, F Me,\textit{U/009,002, info}, 14 Jan. 1974.}
between Meinhof and the lawyers in which it was decided to use the poem externally: ‘I’ll write a few things down and you should tell me whether it can be of any use in the fight against the obscene mess’. ¹²⁵ ‘These things’ included the entire 1973 poem, and despite subsequent reservations Meinhof had that the release could backfire and ‘provide propaganda for the fascists’, ¹²⁶ Groenewold reported back to her on a speech he gave on 30 January 1974 in Stuttgart to around 900 people and the success of the poem in relaying the reality of prison torture. ¹²⁷

Just as experts served the official scientific discourse of terrorism, the support of doctors was also integral to legitimizing the RAF’s medicalized politics, and this support was both offered by doctors and directly solicited. Physicians campaigned against the treatment of prisoners by publishing declarations and open letters, and by supporting events. One such leaflet produced by a group of eight practitioners with no obvious links to the group took the form of an RAF or Committee text, typewritten with an underlined heading and concluding slogans written in capital letters with exclamation marks. ¹²⁸ Doctors also put their names directly to Committee publications, such as the thirty-five medical professionals who signed and delivered an open letter in August 1973 to the Bundesgerichtshof, which was printed by the Committee against Torture by Isolation. ¹²⁹ Sympathetic doctors also lent their support to and spoke at events such as teach-ins, for example at the Committee teach-in about the hunger strike on 26 November 1974 at which Prof. Sigrist and Dr Seckendorff spoke along with RAF lawyers Groenewold and Schily. ¹³⁰

Medical support was also actively solicited and Meinhof was aware of the importance of medical opinion. Given this, she suggested to lawyers in April 1974 two doctors she thought would be useful for their purposes. ¹³¹ Such support was fundamental to the forming and success of the Committees, particularly the support of psychiatrist Sjef Teuns who wrote and spoke of solitary confinement and sensory deprivation as torture, ¹³² most notably in a highly influential article in Kursbuch 32. ¹³³ Ensslin wrote of the hunger strikes bringing the Committees to life, that this was the measure of the success of the self-starvation, and that this process was enabled by the public support of medical professionals. ¹³⁴ In her 1974 letter suggesting suitable experts, Meinhof also wrote of medical expertise as an organizational tool for developing what she thought Teuns had in mind: a counter-medicine. ¹³⁵

¹²⁵ ‘Ich schreib mal hier ein paar sachen auf und ihr sollt mal sagen, ob das überhaupt was für den kampf gegen die schweinerei bringt’, HIS, RAF, F Me, U/009,002, info, 14 Jan. 1974. This discussion seems to answer the question left open by Gerd Koenen as to whether this text was really a poetic transcript of a prison experience or a literary complaint composed for the purposes of the campaign, see Koenen, ‘Camera Silens’, p. 1005.

¹²⁶ HIS, RAF, F Me/U013,001, ‘lieber klaus’.

¹²⁷ HIS, RAF, F Me/U013,001, ‘VERTEIDIGERPOST Nr. 15’.

¹²⁸ HIS, RAF, F RA 02/006,002, ‘Erklärung der Ärzte und Psychologen gegen den TOTEN TRAKT im “neuen Klingelpütz”’. Compare this to the committee leaflet, see HIS, RAF, F RA 02/006,002, ‘M O R D AUF RATEN AN POLITISCHEN GEFANGENEN DURCH Ä R Z T E’, which looks very much the same.

¹²⁹ HIS, RAF, F Me/U012,003, ‘Ärzte gegen ZWANGSUNTERSUCHUNG von Ulrike Meinhof. Offener Brief an den Bundesgerichtshof’.

¹³⁰ GFA, H B 362, F 3363.

¹³¹ HIS, RAF, F Me/U009,005, ‘preuss—’.

¹³² Peters, Tödlicher Irrtum, p. 314.


¹³⁵ HIS, RAF, F Me, U/009,005, ‘preuss—’. 
The RAF had always expressed their struggle in political terms. Now in prison, a model for the expression of the political in terms of the medical was close at hand: the SPK. The SPK emerged in 1970 at the University of Heidelberg as an anti-psychiatry group that argued capitalism was the source of society’s ills. The group’s founder, Dr Wolfgang Huber, had worked as an Assistant Lecturer in the University’s psychiatric and neurological clinic since 1964 and was told in early 1970 that he no longer had a position, after increasing conflict with colleagues and his superiors. Huber and a number of patients occupied the administration offices and went on hunger strike. The group published leaflets and held teach-ins before the situation escalated when an SPK member committed suicide in April, and the apartments of SPK members were raided in connection with the search for the RAF in June. The SPK disbanded in July 1971—it was succeeded by the IZRU—and Huber was sent to prison in 1972 for involvement with a criminal group, production of explosives and false identity papers.136

The intersection of the SPK with the RAF on personnel level is significant. The Special Commission investigating the Baader-Meinhof Group found evidence linking Huber to the RAF in a safe-house.137 RAF members Gerhard Müller and Carmen Roll were members of the SPK, and there were even reports that Müller, who was arrested with Meinhof, first met her in the SPK.138 The SPK also proved a fertile recruiting ground for the RAF, with former members of the patient collective dominating the ranks of the RAF’s second generation, including the group that stormed the West German Embassy in Stockholm and killed two hostages in 1975.139

On 12 July 1971, the SPK distanced itself from the mainstream leftist scene,140 joining the RAF on its radical periphery. The statement it released was typewritten and prefaced with a quote from Mao, and so conformed to the standard for a RAF text. A day later, a leaflet appeared with SPK crossed out and replaced with RAF,141 and while years later in the info Meinhof writes of this being a mere print error she does so in the context of describing the self-conception of the SPK (shortly before its demise) as being the ‘propagandists of the RAF’.142 In fact, a leaflet produced by the IZRU, and described by the author as ‘the last to be distributed by the members of the former SPK’, cites the RAF directly when outlining the programme of the IZRU.143 Likewise, the RAF made the SPK catchphrase, ‘make your illness your weapon’, a slogan of its own during the prison hunger strikes.

The connections go deeper than mere formatting and a broad anti-capitalist affinity, as the enlightenment programme of the RAF—‘capitalism has made you unhappy, you

138 A newspaper clipping (19 June 1972) from an unnamed newspaper in HIS, RAF, F Publ./010,003, reports Müller meeting Meinhof after attempting suicide and finding his way into the patient collective.
140 HIS, RAF, F Hu, W/003,004, ‘Die Revolution ist kein Deckchen’.
141 HIS, RAF, F Hu, W/003,004, ‘SPK RAF’.
142 HIS, RAF, F Me,U/012,001, ‘und eben auch die idiotie des spk’.
143 ‘Dieses Flugblatt ist das letzte, das von Mitgliedern des ehemaligen SPK verteilt wird’, see HIS, RAF, F Hu, W/003,004, ‘ERKLÄRUNG AUS DEM EXIL’. 
just don’t realize it’—was easily married with that of the SPK—’capitalism has made you sick, you just don’t realize it’. A report of 23 October 1973 on material found in Meinhof’s cell describes an info in which Ensslin suggests that the group should incorporate (einbeziehen) the SPK philosophy.\(^{144}\) In a speech she wrote for Astrid Proll to deliver in court, Meinhof metaphorically links the wounded society to the wounded individual body,\(^{145}\) and this is representative of the influence of the SPK on the RAF. It would be misleading to conflate the two organizations, but the medical/political discourse (as well as the argument ‘suicide is murder’ and even the strategy of the hunger strike) has precursors in the SPK. Central to the newly medicalized political programme of the RAF was the hunger strike. The starving body and its treatment enabled RAF prisoners literally to embody their rhetoric and construct their own bodies as loci for both Nazi resistance and anti-colonial struggle.

Presenting the postwar Federal Republic as a continuation of the fascist Third Reich was a mainstay of RAF rhetoric. The group conceived of themselves to some extent as a belated resistance movement and self-starvation was a key element in their conception of the prisoner as a Nazi victim. The self-fulfilling prophecy of visually and physically aligning themselves, that is, their bodies, with concentration camp prisoners in the Third Reich was very much consistent with their own private conception of their identity and their experience. In May 1973, Meinhof wrote in the info that ‘the political concept for the death wing, cologne, is, i say quite clearly: gas. my auschwitz fantasies were real in there’.\(^{146}\) She writes of Nazi experimentation and torture, a mood maintained in her poetic description of solitary confinement and ‘the feeling that your skin is being pulled off’.\(^{147}\) Ensslin, too, framed the prison experience in terms of Nazi atrocities:

\begin{quote}
Difference death wing to solitary confinement: Auschwitz to Buchenwald. The difference is simple: more survive Buchenwald than Auschwitz … The only thing that can surprise us in here, to be very clear about it, is that we haven’t received a lethal injection. But nothing else.\(^{148}\)
\end{quote}

Externally the starving prisoner provided a powerful image that could evoke the recent past and Nazi atrocities and match the private ‘fantasies’ of the RAF prisoners.

The starved body drew on the economy of images in West Germany in the 1970s. Photographs of Nazi atrocities were central to denazification and the Allies’ effort to reeducate the German population in the immediate postwar period: images were pasted on windows and in public places in West Germany allowing Germans to witness the treatment of Nazi prisoners, some for the first time.\(^{149}\) From the end of the 1940s, however, such imagery faded from public consciousness and years of ‘visual amnesia’ set

\(^{144}\) The report attributes the text to Ensslin, see HIS, RAF, F SO 09/003,003, P IX/4–5.

\(^{145}\) HIS, RAF, F Me,U/013,002, ‘Der Hauptwiderspruch in den Metropolen des Imperialismus ist der Widerspruch zwischen Produktivkräften und Produktionsverhältnissen’, p. 18.


\(^{147}\) ‘das gefühl, es sei einem die Haut abgezogen worden’, see HIS, RAF, F Me,U/009,002, info, 14 Jan. 1974.


Habbo Knoch writes of this amnesia as having nothing to do with an absence of images or photos, but rather as being indicative of the cultural ‘recoding’ (umkodieren) of such images, which he traces from Nazi wartime propaganda and the Allies’ postwar reeducation efforts through to the protest scene of the 1970s. So the ‘reemergence’ of such images in the late 1960s represents one such recoding rather than a rediscovery: ‘In the course of the 1960s, the images of the enlightenment of Nazi crimes mutated in many cases and for many people to symbols of political resistance and as such assumed new applications.’

Thematically, this use of images was pared down to representations of concentration camps, particularly Auschwitz (at the expense of other Nazi war crimes), so it is perhaps not surprising to see images of starving terrorists emerging in the midst of a new wave of Holocaust imagery. The emaciated body of Holger Meins was such an image.

Meins’ death in 1974 during the third hunger strike allowed the fantasies of RAF victimhood to intrude starkly into the public realm. This image owes its iconic status among sympathizers and members of the second generation to its ability to draw on the historical imagery of the Nazi period. This association was no coincidence, as RAF lawyers Groenewold and Croissant had actively promoted it; in fact, it is highly probable that it was Groenewold who sourced and released the autopsy photo.

Nor was it lost on protestors who often explicitly spelled it out, and reproduced the image at protest after protest (Fig. 27.04). Birgit Hogefeld, member of the third generation of the RAF, even spoke of this image being ‘one of the central factors [in her becoming a terrorist], because this emaciated person had so much in common with the concentration camp prisoners’. One member of the 2 June Movement, Inge Viett, described the intense feeling in the group that led to the murder of the judge Günter von Drenkmann by associating Meins with the dead in Buchenwald, Auschwitz and the other concentration camps who looked exactly the same, and Hans-Joachim Klein, a member of the Revolutionary Cells, confessed to having an autopsy photo of Meins with him at all times so as not to let the hate subside.

It was not just the process of starving that fed the discursive analogy between RAF prisoner and Nazi victim. The hunger strike, which was initially a protest against prison conditions and the treatment of prisoners, also drew a response from the prison authorities, which would feed back into this discourse. It is indicative of the impossible double-bind the authorities found themselves in that the construction of force-feeding, the response to hunger, would reinforce the evocation of the recent history of Nazi medicine, of experimentation and a technicized intrusion into the body that had been established in the earliest phase of the RAF incarceration. A Committee leaflet signed by doctors in the context of the ‘scintigraphy campaign’ of late 1973 places the forced examination of Meinhof directly in the ‘tradition of NS-medicine of German fascism’. Scintigraphy is a diagnostic technique, in which radioisotopes are injected into the patient in order to produce a two-dimensional image, and it was to form part of a psychiatric diagnosis. In April 1973 the Attorney General charged Professor Witter with the task of determining whether Meinhof could be considered criminally responsible for her actions between June 1972 and her arrest. As Meinhof refused to release her doctor from the restraints of doctor-patient confidentiality, thus making her records unavailable, Witter recommended the skull X-ray, scintigraphy of her brain, and the use of electroencephalography among other diagnostic tools.

The campaign against the treatment of prisoners and the diagnostic methods (the concern was not the use of scintigraphy itself, but rather the forced anaesthetization and

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154 Terhoeven writes of the Meins autopsy image finding great resonance among RAF sympathizers but not being reported in the ‘mainstream’ media. Here, a more prominent photograph of Meins, she writes, was one of the bearded Meins laid out in his coffin, hands folded peacefully, that evoked bizarre Jesus associations, see Terhoeven, ‘Opferbilder—Täterbilder’, p. 393.


157 ‘Ärzte gegen ZWANGSUNTERSUCHUNG von Ulrike Meinhof. Offener Brief an den Bundesgerichtshof’, see HIS, RAF, F Me,U/012,003. This analogy eventually made it into commercial publications, for example when Der Spiegel quoted directly from submissions, complaints and other legal documents, as well as press conference statements, in which the RAF lawyer Croissant compared medical practice in prisons with the Nazi methods, see ‘“Mord beginnt beim bösen Wort”’, p. 52.

158 GFA, H B 362, F 3165, Document 15. The procedure was eventually deemed unnecessary once the earlier publication of Meinhof’s medical history became apparent, see GFA, H B 362, F 3164, Document 407/3-407/4. Electroencephalography uses electrodes placed on the scalp to measure brain activity.
the associated risk of death) created an understanding of prison medicine as allowing the sensory deprivation of, and experimentation on prisoners, using modern technologies. As part of the campaign, the prison holding Meinhof, Cologne-Ossendorf, was referred to as the ‘new Klingelpütz’. Meinhof also wrote info entries that began with the date and her location: Klingelpütz. Cologne-Ossendorf prison was built in 1969, but its nickname drew on the name of the prison it was to replace, the Klingelpütz prison which served as a Nazi execution site during the Second World War. The new prison retained the nickname Klingelpütz, and thus its National Socialist connotations.

The scintigraphy and forced examination campaigns played out in the context of the second hunger strike, during which prisoners were force-fed. At this early stage, the issue of force-feeding was kept out of the commercial media, which undermined an explicit RAF strategy. Heading into this second strike, the prisoners worked on the assumption that everyone being ‘on the hose’ would engender public support for the RAF, but failed to take into account the lack of reporting. The image of the prisoner ‘on the hose’ was, however, part of the alternative media reports, and in this forum did become part of a broad discourse on the technicized intrusion on the unwilling patient, with analogous links to Nazi medical practice. Red Aid wrote of the ‘spirit of Hitler’s concentration camps’ and it was this spirit Meinhof wrote of in her declaration for the third hunger strike, printed in the same issue: ‘Solitary confinement is the old tool of Imperialism with new technology, final solution through liquidation of minorities, which back then were declared not worthy of living, today (in the terminology of the pigs) not worthy of basic rights’. This alludes not only to a Nazi past but also an imperialist present as National Socialist medicine has become interchangeable with ‘imperialist science’.

The notion of ‘imperialism’ was already a long-standing RAF preoccupation. In early RAF texts, ‘imperialism’ was vague and referred mainly to US actions in Vietnam, and ‘anti-imperialism’ was interchangeable with ‘anti-Americanism’. In prison, however, Meinhof developed her understanding of the concept through the works of social scientist Dieter Senghaas, whose theory she understood to be the most important extension of Lenin’s ‘imperialism’. In her personal notes, she wrote of the various functions of Senghaas’s imperialism, which extended from the political and economic to

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159 HIS, RAF, F RA 02/006,002, ‘Erklärung der Ärzte und Psychologen gegen den TOTEN TRAKT im “neuen Klingelpütz”’.
160 HIS, RAF, F Me, U/012,001, ‘klingelpütz, den 13.11.1973’.
161 Today a memorial to Nazi victims stands on the site of the former prison.
162 GFA, H B 362, F 3370, P XV/15.
163 Force-feeding broached as early as Jan. 1973 in the IZR leaflet ‘Rote Volksuniversität aktuell’, see HIS, RAF, F Publ./007,002, ‘Rote Volksuniversität aktuell’.
164 ‘Der Geist der Hitler-KZ’S’, HIS, RAF, F RA 02/002,012.
166 ‘imperialistische wissenschaft’, HIS, RAF, F Me, U/008,002, p. 55.
168 GFA, H B 362, F 3370, XV/30.
the military, the medial and the cultural. Meinhof’s clarification is evident in the third RAF text, written in prison, in which she used the Senghaas model of ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’ to tackle the idea of ‘imperialism’.

‘Imperialism’ was also framed in terms of the body and medicine. A 110-page Committee booklet of January 1974 placed the treatment of prisoners in the context of a worldwide network of torture research. The cover of the booklet showed images of the torture methods and an anonymous insider wrote of research being conducted at the University of Hamburg, as well as at Fort Knox, in Prague and in London.\(^{169}\) Research into sensory deprivation, torture and brainwashing was under way worldwide. Programmes were already in place in the US during World War II and intensified in the 1950s. Brainwashing and reprogramming had become research interests not least of all due to the treatment of US soldiers captured during the Korean War, and the Soviet Union developed expertise in sensory deprivation as part of its space programme.\(^{170}\) In West Germany, research into torture was already being conducted under the guidance of Professor Johann M. Burchard at the Psychiatric division of Hamburg-Eppendorf University Clinic in 1967, where a *camera silens* (a completely dark and soundproof room used as an instrument of both torture and research into the effects of sensory deprivation) was constructed.\(^{171}\) The German Research Foundation also funded the research project ‘Special Research Area 115’, an interdisciplinary project that included studies conducting research using the *camera silens*.\(^{172}\)

In his 1973 *Kursbuch* article, Teuns made the direct link between this research and the prison conditions suffered by RAF prisoners,\(^{173}\) a link placed firmly within an international context of research cooperation by the Committee insider at the beginning of 1974.\(^{174}\)

In this sense, a medicalized language of intervention (*eingreifen*) on the unwilling body was used to evoke cultural memory of the Nazi past, but also to develop a discourse of a worldwide imperialist medicine and the associated anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. Meinhof combined a medicalized politics and the colonization metaphor describing a viral colonialism and the colonized individual: ‘the colonized person heals himself of the thousand wounds (the sickness), by chasing out the colonial master at gunpoint, he fights

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\(^{169}\) See Hellmut Brunn and Thomas Kirn, *Rechtsanwälte, Linksanwälte* (Frankfurt, 2004), p. 217. The connection to an imperialist torture research network made in alternative texts and activities was eventually also reported in commercial publications, for example when *Der Spiegel* cited verbatim material produced by the International Committee for the Defence of Political Prisoners in Western Europe: ‘die Gefangenen aus der RAF [werden] seit sechs Jahren einem bis ins Detail vom CIA entwickelten Haftregiment der Einzel- und Kleingruppen-Isolation, unterworfen’; ‘Die ’Mobilisierung’ gegen die RAF sei ’ein Produkt der Supervision der amerikanischen Geheimdienste über die deutsche Innenpolitik, in der Bender und das baden-württembergische Landeskabinett nur die Rolle des Henkers übernommen haben’”, see “Mord beginnt beim bösen Wort”, p. 28–57.


\(^{171}\) Koenen, ‘Camera Silens’, p. 1000. Incidentally, Meinhof was operated on in 1962 in the neurological section of the Hamburg-Eppendorf clinic.

\(^{172}\) Koenen, ‘Camera Silens’, p. 1000.


\(^{174}\) Such connections did indeed exist: in the early post-war context of behaviour modification programmes in US prisons, researchers studied the ‘brainwashing’ techniques used in North Korea and China to develop techniques for the US prison system, see Alan Eladio Gómez, ‘Resisting Living Death at Marion Federal Penitentiary, 1972’, *Radical History Review*, no. 96 (2006), 62. In West Germany, Professor Burchard brought a Prague researcher across to Hamburg in 1968, in what was an act of scientific co-operation across a border that seemed otherwise impenetrable by diplomacy and politics, see Koenen, ‘Camera Silens’, p. 1001.
for his LIFE (spk: the antithesis of sickness is life). She expanded her notion of individual colonization in 1974 in the info:

If colonization was a conquest, in which the existing social (economic, political, cultural and communication) structures were destroyed, that is: the natives were denied them, and made subordinate to a regime—colonial regime/imperialism—, in which they don’t participate, in which they only ever appear as things—then the colonized individual is a deprived individual, and the deprivation process in solitary confinement is the same as what billions have suffered, endured in their colonization—and which caused an endless number to perish.

She used Fanon’s description of colonialism as a systematic negation of the other and the theme of deprivation, to frame the body of the individual prisoner as a site for anti-colonialist struggle. This allowed RAF members to embody their long-held affinity with the peoples of the third and colonized worlds: instead of bringing the fire and destruction of Vietnam to West Berlin, as Baader and Ensslin sought to do with their 1968 arson attack, Meinhof rained imperialism onto the prisoner body, her body. The colonization metaphor also extended to (again) the brain. Meinhof wrote in the info of ‘colonized brains’ and a campaign soon evolved around the slogan ‘liberate the colonized consciousness’.

The distinction between the terms ‘personality’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘brain’ had by then been steadily eroded—with the meanings collapsing to the diagnosable, that is, the physical, measurable body. Such a collapse meant that brain X-ray, scintigrapies, psychological deterioration due to prison conditions, ‘psychiatric exploration’, and ‘bodily intrusions to get blood and urine samples’, cavity searches and the act of forcing a feeding tube down the throat of the prisoner were able to exist on the same metaphorical plane: all represented attack on the physical integrity of the prisoner body.

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175 ‘der kolonisierte heilt sich von den tausend wunden (der krankheit), indem er den kolonialherrn mit waffengewalt davonjagt, er erkämpft sein leben (spk: der gegensatz von krankheit ist leben)’, HIS, RAF, F Me, U/012,001, ‘und eben auch die idiotie des spk’.

176 Written in 1973 or 1974—a copy in the HIS is stamped as being received (most probably by a RAF-lawyer) on 22 April 1974.

177 ‘wenn kolonisierung eine eroberung war, bei der die vorhandenen gesellschaftlichen (ökonomischen, politischen, kulturellen und kommunikations-) strukturen vernichtet, das heißt: den eingeborenen entzo gen wurden, sie stattdessen einem herrschaftssystem unterworfen worden sind—kolonialregime/imperialismus—, an dem sie nicht teilnehmen, / in dem sie nur als ding, als sache vorkommen—/ dann ist das kolonisierte individuum ein depriviertes individuum und der deprivationsprozeß in der isolation dasselbe, was milliarden bei ihrer kolonisierung erlitten, durchgemacht haben—woran unendlich viele ja auch zugrundegegangen sind’, see HIS, RAF, F Me, U/009,003, Document 182549; HIS, RAF, F Me, U/010,004. The text was intended for internal discussion and was only published in 2001, see Ulrike Meinhof, ‘Deprivation und Kolonisierung. Über den Zusammenhang von Rehabilitierung und revolutionärer Aktion’, So oder So: Die Libertad!-Zeitung, 8 (Spring 2001), pp. 16–17.


180 ‘psychiatrischen Exploration’

181 ‘körperlichen Eingriffe zur Blut- und Urinentnahme’, HIS, RAF, F Publ./007,002, ‘Rote Volksuniversität aktuell’.

Conclusion

A shifting legal framework and social context, and a waning popular fascination with the RAF, meant that the effectiveness of the hunger strike steadily eroded and ensured that second-generation RAF prisoner Sigurd Debus starved himself to death in relative anonymity. The self-starvation of the first generation, by contrast, was the major strategy of the RAF campaign during, indeed it was almost synonymous with, the incarceration of the group’s founders between 1972 and 1977. Central to this was an aggressive construction of hunger and the starving body made possible by internal and external communication networks.

The RAF overcame the isolation of the penal system via a sophisticated network based on the privileged relationship between the prisoners and their lawyers. The so-called info was capable of smuggling, collecting, collating, copying and archiving prison communiqués before redistributing them among prisoners in the form of a newsletter. Another network developed to feed information and texts to the outside world. This system, referred to here as the out-fo, evolved into an external network of alternative publication and event management directed from prison. These communication networks maintained a group identity among incarcerated members and ensured a media presence—both alternative and commercial—and pivotal to this internal identity and the external media presence were the group’s constructions of hunger.

Internally, hunger was sacralized, not least by drawing on the contemporaneous IRA example and the Irish history of religio-political self-starvation. A rhetoric of virtue, sacrifice and martyrdom built around self-starvation served to maintain morale within the group, reinforce the unquestionable nature of the ordained goal, and foster a willingness among the prisoners to sacrifice their own lives. This represented an expression of the pre-existing group dynamic of psychological domination, peer pressure and sense of duty in terms of the starving body. This ‘holy’ hunger, however, was kept strictly within the info.

Externally, the RAF constructed self-starvation in such a way as to maintain the pre-existing rhetorical strands of anti-fascism and anti-imperialism. From prison, the RAF refashioned its struggle from one expressed in terms of ideologies to a medicalized politics capable of countering the public scientific or medical discourse of terrorism. The hunger strikes allowed RAF prisoners to inscribe onto their bodies their conception of a belated Nazi resistance and anti-colonialist struggle.

The incarceration of the first generation not only dwarfs the time the group spent underground, but the group proved much better able to engage the West German public from prison. It was the strategy of self-starvation and the RAF’s discursive constructions of hunger that enabled the group to perform both a pre-existing, internal group dynamic and maintain its established rhetorical threads in terms of the prisoner body. A clear conception of the hunger strike and its performative functions is fundamental to understanding this clearly bracketed phase in RAF history, just as an examination of the discursive strategies of the group is central to the broader story. The RAF was the most media-savvy of West German terrorist groups, declaring war on the West German press while at the same time courting it for the group’s own campaigns. The relationship between the media and terrorism has become a focus of studies into terrorist activities and much can be learned from the West German experience, particularly the constructions of self-starvation during the hunger strikes of the Red Army Faction.
Abstract

The founding generation of the Red Army Faction (RAF), a West German terrorist group, spent two frenzied years in the underground followed by five years in prison, culminating with the suicides of the group’s leaders in 1976 and 1977. This paper examines the prison hunger strikes of the RAF as structured acts of communication that together with accompanying texts were central to a sustained media campaign run from within prison. It examines the internal and external prison communication networks established to enable the coordination of the strikes as well as the discursive functions of the self-starvation of the RAF members. Within the prison system hunger was constructed as ‘holy’ and ascribed a pseudo-religious function used to support a group identity and maintain an internal group discipline. In the texts produced for publication beyond the prison walls, however, hunger became a central element in the RAF strategy to counter what it saw as a mainstream medicalization of terrorism. This, in turn, was the tool employed to repackgage the group’s established rhetoric, as self-starvation allowed RAF prisoners to literally embody their long-standing ‘anti-fascism’ and ‘anti-imperialism’.

Keywords: terrorism, Red Army Faction, Baader, Meinhof, hunger strike, prison protest, prison communication, performativity

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