

Wars of Public Safety and the Policing of History

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De-territorialized Wars of Public Safety

New strategies for the reproduction of American state sovereignty have emerged in the last decade or so that can be characterized as de-territorialized campaigns of public safety. These wars are not exclusively focused on territorial conquest, or on an easily locatable or identifiable enemy with its own respective goals of territorial conquest. Rather, they are focused on countering imputed territorial contamination and transgression - "terrorist," demographic, and biological infiltration. These campaigns are not structured by time-limited political goals but are temporally open-ended. They are not solely geo-strategic instruments - a means to a political end - but function as cultural imaginaries. De-territorialized wars of public safety are geopolitical cultural forms that can achieve a specific internal hegemony within the American public sphere through the symbiosis of internalized fear and other directed aggression. Indicative of this are, obviously, post September 11th campaigns against terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the response to recent bio-terrorism and quasi-naturally occurring viral scares such as mad cow disease and SARS. These public safety wars, however, were presaged by earlier campaigns against drugs, economic refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented immigrants, in addition to police campaigns against quality of life crimes that disproportionately targeted inner city communities of color.

Unlike the classic global and guerrilla wars of the twentieth century, these public safety wars are not wars of utopia, but wars of distopia that assume that "perfected" liberal democracies are threatened by an invisible infiltrating menace. Thus, post 9-11 political fantasy promoted the ahistorical polarities of civilization/barbarism, or

the equally ahistorical liberal rationalist notion of "wars of civilizations." Indicative of this was the rapid nationalization of the World Trade Center (WTC) dead by the state and by the media. The WTC was eulogized as a violated utopian space of Americanized labor, symbolic capital, and democratized and inclusive production of wealth. This image was belied by the number of previously and still invisible undocumented foreign workers who vanished in the building's collapse in comparison to the eulogized dead who achieved a supra-American citizenship.

De-territorialized war promotes an ideology of paranoid space and is an aggressive tacit response to the depolarization of the post-Cold War period, and more recently, to the cultural-economic vertigo of globalization. Thus, the new wars of public safety target an iconography of demonized border-crossing figures and forces including drug dealers, terrorists, asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, and even microbes. Accompanying these new war imaginaries are strategically positioned structures of displacement, projection, and arbitrary object-choice and object substitution. We are now subjected to a new super-structure of war fantasy in which the targets of warfare and the enemies of public safety are as malleable and as arbitrary as a dream image. In this essay, I will outline several characteristics of the emerging forms of warfare and sovereignty: the "police concept of history"; the emerging "treatment state"; the new visual culture of warfare; the sacrificial structure of contemporary political terror; and the actuarial structure of political violence.

Police Concept of History

This new ideological environment promotes a "police concept of history" that is the reframing

of historical process into a dichotomy of ideal safe space and duplicit, distopic, and risk-laden space. In this paradigm, spaces of order are undermined by impinging spaces of disorder. This concept of history advances the normative sociology of the *profile*: who belongs and who is out of place. The police concept of history is also commensurate to the new globalized economy: it promotes a normative notion of the global economy as an orderly space of economic circulation in which bodies and persons fulfill proper functions and occupy proper positions. Improper or transgressive circulation, symbolized in icons of bio-social pollution such as HIV/AIDS, mad cow disease, SARS, the drug trade, and illegal immigrants, is feared and attacked. The infiltrating “terrorist” is thus both an instance of and a catchment concept for the idea of improper circulation, and cognate transgressors from drug misusers to undocumented immigrants partake in the illicit substance of the terrorist.

Policing in this framework of ordered/disordered circulation is about the visible distribution of functions and positions within a society and between societies; it stands opposed to the emergence of new subjecthoods who resist the norms of circulation and/or who practice illicit forms of circulation. This form of policing emerges with the disappearance of enforceable physical national borders, and compensates for the loss of tangible borders by creating new boundary systems that are virtual or mediatized, such as electronic and digital surveillance nets. The virtual border is matched by the virtual or ghostly transgressor. In the last two years, we have accumulated a growing number of such ghosts so one can locate the ever-missing Osama Bin Laden within the same spectrum as the covert carrier of infection,

genetically altered comestibles, demented livestock, and undocumented immigrants.

The stoppage or interruption of the moral economy of circulation is then characterized as a distopic “risk-event,” a disruption of the imputed smooth functioning of the circulation apparatus in which nothing is meant to happen. “Normalcy” is the non-event, which in effect means the proper distribution of functions, the proper occupation of designated positions, and the maintenance of appropriate social profiles. However, circulation is bivalent; it is the structure of social surfaces, the armature of everyday life, the insignia of modernity, and yet, it betrays and harbors dangerous and infecting alterity. The social logic of circulation that exceeds comprehension and explicit control is mimetically handled and secured through the management of image flows. It is through the sympathetic management of image circulation that forces of governance seek to construct the rationality of the total system of material-informational circulation. Hence, wars of public safety take the form of mediatized mechanisms and are ordered as massive intrusions into the sphere of visual culture, which are conflated with and substitute for the public sphere.

The police project, according to Jacques Rancière, is less concerned with repression than with a more basic function: that of constituting what is or is not perceivable, determining what can be or cannot be seen. Policing is a mediatization of society through the symbolic constitution of the politically visible, as made up of groups with specific, identifiable ways of operating or profiles. These ways of operating are themselves organically inscribed into the places where those occupations are performed. Thus, the police concept of history is the spatialization of the historical, an appropriate

post-imperial technology for a globalized economy that is both feared and fantasized as made up of mobile flows – economic, ideological, and microbiological.¹

Ranci re opposes the police enforcement of the continuum of circulation to “politics,” which is the manifestation of subjecthood through the stepping outside of designated positions and functions and spatial habitats (insofar as the occupying of and confinement to a spatial habitus, such as a social function or a pathologized space like the “ghetto,” the Third World, or the periphery is the holding to a proper position, the assumption of a correct profile). Thus, the police concept of history is an ocular centration on managing social surfaces and their possible clandestine subversion, as well as an investment in managing the public visualization of “events” or risk intrusions. Part and parcel of the control of circulation is the strategic regulation of the circulation of images that either refract the normal or the transgressive in terms of the political utilities of the moment. Thus, it is no coincidence that the two governing tropes of recent public safety warfare have been the technological onslaught of “shock and awe” and the excuse rationality of collateral damage. Both forms of violence are invested in regulating the circulation of images. Shock and awe and collateral damage visually distribute death and destruction into domains of the event and the non-event. The sterility of the terrorist response to this ideological apparatus is the counter-dissemination of image events, such as the dramaturgy of suicide bombing. But the terrorist image-event has no deeper purchase on historical transformation than the police enforcement of visual normalcy. The cathexis of the politically visible is an expression of historical paralysis. Both the police concept of history and the

terrorist disruption of circulation structures are incapable of effecting structural transformation. They are modalities of formulaic and ultimately retrospective memorialization: the homeostatic normalcy sacralized by the tomb of 9/11, the revolution as the utopian monument of the martyred and sacrificed dead. Historical consciousness is currently entombed in the monumentalism of formalized public bereavement or fragmented in privatized grief – again, the dichotomy of event and non-event, of shock and awe versus collateral damage and its mourning.

Within and beyond the externally and internally besieged nation-state, campaigns of public safety require both the policization of the military and the militarization of the police. Urban policing, for instance, is increasingly focused on the eradication or management of “quality of life” crimes. These are transgressions that originate in minority economic immiseration zones – the locus of post-industrial downgrading and dis-investment – and the consequent involvement of impoverished communities in informal “black economies.” In this context, policing ceases to focus on apprehending individual transgressors but rather on proactive geographical surveillance, occupation, and the clamping down of entire communities. Policing becomes a variation of counter-insurgency, as crime is increasingly perceived as an economic resistance practice, and as informal modes of clandestine economic circulation, all of which require spatial internment/surveillance of minority enclaves. The “dual city” was originally theorized as an economic consequence of globalization in which entire internal urban peripheries were structurally disconnected from economic growth and development. However, in the police

concept of history, the dual city is transformed into an ideological object enforced by technologies of spatial control.

Campaigns against quality of life crimes contribute to the formation of a new urban “scan-scape” characterized by social control zones.² In order to ensure political stability, the norm of an open-ended civil sphere with experiential coordinates in public space is currently interdicted by new discursive and practical arrangements of policing, public safety, and urban planning. This militarized polarization of the urban scene is bi-directional to the same degree that problematic urban economic peripheries are subjected to police surveillance and infrastructural abandonment, and areas of wealth concentration are marked by defensive militarized office buildings (equipped with surveillance technologies and structural armoring) and gated communities with private security forces that are structurally divorced from their urban surroundings while assuming visual mastery of this terrain.

Much of this political technology of planned geographic bifurcation was pioneered in an apartheid era South Africa in which the state strategically erected its highway system to create bypassed pathologized zones consisting of “surplus populations” of African shanty towns. A similar use of highway systems and tunnels is currently deployed by the Israelis in the West Bank to ensure both settler security and spatial hegemony over indigenous Arab villages. In this combination of arterial planning, Arab communities and surrounding Arab cultivation lands are enclaved by highway overpasses and tunneling that link (frequently hilltop) Israeli settlements. The settlements themselves are militarized, gated communities boasting the most up-to-date electronic surveillance systems.

The Treatment State

Military apparatuses in political emergency zones increasingly function as both surveillance and “peace-keeping” forces committed to regulating circulation in public space by imputed terrorist-ridden populations. Examples of this dual profile can be seen in the Balkans, West Africa, and in the custodial regulation of refugees, asylum seekers, and the “prisoner of war” detention centers in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay. Under public safety regimes, humanitarian interventions are militarized and military interventions exploit the transnational discourse of human rights. The terrorist and the refugee are both the objects and the consequence of military interventions. The juridical personalities of the terrorist as an “unlawful combatant” and of the refugee and asylum-seeker as an unlawful resident and worker are mutually marked by the denial of their citizenship rights in an existing nation-state structure. They are both apolitical entities to the degree that they are classified as existing outside of a recognized political community, and because their context and behaviors have been de-politicized and consequently criminalized.

Related to the militarization of humanitarian aid is the ideological and practical fusion of the concentration camp and the refugee camp, where people who have lost their nation-state citizenship can easily starve to death, or be subjected to military extermination and police and vigilante abuse. Simultaneously, they can be fed, clothed, housed, and receive medical assistance. The treatment state intermingles behavior modification techniques from sensory deprivation to therapeutic intervention. By illustration, the Guantanamo Bay prisoners of war camp, in which inmates are neither subject

to American civil law nor to the Geneva Conventions, accords its detainees comprehensive health care and allows religious and dietary observances, together with a chronic schedule of coercive interrogation bordering on torture and intermittent sensory deprivation. Yet, even this controlled space is not immune to illicit circulation practices or fantasies, as investigations are currently being mounted against Muslim clerics accused of being double agents. Originally commissioned to enact religious humanitarianism, they are now suspected of aiding and abetting terrorists. Object substitution in the public safety regime is endemic. Thus, the first trials to come out of the Guantanamo Bay investigative/interrogation process will be of US army personnel and American citizens suspected of conspiring with the terrorist other.

The militarized state is also the “treatment state,” a specialist apparatus in the psycho-social custodial control/care of anti-societal populations. Foucault’s prophecy about the post-carceral swarming of disciplinary mechanisms into social nervous systems is rapidly being fulfilled. It may be comforting to some that the aforementioned military/disciplinary technologies and media are being applied to so-called discrete populations of terrorists, refugees, substance abusers, and drug dealers, to name a few. But such comfort is illusionary in the face of the massive expansion of the concept of *objective guilt* as the structure of governmentality. The creation of a Homeland Security apparatus and its investment in “total information awareness” type systems points to a structural mutation of the American public sphere and public personhood through the digitization of risk, and therefore, guilt. A new micrology of surveillance is scheduled for debut

which will not only watch and wait, but will also diagnose, pre-empt, and intervene. Structures of everyday life – no longer anonymous behaviors, consumption, communication, and sociality patterns – along with racial and ethnic affiliation are meant to dissect the social persona, abstracting minute behaviors into epidemiologies of potential terrorist threat. Everyone, under the digitized gaze, becomes unknowingly complicit in the promotion of terrorist risk. The body is fragmented into event and non-event, into offending acts and gestures and the inoffensive. This new *objective guilt* is the digital removal of intentionality from the concept of the political or the criminal. For most crucially, objective guilt is archived guilt, its full meaning and significance is reserved for a prospective diagnostic completion. Acts and gestures are spatialized in time in the building of a profile of licit or illicit circulation of the person. The digital public safety biography or profile supplants the life cycle as the measure and portrait of citizenship.

Objective guilt, inscribed into the minute crevices of everyday life, is essential to the new warfare ideologies. For as in all policing ideologies, wars of public safety do not aim at the eradication of “the policed” object, whether it be the terrorist, the undocumented immigrant, or the drug abuser. Rather, these wars require the continued symbiotic presence of the policed object in order to justify the continuation and the new elaborations of state sovereignty. Indeed, the wars against drugs, economic refugees, and undocumented immigrants require the ongoing existence of national and transnational informal economies of scale, which may mutate but are unlikely to be policed or surveilled out of existence. The same can be said of certain transnational “terrorist” networks

dependent on globalized systems of banking, credit, and fiscal accreditation rooted in an oral culture of contract. But beyond the persistence of transgressive informal economies of scale, there is simply the indeterminacy of nomenclature in which the term terrorist can be used to cover a variety of floating objects and scenarios. Thus, at the inception of the invasion of Iraq, the majority of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was directly responsible for the attack on the World Trade Center, despite the absence of any shred of evidence to that effect.

Visual Culture of War

I have already discussed the emerging visual modalities of the “treatment” state in relation to zones and populations marked by objective guilt. The notion of objective guilt has contributed to the acceptability of the concept of collateral damage in that collateral damage is normal under political conditions in which guilt is de-individualized and proactively assigned. Further, the new visual culture of war enhances the ideology of collateral damage through image filtering. The televised visual sensationalism of “shock and awe,” of smart bombs broadcasting their descent onto a building, filters out the sensations of pain, suffering and grief of the victims and their survivors. It creates spectatorship ideologies of inattention and distraction for the televisual witness. Anonymous victims of collateral damage stand in visual opposition to the sensational violence of shock and awe, to the degree that collateral damage ideology combines with the visual centrality of shock and awe to desensitize the viewing audience to the plight of “marginal,” incidental, and accidental victims such as those in the Iraqi market-place bombing who died

invisibly to the American media. The filtering of images ensured that such persons never achieved the visual urgency or commanded the visual attention of the attempted decapitation of Saddam and the destruction of Iraqi “command and control centers” in the American media. Visualized violence here is a powerful system of naming and un-naming. The sheer act of targeting a topos specifies a zone of objective guilt, and effectively “weaponizes” entire communities, turning them into zones of aggression and consequently de-individualizing the concept of victimage in the destruction of these spaces. The “command and control center” that is the individual immersed in everyday life, who is the building block of democratization, is essentially disposable in the perceptual filters of the inattention that is at the heart of ideologies of collateral damage and excuse. Shock and awe is the theatrical manufacture of technological events as history, and the creation of non-events of invisible violence or collateral damage as the non-historical.

The ruins of the WTC are history at a perceptual degree zero. The broken buildings and bodies have melted into a new cyborgian Frankenstein creation, which now functions as a cultural prosthesis, a device for historical perception, one that required up to 3000 sacrifices to bring into existence. Three thousand sacrifices nationalized by George Bush was the price paid for freedom, and the high price that demanded duplication in Afghanistan, Iraq, and possibly, in the future, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other parts of the world so that the realm of sacrificial freedom could be enlarged. The new American imperial project is the proliferation of ground zeros. For as I learned in Northern Ireland, the replication of ground zeros is the sure consequence of

retributive and retaliatory violence, violence that reenacts and rehearses an original assault and transgression.³

There is resonance here with the saturation bombing of Afghanistan and Iraq in 1991 and in 2003. Mass aerial bombing, as I have asserted in an essay on Desert Storm, is a mode of compulsory visibility.⁴ The military panopticon makes adversaries and others appear during and after the setting off of explosive devices. Saturated aerial bombing in Afghanistan, as in Iraq, is a new Orientalism, the perceptual apparatus by which we make the Eastern Other visible. Afghans and Iraqis were held accountable for the hidden histories and hidden geographies that are presumed to have assaulted America on September 11th. The WTC became so much dust and debris, materials that resist optics. Our bombs seek, rather, to penetrate what Ernst Bloch termed “historical dust,” the metaphorical dust that external American geopolitics and internal popular isolationist ideology has accumulated. Dust is more than a climactic ecological condition. It is an emblem of the impenetrable history that lies at the source of the death of so many people, a history to which American exceptionalism is blind. Afghanistan and Iraq have been made to embody our historical dust, our historical blindness, the obscurity in which we could not see our deaths, and that otherness that becomes the natal site of the “Terrorist Other.” Addicted to, yet dissatisfied with the media realism of the building’s death, we seek in aerial bombing the satisfaction of making the terrorist visible, to subject terrorism to our dust clearing smart bombs. To the same degree that the WTC resists optical penetration and comprehension, we displace our need for a transparent explanation of the WTC attack onto our panoptical bomb

sights/sites that have turned Afghanistan and Iraq into an open-air tomb of collateral damage.

Shock and awe is more than a military tactic; it is simultaneously an exercise in war as visual culture for the consumption of the televisual audience and an ideology of American modernization. As Hegel noted in reference to Bonapartism, the march of an army across a national geography materializes the idea of progress to which that political geography is now coercively subjected. The progress of aerial bombing across a civilian terrain has much the same effect. In 1900, George Simmel identified sensory shock as the price of progressive modernity and urbanism. Perceptual shock was the psychological medium in which the modern announced itself and refashioned new forms of personhood.⁵ Modernity’s shock was a conversion experience creating new social subjects amenable to emerging technological and commodity regimes and work disciplines. The current ideology of shock and awe fuses technological and theological norms, for it too is a form of accelerated conversion: the rapid Americanization of the Oriental Other through technological onslaught and subsequent post war therapeutic treatment and rehabilitation.

The Performance Culture of Terror: Sacrificial Repetition

Below the visual logic of “shock and awe,” whether practiced by the fundamentalism of Bush or Bin Laden, are certain theological subtexts that are indexed by both the religious concept of “awe” and by the demonization of adversaries. Subject populations have to be traumatized and awed through terrorist violence. The wonder of awe is, in actuality, the cultural elaboration of fear through technological feats,

be these visual performances of saturation bombing or of crashing a plane into a high-rise building. The *mise-en-scene* of modern political terror is essentially sacrificial spectacle and shock and awe despite the fact that its counter-terror rationale was fully complicit with the visual logic of terrorism. The ratio between the antiseptic visual management of shock and awe on the one hand and collateral damage on the other is sacrificial. The collateral victim is that which is sacrificed to construct the hegemony of visualized violence. As a ritual process, sacrificial violence selects/creates generic subjects as raw material vulnerable to labile objectification. The process of sacrifice requires symbolic actors who can assume and absorb multiple collective memories and refract diverse and often contradictory collective fantasies. Sacrifice is an organized instrument of political terror through which collective meanings and historical change are mobilized, visualized, and dramatized in the visible selection and dramaturgical elimination of the chosen object by violent agency. Sacrifice involves the symbolic separation of a part from the whole, and in such a manner that the part or the victim stands-in for the societal totality that is meant to be effected by sacrificial intervention. Sacrifice recalls the offense, contamination, pollution, and transgression it attempts to rectify through the totalization of the offending social order, group or institution in the form of the emblematic victim. The victim is recruited from within the targeted social order, and is endowed with semiotic and mnemonic capacities that are switched on with the application of violence. The sacrificial act concentrates unreconciled historical memory and social contradiction in a symbolic persona. The victim of sacrificial actions is made to bear messages and is intended to alter social reality

in the very mutilation of his embodiment. The movement of victims by violence from life to death is frequently envisioned as enabling the movement of society from one historical stage to the next. The sacrificial subject is inherently ambivalent, contaminating and purifying, disordering and ordering, intrinsic to the social order and alien because sacrifice for its agents is the expulsion of contradiction from history in the vehicle of the emissary victim.⁶

At this point, I must partially dissent from the thesis of Giorgio Agamben and his concept of “homo sacer,” the radically disenfranchised “exception” to sovereignty, whose categorical abjection and violent death contributes nothing to the sacrificial reproduction of dominant institutions. The homo sacer is positioned outside society and sacrificial logic because this non-person can be killed with impunity and without ritualization. The homo sacer corresponds to the state of social death.⁷ This category can apply to many political and institutional situations such as the inmate in prisons and asylums, and the body that carries a communicable disease, but only to a certain extent. I do not think, however, that the concept of “homo sacer” describes victims of organized programs of political terror and counter terror (which also terrorize). Radical abjectness may be the ultimate consequence of political terror but the processes that produce the abject bear all the registers of sacrificial ritualization. I am thinking here of practices of torture, political disappearance and abduction, arbitrary arrest and detention, political assassination, and acts of terror that target individuals, groups, and locales based on the criteria of objective guilt. I contend that we should move past a classificatory juridical analysis, such as that of Agamben, and towards a performative analysis

of political terror as sacrificial action. It is then that we can see that political terror's investment in sacrificial expulsion of its object from everyday life, the community, the nation-state, and categories of citizenship can create all sorts of ideological and cathartic value, and is a primary means of the pro-active reproduction of sovereignty. As opposed to being dispensable, the sacrificed other is crucial to the reproduction of sovereignty or to legitimating claims to sovereignty. Further, Agamben's notion of the exception to sovereignty is frequently generated and fashioned through both ideological discourse and performative intervention. The "exception" or the socially abject possesses a social biography that moves this entity from a position of interiority within a community to a position of exteriority. Yet, through the sacrificial action of "movement," that is, through the application of structural or transacted violence and/or disenfranchisement from everyday life, community, nation-state and citizenship, the sacrifice carries with it historical memory that achieves a heightened and intensified semiosis in violence.

Contemporary political terror, particularly that which involves civilians and noncombatants, emerges as a particular form of sacrifice. This form of sacrifice is characterized by a compulsive, repetitive disorder, where initial attempts to banish socio-political contradiction through emblematic sacrifice inevitably fail to reach completion. These attempts, thus, must be endlessly repeated until the social object of these acts can no longer bear the costs of its depredations. In this compulsive repetitive dynamic, the sacrificial act itself is unconsciously subjected to a sacrificial logic for its failure to resolve contradiction and for its inability to achieve historical completion. Sacrifice itself is

punished as a meaning-bearing form through compulsive repetition that highlights its sheer lack of efficacy, its empty yet dramatic functionality. The instrumental logic of the sacrificial act is absorbed back into the short-term immediate dramaturgy of destruction. Caught between instrumentality or means-ends relations on the one hand, and symbolic logic on the other, the sacrificial act becomes a symbolic evocation of an empty political-historical instrumentality. It symbolizes historical memory and political transformation, and yet, obscures the latter in the suffering of the act's arbitrary victims as it fails to further its political goal of moving society to a new historical stage. The inability of the sacrificial act to produce a post-sacrificial satisfaction and reconciliation with social existence is displaced onto the ritual process itself. Sacrifice is repeated as a material intervention and declaration of desire that refuses to yield satisfaction and to sustain the memory of the social values and integrities it was deployed to serve. The sacrificial intervention is intended as a summation of historical experience and yet, the act itself fails to reconcile a community of witness with historical experience. History remains static; there is no acceleration of history, to use the concept of Reinhart Koselleck.⁸

Eventually the social inequities that the act of sacrificial violence was meant to dramatize and redress become supplanted by vicious exchanges of sacrificial acts as the primary and traumatic content of social memory of both perpetrators and victims (turned vengeful perpetrators). Primary social inequities such as racism, economic exploitation, and institutional stigma are supplanted by traumatic memories of the violent acts that were meant to convey the message of protest and redress in the first place.

The relations of political antagonism (the means by which the conditions of political antagonism are expressed and materialized) supplant the original conditions and contexts of antagonism. The enacted relations of antagonism eventually transmute into the primary political context in the consciousness of the belligerents.

To peruse the performative infrastructure and role sets of political terror as components of compulsive repetition is to understand why most contemporary acts of political terror have taken on both a decidedly anti-modern and post-modern shape. In many acts of political terror today, we find a contradictory forensic and visual fixation on mortification, mutilation, and atrocity on the one hand, and an almost unlimited capacity to technically sanitize the violent act on the other.⁹ In both cases, the victim is the result of sacrificial excess, of acts of violence that create victims, and through them, tangible historical memory which then obliterates that product in its aftermath. This alteration between atrocity-centered/vivisectionist violence and sanitizing/erased and/or “smart bomb/collateral damage violence” in itself encapsulates a sacrificial dialogic in modern political violence. This dialogic entails the movement from the victim dismembered and somatically opened to history to that of the victim erased. It is a movement from violent acts of political memory to artificially induced historical amnesia. Populations have to be terrorized into silence and forgetfulness about the violence they may have witnessed and experienced, and the material residue and coordinates of that violence have to be covertly disappeared. Perhaps the crudest representation of this was the practice of Renamo in Mozambique of cutting off the sensory appendages of both witnesses and victims of its

violence. Ears, eyes, tongues, and lips were removed as the perpetrators sought to destroy the social capacity of memory and witnessing in the aftermath of their initial acts of terror. Deniability is built into many acts of sacrificial terror, almost as a tacit admission of the political impotence of these interventions, not to speak of their shame. Yet, despite their technological distance, American ideologies of collateral damage share with Renamo atrocities the need to erase the record of suffering as historical value and fact.

The Actuarial Logic of Retribution

Ideologies of public safety are concerned with the governance of risk and the construction of risk perception, and thus, they are actuarial discourses. Human rights laws speak to the act of violence as the removal or theft of the recipient’s civil dignity. Human rights redress is meant to be a form of restorative justice that recovers this stolen dignity. In this model, political violence inflicts loss and damage to the property of the legal personality. Secure and dignified embodiment is considered to be the property of a legal personality. There is an economic logic to this cultural understanding of the political act of terror. An economy of violence speaks of, measures, and compares acts of violence and damage in actuarial terms of loss, commensuration, value equivalence, and compensation. Actuarial memory organizes the modern representation of violence, particularly since the Holocaust. The Nazis ratcheted up the sociology of horror by introducing modern forms of time/motion efficiency in the administration of death and suffering. The resultant outcomes have marked our own tendency to represent such violence in actuarial

terms of production, and the quantification of suffering and pain, which lends itself to commensuration logics at the root of actuarial tables of suffering and risk.

The enumeration of suffering carries within it a hidden theology. In the cultural logic of quantification, evil is qualified by magnitude.¹⁰ Anthropologist Brackette Williams has theorized, in relation to capital punishment, that in our public culture in order to be considered truly evil, an act of violence must have magnitude.¹¹ This is particularly true in the post-Holocaust era, where genocidal and ethnocidal violence and the threat of nuclear warfare has raised the standard of what constitutes eschatological violence, where millions count and are recalled more than relatively anonymous deaths in the thousands or hundreds. Sometimes magnitude-as-evil rests not in actual numbers but in the site and object of violence. Thus, the tragedy of the WTC attack has not been diminished as the number of the missing dead declined, for it is the magnitude of tall buildings destruction and the surprise assault on the American homeland by outsiders that endows the event with a moral compass, and thus, with absolute evil. Further, the morality of magnitude performs a double function. It both assigns evil to an abstracted plane of existence – uncountable death and unspeakable mass suffering – and at the same time, it retracts this abstraction through enumeration. The pseudo-concreteness of numbers substitutes for the abstraction of multiplied suffering. Thus, our public culture is rife with enumeration debates over collective violence, and hierarchies of horror are established with the rhetoric of quantification in which political discourse is dominated by terms such as risk, loss, indemnification, reparation, restoration, and collateral damage.

These numeric diatribes are in effect debates about relative versus absolute evil.

Such debates can take an interesting course, for in the counting of deaths, there are both morally primary and morally secondary numbers. The ideology of collateral damage holds evil at a distance by subordinating violence to the rationalities of reasonable risk assessment; it assigns certain deaths and injuries to a numerically secondary status. Here, the suppression of enumerated damage through the actuarial notion of incidental violence contains the inherent evilness of violence, or neutralizes it via the rationalities of acceptable risk and embeds it within a means-ends relation. This is a version of double accounting: deaths on the side versus the moral justification of primary targets, Milosevic's mansion versus the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, for example.

Thus, enumeration discussions appear to bring an often-reassuring rationality to the cultural management of the memory of violence. To speak of 20 million African slaves or six million Jews, and collateral bomb damage on the outskirts of Belgrade, permits the establishment of public moralities and/or policies of redress. This can be considered part of the governmentality of violence and the governmentality of evil. It has been a truism of my ethnographic research on political violence that rarely do divided and acrimonious politics debate political violence within the framework of violence/non-violence. Rather, in conflicts where violence is a primary medium of political communication, the debates are over modes and kinds of violence – which forms of violence hold evil in abeyance and thus can be deployed, and which forms unleash evil and thus must be shunned and propagandized to delegitimize the other side. In fact, many violent acts are

committed as sidebars to such debates, insofar as they seek to punish the use of “illegitimate forms of violence” with interventions that claim truth through so-called legitimated forms of violence, for example, recent Israeli army incursions into the West Bank in response to Palestinian suicide bombings. Sometimes, the same act can acquire or lose legitimacy in the shift of time, place and target.

The appearance of rational cultural management promised by actuarial mentality quickly evaporates when we also consider that retributive or revenge code violence, often carried out by the state apparatus or para-state apparatuses, is also part of the governmentality of violence. Any logic of retribution is also pervaded by an actuarial logic that seeks to restore loss, to lower risk, and to ultimately restore social symmetry through compensatory violence. In our actuarial culture, accounting practices use a variety of tools, from the calculator to the laser guided missile to the hijacked jetliner. The numbers game is also the crying game.

Actuarial restoration has always been problematic. In creating measures and commensurations of unique acts of violence and suffering, it tacitly commodifies violence and its victims. In so doing, it contributes to anesthesiology of terror. The recent exhibit of Holocaust inspired art at the Jewish Museum in NYC centers on the commodification of memory, victims, and loss. Several pieces in the exhibit attempted to produce picture shock through the anamorphic fusion of commodity brand names and icons with Holocaust images and themes. Just as modern art has increasingly become a meditation on the threat of its own commodification, this exhibit has linked the commodification of art with the

commodification dynamics that produced victimage in the Holocaust and by which Holocaust victims are depicted and recalled 50 years later. Of note is the video installation that, as the viewer turns the focus knob, shows on screen the mutation of a supermarket-style striped bar code with its number sequences, which gradually fades into an image of concentration camp survivors in their striped uniforms and tattoos. The same artist montaged a photo of himself in striped inmate garb in a camp barracks holding forth a can of diet coke. This gesture takes place in an interior scene of camp inmates sitting around the coke drinker, staring hollowed eyed at the camera. Here, the integration of political terror into everyday life and the commodification of everyday life are posited as twinned axiomatic experiences of modern amnesia. They are also advanced as de-historicizing forces when it comes to remembering and thinking the Holocaust.¹²

We are compelled then to draw several linkages. If much modern political violence, particularly the violence of magnitude, occurs within a commodification logic of exchange and value equivalence, then the social depiction and memory of such violence becomes “infected” and inflected by commodification dynamics – thus the need to identify evil with magnitude and the moralities of enumeration. Actuarial logic as both an anticipatory and retrospective depiction of violence is an extension of this commodification pattern as it draws tables of inherent risk and/or consequent suffering and prescribed redress. And yet, in the critical visual language of many of the artistic works in the Jewish Museum exhibit, the foregrounding of commodification logics leads us into the moral/metaphysical maze of the normalization of violence - its incremental integration with and

infiltration of everyday life structures, the banality of its repetition; the commonsensical domestication of violence through factory-like and bureaucratic techniques; and the consequent indifference and moral-sensory numbing. All of these can be identified as generating forms of evil that can never truly be encompassed by numerical magnitude.

Actuarial logic appears less able to function as a curative for violence and even more irrational and dangerous when actuarial intervention deploys the political technology of violence as a form of retribution, compensation commensuration, or even risk management. In actuarial terms, each act of violence creates a debt that cannot be paid. It produces an asymmetry, but it can never return the social order back to or move the social order forward to a new homeostatic resolution. Social symmetry is the retrospective myth that legitimates actuarial or restorative violence. Do categories of measured loss actually diminish the gap, the rupture that the act of political terror creates, and do they further function as a fictive originating point of rectifying redressive acts of further violence?

Conclusion

The current warfare ideologies of public safety share with their “terrorist” adversary an epistemological and visual investment in actuarial retribution and the compulsion for sacrificial repetition. In search of a post 9/11 restoration of national and global symmetry, the Bush regime will not find ultimate satisfaction in a post-war Americanized Iraq, but will embark on the hunt for new transitional terrorist objects, perhaps in Syria, Iran, or Indonesia. Thus, we must ask ourselves if the new world

order of public safety is in effect a new visual order of demonic visualization, a ghost-busting regime committed to bringing invisible alterity to the social surface and thereby, engrossed in personifying and theologizing the problematic vertigo of globalization in the form of emblematic evil? This dynamic conflates the policing of social surfaces with effective governance. American political culture now deploys the mass circulation of images of public safety enforcement, often materialized in concrete acts of military intervention abroad and scopic security regimes at home, as a mediatized palliative against the insecurities and dis-ease precipitated by all the uncontrollable circulatory flows and floods that now buffet a besieged American nationhood from all sides and from within. The increasing convergence of the digital visualization of warfare and the wider American media culture indicates the prospective social logic by which wars of public safety will be progressively normalized and rendered culturally acceptable, therefore, no longer requiring the increasingly distant goad of the burnt towers as they eventually fossilize into collateral damage.

End Notes

- 1 Jacques Ranciere, "Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization," 61 *October* 78 (Summer 1992).
- 2 Mike Davis, *The Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (Los Angeles: Metropolitan Book, 1998).
- 3 Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- 4 Allen Feldman, "From Rodney King to Desert Storm via ex-Yugoslavia: On Cultural Anesthesia," in *Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, ed. C. Nadia Seremetakis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) at 87-108.
- 5 George Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) at 324-339.
- 6 See my discussion of sacrifice and my critique of the work of Rene Girard on the hegemony of sacrificial logic in A. Feldman, supra note 3, at 218-269.
- 7 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: On Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 8 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: The Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).
- 9 See Allen Feldman, "Violence and Vision: The Prosthetics, Aesthetics of Terror in Northern Ireland," 10(1) *Public Culture* 25 (Fall, 1997).
- 10 See my discussion of amnesty criteria and amnesty hearings in South Africa in Allen Feldman, "Strange Fruit: The South African Truth Commission and the Demonic Economies of Violence," 46(3) *Social Analysis* 235 (Fall, 2002).
- 11 I am grateful for a personal communication with anthropologist and MacArthur Fellow Brackette F. Williams on her groundbreaking theorization of the ideology of magnitude and evil, in her forthcoming magisterial study of capital punishment in America.
- 12 Alan Schechner, "Digital Bar Code," and "Concentration Camp Processing," *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, Exhibition shown at the Jewish Museum, New York City, 2002.