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**ANOTHER NEW ILLUSTRATED HISTORY:
THE VISUAL TURNS IN THE MEMORY OF WEST GERMAN TERRORISM
LEITH PASSMORE**

With their new film on the Red Army Faction (RAF), *The Baader Meinhof Komplex* (2008), producer Bernd Eichinger and director Uli Edel wanted to produce not so much a work of art as an “illustrated” history (Kurbjuweit 45). The film, an adaptation of the classic text on the West German terrorist group, is just the latest example of how visual culture has turned the historiography of the RAF. Terrorism in general has long been recognized as a medial event and there is a vague concession that the RAF was rather photogenic, but the visual component of 1970s terrorism in West Germany has only recently begun to receive the scholarly attention it deserves. Despite the methodological shift in the humanities known as the “visual turn” recently coming to bear on the history of the RAF, images have provoked and sustained the controversies and debates surrounding the memory of 1970s terrorism from the beginning.¹ This paper tracks these “visual turns” – from Gerhard Richter’s 1988 cycle of paintings depicting dead RAF terrorists to Edel’s recent film – in the historiography of the RAF, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group.

The Baader-Meinhof Group, as they were dubbed by the popular press, emerged from the waning student movement of the late 1960s. By 1969, the conditions that saw students take to the streets had dissipated: the controversial and long-debated emergency laws had been passed in a somewhat watered-down version, and the grand coalition between the two major political parties, the CDU and the SPD, that formed in 1966, had been replaced by a liberal government under SPD Chancellor Willy Brandt. The movement shifted its energies from protest and civil disobedience to what student leader Rudi Dutschke championed as the “long march through the institutions”. However, following the 1967 police shooting of Benno Ohnesorg and the 1968 assassination attempt on Dutschke, a number of mostly peripheral elements had become increasingly radical.²

¹ For more on the “visual” or “pictorial turn” see Mitchell, particularly pp. 11-34.

² Recent revelations have brought the place of the shooting of Ohnesorg in West German history into question. In the narrative of the student movement, Ohnesorg was the victim of a fascist state embodied in policeman Karl-Heinz Kurras. Archival research, however, has uncovered Kurras’ involvement with the Stasi and membership of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany). Instead of the puppet of the fascist West German state, it seems Kurras was, if anything, a puppet of the communist East. While there is no suggestion the Stasi ordered the killing and no evidence to date that changes our understanding of the order of events, these revelations have proved a shock to the reception of the shooting and its place in the broader narrative of the student movement (Kurbjuweit, Röbel, Sontheimer, Wensierski).

The RAF formed in the aftermath of the 1970 liberation from prison of Andreas Baader by a group including journalist Ulrike Meinhof. What followed was a period of terrorism that dominated the next decade. While violence was carried out in the name of the RAF until the early 1990s, it peaked in 1977 with a few bloody months, the so-called “German Autumn.” This finale saw, most notably, the hijacking of a Lufthansa flight, the deaths of the central RAF figures in Stammheim prison, and the murder of industrial figure Hanns Martin Schleyer by the second generation of the RAF. Throughout the 1970s and until their deaths, the leaders of the infamous first generation had not only released texts but also nurtured a visual identity and were known to most via newspaper photos and television reports. The phenomenon of the RAF cannot be separated from this visual (self-)representation.

Susan Sontag outlined – in the same year as the German Autumn – how people in modern societies have a relationship to reality mediated predominantly by photographic images. This mediation is made possible by that unique quality of the photograph that sees it not relegated to mere representation, but instead overlap with the real. Collective experience of an event in industrialized societies can be understood to be a function of the relevant photographic record of that event.³ So it is, too, that the phenomenon of 1970s West German terrorism is unimaginable without the thousands of photographic images it produced (Terhoeven 390). This understanding is gradually (and perhaps belatedly) coming to the study of the RAF despite protests from former member Astrid Proll that the group’s “communication with the Left was still via words” and that they “never really tried to use the power of pictures” (Terhoeven 380-381).

In 2007 Petra Terhoeven wrote that the importance of the visual is often emphasized in popular culture and discourse on 1970s terrorism, but rarely in the academic literature. In arguing for a research focus on visual culture in its own right, she laments the complete lack of images in Wolfgang Kraushaar’s epic, two-volume collection of essays from 2006. The conception of an image-mediated reality is nevertheless coming to bear on the historiography of the RAF in line with the methodological shift in the humanities known as the “visual turn.”⁴ This

³ Sontag writes of photography reviving a “primitive” sense of images as extensions of real things, as “physically distinct, manifestations of the same energy or spirit” (*On Photography* 155-58). Roland Barthes also notes this relationship to the real as the unique quality of the photographic image, that “every photograph is somehow co-natural [co-substantial in Sontag’s analysis] with its referent” (*Camera Lucida* 76-77). An oft-cited evidence of mass, image-mediated experience in recent years are descriptions of the attack on the World Trade Center as being “like a movie” (Sontag, *Regarding* 21-22; Gabler; Schechner 274-280; Nacos 3).

⁴ Terhoeven (380-381) acknowledges beginnings being made by Martin Steinseifer, see Martin Steinseifer (“‘Fotos wie Brandwunden’?”; “Terrorismus als Medienereignis”). Other notable

academic interest is also reflected in the most recent print edition of *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (Aust 2008). Aust's book can be seen as a barometer of popular interest in the RAF, with updated editions appearing to coincide with each wave of renewed fascination, and the 2008 edition includes, for the first time, photos.⁵ In contrast to the very recent methodological turn in the history of West German terrorism towards imagery, the cultural memory of the period has always turned on the visual.

While the relationship between the imagery and the experience of the RAF is intimate, so is the relationship between visual culture and the memory of the group. Not only can we "witness" events via their photographic reproduction, we can also remember, with the still image as the "basic unit" of memory (Sontag, *On Photography* 167; *Regarding* 22 and 88-89). When writing of "collective memory," Sontag argues that recognizable photographs are "a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about" and it "calls these ideas 'memories.'" But the images do not tell us all we need to know; instead they are common triggers for a given narrative. Sontag describes this as a process of "instruction" that dictates "*this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with pictures that lock the story in our minds" (*Regarding* 85-86). In this sense, the collective memory of the RAF is undoubtedly bound up with iconic images. In fact, the historiography of the period can be read as a series of turns in this relationship between the narrative of West German terrorism and visual culture, beginning most notably with Gerhard Richter's 1988 cycle of paintings *18 October 1977*.

Richter's series of fifteen paintings depicts dead terrorists, including Baader in a pool of blood on the floor of his cell, or moments from their lives, such as a prison record player, or a young, elegant Meinhof. All the paintings are detailed reproductions of photographs: police footage and private photographs, some made famous in newspapers and some from private collections. The works have a distinct photographic quality, but lines scraped across the surface leave the final image deliberately blurry. It is this technique of "photopainting" that has been the catalyst for one discussion of Richter's engagement with history.

There is a broad consensus in art-history literature that Richter's photopaintings represent a self-reflective commentary on the practice of painting, or, the possibility for painting in the age of photography (Green 35). The

works to be published since Terhoeven's article include Carrie Collenberg's analysis of the photographs of Holger Meins after his death, and Rolf Sachsse's study of the RAF logo.

⁵ Other editions to appear at times of great interest include the 2007 (anniversary of 1977) and 1998 (dissolution of the RAF) editions.

recognizably photographic quality of the images is undermined by the lack of focus and the inability of the viewer to take the whole image in without changing perspective. Richter “denies us that crucial quality by which the photographic image has been claimed to have superseded the painted one” (Green 44). The challenge the paintings present to the viewer, therefore, brings into question the claim photography has to the visual representation of reality. If we consider the medium of photography to be the subject of the painting, then the cycle is widely considered a critique of the tradition of painting, in the form of painting (Green 33).⁶ However, its audience in the late 1980s took the subject to be the recent and specific historical context of the Baader-Meinhof Group, which meant Richter’s work had important implications for the contemporaneous debate surrounding RAF terrorism.⁷

Despite never mentioning the names of the terrorists, the historicity of the images is central to Richter’s cycle. The title refers to the date Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe were found dead in their Stammheim prison cells, so the historical context is instantly recognizable despite the lack of labelling. By 1988 the technique of photopainting was not new to Richter, but *18 October 1977* does represent his first attempt to paint a “historically specific public experience” (Buchloh 88). The extensive supplementary information provided at showings in England and the USA, underlines just how central the specific history is to an understanding of the paintings. Rainer Usselman argues the need for explanatory material for contemporary and foreign audiences – that is to say, those without direct access to the cultural context of West German terrorism – will only increase with time (Usselman 24-25). It is in this sense, as a commentary on a specific history rather the art history itself, that the cycle is important for its engagement with the memory of the RAF.

Critics have described Richter’s work as breaking a taboo in the visual arts that saw artists avoid the subject of 1970s terrorism (Buchloh 103; Hohmeyer 226; Saltzman 35). More than that, wrote Buchloh, it broke through the “collective repression” of the memory of the RAF within West German society more generally (103). With the bloody events of 1977, the group was robbed of the cult of personality that had gathered around the first generation. The next

⁶ Richter has denied directly that his photopaintings are paintings about painting (“Interview with Sabine Schütz, 1990” 208).

⁷ Buchloh writes of the “first temptation [...] to respond to the shock these paintings generate with an art-historical reflex, [as] deflecting their impact by an excursion into the history of history painting” (93). Saltzman writes that “given [...] the embeddedness of [the paintings’] subject – the complex relationship between the emergence of terrorism and legacy of fascism – Richter’s cycle produces a pictorial encounter with something that we might well call postwar German history” (35).

decade also witnessed events that heralded the potential reunification of Germany, pushing terrorism from the limelight (Buchloh 88; Green 41). This “collective amnesia” that Buchloh and Green write about existing prior to Richter’s work has little to do, however, with the images being lost or suppressed.

Habbo Knoch writes of the “visual amnesia” surrounding Holocaust atrocities in West Germany as having nothing to do with an absence of images or photos. It is instead indicative of the cultural “re-coding” of such images, which he traces from Nazi wartime propaganda and the Allies’ post-war re-education efforts through to the protest scene of the 1970s (Knoch 894). Similarly, in the case of post-war West German terrorism, the images did exist and Richter was not the first visual artist to tackle terrorism. It was his work, however, that allowed the re-coding of the images of RAF terrorists by recasting the relationship between the image and the real.

Richter acknowledged the claim photography had come to have over the representation of reality in contrast to painting. He writes in 1964-65 that “[p]hotography altered ways of seeing and thinking. Photographs were regarded as true, painting as artificial. The painted picture was no longer credible; its representation froze into immobility, because it was not authentic but invented” (Richter 31). Moreover, he understood his problematization of photography’s role (that is, his paintings) as an act of recalling, as “an attempt to console – that is, to give a meaning. It’s also about the fact that we can’t simply discard and forget a story like that; we must try to find a different way of dealing with it – appropriately” (“Conversation with Jan Thorn Prikker” 194). This act of recalling the RAF rested on a questioning of the medium of photography and, with it, the collective memory of the events.

In this sense Richter broke through the “amnesia” or “taboo” surrounding the RAF, where the amnesia is understood not as an absence, but a dominant narrative. The story “locked in place” by the photographs of the dead RAF terrorists in the immediate aftermath of their deaths was bound up with the official explanation of what happened that night in October 1977: the images of the dead terrorists in particular were produced by prison officials and published as part of the state version of events. By piercing the assumed reality of the photographs – breaking the connection between the image and real – Richter laid bare their subjectivity and opened them up for “re-coding” or “multiple instruction.” It must be noted that those writing of amnesia, repression, and taboo at the time, were also those who championed an alternative “coding” of the suicide photographs. Months after the first showing, for example, Buchloh wrote that Richter’s works resisted “the constantly renewed collective prosecution of those victims in the

form of their eradication from current memory” (93). This was the unique contribution of Richter’s cycle and its showing proved the catalyst for a fierce debate that amounted to a race to “instruct” anew or “code” the cultural memory of RAF terrorism.

According to Richter, his aim was not ideological, nor was he interested in the deeds of the RAF, but instead the paintings were images of grief. They addressed a collective, suppressed trauma and offered a way of remembering and mourning a failed idealism; a way of mourning, that is, the RAF terrorists as victims of a false idea that was doomed to failure (“Conversation with Jan Thorn Prikker” 205; “Interview with Sabine Schütz” 208; Hohmeyer 229). The work was soon celebrated by Buchloch who also spoke of victims in a sense very different to Richter’s in suggesting the RAF prisoners may have been murdered by the state (93). The cycle also quickly drew accusations that it glorified the terrorists. Notably, Dresden Bank withdrew in protest its funding of the *Portikus* exhibition in Frankfurt where the cycle was on display. Former board member, Jürgen Ponto, had been killed by the RAF, and the bank thought the works were too “one-sided” and “omitted the tragedy of the victims,” where “victim” is understood quite differently again (Dettweiler). These responses are representative of a full spectrum of criticism: leftists thought Richter had no right to interpret their history, those in the middle decried the omission of the dead and wounded, and commentators on the right criticized the glorification of such evil men and women (Storr 32). Richter’s own hope for the work may have been lost to political agendas, but he had started a conversation and, perhaps, an overdue engagement with RAF history.

A decade after first being shown the paintings’ ability shock to the German consciousness had arguably begun to wane. “[T]heir cathartic energy,” wrote Usselmann, “had become exhausted” (4). So much so that the paintings left Germany for New York after an offer made by the Museum of Modern Art in New York for this “important political document” could not be matched locally (Usselmann 4). Having started discussion about the memory of the Baader-Meinhof Group and set its tone for ten years, Richter’s work had seemingly run its course as a catalyst for debate with some critics arguing the artist had essentially tamed one of the most unresolved traumas of the post-war era by exporting it (Dettweiler). While the Federal Republic was letting go of Richter’s work in the late nineties, debate surrounding the memory of the RAF was again sparked by a re-coding of the visual, this time at the hands of the advertising and fashion industries.

The remaining members of the RAF announced the group's dissolution in 1998. This announcement heralded an almost instant renaissance of RAF symbolism in visual popular culture. The elements of the terrorist iconography of the 1970s – the five-pointed star, the letters “RAF” and likenesses of Baader and Meinhof – soon appeared on t-shirts, underwear, and condoms (Weinhauer and Requate 9; Kraushaar 1206). In February 2001 lifestyle magazine *Max* recreated the image of Baader dead on the floor of his cell in a pool of blood, declaring, “the time is ripe for RAF pop stars.” This reproduction of the death scene was part of an advertising campaign designed to sell the house shoes featured in an insert (Kraushaar 1209; Albers). Similarly, the magazine *Tussi Deluxe* used fashion models to recreate scenes from RAF history, including finding the body of murdered Hanns Martin Schleyer in the boot of a car (Kraushaar 1208; Drilo). This de- and re-contextualization of terrorist iconography by the worlds of fashion and marketing, this “revival of radical chic in the context of the apolitical 90s,” was soon dubbed “Prada Meinhof” (Worley).

On the edges of the “Prada Meinhof” phenomenon there was a blurry line between commentary on a phenomenon and its reproduction, between critiquing a recycled, historically isolated cult of personality and reinforcing it.⁸ In this context, works of art such as Christopher Roth's controversial 2001 film *Baader* consciously sought to highlight the star and cult factor surrounding Andreas Baader at the expense of historical accuracy (Kraushaar 1207-08). Whereas Roth depicted Baader as the gun-slinging anti-hero of a Western film, Hans Niehus' work *Hollywood Boulevard*, also from 2001, picked up on the idea of the rock'n'roll celebrity terrorist by painting a star on the “walk of fame” with the name of RAF member “Holger Meins” (Biesenbach 60). The altogether flippant use of the RAF logo as a pop-visual reference fell out of fashion around the time of the 2001 attacks in New York (Sachsse 132). Nevertheless, a strong and persistent interest – both popular and scholarly – in the visual representations of West German terrorists and terrorism can be regarded as the most important remnant of the “Prada” years.

The attacks of September 11 provided a dominant terrorism discourse around the globe. In Germany the immediate revelation that a number of the September 11 hijackers had trained in Hamburg and the overarching dilemma of home-grown, middle-class terrorism, produced an explosion in RAF-related literature. In 2008 Bob de Graaf wrote of a natural tendency to view the 1970s as

⁸ Wolfgang Kraushaar writes of the trend becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy as critics of this pop version of the RAF indirectly helped sustain the trend. He also suggests the film *Baader* fell short of its stated goal of critiquing the coolness of, and fascination surrounding, the persona of Baader and only reproduced them (1207-08).

precursor to the contemporary “war on terror” as well as a certain “nostalgia” for 1970s in light of September 11 (de Graaf 90). Within this broad nostalgia and in the context of the lingering interest in the representation of terrorists, the debate surrounding the RAF again crystallized around a specific, visual cue.

The 2005 exhibition in Berlin *Imagining Terror* [*Zur Vorstellung des Terrors*], or more accurately the original working title, *The RAF Myth* [*Mythos RAF*], sparked a major discussion. Many understood the term “myth” to be positive and considered the planned exhibition a glorification of RAF terrorists (Preußner 70). Such allegations recalled those previously levelled at Richter’s cycle. During the planning of the exhibition in the final months of 2003, the debate over the working title took on a life of its own, with around nine hundred articles written in response to this perceived attempt to manufacture an RAF legend (Preußner 70).⁹

What remains from the controversy is a broad uptake in the historiography of the term “myth.” The adoption of this concept presented many of the debates about representation and the Prada Meinhof phenomenon with a common concept with which to work. Of course, despite the ubiquity of a “mythical” framework, opinions still differ on its implications and on how Prada relates to Baader. Stefan Reinecke has argued that the trashy advertising campaigns’ lack of content and naked desire for effect was also fundamental to the RAF (220), Henrik Pedersen has evoked Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* to frame the recent pop renaissance as the “farce” to the “tragedy” of the 1970s RAF (327), and Wolfgang Kraushaar has argued that the re-emergence of terrorist symbols is simply a function of pop-culture and highlighted the “considerable discrepancy” between the “RAF as a historic and an aesthetic phenomenon” (1209).

Most recently, history writing has followed the same seemingly endless cycle of rejuvenation in popular interest. This interest has gathered around a number of high-profile events such as the potential – and eventual – release from prison of second-generation RAF members Christian Klar and Brigitte Mohnhaupt. More important in terms of publications, however, has been the thirty-year anniversary of the German Autumn of 1977¹⁰ and the forty-year

⁹ Meike Schüle provides a detailed account of the debate surrounding the exhibition.

¹⁰ This anniversary has seen a number of timely re-releases such as Aust’s *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*; Pieter Bakker Schut’s *Stammheim: Der Prozeß gegen die Rote Armee Fraktion. Die notwendige Korrektur der herrschenden Meinung*; The report on Meinhof’s death by the International Investigation Commission *Der Tod Ulrike Meinholds. Bericht der Internationalen Untersuchungskommission*; Butz Peters’ *Tödlicher Irrtum – Die Geschichte der RAF*; and *Das RAF Phantom* by Gerhard Wisnewski, Wolfgang Landgraeber, and Ekkehard Sieker. It has also inspired a range of (auto)biographical works such as Jutta Ditfurth’s *Ulrike Meinhof. Die*

anniversary of 1968¹¹ (Weinhauer 109; Sachsse 132). Among the cacophony of this present wave of publications is an identifiable reaction to the excess of the “Prada” years.

RAF history has again turned towards the victims. The call for a focus on victims is not necessarily new, but this most recent understanding of the “victims” is different from Richter’s mourning and Buchloh’s accusations of state violence. It is, instead, framed as a corrective to the discourse of the early 2000s that actively sought to blur the line between victim and perpetrator. Hans-Peter Feldmann’s 1998 work *The Dead [Die Toten]*, for example, was part of the controversial 2005 exhibition and presented a type of memorial in which he deliberately obscured any differentiation between victims. He hung photos of ninety terrorists, civilians and police officers alongside each other in order of their deaths with no commentary save the dates they died. The work evoked a sense of memorialisation, and the lack of commentary and strict chronological order made Ulrike Meinhof just as much a victim as murdered policeman Reinhold Braendle.

This most recent focus on the victims works on the logic that a humanization of the victims is simultaneously a condemnation of the perpetrators.¹² Important to this counter trend have been Andres Veiel’s 2001 film

Biographie; Kristin Wesemann’s *Ulrike Meinhof. Kommunistin, Journalistin, Terroristin – eine politische Biographie*; Magdalena Kopp’s *Die Terrorjahre. Mein Leben an der Seite von Carlos*; and Jörg Herrmann and Klaus Stern’s *Andreas Baader. Das Leben eines Staatsfeindes*. The wave also includes eye-witness accounts such as Ulf G. Stuberger’s *Die Tage von Stammheim. Als Augenzeuge beim RAF-Prozeß* and “*In der Strafsache gegen Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Jan-Carl Raspe, Gudrun Ensslin wegen Mordes u.a.*” *Dokumente aus dem Prozess*. Works on RAF victims including Anne Siemens’ *Für die RAF war er das System, für mich der Vater. Die andere Geschichte des deutschen Terrorismus*. Broader accounts of the RAF include Willi Winkler and Bernd Klöckener’s *Die Geschichte der RAF*; Martin Knobbe and Stefan Schmitz’ *Terrorjahr 1977: Wie die RAF Deutschland veränderte*; and Sven Felix Kellerhoff’s *Rote Armee Fraktion: Was stimmt? Die wichtigsten Antworten*.

¹¹ See for example Andreas Schwab, Manuel Gogos, and Beate Schappach’s edited collection *Die 68er. Kurzer Sommer – lange Wirkung*; Thomas Hecken’s *1968. Von Texten und Theorien aus einer Zeit euphorischer Kritik*; Gerd Koenen and Andres Veiel’s *1968. Bildspur eines Jahres*; Norbert Frei’s *1968. Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest*; Albrecht von Lucke’s *68 oder neues Biedermeier. Der Kampf um die Deutungsmacht*; Rainer Langhans and Christa Ritter’s *K1. Das Bilderbuch der Kommune*; Daniel Gäsche’s *Die 68er und die Musik*; Jürgen Link’s *Bangemachen gilt nicht auf der Suche nach der Roten Ruhr-Armee. Eine Vorerinnerung*; Götz Aly’s *Unser Kampf. 1968*; Oskar Negt’s *Achtundsechzig. Politische Intellektuelle und die Macht*; and Ulf G. Stuberger’s *Die Akte RAF. Taten und Motive, Täter und Opfer*.

¹² Nicole Colin recognizes this as partially a reaction to the focus of the terrorists but also initially places the recent focus on RAF victims in context of developments over recent centuries in cultural history towards the suffering of others that have made their way to RAF scholarship (188-90).

Black Box BRD, Anne Siemens' 2007 book *For the RAF he was the System, for me he was my Father* [*Für die RAF war er das System, für mich der Vater*] and Michael Buback's *The Second Death of my Father* [*Der zweite Tod meines Vaters*] from 2008 (Weinhauer 111; Colin 189). Siemens explained in an interview that her intention with the book was "to widen the view on the history of the RAF, which is not just a history of perpetrators," and tell the "other history" of the RAF, that of the victims (qtd. in Colin 190).¹³

At the fore of this attempt to tell this "other" history is Edel's desire to take back visual culture from the terrorists. Producing this history means producing the "pictures that have been missing" and he has emphasized the role of film in reclaiming the realm of imagery for the victims of the RAF (Kurbjuweit 48). Just as Astrid Proll – in the context of the dissolution of the RAF – produced her 1998 book of photographs as an attempt to reclaim the images from the monopoly of the media industry,¹⁴ Edel in 2008 sought to produce images of cruelty to finally sit alongside the corpus of imagery which, he felt, had to date only recreated the RAF's own loop of self-fascination. The main contributor to the "culture industry's" visual reinforcement of the terrorists' own sense of self-importance, argued one commentator recently, was Richter's 1988 cycle (Kurbjuweit 48).

For Edel, telling the story "as it really was" included manoeuvring the audience into the perspective of the victim, as in his portrayal of the kidnapping of Hanns-Martin Schleyer. Schleyer, president of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations and the Federation of German Industries, was targeted because of his involvement with the SS in the Third Reich. The 1977 operation to abduct him and hold him for ransom involved the ambushing of his car and it claimed the lives of his driver and the two police officers assigned to protect him (Aust, 1998 483). For his film, Edel strapped the camera into a car and filmed the attack from the viewpoint of those who were shot dead at close-range (Kurbjuweit 47-48).

More importantly, at the heart of depicting the reality of 1970s terrorism was a painstaking re-creation of photographic imagery. Edel went to great lengths to reproduce exactly the recognizable images of the time: photos of Benno Ohnesorg's death in 1967, images of Rudi Dutschke speaking to a crowd of students, and television footage of Schleyer (Kurbjuweit 44-45). Whereas Richter

¹³ Caroline Emcke has produced a plea for a third way: a way of writing about the RAF beyond the perpetrator/victim dichotomy.

¹⁴ Proll also re-released her book in 2004, in the heady years of "Prada Meinhof" and shortly before the infamous art exhibition in Berlin.

sought to undermine the authority of the photographic image as the medium of objectivity and historical exactness, Edel relies on it. Richter made the well-known scene of Baader's death immediately less accessible, but Edel's meticulous recreation of the image of the RAF leader lying in a pool of blood is, if anything, even more "precise" than the original, grainy 1970s photograph.

By reinstating photography's claim to the real, Edel's approach seeks to pare down the memory of the student movement and RAF terrorism and lock in the filmmakers' interpretation of "the way it really was". However, no immediate consensus has emerged in the reception of the film. Not only has the wife of high profile victim Jürgen Ponto challenged the accuracy of the events as depicted in the film ("Ponto-Witwe"), but a familiar debate has emerged: sympathizers are emphatic that the film is simply a "continuation of the lies propagated by Stefan Aust" (some have even protested by attacking Aust's house with paint bombs ["Bekennerschreiben"]); critics cannot decide whether to laud the film for cutting finally through the romanticization of the period and offering a historical account or damn it as an "ahistoricization," a perpetuation of the now well-ingrained pop-star clichés of the past decades (Borcholte); still others frame it as the ultimate, ironic commodification of terror, recalling the Prada debates (Schwennicke). Edel, then, seems to have locked in nothing, but he has reaffirmed the centrality of visual culture to the memories of the RAF. The debate surrounding the film does not bring into question the relationship between imagery and collective memory, instead it is an argument as to which of the competing narratives that imagery should recall. It is a debate that shows no signs of abating.

The phenomenon of RAF terrorism was carried as much by images as words, a recognition that is now influencing history writing on the period. The memory of the period, too, has always been bound up with visual culture: where the images have gone, debate has followed. This interdependency burst to the fore when Gerhard Richter significantly recast the relationship between the collective memory of the West German terrorism and its visual cues with his 1988 cycle. His work broke through the claim photography had to the representation of reality and opened up iconic photographs, and with them the memory of the RAF, to new narratives. Since then, the historiography of the RAF can be read as a series of "visual turns," or battles over the coding of highly recognizable images.

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