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“The struggle is over, the wounds are open’: Cinematic Tropes, History, and the RAF in Recent German Film.”

Jamie Trnka

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"The Struggle Is Over, the Wounds Are Open": Cinematic Tropes, History, and the RAF in Recent German Film

Jamie H. Trnka

Recent German films have taken up questions of terrorist violence in ways distinct from an earlier wave of cinematic representations.¹ Andres Veiel's 2001 documentary *Black Box BRD* signals one articulation of the representational shift relative to broader questions about history and film. The tension in Veiel's work between the aesthetics of film form and the politics of personal and public memory opens up a new and potentially productive window for understanding West Germany's experience of terror and its commemoration by state authorities, former terrorists, sympathizers and accused sympathizers, victims of terrorism, as well as the families of both terrorists and victims.

Roughly since the official dissolution of the Red Army Faction (RAF) in 1998, the waxing interest in German terrorism and terrorists has frequently found cinematic expression in Germany. Whereas filmic engagements with terror thirty years ago dramatized the perspectives of (alleged) terrorists, sympathizers, or suspected radicals to highlight a political climate of fear and mistrust rather than specific terrorist acts and their consequences (e.g.,

I would like to thank David Bathrick and Eric Rentschler for their encouragement and Andrew Oppenheimer for his thoughtful comments.

1. The title citation is taken from the promotional materials for Andres Veiel's film *Black Box BRD* (2001). All translations are my own.

Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe von Trotta's *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum* [1975], Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* [1975], and Reinhard Hauff's *Knife in the Head* [1978]), films since the late 1990s focus on the political choices of individual social actors.²

As evidenced by the plethora of reviews, interviews, and opinion pieces on recent films about the RAF, cinematic attempts to offer insights into terrorists' personal motivations have sparked wider public discussions of terrorism and terrorists, however superficial those attempts may be. Schlöndorff's *Legend of Rita* (1999/2000), Christian Petzold's *The State I Am In* (2000), and *Black Box BRD* all attracted considerable attention. Christopher Roth's film *Baader* (2002) enjoyed less commercial success, though it dominated press coverage of the 2002 Bertinale, where he and Veiel spoke as part of a panel on reality and fiction. *Starbuck Holger Meins* (dir. Gerd Conradt, 2001) takes a distinctly different biographical tack.³

The interest in and cultural production around the terrorist past has snowballed with the approach of various milestones. Beginning during the twentieth anniversary of the German Autumn around Heinrich Breloer's widely viewed two-part TV docudrama *Death Game* (1997), which anticipated the official anniversary by several months, this wave of retrospection was closely followed by the thirtieth anniversary of 1968, resulting in another flurry of academic conferences, publications, and popular press coverage.⁴ In spring 2002, retrospective articles and interviews marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the sentencing of the so-called first generation of RAF terrorists. There seems to be no shortage of commemorative dates where there is an interest in (and a market for) stories and histories of terrorism.⁵

2. See Thomas Elsaesser, "Antigone Agonistes: Urban Guerrilla or Guerrilla Urbanism? The Red Army Faction, *Germany in Autumn*, and *Death Game*," in *Giving Ground: The Politics of Propinquity*, ed. Jean Copjec and Michael Sorkin (London: Verso, 1999), 270. Summaries of all of these films can be found in *Deutschland im Herbst: Terrorismus im Film*, ed. Petra Kraus et al. (Munich: Schirfreihe Münchner Filmzentrum, 1997), 118–33. Additional descriptions of the most widely received films from 1975 to 1993 can be found in Stefan Wolff, "The Fictionalization of Terrorism in West German Cinema," in *One Hundred Years of European Cinema: Entertainment or Ideology?*, ed. Diane Holmes and Alison Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 120–30.

3. *What to Do in Case of Fire* (dir. Gregor Schnitzler, 2001) and *Greater Freedom, Lesser Freedom* (dir. Kristina Konrad, 2000) round out the recent boom in documentary and fictional renderings of terrorism and terrorists.

4. A book version of the film was also widely available: Heinrich Breloer, *Todesspiel: Von der Schleyer-Entführung bis Mogadischu. Eine dokumentarische Erzählung* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1997).

5. The focus on the RAF to the exclusion of other active armed groups such as the Movement 2nd June, Tupamaros West-Berlin and Munich, and the Socialist Patients' Collective presents another interesting set of questions, which lie outside the scope of this article.

What distinguishes films since 1997 is their collective decentering of the standard tropes, time lines, and topoi of terrorism found in earlier representations of the RAF. While the first wave of works focused on the first- and early-second-generation RAF (almost none were concerned with what happened after the kidnapping and murder of Hanns-Martin Schleyer,⁶ the Lufthansa hijacking to Mogadishu, and the death of core terrorists in prison) and located the nexus of terrorist violence primarily in West Berlin or the maximum security facilities built to accommodate terrorists in Stuttgart Stammheim, more recent films such as Petzold's and Veiel's grapple with real and fictionalized figures from the third generation, as well as previously ignored sites of struggle, such as Frankfurt am Main. I do not mean to suggest that the later films depart entirely from existing tropes in RAF representations, which still abound in popular media.⁷ Rather, I am interested, first, in how and why their point of entry into these discourses has changed and, second, in the possibilities for renegotiating the history of terrorism in Germany offered by work like Veiel's double biography of suspected RAF terrorist Wolfgang Grams, who himself died under unresolved circumstances at Bad Kleinen in 1993, and Deutsche Bank president and 1989 terrorist murder victim Alfred Herhausen.

Inevitably, cinematic representations of history turn on a thin line between fact and fiction, even as different films rely on a wide spectrum of representational practices from historically inflected fiction to more traditional documentary modes. The challenges posed to visually and historically rigorous engagements are particularly acute in the case of terrorism. As Wolfgang Kraushaar observed during the recent controversy preceding the Berlin Kunst-Werke's exhibition *Mythos RAF*, artists are confronted with the twin challenges of "compensating for a tendentially imageless reality in a world steered by media images" and of facing a hostile public "preconditioned to react with outrage."⁸

6. A notable exception: Fassbinder's farcical rewriting of the Schleyer abduction. *Die dritte Generation* (1979), in which third-generation terrorists unwittingly kidnap one of their corporate bankrollers, whose computer firm profits tremendously from the exponential growth of the state security apparatus.

7. In fact, Schlöndorff and Roth provide excellent examples of just how salient representations of terrorists as politically naïve, sexually deviant, and narcissistically media-obsessed continue to be in German culture. Emblematic of retrospection in the form of retro consumption was the flurry of media attention to "Prada Meinhof" fashion following the publication of a particularly crass photo spread captioned anachronistically to indicate impeccably dressed core members of the first-generation RAF disposing of Schleyer's body in the March 2002 issue of Düsseldorf's *Tiust Deluxe*.

8. Wolfgang Kraushaar, "Zwischen Popkultur und Zeitgeschichte: Von der Schwierigkeit, die RAF zu historisieren," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 1 (2004): 265. Jan Holger Kirsch's essay in the same issue provides a complementary account of the exhibition as medium and the relation between political, aesthetic, and cognitive considerations that are equally relevant to a discussion of RAF documentaries ("Mythos RAF? Zum Streit um eine noch nicht vorhandene Ausstellung," *Zeithistorische*

By highlighting how recent films depict a group whose acts were communicated largely as traces in the media, we can identify the specificity of film as a mode of historical representation and, from there, examine how recent films open up spaces for critical discussions of (West) German terrorism's lingering historical and cultural significance.

Film—especially documentary film—operates within multiple temporalities, most notably the time of the events depicted; the time of the film's production; and the time of viewing, infinitely extendable with the mass distribution of videos and DVDs to private viewers after public theatrical premieres. As such, film is uniquely positioned to address questions of collective mourning and public commemoration of past events at various "present" moments. Recent films prompt us to ask: how, in tandem with their popular reception, do different representations of terrorism in film over time communicate something of the shifting understanding of political violence as a cultural and historical phenomenon? To approach this question, I juxtapose one film narrative that dramatically reinforces already well-established media tropes and figures of terrorism (Breloer's *Death Game*) and one constructed around two largely unknown biographies (Veiel's *Black Box BRD*).

If dominant historical understandings of the RAF were shaped by the public mediation of terrorists' disruption of public spectacle, documentary and perhaps especially biographical films might catalyze an alternate media experience of public reflection.⁹ Shortly before her death in prison, Ulrike Meinhof described "personalization" as a form of psychological warfare aimed at destroying collective political subjects, yet it remains in part a deeply entrenched refusal to personalize terrorist violence that contributes to its psychopathologi-

Forschungen 1 [2004]: 255–61). Bill Nichols has written extensively on the blurring of fact and fiction in the practice of documentary film. See esp. *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). For a discussion of history and nonfiction film specific to Germany see Nora M. Alter, *Projecting History: German Nonfiction Cinema, 1967–2000* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

9. My understanding of terrorism as the disruption of public spectacle draws primarily on Guy Debord. His influential book *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995), emphasizes that spectacle consists not of images themselves but of social relationships mediated by images. It should be understood as a "worldview transformed into an objective force" through image relations (13). Debord points to what he identifies as the methodological necessity of analyzing the spectacle in its own language to "hasten its demise." This is largely what I mean when I point to the terrorists' disruption of public spectacle as itself spectacular and yet fundamentally opposed to spectacle. Looking at West German terrorism in the 1970s with an eye to these concepts is not only theoretically useful but also historically appropriate, insofar as a number of terrorists were closely associated with situationist groups before going underground.

zation in popular historical accounts.¹⁰ More recently, the personalization of collective memories of terror in film has begun, however tentatively, to shape new critical questions about Germany's violent past through a revised collective viewing experience. To be sure, assembling personal, social, and familial networks around what were flattened and decontextualized images on wanted posters and in the evening news attends to different kinds of collective subjects than those Meinhof wished to create. They are, however, profoundly important to reimagining (West) German terror within a larger nexus of social and historical violences and as a political act.

The serendipitous shadow cast on Joschka Fischer's political biography in 1998 and more darkly again in 2001 by allegations of sympathy with RAF terrorists and widely broadcast film footage of his participation in supposedly unprovoked attacks on police in 1970s Frankfurt, respectively, speaks to a related recontextualization and personalization of political violence in the nation's political culture. Fischer weathered the controversy and set in motion a more nuanced public debate on the relationship of participation in political violence and commitment to democratic structures and practices that, by comparison with the media treatment of twenty years of German Autumn, might not have been possible only a few years before. Above all, rescreeing a militant Fischer underscores film's potential historiographical contribution to understanding German terrorism and its legacies.

Breloer's Death Game and Changing Modes of Representation

Death Game explores three events central to the German Autumn: the kidnapping and murder of Schleyer, wealthy industrialist, president of the Employers' Federation, and former SS officer; the hijacking of a Lufthansa plane by the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), acting in solidarity with the RAF;¹¹ and the deaths of Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader, and Jan-Carl Raspe in Stammheim prison.

The film begins and ends with Schleyer's story as presented in photos, news clips, and interviews.¹² These segments are interspersed with reenactments

10. *letzte texte von ulrike*, ed. internationales komitee zur verteidigung politischer gefangener in Westeuropa (self-published, 1976), 18.

11. The PFLP was an anti-imperialist Marxist group engaged in international terrorism that rejected Yasir Arafat's attempts to negotiate with Israel.

12. In keeping with the film itself, press responses focused on Schleyer, one article going so far as to describe him as a martyr, another using biblical language to link his suffering to the Passion of Christ (Klaus Bölling, "Harter Staat, Schleyers Not: Das RAF- und Mogadisch-Drama 'Todes-spiel' hat die Deutschen beunruhigt," *Der Spiegel*, June 30, 1997, 184–85). While the RAF had in

of the events of September and October 1977 and focus on the power struggle between the terrorists and the state. The screen time actually devoted to portraying the terrorists is minimal: the film frequently shows them watching or listening to coverage of their actions on TV and radio, or issuing statements to government officials, underwriting the image of the terrorist hungry for media attention and lacking serious political objectives. Although former government officials and members of Schleier's family were extensively interviewed, no RAF members were asked to recount their memories of the events discussed.¹³

Reflecting on the broad tendency to receive Breloer's filmic tribute to the triumph of the German state over an excruciatingly depoliticized group of terrorists as *the* definitive account of German terrorism in the 1990s, Thomas Elsaesser has gone so far as to suggest a constitutive connection between cinematic and historical closure:

If this [the RAF's] traumatic display of urban disruption and political dissonance had indeed come to an end [with the official dissolution of the RAF in 1998], it was probably not unconnected with the media blitz that six months earlier—in October and November 1997—had “covered” the twentieth anniversary of turbulent weeks known as the “hot autumn of 1977” or *Deutsche Herbst*. The televised *mise-en-scène* of national recollection appeared to achieve what the police and the security services had failed to accomplish: the burial of the RAF along with its mythology, by once more staging it.¹⁴

fact targeted Schleier as an unsympathetic victim and example of the continuity of fascism in Germany, they chose not to emphasize his Nazi past because, already an unpopular figure, they feared that “he would no longer be exchangeable [for the terrorists in Stammheim] if we brought him down a notch further. That’s why we also quickly rejected the idea of photographing him with his SS number and a sign saying ‘prisoner of his own history.’ But in retrospect this meant a crazy reversal: Schleier was . . . only seen as a family man, a victim” (Stefan Wisniewski, *Wir waren so unheimlich konsequent* . . . *Ein Gespräch zur Geschichte der RAF* [Berlin: ID, 1997], 43). Paradoxically, as Thomas Elsaesser points out, the spectacle of *Death Game* relies on an implicit—albeit subconscious—granting of the RAF's critique of continuities between the Third Reich and the West German state. Members of Schmidt's heroic advising team are revealed to be former *Wehrmacht* comrades and in fact compare the terrorist standoff to their experiences on the Eastern Front: “To the extent that *Death Game* is about the former soldiers and their self-representation, it ironically grants the RAF one of its basic points, namely that senior politicians of the Federal Republic were bound together by a military, para-military code of conduct or even an outright Nazi past, and that they formed what were known as *Seltschafren*, old boy networks. . . . *Death Game* valorizes once more the ‘front experience’ and its ideals of masculinity (dating back as far as World War I), promoting the impression that if it had not been for the military men at the helm, Germany's ship of state with its fragile cargo of democracy might have sunk in 1977” (“Antigone Agonistes,” 272). Veiel's documentary *Black Box BRD*, discussed at length below, is one of the few film accounts of terrorism that engages openly with the terrorist's own concern for the Nazi past.

13. Wisniewski, *Wir waren so unheimlich konsequent*, 6.

14. Elsaesser, “Antigone Agonistes,” 267. On the nature of this media spectacle see also Wisniewski, *Wir waren so unheimlich konsequent*, 5.

As the more recent wave of attention to this mythology suggests, it was a premature burial at best. While many films on the RAF have tried explicitly to stage similar graveside accounts in their depiction of funeral services, the experience of terrorism remains something of a revenant in German cultural memory and political debate.¹⁵ The terrorists have not (yet) been successfully plotted in narrative histories of West Germany, where the most popular written account of their genesis, Stefan Aust's *Bader-Meinhof-Komplex*, remains more true-crime narrative than history.¹⁶

Despite its drawbacks, Breloer's film is an important starting point for reopening discussions of the German Autumn and of terrorism in West Germany more generally. The film speaks not only to an audience that participated in the '68 movements and remembers the events of 1977 but also to a younger generation that grew up fascinated by what it perceived as a sort of grand cops and robbers story.¹⁷ Because much of the initial media attention given to the twentieth anniversary of the German Autumn took the form of responses to the film, the dominant terms of commemoration were those of retrospective drama, echoing the film's attempts to reconcile the viewing public to the hard line taken by the state on terrorists and their sympathizers.

Media attention turned toward the inclusion of counternarratives only after the October anniversary had passed. An article in *Die Zeit* concluded: “The hate ended suddenly because it had exhausted itself. Democracy showed itself to be more stable than its advocates or enemies had supposed. That is perhaps the constitutive experience for the conciliatory retrospectives after 1990.”¹⁸ “Conciliatory retrospectives” provide spaces suited only to the most limited readings of the German Autumn. What is excluded from virtually all

15. *Germany in Autumn*, *Stammheim*, *Black Box BRD*, and *Starbuck Holger Meins* all include documentary footage of terrorist and state funerals.

16. First published in 1985, this book reappeared in a new and expanded edition at the same time as Breloer's film in 1997 and has since been reprinted in paperback: Stefan Aust, *Der Bader-Meinhof-Komplex* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1997).

17. In a number of interviews conducted in 1997, now middle-aged professionals recall having “played” Bader-Meinhof as children. See, e.g., *tez-Journal: Die RAF, der Staat und die Linke: 20 Jahre Deutscher Herbst, Analysen, Reserven, Interviews, Debatten, Dokumente, von 1977–1997* (Berlin: taz, 1997), 3. Kraushaar, citing the art historian Martin Warnke, also queries the historical meaning of one generation's fear becoming another's exhibitionist game (“Zwischen Popkultur und Zeitgeschichte,” 264). Almost 20 percent of people living in Germany viewed one or both parts of the documentary, according to a poll published in *Der Spiegel*. Of these viewers, over three-quarters were old enough to remember the events themselves, and many reported having spent a “bad night” after viewing the film. Still more reported spending more than an hour discussing the film with friends or family (Bölling, “Harter Staat, Schleiers Not,” 184–85).

18. Klaus Hartung, “Der Mord und die Hysterie,” *Die Zeit*, April 4, 1997. The existing historical literature also relies heavily on a model of state-society “catharsis”; cf. Kraushaar, “Zwischen Popkultur und Zeitgeschichte,” 270.

press coverage of the anniversary is the atmosphere of fear and silence that marked the German Autumn in 1977. Contesting the designation of Breloer's film as "docudrama," one journalist wrote: "As true to detail as Breloer reconstructed some scenes from the German Autumn, he failed to integrate the events into the political development of the seventies."¹⁹ The blacklisting of alleged radicals from public sector jobs, the continued state surveillance activities, and the fear of speaking openly about the events of 1977 in the following years are strikingly absent. So, too, is public fear of both terror and the state. According to another article that stands out among the rest: "The federal government concerned itself not only with extensive news censorship, but also with a deep emotional censorship: No one spoke anymore of his real feelings. . . . Nothing about any of that in Breloer's film."²⁰ Ironically, most journalistic attempts to fix the German Autumn historically via their reception of *Death Game* appear to remove the events of 1977 from their proper historical context, reducing them to the specific moments, images, and meanings deployed in Breloer's film.

Film beyond Breloer

A few observations about more recent films reveal how many of the challenges of representation encountered in both *Death Game* and discussions of it have been addressed—at least in part—by a perspectival shift away from the state and the terrorists as principal protagonists to the experience of terror by those close to both terrorists and their targets. These films are distinct, too, from the earliest "terrorist" films' treatment of a political climate of fear and paranoia through specific historical figures, scenarios, and sometimes even political motivations. They are less psychologically driven by the nexus of state and fascism, even as the best among them take seriously engagements with anti-fascist critiques contemporary to the height of terrorism in the 1970s. Techniques of personalization have been used to different degrees of success in two main groups of films: (1) those that create composite characters to capture a larger story in the figure of a singular, unified, or definitive narrative account (*Bader, Legend of Rita*) and (2) those (like *Starbuck*, *Black Box BRD*, and, to a lesser extent, *The State I Am In*) that highlight the partialness of historical narratives within larger cinematic accounts. This distinction depends less on the factual content of any given narrative than on the narra-

tive strategies that each group of films employs. It corresponds roughly to the distinction Elsaesser makes in another context between two techniques in Holocaust films: the first, exemplified by Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), takes as its organizing principle synecdoche, where the experience of one stands in for many; the second, exemplified by Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), in which no one story can stand in or speak for another.²¹

The latter group of RAF films also relies on silence as a mode of narration or, at times, even as a refusal to narrate—at least in words—the extremely emotional experiences of the films' various protagonists. The function of silence in Petzold's *The State I Am In* has received by far the most media attention: it has been interpreted by some critics as symptomatic of a break between daughter Jeanne's present-day concerns and her presumed ex-terrorist parents' obsession with past utopian visions, making communication almost impossible.²² Still others suggest that it is in keeping with the ghostly quality of Petzold's figures as they aspire to move undetected into another life in Brazil.²³ Writing for *taz*, Christiane Müller-Lobeck challenges both interpretations by positioning film representations of terrorism within the context of historical silences around the experience of armed struggle from the late 1960s through the early 1990s: "To blame this standstill on the numerous filmmakers who have approached the topic of 'armed struggle' in the past years alone would of course be ridiculous. It has as much to do with the peculiar silence of the former militants, a silence that becomes louder the more that is spoken, written, and filmed about their isolated fates, individual decisions."²⁴ This play between silence and sound touches on deeper historiographical and cinematic problems: Which sounds/recounted experiences constitute a meaningful historical narrative? How can such a narrative be expressed to a given audience? Finally, what sounds/recounted experiences and images convey a kind of historical or

21. Thomas Elsaesser, "Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From *Holocaust*, *Our Hitler*, and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Schindler's List*," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York: Routledge, 1996), 178.

22. Michael Althen, "Die Gespenster der Freiheit," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 31, 2001.

23. The language of ghosts and ghostliness is one of the most frequent means of describing Petzold's film. Examples include Susanne Weingarten, "Ein Leben als Gespenst," *Der Spiegel*, January 29, 2001, 168; M. Feldvoss, "Wenn Gespenster Menschen werden möchten: Die innere Sicherheit von Christian Petzold," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, August 3, 2001; and Althen, "Die Gespenster der Freiheit." As an encroachment of the past on the present, ghostliness underscores the insistence of Petzold (and Conrad and Veiel) that the RAF be approached as a historical problem. The choice of Brazil as refuge is itself haunted by traditions of German immigration, most recently by Nazis and the Jews and political émigrés who sought to evade Nazi persecution.

24. Christiane Müller-Lobeck, "Die merkwürdige Still nach dem Shot," *taz*, January 11, 2001.

19. Harrung, "Der Mord und die Hysterie."

20. Ute Scheub, "Breloers Todesspiel erzählt noch nicht einmal die halbe Wahrheit über den Deutschen Herbst 1977: Eine Erinnerung," *tageszeitung*, June 30, 1997.

cinematographic truth about a series of historical—but also intensely emotional and interpersonal—events? In the balance of what is narrated and what is left unspeakable, how does a public memory of terrorism emerge around commemorative dates, objects, and debates?

Veiel's film in particular addresses these questions by dislodging popular media images and voices central to the history and representation of terror. He opens up historiographical and cinematic space to an unusual constellation of voices, images, and qualitatively different silences that invite hesitation, ambivalence, and reflection rather than foreclose speech through overdetermined and decontextualized images. Schleyer's wrecked car, a dead Holger Meins, Rudi Dutschke with a raised fist at Meins's graveside, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Schleyer's wife are just a few examples of the images recontextualized in Veiel's film.

Black Box BRD stands out because of *how* it accomplishes the shift away from the first- and second-generation RAF members, Berlin countercultures circa 1977, and Stuttgart Stammheim and *which* previously unheard narratives it introduces into the cinematic history and memory of the RAF. By focusing on Frankfurt as the narrative center of his documentary, Veiel opens up a broader set of historical relations and events than is typical of accounts of German terrorism. As one of the more successful sites of articulation of student and popular protest and the development of a broader *Sport-Scene* and alternative movement, any historical account of the Frankfurt movement demands attention to social actors who fall outside the scope of standard works that seek to reduce the origins of terrorism to student radicalization after a '68 centered in West Berlin.²⁵

In temporal terms, Veiel makes the unique decision to elide some of the most popular images of the German Autumn by shifting attention to later

25. Wolfgang Kraushaar provides one of the best accounts of Frankfurt's specificity as a site of protest and violence: "The banking metropolis on the Main was . . . without wanting to contest the Cold War island West Berlin's role as the birthplace of the revolts, an exception in its time—theoretically, politically, and above all socioculturally. No other place in the Federal Republic had a comparable dynamism. That was because here in the closest of quarters multiple factors came together—an antiauthoritarian movement, shaped by critical theory, that wanted unmistakably to convert itself into a revolutionary jumping-off point; a communal politics shaped by the SPD that wanted to position itself to the left of the federal party; and a galloping destruction of housing that, particularly in the West End, had to be understood as an attack by speculators on the interests of the large majority of the population" (*Fischer in Frankfurt* [Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001], 25). As a result, the articulation of the student-popular and workers' movements in Frankfurt distinguished itself from less successful attempts at cooperation in Hamburg, Munich, and West Berlin (31–32). Through this unique constellation of factors, Kraushaar suggests, "the image of a spontaneous subculture, nationally recognized for the first time only years later, has its origin in early seventies Frankfurt" (100).

moments of violence for which the German Autumn is a catalyst, not a climactic end. The only dead terrorists presented in *Black Box BRD* are Meins and Meinhof, whose images provide context rather than focal content, for example when we see an image of Grams in a protest march following Meins's death. Schleyer figures in the film only as a point of reference for Herrhausen's own awareness of his status as a potential object of terrorist violence; the industrialist's funeral as a state event implicitly prompts Herrhausen's request that only speakers approved by his wife and his friend and priest Pater Augustinus Heinrich Graf Henckel von Donnersmarck be allowed to speak publicly at his burial. The deliberate withholding of some images has a powerful effect on the viewer. Disrupting the standard visual narrative of the German Autumn, references to it are recontextualized through new images and events, removing the German Autumn from its privileged position of historical isolation, disrupting the popular snapshot memory of the RAF and its victims. Rather than present the German Autumn as a single focal point or climax in the history of terrorism, Veiel creates a personalized account of the events, tracing the experience of terror from various perspectives on the lives and deaths of Grams and Herrhausen.

More so than any of his peers, Veiel combines present-day interviews with documentary practices, suggestive montage, and contemporary news and Super-8 footage. While Roth freely blends myth and history, Schöndorff creates composite terrorists, and Petzold develops an entirely fictional narrative around hypothetical ex-terrorists and their daughter. Veiel works with factual and biographical detail to create a moving and balanced narrative of postwar (West) Germany's experience of terror. In stark contrast to the documentary pretensions of Breloer's heavily reenacted *Death Game*, Veiel's film produces a multilayered account of events reconstructed from a range of perspectives and situated within a broad historical context.

In the process of contextualization, Veiel hits on a highly charged set of images from the Frankfurt street riots around the squatters' movement in the city's West End neighborhood, images that resurfaced after so many years in the 2001 controversy around then foreign minister Joschka Fischer. (The black-and-white footage shows Fischer—then a member of a militant, RK [Revolutionärer Kampf] *Putztruppe*—and others beating a police officer during a riot as part of a longer series of clips portraying violence by both police and protesters.)²⁶ The relationship of state and public to violence—especially terrorist

26. Veiel had included the footage prior to the controversy—the film took four years to produce—and was asked to cut it after the images became the subject of extensive public debate. Kraushaar provides an excellent summary of the squatters' movement and the escalation of violent conflict, and also engages with criticisms of the movement as anti-Semitic (*Fischer in Frankfurt*, 38–79).

violence—takes on a different meaning when prominent government officials must be considered in light of their earlier positions as opponents to state agents and institutions. In the figure of Fischer, the nature of state development takes on a curiously personalized narrative trajectory. From violent opposition through participation in democratic political structures, he literally incorporates a historical shift from the state-sanctioned and perpetrated violence of the Third Reich, to the contestatory violence of protesters of various political stripes against the state via narratives of continuity, and, finally, to a reconciled and strengthened democracy in the person of a fully developed/mature political leader.

The plethora of anniversaries celebrated in the late 1990s may provide superficial occasions for reflection on these past moments, but larger questions remain: How should the political events of the 1960s and 1970s be represented? How and why have oppositional political strategies—including political violence—been reassessed since 1968? While the present article does not pretend to answer these questions, it begins to put them in relation to one another through a reading of Veiel's film as an innovative artistic and historical response to the experience of terrorism.

"He Didn't Want to Be Like Father":

Personalizing State Mourning through Film

One strength of *Black Box BRD* is its treatment of the Nazi past in relation to more recent events. Through a careful interlacing of narrative strands, Veiel's film accomplishes what few other moments in film since *Germany in Autumn* and *The German Sisters* have: a sustained engagement with emotional memories of contemporaries in the sense of *Zeitzeugen*—producers of time as much as witnesses of its passage.²⁷ Relying on personal narrative rather than now-familiar newsreels and repurposed Nazi propaganda footage, Veiel documents history, again, at a more personal level, revealing the gaps between official histories and familial transmission of historical experiences. Without making National Socialism a singular or causal moment in the emergence of terrorism, Veiel examines historical violence as one of many strands important to an understanding of the emergence, interrogation, and representation of both National Socialism and terrorism as key referents in any account of a history

of German violence. The effect is a qualitatively different inflection of mourning than that presented in more superficial accounts of the RAF's engagement with National Socialism. In his thoughtful investigation of the role of violence in and after the '68 movement, Hans-Jürgen Wirth argues that the student movement more generally represented an attempt to rebel not strictly against but also on behalf of the parent generation:

"It was a representative/proxy [*stellvertretende*] rebellion that was ruled primarily by a protective impulse over and against the parents, who could no longer carry their own history" (Bude, 1995) This problematic is still more pronounced in members of the RAF. In their case it can clearly be shown that they acted subconsciously on behalf of their parents when they fought against the (in their view) "Fascist FRG" with terrorist violence. On the level of the subconscious, the terrorists repeated what their parents had failed to do in their time: resist.²⁸

Grams's development is placed carefully in this context, as Veiel produces a web of images and conversations that allows the viewer to observe the traces of and silences around an older generation's experience of National Socialism, without suggesting a strictly causal or inevitable turn to violence as an expression of resistance. Rather, Veiel allows the different interviewees to express their experiences outside the confines of a strict, cross-generational comparison. In a particularly compelling scene, Grams's father speaks about his participation in the war. Palpable discomfort, regret, and fear dominate his expression and body language: "When I look back today, it was practically an inner compulsion [*Zwang*]—by that I don't mean to talk pretty—an inner compulsion that [long pause] our whole circle or let's say our whole atmosphere [extremely long pause] I volunteered for war to serve the state, like any other normal, mortal Hitler Youth would have, too. [shorter pause] Right?" Positioning his own experience in a broader social context without "talking pretty" or refusing

27. *The State I Am In*'s citation of *The German Sisters* via a school screening of Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955) is suggestive but fails to deal with historical memory in any sustained way, not least because Jeanne is largely raised outside official institutions for socialization and transmission of public memory.

28. Hans-Jürgen Wirth, *Hitlers Enkel—oder Kinder der Demokratie? Die 68er-Generation, die RAF und die Fischer-Debatte* (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2001), 29–30. Wirth cites H. Bude, *Das Alter einer Generation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995). The "representative" character of terrorist and militant violence is underscored in a number of texts, including Andres Veiel, *Black Box BRD: Alfred Herrhausen, die Deutsche Bank, die RAF, und Wolfgang Grams* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2003), 19, 120; and Kraushaar, *Fischer in Frankfurt*, 199, 247. Although I engage with generation as a dominant trope in cultural, psychological, and sociological accounts of the RAF in my analysis, interactions among political actors from the Nazi and immediate post-war era offer significant reason to question generational models of conflict in West German extra-parliamentary politics.

accountability. Werner Grams describes his experience in words that closely approximate what RAF member Birgit Hogefeld (also Wolfgang Grams's partner) has explained elsewhere was her own "inner necessity" to deal with the roots of Nazi atrocities through armed struggle.²⁹ There is neither a clear-cut parallel nor an absolute reaction implied in Grams's relationship to his father. Their family struggle to discuss the Nazi past ultimately results in Werner Grams's decision to talk to his son about his participation in the war, suggesting a potentially more dialogical relationship than models of West German terrorism as a generational reaction or "left fascism" allow. By explicitly engaging with the past and interrupting a positivist or causal reading of terrorist biography, Veiel avoids what Elsaesser has termed a "return of the repressed structure," present in earlier films like *Germany in Autumn*, without sacrificing a sustained engagement with the historical position of terrorist violence relative to what is arguably the major twentieth-century cultural referent for violence in Germany.³⁰

Wolfgang and Werner Grams's different understandings of the state clearly inform their relationships to armed service and to notions of state authority more generally. Werner Grams explains that his son insisted, "There's nothing for me with a gun in my hand," and his turn to armed struggle came only after a long process of nonviolent social intervention, increasing radicalization through participation in squatting, and especially involvement with Red Help.³¹ The elder Grams's notion of serving the state is in keeping with a longer tradition of state-society relations in German history—the citizen to the *Vaterstaat*—a model from which the emerging possibility of *civil* service to the state does not diverge. Wolfgang Grams's initial decision for civil rather than military service represents a turn to a model of service that is not armed but also does not reject the state. Only later, with his move to violence against (rather than in service of) the state, does he reject service to what student and popular accounts marked as an explicitly fascist state.

Here, then, notions of *Staatsräuber* are necessarily inflected differently with respect to diverging understandings of the state. Private and state mechanisms for and objects of mourning are highlighted within the specific, personalized context that turns on both relationships to the state and interfamily

ial relationships: each model accepts a notion of obligation vis-à-vis an ideal state, but the state itself—understood by Grams the younger as fundamentally flawed and continuous with traditions of fascism—is rejected. The state emerges not just as an agent of mourning (e.g., on behalf of victims of terrorism, or even of victims of earlier state violence), but as itself an irretrievably lost democratic potential to be mourned.

Herrhausen's generational position between Grams's father and Grams also shifts the standard terms of analysis. Whereas the more common narrative constellation state-Schleyer-terrorists pivots in part around Schleyer's past participation in the SS and later position in industry, Herrhausen's early childhood experiences at an elite Nazi school place him squarely between the generations party to the much-invoked generational conflict of 1968. This allows Veiel to approach the relation of the Nazi past to the experience and historicization of terrorism in a more complicated way than those historical and filmic narratives that focus on 1977 to the exclusion of other terrorist acts and their victims. At least in part, the continuities that emerge in Herrhausen's narrative are less about fascism than about class privilege and the political and social positions that accompany it.³² This becomes especially clear in his sister's remarks—made from what appears to be the trophy room of a hunting cabin—on their father's admonition that one always had to work "an hour more than the masses" to stay ahead. Class also figures prominently in Herrhausen's choice of a bride (the first for money, the second for love). His postwar achievements are visually completed through an extended Super-8 sequence of the 1950s economic miracle as exemplified by the nuclear Herrhausen family, with car, patio, and single-family house as the scene of their success and happiness.

Herrhausen's class position is also implicitly compared with that of the Grams family, who describe themselves obliquely as "refugees from the East." Their home and neighborhood are, in their extreme ordinariness, strikingly different from the expansive houses and grounds against which the Herrhausens are filmed. Grams's mother, proud of the middle-class lifestyle that the family has attained, comments on her inability to comprehend her son's rebellion or his attempts to explain poverty in Germany as a product of consumer society:

29. See Veiel, *Black Box BRD*, 209.
30. Elsaesser, "Antigone Agonistes," 274.
31. Red Help, founded in 1974 as a successor organization to the Weimar organization of the same name, provided legal aid to leftists and actively supported the RAF. Many members of the second-generation RAF became radicalized during their involvement in Red Help solidarity campaigns with RAF prisoners on hunger strikes.

32. Nonetheless, the relationship of particular class and professional stereotypes to longer traditions of anti-Semitism exploited by German fascism is especially present in the banking community. Herrhausen's insistence that one need not be ashamed of the power that comes with money is rapidly taken up by many of his younger colleagues even as older colleagues dislike speaking openly of power in relation to money as something "dirty," an uneasiness that suggests at least some level of personal anxiety about working in the "Jewish" banking profession.

"It's almost embarrassing when you know your son goes to the Red Cross and gets, buys his things by the pound. I almost couldn't believe it. [short, uncomfortable laugh] He got something from me once in a while, too, of course."³³ The sense of injured pride, the discomfort with the idea that she has not ensured that her son also has the markers and comforts of a petit bourgeois existence, is palpable as she struggles with this question before the camera.

Consumerism and its rejection clash suddenly, as an idyllic scene of country club golf is juxtaposed to newscast of "civil war–like circumstances" elsewhere in Frankfurt, illustrating a radical rift between Grams's and Herrhausen's experiences of the period despite their geographic proximity.

The relation *Black Box BRD* posits between these two figures is as relentlessly social and historical as it is personal.³⁴ Veiel brings the personal to bear on the experience of terror without falling into the traps of mythologization or psychopathologization that dominate so many representations of the RAF in the popular press and in more sustained accounts since the first RAF monograph was published in 1977.³⁵ His personalizations carefully balance the individual and the exemplary, reaching outward from a set of central figures to members of the broader social worlds they inhabited (e.g., in his interviews with Herrhausen's colleagues at Deutsche Bank and Grams's former commune members).

In the same spirit, the balance between individual and collective mourning is thoughtfully sustained throughout the film and placed in a larger constellation of mourning, violence, and German history and identity. Veiel consistently meets or exceeds the challenge posed by Wirth's questioning of popular debates around the RAF, particularly the Fischer debate:

33. Cf. Veiel, *Black Box BRD*, 25, 28, 76. Wirth puts such intrafamilial contradictions in a broader, sociopsychological context: "The rejection of consumerism, the tendency toward the ascetic, the influence of which is to be found in all elements of the simultaneously hedonistic protest movement, is a reaction against the flight into consumption that the majority of the postwar society undertook" (*Hitlers Enkel*, 29).

34. *Focus Magazin* describes this process in terms of the film's title: "Instead of passing judgments, Veiel is concerned with seismographically recording oscillations in politics. In that respect his film functions entirely as the titular Black Box, only he doesn't provide clues to the cause of a plane crash, but rather sketches the roots of German history" ("Öftene Wunden," *Focus Magazin*, May 21, 2001, 138).

35. Jiljan Becker, *Hitler's Children: The Story of the Baader-Meinhof Terrorist Gang* (Philadelphia: Lipincott, 1977). On the press treatment of women terrorists in particular as socially, sexually, and psychologically deviant see my chapter "Beyond Victims and Perpetrators: Women Terrorists Tell Their Own Stories," in *Security in an Insecure Age*, ed. Charles Keeney and Melinda Hicks (Charleston: West Virginia University Press, 2007).

Moral distance from violence is easily pronounced. If it is not to remain lip service, it demands an inner working through that is linked, among other things, to mourning past failures. The simple ascription of responsibility to political opponents does not contribute to the social working through of the problem of violence. . . . The Germans are responsible for the Nazis with or without the "mercy of a late birth," just as the 68ers are responsible for the RAF and the CDU for the neo-Nazis. Only when one acknowledges this internal co-responsibility (that is of course not juridical) will it be possible to work through violence.³⁶

Privileging mourning as an approach toward rather than a distancing from or closure on historical violence ultimately allows Veiel to craft a narrative of the RAF that acknowledges its specificity and its relation to larger cultural experiences with violence in twentieth-century German history.

"I Asked Far Too Few Questions": Intergenerational Dialogue and the Construction of Historical Narrative

Questioning (and failing to question) is the key thematic and cinematic strategy in *Black Box BRD*. Editing, verbal matches, hesitations captured through long shots, and inconsistent use of tense enhance its effect. Ruth Grams's narrative typifies the movement across tenses by interviewees struggling to relate the present to the past: "I asked far too few questions. One just doesn't think that it was the last time." She and others narrate events in a timeless present (one *thinks*) even as events are acknowledged as past (it *was* the last time). (National Socialism, on the other hand, is always firmly located in the past.) How, ultimately, is the viewer left to interpret these images, to engage in what Ruth Grams describes in one particularly moving scene as *Bildbeuten*?³⁷ Scenes that invite interpretation are often (but not exclusively) shown with musical rather than narrative soundtracks. For example, Super-8 vacation footage of a young Grams and his friends, including a hand pouring sand through the empty eyes of a doll's head abandoned on the beach, produces a desire on the part of the viewer to ascribe meaning to un- and undernarrated visual sequences. Even a chameleon montage of possible terrorist disguises taken from the TV news begs the question: what kinds of images are we and were contemporary viewers of news footage prepared to read?

36. Wirth, *Hitlers Enkel*, 42–43.

37. The Gramses show an embroidered cloth, a gift made by their son in the underground. The simple, mass-produced bourgeois craft design acquires special meaning for the Gramses when they try to read it as a code. Could the river with a boat, a crocodile, and an elephant be meant to suggest that he is in Africa? Is the river the Nile? Or could it be the Near East?

By inviting reflection not only on the experiences of terrorists' victims but also on the social networks that surrounded the terrorists themselves, *Black Box BRD* speaks to a different constellation of experiences than films that focus chiefly on (real and fictional) terrorists (*Starbuck*, *The State I Am In*, *Legend of Rita*) or state protagonists and terrorists' victims (*Death Game*). Rather than privilege one constituency over another as the more sympathetic, Veiel works to construct more complicated images of whole people, including aspects of their lives not explicitly related to the experience of terrorism. (One such example: Herrhausen is portrayed not only as a successful career man, champion of debt relief, and loving husband but also as a participant in the weapons industry and in a strip club with friends.) No attempt is made to portray individual figures as straightforwardly sympathetic or unsympathetic to a viewing audience. In keeping with this kind of character development, Veiel's camera technique invites more reflection than do other recent documentary and fictional films addressing terrorism. Unusually long shots and the prevalence of shots moving from people outside or entering homes to interiors invite the viewer into particular, personalized spaces of retrospection. These cinematic strategies enable a greater degree of differentiation and, simultaneously, the establishment of more connections between parties directly affected by the experience of terrorism.³⁸

38. Veiel himself observed in an interview: "Next to the surprises of the respective biographies, their synthesis moved me almost uncanonically, because there were suddenly analogies in the biographies where I would never have expected them. I found that to be the real challenge" (Martina Knobben, "Das Schweigen über den Dingen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 25, 2001). Popular reception of Veiel's film in Germany also emphasized these connective elements. To provide just a few examples: in an interview Veiel explained, "In all of my films it's important for me to grasp relationships in all their complexity and to retain their contradictions. . . . The idea of a juxtaposition crystallized out of the portrait of the most recent RAF generation slowly, in the process of research." To connect the two extreme poles in a single film, Veiel first had to overcome the resistance and mistrust on both sides: "he 'was unprepared to discover the similarities between perpetrator and victim. Because, each from his own distinct position, Herrhausen and Grams were both passionate idealists: 'It occurred to me one piece at a time. It was never a thesis that I wanted to prove, but emerged itself from the material, a little like when the contours of a developing photo suddenly take on forms no one could ever have expected'" ("Offene Wunden," 138–39). *Süddeutsche Zeitung* suggested that the film's timing appropriately corresponded to political debates around Jürgen Trittin and Fischer and provides a historical context for them. Susan Vahabzadeh observes: "Documentary films are a tedious affair in cinema—giving directors cues to reality is even more complicated than directing actors in front of a set. . . . Grams's and Herrhausen's biographies are juxtaposed, interwoven. And in the end they really form a net from which one can see how much the one has to do with the other, how much of it has to do with the Federal Republic of the sixties and seventies, the economic wonderland. . . . Especially in the beginning one senses how differently Veiel approaches the two: Herrhausen from the outside, through the public figure, Grams, on the other hand, from an internal point of view from which he becomes ever more distant . . . and these scenes are so intimate that one notices for a moment how much

In letting his interviewees speak and pose their questions as much as he seeks to obtain answers to his own, Veiel produces a documentary distinct from other films on the RAF. By comparison, Breloer's docudrama or Schlöndorff's historical romance obscures the act of questioning in the process of constructing plots that reduce historical material to a more singular version of events than that which Veiel provides the viewer. This is more than a result of different narrative conventions, although *Black Box BRD*'s success as a historical film can be attributed in part to generic strengths that enable a carefully textured, multiply inflected retrospective viewing experience. Bill Nichols's definition of retrospection as a viewing practice provides a sense of why film may be particularly well suited to renegotiate public memory of the RAF that extends beyond the mythical: "Retrospection, as a viewing process requiring us to draw together fragments independent of what social actors inadvertently betray, operates through a collage-like principle to *embody* the repetition of the past in the present regardless of the filmmaker's ability to coax confessional, self-revealing testimony from his or her subjects."³⁹ Veiel's selection and composition of such "fragments," as well as the effective use of montage to *create* fragments, to break longer blocks of individual narratives and to rearticulate them in a more complex story than any one person tells, makes his film so successful. Rather than present causal relations between a series of images and verbal arguments, Veiel's documentary highlights each account's partialness, building a narrative whole that is larger than the sum of its parts, and deliberately rejects an exhaustive or definitive account of terrorism.

In keeping with this partialness and attendant insistence on an active viewer, Veiel's interviews are more complicated than the formula "talking heads" documentary would suggest; his documentary plays on a constant movement between the modes of witnessing and observation. On this key difference, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis notes that

easier it is to capture people with images than with words. . . . As the figure of Herrhausen becomes more differentiated with this increased proximity, Grams "escapes determinability more and more" ("Schwarzfilm," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 21, 2001). Similar observations on the structural and thematic parallels that result from this strategy are noted in *Die Woche*: "The openness of the interviewees . . . ensures that no simplistic good-bad impression emerges. Veiel's double portrait even shows parallels when, for example, the determination [*Konsistenz*] of the two men leads to ever greater loneliness. . . . Was it murder? Suicide? Did Herrhausen want to forgive the debts of the Third World at the end of his career? Or exploit it more cleverly? Did the Stasi direct the third-generation RAF? Or did they act on behalf of big money? *Black Box BRD* withholds any commentary, any speculation. And with that the film accomplishes something unusual: a plea for independent thought" (Helmut Ziegler, "Black Box BRD," *Die Woche*, May 25, 2001).

39. Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, 5.

with the *observer*, the camera documents; with the *witness*, the camera testifies, renders an account. The observer takes a detached stance toward the seen; the image becomes the visual equivalent of that staple of the news-reel, "fact." By contrast, the witness has a subjective relation to the image (the ability to see oneself *in* the scene), transforming what is seen through the prism of human feeling by means of communication. Requiring an "other," the human connection inherent in communication adds moral responsibility to the act of seeing. While observation suggests the self in isolation (or denies the self altogether in its objective form), witnessing is defined as a question of conscience, a relay between self and others through language.⁴⁰

And, I would add, images. In striking opposition to Breloer's docudrama, of which Christianne Ensslin has noted one is made to witness unconfirmed events through dramatic reenactments,⁴¹ Veiel preserves the communicative element of witnessing and contemplating the mourning, reflection, and at times celebration of lives by those who knew Herrhausen and Grams.⁴² In this way, Veiel disrupts the balance of a public memory that overshadows personal memory, foregrounding personal rather than state mourning.⁴³

Retrospection within historicization is, then, a complex process of embodiment, repetition, testifying, witnessing, and viewing. As we ask after the relationship between these elements, asking "too few questions" in one encounter may seem less tragic—after all, there is no necessarily "last time" in video spectatorship as in lived encounters. In viewing and reviewing, we are asked to

40. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "Documenting the Ineffable: Terror and Memory in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*," in *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, ed. Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Slonowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 209.

41. Ensslin's argument focuses especially on scenes depicting the alleged suicides of the RAF core members (*taz-Journal*, 14).

42. On a related note, Nichols argues for the importance of present address to historical narrative. In his analysis, recounting provides an additional, expanded moment of historical witnessing that incorporates the viewer into the plot itself. "The motivation in the present for using reenactments or historical footage—as a willing backward to conjure the past present memory requires—calls for address. Spoken testimony's indexical anchorage in the present moment of recounting is also where motivation and purpose for a particular story of 'what happened' takes root. With skill and effort, the pressure of the past on the present moment of recounting (a historical latency) can become as much a subject of the story told as the history ostensibly recounted. The web of implication between past and present thickens due to the choice of plot itself" (*Blurred Boundaries*, 4–5).

43. Elsaesser has written about the distinction between public and personal memory in cinematic representations of the Third Reich and the Holocaust (see "Subject Positions, Speaking Positions," 145–83).

"draw together fragments" over time and across texts.⁴⁴ Questioning becomes the constitutive gesture in Veiel's film, with its insistence on the unknowable elements of history, the poor-quality record of a historical disaster's own black box, and the psychological and social reconstruction of events filtered through it.

"Streetfighting Men"

The conservative campaign to relocate Fischer within the circle of violence and terror took advantage of biographical and filmic moments, selectively rescreened for a contemporary audience in Germany.⁴⁵ It is striking that the two most recent campaigns against Fischer roughly coincided with important moments in the new wave of cinematic interest in terrorism: the first, around the time of his testimony in the trial of Hans-Joachim Klein, began not long after the release of Breloer's *Death Game* and the twentieth anniversary of the German Autumn; the second happened roughly before a number of new films in 2001 and 2002, with the release of the (already public) footage of Fischer as a participant in the Frankfurt housing riots by none other than Ulrike Meinhof's daughter, Bettina Rohl.

While there is no reason to suggest a strictly causal relationship between recent filmic production and unsuccessful attempts at the unmaking of a political career, these public performances contribute to a larger discourse on Germany's past and present relationship to terrorist violence that remains

44. Elsaesser notes that the compulsion to review is characteristic of the experience of historical events in the age of television, using as an example the assassination of John F. Kennedy: "History, when it is not just what's past, but what is being passed on, seems to have entered a conceptual twilight zone, not least because it has become a past that cinema and television can 'master' for us by digitally remastering archival material. . . . what of the memory of events which live in the culture because of the images they have left, etched on our retinas, too painful to recall, too disturbing not to remember? 'Do you remember the day Kennedy was shot?' really means 'Do you remember the day you watched Kennedy being shot all day on television?' No longer is story-telling the culture's meaning-making response; an activity closer to therapeutic practice has taken over, with acts of re-telling, re-membering, and repeating all pointing in the direction of obsession, fantasy, trauma. If civil wars, communal strife, and tribal violence suggest a compulsion to repeat at the level of action—because buried memories, rekindled by fresh hatred and local grievance, seek to re-dress wrongs suffered centuries ago—what obscure urge is soothed by the compulsion to repeat so typical of television? Perhaps it is not unconnected with the prevalence of events at once so apparently senseless and so predictably routine that neither narratives nor images seem able to encompass them" ("Subject Positions, Speaking Positions," 145–46).

45. Streetfighters are almost always men in widely published accounts. The relative absence of active women in accounts of the movements generally connoted by 1968 has been much remarked but seldom seriously addressed as a gap in research and academic writing. For a groundbreaking study of women in the '68 movement see Ute Kätzelt, *Die 68erinnen: Porträts einer rebellischen Frauengeneration* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002).

unresolved and can (perhaps even should) be read in dynamic relation to one another. *Black Box BRD* includes documentary footage of Fischer participating in many of the same events that ultimately contributed to Grams's politicization, but the relationship between different expressions of political violence portrayed in the film remains open (not least because the film does not attempt to treat Fischer's personal and political development); those who would close it deliberately ignore the different trajectories taken by Grams's friends as portrayed in the film, and of Fischer's own critical reflections on political violence as far back as the late 1970s.

As a debate about the historical events around 1968 more generally, the 2001 Fischer controversy turns on his position within a generational debate on the relationship of past to present violence and, more specifically, of the broader student-popular movements to the emergence of terrorism, placing him at odds with both popular memories of protesters who wish to distance themselves from violent events and with more radical groups and individuals who reject the move to a more self-critical politics of reform and mainstream political work. In his high-profile role in the Frankfurt scene and, since the 1980s, in government, Fischer has taken on a pivotal and controversial role as object and catalyst of larger public debates about the meaning of political violence and revolt.

Fischer's highly publicized position in the multiple temporalities of *Black Box BRD* refocuses attention on political violence—particularly urban guerrilla theory as developed by Carlos Marighella, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and Régis Debray—as widely discussed in the Sozialistischen Deutschen Studentenbund long before the emergence of the RAF, and to the fact that the escalation of violent conflicts between protesters and the state captured in Veiel's film was well under way years before the first organized terrorist attacks began.⁴⁶ As a figure who both participated in and spoke publicly about the relationship of protest/ers to violence, Fischer has long been located at the margins of a specifically terrorist violence, a position all the more disruptive

46. I deliberately do not say “student protesters.” To cite just one example, Gerd Koennen reports on arrest statistics from the “Osternunruhen” (following the assassination attempt on Dutschke) as presented to the Bundestag by Interior Minister Ernst Benda: “Of 847 arrested demonstrators, next to the 92 high school students and 286 university students, there were also 185 white-collar workers and 150 workers; every third person was over twenty-five years of age.” In short, “student” or even “youth” protest is an insufficient descriptor of these social movements (*Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution, 1967–1977* [Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002], 128). More archival work remains to be done on popular participation in protests to explain the relationship of student protesters to German society.

now that a consideration of his recent political office demands a more complicated account of the relation of violent protest to the state. The best-known instance of his refusal categorically to condemn the RAF is his 1976 statement that to distance protesters from the RAF was to distance protesters from themselves; nonetheless, his acknowledgment of the social, historical, and political character of the RAF's violence did not prevent him from calling for an end to terrorism. Then as now, Fischer's refusal to deny the terrorists political purview through unconditional denunciation or distancing was unpopular not least for its honesty in the face of popular desire to condemn terrorists, a point lost on many scholars of the extraparlimentary opposition and its successor movements and organizations.⁴⁷

Black Box BRD represents an important contextualizing intervention into discussions of the Fischer debate and the recent boom in retrospective and commemorative texts (filmic, literary, auto/biographical, and journalistic as well as historical and sociological) focused on what Gerd Koennen has termed the “red decade” and its cultural consequences. The cultural and political renegotiations of a generation are, through Veiel's camera eye, stretched and shifted to their historical limits. The state mourning of earlier retrospective cultural production is replaced by a larger cultural process of remembrance and mourning that extends well beyond the long-since-overdetermined referents of the German Autumn. In the process, Veiel uses film to play back a history, to subject it to a review that links past events to present lives and political debates. As Nichols observes, images are always in the present tense,⁴⁸ an attribute that may augment the power of film as a catalyst for historical discussion and one of the most important contributions to the popular negotiation of terrorism and

47. Speaking to the motivation for denunciation, Wirth argues that “the terrorists gave the German public the opportunity to participate with moral outrage in the boundless pursuit and condemnation of each and every terrorist, and thereby to divert attention from Germany's violent past.” Wirth then cites Margarete Mitscherlich: “The entire German public participated with extreme affect in the condemnation of the terrorists, by which the senseless and brutal murders should by no means be diminished. Despite that, compared to the weak reactions to mass murder of unimaginably brutal nature, the often almost hysterical reaction to the actions of less extreme activists is particularly striking. Entirely unlike those who participated in Hitler's crimes or even his supporters, one is now stirred up about the so-called ‘sympathists.’ Whosoever even tried to understand or to explain what drove the terrorists to their behavior or to their senseless acts is considered deserving of persecution, and some who have dared to critique their values and corresponding political action have been seen as intellectual proponents [*Urheber*] of the ‘Terror scene’” (quoted in *Hitlers Enkel*, 38). Fischer's political transformation marks movement-internal debates that position him as anything but an uncritical “proponent.” For a concise description of some of his most important contributions to contemporary debates see Kraushaar, *Fischer in Frankfurt*, 171–76.

48. Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, 117.

its antecedent violences in recent German cinema. Recent film engages complex histories of terrorist violence largely through a "fictive reality"⁴⁹ that extends from really fictional accounts of terrorists and terrorism from the 1970s through reunification (and in Petzold's case even after) to fictionally real narratives of many of Grams's friends, for whom the experience of both terrorist and state violence contributed to the construction and negotiation of dystopian visions of personal and social loss.⁵⁰

It is no accident that Kraushaar hit on the metaphor of film in his discussion of the RAF's relation to historical German violences, in particular the Third Reich: "One . . . explanation for the startling self-justification of terrorists who understood themselves to be leftist revolutionaries consists in the fiction that one could replay history like a film and recover what had been lost—by 1933 at the latest—and do a better job of it."⁵¹ Several recent films, taken as a similar attempt to engage not only with the violence of the RAF but with its relation to National Socialism, reframe this fiction through an unsettling of standard tropes, time lines, and locales in representations of the RAF. (Petzold, like von Trotta before him, includes a school viewing of *Night and Fog* within his terrorist narrative, though this time with a temporally more removed audience; Veiel—and to a lesser extent Conrad—attends to the relation of Germans to Nazism through biographical detail and reflection.) One might speculate that the ongoing engagement with Fischer across the moment when his militant history was played back suggested a reaction to past judgments of violence distinct from the acrimonious popular judgments of RAF members in their trial and sentencing described so well by Margarete Mitscherlich.⁵²

49. Kraushaar cites Fischer's own explanation of the term: "It was above all a revolt of heads and feelings, and where they wanted to become reality was simply inconceivable to us. But instead of changing our thoughts in this process, we changed reality in accordance with our thoughts, and with this Marxist head one created his own fictive reality" (*Fischer in Frankfurt*, 16).

50. By far the clearest example of a fictional reality emerges in Veiel's poignant and unsettling interviews with Gerd Böb, who considered going underground with Grams in the early eighties. Filmed first in front of and then at twilight with his back to a "Venceremos" banner he has kept for over twenty years, Böb still seems to regret his turn to what he describes as a bourgeois existence in Hamburg: "I don't think I would have been able to do it. I would certainly have liked to be that way, but I couldn't do it." Veiel's book provides additional interview material with Böb about his relationship to Grams and training for a potential life in the underground not included in the film. See esp. "Ausmessen der Revolution II," chap. 11 of *Black Box BRD*. Similarly, his ex-girlfriend Rosawitha Bleith explains that she saw her own inability to distinguish so clearly as Grams between "the pigs" and "the good revolutionaries" as a weakness.

51. Kraushaar, *Fischer in Frankfurt*, 12.

52. Cf. n. 37.

More than other films, *Black Box BRD* contributes to a contextualization of terrorism that moves away from strategies of clinical individualization precisely through personalizing mourning as part of a larger social process. Rather than plot individual or fictive/composite terrorists against the state, Veiel establishes complex relationships between a wide range of social agents. In the process, the now famous footage of Fischer during the Frankfurt house-ing riots serves less as the isolated news event it recently became than as a particular moment in the much larger development of cultures of protest and violence in German history, which by no means began with terrorism or even 1968.⁵³ Veiel's documentary work affirms what historians like Wirth have argued for some time: "First of all, terrorism cannot be reduced to the pathology of individuals, but rather individuals spoke out on behalf of their own generation and their parents'. Secondly, the juxtaposition of Foreign Minister Fischer and the ex-terrorist Hans-Joachim Klein, for example, shows how narrow the line we all walk is. It would really depend on each of us recognizing how easily we can get mixed up in wrongdoing."⁵⁴

Conclusions

Historical exposures [*Aufnahmen*] are not exact images [*Abbilder*], but rather interpretive fields of images, that is, they demand interpretations that cannot abstract from the respective contexts of their development.
—Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Fischer in Frankfurt*

Popular memory and cultural imaginary cannot be separated from the material experience of terror in a representational order in which highly mediated, symbolic acts of terrorism are firmly rooted in the "interpretive fields of images" that Kraushaar describes.⁵⁵ Forms of violent and nonviolent political protest that drew increasingly on the artistic forms of the avant-garde tradition and situationism—especially the happening—relied on physical bodies marked as different from or disruptive of larger social contexts in which they sought to

53. Contrary to discussions of the Adenauer era as apolitical, the years following the immediate postwar period in fact attest to a range of broad-based political initiatives. Ranging from peace protests to early organization against emergency legislation in the 1950s, earlier postwar political activism has been overshadowed by a fascination with 1968. For a more comprehensive survey of early postwar peace activism see Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Protest-Chronik, 1949–1959: Eine illustrierte Geschichte von Bewegung, Widerstand und Utopie* (Hamburg: Rogener und Bernhard, 1996).

54. Wirth, *Hitlers Enkel*, 41.

55. Cf. Kraushaar, *Fischer in Frankfurt*, 253.

intervene. Film as a medium may be particularly suited to convey both acts of highly stylized physical violence aimed at disrupting public spectacle and ideal images of the spectacle itself. When, for example, the viewer experiences the sequence of commune → street fight → ex-militant/isolated garden cabin → elite/social golf and country club, then disruption, deliberate disorder, and violent confrontation are visually and aurally juxtaposed to the larger social context to which they ostensibly respond.

The rich visual and emotional context that Veiel's film provides for the emergence and escalation of violence articulates disparate locales, social milieus, and a range of individual responses where many others have failed. The historical, social, and aesthetic depth of his film is simultaneously less polemical than other moments in film production on the RAF largely because of its narrative multiplicity. Bound together by beautiful shooting and editing, a unified visual narrative supports an internal complexity that few accounts—written, filmic, or otherwise—of the period have sustained. The course of a filmic “day” at Deutsche Bank begins with Herrhausen's career ascent and comes darkly to a close with his resignation and subsequent assassination; the initial, speculative viewing of the tracks in Bad Kleinen and narrative reconstruction of Grams's last moments is resolved in the groaning halt of a final train at the station and the film's own hesitant end. Even as *Black Box BRD* provides a visual-narrative closure, the historical narrative is left deliberately (and, in the cases of Grams and Herrhausen, necessarily) open: personalization in this case reinforces the ambiguities of history.

Carl Schmitt and the Question of the Aesthetic

Neil Levi

More than twenty years after his death, the works of the German jurist and political thinker Carl Schmitt seem more alive than ever, his influence among political and critical theorists indisputable. Yet interest in Schmitt is almost always accompanied by a certain anxiety. Did he not, however briefly, serve the Nazis by supporting the Röhm purge and calling for “Jewish” influence to be eliminated from German culture? And so, is his thought not in some profound manner “contaminated” by, even ultimately a justification of, such views?

Given his association with Nazism, that regime which is beyond the ideological pale of all postwar political thought, there is something apt about the fact that one of the most fertile ideas in Schmitt's own thinking is that of the enemy. Indeed, for many, his thought is best emblemized by a single sentence, one that Schmitt himself was very fond of: “Der Feind ist unreine Frage als Gestalt,” which, depending on how one translates *Gestalt*, can mean either “The enemy embodies our own question” or “The enemy is a figure for our own question.”¹ This line, originally from a poem by one of Schmitt's friends, Theodor Däubler, evokes what is arguably one of the best-known aspects of Schmitt's thought: the idea that, just as morality is about the distinction between good

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1. Carl Schmitt, “Weisheit der Zelle,” in *Ex Captivitate Salus* (Cologne: Greven, 1950), 90; my translations.