

**Svea Bräunert.** *Gespensstergeschichten: Der linke Terrorismus der RAF und die Künste.* Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2015. 564 S. broschiert, ISBN 978-3-86599-278-9.

**Reviewed by** Christina Gerhardt

**Published on** H-Soz-u-Kult (July, 2016)

In *Gespensstergeschichten. Der linke Terrorismus der RAF und die Künste*, Svea Bräunert's two-part book, she studies the twin phenomena of terrorism and media in part one, and of terrorism and memory in part two, respectively. Given the volume's length (564 pages) and substance, it could almost be considered as two books.

The volume examines the following three texts, precisely because they are canonical vis-à-vis the topic and also because they are paradigmatic, in Bräunert's estimation, for thinking about the relationship between the RAF and ghosts, that is, the way the RAF haunts (p. 343): Heinrich Böll's novel *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum, 1974); the collectively directed omnibus film *Deutschland im Herbst* (Germany in Autumn, 1978); and Gerhard Richter's cycle of fifteen oil paintings *18. Oktober, 1977* (October 18, 1977; 1988), thereby engaging a range of media, including literature, film and art. Bräunert's book, however, also focuses on texts seldom engaged by studies of the Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*, RAF).

The first part focuses on the relationship among terrorism, mass media and media theory. It consists of three chapters and one "spotlight." The three chapters focus on the Springer media debates and Böll's *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*; the hostage crisis at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich; and the recitation of the RAF in media in more recent works, such as the 2005

*Kunst-Werke* exhibit in Berlin and the 2008 Oscar-nominated film *Baader Meinhof Complex*.

In the first "spotlight," Bräunert examines Hans Magnus Enzensberger's "Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien" ("Toolbox for a Theory of Media"), published in March 1970 in volume 20 of the journal *Kursbuch*. Here, Enzensberger – drawing on Brecht's *Radiotheorie* (1927–1932) and Benjamin's *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduceability, 1936) articulated "an aesthetic of new media" (p. 115). The new rules of the game for media intended to free consciousness. They included the following: 1. a decentralization of the media system; 2. a breakup of the mono-directional model of sender and receiver; and 3. a multiplication of the media possibilities (p. 114). As Enzensberger put it: "Die gespeicherte Information steht dem Zugriff aller offen, und dieser Zugriff ist ebenso augenblicksbestimmt wie die Aufnahme" (cited on p. 120). This thematization of a simultaneity of event and media archiving is of interest, Bräunert argues, "weil sie auf ein nicht-chronologisches Verständnis von Geschichte verweist und so eine Konzeption medialer Historiographie einfordert, die aus simultanen Vor- und Rückgriffen besteht und sich Vorstellungen von Erinnerung und Trauma annähert" (p. 121). Indeed, Bräunert's argument here provides an innovative and crucial framing both for her reading and for readings of the RAF

in general: it rereads the RAF history as mediated and it reads this mediated history as non-chronological (mediated) history.

Subsequently, Bräunert discusses the Summer Olympic Games of 1972, not often engaged in studies of the RAF, since the attack was carried out by the Palestinian Black September. The attack was, however, a key part of events of the 1970s, globally and in West Germany, leading, for example, to the establishment of the GSG 9 unit, a counter-terrorism taskforce that could be deployed both domestically and, with permission of the host country, abroad and that played a pivotal role in events related to the subsequent *German Autumn* in 1977.

The 1972 Munich Olympics marked two other notable shifts, which Bräunert explores: 1. new satellite technology allowed the Olympic Games to be broadcast 24 hours a day, globally and live (p. 126); and 2. the “event hijacking” whereby the terrorist group Black September (p. 129), which held nine Israeli athletes and coaches hostage, used the aforementioned technology to hijack the attention of the guaranteed global audience. Here, Bräunert discusses the remarkable affinity between television and terrorism (p. 134); AP photographer Kurt Strumpf’s photos of terrorists at the event and Jürgen Klauke’s subsequent photography series *Antlitze* (1972–2000), which reworks photographs taken by others; and Ulrike Draesner’s novel *Spiele* (2005), in which the main character, Katja, who saw the events both live in the stadium and at home on television when she was 12 years old, tries to reconstruct her memory of them after more than thirty years with television and photography playing key roles, as they would in subsequent re-narrations of the RAF. Bräunert underscores how both television and photography mediate between the public and the private realm (p. 162). *Spiele* is at once an historical novel and a family novel, grappling with History and personal history, recalling, I would argue, aspects of Mar-

garete von Trotta’s film *Die bleierne Zeit* (English title: *Marianne and Juliane*, 1981).

In the first part’s final chapter, Bräunert discusses media images of the RAF in the 2005 *Kunst-Werke* exhibit and the 2008 film *Baader Meinhof Complex*, in the latter considering the role of re-enactment, either via the actors or via the images that are re-circulated (p. 203). It at once, she argues, re-enacts and enacts anew media images. It also raises the issue that media generates history anew (p. 217), which segues into the focus of the book’s second half.

This second part focuses on terrorism and memory. In chapter five, one of the volume’s richest chapters, Bräunert deftly weaves together theories of memory and trauma with visual studies, to argue that *Deutschland im Herbst*, in particular the Antigone episode and what she considers the Hamlet structure of the father-son pairings (Schleyer and his son; Rommel and his son), as well as writings by Kluge and Sebald, reveal how Germany’s trauma of the Nazi era – especially the aerial warfare and the Holocaust – manifest anew in representations of the RAF. In this context, she also grapples with the bomb that was planted on November 9, 1969 in the Jewish *Gemeindehaus* Berlin but did not explode, and the anti-Semitism among the New Left that this and other actions and writings express. It is the Nazi era, she argues, that haunts the generation of 1968.

In a second “spotlight,” Bräunert considers Klaus Theweleit’s “Bemerkungen zum RAF-Gespenst. ‘Abstrakter Radikalismus’ und Kunst” (1997), which also grapples with *Deutschland im Herbst* and Gerhard Richter’s *18. Oktober, 1977* cycle, but underscores how his readings differ starkly from her own. While Theweleit reads the cycle of paintings mainly through Richter’s statements about them (p. 343), Bräunert’s observations are based on a reading of the paintings themselves. In this spotlight, she focuses on the role of corporeality, discussing also the RAF’s hunger strikes, and the terrorism as body politics.

While for Theweleit the Fassbinder episode fills an emptiness or hollowness evident in politics, what Theweleit criticized as radical abstractness, and in art (p. 367), Bräunert argues that it evidences the RAF ghost, that is, her book-length pre-occupation and thesis about questions of visibility or invisibility and about temporality or “time out of joint.”

In the sixth chapter, Bräunert discusses Richter's *18. Oktober, 1977* paintings. The seventh chapter considers the “transatlantic translations post 9/11” and in particular how Marlene Dumas' painting *Stern* (2004) See <<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dumas-stern-t12312>> (June 26, 2016). and Don DeLillo's short story *Looking at Meinhof* (2002) engage the RAF, both thematizing looking and needing to look anew to understand the art and also the history it engages. In the eighth chapter, Bräunert focuses on the “photographic archive of the RAF”, in particular Thomas Demand's *Attempt* (2005), and the Stalinorgan in Karlsruhe as a side theatre of the German Autumn. That is, the focus on Demand's piece draws on archival material but not on the well-known events or their images, and rather on the overlooked “Nebenschauplätze”, in order to provide new perspectives (p. 530), as does much artwork produced about the RAF since the 1990s.

In the ninth and concluding chapter, Bräunert looks back at the ghost of the RAF in media and history. In sum, she argues for a reading of history, outlined at the outset through her reading of Enzensberger's “Toolbox for a Theory of Media”, which is created at the moment of the event but also re-created through subsequent narrations. The role of media is pivotal at once in making visible, even if at times through its obfuscation, the past events that haunt or evidence trauma, whereby Bräunert means as much the RAF-related events of the 1970s that haunt today as the Nazi era that haunts the 1970s.

Overall, the volume contributes a valuable study to the constellation of terrorism, media and

memory, pinpointing how mediations of the RAF illuminate key debates related to German post-1945 history and culture but also reworking concepts of history, that is, putting its temporal linearity into question, and exploring the role of visibility and invisibility (or haunting) in sites of trauma and memory. Bräunert's insightful analyses of both canonical and under-examined texts will prove edifying for research and teaching in a variety of disciplines including but not limited to media studies, such as art history, literature and film studies; German studies; and history, terrorism, memory and trauma studies.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

**Citation:** Christina Gerhardt. Review of Bräunert, Svea. *Gespensstergeschichten: Der linke Terrorismus der RAF und die Künste*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. July, 2016.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=47436>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.