Representation and performativity

Methodological considerations on film and historiography. The example of Baader-Meinhof

Dagmar Brunow

My point of departure is that the impact of media on our perception of history cannot be underestimated. Thus, we can assume that Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* (1993) is more likely the first depiction of the Holocaust our students might encounter rather than the writings of Primo Levi, Raul Hilberg or Daniel Goldhagen. Therefore, the question is not so much whether or not films and other audiovisual media can be used as sources for historical studies but rather how we can develop critical tools for their analysis.[1]

In my paper I would like to point out some of the possibilities and pitfalls in studying the relationship between film and historiography.[2] Using the West-German radical left-wing Baader-Meinhof group, the "Red Army Fraction" (RAF) as an example, I would like to examine the role of media for the construction of their image.[3] Whereas German studies of historical films centre around National Socialism and the

1 For practical reasons I am going to use "film" as a generic term for various media forms, including TV-series, documentaries and fiction films, unless stated otherwise.

2 Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on film/film on history*, Harlow 2006; Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the past: the challenge of film to our idea of history*, Cambridge, Mass. 1995; Annette Insdorf, *Indelible shadows: film and the Holocaust*, Cambridge 1989; Marcia Landy (ed.), *The historical film: history and memory in media*, New Brunswick 2000. The most pointed Swedish study is Mats Jönsson, *Film och historia: historisk Hollywoodfilm 1960-2000*, Lund 2004.

3 In the last few years, the RAF has become a trendy topic in academia. Only in 2008 three book-length academic studies on the media representation of the RAF were published: Inge Stephan und Alexandra Tacke (eds.), *NachBilder der RAF*, Köln 2008; Nicole Colin, *Der "Deutsche Herbst" und die RAF in Politik, Medien und Kunst*, Bielefeld 2008; Andreas Elter, *Propaganda der Tat: die RAF und die Medien*, Frankfurt/Main 2008.

Holocaust,[4] the historical image of the RAF is also, to a great extent, shaped by the media and has become part of the collective memory. As such it is constantly re-constructed and contested. Even more than 10 years after the official dispand of the RAF in 1998 and more than 30 years after the crucial events of the "German Autumn" ("Deutscher Herbst") in October 1977, the group generates not only major interest and controversies, but triggers a steady flow of literary writings, (auto)biographies, fiction films, documentaries and art works.[5] In addition, the discourse on the RAF is constantly nourished by a changed body of source material or by heated media debates, for instance about the amnesty of the former RAF-members Brigitte Mohnhaupt and Christian Klar. Literary scholar Jan Hans has coined the phrase "discursive quake" (Diskursbeben), which, as he states, might say less about the RAF than about current German sensitivities.[6]

My article has several goals: First to develop critical tools for analysing historical fiction films and documentaries. Second, to discuss to what extent conceptualizing films as performative rather than representational can help us to escape the fairly fruitless debate on historical authenticity.[7] Third, to find out how a discourse-analytical perspective can open up new approaches to the study of the relationship between film and history.[8] The focus in this article will be on a German context, thus I will not talk about the Swedish or any other international reception of the RAF.

In recent years, the role of film for historiography has been increasingly examined. Moreover, film studies have pointed out the instability

4 To name but one of numerous examples cf Christoph Classen, *Bilder der Vergangenheit: die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus im Fernsehen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1955–65*, Köln/Weimar/Wien 1999. Classen focuses on a thematic approach. On the notion of collective memory, cf Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, München 2006.

5 For a detailed filmography of both fiction films and documentaries cf Anna Pfitzenmaier, *RAF, Linksterrorismus und "Deutscher Herbst" im Film: eine kommentierte Filmographie (1967–2007)*. <http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/site/40208741/default.aspx>, 28/2 2009.

6 Cf *FSK-Transmitter: Programmzeitschrift des Freien Sender Kombinats*, Hamburg, 03, 2008, p. 16.

7 Though this might sound alarmingly relativistic, I agree with Hito Steyerl who claims: "Denying the ability of images to depict reality is tantamount to paving the way for revisionists and forgers of history", see Hito Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit: Dokumentarismen im Kunstfeld*, Wien 2008, p. 11. My translation from German.

8 I follow Foucault's conception of "discourse" and Butler's appropriation of Austin's model of performativity. Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*, New York 1982; Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, New York 1990.

of the boundaries between fiction film and documentaries.[9] While fiction film, on the one hand, makes increasing use of documentary aesthetics,[10] it would, on the other hand, be naive to regard documentary films as mere reproductions of reality. As even non-fiction films are a result of narrativisation and aesthetic choices, documentaries should not be taken for granted, but constantly questioned, even though the use of testimonial witnesses and a specific visual style is supposed to convey the impression of "authenticity".[11] Furthermore the popular genre of dramatised documentaries, the "docudrama", has added to the blurring of clear distinctions between fact and fiction. Therefore, I do not distinguish between these forms in this article. The tools I develop will be applicable to all genres. Due to the limited space of this text, however, I will only be able to name a few examples, in favour of focusing on methodological concerns.

Analysing historical films

The visual turn in the arts has had an impact on a new critical understanding of the ontology of the image. In this context the study of iconography has only recently devolved from art history to other academic disciplines.[12] To what extent can the documentary image be considered "true?" How do films try to achieve supposed authenticity, for example by integrating or re-enacting archive footage? Nowadays references are also increasingly made to re-enacted material. For instance, as Annette Vowinckel points out, in "The Baader-Meinhof-Complex" (Edel, 2008) the court scenes quote Reinhard Hauff's cinema production *Stammheim* (1986) whereas the interior of the hijacked Boeing 737 in Mogadishu

9 Cf Bill Nichols, *Blurred boundaries: questions of meaning in contemporary culture*, Bloomington 1994; Bill Nichols, *Representing reality: issues and concepts in documentary*, Bloomington 1991. Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, London/New York 2002; Eva Hohenberger (ed.), *Bilder des Wirklichen: Texte zur Theorie des Dokumentarfilms*, Berlin 1998; Steyerl 2008; Ursula von Keitz & Kay Hoffmann, *Die Einübung des dokumentarischen Blicks: Fiction Film und Non Fiction Film zwischen Wahrheitsanspruch und expressiver Sachlichkeit 1895–1945*, Marburg 2001.

10 This aesthetic device has become a mainstream-compatible stylistic practice. On Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and visual historiography, see Mats Jönsson, "Som vargar med eld: tankar kring fiktionsfilmens audiovisuella historieskrivning", *Häften för kritiska studier* 32:3, 1999, pp. 81–90.

11 Cf Eva Hohenberger & Judith Keilbach (eds.), *Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit: Dokumentarfilm, Fernsehen und Geschichte*, Berlin 2003. The notion of treating film as a mirror of society stems from the impact of Siegfried Kracauer's theories on critical film theory and ideology criticism. See Siegfried Kracauer, *Theorie des Films: die Errettung der äußeren Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt/Main 1985.

12 Examples are Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Visual History: ein Studienbuch*, Göttingen 2006, or Thomas Koebner & Thomas Meder (eds.), *Bildtheorie und Film*, München 2006.

quote Heinrich Breloer's TV-series *Todesspiel* (1997).[13] Thus, in referring to re-enacted scenes in order to convey the impression of authenticity, media images create a self-sufficient system of reference. These images in turn enter the visual archive which is not only a site for the preservation of history, but also for the construction of memory.[14]

Apart from the film's use of iconography we should examine processes of narrativisation which we do not only find in fiction films, but also in documentaries.[15] Instead of using Robert Rosenstone's method of arranging historical films into various categories, I would rather ask: what are the narrative devices employed?[16] Does the film allow for an absence of narrative closure? What dramaturgy does the film employ? For instance, the narrative structure of mainstream films implies that the number of protagonists is reduced whereupon complex political questions are often brought down to two opposing standpoints embodied by two antagonists, for instance Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and RAF-member Andreas Baader.[17] In doing so, the films unwillingly reproduce the Manichaean conception that both the RAF and the West-German government had developed during the 1970s. In a classical Aristotelean dramaturgy the events are presented as a result of cause and effect. In this context deterministic or psychological explanations often function as an explanation for the protagonist's motives. To counter classical narration, a dramaturgy inspired by Brecht's concept of epic

13 Annette Vowinckel, "Der Baader-Meinhof-Komplex: RAF goes Hollywood", in Zeitgeschichte-online, Thema: "Der Baader-Meinhof-Komplex". Beiträge und Materialien zum Film, September 2008. <http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/portals/_rainbow/documents/pdf/vowinckel_raf_film.pdf>, 27/2 2009. The article is also an example of the dominant discourse in German academic research on film and historiography expressing the fear that filmatisations might be tantamount to popularisation and, thus, "Americanisation".

14 Cf Assmann 2006, p. 21. Drawing on Lotman and Uspensky, she regards media as a material support for cultural collective memory. See Assmann 2006, p. 20.

15 Martin Loiperdinger traces the invention of narrativisation in documentary back to WWI-propaganda films like *The Battle of the Somme* (W. F. Jury 1916). Martin Loiperdinger, "Die Erfindung des Dokumentarfilms durch die Filmpropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg", in von Keitz & Hoffmann 2001, pp. 71–79.

16 Cf Rosenstone 2006 and Rosenstone 1995. In this paragraph I also draw on David Bordwell, *Narration in the fiction film*, London 1985, and his conception of "classical narration" in classical Hollywood Cinema, pp. 162–204. On dramaturgy and its consequences cf Lena Israel, *Filmdramaturgi och vardagstänkande: en kunskapssociologisk studie*, Göteborg 1991. For a conceptualisation of counter cinema see also Peter Wollen's seminal essay "Godard and Counter cinema: 'Vent d'est' " [1972], in Peter Wollen, *Readings and writings: semiotic counter-strategies*, London 1982.

17 This dichotic structure is also used in Dorothea Hauser, *Baader und Herold: Beschreibung eines Kampfes*, Reinbek 2007. This "logic of mass media" is analysed by Jesper Bengtsson, *Mäktiga medier, mager demokrati*, Stockholm 2001. However, that a dichotic structure is not necessarily tantamount to simplification, can be seen in Andreas Veiel's documentary *Black Box BRD* (2001) on RAF-member Wolfgang Grams and RAF-victim Alfred Herrhausen, former head of the Deutsche Bank.

theatre can for instance be found in *Germany in Autumn* (1978).[18] This narrative mode gives the audience more time to reflect as it abstains from the principle of cause and effect, and instead of insisting on narrative closure, allows multiple points of view.[19] Accompanying the release of *Germany in Autumn* the film-makers published a statement in which the viewers are encouraged to set the film against their own experiences.[20] Thus, the film explicitly leaves open interpretative gaps and encourages the audience to actively participate in the creation of meaning – instead of propagating an already given standpoint. Therefore, in its mistrust of concepts like "objectivity" and "truth" *Germany in Autumn* could be conceptualised as a film essay (Essayfilm).[21] Instead of presenting a closed world view, the filmic process rather becomes a way of gaining insight.[22] The film has no intention of conveying "reality," but rather to reflect on its construction.[23] Thus, we could ask: is the lack of self-reflection a symptom of the film-maker's attempt to make the film "objective" and "authentic"?

To stress the importance of criticism of sources might sound to historians like carrying coals to Newcastle. What sources is the film based

18 The collective consisted of Alf Brustellin, Hans Peter Cloos, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, Beate Mainka-Jellinghaus, Maximiliane Mainka, Edgar Reitz, Katja Rupé, Volker Schlöndorff, Peter Schubert, Bernhard Sinkel. Unfortunately, the usual academic practice is to merely quote a few prominent (male) names as "auteurs", thus rendering the impact of the other members invisible.

19 This idea is echoed in Peter Wollen's notion of "closure" that he ascribes to classical narration versus "aperture" which he finds characteristic for modernist film-making. See Wollen 1982.

20 "Deutschland im Herbst: Worin liegt die Parteilichkeit des Films?", in *Ästhetik & Kommunikation* 32, Juni 1978, pp. 123–124.

21 Important contributions to the conceptualisation of the film essay are: Christa Blümlinger & Constantin Wulff (eds.), *Schreiben, Bilder, Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film*, Wien 1992; Sven Kramer & Thomas Tode (eds.), *Der Essayfilm: Ästhetik und Aktualität*, Zürich 2009. For a profound analysis of the construction of memory in film essays see also Christina Scherer, *Ivens, Marker, Godard, Jarman: Erinnerung im Essayfilm*, München 2001.

22 Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie: Bildforschung bei Harun Farocki und Jean-Luc Godard*, Bielefeld 2006. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty's notion of the inseparability of theory and practice, Pantenburg analyses film not as an illustration of theories, but as a theoretical discourse in itself.

23 Cf Pantenburg 2006 on Alexander Kluge's montage theory: instead of trying to imitate reality, Kluge's filmic montage rather opens up for utopian possibilities (einen von Robert Musil inspirierten Möglichkeitssinn), Pantenburg 2006, p. 41. Here we see similiarties to Dziga Vertov's concept of montage in *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1928). My point is to show that some films deliberately work on overcoming the notion of being a mirror of reality in favour of becoming an instrument for its (re-)construction.

on?[24] How is the choice of testimonial witnesses reflected?[25] In what way are their statements integrated into the film? Analysing historical "docudramas", Rainer Wirtz has come to the conclusion that a spiral structure is employed in which the different elements authenticate each other: Witness testimonies, which are taken at face value by the audience, lead to re-enacted scenes which in turn lead back to witness testimonies.[26] This technique, which is becoming a convention, is also employed in the TV-docudrama *Todesspiel* (Heinrich Breloer, ARD 1997), for example. In the case of films on Baader-Meinhof the standpoint of the RAF is mostly represented by crown-witnesses ("Kronzeugen") like Peter-Jürgen Boock.[27] This is problematic insofar as they are never introduced as crown-witnesses, but as authentic voices from the RAF. Hence, the function of the testimonial witness has to be analysed. Are they to illustrate an already given standpoint or does the film allow contradictions? Are conflicting political positions silenced or are they represented? To illustrate, the account of Irmgard Möller who, though badly injured,

24 Numerous productions are based on Stefan Aust, *Der Baader-Meinhof-Komplex*, München 1989, the latest of them being *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (Edel 2008). Yet, it should be remembered that Aust is not a historian, but a journalist and does not provide any references in his book. Still, he and others among his contemporaries like Wolfgang Kraushaar, Jan-Philipp Reemtsma, Gerd Koenen and Gerd Conrad who were part of the (radical) left after 1968 but who now distance themselves from their left-wing past, have the prerogative of interpretation on the German reception of the RAF.

25 Hito Steyerl warns of making witnesses guarantors of historical truth. She suggests that it is important to reflect on the subjectivity and rhetorics of the witness testimonies. See Steyerl 2008, p. 19. Judith Keilbach's study on the representation of testimonial witnesses of National Socialism offers valuable theoretical considerations on the analysis of historical film. See Judith Keilbach, *Geschichtsbilder und Zeitzeugen: Zur Darstellung des Nationalsozialismus im bundesdeutschen Fernsehen*, Münster 2008; Judith Keilbach, "Witnessing, credibility, and female perpetrators: eyewitnesses in television documentaries about national socialism", in Vera Apfelthaler & Julia B. Köhne (eds.), *Gendered memories: transgressions in German and Israeli film and theatre*, Wien 2007, pp. 101–112. For a profound theoretical reflection on the use of witness testimonies in historiography, see Ulrike Jureit, *Erinnerungsmuster: zur Methodik lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews mit Überlebenden der Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager*, Hamburg 1999.

26 See Rainer Wirtz, "Alles authentisch: so war's", in Thomas Fischer & Rainer Wirtz (eds.), *Alles authentisch? Popularisierung der Geschichte im Fernsehen*, Konstanz 2008, p. 20. In addition, Frank Bösch observes the changing role of testimonial witnesses. Whereas, in the 1980s, they used to represent a kind of counter-memory "from below," they have now become bearers of the master narrative (Leiterzählung) in current productions. Especially in the popular and highly debated TV-productions by Guido Knopp, testimonial witnesses have now become a stand-in for historians as experts for historical authenticity ("Historikerersatz"). Frank Bösch, "Geschichte mit Gesicht", in Fischer & Wirtz 2008, pp. 51–72.

27 The controversial leniency policy ("Kronzeugenregelung") implies mitigation of a sentence in return for considerable testimonies. Cf <http://www.zeit.de/1986/48/Quasi-Kronzeugen-aus-der-RAF>, 28/2 2009. Even conservative newspapers like *Die Welt* have come to find the practice of employing crown witnesses problematic: <http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article827274/Das_Problem_mit_den_Kronzeugen.html>, 28/2 2009.

survived the so called "death night" of Stammheim[28] contradicts the official version that Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe committed suicide. Her story is seldom included in film productions. The TV-series *Todesspiel* whose director Heinrich Breloer won critical acclaim for his putative historical accuracy and objectivity, simply erased Irmgard Möller from the historical picture. Not only does the film abstain from including her as a testimonial witness, but also from having her represented by an actress.[29] To sum up, I suggest that one should analyse whether the variety of testimonial witnesses and their statements might imply a feigned polyphony.[30]

In order to develop analytical tools to escape the notions of "positive" or "negative" images in critical media studies, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam stress the importance of analysing a film's aesthetic means.[31] Thus, the point-of-view or focalisation, the use of montage, camera angles, framing, mise-en-scène and music ought to be examined. Does the film favour multiple points of view? Who is the focalizer? Who is placed in the frame? Who remains in the background? To what extent does the voice-over comment on the events or does it allow various interpretations? To illustrate, in *Germany in Autumn* no voice-over is used in the opening scenes of the film, thus leaving the interpretation of the images to the viewer, as Eike Wenzel has pointed out.[32] In contrast, in conventional documentaries, the voice-over is often used like a "voice of God".[33] In addition, other questions to be asked could be: in what way does the music try to steer the viewer's emotions? To give another example, montage clearly adds to the construction of meaning in the TV-series *Todesspiel*. For instance one scene shows the passengers held hostage in the kidnapped Boeing 737 in Mogadishu suffering of thirst and heat in the airplane. The film cuts to the next scene showing Gudrun Ensslin taking a shower in prison. When suddenly the water stops, she shouts at the female prison ward to start the water whereupon

28 On the morning of October 18th, 1977 the prisoners Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe were found dead in their cells. The fourth prisoner, Irmgard Möller, was heavily injured, but survived. For a detailed account of the events from Möller's perspective, cf Oliver Tolmein, *RAF – Das war für uns Befreiung: ein Gespräch mit Irmgard Möller über bewaffneten Kampf, Knast und die Linke*, Third edition, Hamburg 2002.

29 Cf Oliver Tolmein, "Schmidteinander", *Konkret* 08, 1997, p. 46.

30 According to Bakhtin's concept, developed in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, Ann Arbor 1973.

31 Although they critically examine the films' colonialist perspective, their approach is a valuable contribution for critical film analysis in general. Ella Shohat & Robert Stam, *Unthinking eurocentrism: multiculturalism and the media*, London/New York 1994, esp. pp. 205–215.

32 Eike Wenzel, *Gedächtnisraum Film: die Arbeit an der deutschen Geschichte in Filmen seit den sechziger Jahren*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 247.

33 Cf Bill Nichols, *Introduction to documentary*, Bloomington 2001, pp. 105–109.

the water fizzes from the shower again. The message is obvious: while the hostages are suffering, the prisoners in Stammheim enjoy undeservedly good conditions.[34]

As we have seen, film images are never objective, but are always defined by a contemporary discourse that pervades aesthetic and stylistic decisions. Every camera angle implies a moral statement, to paraphrase Jean-Luc Godard. Like historiography, film creates a narration about the past which remains suspect to change as it is constantly challenged and redefined. Thus, analysing a film's mode of narration and its stylistic means can add to an understanding of the film's discursive function. Instead of debating whether the film provides "positive" or "negative" images, we could rather ask: to what extent does the film nourish the hegemonic discourse on the RAF or in what way does it oppose it?

"Not merely recording reality, but creating it" – film and performativity

To stress the films's performative function might allow us to depart from the fairly fruitless debate about "fact" and "fiction" and to perceive the film as an intervention into an ongoing debate and as a way of not merely recording "reality," but of creating it.[35] Instead of analysing historical films as representations of "how it really was," we could thus rather focus on their social function and discuss their role as counter-hegemonic practice. This would help us to overcome the dichotomy of "objective" versus "biased" film-making since it would be naïve to believe that some productions are more representational and less performative because of their putative objectivity. Films by independent video collectives do not claim to be objective, but they regard themselves as counter-hegemonic responses in order to show that the "real truth" has been silenced or marginalized in the public debate.[36] This understand-

34 Recent publications have been excessively nourishing this discourse. Cf Wolfgang Kraushaar (ed.), *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus*, Hamburg 2006; Kurt Oesterle, *Stammheim: die Geschichte des Vollzugsbeamten Horst Bubeck*, Tübingen 2007. The documentary TV-production *Folter in Stammheim: die Propaganda der RAF* (dir. Annette Baumeister/Florian Hartung, ARD 2005, 45 min.) was repeatedly screened on various German public service channels.

35 Both Bill Nichols and Stella Bruzzi deal with "performative documentaries", though their understanding of performativity is based much more on concepts of "performance" than on Judith Butler's theories. For Bill Nichols performative films "stress subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse", see Nichols 1994, p. 54. For Bruzzi, a performative film is "one whose truth is enacted for and by the filmmakers' encounters with their subjects for the benefit of the camera", see Bruzzi 2002, p. 126. She distinguishes between "films that are performative in themselves and those that merely concern performative subject matter", Bruzzi 2002, p. 154.

36 Film-making groups were established in various German cities. Apart from the Medienpädagogik-Zentrum in Hamburg, the Medienoperative Berlin, the Medienladen in Hamburg video collectives existed for example in Köln, Stuttgart, Marburg and Tübingen. Obviously this understanding of counter-discourse is highly problematic.

ing is based on the concept of political counter-practice ("Gegenöffentlichkeit").[37] Film-making functions here as a political weapon. This can be seen, for example, in Soviet revolutionary film-making or in Third Cinema practice. Departing from the ideas of Brecht and film-makers like Godard, the goal is not to record history, but to make history. Film practice can thus be seen as site of discursive resistance and as a struggle over the prerogative of interpretation. However, this applies not only to the oppositional sector. I suggest regarding putatively objective films like *Todesspiel* as politicised film-making, too, since they nourish the hegemonic discourse. Mainstream productions play an important role in the struggle over the power of interpretation and they are performative in creating reality through repetition. In perpetuating media images and mythologies (Baader in a Jordanian guerilla camp crawling through the sand in his velvet trousers or Baader preferring comics to Marx), these films create a reality that has been removed from historical evidence in order to live a life of its own. Therefore, a discourse-analytical approach could help us to understand the reason for this intertextual network.

Film and the national discourse

Studying historical films from a discourse-analytical perspective can add to an understanding of how the national discourse in Germany is shaped, negotiated and contested. In what way do they contribute to an understanding of national identity that has undergone enormous changes since the German reunification?[38] How do films contribute to creating a collective national memory? What is their role in the accounting for the past (Vergangenheitsbewältigung), i.e. National

37 Cf Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main 2001. Among the first to point to the relationship between film and dominant ideology were Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinéma – idéologie – critique", *Cahiers du cinéma* 216, Oct 1969, pp. 11–15. The idea of counter-cinema was mainly based on Bertolt Brecht's alienation devices in order to break conventional narrative forms and to avoid identification. More recent approaches like Kaja Silverman's concept of "political ecstasy", derived from Sergej Eisenstein, Walter Benjamin and Béla Balázs, modifies the Brechtian approach in regarding identification not as merely negative. Cf Kaja Silverman, *The threshold of the visible world*, New York/London 1996.

38 Cf Christine Achinger, "Evoking and revoking Auschwitz: Kosovo, remembrance and German national identity", in Ronit Lentin (ed.), *Re-presenting the Shoah for the 21st Century*, New York, Oxford 2004, pp. 227–252. See also Claudia Krieg, "Neuauflage der Totalitarismustheorie", in <http://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Standpunkte_0819.pdf>, 27/2 2009.

Socialism and the Holocaust?[39] To illustrate, in the second part of the TV-series *Todesspiel*, dealing with the decision of having the hijacked Boeing 737 in Mogadishu stormed by special unit GSG 9, the former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt is questioned about his participation in the "Wehrmacht". In addition, both testimonial witnesses Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski and Klaus Bölling of the crisis committee ("Krisenstab") compare the current situation to their war experiences at the front. All men claim that their experiences helped them at this critical moment. Here we find a surprising twist: while the 1968-generation has been criticising their parents for keeping silence about their involvement in the Nazi-regime and in WWII, clearly regarding this as opposed to democratic ideals, in *Todesspiel* it is the politician's former involvement into the "Wehrmacht" that now guarantees the continuity of democracy. Thanks to their soldierly experience, democracy can be saved. This is a rhetorical turn that nourishes the contested discourse after 1989 about the role of the "Wehrmacht".[40]

A discourse-analytical approach could also help to outline a diachronic perspective that shows how the discursive space for certain political position has diminished. I would like to illustrate this point by returning to the example of the so called "death night" in Stammheim. In early productions like *Germany in Autumn* (1978) or *Marianne and Juliane* aka *The German Sisters* (*Die bleierne Zeit*, Margarethe von Trotta, 1981), the reasons for the deaths in Stammheim remain ambivalent. Both films claim neither suicide nor murder, but question the official version about the prisoners having committed suicide. In *Germany in Autumn*, dubbed over the footage from the funeral of Baader, Ensslin and Raspe, the soundtrack plays Joan Baez singing Ennio Morricone's "The Ballad of Sacco & Vanzetti". This could be interpreted as paralleling the RAF-members with the death penalty of innocents anarchists, thus suggesting an interference of the state. In *The German Sisters*, the protagonist Marianne, having heard about the death of her sister, doubts the official suicide version and tries to find evidence for murder, however, without

39 In discussing the social function of audiovisual media Thomas Elsaesser offers an explanation why the RAF is more often represented as a West-German rather than an international phenomenon. Claiming that the RAF-films are part of the discourse of collective memory (Erinnerungskultur), he interprets the focus on the RAF as a reaction of a collective not having-come-to-terms-with the legacy of nationalsocialism and the Holocaust. Therefore, transnational interconnections between the RAF and other radical groups in Italy, the USA, Japan or to the Palestinian guerilla in Libanon, Syria or North Africa are neglected. Thomas Elsaesser, *Terror und Trauma: zur Gewalt des Vergangenen in der BRD*, Berlin 2007, pp. 17–19.

40 Elsaesser 2007, pp. 58–59. Yet, the heated debates about both the "Wehrmachtsausstellung" (1995–1999 and 2001–2004) und Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's willing executioners* (1996) have troubled the hegemonic discourse that tries to distinguish between Wehrmacht-soldiers and Nazis.

result. In both early film productions it is interesting to note, though, that the possibility of murder is never explicitly pronounced, only suggested. Thus, an ambiguity remains. In more recent productions, however, the mode of visual representation has changed. To illustrate, both in the TV-series *Todesspiel* and in Nicolas Stemann's Hamburg theatre production of Elfriede Jelinek's *Ulrike Maria Stuart* (2006) the deaths are staged as suicides. Thus, the circumstances of their deaths is made clear-cut and disambiguated. This visual representation does not allow for any other interpretation of the event. This tendency is mirrored in the hegemonic discourse nourished by contemporary TV-documentaries and by recent historical research.[41]

Context: the modes of production and distribution

In my opinion, we can only come to a profound understanding of the films by decoding the aesthetic and rhetorical devices employed in each of them: not in a general overview, but specifically for each film, which then, in turn, has to be contextualised.[42] The case of the alternative media production *Was aber wären wir für Menschen* (1993) which was financed by the German intelligence service shows the importance of

41 Kraushaar 2006 is but one of many examples of this disambiguated view that forms the hegemonic discourse. After years of thorough research, Christiane Ensslin, Gudrun Ensslin's sister, on whom the character of Marianne is based, has come to the conclusion that there is no evidence for either murder or suicide. Thus, until the bugging protocols (Abhörprotokolle) from the death night in Stammheim prison become available, the case will remain unresolved. See also Dagmar Brunow, " 'Die Isolationshaft gab es schon vor der RAF': Interview mit Christiane Ensslin", *Jungle World* 28, 13. Juli 2005. Although archive footage exists of Baader's mother quoting her son telling her "Mutter, wenn du hörst, einmal hören sollst, dass ich mich umgebracht habe, das darfst du nie glauben" ("Mother if you ever hear about me having killed myself, you must not believe it"), this footage is no longer quoted or referred to. (*Auf Leben und Tod*, dir. Hans Hederberg, German version, 1977/1979). The point here is not to prefer one version over the other, but to show how the discursive space for debating this issue has become narrow.

42 Though focusing on US-American cinema, Douglas Kellner offers an excellent critical analysis of the ideology in Hollywood action cinema, thereby combining dicourse-analysis, gender studies and semiotics. Cf Douglas Kellner, *Media culture: cultural studies, identity and politics between the modern and the postmodern*, London 1995. With "context" I do not mean "historical background", but a discursive approach starting out from Ricœur, cf Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*, Fort Worth, 1976. In his study on the film director Oliver Stone in the context of auteur theory, Jan Distelmeyer suggests a departure from classical hermeneutics and their focus on the intention of an auteur. Instead, Distelmeyer regards texts as (cultural) products, thereby taking into account the industrial context of production and distribution, the social context as well as a result of the process of reception. Cf Jan Distelmeyer, *Autor Macht Geschichte*, München 2005. Thus, rather than merely deciphering symbols (as in semiotics), textual analysis should deal with the construction of meaning in the production and reception of texts.

contextualising the films and not merely focusing on a textual analysis.[43] Since a TV-series obviously reaches a wider audience than a low-budget video distributed via alternative channels, at least before the emergence of the internet, the modes of production and distribution of each film should be considered. Who finances what kinds of films? What are the conditions for film-makers to get funding from German TV-stations? While studies on media representation of the RAF all too often centre around mainstream productions, the independent video sector is almost unexplored. Their distribution has also had an impact on reception, as they were usually screened in public viewings in alternative media centres, most of the times followed by a discussion. Videos like *Anna Astrid Proll: Ihr Leben in England* (1978),[44] *Baader: Gespräch mit seiner Mutter* (1977)[45] and *Spiegelbesetzung* (1981),[46] which circulated in left-wing political contexts, could play an important role for left-wing historiography. Thus, a lot of research remains to be done, for example in analysing in what way the iconography and narrative mode of the films have contributed to creating a myth around the RAF. How do these films try to avoid the "mass media logic" (Bengtsson) employed in mainstream productions? Do they include neglected issues like political discussions *within* the left, for example between the RAF and anarchists? Moreover, do they critically reflect on the inherent anti-semitism in the statements of the RAF?[47]

43 See also <http://www.salonrouge.de/gruppe_2.htm>, 27/2 2009; <http://www.aufbau.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=81>, 27/2 2009. The purpose of the video production was to collect addresses of so-called RAF-"sympathisers" ("Sympathisanten"). As opposed to the usual practice of having alternative media centres in various cities distribute the video, in this case distribution remained in the hands of the "Gruppe 2" that was funded by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz) and the Federal Intelligence Service (Bundesnachrichtendienst). Ironically, the government and the German tax payers thus financed a film that conveys a surprisingly complex image of these "public enemies".

44 The film was collectively produced by various alternative video collectives in Hamburg, Berlin, Cologne, Stuttgart and Marburg in 1978.

45 *Stammheim und anderswo*, Gespräch mit der Mutter von A. Baader (Medienpädagogik-Zentrum, Hamburg 1978, 60 min.).

46 *Spiegelbesetzung* (Medienpädagogik-Zentrum, Hamburg 1981, 40 min). The purpose was to raise support for prisoners in isolated confinement.

47 Volker Weiss' valuable contribution on this subject, in having analysed manifestoes and leaflets by the RAF, the "Bewegung 2. Juni" and the "Rote Zellen", could form a point of departure for a critical study of the role of antisemitism in film and media production. Cf Volker Weiss, " 'Volksklassenkampf': die antizionistische Rezeption des Nahostkonflikts in der militanten Linken der BRD", in *Antisemitismus – Antizionismus – Israelkritik*, Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte XXXIII, Göttingen 2005, pp. 214–238.

To sum up, audiovisual media has an important function for the self-fashioning of a nation, a society or a (political) community.[48] Analysing films as performative rather than representational works allows us to examine them as tools for political intervention in a contested discursive space. In order to avoid mere postmodern relativism, I would suggest contextualising the films by employing discourse-analytical theories and focusing on narrative devices as only a specific epistemological and referential framework allows us to analyse each film.

48 As for the importance of film for the shaping of "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson), cf Bettina Mathes (ed.), *Die imaginierte Nation*, Berlin 2007. The volume focusses on DEFA-films, though. However, another aspect worth analysing would be whether mainstream productions on the RAF might contribute to a kind of "Westalgie" as opposed to the GDR-nostalgia ("Ostalgie") triggered by films like *Goodbye-Lenin* (Becker 2003) and *Sonnenallee* (Haußmann 1999).