Reflections on “Art and Terror”

The semester before taking my Capstone Seminar, I began considering my research paper topic after watching the film *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*. It inspired me to study the Red Army Faction in more detail. I began my research later that year by finding the book the film was based on, *Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the RAF*. My translated copy was published by Oxford University Press, and its author, Stefan Aust, personally knew some of the RAF members he wrote about. Although Aust is not a historian, his personal knowledge, as well as this university’s reputation, led me to rely on this book for a basic understanding of the RAF’s establishment and early timeline. Although I did not end up using the group’s manifesto and other political writings as main sources, I read through many of them in order to better understand their beliefs and attitude, and I also watched interviews of Ulrike Meinhof, one of the group’s founding members. My familiarity with the German language was quite helpful during my early research. The books that I later chose to use as sources, with the exception of novels or books compiling artworks, were all published by universities and written by historians or other academics.

Using these criteria, I then found a number of books at UNLV’s Lied Library. I also used terms such as “Red Army Faction”, “Baader-Meinhof Gang”, and the names of its most well-known members when searching the library’s database for other sources. Kimberly Mair’s book *Guerilla Aesthetics: Art, Memory, and the West German Urban Guerilla* became an important source and inspiration for my paper. It led me to focus my topic on RAF related art, and it also introduced me to both the concept of *Prada Meinhof* and to a number of artworks that I discussed in my paper. Mair is a faculty member of the Sociology department at the University of Lethbridge, and her sociological approach to this subject was unique among my other sources. I found other books which fit my criteria and discussed RAF aesthetics or the performative aspects of terrorism, and this solidified my decision to focus my research on art. Many of the sources Mair analyzed in her book were featured in an art exhibition about the RAF that was held at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, *titled Zur Vorstellung des Terrors: Die RAF Ausstellung*. The KW institute created two volumes along with this exhibition, and I was able to acquire these through the Interlibrary Loan service. The second volume contains images of all the artworks that were displayed as well as a number of essays about them and interviews with the artists. Through the ILL service, I was also loaned a book of photographs taken and complied by a former RAF member, Astrid Proll, titled *Pictures on the Run 67-77*, which gave me an understanding of how a RAF member personally viewed art.

Continuing to use both Mair’s and the KW Institute’s books as a starting guide, I then searched through a number of websites, including google, YouTube, and the library’s database to find more information on individual works of art, films, and novels related to the RAF. I bought or rented the novels and films I featured in my paper, and I then found reviews for these works by searching their titles on the library database. I also visited the websites of artists like Gerhard Richter to find more information on their artworks. Through YouTube, I found more RAF inspired videos that I discussed in my paper, such as a music video by the band Prada Meinhoff. Most of the artworks I chose to analyze were featured in the KW Institute’s exhibition, but I also chose other works based on their popularity. For instance, I chose to exclude a number of films and novels that were not well-known and had fewer published reviews. Once I found a large enough list of sources to begin with, I then spent considerable time reading or watching them and deciding which would best suit my needs. Finding primary sources and then narrowing them down to the ones I featured in my paper was a long process, but it was made easier by using my first secondary sources as a starting guide.