



Margit Schiller being brought before the Hamburg press, October 1971

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# Photographs from an undeclared war

Baader-Meinhof: Pictures on the run 67-77 by Astrid Proll

From the mid 1970s until the early '80s I visited Germany regularly. Those were different times, it has to be said, and the Europe of 'no borders' was still some way off. On the train from Brussels to Cologne burly German Border Police stalked the corridors, pistols prominent on their robust hips, their intimidating manner impressive and accomplished. They carried with them what looked for all the world like outsized photograph albums. These they would flick through occasionally as they travelled through the trains examining passports. I never quite saw what was in those albums but imagined them to be full of photographs of suspected guerrillas. I hoped fervently that none of those images bore much resemblance to myself.

At the railway stations themselves one got a hint of what might have been in those bulky snap albums carried by the Border Guards. Everywhere there were

posters, row on row of black and white passport-sized photographs of young men and women, with a question hanging over the ranks of faces: 'Have you seen these people?' There was something chilling about wanted posters displayed so prominently in a modern European state although a cursory glance would not have revealed quite how chilling these posters were. A closer look revealed something odd, indeed disturbing, about some of the photographs. Their subjects were dead. I'm not sure how these images had been made, whether the corpses had been photographed on mortuary slabs or had somehow been propped up for the camera. Having looked once one tended not to look again.

And so here, in this the 'Model Germany', the wunderkind of Post War capitalism, with its vor-sprung durch technik glitz reeking of all that was modern and efficient and liberal, this proof incarnate

that the barbarism of the first half of the century had been swept away forever, here I was confronted with something that seemed to be first cousin to the medi-aeval custom of placing the heads of traitors and vanquished enemies on stakes in public places; a kind of salutary lesson to the potentially disaffected, perhaps, or a triumphalist gesture akin to the display of sporting trophies before one's loyal support?

The cover of Astrid Proll's Baader Meinhof, *Pictures on the Run 67-77* appears to have been taken from one such poster. There are the rows of young faces, serious, but in this case healthy, the pictures now somehow reminiscent of one of those American High School Yearbooks. You know the sort of thing; Holger Meins—Most Tenacious, Ulrike Meinhof—Class President, and so on.

But death is never far away in these photographs. There, at the very beginning of the book, is the dying

Benno Ohnesorg, shot by the police on June 2nd 1967 during a demonstration against a visit by the Shah of Iran. This was the death that started all the other deaths, the first move in the insane game of tit for tat that characterised the years of the German guerrilla. Ohnesorg looking more like an accountant who's put on his best casual clothing for a weekend barbecue than the martyr who will inspire a movement, is a strangely peaceful corpse. He could be sleeping. Another student, Fredericke Dollinger, is in the picture. She is cradling Ohnesorg's head, her own head looking away from the corpse and off into the distance; her eyes, fearful and angry, are a prophecy of what is to come.

And there, in the final photograph in the book, over ten years later, is the corpse of Andreas Baader. His eyes are wide open. He too is staring at something above and beyond the edges of the picture, his shattered head framed by an enormous halo of viscous blood.

In her introduction to her collection of photographs Astrid Proll emphasises how young the guerrillas were. The spirit of the early photographs is one of youthful exuberance. There is one of Baader in the Kurfurstendamm, dancing with Dorothea Ridder, and Rainer Langhans in drag. Baader's round face, and plump lips, give him the appearance of an overgrown baby. In other photographs it is his eyes which stand out: They are the clear and guileless eyes of a young child. The thought arises when looking at these pictures that Baader's appearance did him no favours. When placed against the Authorities' perception of him as a cruel and dangerous terrorist, this incongruous infant quality may have seemed quite terrifying.

Baader retained many of the same physical qualities until his death, but transformation in terms of physical appearance is another major theme to be traced in the book. Transformation unto death. The most dramatic change in the book, and the most disturbing corpse, is that of Holger Meins.

Early in 1967 we see the twenty-five year old Meins as film student. He is handsome, clean cut and neatly dressed. His hair is slightly long perhaps, but it is unlikely that any self respecting bürger would have objected to Meins accompanying his daughter home to discuss their future.

When we see him next he is standing alone outside a block of flats in Frankfurt. His hands are raised to shoulder level and he is staring at the police armoured car which is drawn up a few feet in front of him. In the picture on the facing page the armoured car has retreated about twenty feet and Meins is removing his trousers having already divested himself of the clothes from the upper part of his body. On the following page the near naked Meins is being taken away by police, his arms held rigidly behind him, his mouth open in a scream: Whether of pain or defiance it is impossible to tell. One of the policemen has a small pistol clutched tightly in his right hand; a peculiar detail this, in that his right arm appears to be participating in the arm locks being operated on Meins and is therefore, presumably, not free to actually operate the pistol should the need arise. Indeed he appears to be pointing the pistol more or less at himself, a lapse one imagines to be indicative of the fear of the guerrillas felt by their enemies.

Next we see mugshots of Meins and Jan-Carl Raspe, taken on the same day in 1972. They are both wearing black prison clothing resembling nothing less than the black pyjamas of the Viet Cong; a curious symmetry this considering the inspirational role of the Vietnamese guerrilla groups. The pair appear to be drugged: Their faces are contorted unnaturally. Raspe looks to be having difficulty standing up. In the close-up shots their faces are those of gargoyles; the once dapper Meins looks to have aged fifteen years in the five years since the film student photographs. His

hair is straggly and he sports an unruly moustache. Checking back and forth between these photographs and those in the earlier part of the book it is impossible to be certain that they are indeed the same man.

The final photograph of Meins was taken in 1974. He is laid out in his coffin. His hair is long and he has the beard of an Orthodox priest. Indeed if I had been presented with this photograph out of context I might have taken it for an image of the corpse of the murdered Rasputin. Having starved to death he is little more than a skeleton with skin stretched over it. His eyes are sunk deep into their sockets, the outline of the skeletal basin in which they sit being as prominent as they are in a skull. Still in all it isn't a horrifying photograph. Meins looks to be at peace, he is clothed in white and his winding-sheet is lace trimmed. An ecclesiastical candle stands by the coffin. His hands are folded over one another in front of him. There is a sense of order about this image of Meins in death; it is as if despite the chaos of his guerrilla years and the horror of his death, tranquillity of a sort has been restored.

I have seen another photograph of Meins, not in this book, which is much harder to look at. His naked corpse is laid out on a floor. From neck to groin there is a huge scar, roughly sewn up after autopsy, a brutalisation, which although inflicted on a body already dead, is peculiarly shocking. His head is huge in proportion to his body which is no more than an assemblage of bones, the arms loosely joined twigs ending in claw like hands, the pelvic girdle seems to somehow loom above his torso, the iliac crests pointing upwards like thumbs raised in a gesture of victory.

It is of this picture that Hans Joachim Klein of the Revolutionary Cells, partner with Carlos in the kidnapping of the OPEC oil ministers in 1975, said; "I have kept this picture with me to keep my hatred sharp." It is seven years since the student photographs.

The history of the German guerrilla has many shocking features to it, but the most shocking was the way in which one catastrophic bloodletting led to another in a chain of action and reaction that seems in retrospect to have been nothing less than a blood feud. The day after the death of Holger Meins, the President of the West Berlin Chamber Court, Gunten von Drenkmann, was shot dead.

Njal's Saga, perhaps the greatest of the Icelandic sagas, tells the tale of a decades long succession of murders committed in response to other murders which ends only when the warring parties simply have no more energy to continue the struggle. The German guerrilla was something like that. By the time Baader and the others died in Stammheim another generation of guerrillas was already taking their place. The link between the RAF of the early 1980s and that of the early 1970s was tenuous. Almost from the beginning the motivation of the guerrillas was to release comrades or simply to strike back in retaliation. The German State's reaction to what, in the early days, was comparatively mild opposition, simply fed a monster. In turn the German establishment terrified itself into perceiving a much greater threat than there ever was. The grandiose ambitions of the guerrillas matched perfectly the State's perception of the threat. Action and reaction grew in viciousness and desperation.

The escalation of violence turned on the perception of the enemy as somehow inhuman. This perception is apparent in the photographs. The corpse of Holger Meins seems gutted of humanity, or even any trace of the identity of Meins the film student. The prison clothing the captured guerrillas were forced to wear is a time honoured means of depriving captives of their identity. Meinhof, forever anxious in these photographs, could have been snapped in any number of penal innovations from the earlier part of the century, from the Gulag to Buchenwald.



Enslin, dressed in the same type of canvas wrap, attempts to resist dehumanisation. She smiles at the camera or looks at it with her head tilted up in an almost flirtatious way. The four photographs of her in prison clothing are placed side by side. She is holding a piece of card on a string. The card has the number '1' printed on it. Together the images form a bizarre catwalk model show: Gudrun is wearing the latest in penitentiary fashion...

In an early photograph, a young woman, Margrit Schiller, is being physically carried by a group of five police persons. One, a woman has her head in an arm lock. Either side of this woman are two uniformed men. One is looking towards Schiller's face, the only one to do so, although her face is turned away. He wears an expression of contempt or disgust. On the other side his colleague is looking away. His expression is one of suppressed amusement. At her feet another man in plainclothes is pulling her forward. His expression is more openly amused. He is also looking away from Schiller as if the spectacle of her struggle is too embarrassing to contemplate.

In the middle of the group a second policewoman stands. She is looking at Schiller, but not at her face. She appears instead to be looking at her stomach. Her expression too is one of amusement and she has her left hand raised at Schiller's side, her fingers poised in such a way as to suggest she is about to pinch or, possibly, poke the prisoner. The demeanour of all of the police officers suggests not that they are

Top: Ulrike Meinhof and Irene Goergens, whilst filming the TV documentary "Bambule" in West Berlin, 1969-70  
Above: Holger Meins being taken into custody, 1st June 1972



Gudrun Enslin and Andreas Baader in Paris, November 1969

handling a human being but are dealing with something, a rolled up carpet perhaps, an awkward load.

The caption tells us that Margrit Schiller was being taken to face the Hamburg press. She was a suspect in the murder of a policeman. She was never tried for the crime.

Then there are the photographs of the guerrillas as victims. Peter Lorenz sits stone faced, the cardboard notice pinned to his chest strangely reminiscent of the warning attached to the young David Copperfield, in that, like the proclamation 'He bites', this demonstration of young Lorenz's trophy status is essentially a humiliation.

The pictures of the doomed Hans Martin Schleyer are a similar display. There are three of them, days and weeks apart, and they although they have their eyes fixed firmly on Klein he is pointedly ignoring them.

Klein Was never a member of the RAF but belonged to one of the other two armed groups, the 'Revolutionary Cells' (the third group was 'The 2nd of June Movement'). Within weeks of this picture being taken Klein participated in one of the most spectacular actions of the European guerrilla, the kidnapping of the OPEC oil ministers in Vienna, during which he was wounded in the stomach. Three years later Klein emerged from the underground and gave a detailed interview with *Liberation*, in which he rejected the armed struggle and criticised many of the actions of the guerrillas. He clearly outlined his motivation and the motivation of the guerrillas emphasising the extent to which retaliation played a part. Each time the authorities acted against the guerrillas it produced a desire for retaliation which drew more and more people into the armed struggle: "First there's a vicious

manhunt by the police and then there's a vicious manhunt by the guerrillas." Proll makes much the same point in her book. The chronology speaks for itself.

The other picture I have of Klein is cut from *The Independent* of 13th September 1998. It sits beneath a headline which reads: 'Village rues arrest of affable terrorist.' Twenty years after he abandoned the armed struggle the State has caught up with Hans Joachim Klein, who had apparently carved out an anonymous niche for himself in a Normandy village the inhabitants of which are quoted as regretting his arrest: 'He was a nice guy... He was a friend... He adored opera. We dreamed of going to La Scala.' Daniel Cohn-Bendit is quoted as saying Klein was about to give himself up anyway and that the Frankfurt prosecutor had been cutting a deal with him before the arrest. About the whole affair there is a strong whiff of official duplicity.

One is tempted to ask whose photograph Klein's prosecutor kept by him to keep his, hatred sharp.

Proll had been a student of photography when she became involved with the Baader-Enslinn circle. There is no sense however in which this is a collection of art photographs. The sources of the collection are diverse and include press photographs. Many of the photographs are simply snapshots. A sequence taken in Paris in November 1969, when the group had made the move into illegality and were on the run, is particularly striking. Their high spirits jump out of the photos. This is a group of young people, a group of friends, having fun. They have changed their appearance, though not enough, I think, to fool anybody. The changes seemed designed to make them look more Parisien. These could be stills from the set

of some Nouvelle Vague movie.

Narcissism is a major feature of these early photographs. These are young people showing off. In the Paris photographs Baader is wearing urban guerrilla chic. He stares moodily at the camera, cigarette held loosely in his left hand, the collar of his leather blouson turned up.

In another photograph Enslinn and Baader stare into one another's eyes across a café table. Enslinn's hand holds a cigarette poised above a Ricard ash tray. The photograph would fit quite easily into any number of current advertisement campaigns; it's black and white Calvin Klein chic avant la lettre. Such photographs raise the question of the extent to which Bonnie and Clyde fantasies fuelled the actions of the group—Young! Beautiful! In Love! And Armed to the Teeth!

Bommi Baumann, once of the group, '2nd of June', described the RAF as having the reputation among the other groups of being somewhat in love with the trappings of underground life—expensive clothes, expensive flats and, above all, expensive cars. In his book, *How It All Began*, he claims the other groups joked that the initials BMW stood for Baader-Meinhof Wagon. And here, sure enough we have Baader and Enslinn and others, standing beside a large white Mercedes in June 1969, with a BMW parked alongside. They look like a rock group about to step into their limo. Proll describes Enslinn and Baader as, 'little media stars for the radical left' and the pictures appear to show them ready to carry out this brief.

How readily style becomes substance. The photographs of the group's 1968 trial for arson show them clowning self consciously for the cameras. Thorwald Proll has a cigar stuck in his mouth and looks rather like Groucho Marx. There is a sense in which, in the early stages, the group is always dressing up, playing at different roles like small children. This is evident even in Enslinn's prison photographs, the catwalk pictures, of which Proll writes: 'Gudruun looks like a performing child in a Nazi home'.

It was unfortunate really that this was the role which stuck, that this was the costume she could not shed.

At Enslinn's funeral the photographers crowd to the edge of the grave. Their lust for the telling image puts them in danger of tumbling into the grave with her. The lenses of their Nikons, Pentaxes and Leicas are black mouths gaping like the ever open maws of hungry chicks. As we stare at this sordid avidity the open mouths stare back at us becoming in the process huge black Cyclops eyes. They are defiant and threatening and throw back at us the paranoiac's challenge, 'What are you looking at?'

In the middle of this gaggle of cameras stand a small group of mourners. The sight the photographers are shamelessly devouring is too much for this



group. No one will look into the grave. Each has found their own neutral spot to stare at instead—the ground, the horizon, the sky, a fellow mourner's shoulder. Central to this group and the focus of this photograph is Pastor Enslinn. His head is held high and he wears a mask of Stoic endurance. His chin juts forward and his thin mouth is turned down by the strain of holding it there. He holds his face in this immobile, sculpted position for fear, one suspects, that if he let go for a minute it will simply dissolve or crumble into ruins. He seems to be a figure from another time. His eyes are hooded and black and stare at a spot beyond the grave and beyond the edges of the photograph. We see this far gazing at other death scenes in this book, in Dollinger and Baader, as if at the end, when confronted with the finality of death, it is only possible to look away, beyond the confines of photographs and mere images to search for whatever can transcend the sordidness of the moment.

Perhaps this is a case for the airbrusher's art. There must be still, somewhere in the ruins of the Soviet Empire, persons skilled in eliminating the unwanted from history. Individuals whose task it was to remove all traces of politically inconvenient images from photographs which offered proof of their existence. Perhaps some merciful millionaire could fund a project whereby all copies of this picture could be recalled and the degraded hustle round the grave slowly brushed away, until all the photographers and the sound men and the grim and stolid policemen have vanished, leaving only the group of mourners finally alone with their grief, and Gudruun Enslinn in her coffin, allowed, at last, the dignity in death customarily afforded mere princesses, tyrants and torturers.

*Thorwald Proll, Horst Sohnlein,  
Andreas Baader, Gudrun Enslin,  
14 October 1968*