

DRO

Deakin University's Research Repository

This is the published version:

De Bruyn, Dirk 2015, A German youth brings the Red Army faction to the Melbourne International Film Festival, *The Conversation*, pp. 1-1.

Available from Deakin Research Online:

<http://dro.deakin.edu.au/view/DU:30074967>

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Creative Commons, attribution, no derivatives.

Copyright : 2015, The Conversation Media Group

✉ Get our newsletter ✕

THE CONVERSATION

A German Youth brings the Red Army Faction to the Melbourne International Film Festival: review

August 3, 2015 2.58pm AEST

Périot neither condemns nor romanticises extreme 'resistance' and 'revolutionary' actions, nor the state's response. Images courtesy of MIFF

Dirk de Bruyn

Senior Lecturer in Animation at Deakin University

Jean-Gabriel Périot's feature-length documentary *A German Youth* (2015) – showing at the Melbourne International Film Festival – maps the Red Army Faction's (RAF) metamorphosis from student protest movement and left-wing political origins to what the state called a "terrorist organisation".

This story is told through a cavalcade of media forms that is of itself of interest as predictive of our media-saturated daily lives. Student protest in the 1960s against the Vietnam War and for women's rights occurred on a number of fronts in the West but with a particular twist in occupied postwar Germany.

West Germany's 1960s postwar generation further reacted against the views of parents who had lived through and implicitly or explicitly participated in the Nazi regime.

The Red Army Faction came to the view that the anticommunist capitalism that superseded Nazism still contained fascist tendencies. RAF's response evolved from student protest to bombings, kidnappings and shootouts with police. The group transformed dissent into a spectacular media event.

The film predicts the kind of personal stories of radicalisation of middle class Muslim youth now being recruited to participate in the formation of ISIS states in Syria and Iraq.

Périot has mined media archives for traces of RAF's core group. Journalist Ulrike Meinhof is available through her television appearances as voice for the far left. Horst Mahler performs as lawyer to the student protest movement. Holger Meins' alternative films are included and students Gudrun Ensslin and Andreas Baader are depicted in media reports and university activities.

A German Youth trailer, Jean-Gabriel Périot (2015).

A German Youth is constructed from an amalgam of archival footage, news reports, filmed debates, audiotapes, slogans and experimental films, compiled without commentary. These

modules are intended to speak for themselves. The viewer needs to bring that toolbox of looking and unpacking, gestures developed to negotiate today's social and digital media.

This kind of visual thinking is already available in rudimentary form in Holger Meins' radical student films that pepper Périot's more considered container, the most celebrated of which is called *How to Make a Molotov Cocktail* (1968), a precursor to the kind of DIY pieces that now populate YouTube.

How to Make a Molotov Cocktail.

Périot neither condemns nor romanticises these extreme "resistance" and "revolutionary" actions, nor the state's response. His assemblage strategies deftly counterpoint the multiple views and reactions expressed through the alternative and mainstream media of the time.

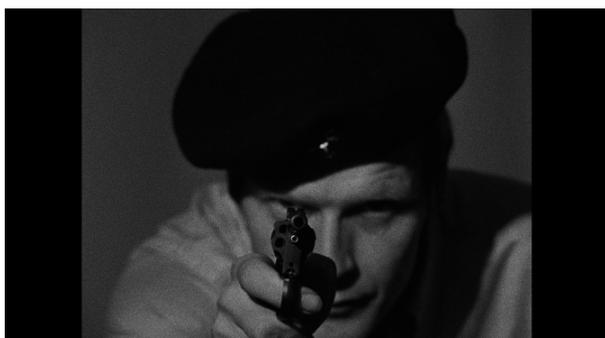
This is not entertainment. Périot performs a visual form of critical thinking in his assemblage. He builds his argument and historic narrative through the film's architecture, as a performed textual analysis. History is revealed as much by the aesthetics of the film's various elements than by what is said.



A German Youth, Jean-Gabriel Periot (2015). Images courtesy of MIFF

The origins of Périot's own visual language can be located in the innovative film-making of the 60s and 70s, a creative community in which Meins participated. Two of its innovators, Alexander Kluge and Dziga Vertov are acknowledged inside Périot's construction, as is Belgium's influential Knokke-le-Zoute Experimental Film Festival.

During this period cinematic dissent moved out of the street into the academy, developing textual analysis and kickstarting a feminist counter cinema but also eventually domesticating dissent into aesthetic form. The anomalous Red Army Faction moved in the opposite direction, out of middle class family life, through student protest into hardcore political resistance.



A German Youth, Jean-Gabriel Periot (2015). Images courtesy of MIFF

Today, images are everywhere. Attention spans may have shortened, but the contemporary eye, roaming both screen and city street, has been trained by daily life to negotiate the most complex of images in an instant. Media theorist Vilem Flusser called these “technical images”, highly constructed and malleable, no longer guaranteeing any photographic residue of “truth”.

Périot builds his truth invisibly through deft editing. His is a visual argument that utilises the insight that each historic period has its own look, from the cave painting to the tweeted selfie and everything in between.

For Flusser “technical images” saturate public and private space, their mobility inducing an amnesia of their origins. Found footage cinema like Périot’s responds to this by bringing a critical history back a-historically, in the architecture of the image’s construction.



A German Youth, Jean-Gabriel Periot (2015). Images courtesy of MIFF

Like our names and spoken accent, this strategy offers an implicit trace of their heritage. This is a familiar shorthand skill for the digital native, and is mobilised in A German Youth to situate the piece’s TV programs, newsreels and low budget activist cinema mixture.

This is Périot’s first feature film but he has made a number of shorter films that plumb a trauma, scratch at a historic wound. His 200000 Phantoms (2007, 11 minutes – see below) is constructed of numerous photographs of Hiroshima’s Genbaku Dome, the only building left standing, at ground zero of the atom bomb detonation on August 6, 1945.

200000 Phantoms.

Like a ten-minute historic timelapse the series of photographs and postcards from 1914 till the present document the site’s transition from business centre, through instantly obliterated ruin to eventual memorial park.

The celebrated filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, a contemporary of what the media called the “Baader-Meinhof Gang” has the last word in A German Youth through his contribution to Germany in Autumn (1978), an omnibus film initiated by Alexander Kluge to respond to the murder of Dresdner Banker Jürgen Ponto by the Red Army Faction and a film whose mix of cinematic forms predicts Périot’s practice.

At a kitchen table, Fassbinder screams at his mother about the importance of an open democracy in Germany, while his mother yearns for an enigmatic leader to take us out of this mess.

A German Youth is showing at the Melbourne International Film Festival on August 12. Details [here](#).



Cinema
Documentary
Screen
MIFF
MIFF 2015