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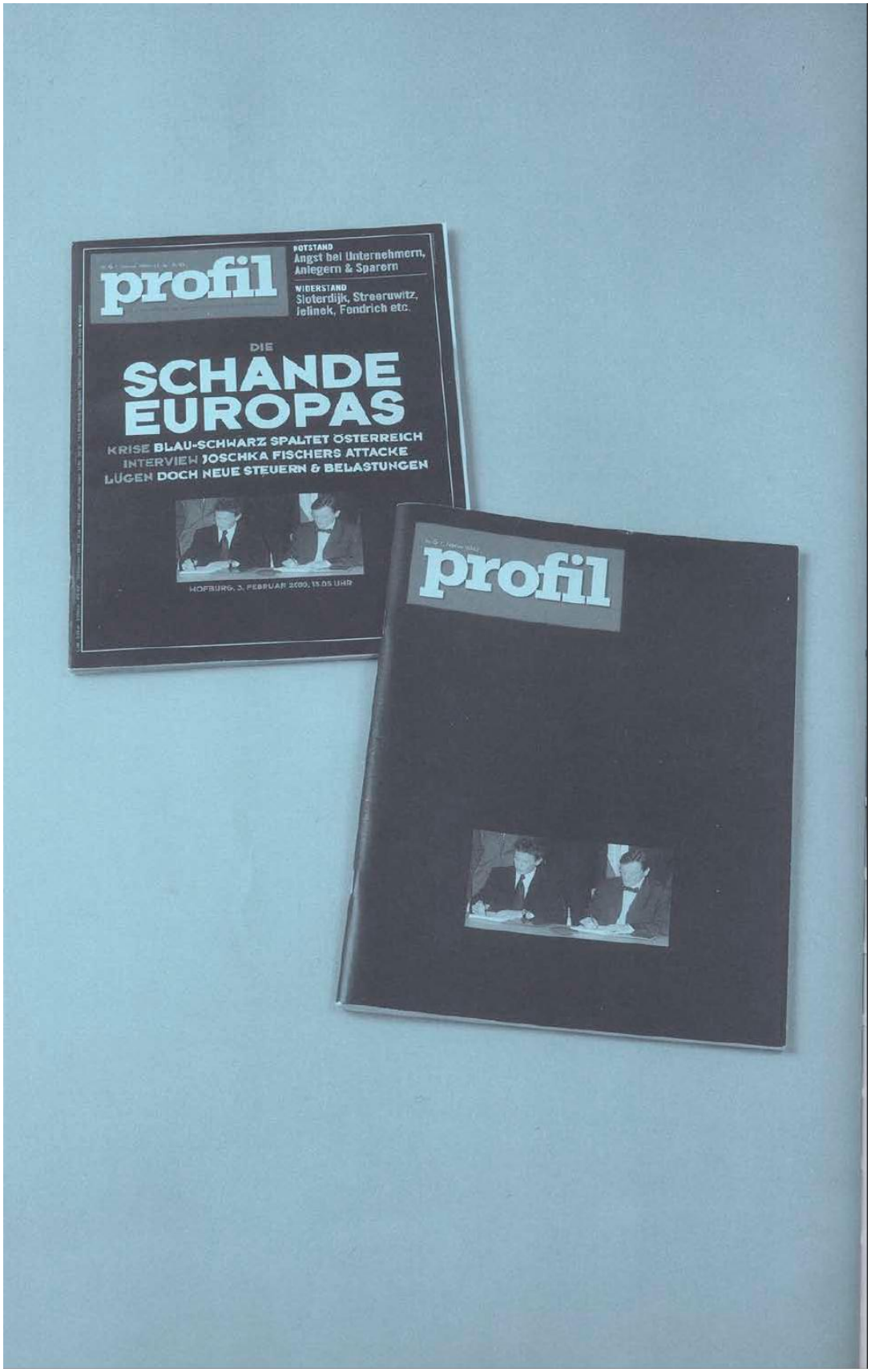

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Cover of *Profil Nr.6 vom 7.02.2000, ohne Worte*, Vienna and Düsseldorf: museum in progress/ Feldmann Verlag, 2000

Hans-Peter Feldmann's Pictures
– Ruth Horak

1. FELDMANN'S FASCINATING IMAGE WORLD

I was 17 when I acquired my first book of Hans-Peter Feldmann's, *Das Museum im Kopf* (*The Museum in the Head*, 1989). The title lodged itself in my mind, where it has remained to the present day. The title is paradigmatic of Feldmann's practice: that is, of his ideas of archive and collective memory, and his strategy of taking everyday images – those that attract our attention in newspapers, magazines and photography albums – and bringing them together in an imaginary museum of the mind where they can be re-arranged, compared, understood and added to. In *Das Museum im Kopf*, the separation of the images from their contexts made other elements besides their narrative content important: the vocabulary with which the photograph communicated its meaning (its symbolism and expressiveness), formal aspects such as composition and rhythm, analogies between images and the suggestive character of advertising imagery or the psychological and emotional charge of private family photographs. The new arrangements made it possible to observe the construction of different, sometimes unexpected meanings. I was also fascinated by Feldmann's way of emphasising the denotative function of the images: he presented them without commentary, adding only simple, descriptive titles – '7 *Bilder*' ('7 pictures', 1970), for example – which resulted in an agglomeration of photographs utterly unremarkable, completely lacking in purpose or message, fully devoid of formal interest and presented in an entirely unpretentious way. Once important photographs were neutralised, suggesting that in our contemporary information-culture 'important' images can no longer be differentiated from the rest. Feldmann's deadpan presentation was emblematic of the postmodern idea that in our culture 'anything goes'.

The next time Feldmann amazed me was several years after, when I saw his issue of the Austrian political magazine *profil*. In collaboration with museum in progress, a Vienna-based arts organisation, Feldmann reprinted *profil*'s 7 February 2000 issue – in the same format, on the same paper stock, with the same number of pages, the same design and the same picture layout, but without any of the text.[1] Where before outsized headlines had announced the events and scandals of the previous week, accompanied by columns full of animated discussion on the subject, Feldmann's *Profil ohne Worte* (*Profil without Words*, 2000) related nothing in text, and offered only a blank page, occasionally interrupted by images that appeared arranged in a strange, random fashion. Having lost their picture captions, the photographs no longer seemed to have any purchase on the page. Occasionally the images from the reverse side of the paper showed through, turning the pages into formal geometric abstractions.

In Feldmann's re-imagined magazine, the image becomes active, taking over the function of conveying a message from the text, rather than merely illustrating or confirming the words beside it. Nonetheless, the lack of language, combined with the radical autonomy of the images, makes us speechless, almost helpless, and it becomes impossible to reconstruct the pictures' factual context. Thrown back on the images

1 http://www.mip.at/en/werke/369.html (last accessed on 17 November 2007). Feldmann had the idea for this project as far back as the early 1970s, but it was not until 2000 that a publication was prepared to put it into practice.

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themselves, we begin to interpret them on the basis of their atmosphere, or attempt to gauge degrees of excitement, anger or goodwill from the expressions and gestures of the people portrayed. We may succeed in guessing a rough location and potential theme, but we are unlikely to identify any defined narrative, let alone any detailed background information. Feldmann renders us unable to make sense of what we are looking at, and so suggests that our habit of reading also makes us visually illiterate. Although we read the images intuitively, we have forgotten how to interpret them. As Brigitte Huck writes in the press release for *Profil ohne Worte*, 'over time and also with increasing distance from the location of the action, our ability to identify diminishes, if we deconstruct the established relationship between text and image'.

Despite its parallels with *Profil ohne Worte*, the changes that are foregrounded in another publication are different in nature: *Zeitungsphotos* (*Newspaper Photos*, 2006) is about the placement of images within printed media. This publication also has a black cover and comes in the size and format of a small school exercise book; inside, too, the white page is generously used as a medium for presenting the reproduced illustrations. Yet, here more of the original newspaper context remains around the images, which have not been isolated or cut out with scissors, but photographed by hand, effectively 'cut out' by the camera. Feldmann – with the newspaper on his knees – imitates our field of vision: this is how we read a paper, with the image at an angle, the blocks of text, the fold in the paper, the characters of the reverse page showing through.

This rough-and-ready reproduction of the newspaper pictures further emphasises the apparent cheapness of the material used. Even though putting photographs in print media can be an expensive business, the resulting images are cut-price material, available everywhere in limitless quantities. This cheapness has its equivalent in our fleeting glance over the open pages, scanning for topics that might interest us: criminals, victims and celebrities account for a good 90 percent of the images assembled here. Nonetheless, the diversity of the material keeps us constantly on the move. It takes a degree of mental agility for us to follow the images, even though this time the picture captions are included – which makes nearly all of them identifiable.

The accumulation of so many photographs – and there are more of them in the small book Feldmann published in 2000 entitled *Voyeur* – uncouples the images from their

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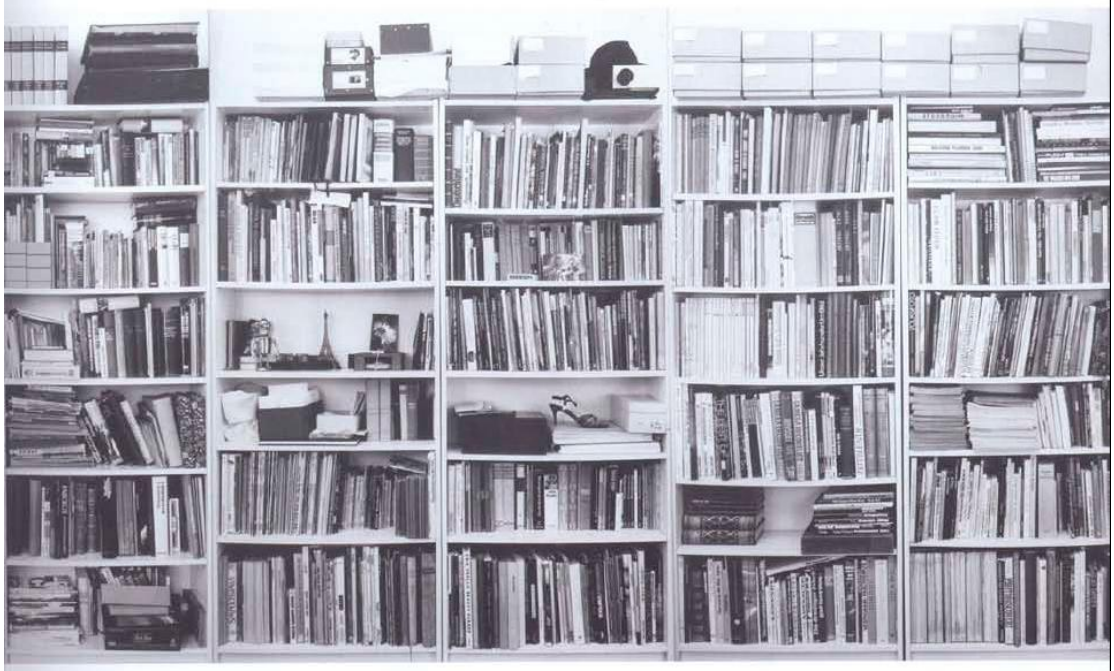
original connection to a person or event portrayed, and places them instead in a collective iconography that he is in the midst of assembling. As we, the voyeurs, leaf through the books, we start to classify the types of images we encounter: whether they were produced by amateurs for private purposes, by news photographers for the press, by set photographers for film advertisements, etc.[2] We can identify the purposes they were made for because we have seen pictures of these kinds an infinite number of times before – we recognise their lighting, their camera angle and their composition, and therefore understand the codes of their message. Even the most intimate images fall within a potential generalisation. After they have lost their specific meaning and become generic, something else happens: we as viewers are able to project our own experiences onto them.

2. AGAINST THE *ONE* PICTURE

Every camera shows a different woman. I've already got many pictures of her, and she always looks different. I don't know where I am with them. The woman I live with has never been captured in photographs. [...] *In every picture she's a different type of person. When she is beside me, the whole range of possibilities unfolds in each moment.* [...] *The film can only ever capture one layer – the layer that happens to be outermost in the split second when the photograph is taken.*[3]



Bookshelves, n.d., five parts, each 124 × 186cm, black-and-white photographs on aluminium

This intrinsic characteristic of photography, vividly described here by the German writer Wolfgang Koeppen in 1986, is also at issue in Feldmann's book *Porträt. 50 Jahre einer Frau* (*Portrait. 50 Years of a Woman*, 1994), which assembles, in chronological order, three-hundred photographs of an unnamed woman from childhood through to the age of 50. Feldmann lays a stranger's life before our eyes and invites us to witness it. He shows the fragmented passage of time, its leaps and bounds from place to place

2 Feldmann holds the many photographers whose images he uses in equal esteem. Many of his books end with words similar to these: 'Thanks ... to all the resourceful people who enabled by their inventive work the creation of this world of paper'. Hans-Peter Feldmann, *Voyeur*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2006, 3rd edition, n.p.

3 Wolfgang Koeppen, 'Joans tausend Gesichter', *Liebesgeschichten. Ein Lesebuch*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004, p.215.

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and from event to event. The photographs fulfil our expectations (she gets married) and disappoint them (she has no children). They invite us to study hairstyles, fashions and interiors; they incite us to compare the poses characteristic of different periods of life, and to recognise the holiday destinations of this generation of central Europeans. Using Harald Weinrich's words, in *Porträt* Feldmann 'sees in the faces of other people he encounters daily the work of "time the artist", slowly but also perceptibly making adjustments to their features'.[4] Through their sheer quantity, the three-hundred portraits do achieve one thing: they provide a more effective portrait than any individual image could have done on its own.[5]

Throughout his 40 years as a collector, Hans-Peter Feldmann's engagement with the photographic image and the way it represents our age suggests that he, to use André Malraux's phrase, is effectively 'writing' a 'history of what can be photographed'.[6] The many books he has produced assemble a 'social iconography' extending from private visual mementos to press photographs to the title pages of *Der Spiegel* magazine. Malraux, Aby Warburg and Pierre Bourdieu introduced the notion of the 'imaginary museum', the 'social uses of photography' and the idea of a Mnemosyne Atlas: these could be proposed as the larger concepts behind Feldmann's obsessive collecting of photographs.[7] Those three authors experimented with arrangements and combinations of photographs, accentuating the comparison between different genres. They worked with reproductions rather than original images, discussed the role of photography and above all proposed the transformation of the traditional museum and its well-preserved, decontextualised artefacts into a conceptual, iconographic institute, on the understanding that, as Rosalind Krauss has said, 'the photograph archive is a source of knowledge which no museum could ever equal'.[8] Following on from these ideas, Feldmann seeks to grasp all applications and themes of photography, including souvenirs, science, war, reportage, fashion, advertising, entertainment and art, as well as the unusual, the normal, the comic, the tragic, the dramatic, the beautiful and the ugly. '[A]n imaginary museum, unlike any museum that previously existed, has opened its doors.'[9]

With his image compilations, Feldmann is constantly building this museum of the contemporary world in the mind and/or on paper – and books are a medium that is ideally suited to this purpose.[10] Like a traditional museum, the published archive also isolates its objects from their original context in order to build a new, different framework. The objects in this museum appear to have no value or uniqueness – they are the all-too-familiar; but as a part of our throw-away culture, they become desirable when everything else has been thrown away, when the temporal distance from the images makes them extraordinary again. More so than any other museum, this archive can never complete its collection, but it can sometimes achieve a certain level of closure through the use of simple sub-categories: *Alle Kleider einer Frau* (*All the Clothes of a Woman*, 1974); *Die Toten* (*The Dead*, 1998); *Porträt and 100 Jahre* (*100 Years*, 2001). Feldmann approaches his project so that despite its potentially gigantic proportions it lifts itself from the exemplary and so reaches (always partial) conclusions.

Inside pages of *Porträt*, Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1994

4 Harald Weinrich, 'Die Zeit und das Werk (Proust)', *Knappe Zeit*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2004, p.148.
5 The changes worked by time also fascinate Feldmann in other contexts – for example, in the pairs and sequences of photographs where he seeks out locations he has seen in old, found photographs, and photographs them again from the same vantage point. Here, too, time is the artist — re-working things, again and again, at irregular intervals. See Helena Tatay (ed.), *Hans-Peter Feldmann. 272 Pictures*, Barcelona, Paris, Winterthur and Cologne: Fundació Antoni Tàpies/Centre national de la photographie/Fotomuseum Winterthur/Museum Ludwig, 2001, p.215.
6 André Malraux, *Psychologie der Kunst*, Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1947, p.29.
7 See, respectively, André Malraux, *The Imaginary Museum* (1947), Pierre Bourdieu, *A Middle-Brow Art* (1965) and Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas* (c.1927).
8 Rosalind Krauss, quoted in Herta Wolf, *Paradigma Fotografie*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002, p.391.
9 A. Malraux, *Psychologie der Kunst*, *op. cit.*, p.12.
10 However, Feldmann's imaginary museum, based on these collective image treasures, also encompasses three-dimensional work. In the form of small plaster casts we meet the *Venus de Milo* and Michelangelo's *David*, who appear as trivialised kitsch figurines. They are not given names, but a title such as *Frau ohne Arme* (*Woman without Arms*, 1978) turns the Greek goddess into a limbless woman. For Feldmann the collection of the state museum — a 'collection of wreckage' — becomes reactivated through the mixing of high and low. In 2006 he organised an exhibition in the antiquities galleries of the Kunsthalle zu Kiel, where his updated ancient heroes with rosy bodies and bright-yellow bleached hair romped about with their original stone counterparts. The title of the exhibition — 'Die beunruhigenden Musen', or 'The Unsettling Muses' aptly summed up its effect.

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Each of the photographs reproduced by Feldmann was once overflowing with life. Even the simplest of them contains any number of stories, yet now they have lost much of this life and energy: they have been made anonymous by their publication in an alien context, by the passage of time and by the absence of commentary. As a result, the ghostly quality that is fundamental to all photographs comes to the fore. Feldmann's re-organisation of the images, his 'objective' ordering by genre, theme (jumping people, legs, mouths) or formal analogies distances us from them. The images are subordinated to an unvarying, repetitive sequencing principle, an unhierarchical arrangement and a disciplined use of the pictures, make them even more anonymous. We are more affected when we can recognise the events – such as ageing in *Porträt*, or the political events of he RAF (Red Army Faction) in *Die Toten*. In the preface to her portrait of Susan Sontag, who in texts such as *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) subjects the impact of mass-

media images to careful analysis, Elisabeth Nöstlinger asks, 'What reality do the pictures show, and what reality do they bring about?'[11] Feldmann is aware of the many possible ways his viewers can answer that question – they may slip inevitably into the role of voyeur provoked by the image's content (*Voyeur*'s sensational photos, for example, included hangings, shootings, accidents, arguments, celebrities, people who are too small, too fat, too beautiful, too naked...); they may adopt the role of a moderately

Inside pages of *Zeitungsphotos*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007

11 Elisabeth Nöstlinger, in her introduction to E. Nöstlinger and Ulrike Schmitzer (eds.), *Susan Sontag. Intellektuelle aus Leidenschaft. Eine Einführung*, Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2007, p.8.

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interested newspaper reader (as in *Zeitungsphotos*); they may be drawn in by their own story in pictures (in *100 Jahre*); they may react with indignity or satisfaction to the equal billing given to victims and criminals in *Die Toten*; or may simply be enticed to keep looking by the seductive quality of the portrayed subject.

If Hannah Arendt's motto was 'say what is', then Feldmann's is 'show what was'. In order to do this he brings time to a standstill once again: by collecting and keeping pictures, and then publishing them again. Newspaper photographs in particular have currency only in the moment of their appearance – after which they are immediately replaced by others. A few which are particularly scandalous or moving may get reprinted again and again, becoming representative of a whole generation, but except in *Die Toten*, Feldmann tends to avoid these, perhaps because they lack the strangeness of the ordinary.

4. VICTORY OF THE TRIVIAL

When we discover the all-too-ordinary in a world from which we still expect the extraordinary, as when Feldmann saturates the art world with an eerie proliferation of everyday images, the result is a feeling of unease that is initially difficult to define. Questioning this world's values could be seen as a possible goal of the pictures and therefore of the unease they provoke in the viewer. This unease could also suggest a fear of the victory of the trivial, orthe fear that one day art might capitulate in the face of powerful competition from the entertainment culture. But it might also work towards an awareness that we, too, belong to this world evoked by Feldmann, even though our ego constantly strives to deny this allegiance because it sees itself as something out of the ordinary.

As well as bringing such direct psychological responses into play, Feldmann is playing an intellectual game with the media and with the society that bows down before it. Feldmann enacts a philosophical analysis of the media: he depicts photography as the medium of the twentieth century, an act of iconography; he arranges the images by type, in a sociological study; he makes fashions and other changes observable. He has understood that, to paraphrase Robert Fleck, anonymous, apparently banal and valueless photographs are the most significant archive, the true monument of the twentieth century. But also, because of that, he seems to adhere to Herbert Franke's words: 'The task to capture our times by means of photography might also be seen as an intellectual game, a sort of order problem setting itself as the goal – science or *l'art pour l'art*.'[12]

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In an interview with Willoughby Sharp, editor of the art magazine *Avalanche*, Feldmann was asked the question 'What do you consider one of the most important aspects of your work?'[13] He responded with an image: from a wall of posters, in front of which crowds of people are heading in one direction, the provocative eyes of a young woman stare out at us; the people in the crowd are looking either forward or towards the photographer (or us). The image offers a precise answer to what has always occupied Feldmann in all his work: the media, the individual and society, and the relationships between them.

12 Herbert W. Franke, 'This is a tricky question', in Jörg Boström and Gottfried Jäger (eds.), *Can Photography Capture our Time in Images? 25 Years Bielefelder Symposia about Photography and Media*, Bielefeld: Kerber, 2004, p.23.

13 Werner Lippert, *Hans-Peter Feldmann / Das Museum im Kopf*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1989, p.133.

Translated by Susan Mackervoy

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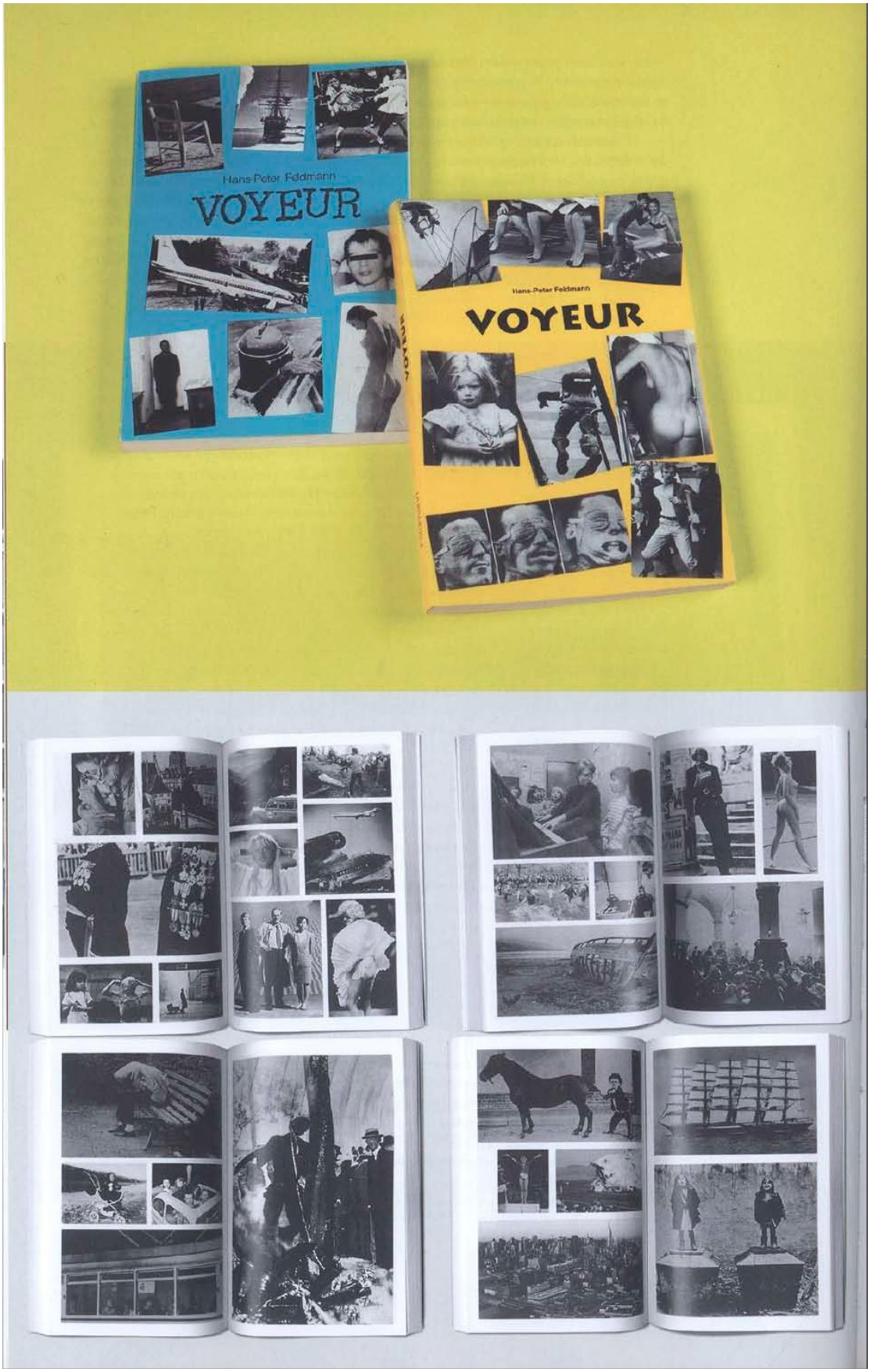

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Cover and inside pages of *Voyeur*, first and second editions, La Flèche: OFAC Art Contemporain, 1994 and Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1997

Art In and Out of the Age of Terror: On Hans-Peter Feldmann's *Die Toten*

– Dieter Roelstraete

I will not accept that there should be first-class and second-class cemeteries. All enmity should cease after death.
– Manfred Rommel, mayor of Stuttgart during the *Deutsche Herbst*[1]

FACING TERROR

If mass-scale terrorism truly is the defining political obsession of our times – whether its perceived danger or urgency is a self-perpetuating illusion or not is a question that must remained unanswered, *for now* – it is definitely one that contemporary art continually struggles to come to terms with. The spectral, faceless nature of present-day terrorism (that of 9/11, of course, as well as that of senseless sectarian violence in post-Desert Storm Iraq, not to mention that of the state-sponsored military-industrial variety) has proven to be a rather arid source of inspiration for contemporary art. Indeed, when it comes down to dealing with this new brand of terrorism, the first decade of the twenty-first century has so far produced surprisingly little in the way of convincing artworks; we need only invoke the well-meaning but ultimately lacklustre example of Robert Storr's Arsenale exhibition in the 52nd Venice Biennale to prove our point.

This awkward state of paralysis in the face of terror has not always been the case; indeed, the relationship between art and terrorism has been one of the great troubling romances of twentieth-century culture, and the romantic identification of the artist with its outlaw warrior ('unlawful enemy combatant') has been one of the more controversial hallmarks of avant-garde ideology. It is a long and hallowed tradition that stretches all the way back to Gustave Courbet, a pivotal figure in the Parisian Commune uprising of 1870, and – after having (in part) been materialised in the aesthetic claims of the Russian Revolution of 1917 – reached its first apogee in the belligerent rhetoric of Dada and Surrealism. For instance, in his 'Surrealist Manifesto' (1924) André Breton famously proclaimed the terrorist act of shooting into a peaceful crowd to be *the* authentically Surrealist, artistic gesture.

As Boris Groys has pointed out, however, 'today this gesture seems to be left far behind by the recent developments' – the reference here is to the anonymous mass-scale terrorism of Al Qua'eda and its various subsidiaries, rivals and opponents – making

1 Quoted in Robert Storr (ed.), *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2000, p.64. Rommel's quote comes at the end of a thoroughly-researched account of the events that lead up to the so-called German Autumn of 1977, the dramatic high-water mark of Red Army Faction terrorism that is the subject of Gerhard Richter's acclaimed suite of paintings *October 18, 1977* (1988), as well as, in a more general sense, of the work by Hans-Peter Feldmann that is discussed in the present essay. As Storr says: 'When it became public that out of respect for the dead prisoners' wishes [those of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Enselin and Jan-Carl Raspe, the leaders of the Rote Armee Fraktion who allegedly committed suicide in their cells in Stammheim prison near Stuttgart on 18 October 1977], their families had made arrangements to inter them together in a cemetery on the outskirts of Stuttgart, conservatives seeking to obstruct the plans and have their common grave relocated protested that the site would become a shrine. In one of the few genuinely noble moments of this otherwise dismal saga, the mayor of Stuttgart ruled against the ban' — the poignant irony of course being that the city mayor himself was the son of German Wehrmacht hero Erwin Rommel, who was forced to commit suicide for his involvement in the 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler. Rommel's dignified insistence that 'all enmity should cease after death' directly reflects the humbling moralistic tone of Feldmann's *Die Toten*, in which death is once again hailed as the 'Great Leveller'.

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Breton's original provocation sound simultaneously tame, naïve and (worst of all, for a temperamental Surrealist) inappropriate.[2] Who needs the mad Surrealist gunning down six, seven people *in* a crowd when Al Qua'eda can take care of the *whole* crowd at once? It is a well-known fact that when life imitates – or, as is the case in this instance, *surpasses* – art, it usually means that art is at the losing end of the equation. Surely Breton, who died a man of impeccable bourgeois tastes, would rightly hesitate to call the Virginia Tech shooting (or, alternately, any unspecified massacre involving countless nameless victims in Baghdad's Sadr City) a Surrealist performance, and it is precisely in this singular moment of hesitation, in said state of paralysis before 'facts' that have effectively become stranger than fiction, that art reveals its dramatically reduced capacity to relate to the contemporary condition of 'post-political' terrorism. It is this same state of incapacitation that was already hinted at in the only partly baffling Surrealist response of Karlheinz Stockhausen to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, which the aging paladin of German avant-garde music (who knows a thing or two about terror), called 'Lucifer's greatest work of art'. This, of course, was nothing but an ill-phrased admission of *defeat*, acknowledging the fact – made all too clear in the devil-like pillars of smoke that rose from the rubble of the Twin Towers, a spectacle that seemed custom-made for immediate televisual dissemination – that art had obviously and irreversibly lost the 'battle' (if it ever could be called that) with modern-day terrorism to capture the hearts and minds of the global media audience.

Here we find the true meaning of Boris Groys's felicitous saying that 'we all know bin Laden as a video artist first and foremost': Osama bin Laden (his name is used here as a symbolic representative of terrorists worldwide who use the symbolic weaponry of video messaging just as much and just as convincingly and consistently as hi-tech explosives) is the world's greatest video artist and/or disaster movie director, demonstrating a degree of media-savviness that effectively puts his 'rivals' in contemporary art to harrowing shame.[3] (This is not to say, of course, that the interest of art lies in the mastery or production of spectacle or in challenging other people's mastery in that same field, nor that art was ever truly engaged in a 'battle to capture the hearts and minds of the global media audience'. In this respect, bin Laden's true rivals are not so much denizens of the art world – the power and ambitions of which are grossly overrated in Groys's comparison – but more probably the likes of Roland Emmerich and Jerry Bruckheimer.) No one has better understood the viral powers of the image as transported through the various networks of the global media archipelago than the masked, knife-wielding terrorist on YouTube who kneels down to behead yet another clearly recognisable UN envoy, and the humbling realisation of the subsequent loss of power and prestige on the part of the art world – indeed, how are we going to contend with *that*? – has surely helped to motivate contemporary art's gradual turning away from the appalling bleakness of current terrorist events, and back towards a supposedly more rosy, nostalgia-infused picture of terrorism – that is, towards terrorism as a *historical genre*. Likewise, the unending ignominy of the Iraq war has us longing for more ambiguous and intellectually challenging images of terror, as well as for a more ideologically complex and 'human' concept of terrorism – a kind of terrorism which we can much more easily understand as the story of a firebrand type of idealism gone horribly (but, ultimately, understandably) wrong. Or how else should we explain the veritable art industry that in recent years has sprung up around the iconic imagery of the Baader-Meinhof-Gruppe and their offspring, the Rote Armee Fraktion? Gerhard Richter's seminal suite *October 18, 1977* dates back to 1988 – back when the RAF was still active: their last high-profile assassination, of German banker Alfred Herrhausen, took place in 1989 – but it is only in the last decade or so that the likes of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof have become instantly recognisable, staple items in contemporary art's catastrophiliac imagination. Meinhof in particular – no doubt because of the exemplarily tragic course of her fate, from righteous journalistic indignation to despair and self-loathing in Stammheim Prison – has done remarkably well: she is the weary heroine (among others) in works by Sue de Beer, Sture and Charlotte Johannesson, Johannes Kahrs and Annik Leroy, and was one of the pivotal figures, of course, in the

2 See André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane), Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1972, p.124.
3 Boris Groys, 'The Fate of Art in the Age of Terror', in Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder (eds.), *Concerning War: A Critical Reader*, Utrecht and Frankfurt: BAK/Revolver, 2006, p.94.

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much-publicised, well-timed exhibition 'Regarding Terror' held at Kunst-Werke in Berlin in 2005, which also included works by Dara Birnbaum, Johan Grimonprez, Jörg Immendorf and Sigmar Polke.[4] The exhibition was certainly a mixed bag that received many mixed reviews, but for me the stand-out piece of that exhibition was unquestionably *Die Toten* by Hans-Peter Feldmann, perhaps the best work of art (certainly since Richter's widely discussed inaugural gesture) to have come out of the present culture's ongoing obsession with the legacy of German left-wing terrorism – reaching fever pitch as I am writing this very article, while Germany is readying itself for the thirtieth anniversary of Stammheim's bloodiest night – and a potent reminder, after all, of art's enduring powers of remembrance and admonition in the face of the grim and grisly numerical facts of terrorism.

PORTRAYING AND NAMING THE DEAD

If the obvious point of comparison and reference will always remain Richter's *October 18, 1977* series of paintings, it is worth pointing out some of the features that set *Die Toten* apart from its justly illustrious counterpart. First of all, there are the truly immense differences in the respective works' economic realities and value systems, which have obvious and deep implications for our understanding of art's relationship to terrorist violence: whereas Richter's paintings may safely be assumed, given their relatively modest formats, to be among the world's most expensive, the price of Hans-Peter Feldmann's *Die Toten* is exactly €12.80, the amount I paid for my copy of the book in which the images are assembled – because, as the artist himself pointed out to me in a conversation conducted in Antwerp in September 2007, ***the book itself is the work of art.***[5] (The work as I saw it installed in Berlin is the only 'exhibition copy' of *Die Toten* in existence and the artist's safely guarded private property: it consists of the same images as those reproduced in the book, framed and hung one after the other in a single straight line, starting in 1967 and ending in 1993.) The fate of Richter's paintings prompts the sardonic observation that 'anti-capitalist' art – that is to say, art that documents the lives and deaths of those embroiled in revolutionary critiques of capitalist society – makes for the biggest sales in today's art market, and it is hard to resist highlighting the irony of the tortuous path that leads from Stammheim to the vaults of one the world's wealthiest museums.

Feldmann's book, by contrast, is effectively as proletarian as the cause the RAF claimed to espouse – in its formal qualities, that is – and gracefully circumvents the art market's thoroughly capitalist value system. For Feldmann, images of terror (and art that reflects upon images of terror) must be 'free' – they cannot, under any circumstances, be allowed to exploit (however subtly or unassumingly) the suffering they depict. If something matters to Feldmann in the way *Die Toten* is handled by both the general audience and the art-world professionals, it is this absolute insistence on 'objectivity', on the work's elevation above questions of valuation and validation: everything must be done to ensure the faultless transmission of the work's central message – that during the short reign of Baader-Meinhof and RAF, ninety people met a violent death and this calls for nothing but mourning. No apologies, no criticisms, no justifications and no reconsiderations, just mere remembrance of the loss of human life. And isn't the frailty of human life – as the very condition of both its decidedly unheroic status and its wondrous beauty – the central concern of Feldmann's lifework?

4 'Regarding Terror: The RAF Exhibition', Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 30 January – 30 April 2005.

5 The book was published by Feldmann Verlag, Düsseldorf in 1998. The acquisition of the entire series by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1995 for an undisclosed sum was a highly public event, met with a great deal of scepticism in Germany, where many observers feared that, once lifted out of their historical context, the works would lose their 'political' meaning — and perhaps this is precisely what Richter, always anxious to protect art from the possibility of ideological abuse, desired. Already here, the contrast with Feldmann's work could not be greater: to this date, Feldmann continues to refuse any invitation to exhibit *Die Toten* in the US, precisely *because* an American audience would not be able to fully and properly understand the context which produced the images *in* this work (as opposed to the work itself) — an American audience lacks the necessary historical experience of left-wing terrorism that is needed for an adequate reading of the work (meaning, in other words, that the artist *believes* there exists such a thing as 'an adequate reading'). Feldmann also fears that showing *Die Toten* outside its historical context — Germany, or countries such as France and Italy, which have similar experiences with left-wing radicalism turned terrorism — would make the images more receptive to *glamorisation*, thereby serving as aesthetic justification for some of the terrorists' crimes. Richter's paintings, by sheer virtue of their immense value, cannot help but contribute to the culture of glamorisation that has surrounded remembrance of the RAF in recent years.

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Die Toten contains 192 pages in total, with a grainy picture of an identified '*Toten*' on ninety of them. The images are of victims and perpetrators alike – a distinction that quickly loses all meaning in the numbing barrage of names and black-and-white photographs that follows the book's frontispiece, a blank page on which only the etymology of terror is explained: it is the Latin word for *fear* – and are all taken from mass-print media, mainly newspapers and magazines. Underneath each picture, Feldmann has reprinted the name of the *Opfer* ('sacrifice') in question, as well as the exact date on which they fell victim to the spiralling vortex of political violence. The first in this long series is Benno Ohnesorg (died 2 June 1967), 'a pacifist student who had never before taken part in a demonstration' shot dead during street protests against the visit of the Shah of Iran to Berlin.[6] The death of Ohnesorg was the defining, galvanising moment that not a few elements on the radicalising fringes of the German student movement had been waiting for, so to speak: shortly after delivering a speech commemorating Ohnesorg's violent death, the fiery Ensslin met the impetuous Baader and the rest, as they say, is history – the history of *Die Toten*. The book's dismal circle of death is closed, 26 years later, with a post-mortem photograph of Wolfgang Grams, a third-generation member of the Rote Armee Fraktion who was killed during a botched escape attempt. (After Grams follow three more names of three RAF-associates who, to this day, remain missing in action.) In between Ohnesorg and Grams stretch the killing fields of Germany's years of lead, with all the usual suspects in attendance and many more unknown individuals scattered between them, whom Feldmann makes it his business to give both

Die Toten, installation view at 'Regarding Terror: The RAF-Exhibition', Kunst-Werke — Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2005. Photograph by Rainer Jordan

a name and a face: next to Baader, Ensslin, Herrhausen, Meinhof, Meins and Schleyer, we also find Edith Kletzhandler, Baron Andreas von Mirbach, Walter Pauli, Fritz Sippel and Ronald Woodward. The pictures vary considerably in origin and style, and some of them of course are well-known (evidently, not all choices seem equally innocent, and neither is 'innocence' an option for Feldmann):[7] an emaciated Holger Meins on his deathbed; Meinhof inside the courtyard of Stammheim, hands raised above her head; Klaus Frings, '*ganz rechts mit Kamera, wenige Minuten vor seinem Tod*'; and many members of the military posing in uniform. The occasional inclusion of Arab, English

6 R. Storr (ed.), *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, op. cit., p.46. Shortly afterwards, Ohnesorg would also be memorialised by Fluxus artist Wolf Vostell in his work *Benno Ohnesorg* (1972).

7 The disparity of the pictures with which Feldmann decided to represent the 'authors' of most of the violence documented in the book is noteworthy and prompts the raising of not just a few eyebrows: Andreas Baader, whom none other than Jean-Paul Sartre famously called '*un con*' (both 'idiot' and 'asshole') immediately after emerging from his ill-fated encounter with the former in his Stammheim prison cell, is portrayed lying in a pool of blood; on the next page we see a picture of his associate Gudrun Ensslin, made during much happier and peace-loving times, pushing a pram (possibly containing her son Felix, who would go on to co-curate 'Regarding Terror') during a protest, sometime in the late 1960s, against war toys. Diedrich Diederichsen also points to this 'meaningful interpretative decision' — a central feature, it seems, of the artwork's fundamental moralistic concerns. Diedrich Diederichsen, 'Photography and Remembrance: Feldmann, RAF, Schlick, Kippenberger, etc.', *Camera Austria*, no.66, 1999, pp.23—25.

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Jonathan Netanjahu
† 4.7.1976

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or Israeli names help to remind us of the truly international context in which this conflict must be seen: American soldiers manned various army bases spread across Germany, while Palestinian freedom fighters taught the German 'revolutionary tourists' a thing or two about hijacking airplanes. (As is well known, the deaths of the original Baader-Meinhof gang members were precipitated by a hijack gone wrong in Mogadishu, Somalia.)

The point of this numbingly precise, 'objectifying' enumeration, however, is not so much to stress the obvious differences that set all these people apart – age, appearance, name, nationality and the entire complex spectrum of ideological positions and political convictions that these identifications might entail – but the terrible sameness, instead, of their violent death, *of all deaths*. As a matter of fact and principle, Feldmann refuses to think of these differences as somehow related, by way of explanation (hence also, inevitably, *justification*), to the cause of death, precisely because this strategy of identification through differentiation has provided the means by way of which so many of *die Toten* have been remembered until now – primarily as casualties of a war of 'us against them'. (It is up to the viewer to take sides.) To Feldmann, however, the eponymous dead are simply human beings first and foremost, some of who sadly fell prey to the tragic delusion of liberation through political violence; in death, they too find themselves

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reunited with the people they sought to liberate themselves from, as well as – or, more to the point of Feldmann's primary artistic decision, *especially* – with those who fell along the way, as so much collateral damage. As such, *Die Toten* may be read as a poignant, sobering sermon on the nullity of all political action in the face of the inevitability of death. Or, as Diedrich Diederichsen put it: 'The radical heterogeneity of these pictures ... becomes a radical illustration of a general – tragic – notion of contingency and fate. For as an illustration, the pictures only refer to the person whose death they mourn or register at the first level, and then widen to embrace general human tragedy, the dominance of fate and the futility of political intervention at the second and third levels. This latter interpretation may be made – all political pursuit becomes small and futile in the face of the great reckoning, all public activity converges on the obituary, funeral, state ceremony, lying in state and the sympathising family or – once again – public.'[8]

Is *Die Toten* a *political* work? No; in many ways it is, in fact, an apolitical one, because it emphatically (and radically) refuses to make any distinction between the 'victims' on the one hand and the 'perpetrators' on the other – the distinction

8 *Ibid.*, p.22.

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Alfred Herrhausen
† 30.11.1989

of conventional political reason. It is precisely this hopelessly Manichean view of Germany's autumn of violent discontent, in which the so-called perpetrators are so often portrayed as victims in their own right *and vice versa*, that continues to dominate public debate around the legacy of the RAF and its ramifications for our attitudes *vis-à-vis* present-day terrorism. *Die Toten* is a *humanist* work of art above all else, revealing the deeply empathic moral concerns that lie at the heart of Feldmann's archival practice, in which any semblance of detachment – the bane of so much appropriationist or encyclopaedic work such as his own – is always, by definition, deceptive. In this respect, *Die Toten*'s immediate frame of reference is not so much the current vogue for nostalgic 'Baader-Meinhof art' – in fact, the work felt strangely out of place in 'The RAF Exhibition' at Kunst-Werke, not in the least because of its objectivist moralism – but the bigger picture of Feldmann's own lifework, with both *Frauen im Gefängnis* (*Women in Prison*, 2005) and his celebrated *100 Jahre* (*100 Years*, 2001) as the two most obvious points of comparison. It is with these photo works, as well as with *Die Toten*, that Feldmann places himself squarely in the great tradition of humanist photography that stretches all the way back to the likes of August Sander, Walker Evans and beyond – a tradition that is more conventionally wedded to the celebration of life than to the glorification of death.

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Andreas Baader
† 18.101977

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