In this presentation, I propose a series of reading strategies for representing historical trauma, focusing on the 2008 film adaptation of *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (dir. Uli Edel; script by Bernd Eichinger; after the 1985/2008 history by Stefan Aust). The film is a complex, epic reconstruction of the events of the Red Army Faction, from the multiple origins of the movement in the late 60s to its culminating catastrophe of the “German Autumn” of 1977. A well known series of images of the RAF’s demise by Gerhard Richter bears witness to the exceptional affect—a combination of violence and mourning—of these events. Given the cultural repression of the direct representation of these events after 1977, both film and images become historical moments of narrative reconstruction. At the same time, the emergence of the RAF itself appears as a moment of narrative reconstruction—of collective responsibility for crimes of the Nazi era in an era of incomplete denazification—undertaken through violent, nonnarrative means of group action. In order to understand these events in their transformative reconstruction of history, I employ a reading of Theodor Adorno et al.’s 1950 study *The Authoritarian Personality*, along with an account of its reception in postwar Germany and in terms of Adorno’s philosophical account of representation and mimesis. Adorno’s dialectic between democracy and authoritarianism provides a prescient framework for the issues the RAF acted out. My presentation forms part a chapter of a projected study to be titled *Modern Authority and the Transnational Imagination*, and is informed by our investigation into what I term “radical historicism” in my current seminar on “Modernism, Historicism, and ‘The Present.’”

**Wednesday, December 7**

**12:30 PM - 1:30PM**

**2339 Faculty/Administration Building**

**Free and Open to the Public**

As a critic, Barrett Watten has published two volumes (*Total Syntax* and *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics*, winner of the 2004 René Wellek Prize) and is the coeditor of *Diasporic Avant Gardes: Experimental Poetics and Cultural Displacement* and the forthcoming *A Guide to Poetics Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field, 1982–98*. He is also known as a language centered writer, the author of book length collections of experimental writing (*Frame* [1971–1990], *Bad History*, and *Progress/Under Erasure*), and a collaborator on multiauthor works such as *Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union* and *The Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography*. He was a 2005 Senior Fulbright Scholar at the University of Tübingen, Germany; has lectured in American Studies programs throughout Germany; and is currently involved in organizing graduate exchange programs with German partners. He teaches modernist studies and poetics in the Department of English at Wayne State.