Gerhard Richter in his studio, 1995. Photograph: Sabine Moritz
gerhard richter
life and work

in painting, thinking is painting
If I may apply a famous saying by physiologist Emil Du Bois-Reymond ("ignoramus et ignorabimus," meaning "we don't know and we will not know") to art, it seems that, when it comes to the meaning of Gerhard Richter’s paintings, with their great complexity of subjects, exceptionally varied use of form, and abrupt stylistic twists and ruptures, most people are quick to settle for a sense of ignorabimus. A cursory reflection on the now complex explanations and interpretations of his work particularly conveys this in terms of transcending the aesthetic phenomena of Richter’s oeuvre to determine the specific importance of his works within the context of contemporary culture. This was a major problem I viewed with caution when, many months ago, publisher Lothar Schirmer approached me and asked if I would write a book on Gerhard Richter. In other words, I had to select works within a limited framework and compose a suitably distilled text about them. It was almost an equal mix of temptation and challenge. But once I had an initial, provisional draft, I was in need of good advice, given that I had well exceeded the specified limits regarding the number of illustrations and volume of text permitted. My fascination and enthusiasm had rendered these framework specifications null and void—or I had simply chosen to ignore them. After a period of sobriety and reflection, however, the publisher decided not to call for rigorous editing, but rather to run the financial risk and complete the Düsseldorf Trilogy, if you will, with this book dedicated to Gerhard Richter, following on from my publications on Joseph Beuys (1991) and Bernd and Hilla Becher (2003). I must, of course, first thank Gerhard Richter himself for his great trust and support (our first collaboration was back in 1973). Soon after, a publication by Schirmer/Mosel Verlag accompanied an exhibition at the Lenbachhaus. It was the start of a cooperation on various projects that has spanned more than forty years. It is thus not just for this publication that I am tremendously indebted to Lothar Schirmer. And this is equally true for his long-time editor Birgit Mayer, who expertly and responsibly eliminated all factual inaccuracies and repetitions, as well as linguistic shortcomings. And, last but not least, Regina Kaiser was extremely helpful in solving countless technical problems, going above and beyond to create an impressive overall package of images and words. I therefore feel just as indebted to Angela Motlik-Ernst, who consistently facilitated fast, smooth communications. I also want to mention all the other publishing staff involved in this book, even if their involvement was mostly on a sporadic basis. The fact that I benefited immensely from many authors who have similarly focused on Gerhard Richter’s works has been acknowledged elsewhere in this publication. There is no doubt, however, that the greatest moral support, encouragement, and patience, not to mention sacrifice, over the last few months has come from Monika Steinhauser. And I would therefore like to dedicate this book to my wife, in deep gratitude.

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INTRODUCTION

"I see myself as the heir to an enormous, great, rich culture of painting, and of an art in general, which we have lost, but which nevertheless is an obligation: In such a situation, it’s difficult not to want to restore that culture, or—just as bad—simply to give up, to degenerate.” When Gerhard Richter said this in 1986, he was in his mid-fifties. He was able to look back on a slew of national and international successes that culminated in the exhibition Gerhard Richter, Bilder 1962–1985 at the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf at the time, given that this retrospective later toured the National Gallery in Berlin and the Kunsthalle in Bern, before being shown at the Museum moderner Kunst / Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts in Vienna. From a purely external perspective, there was no reason to give up, even though exhibition-goers could wonder whether and to what extent Richter was perpetuating the “great, rich culture of painting.” This conundrum seems to have been on his mind when, in 1993–94, another retrospective of his work was presented in four different countries: at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn, at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, and at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid.

The series of sweeping reflections would be continued several years later with Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting. The project organized by Robert Storr in 2002 to mark the artist’s seventieth birthday, meanwhile, once more reminded viewers of the polysemous richness of Richter’s works, to such an extent that it, in fact, became nothing less than a victory parade stopping at museums in New York (Museum of Modern Art), Chicago (Art Institute), San Francisco (Museum of Modern Art), and Washington ( Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden) When asked at the time how he wanted to be seen, the painter responded almost self-deprecatingly: “Perhaps as a guardian of tradition. I’d prefer that to any other misconceptions.” The US tribute was followed by a European homage ten years later to celebrate the artist’s eightieth birthday. It was entitled Gerhard Richter: Panorama, and did the rounds of the Tate Modern in London, the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. This project, too, showcased the vast diversity of painterly idioms and the complementarity inherent in Richter’s works. Once again the works elicited a great response, some of which was enthusiastic and lasting. If one were to recapitulate the numerous other world-wide exhibitions large and small that focused on specific themes, genres, techniques, or time periods—many of them backed by research and conveying new insights—it can be stated that no other German artist in the second half of the twentieth century achieved an international status comparable to that of Gerhard Richter. In saying as much, we must be aware that exhibitions constitute just one of many aspects on which an artist’s reputation is based.

If, in 1986, Richter saw himself as the heir to a great, painterly, albeit long-lost tradition (a view he would continuously confirm over the following decades), the automatic response would be to ask how he would justify his work in a cultural setting marked by rapid changes and profound contradictions, and in the face of great political and social upheavals. The following statement, also from 1986, provides an initial idea: “The plausible theory, that my abstract paintings evolve their motif as the work proceeds, is a timely one, because there no longer exists one central image of the world (world view): We must, therefore, work out everything for ourselves, abandoned as we are on a refuse heap, without center, and without significance; we must cope with the advance of a previously undreamt-of freedom...this theory is no less useless than ludicrous should I paint bad pictures.”

While Gerhard Richter was certainly able to take some pleasure in the diagnosis made in 1948 by Hans Sedlmayr in his iconic book Art in Crisis: The Lost Center, 1957 (Verlust der Mitte)—to which Richter’s expression “lost center” refers—when studying the anti-modernity polemic during his youth, he decisively rejects the therapeutic, archconservative conclusions drawn by the former-Nazi art historian. In any case, the painter’s two statements illustrate his dialectic way of thinking, as evidenced here in the polarity of a great cultural heritage on the one hand, and in the deficit caused by a comprehensive loss of meaning on the other. Both statements, repeated in similar form, demonstrate that Richter, like few other artists of the second half of the twentieth century, reflects on the dilemma of his status as a painter, and in so doing consistently articulates the leitmotifs of his work. Many of his self-characterizations revolve around the contrast between tradition and innovation, belief and ideology, engagement and neutrality, self-determination and fatalism, emphasis and control. Equally, comparable contradictions define the vivid nature of his works. Objective subjects compete with abstractions. Gray imagery contrasts with rich colorism. Overt gestures face up to strict formalism. Controlled coincidence is followed by a sense of regularity. Dynamic structures replace closed surfaces. Transparency supersedes opacity. The banal contradicts the beautiful, and indifference counteracts emotion. The singular work prevails over the series. His work is defined as much by the fluctuation between opposites: traditional and avant-garde attitudes, between impersonal processes and subjective motivation, between construction and destruction, as it is by the contrast between narration and speechlessness. Suggestion and diminishing comprehensibility may be seen as leitmotifs that pervade the work and create a discourse that repeatedly unleashes a “reflexive potentiation of deceptive beauty” (Klaus Krüger). It is not reality he seeks to put on canvas, but rather “the deceptive semblance of reality,” Richter says in 2002.

During his first few years in Düsseldorf and a period of reorientation, Richter evidently came to see his own relationship with his work as ambivalent, just as his work, in turn, owes meaning and truth not just to him, but also to the audience. At the time, this was primarily his artist friends—who did not hold back with their comments—and later also gallery owners, critics, and collectors. The objectification achieved by such critique, be it negative, positive, dismissive, or encouraging, may play a pivotal role in defining and developing one’s own artistic conception. Richter experienced this with his coworkers and friends from the 1960s and 1970s in varying degrees of intensity and duration when, during conversations, debates, and joint
1,024 Colors, 1973
[1024 Farben]
Lacquer on canvas
CR 355, 299 x 299 cm
Kunstmuseum Krefeld
43
4,900 Colors, 2007
[4,900 Farben]
Lacquer on Alu-Dibond
CR 901/Version XI, 680 x 680 cm
Collection Fondation Louis Vuitton pour la Création, Paris
Color Streaks, 1968
[Farbschlieren]
Oil on canvas
CR 192.2, 200 x 200 cm
Private collection
4. INPAINTING AND GRAY PAINTINGS

Between 1966 and 1973–74, Richter painted rural and urban landscapes, seascapes, clouds, and portraits. He also produced several large-format works aimed at harmonizing the illusion of the depiction with the illusion of the depicted, running the risk of creating a tautology of perception and concept. This is true for his paintings of curtains (pl. 33), details (fig. 132), and shadow-casting windows (CR 158, 159, 210/1, 3, 4), as well as three-dimensional offerings such as Seven Tubes (fig. 61). In 1971, Richter noted: "Perhaps the Doors, Curtains, Surface Pictures, Panes of Glass, etc. are metaphors of despair, prompted by the drama that our sense of sight causes us to apprehend things, but at the same time restricts and partly precludes our apprehension of reality." It is not reality that grows alien and irrational to him through artistic reproduction; his doubts instead center on perception itself, and therefore on the question of whether our eyes perhaps deliver images that potentially only present illusions, which thus cannot convey an appropriate idea of reality's true quality. Among the subjects tackled by Richter in this context are Gray Streaks (fig. 60) and Color Streaks (pl. 44). Created in 1968, the pictures effectively fill the gap between visual perception and visualized images, and the practice of self-referencing painting, their titles implying an ambivalent reality. A streak denotes a stripe-like fleck in glass and, more generally, describes a slippery, slimy splotch signifying something incomprehensible. Both meanings are vividly apparent in the pictures.

Other examples from this era similarly illustrate that figurative and abstract paintings are not unrelated opposites, but rather that fluid or abrupt transitions are sometimes also evident. The non-figurative inpaintings appear to spring straight from works such as the large Park Piece (pl. 45), to the extent that some of them (CR 312–319) are reminiscent of wild vegetation. This is particularly apt given that, by referencing the natural colors of green and ocher, Richter himself plays on such associations, and consequently talks of an "artificial jungle." whereby the "shades and forms emerge through the constant blending of brushstrokes; they create an illusionistic space, without any need for me to invent forms or signs." The brush goes on its allotted way, from patch to patch of paint, first mediating and then to a greater or lesser degree destroying, mixing, until there is no place left intact. It is almost a soup, a non-hierarchical interweaving of form with space and color. Pictures, which emerge, which result from the making. Not creations, definitely not creative, in the sense of that mendacious word (I mention this, because I so loathe the word) but creaturely. To

are almost absorbed by the canvas. The overall impression conveyed is that Richter tried out all conceivable options, going from one extreme to the other. Of note here is the bold move—bordering on desperate—to initially apply the colors to the medium in an isolated fashion, and only then begin to mix them, with broader or narrower brushstrokes that dance across the image in rhythmic sweeps and violent darts until a uniform all-over has been achieved. The originally pure colors become fractured, heavily nuanced shades, and, in exceptional cases, even generate an unspecified complexity that adds a sense of indecision and intangibility to the resulting tableaux. Anything specific, concrete, or defined is swallowed up by the atmospheric. Richter described this painting process so vividly, it is best read in his own words: "It took me a little time to remember that I have tools with which I can make anything: Red—Blue—Yellow (and light = white). Pictures as the result of process. Three primary colors, as the source of endless sequences of tones: either tone by tone, systematically multiplied and accurately presented (color charts) or this artificial jungle. The shades and forms emerge through the constant blending of brushstrokes, they create an illusionistic space, without any need for me to invent forms or signs. The brush goes on its allotted way, from patch to patch of paint, first mediating and then to a greater or lesser degree destroying, mixing, until there is no place left intact. It is almost a soup, a non-hierarchical interweaving of form with space and color. Pictures, which emerge, which result from the making. Not creations, definitely not creative, in the sense of that mendacious word (I mention this, because I so loathe the word) but creaturely. To
Bridge (at the Seaside), 1969
[Brücke (am Meer)]
Oil on canvas
CR 202, 93 x 98 cm
Neues Museum, Staatliches Museum
für Kunst und Design Nürnberg
Loan from Collection Böckmann, Berlin
Seascape (Sea-Sea), 1970
[Seestück (See-See)]
Oil on canvas
CR 244, 200 x 200 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin
Seascape (Cloudy), 1969
[Seestück (bewolkt)]
Oil on canvas
CR 235, 200 x 200 cm
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart
Teide Landscape, 1971
[Teyde-Landschaft]
Oil on canvas
CR 283, 120 x 180 cm
Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen
Portrait Liz Kertelge, 1966
[Portrait Liz Kertelge]
Oil on canvas
CR 108, 65 x 70 cm
Private collection, Berlin
166
Betty, 1977
[Betty]
Oil on canvas
CR.425/4, 30 x 40 cm
Private collection, Cologne
Betty, 1988
[Betty]
Oil on canvas
CR 663/5, 102 x 72 cm
The Saint Louis Art Museum
223
Cage (5), 2006
Oil on canvas
CR 897/5, 300 x 300 cm
Tate Gallery, London
Cage (6), 2006
[ CR 897/6, 300 x 300 cm]
Tate Gallery, London
225
Birkenau, 2014
[Birkenau]
Oil on canvas
CR 937/1, 260 x 200 cm
Gerhard Richter Archiv, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Loan from private collection

226
Birkenau, 2014
[Birkenau]
Oil on canvas
CR 937/2, 260 x 200 cm
Gerhard Richter Archiv, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Loan from private collection
ABSTRACT PAINTINGS

227
Birkenau, 2014
[Birkenau]
Oil on canvas
CR 937/3, 260 x 200 cm
Gerhard Richter Archiv, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Loan from private collection

228
Birkenau, 2014
[Birkenau]
Oil on canvas
CR 937/4, 260 x 200 cm
Gerhard Richter Archiv, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Loan from private collection
Abstract Painting, 2016
[Abstraktes Bild]
Oil on canvas
CR 946/1, 200 x 250 cm,
Private collection
230
Abstract Painting, 2016
[Abstraktes Bild]
Oil on canvas
CR 946/2, 200 x 250 cm
Private collection
231
3/25/1986
[25.3.86], 1986
Oil on photograph
CR 25.03.1986, 99.4 x 77.8 cm
Barbara G. Pine, New York
A black-and-white photograph overpainted with oils and measuring 99 × 78 cm is dated March 25, 1986 (pl. 231). This work represents the spectacular inception of an art form that would preoccupy Richter repeatedly in the ensuing years. Strikingly noticeable at the center of the image alongside broad, irregular patches and horizontal strips in olive green, yellow, and reddish tones is a blue, wobbly brushstroke that divides the now bark-like, now flat layers of opaque paint material like a vertical axis, so that very few details of the photograph—which serves as the vehicle of sorts for a painterly invention—remain recognizable. What is visible suggests an interior, evidently Richter’s studio, containing rolling furniture and an office chair, on whose back rest hangs a sports jacket. Parts of a pull-over can also be seen. In the upper area underneath the mélange of colors there is a vertical rectangle whose proportions correspond to those of the photograph. There are sufficient clues to indicate that in the photograph, the painter sits very close to one of his works, perhaps in order to correct or supplement some detail. Subsequently, Richter began applying oils directly to photographs, as if working with the mono-type technique, placing the photographs on a squeegee covered in paint residue. In other instances, he spreads the paint with a palette knife in a horizontal or vertical direction. Chance and control are held in a balance, with the color tones either retaining their purity or being smeared with others to form streaky conglomerates. The photographs function as a kind of foil in a procedure that does not merge heterogeneous elements into a single plane, but instead puts them into competition with one another in two incompatible layers. On the one hand, the representational aspect of the photograph is occupied by the impasto materiality of the paint; on the other, the depicted reality emerges to appear in those places that are left uncovered by the nonrepresentational materiality of the paint.

“I take lots of photographs,” said Richter in an interview in 1988. “It’s difficult to find something you can take a photograph of, and then you have lots of photographs and it’s difficult to decide which one is right to paint.” Richter’s own photographs, often produced in extensive series, rarely betray any conscious artistic impulse. For the most part, they are unspecific, and resemble rapid snapshots, propelled by the hope of photographing something by chance that might satisfy the requirements of a reality that allows itself to be happening. Hence, Richter stresses, and tries to coax them in a specific direction in order to generate a bridge between the representational, the illustrative, the immaterial, the flat, and the abstract, the non-descriptive, the inmaterial, and the sublime.

Manifested in individual pictures, series, or books are various contrasts and contradictions. This is not about transforming photography into painting. The photograph, which refers to an objective world, remains flat and unspectacular. Enamel and oil paint are intransparent in character, and have an almost sculptural quality. Applied in a quasi-destructive act, their materiality remains so dominant that the levels, despite a variety of coloristic and formal affinities with which Richter is concerned, contrast quite clearly with one another, at times to the disadvantage of the overpainted photographs. Determining the conceptual basis of such picture sequences are thematic, formal, structural, and coloristic contradictions and correspondences. Their striking inconsistencies can be traced, to cite Lue M. Schreide, to the opposition between “great abstraction” and “great realism,” as explained by Kandinsky in 1911 in his essay “On the Question of Form” in the Der Blaue Reiter almanac. While Kandinsky’s utopian intentions and ideological conceptions, however, were directed toward the overcoming of positivism and materialism, Richter’s photographs overpainted with oils address a fundamental dichotomy, yet do not strive for interpenetration, because the connection to reality of the illustrative photograph and the reality of oils not only contradict but also challenge each other.

The contrast with respect to material and technique does not apply, however, that no relationships exist between photography and oil painting. When we perceive an overpainted photograph as an overall form,
this is due primarily to formal correspondences between both levels, as contingent as these may seem. In the final analysis, it is vision, which is to say the artist’s gaze, that determines which results become part of his larger oeuvre, or are instead discarded. In the process, form takes absolute precedence for Richter, while content is secondary.¹

**FI R N E Z E**

The edition “Firenze,”⁶ dating from the year 2000, is not to be confused with the eponymous small edition that Richter had produced in 1999–2000, which documents the book Firenze, edited by Dietmar Elger in 2001. The photographs that have been reworked with oils are three rather innocuous postcards of rows of houses set along the languidly flowing Arno River (pl. 236). To the dominant diagonal sweep into spatial depth toward the right, areas of impasto oils respond, almost like tatters coming off paper, applied to the surface in four different ways.⁷ In the process, a cliché is not only identified, but is also severely disrupted. This cannot fail to affect visitors to this city of such great cultural and art historical significance, for the intervention with lumps of oil paint that appear to have been carelessly flung disavows this stereotypical, hardly spectacular view of riverside buildings in the shadow. To be sure, the cycle could be understood in other ways, but, given the complexity and subtlety of the individual treatments, it can hardly be dismissed as a merely formal exercise. The exciting aspect of the series is not least the way in which the three similar views evoke divergent reactions in form and color, excluding the idea of a morphogenesis.⁸

What is not of grave importance in landscapes can turn out to be so in figural scenes. A viewer might ask himself involuntarily whether this procedure would not lead to an unwitting violation of the depicted figures, or even their annihilation in effigy. Asked about this,⁹ Richter referred to such considerations as far-fetched, explaining that he handled many such photographs in this way. The great majority would turn out to be unfruitful or wayward, and were hence discarded. This speaks for the remoteness of the gaze of this artist, who concerns himself primarily with formal or coloristic correspondences. For Richter, then, a photograph is first and foremost a trigger for coloristic, formal, and material intervention, while for the most part he regards the subject as secondary—doubtless a source of irritation for the unbiased viewer.

An example are the various family photographs. In one of the overworked photographs, which is dated November 22, 1999, the artist is recognizable together with his family (pl. 237). The photograph, more guessed at than actually seen, evidently depicts a happy group set against the panorama of Florence. In any event, the physiognomies of Richter and his wife would suggest this, while little more is visible of the other individuals than a hairstyle or a face turned toward the side. Like a violent intrusion, expansive areas of white paint, tinged with green and black, cover much of the vacation idyll, which essentially vanishes, with the exception of the above-mentioned details. Viewed as an abstraction, the image works, seeming coherent and convincing, but in terms of content, an abyss seems to form. The same can be said of many overpainted photographs that show Sabine Moritz, either alone (pl. 233) or together with one of their children (pl. 234). It is also true of photographs of the artist himself, for example one dated December 4, 2006, where whitish veils of paint have rendered him virtually invisible. What remains separate in the paintings after photographs is conjoined in the overpainted photographs often with convincing, at times, though, with double-edged results, it would appear. As an artist who is concerned primarily with form, Richter would, perhaps, be reluctant to interpret his family photographs, reworked and at times distorted with thick oil paint, in terms of content as well as psychologically.

The assumption that the overpainted photographs are the result of a genuinely artistic development cannot be verified. The radical separation of originally related tendencies into two formally and semantically distinct levels (photograph here, painting there) represents only one of a number of possibilities to which Richter had recourse, if he felt it was justified. In particular the constant alternation between repetition and variation, between regularity and rupture are topics of immediate character in such series. The way in which he creates relationships despite all contradictory inescapability is something he would practice and perfect later on as well. Publications such as Sils, Ohl‘rit, and Beirut confirm this convincingly, while major works like War Cut and Wald follow a different principle, leaving the photographs untouched but confronting them with text. It is fair to say, meanwhile, that in terms of quantity alone, the singular photograph supplemented or reworked with an enamel or oils, represents a large portion of his total oeuvre. Not everything here is significant, excellent, or important, but nearly everything possesses personal character, and is characterized by nonchalance, authority, formal and coloristic confidence, but also by wit and lightness, by irony and earnestness—all of which enlarges our conception of an oeuvre that is incomparable in its complexity and vastness.

**BOOKS**

From the very beginning, Richter has been interested in other media, and has either recited texts at his exhibitions (e.g. in Fulda in September of 1962) or played back recordings of texts (as he did at his first exhibition at René Block’s gallery in late 1964–early 1965). And, early on he began to reflect on his art, and to write about these reflections. Some of these projects became known only much later—such as his Comic Strip of 1962, for which he originally failed to find a publisher. Only in 2004, more than half a century later, this fantasy narrative of drawings and text was published, about isolation and self-discovery, the relationship between the individual and the crowd, as well as the conflict between isolation and an egomaniac’s pretensions to power. Revealed within was a hitherto completely unknown side of the artist. In subsequent years, he designed invitations or wrote press releases for his exhibitions. Many of these activities were the result of his own initiatives, while some emerged from proposals or suggestions from others, among them artists, curators, art dealers, and publishers.

Richter’s interest in self-publishing manifested itself for the first time in 1966, when a modest booklet appeared on the occasion of an exhibition at the Galerie h, run by August Haseke in Hannover. As the title Polke / Richter. Richter / Polke suggests, the slender volume was conceived and designed collaboratively by the two artists.¹⁰ This booklet has been commented on in some detail in the opening chapter; it does not elucidate the exhibition as such but instead asserts itself as an independent add-on, alternating between preten-
sion and self-irony. Sentences such as, “I find some amateur photographs to be better than the best Cézanne,” are intended to trigger dissent, proving some latitude for their works in exhibitions, “which are directed primarily against explanations and preconceived judgments.”

There was also a strong desire to provoke. Everybody was producing serious catalogs, and we wanted to make fun of everything,” Richter said half a century later.

In the period that followed, Richter developed clear structures for his publications, elevating regularity and control as primary criteria. This becomes very evident not least when looking at the long and highly complex history of the artist’s book in broad outlines. Numerous such books have been published since the second half of the 20th century. They distinguish themselves from the ubiquitous mass-produced products of the publishing industry not only through a specific combination of text and images, but also in their designs—high aesthetic ambitions, indulging in extravagance and radicalism. Particular printing techniques, expensive paper, and a special typography are all testament to this, while a limited, small edition makes the product exquisite and precious.

Leaving aside the early Comic Strip and the booklet for his exhibition at the Galerie h, Richter remained indebted to conventional principles of book design in his later books, exhibition catalogs, and editions of interviews or notes. “When Richter chose the book as a medium, he wanted its material presence to appear familiar so that it would not distract from the images he was presenting in this framework.” This became abundantly clear in 1972 when he published the first edition of the Atlas. This was followed by additional, often rather modest publications, some as boxed sets of prints. 128 Details from a Picture (Halifax 1978) of 1980 is no exception, and an important publication also discussed in more detail earlier in this volume. It is worth recalling, however, how the artist succeeded in showing the inherent artistic possibilities of the painting Halifax through a rigid arrangement of pairs of black-and-white illustrations in identical format respectively on each of the 64 pages. Only a book has the potential—double-page by double-page—to suggest an inexhaustible reservoir of “communications” and “messages,” with the consequence that the photographic results are conveyed through a double processing and organization: “The resulting 128 photographs were organized in two versions: one, the sequential order that is presented here under the covers of a book, and a second version which is presented pictorially in grid-form (128 Details from a Picture, 1978/1978 × 400 cm, photographs on board, framed, Krefeld).” Appearing in 1998 on the basis of this photographic material in an edition of 1,000 copies was a new version of the book: “128 Fotos von einem Bild / 128 Details from a Picture (Halifax 1978 III).” This already indicates the enormous importance Richter attaches to the choice of form of appearance and dissemination of his ideas and aesthetic strategies. In the end, the self-designed book seemed to be more important than the exhibition catalog, conceived by other graphic artists or designers, even though he never lost sight of that medium, and did not refrain from interfering when it appeared necessary. A few books that belong in this context were published as late as the 1990s. Notably, their number increased with the artist’s advancing age, and nearly all of the most important books appeared only after the start of the new millennium. Discussed below are a few exemplary books.

**ICE**

A book published in 1981 with the lapidary title Ice was limited by Richter to the reproduction of his own photographs of the Arctic Sea, taken in 1972 during a trip to Greenland (fig. 153). The layout, with its mirror imaging, rotations, doublings, and gaps in these conspicuously pale photographs of heroic icebergs, slick bodies of water, and dark coastlines with sparse vegetation and little villages, follows its own rhythm; it captures the restrained melancholy of hostile nature, an impression that is counteracted by the strong colors of the cover, with its intermingling of flowing and luminous tones. Emerging here are the coming apart and interlocking of various visual levels, modes of depiction, and techniques that were to determine large areas of Gerhard Richter’s art, particularly toward the late 1980s.

**SILS**

The booklet Sils appeared in 1993 on the occasion of a Richter exhibition in Nietzsche’s former retreat in the town of Sils. It contains texts by Peter André Bloch and Hans Ulrich Obrist, the editor. The small volume (just 90 pages) was reprinted in German, French, and English in 2002, and again in German, English, and Spanish in 2009. With two exceptions (see below), the reproductions are photographs reworked in oils that were taken in the Swiss canton of Engadine in 1990 and 1991. The reworkings by the artist allow both techniques to appear in competition with one another (fig. 154), as though wanting to do justice to an experience of Nietzsche’s which the writer noted on September 3, 1888, after composing the preface to his Twilight of the Idols: “Stepping out into the open air in the morning, I discovered the most beautiful day which Upper Engadine had ever showed me—transparent, glowing colors, encompassing all of the contrasts, all of the transitions, between the ice and the south.”

In this singular landscape, the philosopher—whose works Richter had read in his youth—had experienced an immediate exposure to the laws of nature, while in Richter’s artistic production, the fundamental principles of morality and aesthetics, of concept and form, depiction and comparison, experienced an incredibly fresh shape.

The series of reworked landscape photographs, which focus primarily on the snow-capped peaks of the surrounding mountains, are initiated by the reproduction of the multiple Transformation of 1968, which shows the transformation of a mountain into a sphere, (putatively) undertaken jointly by Polke and Richter. The series is concluded by another multiple, created in 1992, namely a photograph of a stainless steel ball.
Chapter 14

Fig 154
Gerhard Richter, Sils, 1992
Artist’s book
Verlag der Buchhandlung
Walther König, Cologne 2002, unpaginated

weighing 16 kilograms, and each of the eleven copies was inscribed with the name of one of the surrounding mountain peaks.¹⁵

Engendering additional formal relationships are the round lumps of paint on the photographs, joined by small white dots that resemble snowflakes, along with photographs of a full moon above the mountain range, while a portrait of the artist introduces a personal aspect into the booklet, testifying to his on-site presence. In this publication, to be sure, painting is pushed to the foreground, sometimes more, sometimes less, but the motic linkages and the interplay of the two media endow the pages of the book with an autonomous status. Not least because of the modest format of 56, which is smaller than a conventional postcard, the sometimes sublime, sometimes inverted mountain panorama appears simultaneously poignant and repellant. The result is a small masterpiece shaped by a combinatorial process, with the work of the artist manifesting itself, albeit in reversed order, with the text retaining its register of the included texts.

WAR CUT

In 2004, Richter published War Cut. This book, comprising 344 pages, contains close-ups of Abstract Painting 1987 (fig. 155) taken by the artist in 2002 at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, without knowing what he might eventually use them for. The reproductions are combined with text that appeared in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on March 20 and 21, 2003, when the Iraq War broke out.

It is well-known that the terror attacks in New York on September 11, 2001, served the United States, Great Britain, and a “coalition of the willing” as a justification for launching an attack on Iraq eighteen months later, which was further legitimized by the assertion that Saddam Hussein had gained access to weapons of mass destruction, and was seriously pursuing plans for an attack on the United States and its allies. This was later revealed to be untrue, the United Nations Security Council and the global public had been deliberately misled. The war against the regime of the Iraqi autocrat, was launched on March 20, 2003, and ended on May 1 of the same year. Before long, it would become evident that this military operation resulted in the destabilization of the entire Middle East which persists until the present day, an almost inconceivable destruction within Iraq, and a large number of deaths, to say nothing of the radicalization of significant segments of the population and an increase in terrorism, also operating internationally.

Richter’s book War Cut was published in a comparatively large print run of 2,400 copies in German, as well as 1,500 copies in French and 5,000 copies in English, the latter version containing articles from the New York Times of March 20 and 21, 2003. With the exception of a special edition of 100 copies, it differs fundamentally from the elaborate artist’s book of a more traditional stamp, oriented toward a special connoisseur clientele via aesthetic design and a limited edition.

The photographs of his large-format paintings, taken in 1987, scan the surface of the squeegeed paint layers, as though he wanted to decipher enigmatic phenomena of the macro level with his photographic details (pl. 239). The arrangement of these illustrations in connection with empty spaces on the one hand and blocks of text on the other (fig. 156), follows an ingenious layout undo until the middle of the book, and then repeats itself, albeit in reversed order, with the text retaining its consecutive configuration. Found at the end of the volume is a diagram of the layout as a whole, along with a register of the included texts.

ABSTRACT PAINTING 825–11, 69 DETAILS

The book Gerhard Richter: Abstract Painting 825–11, 69 Details, was produced in 1996. The small abstract painting (61 x 51 cm), which dates from 1995, dissolves into rectangular parcels by means of color photography, which visualize in particular the squeegee fissures of the top paint layer, recalling geological formations or Bengal lights on primordial landscapes or frozen waterfalls. Evoked here is an almost surreal phantasmagoria that is barely perceptible from a distanced view of the painting. Like 128 Details from a Picture (Halifax 1978), the book demonstrates how the wealth of pictorial processes resides in the detail, and is only disclosed through a close view. The dissolution into rectangular elements also betrays a conceptual rigor, as though the aim was subordinating the results of controlled chance to a minimalist grid in order to demonstrate the quality of mutually exclusive strategies. The publication was conceived and designed by the artist. Alongside the 69 illustrations, the unpaginated volume, with its cardboard slipcase, contains a text by Hans Ulrich Obrist, 4,090 books were printed in German, 5,000 in English.

Aside from a new edition of 128 Fotos von einem Bild / 129 Details from a Picture, Halifax 1978 III, which was published in 1998, it was to take some years before Richter would return to the medium of the artist’s book. War Cut was published in 2004 with Walid following in 2008, and Obrist was published in 2009. In 2010, Suhrkamp Verlag published December, combining twenty-nine stories by Alexander Kluge with thirty-nine pictures by Gerhard Richter. A second edition in color of 142 dates from 2011. That same year, Richter’s Night Sketches, consisting of diagrams, hatchings, tentative linear webs, and scribbles alongside figural and physiognomic studies from the period between August 14, 2005 and April 19, 2009, was published in London. The slender volume is a kind of supplement for Richter, 66 Drawings, Halifax 1978, which, accompanied by two texts by Gerhard Storch, was published in 1997 by the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum. Derzis was published in 2012, and in 2013, Suhrkamp Verlag published Message from Quiet Moments, to which Alexander Kluge contributed eighty-nine poems and Richter sixty-four pictures. Further books could be named as well, each meriting a specific commentary. While that is impossible here, three books will be examined in more detail, since they have a special status within the spectrum of Richter artist’s books as a whole.

Fig 155
Gerhard Richter, “Abstraktes Bild” [Abstract Painting], 1987, Oil on canvas
CR 648/2, 225 x 200 cm
Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris
Immersing oneself in War Cut—turning the pages, looking, reading—the reports and commentary, drawn from war reportage of the time, evokes an impression of the destruction, the violence, the suffering of the civil population, and the deaths of so many people. But the reader also encounters reports about parliamentary debates, diplomatic activities, currency fluctuations, stock market reports, economic events, and historical and cultural reminiscences. In the process one thing becomes clear: the impotence of the remote viewer, who perceives, reflects, and perhaps comments on dreadful events from a safe distance. The global and virtually instantaneous transmission of filtered facts, which gruesome occurrences in real time often render outdated as soon as they are disseminated, transforms military confrontations and their immediate consequences into global media events that are as spectacular as they are remote. Often, it is a question not simply of informing and enlightening the populace, but instead of merely disseminating propaganda, designed to legitimate the war. Although War Cut deals with the Iraq war, it is not a political or historical account, and does not take the form of a critical commentary or a moral evaluation. Instead, Richter seeks to come to terms with a reality that is propagated by the media, subordinating this form of a critical commentary or a moral evaluation.

Richter suggested that it was less mourning and more rage that motivated him to take up the project War Cut. “Mainly rage because war is upsetting, because it demonstrates our impotence, because obviously we can’t prevent it, because we cannot assess it anywhere near adequately. That is also why I absolutely avoided political or historical account, and does not take the form of a critical commentary or a moral evaluation. Instead, Richter seeks to come to terms with a reality that is propagated by the media, subordinating this form of a critical commentary or a moral evaluation.

As a result, conceptual activity is thrown back upon itself, the consistency of the text is undermined, and language as a medium of conclusive explanation is discredited. With some exaggeration, one could say that the text, literally molded into a desert of blisters, and fissures, which alternate with empty space, demonstrates our impotence, because obviously we cannot assess it anywhere near adequately. That is also why I absolutely avoided any reference to the truth content, they ultimately reinforce the helplessness and impotence of the remote observer, thereby eliciting a sense of indifference. To be sure, the war is not disclaimed in and with War Cut; yet emerges as something utterly inconceivable, incomprehensible, and opaque. In part, this happens indirectly (in the color details), in part directly (in the text passages from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung). The violence, the terror, the suffering, and the wholesale destruction cannot be relayed by images from entirely different contexts, while the words that refer to them directly, can only express this context in vague terms, since they are withholding the facticity of events from the reader. On disparate levels, art and painting at most evoke something resembling a counterworld, creating intermittent bridges between that which is referenced by the words and that to which the color details refer. Richter’s War Cut is a stringently structured and deeply pessimistic statement which can, by virtue of its formal rigor, easily be misread. While John Cage stated that he had nothing to say, and was saying it (a sentence Richter has cited repeatedly), Richter’s message, as formulated indirectly in War Cut, seems to be: I have absolutely no hope and I’m showing it. In an interview conducted in late May, 2004 by Jan Thorn-Prikker, Richter suggested that it was less mourning and more rage that motivated him to take up the project War Cut. “Mainly rage because war is upsetting, because it demonstrates our impotence, because obviously we can’t prevent it, because we cannot assess it anywhere near adequately. That is also why I absolutely avoided
expressing any opinion, which is completely useless here and obstructs the attempt to come somewhat closer to the truth . . . But I did not have so much cause to mourn. September 11 horrified me to a greater extent." A painting executed not long after the book War Cut confirms this statement, and demands to be considered in this context by virtue of this extraordinary quality, and not least by virtue of the immediate evidence of its motif.

**SEPTEMBER**

The main trigger for the war against Iraq was the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001. One year after the publication of War Cut, Richter produced a midsized painting (50 x 72 cm) which bears the lapidary title September (fig. 157). Recognizable in the image are the events that caused the two skyscrapers to collapse, killing more than 3,000 people and injuring many more. Gerhard Richter was expected in New York on September 13, when an exhibition of his works was opening at the Marian Goodman Gallery. On September 11, he found himself on a flight to New York with his wife when the terrorists flew the first plane into the World Trade Center. Immediately thereafter, the entire airspace of the United States was closed to passenger traffic, and the Richters’ Lufthansa flight was rerouted to Canada. Two days after landing in Halifax, Richter and his wife returned to Cologne.

For the so-called West as a whole, the destruction of these powerful global symbols of capitalism was an inconceivable shock and a traumatic event. The eradication of this symbol of economic and financial policy had already been predicted when the twin towers were still being built, in fact, it was first attempted in 1993, after various disaster movies had conjured up precisely such a criminal act. The impact on global politics of this devastating act of violence was immediately evident, while the initially unforeseeable consequences began to emerge only when the frightful emotions of shock and horror began to subside in intensity, and countermeasures were being considered. All too predictably, this only led to further atrocities, and eventually to military confrontations. The consequences are still felt to the present day, bringing unspeakable suffering to so many people, particularly in the countries of the Middle East.

Some observers perceived these events as a clash of civilizations, while others identified the causes of this outbreak of violence as politically and economically motivated, without overlooking the contributory factor of religious fanaticism.

In 2005, when Richter created his picture, these fatal events were not yet anticipated in all of their consequences, but the attack on the World Trade Center was still strongly present in the public consciousness, not least through the powerful tide of images which flooded the media.

Compared with what eyewitnesses still recalled after many months, however, or what had been captured on film, video, and photographs, Richter’s restrained, and at first glance almost otherworldly vision of the events of September 11, 2001, emerges as an eroded visualization of the explosion of these monuments into blood, rubble, and ashes, and could, in a sense, even be received as a revenant ghost. When Richter began this painting several years after these events, he had access to a number of color reproductions from magazines, which he integrated into the Atlas. Also serving as points of references were various large-format abstract drawings from 2005. While working on the painting, he mounted some of these sheets alongside his easel (fig. 158). The final form of the composition was based on a drawing with the same dimensions as the canvas. While the towers are depicted in painstaking detail, the explosion and the smoke are only indicated schematically.

According to statements by the artist, the genesis of this painting was strongly shaped by a sense of contradiction. "The little picture of two towers," remarked Richter in 2006, "was very colorful to start with, with the garish explosion beneath the wonderful blue sky and the flying rubble. That couldn’t work; only when I destroyed it, so to speak, scratched it off, it became acceptable." 44

The painting (fig. 157) is characterized by black, deep gray, and pale blue, and depicts the moment when United Airlines Flight No. 175 flew into the southern tower just after 9 a.m., triggering a massive explosion. This dramatic event is only hinted at in the painting. On the right-hand side of the picture, the twin towers are only vaguely recognizable, while dark shadows and blackish smoke, together with the whitish dust from the detonation, almost entirely mask the cool, yet intense blue of a late summer day in New York City. This darkening seems to spread across the picture surface from above, while an impression of subsidence and potential disappearance is evoked by horizontal streaks of dark gray paint; in other areas, the paint has been scraped off to such a degree that the structure of the canvas emerges clearly. This hint at a surface tension in the paint layer, which threatens to tear, and the transparency of the upper layers seems to transform the painting into a brittle and partly porous foil. Painting and canvas are perceived in their materiality, yet at the same time seem to dematerialize. On the one hand, the semblance character of the depiction is emphasized and made plausible, on the other, it is undermined by what appear to be misguided brushstrokes and patches of off-white and indeterminate gray. The smeared and superimposed elements come off as unmotivated, even disturbing, yet have a similar function to the marks made by wiped-on color as in Telluric (pl. 1) or the overpaintings seen in landscapes from the 1980s, among them Godthaab (CR 570) and Krems (pl. 147). Here however, nothing is masked, but relates directly to the events in the middle of the painting. The seemingly accidental or perhaps precisely cal-

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Fig 157
Gerhard Richter,
"September" [September],
2005.
Oil on canvas
CR 89/5, 52 x 72 cm
Museum of Modern Art,
New York
culated overtones of ostensible damage or impurities do not, however, question the picture's truth value, but instead cast doubt on the character of what is portrayed. September evokes the ambivalent impression of depicting something that cannot actually be depicted. The catastrophe and collective trauma manifested in the attack and destruction of the World Trade Center and the unanticipated consequence of this terrorist act seem to justify a desire for artistic rendition while at the same time undermining it. What is separated by War Cut is astonishingly joined together by Richter's style of painting, confirming the semblance character of the formed work and its significance very much in Adorno's spirit. "Ultimately, art is semblance in that, in the midst of meaninglessness, it is unable to escape the suggesting of meaning."43

To paint this indescribably gruesome act of violence so exquisitely is not an attempt to whitewash it, but to make people aware of the plight of those afflicted by brutality, making it more difficult, if not impossible, for the viewer to turn away once the subject of the image

had been destroyed by bombs.51 Today, the artist lives not far from the area shown in the wartime photographs. In a certain sense, September mediates between various genres. That this work has great significance for Richter is shown by the fact that in 2005, he prepared an edition of inkjet prints of this work.52

September touches on the book War Cut, and indirectly also refers to the cycle October 18, 1977.53 References to contemporary history are apparent in all three works. Here, as in many other instances, Richter places great emphasis on the primary of form. In 2004, he said: "Form is all we have to help us cope with fundamentally chaotic facts and assaults. Formulating something is a great start. I trust form, trust my feeling or capacity to find the right form for something. Even if that is only by being well organized. That, too, is form." And in reference to September 11, 2001, and the Iraq War, as well as War Cut, and in anticipation of the not yet executed picture September, he added: "In this case the facts are so overpowering, the contents so crucial, the form is also all the more significant. We need it simply to be able to deal with the subject matter."44

WALD

The book Wald was published in 2008.55 It is another artist's book with just under 400 pages and 286 color illustrations, based on photographs the artist took in the winter of 2005 in Hahnwald and in the environs of Cologne. The texts are drawn from the German-language magazine Waldgang. Magazine für Wald, Wandern, Wissen, no. 1, 2006, edited by Nikolaus Theile, although punclation marks, place names, and names of individuals were removed. In addition, the articles ("Hiking in the Spessart," "Of Ravens and Songbirds," "Watch out for Wild Boar," "Magic Trees, Mud, and Forest Dwarfs," and so forth) were randomized by a computer in such a way that the sequence of words produces neither context nor meaning. Set in blocks, they at times fill entire pages, or may be reduced to just a few lines, so that in places, a number of word cascades are set opposite an illustration. Many double pages are illustrated, while pages of pure text are rare. Despite the motivic restriction, when browsing through the pages one encounters a lively, varied course, which strongly underscores that here too, Gerhard Richter's primary interest is in the book's formal structure. Contentual aspects are not thereby withheld, but are delegated exclusively to the photographs.

Fig 158
Gerhard Richter's studio with "September" [September] 2005
The motif of the forest preoccupied Richter in 1990, when he created four exceptionally striking abstract works bearing the same title (for example, pl. 209). In particular the color scheme, restricted to an intense blue and several yellow and green tones, is certainly capable of evoking romantic associations, far more, in any event, than in the series of twelve pictures bearing the same title from 2005 (CR 892/1–12). Presumably, the series of 2005 resonates with all the romantic connotations attributed to the German forest over time, but in the works themselves, this is difficult to comprehend, because Richter has deliberately avoided any corresponding stylistic and, in particular, motific elements. Nor does the book betray any emotions for the neologism Waldenmutigkeit ("forest solitude"), first coined by German romantic author Ludwig Tieck around 1800. Ever since the forest dieback entered public awareness and discussions, particularly in the 1980s, the notion of a marvelous and beautiful wilderness, which every hiker could explore and conquer for himself, had long since come to an end.

The tradition of forest paintings, beginning with romantic renditions and Adalbert Seiter’s Der Hochwald (The Forest, 1842) or Henry David Thoreau’s Walden; or, Life in the Woods (1854), and continuing to Ernst Junger’s Der Waldgang (The Forest Passage, 1951) and the numerous publications of Peter Wohlleben, a contemporary German nature writer and forest ranger, is no more called to mind here than the countless paintings of forests by painters all the way from Caspar David Friedrich to Anselm Kiefer and his contemporaries. A mass of tall vegetation in some of Richter’s photographs evokes none of these historical renditions.

The text consists of sequences of words without punctuation marks, which form lines, are structured into paragraphs or fill entire pages. Nouns, verbs, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, articles, and conjunctions follow one another without generating any meaning. Language that is devoid of any function, of transmission, appeal, or expression, is essentially useless for communicative purposes. The most important medium in interpersonal relationships here experiences a fundamental devaluation in relation to the image. In a certain

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**Fig 159**
Gerhard Richter, Wald, 2008
Artist’s book, pp.42–43
sense, this rigorous formalism is reminiscent of Carl Andre’s treatment of words as sculptures: the minimal
ist sculptor, in particular during the 1960s, cut up pre-existing texts and ordered them into typographic images (“From Map of Poetry,” 1959 fl.), with some horizontal or vertical letters displaying additional enigmatic meanings. Richter’s approach confirms his repeatedly expressed conviction that form is every-
thing, and content merely the result of the form. On March 18, 1986, he stated that “the form . . . generates a content,” and that the emergence of the work’s appearance can be guided “to yield to this or that con-
tent.” In a certain sense, this is as true for his painting as it is for music by and after Schönberg: a trans-
fer to language is possible only at the cost of a far-reaching loss of content and meaning.

The book Wald was certainly not conceived and cre-
ated in order to refute War Cut and the way it uses lan-
uage, but it may have led Richter to the (quite evi-
dent) insight that an asymmetry between language and image cannot always be made into something aes-
thetically fruitful. In War Cut, the blocks of text convey information on various themes, and taken by them-

selves, contain meaning, while the images are oriented solely toward visually, not denoting their origin as details of an abstract painting, yet tending to cover it up. With Wald, things are reversed: here, the images supply an abundance of information, and are highly structured, while language, formalized and configured into blocks, no longer conveys a message, since seman-
tics has been liquidated by the dictate of form. The results, meanwhile, may have advanced the artist’s insight that it is better to work over series of photo-
graphs with paint rather than confronting them with words, that is, combining the visual message with painterly randomness.

This is visualized in Museum Visit, a series of 234 pho-
tographs that have been reworked with paint, which Richter created in 2011 at Tate Modern on the oc-
casion of his exhibition Panorama. In the book 88ur, pub-
lished in 2012 on the occasion of an exhibition, accompanied by an essay by Achim Berndt-Hume, the sequence is reproduced in full, only to be repeated after a block of different reworked photographs and editions by Richter, now however in reversed order and with the text printed in Arabic script. In these works and various others in the same genre, things are not what they seem at first glance. Photograph, paint-
ing, and reality appear as incompatible, though only a sharp eye and an attentive gesture can render their dif-
fferences recognizable.

Patterns

Against this background, Richter’s artist’s book entitled Patterns acquires special significance, because it is the point of departure for an entire series of spectacular and at the same time disconcerting works that probe new pictorial procedures.

Published in 2011, it is a voluminous, heavy tome with an abundance of illustrations which follow a spe-
cific principle. The point of departure is an abstract painting from 1990 (fig. 160) which motivated Richter to have a series of colored, lacquered tapestries pro-
duced in 2009. The design was based on one quarter of the painting, mirrored first horizontally and then verti-
cally. This resulted in a point of departure for the tapestry of a center surrounded by framing elements.

The composition of the painting was transformed into woven ornamentation. Since this procedure was repeated with the remaining quarters of the painting, four different carpets were created, which received Arabic-sounding titles: Musa, Yusuf, Ilan (pl. 240), and Abdü (pl. 241). The beguilingly beautiful tapestries were manufactured by Flanders Tapestries in Wielisbeke (Belgium) in an edition of ten, and it would be difficult to find anything that could compare.

Two years later, when preparing the book, Richter approached the same painting in a far more rigorous fashion. First, he cut it vertically into two halves. The left half was mirrored, and the whole then repeated. The same was done with the right half. This procedure is spelled out in the book’s subtitle: Divided, Mirrored, Repeated. This approach is continued systematically: the halves are divided into quarters, again followed by mir-
roring and repetition. Quarters then become eighths, and finally sixteenths, and so forth (pl. 242). After twelve such operations, he finally arrived at 4,096 very slender vertical strips, measuring about 0.05 mm in width and barely distinguishable now by the naked eye. The process could be continued, but would then be perceptible only through strong magnification.

The publication follows the progression of these operations up until the sixth stage, and correspond-

ently reproduces all of the sixty-four generated results (pl. 244). As it continues, the number of illustrations in this publication is necessarily reduced. Of the sub-
sequent variations, formed on the basis of 128 strips, thirty-two are still reproduced. Thereafter, however, one exemplary selection is followed by the next, with the twelfth and final group containing only seven of the 4,096 variations.

Browsing through the 221 double-page spreads of this book, the effect is kaleidoscopic. While, initially, specific color and form complexes are readily legible, and hence dominate the visual character of the spreads, this impression gradually dwindles as the compart-
mentalization that is due to subdivisions and stages of reflection rapidly increases. Soon, strips that are more or less closed and run from left to right (pl. 243), can be made out. Staccato-style repeated constella-
tions are registered after that, which set strikingly verti-
cal accents in the first half of the book, and at times trigger associations with vegetal, zoomorphic, or even anthropomorphic forms. Oriental elements only seem to play a role. Recollections of Rorschach tests also sur-
face, only to dissolve once more into the compartmen-

PATTERNS

Fig. 160
Gerhard Richter, "Abstraktes Bild" [Abstract Painting], 1990
Oil on canvas
CR 724/4, 92 x 126 cm
Private collection
tialized structure. Fractal geometry, too, might come to mind. Sequences of vertical elements seem to emerge in rhythm, being repeated at intervals, albeit at times with reduced emphasis. In this way, ornamental motifs are increasingly lost in the pattern repeat. Beginning with the resolution down to sixty-four strips (pl. 244), the horizontal layering is increasingly conspicuous, the minimalized individual elements are deprived of their character, and at the latest with surfaces consisting of 256 vertical strips, the viewer perceives a structure mostly consisting of numerous horizontal lines, which are differentiated by color, intensity, brightness, width, and marginal sharpness (pl. 245). Increasingly, similarities with the abstract painting of 1990 (fig. 160) evaporate, and, by the final third of the book, the patterns are completely extinguished.

We are confronted here with an uncommonly elaborate publication which signals by its size, weight, and design alone how the stringently performed process of transformation must be associated with significant aspirations and an aesthetic message to which Richter attaches considerable importance. Patterns holds firm to the traditional abstract painting that forms its point of departure, explicating and documenting a mechanistic technique which continually astonishes—and sometimes possibly delights—the viewer by virtue of the consistency of its progression. While the initial subdivisions into quarters and eighths keep the vertical structure dominant, a horizontal sensation quickly increases with the sixteenths. At the latest with subdivision into 1,024 elements, it is mainly stripes that are perceptible. If it were not for the repetition of minimal accents, one would not even notice the process of division. With the 2,048-fold and finally the 4,096-fold subdivision, nothing of the vertical stripes is visible any longer. Through this process of division, mirroring, and repetition, it is now only the horizontal, oscillating lines that remain recognizable. Evidently, Richter did not attempt to take the process further with an 8,192-fold division, presumably because the result would not have led to any graphically comprehensible results.

From a more long-term perspective, the consequences of this strategy also evoke something deeply disillusioning, even alarming. Emerging through the free play of flexible, unbounded forms and the richly orchestrated coloration, through multiple division, perpetual mirroring and unremitting repetition—traversing intermediate stages, generating an abundance of impressions and poetical moments—something increasingly anonymous, clear, cold, and stereotypical is generated, something that creates distance, evoking rationality and masking every trace of empathy while eliminating, ultimately, every indication of subjectivity. In contrast to such minimalist perfectionism, the painting that forms the project’s point of departure preserves a clear facture, manifest in the traces of the human hand, and hence indirectly also in the personal, controlled decisions of the artist, including all spontaneouse interventions and changes of direction, as well as potential coincidences that result from the nature of the materials used. The access to manifold forms that is so characteristic of this painting, its spontaneous or reflective metamorphoses, the subtle alterations of contour, internal structure, and surface indicate the potential of abandoning the sphere of contingency within the picture while intimating at correspondences. An overall variability and flexibility together with the monochrome mirrors and the glass panes on which he began to work in 2008.

**Strip Paintings and Glass Pane Pictures**

After this book, Richter produced various paintings that, in terms of their structure, recall what emerged in Patterns at the end of a long process (pls. 247, 248). Now, however, it is not the horizontal lines, generated from the original painting of 1990 (fig. 160) through division, that are converted into pictures. The book Patterns demonstrates only the process, which is to say the dissolution of a painting into an ever-denser series of colored lines that have no pictorial or contentual relationship with the original image, but are instead purely contingent.

In his next step, Richter had numerous strips printed, from which he then selected some to join them together vertically. He assembled the strips, dissected into ever smaller parts, in such a way that it is “as though he were no longer involved with the results of a complicated procedure, and instead with a set of directly given lines”... The decisive point was that the mechanical process flipped over into a different quality, there was a leap from strip to line, from vertical cutout to horizontal extension... In order to ensure precision as things proceeded, the digital data from the hand-mounted strips was registered and transmitted to the printer, which transferred them to paper in the desired format. The results are pictures, although the “strips” have nothing in common with painterly approaches. The obvious identity of color and prime coat in these works is dissolved in such a way that the lines do not form units, but are instead composed of pixels. The sensorial nature of the canvas is replaced by transparent acrylic glass, which impedes direct access to the paint surface... This does not, however, mean that Richter had transformed himself into a digital artist, for his thinking remained analog, and the contrast with the traditional production of paintings became evident only while he was painting... The Strip paintings flout conventional concepts of painting, and are divorced from all of the aesthetic ideas generated by the subject’s unconscious. Nonetheless, they can certainly be positioned together with the monochrome mirrors and the glass panes on which he began to work in 2008... What makes the Strip paintings stand out is the primacy of visibility, their unsentimental presence, and their fascination with chromaticism. "The more...
heightened the visual delight in the condensed sensa-
tions offered by the lines, the more the capacity of the
 beholder to define their uniqueness misfires. Without
passing judgment, Richter plunges the beholder into a
dilemma between visibility and recognition, delivering
him into a situation which demands to be articulated
outside of the familiar categories of painting.74
Through the uniform repetition and stretching of the
strips, which the viewer might conceive as continuing
beyond the boundaries of the picture, the Strip
paintings deny all illusion and all spatial experience.

Richter’s gradation of parallel lines thereby also
detaches itself from the grid, that is to say, from one
of the dominant pictorial paradigms of Modernism, which
defines a self-contained pictorial field through the
intersection of horizontal and vertical lines. The con-
trast to the works of Gene Davis, Kenneth Noland,
Agnes Martin, Sol LeWitt, Bridget Riley, and others is
striking, as Dieter Schwarz was able to demonstrate,
since all of them begin with the line as a positive agent
which shapes the design. In contrast, Richter arrives at
the lines as secondary forms from procedure, of mir-
roring and repetition of the strips.75 Connections can
be drawn between Gerhard Richter and postmodernist
American art as represented primarily by Sol LeWitt,
while any perceived affinity with forms of painting that
are dependent upon Modernist principles remains
superficial, and lacks any genuine foundation.76 To be
sure, the monumental horizontal format of these
works, measuring up to 10 meters in width, prevents
the simultaneous apprehension of such strip paintings,
yet these works have nothing in common with Barnett
Newman,77 whose large horizontal formats do not
emphasize the apparent limitlessness of the perceptual
field. Narrow, vertical strips, as in Newman’s Zips, sub-
divide and structure the visual plane, unsettling the
viewer through the interplay of figure and base. “Size
doesn’t count. It’s scale that counts. It’s human scale
that counts, and the only way you can achieve scale is
by content.”78

The Strip paintings, with their potential to suggest
infinite extensibility and high-velocity horizontal radia-
tion, by no means evoke an impression of overwhelm-
ing sublimity, quite the contrary. Richter’s choice of
exceedingly wide canvases allows any sense of scale.
They make it impossible to find a suitable position
from where to view them. The reason for large-format
painting was understood by the Abstract Expressionists
as a human and highly personal choice: “If you paint a
larger picture, you are in it. It isn’t something you com-
mander,” was how Mark Rothko explained his preference
for large formats.79 The viewer cannot be “in” the Strip
paintings, and it is impossible to enter into them—figu-
ratively speaking—in the way intended by Rothko or
Newman with regard to their own works. By virtue of
their hermetic slickness and aseptic surfaces, Richter’s
Strip paintings reject any emotionally coded response.
Pure visuality, they are instances of chilly perfection.
Their sense of remoteness and fascination is due partly
as resistance against the existent, but instead as
affirmation on the one hand and at the same time
negation on the other—not indifference then, but
ambivalence.

But that is not all. As so often, in practice, Richter
simultaneously adopts the opposite position. Produced
alongside diverse structures made of glass, the realiza-
tion of the Patterns, and his preoccupation with the
Strip paintings are enamel paintings on glass panes that
have an entirely different character (fig. 162, pls. 249–
250). Involuntarily, the viewer wonders how it is possi-
ble for the artist to pursue and to realize such
antagonistic conceptions. The Strip paintings are based
on a rational, repetitive process consisting of three
steps. By virtue of the materiality of the paint, its con-
sistency, fluidity, and viscosity, the enamel paintings
assume various and in particular highly unpredictable
forms and structures, once multiple colors are poured
simultaneously or successively on a smooth, horizontal
surface. But Richter did not aim for a completely
uncontrolled flow and admixture. Using brushes and
palette knives, and by modifying the inclination of the
acrylic glass sheets, he was able to influence the results
and guide the paint in specific directions. This process
of controlling chance can, of course, be interrupted at
any moment in order to preserve a special look or
detail. For this purpose, a glass panel in a predefined
format is placed in a selected position on top of the
colors that have just been poured out and are partly
intermingling. The glass pane is then removed and has
now become the picture carrier, having fixed the exact
configuration of the colors. This procedure can be
compared with monotype, which is also very much
dependent on framing.

With the glass paintings, it is once more the artist
who selects and decides. In doing so, he also asserts the
artistic character of the results. These steps are compa-
rable to those made for a readymade, only that the
outcome, indeed, not a readymade, but an individual,
unique, and distinctive picture that points directly to
the artist and his intentions, and, perhaps, also to his
intuition. Once again, Richter employs controlled con-
tingency, according greater leeway here to the guid-
ance procedures.

The structures generated in this way are reminiscent
of geological formations. The viewer may also recall
the marbled end papers of a bygone book culture, or
perhaps the Lackskin technique invented by André
Thomkins in the 1960s. On the other hand, the prolif-
erating, meandering, or sprawling veal-vein-like shapes
are reminiscent of a realm which appears glistening
and alien, graceful and fabulous, but triggers hardly any
associations that transcend the viewer’s immediate
sensations. Organic appearances seemingly alternate
with geometrical ones, cool colors are juxtaposed with
luminous ones, the dazzling competes with the lacklus-
ter, compact elements with frayed ones. It is the mate-
rials employed which, at most, can put Richter’s glass
paintings in relation to traditional reverse glass paint-
ing, but they display virtually no other similarities with
this folkloristic tradition, and seem instead to tap into
his earlier works, such as Color Streaks (pl. 44). Details
(figs. 132, 133) from around 1970, or editions of Ciba-
chrome photographs such as Guildsisters, Ophelia,80 or
the 12 Rhombuses (CR 853–1–12), also from 1988.
Pouring, flinging, melting, but also diverting and channeling, or mixing and scrambling, are techniques most often associated with Art Informel or Abstract Expressionism (Pollock), and perhaps also with Land Art (Robert Smithson, Asphalt Rundown, 1969) and Conceptual Art (Richard Serra, Splashing, 1968), with Viennese Actionism (Hermann Nitsch, Poured Paintings), and with the Nouveaux Réalistes (César, Expansions). Richter’s glass paintings are indirectly related to these changes from the 1950s onward, but for him, it is not a question of expanding the boundaries of art, but rather of fathoming the inherent possibilities of painting as a medium. Richter takes up an almost archaic technique, albeit with a certain refinement and ennoblement. He is not at all interested—as Buchloh claims—in invalidating those standards that have up to now guaranteed a dialectic of artistic intention and contingency, of subjective freedom and the resistance of the material, of exemplary artistic subjectivity and sobering de-subjectivation. In particular the revitalization of almost primeval techniques, based on pouring, spreading, smearing, wiping, and mixing, are not to be understood as a “deceptively crude denial of all expressive work or iconic potentials,” which, together with “this saccharine chromatic temptation” reinforces the anti-aesthetic skepticism supposedly inherent in Richter’s more recent works. There can be no question here to speak of “the most thorough-going disenchantment of the mystical promises” of painting. Indeed, this is not about “a desystematization and desublimation of all of the principles of painterly processes known to date,” as Buchloh asserts. My view is that the fascinating quality of this series is in the intermingling colors, from which we are separated by crystal-clear glass, implying a certain distance, offering us something quite unexpected: they are simply very beautiful. In an interview in Der Spiegel, Richter remarks: “For me, beauty has always been a factor in determining the quality of a work of art, regardless of its form or the era in which it was conceived. This means it can’t be separated from form, without which nothing can be created. And the most important aspect, as far as I’m concerned, is that the pane of glass as a support simultaneously parent, the pane of glass as a support simultaneously material, of exemplary artistic subjectivity and sobering de-subjectivation. In particular the revitalization of almost primeval techniques, based on pouring, spreading, smearing, wiping, and mixing, are not to be understood as a “deceptively crude denial of all expressive work or iconic potentials,” which, together with “this saccharine chromatic temptation” reinforces the anti-aesthetic skepticism supposedly inherent in Richter’s more recent works. There can be no question here to speak of “the most thorough-going disenchantment of the mystical promises” of painting. Indeed, this is not about “a desystematization and desublimation of all of the principles of painterly processes known to date,” as Buchloh asserts. My view is that the fascinating quality of this series is in the intermingling colors, from which we are separated by crystal-clear glass, implying a certain distance, offering us something quite unexpected: they are simply very beautiful. In an interview in Der Spiegel, Richter remarks: “For me, beauty has always been a factor in determining the quality of a work of art, regardless of its form or the era in which it was conceived. This means it can’t be separated from form, without which nothing can be created. And the most important aspect, as far as I’m concerned, is that it is only form that makes it possible to understand things and thus build a society.”

The glass pane paintings were executed in various groups. Ninety-eight small works, arranged into diptychs, were produced in 2008, exhibited under the title Strip, and published in an artist’s book. They were followed in 2010 by series such as Baghdad (pls. 249, 250), Ifriqi, and Persada. Next came the group with the title Abdallah, consisting of one hundred works. The titles are allusions to the world of Middle Eastern fairy tales and legends of the kind passed down from The Arabian Nights, also known as One Thousand and One Nights. To be sure, these titles may be interpreted as a homage to the magnificence of Islamic culture, while the graphic character of Richter’s glass pane paintings is suggestive primarily of flexibility, unconventionalism, and freedom, phenomena unknown in the Arab tradition, reliant on ornaments, patterns, and calligraphy. Islamic culture developed two-dimensional symmetries of such complexity that they first had to be translated and abstracted by mathematics into the language of algebra before shapes and patterns used, for example, in the interior decoration of the Alhambra in Granada could be configured and made comprehensible. Richter’s glass pictures, on the other hand, suggests a sphere in which the marvelous encounters the eerie, the fantastic is transformed into the gruesome, the quaint surfaces alongside the sublime, and beauty is confronted by ugliness. The temptation to indulge in such impressions is restrained by the circumstance that the materiality of the paint is not directly perceptible, but is instead seen through the glass. Although transparent, the pane of glass as a support simultaneously functions as a barrier that creates distance. Added to this is an impression of fragility that demands distance and caution.

In 2013, Richter returned to this technique again after an extended pause, but decided on a far larger format. The series with the self-explanatory title Flow (fig. 161, pl. 253) no longer has an intimate character, but has an uncommonly suggestive impact. Strip paintings and glass pane paintings were then produced alongside another, once more bringing to mind the enigmatic, and consistent range of Richter’s work. What the two groups of work share is the material, glass, which on the one hand protects the digitally created strip paintings and the flowing paint material, yet, on the other hand, also hermetically seals them off. The subjective element is inherent in these work series to differing degrees. It is left to viewers to expose themselves to this fascination, to see the calculated and the emphatic, the rational and the irrational, the ordered and the contingent, and to fully comprehend the pictorial possibilities that are embodied in this work series.

Is Richter concerned primarily with evoking beguilingly varied and seductively beautiful forms and colors? Do the Patterns, the Strip paintings, and the enamel paintings on glass amount to nothing more than their connections to Op Art and Art Informel? At least in the case of Patterns and Strip paintings, the divisions, mirrorings, and resulting symmetries are based on mathematical structures, and allude to natural scientific rather than artistic procedures. Marcus de Sautoy assumes that the human mind searches incessantly for patterns, and is therefore obsessed with symmetry. “Pattern is [hence] synonymous with meaning.” In his works, Richter is not in search of the seventeen possible plane symmetry groups. In his new works, too, he aims at vision and visibility, and at their transfer, or the question how optical phenomena become carriers of perceptions. In 1997, he wrote the following note on this dilemma: “that our sense of sight causes us to apprehend things, but at the same time restricts and partly precludes our apprehension of reality.” One year later, he said: “I don’t mistrust reality, of which I know next to nothing. I mistrust the picture of reality conveyed to us by our senses which is imperfect, limited.” And in 1981: “Painting is the making of an analogy for something non-visual and intelligible—giving it form and bringing it within reach. And that is why good paintings are also incomprehensible.”

![Fig. 161](Gerhard Richter, “Flow” [Flow], 2013. Lacquer on glass CR 933/2, 100 x 200 cm. Private collection, New York.)
Surely, the agnosticism that is revealed in these statements must be relativized and placed within a larger context. Martin Kemp, to whom we owe a profound and exceptionally illuminating investigation of visuality, has demonstrated a continuity from the Renaissance to the present time, so conditioned by the new communications technologies, by pluralism and processuality. In the process, he refers to the complicated relationships that exist between the bewildering multiplicity of visual stimuli, the conditions of vision, and the neurophysiological foundations of sensory experience. These reflections also encompass the capacity for memory and the areas of experience, knowledge, and interest. The parameters of the process through which we determine what something looks like are structured by multifarious interconnections. After a detailed explanation of historical changes in perception, Kemp arrives at the following conclusion with regard to the present day: "The more I think about the process of seeing and its inherent results, the more awesome seems the dialog that we conduct between external complexity of almost infinite variety and the pull of our perceptual system toward simple patterns of coherence at every conceivable scale." In particular in the area of microstructures, it becomes problematic to speak of "visibility," because there, the emitted waves lie entirely outside of what our perceptual capacities can ascertain. In the molecular area, a translation into visibility requires a specific collection of data, which must be modeled and made visible. It is therefore not a question of which model is most realistic, but instead of which model corresponds more closely to specific questions and intentions. Richter is receptive to such questions and is strikingly illustrated by the four large pictures entitled Silicate (pls. 217–220). The Patterns and the Strip paintings belong in this context, except that with them, he does not create physical pictures generated from data produced by electron microscopes, but instead proceeds in the opposite way. In them, he traces a path not from the inconceivable to the conceivable, but instead from large paintings via a continuous process of division and mirroring toward tiny details whose origins are no longer perceptible. In science, but also in art, visual intuition is one of the most powerful tools we have for feeling our way into the unknown once knowledge has ended. If patterns actually make sense, then Richter obviously moves in this sphere with the Patterns and the Strip paintings, taking up the questions that have preoccupied him repeatedly. What is reality, and how do we perceive it? It is not reality he distrusts, but the picture we make of it. "Artworks become appearances, in the concise sense of the term—that is as the appearance of another—when the accent falls on the unreality of their own reality." Despite the enormous differences between them, the various work series confirm the continuity of a creative oeuvre that is characterized by its consistently high quality.
232
2/8/92 Cologne Cathedral, 1992
[8.2.92 Kölner Dom]
Black and white lacquer on photograph
CR 08.02.1992, 10.9 x 14.8 cm
Private collection, Cologne

233
8/14/94, 1994
[14.8.94], Oil on photograph
CR 14.08.1994, 9.9 x 14.9 cm
Private collection, Tokyo
overpainted photographs, books, and pictures

234
Nov. 9, 1999, 1999
[9 Nov. 1999]
Oil on photograph
CR 09.11.1999, 10.1 x 15 cm
Kiyoshi Waka, Tokyo

235
[12.2.1998], Oil on photograph
CR 12.02.1998, 10.1 x 14.7 cm
Private collection
Firenze, 2000
Oil paint on photograph, Copy 13/99
12 x 12 cm (framed 32.2 x 32.2 cm)
Edition 110
Private collection
237
Nov. 22, 1999 (Firenze), 1999
[22. Nov. 1999 (Firenze)]
Oil on photograph
CR 22.11 1999, 11.9 x 11.9 cm
Noburo and Eiko Wako, Tokyo
Lacquer on color photograph
CR 20.06.2008, 10 x 14.8 cm
Private collection
overpainted photographs, books, and pictures

From: Gerhard Richter, War Cut, Cologne 2004, p. 72
Iblan, 2009

Woven Jacquard wall tapestry,
276 x 378 cm

Edition 143 (8 copies + 2 artist’s proofs)
Abdu, 2009
Woven Jacquard wall tapestry,
276 x 378 cm
Edition 144 (8 copies + 2 artist’s proofs)
Details from: Gerhard Richter, Patterns, Cologne 2011

Reproduction of Abstract Painting [Abstraktes Bild] from 1990 (CR 724/4, 92 x 126 cm, fig. 160) was progressively divided into vertical strips, that is, into $2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64 \ldots 4,096$ parts or strips. The final division accordingly creates vertical strips of only about 0.003 cm thickness. The strips were then again mirrored $x$ times and repeated to become a pattern.

242 Pattern 16/16
Detail of the 16th (extreme right) vertical strip of CR 724/4 (divided 16 times), mirrored 16 times, and repeated

243 Pattern 14/32
Detail of the 14th vertical strip of CR 724/4 (vertically divided 32 times), mirrored 32 times, and repeated
Pattern 18/64
Detail of the 18th vertical strips of CR 724/4 (vertically divided 64 times), mirrored 64 times, and repeated

Pattern 76/256
Detail of the 76th vertical strip of CR 724/4 (vertically divided 256 times), mirrored 256 times, and repeated
Pattern 1,024/4,096
Detail of the 1,024th vertical strip
of CR 724/4 (vertically divided
4,096 times), mirrored 4,096 times,
and repeated
247
Strip, 2011
[Strip]
Digital print mounted between aluminum and perspex
CR 919/1, 200 x 200 cm
Private collection, New York
248
Strip, 2012
[Strip]
Digital print mounted between aluminum and perspex
CR 916/2, 120 x 300 cm
Private collection
Baghdad, 2010
Bagdad, 2010
Lacquer on glass mounted on Alu Dibond
CR 914/1, 50 x 40 cm
Kunstmuseum Winterthur
Loan from private collection
Baghdad, 2010
[Bagdad]
Lacquer on glass mounted on Alu Dibond
CR 914/23, 60 x 60 cm
Kunstmuseum Winterthur
Loan from private collection
Flow, 2013
[Flow]
Lacquer on glass, mounted on Alu Dibond
CR 933/3, 100 x 200 cm
Private collection
Gerhard Richter
in front of the paintings “Strip” (CR 930/1), 2013.
Photograph: Norbert Arns
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Having completed this survey of Richter’s pictorial world with its diverse genres and themes, producing a summary represents a challenge. The apparent differences between the individual series are, apparently, too vast; the paintings after photographs too disparate in relation to the color charts, too little links the mirrors with the landscapes. Alongside the abstractions, the still lifes and portraits seem too inconsistent—to say nothing of the discrepancy between traditional picture formats and installations. On the one hand, Richter is repeatedly preoccupied with reality; on the other, he depicts this reality so indistinctly and ambiguously that it seems to elude the viewer, to slip through his fingers.

If Modernism shifted from semantics to semiotics, from the depictive function of the sign to the self-referentiality of the sign itself, from the illusion of the represented motif to the visualization of facture, then Richter distances himself in his production from a Modernism that strives to extinguish semblance in order to allow real objects to emerge in its place. Typically, the readymade and the collage—the two foundation stones of the classical avant-garde—play highly divergent roles in his oeuvre. While the ready-made preoccupies him primarily in theoretical terms as a strategic model (and hence never appears in his artistic praxis in the form of real objects), he rejects collage as too simple and superficial. A constant source of fascination for him, instead, is the materiality of the paint and its possibilities of application and presentation. This focus may explain why drawing plays such a subordinate role in his overall oeuvre. To an astonishing degree, this basic disposition has allowed him to achieve an enormous expansion of his pictorial strategies, based on pre-existing subjects (for the most part mediated by photographs—which is to say through readymades in their broadest sense), and through a facture that varies between construction and destruction. Sticking, nonetheless, is his commitment to a painterly tradition that extends, in some works, back beyond the nineteenth century, all the way to the Renaissance. At the same time, Richter is aware that a modernist view according to which freedom and free will simply do not exist. In an interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist in 1993, he claims that “the important thing for me is that reverse: idea-less actions and reactions which lead toward forms which can be named and explained—and only then give rise to ideas.” The connection between content and form, between motif and composition, which remained valid until Cubism, is thereby dissolved, so that reaction now takes the place of representation. This means that Richter enters a highly uncertain sphere of impenetrability, one that necessarily remains opaque even to him, where all conventional criteria of evaluation and judgments of quality have lost their validity, without however being replaced by new parameters and corresponding standards. When, in his statements, Richter repeatedly invokes traditions, toward which he feels indebted, then this may conceivably serve to conceal profound insecurity manifesting a quest for stability, confirmation, and self-assurance. This becomes comprehensible through statements by Richter himself.

In his numerous interviews, Richter has repeatedly discussed his work, and has made these texts widely available by compiling them in a volume that bears the lapidary title Text. His testimony is not to be understood primarily as an explication or even interpretation of his own compositions (remarks on individual subjects of the kind that Richter provided for the catalog entries to his exhibition in the Tate Gallery in London in 1991–92 are the exception to the rule). They usually have a more general character, at times fulfilling strategic functions and revealing the intentions he pursues through his painting, along with the expectations he associates with art in general. It seems instructive to observe the way in which a profound fatalism is manifest, in his Notes from around 1982 onward and not explicitly related to his paintings, whether he is excoriating the dominant art scene, criticizing the art academies and their professors, arguing about morality and hypocrisy, discussing the world situation, which he perceives as catastrophic, alluding in the process to climate change, war, famine, and epidemics, referencing biog- nomy when discussing the meaning of life (perhaps a sign of the lingering impact of having read Nietzsche when he was younger), or reflecting on conformism and non-conformism. He laments the impossibility of preventing catastrophes, and vents his feelings concerning communism and the relationship between belief and ideology. Essentially, all theory is negative, and life is perceived as nonsensical, useless, futile, and superfluous, the pursuit of reason is deemed lunacy, efforts to procure legitimation are said to be “nothing but flimsy attempts to bend and block the truth.” This pessimism culminates in a kind of vulgar materialistic view according to which freedom and free will simply do not exist. In an interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist in 1993, he claims that “the important thing for me is that this kind of fatalism or negativism and pessimism is a useful strategy in life; there is a highly positive side to it, because one has fewer illusions.”

Considering Richter’s career as an artist, it is tempting to agree. Doubts about the world and about oneself may have been a good prerequisite for working twice as hard rather than succumbing to vanity. Richter realized early on that it was not only knowledge and skill that were decisive, but moreover standards which he could subscribe to. It is hardly surprising that the concept of tradition surfaces quite early in his Notes, for example in around 1964: “In every respect, my work has more to do with tradition than with anything else.” Especially from the 1990s onward, he returned to this idea in ever-new variations. On December 30, 1992, he wrote: “What counts is the world of the mind, and of art, in which we grow up.
Over the decades, this remains our home and our world. One year later, he avowed: “I’m increasingly in favor of the official, the classic, the universal.” Similar statements could be added to these. In 2002, for example, he said to Robert Storr: “The classical is what holds me together. It is that which gives me form. It is the order that I do not have to attack. It is something that tames my chaos or holds it together so that I can continue to exist. That was never a question for me. That is essential for life.” And in 2006, the “cultural heritage” was just as important to him as a desire to approach the “mysterious, lasting quality” and the “timelessness” he found embodied in the oeuvres of Titan, Velázquez, Dürer, and Corinth. In 2011, he remarked to Nicholas Serota: “The classical was always my ideal, from my childhood onward, and some of it has endured until today.”

Gerhard Richter’s reflections on painting have provided him with access to historical possibilities. That he is oriented toward the classical as well as toward the romantic is owed to the insight that although such traditions are obsolete, they nonetheless remain indispensable for him.

A similar role is played in Richter’s statements by the term beauty. In 1970, when asked by Rolf-Gunter Dienst why a colorful landscape appealed so much to him, he replied: “Just because landscape is beautiful. It’s probably the most terrific thing there is.” In an interview in 1977 about beauty, he remarked that “it still has just as much of an impact.” In 1980, in a letter to Birgit Pelzer, he mentions his “heritage” was just as important to him as a desire to apprehend the intrinsic inaccessibility of phenomenal reality; that art is an instrument, a method of getting at that which is closed and inaccessible to us (the banal future, just as much as the intrinsically unknowable); that art has a formative and therapeutic, consolatory and informative, investigative, and speculative function; it is thus not only existential pleasure but Utopia. Apparently, Richter does further not pursue these ideas—in which utopia is comprehended in the usual sense as a counterimage (qua negation) of existing reality—and for very good reason, since the more emphatically a utopian moment is demanded of art, the more existing reality seems to thwart every utopia. According to Adorno, art must therefore avoid betraying utopia by providing semblance and consolation. “If the utopia of art were fulfilled, it would be art’s temporal end.”

Rather than concentrating on utopia, Richter focuses on hope, which he links in a number of remarks to the demand for enlightenment. On July 23, 1989, he stated: “However ineptly—desperately ineptly—I set about it, my will, my endeavor—which drives me—is the quest for understanding and of the interconnections; coming closer to a meaning, so all my pesimistic, nihilistic actions and assertions have the sole aim of creating or discovering hope.” Elsewhere, he links hope with the message “that life can be beautiful.” As chief witnesses for his point of view Richter invokes Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer, and finds himself strengthened in his belief that “art is the only thing that keeps us going at all and that gives, if not meaning, then at least a little hope to existence.”

If Richter repeatedly refers to tradition, the classical, beauty, understanding his oeuvre as a part of art history, striving to evoke not just hope, but a utopian moment as well, and finally, attempting to express the beauty of life, then it should be borne in mind that most of the statements date from the 1990s and later—in other words, from a time when Richter was regarded on both sides of the Atlantic as one of the most important artists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This phase was also marked by his major public commissions: Black, Red, Gold for the Berlin Reichstag, and the large, multicolored window for the southern transept of Cologne Cathedral. This may have had an impact on his self-image and his self-assessment. The difficult early years, the financially lean periods, and, in particular the long struggle for recognition now lay in the past. This also forms the background for a statement from 1993: “The image of the artist as a misunderstood figure is abhorrent to me. I much prefer the high times, as in the Renaissance or in Egypt, where art was part of the social order and was needed in the present. The suffering, unappreciated Van Gogh is not my ideal.”

In 1990, he commented reflectively on his paintings on October 18, 1977, again expressing criticism of ideology in general, and expressing a profound distrust of “the leftist faith” and the “self-righteous arrogance of many artists and intellectuals.” The status he envi-
sions for himself is revealed by the following statement: "I never wanted to be a misunderstood artist, an outsider, a bogeyman. Never. Even fifty years ago I found the thought satisfying that, whenever culture blossomed, artists tended to be part of the establishment rather than freaks; that their status as highly qualified masters made them part of the elite. We still benefit from that today." 34 In this context, Richter is well aware of the fact that Fluxus opposed established conceptions of art, and indirectly, the social and political establishment as well, and he himself was shaped in lasting ways by this radical defiance and anarchism. He shared, he says, this irreverent attitude, and just did something new, something which had been forbidden, and which intellectuals could not share in because of their criteria. "The anti-authoritarian aspect was always part of me, even if it was never obvious." 35

In conversation with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, who represents a completely different political orientation, Richter affirms an increasingly conservative position: "For me, it has always been the case, the only possible case, that art is inseparable from power relations, and that both mutually influence and enable each other. And exactly this was the Utopia and great fallacy of the 1960s, when we thought that we could dismantle all that." 36 Viewed historically, what Richter envisions here as an ideal was the exception to the rule. In antiquity, artists as a rule occupied an inferior social position, at the level of craftsmen, and could rarely claim special distinction by virtue of their techne. Surfacing in the Renaissance to an increasing degree were cultural heroes of the type described by Vasari in his Lives, for example, and at courts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, artists received titles of nobility and were elevated to superior status; 37 prominent instances being Velázquez, invested with high offices, and Rubens, entrusted with diplomatic missions. The myth of the artist that proliferated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in contrast, involved instead the pathologies and social isolation experienced by the genii—notions which continue to resonate into the present. The image of the artist sanctified by the state, which Richter evidently has in mind, appears to be an unconscious reminiscence of what he must have experienced in East Germany. Against this background, it hardly seems surprising that for Richter, art appears increasingly as the "pure realization of religious feeling, capacity for faith, longing for God." 38 A few years later, he stated: "Belief... is thus our most important quality and capacity." 39 In 2001, in an interview with Der Spiegel he explained: "I sympathize with Catholicism, without being a Catholic myself." 40 In 2002, he talked to his daughter Babette about, among other things, a multiple, a small steel cross he had produced in a large quantity in 1997, 41 and which must have had a subliminally polemical character, thus our most important quality and capacity."

Throughout my life, as well as with the insight, which has grown throughout my life, into the superiority of Christian teaching, which is so much more intelligent than all of these ideologies that promise paradise on earth. For me, another connection with the church is the capacity for faith, by which I mean that for me, our capacity to believe is a trait that is every bit as imperative as eating and drinking, no matter how badly or how well, we always believe. 42 When Richter's various statements on tradition, beauty, hope, and utopia, on the social status of the artist, and on Catholicism are considered as a whole, it becomes evident which task he assigns to art. It is by no means a question of pointing up an alternative to the status quo, of transcending the existent, or perhaps of anticipating a better world, nor of assigning art with the function of relieving the stress of everyday life. It is not a question of "rescuing the eye from gazing into the horrors of night and releasing the subject, with the healing balm of illusion, from the convulsive stirrings of the will," as Nietzsche expressed it. 43 After the turn of the millennium, such notions are foreign to Richter, whereas he is quite aware of the fact that only when it is autonomous can art formulate a contraposition in relation to society, and that its resilience, then, results primarily from it being functionless. It is hardly astonishing, therefore, that he perceives the task of art not just as enlightenment, but also as reconciliation with the world. 44 During a period that is dominated by hate, terrorism, populism, racism, and political regression, this constitutes a statement that should not be underestimated, and one that, in the context of interviews with But is that, assumes the character of a polemical delimitation in relation to his interlocutor rather than as a clarification of his own intentions.

What impels Richter instead is solely and exclusively "the aesthetic accomplishment of art." 45 When he speaks, then, of reconciliation, he presumably means not a "reconciliation with the world," and instead, the self-referential reconciliation of art with itself, which is to say with its own success. 46 And for Richter, this achievement is not found primarily in forms of anticipatory reaction or determined by its contents, but instead by the form, which is embodied in his oeuvre emphatically in techniques or their purposefulness. "What transcends the factual in the artwork, its spiritual content, cannot be pinned down to what is individually, sensually given but is, rather, constituted by way of this empirical givenness... The spiritual content does not hover above the work's facture; rather, art works transcend their factuality through their facture, through the consistency of their elaboration." 47 This remark by Adorno perhaps expresses what it is that Richter's thinking revolves around in such diverse ways, namely the center of his conception of the appearance of reality, as he repeatedly attempts to depict it in his paintings, situated between mimesis and performance.

From the very beginning, Richter is less interested in reality itself than in presenting its appearance. "I never wanted to capture and hold reality in a painting... That was never my intention. But I wanted to paint the appearance of reality. That is my theme or my job," he said in 2002 to Robert Storr. 48

No matter what the pictures represent, regardless of which formal principles form their basis, they first and foremost embody an illusion that can be defined as "appearance." In 1977, in response to the question of whether the abstract paintings were to be understood as a renunciation of illusionistic modes of representation, Richter replied: "Not really. If I forget about the negative connotations that the term has, what I have...
left is an illusionism that is inseparably bound up with painting—or even identical with it. Painting as appearance—this has nothing to do with the ‘world of appearances’ and ideas like that . . . And in 1969, he added, so to speak taking up the thread again: “Illusion—or rather appearance, semblance—is the theme of my life . . . All that is, seems, and is visible to us because we perceive it by the reflected light of semblance. Nothing else is visible. Painting concerns itself, as no other art does, exclusively with semblance . . .” Of course, Richter is cautious about speaking of the sensory semblance of the idea in the Hegelian sense, since precisely what seems can neither be named, nor recognized, nor rendered immediately. His works are hence meant to be taken entirely for themselves, and provide no perspective on the truth of actual states of affairs. In a never-ending movement that is oriented toward the registration of the seen, the reflexive activity generates an instinctive, oblivious performance, one that never arrives at certainty, since it relates only to sensory experience, under the spell of the picture. It is the ungraspable aesthetic phenomena, supported by nothing, which thought is invited to master, but which is, nonetheless, forsaken. Inherent in these paintings is something which desires to be and is capable of being comprehended, but which ultimately escapes any exclusively rational specification. It is, however, not a question of a mere illusory expectation, which reveals that that which is presumed to be present is not detectable anywhere. Instead, something is present that is very different from what the anticipation of understanding assumes. Aesthetic perception, one might conclude with Martin Seel, cannot be captured through propositional determinateness. “It may lead to conceptually determined knowledge or take the latter as its starting point, but it is not conceptual knowledge, since it remains tied to the sensuous and signifying occurrence and thus to the specific appearing of artistic objects. All art perception proceeds from an appearing and is in search of an appearing.” The structures of Richter’s abstract pictures, for example, do not refer to psychological categories or otherwise transcending realities. Instead, they generate “the imaginative experience of a reality which is essentially unrepresentable, and which exists for the beholder only as appearance.”

And herein lies the real problem for reception. What appears in the work of art is ultimately concealed from aesthetic experience. Seen in this way, the truth of the work of art, which comes to appearance as a kind of flash in the moment of aesthetic experience, is at the same time utterly ungraspable as something concrete and present.

Richter reflects upon the incomprehensibility of the work of art and the interminability of aesthetic experience with great immediacy, and both aspects are condensed in the heteronomy of styles and subjects. Accordingly, painting not only embodies irresolvable contradictions, but also constitutes a continuous process. “Painting is engaged in acquiring, working out, adumbrating a future for itself. It’s a future that has yet to arrive anywhere else: but in the picture it’s celebrated in advance, as it were.” After everything that has been observable up to this point, this sounds rather optimistic. Richter immediately qualifies himself, identifying this statement as a wish: “If that were to work, yes, that would be good.”

Shaping Richter’s creative production is an oscillation between traditional and avant-garde approaches, between impersonal procedures and personal motivations, between construction and destruction, along with the opposition between revelation and concealment. The presence and impermanence of appearance, transparency and vanishing comprehensibility, can be understood as leitmotifs for pictorial intentions which permeate the work and give form to a discourse that unleashes a “reflexive potentiation of beautiful appearance” through ever-new approaches.

Perhaps the essential trait of Richter’s artistic oeuvre, which now extends to more than six decades, could be identified as a gradual increase of self-referentiality of subjects and techniques, of strategies and forms, which is to say, a tendency toward self-referentiality and immanence, one that increasingly breaks down inherent contradictions and friction coefficients, without, however, suffering an accompanying loss of quality. Adorno has characterized the potential consequences of such an approach: “Works are usually critical in the era in which they appear, later they are neutralized, not least because of changed social relations. Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy. However, once artworks are entombed in the pantheon of cultural commodities, they themselves—their truth content—are also damaged.” Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory appeared just at the moment when Richter was in the process of establishing the preconditions of his enormous international significance, embarking on a path that strengthened his connections with tradition rather than dismantling them. It is impossible to anticipate today whether Adorno’s forecast will ultimately prove accurate, and, if so, in which way. It remains to be seen how Richter’s oeuvre will further develop, and whether new and different aims are likely to guide it, rendering superfluous speculations concerning the survival of his work in a future past and within the pantheon of our cultural heritage.


13 Schneider, op. cit., p.342.

14 Will Sitte’s Mass簌 II (1959) is hardly compre- hensible without direct quotes from Picasso and Guttuso. The subject is the retaliatory action by German soldiers in the Czech town of Lidice after the assassination of Heydrich, the governor of the German occupying forces in Bohemia and Moravia. In June 1942, almost all male inhabitants of the town were shot dead, and the women and children taken to concentration camps. Despite the clearly anti-fascist subject matter, the work caused great indigation among the cultural functionaries of the GDR. A partial overpainting was demanded, which Sitte, however, did not do. His resistance demonstrated how the dogmatic strictness of socialist realism could be overcome.

15 Elger, p.39.

16 Elger, p.41.


28 Letter to Helmut and Erika Heinze dated April 4, 1962, ibid., p.34.


31 Richter gifted one of his works to Franz Erhard Walther, who had initiated and recommended him for the exhibition. One item of clothing he often mentions (Ema’s blouse) was shown in the exhibi tion. The Inverted Object at the New York Luhning & Augustin gallery in December 2009.


34 This is true, for example, of the painting Rheinhausen (70 x 110 cm) from 1962, which represents the industrial port and the brightly lit metalurgical huts. Compared with other works, which were also created in 1962 or after, the color of the night pic ture in particular stands out. Cf. the detailed docu mentation of the Bassenge (Berlin) auction house, Auktion 100, Lot 8345, dated December 1, 2012.

35 Very revealing in this context is Jeanne Anne Nugent’s explorations, cf. her essay “From Hans Sedlmayr to Jeanne Anne Nugent’s explorations,” in: exhib. cat. Museum Ludwig, Cologne/Museum Moderner Kunst und Leben! Der Künstlerfreunde.” With introduction by Dietmar Raddatz, “Die verwaltete Angst oder Deutschland, Humanity in the GDR was seen as humanity. Cf. Fritz J. Raddatz, “Die verwaltete Angst oder Deutschland, Humanity in the GDR was seen as humanity.”


Eckhart Gilden, "Painter without Qualities,” in: Richter, Early Work, p.73.

In 2010, Richter commented as follows: “I didn’t want to paint a report on a specific misfortune, but rather an example that says something general about the inexplicable and utterly nonsensical nature of death. Somewhat strange in the picture is the fact that nothing failed retouching. I accepted that at the time, but a degree of uncertainty has remained until today.” Richter, Bilder einer Epoche, p.109.

Cf. John J. Curley, “Gerhard Richter’s Cold War Vision,” in: Richter, Early Work, p.20, who believe that the word can also be read as loit, the imperative of loiten (fathoming) or auslisten (comprehending). Curley sees the picture as an indication of the reciprocal relationship between photography and the Cold War (p.23), and formally as a superposition or penetration of figurative and abstract painting (p.23).

Cf. my interview with Jan Thor-Prikkcr in 2004.

And the painter needs to reflect the mystery, and, if possible, amplify it. If I had only copied it as accurately as possible, it would have been very boring.” Richter, Text, 2008, p.475.


Cf. the documentation edited by Harald Szeemann on behalf of the Kölnischer Kunstverein on the occasion of the eponymous exhibition happening at Fluxus. Berlin 2003.


Throughout his life, Richter has had a deep mistrust of utopian ideas and ideologies that mix art and politics. In this respect, he was also skeptical of Beuys’ actions. Nor was he able to draw a lot of the ideas of George Maciunas. He could only reject the latter’s intention to abolish the arts, that is, music, theater, painting, and sculpture, and transform them into the applied arts, such as industrial design, engineering, typography, etc. As indicated, the ideas of the LSF group of 1929 boiled down to making all creative impulses subservient to social and constructive goals. Richter did not explicitly comment on this and understood Fluxus primarily as a movement that conveyed a sense of freedom that motivated him to challenge the established practices of the art world. At any rate, the artist was not at all interested in becoming politically involved.


Kuper, ibid., p.267.


Gerhard Richter, _Texte_, p. 32.


Cf. Walter Benjamin, "A short history of photography." In: _Szenen, 1972_, p. 21: "The pricing of the object from its shell, the destruction of its aura is the mark that the sense of the sameness of things in the world tended to such an extent that by means of reproduction even the unique is made to yield up its uniqueness."


172. Richter, _Texte_, 2008, p. 22. Richter here evidently refers to a box that is attributed to Max Lieberman, which, however, was: "The old saying that a good painting of a turpin is better than a poorly painted Madonna has now become a permanent feature of modern aesthetics. But it is wrong. It should be: A good painting of a turpin is just as good as a well-painted Madonna." Cf. "Einen Anarchist ist der Kerl doch!" Anecdotes of Max Lieberman, researched and published by Walter Rüschel, Berlin 2007, p. 73.


174. Richter, _Texte_, 2008, p. 46. In a slightly later version of this note, Richter uses the same terms, but in a different order, which amounts to a shift in focus: "I am fascinated by the human, temporal, real, logical side of an occurrence which is simultaneously so real, so incomprehensible and so atemporal. And I would like to represent it in such a way that this contradiction is a coherent composition. Of course, the painter has left out the arrangement to form a coherent, pictorial composition. Of course, the painter has left out the arrangement to form a coherent, pictorial composition. Of course, the painter has left out the arrangement to form a coherent, pictorial composition. Of course, the painter has left out the arrangement to form a coherent, pictorial composition.


176. Kraus, ibid., p. 203.

177. Kraus, ibid., p. 205.

178. Kraus, ibid., p. 211.


194. Richter confirmed this in 2007. Cf. Gotti Adranz, "Von der ‘lust, etwas Schönes zu malen’," in: _exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter: Bilder aus privaten Sammlungen_. _Museum Frieder Burda_, Baden-Baden and elsewhere 2008, notes, p. 221: "The photograph of the Fat Chair by Beuys in the catalogue raisonné, vol. 1, on p. 231, recalls a shot by Eva Beuys (cf. Beuys, Düsseldorf/Deutschland), Druckplastik: Photographien und Bilddarstellungen Eva Beuys, ed. and with a foreword by Lothar Schmierer, Munich 2016, fig. 26). The equivalent in this photograph of what can be interpreted as a black floor in Richter, is a dark table top, placed on top of boxes, on which the Fat Chair has been placed parallel to the wall, probably by Beuys himself. Other objects on the right complement the arrangement to form a coherent, pictorial composition. Of course, the painter has left out the big fat wedge between the seat and the backrest as well as the wire at the upper end of the backrest. The differences could perhaps be understood as criticism of an artist whom Richter on the one hand admired, on the other hand regarded with skepticism or even with suspicion. The readymade "chair," changed and at the same time charged by Beuys, is demystified by Richter. Cf. Uwe M. Schneede, "Gerhard Richter Bilder einer Epoche," in: _exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter, Bilder einer Epoche_, Bucerius Kunststof- num, Hamburg. Munich 2011, p. 14.


196. What I now saw in reality left an incredible impression on me: "I would like to represent it in such a way that this contradiction is a coherent, pictorial composition. Of course, the painter has left out the arrangement to form a coherent, pictorial composition. Of course, the painter has left out the arrangement to form a coherent, pictorial composition.

197. Before the Russian historian and civil rights activist Irina Shirshakova first came to Dresden in 1961, and she remembers, “In the city center, only the Zwinger was left standing. All around it was just one big emptiness. I knew Dresden from an old book with many pictures that we had at home. What I now saw in reality left an incredible impression on me: ‘For me the Zwinger was the very symbol of a destroyed city.’” Irina Shirshakova _/ Kari Schögell, Der Russland-Rex. Einsichten in eine Beziehungshülle_, Hamburg 2015, p. 24.


199. This is the conclusion reached by Dietmar Rübel, ibid., p. 64.


201. Elger, p. 120.

202. August Hause, a teacher who had studied for a few years at the Düsseldorf Akademie, opened his first gallery in November 1966 showing works by Gerhard and Brigitte. Polke and Richter project was his fourth exhibition. Cf. _exhib. cat. polke/ richter_, Dokumentation einer Ausstellung des Gerhard Richter Archiv Dresden im Albertinum 2001, _Texte_, 2004, p. 20, _exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter Archiv Dresden_, vol. 12, ed. Dietmar Elger), Cologne 2004. The publication reproduces the model developed by Polke and Richter as a facsimile and juxtaposes it page by page with the actual publication, so that the character of the collage becomes evident. The epilogue by the editor is particularly illuminating (pp. 35 ff.), as is the documentation of the exhibition in Hannover (pp. 35 ff.). Cf. also exhib. cat. _polke/richter_._richter/polke_, curated by Darren Leak and Kunihiko Schachter, Christie’s London 2004 (the first part of this publication is the English translation of the aforementioned Schriften des Gerhard Richter Archiv Dresden).


204. Richter, _Texte_, 2008, p. 43.

205. Richter, _Texte_, 2008, p. 46. In 1972, he was to distance himself from this statement and asserted it "was meinten potenziell, gegen die viele Triumphierte, die nach dem 1960er geworden, und die viele durch die Ordnung der Zeit auch sehr beeindruckte."

206. Thease, _A short history of photography_. In: _Szenen, 1972_, p. 21: "The pricing of the object from its shell, the destruction of its aura is the mark that the sense of the sameness of things in the world tends to such an extent that by means of reproduction even the unique is made to yield up its uniqueness."
Bourdieu, ibid., p. 680.

Cf. Christene Mehring, “Ob Osten, ob Westen, zu
Richter, “Heldenverehrung oder Ideologie-
rkritik? Gerhard Richters Film ‘Völkische Brüder’
von 1966,” in: Gerhard Richter, Bilder einer Epoche


Hubertus Butin, “Heldenerziehung oder Ideologie-
kritik? Gerhard Richters Film ‘Völkische Brüder’

This can be surmised from Two Fists 1964 (pl. 17) and Ferris (CR 22) as well as Mister Boat (pl. 10).

Boat Trip (CR 69), Woman with Child (Beach) (pl. 21), Belted Dancers (CR 123), Hunting Party (CR 121).

1951 – 1966, Munich

Cf. Chr. Stator (CR 2), High Diver (pl. 14), Gymnastics (CR 156).

Great Sphinx of Giza (pl. 15), Negroes (Nude) (CR 45), Mount Everest (CR 48), Milan Cathedral (CR 49), Negroes (Nude) (CR 46), Titanic (CR 146–47), Cathedral Square Milan (pl. 127).

Cf. Neunassen Castle (pl. 114), Alster (fig. 99), Forest Piece (CR 66), Meadow (CR 75), Snowscape (Blurred) (CR 80), Oxford Landscape (CR 167/2).

Cf. Dier and Dier II (CR 7 and 120), Cow and Cow II (CR 15 and 88), Birds (CR 21), Tiger (CR 78), and others.

Two Women with a Cake (CR 93), Group of People (pl. 17), Child on a Horse (CR 80/122), Working in the Garden I and Working in the Garden II (CR 113, 114), or Travel Agency (CR 120).

Red Nude (CR 101), Lovers in the Forest (pl. 18), Two Couples (CR 128), Olympia (pl. 19), Easter Nudes (CR 138), Student (CR 140), Spanish Nudes (CR 190), Bathers (CR 94), Diana (CR 195), and Small Nude (CR 165).


Uncle Rud (pl. 23), Aunt Marnianne (pl. 22), Christa and Wolf (pl. 20), Family (pl. 23), and Family in the Snow (CR 80/8).


Richter, Atlas, 2006, No. 3.

Paul B. Jakot, “Gerhard Richter and Adolf

Jakot, ibid., p. 475.

Cf. Andreas Huyssen, “Gedächtnisfiguren im

Christine Mehring, “Die Kunst eines Wunders.


John J. Curley, “Gerhard Richter’s Cold War
Vision,” in: Richter, Early Work, p. 29.


Robert Storr, Gerhard Richter, Forty Years of Painting, Munich 2004.


Cf. Jürgen Schreiber, Ein Maler aus Deutschland.
Gerhard Richter, Das Drama seiner Familie, Munich and Vienna 2009, p. 170.


Monika Jenny-Preys, Gerhard Richter und die

In conversation with Robert Storr 2002.


Richter’s letter to Wieland Förster dated Febr.

Cf. Andreas Huyssen, “Gedächtnisfiguren im

Ulihert Herz, Geschichte Deutschlands im

Herbert, ibid., p. 773.


Guido Meincke, Gerhard Richter / Zeitgenossenschaft, Munich and Vienna 2009, p. 3.

Dietmar Rübli, “Die Fotografie (un)erträglichen
machen. Gerhard Richter gesehen mit W. G. 451
2. "IN PAINTING, THINKING IS PAINTING"  

2 In 1969, in conversation with Jan Thorn-Prikker, Richter said: "If work methodologically, it just doesn’t work. A picture has a logic that can’t be verbalized until afterward; it can’t be designed. We talk about thinking a thing over, meaning over, afterward," (Richter, Text, 2008, p. 230). Eleven years later he elaborated to Astrid Kasper: "painting is like a substitute for thinking— a different way of thinking" (Richter, Text, 2008, p. 365), and in 2002 the artist said to Robert Storr: "Maybe seeing and deciding and doing is such a complicated, delusive activity, that I should not be bothered by verbalization attempts." (Richter, Text, 2008, p. 408).  
7 Whether Richter had read Sartre’s "Bought Sartre instead of literature." Cf. exhib. cat. by Werner Hofmann, "Bought Sartre instead of literature."  
9 Gehlen, ibid., p. 61.  
10 Gehlen, ibid., p. 519.  
12 "Bought Sartre instead of literature." Cf. exhib. cat. by Werner Hofmann, "Bought Sartre instead of literature."
For example, Lovers in the Forest (pl. 18); Helga Matas with her [first (pl. 24). Two Couples (CR 128), Eight Student Nurses (pl. 29), and others.

CR 142, 143, 145, pl. 31, 37, 31.
CR 160.
CR 178, 179, pl. 16–25 (pl. 35).
CR 197/3–1 181–186, 189.
Richter, Text, 2008, p. 142. Eighteen months earlier, Richter had already made a statement to that effect, adding to his earlier statement, which he repeated almost word for word in 1976, but adding the demand to preserve controllable: “That is why I have to avoid intervening or altering anything, for the sake of a simplicity that can thus be more general, definitive, decisive, lazing, and comprehensive.” Richter, Text, 2008, p. 34.

“I am only interested in expressing basic human emotions – tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on – and the fact that lots of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I communicate those basic emotions.” Selden Rodman, Conversation with Artists, New York 1975, p. 93.
Andy Warhol, The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again), London 1975, p.149.
In February 1973, Richter recorded: “I have no idea what one is doing, one has to commit oneself inwardly, in order to do painting. One observed, one ultimately came to the point of believing that one might change human beings through painting. But if one lacks this passionate commitment, there is nothing left to do. Then it is best to leave it alone.” Richter, Text, 2008, p.70.
Cf. Kellner, ibid., p.33.
Gelshorn, ibid., p.32.
Richter, Text, 2008, p.98.
Richter noted in 1984: “No, I wouldn’t say that again. I’m glad I said it then. By doing so I created some space for myself, protected myself, as it were, against being tied down, in order to maintain the freedom to do what I like – to try anything I like, and not to become an artist-painter who is tied down to a single trick.” Richter, Text, 2008, p.138.
It should be noted that contingency is to be understood as an area of possibility of what can happen and thus is not clearly distinguished from chance as a realized event.
Cf. Julia Gelshorn, Anregung und Wiederholung: Bilddiskurse im Werk von Gerhard Richter und Sigmar Polke, Munich 2012,
Richter, Text, 2008, p.95.
Richter, Text, 2008, p.98.
Pepi Lippard, “Minimal Art” (pl. 1986), in: Art in America, p. 231 (Lippard) and p.199 (Stella).
“252 My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there. It really is an object. . . What you see is what you see.” Ibid., p.158.
Alloway, ibid., p.56.
Cf. also Storr, ibid., p.53, where reference is made in particular to Sol LeWitt’s “Sentences on Conceptual Art” (1970), albeit with the limiting note: “Richter was and is a Conceptual artist not merely by virtue of method, but by poetic aspiration.”
In 2007, Richter took this one step further when, in the context of the Cologne Cathedral window, 4,900 Colors, an even larger color chart picture was created. Cf. exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter – Zufall, das Köher Diskurskunst und Farben, Cologne 2007
Richter, Text, 2008, p.91.
Birgit Pelzer, “Der Zufall als Partner,” ibid., p.141.
4. PRINTINGS AND GLAZED PAINTINGS


4.2 Richter, Text, 2008, p. 57.


4.4 Richter, Text, 2008, p. 68.


4.6 That’s what we’re all trying to do, to see and define that quality. It’s actually the most fantastic cultural achievement, that we can distinguish between good and bad, that we’re always working at this, be it as producers, or since time immemorial!” Gerhard Richter in discussion with Nicholas Serota, in: exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter. Panorama: A Retrospective. Expanded Edition, New York 2016, p. 16.


4.8 Asked by Wolfgang Pehnt, if one could permanently cancel indifference and a lack of meaning.

5. GLASS AND MIRRORS

5.1 Richter, Atlas, 2006, No. 27.

5.2 The Spanish Nudes (CR 121) can be recognized just like the Three Women (CR 120) and Two Women (CR 150) by their identical glass composition.

5.3 Guggenheim, Aachen, Zentrum für aktuelle Kunst, Gerhard Richter, Zeichnungen 1960–1999, Aachen, Zentrum für aktuelle Kunst, Gerhard Richter, Zeichnungen 1960–1999, p. 14, and in 2002 he said: “We only find paintings interesting because we always search for something that looks familiar to us… that’s how Malevich and Richtow work as well. You can interpret the Black Square of Malevich as much as you like, but it remains a provocation, you are compelled to look for an object and to come up with one.” Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p. 426.

5.4 Richter, Text, 2008, p. 67.


5.11 “Melancholy and indecision.” In addition, Honnef speaks of the contained indifference and a lack of meaning.


5.15 Cf. Gerhard Richter, “You can interpret the Black Square of Malevich as much as you like, but it remains a provocation, you are compelled to look for an object and to come up with one.” Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p. 426.


One needs to mention here Picabia’s watercolor Der westdeutsche Impuls, Leipzig 1920, which could apparently oscillate. Labeled as “Gabrielle Buffet,” the sheet in the Graphics Collection in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart carried the added phrase: “Elle corrige les mœurs en riant/Le fidèle Picabia.”

Some fundamental explorations should be mentioned in Gerhard Richter’s "Acht Grau," (ibid., p. 20) and his statement: “This has now been achieved by Scheerbart with his glass, and by the Bauhaus, with its steel. They have created rooms in which it is hard to leave traces.”


In his essay "The Mirror Stage," Hal Foster, The Sense of Sight, ed. James Jennings, Harvard (see note 26), pp. 134-135, states: “And in another place he stated: “This has now been achieved by Scheerbart with his glass, and by the Bauhaus, with its steel. They have created rooms in which it is hard to leave traces.” Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty,” (1933), in: Selected Writings, vol. 2, part 1; ed. Michael W. Jennings, Harvard (see note 26), pp. 731-736.

Gerhard Richters “Acht Grau,” (ibid., p. 20) and his statement: “This has now been achieved by Scheerbart with his glass, and by the Bauhaus, with its steel. They have created rooms in which it is hard to leave traces.” Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty,” (1933), in: Selected Writings, vol. 2, part 1; ed. Michael W. Jennings, Harvard (see note 26), pp. 731-736.

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The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis exhibited the Atlas in spring of 1992; the Kunst Moderner die Ville de Paris followed in fall of 1993; then came the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn from December 1993 to mid-February 1994.

Exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter: Atlas der Fotos, Collagen und Skizzen, Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 1997; Apr. 8–June 21, 1998. The volume contains a list of past exhibitions and changes that were made over the years, ibid., pp. 374 ff.

The 2006 edition was the basis for this publication: Gerhard Richter: Atlas, ed. Helmut Friedel, Cologne 2006. The list of previous exhibitions of the Atlas is expanded here, ibid., pp. 850 ff.


When Richter created his first inventory of pictures in 1969—the precursor to his catalogue raisonné—and started working on the Atlas, he not only applied Concept art practices but, in a way, also artistic historical methods. For Stefan Gronert, therefore, this becomes a kind of camouflage, whereby the resulting works of art—like the Atlas—underline the representability and alleged objectivity of the methods applied. As a result, Richter becomes the embodiment of a desperate swan song of a kind of painting that, from a semantic point of view, at least according to Buchloh, is to be regarded as having failed. Cf. Stefan Gronert, “Art History as Art,” in: Gerhard Richter: Early Work, 1951–1972, eds. Christine Mehring, Jeanne Anne Nugent, Jon L. Seydl, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles 2010, p. 119.


Richter, Text, 2008, p. 163.


Richter in conversation with Jan Thorn-Prikker.


Interview with Rolf Schön in December 1977; cited after Elger, p. 31.

Interview with Rolf-Gunther Dienst in February 1987, which was based on a photograph during his two-week trip to Greenland.

Much to the horror of the stonemasons at the cathedral corner (Cf. Gerhard Richter, Zeichnungen, Munich 1997, ed. Gerhard Finckh, p. 450), which were created using colors. Cf. CR 716/(1), p. 136). In this context, Richter mentions his paintings Cathedral Corner (CR 629/1, 626/1, pl. 143) of 1978, which was based on a photograph that he took three years earlier. Similar observations can be made in the Betty images (pl. 166, fig. 118), and in the Arctic seascape, which went back to photographs taken by the artist in 1972 during his two-week trip to Greenland, e. g. SSausages, 1975 (CR 375–378), Ice from 1980 (pl. 135), Lobry and Lobry, both from 1982 (CR 496/1–2, pl. 136).

Cf. Atlas, pls. 769–783 with more than 200 photographs.

Richter, Text, 2008, pp. 162.


Barthes, ibid., pp. 60–1.

Barthes, ibid., p. 36.

Barthes, ibid., p. 36.

Barthes, ibid., p. 55.

Barthes, ibid., p. 102.

Barthes, ibid., pp. 86–7.

Barthes, ibid., p. 190.


The paintings are often evenkitsch when I bring all the elements from myself into them, because I’m not just good and rational and all that, but also put all the rubbish into them.” Cf. Couve de Bruggen, “Gerhard Richter: Painting as a Moral Act,” in: Artforum, May 1985, p. 91.


Cf. Robert Storr, “Interview with Gerhard Richter,” in: exhibit. cat. Gerhard Richter. Forty Years of Painting, Museum of Modern Art, New York 2002, p. 302. – In the interview, Richter highlights the difference between his portraits and the works of Paolini, which he characterizes as decorative play. “I suddenly understood how dead serious mine was. That it was somehow inconsistent with the humour of Pop Art. It was humorous, it was that way in a tragic manner.” On May 15, 1983, Richter set up the room with the two sculptures at the Lenbachhaus, and, on the same evening, the exhibition The Dream of Orpheus was opened there, which also included works by Parmiggiani and Paolini.

Cf. interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, in: exhibit. cat. Gerhard Richter, Bilder/Szenen, Foundation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel 2004, p. 105. – During the MoMA interview with Robert Storr (2002), the artist stated that, rather, he saw the father problem in the 48 Portraits. And that this was also a typical German post-war phenomenon. “Most of our fathers were away in the war for a long time, and they either didn’t return or they came back shattered and broken—and as perpetrators… This,” he said, “creates a restlessness and uncertainty that certainly helped me paint the 48 men.” Richter, Texte, 2008, p. 502. To Nicholas Sera- to, Richter said in 2001: “I missed both: the great role model father and his resistance.” He therefore saw himself as an example of the fatherless generation. “I had nothing to say, and I’m saying it.” Conversation between Gerhard Richter and Nich- olas Serota, spring 1991, in: exhibit. cat. Gerhard Richt- ter, Panamani, Tate Modern, London, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Centre Pompidou, Muße national d’art moderne, Paris; Ostfildern 2001, p. 24. – As we know, Richter’s alleged father, Horst Richter, who had been a soldier from 1939–45, was barred from the teaching profession after the end of the war because he had been a member of the NSDAP. He had to work as an unskilled laborer for many years. Richter never met his biological father. Cf. Elger, p. 31 ff. – Alexander Mitscherlich’s book Auf dem Weg in eine wertlose Gesellschaft was pub- lished in 1963.

Buchloh, ibid., p. 45.

Cf. also Richter, Atlas, No. 61.


The fee of 75,000 DM allowed Richter to fulfill a long-cherished dream and to buy a terraced house in the Brend'amourstrasse. Cf. Elger, p. 237.


As Dietmar Elger quite rightly emphasizes. Cf. Dietmar Elger, “Images in the Plaza. Gerhard Richter’s 14 Standing Poles for Toyoshima,” ibid., p.73. 1986; ibid., p.89 ff. – Evidently, Richter worked with a module of 180 cm. The clear height of the room is 360 cm, the width 540 cm. For the vanishing point there is a height of about 190 cm, that is, the height of the base plane (as of Jan. 2018) plus half the size of the pane (95 cm). However, the shadow gap on the ground and the height of the steel spars on the base are disregarded here, so one might have to assume about 160 cm. After all, the illustrations in the aforementioned publication give an impression of this work, which, in contrast with any other painting, only reveals itself when, in situ, one relates to each other inside and outside, and near far, architecture and object, art and culture, reality and its mimic in a natural relationship. Cf. Richter, Raum. in: Atlas, Nos. 221 ff.

Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p.65.


The largest gasometer in Europe, in Oberhausen/Ruhr, has since 1931 been used as an exhibition venue for contemporary art (Christo and Jean-Clavain: The London Mastaba, 2016-17). It is to be expected that cultural-historical projects, and clocks up to one million visitors a year.

As named after the French physicist F. Charon, who in a publication in 1931 and afterwards analyzed and described the operating modus of such a ring under a suspended pendulum.


With regard to his early designs for extensive spa-
nal studies, Richter said in 1985 in an interview with Dorothea Dietrich: "Oh, yes, that is such a dream of mine—that the pictures will become an environment or become architecture, that would be even more effective." Richter, Text, 2008, p.154.


46 Gerhard, ibid., pp. 60-61.

47 This is in the interview with Nicholas Serota, in: exhib. cat. Pomona, National Galerie Berlin et al. 2011, p. 15.


49 Harari, ibid., p.608.

8. PICTORIAL REFLECTIONS ON THE STATUS OF THE ARTIST

1 Cf. Richter, Atlas, Nos. 44 and 45.

2 The second German artist, Friedrich Gräsel, was represented in the outdoor space with his sculpture Tor and Doppelewinkel.


4 Elger, pp.228 ff.

5 Stefan Gronert, Gerhard Richter, Portraits, Ostfildern 2006, and Paul Maierhofer, Die Porträts von Gerhard Richter, Cologne 2009, both discuss the debates of Brigid Polk and those of Gilbert & George.


7 Cf. also Stefan Gronert, Gerhard Richter, Portraits, Ostfildern 2006, p.102.

8 As, for example, in Invitation of Christ, Bike Bay, and The Laws of Order.


12 Of course, also the, ibid., p.452.


15 In 2003, Richter recalled: "There was this party at 5th [meaning Six Friedrich, the wife of the gallery owner], with Brigid Polk—the fat lady from the Warhol Factory. And then the three of us got undressed and jumped about naked. We just did our little performance and got dressed again. That was the benefit of the others, so they had something to shrub about. We didn't do anything; we were just naked. Brigid always made 'tit prints' of her breasts." Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p.215.

16 In conversation with Asi Bibi in 1995, AIDS Foundation, AIDS Art, AIDS Art in Context 1977-1985, CAPS Musee d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, Kunsthalle Basel and elsewhere, 1986-7; Dan Sharlatch No. 1 and No. 6, fig. 167-8. From March 17 to April 17, 1994, Fischer had exhibited examples from the Human Rights series, among other works, while Dan Sharlatch was on show at Art & Project in Amsterdam and then at the New Greenway Gallery in London, also in 1974. Elger already pointed out this connection, p.279.

17 In his MoMA interview with Robert Storr, Richter said: "I can't explain why I have such an aversion to collages. To me it always seemed cheap, and it was said: "I can't explain why I have such an aversion to making a painting, in this sense?," Richter replied: "Well, it is somehow my duty and my task to fill the space of painting, to make a whole out of it, and everything else seems inappropriate." Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p.57.

18 Cf. Dorothea Dietrich's interview with Sabine Schütz: "The real-life castle is a hideous monstrosity. But it does also have this other, seductive side to it, that of the beautiful fairytale, the dream of sublimity, bliss—happiness—and that's the dangerous part—then why isn't it a very special case of kitsch?" Richter, Text, 2008, p.235.


21 Ingrid Mesterk-Flygger, ibid., pp.236 ff. and figs. 64, 65.


23 Richter, Atlas, No. 10.

24 Mesterk-Flygger, ibid., p.240.


26 Richter, Text, 2008, p.567: Richter had still hoped to find a safe place for this assignment in 1993. He was wrong, however, because the picture was auctioned in London in December 1998 for £2 million. Cf. Elger, p.181.


29 Cf. Atlas, 199, Richter has chosen the section of his template so that the main traffic axis crossed his painting from bottom left to top right, while two smaller routes marked the corresponding counter-movement. Thus, the entirety of the composition is held together in a way that the photographic template is not.
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19 Atlas, No. 112, the first picture in the second row, although the square marked with pencil lines is misleading. Richter has based his representation on an enlarged section that had been shifted to the right and down. Therefore, only one tower of the Frauenkirche is shown in the painting in the lower left corner; diagonally above it is the tower of the city hall, and almost at the upper edge of the picture, just to the right of the center, the Isar tower. The painting thus does not exactly represent the square which is marked out on the Atlas plate.

20 With regard to his Alpine paintings, which have a similar ducit, Richter commented in an interview with Rolf-Gunter Dienst in 1970: “I no longer felt like painting those soft photo-pictures. Perhaps I also wanted to correct the false impression that I had adopted an aesthetic viewpoint. I don’t want to see the world in any personal way. I have no aesthetic problem, and the technique of making is immaterial. There’s no distinction between the paintings, and I would like to change my method as often as appropriate.” Richter, Text, 2008, p. 98.


22 Richter was said to have confirmed this much later, in 1993, when he thought that the picture reminded him of the destruction of Dresden. “Gerhard Richter und die Gegenwart: Gerhard Richter im Gespräch mit Sean Rainbird,” in: exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter, Tate Gallery, London 1993, p. 126.

23 Richter, as he emphasized in 1991, found the model in an architectural journal. “They were also mini-mini surrealistic in a certain way. In this painting the model does not fit together—there is a sense of discontinuity about the image. I think very few of the paintings after architectural models are successful, with the exception of one: I was able in this painting to achieve a sense of presence. I put the paint on very thickly in black and white, creating with the two a gray. It was quite musical, almost like a fugue.” Richter, Text, 2008, p. 263.

24 Cf. Elger, p. 100 ff.—On his cityscapes, Richter said in 1979: “They were horrible, like newly built housing developments, so inhuman, revolting. They looked as if they had been bombed, though they were normal cities. But I never said that I meant anything with them.” Goossen van Bruggen, “Gerhard Richter. Painting as a Moral Act,” in: Artforum, May 1985, p. 86. Harnen follows this assessment and sees in the illustrations “bombardment instead of flourishing cities” and speaks of “atrocious oblitera tion” or “terrible emptiness of designed space.” Richter, ibid., p. 39. And in 1983, Richter then said again about his Alpine paintings and cityscapes: “Those were done when I no longer felt like doing figurative photo-pictures, and wanted a change in the unequivocal statement, the legible and limited narrative. So I was attracted by those dead cities and Alps, which in both cases were stony wastes, and stuff. It was an attempt to convey content of a more universal kind.” Interview mit Benja min H. D. Buchloh, in: Gerhard Richter, Paintings, Chicago, Toronto 1988, p. 21/here cited after: Richter, Text, 2008, p. 174.


26 Godfrey, ibid., p. 77.—After 1945, the aerial war with its devastating consequences was as little discussed as the crimes of the National Socialist dictatorship. This changed in part with two publications that appeared only much later: Alexander Kluge, Der Luftkrieg auf Heveliusstern am 8. April 1945 (Frankfurt 2008) and W. G. Sebald, Luftkrieg und Literatur (Munich 1999).


28 His daughter Babette was born in 1966, his mother died in 1967, and in the year after, his father committed suicide; Konrad Lueg had become a gallery owner in 1967 and his relationship with Polke cooled noticeably. Cf. Jenni-Preis, ibid., p. 118.


30 The photographic starting point can be found in the Atlas, No. 171 (1967) (Richter, Text, 2008, p. 111).

31 Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie, pp. 66.


33 Comments on some of the pictures were made in 1991, during preparations for the Richter exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London. Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p. 265.

34 Richter, Text, 2008, No. 118, p. 98.

35 Seacape (Centre-guer) (CR 233) should be referred to Atlas, No. 191.


37 Winter, p. 118.


40 Godfrey, ibid., p. 84.

41 Richter, Atlas, No. 205 ff.


43 Cf. inter alia Hubert Dambisch, Theorien der Weltkarte. Für eine Geschichte des Malers, Zurich 2013.


50 Richter, Text, 2008, p. 120.

51 Theodor W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 93.

52 Adorno, ibid., p. 77.

53 Adorno, ibid., p. 82.

54 Richter, ibid., p. 118.


57 Richter writes on his subject: “The marriage was in crisis, and the photographs he took in Greenland were visual analogues for his own failed hopes. He was exhausted by the struggle to find his own way as a husband and father, and felt that his dream of domestic happiness had, as a consequence, been written off.” The project was also an excuse for getting away. “Trouble in my marriage was reaching a climax. Going into the ice could be...”
interpreted as longing for a place where on feels safe-just so long as there is no life, only vision,' Richter says today. 'Elger, p. 203

85 Elger, p. 231

86 Richter, Atlas, 2006, No. 333


88 Paul Valéry, Windstriche, Frankfurt 1935, p. 67


92 Richter, Text, 2006, p. 163


95 Richter, Text, 2006, p. 158.


104 Rancière, ibid., p. 92. Although one has to ask oneself whether such an epiphany comes about only because the visible is dependent on the world. This is what Rancière says elsewhere: ‘The Embodiment of the Real through a database, that is the Underwriting of the Sightbare under the Sichtbaren moment of the World unitiert. This Ubiquity Derivation offers the double Deleuze, who is the one who transforms the Abwehring in the Sichtbaren moment of the Visible. Erstreckt. This Deleuze Sichtbaren functions actually only through the direct Abwehring, its direct Zurück- haltung.’ (p. 122)


106 Martin Seel, Ästhetik des Erscheinens. Munich 2000, p. 39


109 Christiane Vielhaber, Interview with Gerhard Richter, in: Das Kunstwerk, No. 4, 1986, p. 43.


112 The Hotel Waldhaus of Sils Maria, a fashionable place of hospitality and intellect, counts many celebrities among its past guests, including Theodor W. Adorno, Thomas Bernhard, Joseph Beuys, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Albert Einstein, Samuel Fischer, Otto Klemperer, Max Liebermann, Thomas Mann, Ernst Rathenau, Max Reinhardt, Luchino Visconti, and last but not least Gerhard Richter.

113 Robert Storm, Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting, ibid., p. 67.


10. STILL LIFES

118 Dieter Schwarz, above all, emphasized that genre plays an important role in Richter’s oeuvre. The reference to a convention guarantees, after all, that Richter’s corresponding images can be read as a part of history. They deduct their differentiation from this fact and are able to remove themselves from a purely subjective form of expression. Cf. Dieter Schwarz, ‘Zwei Landschaften von Gerhard Richter,’ in: Text zu Werken im Museum Winterthur, ed. Dieter Schwarz, Düsseldorf 2000, p. 229.


120 Among others, a very informative essay, dedicated to the offset print reproduction of the painting Gerhard Richter, Kerze, 1982, ibid., pp. 110–112, although I rather get the impression that Richter would wish to avoid such a formalized platitud. ‘Dass Richter auf der Suche nach dem Gemeinsamen und Selbstverstand- nischem nicht im dafür prädestinierten Ruh gerichtet ist, beleuchtet der Text ebenfalls, wobei die treueste bewah- rungsdienliche Souveränität.’ Cf. Butin, ibid., p. 8.

121 CR 497/1–2 and CR 499/1–4, 512/2, 512/3 (pl. 198) and CR 523/1–2 sowie CR 567/1–2.

122 CR 57/1.

123 CR 499/1–3 and CR 590/1.

124 CR 498/1–4.

125 Friedel speaks of Minimalism. His observation that the candle, or rather its flame, divides the picture both horizontally and vertically according to the golden ratio, fits with this only too perfectly (cf. Friedel, ibid., pp. 11–12), although I rather get the impression that Richter would wish to avoid such a formalized formalism. Above all, one would have to agree on whether one refers to the size of the canvas or internal lines. In CR 513/1, which is at the center in Friedel, the dark band on the right margin appears so dominant that it is hardly possible to define a measuring point here, but at the edge of the canvas or at the area of the offset print. Cf. Buchloh, ‘Gerhard Richter. 18. Oktober 1977,’ in: exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter, vol. 2, Bonn 1993, p.31.

126 In Barthélemy Aneau, Picta Poetis, 1952, one can find the motto ex maximo minimo (The greatest shall be the smallest), the picture of a skull and a few bones, and the caption, translated here: ‘These now are the remains of the temple where the living image of God was supposed to have been. This is also the ruin of the house where reason once resided. And now it is the terrible picture of an empty bed without a brain.’ Cf. Emblemata, ed. col. 507 f.

127 Ottofer, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller.


129 Some pictures only reproduce the skull in “normal position” (CR 545/1–2, CR 548/1–2, pl. 153) and in the Atlas, there are also two photographs showing the skull in this position, with one or two can- dles (Atlas, No. 397, 1 en. 1). Richter, Atlas, No. 398, bottom left.


Richter, Text, 2008, p.22.


Ehrenfried, ibid., p.39. To name a few examples: Portrait Lumm (1942; CR 48; 5), Portrait of Hans-Jürgen Moller (CR 71), Karl Stroher (CR 72), Prof. Zander (CR 81), Wasmuth (CR 104-5), the Hölzel family (CR 105), and others.


Richter, ibid., pp.59 ff.

Cf. Groener, ibid., p.105.


Cf. Groenert, ibid., p.84.


Cf. Ehrenfried, ibid., p.182.


Ibid.,p.104.


Silverman, ibid., pp.199.

Silverman, ibid., p.208.


Richter, Editions, No. 75.


Krüger, ibid., p.151.


85 Cf. Elger, p. 233 and 268–9.—Richter and Marianne (Emma) Eulinger were divorced in 1981.


87 Elger, p. 338.


90 Krüger, ibid., p. 175.

91 Robert Storr, "Gerhard Richter," in: Richter, Text, 2008, p. 404. As for the shock, one needs to recall that the devastating attack on the World Trade Center with its many dead had happened just five months earlier.


95 Asked about his family pictures, Richter answered: "They are not even that beautiful. They are a little damaged... Again I couldn’t quite hold it: they are not as beautiful as Vermeer... Painting is the only positive thing I have. Even if I see everything else negatively, at least in the pictures I can communicate some kind of hope. I can at least carry on." Cf. Interview with Robert Storr, in: Richter, Text, 2008, p. 402.


97 Of course, that does not mean that Richter would have been constantly invisible. Quite the contrary. When in 1993, the volume was published with his records, notes, and interviews (Reviews, Text), it was illustrated with 90 reproductions of him. Of these, 76 show the artist alone, in a passive mood, reflect- ing, resting, frequently also at work in his studio, while in the remaining 14 pictures, he appears together with Ema or his sons, or with other artists such as Palermo or Baeselt, or with gallery owners and curators. This is not surprising at first, after all, the artist and his reflections and observations are at the center of the publication. The new edition of 2008, however, creates an entirely dif- ferent impression now. They are predominantly pictures of individual works, of exhibition installa- tions, of friends, curators, visitors of museums, gal- lery owners and dealers, interpreters of his oeuvre, exhibition organizers, and many more. Richter too, appears, of course, but now he is essentially but one part of the entire art industry represented in the images. What had been characterized by a latent egocentrism in 1993, now proves to be the manifestation of an event that embodies nothing eccentric and no longer gives the artist any special status.


101 According to one of Richter’s statements (in Nov. 2001), a photograph was the starting point for this work, in which the artist represents himself as "blackface" (Atlos, Noss. 62, 63).

102 The publication in question is: Selbstdarstellung Künstler über sich selbst, eds. Wolf Herzogenzahl, Darmstadt 2003, See Butin, ibid., p. 27.


110 Bürger, ibid., p. 204.


118 Richter, Text, 2008, p. 144.


121 Cf. Atlas, No. 618 and r.


Notes

463
12. oktober 18, 1977


13 The theologian Helmut Gollwitzer called the journalist at her funeral a woman who had had a hard life, and who had made her life harder by allowing other people’s misery to get to her. In: Aust, ibid., p.398. In the Shadow of Karl Barth: Charlotte von Kirschbaum

14 Uteke M. Meinhold, „Aufklärung über eigene Denken,” in: Der Spiegel, No. 33, 2016, p.120 ff.


22 Reproductions in Storb, ibid., p.127.

23 Aust, ibid., pp.238 f.


26 Aust, ibid., pp.239 ff.

27 Aust, ibid., pp.289–90.

28 Ibid., p.305 ff.

29 Aust, ibid., p.376.

30 Aust, ibid., p.366.


32 Herbert, ibid., p.927.


36 Wellmer, ibid., p.274.

37 Wellmer, ibid., p.275.

38 In cooperation with Jan-Thorn-Prikker, Richter said in 1989: “Stefan Aust’s book was very important to me. So knowledge of the people, knowing the people, was basic to the pictures.” Richter, Text, 2008, p.230.


based on a misunderstanding. Gerschenk's name was apparently used by a member of the RAF as a cover name. Cf. Ulf Erhard-Ziegler, "Wie die Seele den Leib verlas," ibid., p. 412.


49. Germer, ibid., p. 53.


56. Lyotard, ibid., p. 334.


58. Lyotard, ibid., p. 53.


60. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Die Malerei am Ende des Sujets," ibid., p. 64.


64. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, ibid., p. 237; it probably also this figure of thought on which Buchloh bases his considerations, which is reflected in his view that Richter's politics, although by no means understood and intended by the artist in this way, ultimately follow the market.

65. Richter, Text, 2008, p. 113. In the first catalogue ransormed from 1986, it is pointed out that this version for the next catalogue is to be listed in a volume on printmaking. In the catalogue ransormed of the works dated 1993, No. 441 has been omitted.


68. Richter, Text, 2008, p. 424. In his MoMA interview with Robert Smith, Richter says among other things: "That was pure unarguement. It was a very big and boisterous picture, and I don't remember anything at all about it." Cf. Robert Storr, Richter says among other things: 

13. ABSRTACT PAINTINGS


2. Herbert, ibid., p. 885.


6. Habermas, ibid., p. 21.


9. Peter Bürger, Theory of the avant-garde, Minneapolis, Manchester 1984, p. 94.


13. Habermas summarised the fifth volume of his small collection of political writings from 1971 to 1984 under the title, Die Neuezialisten- lektüre (The New Confusion), which then became a buzzword (Frankfurt 1985).

14. Cf. CR 293-300 (Camino) and CR 293-303 (Rozet).


21. Looking back, Richter said: "My pictures became more and more impersonal and general until nothing was left but monochrome grey or colors next to each other, any unmodulated color. Then I was totally outside my paintings. But I didn't feel well either. You can't like that, and therefore I decided to paint the exact opposite. I decided very consciously—as salvation after all that grey—to survive, to paint polychrome, complicated, [kitsch]y pictures." Richter in an interview with Dorothy Dietrich in 1986, Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, pp. 155–6.


29. Cf. Michael Schwarz, "Spontanmalerei," in: Kunst- journ international, vol. 20, 1977, pp. 44 ff. The volume, to which Richter expressly refers in his letter to Buchloh, also contains monographic contributions on Georg Baselitz (by Carla Schulz-Hoffmann, pp. 97 ff.), Markus Lupertz (by Walter Ehrmann, pp. 100 ff.), Anselm Kiefer (by Evelyn Weiss, pp. 107 ff.) and others. Richter is only mentioned in passing in Schwarz's article and is only given three pages with color plates (paint- ing and detail), while Baselitz and Lupertz have eight color pages each.

30. Richter, Text, 2008, pp. 94–95. A little later Buchloh speaks of a "regressive" phenomenon and of "recently" German artists or of a "Fetisch- sierung der Malerei im Kult der peinture." Cf. Ben- janin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regulation: Notes on the Return of Representa-
ment, "but I have to take back what I said about the abstractions being free from all meaning and opinion, that they are merely a crystal clear dynamo of world . . . it has to do with atmospheres and contents. They are narrative and sentimental." Ibid, p.443.


16 Morneau, ibid., p.127.

17 Morneau, ibid., p.130.


20 Adele Weidemann, ibid., p.351.

21 For example, CR 288, 242/1-2, 543/2, 744/3-5, 592/5-6, 658/2, 2, 567 etc.


23 Ulrich Loock, ibid., p.100.

24 Ulrich Loock, ibid., p.109.

25 Ulrich Loock, ibid., p.112.


29 For example, CR 18, 1977, p.43.


31 Richter, Text, 2008, p.270. Richter made this comment when the paintings were shown at the Tate Gallery in London in 1991.

32 Sabine Morsbach joined his class in the winter semes­ ter of 1992, almost as his last student, because Richter had decided to stop teaching by that year.


38 Peter Gidal, ibid., p.19.


45 Klinger, ibid., p.88.

46 Klinger, ibid., p.79.


48 Klinger, ibid., p.175.

49 Klinger, ibid., p.185.


52 Richter, Text, 2008, p.115. Let us add that this remark serves Richter above all to oppose any form of ideology. “Action in pursuit of ideology creates lifeless stuff at best, and can easily become crim­ nal,” Rather, this points ahead to the very October 18, 1977, and is less valuable as a painterly-aesthetic argument.

53 Klinger, ibid., p.64.


56 Klinger, ibid., p.8.

57 Klinger, ibid., pp.173 ff.

58 Klinger, ibid., p.91.

59 Klinger, ibid., p.93.

60 Klinger, ibid., p.259, Note 25.

61 Theodor W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, ibid.,
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14. Overpainted Photographs, Books and Pictures, Oil Paint on Photographs


6. The combination of abstract and real elements, however, could only lead to a fruitful goal for Kandinsky if the mind manifested here as well as there, either as "composition (that is, obeying the inner call)" or as "construction (standing on an inner base)" (cf. Wassily Kandinsky, "Über die Farbe und das Bild," in: exhib. cat. Gerhard Richter, Übermalt Fotografie, ed. Markus Heimzelmann, Mannheim Monbroich, Leverkusen 2008, pp. 85–87).


Richter, Editionen, No. 124.

Richter, Editionen, No. 125.

Richter, Editionen, No. 149.

Richter, Editionen, No. 147: Not to be confused with Edition No. 58 of 1991, which has the same name.

Richter, Editionen, No. 124.

Richter, Editionen, No. 125.


The illustrations I–IV each measure 171 × 201 cm, reproductions in Storb, ibid. pp.30–31. The preparatory drawing for the painting, however, measures 22 × 27 cm, like the canvas, and is a meticulous representation of the architecture, including the prevailing clouds of fire and smoke. Fig. in Stort, September, p.32


Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, ibid., p.154.

Storr, September, ibid., pp.52–3.


Rancière, ibid., p.139.

Rancière, ibid., p.171.

Storr, September, ibid., pp.67–8.

Cf. Richter, Editionen, No. 131.


The exhibition, in cooperation with the Goethe Institut Lebanon, took place at the im Beirut Art Center from April 27 until June 16, 2012.


Gerhard Richter, Patterns, Cologne 2011.

Richter, Editionen, No. 141–44.


Schwarz, ibid., p.38.

Schwarz, ibid., p.32.

Schwarz, ibid., p.59.

Buchloh, ibid., p.56.

Schwarz, ibid., p.40.

Schwarz, ibid., p.39.

Schwarz, ibid., p.40—There is, for example, a super- ficies exhibited in 2003 which ‘has been completely destroyed, disintegration and damage. This means it can’t be separated from form, without which nothing can be created.’ Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p.506–17.

Richter, Text, 2008, p.515. For Klinger, form has to perform a special eschatological task which means it is not subject to any purpose other than communica- tization itself. While photographs fulfill that purpose, the painting is ultimately only there to make us assemble around it. Cf. Florian Klinger, Theorie der Form, Gerhard Richter und die Kunst des pragmati- schen Zeitalters, Munich 2013, pp.47–58. What one reads seems reasonable, but to my mind, the visual result does not correspond with what is stated. The illustration of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct illusion of the photograph is, ultimately, incompatible with the added oil color, so that one cannot speak of morphogenesis—this is a distinct
To Henri-François Debailleux, Richter said in 1992: “I can't explain why I have such an aversion to collages. To me it always seemed cheap, and it was too sloppy, too loose. I always wanted to make a painting.” Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p.419.


8 Richter, Text, 2008, p.299.

To Henri-François Debaillieux, Richter said in 1993: “I’ve just remained extremely attached to a culture of painting.” (Richter, Text, 2008, p.298); to Astrid Kasper he said in 2000: “Tradition enriches our lives. We are bearers of this tradition. That’s our task.” (ibid., pp.369–70). So, in hindsight, even in the phase of upheaval and change, when he grappled with Minimal and Conceptual art, perceiving it as “a kind of craze if you like, which carries you and lets you be very productive,” he says he was never abandoned by skepticism and the “constant awareness of certain traditions or skills I had attained,” which accompanied him like guardians (ibid., p.454). He would prefer to be understood as the “keeper of tradition,” as he said in 2002, to “rather than any other misunderstandings” (ibid., p.495).

Richter, Text, 2008, p.419.


Richter, Text, 2008, p.56.

Richter, Text, 2008, p.81.


Richter, Text, 2008, p.146.

Richter, Text, 2008, p.158.


Richter, Text, 2008, p.443.


26 In an interview with Amine Hase, 1982. Ibid., p.128. Also in a note dated March 17, 1986 (ibid., p.191), and in an interview with Christiane Viehhaber, in 1986 (ibid., p.195).


29 Kemp, ibid., p.315.


31 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, ibid., p.79.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

1 In conversation with Robert Storr (2002) he said: “I can’t explain why I have such an aversion to collages. To me it always seemed cheap, and it was too sloppy, too loose. I always wanted to make a painting.” Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p.419.


5 Kemp, ibid., p.315.

43 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, ibid., p.79.

38 In conversation with Birgit Grimm in 1992, ibid., p.398.


41 Interview with Robert Storr, Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p.446 in the German original.


43 Ibid., p.475.


50 Richter is here obviously referring to the so-called “crucifix judgment.” On May 16, 1995, the Federal Constitutional Court declared the wearing of crucifixes in Bavarian schools as inadmissible (excepting confessional schools).


52 Interview with Jan Thorn-Prikker 2004, Cf. Richter, Text, 2008, p.484. Richter received the commission for designing the window in the southern transept of Cologne Cathedral in 2002.


56 Ibid., p.493.

57 Klinger said that art ignites itself through the inadequacy and negativitiy of the world; however, as a successful form, it cannot be other than positivity and afirmation in itself Klinger, ibid., p.127.

58 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, ibid., p.1129.


60 Richter, Text, 2008, p.977.

61 Richter, Text, 2008, p.215. And in an interview with Zdenek Felix in 1984, Richter said: “Perhaps there is no real difference between representational and non-representational pictures . . . Both kinds are pictures; that’s to say, never mind what they represent, they use the same methods to do it: They seem, they are not what they depict but a semblance of it.” In: Gerhard Richter, Armin Zweite, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen. Here cited after Ulrich Look and Detlev Zacharopoulos, Gerhard Richter. Munich 1985, p.37. Note 53.


63 Burbner, ibid., p.41.


67 Richter, Text, p.137.

68 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, ibid., p.228–9.
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