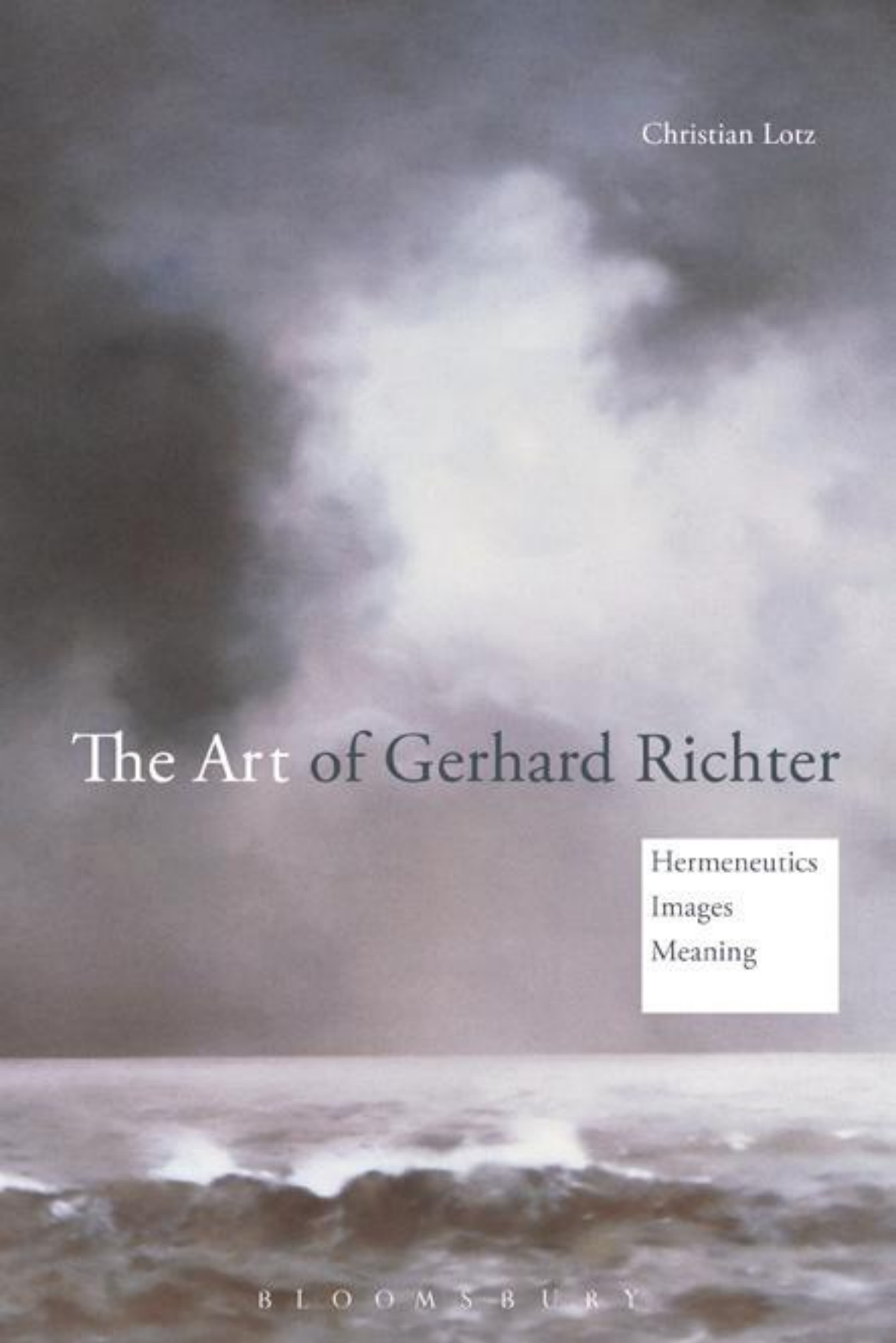
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Hermeneutics
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Hermeneutics, Images, Meaning

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To this context belongs the stereotypical question "What are you having in mind while you are painting?" One is unable to have something in mind, for painting is simply another form of thinking. That would be similar to asking Einstein "What did you have in mind when you came up with equations?" Einstein has nothing in his mind; he calculates.

Gerhard Richter

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Note on the Text

Whenever I refer to Richter's works, I refer to either the original German or the English title, followed by the creation date, the catalog raisonné number (CR+number), and, whenever possible, to the reproductions in this book (figure+number).

Given the vast scope of Gerhard Richter's work and given the limited number of reproductions that are included in this book, many references to works are made that are not directly accessible here. The reader, however, can easily access all of Richter's works online at a fantastic web page to be found at, http://www.gerhard-richter.com, which contains a database of all images along with precise information about each work, and, in addition, the site offers excellent background information about Richter's work including literature, videos, and biographical information. There are also four excellent documentaries with and about Richter available: *Gerhard Richter. Das Kölner Domfenster* by Corinna Belz (DVD, 2007), *Gerhard Richter: Painting* by Corinna Belz (DVD, 2011), *The South Bank Show: Gerhard Richter* (2006, available on YouTube), and *Gerhard Richter – Meine Bilder sind klüger als ich* (without year, available on YouTube). In addition to contributions by his major American commentators, Robert Storr and Benjamin Buchloh, in my view, the best essay that deals on a proper theoretical level with Richter's *entire* oeuvre is Arnim Zweite's essay in the exhibition catalog that accompanied the retrospective in Düsseldorf 2005 (Richter 2005a).

Acknowledgments

Above all, I would like to thank Corinne Painter, the better side of myself, herself a philosopher, for her patience with my still-at-times-imperfect English, and for her help and corrections, which doubled the burden on her already busy schedule. In addition, I would like to thank the editor of Bloomsbury Press, Colleen Coalter, for taking on and supporting this project although it was difficult to find external reviewers for my manuscript, the reason for which can be traced back to the uncanny mix of philosophy, hermeneutics, aesthetics, and art historical ideas that this book attempts to integrate. Given the broad approach that I have taken in this book, readers who have *narrow* ideas of philosophical activity and academic "isms" will be dissatisfied, if not frustrated, with my text.

This book was a long time in the making to the point that I almost gave up the project. The manuscript disappeared for two years in a box on my desk and a folder on my hard drive, until 2011, when Hugh J. Silverman, an undogmatic mind, who unexpectedly passed away in 2013, showed interest in publishing my manuscript in a Continuum series devoted to the interchange of philosophy, aesthetics, and art. Meanwhile the manuscript for this book was "on hold," my own intellectual trajectory significantly moved from a phenomenological approach to understanding our world to an approach that is centered on basic insights in critical theory and the Marxist tradition. Nevertheless, I believe that phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Marxist aesthetics can be reconciled with each other, which is visible in the trajectory that important critical theorists, such as Adorno and Lukacs, have themselves taken by integrating the phenomenological tradition into their materialist frameworks. For example, I hope that readers of this book can see the deep affinities between my concept of representation (Darstellung) and a realist and mimetic conception of art. Adorno, in particular, is an interesting case, since, given that his lectures on aesthetics that he delivered in 1958 very clearly integrate central hermeneutic insights, such as Gadamer's concept of participation. However, Adorno himself does not make this connection visible. Accordingly, though this book is a "mixed bag" in several regards, I still hope that readers with an open intellectual attitude will find the ideas presented here stimulating for thinking about hermeneutics,

painting, and photography within the context of Gerhard Richter's work, which, for me, is the pinnacle of contemporary painting.

I would also like to thank the *Philosophy Documentation Center* for allowing me to use portions of an earlier essay on Gerhard Richter, which appeared in *Symposium, the Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* (Lotz 2012) in Chapter 5. In this vein, I would like to thank Antonio Calcagno specifically for inviting me to give a lecture on Richter at King's University College at Western University (London, Ontario) and thereby encouraging me not to give up on the manuscript. I would also like to thank Bloomsbury Press for allowing me to republish four pages, from an essay on Husserl and Barthes (Lotz 2010b), in Chapter 2. In addition, I would like to thank the Museum of Modern Art for allowing me to see Richter paintings in its Brooklyn storage facility and the St. Louis Art Museum for giving me access to research material related to Richter's paintings. Finally, I would like to thank Michigan State University for providing me with a Humanities and Arts Research Program (HARP) production grant, which allowed me to add color reproductions to this book and to purchase the images from Richter's studio, as well as for providing me with one semester on leave Intramural Research Grant Competition (IRGP), during which I was able to develop the first ideas of this manuscript and immerse myself in the art of Gerhard Richter. This semester took place in a beautiful setting at the *Nordsee*, and I would like to express my deep gratitude to my parents who provided me with that unique place in which to work. I still carry with me happy memories of those cold days *at the sea*, filled with wind and below the wide sky of Northern Germany.

Ann Arbor and Berlin, 2015

Introduction

In his recently published lecture course on aesthetics given in 1958/9, Adorno introduces a term that, two years later in his Mahler book, he takes up in a different fashion, namely, the term "breakthrough." The term "breakthrough" [*Durchbruch*] refers to the moment in which the idea of freedom and being liberated "breaks into" the experience of art in the form of being beyond the empirical world: the experience of a quasi-transcendence in art. This transcendence can be achieved by the work of art, because the work is able to push us and itself beyond the everyday world and to leave behind all instrumentality encountered in the world (Adorno 2009: 195). This transcendence is an experience of liberation, according to Adorno. On the one hand, this possibility of a breakthrough is a real possibility, and, on the other hand, it remains a semblance. It is real, since such breakthrough moments can indeed be experienced in "being overwhelmed," but it remains a semblance, as the breakthrough only *seems* to be something immediate (Adorno 2009: 196); for example, when the experience merges with the object. Indeed, a breakthrough is a truly non-reified experience and cannot be possessed. As such, it must negate itself as soon as it is experienced. Ideality and the present moment contradict each other in a breakthrough moment. These moments, which, for Adorno are moments of the disappearance and dissolution of the subject, are not, as one might think, simply moments of enjoyment, or feelings of exaltation, of being excited, or of being entertained; rather, according to him, it is happiness that breaks through in these moments. And this happiness breaks through as an objective moment, that is, as an aspect of work in a world within which the experience of happiness becomes increasingly destroyed. It is, accordingly, a special form of happiness that Adorno has in mind, as he does not think of it as an ethical or a psychological concept; rather, in this case happiness is based upon the ideal of being merged *with* the object. The experience of art, put in hermeneutic terms, is *participation*, being-with, not being-in-front. He also thinks of it as a form of containment, which implies that the subject is *taken over* and "carried forward" by the object. The object holds the subject and—echoing lost childhood experience—art is able to bring out this a-subjective

possibility of being related to an object. This book ultimately can be traced back to such an experience, despite the instability and nonpermanent nature of such experiences. As such, these experiences are kept and turned into a promise. The experience of art is based on a promise because it offers to the participant an experience of a non-objectified and non-reified relationship to the world. Instead, the audience is fully acknowledged as enclosed and safeguarded by the work. As Adorno has it, this experience resembles a happy childhood, or the childhood of our dreams.

Whenever we encounter such a breakthrough, we have the impression that this experience is sufficient, enclosed, and closed off; however, this impression is wrong, as any reference to an immediate "having" and possession on our side would abstract from the work and lead us back to ourselves—and decidedly away from the work of art. Accordingly, I agree with Adorno's claim that the work of art is in need of reflection because it *seems* to speak, but whenever we try to listen to it we are confronted with the fact that the work is in need of a language in order to understand it. Though reflections on art ultimately stem from an impulse outside of our rational conceptions of them, they are unable to be experienced in their own right without letting them speak. The claim that the work of art does not need conceptual reflection, as some phenomenologists would maintain, is thus incorrect, as this would lead us to a subjectivization of the work of art, since the claim that experience is itself independent from reflection is based on the assumption that experience is something immediate, that is, an experience without mediation. Conceptual reflection, however, is not something that we perform "on top" of our experience, or that we "add to" an experience; rather, the work of art implies its own understandability *as* experience, which I take to be a genuine hermeneutic insight. Accordingly, any claim to have an *immediate* possession of works of art remains an illusion produced by the culture industry and the commodity form (Adorno 1997: 13). A work of art is *always* mediated. As a consequence, my own position lies somewhere between critical theory and hermeneutics.

In reflection 509 in his *Maxims and Reflections*, Goethe said that we are in need of a "delicate" [*zart*] theorizing that "makes itself identical with the object and becomes true theory" (Goethe 2008/12: 435), a claim that could have been chosen by Adorno (and Benjamin) as their own theoretical guiding principles, as Goethe's call implies that a successful philosophical reflection must merge with its object and do away with both idealist or logical abstractions and naïve or positivist accounts of the object about which we want to philosophize.

Interpreting works of art in the former way would transform *concrete* unities of meaning into *signs* of theoretical insights that were reached *outside* of the concrete work, on the basis of which this outside knowledge is then applied to selected works, artists, or movements. In contrast, I believe that theoretical reflection about art can only be successful if it comes *out of* the concrete work such that through theoretical reflection the work itself changes its character in such a way that work and reflection are shown as dialectically related, and as forming themselves into a higher unity. Simply put, what we think *about* a work of art is—at least in an ideal situation—*part of* the work of art. Accordingly, in what follows, neither do I apply a ready-made theory to a painting (as is often done in contemporary art interpretation), nor do I remain on the side of the painting alone; instead, I try to present a reflection that mediates the conceptual with the object so that both the conceptual side and the side of the object are mediated with each other; in addition, I hope, to steal words from Adorno again, that the "solution springs forth" as a constellation of its elements (Adorno 2000: 32).

This book defies standard classifications. It will be taken as unphilosophical for the philosophers, not historical for the art historians, and not critical enough for the art critics, despite that it is based on important elements of the aforementioned "disciplines": philosophical aesthetics, art history, and art criticism. I confess that I am neither interested in a pure analytic style of writing about art on the meta-level nor interested in the historical place of Richter's work. Neither do I have sufficient knowledge to compete with the art historians or the art critics' comparative gaze. Nevertheless, my independence from overly scholastic attitudes and expectations on the side of (certain) philosophers, and the independence from comparative exercises on the side of (certain) art historians lead, I hope, to something that ultimately remains closer to its object, namely, the work of art. Accordingly, I do not investigate Richter's work from a general theory of modern art and modernity, the consequence of which is that I am not interested in the question of how Richter's work can be placed within the development of twentieth-century painting or how his work is related to the question of whether the development has reached a point beyond modernity, having moved toward postmodernity. These questions are certainly of interest for aesthetics in general and everyone attracted to Richter's oeuvre in particular, but they come with the danger of moving away from the work itself. As Gronert points out, most commentators take Richter's painting to be operating on the meta-level, which leads them to overlook the structure of single works

(Gronert 2002: 40). Interpreting Richter in this way would transform *concrete* unities of meaning into *signs* of theoretical insights that were reached *outside* of the concrete work, on the basis of which this outside knowledge is then applied to selected works, artists, or movements. Though we have seen, during the last decades, that theorists, such as Hal Foster, Rosalinde Kraus, Benjamin Buchloh, and Therry de Duve, have developed highly sophisticated interpretations, I do not want to follow the path that they so brilliantly opened up. I am willing to take the risk of being naïve and to let most insights come out of the work itself, namely, the paintings created over the last four decades. Indeed, I take Richter's paintings to be a response to questions that are not *beyond* painting. This position, as we will see, does not exclude external knowledge. For a work of art, as Hegel pointed out, is always located in a specific *milieu*, insofar as it is placed and comes out of a world to which a work belongs and which the work mediates and forms into an image (Hegel 1971a: 346). We cannot even *understand* simple cultural objects, such as the forks and knives that we hold in our hands at dinnertime, without looking at them as mediating a specific historical, theoretical, and cultural world (e.g., an industrialized modern design world with the ideal of universal capitalistic distribution of standardized forms). However, knowledge that we bring in contact with the work must ultimately be legitimated out of the work. I do not conceive of phenomenology and hermeneutics in the Gadamer/Adorno sense as separate and specialized interpretations of art; rather, I conceive of them as a universal attempt to offer a coherent account of interpretation itself both on the side of the audience and on the side of the work itself. The latter is often overlooked, since we tend to forget that a work of art is itself an interpretation of something, especially insofar as it lets us see the world in a specific light. I will come back to this point in Chapter 1.

The sharp gap that we sometimes observe between theory and the concrete work of art is certainly an effect of the development of art in the twentieth-century. The more works of art became reduced to their "pure" qualities (especially paintings), and the more these works resist allowing us to speak *with* them, the more the theorists are forced to speak *about* them. The silence about a great portion of painting in the twentieth century has forced us to develop theories that make their silence understandable from the outside. It is astonishing that a critique like the one offered by Greenberg could produce so many (intelligent) words about what (according to his own definition) was moving toward its absolute zero-point, namely, the definition of paintings as a simple delimitation of flatness (Greenberg 1962). This process and tension between the silence

of the reductionist tendencies in painting and the chatter of their interpreters is deeply ironic; for it seems that especially works of artists that are anti-intellectual in their nature, such as Jackson Pollock's drip paintings, produced an industry of commentators and commentaries. All of this seems to be ruled by the fear that the less we see, the more we must speak in order to overcome the shocking silence that we produced through how we render ourselves visible in the external world. The silence on the side of the object is always a sign of silence on the side of us.

On the other hand, we can observe a certain return to rhetoric in recent movements, at least in movements that are connected to the European tradition of painting, such as those advanced by painters like Francis Bacon, Anselm Kiefer, Markus Lüpertz, Neo Rauch, Lucian Freud, and Gerhard Richter. These painters allow us to move away from the torturous fixation portrayed by the older generation of critiques, to critiques about painting offered from the perspective of a theory of modernity, which, in the light of these painters, turns out to be a sign of the emptiness of works produced in the name of "purity." In contradistinction to the rupture that abstract movements of modern art have introduced in our world, these painters allow us to return to their paintings again and again, and to speak about these paintings by speaking *with* these paintings. It is the underlying spirit of humanism that pulls our attention to these painters. The possibility, therefore, to take seeing and speaking, the gaze and the word, as being interrelated instead of as being disconnected returns in these cases. It is precisely this welcoming gesture and openness to dialogue in Richter's work that I am interested in. Instead of being an empty gesture of rejection, Richter's work is based on *positive* ideas that can be identified. His art, in other words, is constructive and not simply destructive, which commentators, such as Buchloh, were puzzled about (but against this see Storr in Holert 2002: 105). The affirmative moment in Richter should not be identified with conservatism or as a rejection of modern principles; rather, it should be interpreted as Richter's attempt to *save* painting as a meaningful activity that, as such, wants to keep its own communicability open. Silence is not an option for Richter. As one commentator has it, according to Richter, "art emerges from the imperfection and negativity of the world; however, as actualized form art is forced to be positive and affirmation" (Klinger 2013: 127 trans. C. L.).

Instead of "doing theory" I intend to follow a very traditional path of thinking about art that has been opened up by philosophical works, such as Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* Langer's *Feeling and Form*, and Gadamer's

Truth and Method. The unique feature of these philosophies of art is their shared conviction that art is of interest for philosophical thought because the art work is itself an objectification of human spirit and human activity, and is therefore related to "metaphysical truth." Art is, according to these authors, a *form* of "thinking," namely, a form of thinking that is not carried out *as mental* thinking or *as* cognition, but rather *appears*—"shines," to use Hegel's terms—in its externalized being. As Richter himself puts it, "painting is like a substitute for thinking—a different way of thinking" (Richter 2009a: 365). We are able to (possibly) understand a work of art because we find meaning *in it*, indeed rationality, even if it does not show itself in the form of arguments and inferences. Something "shows up" in art, as Gadamer puts it, and it is this that we call "truth" (Gadamer 1993/8: 384). A work of art without this event of "showing something" and letting us see something would be without any intellectuality and therefore it would be a meaningless piece of matter. Every work of art, we might say, *takes a stance toward the world.* Creative human beings objectify themselves in those objects and therefore we are able to recognize ourselves in them. Even anti-art and extreme forms of the avant-garde of the last century are not possible without this *intellectual* element. Anti-art affirms what it tries to negate. For negations, in Hegels words, are always determinate negations and remain tied to the object that they negate. Only an intelligent object can *deny* its intelligent status. The consequence of this view is that the *shape* of our world, including paintings, is not taken to be in conflict with rationality, but rather, it is a *realization* of it. Even the garden hedges around our houses, whether they follow a standardized industrial norm or a more subtle creative idea of gardening, still contain an element of the human spirit that takes possession of the world by forming itself into it. And because there is not simply "matter" out there, but an always-already historically shaped world, the human spirit is thereby constantly re-forming itself. Works of art, as cultural things, then, are themselves a way through and in which the world within which we live is shaped and comes into being. As such, works of art are intellectual in a wide sense of intelligence and intelligibility, which includes the entire perceptual apparatus of embodied human beings.

However, to briefly introduce the issue at this point (I will come back to it in Chapter 1), a work of art gives us something to be understood in a "sensual" and external way. Even if the work would be (incorrectly) taken as an "idea" of an artist or a temporary event in a desert, it *must* appear in the external world, whether in the form of a word from the artist or in the second within which someone notices the event in question. The being of the work forces thinking to

leave its own sphere and to remain bound to materiality. This conflict and gap between meaning and materiality, or, in Heidegger's words, between world and earth, can never be overcome and leads to three consequences:

(1) A work of art can never be fully rationally understood because a work of art can never overcome its materiality and the way in which it is externalized. Even the most abstract work of art, such as Malevitch's *Black Square*, for example, is not reducible to an idea or a thought. The idea must appear in the work itself and come to presence in it. Meaning, we could say, is ultimately bound to its material form and therefore any reflection on art is forced to come back to the "thisness"—to the "here and now"—of the individual work. Otherwise it could simply be reported. Thought is forced to return to the gaze, the ears, the hands, and the tongue, in order to find itself in the external world. Thought, therefore, is desire when confronted with a work of art: it wants to understand what appears as something to be understood, but it shows up in a foreign element (the materiality). However, since thought is no longer in its own sphere, it must go out of itself (to the work) in order to return to itself. This return (again) points to the presence of what shows up in a work of art. Every idea *about* a work of art must come back to it in order to show evidence that it is the idea *of* the work. Only then can thinking and its universality—ideally—be found *in* an individual object or formation, which thereby becomes an image of that universality.

(2) A work of art—in contrast to thoughts that remain within their own sphere—can be enjoyed because the gap between form and materiality gives us the possibility of moving into a new dimension, which is located *between* the necessities of rational thinking and the necessities of external nature. Though arguments, science, and art are all *forms* of intelligibility, neither the intelligibility expressed in an argument nor the intelligibility expressed in a formula are *as such* enjoyable; however, the intelligibility of a work of art is *per se* pleasurable (including dis-pleasure). Theoretical reason can only deal with what *is* the case. Practical reason can only deal with what *should be* the case. And aesthetical reason can deal with what *could be* the case, and is therefore higher than both theoretical and moral reasoning; for in living close to art, we, as Schiller puts it, "move into a mediating mood in which sensuality and reason are active *at the same time*" (Schiller 1966/3: 493). Works of art, understood as what I will call *Gebilde*—"formed images"—are *in between* nature, theory, and morality, and they allow us to enjoy our own rational activity and the possibility of seeing our ideas about the world *in* the world (and not only in our mind or in scientific form). Images (can) *liberate* our reasoning from logical and moral strictness.

(3) A work of art is always a product of human productivity (even if it was generated by machines or by chance) and an opportunity for *us* to participate, and, as such, it is always related to cultural and social realities. Though in our contemporary capitalist culture the audience is more and more driven to an atomized reception of art, the works nevertheless gather together and bring about a world in which all of us participate throughout our private and public reception. The hermeneutic concept of participation, in fact, is a social concept.

Given this initial position, the gap between theory and individual work has to be narrowed *by the work itself*, and Richter's paintings are a superb example of works that do not need external theory to explain them precisely because *they form and display thoughts into images*, and by "thoughts" I do not mean propositions; instead, I refer to a larger conception of intelligence that comes out and appears in images. In fact, the act of painting itself, as we will see in regard to Richter, is always embodied intelligence. More specifically, commentators have noticed Richter's self-related "philosophical quality" before; for example, Peter Schjeldahl and Susanne Ehrenfried call Richter a "philosophical painter" (Ehrenfried 1997: 69). Richter, according to Ehrenfried, "paints philosophy. . . . Though he does not use words, he philosophizes in his paintings" (Ehrenfried 1997: 164). Robert Storr explains that Richter is a "broadly philosophical painter, more than strictly a conceptual one, a radical thinker and traditional maker" (Storr 2002a: 89); his art has a conceptual character (Friedel in Richter 2006b: 16). And, finally, Nasgaard has characterized Richter's work as "epistemologically" oriented (Nasgaard 1988: 35). Richter himself never explicitly referred to philosophers or philosophical content in his paintings, except in his book art project entitled *Sils*, which makes references to Nietzsche (see Erbsmehl 1994). As demonstrated by Florian Klinger, Richter's conception of painting and its relation to the contemporary art world is sophisticated (Klinger 2013).

Richter's work *First Look into the Inside of an Atom* (2000, editions CR 112, figure 1) makes the ambivalence and unity between philosophy and image immediately visible. From a philosophical perspective, I consider this to be his most *paradigmatic* work; for Richter has taken a page from the German daily and nationally distributed newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* that shows a photo taken by a new electronic microscope together with a part of a newspaper article about the photo, which (according to the article text) depicts an atom (for the technical background, see Nielsen 2008). As the text beneath the photo explains, what we see here for the first time within human history is the inner structure of an atom. It promises, in other words, to reveal secrets to

the human eye that are usually hidden and invisible to us behind the appearing world. What appears here is the essence of physical reality, the core of everything in the universe. However, as we notice by turning our attention from the text to the picture, though the text claims to let us see the core of matter itself, in truth it does not show anything; at least nothing we could identify in any intelligent manner. What do we *really* see? What do we see if we forget for a moment what the text tells us we are *supposed* to see? Do we see "the structure" or "the core" of nature? Do we see matter itself? Reality? Nature? It seems not. We should be honest and admit that we do not see the basic elements of the universe in this work. Instead, we really see a veil of blurred gray and black tones—a cloudy and foggy world—leaving us without the possibility of identifying anything beyond the fact that we see something "cloudy" in front of us. If we are honest, then we must admit that we do not actually see much, although we clearly see something. However, once again, what do we really *see*? Let us take into account that we are not simply staring at a newspaper clipping or a picture of a newspaper clipping (which unfortunately the reproduction in this book makes us believe), but rather, a print *of* a newspaper clipping. This has two consequences:

(1) On the one hand, the act of seeing turns into an act of blindness. Instead of seeing *more* of the world, we realize that we see *less* than before. The picture is not simply a depiction of reality, but, above all, it offers a promise of a special kind, namely, it offers the power to make the *force* behind everything visible, thereby turning itself into a metaphysical instrument of reality, truth, and essence. Instead of taking the essence of the world to be at the *surface* of the world, we are forced to look behind the world and to take the real essence to be hidden behind the surface. However, despite its promise, what we see is not the truth of reality; it is not truly reality. We still see only a picture. The picture promises to present the *visible* instance of the world that not only (so far) had been hidden behind our world but also had been determining our world. However, seeing this picture makes us realize that we see, again, only a surface. We see only a picture of something, and not the natural reality itself. What we see is a blurred unidentifiable cloud of gray, not an atom. What is more, we will *never* see the atom itself. Even if we would not see a blurred picture (and who says that this picture is blurred?), we would still only see a picture. Nature loves to hide, as Heraclitus once said and as Richter now shows. The latter point leads us to the other consequence, or rather, to the other side of blindness.

(2) On the other hand, namely, taken now as a *painting*, it turns our *blindness* into its opposite because, as a painting, the work forms all of its elements into

an *image* and thereby lets us—the viewer—understand something *about* itself and the world that it forms into an image. It is precisely *this* quality that gives Ehrenfried's claim that Richter's paintings "philosophize" its substantial evidence. As a painting, the work demonstrates the blindness of the picture and *thereby* makes us see. What we *see* is a *cloud*, and not an atom, the consequence of which is that we encounter a conflict between what we *believe* and what we *see*, and it is precisely this thought that the work unifies into an image. In this connection, in his very enlightening commentary delivered as the celebration speech of Richter becoming an honoree community member [*Ehrenbürger*] of Cologne, Arnim Zweite pointed out that we are forced to interpret the optical phenomena in a symbolic way (Zweite 2007a). However, based on what I have described so far, we must reject Zweite's thesis and make the claim even stronger. It is not the case that we *symbolically* interpret optical phenomena as "clouds"; rather, we *see* a cloud and a cloudlike formation. In addition, as Zweite correctly points out, pictures as photos of atoms are in a sense impossible because these "photos" are produced through waves that are *in principle* outside of what one can *see* (Zweite 2007a). Consequently, to underline this point again, what we *see* is neither an atom nor a symbolically interpreted atom; instead, we see a print of a foggy picture, which—when all elements are taken together—transforms the picture into an image that allows us to understand something about the nature of images and the relation to what we call "reality" within a naturalist framework. In this sense, the painting *is* intelligently demonstrating its own intelligence; for, as I will later explain, the nature of thinking (in a non-mentalist framework) is precisely characterized by two aspects: it establishes both our *relation to* something (the "image") through its own "being" and its materiality.

We are now better equipped to understand the path that I want to open up in this book. However, we must first understand in more detail how paintings constitute meaning, and how Richter's work in particular realizes itself in what has been called by recent commentators Richter's "second order representational strategy" (Green 2000: 33; Philippi 1992: 118), namely: an attempt to present paintings that thematize their own status *in* them (van Bruggen 1985: 83). It is of course true that all avant-garde art from Malevich onward has incorporated a reflective structure, by means of which the status of art becomes visible through different possibilities for realizing art. However, Richter's case is of a special nature, insofar as he returns to an art practice that is not only driven by inner reflexivity but also driven by the *sublation* of this reflexivity. His paintings, in other words, try to *overcome* and dissolve the tension that they introduce. In signature works

such as *Betty,* the *October 18, 1977* series, or the *Cage* and *Forrest* series, the inner meta-reflexivity is synthesized and becomes part of a higher unity and identity. In order to understand this unity and identity on a philosophical level, I will deal with the hermeneutical nature of Richter's painting in the first part of the book by outlining basic elements of a hermeneutic aesthetic and reflections on image constitution, which include painted images and painted photographs; not incidentally, I believe that my main convictions outlined in the first part are not in conflict with Richter's own basic beliefs. Indeed, the first note published in his own notes and diary (from 1962) expresses Richter's rejection of an attitude that takes art to be an activity of no relevance. Against this, he says that the impulse toward painting "stems from the need to communicate, the effort to fix one's own vision, to deal with appearances. . . . Without this, all work would be pointless and unjustified, like Art for Art's Sake" (Richter 2009a: 14), which is a perfectly hermeneutic claim, since *communicability* is the basic principle of hermeneutic aesthetics (Jauss, Gadamer). Richter's claim is also applicable to philosophy in general. We philosophize because philosophy is a response to our impulse to transform the unintelligibility of the world into intelligibility and to question what we find in front of us. "Picturing things," Richter goes on, means "taking a view" (Richter 2009a: 14). Thinking (through) things, we might respond, means taking a position. In this way, both philosophy and art need each other equally. "Every work of art," as Adorno puts it, "needs thought [*Gedanken*] and therefore philosophy in order to be fully experienced" (Adorno 1998/7: 391). I do not think that Adorno refers here to philosophy as a professional activity; rather, what he has in mind is philosophy as a hermeneutic activity, that is, works of art are in need of interpretations as attempts to communicate that which the works already implicitly articulate. As Heidegger has it in *Being and Time* in a section that deals with language, "The intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it. Discourse is the Articulation of intelligibility. Therefore it underlies both interpretation and assertion" (Heidegger 1985: 203). The relation between articulation and interpretation, as I will argue in Chapter 1 (without explicitly referring to Heidegger), can be applied to *painted images as articulated intelligibility*. These images, independent from whether they are "figurative" or "abstract," however, are in need of interpretation [*Auslegung*] as an explicit structuring, organization, and "laying out" of what is already contained in images.

In Chapter 1, I will develop the general hermeneutic claim that painted images are a form of intelligibility, which includes the idea that painting is a form

of understanding and interpretation of the world. In Chapter 2, I offer general remarks on the relationship between painting and photography, given that this issue is so central for Richter's work. After Chapters 1 and 2, I will deal in five chapters with *topics* and objects that are introduced in Richter's work alongside the main framework, which will be facilitated by concrete interpretations of selected paintings. I will extensively deal with *Window* (1968, CR 205a, figure 3), *Secretary* (1968, CR 14, figure 2), and *Abstract Painting* (1977, CR 422, figure 5) in Chapter 3; with *Youth Portrait* (1988, 672-1, figure 11) in Chapter 4; with *Reader* (1994, CR 804, figure 13) in Chapter 5; with *Dead* (1998, 667-2, figure 9), *Man Shot Down* (1988, CR 669-2, figure 10), *Betty* (1988, CR 663-5, figure 8), *Moritz* (2000, 863-3, figure 14), *Black Red Gold* (1999, CR 856), *Strontium* (2004, CR 888, figure 15), and *November* (1989, CR 701, figure 12) in Chapter 6; and with *Country Path* (1987, CR 629-4, figure 7), *Clouds* (1978, CR 443-a, figure 6), and *Forest* (2005, CR 892-12, figure 16) in Chapter 7. As Adorno indicates in his *Aesthetical Theory*, "aesthetical experience is only alive if it starts from the object, in that very moment, in which the works of art are becoming alive through our gaze" (Adorno 1998/7: 262). For now, I shall only briefly introduce these elements and return to them throughout my further elaboration of Richter's work. There is first *the metaphysical aspect* (Chapter 3: Being); there is second *the meaning aspect* (Chapter 4: Essence); there is third *the epistemological aspect* (Chapter 5: Vision); there is fourth *the existentialist aspect* (Chapter 6: Terror); and finally, there is, fifth *the natural aspect* (Chapter 7: Culture) of Richter's vast painting activity.

Chapter 1 outlines basic elements of a hermeneutics of art and images in order to establish a philosophical framework for approaching Richter's paintings. The hermeneutic framework is contrasted with traditional dualistic views of works of art which claim that art is a mixture of form and content. This dualism, it is argued, is too simple and thus it needs to be extended in several regards. For example, images play a central role. I argue that images have a performative dimension that requires activity on the side of the viewer through what Gadamer calls "participation." More specifically, meaning in images is constituted internally since the content of images is established internally through the "iconic difference" (Boehm), through mimesis, and through an idealization and essentialization of their unity. As such, images are intelligent formations [*Gebilde*] that present interpretations of what they are about. By "staging" their content, they confront us with a stance toward the world that we can either reject or affirm. The idealization that occurs in images, however, needs to be related

to the materiality of paintings, which I lay out as an internal moment of painted images. In this vein, I also offer extensive remarks on Richter's attempt to get rid of all subjective and "expressive" moments in his work. I argue that Richter is a "protestant" painter (Adriani in Richter 2008b: 15), insofar as we find in his work a kind of *suppressed emotionality*. In other words, although Richter tries to *hide* the genesis of his paintings, this does not mean that he does not operate with a specific mode of sensuality.

The question of how paintings and photographs are related to each other and how we should understand the difference between photography and painting is a crucial question for Richter's art. In Chapter 2, it is argued that we need to understand paintings *of* photographs in a totally different manner than photographs on their own. Whereas photographs remain fixed to their referents and to the temporal dimension of the "have-been" (Barthes), I argue that paintings "bracket" this fixed relation and open it toward the essential. Paintings, accordingly, liberate the limited dimensions of photographs and turn them into images in and through which something ideal and universal can appear.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate that Richter's paintings deal with philosophical issues related to the nature of reality and the nature of knowing reality. It is argued that the viewer of Richter's abstract paintings is confronted with the question of what it means to perceive, and I conclude that visibility, vision, and desire are interrelated (Pelzer 1993). The problem of perception and reality is also revealed and discussed in regard to paintings that are located somewhere between abstract and figurative images, such as the more recent painting *Strontium*, which is important for the question of aesthetic illusion. *Strontium* is both successful and unsuccessful: unsuccessful, because it cannot give us the metaphysical insight that it promises; successful because it gives us *what it is*, namely, an image of this promise. Though the work destroys our belief that we can encounter the "real" world behind our world, the *appearing* world itself is confirmed by the print. Visibility and phenomenal presence, I submit, is prior to every model we can produce of reality, and, as such, it is confirmed in Richter's work.

The relationship between photography and painting that was introduced in Chapter 2 is in Chapter 4 worked out in regard to one of the paintings within the famous *October 18, 1977* series, which deals with the *Rote Armee Fraktion*. One of its paintings depicts its central figure, Ulrike Meinhof, who died in Stammheim in 1976. I show that the painting *Youth Portrait* should not be confused with a portrait of Ulrike Meinhof; since the painting transcends the

level of the photograph and presents a deep meditation of what it means to be faced with human corruptibility in general. I interpret the painting as Richter's attempt to grasp the relation between being young, melancholy, death, and a failed relationship with society. As such, it is demonstrated that the painting is an image *of* Meinhof, that is, that it is a meditation on something universal that is contained in her portrait.

In Chapter 5, utilizing ideas from Gadamer and Adorno, I argue again that representation conceived as a performative concept and as an act of formation is centrally visible in *Reader*, insofar as this fascinating painting leads us deeper into the problem of painted images, insofar as it enacts what it is about, namely, the constitution of itself as an image by means of a complex and enigmatic relationship between seeing, reading, memory, inner, outer, gaze, and blindness.

Chapter 6 is a central chapter for this book since I deal with three key issues for Richter's art, namely, death, faith, and beauty. I try to show that the issue of death, which can be found in many paintings, is intertwined with Richter's conception of art and painting as an activity that is based on hope and faith. Death is most centrally presented in paintings such as *Dead* and *Man Shot Down*, which are part of the *October 18, 1977* series. In this vein, I argue that the topic of faith is connected to Richter's attempt to establish painting as a meaningful activity in a world that no longer seems to allow such a view. This deeply existential dimension in Richter is contrasted, on the one hand, with the issue of shock and terror as issues of the sublime and of the process of vision, especially as they come out in the painting *Moritz*, and, on the other hand, with the topic of beauty, which I interpret with Adorno and Marcuse as the underlying promise of happiness in Richter, especially in *Betty* and *Schwarz Rot Gold*.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I reflect on Richter's figurative and abstract landscape painting. After presenting a brief historical sketch of the modern history of landscape painting from a philosophical point of view, I point to the central role that paths play in many of Richter's paintings, which is most centrally visible in the painting *Country Path*. Utilizing Heidegger, I establish a framework of how we should understand the relationship between the viewer, nature, and paths that are interrelated with the activity of walking. Philosophically interpreted paths play the same role that images played before, insofar as paths reveal the natural environment as a whole through a partial view of the whole. This chapter is rounded up by concluding remarks about the role of landscapes in Richter's cloud paintings and in the more recent series of abstract paintings entitled *Forest*.

I do not know another contemporary painter who shows as much breadth and scope of intelligence and sensitivity in his or her work as Richter does. Furthermore, every thoughtful confrontation with this amazing demonstration of the possibilities of contemporary painting requires the same level of intelligence and sensitivity on the side of the interpreter. Indeed, Richter shows a will in his art and a distance to the established *doxa* that is comparable to the will of great thinkers we encounter in philosophy. Thinking about painting is not an easy task, and it can only be successful if the act of reflection is a *response* to art. This presupposes, in other words, a receptive moment on the side of the philosopher, which is expressed in the ability to listen and to see, as well as in being attracted by *the object* of thought. In fact, reason and rationality are, as Heidegger always pointed out, *receptive*. The process of understanding always depends upon what is already understood and thereby the act of understanding has already understood something that gets corrected and changed *by* and *through* the object. As such, in what follows, I try to follow a statement of the great art historian Max Imdahl: "The interpreter is always a performer, an accomplice, distance is precisely not the presupposition of his activity; rather, it is a form of identification, out of which the explanation emerges: interpretation is always also devotion" (Imdahl 1996/3: 644, trans. C. L.). Let's start then.

1

Painted Images

Intelligence

> *Painting has nothing to do with thinking, because in painting thinking is painting.*
>
> Richter 2009a: 15

We naturally assume an interconnection between language and thinking. We take for granted that words express, form, or are formed through our thoughts. Though our imagination is in play when we form and articulate our world in words, we do not naturally assume that we do the same with other formed images, such as sculptures, photos, or paintings. We often believe that paintings are "only" visible objects that are somewhere out there in the external world that perhaps through experience or interpretation can be related to meaning, but we usually do not consider that the objects themselves are "intelligent." Instead, we assume that intelligence is something that is "somewhere" in people's minds, but not in the objects that these minds produce.

What follows is based on a different idea. Just, as there is intelligence in words, I submit that there is intelligence in paintings. I will address this as *formed intelligence*. To be precise, I am assuming that intelligence is not only present in the paintings as their content, but even more, that paintings (at least the paintings dealt with in this book) *are* a form of intelligence, and not a sign of it, as is taken for granted by a mentalist or semiotic framework. I will argue that works of art are self-reflexive insofar as they present a specific perspective on something in the world or take a stance toward the world. They are *themselves* interpretations (Cassirer 1992: 142). As we will see, this view does not imply taking art as something "conceptual"; in contrast, following a hermeneutic tradition in aesthetics (such as Heidegger, Gadamer, and Adorno), I am convinced that (successful) art always combines both the material and the "spiritual" levels whereby after some considerations the material turns out to be

spiritual and the spiritual to be the material aspect of art. Both levels are mediated by the historicality of these objects. To be sure, I do not simply mean that form and matter come together in a work of art in a "mystic" synthesis; rather, works of art *disclose* the world *in* them *through* their formed character. Whereas in signs, meaning always remains outside of and external to its bearer, in the case of art, meaning can only come to the forefront, *while* it is *in* the work and while we are in the presence of the work. That there is already intelligence in normal cultural objects is indicated by standardized pictures. For example, in advertisements and commercials, we soon discover that those images have a rational structure and that they are composed *like* a language. They are based on a specific rhetoric and gestures, on selections, organizations, combinations, etc., which are only possible with (at least some) rationality that we can decipher, though they might not be internally reflective and organized into a higher form by means of which they are related to the truth like a symphony is by Mahler.

Richter repeatedly mentioned in interviews that he conceives of himself as an "idealist" and that he believes that the practice of art is impossible without idealism. "It is impossible to exist without idealism," he says. "I always imagined that I was one of the few who could live without idealism only to discover later that all that time I was full of illusions. Even when I was against it, I *believed* in my opposition to it" (Richter in Storr 2002b: 307). The interesting aspect of this quote is the connection that Richter draws between idealism and believing, which points to the underlying thesis that idealism somehow includes a "religious" aspect, which, for Richter, consists in having faith in the *positive* value of the practice of art and in having hope for a positive effect of painting, even if it is not always clear how to define or to conceive this effect. I will come back to this religious aspect of the painting practice that Richter is fully aware of, despite that he does not always spell this out satisfactorily in his texts or interviews. For a full understanding, I will philosophically unfold the structure of this dimension later. For now, however, let us instead reflect on the scope and meaning of idealism as it is connected to a conception of painting as formed and "shining" intelligence. "Idealism" here is an ambiguous term; since it refers to a position that, from the beginning, is based on the idea that meaning in works of art cannot be understood without the cultural and *material* dimension of works of art. Hal Foster has claimed that Richter implies a "thorough critique of idealist philosophy (as represented by Adorno and Schiller)" (Foster 2003: 174). He argues that Richter does not follow idealist aesthetics because of its inner negativity, in which we find a "beauty that foregrounds its own refusal or inability

to reconcile" (Foster 2003: 175). Instead, he charges Richter with following a project of reconciliation. Fosters' critique is wrongheaded, simply because he mis-portrays idealist aesthetics and confuses it with a simplistic notion of ideality. In contrast, idealist aesthetics, as it can be found in Schiller, Hegel, and Adorno, takes the internal negativity of art into account, which I reinterpret in what follows as a hermeneutic structure. Representation, I argue, contains an internal negation. Beauty and meaning, according to this conception, due to their intellectuality are never concepts or effects that come into our world through an unreflected and unmediated relationship to works of art.

It seems as if the twentieth-century history of painting is driven by a conflict of what in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was still taken for granted, namely, the ideal unity of form and matter, or, to put it in another terminology, the ideal unity of sensuality and reason on the side of the subject and of materiality and meaning on the side of the object. The progress and driving forces of the many avant-gardes that we have seen during the last 150 years were all driven by a further development of the material side of art, especially the experiments and developments of the *medium* of art. As Bernstein puts it, "The specificity of (modern) art-meanings is that their mediums are not regarded as contingent with respect to the meanings communicated" (Bernstein 2006: 74). Though the terminology changed over time and throughout history, the basic dualities are used in one form or another by all approaches to philosophical aesthetics, though in very complex theories we might not always be able to immediately identify these basic metaphysical divisions.

The situation is not very different on the side of the object of philosophical aesthetics. Even art historians and media theorists, such as Hans Belting, who have redefined our thinking of art in the last two decades, are forced to refer to traditional concepts in their attempt to overcome the classical concepts that still determine our thinking about images (Belting 2005). Belting criticizes the old metaphysical distinction between form and matter (materiality) by claiming that the concept of the medium cannot be understood with this distinction, especially since the institutional and political dimension cannot be grasped. Though I agree with Belting, I will, in the following analysis, not focus on the media because I am exclusively concerned with painting in this text.

Of special interest for us in regard to the developments in the twentieth century includes that the philosophical tension between the side of rationality (the form-giving *nous*) and the side of nature (the form-receiving matter) was carried from theoretical aesthetics right into the heart and reflective practice

of twentieth-century artists. There is much art in the twentieth century that seems to give us a great deal to think about but nothing to experience, just as there is a lot of art that gives us a lot to experience but nothing to think about (leaving aside here the works in which we neither find something to think about nor find something to experience). Accordingly, what we find here (though I am simplifying) is a similar tension between the aforementioned metaphysical dualities: on the one hand, we find conceptions of the artistic practice that deny meaning and intelligibility, while on the other hand, we find conceptions of artistic practice that explicitly stress intelligence. If we take conceptual art as one extreme of the spectrum and happening as the other extreme of the spectrum, we usually find two extreme consequences: conceptual art is *dead* and happenings are *empty*. Put differently, conceptual art is over-determined by its intellectuality, whereas happenings are over-determined by sensuality. In both cases, meaning and formed image are ripped apart and are related in an external way to each other, the consequence of which is that either the conceptual level or the sensual level becomes arbitrary. Accordingly, to use a word of Kant here, intuitive art without concepts is blind and conceptual art without intuition is empty. By this, I imply that a "purely" conceptual work of art is impossible because the work must in some form or another appear in the *sensual* world (Crowther 1997: 178–9). Given this, we should conclude that the ideal relation between both sides is given when the intelligence is fully formed *in* the image, that is, in the formation of the material. In what follows, this will lead us to the consequence of rejecting all semiotic theories of painting, given that this approach *presupposes* that meaning and materiality are *external* to each other. In his Berlin lectures on aesthetics, Hegel puts it this way: "Idea and formed existence [*Gestalt*]: the formed [*gestaltete*] idea is the ideal. In this case we must determine the relation between the idea and its formed existence and the requirement is that the formed existence merges [*entsprechen*] with the idea" (Hegel 2004: 26). If we take the history of art, we see that almost every great movement and the major individual artists within the twentieth century position themselves somewhere on this scale between what is the substantial thought on which their positions are based and what is given in intuition. For example, we encounter a wide gap if we compare conceptual work by artists, such as Kosuth, as well as work of artists who have pushed the mythical dimension of human experience into the center of their work, such as Hermann Nitsch's spectacles. Malevitch's *Black Square* and most monochrome paintings give us a lot to think, but not much to see (though I am simplifying here and we will later see how Richter's monochrome paintings are

not *simply* monochrome). Furthermore, Bruce Naumann's "sublime" paintings are supposed to let us experience a lot, but not to think of anything. We find the same opposition on the side of the artists: Jackson Pollok was an extremely anti-intellectual figure, in contrast to de Kooning, who never took art to be something that is anti-intellectual. Even if we cannot claim that all works of art (and Richter's work does not fit into this schema either) in the twentieth century display a tendency to be placed on either side of the spectrum between the attempt to negate the conceptual and the attempt to negate the sensual, we cannot deny that the tension between these two sides plays a defining role in art in general and in painting in particular.

As the reader might already have assumed, not only do I believe that works of art necessarily need both sides to exist, but I also believe that Richter's works give us both sides in an ideal unity: his works give us plenty to see and much to think about. As Heere nicely puts it, Richter achieves "a synthesis of intellectualism, sensitivity and direct strength of expression" (Heere 1981: 28). As such, Richter's art calls for our whole humanness, which comprises seeing and thinking, and it does not merely call for an audience that is forced to move back and forth between experience and concept. In a more specific sense, Richter's paintings are double coded, since they are well painted *and* well thought through, which leads to a meaningful reception on all levels: not only is the intellectual audience able to enjoy them, but the nonintellectual viewers also feel addressed (which also explains their popular success). Seen from this standpoint, Richter's paintings both *affect* us through their sensual materiality and *call* us due to their intellectual thickness.

This intelligent "thickness" can vary from work to work and it can take time to reveal everything that lays hidden in the work. During the process of forming itself into an image through the interpreter and spectator, sometimes the basic categories switch: the intellectual thickness suddenly *affects* us and the sensual materiality *calls* us. For example, Richter's *October 18, 1977* series is so rich with respect to how it achieves the unity between materiality and intelligence, and it plays this unity out in so many variations, that again and again it gives us enough to look at *and* enough to think about, though thinking must always relate itself to the presence of the work, that is, to its material presence (for this see de Warren 2013: 81). What the viewer can expect from the *October 18, 1977* series when approaching the work the first time is most likely a mixture of a specifically overwhelming atmosphere and attunement combined with the topic of dying as well as with issues of political significance (at least for a German audience).

Whereas the atmosphere is related to the sensual presence of the paintings and the closed character of the series, the topic of dying comes to the forefront when we begin to identify what these paintings are about. What we encounter here, in other words, is a fine dialectic between being affected by the materiality of the painting and being called forth by the topic of the series, both of which form—in this case—an ideal unity. Although we are learning more about the object of the paintings and seeing more while perceiving the paintings, the situation can switch. For example, we might suddenly become affected by the problem of death, dying, and loss, as well as be called back to the material presence of the paintings in front of us. Turning to *what we* see, in other words, becomes an effect of our thinking, whereas turning to thought becomes an effect of what we feel. During this process, the two extreme sides become movable, leave their fixed status, and enter a "fluid" exchange of going back and forth, which the German philosophical tradition addressed as either the *play* (Kant, Schiller, Gadamer) or the *process* (Adorno) of the work. Ideally, the work is a *becoming* that does not simply occur in the mind of the viewer; instead, we see a merging between viewer and work within which one affects the other. On the one hand, play refers to the exchange and coming alive of our human faculties for the sake of understanding the world; on the other hand, play refers to the integration and the *internal* establishment of the unity of the image itself. *Process* is closely related to the second meaning of "play" and refers to the exchange and relation between the parts and the whole, which a painting constitutes *in* its *Gestalt*. A work of art begins to live, so to speak, by the dialectical processes that it produces between us and it, *because* it is a unity of elements in which the elements are in conflict with themselves and their unity. This unity is meaningful because the work brings it out throughout the process of being with it. "The spiritual [i.e., intelligent, C. L.] moment," as Adorno puts it, "does not simply exist [*ein Seiendes*]; rather, it is in every work of art the becoming and forming moment" (Adorno 1998/7: 141).

As such, the paintings—which come to life in our experience *with* them—bring us into the exceptional situation of exercising *all* faculties of human reason at once. In the presence of the paintings (and perhaps other works of art), our *humanness* and anthropological nature comes to presence, which, liberated from everyday practical tasks, such as cooking, laboring, and sleeping, is experienced by entering the process and play of painting. Consequently, this dialogue is ruled by how the sensual and the intelligent, as well as how seeing and thinking, are interrelated to each other, as well as how a painting structures and predetermines this conflict.

The emphasis on intelligence in what I have said so far about this topic could lead to a misinterpretation whereby intelligence is seen as "conceptual" or even inferential (i.e., as the ability to draw conclusions). If we understand by "conceptual" a certain way of *reasoning* through a work of art and the ability to come to certain conclusions *about* the work, then every work contains conceptual elements on the side of the audience, though—as pointed out—it fails if it remains abstractly separated from what is *present* in the painting. However, reasoning that remains tied to something that appears and is not simply a concept, differs from drawing inferences. Richter's work requires the moment of appearance, especially since it reminds us again and again of what we *see*. As Robert Sokolowski puts this, painting

> calls for intelligence (*intellectus* or *nous*) and not reasoning (*ratiocination* or *syllogismos*). You do not have to draw inferences when you are studying, when you are decoding the symbols, being informed about the iconography, and examining the patterns of line and color, but when you see the painting as a whole, you engage not in inference but in articulated identification, in categorical synthesis, in an act of intelligence, an act of understanding. (Sokolowski 2005: 348)

If we understand by intelligence that the work of art is itself intelligent, then in this regard Richter's paintings should not be conceptual art since conceptual art presupposes an alienation of what is present in the work from what it presents in its representation, or, in Schiller's terms, it is based on a separation of sensuality from the intellectuality of the work. If we understand by the term "conceptual" a reflective *conception* of painting, then Richter's work is indeed "conceptual," as Lenger points out by underlining the permanent stylistic changes in Richter's oeuvre (Lenger in Butin/Reese 1994: 42). However, the point is that even a thoughtful relation *to* painting and its possibilities does not make the paintings themselves "conceptual." Consequently, we should reinterpret what has been so far called "conceptual," that is, we need to overcome the entire vocabulary that is implied in the concept of the "conceptual." In what follows, I will offer a hermeneutic perspective.

The separation of sensuality and intelligence remains artificial in the case of works of art in general and in Richter's paintings in particular, insofar as the unity and synthesis of sensuality and intelligence must be achieved through play and process *in* the work. As the great Gilson has it, "A reduction of art to any kind of cognitive process is particularly impossible in the case of painting. The work of the painter is there, materially present in space, for everyone to

see" (Gilson 1959: 122). As interpreters, we must *see*, *touch*, *read*, or *listen to* the object we encounter and *then* think about it; however, we can only do this because we *already* receive the object as *intelligible*. What Sokolowski in the quote above rightly calls "intelligence," in contrast to reasoning or cognition, is a form of reception and not of construction.

The idea of a conceptually driven art is an effect of the currently very fashionable idea that the work can be carried out in a semiotic fashion, as long as we mean by "semiotic" that what the work represents is to be found *outside* of the work. Of course, it is not a problem to take a piece of mud and declare it to mean "liberation," since the relation between signs and meaning is conventional. As the twentieth century has shown, the relation between signifier and signified is not determined by an essential connection, the consequence of which is that (in principle) everything can stand for everything. However, as I argue here, the arbitrary relation between sign and meaning ultimately cannot be applied to art in general or to Richter's paintings in particular because something must appear *in* something or, even stronger, something must appear in itself. Accordingly, speaking of the "conceptual" is too narrow in the case of art. It is therefore also dangerous to speak of a "meaning" of a painting because this wording signals that we take the presence of the work to be irrelevant. Instead, we should think of the relation between material structure and material presence and meaning as a dialectical relation, in which what *is* formed as an image is *a process of formation*, which takes on an image-character. I will come back to this point in the next two subsections.

For now, we should acknowledge that existence and meaning are ultimately inseparable, though there are great variations within which only one of these components is primarily addressed. In Richter's best paintings, however, sensuality and intelligence show up in their *ideal* unity (which is never immediately given), though both sensuality and intelligence never reach their full identity, given that a full identity would imply that the *difference* between intelligence and sensuality, that is, between meaning and existence, disappears. Such a disappearance, however, is in principle impossible because of the necessary materiality and presence of the work. Consequently, we can never totally separate one from the other; in addition to which we should avoid abstract differences, such as the difference between "form" and "content," which would lead us back to the idea that paintings are "signs." To repeat the point, the conception of art employed here is radically anti-semiotic. For an image should instead be understood as a *gesture*. A full identity between materiality and meaning would lead to a

dissolution of the materiality and hence to the disappearance of externality in the work of art. Only then would art be "conceptual." Concepts are objects of thought. However, in distinction from pure thought and pure philosophy, which remains purely self-related, in the work of art, human intelligence encounters itself in its externality. Intelligence, in this case, must *appear*, and it does this, as I will further explain in what follows, in the form of *images*. Accordingly, good works of art *strive* for the unity of presence and intelligibility, but show an awareness of the inner impossibility to ever achieve an "absolute identity" of meaning and external existence. In significant works of art, as Adorno puts it in his *Aesthetical Theory*, the "spirit" of the work is transformed into "sensual radiance [*Glanz*]" (Adorno 1998/7: 29). Radiance implies both identity of intelligence *in* materiality and difference as materiality *in* intelligence. In a similar fashion, Susan Langer claims that "art is expressive through and through—every line, every sound, every gesture; and therefore it is a hundred per cent symbolic. It is not sensuously pleasing and *also* symbolic; the sensuous quality is in the service of its vital import" (Langer 1953: 59). Here Langer refers to an old idea that is mainly worked out by German idealists such as Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel. We should underline, though, that these positions are not "Platonic," since there is no claim that works of art are of "less" reality because "appearance" has a lower status than the essential (meaning). As Hegel explains, "radiance" and "shining" should not be taken in this sense. Rather the opposite is the case: "It is rather the normal reality, which appears through art as inauthentic; the radiance in art is rather the higher mode of appearance as the appearance of the reality," because, we might add, the reality becomes reflected and becomes transparent for itself through the work of art on a higher level (Hegel 2004: 25).

The *ideal* unity of reason and presence, which Schiller calls the "balance between reality and form" (Schiller 1966/3: 482), leads the spectator or audience to a moment of *recognition*, since what the object forms must be recognized as such. The ideal process, then, between the audience and the painting is an identity achieved *between* the formative play of experience and the formative process of and in the image. Understanding mediates *both* aspects into a unity. Ideally, these two sides merge: we recognize the formative process of and in the image as an *intelligent* process, which is to say, we recognize *us* in the image. The joy that we might feel in front of a painting is based on a moment in which we see our own, human, abilities—affection and thinking—and our own shaping power *in* the painting. More speculatively formulated, images—in this case, paintings—establish themselves and achieve their unity through our

own shaping power and faculty of formation, which we do not simply find *in us* or simply find *in the object*; rather, (ideally) we must find *this shaping power in* the object as *our* power. What we see in the formations of pictures is ultimately a formative power, and it is as such that we are able to understand pictures as something that is not natural, but, rather, formed, constituted, and *of* ourselves. As Richter underlines in his now famous interview with Buchloh in 1986, "The artist's productive act cannot be negated" (Richter 2009a: 169). Nevertheless, the individuality of the artist who created the work disappears behind the universal moment that the image presents. The painter becomes an instantiation of *us* when we come to an understanding through a painting. However, this does not mean that this process necessarily leads to a success. Often, we do not find anything of interest in a painting: it neither affects us nor calls us. In this case, the painter remains an individual who has created an object that is inaccessible. Total inaccessibility means that we are unable to find something universal in the object and hence, we do not come to the ideal unity of merging subject and object in the formative process. For example, when Beuys created his famous *Fettecke*, most of his audience reacted very negatively because they neither were affected by the presence of the work nor were they called to an intellectual transformation of the work. It took some time before Beuys' ideas about certain materials, temperature, earth, and protection found their way into the intellectual confrontation with his work, which can turn into a very affectionate response on the side of the audience, if one learns to understand, for example, that fat involves a healing of what remains "cornered" and excluded. Once understanding is established, the *image* can appear and the odd contrast between the sensual qualities of fat as something warm, organic, and transitory with its cold, cornered, and geometrical enclosure could be received and understood.

The German term for "balance" that Schiller uses in the above cited sentence is "*Gleichgewicht*" and as such it is a combination of two words, namely "equality" and "weight," which reminds us of the allegory of justice in which we see "justice" as a personification standing with a scale in her hands *weighing* what is to her left and what is to her right. In this way, "balance" indicates a very fragile state (both bodily and symbolically) in which something is *precisely* at the point at which it can fall over or shift to the other side. Accordingly, "*Gleichgewicht*" does not mean that an abstract equality is reached; rather, it refers to the point at which the highest point of sensitivity and balancing is reached. It is, as Schiller himself remarks, an *ideal* state and presents itself as something that can easily

be missed. What we, as the interpreters (and the artists themselves), sometimes call the "moment of fitting"—"being attuned" [*Stimmigkeit*] in Richter's own terminology—is the same expression for what Schiller addressed as "balance."

Holding fast to the *ideal* of the unity and the balance between the mediation of materiality and intelligence hopes to overcome the attempt to take paintings as *signs*, especially given that signs are defined by a structure in which the materiality of paintings points away from itself to something that is *external* to the material level. For example, the scribble "chair" points to its meaning as something that we do not find in the scribbles. Hence, it is unimportant whether the scribbles are written on a letter, spoken, or printed out with a computer. The materiality of "chair" is—at least in most cases—unessential in relation to its meaning. Although I can utter the word chair, as I can write it down in German or print it out in English, the (ideal) meaning is the same in all cases. But it is precisely the opposite in the case of painting, where meaning is "there" *in* the materiality and *in* the medium. Though paintings are often interpreted in a semiotic fashion and in certain cases they want to be interpreted in this way, Richter's paintings belong to a different category of art, especially since Richter's work is based on the rejection of any form of symbolism.

Before we consider this point in more detail, we should underline that nothing can be taken as immediate here. Paintings are not given and constituted in a single gaze, and interpretations are not made in seconds. *What* the painting is and *what* we actually *see* is an ongoing process of shifting perspectives, knowledge, history, dialogue, etc. Works of art are anti-positivistic. Some of us might think that the meaning of and in paintings is found either in single objects or in abstract theories; however, in the end everything—theory, looking, history, culture, knowledge—plays its role in the process of seeing, interpreting, and using these objects. *All* of these aforementioned moments, taken together, *form* the image, as long as they return to the presence of the object. All paintings taken together might even lead to a higher unity that forms a whole world and worldview. For example, *the* abstract expressionism formed as a whole movement in modern art after the Second World War, not only depends upon specific images, but, as a whole, forms a specific image in the form of a world attitude and an ethos of "purity," rejection, and American power. The "will" of abstract expressionism forms itself into a specific *view* of the world and thereby positions *us* toward the world.

Given what we have said so far, the structure as outlined up to this point is certainly too simple and remains insufficient in its outline. Assuming a simple

duality of sensuality and intelligence is a caricature not only of the painting practice but also of the act of painting and the painting itself, since it claims that all aspects of painting can ultimately be reduced to a basic duality. Reducing the visible world to an underlying structure is a classical metaphysical procedure. By looking away from the manifold of appearances and going behind what is immediately given, we enter the "real" realm of what gives everything its structure and holds it together. However, though this thesis is unsatisfactory, in its simplicity, understanding the procedure in this way has an advantage to begin with, because we can use the simplicity of the dual structure as an opportunity to enter a discussion of the more complex aspects of painting and intelligibility, including their process character, their bodily dimension, their cultural mediation, and their aspect of idealization. As it turns out, the dual structure, if analyzed, is itself quite complex. Indeed, meaning, as Bryson has it, "doesn't appear spontaneously out of matter: it is the product of human work and human labour" (Bryson 1991: 68).

As a consequence, even if we reformulate the basic metaphysical distinctions on a more complex level, it remains a fact that even from the point of the painter, a specific material (placed within a specific history) and its forming, which includes deformation and transformation, through the process of painting and mental projection remain the main elements of the creative process. The mediation of material and formation depends upon the medium that is used and the human activities involved in the process of shaping it: paint, canvas, instruments, tools, brushes, strings, materials, etc. Everything used and produced within this process has its unique properties. The unity and "play" of the formation are not formed through some neutral or pure mental activity, such as intentions; rather, *all* intentionality in painting is in some way or other a bodily forming activity in which something given, in accordance with certain rules and habits, is *formed into* a *Gestalt* and shaped into an object.

On the one hand, painters are forced to follow the natural or artificial properties of the material they use; on the other hand, they are able to liberate themselves from the necessities of the material by forming and shaping it. Thereby, they liberate us too. Forming, shaping paintings, on the side of the painter as well as on the side of the audience, presupposes distance to what is created. It is precisely in this sense that cultural objects that introduce a reflective component in our lives are objects of human freedom. We take the liberty to act in the world and to take the world as it appears in painting to be our world, which is to say, we posit the world as a place for our own freedom. Human

activity, therefore, presupposes that we do not take nature and the universe as one in which we are simply a *natural* part; rather, we take and posit nature as one *in which* we can act by forming it. We thereby posit the ability to transform nature and recognize ourselves as able to transcend nature. Every move with our hands, every move with our fingers, presupposes that we take ourselves to have the freedom of changing the world as it is. Consequently, human activity is not simply a something *in* the world, as a thing is, but rather it is forming and re-forming the world both *as* an activity and *as* object. Hence, transcendence is not only on the side of activity, but even more, it is *in* cultural objects (such as chairs and paintings). Paintings as objects transform the world we live in. They introduce new relations, new reflections, and a new form of the world itself by mediating the sensual presence with rationality into the universality of an image (for a similar point see Bernstein 2006: 75). We should therefore not give up on Schiller's thesis that he introduced in his *Letters on Aesthetical Education*. There he claims that only through art can humans reach real freedom. Though based on a rigid theory of reason as divided into theoretical, moral, and aesthetical reason, his claim that both theoretical and moral reason does not really allow us to put ourselves into a free distance to its content is still convincing. Logic, mathematics, and science (and for Schiller also moral reason) do not allow us to "play" with the content; it is rather the case that human reason is *forced* to come to certain conclusions and certain insights due to the objectivity of the content that rational procedure encounters. In contradistinction, by looking at and interpreting paintings, by enjoying poetry or by reading (good) novels though, these activities come with the claim of being fully understandable. Our mind and our reason finds itself confronted with a content that can be handled within a wide range of reactions and thereby this leads not only to the formation of work but also to the formation of ourselves within a *range of possibilities* on the side of the object as well as on the side of the reception. Indeed, freedom can be found on both sides: the reaction of the viewer and the painting (for this, see Jauss 1972: 48). In a similar fashion, we should understand Kant's determination of the aesthetic judgment as a judgment that does not have the force of a logical judgment but as one that opens up a realm in which the subject can *freely* move around, even though it is still determined by rules and hence not outside of rationality. The range of possibilities opened up leads to a *communicative* situation that establishes true sociality, which cannot be established by other modes of reasoning (Jauss 1991: 29). Accordingly, painting and other arts are always also formations of humans who are part of the worlds formed, reflected, and thought

through in the works. However, as Hegel advances, it is certainly true that in our abstract modernity, art is no longer able to fully realize the highest ideal, which is to say that art is no longer *the central* mode and formed reality (instead of science, religion, or philosophy) in which we reflect and understand ourselves. Nevertheless, even in an age in which art no longer functions as an expression of the highest insights and ways of existence in our culture, it *shows* and echoes our way of understanding ourselves and the world within which we live.

Formation

> *We describe them as more abstract, because they bear so little resemblance to reality but, nevertheless, they are exactly that: they present us with a picture of something, regardless of whether it could exist or not.*
>
> Richter 2011a: 20

Let me summarize the first step toward basic elements of a hermeneutic aesthetic. What I have tried to demonstrate is that painting is located within the traditional framework of intelligence and sensuality, or, more classically put, within the framework of concept and intuition. In what follows, I will try to make this fixed distinction more "fluid." The goal here is to present a conception of painting and image that is opposed to those that take images to be immediate and intuitive entities. It is rather the other way around: an image in the form of a painting must form itself into a unity through the process of understanding that is led *by the image* itself. The primary feature of images is not that they present themselves in their *immediate* unity; rather, the unity is their condition of possibility and is achieved through a process of formation. The unity is temporal. Images—in this case, in painting—remain bound to what I would call the "thisness" of the image, inasmuch as everything that we see and discover remains tied to the sensual presence of the work and cannot be disconnected from it. Indeed, even if I would know a lot about Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, without actually listening to it (even if I would do that in my imagination only), I would not know anything. In what follows, I will therefore introduce two new ideas in regard to how images and paintings as a subclass of images represent: (1) Against the mainstream of semiotic conceptions of images and paintings as images, I submit that images have a totally different structure than signs. Images, according to my position, are formations through which something presents

itself as a process. This concept of image, then, which has its roots in Adorno and Gadamer, is both mimetic and performative. (2) Against contemporary attempts to reduce art to its experience, as is done in some phenomenological circles, or to reduce it to non-representational accounts, which Deleuze does, I contend that we are unable to give up a substantial concept of representation, at least if we use the concept of representation that I favor (more in Lotz 2009).

The concept of representation has a long history, which is difficult to untangle, not only because epistemological considerations go hand in hand with aesthetical considerations but also because the different languages handle the term in very different fashions. As will soon become clear, the conception that I would like to present here is closely connected to the German word for representation. There are two German terms for "representation" in this context: on the one hand, it can mean "*Vorstellung*," which refers to a mental representation, and on the other hand, it can mean "*Darstellung*," which means to present something to someone. Neither has to do with being a copy or imitation nor does it involve mental representations. The confusion is even deeper if we take into account that the German word for mental representations (*Vorstellung*) is also used, for example, for theater presentations. The word "*Vorstellung*" here means "show" or "presentation." Accordingly, even the term used for mental representations in German has a nonmental aspect, insofar as it has the sense of "to present" and "to show." Moreover, "*vorstellen*" as a verb can be used to introduce a person to another person. Finally, in the Latin context, the word "*representare*" did not mean that *something stands in for something else*; rather, the term was used in a legal context and meant that a person herself *shows up as herself* in the courtroom (accordingly, it comes closer to the German word "*vorstellen*"). Whereas we often think of representations as a relationship between something and something that it is not, here we can see that representation has the sense of an *internal* relation: something shows *itself as itself*.

These linguistic considerations are important, especially since discussions about images usually deal with similar problems. For example, scholars who argue that representations in the form of images can be reduced to semiotic entities imply that something stands in for something else and therefore points to something beyond itself. As already mentioned in the last subsection, the word "table" points to something beyond itself, which is external to itself. If objects such as symphonies or paintings are semiotic beings, too, then these representations would point beyond themselves and make something present that is *external* to them. I believe, on the contrary, that representations always

refer to themselves and that we should therefore speak of an internal negativity that constitutes the structure of representations. I think that this is the correct position for three reasons: (1) a semiotic approach to representations overlooks the materiality and material organization of the representation, which is the decisive aspect of art, insofar as here meaning constitutes itself only in and through the material; (2) a semiotic approach to art, in particular, leads to the ontological assumption that works of art are a subclass of signs (or a form of language). If this would be true, though, then a genuine theory of art *as* art would be impossible, insofar as works of art would simply be a different type of sign. In this vein, Heidegger has presented the most forceful analysis at the beginning of his art essay. Not only does he reject three traditional thing ontologies, but he also—which is often overlooked—rejects the claim that the work of art is a "symbol" (Heidegger 2008: 145). (3) It is phenomenologically not convincing to claim that images point beyond themselves, since, to use the term that Richard Wollheim introduced, one necessary condition of images is that we can see something *in* them, or, for that matter, listen to something in them (Wollheim 1990 and 1991; for this, see Lotz 2007 and 2010a).

I think that the same thing happens in seeing paintings: if we immerse ourselves into seeing a painting, we build up a temporal unity with the painting, which will lead us to a formative process that includes both us and the image presented in and given by the painting. "Artworks," as Adorno similarly puts it, "are images as *apparition*, as appearance, and not as a copy" (Adorno 1997: 85). Images are, accordingly, not stable unities, as they remain tied to *wherein* the meaning constitutes itself. Images remain bound, in other words, to the material organization of the work and to what Adorno called the "law of form" (Adorno 1997: 9). The image can only appear *in* and *as* the material organization of the work and, accordingly, it cannot be conceived as a simple semiotic structure. Strictly speaking, images are nothing else than form. It is therefore false to approach an image with a question such as "What does this mean?" A work of art "has meaning," but in a different sense than the usual sense, as we need *to be with* and participate in the object in order to encounter the meaningfulness of the object, which is a step toward the less important role of subjectivity in this context. In contrast, we do not need to be in the presence of signs in order to refer to their meaning. I could, for example, ask someone on the phone what the meaning of the word "table" is, but I cannot ask someone for the meaning of a symphony, as I need to be in its presence. In my view, debates à la "what does this mean?" remain external to the work of art because this kind of questioning

treats work of art as something that refers to meaning understood as something outside of the presence of the work itself. In regard to sculptures, such a question totally misses how sculptures rearrange the entire spatial setting and *reveal* this spatial setting to their "audience." For, in the case of sculptures, one is supposed to *walk* or at least move in order to get a sense of how a sculpture spatializes its own environment and *creates* space. Thus, what a sculpture is only comes out in this internal relationship that is always *about* something, but not in the sense of something that is external to the work. Meaning is not something that is "there"; instead, we should look at it as something that *becomes*.

In this sense, the meaningfulness of an image also does not depend upon a meaning that is fixed to the object as a property; rather, the meaningfulness is *in* the material organization and its formation character. It has its own temporality. As such, the "process character of art" does not permit the semiotic approach to art. As Adorno puts it, "Aesthetic images are not fixed, archaic invariants: Artworks become images in that the processes that have congealed in them as objectivity become eloquent" (Adorno 1997: 85). This conception of image as (1) performative, (2) self-related, (3) unstable, and (4) material form should lead us also to rethink the concept of mimesis, as some scholars have argued that the concept of mimesis becomes obsolete once we introduce a performative concept of representation. Fischer-Lichte, for example, argues that the character or figure does not emerge from something *prior* to the performance and therefore that which comes to presence in a performance cannot be related to something *independent* from the performance (Fischer-Lichte 2004: 256). Consequently, she implies that a performative approach to art must give up on the concept of mimesis and allow either for construction or for what the deconstructive school has called an "event." "Event" refers here to the material presence of the work of art that escapes representational structures (Mersch 2002). I do not think that her argument makes sense, however, since she ultimately falls back onto a semiotic theory. For the problem of mimesis is not primarily whether the image imitates something prior to the image; rather, the problem is that that which the image is an image *of* or that which the work is *about*—seen from a phenomenological point of view—always constitutes itself *as* something independent from the active construction—but not, and this is important, as *externally* independent.

For example, when a child pretends to be a horse rider, then he/she does not simply imitate something outside his/her play. But how should this be the case, as there is no horse rider present who could be imitated in this moment? For, the pretended horse rider imitates something of its own kind, as the horse

riding is not present as long as the child is not really riding a horse. It is not sufficient to point to the imitated as if it would be a sign. Accordingly, the horse rider imitation is a *coming about* not only of the horse rider, but also of what a horse rider is (= image). Mimesis, accordingly, is an internal relation, namely, the relation between the performance and what comes into presence throughout the performance (for this, also see Klinger 2013: 69–72). In addition, it is related to the being of what presents itself as itself. Nevertheless, that which the play is performing is a horse rider and not any arbitrary object. Consequently, it *presupposes* mimesis. As Adorno points out, we need to think of mimesis as the attempt to *become* the object: "Although art is imitation, it is not imitation of an object; rather, through its gesture and its whole attitude, it is the attempt to reconstitute a situation in which the difference between subject and object did not exist" (Adorno 1997: 70).

Let me further elaborate on the claim that what is denoted in a painting does not depend on something external to the painting; instead, the painting constructs its own denotation *internally* through itself. A painting does not point (like a sign) to something that it is not, but it points *internally* to what it presents in its representation. Images, in the words of Kuhlenkampff, "let us see what they represent" (Kuhlenkampff 2005: 200). What is coming to presence in a representation is what we should call in the proper sense an "image." Images are not pictures, since they are *dynamic* formations that are never fixed, which depend both on the spectator's formation and on the internal formation of the painting. Ultimately, we are unable to make a sharp distinction between the subjective and the objective side of this formative process, since ideally, they fall together. However, the history of art demonstrates that (especially) classical works are works that are interpreted again and again and thereby they are *historically reconstituted*. Masterworks, on the other hand, are *dialectically constituted*, insofar as they are based both (1) on the production of historical distance, the merging of this distance into a new unity, and—with the establishment of a new unity—(2) on the creation of a new distance. The historical difference that results from this process forces us to reappropriate these works.

The historicity of experience escapes the fixed duality of the subjective and the objective. For the historical point in time that marks our distance from the object, which changes over time, is, simply, arbitrary. However, having admitted this, it is nonetheless still the case that great works of art can only be reinterpreted because we *presuppose* that they transcend this difference (which—*because* of their transcending character—must be reappropriated again under changing

historical conditions). "To be part of the historical process," as Gadamer puts it, "does not limit the freedom of knowledge; rather, it makes it possible" (Gadamer 1993/1: 367). In this way, what we call "the" painting or "the" work shifts historically. For example, over time, the fresco from Massaccio in the dome of Florence shifts its *meaning* because we are in distance to it and because we have developed sophisticated methods for understanding cultural formations including frescos by Massaccio. The constitution of meaning is fixed neither on the side of the subject nor on the side of the object. Instead, the image is formed *between* the subject and the object and constitutes *itself* throughout this process as independent from subject and object. This ongoing *shift of the same* is what we should call the "image." In this connection, images are not stuck to the canvas as paint sticks to it; instead, images are formed *in* and *out of* the presence of the painting. Gadamer has given us a clear formulation of this structure of images. I would like to use his analysis for the purpose of understanding the structure of paintings.

Some of the most striking passages in *Truth and Method* are those in which Gadamer discusses the concepts of representation and imitation, both of which he tries to reinterpret and recover from their general philosophical dismissal. He writes:

> The situation basic to imitation that we are discussing not only implies that what is represented is there (*das Dargestellte da ist*), but also that it has come into the There more authentically (*eigentlicher ins Da gekommen ist*). Imitation and representation are not merely a repetition, a copy, but knowledge of the essence. (Gadamer 1993/1: 120, 2003: 114)

Here, Gadamer is dealing with the connection between representation [*Darstellung*] and imitation, the relation of which can be (going beyond the quote) expressed in two theses: (1) the relation between representation and the represented is not a copy or reproduction; and (2) what presents itself in the representation is not something static that could be immediately identified; rather, it comes into being and remains "fluid" throughout. The result of both (1) and (2) Gadamer calls "formation" or "formed image" [*Gebilde*]. The formed image is to be understood as an active and dialectical notion and leads throughout its constitution to a clarification *of itself*. The constitution of an image, according to Gadamer, is a self-referential process.

For a better understanding of what Gadamer has in mind, let us first examine an example. Let us suppose that we are watching a play, such as Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. One of the major characters of the play

is a Jewish money lender called Shylock, a figure who has produced a lot of discussion and accusation of Shakespeare as an anti-Semite. Depending upon who plays Shylock, the configuration of the play changes. For instance, in the newest film adaptation, Al Pacino plays Shylock in a very complex way, which allows for a final judgment of Shylock's character neither as the "money-hungry merciless Jew" nor as the "exploited figure" in the play. The complexity of Pacino's masterful play allows us, as viewers—despite all debates and battles over the meaning of the play—to discover Shylock's character anew. Accordingly, we should take into account three levels in our analysis of the play's meaning: first, the actor (Pacino), second, the represented character (Shylock), and third, the character as it presents itself in the represented (played/interpreted Shylock). The last category is the most important category, as it leads to the important insight that the "represented" is neither *outside* of the representation *nor* simply identical with the representation. The represented in this special sense, and taken as something to be *formed,* will be called "image."

Let us translate our example into Gadamerian language: the actor, here Al Pacino, is an individual with a specific history, education, background, etc. Throughout the play, the individuality of Pacino himself disappears behind being an actor of a specific character, which in this case is the character Shylock. Even in Brecht's conception of actors as the attempt to break down the difference between actor and representation, the fundamental disappearance of the specificity of the actor's "real" individuality remains in place: even in the extreme case that an actor plays herself, this difference remains intact. Be that as it may, being an actor means that the actor not only gives a performance within which a character is represented, the performance is at the same time the ongoing *establishment* of a character; it is the performance *of* a character. The being of the character is indeed *constituted* throughout the performance and cannot be found as something outside of the performance. Even if a real person exists that the actor represents, the constitution of the representation remains ultimately independent of the real referent. This character, as it appears in and throughout the performance, has its being only in the performance, and not beyond the actual play. In other words, what we call "the Jew Shylock" is neither a naively understood imitation (which Gadamer rejects) nor simply represented by Pacino; rather, the character is systematically built up and *presented*—which Gadamer calls *darstellen*—by the actor. Although images can only be found in representations, they are built and formed on the basis of an internal difference between the image and the representation. Playing a character precisely

means that specific aspects of that character are established *through* the play (representation) and that they are put together in a synthesis established by the actor. In German, we call an actor a "*Darsteller*," which means *presenter*. But what is it, exactly, that is presenting itself in the representation of Shylock? Let us listen to Gadamer:

> Only through this change does play achieve ideality, so that it can be understood as play. Only now does it emerge as detached from the representing activity of the player and consist in the pure appearance (*Erscheinung*) of what they are playing. As such, the play—even the unforeseen elements of improvisation—is in principle repeatable and hence permanent. It has the character of a work, of an *ergon* and not only of *energeia*. In this sense I call it a formed image (*Gebilde*). (Gadamer 1993/1: 116, 2003: 110; translation altered)

What Gadamer has in mind here is the unified view of what appears *throughout* the performance and play. It is precisely this view—as distinguished, but not independent, from representation—that he calls "image." It should be clear by now that Gadamer is interested neither in "mental" images nor in "material" or physical images; rather, following Heidegger on this point, he claims that both mental and physical images have as their condition of possibility the process of imaging within which we discover the image as that which *shows up* and *comes to being* in and through a representation. Gadamer's conception of images implies that images let us see things independently from their "locations" as either physical or mental. Moreover, images are connected to all art forms, including theater, music, and the fine arts [*Bildende Kunst*].

Gadamer's reflections have their roots in specific key terms and in semantic fields of the German language. In German, one can say, when one sees a spectacular landscape, for example, "What an image!" [*Was für ein Anblick*], which literally means: "What a view!" or "What a look!" However, the "view" here does not refer to a subjective feeling or subjective impression of the landscape: it refers to the *appearing* landscape. In other words, even in the case of an aesthetical perception, we must take into account the difference between the landscape and how it appears *within itself*; for the landscape is perceived not simply as a percept but as a specifically constituted and *appearing* landscape. Indeed, images always imply at least a simple difference between the content (landscape) and the appearing content (view [*Anblick*]), which several philosophers, from Sartre to Colin McGinn, have addressed as the "negativity of the image," and which other philosophers (in a similar context) have referred to as an "iconic difference" (e.g., Boehm 1987 and 1995).

In the hermeneutical context, we should underline that the negativity of the image constitutes an *internal* difference: the image is related to itself and is in Hegelian language a for-itself [*Fürsichsein*] (see Gadamer 1993/1: 143), since the relation that the image opens up does not point beyond its representation but comes to being *in* the representation. As James Risser puts it, "The presence of what is presented stands in its own right as a completed whole in the presentation" (Risser 1994: 128; see also Tate 2001: 62). Put very simply, the image comes into being *through* its formation. For example, a painting of a landscape does not (primarily) refer to the "real" landscape; rather, as a condition of the possibility of reference, it is related to what comes into being and presents itself *in* the painting, which is (according to what we have said so far) the enacted or formed image. Accordingly, the image should be understood as the specific unity of the *presentation* (*Darstellung*): in this example, the presentation of the landscape. As Jean-Luc Nancy has pointed out, the German term "*Einbildung*" (*imagination*)—literally "in-forming"—can also be understood as a form of unification (*Einung, Ein-formung*), which means "making one." In order to be seen, something must appear unified and in a synthesis (Nancy 2006: 83–4). What Nancy has in mind is a form of being-seen and visibility that is presupposed for it to be possible for any entity to be addressed. It has to show itself. For example, as Heidegger argues in his discussion of Kant's concept of imagination in the *First Critique*, image means the very way in which something must be given to us as itself. A reproduction, as Heidegger remarks, presupposes an image, since before the reproduction can refer to something that it is not, it must show itself *as* a reproduction. There is, we might say, always an original: "What presents itself does so always in its showing-itself" (Nancy 2006: 86). The "living unity" (Gadamer 1986: 43) is the condition of the possibility of the seen. In our perceiving of the landscape in its "look" and "view," we are referring to *what the object, here the specific unity and look of what we perceive, offers us*. We are expressing something about *how the landscape shows itself as a landscape*. It is precisely this presentation of itself in its unity that Gadamer calls "formed image" [*Gebilde*], inasmuch as the image always appears as a specific structure and in the form of synthesized elements that are unified in a specific, *noticeable* manner.

In other words, the image is the presentation of something that *comes into being* and can thereby be seen *as such*. Something—an issue, content, etc.—can be identified and comes to presence in the form of an image, that is, as the *view of* the issue in question (Boehm 2003: 97). For example, as I will later show, Richter's painting *Youth Portrait* (figure 11) makes the issue of human corruption

visible *in* itself and in exchange with our interpretation. It is not identical with its meaning, but its meaning is a complex process that presents itself throughout *Youth Portrait as* something meaningful to us. This also applies to the abstract paintings. Richter himself nicely expresses it this way:

> I paint the view [*Anblick*] of an existing thing in a figurative image; in an abstract painting the image of a landscape, which I do not know in advance, forms itself in the process. The means, however, are the same, i.e., the colors, forms, proportions, structures are the same as when a really existing scene emerges. Consequently, abstract images should be seen in the same way as photo realistic motives. (Richter in Elger 2009: 16; my translation)

The image as that which presents itself in its representation is, as I pointed out, not a static or immediate entity; instead, it has a temporal dimension and, moreover, the image is something that *comes into being*. At this juncture, we must now ask how this coming-into-being should further be conceptualized and understood, and what relation it bears to a possible audience or to the spectator of the image. The answer to both questions can be found in the introduction of the term "participation." For with the introduction of both terms, Gadamer ultimately tries to overcome a simple epistemological and subject-object model of how we experience art and pictures. As Gadamer puts it, because imitation and presentation "are not merely repetition, but a 'bringing forth,' " they imply a spectator as well. This structure Gadamer calls "participation," which I already addressed before as the unity of the subjective and objective side of the image formation.

We should first point out that every presentation and every performance, even the modern practice of painting and modern museum culture, depends (in some form or another) on a relation between the audience or spectator and the performance or art object. This relation is manifested in specific practices. For example, the spectator of a painting is not only neutrally and objectively "observing" the painting; rather, the spectator is a *moment of* the event that we call a "show" or an "exhibition." Indeed, the painting must be exhibited and shown, even if this happens in a private setting. In other words, a painting must be shown *to* a spectator, which lets the spectator communicate with the painting and participate in this relation *between* the spectators, possibly other spectators, and the work. Usually, we go to specific places, such as the museum, in order to "be there" and be part of what we experience, for example, a painting. Put differently, we do not want to simply *be with* the representation, but we also want to *become part of* the representation. Accordingly, if we want to see paintings,

then we (usually) go to museums, where paintings are exhibited. But exhibitions are essentially the same as what we call "showings" or "performances" in theater and in music, where although what is exhibited is, of course, the work itself, the exhibitions are more than simply an establishment of visibility, since to be exhibited means that the audience or the spectator can *be together with* the work. Listening, seeing, and touching are all forms of this "being-together with a work," on the basis of which the image constitutes itself. Consequently, it is not only the painting that is exhibited, but at the same time, it is us as a necessary condition of this event who are exhibited, *with* the painting. Interpreter and painting have to be "present together" in a specific historical and social way. This is supported by the fact that the audience *and* the work *participate* in the presentation of what shows itself throughout the performance. Gadamer further determines this being present" as a temporal notion, which he calls "Contemporaneity" [*Gleichzeitigkeit*] and which "forms part of the being of a work of art. It constitutes the nature of 'being present'. . . . Contemporaneity . . . here means that a single thing that presents itself to us achieves in its presentation full presentness, however remote its origin may be" (Gadamer 2003: 332).

In this vein, according to Gadamer, we should understand the process of seeing and perceiving a painting, which is part of the exhibition of the painting, as a form of celebration [*Fest*]. "Watching something," as Gadamer puts it, "is a genuine mode of participation" (Gadamer 1993/1: 129, 2003: 124) throughout which we not only establish a unique being-together with the work but also experience the formation of the image throughout the participatory activity. In a similar fashion, Susanne Langer and Ernst Cassirer have claimed that images are dynamic categories that establish themselves in their own self-reference (Cassirer 1992: 142–5). Just, as we sit *through* a theater presentation, we also perceive *through* a painting. The ideal of what Gadamer has in mind can be seen in what we usually call celebrations and parties. For a party is a gathering of people who—beside strategic and instrumental reasons—are celebrating primarily their togetherness and friendship. In celebrations, as Gadamer puts it, "we are not primarily separated, but rather gathered together" (Gadamer 1986: 40). The same occurs in perceiving paintings: with every act of understanding, we celebrate the togetherness of ourselves and the painting. In contradistinction to looking *over* a painting, which overlooks the image, *seeing* the painting is based on a *presence* that we establish *with* what we see and during which the image is established as the superior being and not as a construction of our looking at it: the image "finds in its performance its true being" (Gadamer 1993/8: 389).

We can see from the discussion of what images are that most perceptual accounts of images are inappropriate because they are unable to cover the *dynamic* and historical constitution of the image. Paintings do not simply represent something (under the condition that we see something in them); instead, they present and form something *in* what they represent. This level of presentation and formation is also the criterion used to distinguish between pictures and images. Pictures are not images because they are *only* representations. However, at this point, it is not our task to clarify whether pictures can ever be *only* pictures or whether they are also always images. We will come back to this point when we look at Richter's photo-paintings, since these paintings demonstrate how pictures become transformed into images through painting. In sum, at this juncture, we should take images as formations that are constituted between the subject and object because they are constituted as something within which both sides participate.

What I have tried to do (up to this point) is to make more sense of what I call *image formation*. As we said above, paintings not only form images, they also form worlds. In order to further investigate the forming power of images, we should briefly sketch out *how* paintings form images. Paintings do this in two ways: first, the formation is constituted by what Boehm calls "iconic difference"; and second, it is constituted by what Imdahl calls the "unity of the image." Boehm, as briefly noted above, introduced the term "iconic difference" (Boehm 1987: 10), in order to refer to the temporal constitution of the image and the difference of part and whole in an image. The fact that we never see parts and elements of a painting simultaneously leads to a dialectical mediation between seeing, painting, element, and the whole (Boehm 1980: 129–31), whereby the presence of the image is constituted by a synthesis of absent and present moments (on elements see Loock 1985: 91). Seeing a painting, in other words, is always forced to move back and forth between its parts and the whole. The structure of a painting is determined by the elements that make up the painting, the painting itself, and the relation established between the elements and the whole. For example, a simple line on a plane can only be taken as an image of a line if the element (here the line) is differentiated from the rest of the field *and* related to the whole (see Boehm 1987: 7). Susan Langer makes the same point in regard to sculpture as an organism: "It is the functional whole that is inviolable. Break this, and all the subordinate activities cease, the constituent parts disintegrate, and 'living form' has disappeared" (Langer 1953: 89). This process of "relating" goes beyond *Gestalt* psychology because it is an *active*

constitution of structure *and* meaning through the painting and our vision. The differentiation between the elements and the whole has to be introduced by us; otherwise, we do not see a painting as an image *of* a line, but, instead, we see only a line. However, what we have in front of us is a painting *of* a line. In a similar fashion, *relating* transforms a monochrome painting from a simple colored surface into an image *of* color. Viewers who are unable or unwilling to "relate" are unable to understand a monochrome painting as a painting. They will simply see paint on canvas. What Boehm calls "iconic difference" is based on the differentiation that the image introduces, which is based on an *internal* negativity of the image formation. For example, in Richter's huge works *January, December,* and *November* (1989, CR 701, figure 12), one can identify layers, colors, strokes, blurs, etc. During the process of image formation, even a simple "scrape" becomes an element of a whole. Here, "scrape" suddenly is related to the other moments and it is no longer simply a "scrape"; rather, it is now "a line." In contrast, external negativity means that the image differentiates itself from what it is not, which is a necessary condition for pictures. External negativity, in this context, leads us back to the classical question of the theory of representations, which involves the question of how a picture is able to represent something that it is not. However, for us, external negativity is no longer a problem, since, according to the position presented here, paintings construct their reference, meaning, and denoted objects *internally*. Indeed, paintings create their own reality. Consequently, the iconic difference introduces negativity as an internal condition of the *formation* that the painting presents, if we keep in mind that formation is used here for what the painting *presents* and "works out" in its representation. If we learn to understand that the structure of the image is not constituted through something outside of the image, and that it is an effect of its internal "work," we should conclude that the primary dynamics that drive the painting to its "work" are the iconic differences, understood as the *internal* negation and differentiation of the image.

At this juncture, we should be compelled to ask: How do images internally negate? First, images negate themselves as a whole (not being unity); second, they negate themselves as a part (not being part); and third, they posit a unity: they are *not* simply one; rather, they present themselves as an ongoing process during which the unity of part and whole, that is, the *unity of itself with itself*, is established. Boehm has nicely demonstrated this process in regard to the question of the description of paintings (Boehm 1995: 30). The description of a painting would never be successful if we would only refer to the *factual*

elements that we can identify in a painting (even if those elements are abstract, such as color patterns, brush patterns, etc.), since these only lead to a collection of elements that, as such, remain absolutely meaningless, unless they are put in relation to each other. Indeed, they need to be seen as reacting to each other, as resulting from each other, and as being placed within the whole of the painting, in order to be meaningful. This specific "seen seeing" [*sehendes Sehen*] (Imdahl 1996/3: 304) is a relational seeing that forms the image as something that presents *itself* in the painting *through* the spectator but only also *with* the painting. Without this "process" (according to Boehm), the image could not come in to being through its description. Consequently, the process of image formation is a process of further differentiating *and* further unification.

For example, Richter's landscape paintings bring elements together in a specific way, determining their position within the whole, in addition to which they lay those elements out in their unique position within the painting. As such, a painting always synthesizes something into *one* concrete image. For instance, a still-life painting, such as Richter's tulips, gives us *one* view of what human finitude is about (his painting lets us see this traditional topic in a very modern and photographic way). Interestingly, although most still-life paintings belonging to genre painting operate with similar elements, such as flowers, plant arrangements, fruit, skulls, etc., all of these paintings are unique regarding the mode in which they determine light, perspective, symbols, paint, etc., in order to form them into a specific unity, that is, into *one* image. The spectator not only must reconstitute and identify the elements and their relationship, she also must bring all elements together into one image in order to take it to be about human finitude in the form of a *specific* interpretation. This specificity will not be constituted if the viewer understands a painting only as an example of a general kind of painting. Thus, a still-life painting is only an image, if it is able to establish itself as unique, that is, if it is able to present a *specific view* of its topic. Otherwise, it remains an illustration.

Referring to Albers, Boehm has further determined the differentiation that is occurring in the constitution of the image by what he calls the difference between "fact and act" (Boehm 1995: 37, 1980: 119). The complexity of the formed image that the spectator establishes in exchange with the painting depends on both poles of this process and is similar to the general concept of understanding. As Gadamer has repeatedly pointed out, understanding is only possible if we interpret the parts in relationship *toward the whole* and thereby already *presuppose* a "unifying" sense of the whole. On this view, an art historian

who would only give us pieces of incoherent parts and elements of a painting will not be successful, since the *toward which*—the *from . . . to . . .* directionality (Boehm 1980: 131)—of the process of meaning constitution remains empty if it is based on a mere collection of facts without internal coherence. Successful seeing and successful understanding is only possible, in other words, if we have an idea of that *toward which* the process should lead and of how the elements that belong to this process are organized and related to each other.

The most perfect examples of this process of understanding are paintings that determine and *form* each of their elements in all possible aspects. A good painting is therefore like a symphony. Meaning here is both the *ongoing result* of seeing as well as its *presupposition*. Thus, seeing can only be a correction, differentiation, and reunification of this presupposed "whole." Unification as a collection of internal differences and relations is, then, in the case of image formation, a *directed* gathering and has a normative structure. This should allow us to see that the nature of this gathering is a form of "reading." The German word for reading is "*lesen*" and originally means *harvesting*. Gadamer has described the role of reading in the following way:

> This harvest is the fullness of sense that is built up into a structure of meaning and similarly with a structure of sound. There are likewise the building blocks of meaning: motives, images, and sounds. But these elements are not letters, words, sentences, periods or chapters. No, these things belong to grammar and syntax, which belong to the mere skeleton of writtenness and not to its formed image [Formgestalt]. It is the formed image that comes forth thanks to the means possessed by the language of art in poetry, sculpture and picture, which in the flow of its play builds up the Gestalt. Afterwards, the work can be articulated and this may enhance the real seeing or hearing of the work so that it gains in differentiation. In general, however, the formed image of the picture or of the text takes shape without any critical distance. The event of emerging as experienced by the viewer, hearer or reader, i.e., the performance as experienced—the Vollzug—is the interpretation. (Gadamer 1993/8: 393; translation altered)

What Gadamer has in mind here is quite simple. He wants to point out that reading is not a two-level process within which we first see the colors or signs on canvas or on the paper, which we then somehow interpret and connect to meaning; rather, reading is itself the very process that *articulates* what is read *while* we are reading it, and as such, reading is a re-formulation and forms into a *Gestalt*. For example, as Gadamer points out, reading poetry, which was originally meant to be read aloud, is not a simple reproduction or echoing of

the text: what we call "the" text or "the" poem is forming itself throughout the activity of reading, the consequence of which is that from the hermeneutical perspective, a poem does not exist independently of its being read, collected, structured, unified, and formed into an image.

Thus, although reading is certainly not identical with "speaking out," it nonetheless requires the internal structuring of meaning, which depends upon the relation of whole and part, retention and protention, memory and anticipation, etc. Reading, *whether it is in the form of speaking aloud or whether it is in the form of seeing a painting*, accordingly, is a "plastic process," the essence of which is a *performative articulation* understood as a process of self-structuring. Doesburg calls this process "reproductive formation" (Doesburg 1966: 39). In this vein, Boehm has pointed to the temporality of this process in the form of "recollected seeing" [*erinnerndes Sehen*] (Boehm 1985), within which elements are kept and anticipated, and which, throughout the process of anticipation and memorization, come to an ongoing presence in their temporal unity (Boehm 1980: 120). Memory and projection are necessary moments of the formation of images, which, in its fixed schema of sensuality and rationality, the philosophical tradition has overlooked, especially because it typically understands the process of seeing (and its temporality) as a merely subjective process. However, in this case, the temporality is *between* the process of seeing and the process of the painting. We see *with* the painting, which forbids us to understand the act of seeing as a merely subjective and psychological process. In Husserlian terms, the painting is the *intentional correlate* of our act of seeing. The image, in other words, forms *its own past and its own future*.

This seeing *into* and forming oneself *into* what the painting "images" always presupposes that the spectator has given up a simple form of identifying elements in a painting (though this is part of the process) (more in Lotz 2010a). For relational seeing and receiving, the "work" of a painting is not a semiotic process of taking elements to be signs of something else; rather, it is based on how the painting and the spectator bring the elements together and *thereby* form an image. The image constitution occurs *below* and independent from the semiotic level. The question of a spectator, accordingly—of what the other spectator sees—is not directed toward the elements of the painting (though those are necessary); instead, it is directed toward the *image*, that is, toward the *unity* of what comes to presence in the representation. It is this unity that becomes the object of any communication about a painting (if we assume that more than one spectator is encountering a painting). Given all this, we must

conclude that the *Gestalt* of a painting is in truth a historically and temporally determined concept. What appears therefore to be the *result* of acts such as seeing, interpretation, and painting, is in truth the *becoming* of the *Gestalt* itself, which we artificially fix into our categories, even though the painting has always already transcended our fixation of the image into concepts. The "configurative meaning" (Iser 1972: 290) is somewhere between the facticity of the painting (its being-there) and the image that the painting produces in its historical constitution. This transcendence appears to us as a "transgression." As Imdahl puts it, "The identity and non-exchangeability of an image is the revelation of an unthinkable convergence of all experiences that it mediates" (Imdahl 1996/3: 393).

The presence of the image, hence, goes together with its articulation in seeing and description, by means of which it is reconfigured and reshaped throughout the dialogue between subject and object. As Gadamer points out, this performative dimension of the formative image should not lead us to take paintings as the *result* of a producing act. For the painting is not simply the result of a producing act on the side of the artist; instead, following what we have developed so far, we must come to the conclusion that in a formed image, genesis and result *fall together*.

Finally, I shall briefly clarify the dialogical structure of how the image comes into its presence. In order to do this, I would like to draw a parallel. In both poetry and literature, we find the function of the narrator; especially in poetry, we find the "I" that speaks through and with its formations. This "I" has a universal function: the reader is able to identify and take the poem as a work within which a voice comes to presence, because the voice remains a universal voice and transcends itself as the voice of the *individual* poet. The individuality of the poet's voice becomes transformed through the artistic presentation and through the formation of the poet's voice into the word formation of the poem. The "I" is "our" "I," the imaginary "I" that speaks for all of us. As Gadamer points out in his commentary on Celan, when we read poetry, we have always already understood who the "I" is (Gadamer 1993/9: 384). As such, we understand the poem as a voice to which we, as the reader, need to respond. In other words, in reading a poem, the poem comes to presence and it does this because we enter a dialogue with the poem. *Reading, whether in poetry or in painting, then, is responding*. In addition, during the process of reaching its *Gestalt*, as we said above, our reading is not simply a reproduction and repetition of the poem. Instead, the poem *becomes* itself, that is, it becomes an image, throughout us

articulating it, that is, on the basis of our laying it out by reading it. Reading, accordingly, is centrally a *receptive* occurrence.

Now, let us think of painting. It seems to me that we find precisely the same structure in painting and vision. For when we encounter a painting, we feel attracted and forced to respond. The painting's claim on us is prior to our response and calls for its further investigation and perception. Though it is true that instead of listening, it is vision that plays the main mediating role, in both cases the *image*, the intellectual content of what is formed and structured into a *Gestalt*, comes to presence through a dialogical structure in which we respond to the claim made by the work. However, we have to go even further: responding to a claim is only possible if the painting is *questionable*, that is, if we understand the painting as a question to which we are called to respond in the form of seeing. Seeing, as we know, is not a fixed, a-temporal act, but a dynamic form of responding and answering to what presents itself in a painting. Vision can therefore be understood as reading because it is the *performance* of being-with the image. In this connection, we may say that the painting, as Klee and Merleau-Ponty pointed out, *looks at us* first before we look back, where this is not meant in a metaphorical way. Indeed, we must presuppose that when we turn our gaze toward a painting, something affects and attracts us *before* we turned our gaze. This is to admit that the motivation for why we look at something is not an effect of the gaze; rather, the gaze turns itself because it "feels" pulled and thereby associated with the object. The painting is a call, an *Ansprechen*. Of course, it might be the case that our interest disappears when we discover that a further response to this object is (for whatever reasons) not realizable, but so long as we remain interested, a dialogue of gazes will begin within which we feel *faced* by the painting and forced to respond to the gaze of the painting. If we respond to such a gaze, we single out the object in question, take it in its own right, and *open up* a space of possibilities. As Podro has pointed out, "A painting or drawing is for our perception an object in its own right. We explore *its* many facets for ways in which they may be revelatory of its subject and of its own internal organization, which combines these facets" (Podro in Bryson 1991: 183).

These possibilities of responding to the internal organization go far beyond what Podro has in mind, though, insofar as the organization of a painting is itself not absolutely fixed. Through new revelations, new interpretations, and new dialogues, the image can change in its identity. For example, what we see in Richter's painting *Mr. Heyde* (1965, CR 100) changed after the personal story behind the painting and its connection with Richter's *Aunt Marianne* (1965,

CR 87) were revealed (Schreiber 2007). What we see in *Aunt Marianne,* after this reconfiguration, is not only a well-organized painting (it echoes old master paintings), but suddenly we see that the painting is also about someone who died at the hand of the Nazis. Consequently, responding to a painting does not simply mean to respond to its material structure, as Podro points out, but it means much more, since it always includes the *whole* image as it has formed itself up to that point. Consequently, as trained musicians and composers *hear more and different tones and notes* than a non-trained listener does, art historians see more and different aspects of paintings than the non-trained spectator does. Nevertheless, both the complex and the simple view are views of *this* painting such that if the interpreter is not able to demonstrate that the image comes into being *in this* painting, the interpretation must be taken to be a mere construction. As we said previously, since meaning and intelligibility show up and are *there*, what can be said about a painting must always return to the painting. This brings us to the next point.

Idealization

Imdahl has analyzed the unity of images in broader terms and in relation to the spectator. If it is correct, as we claimed above, that the relation between the spectator and the painting is an intimate and participatory relation, then we should underline that the spectator brings herself in to a specific presence that she shares *with* the painting. We can see how this happens in literature, where a reader must *enter* the newly established imaginary world in order to see. In the visual arts, the same occurs insofar as the spectator must *enter* the image if it is to come about in an ongoing formative process within which the spectator establishes a dialogue with the painting(s) (Jauss 1991: 671–86). Through the inner organization of the painting, the spectator enters "a new world, which exists only in painting and can be seen only by the spectator who attends to the procedures of painting" (Podro in Bryson 1991: 164). In this way, paintings "make visible for us a covered up connection of all things, the 'synthesis of a world'" (Jauss 1972: 35). In other words, paintings put something together and let something *stand* in front of us, because they allow us to see new, different, or similar relations and connections between concepts, ideas, forms, things, etc. that we have not seen before in this way. Accordingly, if we see paintings as images, then we no longer take them to be an example of something general;

rather, paintings suddenly appear to us as singular in their presence (Gadamer 1993/8: 335). Moreover, images are also events, not in the sense of irrational occurrences, but as unique configurations that put things together in a new light. For example, a still life becomes an image for us if it synthesizes its elements in relation to a world that shows up in its unity as a *never before* seen aspect of how these elements are put together. Otherwise, it would be impossible to enter a dialogue with the painting, as thousands of still-life images exist in the history of art. Though most of these paintings try to reveal the finitude of life, *how* each of these paintings *does this* is unique and therefore a different interpretation of its theme. One central possibility of paintings, accordingly, is to not only echo our world by existing *in* our world but also to transcend their existence by defining it. This transcendence is what I would like to call in this section "idealization," although later, while looking more closely at selected paintings by Richter, I will refer to this as "essentialization." As Heidegger has it, an image is "presentation, *eidos*, making visible. The art work, the image formation [*Gebilde*], brings into an image, makes visible" (Heidegger 2002: 554). Essentialization is an effect of form, which we previously reconceptualized as *formation*. One way to think about image formation in this context goes back to the relation between understanding and synthesis that images offer to us. In his lectures on painting, the French scholastic philosopher Etienne Gilson nicely puts it in the following words: "Inasmuch as it is 'reason,' form is that in any reality which makes it intelligible . . . reason, or intelligible formula of a thing results from its form, whose function it is to gather together a multiplicity of elements and to include them in the unity of a distinct being" (Gilson 1959: 119). Three aspects are important in what Gilson says in this quote. All we have to do is transfer Gilson's ontological description of being and form to the aesthetic description of representation and formation. First, by means of their form or, in our extended definition, by means of their formation, representations not only *are*, but, they are *understandable* to us. Second, for that to happen something must show up in its unity, that is, something must present itself to us in a *view*. Paintings "gather" something together and present this gathering and "collection." For example, as was argued previously, a character in this sense is the enacted gathering of all aspects that the actor enacts during a performance. Only this way does a character have a form, or better, *is a formation*. Third, as Gilson underlines in his quote in regard to entities as such, paintings establish their own unity as a *distinct* unity.

In order to establish a difference between what is presented in a representation and the representation itself, a painting has to establish itself in its presentation

as something separated and identifiable. Identification is always a process of bringing elements together in such a unique way that something becomes *prominent* and separates itself from a background or context. For example, an architectural element becomes distinct and identifiable when it can be separated from the other elements surrounding it. A bridge can make the environment, in which it is placed, visible when it both establishes itself in its unity *and* distinguishes itself from the environment. Paintings establish their distinctiveness through what could be called the *condensation* and *concentration* of formative elements (Cassirer 1992: 143). Distinctiveness, in other words, must set in as soon as the image comes into being and thereby separates itself as something we can identify *in* the representation. For example, Friedrich's famous painting *Monk at the Sea,* Hopper's *Night Hawks*, or Beuys' happening *I love America and America loves me* let us see something and clarify what they are about by extremely simplifying their content (though it might become very complex once we begin to speak about it). In order to make this point clearer, we should note that by "simplification" we do not mean something negative; it is rather the other way around: simplification here means *clarification*. For example, *Monk at the Sea* gives us the unique view of what it means to be related to the universe as a single individual. As the saying has it, an image shows more than thousand words. It synthesizes its elements in such a condensed form that the spectator can see the idea in its material existence. In other words, something *infinitely* complex (such as the idea of human existence) suddenly appears as something *finite*.

This dialectic between finitude and infinity has been well grasped by Andreij Tarkovsky who, though a filmmaker himself, understood his own art as being in close proximity with painting. In his *Sculpting in Time*, he compares the image to a drop of water: "The image is not a certain *meaning*, expressed by the director, but an entire world reflected as in a drop of water" (Tarkovksy 1986: 110). This analogy of a drop of water with an image is very precise, as, on the one hand, an image is a *closed unity* in a very small entity, but, on the other hand, it shows or "reflects" an entire world in its partiality. This relation from infinity to a condensed image of that infinity we should call "simplification." Indeed, Richter himself calls this movement introduced by painting "simplification" (Richter 2009a: 167). Simplification is related to the unified view (see above) that images offer regarding what they are about. In order to let us see something, images offer a unique synthesis by *simplifying* their material into something that we can grasp. Throughout this condensation, the image *becomes one* and establishes

itself in its unity in *separation* from other images. Every painting as a single object and paintings taken and viewed together, hence, are forming *their own reality in the form of an image*. Their nature is not simply to be (thing) or to point (sign), but to *show* in themselves something new and so far unseen: they *simplify* something and therefore we are able to *see* them. Again, simplification does not mean "easier" or "dumming down"; rather, it makes that which as such cannot be *seen* visible and therefore accessible; it *idealizes* its content. Simplification is at the same time always a process of idealization, which is to say, particular formations must appear at some point as something general. They are unique, but as an image they need to contain nonuniqueness in them. *Monk at the Sea* is not about something someone felt at a specific point in time; rather, it is about something general: human existence, the sublime, religious feeling, etc. A painting can only *be* an image because it internally *builds up what it is about* and thereby *idealizes* what it is about: it no longer refers to something in "outer" reality; rather, it needs to form this reality, as we said earlier, in itself, since the relation of images are internal relations. To use Tarkovsky's analogy, I see the world in the drop of water and therefore I no longer need to look at reality itself. As an artist, Richter puts this in different words, but he means the same thing; he writes the following in his diaries: "You realize that you can't represent reality at all—that what you make represents nothing but itself, and therefore is itself reality" (Richter 2009a: 59), and he goes on, "but since pictures are not made for purposes of comparison with reality, they cannot be blurred, or imprecise, or different (different from what?) How can, say, paint on canvas be blurred?" (Richter 2009a: 69). Later I will come back to the problem of blurredness, but what Richter has in mind is the becoming of images as something that no longer needs to refer to anything outside of itself. The paintings can only achieve this because they establish their unity through simplification, which, in turn, is always an idealization: the painting takes something out of reality, it cannot deal with "everything" at once, and, hence, it needs to establish a *new* unity in itself.

In our words, the formation that comes into being throughout a painterly representation establishes itself as an autonomous unity that functions totally independently from the mimetic level, though this does not exclude the assumption that art in general is an effect of the general human mimetic impulse (Adorno 1997: 53–6). Important to note at this point is that that which comes to presence in a painting can no longer be compared to or contrasted with what motivated the painting. Even in a portrait carried out in a realist fashion, the image that establishes itself throughout its participation is not comparable to the

"real" person, for *as a canvas* it not only has no similarity to the "real" person depicted, but as a painting it also synthesizes elements such as colors, lines, spots, movements, etc. necessarily into something new. This is because it is not a second face, but a painting *of* a face. Put simply, the face is established *through* the painting and as something ideal, but it is neither identical with the canvas nor simply in our mind.

Accordingly, as Richter points out in the above quote, even if painting of photographs appear to be blurred, they *are* not really blurred, because the blurredness is itself something painted and formed, and not a natural property of the image. Thus, since it is a property of what is painted (in this example, a blurred photograph), it cannot be compared with an "incorrect" rendering. The fact that we sometimes take realist portraits to be "more correct" than expressionist portraits is dependent on a criterion that was not won out of painting itself but was developed out of an *external* relation; however, we do not need an external criterion for establishing the claim that one image is better or closer to the reality *outside* of the criteria established by a painting itself. The historical process of art itself demonstrates this; for nowadays, after having learned to acknowledge the new view developed by expressionism, we take expressionist portraits to be even more "truthful" regarding what they want to depict than other forms of portraiture painting.

The easiest way to reflect further on this is to take an example from Richter's work. A good candidate for this is a collage of photos that Richter worked out with Sigmar Polke early during his career entitled *Transformation* (1968, CR 14). *Transformation* seems at first to be an ironic statement about the power of art and artists, since Richter and Polke seem to claim that the photos demonstrate the transformation of a mountain range into a sphere. The claim that this is a work of irony is certainly true, since the collage subtly makes us aware of three aspects: (1) it destroys our everyday belief that photos show the "reality" in a direct way; (2) it claims to demonstrate the "power" of the artist to change the world (which in the light of [1] turns into the opposite); and (3) it allows the spectator to reflect on the difference between a representation and what is depicted *in* a representation. In his discussion of the work, Butin argues that Polke and Richter "deceive" us in their attempt to demonstrate the infinite power of art. The work makes us believe that a transformation really occurred, which conflicts with our knowledge that natural laws are unable to be changed through art or the power of painters (Butin 1991: 54; similarly, Koch 1992: 135). But Butin's thesis is not precise enough; for *Transformation* is precisely the

opposite of a deception, insofar as it lays bare the "impotence" *and* the potency of painting and imaging, as, on the one hand, the powerlessness of the painter is demonstrated in the impossibility of changing the reality through art, and, on the other hand, this impossibility dialectically contains its opposite, since *on the level* of the image, the reality is *indeed* transformed. What we *see* (at least if we synthesize the pictures in a temporal way) *is* a transformation of a picture of a mountain range into a picture of a sphere. Seen from this point of view, the artists are quite successful! We should therefore reject the first part of Butin's thesis (deception) and keep the second part (irony), for *as such*, given that on the level of imaging and painting, the transformation is successful. In this way, Richter's claim that painting forms and constructs its own reality turns out to be correct if we apply it to *Transformation*, since what is depicted in these pictures are not the "real" mountains, but *depicted* mountains, which are formed by the representations and exist only in the medium (which in this case is paper). *Transformation* thereby demonstrates that it does not make sense to compare the constructed reality with the reality itself. To claim, as Butin does, that the image "deceives" us implies that we—as spectators—have a *criterion* for the "correct" or "incorrect" representation of a mountain transformation. However, we do not have such a criterion. When Caspar David Friedrich paints a rainbow in a cloudy night (Butin/Reese 1994: 14), this depiction is not "deceiving" (a rainbow in this situation is factually impossible); rather, Friedrich's painting creates a new level and shows that *it is possible* to see a rainbow at night if we take the painting to be a painting *of* a rainbow and *of* night. It is precisely *this* process that makes the formation visible and leads to an idealization. Natural laws are bracketed in art, as we know from paintings that have made painters such as Dali famous. For example, looking at a surrealist painting, we usually do not complain that these paintings are deceptions because they depict something that "in reality" is impossible. For we know that it makes no sense to compare a surrealist painting to anything outside of itself.

In sum, since images are not ontologically less than reality and since they do not "lack" something that reality possesses, they are not "better" or "worse" than reality itself. Looking back at the example with the "blur," Richter's paintings *form what we call "blur" as an internal property of themselves,* like the green of the painted grass and the gold of a painted Madonna. Richter's "blur" is perfect in its *being painted*. These paintings want to be blurred and some are perfect in their blurred state. Paintings on which we do not identify anything are not better or worse than paintings on which we are able to identify something;

rather, paintings transform *every* aspect into a moment of *their own* unity, which Richter identifies as their *autonomy.* As he puts it in an interview, "Above all, art does more than destroy. It produces something, a different image. *Of Autonomy?* Yes" (Richter 2009a: 176).

Another example I want to briefly discuss in this context is one of Richter's biggest paintings that he has created so far. The work entitled *Line (Strich)* has a length of 20 meters and confronts the spectator with the question of what we see and what can be seen in the most extreme way possible. For *Line* looks like a huge abstract red-yellow painting; however, what at first seems to be abstract turns into something we can identify, namely, the blown-up version of a yellow line on a red background. The work is both an abstract work and a photo-painting and it demonstrates their ultimate identity (a point to which I will later return). Seen as a photographic depiction, the painting seems to be a realist work since it simply depicts a line. However, one must ask whether we are really ever able to see such a line, or whether we instead see those structures in very artificial situations, such as when we look through a microscope. Who has ever seen a 20-meter long and 2-meter wide pencil line (which would presuppose a huge pencil)? Nevertheless, as in *Transformation* we must conclude that this *is* a stroke, which we can see in front of us in the gallery. It is both a perfect illusion and a perfect abstraction, and as such it demonstrates, once again, the power of paintings to make their own referent visible *in* the painting. Paintings do not point to something that they are not (in the real world); rather, the difference and negativity of the image is constituted *in* the image. In *Line*, this is demonstrated very clearly because there is nothing in reality that this painting depicts even though, from the point of photo-painting, it is a perfect illusion. As Boehm has put it, "As work art does not point away from itself—it is neither sign nor set of sign, which points away, it is also not a transitional passage of cognition; rather, it is world. The work of art points back to itself, wants to be only itself, it possesses projective character" (Boehm 1989: 260). The iconic difference is established and an ideal level is introduced. This painting of a line is not simply a line; rather, it is a *painted line*, a painted brush stroke. In an interview with Storr, Richter points out that even in front of abstract pictures, such as Malevitch's *Black Square*, the question of identification and the question of aboutness does not become obsolete. "Even those paintings that are supposed to be nothing, but a monochrome surface are looked at in that searching manner" (Richter in Storr (forty years): 304). Abstract paintings are therefore not taken to be the rejection of meaning and identification, but rather, as a skeptical mode of the

referent relation. They *question* and interrogate the aboutness of paintings, but an abstract painting, even a monochrome painting, is *about* something and it can only achieve this aboutness on the ground of the iconic difference and on the ground of simplification through idealization. There is always a moment of identification, simply because the nature of images presupposes such a referent as one moment of its possibility. It can be very simple: forms, curves, colors, tensions, etc., but without iconic difference and without "relating," as was said above, we would not encounter an image. We would not *see* an image and a representation if the iconic difference would not be established. With the introduction of the iconic difference, however, the *view of something* in difference from the representation comes into play. As Richter puts it, "There is no color on canvas that means nothing but itself and nothing beyond it, otherwise the *Black Square* by Malevich would just be a silly coat of paint" (Richter in Buchloh 2000: 396).

As said above, the idealization makes it possible for us to actually see something in a painting and to understand the painting as an interpretation and formation of a world. Grasping and understanding is only possible if paintings present themselves as things that want to be understood. In his famous text for the *Dokumenta* in 1982, Richter made the following statement: "Every time we describe an event, add up a column of figures or take a photograph of a tree, we create a model; without models we would know nothing about reality and would be like animals" (Richter 2009a: 121). What Richter calls "model," we introduced as a combination of world and image formation, which was further described as a process of idealization in this chapter. Images make it possible for us to grasp und understand what is represented, as we said, because, as and through the image, what is represented comes to its own unity and shows itself as such in it. In a similar fashion, Richter explained his use of photography for his paintings in the following way: "The photograph had to mean more to me than art history, for it was the reflection of my reality, our reality, and I took it not as a substitute for reality but as a crutch to help me understand reality" (Richter in Nasgaard 1988: 47). What Richter has in mind is that the painter creates images in order to make an image of the world we live in. Making an image of something is identical with the transformation of a complex phenomenon into a *condensed* and understandable form. Accordingly, the idea is that we need images to get hold of our world. We need an externalization in order to recognize ourselves and our relation to the world within which we find ourselves. Whereas within the realm of thinking, these condensations of how we get hold of something are

concepts, within the realm of embodied intelligence, we get hold of something through images that transform the fleeting reality of our perceptions, ideas, and conceptions into something stable. For example, in regard to his mirror images, Richter made the following statement: the glass mirrors allow one to "see everything and grasp nothing" (Richter in Rorimer 1987). In my view, the commentators have utterly failed to understand this often repeated quote by Richter, inasmuch as they overlook two main aspects that Richter has in mind, namely, seeing and grasping. Stemmrich (2007) states that Richter's claim can also be applied to the *Grey* paintings. However, the monochrome paintings, as I will show in the section on essence, are precisely the opposite of the mirror "paintings" insofar as the *Grey* series forms stable and permanent *images*, even if they are reduced to images of the color gray. The *Grey* series is about seeing *and* grasping; whereas the mirror paintings are about seeing *without* grasping. Grasping something, I submit, is only possible if we have a synthesized view of what is to be grasped. Put in other words, the conflict in the mirror images is the conflict between permanence (image) and change (seeing). Because the picture and reflection (what we see) continuously change and depend upon the position, angle, and viewpoint of the viewer, the viewer never has in front of her some identifiable and stable structure. Seen from this point of view, it is even questionable whether we see an *image*—that is, an idealized structure—in the mirror paintings. It seems rather to be the case that all we see are "blind" reflections that do not allow us to see *something*, since the "something" is reconstituted in every moment and does not allow the spectator to refer to something that comes *into being* in the representations. What we find in the mirror "paintings" are indeed pictures, but not images. In reference to a famous sentence by Kant, we can say that representations without images remain blind, and images without representations remain empty. The mirror works contradict Richter's overall position, which is most likely the reason why Richter gave up this line of his work. For this reason, we would do well to understand them as *experiments*. In addition, because these representations are dependent on the spectator and the environment, they remain purely subjective and are the causal effect of what appears in front of them. Though at a first glance, we might think that something appears *in them*, we must come to the conclusion that the content of the appearances remains *outside* of the work and, accordingly, disappears when the reflected world changes. They are empty. The mirror paintings do not possess a *substance*, since we do not find anything *in* them. They do not idealize anything, and, accordingly, they do not refer to themselves as something that becomes within a unity.

Materiality

Even Ryman's paintings make me think of toothpaste or flour or white paint.
Richter 2011a: 19

So far, we have not paid much attention to the materiality of images, but we are now better equipped to understand this aspect of representation and *painted* images. Instead of simply operating with a dual structure of bearer and meaning, we need to understand that, as in the case of representation and presentation, the materiality of images, in this case paintings, establishes itself *through* the representation as one of the forming elements of the unity of images. Images, in other words, *reflect* in them their relationship *to* or *toward* their own materiality. This point will become very important for the Richter interpretation, as I will argue that Richter's works are *precisely* dealing with the relationship between image and materiality via *hiding* their material genesis. In addition, my hermeneutic position is opposed to anti-representational positions of painting, such as Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, and Greenberg. The difference between different forms of images needs to be seen in the way in which images deal with *their own genesis* or with their own coming to be, which goes beyond a simple "emphasis on the medium specificity of painting" (de Warren 2013: 87). For example, a painting is only a painting because it operates on and in a specific medium that is in most cases determined by brushes, tools, frames, and other aspects of the *materiality* of the image. This materiality, however, is not simply "there" as an underlying bearer of a painting; instead, it is *more or less* visible and reflected in the image. Some paintings try to *hide* their genesis (as Richter's photo-paintings), some paintings try to reveal their genesis (as in many Rembrandt paintings, or in expressionist paintings), and some paintings try to deal in other ways with the fact that painted images can only *exist* because they are paintings (and not other works of art), none of which excludes the attempt to destroy, transcend, or shake the borders of what should or should not be conceived as paintings. But even in cases in which this occurs, for example, in Rauschenberg's "multiples," we can observe a conflict between that which Heidegger calls "world" and "earth," that is, the conflict between the world in which images open up and the *concrete* way in which they establish this opening up *through* their materiality. As we have seen before, images are *world*-forming, and, hence, it seems to be too easy to speak of a conflict between meaning and matter, as Bernstein does. He writes: "If meaning is indifferent to its material bearer, then freedom is not so much *appearing* as merely being transmitted. For freedom to appear, it must

be *embodied*; but if truly embodied, then there must be an exchange between matter and meaning" (Bernstein 2006: 77). As I argued, the distinction between matter and meaning is a (semiotic) *abstraction* from a unity that, on the level of the painted image itself, never appears as such, since we never encounter any "matter" in a painting; instead, we encounter an already embodied world that is carried forward by its material "pathos" and its embodied *world*. In the case of Richter, as I will argue, we encounter a world that tries to be suppressive of its own embodiment, emotionality, and subjectivity. The *objective* quality and *truth* of Richter's images, in other words, is related to Richter's attempt to eradicate all elements that point to a human source of his paintings, such as his hand, his intentions, and his expressiveness. This attempt to establish the objectivity of the image is one of Richter's great qualities and connected to his attempt to establish a modern painting praxis that is characterized by a serious, if not religious, faith, in the centrality of painting for human existence. It is in this sense that Richter should not be interpreted as a postmodern painter, since his work rejects irony as the essence of art in a world that seems to make any serious attempt to establish painting or art in general as a meaning-generating praxis impossible.

Richter follows a very traditional image conception. In an interview with Thorn-Prikker in 2004, Richter points out that he never took painting to be a form of resistance; rather, he takes the best painters to be the painters recognized by the state, those who are "highly educated," and those who belong to the "top of the society" (Richter 2009a: 470). As such, it is clear why Buchloh had problems with Richter's rejection of a critical painting praxis and his attempt to overcome the negation of traditional art through different means. For Richter, the opposite is the case, insofar as his art tries to position itself *within* the world of painting, instead of negating, rejecting, or playing with it. In a recent interview, Richter still underlines that he tended to like antimodernist art (Richter in Obrist/Schwarz 2014: 43). Not incidentally, the world that this art reveals is a world in which meaning exists; even in its most skeptical works, such as *November* or the series of gray paintings, which, according to Richter himself, had much to do with the experience of the loss of meaning. As it turns out, even this series reveals a world in which not every gray is gray, and, as such, the work still allows for distinctions and discoveries. In the end, it is always *the image itself* that wins over every attempt to be skeptical toward it. In many interviews, Richter reacts to the idea of abstract art with reservation because even the denial of meaning and the denial of the image-character of paintings still reveal the image as a world-formation. Just think of Malevich's abstract paintings and their connection

to technology, Russian avant-garde, and emphatic affirmations of art as absolute. In their apparent emptiness and abstractness, they *reveal* a world that *becomes* visible in his work. To be sure, this world no longer is a middle-age world of churches and Christianity, but it is a world of high rises, machines, and airplanes.

It is in this context that we also should reconsider both the materiality and the bodily aspect of a painting; for this will lead us to further understand the difference between paintings and photographs. Every painting that binds us in its presence is not only the process of image formation as such, but it is also an effect of the material and bodily expressiveness of the painting, which makes it impossible to understand paintings as simple realizations of intentions on the side of the painter. Thus, we should say that "the materials of painting . . . become a world the painter inhabits" (Wentworth 2004: 49), a thesis first put forward by Merleau-Ponty (1964). As much as I agree with this thesis, I believe that the expressive effect of painting is more than a simple bodily expressiveness. For speaking of bodily expressiveness only makes sense if we take into account that the expressive form implies an *attitude toward the world* as well as a specific *conception of what the object of the painting is*. For example, the landscape paintings of the early period of German expressionism all deal with a new relation toward nature: by looking at these paintings we encounter the sensual, in this case, the visible "working out" of a whole new world. What we find here is a new emotional, rational and bodily conception, projection, and disclosure of what it means to be in this world. This world, formed into a *conception* of nature presented in *images,* is totally different from what was worked out in nineteenth-century landscape painting, in abstract expressionism, or in Edward Hopper's realism. All of these different ways are attempts to establish *specific* world attitudes, which are at least partly opposed to each other and involve the way in which they embody their meaning.

What I have in mind is well expressed by the German term "*Gebärde*," which is an untranslatable term. It expresses immediately the identity of body and meaning. A *Gebärde* is a bodily expression that does not point to or hint at meaning, but rather *is* meaning. In this vein, Gadamer has spoken of an image that is a bodily expression, by which he means that not only faces are taken to be the core of how the inner can be expressed in the outer or how parts of a painting are interpreted as expressive, but, in addition, that a painting as a whole can *be* a unity of bodily meaning:

> In a bodily gesture [*Gebärde*] is that which it expresses present [*da*]. Bodily gestures [*Gebärden*] are something wholly bodily *and* they are something wholly

> psychic [*seelisch*]. There is no inner, which is differentiated from the bodily gesture [*Gebärde*], in which it is revealed. What the bodily gesture [*Gebärde*] as bodily gesture [*Gebärde*] reveals, is wholly its own being. (Gadamer 1993/8: 327–8)

A painting, in other words, comes with a specific character that is produced by the expressiveness of how the materiality *appears* in the painting. It is not simply the paint or simply the way the painter paints; rather, the expressiveness and bodily quality of a painting is how the materiality shows up and brings itself to presence within the whole of the painting. In this vein, we should see a painting like a *face* that looks at us. All faces somehow look alike; they have a general form, but they are determinate shapes. Faces have certain characteristics, such as bigger and smaller elements, as well as certain appearances, such as "harsh," "smooth," or "friendly." Faces express age (time); they have a soul. It is the same with painting. The materiality, as it appears in front of us as a *specific* way of laying paint on a canvas, has a character that faces us, and it is precisely this character that we should call the bodily gesture [*Gebärde*] or *gestureness* of a painting. The character of a painting carries with it the *immediate* realization of meaning. As Sartre puts it in an essay on faces, joy lives in a face as green lives in leaves (Sartre 1997: 329). Thus, we might say regarding paintings that the meaning of the gestureness of a painting lives in the paint as green lives in leaves. Accordingly, we should avoid abstract dualism, such as the claim that "paintings are objects as well as images" (Storr 2009: 63), since Storr underestimates that the relation between image and materiality is a *dynamic process*, that is, a *formation*. To be fair though, Storr pays a lot of attention to the "how" of the painting process.

In a similar fashion, Deleuze has interpreted Francis Bacon's paintings as the attempt to make visible the level of experience that we find beneath or prior to intentionality and object-relations, which Deleuze calls "sensation." The sensational level—transported through the gestureness of painting—establishes what he calls the "pathic" moment (Deleuze 2004: 37) between the viewer and the painting. Put differently, every painting not only opens up a distanced relation through our attempt to identify elements in the paintings and the attempt to see *something*, but also opens up a bodily dimension through which we experience the painting as "neutral," "wild," "disgusting," "expressive," etc., which must come to us in the form of a unity: "The painter," as Deleuze puts it, "would thus *make visible* a kind of original unity of the senses" (Deleuze 2004: 37). The way in which such a unity *moves* and *affects* us Deleuze calls the "rhythm" of a painting,

which is a very helpful term that we can use for Richter. The rhythm in Richter's paintings is extremely distanced—almost cold—the effect of which goes back to Richter's neutral style of showing the brushwork. In his photo-paintings, the brushwork is only visible in the form of a fine pattern produced by the brush with which Richter produces the smooth and blur effect in his paintings. Even in his abstract paintings that seem to be very expressive—such as the *Forest* series (2005, CR 892/1-12, figure 16)—the rhythm remains neutral, since we do not find any traces of Richter's *hand*. Instead, we *feel* the tools that Richter uses for his paintings, such as large wooden beams, spatulas, and scratchers. Accordingly, what we find embodied in Richter's work is not only the negation of his own person and individuality but also a negation of the bodily dimension. This attempt remains unsuccessful, though, since the attempt to negate the bodily dimension in painting is itself a form in which the bodily dimension is expressed. In regard to Richter, this means that the body is visible in his paintings in the form of an intellectual rejection, the consequence of which is that Storr's thesis that in Richter's paintings the gestureness remains without author (Storr 1994: 102) must be rejected. This is the case since the attempt to avoid a style that implies an author and the subject is a *privative* phenomenon: in its absence, the non-expressive style in Richter refers to a style, namely, the absence of expressive gestures. It thereby presents itself in a distanced way, which reflects itself in how the paintings are *distancing* themselves from emotionality, feeling, and affection. However, this—we might say, *Dutch*—mode of freeing painting from affection turns into its opposite insofar as the absence of emotion is itself a mode of being emotional. An analogy may be helpful here: it does not make sense to speak of a cold, neutral, and very distanced person as a person who has *no* emotions, since human nature makes this impossible. Coldness, neutrality, and distancing are forms in which a person forms out her feelings and displays herself as an affectionate person. In this way, being affectionate for such a person is identical with her coldness. Richter's paintings work in a similar fashion: the apparent absence of wild brushwork, subjective expressions, transgressions, grotesque elements, etc., involves an almost *rational* attitude that is formed in these paintings through their materiality. In addition, in a person who represses all visible emotional expression, the *gaze* becomes important, inasmuch as desire now turns away from the body to that which can be held in distance. The gaze is also the center of Richter's photo-paintings. Instead of being obsessed with the hand (such as in de Kooning), his photo-paintings are obsessed with vision, seeing, and looking. As Zweite nicely put it, "Whereas gestureness embodies

closeness, temporal presence and presence of the artistic subject, reproductions stand for distance, past and anonymity of the photographic perspective" (Zweite 2005: 29).

Distance is Richter's obsession, not touch, though, as we will see later in the interpretation of *Reader,* vision is based upon the *desire* to touch. Touch as the interchange of tactile and visual moments, is thereby a *hidden* element in Richter's work. When the eye, as Didi-Huberman points out, comes too close to the canvas and the surface of a painting, it no longer "possesses" anything in this space. It is as if the eye *runs out of space* the closer it comes to the surface (see Didi-Huberman 2002: 13). Richter tries to avoid this *nearness* to the world by all means and sets up all kind of distancing hurdles, the main one of which is the *ethos* that is embodied in his paintings. This distance and relation to touch and nearness also presents itself in the distance that Richter's paintings build up toward any form of signs and language. Any form of wild, concentrated, emotional, and chaotic scribbles, as we find it, for example, in Twombly's paintings, is entirely eliminated. This elimination of *drawing* in the painting takes out any reference to writing, and, hence, to the human hand, insofar as any trace of drawing in paintings (even a signature) points to a hand that drew or wrote on the paintings. Similarly, we rarely find *lines* in Richter's paintings, unless they are precise and mathematical. Consequently, and paradoxically put, Richter tries to establish a *human* world by eradicating all human traces in his work (for this also see Germer 1997: 110).

Let me briefly point out the importance of the disturbance that the material relationship of the image *to itself* introduces in the image formation. As we said before, the understanding of objects we create is not an immediate process. What is shaped by a painting depends both upon what is formed by the painting and the spectator who is included by participation. The relation between the process of understanding and the presence of the painting is characterized by a dialectical structure. Paintings cannot simply and immediately be understood (like self-referential thoughts) because the meaning—that which wants to be understood—must *appear*. The facticity of the appearance, that is, the fact that we have to see and perceive a painting, is in conflict with the attempt to reveal the unity immediately. The facticity of the painting, that is, its materiality, *disturbs* the process of understanding *because* understanding is not purely dealing with itself but with itself as *appearing* or being present. The intelligibility of paintings, as we know by now, does not necessarily include that we make explicit reflective interpretations of a painting; rather, the perceptive process itself and

the forming of the painting are *internally* "intelligible." Accordingly, the conflict between the representation of the painting and its materiality is in two ways internally constituted by what I would call "inner negativity": on the one hand, the materiality of the painting "crosses out" the meaning aspect by pointing to its absolute presence, and, on the other hand, the meaning aspect crosses out the materiality aspect by pointing to its representation. This conflict and going back and forth between *seeing something* (understanding) and *seeing this* (materiality) can never be resolved, as this conflict, as we can now say, is nothing else than the genesis of painting in its *gestureness*. The representation in the case of paintings is not *simply* a representation, but it is always a representation that is bound and tied to an absolute appearance. "To experience something as a work of art," as Sonderegger has it, "means to experience it as a representation of a part of the world, which is crossed out by the objecthood of the representational moments" (Sonderegger 2004: 57). We should add, however, that the objecthood is itself an *effect* of the representation and not an element external to or outside of the representation, since otherwise we would fall back onto a semiotic conception of painting. The configuration that a painting forms into an image is never immediately accessible; it is, to use a word by Adorno, an enigma because it is a result of a relation "that is never self-transparent in the moment of its appearance. . . . The undetermined difference between the unrealizable and the realized precisely is its enigma" (Adorno 1998/7: 194).

I believe that we should extend the materiality of painting so that it also includes what I would like to term *attitude* or *ethos* of a painting. The gestureness of a painting is not, as we already noticed, a purely bodily effect; rather, it reveals the *attitude of the painting to its gestureness and bodily component*. Gestureness and *Gebärde*, in other words, are the way in which a painting is related toward the world. "Emotional," "wild," or "neutral" not only refer to irrational categories; rather, they open up the possibility for the viewer to form herself *into* such a world. Standing in front of one of de Kooning's paintings when compared with one of Richter's paintings is like being in *different* worlds; for both paintings open up a different attitude toward the world and toward being in such a world, which we as the viewers can either embrace or reject. We either have the feeling that we can live in the world offered by the painter, or we must reject the world.

The human and existential issues (more in Chapter 6) that Richter works out in his paintings, such as love, crime, death, and birth, are handled in an "impersonal manner" (van Bruggen 1985: 86), but, as we can now see, this is not because of their photo qualities or the representation as such; rather, these

issues appear in an impersonal manner because these paintings try to cover up and distance themselves from their own genesis. It is as if Richter tries to get rid of any human traces *while* painting human issues and human situations as of existential and human importance. As he puts it in an interview:

> That's a tendency of mine, in order to avoid the situation where *I* come up with something that is *my* taste. I hate it when artists say, "I put that together, *I*!" It's often much better when you, the artist, don't do anything and something emerges of its own accord. (Richter in Obrist/Schwarz 2014: 60)

Of course, as we will see in the next chapter, painting photographs doubles this distancing effect, but even in the overpainted photographs, the paint that Richter applies to the surface of the photographs appears as an odd effect of distance, as if the paint that we see on top of the photograph belongs to the photograph. Even the splats of paint appear *as painted* and therefore they are integrated in the unity of the image. According to Wentworth, the gesture of paintings is, "the activity through which painting is actually done" (Wentworth 2004: 46) and "a certain mode of habitual being, a habit body" (Wentworth 2004: 49). The bodily quality, accordingly, comes out in Richter's work as a genetic relation between the unity of the image and its coming to be in their materiality. As Wentworth nicely puts it, "The materials of painting, in this way, become a world the painter inhabits" (Wentworth 2004: 49). I agree with Wentworth that painting as an activity cannot be fully understood by a mentalist paradigm (paintings as the physical realization of intentions), and that instead they must be understood "as a way of man's being-in-the-world" (Wentworth 2004: 49). However, Wentworth makes the same mistake as Merleau-Ponty, since he fails to acknowledge that the expressiveness and the expressive effect of painting is more than a bodily expressiveness. Instead, as I maintain from a hermeneutical point of view, speaking of gestureness makes sense only if the bodily expressiveness contains a moment in the form of an *attitude*. Though Wentworth speaks of a "world" and "feeling" that certain paintings produce, he does not lay these terms out in practical ways. The world that a painting opens up, however, is one that we feel *acquainted with*, and that we *like* or *dislike*. This points to more than bodily expressiveness. The "habitual being" that Wentworth has in mind presents itself in Richter's paintings as a specific world relation and world revelation that, perhaps ironically, we can call a *protestant* worldview, and Richter leaves it to our aesthetic judgment to decide whether we want to embrace this "puritan" take on sensuousness or whether we want to reject it. As a consequence, the intellectual character of Richter's paintings is visible in their observing status,

their removed and distance look onto the world, and the distance that they build up between themselves and us as their spectators. However, to underline this point, we should acknowledge that this distance between us and the paintings is itself a mode of *participation* in the hermeneutic sense introduced above. The unity of the image in Richter becomes a unity, insofar as it included the spectator by rejecting her. We will later see in Chapter 5 that Richter's painting *Reader* (1994, CR 804, figure 13) is the best example for this paradoxical structure. Even some of Richter's abstract paintings that seemed to be to some commentators a return to an expressive form of painting do not fit into this category. "Expressiveness" in Richter always is limited, restricted, constrained, and determined. Richter is not a painter of excess and transcendence; rather, he is a rationalist appealing to our intelligence first before attempting to produce emotions (for this, also see Zweite 2007b: 33 and Buchloh 2000). In a similar fashion, one should interpret Richter's "suppressed" relation to pop art as an embracing by distancing, as a participation through distance. As van Bruggen points out, "Richter always underplayed the sensational and avoided the fashionable" (van Bruggen 1985: 86), both elements of which would lead to the breakdown of vision and the breakdown of a world that is based upon distance. Similarly, some commentators have argued that the plurality of painting modes that Richter employs throughout his career should be taken as the loss of an *ethical* idea of modern art, insofar as a modern artist is characterized by a guiding idea in which aesthetical creation and artistic life are united (Storr 1994: 110). However, it is astonishing how unified Richter's work appears to the contemporary spectator: it is based on the rigorous attempt to ask the question of what images are in all of their modes (mirrors, monochrome, figurative, photographic, abstract), and, as was just argued, it is also based on a projection of a depersonalized world that is carried out with discipline, reflection, its own memory (Atlas), and an almost religious definition of artistic practice. Seen from this point of view, the characterization of Richter's work as a permanent stylistic break is wrongheaded, given that the principle of *participation by distancing* is the guiding clue to his work and its unity.

2

Painted Photographs

Looking

In this chapter, I do not intend to discuss every aspect of what has been said about the relation between photography and painting by many philosophers, art historians, and art critics about Richter's "meta painting" (Gronert 2002: 48); as this would require an entire book on its own. Instead, I will formulate a brief sketch of how, I believe, we should understand the confrontation of photography and painting in regard to Richter's work. I will proceed with what I introduced in the previous sections, according to which I will continue to operate with a rather classical view of painting, namely, the view that painting is superior to photography. Whereas in photographs meaning enters the image from the *outside* since photography cannot be separated (ultimately) from its referent, in paintings (though they also have a causal basis) "meaning" shows itself and is formed *in* the work. I am especially interested in the transformative process that painting introduces when it depicts photos; for this process—rather than being causal—the *forming of* the image occurs through an act of freedom, even if, as we know, Richter tries to eliminate this moment. Some commentators still call Richter's paintings of photos "photo-realism." However, this view is misguided. Richter's paintings do not intend to be a form of photo-realism; instead, as Richter repeatedly underlined, his goal is to *paint photos*. In other words, the *objects* of his paintings are photos, which is important to acknowledge, insofar as Richter takes photos to be *pictures* that are *not* made with artistic intentions. Accordingly, artistic images are here explicitly confronted with nonartistic images by "enveloping" the latter in the former: "I have always regarded photographs as *pictures,*" as Richter states in an interview that was conducted in 1988 (Richter 2009a: 227). Put differently, photographs are not constituted on the same level as paintings, since paintings are not simply pictures, but, as was argued above, they are images. As other painters paint cars or trees, Richter paints photos of trees

and photos of cars, though by doing this he is undoubtedly also painting trees and cars. Accordingly, we must find out whether there is any special limitation or delimitation of painting when painting depicts photographs. Commentators have often pointed out that in Richter's photo-paintings, amateur photography usually functions as the origin of the paintings. But, as he points out in many interviews, Richter is not interested in art photography, especially since he does not want to work with images that have something subjective and stylish about them: "There was no style, no composition, no judgment," Richter tells an interviewer, they "liberated me from personal experience. There was nothing but a pure image" (Richter, quoted in Antoine 1995: 57; Ehrenfried 1997: 170).

I will interpret Richter's "method" in the sense introduced in the last chapter: he tries to eliminate traces of subjectivity in his work in order to make his work appear as objective as possible, but, as I will underline, the underlying intentionality and meaning constitution of Richter's work *as* painted images cannot be eliminated. Otherwise, we would simply have identical copies in front of us, which we certainly do not possess. As we already discovered, painting photographs enables Richter to turn the philosophical question of what images are into the object of his artistic activity, as well as into a form of "painterly thinking" through this question. Moreover, by means of the object status of the photo now taken as a simple picture (and not as a work of art), Richter can both introduce classical picture motives in his paintings that have been rejected for a long time by the modern avant-garde (such as his landscape paintings) and still demonstrate the force of painting over other artistic practices and photography. However, we must understand this force in philosophical terms if we want to understand Richter's works, which will be facilitated in the following through the conceptual lens of Roland Barthes' theory of photography.

Let us first remind ourselves of some generalities of the recent debate about the essence of photography, which is primarily focused on three questions: (1) Is photography based on causality, on intentionality, or a combination of both (which has been discussed in particular by Anglo-American philosophy)? (2) Is photography based on death and memory (which has been discussed especially by European philosophy)? (3) How do we deal with the "indexicality" of photography (which brings both aforementioned questions together)? Richter himself claims that the following is the case: "Photographs are almost nature. And they drop onto our doormats, almost as uncontrived as reality, but smaller" (Richter 2009a: 228). He clearly holds an "indexical" conception of photography, which justifies my treatment of photography in this chapter on the basis of Barthes' philosophy of photography, given that Barthes gives us the theoretical

backing of Richter's view of photographs. Accordingly, we need not go through the entire contemporary debate on these matters, since we can use Barthes for a better understanding of Richter's work.

The close relation between photography and nature has often been observed. For example, as Susan Sontag writes,

> first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask. . . . Having a photograph of Shakespeare would be like having a nail from the True Cross. (Sontag 1980: 154)

Sontag not only points here to a long-standing debate within the history of art and the origin of the image question in Christian art, namely, the question of what Jesus Christ looked like and whether we can have an authentic image of him, but also to the question of what the founder of photography in the nineteenth century, Talbot, famously called in his descriptions of photos in 1844 "the pencil of nature." If conceived as having a natural foundation, photography is a form of drawing and writing [*graphein*], and it is more than interesting that (especially) the German language is extremely rich in using the word for "drawing" [*Zeichnung*] for representational contexts, such as *to record* [*aufzeichnen*] or to copy [*abzeichnen*]. According to Talbot, the camera truthfully draws a picture of nature to which we may always come back (Talbott in Kemp/Amelunxen 2006/I: 61). Consequently, photographs belong to the order of writing and inscribing and thereby become "thanatotic" (Schjeldahl 1990: 250) since they push that which was once alive into the past.

Photographs in their standard social function, as Susan Sontag has reminded us, produce *clichés* (Sontag 1980: 173), that is, standard versions, mostly bourgeois in their nature, of life events: a family poses for the yearly Christmas event, the baby is placed in front of its cradle, the vacation photo shows the girlfriend at the beach, or the island is shown in order to remind us of the last vacation in Hawaii. These are photos without real "character," without artfully produced properties, we might say. Painting, as I will try to show in the following, gives this *cliché* function of photography (at least the type of photography that Richter often uses for his work) its aura and character back, which was, so to speak, erased when the photo was taken. It turns the everyday into something *exciting* and, as we saw already in the case of Richter's *Secretary* (1964, CR 14, figure 2), idealizes and *essentializes* its referent. The referent reemerges from this painted and almost religious transformation, but it reemerges on another level, namely, a level on which the image is no longer dependent on the referent. Instead, the

referent shows up *in* and *through* the image. It now becomes a representation in the sense outlined in Chapter 1. Painting releases the referent from its fixation in a photo and reopens the former natural context of photography to the event of meaning and essence. Given what we discussed in the foregoing chapter as hermeneutics, we could also say that a painted photograph turns the photograph into a hermeneutic event by turning it into a *presentation* [*Darstellung*] rather than something that remains on the level of representation. A photograph, so to speak, and this is central for Barthes' position, cannot function as an interpretation; instead, it needs to be interpreted from the outside. A painting, however, is *itself* an interpretation, as it gives us a *view* of something. Paintings *stage* their meaning. I believe that we must analyze (at least) three major moves of what others have called "un-doing" (Foster 2003: 172) or "unsaying" (Rapaport 2004: 100). The first move that Richter's technique of painting photos initiates is the *return of history*, the second move is the *return of intentionality* and the transformation of causality into meaning, and, finally, the third move is the *return of openness* against what remains *fixed* in the photographic image.

One of the most discussed and most celebrated essays on photography after the Second World War is Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. The text appeared in 1980 and ever since it has been taken as the introduction and defense of a strong "realist" position in photographic theory, which is to say, a theory that claims that photography is ruled by its relation to the referent. This characterization is given because Barthes' ideas about the temporal character of photographs as a "have-been," and the "indexicality" of photographic images, contribute to his claim that the photograph is "somehow co-natural with its referent" (Barthes 1980: 76). Barthes' beautiful and masterful essay not only has been admired for its revelatory force, but it has also been under attack ever since its publication, mainly by theorists who claim that the priority of the photographic referent is itself a historical, technological, and cultural construction. I will analyze some aspects of his philosophy of photographs in order to offer a better understanding of painted photographs, which, as we know, is one of Richter's main areas of paintings.

Two aspects of this debate are astonishing: (1) Almost none of the commentators has paid much attention to the theoretical position that Barthes introduces right at the beginning of his essay: not only did he dedicate his essay to Sartre's analysis of imagination, he also claims that the position from which his essay is written is a phenomenological position, framed by Barthes' introduction of concepts such as "noema" and "eidos," and even a form of "epoche." (2) Only

a few US American philosophers have taken a closer look at Barthes' reflections, which is even more surprising, given the lack of an appropriate philosophical understanding of these issues on the side of cultural theorists and art historians. In the following, I intend to correct the aforementioned view of Barthes' position as a simple causal realism by arguing that the relation between photograph and referent should be understood as a specific mode of intentionality. I do not believe, in other words, that Barthes' position is satisfactorily described if it is understood as an essay on the relation between the "reality" and the "photograph"; rather, the relation of photograph and referent can only be addressed satisfactorily if we take the relation to be a part of a general analysis of *looking at* photographs. We should, accordingly, focus on the photograph and what (and how it) shows up *in* the photograph (as a form of intentionality).

Instead of taking a general notion of photography into account, that is, instead of following certain historical patterns and existing cultural codes, Barthes tries to find a point from which he can address photography with subjective *certainty*. According to Barthes, this means that one is forced to start with what oneself and not someone else *takes to be* a photograph: "So I resolved to start my inquiry with no more than a few photographs, the ones I was sure existed *for me*." (Barthes 1980: 8). It is important to note that Barthes does not mean that there are only a few photographs that *existed* in the world; rather, he starts with the assumption that we must start with a selection of images that *we take to be photographs* and not another kind of images. This seems to imply that the nature of photography cannot be found—at least not immediately—by addressing "the" photograph, given that "the" photograph only *exists* in the form of *looking at* photographs. This point is important because it enables us to interpret photographs as something paradoxical, namely, as an *existing* intentional relation. On the one hand, a photograph is an objective relation to a referent, but, on the other hand, since a photograph is simply a specific *existing* form of intentionality, it can be argued that a specific temporality (e.g., the past) is connected to the referent relation.

The turn toward vision or, in Barthes' language, the turn toward the *desire* to look at photographs should be seen as a result of his attempt to establish the being of photography through establishing a difference between photographs and language/texts. Here, Barthes' thesis is that we do not "really" *see* photographs if we do not take them to be of interest for a viewer (Barthes 1980: 16). We all know that we are bombarded in our daily life with images and pictures. Thus, we only turn our attention to *some* of those images, namely, when there is something *in*

those images that stirs our interest and attracts our desire to have a closer look at those objects. Only then do pictures become the object of our *gaze*.

As we already remarked, pictures can function as signs. For example, in a book with thumbnails, we usually do not take the pictures *as* pictures; rather, we take them to be signs that point to a meaning outside of their material bearer. In contrast to signs, however, representations are constituted as constituting the signified *in* the signifier. Barthes is basically repeating the same argument: in order to constitute photographs *as* photographs, the viewer must move away from taking them as simple signifiers and constitute them as objects of *the gaze*. Put in more hermeneutic terms, the viewer needs to participate in the image. The motivation for this move, according to Barthes, is the *attraction* selected photographs have for us, which turns them into meaningful and *animated*, that is, intentional, objects (Barthes 1980: 19–20). Desire and attraction point to the very moment in which a viewer turns her attention *to* the photograph *as* a photograph and begins to *see* the photograph *as* what it is, namely, as a photograph. For example, this is at work when, for example, flipping through a newspaper or a picture album, we suddenly become interested in a specific photograph or a specific detail of a photograph. In this moment, we switch from taking the photographs or thumbnails as signs, which are part of a larger semiotic context, to taking them *as what they are*. Thereby we establish the photograph as a picture and as an object of a special act of looking. Consequently, if photography has an "eidos" and if this "eidos" is not a mere abstraction, then we must define photography as a form and mode of looking (consciousness) that is caused by and attracted *by* the photograph. Accordingly, photography is conceived as a relation. Though it is rather astonishing, given his writings on semiotics, Barthes establishes in *Camera Lucida* a clear phenomenological paradigm.

This move toward consciousness is very important for the following four reasons: (a) it constitutes the photograph *as* a photograph; (b) it constitutes the photograph *in relation to* the viewer *and* to the referent, (c) it constitutes the materiality of the photograph as secondary to the act of perception, and (d) it constitutes the photograph—primarily, though not ultimately—as an object *beneath* or beyond language and cultural systems. A photograph is, one could say, *a mode of seeing*. As Barthes puts it, a photograph "cannot *say* what it lets us see" (Barthes 1980: 100). The looked-at photograph and the turn toward the object of the gaze, in other words, overturn (for a moment) all attempts to "read" or to take photographs as a form of cultural text. Perception, vision, and intentionality, we might say, cut through cultural codes. It seems to me

that it is exactly this moment that Richter likes in photographs and uses for his image-making praxis. They are, as he says in many interviews, simple images, and as everyday images, they tend not to be more than that. The photograph, then, helps Richter to enter painting on a neutral footing, so to speak, since photographs are constituted, despite all manipulation and despite all attempts to bring in subjective aspects, as *recorded* images.

It should therefore not be surprising that commentators who focus on the causal relation between referent and photograph miss Barthes' main point, insofar as they do not recognize Barthes' attempt to establish photography as a mode and an object of vision and consciousness (rather than as a semiotic mode). Taking the latter into account, we may also understand why the sudden discovery of photographs as objects of *vision* functions as a "wound" (Barthes 1980: 21), according to Barthes. For vision inhibits and "violates," for a moment, all cultural codes and all textual interpretations of pictures, which is to say, it is based on a moment of the *absence of language*. By turning to the photographic image, we *see* instead of *listen*. Painting reestablishes the listening aspect. Again, as we said above, Richter's paintings try to establish the same on a higher level, insofar as they *try* to eradicate all traces of language. The photograph as an "uncanny object" (Lowry in Elkins 2007: 316) makes us speechless, so to speak. It functions like a shock moment within which discursive meaning becomes inhibited. Barthes also deals with trauma and shock in his early semiotic essay "The Photographic Message" (1961); however, in this essay, he interprets *possible* traumatic photographs as being connected to their *contents,* such as catastrophes, etc. (Barthes 1985: 19). In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes differentiates the "*punctum*" from the "shock," which is still defined as being an event *in* the system, such as a surprising aspect, a unique perspective, or a new intention. In *Camera Lucida,* though, the photograph *as such* is characterized by its nonverbal character. Accordingly, *we might say that photographs that are fully readable are not photographs in the essential sense.* In his early essay, Barthes' position differs from that in *Camera Lucida* because the role of language is central to his analysis: "the photograph is verbalized at the very moment it is perceived; or better still: it is perceived only when verbalized . . . the image . . . exists socially only when immersed in at least a primary connotation, that of the categories of language" (Barthes 1985: 17). This is not to say that Barthes later believes that language no longer plays a role in the constitution of photographs. The opposite is the case; however, the *essence* of photographs depends only on their ability to appear as something that is independent from language. Consequently, Barthes' thesis

that photography deals with the referent *before* it deals with meaning, signs, and codes (if we take meaning here as a result of "reading") is thoroughly constructed and internally coherent.

Barthes pushes the conflict between language and image one step further by his distinction between *punctum* and *studium*. The conflict between *vision* and *text* (or "reading") is echoed in this distinction; for, as a few commentators have suggested, Barthes' concept of the *punctum* is not a subjective or private moment that the viewer builds up toward the photograph (Burgin in Kemp 2006/IV: 31; Michaels in Elkins 2007: 439). Rather, as Rosalind Krauss points out, it is "a traumatic suspension of language, hence a 'blocking of meaning'" (Krauss in Elkins 2007: 341). Accordingly, what Barthes calls the *punctum* is the moment at which a photograph breaks through a code and signs. It is incorrect, accordingly, to claim that Barthes "focuses on how the photographic image is *read*" (Dant/Gilloch 2002: 15). On the contrary, Barthes' whole project in *Camera Lucida* can be defined as the attempt to describe the photographic experience as the *breakdown* of language. The *force* of the picture, for Barthes, is precisely its visual nature. It constitutes itself and comes alive *as* an image through its difference from something that is of a different nature, namely, something we can read. Though photographic images can also be read, they constitute themselves *as* images beneath and in difference from something that is meaningful on the level of texts. As Jeff Wall has it, photography is "the eradication of language. This allows the thing itself to appear and to which the viewer can establish an aesthetical relation" (Wall 2014, trans. C. L.). Photographs as signs, accordingly, are *founded* upon vision. To put this differently, the *punctum* is the moment when a viewer leaves the photograph as an object of textual investigation and constitutes the photograph as an event that breaks through a cultural code, knowledge, or instruction (Barthes 1980: 30, 55). Whereas the *studium* is a "procedure," the *punctum* is an "arrest" (Barthes 1980: 51): it literally *stops* movement. In addition, with the *punctum*, the viewer necessarily comes into the picture, too: for vision and looking are only possible in relation to a viewing and looking subject. This does not exclude the possibility of taking photographs as the result of the "unconscious" (Benjamin, Kraus), that is, as the result of what we *do not* see. In addition, photographs are of interest because "they slightly disrupt our sense of the security of the visual" (Lowry in Elkins 2007: 314). Consequently, Barthes introduces the *punctum*—the wound—because it establishes both the photograph as a photograph *and* the viewer as a viewer *beneath* or *prior to* the photograph as a text and the viewer as a reader. Accordingly, Barthes theory of photography turns into a theory of viewing photographs.

If we take this into account, it also becomes clearer why Barthes takes the photograph to be an object of what he calls "affective intentionality" (Barthes 1980: 21), given that it is the *punctum* as the moment that draws our attention to the photograph, which lets us *want to* look and *desire to* see (something in) the photograph. Through the "work" of the *punctum*, the traumatic event that leads to a turn, the photograph animates our desire to see it. Whereas the viewer is suddenly confronted with an "I see!," as Krauss puts it, the photograph itself becomes a moment of pointing: "You see" (Krauss in Elkins 2007: 342). The latter point is important, as we will shortly see that painted photographs turn the visual desire necessary for photographs into a higher-order desire, insofar as photographs open up again the visual core of photographs to a wide range of meaning.

Memory

If the foregoing considerations make sense, we should come to the conclusion that Barthes does not simply refer to the "reality" or the "real" referent in and of photographs; rather, he is concerned with the way in which the referent is given and intended in an act of photographic looking or of *looking through photographs*. Accordingly, it is not only the noematic side but also the noetic side of photographs that we should take into consideration. It is no wonder, then, that at one point in his essay, Barthes himself mentions the "ur-doxa" (Barthes 1980: 107), which, as phenomenologists know, is taken from Husserl's *Ideas I* and means a *mode* and belief, within which an object is intentionally given *and* posited. As Husserl states, "The intentionality of the noesis is mirrored in these noematic respects [*Beziehungen*], and one feels forced to speak again even of a '*noematic intentionality*' as a 'parallel' of the *noetic* 'intentionality,' which is 'intentionality' properly so called" (Husserl 1982: 251). What Husserl calls "ur-doxa" is the primordial relation of *noesis* and *noema* in *every* act in which something is given. For example, even an act of hallucination has a *noema*, insofar as something is *believed* and originally posited. Indeed, all modalities and modifications of intention (*noesis*) and being intended (*noema*) go back to an original position. Given this, we can easily see what Barthes has in mind: whereas we can have doubt about whom, what, and how something or someone is represented in a photograph, all possible belief- and being-modifications (see Husserl 1982: 103ff) go back to a position-taking moment by means of which the *noematic* object *itself* is both taken and given as

"being-there" or "existing." After the *epoche* is in place, this simply means *being given* or "is." As Barthes points out, no other art, except photography "could compel me *to believe* its referent had really existed" (Barthes 1980: 77; emphasis C. L.). Put in Husserlian language, looking at a photograph is a position-taking *akt* [*setzender Akt*]. Accordingly, the question is not whether a photograph "really" presupposes the existence of its referent (by virtue of its causality); rather, from a phenomenological point of view, we must claim that as long as we *see* something *as* a photograph, we are in the *belief* that the referent existed at some point. In Husserl's view, the *noetic* moment of positioning (and its *noematic* correlate) determines the "founding order of Photography" (Barthes 1980: 77). If we would claim that our certainty about the real existing referent would *not* be founded on the *noesis-noema* correlation, we would need *additional* empirical knowledge about the causal mechanism that underlies the photochemical process. In contrast, it is precisely Barthes' point that *while I am looking at* a photograph I *see* the referent, which is to say, I do not reason or *conclude* that the referent has been there *because*, for example, I know that the photochemical process produced the photograph. With rare exceptions, commentators who are not trained in phenomenology confuse this important distinction between intentionality and causality. This confusion is mainly based on the assumption that intentionality is identical with "intentions." We can apply this structure to the experience of photographs: looking at a photographic image I do not constitute the image as such as a causal object or as the result of causal processes. This is because taking the image as an object that is related to causality either requires external knowledge or it requires reducing the image to its material bearer. Examples might be when a photograph slips out of my hands and falls down, or when I investigate the chemical structure of the image: both of these examples require switches in my attitude, since I no longer see the image as an image and instead I see the image *as* a falling object or *as* a chemical and natural object.

There has been a lot of critique of Barthes' supposedly realist position, which we would do well to briefly analyze. Two of the main arguments against Barthes are the following: first, he does not realize that that which he takes to be "the" essence of photography is only "one" mode of photography, namely, photography as documentary praxis. Accordingly, what Barthes calls "essence" is itself historical; second, he does not take into account that with the advent of manipulated images, abstract photography, and digital photography, the founding order of photography has been shaken up. I contend that both

arguments should be rejected from a phenomenological perspective for the following reason: the question is not whether the referent of a photograph "really" existed or was manipulated; for all modalities and modifications of how and what is intended in picture experience are based on a *subjective* and *noetic* side that, put in Husserlian terms, ultimately *goes back* to an "unmodalized primal form of the mode of believing" (Husserl 1982: 251).

Consequently, even if we admit that abstract photography and digital photography have shaken up the field, this does not force us to lose our belief and the position-taking act itself, since without this moment, the photographic image would no longer be a *photographic* image. For example, in order to see a photo montage or a manipulated photo, I must first take it to be a *photograph* before I can take it as a *manipulated* photograph. This means that I must presuppose that *in principle,* there is an original of which the manipulation is a manipulation; otherwise, I would constitute the photograph as some other form of image. The fact that, empirically, we can be confused about what we have in front of us does not change the intentional relation itself.

Materiality

The decisive step within Barthes' considerations is the thesis that the materiality of the photograph as such is not important for the experience of photography. As we saw above, Barthes claims that "normally" we do not pay attention to the material presentation of the photograph because the *first* and *founding* moment of what we see is what is *in* the picture. As Barthes writes: "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it what we see" (Barthes 1980: 6). What he has in mind here is quite simple: if we take photography as a form of looking and a mode of our gazing, then we are not interested primarily in the materiality of the photograph itself. In fact, we must switch into an artificial position if we want to investigate the materiality of the photograph, that is, the colors, the paper, the frame, etc. Barthes claims that we *either* see the photograph *as* a photograph, *or* we see the material bearer as material bearer, but never both at the same time.

How close Richter comes to Barthes' position can be observed in his interviews with Buchloh, who criticizes the apparent naturalism of the position that takes photography as an index of reality; instead, as he points out, photography is a cultural process in which elements are transformed in order "to demonstrate

the indissoluble link between culturally conditioned elements and the natural process of perception" (Buchloh 2000: 378). As we have seen from the foregoing, however, Buchloh's position is not precise enough, insofar as he confuses the main concepts. The thesis that photographs establish a relation to the referent as a *past* referent, the effect of which is that the photograph is something "fixed" and finite, should not be confused with "naturalism" since, as I have underlined, the problem is not the causal relation between photograph and reality. Instead, we need to reconstruct the difference between causality and intentionality in terms of *time*. It should thus come as no surprise that Richter uses photographs *precisely* in Barthes' sense. As Richter himself puts it, "I am interested in what I see, not in photographs. Photographs are a medium. . . . I am interested in just what I see, the portraits of the world, a human person, a landscape, whatever" (Richter 2009a: 357). Richter quite clearly follows Barthes here, insofar as he indicates that he is not interested in the photographic "materiality." The photograph allows us to *look through* the medium, which, of course, does not mean that it can be conceived without chemical processes, paper, etc.

Richter makes a *phenomenological* claim; for, through indexicality, photographs usually hide their own nature *as* image, that is, a secondary act and a reflection are required in order to make the picture character of photographs visible. This process is even supported by the different relation to materiality. As was argued above, the painted image cannot be thought of without its essential relation to its materiality, whereas photographs on a first level make their materiality invisible. The conflict between materiality and reference is especially visible in overpainted photographs. As one commentator points out, whereas the photographic image is an *invisible* material chemical process, the painting has a sensual quality, inasmuch as the viewer can see its structure and even smell the paint (Koldehoff 2001: 63). Put differently, the images are *present* to the senses in a totally different mode, which not only includes smell but, above all, *touch*. The hand is visible in paintings not only as a trace (even if negated through tools, etc.), but also on the side of the viewer through the desire to *touch* paintings on their surface. Dissimilarly, the desire to touch photographs is more related to the *referent*. For example, one might have the desire to touch a photograph because it displays a lost loved one or because it reminds one of memories and former events. The desire to touch a painting is different, though, as it involves the contact established between the painting's materiality and the viewer. Touch in painting is *participatory*, whereas touch in photography is *distancing*.

Bracketing

Now, after having developed a clearer picture of how to think about photographs within the world of Richter's art and ideas, we need to briefly sketch the constituting effect of the reintroduction of painting into the photographic world. It seems to me that painting *of* photographs introduces what could be described as a temporal effect, namely, a "delay" of the image-referent relation that turns the underlying object of painting (the photograph) into a new mode, namely, the *presentation* of a photograph within the painted image, which could further be described as a *neutralization* of the picture as the object of painting. Many commentators of Richter have pointed out that Richter's position toward painting is based on doubt. In fact, one of the main works on Richter by Storr is entitled *Belief and Doubt in Painting*. What gets lost, though, in most commentaries is the precise procedure on which Richter's doubt is based, namely, his introduction of painting as a quasi-phenomenological *epoché*, which is understood as the neutralization of the referent's status and which Didi-Huberman called the procedure of "suspending any position" (Didi-Huberman in Richter 2014: 163). This "suspension of any position" leads to the emergence of the image. "Doubt," as Didi-Huberman has it, "is also the passing of time: a sort of prolonged delay, an ordeal of idleness. . . . Doubt makes you 'come out of yourself.' It is an ordeal of de-subjectification" (Didi-Huberman in Richter 2014: 165). This procedure of doubt is specifically prominent in the case of painted photographs, as with these we deal with two kinds or two levels of temporality. As we argued, the photograph is based on memory, and, consequently, we should understand the introduction of painting as a transformation of this memorizing intentionality. Taking up Didi-Huberman's point, we could say that doubt transforms the intentional relation that makes up the photograph. In this way, doubt changes the *entire* intentional relation as a temporal relation. What is happening in the case of painted photographs, in other words, is the neutralization of the specific temporality connected to the photographic intentional relation. The consequence of this "painterly" operation is that the relation between painting and photography and the relation to the depicted image are modified by *leaving open* whether the depicted image exists or not. Neutralization of a positing intentionality, in the technical Husserlian sense, precisely means that we no longer bother about the "existence" of the object and only care about the object as such, that is, about how and as what it gives itself in its showing up *as* that specific object. It is precisely this shift and "bracketing" of existence that Husserl

introduced as the phenomenological *epoché*, which enabled him to describe the intentional constitution of the world. With the neutralization of the existence of the object, the entire intentional realm is opened up. What was formerly hidden, namely, the intentional relation that constitutes specific objects, now shows up as the constitutive realm. We do not need to go into the technical details of Husserl's philosophy here, but we can use the idea of a philosophical and phenomenological *epoché* for understanding the transition from photographs to painted photographs, insofar as Richter's photo-based paintings have a similar effect: they "bracket" the underlying photographic image, that is, its fixation to the past as a fixation to the "have-been." This bracketing effect turns the photographic relation into a relation of *meaning*, since meaning is precisely something that is not fixed. Meaning only comes to presence *in* and *throughout* interpretation. It is based on openness. As a consequence, the "have-been" turns into a "could-be." Paint, for example, *dissolves* the one-dimensionality of the photograph and its fixation into what existed, since it makes the photographic materiality and its invisible surface visible *as* materiality. What was invisible in the photograph now becomes visible in the painting. As stated previously, the materiality in painting destabilizes the image. Furthermore, if we agree with Barthes that a photograph has a specific temporal structure, it must destabilize that which is not changeable, that is, the past. The image can now be conceived of as an imagination, projection, construction, or reproduction: "Painting is superior to photography by virtue of doubt, i.e., . . . painting allows us to consider the apparent unshakable evidence of the factual as construction" (Germer 1989: 52; trans. C. L.). Or, as another commentator has it, "often gloriously seductive, the paintings are also an unanalyzable mixture of visual events in which order is constantly deferred, yet sufficiently promised to provoke both memory and the imagination" (Nasgaard 1988: 109). This opening up of a neutral realm of presentation *in* the image in Richter's work becomes reflexive, as the viewer is forced, even in the cases of abstract paintings, to ask about the exact status of the photograph, insofar as the photograph *becomes* an image in the sense outlined in Chapter 1. The neutralization achieved by painting is a *skeptical* move, since the dissolution of the past referent as an existing referent opens up the space of meaning, and, as a consequence, the painted photograph becomes an interpretation.

For example, the painting of Ulrike Meinhof in *Youth Portrait* (1988, CR 672-1, figure 11) is not simply a repetition of the photographic relation, and the referent of the painting is not simply Ulrike Meinhof as she existed when

the photograph was taken; rather, the image of Meinhof now becomes an *interpretation of* Meinhof. As we will see in Chapter 4, by painting Meinhof, Richter's painting offers us a view of what it *means* to be a human *like* Meinhof through looking at her. Put differently, Meinhof becomes an instantiation of humanity. In the context of the series, the painted portrait, in other words, becomes an interpretation of the Bader-Meinhof group at a meta-level, which is a level that the photograph is unable to reach because it cannot be skeptical about the *existence* of its referent (though it can display skepticism in regard to all kinds of other properties of the photographic referent). Put simply, memory cannot be experienced as doubtful *if* we assume that there is a past. Of course, we can become doubtful *after* an act of remembrance, but we are unable to doubt the act of remembrance in the moment in which it occurs. Painting the photograph, or, put differently, painting an act of remembrance, opens up this act by removing the certainty connected to the experience of the "have-been."

It is in this sense that Richter behaves like a phenomenologist when he paints photographs, which does not mean that the operation that painting introduces in the field of photography reduces everything to phenomenal presence, although painting opens up the photograph to what lays hidden *in* it. Essentialization is not possible on the level of the photograph because we do not find in a photograph the presentation and interpretation of what the photograph is about *in it*. Photographs, in other words, are not images in the hermeneutic sense because they cannot present the essential *in* them. What photographs refer to remains, at least in terms of the existence of the referent, external to the image, since it cannot be put into question. As I have argued in the foregoing chapter, representations can only be images if the aboutness of images shows up as an *internal* presentation of the image. For, as soon as the externality of the referent is put into question, the photograph ceases to be a photograph. Put differently, whereas existence precedes essence in photographs, essence precedes existence in painting. In addition, as I argued above, painting is always done *from* memory, but it is not itself an act of memory. In Richter's case, this is even more prominent, since in the case of his painted photographs his memory does not come from his inner life, but, instead, from memory in the form of photographic images. Richter paints *from* memory, but, and this is the fascinating aspect, he paints from a quasi-existing memory, that is, a memory that he does not need to produce in himself. He externalizes his memory and turns it into something inward by painting it. As a consequence, the effect of de-subjectivization is strengthened, and, thus, painting a photo reverses everything that makes a

photograph a photograph. Stretching the English language here, we could say that while a photograph *is taken*, painting *takes away* the photograph as photograph and turns the image into a formation. We *take* pictures with our cameras, but we take away this "taking" when we paint the photograph. The painted photograph, hence, is a *return* and "giving back." It turns pictures into presentations. Brecht spoke about this in the following way: "It is not the matter of showing how real things are, but of showing how things really are [*Es geht nicht darum zu zeigen wie die wirklichen Dinge sind, sondern wie die Dinge wirklich sind*]." What Brecht indicates here is the difference between a form of picturing that remains on the level of depicting reality and a form of picturing that enters the domain of the essential and thereby becomes an image of something, though this process might include showing things in the most naturalistic way possible, that is, it can be conceived as a higher form of realism.

As a consequence of the foregoing, we should reject Osborne's thesis that "paintings *of* photographs . . . produce the inevitable side effect of a doubly distanced reference to the object" (Osborne 1992: 106); for it is rather the other way around: the painting brings the photographic referent *closer* to us, since it is no longer a reference to the past and, instead, it is open to interpretation and no longer cut off from accessing it as an intelligible interpretation of the world. Indeed, the painted photograph *opens up* the relation to the referent: whether the referent is or was "real" is no longer the question of painting, since *it does not matter* whether the referent exists or not. To repeat this point, the referent *can* exist or *cannot* exist: this is the condition of the image as an interpretation. To return to the Pacino example from Chapter 1: even if Pacino plays himself, *playing* himself implies a minimal difference between his person and his character, the consequence of which is that he turns into a character that is *staged*. It no longer matters whether Pacino exists or whether he does not exist (though on a meta-level this question can of course be raised). Similarly, the painted photograph *stages* the photograph as something that *means* something. What is decisive in both cases is not the status of the referent itself (as is the case in photography), but the *relation to the referent*, which shows up, as I argued above, in and through the image. The referent is now part of a presentation. The referent in a photograph is *external* to the image, while the referent in painting is *internal* to the image (even if the painting has a referent in the physical world). Consequently, painting does not *alienate* us from the referent; instead, it turns the referent into something that the image *is about*. Hal Foster therefore properly spoke of "semblance" in Richter (Foster 2003: 174), claiming that it must be produced by destroying the photographic picture and mediated world.

In this vein, we should reject Osborne's claim that Richter's work is a "painterly negation of this negation, a reappropriation of photography by painting" (Osborne 1992: 107). If Osborne's thesis would be true, then the whole *October 18, 1977* series, for example, would not be about death, mourning, and the Red Army Faction (RAF), but it would be about the *photographs* of the RAF, or, perhaps, about the RAF. However, as I will argue in the next chapter, the RAF paintings are not directly about the RAF; rather, they are about what the RAF members stood for: humans confronted with their failed ideals. In the same way, painted photographs are not really reappropriations of photographs; instead, they are what Germer calls "approachment through distancing" (Germer 1989: 51), especially if we understand by "distancing" the effect of *essentializing the referent*.

Approachment, however, is higher than distancing. Accordingly, it is also incorrect to claim that Gerhard Richter tries to "abolish intentionality" (Meinhardt 2009: 136), insofar as it is precisely the opposite operation that we can observe as an effect of essentialization, namely, the *liberation* of intentionality as a relation between image and world formation. This, of course, includes Richter's attempt to abolish intentions as traces of subjectivity in his work. Again, Richter escapes style and imagination by painting photographs, but he does not escape interpretation. On the contrary, he opens up the image for *being* an interpretation. For example, the painting *Dead* (which depicts the dead Meinhof) is an interpretation of what it means to be such a (dead) human. Similarly, Meinhardt's thesis that Richter follows minimalist artists and their rejection of any signification, meaning, and iconic signs should be rejected, too, since it is exactly the other way around. For, Richter's paintings open up the representational world to a presentation of that world. For example, the RAF *October 18, 1977* series nicely demonstrates that painting a series of photographs that are taken from magazines turns the entire series into a meditation on what the historical events surrounding the RAF *mean*. They open up [*eröffnen*] history that would remain silent in simple illustrations. Richter's "illusionism," Meinhardt says, "does not deceive, but rather provides something to look at and at the same time nullifies any interpretation, any definition, of what we are seeing" (Meinhardt 2009: 140). Again, Meinhardt is on the wrong track here, since he overemphasizes Richter's skepticism.

Richter's images *are* interpretations *of* what we are seeing, insofar as they stage a specific perspective on the world and help us *understand a world* by projecting it. In the words of Richter, "The photograph reproduces objects in a different way from the painted picture, because the camera does not apprehend objects, it

sees them" (Richter 2009a: 32). Knowingly or unknowingly Richter repeats here a long tradition in photography. Already Talbot had claimed that the camera represents everything it "sees" (Talbot in Kemp/Amelunxen 2006/I: 61). In an interview conducted in 1992, Richter himself puts it this way:

> In one sense it [painting, C. L.] is closer to appearance, but then it has more reality than a photograph, because a painting is more an object in itself, because it is visibly hand-painted, because it has been tangible and materially produced. That gives it a reality of its own, which then as it were substitutes for the reality. (Richter 2009a: 285)

This effect is strengthened by Richter's choice of everyday photographs, that is, in the fact that he does not take photographs taken by artists or designers. The everyday photos "have a dignity and are noticed if one transports these into art" (Richter in Elger 2002a: 117). Painting these photographs, then, "dignify" them because they turn them into something meaningful through the painting, whereas in everyday life most photographs are used as signs of memory or as triggers for communicating something related to the photographic referent. In a painting something gets new worth, a new value, as it is recreated on a new level: the painting, in Richter's own words, "*becomes* an image [*es wird zum Bild*], it receives meaning and importance. It becomes more visible and above all, it becomes more important" (Richter 2009a: 475).

History

The relation between photograph and painted photograph can also be reconstructed in terms of history. Siegfried Kracauer made a distinction between photographs and what he calls "memory image" in his famous essay on photography. Whereas the photograph remains on the level of facts that are serially organized, the memory image is based on a different temporal logic that is mainly characterized by *synthesis* and filling in what can never be simply taken as a linear series of events. Similarly, as he argues, the photograph remains on the level of historicism, which does not really grasp the *meaning* of history. History, according to Kracauer, can only emerge through the destruction of historicism. We can use his distinction and apply it to Richter's photo-paintings, insofar as turning photographs into *painted* photographs turns something that operates on a linear timeline into a synthetic timeline *in which past and future belong to the present* (whereas the photograph remains tied to the past as something *external*

to the present). "Through being painted, the images no longer report about a specific situation," as Richter puts it, which is to say that paintings no longer belong to the order of linear events and facts. Kracauer goes on in the following manner:

> On the whole the advocates of such historicist thinking believe that they can explain any phenomenon purely in terms of its genesis. That is, they believe at the very least that they can grasp historical reality by reconstructing the series of events in their temporal succession without any gaps. Photography presents a spatial continuum; historicism seeks to provide the temporal continuum. According to historicism the complete mirroring of a temporal sequence simultaneously contains the meaning of all that occurred within that time. (Kracauer 1993: 424)

What Kracauer has in mind here is the assumption by historicism that the meaning of events is internal to the linear ordering of events, but, as he argues, this is an illusion because the mere reconstruction of facts, which are not *united* through meaning, remain mere positivistic repetitions. Historicism assumes that historical events are meaningful by simply *repeating* them. Similarly, the photograph remains on this level of repetition, since it cannot go *beyond* the past. History, as opposed to historicism, however, is on a different level. As Kracauer has it:

> In order for history to present itself the mere surface coherence offered by photography must be destroyed. For in the artwork the meaning of the object takes on spatial appearance, whereas in photography the spatial appearance of an object is its meaning. The two spatial appearances—the "natural" one and that of the object permeated by cognition—are not identical. By sacrificing the former for the sake of the latter the artwork also negates the likeness achieved by photography. This likeness refers to the look of the object, which does not immediately divulge how it reveals itself to cognition; the artwork, however, conveys nothing but the transparency of the object. (Kracauer 1993: 427)

What Kracauer calls here the "transparency of the object" is precisely what I have in mind with "bracketing" as a process that makes the underlying photograph intelligible and opens it up for a new temporal synthesis in which the image does not remain tied to the past; instead, the past *as* past is opened up to the full synthesis of the entire dimensions of temporality, that is, to the synthesis of past, present, and future. In addition, what Richter addressed above as the "dignity" of painting is grasped by Kracauer as an act of concentration and perception. As

he argues, the photograph, especially the everyday photograph and magazine illustration, are not really seen. For we see too many of them every day and we do not really look most of the time (unless we see them in special places, such as the museum, but then they are on the verge of being conceived in a different mode). As Kracauer argues:

> The flood of photos sweeps away the dams of memory. The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits. . . . In the illustrated magazines people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving. The spatial continuum from the camera's perspective predominates the spatial appearance of the perceived object; the likeness that the image bears to it effaces the contours of the object's "history." Never before has a period known so little about itself. (Kracauer 1993: 432)

It is no wonder, then, that Richter's photo-paintings not only dignify their underlying photographs, but also reopen history, which for a long time was denied by the reception of Richter's art. As we now know, however, many of Richter's works are directly and indirectly related to (German) history. Even seemingly banal family depictions refer to images related to the Second World War, the German Nazi past, the destruction of German towns, the RAF, and, most recently, to German politics with Richter's contribution to art in the Berlin *Bundestag*. Even many of the abstract paintings, such as *November* (1989, CR 701), the *Cage* (2006, CR 897-1/6) paintings, and *September* (2005, 891–5) are indirectly related to a larger historical background. In sum, Buchloh's claim that photography "transposes a lived reality into history, fixing it in a reproduction by simultaneously rescuing from time what was doomed to oblivion and reintegrating it into the present as an artificial presence" (Buchloh 2000: 378) should be rejected, since the photograph remains positivistic and cannot give us a synthetic view of what really occurred. Put simply, the photograph *cannot* be integrated into the present. This fact can also be approached from a slightly different angle. "If it is possible to read the history of painting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," as Schaeffer puts it, "in part as the story of a series of movements and avant-gardes taking their place in a progressing teleology, this kind of attempt is doomed to fail in the case of photography" (Schaeffer 2000: 291). According to Schaeffer, the difference between the historicity of painting and the historicity of photography becomes immediately visible if we compare a painting from 1890 with a contemporary painting in contrast with comparing a photo taken in 1890 with a contemporary photographical work.

Whereas the semiotic system of painting has changed so evidently that it makes an insightful comparison impossible, the comparison in the case of photography is still possible. Photography remained (at least before the digital revolution) a homogeneous field (though this certainly does not mean that they are "the same" or aesthetically on the same level). Kracauer's argument, therefore, also holds in relation to the history of photography and the history of painting. Whereas the history of photography is in truth historicity, painting establishes itself *with* a history since it reinterprets its own status throughout its becoming.

In conclusion, painting *breaks the spell of the photograph*, insofar as it overcomes the fixation to the past and, accordingly, does not need to *repeat* the past. Instead, it frees this temporal dimension and reopens it for the essential: "Richter's paintings work precisely because they transfer the fixed moment in the photograph into the timelessness of painting. The situation documented in the photographic original bound to a topographical situation thus transcends the painting to become a placeless experience of nature" (Elger in Richter 2012: 27). The "timelessness" that Elger has in mind does not mean that a painting has a fixed meaning or a one-dimensional message; rather, the plurality and infinity of interpretations of paintings is only possible because paintings are hermeneutic, that is, they are themselves interpretations and presentations of something and, accordingly, they must establish meaning as an *ideal*. As argued before, idealizations are necessarily included in what we called images. Painting, as Richter himself underlines, "shows us the thing in all the manifold significance and infinite variety that preclude the emergence of any single meaning and view" (Richter 2009a: 33). Richter is absolutely correct, but the variety of meaning is only possible *through* essentialization. In other words, that paintings *mean* anything at all is the condition of the possibility of the variety of meanings of which Richter speaks. In an interview, Richter talks about his painting *Tote* (1963, CR 9), which is taken from a newspaper article about a dead person found under an ice cube; he says: "The image should bring back the riddle character, and, if possible, make it even more enigmatic. If I would have simply copied it, it would be rather boring" (Richter 2009a: 475). What Richter's means by "riddle character" is precisely the opening up of essence.

A variety of something and its pluralization are only possible through the re-enchantment of *something*, since otherwise nothing would present itself in an image. Put differently, an image can only be an image if it is able to bring something into being performatively through its own specific presentation. "The photograph is the most perfect picture. It does not change; it is absolute, and therefore autonomous, unconditional, devoid of style" (Richter 2009a: 29). What

Richter has in mind here is what Barthes described as the impenetrability of the photograph. Every element in the photograph is fixed to a whole. It has no gaps, white spots, imaginative edges, or reflective elements. In sum, through their general operation, Richter's photo-paintings take on a critical function toward reality. By demonstrating that the representation and image constitution is of self-referential nature, they neutralize the index-function of the photography. They turn around the relation between image and reality by reinventing themselves, the consequence of which is that the paintings have a "subversive quality" (Germer 1989: 52). Richter's photo-paintings subvert photographs by subjecting them to the process of meaning formation in images. The paintings "slow down the act of looking, drawing it out in time, and make it conscious of itself" (Danoff quoted in Green 2003: 57). Put differently, they open up the gaze for the image. The photographer "has already chosen what parts. . . . I can watch; the camera looks for me—and obliges me to look, leaving as my only option not to look" (Sontag 1980: 169). Painting a photograph reverses this process: it loosens the choice of the photographer by showing us precisely *that* it is a choice and not exclusively a causal nexus.

3

Being

Appearance

> *I would like to try to understand what is. We know very little, and I am trying to do it by creating analogies. Almost every work is an analogy. When I make a representation of something, this too is an analogy to what exists; I make an effort to get a grip on the thing by depicting it. I prefer to steer clear of anything aesthetic, so as not to set obstacles in my own way and not to have the problem of people saying: "Ah, yes, that's how he sees the world, that's his interpretation."*
>
> Richter 2009a: 55

After having dealt with more abstract considerations that employed only sporadic references to Richter's work in the first part of this book, I will now turn to his paintings, where in direct exchange with selected paintings, I shall try to develop insights that will often refer to what has been developed so far. I proposed in the introduction that we would do well to differentiate between core philosophical themes in Richter's oeuvre: the metaphysical, the humanist, and the romanticist themes, all of which, broadly construed, deal with classical philosophical topics: including the distinction between appearance and reality, the meaning of the artistic practice, the temporal constitution of human life between birth and death, as well as our place in nature. All of the aforementioned form a world. I shall start with the metaphysical aspect, which I have divided into three aspects: appearance, vision, and essence.

The reality never simply is; rather, it must appear, show up, and be accessible in experience. Even if we assume a world behind the world, a metaphysical structure behind what we see, feel, and touch, we must assume that this structure shows itself somehow and becomes accessible. In this connection, it did not happen by chance that aesthetics was invented by Baumgarten in the eighteenth century, when empiricism showed its influence within science and within philosophy;

for it was empiricism that reintroduced sensuality and experience as a major source of human knowledge and thereby overcame the metaphysical rationalism of the Middle Ages.

In contrast to the ancient notion of reality as that which shows itself *prior to* and without necessary mediation by being represented, the modern turn introduces an important concept and structure into the field of reflection that is often debated in philosophy, namely, the concept of representation and human cognition, which no longer seems to allow us to address the phenomena directly. Richter's paintings are concerned with this structure of seeing (representation), being, and appearance. Accordingly, we would do well to bring more light into this aspect of Richter's work.

Explaining the constitution of images as formations, I claimed with Boehm that image formations are only possible if they synthesize and unify their elements into *one* image. Elements, we should keep in mind, are not the materials used in a painting; rather, elements are here taken as all the moments of an image that play their "vital role" (Langer) in establishing the *unity* of the image. As Langer puts it,

> Elements are factors in the semblance; and as such they are virtual themselves, direct components of the total form. In this they differ from materials, which are actual. Paints are materials, and so are the colors they have in the tube or on the palette, but the colors in a picture are elements, determined by their environment. They are warm or cold, they advance or recede, enhance or soften or dominate other colors; they create tensions and distribute weight in a picture. Colors in a paintbox don't do such things. (Langer 1953: 84)

What is offered on the side of the painting has to be *seen* by the viewer in such a way that the elements are seen in what was called in Chapter 1 "relating seeing" (Imdahl). Seeing as relating is only possible if elements of a painting are noticed and related (a) to other elements and (b) to the whole, which must be given in a prevision in order to inform the process of opening up relations in the first place. In noticing that something is as such, there is already a process of differentiating at least two things or aspects from each other in place, since in noticing we pay more attention to a particular something than to some other. Consequently, what we should reject right away is the concept of seeing and image formation as a *direct identificatory* process. Rather, it is the other way around: seeing is only possible as not-seeing. Paintings are not only there as something that we *simply* see, but at the same time, as something that we do *not* see. For example, a drawing is clearly not what one can *see;* instead, it is

constituted by a fine dialectic between what one can see *and* what one cannot see. In this vein, Gadamer pointed out that

> perception conceived as an adequate response to a stimulus would never be a mere mirroring of what is there. For it would never remain an understanding [*Auffassen*] of something as something. All understanding-as is an articulation of what is there, in that it looks-away-from, looks-at, sees-together-as. . . . Thus there is no doubt that, as an articulating reading of what is there, vision disregards much of what is there, so that for sight, it is simply not there anymore. (Gadamer 1960: 90f./96)

The outline shape of a face, for example, might show a mouth with only one simple line, such as 😐 or ☹. In this way, what shows up depends upon what we do *not* see, namely, details of the face. The same happens in painting, for, as we said above, noticing something, seeing *something*, means that the element we focus on is differentiated from other elements. Hence, the foreground-background distinction is truly a distinction that constitutes itself between the object and subject. What is called "noticing" on the subjective side has its correlate in foreground and background elements. Let us look at two of Richter's paintings, the *Abstract Painting* (1977, CR 422, figure 5) and *Clouds* (1978, CR 443; figure 6), both of which are very similar in their formats. Both paintings are large paintings and show the same rectangular setup, though *Clouds* has a slight tendency toward a square form. Both paintings make an "artificial" impression insofar as they both use slightly unnatural coloring for the elements used in the painting. The blue for the sky in *Clouds* is slightly "too blue" for a sky, and the red-brownish colors in *Abstract Painting* show a tendency toward "designed" colors, such as colors we find in plastic things. In addition, we can see that both paintings introduce a major distinction based on foreground and background. Though it would be problematic to claim that in reality clouds are *below* the sky or somehow in between the sky and the earth, we certainly experience clouds in our everyday experience and in this painting as something that is clearly distinguished from the sky. In *Abstract Painting*, we immediately find a similar layering: the foreground elements to the left are the most material elements and are distinguished from the small square color buttons that hang down like blinds and appear *in front* of a background, which appears to be of an immense depth.

Both deal with something similar, though it seems as if they are worlds apart from one another, especially since the first one seems to be an example of abstract painting whereas the second one seems to be an example of figurative painting (a classical nineteenth-century romantic study). The longer we explore

Abstract Painting the more we actually begin to identify certain relations; for example, I already noted above that we *see* the color spots hanging down like blinds. Similarly, the longer we explore *Clouds* the more we actually begin to have doubts about whether we really see clouds. After a while, it is difficult to differentiate them clearly from the background, and we notice that not only the white, but also the blue, is washed out and blurred at its margins. After a while, we might even have the feeling that we actually see white blotted spots on a bluish background. In the form of a process, what we see in these two cases is that these paintings switch and move between the range of material (painterly) elements, such as brushstrokes, and recognizable elements, such as clouds. The paintings present a complex structure, though they are reaching their specificity especially through the effect of what Loock calls "condensation" (Loock 1985: 83). All elements appear in a dense proximity, which produces the primary sense of space and spatiality. All elements are put together in a small spatial setting that offers a microscopic view of something (in other paintings of Richter, this effect is even more apparent). Interestingly, *Abstract Painting* seems to be an *enlargement* of a scene, which enables the viewer to have a *closer look* at it. In other words, *Abstract Painting* produces the feeling that we *see* something in the painting, even though, as we know, it is not really clear whether we really see something "in" the painting, let alone what that something is. The depth that the painting is based on draws our vision *into* the scene, which is stressed through the part that structurally functions as a "curtain" and therefore gives us the impression of a *scene*. Though we have the feeling that we see *something* and not merely some unidentifiable structures (which in some sense would already be an identification), we do not exactly see *what* we see. The consequence is that "the simultaneity does not allow for conceiving *what* the image is and thereby creates the event *that* something is visible at all" (Loock 1985: 106). What we encounter here is a philosophical move in Richter, insofar as the inner reflexivity of this process forces us to become aware of two things: our own vision and the correlate of our vision, which is visibility. Due to the fact that the condensation of the image is so strong that it always immediately exceeds the relating that occurs, an "excess of visibility" (Loock 1985: 83) is noticeable through which there is always *more to see*. The tension between identificatory elements and non-identificatory elements, between materiality and meaning, defines the painting as being placed somewhere between a *thing* and *meaning*, although, as explained in Chapter 1, due to its idealization, a painting can never be pure materiality or pure thing. On the side of our vision, the effect of the painting is

revolutionary because it turns our vision toward itself. Visibility as groundless appearance and as an event, points beyond itself. The unconceivability of the fact that reality appears at all throws vision back to itself because visibility is here encountered as something that exceeds vision, that is, as something that is more than vision. Furthermore, this tension puts us in a position of becoming *aware* of the process of seeing, because this abstract painting functions as a "pre-image" (Loock 1985: 105) insofar as we, the viewers, suddenly begin to notice that *we want* to see something in the painting. Visibility, vision, and desire are interrelated. As such, the search for something to be seen in a painting turns into a painterly reflection of seeing-as. This effect of becoming aware of our own *desire to see* is only possible because the painting is *ambivalent*. It does not decide to be on one side (unidentifiable) or the other (identifiable). Using the terminology that we developed in the first part of the book here, we can now see that the "image" that presents itself in the representation of this abstract configuration is *not* simply this configuration, but rather, the *ambivalence* between, on the one hand, the configuration, and on the other hand, our seeing of this configuration. What this painting *forms* while we are in dialogue with it *is* the process of seeing. The image here is the process of seeing; for the painting *forms* this thought and idea of what seeing is *into* an image without words, simply through painting (it).

Abstract Painting positions us between two extreme poles and does not allow for a clear response to either of its aspects. Before we turn to *Clouds* in order to see that even so-called "clear" identification remains as ambivalent as the other, we should pay more attention to the relation of the elements, to the temporal and spatial configuration of *Abstract Painting*, in order to describe how the effect is concretely formed by the painting. The spatial depth that we encounter in the painting is not only an effect of the "blinds" and the "curtain;" rather, both the blinds and the curtain (and all other elements) presuppose a formal structure that produces a tension of *covering up* and of *uncovering*. What we have here, in other words, is the play of visibility and invisibility, which is presented in a way that forces us to come to the conclusion that visible elements are only possibly visible, because in their visibility they hide and cover up something else. However, this structure is only in place *if* we tend toward an identificatory reading of the painting, which constitutes the painting as a spatial setting of some sort. However, due to the fact that the identificatory reading ultimately remains unsuccessful, the failure leads to the opposite effect, namely, an arrangement of elements that are not at all placed "behind" or "before" something. This is because they are all arranged on a single picture plane. Once our vision turns

away from the recognitional seeing and turn to a "seen seeing" (Imdahl 1996/3: 304), where we begin to see colored painterly spots, the spatial effect is minimized and the image rearranges and forms itself in another configuration. The same structure is even more visible in Richter's paintings *of paint*, such as his beautiful paintings entitled *Enlargement/Ausschnitt* (1970, CR 273) and *Enlargement/ Ausschnitt* (1971, CR 290). On the one hand, we really see something, namely, simple paint (as it appears in reality); on the other hand, we actually do not see anything at all. In the words of Langer, something is "set in a new order: that is the image" (Langer 1953: 47). However, since the painting leaves us to accept its ambivalence and its excess, we are almost forced to notice how condensed the spatial relations are that show up in this painting. Elements are crossed over, they are almost floating around, and we find layers and covered elements, which let us reflect on our desire to "look behind" and to remove the hindrances of our vision. What we must accept is that it is the painting as a whole that is a hindrance to our vision, but not the elements we find as parts of the painting. The dynamics of covering up and uncovering also introduce a temporal sense in the painting. Uncovering and covering is always based on a specific relation to the future and past dimensions. What becomes uncovered must be anticipated, and what becomes covered must be kept in mind. Taking all this together, we must come to the conclusion that we are faced with the formation of an immense thought, namely, the thought that visibility as such is an effect of or dialectically the same as invisibility (Loock 1985: 100). Hiding and seeing are worked out as complementary concepts. One cannot be thought without the other: at least that is the view the painting presents and confronts us with. As we learn from this painting, even an abstract painting is never *simply* an abstract painting; for what we called before, with Boehm, "relating," must also occur in an abstract painting (without any figurative elements). Otherwise, we do not *have* a painting, but, simply, perhaps paint on canvas. Relating is the opposite of "chance" and makes the formation a necessity (though not always a successful and fulfilled necessity). The elements of an abstract painting, in other words, must be differentiated from each other and must be placed in a relationship to each other, which can happen through form, color, association, or identification. They are not only formed into their unity, they also "correspond" (Loock 1985: 93) with each other, as if they would echo each other in the space that the painting opens up. The correspondence, at least in this painting, is disturbed, mainly because—philosophically—it introduces itself as a thought about itself and thereby disturbs an unreflective view. Instead of expressing it philosophically, we can also express

it thus: distance *in* the painting turns into distance *to* the painting (for this, also see Krüger 1995). In other words, Richter's paintings often mirror the situation of the viewer *in* the formal structure of the painting and thereby demonstrate the main effects of aesthetic illusion. What draws the viewer *into* the painting is, at the same time, broken down by the painting. In *Abstract Painting* this is also indicated by the tension between the size of the painting and the microscopic space it offers. If a microscopic area of, say, 1 millimeter is blown up to several meters, it *seems* as if we would see more, but we soon recognize that this is not the case. It seems as if we see *more* because the painting has an over-dimensional size, but it is precisely its size that disturbs our desire to see more. This internal negation, philosophically expressed, is formed as the conflict between being and appearance, which the painting presents as a deep division: *what there is* always turns into *what appears*, so that all there is is appearance. As Richter himself says, we encounter the "dilemma that our vision lets us know things, but that at the same time, the cognition of the reality is limited and only partly possible" (Richter in Elger 2002a: 191).

Let us now briefly turn our attention again to *Clouds* (figure 6). Here, as we said previously, the opposite happens: we start out with the immediate recognition of something that turns into its opposite when we begin to notice the relating of the image, which Zweite calls the "balance between recognition and alienation" (Zweite 2005: 35). In a newer contribution, Zweite put it in the following way: "The semantic (i.e., the object like quality) is played off against the semiotic (i.e., the sign like quality) and the other way around" (Zweite 2007a). The size of the painting is an ironic statement, inasmuch as the painting seems to present itself in a mimetic form that stems from the content (clouds). It is certainly more appropriate to paint "the" sky in an oversized painting. The hugeness of the sky is mimetically appropriated by an oversized painting. However, the over-dimensional size of the painting produces the opposite effect, namely, the breakdown of mimesis: the bigger the painting, the faster we realize that there is *not any* painting of clouds (in a mimetic fashion) possible, since the size of the sky transcends human dimensions and is too vast to be painted. So, what is painted then? Clouds? The painting, again, promises something, namely, to let us see the sky and the clouds. It is as if it calls for our vision and for our gaze to turn into the space of the painting. If we follow the appeal of the painting, however, we soon discover that there is nothing to be discovered except a large abstract painting within which the elements in the form of white color fields correspond to each other in the same way that the elements in *Abstract Painting*

correspond to each other. The event of seeing as the event of visibility is the focus of Richter's thinking. We *see* how the painting *thinks* through the switch between seeing something, the negation of seeing something, and the return to something that can be seen. The painting demonstrates this excess and thereby lets us see its own nature.

Moreover, this structure of negation and affirmation is supported by the spatial setting of *Clouds,* which involves what we could call its "verticality." We are familiar with looking at landscape paintings and clouds from a position from which we look *horizontally* toward cloud formations. Usually, clouds are painted above a horizon so that the perspective of the viewer in front of the painting mirrors the perspective offered in the painting, namely, the perspective of a person *standing on earth* and looking toward the sky. In this painting, though, this perspective is broken down, inasmuch as it is painted from the perspective of a viewer who *is laying* on the ground and looking *up* toward the sky. By doing this, the painting disturbs and crosses out our usual perspective: though we have to *stand* in front of the painting when we look at *Clouds*, the painting forces us to change this upright position into a direction that is in conflict with our position as a viewer (for this, see also Godfrey in Richter 2011a: 85). Finally, the disturbance and balancing between recognition and alienation is also enforced by the classical topic that *Clouds* depicts, namely, clouds. Clouds are formations that do not seem to have a substance: they move, they change, they float by, and never have the same shape. As such, they stand for the transitoriness and fleetingness of natural phenomena that have their being only in a momentary appearance, which stands in conflict with the temporal fixation in which the painting depicts the clouds (more on this in Chapter 7).

Let us look at a third example, the newer work *Strontium* (2004, CR 888, figure 15), which is closely connected to a series of paintings that are entitled *Silikat* (2004, CR 885-3), and go back to *First Look* (2000, edition CR 112, figure 1), which we discussed in the introduction. The tension between the size of the painting and the microstructure that it depicts in this work is extended to its most extreme version. The painting has a square form and measures more than nine meters at each side. Since the work does not offer any ideal standpoint to the viewer, and because of its size, the spectator helplessly tries to find a point from which the work is best seen. This effect is even made stronger through the repetitive structure of the circled forms out of which the work is made. This initial observation already introduces the problem that this work centrally forms. It is supposed to depict a *micro-world*. Accordingly, we might think, we should not have any problems seeing and understanding this world (at least if we

assume that we have the help of technical instruments). However, it is precisely this micro-world blown up to an over-dimensional size that denies the viewer a standpoint, perspective, or even an instruction that explains how it can be seen. The bodily relation that the work opens up is worked out as a conflict, insofar as the print *negates* the viewer's attempt to enter the realm of the work.

The repetitive structure and the size of the work, and the contrast with the micro units it deals with, are both based on the concept of quantity. The tension that appears here, in other words, is the tension between *infinitely small* and *infinitely big*. One feels reminded of Kant's concept of the sublime, which he defines as an idea that, due to its incomprehensibility, goes beyond mathematical concepts. Our judgment that something is sublime in terms of its size and overwhelming presence, hence, must be based on our ideas and is not a property that objectively belongs to natural entities (Kant 1983/8, A83). Taking up Kant's discussion of the sublime in a famous essay entitled *The Time of the World Picture*, Heidegger describes how in modernity the "gigantic" became something that no longer shows up in the phenomenal realm; rather, the gigantic is our world as it shows up from the atom perspective, that is, from the world we *do not* see and which is—as both Heidegger and Kant argue—an incomparable unit, namely, the "quantitative" as such. Heidegger writes in this connection:

> The gigantic is that whereby the quantitative becomes a quality in its own right and becomes thereby an exceptional sort of greatness. Each historical epoch is great in a manner that sets it apart from other epochs; moreover, each has its own concept of greatness as well. But just as soon as giantism—in planning and calculating and instituting and securing—somersaults into something <taken to be> Qualitative in its own right. It thus becomes a distinctive exceptional sort of magnitude. (Heidegger 1977: 135)

Heidegger introduces this troubling notion of the gigantic in an essay that primarily functions as a critique of subjectivity and presents an overview of how, throughout the development of modern thought, the concept of the world turned into a representational category and was no longer accessible as such. Heidegger thereby already introduced what later became a prominent object of postmodern theories, namely, that we no longer have access to reality because we can refer to the latter only through the media, television, radio, and pictures. Heidegger argues that long before these events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a prior event occurred, namely, the modern introduction of the human mind as a representational screen and the quantification of nature through the natural sciences. "Being" in Heidegger's terms, is no longer taken in its own

right and as something that presents itself without the control, manipulation, or influence of human beings. Due to the mathematization of nature, nature for the modern mind became something that can be controlled and technologically reproduced. As Heidegger explains, the world became accessible in this way to human beings because the world, from the sixteenth century on, was conceptualized as something *for* the subject experiencing the outer world. The introduction of subjectivity led, on the one hand, to the modern notion of the mind as a *representational* structure and, on the other hand, to the investigation of the invisible world through modern technologies such as microscopes and other tools. This transformation of nature was so complete that it turned nature into something that could be manipulated into the modern atom bomb. With the transformation of being, what was once the home of human beings becomes something quantifiable. The final step of this transformation is called "The Gigantic." The forces unleashed by this process and the control performed, accordingly, lead to its precise opposite: control turns into loss of control, the visible turns into the invisible, presence turns into absence. World is only experienced as something to be manipulated and calculated, but no longer in its own right. The real world moves out of sight and being becomes a technological category.

Richter's work *Strontium* (figure 15) can be seen in this context, insofar as it presents the problem of the infinite quantifiability and loss of reality from a painterly perspective. Strontium has a half-life of twenty-eight years and is a product of nuclear fallout. As such, it can produce health problems. In its metallic properties, Strontium has a highly optical dispersion and is used in optical materials such as television tubes. It is almost as if we see *through* it in our representation of the reality through television. The technical and nuclear contexts that are opened up lead back to Heidegger's concept of the gigantic and are visually present in the form of the infinite repetition of the smaller and bigger row of blurred spots that we find in *Strontium*. As such, the work denies entrance because of this repetitive structure and because the viewer is offered *no* help in determining how to best take control of this immense C-Print. By putting us in distance to it, we are again becoming aware of the meta-level of the work as one that reflects on its own conditions. Because of this denial of access to the depicted micro-world, the opposite of access is formed: we do *not* see more when we see the microscopic and infinitely small elements of nature; instead, what we see is just another image and not reality. However, in addition, it thereby *affirms* its own presence *as* an illusion. This affirmative force is supported by the following observation: *Strontium* offers and promises a view of a chemical substance,

Strontium and thereby promises to let us see one of the major elements out of which the universe is made. What it offers, in other words, is a glimpse at and a view of physical reality, of which our everyday visible world is, according to the naturalistic position, only a causal effect. Already, the Greek atomists knew about the elements as important metaphysical unities; for, as they argued, if we are able to come up with the discovery and the rational understanding of elements in nature, humans would be able to answer two important questions: first, they would know what makes up literally *every thing*, that is, the whole of reality; and, second, they would know from where everything comes, since elements (if there are any) must be the *original* and simplest units out of which everything else is made. The print promises us the possibility of accessing this world visually and thereby promises to show evidence of what would otherwise remain a rational construction. This promise, however, and this is the main thought worked out in this print, is disappointed as soon as we realize that seeing this element turns into its own opposite, namely, into not-seeing it.

This structure is echoed on the level of the image: the work demonstrates the effect of aesthetic illusion as such, because it takes *itself* to be both successful and unsuccessful: unsuccessful, because it cannot give us the metaphysical insight that it promises; successful, because it gives us *what it is*, namely, it points to its being an image. The pure visibility of our world is affirmed in *Strontium;* for although what remains in the end is a skeptical take on the problem of the invisible structure of the world, at the same time, it turns out to be a celebration of the pure *presence* right in front of our eyes. Though the work destroys our belief that we can encounter the "real" world behind our world, the *appearing* world itself is confirmed by the print. Visibility and phenomenal presence, we might reformulate, are prior to every model we can produce of the reality. As such, Richter's painting retranslates the scientific model and "view" of the world back into the visible realm (for this, also see Zweite 2007b: 16–20). As Richter himself states in one of the first notes in 1962:

> It makes no sense to expect or claim to "make the invisible visible," or the unknown known, or the unthinkable thinkable. We can draw conclusions about the invisible; we can postulate its existence with relative certainty. But all we can represent is an analogy, which stands for the invisible but is not it. (Richter 2009a: 14)

Similarly, Richter speaks of both his abstract and figurative paintings as paintings that "produce appearance" (Richter 2009a: 373). The absolute priority, in other words, are visibility and appearance, which become transformed into an event,

within which the viewer who is held in distance to the work experiences *precisely* her own helplessness as the event of visibility, that is, as the absolute presence of what can be seen. What we find here, in other words, is the highest praise of aesthetics, if we understand by aesthetics the turn toward the *presence* of the world. To be sure, this visibility is not simply identical with the materiality of the painting or the surface of the print. For, as we said above, even the most abstract material surface is always already in conflict with our desire to see *something* and to see something *as* something. Visibility, therefore, is neither purely recognitional nor purely material; rather, it is somewhere in between making both sides possible. To use a Heideggerian formulation, something must show itself as itself from itself, in order to be interpreted one way or another. The claim, for example, that we do not see anything presupposes that something shows up, which we *take as* something not identifiable. Indeed, appearance is the condition for the possibility both of recognition and of alienation.

It is interesting to note that Richter takes up the topic of *Strontium* from a newspaper article that he found in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which is part of his *Atlas* (Richter 2006b: nr. 745). The photographic reproduction of a picture produced by an electron microscope, which itself displays an infinite repetition of the same structure, is taken up by painting and celebrated as an object of vision and magnitude. As the newspaper article explains, the photo is based on a size of 0.138 nanomilimeters, which, in Richter's painting, is blown up to the size of 80 square meters. In sum, it is this conflict between the visible and the invisible that the painting makes visible, underlining Richter's rejection of the attempt to deal with transcendence in painting (Zweite 2007b: 30). We may summarize Richter's position by remarking that painting is about the visible: we always end up with an image, even if the painter tries to negate it. As Richter himself states in his diary in one of the first entries, "it makes no sense to expect or to claim to 'make the invisible visible', or the unknown known, or the unthinkable thinkable" (Richter 2009a: 14).

All of the discussed work, *Clouds, Abstract Painting*, and *Strontium*, are highly "visionary" works because they play out and play with both sensuality and rationality. The thought that these images form is a reflection on seeing, but this reflection (distancing) always returns to the act of seeing itself (non-distance); for, it moves back and forth between sensuality and the conceptual. Both paintings give us *much* to see, especially since they open up a depth—a vision—within which our gaze gets lost once it has responded to the invitation to enter the painting. This process of seeing from the point of the viewer, to

repeat this point, is negated *by* the painting itself and *thereby* turns into its conceptual structure. The play of distance and nearness in Richter's so-called abstract paintings leads us to consider appearance as something universal and absolute. "There is no difference," as Richter says in an interview, "between a landscape and an abstract painting for me" (Richter in Elger 2002a: 282). Both are autonomous constructions of their own reality.

Vision

The problems of being and reality, and appearance and vision, also come to the forefront in Richter's early experiments with aesthetic illusion, for instance, in his paintings of windows, one example of which is *Window* (1968, CR 205-8, figure 3). The window paintings are of interest here because these paintings refer on a meta-level (again) to their own constitution *as* windows. It has often been repeated throughout the history of modern art that in his tractate on painting, Alberti defined a painting as a window through which we look into the external world and which is the metaphor for the construction of reality in proportional precision.

> First of all, on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen. (Alberti 2011: 167)

Richter's window paintings implicitly refer to this well-known definition through painting it and again leave us in an ambivalent position. Before we look closely at one of his window paintings, we should keep three observations in mind: (1) Richter's window paintings are paintings *of* windows; (2) in their illusionary power, they *are* windows; and (3) all we see are the windows themselves (without a represented world). The paintings' thinking unfolds within these three aspects and thereby reflects Alberti's definition of painting with the result of, on the one hand, *confirming* it, and, on the other hand, *denying* it. Given the anti-painting atmosphere of the 1960s, during which Richter painted these paintings, these works become a statement about the possibility of painting by both confirming modernism and rejecting modernism. In addition, windows also play an important role in modern art, especially in connection with glass and architecture (see Buchloh in Richter 2002c: 20–1). Given that I do not intend to present an art historical treatise here, I leave these aspects aside.

The painting *Window* (1968, CR 205-8, figure 3), when seen in the gallery, tries to be a perfect illusion, insofar as Richter tries to include in the conception of the painting its material ground by transforming the whole canvas, including the frame, into an illusion. The canvas, which is not visible in reproductions, is not straight; rather, it is bent like a lens that produces a shadow under the painting, which depends upon and is influenced both by its hanging and by the light in the gallery. In addition, in the gallery, the frame looks like a wood frame, which only changes if the viewer comes very close to the painting. When I saw the painting for the first time in person I, indeed, thought that it was a wooden frame with painted fields inside. Accordingly, this painting does not really have a frame because the frame is itself painted and part of the painting. Even the (real) space between the four canvasses is part of the painting, since they function as moments of the illusion, too. In addition, through its slightly curved shape, a real shadow appears underneath the painting and underlines the illusionary effect. Finally, the brush strokes are very fine grained and have almost no structure. Richter tried to hide any subjectivity behind the technicality of the painting. The painting stands out of Richter's *oeuvre* because it forms a contradiction, which is not often found in his other works, namely, the tension between being a perfect illusion and being a totally formalist painting. The painting switches back and forth between a window illusion and the repetition of gray color fields. What we find in this painting is again Richter's strategy of creating aesthetics of distance and non-distance. The formalist and non-recognitional aspect comes out when we look longer at the painting and begin to see the relating that the painting performs in a different unity; for the gray shadow fields can be seen on their own, which is possible because the structure of the painting is based on a strange logic of foreground and background, which reminds us of so-called duck/rabbit illusions: in these, our vision switches by means of first seeing the image as a duck to second, seeing the image as a rabbit. In *Window,* the formal fields between the window frame can be seen either as behind the frame, which leads to the illusionary effect, or as in front of the frame, which leads to the formalist effect. Accordingly, what the painting works out on the subjective side are different conceptions of vision and seeing, and on the objective side, different conceptions of painting.

The formalist reading of the painting is produced by the repetitive structure of the gray fields, which follow a pattern: the field in the upper left corner stands out because it is the only field that is not repeated. In its corner position, both the rows to the right and the column to the bottom emerge. We find a field

repeated twice in the upper row and a field repeated in the left column. Finally, one pattern is repeated in the other six fields. This 1-2-2-6 schema gives the painting a rhythm because it leads the gaze from one field to the next, relating them in their formal identity and formal differences. The recognitional aspect of the painting almost disappears in its entirety if we take the painting to be a formalist structure, which occurs if we give the elements a priority over unity.

In contrast, the formal structure disappears once we give the unity of the painting a priority over its elements. In this case, the painting—at least from a specific distance—turns into a perfect illusion. In contrast to the paintings discussed in the last section, such as *Clouds* and *Abstract Painting*, this painting does not negate the viewer's standpoint. Due to the illusionary character of *Window*, it requires a specific standpoint (even if not an exact one) in order to function as an illusion. The negation works through the serial setup of the fields and through the negation of what we expect when we see a window, namely, the external or outer space, which in this case is denied. The main function of windows, which is to let us see something and to open up the world to our vision, accordingly, is negated in this painting. The longer we look at the painting, the clearer it becomes that the painting as a window denies itself as a painting of a window. Instead, it becomes a painting of shadows, which is to say, an autonomous structure: the window only opens up to itself, repeats itself, and refers to itself. It is the perfect example of the claim that painting constructs its own reality *in* itself.

Essence

The double strategy in Richter's works that we have explored so far under the topics of negation and affirmation should be combined with another classical move in Richter's paintings, which shows especial evidence of the affirmative character in his work, namely, the attempt to *essentialize* its motives. In his famous essay on the nature of art, published in 1936, Heidegger put forward a complex thesis about the metaphysical character of art. In the introductory part of the essay, within which Heidegger introduces his thesis that art should be understood as a discovery and disclosure of truth, he deals with a painting of van Gogh that depicts shoes. Heidegger's thesis is that the painting by van Gogh makes something present about the nature of the shoes depicted in the painting. As Heidegger claims, the shoes are shown in two regards: first, they belong to

a certain world that is characterized by nature, earth, working, and peasant life; second, they make visible a certain usability of things, which Heidegger calls "equipmentality." What we see in this painting, accordingly, is not simply a pair of shoes; rather, we see and discover the essence of a specific way in which these shoes belong to and determine a *world*. In this vein, Heidegger writes:

> The artwork lets us know what shoes are in truth. . . . What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth. This being emerges into the unconcealement of its being. The Greeks called the unconcealement of beings *aletheia*. We say "truth" and think little enough in using this word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth at work. (Heidegger 2008: 161)

For Heidegger, the work of art (or, more specifically, selected works of art) is another way of addressing metaphysical questions, assuming that metaphysics deals with the question of being. Heidegger ascribes to van Gogh's painting the power of letting us see how and what something is. Simply put, Heidegger's thesis is based on the idea that art reveals something essential and universal, which is a view that Richter himself supports: "I always try," as he points out, "to generalize, and I try to give things something universal" (Richter in Elger 2007: 33). Accordingly, the position outlined here is absolutely opposed to a position that claims that Richter's paintings are about the fleeting moment (Schwarz in Richter 2008b: 38). Again, Schwarz confuses photography with painting. The latter, however, allows us to see the essence of something, that is, it lets us see what something is. With Heidegger, I assume that works of art, or, to be more careful, certain works of art, such as Richter's photo-paintings, indeed open up something essential. Whereas the reality always remains imperfect, the world of art and painting can create a world in which, to employ a sentiment advanced by Marcuse, "things appear as what they are and what they can be" (Marcuse 1978: 54). Paintings are revealing *possibilities*, not realities.

I would like to discuss this crucial move in regard to two exemplary, though very different, works, namely, the monochrome paintings entitled *Grey* (1973; CR 194/1-16, CR 247/1-16, CR 334/1-11; others during his whole career) and the photo-painting entitled *Secretary* (1963, CR 14, figure 2). Richter has painted numerous variations of *Grey* during the last three decades of his career and they are the most vivid examples for reflecting on the philosophical quality of Richter's work, the point of which is made visible *through* the obsessive variation of the same.

Commentators such as Buchloh have taken Richter's monochrome painting as an additional example of the negativity of modern art and as a further example for the purity of painting as defended by Greenberg. In an interview with Buchloh in 1986, to the surprise of the interviewer, Richter underlines that his abstract monochrome paintings are not the negation of meaning and content, but that they present a different way and different possibilities of depicting something and, as Richter stresses, to "convey a content" (Richter 2009a: 179). Furthermore, in this interview, he denies that any image can be without a referent and that there is a substantial difference between figurative and abstract painting. Instead, both are valid ways of expressing something that remains ultimately "inadequate" (Richter 2009a: 179). This shows that Richter is the better philosopher than Buchloh, since it is more convincing to claim that paintings as paintings *always* have a content; otherwise they would not be images but meaningless pieces of wood or canvas. In another text, however, Buchloh admits that Richter's attitude toward painting shifted during his career from being an "anti-painter" to employing an affirmative framework in which the painterly practice of "self-referentiality" is rejected (Buchloh 1985: 7). In addition, as Richter interestingly formulates it in another interview, images are only images because they "remind" us of something (Richter in Koldehoff 1999: 20). Reminding us [*erinnern*] of something points to the inner sphere, to something we form and find in our memory; one might say that memories are almost like Platonic essences. Let us reflect on this interesting claim.

As was established in the reflections presented in the first part of the book, images are constituted by an *internal* negativity, namely, by the iconic difference by means of which elements of the painting are pushed out of their fixed position and placed in relation to each other as well as in relation to the whole. What are the elements in these monochrome paintings and what kind of image is formed in these cases? Taking only one of the gray paintings into account, one can see that the complexity of the elements is reduced to a main element, namely, color. The painting *Grey* (1970, CR 247) is about something: it presents something *in* the representation of the gray surface, which is simply "gray" itself. The color gray is what this painting is about. What the painting forms into an image is an image of gray as a color. It gives us a *view of* what gray is, that is, of what gray looks like. Once we acknowledge that through the series of gray paintings that Richter has produced so far, there is not one single possibility for grasping gray, we realize that there are *infinite* possibilities for presenting an image of gray. Gray presents itself in an infinite line of variations and, as Richter surprisingly points out, it presents itself despite its variation in every painting

as a *unique* image. Though it *seems* to be the same, it *is* not the same. Being and appearance are different. This is also true for all other "abstract" paintings by Richter. Though one might be tempted to call them all "abstract paintings," one would overlook their *uniqueness* and complexity that differentiates all of them (Storr 2009: 80).

In addition, the color gray also carries with it a symbolic force, which Richter describes in several interviews as "meaninglessness." Accordingly, the dialectical tension that shows up in the monochrome paintings is the tension between the extreme reduction of meaning and the creation of meaning *through* the attempt to reduce it and even to eliminate it. Paradoxically, though, the painting produces meaning *through* meaninglessness, and hence it turns into something meaningful. The ultimate insight worked out *through* these paintings is surprising, especially for the modernist interpreters of Richter's work, because it forces us to come to the conclusion that even the monochrome paintings reveal the absolutely *affirmative* force of painting images. Even in its reduced form, the image shows up as internally meaningful. We might therefore speak of *essentialism* in these cases in the following sense: through a variation of the same, and through seeing the differences between an infinite line of gray, the color gray is revealed in what it is. I should underline that I do not claim that Richter's work stands for an essentialism in art; rather, I submit that *these* paintings are a *form of* essentialism. Indeed, I only want to reflect on these paintings at this point, and not about art in general.

Painting in this case becomes an echo of what Husserl developed as (what he called) the "eidetic variation." Eidetic variation, in brief, is the imaginary variation of a concept by means of the philosopher's intuition and through which the essence of what is varied and played with within its boundaries forms itself in front of the philosopher's "inner eye." The *Grey* paintings are a translation of this philosophical method into the practice of art, and therefore I have found it convincing when other commentators have repeatedly noted that Richter is searching for "something universally valid, atemporal, objective, true" (Kasper 2003: 212). This universality includes a certain gestureness and *Gebärde* (the concept to which I will return in Chapter 5), namely, Richter's negation of personal traits in these gray paintings (as well as in *Color Fields*), which would transform them into an "expression" of psychic qualities. Instead, Richter tries to be as neutral as possible, since only this neutrality can secure the desired universality, which, per definition, transcends subjective expressions. Buchloh observes that "the *Grey Pictures* succeeded in removing the historically

determined qualities of pictorial practice as gestural activity" (Buchloh 2000: 393). However, we should slightly modify Buchloh's thesis since, as we stated in Chapter 1, as long as painting has a bodily relation, a total negation of gestural activity is impossible. Instead, Richter's gestural activity is *without* gestures, even though it is precisely that which characterizes Richter's gestural activity. Gestures *appear* here *through* their absence.

The monochrome paintings, additionally, work out the contradiction that we discussed in the foregoing sections: on the one hand, they merge the viewer and the paintings into each other through the act of looking at them in an extremely concentrated form; on the other hand, they bring the viewer in distance to him/herself, insofar as the reading act is reduced. The viewer's attempt to read the paintings is blocked by the painting and thrown back to itself. The identificatory relation is built up through the meditative character of the paintings, whereas the distance is built up through the awareness of one's own seeing that they produce through the dejected quality of their appearance and through the impossibility of showing *the* color gray in *one* painting (Storr 1994: 98). Though we certainly have a successful image of gray in front of us, we realize that the task of painting the essence of gray or "absolute" gray is an impossible and infinite task. Accordingly, on the one hand, we find a prior *affirmation* of the force of painting; while on the other hand, we discover the skeptical effect that we can never fully reach the promise of essentialism. Richter breaks the fixed gaze of the viewer open, by pushing us into the conflict of the one and the many. Once we have understood that we are about to see the essence of the color gray, and once we have realized that we are about to see a painting *of* gray (not simply gray), we realize the fine-grained differences of the paintings, their structures, their sizes, and their shading.

Moreover, the monochrome paintings open up the tension between identification and distance through the closeness of the intentional object and the material presence of this object. Indeed, what is confusing in monochrome paintings is that the object of the painting (=the color gray) seems to be identical with the material color used for presenting the color gray, namely, gray paint. However, the iconic difference comes into play once we understand that the representation (gray paint) is not the presented image ("the" gray) and we understand how images in general come into being. Hegel expressed this insight in a similar fashion when he claimed that this feature of color should be conceived as the essential moment of painting, as color separates itself from being part of nature and, through painting, turns into something "spiritual," that

is, into something meaningful (Hegel 2004: 250). Richter himself is aware of this constitutive difference; as he writes in a letter: "But grey, like formlessness and the rest, can be real only as an idea, and so all I can do is create a colour nuance that means grey but is not it. The painting is then a mixture of grey as a fiction and grey as a visible, designated area of colour" (Richter 2009a: 92).

It is interesting to note that Richter uses the term "idea" here to express the denoted object of these paintings. For, put roughly, ideas are identical with what something is. The idea (*eidos*) of gray, in other words, is the essence of gray and not a psychological representation of it. The problem is sensually visible for us, as Richter points out, because the image of gray allows us to see what gray is, but nevertheless, in its painted realization it is clear that one can paint an infinite line of realizations. Though one stands in front of one of these paintings and has the impression that *this* is gray, we know that this *is not* gray. The gap, in other words, between presence and essence is unavoidable here, though the fact that we can paint gray demonstrates that we do not deal with an ontological difference; for otherwise gray would not appear at all. Accordingly, Richter's expressions are somewhat misleading, because he seems to believe that the idea of gray is unpresentable. However, it is the signature of these paintings that gray undoubtedly *presents* itself. As Gadamer likes to say, an image "forms itself into its own *Gestalt* and is *there* as itself and only as itself" (Gadamer 1993: 58). Essence must appear *to be* essence and (logically) appearance is always the appearance of something, even if it is only taken as the appearance of itself, that is, as its essence. Accordingly, the following statement of Richter comes closer to the truth, insofar as he underlines in this quote that he wanted the viewer to *see* the tension that the painting presents: "It was my intention that they [the grey paintings, C. L.] look the same, but are not the same, and that one can see this" (Richter in Elger 2002a: 274). Richter has stressed what we have called "essentialism" several times in his own terminology. For example, in an important interview with Storr, he underlines that he is of the firm belief "that the quintessential task of every painter in any time has been to concentrate on the essential" (Richter in Storr 2002b: 295). Importantly, we can observe this move not only in his monochrome paintings but also in his early photo-based paintings. Let us briefly turn our gaze to *Secretary* (1963, CR 14, figure 2), which Richter painted in 1963.

The "essence-like quality" (Werner 1994: 21; see also Moorhouse in Richter 2009b: 44) of *Secretary* is mainly an effect of the unusual situation within which the woman is depicted in this painting. In contradistinction to a traditional

portrait, the woman is portrayed in this painting while she is engaged in activities (though it is not clear what she is engaged in is). She is apparently moving in or out of a door and she seems to be *fixed* during her engagement. The painting freezes a moment of her activity as if this moment is the *decisive* moment for showing what she is. She is not presenting herself to the viewer; that is, the painting does not present a *pose*. Though Richter took the photo on which the painting is based from a newspaper article (which is collected in his *Atlas*), the image avoids what is typical of photography, namely, the positioning of a person or a body *for* the camera. Indeed, the quasi-documentary character of the picture—the woman does not seem to be in relation to the viewer at all—leads to an intense neutrality and objectivity.

It is important to note that the fixed character of *Secretary* is *not* identical with what Barthes calls the "arrest" that constitutes the pose in a photograph:

> I might put this differently: what founds the nature of photography is the pose. The physical duration of this pose is of little consequence, even in the interval of a millionth of a second (Edgerton's drop of a mil) there has still been a pose, for the pose is not, here, the attitude of the target or even a technique of the *Operator*, but the term of an "intention" of reading: looking at a photograph. (Barthes 1982: 78)

Barthes describes the "pose" not as an intention on the side of the photographed person; instead, as he explains, the pose is the effect of the moment in which the motive was fixed *for* an eye or a camera (Fried 2005: 567). The pose is an effect of the photograph and the viewer *looking at* the photograph, according to Barthes, and not of the photographed person. Although the pose is a necessary moment of photography, the pose is primarily not (though it can be) a positioning of a person, unless she knows that she is being photographed. In *Secretary*, though, the person depicted is precisely *not* presented as essentially fixed *for* an eye or a camera. For there is no pose. This painting is also not an example for Fried's concept of absorption and anti-theatricality (which will be the topic of my discussion of Richter's *Reader* in Chapter 5). In contradistinction, the fixed character in this painting is an effect of what we could call *being essentialized*. It is not the *look of the secretary* that is important (which would be the case for photography), but the center of this painting is the *look of the essence of a secretary*. The painting, accordingly, is transforming the photographic pose into something *intentional* because the arrest is itself *an object* in this painting. This is a painting *of* the look of a secretary, the consequence of which is that

the look must form itself into an image and become a *Gebilde*; however, in the original photograph the pose is, in Barthes language, "inevitable" (Barthes 1982: 78).

Furthermore, the blurred effect in this painting is a *painted* blur and therefore is *not* part of the picture. Let us recall at this point the important quote from Richter that was cited previously: "Since pictures are not made for purposes of comparison with reality, they cannot be blurred, or imprecise, or different (different from what?). How can, say, paint on canvas be blurred?" (Richter 2009a: 60). Because paintings create their referent *internally* through forming themselves in the image, they cannot be taken to depict the reality in an incorrect way, especially since there is no criterion for such a comparison. This is the precise point at which the difference between photographs and painted photographs appears. The blur is not a material property of the painting as paint is on canvas; rather, the property of blur is itself a moment of the formed image. It is part of the image, not of the representation. Painting differs from photography, as I argued in the last chapter, insofar as it liberates the photograph from its causal referent by turning it into an intentional referent. A comparison might make this point more transparent: when an actor in a movie plays a person with a heavy accent, then we would not claim that the accent is "unclear" speech; rather, we take the accent as something that the actor must *play out* during her representation of the character. The accent, in other words, is part of the idealization. If a spectator would complain about the accent, then she would mistakenly interpret the accent as a natural property of the actor. Similarly, if we take the blur as a property of the painting, we also make a mistake, since in this case the blur is an object *of* the painting.

The distancing and neutral effects of *Secretary* are underlined by the everydayness of the situation and the averageness of the motive. Nothing seems to be extraordinary in this painting. Indeed, averageness is the extraordinary in this case. Hence, what the painting forms into an image is not simply a "secretary;" rather, it presents the everyday *being* of a secretary. This means, in this case, that we do not see a painting of a specific person in front of us (*this* secretary); instead, what we see is a *type*. In this connection, we feel reminded of what Schelling states in his *Philosophy of Art*: "Art, because it presents the essence in a single moment, elevates the essence beyond time, art lets essence be in its pure being and lets it appear in the infinity of its life" (Schelling 1982: 66). This essence, however, is presented in a "destabilizing" fashion, insofar as the image that is presented in the painting does not show a "cliché" like

secretary. For example, we do not see her typing or behind a desk, and the situation and narrative contexts remain unclear. This removal from the type as a cliché makes the essential quality even more visible, inasmuch as it is unsettling for the viewer and forces us to communicate with the painting (I will present more thoughts on the removal of persons from their situational contexts in Chapter 6).

4

Essence

Youth Portrait

In this chapter, I shall take up the central problem that Richter works out in his paintings, namely, the questions of how to describe best the transition and transformation of photography in Richter's paintings and how to analyze the difference between photography and painting. Whereas Chapter 3 entitled "Being" dealt with basic structures related to Richter's concept of reality, vision, and essence, I will now deal with the concept of meaning in painting, which in Richter's work is addressed mainly through the works that deal with the constitution of images through idealizations (for this, see Chapter 1). Richter demonstrates a certain "superiority" of painting over photography by reintroducing a category that appears in photography only in a limited sense, namely, the image.

I would like to carry this task out by analyzing one of the central paintings in Richter's *October 18, 1977* series, namely, the painting entitled *Youth Portrait* (1988, CR 671-1, figure 11), which depicts the young German journalist and RAF terrorist Ulrike Meinhof. Due to the extensive debate over Richter's series, I do not want to repeat the most obvious aspects and the wider historical background in my discussion here (for this see Butin 1991, Richter 2002b, Storr 2002 and 2003, Hemken 1998, Henatsch 1998); instead, after my hermeneutic analysis of *Youth Portrait*, I will explain the effects of the painting in contrast to the photograph that Richter took as the object of his painting. This chapter further works out the claim that Richter's painting practice is based on what I called "idealization" in the first chapter and what was there called "essentialism."

Youth Portrait depicts Ulrike Meinhof, one of the German terrorists who founded the RAF and died with three other terrorists in Stammheim in 1976. As Robert Storr, in his monography about the *October 18, 1977* series, points out, the painting is carried out not only as if it is "derived from old-master painting"

but, in addition, it also "resembles a high-school yearbook picture" (Storr 2000: 105–6). At least for modern art critics, this perhaps rather embarrassing "sentimentality" (Richter) of the picture leads to a surprisingly careless analysis on the side of the commentators. However, Storr does not pay enough, if any, attention to the details and the structure of the painting. Let us therefore see what the painting represents on the basis of a more careful analysis.

Above all, we should keep in mind that Meinhof is depicted (if we take for granted that *she* is depicted) *before* she became a terrorist; in addition, we should note that the painting's title does not refer to the name of the terrorist. Rainer Usselmann points out that the titles are contradictory in another regard, too; for the elusiveness of the paintings "contradicts the matter-of-factness of their titles" (Usselmann 2002: 5). I believe that we should translate this "contradiction" into another tension that Richter builds up, namely, the tension between what we see—the titles precisely point to what the image is about—and what we know—the RAF background. Hence, the true conflict in these paintings is between seeing (presence) and memory (absence). We should bracket our knowledge briefly and take into account that immediately speaking of Meinhof at this point, at least without any further reflection, would be a rather improper way to start with the process of understanding the image. The title, at least if we take it seriously, tells us nothing in addition to what we see. Consequently, Butin's thesis that in this painting concept and intuition fall apart (Butin 1991: 47) is only halfway correct, since the gap between concept and intuition enters the scene only on a *second* level at which a conflict between our knowledge that Ulrike Meinhoff is depicted in the painting and the young face that we actually see in the painting are in conflict with each other. However, what we see *and* what the title tells us is the fact that this painting is *about* an image *of* youth. What comes to presence in the representation must have something to do with being young! The aboutness of the image defined in this way leads to noticing a first tension in the painting, namely, the contrast between being young and the way in which the painting is carried out: the tonal structure of the painting is somewhere between black and white without much variation. In addition, as we know from the context of the series, it is also about the opposite of youth, namely, death. If we want to be more precise, then we should make the contrast even stronger: what is confronted here are death and birth, darkness and lightness. Content and form, as Richter says in his notes, are identical in a good painting: "The fact is that content does not have a form (like a dress that you can change): it is form (which cannot be changed)" (Richter 2009a: 129).

If the painting is formed in and about tensions and opposites (which is then its content), we should ask: what is born here? What begins? What does it mean to be born, if young means to be in a stage *before* "life starts"? What is the essence of this latency period? Youngness is about the future, since being young and hence being in the process of being born implies that one is unable to look back. Something that is born does not have a "before," for it *is* the "before." If she is unable to look back, then she must look forward, toward the open, toward what comes and will come. Being young means to be *hopeful* and to be welcoming what comes and what will come. But, now, take the image and look again at her eyes! Look at her gaze! This gaze disturbs what we just said. Let us keep this in mind.

The painting taken on its own is quite beautiful, though the beauty of the painting stands in contrast to the extreme reduction of possible color to gray tones, held by the contrast between black and white. Perhaps we should be more precise at this point: the *painted* face, the surface, the painted image is beautiful. Artistic beauty is a property of what is *formed as an image*, not of what is *in* the image. If it would be (simply) *her* who is beautiful, then we would not need this painting, given that we could simply look at the photograph or (if this would still be possible) meet her. But even if it is her who is beautiful, painting something that is beautiful nevertheless elevates the beauty of the object onto a new level: for the beauty in this case is not simply a property of the object; rather, it now comes into being and is "there" and presents itself in a *formed representation*. The painting forms the beauty and thereby saves it, since, as we have known from the beginning of painting, the wonder of painting lays in its nature and ability to save that which in nature and human action is subjected to decay and disappearance. In this context, it is sufficient that we note how the glory that this painting introduces in our universe stands in strong contrast *and* in line with the problem of death and youth that this painting forms into a unity.

Though we are used to Richter's gray paintings, *Youth Portrait* is exceptional in its reductive quality. It is carried out within an extremely narrow range of gray tones, which, paradoxically, tend to overcome the gray tones. A field of almost black and white tones determines the painting. Meinhof's hair is hardly identifiable in front of the black background on the right and her left arm almost merges with and disappears within the black background. *The face*, though, emerges *out of* the background like an event in a dark world. Her face is apparently the center of the painting and shows a soft, very smooth surface, especially around the nose and the mouth. The smoothness caresses her face and

thereby the face is shining forth and appears holy. She is depicted as an angel here. An angel of youth? An angel of death? A dying angel?

Gaze

We must come back to her eyes and her gaze! Look at her eyes! There is something strange about her eyes: for they do not look into the spectator's eyes (originally the lens of the photographer), they do not look at us; rather, the gaze seems to lose itself *in* her and thereby it is turned inward. Accordingly, it is not the head that is turned inward (as in *Betty*, figure 8, which Richter painted right after *Youth Portrait* which I will discuss later); instead, the eye balls are visible but turned away, turned into something "inner." One might ask: what does she see? Where is she? What do her seeing eyes look at? What is her inner vision? What is her secret? A gaze that is not turned outward is founded on a specific temporal structure: instead of being *present*, present for us, and present to us as spectators, the gaze is here *for itself*, present *to itself*. For us, the spectator, the gaze is present in its absence. Put differently, only the absence is present. Emptiness has the following phenomenal structure: though something can be empty, the emptiness itself must show up in order for us to be recognizable. Accordingly, the phenomenon—what shows up—is emptiness. She therefore does not really look at us. Human eyes are not identical with their gaze, which we do not find in the eyeballs. A gaze shows up *only* in contact with another gaze. What is really present? It is us, the spectator. *Our* gaze does not find *her* gaze in the image. Consequently, we become aware that her gaze turns away from what is present and what could be taken to be present, namely, us. The gaze introduces a rupture and disturbance in our desire to look at *her* (not her eyeballs, but her gaze) and thus pushes us from a possible dialogue to a monologue, which we are now forced to decipher. The desire of the spectator to look at her is blocked by the painting itself; for the gaze does not speak to us but remains silent. Ultimately, this distancing makes the painting even more beautiful, insofar as it refuses our desire to see her.

Let us go back to the painting. We often call someone "absent" who does not seem to be *with us* and is instead lost in thoughts. Communication and dialogue are only possible when persons who are speaking to and looking at one another establish *one* present between them. A shared "here" and "now" must be established between the speakers and lookers; otherwise, we have the

feeling that the other person is "somewhere else" and "absent." Someone who is absent looks through us and usually does not listen to us. The gaze in this painting is disconnected from any communication with us and does not share the same space or the same time with us. In a sense, the painting forms an *image of a-sociality*. She turns away from society. She is gone, in her secret inwardness. She has turned away from being social: for turning inward is a negation of being social. She is *not* social. Is she rejecting us? Is she already a murderer in this painting? Is this a painting of youth or of murder? Perhaps it is both forming contradictory opposites into one image and uniting it for our gaze. Given this, we may now start to understand why this painting is part of the *October 18, 1977* series. *Youth Portrait* is presenting someone to us who, before her life started was already "gone"; in her absence, this person has turned away from any real communication with us. She has left society and turned away from the future.

Intermezzo: silence as a topic of not speaking to each other and as the end or the death of a dialogue is also the topic of another image that is part of the series *18.Oktober 1977*, namely, *Record Player* (1988, CR 672-2), which is the hidden center of the entire series (Storck in Richter 1989: 15). *Record Player* is not simply an image of a record player; rather, in order to be more precise, we should stress that it is about a record player *with* a record. This fact pushes the *relation* between the record player and the record into the focus of our attention. As we see, the arm of the player is not on the record, the consequence of which is that we see a record player that does not play a record. It is a *dysfunctional* record player. The painting, hence, is not about a record player; rather, it is about *not playing* and in that way the painting is about silence (see also Henatsch 1998: 78). It is not simply the case that we do not hear anything when we look at a painting of a record player; we realize that it is also the case that the record player itself is not playing anything. We see a dysfunctional machine; we might even say: a *dead* machine. As I argued in Chapter 1, we should underline that this record player as an image is not a simply a *sign* or a symbol of silence; rather, it is an image *of* silence: it *represents* silence. During the process of looking at *Record Player*, especially looking at the painting within the context of the series and within the loss of communication that we encounter in *Youth Portrait*, we must come to the recognition of what both images share: that is silence! The plasticity of the image is the result both of our description and of our thinking of the painting and the thought that is (in) the painting. With Gadamer, the meaning of an artwork, in this case, the meaning of these two paintings, is to be found in the "configuration of the formed image," which does not signify an

external meaning; instead, meaning becomes present *in* the formation. Once we also take our knowledge into account that the record player was used for concealing the gun with which Baader was killed, the paradoxes reappear on a new level, especially since not only the record player is silent: it now becomes part of a requiem used for silencing lives. The effect is paradoxical: "Banality" (Foster 2003: 169) is combined with the most fearful moment in life, namely, death, and is suddenly loaded with meaning. What we take to be moments of our everyday life turns into a dreadful reality in this painting, which renders it visible for us by integrating the contradictory moments into a unity. This insight is even more forceful, if we take into account that the record on the record player, according to Lisa Saltzman, is Eric Clapton's 1974 *There's One in Every Crowd*, which deals with death (Saltzman 2005: 29). In "Opposites," we hear *Night after day, day after night./White after black, black after white. / Fight after peace, peace after fight. / Life after death, death after life.*

Melancholy

Let us go back to *Youth Portrait*. As discovered, the young woman seems to be gone in this painting and is refusing all communication. Turning away is also about thinking. We all know the situation in which a person with whom we want to communicate does not really look at us. "What do you think?" is the standard question. Humans are unable to think together. We are alone when we think. Perhaps that is why thinking and philosophy were always so threatening to so many people. We are certainly able to speak of our thoughts, and in this way, we transform thoughts that are communicated *with* the other, but we cannot really *think* together with the other in the way in which we can dance together or kiss each other. Is she thinking? Perhaps we should say that she is seeing. She is both thinking and seeing: thinking *as* seeing (for, to be precise, we can only see her gaze). Turning away from the present, becoming blind of what is in front of her, lets her turn toward what is *in* her. But what is in her? Our present and shared world, from which she turned away, is certainly not in her, and it is also not the future which has yet to come which is in here, but it is her memory, that is, the past that seems to be in her. She turns away from us, thereby blinding herself; however, in addition to blinding herself, she is also blinding us. She makes *us* blind; for we no longer *see* her, if by "her" we mean *she* as the other, her soul, her gaze. Turning toward the inner world means that she remembers, and that she thinks.

Everything is contradictory in this painting, but the wonder is that this painting configures a new unity. First, she turns away from us, escaping the present; second, she turns into herself, arriving at her own self-presence; and finally, third, she turns toward her past as something that is *not* present, *not* now. Consequently, the movement that this image presents is ambiguous since turning away means becoming present, and becoming present means becoming absent. Turning toward oneself as being present in one's lostness is what we usually address as melancholy. Is this painting "painted melancholy?" Yes, it is, but it is too contradictory to be just *that*.

We should be aware that Richter is operating with a type of portrait that is well known throughout the history of painting as a representation of melancholy. For example, just look at Daniele Crespi's Caravagio-inspired portrait *Manfredo Settala* (1620, 60 cm × 45 cm) and compare it with *Youth Portrait*. Though Richter often uses images as quasi-quotations (Gelshorn in 2005d: 28) and references to the history of art, the melancholic character of *Youth Portrait* is striking. Given this, we should add to Storr's observation that not only does this portrait remind us of the background of old masters; it also creates a tension between absence and presence that is historically situated as a *human* quality, namely, melancholy. The central topic of melancholy within the history of Western art goes back to the doctrine of the human temperaments and was closely tied to human activities such as thinking, understood as the turn away from the world, and writing, understood as turning toward the past and externalizing memory. Although the art historical background is not the primary focus of my considerations here, we should keep in mind that Richter underlines the melancholic structure of *Youth Portrait* by placing it within one of the great traditions of Western painting. Importantly, this move essentializes and idealizes the image even more, since Richter takes the painting out of the context in which we are used to looking at it, namely, the RAF background. Put differently, he builds up a contrast between the transcending *universal* representation and the historically specific context within which it emerges.

As if the aforementioned tensions between presence and absence would not already be enough for our desire to understand this painting, we should note that the gaze introduces an additional ambivalence as part of the whole image formation: for the face is obviously shown in its youth. Thus the problem of time returns at this point. She is clearly a teenager. What do we know about teenagers? First of all, we typically do not take teenagers to be the best examples for melancholic people. They can be angry, irresponsible, funny, or simply be a failure, but we do not typically connect them to melancholy. In their youths,

human beings are not supposed to turn inward; rather, as teenagers, human beings look forward toward their future. As young people, we are supposed to be open and not closed off in ourselves, remaining in our inner world. Accordingly, being a teenager and being young *means* to be on a way or, to be more precise, to be "somewhere" *before* the way is entered, and *before* life really starts. Too young to be corrupt, which produces the conflict with our knowledge: we know that Meinhof in front of us is heading toward a disaster. Why this gaze? Why?

It is time to make an additional move to make the interpretation more complex. We should put the painting in relation to the other paintings in the series about the former German RAF terrorists. Richter himself does not want these paintings to be on show as single paintings, nor are they not allowed to enter the art market as individual paintings. These fifteen paintings belong together. They carry a heavy burden: for the whole series of paintings, as we know by now, is based on a central theme, framed by political and historical questions, namely, the topics of death, dying, and murdering. Though only the biggest painting in the series is entitled *Funeral* (1988, CR 673), we should underline that the whole series is the performance of a funeral rite. The fifteen paintings, painted ten years after the deaths of Baader and Enslin in Stammheim, *are* the attempt to bury them: respectively, the memories of those days and the problematic of the terrorist group in Germany in the 1970s. Here, we not only see images of death, but above all, *images of dying images*. Images that do not want to disappear, as all memories produced by melancholy do. We cannot let go of the images, though we want to let go. As with all phenomena of saying farewell and burying, the object of the farewell does not disappear; instead, the object appears even more intense in saying farewell and it shows itself in its *presence*. Let us keep this in mind for the next move and our final consideration.

Bildnis

We know by now that the painting is formed as a set of contradictions: innocence and criminality, youth and death, thinking and seeing, past and future, absence and presence, black and white. The painting gives us an image of these absolute opposites. The painting is therefore not about Ulrike Meinhof; rather, it is about the tensions between these aspects of human life. It forms them and brings them together in *one* image. The painting entertains these thoughts *visually*. It is intelligible and lets us understand something. Intelligibility is *in* the painting.

The title of the painting is "*Bildnis*," which, in German, means slightly something different than simply image [*Bild*]. "Bildnis" is a combination of "*Bild*" and "*Gleichnis*" [*simile*], which implies that we are confronted with an image that is also an idealization. The translation of "Bildnis" into "portrait" is problematic because the English title indicates that we have an image of an *individual* in front of us. Similarly, "Portrait of a Young Woman" (Green 2003) is an equally incorrect translation. However, the German title clearly does not imply this conclusion because, as Bertolt Brecht in a little piece entitled *Of Making Images* nicely indicated, creating a simile of a person [*sich ein Bildnis machen*] implies making a "model" of the other: "Human beings produce of things with which they are surrounded and with which they are confronted miniature models which tell them how they function. Human beings create such images [*Bildnisse*] also about human beings" (Brecht 1968/20: 168). What Brecht points out here is that we need images and "models" of other persons since these images not only give us *in advance* a "pre-view" of someone but also because these images let us *understand* the other (which, if the images are incorrect, can lead to miscommunications and other distortions). Richter's painting functions as such a simile and therefore it produced a political debate especially in Germany, where people differ in their perceptions of Meinhof and what she stands for.

We should go back to the problem of youth. As we said, the image is of youth and about being young. "Innocence" has a double meaning: first, we call someone innocent when we want to refer to the age of that person. Usually by using this word, we refer to a person before adulthood and even before life "really" starts during our later childhood. An innocent person is pure and untouched like an angel. Second, we call someone "innocent" when we want to refer to the moral and legal status of a person. An innocent person is a person who has not committed crimes or at least has not yet been convicted of a crime. Consequently, this painting is not simply giving us an image of youth and what youth is. What we encounter in this image is *human corruption*, but it is not the corruption of Ulrike Meinhof. What is represented in the painting is a universal idea, the *shaped eidos* of innocence in general. As Richter himself says in his famous interview with Jan Thorn-Prikker, "What counts is that the pictures . . . become universal. They are there to show themselves and not me. That's why form is so important—and that is difficult nowadays" (Richter 2009a: 234). In her commentary on Richter's portraits, such as *48 Portraits* (1971, CR 324), Ehrenfried has offered an interpretation of Richter's work (using a thesis by Wittgenstein about the impossibility of painting a "portrait of red") that is based on the claim

that a portrait of X is never identical with X itself. Because of this structure, as Ehrenfried further explains, portraits of *individual* things are impossible and ultimately remain paradoxical. "The portrait of an individual red tone must show for itself the depicted red tone," and, as she concludes, this identity would make the portrait impossible (which needs the difference between image and individual referent for being a portrait) (Ehrenfried 1997: 34). Put differently, the iconic difference must be in play. In regard to portraiture painting, Richter is even clearer; for he outright rejects that portraits, if understood as paintings of something individual, are possible, claiming that "since one is unable to paint an individual human being, but always only an image, which has absolutely nothing in common with the original" (Richter quoted in Ehrenfried 1997: 147; this point is totally missed by Moorhouse in Richter 2009b: 16). Accordingly, in contrast to the photograph, *Youth Portrait* lets us see something nonindividual, despite the fact that it seems *as if* it shows an individual. The individual, however, remains external to the painting because the painting creates its own internal "aboutness" and, as I explained, during this process and during this differentiation it *becomes an image*. The consequence is paradoxical for our usual attitude toward portraits: though we expect to see something that is individual (such as Meinhof), we see something universal, namely, a formation of something new, which in this case is (at least according to my interpretation) corrupted innocence. In addition, the titles of the paintings of the *October 18, 1977* series do not mention the *names* of the terrorists. Richter has pointed out that the nontransparency of the paintings should make it impossible to identify the individuals (Richter 1995a) Tensions and even conflicts occur for the viewer when she begins to *compare* the painted image with the image that she might have of that person on the basis of external knowledge. The latter depends upon the cultural setting of the viewer. Conflicts are less likely to occur when the viewer does not have external knowledge about or an image of the person portrayed. This explains why Richter showed some relief after the whole series was sold to the Modern Museum of Art in New York. For, it is less likely that an American audience is dragged into deep conflicts about memories that can distort what the painting is really about, namely, *human corruptibility*.

Innocence and corruptibility of human beings are connected to two things: first, they are connected to the problem of death (which is already contained in the problem of youth); second, they are connected to the problem of crime and murder. The painting contradicts our knowledge; for we certainly only know, but we do not see, that she later became a murderer. What we see in this painting

and what this painting presents to us in its representation is a dead murderer *before* she was a murderer and before she was dead. In this way, the painting is an *interpretation of Meinhof*. The past appears on two levels: on the one hand, it appears in the inward turn of the gaze, and, on the other hand, it appears in her youth, before she died. Do not we all die at some point when we enter adulthood? Something certainly dies in us, namely, our innocence. Life is the process of dying away. The painting *keeps this innocence in all of its tensions alive* and turns innocence into a permanent form: this is precisely the meaning of "Bildnis." She is there, in front of us, pulled from her absence and saved from being forgotten.

It is understandable that Richter's painting produced a public debate in Germany; for the painting forms the tension between murdering and idealization into one image. Seen from the perspective of our knowledge of who Meinhof was, the painting could be interpreted as if it depicts the savior of a murderer. So, again, it is understandable why Richter's series produced a heated debate, given that in this almost religious transformation of a murderer, the paintings put themselves *in conflict with their context*, which is not only death, but also the act of murder. Rainer Usselmann points to the "quasi-religious sentiments of suffering and retribution" that come out in the paintings that surround *Youth Portrait* (Usselmann 2002: 5). Looking at this icon—which is certainly only *one* aspect of the painting—had to make certain people feel uneasy and discontent. The painting *forgives by giving us Meinhof back* on a new, universal, and insightful level. It idealizes her. According to Freud, this is *precisely* what melancholy is. The lost person returns as an image, inasmuch as we introject the lost person and build up an image of her. Those (German) commentators who were unable to forgive the terrorists were also unable to forgive the painting.

Let us now return to the underlying process that is in play when we look at paintings such as paintings from the *October 18, 1977* series, namely, the transformation of photography into painting. *Youth Portrait* is a painting. Why would it not be sufficient to look at the photographs or at the reproduction that Richter took mainly from pictures published by the German magazine *Der Stern*? Why painting? Why painting youth? Why painting a photo? As we now know, our analysis of *Youth Portrait* led to the result that Richter clearly did not paint Meinhof; instead, he painted an image of youth, which means that he formed all meaning moments into one image. We *see* it. Nevertheless, as numerous commentators pointed out, Richter paints photos. Undoubtedly. So, it is important to ask: how should we understand the relation between the

painted image and photography? I think that we must look for an adequate response to these questions by looking closer at the process of transformation that the painting introduces in order to understand what painting does with the photographic view of the world.

I addressed the transformation of a *photograph into an image* as a re-auratization and re-enchantment (Ehrenfried 1997: 180) of what the photograph is about in Chapter 2. Aura, in the case of Richter's photo-paintings, is the formation of the contradictory aspects that we have uncovered so far into an image of their unity *and* thereby into the *return of* what was taken away by photography. The photograph, as we argued in Chapter 2 on meaning formation in painted photographs, remains fixed to its referent and to the past status of the referent. The difference between the photographic image of Meinhof and the painting *Youth Portrait* is to be localized in the effect of painting, of opening up the *essence*, and thereby, of *becoming* a portrait. Photographic images can never be portraits and *Bildnisse* because they do not reach the essential structure with which paintings confront us. Tied to their own causality, they are unable to build up an image *of* what they depict. Photographs are not interpretations. Whereas the photograph is a picture, the painting is an image. If Benjamin's thesis is true that photography should be conceived as the "liberation of the object from its aura" (Benjamin in Kemp/Amelunxen 2006/II: 207), then painting is the liberation of the aura from its object (for this, also see Gronert in Richter 2005b: 95).

The photograph that Richter took from the magazine *Stern* refers to a fact and to something that has-been, but the painting brackets and neutralizes this relation and idealizes it so that the image can appear beyond the temporality of the photograph. Only this transformation makes it possible for meaning as something *universal* to reappear in the painting. *Youth Portrait* is so telling because it also (subtly) reflects on one of the main categories of hermeneutic aesthetics, which is *mimesis*. By dealing with this category in regard to Richter's work, we can strengthen the thesis that painting liberates photography from being fixed to the referent, since *mimesis* is not simply an imitation; rather, put in Gadamerian language, *it is a process through which we gain insight into something*. Mimesis is a form of recognition and the interpretation that *Youth Portrait* gives of Meinhof and our participation in it leads to a *becoming aware* of what the painting presents to us. The painting only seemingly "copies" something in our world. As Gadamer puts it in relation to still lifes, "The painter composes the reality, almost as she deals with the reality when she constructs

[*aufbaut*] a still life. Even in this case the painting is through and through a new composition and not a truthful reflection [*Abbild*] of the construction" (Gadamer 1993/9: 44). Remember what was said in Chapter 1 on images and representations: when a child pretends to be a horse rider, then he/she does not simply imitate something outside of his/her play. For, the pretended horse rider imitates something of its own kind, as horse riding is not present as long as the child is not really riding a horse. Indeed, it is not sufficient to point to the imitated as if it would be a sign. Accordingly, the horse rider imitation is a *coming about* not only of the horse rider, *but also of what a horse rider is* (=image, essence, ideal). Mimesis, accordingly, is an internal relation, namely, the relation between the performance *in* the image and *of* the image, and what comes into presence throughout the performance. In addition, it is related to the being of what presents itself as itself. Nevertheless, that which the play is performing is a *horse rider* and not just any arbitrary object. Consequently, it *presupposes* mimesis. So, let us apply this example to *Youth Portrait*: the painting imitates something, namely, a young person. Accordingly, it builds up *specific* relations and throughout its interpretation, which requires our participation, it brings out the young person *as* something. It lets us understand the young person *as* human corruption. Moreover, it helps us understand this human corruption *in* an image and, accordingly, it lets us see what human corruptibility *is*. Richter pointed to this fact over and over again in his interviews, but his listeners did not want to listen: "I am not talking about the RAF, I'm talking about us." (Richter 2009a: 237).

5

Vision

Reader

Reader (1994, CR 804, figure 13), painted in 1994, appears at first as an extremely classical painting, since it defines itself with a schema that secures the importance, weight, and identity of the image. As we know, up to the nineteenth century, the idea of the classical artist and the idea of the classical image were substantially ruled by the repetition of a schema, which secured the truth and reality of the topic chosen by the artist. It was self-explanatory for a classical artist in the Middle Ages, up to the end of the eighteenth century, to have full power over and access to the repertoire regarding the topic chosen. Richter places himself in this tradition by choosing a topic that has been painted over and over again throughout the last 2000 years of our Western history, namely, women reading. *Reader* is a specific reference to one of Vermeer's paintings, namely, *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter,* painted around 1662. Vermeer's painting shows a few aspects that we do not find in Richter's painting, however. Vermeer's reader is placed in a more prominent social context, which includes reading a letter, being pregnant, being in Holland, and reading in a bourgeoisie interior. Moreover, whereas Vermeer's reader is placed in front of a window, the surrounding area of Richter's reader is almost abstract, as if his reader reads in front of an abstract formalist painting. Richter's reader is not without any social references though; for in this painting we notice the pearls, the careful hair knot, as well as the earring. In addition, Richter's reader reads a magazine and not a letter. In the following, I shall leave these social aspects aside, so that we may look more deeply into the actual structure of the painting.

We should note again that Richter's explicit embracing of the art historical tradition is immediately negated by the way in which he takes up a modern position in this painting: the painting is based on a photograph. What we find

here is the tension between two moves that the image introduces, namely, on the one hand, an affirmative and almost celebratory character of beauty resulting from the affirmation of the classical conception of images, and, on the other hand, an equally celebratory process of distancing this image from the tradition that it tries to embrace. Distance and identification are the main structure in *Reader*. In what follows I shall address the problem of distance in regard to three aspects: I will first develop what I call "expressiveness," which will then lead me to a brief reflection on painting and photography, before I finally push the problem onto the level of reading and seeing.

As to the first aspect, we need to reconsider both the materiality and the bodily aspect of a painting, since it will help us understand the difference between paintings and photographs. Every painting, which binds us in its presence, is not only the process of image formation as such, but, in addition, it is an effect of the material and bodily expressiveness of the painting, which makes it impossible to understand paintings as simple realizations of intentions on the side of the painter. Instead, by picking up a theme developed in Chapter 1, we should say that "the materials of painting . . . become a world the painter inhabits" (Wentworth 2004: 49), a thesis first put forward by Merleau-Ponty. As much as I agree with this thesis, I believe that the expressive effect of painting is more than a simple bodily expressiveness. Instead, I would further claim that speaking of bodily expressiveness only makes sense if we take into account that the expressive form implies an *attitude toward sensuality and materiality*. A painting, in other words, comes with a specific character that is produced by the expressiveness of how the materiality *appears* in the painting. It is not simply the paint or simply the way the painter paints; rather, the expressiveness and bodily quality of a painting is *how the materiality shows up* and brings itself to presence within the whole of the painting. The materiality becomes a moment of the image and, hence, it cannot be thought of as being outside of any representational structure. In Adorno's words, "The spirit of the artworks is their immanent mediation, which transforms their sensual moments and their objective arrangement; this is mediation in the strict sense that each and every element in the artwork becomes manifestly its own other" (Adorno 1997: 87). What Adorno has in mind is exactly what I introduced earlier with my claim that we need to deal with a relation between three sides and not two. Richter's *Reader* is not simply an imitation of a reader; instead, it introduces a new level: that which Adorno calls spirit and I called image, namely, the level through which all elements of the painting become mediated through a new level of

appearance. The sensuality of a painting, then, is never simply a twofold relation of senses and spirit or image; rather, the spiritual dimension is constituted by the relationship *to* the senses. *What is represented here is that relation itself*. The sensual materiality of a painting is not simply "there," nor could it be described as something objective such as an objective property, insofar as the sensuality and its character must show up itself, and as a consequence, it becomes a moment of the representation (for a similar point, see Klinger 2013: 110).

In *Reader*, the brushwork is only visible in the form of a fine pattern produced by the brush with which Richter produces the smooth and blur effect in his paintings. Even in his abstract paintings that seem to be very expressive—such as the *Wald* series (2005, CR 892/1-12, figure 16)—the rhythm remains neutral, since we do not find in it any traces of Richter's *hand*. Instead, we feel the tools that Richter uses for his paintings, such as large wooden beams, spatulas, and scratchers. Accordingly, what we find embodied in Richter's work is not only the negation of his own person and individuality but also a negation of the bodily dimension. This attempt remains unsuccessful, though, since the attempt to negate the bodily dimension in painting is itself a form in which the bodily dimension is expressed. In regard to Richter, this means that the body is visible in his paintings in the form of an intellectual *rejection*, the consequence of which is that the assumption that in Richter's paintings the gestureness remains without author must be corrected. This is the case, since the attempt to avoid a style that implies an author and the subject is a *privative* phenomenon: in its absence the non-expressive style in Richter refers to a style, namely, the absence of expressive gestures. The style thereby presents itself in a distanced way, which reflects itself in how the paintings are *distancing* themselves from emotionality, feeling, and affection.

However, this, as we said in Chapter 1, "Dutch" or "Protestant" attempt to free painting from affection ultimately turns into its opposite, insofar as the absence of emotion is itself a mode of being emotional. Let us first work with an analogy: it does not make sense to speak of a cold, neutral, and very distanced person, as a person who has *no* emotions, since, given human nature, this is impossible. For coldness, neutrality, and distancing are manners in which such a person forms out her feelings and displays herself as an affectionate person. Being affectionate for such a person is here identical with her coldness, as coldness is a *form of* being affectionate. Richter's paintings work in a similar fashion: the apparent absence of wild brushwork, subjective expressions, transgressions, grotesque elements, etc., has to do with an almost *rational*

attitude that is materially present in these paintings. Richter's style of painting is neither expressive nor formalistic. Instead, what we find here is the "spirit" of *suppressed emotionality*. To repeat this point: sensuality shows up in *Reader* as the relation *to* sensuality. In *Reader*, in other words, suppressed emotionality and distance are represented in the sense outlined above. Put differently, although Richter tries to *hide* the genesis of his paintings, this does not mean that they do not have a genesis. His attempt to negate the *bodily narrative* remains unsuccessful, because the question of bodily narrativity (its rhetoric, movements, expressions) becomes even more of a question when confronted with its absence. In addition, in a person who represses all visible emotional expression, the *gaze* becomes important, inasmuch as desire now turns away from the body to what can be held in distance. The gaze is also the center of Richter's photo-paintings. Instead of being obsessed with the hand, Richter's photo-paintings are obsessed with vision, seeing, and looking. In *Reader,* this dimension is reflected *in* the image. Accordingly, distance is Richter's obsession, not touch.

Essentialization

It is important to note in this context that, when asked about his motivation to paint photographs, Richter repeatedly points out that it allows him to paint without any reference to his own subjectivity and personal preferences, which in turn points to a conception of painting that is based on vision instead of on imagination or narratives. For example, in an interview, his response to the question of why he started to paint photographs is the following: "There was no style, no composition, no judgment," Richter tells the interviewer, "It liberated me from personal experience. There was nothing but a pure image" (Richter in Ehrenfried 1997: 170). Accordingly, painting photographs has two aspects: first, it belongs to Richter's attempt to eliminate expressiveness in his paintings in the sense outlined above. *Reader* is an extremely unemotional painting, almost totally removed from any affective expression, which is not only the effect of distance but also the effect of the fact that we look here at a painted photograph. Painting photographs should also be taken as the attempt to *negate* the bodily dimension and to suppress the bodily quality, especially if we take into account that, second, *the* difference between paintings and photographs is what Roland Barthes calls the "flatness" of the photographic image (Barthes 1980: 106). I shall briefly turn to this concept.

The difference between how a photograph is given and how a painting is given is not that one is the product of a mental act whereas the other is a product of causality; rather, how the photograph embodies its meaning is different, since it does not have *any* expressiveness or gestureness (as we called it in Chapter 1). One consequence of this is that in photographs we can only find a view from the outside of the *objectified body*, that is, the body taken as an object; however, in painting we always also find the *lived body*, that is, the movable and intentional body experienced from the inside. Accordingly, the recipient is part of the formative power of painting, whereas in photography the recipient's involvement in the image is blocked, given that the photograph ultimately remains *impenetrable* by our body (to use, once again, a term introduced by Barthes in his famous essay on photography). This impenetrability goes back to the other main difference between a painted and a photographed image, namely, the indexical nature of the photograph. By "index" Charles S. Pierce meant a sign that in its materiality is a trace of what it is a sign of.

As we know, the photograph can be manipulated, changed, cropped, and transformed in many ways, but ultimately—as long as it is a photograph—the photograph is unable to invent or construct its referent internally. Instead, in the photographic image, the referent appears as a *fixed* and passive referent but not as a constructed referent. It might be extremely difficult to figure out what we see in certain photographs, but whatever we see and however we "interpret" the photographic image, ultimately, we must take the photograph as an *arrest* of something that passed by in the moment, in which the photograph was taken. Let us look at a passage in Barthes again, which was quoted previously in Chapter 3:

> I might put this differently: what founds the nature of photography is the pose. The physical duration of this pose is of little consequence, even in the interval of a millionth of a second (Edgerton's drop of a mil) there has still been a pose, for the pose is not, here, the attitude of the target or even a technique of the *Operator*, but the term of an "intention" of reading: looking at a photograph. . . . I project the present photograph's immobility upon the past shot, and it is this arrest which constitutes the pose. (Barthes 1980: 78)

Barthes describes the "pose" neither as an intention on the side of the photographed person nor as an effect of the photographer; instead, as he claims, the pose is the effect of the moment in which the motive was fixed *for* an eye or a camera, which, and this is important, establishes a temporal relation between past (the pictured) and present (the looker and the picture). The looker *takes* the present photograph to be there when it was taken (which is *not now*). Of course,

what Barthes has in mind is that something that belongs to the past can never be *totally* constructed. Something that we claim to be in the past we take to be part of a past *reality*, but we do not take it to be there *now*. A photograph, to borrow again Barthes's language, does not show "*what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*" (Barthes 1980: 85). Photography is an art of the past because, due to its indexicality, it remains bound to its referent as something that was there (whenever and wherever). As long as we do not take the image as a total construction, which we are unable to do as long as we take it to be a photograph, we take the photograph as an image of something that *was* present somewhere when it was taken. This temporal structure that constitutes the indexicality of the photographic picture is certainly *not* applicable to painting. Accordingly, we need to understand what happens to the photograph when painted.

In Richter's *Reader*, the person depicted is precisely *not* presented as fixed in her past form. In contradistinction, the fixation in this painting is an effect of what we called in Chapter 2 *its essentialization*. What we must take to be a fixed image of Richter's wife in the photograph that Richter used for the painting becomes, through the act of painting, something else: the aboutness of the image is no longer necessarily tied to the past existence of its referent and its pose. We no longer *take it to be something that was there*. Instead, what we find here is a strange bracketing or *neutralization* of the referent's existence. By "neutralization," Husserl understood the possibility of transforming every act into what he called the "as if" mode of belief. It is as if we leave open whether the referent exists or not, which enables the painting and us, the viewers, to form an image in the way described above. Something *totally* independent from the has-been of the referent can come into presence, which no longer *with necessity* is bound to the external referent. As a consequence, as one commentator puts it, "the painter is actually liberating the photograph's captured moment, his action is breaking the spell of all our yesterdays that had been woven round it and shifting it into the time-free presence of the artwork" (Strauss 2008: 207). As Richter himself says in a famous interview with Jan Thorn-Prikker, "What counts is that the pictures . . . become universal. They are there to show themselves and not me. That's why form is so important—and that is difficult nowadays" (Richter 2009a: 234). The individual as the referent, however, is bracketed and neutralized in the painting because the painting forms its own referent and, as explained, becomes an *image*. What are the moments of this formation as essentialization that the painting introduces? I think we should

note at least five aspects: (1) if Barthes is correct with his analysis of photographs, then we need to think about painting and memory; (2) with this move, we need to recognize that we encounter in this painting a strange conflict of acts, namely, of inner and outer acts; (3) this conflict is deeply related to painting itself, as painting was always connected to an activity *from memory*; (4) the conflict is intertwined with the problem of seeing and vision itself; since, finally, (5) the conflict involves the reader herself and her activity, namely, reading. Is reading a form of vision? What does she see when she reads? And what does she remember when she sees? In addition, we must ask what *we* see when we see her reading. All these questions should lead us deeper into the painting, since attempting to answer them allows us to realize that this painting is an image of something that does not lie at the surface of the picture. Something presents itself here that needs to be carefully laid out.

Distance, as already noted previously, is important for several reasons: for distance is connected with the sense of vision, seeing, and the gaze. How is the gaze visible in this painting? On the one hand, we should recognize that the place of the viewer is *extremely* close to the object of the painting. In fact, it seems to be as if we are standing right in front of her, since otherwise we could not even see what she is reading, but we do catch a glimpse of what she is reading, and it is this that moves us *extremely* close to the object of the painting. On the other hand, this distance can be spelled out spatially; however, I do not think that this is the main aspect, as we notice that we remain in distance to the object of the painting only because we remain in distance to *the activity* of the reader, which itself has two aspects: looking and reading. Why is this so? I think the reasons for this form of distance involve both the way in which the reader appears to be absorbed in her own activity, and, in addition, the gap presented by vision and reading. We, the viewers, are unable to see her reading. We can see what she is seeing, but how could we ever see what she is actually *reading*? In this way, we might say that this painting becomes an exercise in phenomenology. Finally, the distance structure is also prominent because of the magazine that the reader is apparently reading. As Svetlana Alpers, in her famous book on letter writing in Dutch art has pointed out, a painter "introduces the letter because of its ability to close distances, to make something present, to communicate secretly—all of which confirms what we have seen of the painted letter in Dutch paintings" (Alpers 1984: 200). Accordingly, *to* the reader, reading a magazine is about *closing* the distance, by bringing the world nearer to her and by overcoming the problem of vision through reading. Reading is for her the attempt to overcome

seeing and perception, insofar as the magazine brings something into her presence that she cannot see.

In sum, the painting confronts us with the question of what we see when we see, as well as whether we see anything at all. Perhaps this painting is an image of blindness, a blind spot, an overlap of different acts that exclude each other. Since we know that what we see here in Richter's *Reader* is ourselves, perhaps this painting is not about the reader at all, but it is about us and about what we do not see when we look at a painting. Finally, let us not forget that Heidegger, Gadamer, and Derrida claimed that reading is a form of listening: "Reading proceeds in no other way," as Derrida puts it in *Memoirs of the Blind*; "it listens in watching" (Derrida 1993: 2). We should, therefore, think about whether this painting is really about reading and self-consciousness as a form of listening. In what follows, I shall try to untangle these moments.

Seeing

Let us first think about reading. Objectivity and authenticity are the goals of these paintings. However, the effect is thoroughly paradoxical, insofar as the beholder is introduced *as* a beholder *through* her as-if absence. It is as if we observe a reading scene *without* the knowledge of the reader. She does not *know* that and what we *see*. Accordingly, though she is there as if we were not there, it is precisely this fact that makes our voyeurism even more apparent than if it were exhibited in works of art that are theatrical. It is *us* who know more than her. We find a double-secret worked into this illusionistic painting, namely, the secret of the reader *and* the secret of the spectator. Accordingly, what *her secret* is on the reflective level becomes *our secret* through being absorbed in the picture. *We* are the reader(s). Thus we find in Richter a strategy for giving the viewer a position *in front* of the image that the person *in* the image has (Krüger 2005). What it forms, accordingly, is not simply a painting and a viewer, but the image itself forms this aspect *internally* by forcing us to participate in it.

This tension between the involvement and the distance of the spectator is carried out again by the contrast between absence and presence, or between past and present. The reader clearly seems to be fully absorbed in her activity and fully immersed in herself. However, in contrast to a painting that depicts a melancholic topic, we do not find the inner presence of a past by being immersed in an inward activity (thinking), but rather, by being immersed in

an outward activity (reading). Accordingly, what we find here is a self-relation that is closed off, private, and not accessible to anyone outside of it. We should take into account the following though: what seems to be an outward activity, namely reading, in truth *is* an inward activity; for if we take into account the nature of reading, this should be obvious. In this connection, Richter's painting stands in the tradition of anti-theatrical imagery where we see figures "who appear absorbed in what they are doing, thinking, and feeling and who therefore also appear wholly oblivious to being beheld" (Fried 2005: 549). These images, as Fried points out, have their realist appeal due to this stress on absorption. They do not belong to what he called "theatrical" works that invite the viewer to explore the work; instead, they try to keep the viewer in distance. They are "*anti*-theatrical, which is to say that they treat the beholder as if he were not there" (Fried 1980: 2; for this also see Germer 1997). This point is important, for one could argue that the person depicted in Richter's *Reader* knows that she is observed by an external gaze. In contradistinction, I believe that this claim should be rejected, for the idea that she *poses* in front of a camera overlooks that we are looking at a painting (and not a photograph). Richter's painting is *of* a (photograph of a) reader, and not a picture taken in front of a reading woman.

What is the structure of reading, then? We are certainly not directed toward the scribbles on paper when we read a text; rather, while we are reading, we are "living" through what the text and our mental activity construct in front of our "inner eyes." Reading is a formation of memory: we hold something in mind, anticipate something coming, and thereby establish a unity and synthesis of everything we gather together. Reading, according to Wolfgang Iser, is the "concretization" (Iser 1974: 279) of the text, that is, it forces us to enter a world in which the parts, relations, and references must be established by *performing* and entertaining them. As Iser further points out, "The degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process is far above mere perception of what is written" (Iser 1974: 283). In other words, as readers, we do not simply recognize facts and what is the case; rather, we *actively* engage with the text in order to understand its relations, its internal references, and its unity. "This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination" (Iser 1974: 284) in the form of a "living process" (Iser 1974: 296). Reading, then, is not only a form of self-relation and listening to oneself but also an imagining as participation in a text.

We are also turned *away* from the outer and the visible while we are reading, insofar as we are turned into our selves. Whereas writing has something to do

with the transfer of something that is inner and in our memory into the outer world, reading is the transfer of something that is outer into the inner world. Accordingly, what we find here is a *self-reflective* form of absorption, which is a second-order type of consciousness. Let us not forget that the relationship between looking and reading is one between something that is present "in the flesh," as Husserl puts it, and something that is re-presented in memory, given that what we read belongs to our inner world and thereby enters the privacy of a self-relation. Memory is the best expression of this privacy. Reading, then, is a form of memory, as the formation of memory and the formation of an image: holding in mind, looking forward, restructuring through the text. During this process, an "inner image" is formed. It is also not simply the case that we see someone being absorbed in an activity, such as playing football or writing a letter when we view *Reader*; rather, the absorption is characterized by an *attention to this being absorbed*. Consequently, the inwardness presented in this painting is pushed to its extreme because not only does it build up a first-level absorption, namely, the fictitious absence of an observer for the agent, but rather, it builds up *the total absence* of the agent, given that the agent is here turned inward *and* is related to her *inner* activity. As a consequence, we find ourselves totally alone in front of the painting. The secret encountered here puts us in *absolute* distance to the painting. We are denied access, so to speak. This should remind us of something else: the painter, according to the nineteenth-century painter Caspar David Friedrich, has to point her gaze away from the outer into the inner world. He says: "Close your bodily eye so that you see the image first with your mental/spiritual eye. Then bring to light what you have seen in the dark, so that it returns from the outer to the inner" (Busch 2003: 184; trans. C. L.).

Blindness

Consequently, this painting is not about seeing or reading; rather, we must come to the conclusion that it is about *not-seeing* and *not-reading*. We cannot see what she is reading, we cannot see what is going on in her, and we cannot see what she is absorbed in. Above all, we cannot see the activity of reading as such; for this is impossible, if we take reading to be an inner activity. Just as we are unable to see thoughts, we are unable to see reading. Seeing, in other words, is treated in this painting (and in other paintings by Richter) with absolute skepticism. So, what seems to be so accessible at first, turns out to be almost impenetrable, even though

this impenetrability remains different from the impenetrability of photographs, since in this case it is presented as a problem of the gaze and of knowledge. Interestingly, Richter's *Reader* differs from Dutch depictions of the same topic in one important regard. Most of the old master paintings deal with letters, the topic of which is love (and the origin of painting) (see Alpers 1984: 192–200). In Richter's work, however, the reader is not reading a letter, but a magazine. It has been argued that the reader in this painting is reading a German news magazine called "Der Spiegel," which might lead us to ask: what is the function of news magazines like *Spiegel*? The main function of these magazines and other news media certainly is to make something present that is absent from the situation of the reader, and, in addition, to give their readers an image of what otherwise remains hidden. Magazines such as this thereby make the world accessible. Finally—and not incidentally —"Spiegel" in English means "mirror." As is well known, a mirror reflects what is going on outside of the mirror. I submit that this can be taken as an ironic reference to the history of paintings within which females are often depicted as looking into a mirror (which indicates vanity). Perhaps this tradition of vanity paintings can be read as a self-thematization of painting itself: as Bellori claimed, painting is like a woman seeing herself in a mirror. The gaze into the mirror is, thus, self-reflective, self-related, and closed off. Indeed, the closer we come, the further it seems to move away; the more we see, the less we understand.

However, in addition to this ironic reference to the history of painting, we should note the following tension: as was argued previously, the spectator is present here *because* of her supposed absence. The more we look at and the more we desire to enter into the painting, the more we experience distance and the limits of *our* own vision, especially as the reader reading a magazine is *removed* from what is absent in two regards: the reader has only a representation of what she is reading and, in addition, while reading, she remains removed from the action referred to. What the image mirrors is, accordingly, the situation of the spectator in front of the painting. It is not only *her* turning away from vision; rather, it is also *our* turning away from vision: in this moment, we realize what this painting is about, namely, *not-seeing*. The topic of this painting is seeing *as* blindness. It allows us to see the situation of our gaze as a failure.

As I outlined above, the relation between painting and photography should be seen as a process of essentialization, since painting neutralizes the photographic referent and Richter himself supports this view. In an interview, he says the following: "I believe that the quintessential task of every painter in any time has

been to concentrate on the essential" (Richter 2009a: 413). This statement, as it now turns out, is thoroughly paradoxical because Richter's attempt to let us see something essential, on the one hand, utterly fails, while, on the other hand, is very successful. It fails because the painting pushes us to the limits of seeing as reading, insofar as it tries to do the impossible, namely, to paint something that cannot be painted. At the same time, however, it is also successful, since it also demonstrates this impossibility in an astonishing fashion. In this way, Robert Storr pointed out that Richter attempts to work "away at the image and at the paint until you can see something" (Storr in Richter 2009a: 415). And indeed, we can now see that this essentialization turns into its opposite: paradoxically put, we are able to see something because we do not see anything. "The strength of the work lies not in what is shown, but in what is withheld," as one commentator says (Hawker 2002: 584). Moreover, as another commentator nicely writes, "all painted from photographs, these pictures at first seem accessible, almost documentary, but the distance at which each figure is caught never lessens, and over time the atmospheric haze of nostalgia and memory suggested by sift brushstrokes, contributes to the mounting sense of uncertainty" (Homburg 2003: 91). Hence, *Reader* is constituted both by a dialectic of the installment of illusion, and at the same time, by the attempt to break down this illusion. The reader is not present for the spectator. Her position is based both on the invitation to enter the picture and, because we are unable to see her *as* a reader, on being blocked from entering fully into this illusionary sphere (Krüger 1995: 91). In other words, the painting is bringing out a tension between the involvement of the spectator and the distance of the spectator. In this way, we might say that the painting is a *broken promise*.

Benjamin's famous definition of aura is stated thus: aura is the "unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (Benjamin 1991: 479). It is the distance, then, that is shockingly close to us, or, even better, it is the presence that is so shockingly far from us and outside of our reach. In my view, it is precisely this structure that we find in Richter's painting: although it celebrates us in the presence of itself, it leaves us in *total* distance from what it presents. We *believe* that we see and understand, but in truth we do not see anything. Perhaps it is this auratic and almost holy quality of this image that makes it so beautiful.

6

Terror

Death

The role of death, suffering, and humanity has often been seen in commentaries on Richter's work. Early on, we find paintings that are related to the Second World War, such as fighter planes and destroyed German towns. In paintings such as *Uncle Rudi* (1965, CR 85) and *Aunt Marianne* (1965, CR 87) we find indirect references to the Second World War. In addition, *Eight Student Nurses* (1966, CR 130), *Dead* (1963, CR 9), and, though hidden, even *Secretary* (1964, CR 14; confirmed in Richter 2011b: 108) present the same connection to death. Finally, we find more recent works such as *September* (2005, CR 891-5), which depicts the twin towers, the *October 18, 1977* series, which deals with the RAF, and book editions after the Iraq invasion such as *War Cut* (2004, editions CR 124) that are explicitly concerned with death and suffering in recent history. As Shapiro has it,

> Victims of violent death, impassively rendered, have consistently appeared as topics in Richter's work. For example, *Dead*, 1963, the painting of an iceberg, was based on a newspaper report of a man found drowned at sea. Twenty-five years later, a similar title was used for one of the Baader-Meinhof paintings. Another early painting, *Oswald*, 1964, depicting presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, was painted the year after Kennedy's death. Richter's portraits, *Eight Student Nurses*, 1966, who were killed in Chicago by serial murderer Richard Speck, were based on photographs of the nurses that had been printed in the popular press. His more recent still lifes of skulls and candles are meditations on death and loss. (Shapiro 1992: 17)

But there is more: many abstract paintings, such as the *Grey* paintings (1970, CR 247/1-16), as well as (indirectly) the Caspar David Friedrich–inspired *Forest* series (2005, CR 892/1-12, figure 16), can be related to death through their reference to meaninglessness and ending. Finally, the more recent

series *Strontium* (2004, CR 888, figure 15) and *Silicate* (2003, CR 885/1-5) imply subtle relations to destruction through their nuclear dimension. It is interesting to note that Storr overlooks the deadly dimension of *Strontium* (Storr 2010: 61).

In what follows, we need to pay more attention to the dialectic relation between death and hope that determines Richter's work, though we already partly dealt with the one of his meditations on death in the chapter on human corruptibility that is presented in the Meinhof portrait. Though commentators have seen that both death and faith play a significant role in Richter's work, reflections that bind together both life and painting, and art and existence beyond the *October 18, 1977* series are rare. As I will argue in the following, these dimensions are tied together through the relationship between the figurative and abstract dimensions in Richter's work, which can be understood through the role of beauty that functions as the hinge between figurative and abstract "models" of reality. In addition, the topics of faith and hope are directly interwoven with the human category of death, since, as I will point out, the only way to overcome the problem of how to act in a world that is so concerned with death and the end of everything is faith, which, in turn, confirms our earlier thesis that there is something "protestant" in Richter. This time, however, we need to deal with this "protestant" character of Richter's art not only in regard to how he deals with sensuousness in his paintings but also in regard to where the *force* of his painting praxis and his deep commitments to meaning stem from. In this vein, it is also noteworthy that Richter's entire studio functions like a Renaissance studio (with archive, assistants, scientific assistant, etc.) and that Richter talks about being a painter like a profession with duties (for this, also see Adriani in Richter 2008b: 14). Some commentators have argued that Richter is not committed by anything because of his "plural" style switches and because of his neutral distance toward that which he paints. In contrast, I contend that this is wrongheaded, inasmuch as Richter is one of the most deeply committed artists in existence who still believes in the traditional force of art. Consequently, the problems of action and death are echoed in Richter's conception of painting and art. Since we are living in times in which art and painting no longer seem to be possible, the praxis of painting turns itself into acts of faith, commitment, and hope.

According to Adorno, whom we can utilize for giving us a seismographic overview of our own situation, that is, the experience of the modern world after the catastrophe of Auschwitz, our times are deeply related to the experience of

death, which is something that Adorno called a *metaphysical experience*. Let us first see what he says in a famous passage of his *Negative Dialectics:*

> That the metaphysics of death degenerated either into advertising for the heroic death or into the triviality of the pure repetition of what is unmistakable, namely, that everyone has to die, its entire ideological bad state of affairs, is very likely based on the enduring frailty of human consciousness to this day, which cannot stand up to the experience of death, perhaps cannot even accept it at all. . . . The current metaphysics of death is nothing but the powerless solace of society over the fact that through social transformations, human beings came to be deprived of what was once supposed to have made death bearable to them, the feeling of its epic unity with the rounded life. But it may have only transfigured the domination of death by the weariness of the elderly and those sated with life, who for that reason believe it right to die, because their toil-filled previous life was indeed no life at all and stole from them the power of resisting death. In the socialized society however, in the inescapably dense web of immanence, human beings perceive death solely as something external and alien to them, without illusions as to its commensurability with their life. They cannot absorb the fact that they must die. An oblique, severed piece of hope clings to this: precisely because death does not, as in Heidegger, constitute the entirety of existence, one experiences, so long as one is not senile, death and its emissaries, illnesses, as heterogenous, ego-alien. (Adorno 1998/6: 361)

What Adorno points out in this rather complicated quote are two aspects of the modern experience: (1) modern culture turned the essence of death either into empty heroism that is disconnected from any social context or into a meaningless and positivistic event that defines humans as a species; (2) the modern experience of death as something that remains external and alien to individuals no longer can be integrated into the entirety of human existence and remains a foreign element. However, this foreign element is related, according to Adorno, to a central aspect of death that especially in modern philosophy (such as existentialism) is suppressed, namely, that which *remains* foreign even to death: the *corpse*. The corpse, for Adorno, is the part of death that escapes idealized versions of death and dying.

Adorno comes to the conclusion that a different form of materialist philosophy is needed, namely, one that is based on the experience of what he calls the "corpse," that is, the experience of that which cannot be integrated in social consciousness, which remains nonidentical, and which cannot be consumed by modern culture, modern society, or its accompanying philosophical ideologies

(such as existentialism and positivism). Not surprisingly, Adorno also has in mind the modern experience of dead bodies that are the result of wars and conflicts and which are so central for modern depictions of war and militarized conflicts. This aspect is decisive for Richter, since Richter's works that deal with human death are meditations on death that understand death as something that remains foreign to consciousness and meaningfulness. For Richter, death functions as a "reminder" of something that cannot be integrated into a framework of meaningfulness, and, as such, death functions as that which triggers reflection in the form of painting. As Richter underlines in several interviews, the issue of death "haunted" him. He says the following in an interview about the *October 18, 1977* series:

> In the early 1960s, having just come over from the GDR, I naturally declined to summon up any sympathy for the aims and methods of the Red Army Faction [RAF]. I was impressed by the terrorists' energy, their uncompromising determination and their absolute bravery; but I could not find it in my heart to condemn the State for its harsh response. That is what States are like; and I had known other, more ruthless ones. The deaths of the terrorists, and the related events both before and after, stand for a horror that distressed me and has haunted me as unfinished business ever since, despite all my efforts to suppress it. (Richter 2009a: 202)

In Richter, death is something that escapes the attempt to "store it away," insofar as it defies meaning; moreover, his paintings are not only interpretations of the general meaning of death, but also of how death functions as a motivation for action and painting. The experience of the corpse is especially visible in the paintings entitled *Dead* (1988, CR 669-1, figure 9) and the two paintings entitled *Man Shot Down* (1988, CR 669-2/3, figure 10), which are part of the *October 18, 1977* series, as these paintings show the dead Meinhof and Baader. All of these five paintings, however, present human death as something that comes out and presents itself in the body alone, given that they are primarily presentations of bodies: as corpses. As I already pointed out in Chapter 4, which dealt with the Meinhof portrait (1988, CR 672-1, figure 11), we should not underestimate that the titles of the paintings do not refer to Meinhof and Baader; rather, they refer to a universal issue and, thus, to something essential. Though the titles should not be overestimated, as they almost always refer to generalities, in the case of portraits, however, these title choices point toward that which I called before "essentialization" and "idealization." For only through these forms of transcendence can paintings be truth related. As one commentator has it,

"like other artists and writers before him, Richter elevates enlightenment from the 'ideological' realm of politics to a realm of truth, namely, aesthetics. Truth may be brought to reside in the aesthetical realm, for it is here that human experience can be reflected in all its ambiguity" (Crawford 2009: 210). The paintings of corpses that are part of the *October 18, 1977* series are central for this claim.

The human experience and the truth content of these paintings, however, despite the historical setting in which they are embedded, are primarily reflected in the paintings themselves and in their *internal* essentialization. For example, Richter shows the head in *Dead* as being *totally* isolated from its context (figure 9). The head is represented and, hence, interpreted *as* an isolated head. We see, in other words, a head that is isolated from *any* context, insofar as we cannot tell where the head is located, whether other people are around, what the weather is like, or when, why, and how the head ended up where it is depicted. In addition, the head is separated from the rest of the body and *as* head it is singled out, which points to a focus on thinking and on something "ideal," especially if we take into account that we cannot really see the eyes. Indeed, we do not see any part of the body below the neck line, which could be understood as a hidden pointer to an execution (it was publically debated whether the German state had killed the imprisoned RAF members in Stammheim). The "execution," however, points to a more general issue: the head is *cut off*, that is, the ideals are *cut off* from the rest of what was once a "whole" human being. We do not see hands and legs, which means that any *activity* and *action* escape the painting. Finally, we do not see things like fashion or clothes. Accordingly, what this painting presents to us in its representation of human and social *separation* comes to the forefront through that which we do *not* see, which leads to a total disconnect between the dead head and the circumstances that could further describe or specify the head and relate it to a "situation" or "story." The formal structure of *Dead* tends toward an essentialization and idealization of its content, which points to that which *remains* when we die, namely, the corpse as something that is *cut off* from life and activity. Of course, as we argued in regard to the Meinhof portrait, we can also find the representation of a "world" that is based not only upon a total social isolation of the head depicted but also on a total existential isolation. The connection between action and person usually indicates some kind of personal character. Accordingly, by neglecting the entire horizon of action, these paintings show death as *characterless*. The effect of essentialization and removal from all context, I submit, is best understood as a *positive* determination of the content, which is primarily

philosophical and not necessarily related to German history (though it is of course *also* related to this aspect). There is something general, if not universal, in these paintings, and Richter indicates this through the removal of the entire narrative dimension *in* the paintings (though the narrative is present in the background). Through the isolation of the head, the personal character of the depicted person becomes invisible, which in turn leads once more to the importance of distance and nearness in Richter's work. On the one hand, the viewer is distanced from the painting since the *affective* relation seems to be removed from it. For example, we do not have *empathy* toward the dead head, since empathy or other emotional relations are only possible if we can connect the person in the image with the result of some action. What we *might* see is the *result* of action—a *dead* result, something cut off, that is, a "thing" that is no longer alive. On the other hand, however, the nearness of *being* dead is brought to the forefront, as in both *Dead* and *Man Shot Down,* death is represented and interpreted as something *decisive*—"all is over," as Kierkegaard puts it in his *At the Graveside*. The representation that is built upon separation *as such* indicates the *final* decision and a point of no return. Accordingly, the image is also not simply about a "head" or a dead person ultimately; rather, it is about the *quality* of being dead in relation to *what* is dead, namely, the head and all the "ideals" that might once have populated the mind in front of us. We find a metaphysics of the corpse in these images. The image, put differently, tries to achieve the impossible, by trying to be an image of death (and not simply of dying or of a dead body). This decisiveness of death, this "all is over," is truly frightening, and we can see here that the nearness and tension to the distancing effect is formed by the *meditative* quality of these paintings. The corpse indicates the total removal from everything, which is to say, it indicates its total removal from all hope. It cuts us off from the future and the past. In contrast to *Youth Portrait*, there are no eyes that would point us toward the inside and the past or toward an open future. The uncertainty of hope is countered by the certainty of being dead. Nothing comes after it. Moreover, the head and the shot body no longer seem to be part of any struggle *with* death, which could be taken as an indicator of a heroic dimension in the person as an agent. All agency, however, is removed and therefore death does not seem to be something that one has a chance against, so to speak. Instead of showing how humans can transcend death by heroically struggling with it (which can be seen in a famous picture from Holger Meins that shows Meins at his deathbed; for this, see Collenberg 2008), these images are the opposite. Richter paints images of the power of death over life. Indeed, death is presented here as something that has *priority*

over life; it is the absolute master. Finally, the isolation of the object leads to a meditating effect on the side of the object: a farewell. As Richter puts it,

> I wanted to say something different: the pictures are also a leave-taking, in several respects. Factually: these specific persons are dead; as a general statement, death is leave-taking. And then ideologically: a leave-taking from a specific doctrine of salvation and, beyond that, from the illusion that unacceptable circumstances of life can be changed by this conventional expedient of violent struggle (this kind of revolutionary thought and action is futile and passé). (Richter 2009a: 213)

Richter then goes on to state that without a general human perspective, his paintings would not make sense. In relation to the Meinhof portrait, I already argued that Richter addresses human corruptibility *in general* in these paintings. This is underlined by the fact that Richter reported that the topic of the RAF interested him because *all of us* are somehow related to them as terrorists, to their ideals, and to their failures. As one commentator has it, "these people, so alien to us, are human, all too human. They are not like us. They *are* us" (Danchev 2010: 100). Richter himself is always careful to point to the universal human component in his work. In an interview about the *October 18, 1977* series he was asked "*So you consider the RAF* [Red Army Faction] *dead as the victims of their own ideology?*" and Richter responds with "Yes, certainly. Not the victims of any specific ideology of the left or of the right, but of the ideological posture as such. This has to do with the everlasting human dilemma in general: to work for a revolution and fail . . ." (Richter 2009a: 232).

Nevertheless, in addition to the essentialization of human dilemmas, and almost dialectically related to it, Richter carefully works in historical associations that push the essential toward a historical dimension in art. In the case of *Dead*, these associations are related to depictions of the dead Jesus Christ from Mantegna to Böcklin and Hodler and to funeral depictions of dead historical figures, such as the famous depiction of the dead Liebknecht by Käthe Kollwitz (1920) as well as the famous photographic depiction of Che Guevara by Freddy Alborta (1967). The most visible reference is the famous painting of the dead Christ entitled *Christ in his Grave* by Holbein (1521), though in this painting the entire body is visible. Both Holbein's Christ and Richter's *Dead* are depicted as laying down and from the side, with their face upwardly oriented. The dead body as one that is finally no longer "breathing" is close to the earth again, which is indicated through the body lying on the ground. The loss of any "upright" posture indicates that that which characterizes humans anthropologically has come to an end. However, the isolation that is connected to Richter's *Dead* is

not only a formal feature, since the painting presents us with an interpretation of human death that views it as *isolating*. In contrast to Kollwitz, for example, the dead head in Richter's painting is *absolutely* isolated, since it is removed from culture, society, history, and life, as well as other human beings. For example, we do not see mourning people in the painting. Instead, there is only *Dead* and us, or *you*, as the sole audience. This isolating feature of death becomes visible in and through a meditation on death, and one could say that this pushes the tension between life and death to its utmost height, given that the corpse as the "meaningless" and "breathless" material in its absolute otherness remains an indicator of what cannot be integrated into social and human existence. It also cannot be integrated into our meditation on these paintings, as it is that which "triggers" the meditation. It expresses nicely the experience that Adorno called the underlying experience of a modern philosophical materialism, namely, the idea that only in reference to the dead body and to the corpse, does it make sense to speak of life.

Faith

The materialism of the corpse is also the issue and concern of the two paintings entitled *Man Shot Down* (figure 10), which, similar to *Dead*, isolates the body from any circumstance, but, in contrast to *Dead*, shows the body in its entirety and in a pose that also opens up historical associations, such as the famous painting by Manet entitled *L'home Mort* (under a different title, *Dead Torero*) (1864). This should be understood as an indicator that these paintings interpret death as something that is related to painting and the praxis of art itself.

> The ones that weren't paintable were the ones I did paint. The dead. To start with, I wanted more to paint the whole business, the world as it then was, the living reality—I was thinking in terms of something big and comprehensive. But then it all evolved quite differently, in the direction of death. And that's really not all that unpaintable. Far from it, in fact. Death and suffering have always been an artistic theme. Basically, it's *the* theme. We've eventually managed to wean ourselves away from it, with our nice, tidy lifestyle. (Richter 2009a: 227)

Accordingly, the relationship between death and faith as well as between death and hope is carried out in these paintings by idealizing the praxis of painting itself. Richter wants to claim that to some extent painting as such is related to death. As the RAF group failed with its moral ambitions and ended up in

total meaninglessness and isolation from the social world, so painting and art encounter the same difficulty, since painting as art (and not as a hobby) tries to establish the truth, tries to be meaningful, and tries to produce paintings that are not about nothing. Accordingly, the problem of meaning is not only related to the content of paintings but also related to the praxis of painting. As Richter puts it,

> Of course I constantly despair at my own incapacity, at the impossibility of ever accomplishing anything, of painting a valid, true picture or even knowing what such a thing ought to look like. But then I always have the hope that, if I persevere, it might one day happen. And this hope is nurtured every time something appears, a scattered, partial, initial hint of something which reminds me of what I long for, or which conveys a hint of it—although often enough I have been fooled by a momentary glimpse that then vanishes, leaving behind only the usual thing. (Richter 2009a: 140)

Moreover, as Richter underlines in a letter in 1961, he encountered the art scene in the West as nihilistic: "it seems as if our times are characterized by the making of things that are without meaning and without morality, without doctrine, and they no longer desire anything" (Richter 2011b: 48).

We need to discuss, then, the question of how one can act (or paint!) in a hopeless and haunted world. As we know, Richter repeatedly pointed out that he conceives of painting as the highest form of faith and hope. How can we philosophically reconstruct the problem of how an agent (or an artist!) can go on and can act (or paint!) in a world in which the latter no longer seems possible. Just as the RAF terrorists had to act in a world in which (political and moral) action no longer seemed possible, so must the artist paint in a world in which painting no longer seems possible. It is precisely at this point where the individual enters the picture; for understanding the possibility of a meaningful art praxis presupposes that the painter appropriates and "translates" its universal determination and abstract ought into something that belongs *to* herself, which we could translate as "this should be done *by me*," "this is right *for me*," "*I* must externalize myself" or "*it is me who* must do this." *I should paint!* It is in this sense that the activity of painting appears to the artist as a *moral* act, since the only inner motivation that remains in a world of truly autonomous art is the impulse and the "*ought*" to paint. In regard to the modern artist, we might put it this way: In a world in which painting objectively seems to be impossible because of its relativism, its pragmatism, and the officially and unofficially pronounced "end of painting," the artist must translate his or her general idea of art into

something that the individual artist can *in fact* do. As Richter himself puts it, we are confronted today with the end of painting, which leads to an overall "laughable role of painting" (Richter 2009a: 493) in our culture. In other words, we no longer believe in it. With Hegel, we could say that painting belongs to the past and became inessential for our modern culture. As Richter put it in 1988, "We have lost the great idea, the Utopias . . . , everything that creates meaning" (Richter 2009a: 201).

Now, given this situation, the problem is the following: how does a subject know that the possibility of acting is not a mere chimera and a mere appearance, especially in a commodity-driven world and in a world that reduces any attempt to be *serious* to an ironic and entertaining activity? How does the artist know that he is able to *realize* himself as an artist and how does he know that his self-determination is not an illusion and something that only belongs to his "inner" world? How can he escape the illusion of a meaningful activity? Following some ideas of the protestant tradition, such as those of Luther and Fichte, we should say that someone who finds herself in a world of neglect *never* knows in a *propositional form* whether she can act or not; furthermore, in general, humans will never find a theoretical proof for the *reality* of action; rather, as a presupposition for every moral action we take, something must lead and force us to *believe* that moral self-realization is more than a theoretical concept. The argument is clear: propositional "knowledge" of whether we are able to realize ourselves as a moral consciousness *in* this world is only possible *after* the action is done. The artist's situation is similar, insofar as in a modern situation in which the experience of death has been the determining experience and in which the status of art has been reduced to a "subjective" activity, art no longer seems to have any broader cultural meaning for the artist. This, in turn, translates into the deep seriousness of Richter's activities. As we know, Richter tries to avoid irony, since this would result in being unable to take anything, including himself, seriously. Florian Klinger has put forward the thesis that Richter works out a pragmatic model between an open pluralistic "everything goes" mentality and an essentialist conception of art (Klinger 2013). Though it is correct that Richter tries to successfully operate within a field that is no longer determined by a transcendental "measure" [*Mass*], I believe Klinger's position underestimates Richter's attempt to react to the *objective* loss of measure with a *subjective* projection of measure, which, through faith, is still related to "good" art and "beautiful" art. The meditative quality of Richter's work and the *will* to truth (even if this is carried out as a form of skepticism) are visible in almost

everything he produced for more than half a century. As he puts it in a famous note: "Art is the pure realization of religious feeling, capacity for faith, longing for God. . . . The ability to believe is our outstanding quality, and only art adequately translates it into reality. But when we assuage our need for faith with an ideology we court disaster." (Richter 2009a: 200).

We should neither overestimate nor underestimate Richter's statement, but we should consider the fact that in a recent interview, Richter points out that his attitude toward religion changed over the last decade (Richter 2009a: 472), leading him to take on the much discussed design for one of the window panels for the Cologne cathedral. Though Richter tried to distance himself from the Christian iconographic context in this work, he did not reject the role of light and beauty in that commissioned work, and he also accepted that it would be placed in a cathedral that is supposed to last forever. Accordingly, Richter accepted the idea that his piece was made for *eternity*. Thomas Struth, Richter's former student and now himself one of the most important contemporary artist photographers, pointed out after the retrospective in New York in 2002:

> But it also made me aware of how this humor has faded. Over time Richter has become exceedingly earnest and completely serious. Now that we are overwhelmed by photography and it has become ubiquitous in contemporary art, one might perhaps look at these paintings qua paintings for a kind of truth. (Struth 2002: 160)

At this point, it is important to note that we should slightly change the terminology. In German, there is only one word for belief and faith, which is "*Glaube.*" Accordingly, "faith" is identical with the agent's *conviction* that (moral) action is not a mere illusion or inner appearance, and that the proposition that one believes is itself not an illusion. Put differently, faith is the condition for the possibility of taking oneself as a practical being, that is, of *being* serious. The attempt to transform the world in a world that appears to resist transformation presupposes the construction of oneself as an entity that *is able to realize* itself in the world. As Richter puts it, it is the faith that he can "after all effect something through painting" (Richter 2009a: 181). This *projection toward the future* is a form of faith. Faith here means a special form of certainty about the possibility of realizing one's ideals in the world, which directly follows from the gap between the *present* abstract state of the agent and her *future* reality. *Faith closes this gap between presence and future.* Accordingly, if we apply it to Richter's situation, faith has an *existential* quality that is related to death, given that *in the moment*

of action, one no longer is able to be skeptical about the act itself, that is, in the moment of painting Richter eliminates doubt. The reason for this is the following: if the agent would have doubts about her action when she is about to act, she would *reflect* on the rightness or wrongness of her action. Accordingly, her consciousness would again be split into two levels, where the second level would be the object of the first level of consciousness. Such a consciousness would be a form of doubt, inasmuch as doubt is a reflective second-order consciousness *about* one's beliefs. For example, if I *really* (and not only hypothetically) doubt whether writing this book is the right thing to do, then I would ask myself in the form of a second-order consciousness whether my first-order consciousness is right or wrong. Accordingly, the certainty that we refer to in "conviction" is not a form of propositional knowledge; rather, it is an affirming principle that transforms skeptical knowledge into something indubitable and allows us to act in a world that *objectively* no longer allows us to do what we do. Schjeldahl hits the nail on the head when he writes that Richter's "moral aspiration . . . , though opposed in politics, seems strongly marked by the yearning for purity of will, the scorn for worldly compromise and the iconoclastic suspicion of merely symbolic expression that are extreme traditions of Northern European Protestant thought" (Schjeldahl 1990: 255).

We can easily see that this general structure of action based on faith is *precisely* Richter's situation, which, despite all distancing and all attempts to appear "neutral" about his own activity as an *artist* who is interested in the *truth*, leads to the deep "searching" quality of his paintings, which the viewers can sense especially now, after more than fifty years of virtually covering the entire "world" in his paintings. The search for truth in a world that seems to make this search increasingly difficult is a deeply human and existential dimension in Richter's art. As Adorno has it in relation to art and death:

> Artworks were always meant to endure; it is related to their concept, that of objectivation. Through duration art protests against death; the paradoxically transient eternity of artworks is the allegory of an eternity bare of semblance. Art is the semblance of what is beyond death's reach. To say that no art endures is as abstract a dictum as that of the transience of all things earthly; it would gain content only metaphysically, in relation to the idea of resurrection. (Adorno 1997: 27)

Moreover, Richter's meditations on death are also related to his confrontation with the early "death and disaster" works by Warhol. As Foster has shown in a brilliant essay (Foster 1996), the poststructuralist reading of pop art as

a celebration of the surface of the image is wrongheaded, which is especially visible in the traumatic encounter with death that we find throughout Warhol's work as well as in Richter's work. Foster speaks of a "traumatic realism" (Foster 1996: 39) that we find in Warhol's early series entitled *Disaster Series* (though Warhol first intended to call it *Death in America*). The series entails images of the Birmingham race riots, of car crashes, and, most famously, of the electric chair. However, Warhol's motto that there is nothing else in his works than himself is, in a weird twist, a reversal of Richter, since Richter obsessively tries to eradicate traces of his subjectivity. We should not forget, though, that Warhol's reference to himself is ambiguous, as his entire work can be read as an emptying out of himself as the absolute object of his work. Warhol's motto *I am a Machine* expresses the inner dialectic of a subjectivity that is *so extremely* subjective that it is no longer able to contain anything and thus it turns into an empty placeholder. Here, the subject turns into something a-subjective. Moreover, as an empty placeholder, the subject becomes universal. As an individual, Warhol disappears behind his diaper boxes and soups cans. Similar to Richter and despite Warhol's narcissism, the artwork becomes central again. Foster further argues that the fixation that shines through the endless repetitions in Warhol's work displays a fixation with the *real* and that we should therefore reject the reading of pop art as something that remains only at the surface of the world. The commodity form that rules our world is made visible in Warhol's work: "Warhol, though he grounded his art in the ubiquity of the packaged commodity, produced his most powerful work by dramatizing the breakdown of commodity exchange. These were instances in which the mass-produced image as the bearer of desires was exposed in its inadequacy by the reality of suffering and death" (Crow 2001: 51).

Though in Richter we do not find the relationship between our commodity culture and the "real" of death and suffering, we find a similar relationship between the image and traumatic events in *political* and moral history, which is more central for Richter than for Warhol. This political dimension, which Richter subtly reflects in his work on central experiences after the Second World War, is especially visible in works such as the *October 18, 1977* series, the paintings of bombed German cities at the end of the Second World War, the book edition *War Cut*, and, most recently, the painting *September*, which explicitly and implicitly reflects the events surrounding the attacks on New York City and the World Trade Center in 2001.

Richter's engagement with general human topics such as death remains extremely close to an engagement with the real as something that traumatically inscribes itself in modern human experience; however, the relationship between

trauma and painting, as we saw earlier, is achieved through the *transformation* of photography into painting. As I argued earlier, only the photograph can cut through the symbolic level and through language, whereas painting can open the meaning dimension by turning that which is external in photography into an image. Therefore, against Foster, I think that Richter's work deals with the *essentialization* of what remains traumatic on the level of experience. Put differently, it is wrong to identify the level of representation and interpretation that the paintings bring about with the *real* traumatic qualities of the experience itself. As such, the paintings *of* these experiences, as argued above, *bracket* the traumatic "reminder" and attempt to render it intelligible. In this vein, Foster makes the following point: "Just as the *punctum* in Gerhard Richter lies less in details than in the pervasive blurring of the image, so the *punctum* in Warhol lies less in details than in this repetitive 'popping' of the image" (Foster 1996: 43). I think that we should reject this claim because Foster conflates the photograph and the representation of the photograph in an image. Paintings cannot have a *punctum* because they cannot break through the level of meaning as photographs can, at least not in the way in which Barthes envisioned it. As Storr puts it, "painting counters a myth of photography; the discretion of painting is opposed to the voyeurism of the camera" (Storr 2010: 53). Paintings can deal *with* traumatic aspects of experiences and can thereby be *about* those aspects, but they cannot, *as* paintings, be based on the *punctum*, for, as Barthes argues, the *punctum* is only possible if we understand the photograph as an intentional relation, that is, as memory. The *punctum* remains untouched by language or meaning and therefore, paradoxically, it can "touch" us. As long as paintings are *somehow* related to human intentionality, they cannot be based on the fixed memory relation that the photograph embodies, since paintings always already have destabilized the fixed relation of the photograph (for this, see Chapter 2). Accordingly, we need to extend Foster's analysis toward the confrontation of the traumatic and *real* aspect of the photograph and its opening up in painting; and we should speak instead of trauma in painting as a *reflective trauma*.

As we saw in the last chapter, Richter often deals with a subtle dialectic of distance and nearness, and the same holds true for his meditations on death, hope, past, and future. As one commentator rightly puts it, "whereas Warhol was frigid toward his subjects, Richter has the remoteness of depression" (Bonami in Fogle 2005: 26). It is crucial to note, though, that Bonami employs the phrase "remoteness of *depression*," since it is this depressive aspect that pushes us from a remote and distanced position back into the real issue that is at stake in paintings

that deal with human death, including the *October 18, 1977* series. The depressive quality, as Bonami overlooks, is an *emotional* quality and, accordingly, it cannot simply be interpreted as a matter of distance. The confrontation of the desire to know and the distancing effect is presented and worked out in many paintings, such as in the *October 18, 1977* paintings, in *November* (1989, CR 701, figure 12), and—masterfully—in *Betty* (1988, CR 663-5, figure 8).

The two-sidedness of this dialectic is, then, also related to the hopeful and positive quality in Richter's art. As his painting praxis reveals and forms a world that is broadly "protestant" and is based on the belief in the force of painting, so his paintings present an image of hope. Richter's longing for "a better world—that is, for the opposite of misery and hopelessness"—has a *subjectively* religious quality: "I might also call it redemption. Or hope—the hope that I can after all effect something through painting" (Richter 2009a: 181). We need to understand that through this quality of hope, Richter's work contains a *negative* and *critical* aspect through which he negates the given world as one that simply needs to be accepted. Beauty transcends the world: "A painting can help us to think something that goes beyond this senseless existence. That's something art can do" (Richter 2009a: 431). Accordingly, beauty is always *critical* and never affirmative. As Marcuse has it, "the sensuous force of the Beautiful keeps the promise alive—memory of the happiness that once was, and that seeks its return" (Marcuse 1978: 68). As Richter himself has it: "It is impossible to exist without idealism. I always imagined that I was one of the few who could live without idealism in order to discover later that all that time I was full of illusions. Even when I was against it, I *believed* in my opposition to it." (Richter in Storr 2002b: 307). What Richter calls "idealism" here is nothing else than a deep commitment to the meaningfulness of art as something that is *possibly* truth related and, accordingly, is more than just another consumer entertainment praxis. Art is, according to Richter, the "highest form of hope" (Richter 2009a: 488). A similar point is made by Marcuse in his aesthetics in which he tried to reject positions that deny the universal aspect of art as something that is able to transcend the given toward a better life, the Good, and a liberated humanity: "art shows us how to see things that are constructive and good" (Richter 2011a: 24). As Marcuse nicely puts it:

> Under the law of the aesthetic form, the given reality is necessarily *sublimated*: the immediate content is stylized, the "data" are reshaped and reordered in accordance with the demands of the art form, which requires that even the representation of death and destruction invoke their need for hope—a need rooted in the new consciousness embodied in the work of art. (Marcuse 1978: 7)

This surprising statement by Marcuse establishes a utopian motivation for the practice of art that is based on transformation and, since it is no longer confined to a particular social vision, it must be the *religious* dimension of the practice to which Richter alludes. It is surprising that Marcuse never refers to this religious dimension, since (especially in the protestant tradition) many examples of what he has in mind can be found. Richter seems to be aware of it when he writes:

> Art is not a substitute religion: it is a religion (in the true sense of the word: "binding back", "binding" to the unknowable, transcending reason, transcendent being). But the church is no longer adequate as a means of affording experience of the transcendental, and of making religion real—and so art has been transformed from a means into the sole provider of religion: which means religion itself. (Richter 2009a: 34)

Apparently, without being aware of this fact, Richter clearly stands in the midst of an idealist tradition that is based on the assumption that the struggle with meaningfulness in a world of meaninglessness comes about through the art praxis itself, that is, through that praxis that *forms* a content. Form, as I argued in the first chapter, is a *becoming* (for this, also see Klinger 2013: 70). As Marcuse puts it, "promise, too, is a quality of aesthetic form, or more precisely, of the beautiful as a quality of aesthetic form. The promise is wrested from established reality" (Marcuse 1978: 46). Once again, we can see here again why the *October 18, 1977* series is so central for Richter's entire oeuvre. It is central because in it the historical dimension of both political and moral experience is connected to human existence, to the artist, and to painting as art. Richter sees parallels between himself as an artist and the terrorists; not because of the political dimension, but, instead, because of the moral dimension of a political idealism that turns what is deadly into a *meaningless* praxis. The hopes and anxieties of the Baader-Meinhof group are similar to Richter's hopes and anxieties. Accordingly, what we find here is the struggle for a perspective that can transcend the given world and is able to remain faithful to the unknown outcome despite the anxiety that painting does not lead to anything and is merely empty play. In the words of Marcuse,

> The possible "other" that appears in art is trans-historical inasmuch as it transcends any and every specific historical situation. Tragedy is always and everywhere while the satyr play follows it always and everywhere; joy vanishes faster than sorrow. This insight, inexorably expressed in art, may well shatter faith in progress but it may also keep alive another image and another goal of praxis, namely the reconstruction of society and nature under the principle of increasing the human potential for happiness. (Marcuse 1978: 56)

The fact that Richter's work requires us to deal with a *subjectively*, that is, quasiprotestant version of faith, comes out in another aspect of Richter's art that commentators have seen before but have rarely seen in its *systematic* connection to faith and hope, namely, the topic of *doubt* (an exception is Tojner in Richter 2005c: 13). The subjective dimension of this is well expressed by Richter himself. Asked whether he believes in God, he responds the following way: "Well, in the first place, I believe that you always have to believe. It's the only way; after all we both believe that we will do this exhibition. But I can't believe in God, as such, he's either too big or too small for me, and always incomprehensible, unbelievable" (Richter 2011a: 11). Faith, as we said above, can only become operative as a "meta-certainty" if it is confronted with the open and uncertain outcome of the moral action or, in this case, with the open and uncertain outcome of painting. Faith, at least in the protestant tradition, cannot be the result of an argument, though the conclusion that God exists or does not exist can come from an argument. Doubt, then, is not a metaphysical concept; rather, it is systematically tied to the problem of faith itself. This doubt about the idealism that Richter painted in his *October 18, 1977* series is addressed in works directly following the *October 18, 1977* series. As Shapiro has convincingly argued, the three massive paintings *January* (1989, CR 669), *December* (1989, CR 700), and *November* (1989, CR 701, figure 12) are each related to the *October 18, 1977* series and should be taken as a further reflection on the problem of ending:

> Painted during the months of January to May 1989, the diptychs evoke the mood of winter and reflect the psychological state the artist had been in since beginning the *Oktober* paintings. The painter titled them after they were complete, as if they moved backwards in time from *January* to *December* to *November*. The artist leads the viewer to think back to the figurative *Oktober* paintings which preceded them and which appear connected to them in mood if not in meaning. Just as the *Oktober* paintings seemed to resurrect the powerful shock of the *German Autumn* of 1977, so do the abstract diptychs suggest powerful forces moving beneath the surface of events and appearances. In that regard and in that view of reality, the diptychs and the *Baader-Meinhof* paintings are entwined. (Shapiro 1992: 24)

Richter's paintings that follow the RAF series, in particular the painting *November* (figure 12), are reflections on loss and death, too, but in relation to an abstract quality of painting. As one commentator has it, these paintings are "abstract images of death" (Schneede 2006: 22). A more concrete sense of this is visible in *September* (2005, CR 891-5), which—scratched and hidden—show the twin

towers when they were destroyed in 2001. The tactility and materiality of the canvas are laid over an almost disappearing schema of the twin towers, which, according to Storr, produces the effect of "presenting a highly real and physical dissolution" (Storr 2010: 48). The theme of death and dissolution, however, is especially visible in regard to the more recent paintings on microstructures, such as *Strontium* (2004, CR 888, figure 16), which is also related to *universal* human issues and not, as one might suspect, to something specific in this world. In regard to *Strontium*, Richter states: "the general dimension absolutely has to be there, otherwise it would be totally uninteresting" (Richter 2009a: 486). *Strontium* is taken from a *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* image entitled "*Atoms in Rank and File*" [*Atome in Reih und Glied*], which, as Nielsen points out, has a military connotation. In addition, as Nielsen argues, strontium-90 is related to nuclear weapons testing: "Its composition is ordered, computer mediated, and distanced, much like the ideology of modern warfare that emerged during the Cold War" (Nielsen 2011: 457). What we find then in even these "abstract" series is a formation of death as a problem for human existence. As Richter himself puts it,

> I have also thought at times that perhaps this really is a quite terrifying thematic, like getting closer to the end, in the direction of death and dissolution, down to the very elements, where all that is left are these dead atomic structures. And that would then be in keeping with the other works, with the *Glasscheiben*, which also have this side because they look like gates onto nothingness. There you have it. (Richter 2009a: 486)

The preeminence of gray (Zweite 2006: 13) in the *Silicate* and *Strontium* series, in addition, points back to the paintings of gray that Richter described as being connected to the experience of meaninglessness. One version of *Silicate*, as Armin Zweite has pointed out, reminds one of skulls (Zweite 2006: 43), which, in turn, makes the universal dimension immediately visible: "to paint a skull is to do 'the portrait of everybody in the world'" (Foster 1996: 51).

Let us have a second look at *Strontium* (figure 16). As I argued in Chapter 3, this painting works out the tension between vision and size. The *horror vacui*—the anxiety related to nothingness and the obsession to *fill up* the emptiness—is related to the inverse sublime quality of the work since we are dealing with something that limits our imagination. In this case, the limitation is not related to magnitude, but, on the contrary, with inversed quantity, that is, with something that is *infinitely small*. The result is the "character of Allover" (Zweite 2007: 42) in combination with "contingent details" (Zweite 2007: 44) that we encounter in *Strontium* and *Silicate*. The *horror vacui* is also visible in

the so-called "Inpaintings" [*Vermalungen*] (for example, many paintings in CR 325-326), which we also find in the history of art.

This problem of the *horror vacui* reminds us of the problem of death in another aspect as well, namely, the ancient idea of becoming, that is, of "appearing" and "disappearing" for which the atomic and subatomic level has special significance, insofar as we usually assume that that which we call "reality" or "being" is made of something that does not appear as such. Once again, Richter's problem of absence and presence is one of the meaningful dimensions that works like *Strontium* present in their representation of "invisible" structures. We should also integrate the general "blur" aspect of Richter's paintings as one that belongs to this dialectic of what we could call the *dialectic of the in between*: in between visible and invisible, in between appearing and disappearing, and in between beginning and ending. In addition to the problem of reality and appearance, the ancients already knew that the problem of appearing and disappearing, of coming and going, of beginning and ending, is related to the problem of death as a *universal* category, that is, as one that is related to every being and the universe as such. It is in this sense that death becomes present in works such as *Strontium* as the "deadly" and frightening dimension of the subnuclear "world." According to the pre-Socratic philosophers, the word "thanatos" was already associated with that which "goes away" and with that which has an end. Whereas Anaximander, for example, assumed that there is ultimately no beginning or ending, since everything is enveloped by the "infinite," the *Aperion*, Heraclitus assumed that the primary principle of the universe is "becoming." In this sense, he is the first philosopher of death. In his fragment B21, we read the following: "All the things we see when awake are death, even as all we see in slumber are sleep." What Heraclitus has in mind is the inner finitude of everything that we encounter in the universe. Though "things" seem to be "there," in truth they are subjected to "thanatos" and are in a constant state of becoming. In three other fragments, we read: "for it is death to souls to become water, and death to water to become earth" (B36); "Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the others' death and dying the others' life" (B62); and "The death of fire is the birth of air, and the death of air is the birth of water" (B76), that is, Heraclitus speculates that that which is "dying" for one is "living" for another. This dialectical notion of life and death in which both are one and the same points to a conception of reality in which nothing remains the same and in which, ultimately, the reality is not "fixed," or "stable," nor is it forever present. In Heideggerian terms, Heraclitus tries to escape the assumption that being is *presence*.

In *Strontium,* we find a deep meditation of this problem (though not explicitly), inasmuch as (1) the "nuclear" make-up of reality is itself something that "falls apart." As Richter says in the quote above, Strontium is "dissolution" (The is is not); (2) the nuclear level, as we know, is frightening to humans, since it seems to be the case that that which makes up at least certain parts of the universe also has a deadly impact on life (at least if we encounter too much of it); (3) the problem of falling apart and nothingness is itself a frightening and "terrifying" (Richter) topic for humans, since we are confronted not only with our own freedom and faced with our own finitude, but even more with how our own existence is faced with the finitude of everything. The terrifying quality of *Strontium* and *Silicate* is also present in the visual overflow that these paintings produce on the side of the viewer, inasmuch as the attempt to perceive these gigantic works leads to de-balancing effects. *Strontium* deals with nothingness in the sense of *meaninglessness*, and since, as we saw, Richter is a "serious" artist, he rejects the view that we can understand this meaninglessness as an infinite "play" of forces. Death, as Kierkegaard puts it in his *Speech at a Graveside*, is the master of seriousness and forces us to reflect on ourselves and our presence in the world. "Strontium" refers to a specific type of yellow that is usually referred to as "strontium yellow" and is used in silicate paintings, that is, in paintings that are directly applied to walls. Indeed, silicate is the *binding* chemical that makes it possible to apply paint to a surface that would otherwise not allow for painting. When applied, the paint literally turns into stone. Accordingly, the terrifying quality of the substructure of perception and the reality is itself deeply intertwined with the process of painting: as the reality is somewhere between nothing and something, painting is located somewhere between nothing and something, insofar as the image during the process of painting, as I argued in Chapter 1, is a *becoming* and does not exist outside of the process itself. As Zweite has pointed out (Zweite 2007b), *Silicate* ultimately goes back to the problem of reality and knowledge in Richter (which I addressed in Chapter 3), which allows us to see that this problem is directly presented as a problem of painting itself, since *while* one paints, the problem of how something invisible can be made visible is part of the material activity of painting.

In Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates discusses the infinity of the soul and the finitude of life. He suggests that the philosopher should have a positive relation to death, as the separation of soul and body will allow the soul to see the infinite ideas that make up everything without the hindrance of the senses and the influence of the body. In this way, death is associated with "pure" ideas and as such it will

allow the soul, which desires to know, to see that which it desires in its ultimate truth. A philosopher, accordingly, strives toward the "one" during her lifespan in order to be as close as possible to the truth; as Socrates argues, she thereby prepares for death, overcomes anxiety, and is prepared for the transition. Being a philosopher is, according to this position, a preparation for death as an exercise in dying. Even more, philosophizing means to take on and to understand life as a process of dying.

In terms of painting, we might say with Elger that Richter's paintings "make the reality more manageable and perhaps even a little comprehensible" (Elger 2009: 24), and, as we should now add, his paintings make the reality more comprehensible through their relation to death. As we could see from the foregoing, with Richter's attempt to give painting and art an absolute meaning, and with his attempt to represent the "terrifying" aspect of reality, he takes on a Socratic project by representing death in all of its aspects (human projects and nature) to us. A central part of his work should therefore be understood as a *commentatio moris* (Cicero) or as *meditatio moris* (Seneca), despite the fact that Richter is not a Stoic. Even if this sounds foreign to most readers, we should understand Richter's painting praxis as *a preparation for death*. Socrates, of course, did not think that we should exercise suicide; rather, as philosophizing beings (and every soul is in principle desiring knowledge and therefore "philosophical"), we strive toward death naturally. Life, in this idealistic vision, is not driven by death understood as a material principle, such as our biological setup; instead, from the beginning on and from its essence life moves the soul toward death as the point from which it can turn or perhaps return to the truth. Some of this we find in Richter. However, let me underline that my position is not far from Elger's position, which is expressed when he refers to the *Grey* paintings as paintings that are "at the same time a symptom of a crisis and means to its defeat" (Elger 2002a: 270). Let us take into account that if philosophizing (and therefore painting in my analogy) does not mean that we should commit suicide, but, instead, means that we try to overcome the daily noise in order to come closest to the truth in life and to be best prepared for the truth and for the afterlife (so that we do not fall back into the shadow world, as Plato considers in *Phaedo*), then it is immediately visible how this vision is present in Richter's painting. For we should interpret Richter's attempt to overcome subjective traces in his art and to eradicate all traces of "emotions" and his personal desires as a similar move. In this way, Richter is very anti-Nietzschean, insofar as he tends to turn toward the ideal. Indeed, according to Richter's protestant world, in painting

one comes closest to the truth when we let all temptations go and we remain in distance to the world. As we know from our interpretation of *Reader* in the last chapter, though, the effect is twisted, insofar as this protestant worldview brings out our desire to be in "touch" with the world even more. Overall, Richter takes on the problem of death with a level of depth that we rarely see in contemporary art. The presence of death in his work becomes even more pertinent if we look at the many versions of the *still-life* genre that Richter has painted, one of the most beautiful of which is *Flowers* (1994, CR 815-2). An especially troubling version of this genre is *Lilies* (2000, CR 870-1). As Julia Gelshorn nicely put it, and in reference to Imdahl (to whom I referred in Chapter 1 of this book), in his still-life paintings, Richter builds up a "strong 'iconic tension' between the picture's 'transparency' and its 'opacity' by *intensifying* the 'iconic difference'" (Gelshorn 2006: 31). Consequently, the reflective quality of *Lilies* is the result of an image that represents an opening up of the photographic referent *and* the iconographic tradition to which it belongs through *painterly* means. The painting is able to reintroduce the *memento mori* into the picture through the opening up of the meaning horizon and the release of the photographic referent, despite that the distancing effect *seems* to introduce one of the oldest genres in the history of art. Richter's representation of death is ultimately even stronger because the distancing effect in this case is an expression of the "terrifying" nature of what is going on in the image: the Lilies are bending down, are losing their shape, the effect of which is strangely heightened by the light shining down on the flowers as if we are watching an actor *dying*. The entire background, as is so often occurring in Richter's painting, is formalistically separated into two color fields, which, again, *essentializes* the flowers. Whereas we do not find other traditional aspects in this painting such as music instruments, candles, skulls, fruit, etc.; instead, we see *only* the flowers. But we would do well to emphasize that this antinarrative aspect leads to an even stronger universalist meaning of the painting, since it focuses on one *thing* instead of many relations. The representational quality of these paintings stems from their non-functionalist and non-situational vision of the world that is embedded in them. This also explains why the titles of Richter's paintings work so well. In most cases, the titles function as *names* that are referring to things as their "labels." This procedure of naming that is involved in the representational process is not arbitrary and, to some extent, it is poetic if we take into account that naming is a process of a *calling forth* through which a thing *receives* its meaning. Just as we are familiar of speaking of Rilke's poetry as "thing poetry," in regard to Richter's photo-paintings we can, speak of *thing*

painting, insofar as that which the representation presents in most of Richter's paintings is typically a single thing and is rarely stories, relations, situations, events, developments, etc.

Shock

One of the most unsettling paintings are the three paintings that Richter painted of his son Moritz entitled *Moritz* (2000, CR 863-3, figure 14); while it might be true that *Moritz* has a biographical background and that it was Richter who—absent in the picture—took the photo of his son, which could indicate a modern story behind these paintings, such as the problem of the "absent father," I do not think that the biographical background of these three paintings are sufficient to understand what is presented *in* them. For what is presented in them seems to *break down* and *interrupt* the background information, insofar as it interrupts every narrative situation that might be contained in it. Thus Buchloh's attempt to take these paintings as Richter's attempt to revive paintings of intimacy in modern art via exceptions is not convincing, since these three paintings remove, as others do, the family structure from what they are about (Buchloh 2013).

Against the biographical interpretation, my counter position is that we find in this painting a subtle extension of the death theme, insofar as *Moritz* is about the unsettling encounter with reality. This unsettling moment in the painting is centered around the breakthrough of vision and is, again, related to the painting itself *as* a painting. Moreover, *Moritz* is an extremely poetic painting, if we understand "poetic" to mean that poetic speech *disrupts* everyday language by taking words out of their normal context and illuminating them in a new light. We find a similar structure in *Moritz*: for this painting disturbs our normal perception and illuminates that which it presents to us in a new light. This poetic moment, which we should not confuse with Novalis' term "poeticizing," is here even doubled, since the widely opened and apparently horrified moment of the eyes refers to the traumatic moment in which the usual and normal mode of vision no longer functions. The "horror" depicted here is the encounter with the real as something that cannot be integrated in the identity of a subject. This trauma, namely, the violent intrusion of something radically unexpected, something the subject was absolutely not ready for, and something that the subject cannot integrate in any way, is the "situation" that the painting interprets through the face of the toddler.

I agree with Zweite that Richter's "message" in these works transcends most of modern aesthetics because it works out a moment of humanness that we barely find in contemporary art (Zweite 2005: 40). These paintings make "the fragility and finitude of existence visible and gives the presence of life the feature of hope and confidence" (Zweite 2005: 40). This feature explains why so many art critics have ambivalent feelings when they see these paintings; for their theory of modern art as a *negation* of the modern world does not allow for art that is affirmative in essence and, accordingly, they confuse *Moritz* with a "family picture." Thereby, they do not see the real focus of the painting, which is not the toddler, but, instead his *gaze*. Again, as in *Reader* (figure 13), Richter's obsession is vision and the real issue of *Moritz* is the problem of vision and reality. Accordingly, it is false to identify Richter as the virtual onlooker, since it is *us* who is the onlooker. In addition, in order to move away from the family story, we should remember again what we said earlier in Chapter 2 about the relationship between photography and painting. *Moritz* does not offer us merely a photograph; rather, in *Moritz* the opening up of the photographic referent turns the referent into one that is *interpreted* in the painting and thereby transformed into an image, which, in turn, transforms the referent into one that is presented in the representation [*Darstellung*]. In regard to painting and photography, Richter underlines this point when he states the following:

> In one sense it's closer to the appearance, but then it has more reality than a photograph, because a painting is more of an object in itself, because it's visibly hand-painted, because it has been tangible and materially produced. That gives it a reality of its own, which then as it were substitutes for the reality of the cup. So can a painted appearance tell us more about reality? Perhaps it can, because it's more unsettling. It's always more or less different from reality; and that's unsettling. (Richter 2009a: 284).

So, what is it that this image wants us to understand by means of its interpretation of vision and the gaze? What is so unsettling here? The main figure, Moritz, is placed behind a typical background of abstract color fields that have only formal features. Furthermore, in contrast to other portraits, *Moritz* refers to more than simply a thing, insofar as Moritz is placed in a situation: we see an eating instrument (most likely a spoon), a bib, a child seat, and a glass, and the mouth is visibly messy. Accordingly, we clearly look at a "scene" or "situation" given that we are looking at a feeding situation, even though in two of the three versions, Richter scratched off or overpainted any sign that referred to a narrative situation, such as the spoon and the glass, which push the toddler itself

into the center of the painting (especially in CR 863-2). Let us look more closely at the toddler's gaze and eyes. Zweite's claim that the toddler looks at the camera holder is not convincing, as the widely opened eyes are so special because they do not seem to be directed at anyone or anything; rather, the gaze goes into some indefinite "direction," neither outside nor inside. Accordingly, the gaze is neither directed at external reality, at the viewer outside the picture, or toward its own past; instead, the eyes appear to be *beyond* subject and object. The gaze seems to have a universal quality, which serves to overturn the personal and biographical moment of the image. Apparently, "the looker experiences his environment as something frightening" (Zweite 2005: 41). If we take into account that the look is not directed at anything specific, then we should go even further: what the looker here experiences as something frightening is not his environment, but more (or, perhaps, less), namely, the act of seeing and the traumatic quality that it contains. Using a wonderful expression, Zweite speaks of "the terror of seeing" in this painting that equals the overall "experience of what it means to be" [*Der Schrecken des Sehens wird zur Daseinserfahrung*]" (Zweite 2005: 41; for this, also see Gronert in Richter 2006a: 101).

The frightening aspect of the toddler's act of seeing stands in contrast to the overall "scene" that the image presents, which is an ordinary feeding scene. For the focus on feeding, eating, and drinking is broken through, destroyed, and pushed aside by the terror of the eyes. Accordingly, the center of vision is confronted with the overall narrative placement of Moritz, and this center is the mouth, because of the food, drinking, and eating. Instead of an open mouth, however, we see *open eyes*, which means that that which the painting presents is in truth the takeover, move, or transformation of an "oral" scene to a "visual" scene. I submit that it is this *displacement* of the scene toward something that no longer can be conceived as a situation or a narrative, which is the true unsettling moment of the painting *for the viewer*, namely, the widely opened eyes and the *terror* that is connected to these open eyes. If eyes could cry like open mouths, I am tempted to say, then they would look like these eyes!

Some commentators have referred to the Oedipal setup of the painting (Buchloh 2009: 177). Storr writes:

> Richter has offered a few clues about what he may have had in mind, but he has spoken several times of a need to identify father figures. In purely private terms, the issue of fatherhood is an admittedly unresolved one. Uneasiness about his own father is clear from remarks made about his family situation as he was growing up. . . . Three recent portraits of his own son, titled *Moritz* (2000-2001), have an

> uncanny atmosphere about them, while expressing a bewilderment seemingly at odds with the scrap-book cuteness of their subject. Whatever Oedipal drama they foretell, Richter has acknowledged that "it wasn't until Moritz was born that I started to know what a father is". (Storr in Richter 2002a: 62)

Again, we should be suspicious of this biographical reduction of the painting and reflect more about what, beside the confrontation between father and son or mother and daughter, is contained in an "Oedipal" situation. According to both Freud and Lacan, the Oedipal situation is not simply about the encounter of son and father; rather, it is about the *introduction* of the child to the reality of norms and "the" law; the child's "wake-up" and encounter of its own sexual reality, as well as social reality in general, which, in turn, leads to the psychic functions of super-ego and ego-ideal in the child. Psychic differentiations between child and parents, identifiable qualities of father and mother, as well as sexual differentiation take place in the Oedipal situation within which the child learns to draw a clear line between what is permitted and what is not permitted. The aggressive impulse toward the father (or mother) is redirected into the self and, according to Freud, leads to a "split" between ego, super-ego, and ego-ideal. Whatever else we might learn from psychoanalysis, the decisive point here is that the Oedipal situation is taken as a moment in which the child learns to draw a clear line between his or her desires and "reality," which is encountered as the absolute authority of the father or whoever is the authoritative caretaker. As Richter himself generally says in Corinna Belz's film, namely, "the breakthrough of reality [*Realitätseinbruch*] is frightening" (1h: 11min), could be taken as the proper interpretation of what is represented in *Moritz*.

The name *Moritz* comes from the Greek word "*mavros*" and means *anticipating* and, most originally, *seer* or, more religiously expressed, *prophet*. With this in mind, let us look more closely at how the eyes come to the forefront of the painting and how Richter painted the face of *Moritz*. A seer is someone who can look ahead, can see the future, and already can anticipate what is coming. To some extent, every human being is a seer, since in every moment of our experience, put in Heideggerian terms, we are ahead of ourselves given that we experience the present out of a larger framework of meaning that comprises both past and future. The "protentional horizon" (Husserl) in almost all instances of experience does not allow us to encounter the *really* new, although the sensual core of experience is, in fact, in every moment something unique and new. The moment of terror that the painting presents is a breakthrough of the anticipated framework; it is something that overcomes the subject, displaces it, and

encounters *more* than it can anticipate. It is a *surprise*, something discontinuous and unexpected. According to Plato, philosophy emerges with *wondering*, that is, the experience that reality is what it is. Reality is experienced in wonder as something that no longer is just there, natural, or simply given; rather, as wonder it appears as something unsettling and unknown. Dissimilarly here, the unsettling experience for the toddler is not wonder but *shock*.

In a very early interview Richter perfectly expresses the issue in the following way: "I am fascinated by the human, temporal, real, logical side of an occurrence which is simultaneously so unreal, so incomprehensible and so atemporal. And I would like to represent it in such a way that this contradiction is preserved" (Richter 2009a: 46). We would do well to remember how familiar we are with the word "terror" in English: for example, we speak of "terribly" forceful emotions, of "terrific" beauty, of "terrible" pain, etc. Terror refers to the sublimity of emotions or experiences in general that cut through the symbolic level which, to speak with Kant, cannot be grasped by reason and rationality alone. In experiences of the sublime, we are unable to produce a unified synthesis of the experience and, accordingly, our imagination tends to go toward the infinite. As I argued before, paintings are not based on a "punctum" in the sense of Barthes' theory of photography, but they can nevertheless represent the experience of a traumatic moment and *Moritz* seems to be about just that. Freud helps us understand this moment. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, we find his most detailed account of trauma and shock:

> I think one may venture (tentatively) to regard the ordinary traumatic neurosis as the result of an extensive rupture of the barrier against stimuli. In this way the old naïve doctrine of "shock" would come into its own again, apparently in opposition to a later and psychologically more pretentious view which ascribes aetiological significance not to the effect of the mechanical force, but to the fright and the menace to life. But these opposing views are not irreconcilable, and the psycho-analytic conception of the traumatic neurosis is far from being identical with the crudest form of the "shock" theory. While the latter takes the essential nature of the shock as residing in the direct injury to the molecular structure, or even to the histological structure, of the nervous elements, we seek to understand the effect of the shock by considering the breaking through of the barrier with which the psychic organ is provided against stimuli, and from the tasks with which this is thereby faced. Fright retains its meaning for us too. What conditions it is the failure of the mechanism of anxiety (apprehension) to make the proper preparation, including the over-charging of the systems first receiving the stimulus. (Freud 2010: 11)

We can see that Freud takes up the same elements that we have brought out so far. Interesting to note is that the shock that Freud describes here is disconnected from anxiety and any apprehension of the traumatic event. Fright is entering the psychic and organic defense mechanism because anxiety *failed* to do its job, insofar as the shock, in Freud's interpretation, is something that occurs *before* the defense mechanism begins to operate. Richter's paintings work this moment beautifully out, since the widely open and frightened eyes of the toddler do not really express anxiety, by which Freud understands a psychic preparation of something dangerous, but the total *indefiniteness* of the almost "insightful" moment that the toddler seems to express.

What was once called *phobos* was understood in modernity and in the modern aesthetic of the sublime into *terror*, which is most visible in Burke's treatise on the sublime. The most interesting aspect of Burke's reflections is his focus on sensuousness and the sublime, which, in contrast to Kant's reflections on the sublime, takes a psychosomatic and a physiological component into account. Terror and sublime are closely connected, according to Burke. In fact, terror is connected to experiences and aspects of our sensual encounter with the world that are based on non-anticipated anxiety, empty future horizons, and the very moment in which experience cuts through the symbolic level in order to encounter "the real." In a central passage about terror and seeing, Burke writes:

> No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as *fear*. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endured with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on anything as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous. There are many animals, who, though far from being large, are yet capable of raising ideas of the sublime, because they are considered as objects of terror. As serpents and poisonous animals of almost all kinds. And to things of great dimensions, if we annex an adventitious idea of terror, they become without comparison greater. A level plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean; but can it ever fill the mind with anything so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes; but it is owing to none more than this, that the ocean is an object of no small terror. Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime . . . , the English *astonishment* and *amazement*, point out as clearly the kindred emotions which attend fear and wonder? (Burke 1999: section II)

What Burke perfectly describes here is based on a phenomenology of sensual terror connected to seeing and vision. In the moment when we encounter something too overwhelming and too "big," that is, something that we can no longer frame, structure, grasp, and conceptualize, we are filled with terror as a quality of our experience, which we could call the *fear of vision*. The same, Burke argues, also counts for audible experiences:

> A sudden beginning, or sudden cessation of sound of any considerable force, has the same power. The attention is roused by this; and the faculties driven forward, as it were, on their guard. Whatever, either in sights or sounds, makes the transition from one extreme to the other easy, causes no terror, and consequently can be no cause of greatness. In everything sudden and unexpected, we are apt to start; that is, we have a perception of danger, and our nature rouses us to guard against it. It may be observed that a single sound of some strength, though but of short duration, if repeated after intervals, has a grand effect. Few things are more awful than the striking of a great clock, when the silence of the night prevents the attention from being too much dissipated. The same may be said of a single stroke on a drum, repeated with pauses; and of the successive firing of cannon at a distance. All the effects mentioned in this section have causes very nearly alike. (Burke 1999: section XVIII)

"Everything sudden and unexpected," including to some extent the future itself, is something that we experience at least potentially with fear. The moment of terror and overwhelming experience, the moment of reality itself, that is, the *gap* between the real and the symbolic, with Lacan, could be interpreted as the moment of the unconscious itself, especially if we take into account that the unconscious stands for discontinuity, surprise, and the unexpected (Lacan 1978: 25). Consequently, the dialectic of seeing and blindness, and the dialectic of absence and presence, which we already found at the center of other paintings such as *Reader* are also present in *Moritz*, insofar as seeing is here interpreted and represented as a non-seeing in the form of a breakdown of vision, or a blockage of the process of seeing *within* itself. As Kant nicely puts it in his *Anthropology*, "fright is suddenly aroused fear that disconcerts the mind" (Kant 2006: §76).

Moreover, we should note that *Moritz* not only presents us with an interpretation of an existential moment, but is eminently also dealing with an aesthetical experience and painting itself, insofar as terror is also an aesthetical category, if not *the* category of modern aesthetics, given that it is directly interwoven with the problem of how to reject and negate meaning in a world in which all meaning is sucked up by a one-dimensional system. As argued

above, beauty is not something affirmative, but a projection of the future and a transcendence of the present. *Moritz*, however, is a modernistic work *per se*, and it is therefore surprising that Buchloh feels so ambivalent about Richter's family paintings (Buchloh 2013). For the connection between vision and shock as well as the skeptical move contained in this painting's projection of vision as something frightening has been the center of some modernist aesthetics, such as Benjamin's. In this connection, the modern "poetic principle," according to Benjamin, is the "shock-like perception" that determines and characterizes the modern experience triggered and produced by a capitalist society of the spectacle [*Schauplatz*]. This poetic principle, taken as an aesthetic principle, points to an experience that transcends and overcomes the entire normal range of experience and thereby secures access to the "truth" and reality in an immediate sense that escapes the narrative dimension that would typically cover it up. We need to underline though that Richter's painting does not elevate the shock to a formal principle itself, insofar as his work remains through and through hermeneutic by presenting us with an *image of shock*. Put differently, he does not follow an aesthetics that some art critiques have taken to be the paradigm of the modern avant-garde, such as formal abstraction, montage, alienation, deformation, dissonance, etc.

Beauty

As Jauss pointed out, aesthetical experience is characterized both by a utopian element in which something "good" shines forth and by a moment of keeping the past through recognition (Jauss 1991: 39). The question of what makes a painting a "good" painting or a good work of art is of course a question that haunts all modern art after the downfall of most, if not all, objective criteria of "good" genres, traditions, forms, structures, motifs, etc. Nevertheless, Richter has tied his work not only to the ideas of faith and hope but also to the ideas of "good" and "beauty," both of which became problematic in modern aesthetics and which function in his oeuvre as a counter principle to death. In many interviews, Richter points out that that which makes a painting good is a moment that transcends the intentions and the control of the artist, insofar as only the painter "knows" or sees something to be "good" during the process of painting itself, that is, *while* the image is in the process of becoming an image. To some extent, one could say that the good and beauty, in Richter's view, must

be something that is determined by the image and the painting *process* itself, and not by criteria to be found external to the work. Put differently, it is not taste that determines whether an image "works" or whether it does not. His thesis of "good" and beauty as an internal moment of the image nicely fits the hermeneutic idea of images, painting, and art, as I presented these ideas earlier. As I put it in Chapter 1, the image is a "for-itself." This hermeneutic take on images and representations is not only the idea of Gadamer's hermeneutics, but it is also at the center of Adorno's aesthetics.

In lecture sixteen of his 1958 lecture course on aesthetics, Adorno determines three criteria of truth and beauty that are related to the inner systematicity and inner organization of works of art. The main idea of truth in this lecture is introduced as being based on the relation between the regulatory principles of a work of art and their actualization in the work. The "law of form" [*Formgesetz*], as Adorno likes to put it, determines to what extent its regulating structure can be realized in the work; if matched up with each other, it "works" and we can speak of a "correct" work. Another term for this, I think, is "good." A painting is good whenever it does not simply follow conventions and traditions, since in this case the organizing principle would be located outside of the painting and the image. Indeed, according to this view, it can only be good if it successfully actualizes its own formal idea or, more speculatively put, its "spirit" within the historically given position of the work, that is, its position to other "competing" works. Another word used for this idea, which is difficult to translate, is *Gestaltprinzip* ["structuration" or "formation principle"]; not incidentally, this term is often used in art education. The idea that a painting (or any other work of art, for that matter) must realize its *Gestaltprinzip* does not necessarily mean that it cannot be contradictory or be based on dissonance, but it does mean that its elements need to be coherently organized in relation to its formal principle(s). From the perspective of the artist, it seems to be self-explanatory that the real idea that goes into a painting is not an intention or an idea in the mind of an artist; rather, the real idea that goes into a painting is one that is internally related to its coming about during the process of creating it. The idea of the image [*Bildidee*], we might say, is a process and not something fixed and given. Since Richter is so well organized in his studio and so well educated in the basics of painting as a craft, the *Gestaltprinzip* seems to be even more central.

Although Adorno has the process of musical composition in mind within which the inner organization of a composition is so central, I submit that his thesis can be used for painting, too, if we take into account, as I argued in Chapter 1,

that a painting is never a simple "thing"; rather, at any given point it is a *process*—including when we look at it, which does not happen instantaneously, but has its own temporality. Usually, this process remains invisible, but a film, such as Corinna Belz's film on Richter's daily painting praxis, very nicely demonstrates that ultimately the process of painting an image is *becoming* (of the image). The formal principles of a work of art, according to Adorno (Adorno 2009: 256) whom I follow in this regard, are only conceivable in a historical development, given that every painting rejects as a monad all other paintings, but remains through its inner organization negatively related to them, not to mention that within the overall development in the history of the forming principles that determine single works. Simply put, we do not love Cezanne's painting of apples because of the apples! Instead, we contrast the principle of Cezanne's paintings with other paintings by other painters. If we take all moments together and think about the inner organization of these moments, then we reach the idea of beauty. Put differently, only a *good* painting (or a "true") painting can be a beautiful painting, even if it defies all given standards of taste. As Adorno has it,

> This idea of truth, i.e., that in all of its moments a work of art presents itself in its contradictoriness as necessary, that is, that this necessity is experienced as a force of truth, is at the same time the overall coherence, which we can think of under the concept of beauty. (Adorno 2009: 257; my translation)

This actualization of its own principles and its own organization leads to a form of "good" that Adorno also calls "just" (Adorno 2009: 260). We do justice to something or someone if we treat it or her properly. An "authentic" painting, we might say, is here thought of as something that remains truthful to itself, proper to itself, and therefore can appear to us as something *unique*. Though Richter might not necessarily agree with me, his own description of the process of work and the process of painting, especially if we take into account the meticulous preparations that go into this process and the virtuosity with which it is carried out, come very close to Adorno's thesis. Even if we acknowledge that the moment of chance particularly in the abstract paintings and in the color field paintings is *part of* the process, in the end these works are only then satisfactory when their elements and their inner aspects, that is, the law of form, are matched by the process. Put differently, chance functions in Richter as a *formative* and representational moment, and, as a consequence, chance in Richter is not an element that should be interpreted as arbitrariness (Klinger 2013: 84). Accordingly, I also do not think that Pelzer's identification of chance with "the real" makes much sense (Pelzer in Richter 2007: 138), inasmuch as

chance would, in this case, be conceived of as an element that remains external to the process of formation.

Richter describes this connection in the following way: "I don't know if it is the same in English, but in German if you say it's a good painting, you already mean it's beautiful; . . . If we say something is beautiful, then we mean it's good." (Richter 2009a: 383). Put differently, beauty refers to the *quality* of a painting. Only this view of artistic truth and beauty can avoid the pitfall of subjectivism or of an aesthetics that is purely based on taste (which does not mean that the interpretation and determination of the law of form is simple to perform). Richter pointed out in many interviews that in the process of creation, the moment at which the image "comes together" is determined by two things: (1) for the painter the choices to be made during the process of painting become less and less (or it has to be redone or overpainted), that is, the beginning choices, such as brushes, wooden tools, canvas size, color, structure, etc., determine the further process and *narrow* it over time, and (2) the exact moment at which a work *turns* into a "good" painting might not be controllable, but in all cases this moment is the very moment in which everything that makes up the work appears with *necessity*. Adorno's word "coherence" is another word for this. Again, this does not mean that it is always easy to determine or even detect the organizing principles of a painting, but a good painting must have organizing principles. If we push this one step further, we can reintroduce the idea of beauty here, which Adorno determines is an internal principle in an eminently hermeneutical sense:

> The conclusion that we need to draw, would be that we need to hold fast to the idea of beauty, but instead of determining it as an ontological category, i.e., as a specific type of being, which would show up in the work of art and would come in it to itself, beauty would actually be determined exclusively as dynamics, becoming and in each case as moving in itself. (Adorno 2009: 258, my translation)

We earlier already dealt with the idea of *process* and *becoming* as the determining principle of the work of art, which we can now extend toward the inner organization of paintings. Let us consider, then, one of the most famous works by Richter, *Betty* (1988, CR 663-5, figure 8), which, without doubt, is most likely one of the most beautiful works that Richter painted. However, since some readers will be skeptical about this choice, given that this image is so hugely popular and became an "icon," and since the beauty of *Betty* could be confused with the motif (Richter's daughter Betty), we will consider two additional paintings, which are as beautiful as *Betty* though most commentators (and the public) have not taken

them to be examples of beauty, despite the fact that Richter himself made this determination: we shall consider his installation for the German *Bundestag* in Berlin entitled *Schwarz Rot Gold* (1998, CR 856), and the painting *November* (1989, CR 701, figure 12).

Let us start with the work for the German *Bundestag*, which, at the time of its installation, was heavily criticized by the public as being "inappropriate." Richter, however, said the following:

> I wanted to represent [*darstellen*] these three colors as beautifully as possible—or rather produce [*herstellen*]: for the space and for the purpose. Visible and quasi touchable, in the form of a thin glass shield floating in front of the wall, big and at the same time fragile, and, of course, mirroring. (Richter in Koldehoff 1999: 19)

In order to understand *Schwarz Rot Gold* [*Black Red Gold*], we need to point out first that this work does not simply consist of three color fields; rather, it *represents* these colors and tries to present us with an image *of* the three colors that are contained in the German flag. Put differently, we need to take that which we called in Chapter 1 "iconic difference" into account.

By taking the three colors out of their normal order, which is horizontal, and by turning them in a vertical order, the work breaks from its traditional external context and its normal meaning. It no longer represents a flag; rather, it breaks down its main elements, removes them from any everyday context, and thereby, as I explained in the first two chapters, it *idealizes* that which it is about. In this case, the essentialization that is operative in almost all of Richter's works is pushed to its limits, insofar as this work tries to bring out the three colors in their most "shining" quality, which, with Hegel, we could also call its *semblance*. This image of black, red, and yellow tries to *be* black, red, and yellow; by looking at these colors we are called to acknowledge the *inner* quality of the colors themselves, which is supported by the glass panels that Richter used for the colors. In this work, the colors appear even more "shiny," idealizing, and "pure," and we cannot detect any deviation on the color planes themselves. So, the principle of the work is that the three colors are taken out of their significant context, and as representations of colors alone, they are confronted again with the context in which that work appears, namely, the center of German political history in the *Reichstag*, which, as we know, is related to the emerging democracy in the nineteenth century, the Nazi dictatorship, as well as the reunification after 1989. The work, however, refuses to be a *sign*, and this refusal helps to

present the three colors in an even more beautiful way, since they are placed in *total* contrast to their political environment. It is as if for the first time we can see the German flag in a way never seen before, namely, in the way an artist would look at the flag as something totally removed from its narrative background and its pure sensuousness. Again, with Marcuse, we can say that this move, to confront us with the sensual quality of what is contained in the German flag as its *ideal* and with the idealization of these colors to something *essential*, pushes the work beyond any given fact, experience, and environment. This *transcendence*, however, is *precisely* the reason for why this work contains a *true* promise that goes beyond any political promise that might or might not be contained in the building in which it is installed. The beauty of *Schwarz Rot Gold*, in other words, remains absolutely true to itself, follows its own law of form, realizes itself in total disconnection from any tradition, expectation, and genre, and *therefore* represents a semblance of true happiness as something in which the "colorfulness" and the sensuousness would be liberated from any day-to-day political attempt to turn the work into something instrumental for a given German politics. It is exactly this transcendence and idealization that bothered so many people causing them to be disappointed about Richter's work. What they overlooked, however, is the fact that this work *defies* instrumentality in a setting that calls for instrumentality, by remaining authentic to its own formal principle, which, in this case, is very simple: for, it is the principle of giving us an image *of* the sensuousness of the three colors contained in the German flag. The image, again, comes about *without* being an image of a flag. It is supposed to be clear, formal, pure, and simple; but how else could someone have presented the three "national" colors with more purity than this? Some newspapers called Richter's work "banal" and a politician characterized it as "charlatanism." These reactions simply confused their own expectations of what would count as "appropriate" art in the main German representative building with the work itself. Moreover, the transcendence of the work *within* its surrounding is highlighted by the perfect shininess of the glass surface, which mirrors its environment and establishes on a higher level a new symbolic field, insofar as everything and everyone in its immediate environment, including the "real" German flag that is outside of the building, have to "measure up" to the cool perfection of the color plates and the unearthliness of the colors that are represented on a material that idealizes them even more. It is exactly in this way that Marcuse's thesis about the internal promise of beauty becomes true. The work *Schwarz Rot Gold* asks us to live up to its standard.

In regard to *Betty* (1988, CR 663-5, figure 8), this work certainly could be interpreted as a naïve family painting of Gerhard Richter's daughter that idealizes the private sphere and private happiness (Buchloh cited by Butin in Richter 2005b: 60). Indeed, the patterns on the bathrobe and the tactile surface of her blonde hair are painted in such a vivid way that we have the impression that she is present within the space of the viewer. Similar to *Reader*, it is as if we could touch her. On the other hand, any intimacy with her is denied by the formal organization of the image. Echoing central works of the German romantic painters, the woman turns away from the viewer: her face is not visible, which seems to resist any attempt to enter her space. This double movement comes out in the bodily posture of the woman who, on the one hand, has her upper body twisted toward the viewer, but, on the other hand, her face turned away. Furthermore, the contrast between the dark monochrome background and the vividness and fullness of the jacket colors is heightened as in no other painting by Richter, except in his red to yellow abstract paintings of the 1980s (CR 454-480), and in his more recent vivid yellow/red abstract paintings (CR 910). The girl looks toward a black background that many commentators have taken to refer to one of Richter's gray paintings, which, in turn, other commentators have interpreted as a view of "nothingness" and meaninglessness. Even Richter himself indicated that context: "The averted, turned-away face has something to do with parting and also with death" (Richter 2009a: 445), which also involves the fact that this painting is closely related to the *October 18, 1977 series*. In addition, art historical references are built into the associative horizon of the image. As Shapiro explains:

> In *Betty*, 1988 he presents her turning away from the viewer but towards the gray painting that provides the backdrop for her. Unlike the stark Baader-Meinhof paintings, Betty is painted with sweet colors, wearing a red, flower-patterned top, and a pink and white blouse. The painting, based on Ingres' *Valpinçon Bather*, c. 1808, turns away from us and towards the indeterminate gray- ness of her father's gray painting behind her. In one sense, this is a tender double portrait of an artist father and his only child in which the "subject" denies the viewer and turns affirmatively toward the gray which represents the artist and her father. (Shapiro 1992: 19)

Again, as in *Moritz*, I submit that we should not too hastily push the biographical background into the representation and, instead, we should reflect more on the philosophical quality of the work, which is the sensuousness, that is, the *representation* of sensual presence as *visual* presence and as *materiality*. The topic of this painting, similar to *Moritz* and *Reader*, is vision.

I would like to focus on the extreme sensuousness of the painting, which, I believe, is the formal principle that this painting embodies and which leads to the extreme beauty of the painting. The dialectic between presence and absence as well as between distance and nearness in this painting is heightened by the tension between the erotic quality of the sensuousness and the total denial of the bodily posture through which this form of presence is countered. Like other paintings, the strength of the work lies not in what is shown but in what is withheld. As one commentator nicely summarizes it:

> The work negotiates so many ambiguities and doubts, to achieve such a carefully maintained *aporia*, that has immediately impressed me with what I can best be described as the force of its tentativeness. Here, for example, is the uncertainty of experience. Betty is caught in the full strangeness of her own act of observation; she's the consummate subject, portrayed in the act of an observation purely and entirely her own. But the image is focused on the dramatic twist of her shoulder, deflecting one's eyes away from any expression one might salvage from what little there is to see of her face. (Lewis 1993: 132)

If we take into account what I developed in Chapter 1 in regard to sensuality and materiality, we would do well to pay more attention to two important aspects of this painting. First, we are dealing with a representation of sensuality and vision. So, we should reflect more on the fact that the painting is not simply a painting of Richter's daughter "Betty," but above all an image, that is, something in which something else presents itself throughout its process of meaning constitution. Second, we should also take into account that the painting is not very large in size, even though most reproductions hide this fact. The size is important because in a gallery or a museum, the viewer has to get relatively *close* to the painting in order to see it properly, which contributes to the intimacy of the relation between the space of the painting and the space of the viewer. In addition, the quality of it as a *painting* gets lost in most reproductions and most viewers look at this painting as a photograph; but, as we know by now, in photographs there is no materiality because photographs make us look through them. However, when close to the painting itself, the viewer actually gets a deep impression of the materiality of *Betty's* beauty, that is, an impression of what Adorno calls the "spiritual" character of sensuousness in a successful work of art. "In important artworks," as he puts it, "the sensuous illuminated by its art shines forth as spiritual just as the abstract detail, however indifferent to appearance it may be, gains sensuous luster from the spirit of the work" (Adorno 1997: 15). Accordingly, what makes *Betty* so beautiful is not simply its vivid colors; rather, it is the relation that the paintings builds up

toward its own sensuousness, namely, a sensuousness that is encountered as "absent presence."

Moreover, as Didi-Huberman worked out in detail, the dream of good and beautiful painting comes alive through the ideal of overcoming color as the "surface" and effect of painting, instead of color *being* the image. The color as materiality is not like drapery over something underneath it; rather, it is the opposite, inasmuch as the image comes alive when it carries with it, *in it*, that which it depicts; otherwise, color is reduced to something unessential, that is, to a surface, to a cover, or to function as "make-up" (Didi-Huberman 2002: 22). Put differently, paint as a painterly ideal has to be more than coloring [*Kolorit*] in order to be the *flesh* of the image and in order to overcome the duality between material surface and what is underneath this surface, which Didi-Huberman calls the *incarnate*, understood as the idea of painting as the synthesis [*Ineinander*] of surface and depth, projection and substance, and phantasm and reality. The incarnate seems to be the forming principle of *Betty*. The desire to turn that which is only visible into something touchable, to overcome the sensual separation, and to reunite the senses in a new synthesis is only possible as *flesh;* flesh is here understood with Merleau-Ponty as that "hinge" through which materiality, image, and representation meet, before every intentionality, before the sign, and before the symbol.

Vision has been interpreted as a "distance sense" throughout the history of anthropological philosophy, whereas touch has been interpreted as the overcoming of all distance, as absolute nearness. Accordingly, whenever painting becomes flesh like, vivid, present, and material, it is *becoming* present. The dialectic of vision and touch is one in which that which is as per definition far, is painted as so close to the eye that the eye could touch what it sees. In *Betty*, it is crucial and *necessary* that we do not see her eyes, since otherwise our own vision would be deterred by hers. As in *Reader,* we can look at her, at her hair, and at the colors without anyone noticing. . . . However, there is a limit condition for the relation between vision and touch given that in the moment in which the eye would touch that which it sees, it will stop seeing, since touch is the very sense in which all distance is removed and vision is the very sense that is in need of distance. These senses cannot be experienced together, but nevertheless, both senses desire what the other has to offer. Touch wants to see, that is, it wants to be in distance to colors, and vision wants to touch colors and *feel* them, that is, it wants to be in contact with the world. Without (the goal of) touch, vision could not be vision, and without (the goal of) distance, touch could not

be touch. Even when thing and body, or body and lived body, touch each other, a minimal distance needs to remain. Getting close is identical with playing with distance, or, put in temporal terms, the more present a work is, the closer it is to us; and the more it refers to the here and now, the more intense the *promise* and desire become, since it offers that which we can only see as something that we no longer must see but can nonetheless be in contact with. Feeling color! Vision has here a *haptic function* (Didi-Huberman 2002: 58). This gap between presence and future as that which arrives or *possibly* arrives is the structure of promising. It is in this sense that Marcuse is right about the transcending quality of sensuousness in works of art. He writes: "The sensuous force of the Beautiful keeps the promise alive—memory of the happiness that once was, and that seeks its return" (Marcuse 1978: 68). Happiness would here be the actualization of that which *Betty* promises, namely, to realize its sensuousness in a world in which the gap between the here and now and the coming would no longer exist. In paradise, we might say, the future as something not yet present has vanished. Life would be full, present to itself, and satisfactory.

In sum, *Betty* is a perfect performance of the entire dialectic of painted color as flesh in which distance and nearness come to its fullest and highest tension: (1) though close to the woman in the picture, the viewer remains outside of her space, (2) though by means of her posture she points us toward the background of the image *into* the space of the image, we are denied access to her eyes, (3) the extreme vividness and flesh-like presence of the red of the jacket (or bathrobe) and the blonde color of her hair contrast with the undifferentiated and monochrome background. The *painted* red and the *painted* light are the promise through which our vision *almost* finds its presence in the image, as well as, *almost* finds touch, and thus its presence *almost* overcomes itself and turns into something *resolved*, reconciled, good, and beautiful. *Almost*! And the longer we try to enter the image, the further we get lost in the play of distance and nearness, and the more easily we realize the absolute and essential gap between vision and touch. *Betty* as a beautiful work "establishes a sphere of untouchability; works become beautiful by the force of their opposition to what simply exists" (Adorno 1997: 51). This *untouchability* is the gap that makes painting possible and *Betty* is *the* image of it.

Finally, before moving on, let us briefly consider *November* (1989, CR 701, figure 12), which is part of two other paintings, *January* (1989, CR 699) and *December* (1989, CR 700). The gloom and melancholy that linger above these paintings have been connected by commentators to the *October 18, 1977* series,

and, in fact, in *November,* Richter seems to have used paintings that he did not use for the *October 18, 1977* series and, instead, overpainted them. The formal principle, then, of these paintings, is the *layer*. The paintings are indeed "heavy" paintings, which is an effect not only of the massive amount of paint layers applied to the canvas and the size of the paintings, but also an effect of the dark materiality of the painting. In contrast to *Betty* and *Reader*, the "heaviness" applied is not a problem of vision and touch; instead, what we find here is the contrast and tension between color as something "transparent," ideal, and nonmaterial, and its quality of *weight*. Since volume and weight are properties of bodies, we can see that the "flesh" of these paintings is closely related to the heaviness of bodies and thereby, it is related to the viewer's bodily intentionality. Accordingly, the mood of the paintings that can be identified as melancholy is not simply an effect of layers, which open up a reference to the past *in* the painting and through its materiality, but, is also an effect of "weighing" on someone, almost as if these paintings are weighing on the vision that tries to get into them. Although *November* does not give the viewer a hint that the painting is carried out by hand, it also does not seem to be produced mechanically or technologically. As such, the painting remains located on a surface somewhere between body and technology. The surface is thoroughly detailed and presents much to see: there are many tensions between smooth areas, rough spots, openness, and closed regions, as well as removed layers and "wounded" surfaces. The main direction of the paint applied to the surface is vertical, but when one comes closer to the paintings, this changes to a horizontal dynamic, which is especially visible in the lower right area of *December*. The scraping away of upper and lower layers of the paint is a dialectical process, insofar as every scraping away reveals something else. Consequently, we also find in *November* a subtle promising structure since despite all of its weight and bodily force, the viewer can discover light areas that appear and reappear through scraped areas. *November* is visually very complex (which gets lost in reproductions), since vision gets caught in its attempt to see something confronted with the materiality of the painting. In addition, the dark paint resembles burned wood or burned trees, and the white spots in them remind one of snow or water, which Richter himself has pointed out, too: "The leftovers of snow for me point to something optimistic, like pre-spring. That's why I like it" (Richter 2009a: 477). Given the layering, open spots, and hints at colored layers together with the "milk glass" effect of the surface, the painting's promise comes out in its temporal structure (which other abstract paintings by Richter also employ), which is to say that it is expressed in the hint at something

that is "there," but not *clearly* there, as if it gives us an unclear image of the past and the future. The intransparency is an "in between" phenomenon, inasmuch as "intransparency" does not mean that we do not see anything; instead, we see something, but we do not see it clearly: it both is and is not. This could be a problem of vision, but if we take the materiality of the paint into account, we discover that it turns out to be a property of the painting, that is, of being. In this connection, Gertrude Koch has argued that the blurriness of Richter's works is "a mental state in which the relation to the world of objects blurs and the act of blurring causes that world to appear particularly threatening—to appear as an impenetrable presence" (Koch 1992: 134). While I agree with Koch, I would like us to consider the realistic perspective: it is not our mental state that is "blurred"; rather it is the world that is intransparent, but when turned into a painting, it becomes an *image* that is based on the promise of overcoming these limitations.

7

Culture

Landscapes

The term "landscape" (from the Dutch "*lantschapp*") has philosophically defined two major aspects: on the one hand, it refers to a geographical region that is "shaped" in a specific way, by having a geographically specific sense; on the other hand, it refers more abstractly to the *look of a region* [*Anblick einer Gegend*], that is, to nature constituted *as* an aesthetical object. According to a long tradition in landscape painting, this genre of painting reveals certain kinds of natural *characters* to its viewers. "Region," (*Gegend* in German), refers to a specific way in which we encounter something in our geographical and natural environment, insofar as it indicates a specific way in which things are related to us in their presence. Using some of Heidegger's later speculations, one could also say that *Gegend* refers to a specific way in which things are gathered together, united, and synthesized. With Heidegger, we could speak of an "abiding expanse." This expanse lets everything of a region "rest" and *be* in a specific light. For example, when we travel through the United States, we like to speak of the open sky in Kansas, the vastness of the Rocky Mountains, or the rolling hills of Iowa. But what do we mean exactly? It seems to me that we do not really refer to a historical feature of a "region" and that, instead, we refer to a local "character" of how nature "looks" to us and how it determines the way in which we are related to it. Accordingly, by "local" we refer to a character of landscape that is tied to how it is to *be* there. *Gegend*, then, is a concept of how something, in this case nature, *is*, and how it appears. To be sure, local characters of nature are not the result of objective measurements, of geographical boundaries, or of culturally defined borders; rather, they are "areas" of the natural world that we determine in regard both to how they exist and to how we experience them. Both together make specific places possible.

Large portions of Richter's oeuvre are related to landscape paintings: we find traditional romantic paintings, townscapes, as well as seascapes within his

landscape paintings. In addition, Richter's landscape paintings are divided into abstract landscapes and so-called "cultural landscapes," which is supported by the fact that many abstract paintings are associated with titles that refer to either seasons or specific aspects of nature, such as ice, snow, surfaces, etc. Many of the paintings in the romantic tradition, which often are related to Caspar David Friedrich by commentators, refer to specific regions and towns in Germany, which not only indicates a close connection between people and "their" region but also has a melancholic aspect. As Adorno writes in his *Negative Dialectics*:

> What metaphysical experience would be, to those who eschew the reduction of this to presumably religious primal experiences, is closest to how Proust imagined it, in the happiness promised by the names of villages like Otterbach, Watterbach, Reuenthal, Monbrunn. You think that if you go there, you would be in what is fulfilled, as if it really existed. If you really go there, that which is promised recedes like a rainbow. Nevertheless you aren't disappointed; rather, you feel that you are too close, and that's why you don't see it. This is presumably why the difference between landscapes and the districts, which determine the world of images of childhood, is not that great. What Proust experienced at Illiers was something many children of the same social strata shared at different places. But for this generality, what is authentic in Proust's portrayal, to form, one must be enraptured at that one spot, without squinting at the generality. To the child it is obvious that what delights it about its favorite little town is to be found there and only there, and nowhere else; it errs, but its error constitutes the model of experience, that of a concept, which ultimately would be that of the thing itself, not the poverty of that which is shorn away from things. (Adorno 1998/6: 366)

What Adorno has in mind here is the utopian vision of concepts that could function like names. Whereas concepts usually refer to something universal or general, they are unable to deal with, describe, define, or express the specificity of things they refer to. The utopian idea of a name, however, is the opposite of the idea of a concept, since a name, at least in its utopian version, refers to a *unique* thing where abstract concepts and concrete experience have not yet supported one another. In this vein, it is interesting that Adorno combines the utopian vision of *knowing what something is* with the experience of towns, the memory thereof, and the geographical names connected to them. Put differently, he wants to say that through the name we experience a geographical region or a town as an area where a certain type of experience can occur: *only there!* Happiness is the utopian vision of an experience in which experience and knowledge have not departed from each other and are unified. This is probably the reason for

returning in life to specific locations, spaces, and regions from our childhood throughout our lives. Certain memories (i.e., knowledge) are tied to specific places and we believe that our knowledge and experience, via a hidden unity, are tied to the location itself. It is not abstract; rather, our experience took place and occurred in a setting that cannot be disconnected from the experience itself. Location, knowledge, and experience, as it were, form a harmonious symbiosis. Richter himself pointed to such a background:

> If the abstract pictures show my reality, then the landscapes and still-lifes show my yearning. This is a grossly oversimplified, off balance way of putting it, of course; but though these pictures are motivated by the dream of classical order and a pristine world—by nostalgia, in other words—the anachronism in them takes on a subversive and contemporary quality. (Richter 2009a: 120)

In this vein, we could say that landscape paintings, at least the traditional romantic landscape paintings that Richter creates, projects a world for the utopian vision of happiness that Adorno has in mind. Let us consider some of Richter's landscape titles: *Landscape near Hubbelrath* (1969, CR 221), *Monstein* (1981, CR 471), *Garmisch* (1981, CR 469-3), *Wiesental* (1985, 572-4), *Staubach* (1985, CR 572-1), *Troisdorf* (1985, CR 572-2), and *Buschdorf* (1985, CR 572-5). These landscape names indicate, in the Adornian sense, worlds in which something that *only* belongs to that specific landscape and locations can appear and be encountered in its specificity. These names *are* images, insofar as "Buschdorf" refers to a village in a forest, "Wiesental" to valley meadow, or "Staubach" to a small river. Though these images are more abstract than memories from our childhood or past experiences are, in principle, the same structure is in play. The core of Richter's landscape paintings projects a world in which memory and geography form a "happy" unity, insofar as they *remind* us of a better world, and their *titles*, that is, their names, function like memories or *images of a happy past*, even if Richter's paintings are idealizations and condensations of what they are about in general.

One could argue that Richter's overall interpretation of nature is deeply ideological, insofar as the contemporary destruction of nature, the total extraction of resources, industry, etc., do not appear in his paintings. In fact, with a few early exceptions, his landscape paintings do not even contain humans and, as such, the idealization of nature and Richter's "romanticism" is extreme. However, we should not accept this interpretation, as this critical reading of Richter's images does not adequately take the images into account and ends up rejecting Richter's position on abstract grounds. As we will see, his meditations

on some aspects of landscape, in particular in relation to his abstract paintings, are deeply philosophical, and with more detailed reflections, we can detect "cultural landscapes" in what seems to be purified of human traces. Moreover, the argument that Richter's paintings abstract from cultural, historical, and social contexts misses the point that these paintings project a natural-cultural world in which this world *is not* destroyed, exploited, or used up. Put differently, landscapes are treated as modern ideals that point to a harmony that, though destroyed throughout history, remains necessary for human imagination and for an understanding of something that is in peace with itself: "Sorrow and unfreedom are still reflected in the purest imagery of happiness and freedom. They too contain the protest against the reality in which they are destroyed" (Marcuse 1978: 48).

Commentators have repeatedly pointed out that Richter's landscape paintings are not only idealized visions of memory images, since they also deal with *Kulturlandschaften*, that is, with cultivated nature that humans have worked on, formed, shaped, and used for their purposes (Elger 2002a: 346). Arrived at in the twenty-first century, it is of course highly questionable if there is anything like an uncultivated nature left on earth; for even if there would be a place or spot that humans would not yet have touched, these spots are already objects of the human gaze since they have been cartographed, mapped, described, fantasized, etc. Thus nature as untouched and as remaining independent of human influence seems to be a romantic dream and a figment of our imagination. Additionally, it is certainly also the case that we are unable to conceive nature as something beyond reason, though in certain experiences, such as the sublime, nature is present as something that cannot be fully assimilated to reason. However, the apparent necessity of conceiving nature not only in certain forms, regulations, rules, and laws but also as an object of our fears, anxieties, interests, and dreams, indicates that we take nature in principle to be constituted by a "reasonable" structure.

As phenomenologists, such as Heidegger and Scheler, have shown, feelings are not merely subjective; rather, they let us discover something that belongs to the objects. The threatening quality of a tiger will not be discovered through observation alone; instead, this quality is a correlate of our fear of the tiger. Accordingly, we *understand* something *about* the tiger when we establish a psychological or, more specifically, a fearful relation to this animal. It might seem to be rational to run away when a tiger approaches us, but we are only able to run away because we have sensed the fearful quality in the tiger through

our fear. Consequently, feelings such as fear and anxiety are not beyond reason or "irrational"; rather, they belong to our full understanding of our world, which includes nature. Similarly, the experience of landscape paintings that we describe in terms of moods or "tones" is not simply an expression of a subjective moment; instead, we should look at these characteristics as characteristics of the landscape itself, so that landscape paintings are able to reveal these qualities to us.

Human beings can cultivate their relation to external and internal nature in different ways: on all levels and in numerous activities we deal with nature. For example, the farmer is related to the natural environment in a different way than the biologist who is doing fieldwork or the physicist who is conducting experiments in the lab. Even more removed from what we can experience as "nature" are mathematical considerations about the ultimate structure of the universe. All of these activities are defining different frameworks and are based on different attitudes toward nature. Whereas the intentional object, in philosophical terminology, in all attitudes is the same, namely, nature, the aspects and the concrete "how" of the intentional object in each case are different. A (traditional) farmer experiences nature as something that she has to work on and which she understands as a place for growing and dying, that is, a place for life and death, which is mediated by food. While laboring on the field, the farmer certainly does not establish a scientific relation to nature as the physicist does, for whom nature is no longer the place for life and growing food, but rather reveals itself as an object of observation and testing. The biologist working in the field is somewhere between both the traditional farmer's attitude and the scientist's attitude; for, on the one hand, she objectifies her interests and therefore nature in her observations, but, on the other hand, she must still take nature as something "one has to be careful with." For example, a biologist who works with dangerous animals, despite all curious and scientific interests, must take these animals as something one "should be fearful of." In all of these cases, nature is experienced in different ways, which is to say, it is not only the case that the acts or activities through which we are related to nature differ (observation, working etc.), but the object itself changes, too (as having qualities in observation, as being threatening in care, or as "workable land" in labor).

Given this, we should underline that "nature" is something that reveals itself in different modes and different attitudes, whereby the more abstract and "exact" attitudes cover up the aspects of nature that we experience in our everyday life. These everyday attitudes might even differ in geographical, sociological, and

historical contexts: "Nature," as Joachim Ritter puts it, "is for the human beings who live in the countryside always 'a home' [*heimatlich*], always part of nature as it is related to working life [*Dasein*]: the forest is the woods, the earth is the field, the water is the place for fish" (Ritter 1963: 147). In a similar fashion, Jean-Luc Nancy has claimed that

> "nature," as it is most often understood, is an abstraction, as is the idea of man standing in front of it. What is real is the earth, the sea, the sky, the sand, one's feet on the ground, and one's breath, the smell of grass and of coal, the crackling of electricity, the swarming of pixels. . . . There is no real except for the earth, with all its corners and recesses. (Nancy 2005: 56)

All of the aforementioned examples, strangely so, do not include the experience of nature as being beautiful, but, given what we have said so far, we can say that the experience of nature *as* beautiful must belong to a *specific* kind of relation between us and nature, too. I do not deny that there can be a mixture of these experiences. For example, the farmer taking a break from hard work might realize how beautiful the setting is and might refer to the glory of God's universe. However, *ideally*, that is, for our reflections here, these activities can be separated. The fact that we make a difference indicates these ideal distinctions. We should also underline that beauty in experience always appears to be on the side of the experienced object. In our leisure time, when we observe a sunset, we do not experience the beauty of the sunset as a figment of our subjective imagination; rather, we experience a *beautiful* sunset. To be sure, the property of being beautiful is certainly taken to be a property of the colors and the sun, the consequence of which is that there might be a specific relation to nature, namely the aesthetical relation, that can let us see something special about nature that all other activities are unable to discover. Aesthetical understanding can achieve something similar to the sciences, though it might not enjoy the status of so-called "objective" explanations of nature that nowadays (for good reasons) only scientific considerations possess.

In a similar fashion, if religion takes the universe to be beautiful because it demonstrates the glory of God, then it can certainly let us see something about what and how nature *can be*, namely, *glorious* and *admirable*. It could even be that the scientist who—from time to time—discovers how admirable the laws of nature are, in those moments is in a religious attitude, which allows her to see those qualities of natural laws that they usually do not notice *within* the scientifically experienced world. The evocation and praise of the beauty of nature that we find in painting are not merely subjective and about the feelings

of the painter or the feelings expressed in the painting; rather, painting can reveal something to us *about* nature, the properties of which will never be given through a scientific relation (Cassirer 1992: 143). This "giving" of how something is can be addressed as a moment of truth. Whenever we experience something *as it is*, a moment of recognition and identification is in play. The object of our experience, put differently, "echoes" the way in which we are related to it. Given all this, we are now able to understand the role of nonscientific experiences and theoretical considerations as necessary to get a complete picture of our world and the things around us. The mimetic quality of landscape paintings is connected to the general mimetic quality of images, and, as I argued with Gadamer previously, "mimesis" does not simply refer to an imitation or copy; rather, an image is mimetic when we *recognize* in it something *of* what the image is about. Mimesis, in other words, is a process of truth in art because in images something is revealed through representation, understanding, and interpretation. As I explained in Chapter 1, we *participate* in this process as viewers. Thus our engagement is part of the image.

Baumgarten, the inventor of modern aesthetics, in his *Aesthetica* (published in 1750) in §69 remarked that the modern sciences, such as physics and astronomy, are unable to address nature as it is experienced by lovers, for, as we know, these experiences cannot be translated into the language of the exact sciences (see Ritter 1963; Piepmeier 1980). The separation of the scientific relation to nature from other experiences took place especially in Europe after the Middle Ages paved the way for modern poetry and art and, as we will see shortly, also led to the invention of something like "the landscape." Art and philosophy at the beginning of modernity in the Renaissance had to compensate for what the natural sciences could no longer give us (even if they might not admit their inferiority in regard to nonobjective properties of the universe or take everything beside their own ideal of exactness to be "relative"). Art has the ability to view and contemplate nature as prescientific and, looking forward to the twentieth century, as pretechnological (especially if we understand technology as an extension of the sciences).

In this vein, it is interesting to note that the historical separation of the sciences from other modes of our existence and of being related to the world, nature, and the universe, almost simultaneously occurs with the birth of the phenomenon of "landscape" (and as a consequence the birth of landscape painting, landscape gardening, etc.) in the Western world. With the prominence of logic and metaphysics up until the eighteenth century, aesthetics in the modern form was impossible, insofar as the metaphysical experience of the world did not allow

for an aesthetic relation beyond the primary relation that involved the being of the universe. Finally, it became introduced because philosophers elevated the status of sensual experience and the intuition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to a fundamental component of human cognition and our relation toward the universe. As Hegel puts it in his *Encyclopedia*, no longer did humans think of the universe merely in theological categories; rather, human experience and with it the empirical world began to enter the picture and produced a new science of the sensual mediation of the world (which is different from Platonic speculations about the beauty of the *logical* structure of the universe, which no one can *see*, *feel*, or *touch*). With the inclusion of the empirical and real experience in philosophical reflection, the relation to nature changed, too; for the world no longer is given in pure rationality, but, through the senses and through experience rationality is infected by particularity. "Aesthetic judgment and taste," as Bernstein puts it, "became the refuge for the meaningfulness of the natural world, material meaning, beyond rationalized discursive meaning" (Bernstein 2006: 48). Petrarch is one of the main witnesses of the shift in this complex field in which nature was not only discovered as an object of exact *theory* but also discovered as something *to be humanly experienceable*. In his *The Ascent of Mount Ventoux*, by means of theological and anthropological considerations, he famously describes how he hikes to the top of the mountain. Once on top of the mountain, while enjoying the view of "earthly things," he begins to read in Augustine's *Confessions*:

> While I was thus dividing my thoughts, now turning my attention to some terrestrial object that lay before me, now raising my soul, as I had done my body, to higher planes, it occurred to me to look into my copy of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, a gift that I owe to your love, and that I always have about me, in memory of both the author and the giver. I opened the compact little volume, small indeed in size, but of infinite charm, with the intention of reading whatever came to hand, for I could happen upon nothing that would be otherwise than edifying and devout. Now it chanced that the tenth book presented itself. My brother, waiting to hear something of St. Augustine's from my lips, stood attentively by. I call him, and God too, to witness that where I first fixed my eyes it was written: "And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not." I was abashed, and, asking my brother (who was anxious to hear more), not to annoy me, I closed the book, angry with myself that I should still be admiring earthly things who might long ago have learned from even the pagan

> philosophers that nothing is wonderful but the soul, which, when great itself, finds nothing great outside itself. Then, in truth, I was satisfied that I had seen enough of the mountain; I turned my inward eye upon myself, and from that time not a syllable fell from my lips until we reached the bottom again. Those words had given me occupation enough, for I could not believe that it was by a mere accident that I happened upon them. (Petrarch 2011: 33)

Petrarch discovers nature in this text as an object for anthropological reflections. Taken as an object of his joy and taken as something sublime, seen from the top of the mountain, nature becomes something *for* human beings. Though Petrarch is close to heaven, he looks *down to earth*. Consequently, in the moment of enjoying what he sees, nature begins to "echo" the mind of a *human being* who looks at it and turns nature into an object of his gaze. Turning toward the human qualities of nature, Petrarch tells us, turned him away from God who is, according to the Augustinian doctrine, only discoverable in the soul, that is, inside the mind. Turning outward toward the open lets us turn away from our religiously conceived inwardness and God. As Jauss points out, the deep conflict between the inner and the outer is hard to understand for a modern reader who is familiar with landscape painting and romanticism in poetry and literature during the last 200 years (Jauss 1991: 140). What Petrarch's brief text introduces is a new attitude toward the cosmos and universe (independent from the question of whether this *really* was the first text that introduces an aesthetical attitude toward nature). Instead of simply taking it to be the creation of God, the cosmos now becomes an object for human vision and experience. Nature turns from being a metaphysical (hidden) structure to something humans can *experience*. Nature becomes *humanized*, we might say. Put in words we introduced above, nature enters a new intentional relation that is beyond the metaphysical relation. Though Petrarch interpreted this turn as an implicit message to turn again toward God in one's soul, he could not avoid introducing a new, revolutionary shift from a religious to an aesthetical mode of *looking at* nature and, thus, conceiving of nature as something *to be looked at*. Nature, in other words, was newly discovered as something that one *can look at*.

In Petrarch's description, nature becomes a landscape *for* a subject that puts itself in opposition to nature as a whole, that is, to "open nature." The German language expresses this nicely, since Germans often say that they enter *die freie Natur*, that is, the *free nature*, whenever they leave town, beyond daily necessities, and visit the countryside. The "free" indicates a relationship in which both the subject and nature are revealed as "open" and are no longer limited

by daily life. As such, nature as an *object* of experience, instead of being *part of* experience, lets the individual transcend herself toward the outside and *in opposition* to laboring, working, and everyday life. Nature, in other words, shows up *as* landscape because it is placed in opposition to useful activities. This shift not only occurs on the side of experienced nature; rather, it also occurs on the side of the individual who is no longer part of the natural environment, such as the farmer. However, after the shift occurs, the individual *as a subject* is placed in front of what is experienced. As such, the emergence of landscape, we might say, is interrelated with the emergence of subject and object in experience. The human being experiences both herself and nature *as such* in a mode in which the practicality of our life is bracketed. The attitudes in terms of how they place the subject in front of an object are therefore comparable in both the scientific attitude and the attitude that discovers nature as a landscape. The most visible effect of this discovery can be seen in the historical shift that begins to take nature in its fearful and asymmetrical qualities as "great," "sublime," and "beautiful." Art takes over the function of what science can no longer explain to us (Ritter 1963: 158) because, as we said above, the sciences cover up certain aspects of nature, and the experience of landscape points to a nonscientific nature *experienced* by human beings. It is therefore impossible to think about the concept of landscape without taking into account the role and relation between modern societies and scientifically conceived nature. It is precisely in this sense that painting is related to truth, namely, in its attempt to show nature *as it is* through qualities that objectifying attitudes are unable to describe. In sum, an appropriate understanding of landscape painting is only possible if we give up, as a recent commentator puts it,

> a one-sidedly science-dominated appreciation of nature. . . . Science, rightly and necessarily, gives precedence to *objectivising* movements of mind: probes behind the human perspective with its phenomenal properties: abstract from our emotion and value-suffused, perceptually selective, view of the world, and works ultimately towards a mathematically quantifiable and imperceptible reality. In the course of that abstraction, most of all of the features of the world that are of human concern are eliminated. Yet the very pursuit of that scientific enterprise has dynamics that belong only within the human life-world, the world of perception and feeling, curiosity and striving to know, and vanish in the objective view. (Hepburn 1996: 194)

In addition, as Oskar Bätschmann pointed out, one motive of nineteenth-century landscape painting was the experience of movement, especially in regard to the

invention of panorama paintings, in regard to clouds, and, finally, in regard to new forms of transportation techniques, such as train and river "corrections" (Bätschmann 1997: 93–135). The panorama paintings should be understood as an early development of movie technology, insofar as the paintings, up to three miles in length, were put on rolls and then they were unrolled in front of the spectator so that the audience was able to look onto the landscape as a "moving landscape." Landscape, as Bätschmann puts it, not only became accessible to the human gaze through the idea of depicting overviews (partly an effect of the invention of the balloon and of humanistic movements such as Petrarch) but also "transportable." It became possible to experience landscapes, such as the view from the Chinese-Russian train, at home (Bätschmann 1997: 97). As a consequence, the problem of movement for painting shows up on three levels: first, as painting (transport of foreign experience), second, as a landscape (construction of viewpoints from trains), and, third, in the landscape (clouds, driving trains, dancers, etc.).

In Richter, we find movement and time addressed. The aspect of movement is not only present in his so-called seascapes and cloud paintings, but primarily in his landscape paintings of meadows and fields. They are all painted from the experience of *walking* and not, as one commentator claims, from a moving train (Lenger in Butin/Reese 1994: 42), which points to Richter's attention to *human* experience. The aspect of time is in play in his paintings in which he destroys and paints a layer of paint over landscapes that almost disappear under the new level. Let us first turn to the landscape paintings that deal with walking and what Joseph Leo Koerner properly called (in relation to Caspar David Friedrich) the "halted traveler" (Koerner 2009: 189–97). The underlying experience that becomes visible in paintings such as *Country Path*, *Barn*, *Wiesental*, and *Landscape nearby Hubbelrath* is the experience of walking and hiking *through* landscapes. Accordingly, what we do not find in Richter's paintings is a thematization of landscape from the point of modern technology such as cars or airplanes (except the townscapes); rather, what we find in Richter is an interpretation of human experience as it is related to the walking body, that is, as being related to our own activity. Nature, in most of these paintings, is something *in which* our own activity is integrated as a moment. When we walk through a landscape, our walking occurs on a path that is part of fields and part of the landscape. Accordingly, in these cases, the objectifying moment recedes into the background. This insight is very important, especially since most commentators abstractly refer to Richter's romantic landscape paintings as being constituted *without* the aesthetical point of view. Against this position,

I submit, that we should look more closely at the relationship of these paintings to a specific modern experience, namely, the *moving body through landscape*. In Marcusian terms, we might say that most of Richter's landscape paintings are images of happiness, insofar as they project an ideal and utopian harmony and identity of walking and their environment, that is, a projection of an "authentic" relationship between us and the environment. Most of Richter's figurative landscape paintings are memory images of a happy body. I will come back to this point.

Seen from this background, how can we further determine a "landscape?" First of all, to experience nature as a landscape, one must take nature—as we said above—to be an object of *human experience*. In contrast to scientific theories of nature, human experience is bound to a specific angle or perspective *from which* nature is experienced. Accordingly, the specific perspective indicates a subject that is positioned *bodily* in or in front of nature. As we also underlined above, in this case nature is not taken to be an abstract structure or entity; instead, it is taken to have a *scape*, that is, a form. This shape needs elements that we address as trees, houses, plants, mountains, mountain ranges, etc. As Jean-Luc Nancy points out, landscapes are always "delimited by some natural or cultural feature" (Nancy 2005: 51). Through the bodily experience of the subject, the delimitation indicates a cultural moment, which takes possession of the landscape; for taking nature as *for someone* indeed transforms nature from a neutral element into something that the gaze and the walking body take to be *for* being walked in (or on) and *for* being looked at. Though not in a full instrumental sense, nature is something of which we take possession when we perceive it as a landscape. This taking possession is limited, however, because we do not take possession of nature in a practical or in a legal sense; instead, we take possession of it in order to enjoy *it* as an object prior to our experience. Though for the time that we are related to the landscape we can claim that the landscape is "ours," while we remain in *distance* to it (Zweite 2005). Accordingly, what we find in the experience of a landscape is an experience that is characterized by an ambivalent and almost dialectical structure: on the one hand, we are in *distance* to it; on the other hand, we are *in* and part of the landscape, which points to a moment of identification and mimesis. Even in the most removed experience of a sublime landscape, we never overcome the identificatory moment. Only a scientific or metaphysical relation can abstract from the bodily moment because these attitudes do not (at least in their most extreme forms) take nature as *human* experiences. However, in the case of landscape, nature

is related to the human body. The moment of distance, furthermore, is most prominent in the experience of the horizon and of wideness. As Nancy puts it, "The landscape begins with a notion, however vague and confused, of distancing and of a loss of sight" (Nancy 2005: 53), which he leads back to the difference between the experience of someone who is fully emerged in the landscape as his or her country (the peasant) and the aesthetical relation that we find in modern experience. According to Nancy, early landscape paintings are still ambivalent because they depict nature still in the mode of being occupied by human beings.

Richter's landscape paintings do not belong to this category. They are all modern precisely because they do not depict nature as being occupied by someone, but they fully present *themselves* in their representation. As such, they belong to what Nancy calls "uncanny landscapes," since—according to Nancy—in their depopulated presence, "the landscape estranges, it renders uncanny: there is no more community, no more civic life, but it is not simply 'nature'" (Nancy 2005: 61). Though Nancy's thesis might be appropriate for certain examples of the experience of landscapes and landscape painting, we should reject this thesis in regard to Richter's paintings, however, especially the paintings in which Richter indicates the occupation of human beings either through the perspective from which the landscape is experienced (such as walking) or through certain cultural indicators in the paintings, such as paths, bridges, forests, houses, barns, fields, prepared meadows, and other signs of civilization. For Richter's landscape paintings neither deal with a "wild" and dangerous nature nor are they absolutely empty. Let us turn to selected paintings and their analyses in order to understand this claim.

Paths

Country paths have a special status in our natural environment and for the development of human civilization. Usually, country paths are *not* used by modern transportation, such as cars, buses, or trains. They have their own history, which in most cases goes back to how animals found their way through nature long before human beings ever did. Now they are primarily used for walking and by farmers. The usage of these paths for walking has a special status within the European tradition. The *Spaziergang* [walk/hike], particularly within the German tradition, is still today a meaningful (Sunday) activity during which families together with their children dress up and walk around lakes or through

fields for several hours (Kronbichler 1990). In this tradition, walking belongs to the ideology of *frische Luft*—of "fresh air"—by means of which the members of societies with this tradition combine sociality and being in a community with the experience of *their* natural environment. This social experience of nature and community is not based on competition, speed, or achievement, as, for example, hiking or walking in the American park culture. Instead, walking in nature within the European tradition is an explicit bourgeoisie noncompetitive activity, though over time it lost its significance because of the automobile culture, and more recently, because of the bicycle culture. Given this background of the idea of a social nature, we should ask for the significance of paths for philosophy and painting. Several times, Richter has painted landscapes in which the country path plays a central role: to name just a few, in *Barn* (1983 and 1984, CR 549-1 and 550-1), *Apple Trees* (1987, CR 650-1), *Chinon* (1987, CR 645), *Landscape nearby Koblenz* (1987, CR 640), *Wiesental* (1985, CR 572-4), *Garden Path* (1987, CR 637-2), *Evening* (1987, CR 651-1), *Bühler Höhe* (1991, CR 749-1), *Beech Tree* (1987, CR 637-1), *Kaitum* (1995, CR 826), and *Hahnwald* paths appear. As we will see in the following, the role of the path for Richter's painting should be seen in its *forming* function for the image constitution itself.

In order to understand the path as an image and as part of an image, we do well to include two shorter pieces that Heidegger wrote in our reflections: one is entitled *The Country Path* [*Der Feldweg*], the other is entitled *Creative Landscape. Why do we live in the province?* [*Schöpferische Landschaft. Oder warum bleiben wir in der Provinz*?]. The first one Heidegger wrote in 1933 and the second one he wrote after the Second World War in 1949. While reading the Heidegger essays, we should also keep in mind Richter's *Country Path* (1987, CR 629-4, figure 7). Although the internal tension in regard to Heidegger's own thinking before and after the Second World War is not of interest in this book, both essays resonate with what we are attempting to grasp in Richter's paintings. In his short essay *Pathways* or *Country Paths*, Heidegger tries to show how a world, taken as the unified whole of human being, nature, and culture, comes into being, hangs together, and begins to "shine" through the pathway, which connects villages with the natural environment. Humans walk on paths which, according to Heidegger's poetic understanding, bring together heaven and earth, and which come into being and "happen" as a condition for the possibility of our objectifications of nature in the form of scientific investigations or technological exploitations. The country path, in other words, brings human and natural elements together and forms a unity. It gives us a vision of to where we *belong*, which is independent from our instrumental relationships to the world. As such,

the country path is an image of dwelling and being-at-home [*Heimat*]; it reveals a world before we can objectify and instrumentalize it. Heidegger begins his reflections in the following manner:

> It [the countrypath, C. L.] runs from the park gate towards Ehnried. The old linden trees in the Schloss garden gaze after it from behind the wall—whether at Easter when the path shines bright between emerging crops and waking meadows, or at Christmas when it disappears in snowdrifts behind the next hill. At the wayside crucifix it turns off to the woods. Along its edge the pathway greets a tall oak under which stands a roughly hewn bench. (Heidegger 1973: 33)

Three elements are of importance in this passage. First, Heidegger introduces the pathway as having a beginning and a target, or *telos*. Second, natural entities (e.g., trees, oak) are connected with cultivated entities (e.g., garden, bench). Finally, the path is related to the experience of natural time (seasons) and historical time (Christmas). As such, the main theme is already visible in the opening lines, namely, the synthesis and unification of elements to a whole, which should remind us of how we analyzed the constitution of *images* in Chapter 1. Accordingly, we should pay attention to how Heidegger conceives of the country path as an image! Spatiality (the path has a direction and goes along fields) is brought together with temporality, insofar as the path is related to the appearance of the fields in different seasons. Nature is here presented in a very concrete manner, which is close to how we really experience the country path when we walk on it, especially if we are able, as Heidegger underlines, to "listen" to this experience and to reject prejudices that we may have toward such an experience. "Way," "path," "walk," etc. have always been used for the life of human beings; indeed, it seems as if we are born and grow older on our life path, which is directed toward a biologically, religiously, or ethically interpreted *telos*, such as death, infinity, or happiness. Accordingly, the pathway not only refers to geographical paths that are related to regions and *Gegenden* but also refers to human life. As such, in the image of the path, both nature and human life are united. Heidegger presents the connection between the human path and the country path in terms of time:

> With the years, the oak along the way frequently carries one off to the memory of early games and first choices. (Heidegger 1973: 33)

The older we become, the more we are able to discover the path on which we are walking as it relates to our past. The country path, accordingly, not only is

determined by a *telos*, which is a future element, but is also determined by a beginning, which is a past element. Consequently, in addition to merging space and time, the country path also gathers together different temporal moments. All of the foregoing is held together by what Heidegger calls "growing," which is the term he uses to refer to what he takes the ancient concept of nature (*physis*) to mean. *Physis*, according to Heidegger, is a coming together of two elements, namely, blossoming [*Aufgehen*] and retreating [*Zurückgehen*]. As long as we do not interpret "nature" according to the modern conception that emphasizes laws and forces, but according to a conception that is closer to how we encounter nature as human beings, we may detect the way in which different "directions"—blossoming and retreating—come together. Seasons, for example, are not experiences that we can easily "objectively" define or scientifically determine; instead, seasons come and go like flowers blossom and die. According to Heidegger, we can experience this essence of nature only if we bring ourselves into a specific mood which, for example, we can only experience in relation to what is proper to the pathway, namely, walking, which, as we said above, is also a form of movement and, as such, is related to time.

Indeed, seen from this point of view, nature seems to be something that we never encounter "as such"; rather, we encounter nature in the form of trees, fields, and grass that we play in as children, or, in this case, while we are *walking* "through" it. Instead of just being there, we encounter it as something that comes and goes, has its rhythms, changes its colors, and is somehow between heaven and earth. All of this "moves forward" and receives its speed by what comes and goes at once. Growing and dying have *their own* time and temporality, which the pathway and our walking on the country path help us understand:

> Growing means this: to open oneself up to the expanse of heaven and at the same time to sink roots into the darkness of earth. Whatever is genuine thrives only if man is both in right measure: ready for the appeal of highest heaven and preserved in the protection of sustaining earth. (Heidegger 1973: 35)

Growing, according to Heidegger, is another unifying element within world experience, since growing is only possible if it is held back by something from which it originates and something to which it strives, namely, the earth. In terms of landscape, the connection is immediately visible. When we walk on a country path, everything we see (without digging) seems to come out of what holds all things together, which includes our own body and what is above the earth, namely, the sky. In all of Richter's landscape paintings, we encounter both earth and sky, even if it is in its abstract form, such as is the case in the early painting

Evening Mood (1969, CR 243, figure 4). This painting reminds us not only of the sky in some of Friedrich's paintings, such as *Evening* (1824), but also of Rothko's work given its abstractness. The elements of earth and sky are the determining elements whereby the upper and lower parts are connected not only by the horizon line but also by the darkness of the lower part and the lightness of the upper part. In addition, in this painting, it is not the country path that gathers everything together and functions as the secret center of the painting, but it is the bay area that we see in the center of the painting. The moment of time is probably the most central part of *Evening Mood*. As indicated by "evening," there is an image of something that turns downward to darkness in this work. Since sun experienced in the "evening" is not rising, the painting thematizes the aspect of growing that is related to "returning" and going back to the earth. This experience is only possible if we understand it in relation to the moving body and its "development" toward something in life, which is to say, ultimately toward death. Importantly, the "mood" of an evening can only be understood if we understand the coming and going, as well as the beginning and ending, in relation to human time.

Let us go back to Heidegger, who brings up in his essay an additional aspect of paths that is closely connected to what I pointed out in the last section about landscapes in general.

> But the message of the pathway speaks just so long as there are men who, born in its breeze, can hear it. They are hearers of their Origin and not servants of machination. In vain does man try with his plans to bring his globe into order if he is not ordered to the message of the pathway. . . . So man becomes distracted and pathless. To the distracted the Simple seems monotonous. The monotonous makes one weary. Those who are weary find only the uniform. The simple has fled. Its quite power is dried up. (Heidegger 1973: 37)

Describing and interpreting nature and the country path in the way Heidegger develops it, puts us into sharp contrast with a modern instrumental attitude toward nature, which carries us further away from an integration of the human and nonhuman aspects of our lives and the universe in which we are placed. It is this element that in our times gives almost all speaking of nature and landscape painting a "romantic" (meant in a nontechnical sense) touch. Richter's landscape paintings are based upon this element, insofar as they present nature to us in a contemporary form of picturing it (photography). But, in addition, they also give us the feeling of having lost something, namely, a relation toward nature that does not seem to be mediated by human beings. Several commentators

have pointed out that in most of Richter's landscape paintings, human beings do not appear *in* the paintings. Indeed, these paintings are emptied of references to human beings. I think we should reject this interpretation for two reasons: first, at least in the paintings in which paths appear, the human quality is indicated through the path and walking; second, on a reflective level, these paintings imply *us,* the spectators. As we discover by reflecting on the positioning of ourselves in front of the paintings, we can notice that we are part of them simply by the fact that we are seeing something *without* us in it. Interestingly, the phenomenon of human presence shows up even more when it is lacking. The feeling of lack is related to *what* is lacking. Accordingly, what is lacking appears even stronger than before and we notice this fact precisely when we notice that these paintings are emptied out of human beings and individuals.

In addition, by looking at *Evening Mood* (figure 4), for example, on a reflective level, we establish a relation between the painting and us, the viewer, in a specific mode, insofar as looking at a landscape without human beings or cultural objects in it is similar to looking into our past. Paintings such as *Evening Mood* let us establish a reference to *the past*, namely, untouched past. However, when we are looking at the work, we are self-related by way of our relationship to the past, given that we must take this painting as a formation of time, and more specifically, time as *memory*. Thus what is really painted and formed into an image in *Evening Mood* is memory. But memory is only possible, as we all know, because we *lost* what we are attempting to recall. The activity of recalling, therefore, is ambivalent since by recalling something we are becoming aware that it is no longer there as present. The painting makes this process visible; it *is* this process as an image, which is the reason that we can address it as a mood that is melancholic in its essence, and which, via its transcendence, indicates happiness in the way that Adorno and Marcuse envisioned it.

Let us return to Heidegger's essay and summarize what we have learned through this exercise. In a central passage of *Pathways*, Heidegger writes the following: "The pathway gathers in whatever has its coming-to-presence along the way; to all who pass this way it gives what is theirs. The same field and meadows accompany the pathway through each season with an ever-changing near-ness" (Heidegger 1973: 35). In this passage, Heidegger points to the main "functions" of the country path, namely, on the one hand, the gathering and collecting of all things between the earth and sky that are experienced on the way, and on the other hand, *leaving* everything as it is. What Heidegger has in mind is the dialectical character of this special experience of gathering and

unity; for the unifying event is not distorting, instrumentalizing, or destroying the elements that are integrated into a whole. As moments of the image, they even find their *place*, that is, their identity within the whole. The forming and "collection" of all the aforementioned moments result in what Heidegger calls the "giving" or "donation" of world, wherein by "world" Heidegger does not mean something that stands opposed to the experiencing subject, but rather, the structure of ultimate meaningful references *out of which* all things can be understood as such. "The expanse of all growing things," as Heidegger writes, "while along the pathway, bestows world" (Heidegger 1973: 35).

In sum, in his essay Heidegger tries to show how a world—taken as the unified whole of human being, nature, and culture—comes into being and begins to "shine" through the pathway. As such, Heidegger's analysis of what a country path is and means for us comes close to what in Chapter 1 we called "formed image," which Heidegger himself addresses in another short piece as the essence of images (Heidegger 2002: 120). The country path, we might even say, *forms* nature into a whole (image) and gives us the opportunity to see how everything is connected with each other before we can be related to it in objectifying modes. The path is a poetic principle. The essay is written in a poetic style because Heidegger assumed that this whole cannot be addressed properly by employing traditional philosophical language. As such, making the world visible is not possible, according to Heidegger, through scientific speech, but rather, it needs poetry, or, as we might state in our context, it needs the painted image. What we need to realize is that *the image functions like the pathway!*

"Paths" are deeply inscribed in Western intellectual history. Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, for example, gives us an "image" of how human beings may turn away from their inauthentic lives and turn toward the truth. The "path" one must take in order to leave the cave means in Greek *hodos*, which also means "method." A path, therefore, is a specific way and a specific direction by means of which human beings can reach a goal. Indeed, paths always have two aspects, namely, they have a direction and they have a target or goal, that is, a *telos*. Even if paths lead to "nothing," they must first be taken to lead to some target. As such, paths may be understood metaphorically as the human path of life on which we "walk." However, the direction is always ambivalent, since, on the one hand, a path points *toward* something; while, on the other hand, a path points *backward*. Consequently, the experience of the path is a *transitional* experience: while we are on our way toward a goal, at the same time we always distance ourselves from where we came from. In contemporary German, the word "*weg*," which is part

of the word for "country path" [*Feldweg*], is still used to indicate a movement away from something, such as "moving away" [*weg-ziehen*, literally "pulling away"] and "leaving" [*weg-gehen*]. While being on a path, we are arriving and leaving at the same time. Curiously, the term "*weg*" goes back to the German translation of the bible by Luther and was used to refer to a unit of distance. For example, in 1 Genesis 35:16, we can read in Luther's translation that Moses moved one "field away" [*feldwegs*] from Bethel. Way and path [*Weg*] in German are closely tied to the semantic field of leaving and moving away. In addition, the *Feldweg* refers to a path, which is contrasted to what is called "*Landstrasse*" (which means "highway;" literally "land street") in German. The translation of "*Feldweg*" as "country path" is therefore not perfect, since one should rather translate "land" as "country," which forces us to make a distinction between *field* and *land*. Whereas fields are identifiable units that are usually delimited within a landscape, "land" rather refers to something that is open and visually not easily identifiable. The highway [*Landstrasse*] is connecting "lands," as Schiller puts it in his famous poem *The Walk* [*Der Spaziergang*], whereas the *Feldweg* connects fields, as the name indicates. The *Feldweg* suggests that farmers, walkers, and animals are using these paths and that they do not play a role in connecting regional or national areas. They are purely local and thus tied to a locally specific landscape. They let us see the *specificity* of a landscape by bringing out the local characteristics of a region. They are about *Gegend*, and, as such, they function as do Adorno's names with which we began this chapter.

But let us look even more closely at Richter's *Feldweg* (1987, CR 629-4, figure 7). Since the path stands out in high contrast to the greenish colors that determine the painting, the path almost takes over the role of the horizontal line, dividing the painting into two main areas. The brownish path functions like a lightening stroke that separates and dislocates certain areas of the painting (Elger 2002b: 11). However, in separating these areas, the path brings these two areas together: it lets us see the togetherness of the grass in the foreground, the field in the middle area, the sky in the upper area, and the tree at the right side of the painting. Our gaze collects these elements while following the path. It understands these elements in their unity, and only in their unity receives the image its form. The tree to the right, though depicted in a very neutral way, gives the path a direction. The path leads *to* the tree, the directionality of which our gaze constitutes by wandering from the left to the right side of the path. The path leads *into* the landscape and *away* from the spectator. It is not placed in the painting like a horizontal dividing line, but as a dynamic line that meets with

the horizontal line behind the tree at the right side of the painting. The shadows that we see left of the tree indicate time, namely, later evening. Accordingly, the painting of the path not only unifies different "areas" of nature and brings them together (grass, tree, forest) but also unifies these elements by giving them a direction (=movement) by indicating time. However, time is not only indicated in the shadows but also in the season that the painting depicts. Landscapes never appear without the indication of natural time and natural rhythms, such as seasons or special periods of growing and flowering. In addition, as Nancy underlines, landscapes always make nature present as *weather* (Nancy 2005: 61). The weather in this painting is "nice," that is, it is not foggy, misty, or scary, but it is "soothing" and "warm." The atmosphere that the painting presents to us is clearly developed from the weather atmosphere, which, through empathy, can be understood by the spectator. There is no estrangement in this painting. It does not depict an "empty" or uncanny path in a threatening landscape. Furthermore, this landscape is not sublime, as the image does not present a lonely landscape, emptied out of human elements; rather, it functions as a *model for* paths and landscapes as such. As the main element in the painting, the path functions as the integrating moment that gathers together all other elements in the Heideggerian sense. The depiction is extremely neutral because it does not contain any psychological elements, such as discontent, fear, or excitement. Therefore it is not convincing in all cases, including this one, to place Richter within the romantic tradition.

This painting shows *simply* a country path, which reveals the "philosophical" function of the painting, insofar as it is an *image* of *the* country path. It presents an image to us, which we described by interpreting Heidegger's text: it is a country path! The essential appears in the form of an image and shines in its materiality. The painting gives us a view of a country path by *simply* depicting it but in a *complex* way forming all moments that belong to *the* country path into an image: movement, time, goal, separation, unification, weather, earth, growing grass, and sky. We should underline that the gathering of the image that we encounter is also connected to time in another sense. While we are hiking through a landscape and while we are experiencing a region *as* a landscape, the elements are held together by a dynamic view. Elements come and go, and when we leave the path, the landscape disappears. The painting gives us an *ideal* view of our world. And the *Feldweg* brings this moment out on a reflective level: one *stops* in order to enjoy and see a landscape, which is to say, one breaks through the natural flow of time. *One stands still. Time stops and temporality appears*.

The viewer's standpoint is not *on* the path but *before* it. Accordingly, one must stop and place oneself in a specific position in order to establish *this* view. As Nancy puts it, "A landscape is always the suspension of a passage, and this passage occurs as a separation, an emptying out of the scene or of being: not even a passage from one point to another or from one moment to another, but the step [*le pas*] of the opening itself" (Nancy 2005: 67). In other words, the distancing occurs in the painting on a higher level, given that the point of view is itself made visible, requiring a *static* unmovable moment that idealizes the path. Put in Elger's words, Richter's paintings "transform the photographically fixed moment into the timelessness of painting" (Elger 2002b: 22).

A path not only appears in *Feldweg*, however. As we mentioned above, Richter has painted many paths. Indeed, in *Barn* (1983 and 1984, CR 549-1 and 550-1), *Apple Trees* (1987, CR 650-1), *Chinon* (1987, CR 645), *Landscape nearby Koblenz* (1987, CR 640), *Wiesental* (1985, CR 572-4), *Garden Path* (1987, CR 637-2), *Evening* (1987, CR 651-1), *Bühler Höhe* (1991, CR 749-1), *Beech Tree* (1987, CR 637-1), *Kaitum* (1995, CR 826), and *Hahnwald* paths appear. In all of these paintings, the path is taken not only as the unifying element through movement and time but also as the main indicator of a harmony between the body, culture, and nature. Landscapes with which we have become accustomed during the last three centuries are, as previously mentioned, not "pure" nature, but are always encountered within a cultural framework. Landscapes are *for us*, that is, for our vision, for our enjoyment, and for our admiration, which is only possible if we encounter ourselves *in* and as part of them. Except for vast landscapes, such as large deserts, which are best explored by car or train; hills, fields, and mountains are best experienced on foot.

In this vein, Richter's paintings *Barn/Scheune* (1983 and 1984, CR 549-1 and 550-1), which he painted twice in 1983 and 1984, are of interest for us since they extend the concept of landscape that is worked out in his landscape paintings. With these paintings, it is not only the case that each painting confronts us with the imaging of a specific landscape, but it is also the case that all "path paintings" develop a specific attitude toward and a specific *thought* about nature that the spectator is able to visually reconstruct. As I mentioned in my introduction by referring to Sokolowski, paintings give us a view of a world in which we *can exist* and live in specific ways. Indeed, an image includes an ethos. The paintings thereby position us, the spectator, in a specific relation to what presents itself in and as the image, to which the spectator must respond either through reflection or through affection. Participating in an image is a form of positioning. In

extreme cases, one can totally reject or totally affirm such an offer. For example, the first pop art paintings were a shock for an audience that was comfortable with abstract expressionism and its accompanying attitude, which did not allow for the integration of the everyday, low culture and the popular world. This shock was not only based on the revolutionary shift in formal qualities or the different approach to art and painting; rather, together with this shift in formal qualities came a new world-relation formed into images and, as a consequence, the audience was forced into a specific position toward the world that was projected in these images. Accordingly, to repeat this important point, we would do well to take paintings not as simple *objects* of interpretations but as interpretations *themselves*. Because of this, they offer us intelligible views upon our world. As Hegel nicely puts it: "Humans want to be at home [*zu Hause*] in their world, they want to freely move in it and to find themselves at home [*heimisch*]. . . . This includes a manifold of relations and that the moments can be worked out. Art represents more or less these relations" (Hegel 2003: 106, trans. C. L.).

In addition to poetry, Hegel emphasizes painting in this context because painting is able to depict the world with which we are forced to arrange ourselves and in which we want to be at home in a variety of perspectives. Even a world depicted as alienating and foreign, expresses in its foreignness how the individuals who belong to this world find themselves *in* this world, which through their relatedness always is *their* world. This world includes concrete natural conditions, such as weather conditions, climate, etc. Thus the difference between landscape paintings by Nolde and landscape paintings by Macke are not simply personally or subjectively determined; rather, they are based on a different presentation of their "being-at-home" in what they present as their natural environment. Given this, we can see how Richter confronts us with a *specific* relation and a specific world that necessarily places us *in* it because, to use Hegel again, as humans we are *part* of it.

In the case of landscape paintings in general and in the case of Richter's paintings in particular, paintings are "statements about our relation to nature and therefore about ourselves" (Butin/Reese 1994: 15). Our judgments about paintings are not only, as Kant assumed, about the inner harmony that we feel in ourselves and in front of the work, they are also based on a reaction to the *view* that paintings work out, "stage," and create. For example, Russian futurists present a take on nature in their works that is certainly extremely different when compared with Richter's world. All of Richter's path paintings have a serene, unemotional, and thoughtful quality, which is supported by their intellectual,

ultimately unromantic distance with which they confront us. Richter's landscape paintings remain bound, as Astrid Kasper puts it, to the "facticity of the appearing nature" (Kasper 2003: 184), which to some extent can also be traced back to the "Dutch" conception of vision that we find in Richter's work. In addition, Richter's paintings do not contain an explicit religiously determined symbolic level, which moves Richter away from the German romantic tradition (Butin/Reese 1994). For example, whereas Friedrich's paintings are highly constructed regarding the symbolic message that they convey (Butin/Reese 1994: 19), with his paintings Richter remains bound to the logic of the visual *before* it can be taken as a sign for something else. Though commentators have tried to relate Richter again and again to the German tradition in romantic painting (2006c), the antiromantic setting of Richter's paintings is also supported by the fact that they do not bring a form of human longing into the picture. The landscapes are presented without "symbolic elevation" (Zweite 2005: 32). As Richter himself pointed out:

> What I lack is the spiritual basis which undergirded Romantic painting. We have lost the feeling of God's omnipresence in Nature. For us, everything is empty. Yet, these paintings are still there. They still speak to us. We continue to speak to them, to use them, to have need of them. (Richter in Storr 2002b: 68)

In sum, we should see that these paintings work out specific images of nature, precisely because they give us a sense of what nature *is* and how we are placed in it. In connection with this, Robert Storr holds the thesis that these paintings introduce a moment of memory, and in regard to *Davos S.* and *Barn*, he claims:

> Conceptually, Roland Barthes's definition of the photographic condition as "the that has been" of experiential reality is once again germane. These vistas never were and never will be there for us; they were there for the artist just as long as it took to snap the picture and are only available to him through the combination of that imperfect documentation and his equally imperfect memory. (Storr 2002a: 67)

I do not want to return to our discussion of the difference between the photographic and the painterly image (for this see Chapter 2). But let us recall that the main difference between the photographic and the painterly image is that the photo remains tied to its referent in the mode of "have-been," whereas in painting the opening of a world, that is, meaning, essence, and the ideal can appear. Consequently, two aspects are incorrect in Storr's interpretation: (1) Richter's landscape paintings are in truth instantiations of the opposite of

what Storr claims: rather than showing the "has-been" of the landscape, the painting *makes present* the landscape *because* it represents the landscape as an ideal formation. (2) The private aspect of one's memory, which in photography becomes a *public* moment, is certainly in play in painting. Memory is a *secret* and can never be communicated as such, but painting is the opposite of this secret moment because it loses the reference to a *subjective* and *inner* view of the world. Remember: Barthes explains the "have-been" by means of a photograph of his mother. Painting, then, remains always tied to the essential. These paintings are the formation of an *image* and an idea of nature. As I argued in Chapter 1, images *are* formed representations that "stage" their aboutness. Even in regard to his abstract paintings, as Richter himself explains, one can read his paintings "as similes, that is, as images of a possible social cohabitation" (Richter in Butin 1991: 52). In this way, they are, as Butin explains, "social models" (Butin 1991: 52). There are five main aspects of this social model (at least as it appears in the landscape paintings) that structure the understanding of the human world, as it is formed into these paintings: (1) the landscape is whole, which is to say that it is not destroyed or partial, (2) the view presented is a bourgeoisie, uncritical idea of the relation between humans and nature, (3) the landscape paintings are not religious, (4) they take nature to be a cultural artifact, and (5) they are factual, that is, they are not symbolic.

Let us explain these elements by looking again at the two paintings entitled *Barn*. Both paintings are based on the same scene, although the first painting depicts the barn from a further distance. Whereas the barn and the tree in front of the barn appear very similar in both paintings, it is precisely the path that appears in differently shaped curves. Whereas in the first painting, the path shows a direction toward the left, the direction changes to the right in the second painting. But in both paintings, the path leads into the scene and away from the position of the viewer, the consequence of which is that the viewer is taken to be *on her way*. The painting interrupts this movement and forms the earth, the sky, the meadow, the grass, the fence, and the barn into an image of an undestroyed landscape. Hence the temporal rupture introduced here is related both to the indicated spatial movement and to the ideal "fixation" of the painting. The impression that Richter's landscape paintings are emptied out of human beings, at least in relation to these cases, is not correct: for from the point of the viewer, the path, the cultivated field, and also the barn (in these two paintings) are a clear indicator of human presence in these landscape paintings. Barns are an optimal example for enculturated and cultivated nature, that is, for a mode of human presence in nature that is not destructive but is a harmonious

conception of the unity between human activity and natural reality. It is in this sense that these paintings present a bourgeois, but nevertheless promising and transcending, view of nature; though this view is based on an uncritical and affirmative relation toward the natural world that is experienced in its landscape character in which the barn is the integrating element around which all other elements come together in their presence. The special focus on the harmonious view of nature is supported by the fact that in his painting *Chinon* (1987, CR 645), Richter left out the power plant, which was still visible in the photograph.

But why are these paintings "harmonious" interpretations of the human world? Barns are usually not made from modern artificial materials; rather, they are built from wood and inconspicuously integrated into the landscape. Farmers do not build barns away from fields, but they are built close to where grass is mowed, fields are cultivated, or animals are placed. In other words, barns are a form of building and human self-externalization that *mediate* culture and nature without a destructive relation to either of those sides, for they remain as close as possible to the natural environment and the natural material to build the barn, in addition to which they remain as close as possible to a simple human world. Moreover, barns are used for *protection*, particularly for the protection of hay and grass, which are used as food for animals. As such, barns are a part of the nature-culture circle in which we are placed and in which we participate as human beings. Accordingly, on the one hand, barns are used for protecting what humans have taken from nature, and on the other hand, barns are there to protect cultivated nature from nature itself, such as bad weather in the form of rain, hail, snow, and heat. Nature as weather in these two paintings is not only indicated by shadows and atmosphere (as in *Country Path*) but is also indicated and referenced in the depiction of the barn. Accordingly, the image mediates and thereby integrates three levels: (1) human cultivation, (2) the place of cultivation in nature, and (3) food/life, all of which are gathered together and formed out as a *landscape*; for what counts is not simply that we see a barn, but that we notice how beautifully the paintings integrate everything into a unity.

Clouds

I would like to round up this final chapter that deals with culture and landscape images as images of a world we can live in with two briefer reflections and comments, namely, on the one hand, with reflections on the astonishing

presence of clouds in Richter's painted world, and, on the other hand, with brief comments about the beautiful series of abstract paintings entitled *Wald* [*Forest*]. I already offered some reflections on one of Richter's cloud paintings in Chapter 3, but I would like to extend these comments toward the praxis of landscape painting.

Clouds have a central position in our cultural and intellectual history, which includes a close relationship between art and the sciences in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly since the visualization of natural phenomena was (and perhaps still is) crucial to scientific knowledge and progression (Esmeijer 1977). For example, Constable thought of landscape paintings as experiments of the philosophy of nature. Even in the history of philosophy, clouds play a crucial role, perhaps most visibly in Descartes and Kierkegaard. Descartes most famously declared clouds to be an important object of philosophical thinking by declaring clouds to be a primary phenomenon for a philosophy of nature in *The World or Treatise on Light*. Given the complexity of cloud formations, Descartes argued, clouds are the best "test" for philosophy, but not because of their physical nature (which he tried to explain in a mechanistic way), as one might have suspected, but because of their empirical qualities and the challenge they present to sensual experience. Of course, Descartes was interested in destroying the mysticism that surrounded clouds in his century as something "high up" in the sky and God-given. Indeed, by explaining clouds as an effect of natural processes, Descartes tried to make clouds the object of scientific knowledge and thereby, he contributed significantly to the history of the Enlightenment. The irony of this reduction, however, is that because of the assumed empirical basis of scientific thought, one needs to pay even more attention to the complexity of cloud formations on the level of experience and "wonder," which, in turn, *motivates* our thinking about it. Consequently, though Descartes tried to explain clouds in a quasiscientific manner, he had to first acknowledge their empirically infinite range of appearances. As he says at the beginning of Chapter 3 of his treatise:

> I consider that there is an infinity of diverse motions that endure perpetually in the world. After having noted the greatest of these (i.e. those that bring about the days, months, and years), I take note that the vapors of the earth never cease to rise to the clouds and to descend from them, that the air is forever agitated by the winds, that the sea is never at rest, that springs and rivers flow ceaselessly, that the strongest buildings finally fall into decay, that plants and animals are always either growing or decaying; in short, that there is nothing anywhere that is not changing. (Descartes 2014)

The empirical variety and the infinite range of formations that characterize clouds, together with an infinite range of color experiences and weather situations, made clouds one of the most often-used objects for painting in the history of Western art, especially since clouds offer painters an infinite range of images and an ever complex field of formations.

In addition, due to their changing nature, clouds challenge the painterly skill and craft. As such, clouds are located *between* figurative and abstract painting, and it is this aspect, which Buchloh calls Richter's "dialectical conception of abstraction" (Buchloh in Richter 2005e), that seems to be decisive for Richter. Clouds are themselves "landscapes" (as cloudscapes) and, given their dynamic nature, they need to be conceived of as objects that are deeply connected to the experience of time and movement. This observation is supported by the history of modern (Western) painting itself, insofar as we can observe a direct connection between nineteenth-century landscape painting and abstract art in the twentieth century. The more subjective landscape paintings became, that is, the more they focused on psychological aspects such as feelings, moods, and such things as color "music," the less important the object became itself and, as a consequence, landscape paintings became abstract. It seems as if Richter found a way out of this dilemma, however, given that photographs of landscapes remain the basis and starting point for his paintings, the consequence of which is that his paintings avoid the subjective route and remain oriented toward reality.

In this vein, Kierkegaard muses in a short piece written in 1846 about the philosophical quality of clouds that are, he claims in a rather amusing tone, the only thing in the universe that is not boring, especially during autumn when clouds, according to his observations, move like "vagabond dreams" and "support themselves in voluptuous floating." He goes on with the following:

> Stand still, you who call yourself a thinker, and watch the clouds—during autumn. If you have ever thought about anything before, then think again. Consider what you might wish to be—a human being? Such a thought could hardly occur to a human being. An angel? Tiresome! A tree? It takes too long and it is too quiet. A cow? Too stolid a life. No—a cloud—in the autumn. Would I were that. The rest of the year I would stay hidden somewhere—or in nothingness, which could also be expressed in this way: I do not want to be, but every autumn I would like to live for one month. In itself a cloud is a rather impressive thing . . . ; I would like to be a large, shapely cloud. (Kierkegaard 2009: 157)

In this quote, Kierkegaard combines a poetics of nature, the basis of which also determined romantic landscape painting in the nineteenth century, with

a poetics of the (philosophizing) self. What Kierkegaard is fascinated by is ultimately very similar to Descartes, namely, the infinite range of formations, which, for Kierkegaard, point to philosophy itself, insofar as he takes up an old mythological story according to which the clouds in autumn are the thoughts of gods. In this analogy, the clouds are treated like a thinker who is flexible, moving, changing, and imaginative. Though Kierkegaard operates with the analogy of thinking, that is, philosophy, and clouds in autumn, I submit that we can extend the analogy for our purposes and say that clouds are not only an important object of painting, but, even more importantly, that they are an analogy for painting itself. As the clouds in autumn are changing their appearance, so must the painter paint if she wants to be successful in painting the image (Esmeijer 1977). The flexibility and the imaginative power make a good painter "like a cloud."

In this vein, cloud paintings in particular involve from the outset the attempt to image time and movement: painters such as Menzel and Turner were the first painters who dealt extensively with the new take and attitude toward nature. The painter (and this was the new problem in modern painting) not only was forced to deal with the problem of how to paint movement in a painting but also faced with the meta-problem of how nature should be temporally understood, given that nature became something that is accessible "as a whole" (or at least in large spatial settings). In Turner's famous train painting *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844), a new temporal factor is in play, which both for the viewer and for the painter are experienced as unsettling, inasmuch as the train movement that Turner painted *lasted* while the rest of the painting was fixed and "frozen." Nature, taken for centuries as a metaphysical, unchangeable structure, now becomes discovered as something flexible, movable, and changeable. Experienced nature became, therefore, the center of how nature was conceived. What we find, hence, is the phenomenon of a "double time," which Turner's painting forms into an image of *one* landscape. While a painting always contains an "ideal" and permanent moment, the problems of movement and time are difficult to resolve if the experiencing subject is moving (on a train). As we know from our own experience, when we see a landscape from the window of a driving car or moving train, it is not always clear whether the landscape or the car/train is moving. Most of the time, though, we experience ourselves as *fixed* whereas we experience the landscape as *moving*. Sometimes, however, when we pass a moving train, it happens that we experience this as our own movement. Accordingly, the painters of the nineteenth century did not only start to imagine themselves as moving (e.g., Turner on his extensive travels throughout Europe);

rather, these painters suddenly discovered a "moveable" nature. Despite all this, the experience of clouds in Richter is based on the precise opposite of the foregoing, insofar as it is the clouds that are constantly moving and constantly changing whereas the viewer's position is fixed, that is, her bodily position remains undefined.

The reference to the body is important since it makes even more visible the contrast in something that cannot appear in an image directly, namely *the* nature as a whole, insofar as the lived body indicates a perspective from which nature is experienced. Indeed, landscape painting is always confronted with the tension between the whole and a limited aspect of it. The representation of clouds makes the same problem even more visible. For example, in Richter's *Clouds* (1978, CR 443-a, figure 6), the problem is indicated through the *extremely artificial* framing of the clouds, insofar as we do not see any cloud as a "whole" and the limitations of the painting "cut through" every particular cloud formation that the painting presents. Accordingly, right from the onset, the *limits* of painting clouds are clear and these limits are put in an extreme tension with the sky and cloud formations *within* the frame. Moreover, the infinity of the clouds is driven to an extreme abstraction such that one wonders whether the painting is really about clouds or whether the painting, instead, presents a beautiful contrast and unity of two colored forms to us, namely, the deep blue of the sky and the white-gray color of the clouds, which, in turn, render the "blueness" of the blue sky even more visible. As such, *Clouds* is a painting that presents the tension between the figurative and the abstract, or, put differently, the tension between the finite (figurative) and the infinite (abstract). As a consequence, this painting appears even more idealized and essentialized than others because the figurative and identificatory moment is driven to its utmost abstraction. To quote Elger's nice formulation again, "Richter's paintings work because they transfer the fixed moment in the photograph into the timelessness of painting. The situation documented in the photographic original bound to a topographical situation thus transcends the painting to become a placeless experience of nature" (Elger in Richter 2012: 27).

According to Simmel in his essay *The Philosophy of Landscape*, a landscape is related to the relation between an aspect and the whole, insofar as a specific natural aspect or perspective (region) is presented as unity (Simmel 2007). A landscape tries to integrate the infinite in the finite and limited. The presentation of clouds in paintings, that is, the *image* of clouds, seems to be the best vehicle for what Simmel has in mind, inasmuch as the two moments, aspect and unity, or region and whole, are put into the most abstract tension with each other. On the one

hand, in each of their developments, clouds are *limited* to a specific formation and appearance; on the other hand, in each of these formations, they seem to present a whole and a unity. The latter is supported by the fact that clouds can be categorized and meteorologists have found many *types* of cloud formations that all receive their own *name*. Put in Simmel's terms, the finite and the infinite come together in *one* image of something that remains vaguely placed between the figurative and the abstract. As Simmel puts it in relation to landscape painting,

> The raw material of landscapes provided by bare nature is so infinitely varied and changes from case to case. Consequently, the points of view and the forms that compose its elements into a sense—perceptual unity will also be highly variable. The route towards gaining an approximate idea at least, seems to me to lead through landscape as an art-form in painting. (Simmel 2007: 23)

As I indicated in Chapter 3, though it is difficult to detect the walking aspect in Richter's *Clouds*, the bodily aspect of the painting is nevertheless present, insofar as the presentation of the clouds is pushed to such an abstract and artificial level that it brings about an odd bodily distortion, namely, the body as placed on the earth (if we take seriously that the clouds are above us). Whereas the clouds seem to be painted from "nowhere," they produce a tension with the bodily position of the viewer. For, the "nowhere" is only possible, at least if we refer to our everyday experience, from a position of laying on the ground, whereas in the gallery we look at these paintings while standing in front of them. Our imagination needs to constantly correct, so to speak, the bodily position that the painting prescribes and the position that we take in the gallery or museum. Consequently, the conflict and tension between the limited and the unlimited is also reflected on the level of the viewer, since we are aware of having a perspective (our position) onto something that, as such, has no perspective (clouds, sky, heaven, blue). What a pleasurable dialectic!

Wald

If we trust Adorno's idea that memories of towns and landscapes that we encountered in our childhood stay with us as promising *images* of a reconciled world, then we should understand many of Richter's landscape paintings as superb realizations of this aspect of transcendence in time. Similarly, in a brilliant essay, the phenomenologist Sokolowski explains that painting as such is related to human happiness, as paintings show us certain possibilities about ourselves

and a world in which we are placed and are forced to understand ourselves. The possibility of forming a world, put differently, depends upon the condition that the painting is *part of* this world. Consequently, paintings taken as world formations have the following double structure: they are meaningful because they are placed *in* worlds in order to *reveal* these worlds; otherwise they would be illustrations or documents. Sokolowski writes:

> Even in landscapes and seascapes, poetry [S. includes painting here, C. L.] imitates and intimates action or at least a setting for action, and a setting with a certain quality: as enabling the action, or as hindering, threatening, inviting, absorbing, scorning, or annihilating it. Even Jackson Pollok and Mark Rothko express a context for human beings. (Sokolowski 2005: 346)

Sokolowski's thesis that both figurative and abstract landscapes can never lose their human contexts seems to be the most proper way of dealing with many of Richter's paintings, primarily because both the abstract and the figurative paintings can and should be understood as landscapes. On the one hand, figurative paintings, such as *Small Stair at the Seaside* (1969, CR 237-2) or the beautiful painting *Small Landscape at the Seaside* (1969, CR 220), are so extremely formalized that they could compete with paintings by abstract painters such as Barnett Newman. On the other hand, a recent series of paintings, such as *Cage* (2006, CR 897/1-6) and *Wald* (2005, CR 892/1-12, figure 16), tend to have deep human associations despite their abstractness. As Richter pointed out in regard to his abstract paintings, "Painting is the making of an analogy for something non-visual and incomprehensible: giving form and bringing it within reach" (Richter 2009a: 120). Interestingly, Richter follows a German tradition that starts with Goethe and runs all the way through Klee and Beuys, whose entire works are devoted to work on the organic connection between image and reality understood as a connection between image and world/nature, as well as the connection between the visible and the invisible. The invisible is understood as the natural process (Koerner 2009: 225). The latter is thereby conceived of as a relation between intuition and knowledge. In this vein, in the context of drawings of rock formations in 1824 Goethe writes:

> By means of this concept (i.e., the relation between intuition and knowledge) it is possible that the draughtsman is able to correctly represent [*darzustellen*], on his own, rock formations and mountain tops, insofar as he clarifies [verdeutlicht] the invisible through the visible and is able to reveal the general character of the world in the small as well as in large. (Goethe 2008/14: 623)

In this passage, Goethe outlines an idea that inspired German artists from Klee to Beuys: the idea that a proper knowledge of nature *necessarily* needs and is related to intuition and visual representation, which makes that which is invisible visible and renders it accessible to the human mind and to human reason. In a similar fashion, Richter refers to his abstract paintings as "models," which is a term that Goethe also uses in his philosophy of nature. In this connection, Richter writes: "Abstract pictures are fictive models, because they make visible a reality that we can neither see nor describe, but whose existence we can postulate. We can denote this reality in negative terms: the unknown, the incomprehensible, the infinite" (Richter 2009a: 121). These fictive models, though they do not go as far as Goethe does, can be understood through Richter's abstract landscape paintings, which give us a "hint" and "pointer" toward that to which they refer.

The *Cage* and *Forest* series are the central works in Richter's oeuvre that can be understood as "fictive models," since, with their abstract layering and their infinite range of dealing with background, foreground, distance, nearness, and "shining through," these paintings give us an *idea* of a forest. Woods, in addition, also echo the long cultural history that they enjoy in German culture, including their central importance for fairy tales and nineteenth-century romantic music, such as Brahms. Richter himself points out that the Germans have a special relation to forests and, not without irony, he remarks that as a young child he wanted to become a forester (Richter 2009a: 253). In addition, he mentions the following:

> Helplessness is the great theme in painting, or rather the strongest motivation for and during painting. And the forest in general has special significance, perhaps more so in Germany than anywhere else. You can lose your way in forests, feel deserted, but also secure, held fast in the bosom of the undergrowth. (Richter 2014: 99)

The analogy that Richter draws in this passage between the image of forests and painting is remarkable, since it points to the function of the image as a model for reality. Painting is such a model. In the Richter exhibition in Los Angeles in 2006, the *Wald* paintings were all displayed in one room, facing each other, so that the viewer was literally surrounded by them which to some extent allowed the viewer to become lost in these images. As the saying goes, there are situations in which one no longer sees the forest through the trees: *Wald* seems to present such a position. The images that make up *Wald* are all images of and about *visibility*, since all paintings in this series deal with the problem of what we see when faced with them as abstract paintings, the situation of which is echoed by our

experience of the jungle of trees and stumps that we (can) encounter in woods. Due to overlapping trees, stumps, leaves, bushes, etc., it is very difficult to make proper identifications in such situations, which is most likely also the reason for the frightening nature of woods. We can hear noises and we see shades, but it is extraordinarily difficult to identify anything and to build up and establish a stable reality while in the woods. As a consequence, vision goes back and forth between imagination and reality, and clear apperceptions are no longer possible. These paintings are presenting this "situation" in a perfect manner: many areas on the canvas are very unclear, but at the same time, one can detect shimmering (like water or ponds); there are veils, scratches, overlapping streaks, fog, and even mist. The foreground layers seem to work like screens. Indeed, the entire representational world of these paintings can be summarized in one word: unclarity.

However, and this point is crucial, unclarity and the "mysterious chill" that it produces (Nugent 2006: 97) do not mean that nothing can be seen, experienced, or identified. Consequently, *Wald* gives us a model and interpretation of this world "between" identification and loss of identification. *Wald* is a series, perhaps even more than other abstract paintings, which deals with the transition between abstract and figurative painting *as* images. The mimetic quality of *Wald* is clear: as we can no longer clearly see "what is going on" in a forest when faced with its frightening nature, so are we faced with unclarity when confronted with Richter's paintings in the gallery. Accordingly, *Wald* is a *perfect* model, despite its skepticism. As such, they are the best examples for the idea of painterly images, since, despite their "abstractness," one can see much in them. The color range of *Wald* reminds us of colors that we encounter in a setting determined by water, by a humid atmosphere, and by brownish and greenish tree stems. The paintings display their materiality in an extraordinarily synthetic manner, and thereby they give us an image of the materiality of trees, wood, and bark. The materiality and sensuality are, we might say, very "woody." The constant shifting of background and foreground, which makes us see "through" the first layer and anticipate something further behind (such as light or water), is also supported by a very rough material foreground (which indicates the usage of mechanical tools and not brushes) and a blurred and very smooth background. In fact, with the exception of fire, all elements are in play in these paintings: water, earth, and wind. Accordingly, Elger's observation about the relation between abstract and figurative paintings in Richter makes sense: abstract paintings "borrow their compositional structures and coloration

from the landscapes he was painting during the same period" (Elger in Richter 2012: 23).

Overall, then, with Goethe we can conclude that Richter's paintings in general and *Wald* in particular clarify "the invisible through the visible and [are] able to reveal the general character of the world in the small as well as in the large." The landscape paintings are in their entirety "fictive models" of the world, insofar as they idealize what they present through condensation, concentration, and interpretation.

Conclusion

If we ask at the end of this text what I have achieved in terms of quantity, then I need to respond with a disappointing answer: not much! In seven chapters, I have tried to demonstrate the complexity of Richter's paintings as images and modes of understanding the world. In these chapters, I have mainly used and discussed the following paintings: *First Look into the Inside of an Atom* (figure 1) in the introduction; *Window* (figure 3), *Secretary* (figure 2), and *Abstract Painting* (figure 5) in Chapter 3; *Youth Portrait* (figure 11) in Chapter 4; *Reader* (figure 12) in Chapter 5; *Moritz* (figure 14), *Dead* (figure 9), *Strontium* (figure 15), and *Betty* (figure 8) in Chapter 6; as well as *Country Path* (figure 7) and *Clouds* (figure 6) in Chapter 7. Though my interpretations of these paintings and my view of them *as* interpretations might not have satisfied everyone and might be judged differently from different disciplinary angles, I have tried to demonstrate that in many cases we can avoid the pitfall of abstract theorizing, as well as the chief problem of many philosophical interpretations of artwork, namely, the attempt to use works of art as *illustrations* of philosophical ideas. Although I have not dealt with the art historical tools, such as iconographic comparison, in a fully comprehensive manner, I hope that my approach will not be judged as too naïve. For although the term naïve has often been used to describe the hermeneutical approach to cultural artifacts, and despite the criticisms that have been raised toward Heidegger's essay on art (primarily via Shapiro) and Gadamer's hermeneutic view of art (primarily via Szondi), I still think that they offer us ways of resisting overly abstract approaches to works of art. Accordingly, I do not understand hermeneutics as a "theory" of art or as a theory about how to understand documents historically; rather, I understand hermeneutics as a phenomenology of how *to read* various kind of things, including nonliterary documents, such as paintings. Consequently, hermeneutics, in my view, should be used as a philosophical *propaedeutic*.

The first chapter, in which I outlined some basics of a hermeneutics of images, I did not intend to offer a satisfactory philosophical aesthetics; rather, I intended to work out and to reflect on some guiding principles of how to look at and understand Richter's paintings as something that is itself a mode of

understanding. For works of art are entities that want to be understood out of themselves, even if this includes knowledge that is not immediately accessible. As languages need to be learned in order to be spoken, so art needs to be experienced in order to be understood. In the end, according to my intuition, all aesthetical reflections, unless they deal with aesthetics or aesthetical experience in a metaphysical sense, that is, as a capacity of reason or as the creativity of the universe, need to return to the work and this, ultimately, is the real and most difficult task, especially for a philosopher, who is most comfortable making abstract reflections.

As I outlined in Chapter 1, such a propaedeutic view should reflect on paintings from a perspective that is best characterized by the following aspects: (1) paintings are intelligent formations, that is, they are not simply constructions; (2) paintings are formations, that is, they are not simply given, but they have their own temporality that is constituted between process and participation; as such, they are interpretations and help us understand what they are about; (3) paintings as images are idealizations, since they need to transcend the given toward some kind of essence or the essential; otherwise they could not be *images* and would remain pictures; (4) paintings have their own materiality that comes to presence *within* the representation and image; as such, materiality is not external to the interpretatory force of the image, but, instead, is a relation *to* and *within* it. On the basis of understanding these aspects as "guiding clues" for interpreting some of Richter's paintings, we learned in Chapters 2 through 5 that, indeed, Richter's paintings offer us interpretations of what they are images *of*. Paintings are like actors. This, however, is never simply given, and my interpretation of *Youth Portrait* tried to reveal exactly this point: whereas most viewers might think that *Youth Portrait* is about Ulrike Meinhof, further reflections reveal that the painting is not about Meinhof, but, is about a general quality of what it means to be human (which Meinhof embodied). The difference between photographic images and painted photographs, as worked out in Chapter 2, should have made it even clearer why we should not look at Richter's "figurative" paintings as if they are photographs. Paintings as images *entertain* their issues, particularly if we take the entirety of Richter's work into account, and these issues make up an entire world! From abstract problems, such as "what is an image?" or "what is vision?" over questions of human death and human morality, through issues of human existence and human culture, Richter's work covers the entire range of human experience as well as the entire range of philosophical reflections that might be connected to it.

As we pointed out in the introduction, this latter aspect is important since Richter's paintings are themselves "philosophical" given that they reflect on what they present. Another word for this reflection is "meditation." "Meditation" is more proper to images, since images operate beneath and beyond language, insofar as they unify and synthesize their content differently. As images, they remain ideals beyond the fleeting world, but the inner structure of these images and how they achieve their unity throughout their moments display the deep intellectual motive in Richter's art, insofar as they always force us, the viewer, to ask what we *really* see when we look at his work. This gap or delay between seeing and looking that his work emphasizes, which some commentators have interpreted as Richter's skepticism, is the meditative force of these paintings. Richter's skepticism, however, is not final, or, put differently, being skeptical is not the final answer that we get from Richter. Instead, we should understand this skepticism only as the starting point and as the initial move to push us out of our comfort zone into a mode in which we start to think through images without using words and theories.

To my mind, the *October 18, 1977* series is the high point of this kind of intuitive intelligence, which stands unmatched in the history of painting after 1945. For the *October 18, 1977* series is not, as some commentators have claimed, based on Richter's skepticism; rather, this series is the best example for how painting can overcome the skepticism that it entertains only as a beginning point. Ultimately, the skeptical attitude that comes out *in* them is transcended by the understanding that these paintings offer us *of* their initial skepticism. On the meta-level, here I agree with Adorno and Marcuse, works of art in general transcend their own "skeptical" position, and it seems to me that Richter's remarks on faith and hope, which I interpreted in Chapter 6, are evidence enough that he is aware of this transcendence. Consequently, his postmodern interpreters are distorting the real issue that is at stake in his works (for this, also see Klinger 2013: 77).

The most complicated aspect in Richter's painting is the materiality of his paintings. Though I have argued that we should understand Richter's attempt to avoid any traces that could point to his subjectivity through either painting photographs or through using tools other than brushes for his paintings as a "reversed" process, namely, as a "protestant" mode of sensuality, I am no longer sure whether this general interpretation of sensuality is sufficient and would need an extension. The fact that all of Richter's paintings are ruled by the conflict between seeing and touching, and between the conflict of nearness and distance,

points to the regulating principle of desire in his work. Importantly, the question of desire, I admit, would need an exhaustive treatment through additional reflections and through questions that I have not raised in this book. Perhaps this task is too large for a book like this. In this vein, Didi-Huberman's brilliant reflections on touch, flesh, and materiality go beyond what I was able to tackle in this text, but they would need to be more fully addressed in the context of the problem of materiality. Moreover, the question of how far the desire that undergirds many of Richter's images is a male-driven desire and needs to be spelled out and made visible as such, I have avoided to ask. Finally, the first draft of this book included an entire chapter on the *S. and Child* series (1995, CR 827/1-8), but I decided to remove it since I was no longer sure whether these paintings really "work" and are successful. I simply felt uncomfortable commenting on them. Given that Richter himself acknowledges that the point at which a painting is "finished" and "works" is difficult to determine, I came to the conclusion that this series does not work, especially since in addition to the private character of these paintings (Germer 1997; Haidu 2009), the symbolic aspect and the art historical horizons that we find in these images are too powerful and *overdetermine* the image. It is as if the image is blocked in these paintings. The effect of this overdetermination and blockage is that it becomes unclear whether these paintings *really* help us understand the mother-child relation that these images present, idealize, and essentialize. Similarly, *Reader* and *Betty* would need to be accompanied by more comprehensive reflections on the gendered gaze, but in these cases I had the impression that these paintings are not *exclusively* ruled by one single aspect and that they are immensely authentic paintings, even without meditating on the male gaze that may or may not be contained in them. In addition, I have the impression that the literature on this topic too easily moves away from the paintings and reflects on issues in psychoanalysis and sociology that, for me, are secondary and not *necessarily* constitutive for the image as such.

Finally, given the small amount of works that I discussed in this book and given the vast scope of Richter's work, the title of this book might be taken as misleading by some readers, insofar as it indicates that I am dealing with Richter's *entire* oeuvre. As everyone knows, this is an impossible task despite the fact that Robert Storr (in Richter 2002a), Benjamin Buchloh (2000), and Arnim Zweite (in 2005a) provide pieces of such a treatment. I submit, however, that the approach that I have taken here can (and hopefully will) be understood as a *model* of how to approach an artist such as Richter, since my goal was not to give

a comprehensive overview of this work or to deal with paintings as if they are all linearly connected to each other (for this see Elger 2002b). Instead, we would do well to look at paintings as if they are monads and worlds in themselves that, as I explained in Chapter 1, are able to function as monads precisely because they form and structure their own unity as something that transcends their internal moments. Their unity, in other words, is established through internal negations. As such, each monad takes on a position within the art world and takes a stance in relation to all others. It is as if each painting wants to be the only painting in the universe and needs to reject all others. Difference is the regulating principle. I agree with Adorno that works of art, and paintings are no different, can only be understood *internally* in their development, that is, they cannot be reduced to being an effect of external social or historical causes, though these are necessary to make sense of them. The history of art and the history of painting have their own logic, which is to say that they are based on the internal development of the "law of form." Whether they are *truly* autonomous, however, is still an open question and would need to be answered in an aesthetical treatise that argues from either a Hegelian or a Marxian position. Here I am thinking in particular of Lucans' later aesthetics, which unfortunately has not found many readers in the Anglophone world and seems to be forgotten in Europe, too.

Perhaps we could try to conclude with the following characterization of Richter's work: Richter tries to understand the whole. For Adorno, it was Beethoven who understood the whole and whom Adorno took to be the "Hegel of music." Should we call Richter the "Hegel of painting?" I am not sure. Though his work is an impressive attempt to defend classical notions of painting and the painter, and though Richter's painting can be understood as "his time grasped in painting," it is difficult to make such a judgment. The future and further development in painting, if there are any, will show where Richter is to be placed. Nevertheless, Richter is the philosopher in the world of contemporary painters—there is no doubt about that. In one interview, despite the general impression that painting has reached its historical limit, Richter is asked by Buchloh why so many people visit his exhibitions and he responds: "Maybe all those people came in order to see the end of painting, a last flare-up, before it's over" (Richter in Buchloh 2009: 181). If this is true, and the future will tell, then at least we can grasp in Richter what painting once was. Finally, in the same interview we can read the following passage which I could not agree more:

> *So you are the last great painter?*
> When you put it that way, I don't know how else to answer.

And the technical moment, the virtuosity in the creation of your paintings, isn't that an additional argument, or is it even the secret of your success? That is, it's not just that you are the last great painter, but rather that you are the last painter who really knows how to do this in a technical sense?
That could be.

And isn't it objectionable to you that virtuosity becomes a cult?
Well, no, virtuosity has something beautiful about it. I do like it.

Like Yehudi Menuhin? A great violinist of painting?
A great violinist of painting!

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Erster Blick in das Innere eines Atoms

Mit einem Rastertunnelmikroskop konnten jetzt erstmals Details innerhalb eines einzelnen Atoms sichtbar gemacht werden. Auf diesem Bild sind die Elektronenwolken eines Siliziumatoms zu erkennen. Vom Halbleiter Silizium ist bekannt, dass an seiner Oberfläche einige Atome hervor-

Stiel haben, erklären die Physiker als Artefakt, das durch die Technik des Abbildens entsteht („Science", Bd. 289, S. 422).

Die höhere Auflösung erreichten die Forscher, indem sie einen verbesserten Sensor verwendeten. Er besteht aus einer „Stimmgabel" aus einkristallinem Quarz,

Figure 1 *Erster Blick/First View*
2000, 18.2 cm × 15.1 cm, Editions Catalogue Raisonné: 112, Offset print on paper, mounted on card.

Figure 2 *Sekretärin/Secretary*
1963, 150 cm × 100 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 14, Oil on canvas, Galerie Neue Meister, Albertinum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Dresden, Germany (loan from the Collection of the Federal Republic of Germany).

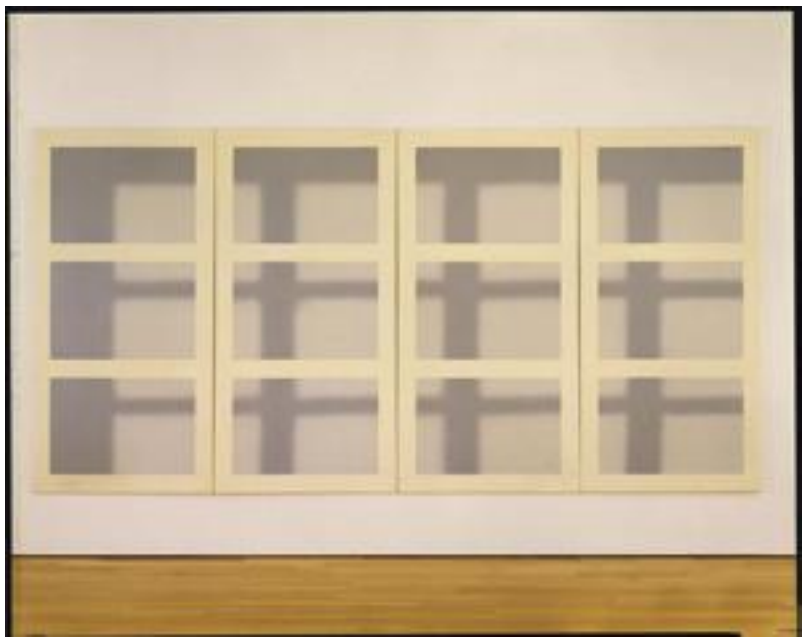

Figure 3 *Fenster/Window*
1968, 200 cm × 400 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 205a, Oil on canvas, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., USA.

Figure 4 *Abendstimmung/Evening Mood*
1969, 120 cm × 150 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 243, Oil on canvas, Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Kiel, Germany.

Figure 5 *Abstraktes Bild/Abstract Painting*
1977, 300 cm × 200 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 422, Oil on canvas.

Figure 6 *Wolken/Clouds*
1978, 400 cm × 250 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 443-a, Oil on canvas.

Figure 7 *Feldweg/Country Path*
1987, 82 cm × 112 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 629-4, Oil on canvas, Daros Collection, Zurich, Switzerland.

Figure 8 *Betty*
1988, 102 cm × 72 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 663-5, Oil on canvas, Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, USA.

Figure 9 *Tote/Dead*
1988, 62 cm × 62 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 667-2, Oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA.

Figure 10 *Erschossener 2/Man Shot Down 2*
1988, 100 cm × 140 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 669-2, Oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA.

Figure 11 *Jugendbildnis/Youth Portrait*
1988, 67 cm × 62 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 672-1, Oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA.

Figure 12 *November*
1989, 320 cm × 400 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 701, Oil on canvas, Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, USA.

Figure 13 *Lesende/Reader*
1994, 72 cm × 102 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 804, Oil on canvas, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), San Francisco, USA.

Figure 14 *Moritz*
2000, 62 cm × 52 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 863-3, Oil on canvas, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany.

Figure 15 *Strontium*
2004, 910 cm × 945 cm, Catalogue Raisonné: 888, C-Print, De Young Museum, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, USA.

Figure 16 *Wald/Forest*
2005, 197 cm × 132 cm Catalogue Raisonné: 892-12, Oil on canvas, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA.