MUSEU
D'ART CONTEMPORANI
MACBA
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GERHARD RICHTER
Atlas

-From 22 April to 4 July 1999-

Gerhard Richter, born in Dresden (Germany) in 1932, is considered one of the most important artists of the second half of the 20th century. The exhibition that opens on 22 April in the MACBA presents *Atlas*, a major work in constant progress and which now consists of over 640 panels with some 5,000 images.

The *Atlas* is a personal archive of images organised on standard sized panels, which includes photos, snippets from newspapers and magazines, and drawings. The artist organises all this material by theme, in family and private scenes, pornographic scenes, experiments in space and form, aerial views of cities, rooms, colour cards, candles, abstractions, etc. in such a way that the album becomes a potential encyclopaedic project.

After studying Fine Arts in his city of birth, Gerhard Richter moved to Federal Germany in 1961 - just two months before the Berlin Wall went up - and settled in Düsseldorf. Here, he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he met Joseph Beuys, Sigmar Polke, Konrad Lueg and Blinky Palermo, who were to prove influential in his work. Since that time, Richter has taken part in the leading art events throughout the world (such as the biennials in Paris, Sydney, and Venice and the Westkunst and Carnegie International biennials). He has

put on one-man shows in prestigious international museums and his works are to be found in the main contemporary art collections worldwide.

Shortly after settling in Düsseldorf, Richter destroyed most of the work he had produced in East Germany. The only thing he kept was a photo album that he began to put together soon after arriving in the city. This album was the seed for *Atlas*. It was not until 1969 that he began to put this photographic material in order, putting it on panels and structuring it in various categories.

The first broad group of images, spread around 343 panels, was exhibited for the first time in the Hedendaagse Kunst Museum (Utrecht) and was shortly afterwards exhibited in a number of cities around Germany, with new additional panels. In 1990, at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, the artist was already presenting 472 panels. In the new phase, Richter focussed basically on nature and landscape photos, as well as on still lifes, abstract images and family photos. *Atlas* has belonged to the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus (Munich, Germany) since 1997.

This work, which has never before been exhibited in Spain, provides several keys for understanding the origins and formative process of much of Richter's pictorial work, as the photos, sketches and collages that make it up are a source of information on his artistic development. *Atlas* is an initial compilation of images from which Richter chooses issues and pictorial motifs for his paintings. Due to the abundance of material, this work holds a considerable degree of potentiality and, to a certain extent, reveals the ideological background of the works that were finally produced.

Richter's work resists any notion of style. In his opinion, concepts such as realist, conceptual or abstract art are not exclusive, but are instead seen as alternative channels. He himself has described parts of his work as "figurative", "constructive" and "abstract" depending on the specific procedure that he used. His work goes from a faithful reproduction of reality based on a photographic

model to grey monochromatic abstractions, from the use of mirrors and panels painted in a mechanical way to gestural paintings, from painted sculpture to abstract expressive paintings.

The exhibition at the MACBA shows the most recent version of *Atlas* and is the first occasion when the informative material of this major work has been confronted by Richter's paintings, as over 20 works in various formats from public and private international collections are included in the show. The different paths and ideas that Richter has been researching alongside each other are revealed, spanning the process from the sketch to the production of the final work. Pictures from the early part of the artist's career are shown together with others from various periods in his artistic development through to the present day, including classic themes such as still lifes, landscapes, portraits and abstraction, exploring issues related to the way that public and private topics, autobiography, politics, seduction, nature and the way we see things are all represented.

Exhibition co-proced by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona
and the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus (München)

Curators at MACBA: Manuel J. Borja-Villel and José Lebrero Stals,
in collaboration with Helmut Fridel

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Benjamin BuchlohBenjamin H.D. Buchloh
Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive

What the photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is there collection of death, which is part and parcel of every memory image. In the illustrated magazines the world has become a photographable present and the photographed present has been entirely eternalized. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it.

In the exact duplication of the Real, preferably by means of another reproductive medium —advertisement, photography, etc.— and in the shift from medium to medium, the real vanishes and it becomes an allegory of death. But even in its moment of destruction it exposes and affirms itself, it will become the quintessential real and it becomes the fetishism of the lost object.

Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*, is one of several structurally similar, yet rather different projects by a number of European artists from the early to mid 1960s whose formal procedures of accumulating found or intentionally produced photographs in more or less regular grid formations have remained enigmatic (one could also think of the fourty year old collection of typologies of industrial architecture by Bernhard and Hilla Becher begun in 1958 or the work of Christian Boltanski begun in the late 1960s). They are either notable for their astonishing homogeneity and continuity (as is the the case with the work of the Bechers) or for the equally remarkable heterogeneity and discontinuity that defines Richter's *Atlas*. Having made photography's innate structural order of the archive, its seemingly infinite multiplicity, serialization and aim for comprehensive totality the principles of the work's formal organization, these projects share first of all a condition of not being classifiable within the typology and terminology of avantgarde art history: neither the term 'collage' nor the term 'photomontage' would adequately describe the apparent formal and iconographic monotony of these panels, the vast archival accumulations of their materials. Yet at the same time, the descriptive terms and genres from the more specialized history of photography, all of them operative in one way or the other in Richter's *Atlas*, appear equally inadequate to classify these image accumulations.

Despite the first impression that the *Atlas* might provide, neither the private album of the amateur, nor the cumulative projects of documentary photography could identify the di cursive order of this photographic collection. And we could not argue either that the exactitude of topographical or architectural photography or the massive image apparatus of surveillance and spectacularization operative in photojournalism, govern the peculiar "photographic condition" of Richter's *Atlas*. Lastly, in spite of their frequent appearance among the genres presented, not even advertisement and fashion photography and its principles of fetishization determine the reading of these panels. By contrast, what could come to mind first of all are the terms with which one would desribe instructional charts, teaching devices, technical or scientific illustrations found in textbooks or catalogues, the

archivalm organization of materials according to the principles of a still unidentifiable discipline. Avantgarde history, however, seems to have few, if any precedents for artistic procedures that organize knowledge systematically within didactic models of display or as mnemonic devices. If such precedents do appear —as for example in the teaching panels produced by Kazimir Malevich between 1924 and 1927 which illustrate the theoretical efforts of the Institute of Artistic Culture in Leningrad— they are generally considered as mere supplements to the actual aesthetic objects. This would also be the case with another crucial example that has equally remained outside of the historian's terminological purview, Hannah Höch's Media Scrap Book, which the artist produced around 1933. Hõch's project points distinctly towards the earlier existence of a variety of artistic strategies whichj attempt to organize and accomodate large quantities of found photographs in an archival manner. Rather than deploying fragmentation and fissure as the dynamic principles of photomontage that Höch had practiced in the late 1910s, her turn towards the foregrounding of photography's archival order seems to be probing the subject's continuing mnemonic competence in the face of rising media culture. The tracing of historical processes, the establishment of typologies, chronologies and temporal continuities —even if only fictitious, as in Boltanski's case— seem to have conflicted for the longest time with the avantgarde's self perception as providing instantaneous presence, shock and perceptual rupture.

Excursus on the Atlas

The term "Atlas" rings perhaps more familiar in the German language than it does in English, being defined since the end of the sixteenth century as a book format that compiles and organizes geographical and astronomical knowledge. We are told that this format received its name from one of Mercator's map collections in 1585 which carried a frontispiece showing an image of Atlas, the titan of Greek mythology who holds up the pillars of the universe at the threshold where day and night meet each other. But later, in the nineteenth century, the term had been increasingly deployed to identify any tabular display of systematized knowledge and one could have encountered an atlas in almost all fields of the empirical sciences: an atlas of astronomy, of anatomy, geography and ethnography, and later even schoolbooks charted plants and animals and carried that name like the god had carried the pillars. When the confidence in empiricism and the aspiration towards comprehensive completeness of positivist systems of knowledge withered in the twentieth century, the term "Atlas" seems to have fallen into a more metaphorical usage.

Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas

Thus we encounter the most important example of this tendency around 1927 in a monumental project which sets out to gather identifiable forms of collective memory: the Mnemosyne Atlas was first conceived by the art historian Aby Warburg in 1925 after his

release from Ludwig Binswanger's psychiatric clinic in 1924, actively developed in 1928, it was continued until his death in 1929. Even though the scholar had to leave the project behind in an unfinished state, more than sixty panels with over one thousand photographs had been assembled by Warburg at the time of his death. According to his aspirations as recorded in the diaries, the Mnemosyne Atlas wanted to construct a model of the mnemonic in which Western European humanist thought would once more, perhaps for the last time, recognize its origins and trace its latent continuities into the present, ranging spatially across the confines of European humanist culture and situating itself temporally within the parameters of European history from Classical antiquity to the present.

While collective social memory according to Warburg could be traced through the various layers of cultural transmission (his primary focus being the transformation of 'dynamograms' transferred from classical antiquity to Renaissance painting, the reoccurring motifs of gesture and bodily expression that he had identified in his notorious term as "pathos formulas"), Warburg more specifically argued that his attempt to construct collective historical memory would focus on the inextricable link between the mnemonic and the traumatic. Thus he wrote in the unpublished introduction to his Mnemosyne Atlas that it is in the area of orgiastic mass seizure that one should look for the mint that stamps the expression of extreme emotional seizure on the memory with such intensity that the engrams of that experience of suffering live on, an inheritence preserved in the memory

While this introduction to the project retrospectively reads like an uncanny prognosis of the imminent future of social behaviour, Warburg evidently hopes to construct —even if for the last time— a model of historical memory and continuity of experience, before both would be shattered by the catastrophic destruction of humanist civilization at the hands of German Fascism. But the *Atlas*, at least according to its author's intentions, should also achieve a materialist project of constructing social memory by collecting photographic reproductions of a broad variety of practices of representation. Warburg's *Atlas* thus not only reiterated first of all his life-long challenge to the rigorous and hierarchical compartmentalization of the discipline of art history, by attempting to abolish its methods and categories of exclusively formal or stylistic description. Yet by eroding the disciplinary boundaries between the conventions and the studies of high art and mass culture, the *Atlas* also questioned whether mnemonic experience could even be constructed any longer under the universal reign of photographic reproduction, establishing the theoretical and the presentational framework to probe the competence of the mnemonic from which Höch's scrapbook would emerge a few years later.

Kurt Forster, the editor of the forthcoming English edition of Warburg's writings, describes the arrangement as follows:

> There, cheek by jowl, were late antique reliefs, secular manuscripts, monumental frescoes, postage stamps, broadsides, pictures cut out of magazines, and old master drawings. It becomes apparent, if

only at second glance, that this unorthodox selection is the product of an extraordinary command of a vast field.

It seems, at least at first reading, that we encounter in Warburg's project an almost Benjaminian trust in the universally emancipatory functions of technological reproduction and dissemination. Thus, the extreme temporal and spatial heterogeneity of the *Atlas*'s subjects, is juxtaposed with the paradoxical homogeneity of their simultaneous presence in the space of the photographic, anticipating the subsequent abstraction from historical context and social function in the name of a universal aesthetic experience by André Malraux in his *Le Musée Imaginaire*. This condition alone seems at first sight at least— to situate the Mnemosyne *Atlas* also in a peculiar parallelism to artistic practices of the historical avantgarde of the 1920s. Not surprisingly, this argument has is in fact been made by numerous Warburg scholars, notably by Wolfgang Kemp, Werner Hofmann and most recently and most emphatically by Forster himself in his two essays on Warburg's methods. Thus he states for example that in...terms of technique Warburg's panels belong with the montage procedures of Schwitters and Lissitzky. Needless to say, this analogy implies no claim to artistic merit on the part of the Warburg panels; nor does it invalidate that of Schwitters' and Lissitzky's collages: it simply serves to redefine graphic montage as the construction of meanings rather than the arrangement of forms.

It is this remark (and many similar ones by the Warburg scholars mentioned), in particular its intriguing and surprisingly clear —cut opposition between a "construction of meanings" (supposedly Warburg's) and an "arrangement of forms" (supposedly that of Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky's) which poses another question. First of all, whether any aspects of Warburg's *Atlas* can in fact be productively compared to the collage— and photomontage techniques of the 1920's or whether we could understand more about either side of this problematic comparison by differentiating its two parts more rigorously and —most importantly for our project— by recognizing that the *Atlas* established in fact a cultural model of probing the possibilities of historical memory whose agenda was profoundly different from its activist precursors in the field of photomontage. Second the question, whether it could in fact be potentially productive to compare Warburg's *Atlas* with Richter's *Atlas*, as another example of such a mnemonic project. We would have to recognize first of all that while both projects obviously address the possibilities of mnemonic experience, they operate under dramatically different historical circumstances: the former at the onset of a traumatic destruction of historical memory, the moment of the most devastating cataclysm of human history brought about by German Fascism, the latter looking back at its aftermath from a position of repression and disavowal, attempting to reconstruct remembrance from within the social and geo-political space of the society that inflicted trauma.

Structures of an Atlas

Wolfgang Kemp had been the first to point out that Warburg's project of an organization and

presentation of vast quantities of historical information without any textual commentary could remind us of Surrealist montage procedures. Thereby, Warburg's *Atlas* inevitably enters also into a comparison with another extraordinary and unfinished montage-project of the late 1920s, a textual assemblage which had attempted to construct an analytical memory of collective experience in nineteenth century Paris. Benjamin had equally associated his Passagenwerk with the montage techniques of the Surrealists and had explicitly identified it in those terms when he wrote that the "method of this work is literary montage. I have nothing to say, only to show."

And Theodor W. Adorno's description of the Passagenwerk could just as well be addressing the essential features of Warburg's Mnemosyne *Atlas*:

> ...(Benjamin) deliberately excluded all interpretation and wanted to have the actually existing conditions to be foregrounded through the shocks that the montage of the materials would inevitably generate in the reader...To bring his antisubjectivism to the point of culmination, Benjamin envisaged that the work should only consist of accumulated citations.

Again, several terms stand out in this discussion that deserve our attention, both, with regard to the accuracy of the description (and the potential differences) of Benjamin's and Warburg's model and with regard to the accuracy of their definition of the epistemes of collage/ photomontage and the question whether these are in fact the epistemes of the structural organization of the *Atlas*: first of all, the exclusion of interpretation in favor of actually existing conditions in the discursive construction of the textual memory. Second: the anticipation of shocks as an inescapable and intended result of the montage technique, presumably occurring most vividly in the interstices of discursive fields (such as the pictorial versus the photographic, the mass-cultural clutter versus the structural destillation of the avantgarde strategy, the artisanal versus the technically reproduced, the scriptural versus the painterly: to name but a few of the classical topoi and tropes of collage and montage aesthetics).

Thirdly, and crucially, it is Adorno's observation of antisubjectivism as the driving force of the collage / photomontage aesthetic, that presumably articulates a systematic critique of what would later come to be called "the author function" of a text. And lastly, and directly connected with the preceding term, Adorno's emphasis on the accumulation of citations as a newly emerging structuring device of montage aesthetics: first of all, in photo-montage itself where it displaces the homogeneity of the conception and execution of painting. But soon thereafter, montage will also transform literary or filmic aesthetics (those of the Soviet Union in particular) as for example in the factographic novel where it will displace authorial omniscience, narrative and fiction.

Thus one could argue that by the mid 1920s a variety of homologous new models of writing and imaging historical accounts emerged simultaneously, ranging from the montage techniques of artistic practices to Warburg's *Atlas* or those of the Annales historians. In all

of these projects (literary, artistic, filmic, historical) a post-humanist and post-bourgeois subjectivity is constituted. The telling of history as a sequence of events and accounts of its individual agents is displaced by a focus on the simultaneity of separate, but contingent social frameworks and an infinity of participating agents, whereas the process of history is reconceived as a structural system of perpetually changing interactions and permutations between economical and ecological givens, class formations and their ideologies, and the resulting types of social and cultural interactions specific to each particular moment..

Even if Warburg's *Atlas* was in fact part of a newly emerging cultural paradigm of montage as a new process of writing a decentered history and constructing mnemonic forms accordingly, any comparison between Warburg and the montage techniques of the artistic avantgardes, let alone the neo- avantgarde, will remain highly problematical if it does not recognize first of all the actual discontinuities of the collage / photomontage model itself. These internal shifts and breaks in the paradigm emerge already in the late 1920s, and these changes will become especially decisive in the paradigm's rediscovery in post war practices. Furthermore, any attempt at a comparative reading of the structurally comparable projects will have to develop an equally differentiated understanding of the contradictions and changes which emerge already in the 1920s in the definitions of photographic functions themselves, both in the theoretical approaches to photography in Weimar Germany and the Soviet Union as much as in the artistic practices deploying photography in both countries. More specifically, and particularly important for our discussion of Warburg's and Richter's mnemonic project, is the fact that at the very moment of its elaboration, opposite theorizations of photography had collided precisely on the question of the impact of the photographic image on the construction of historical memory.

This dialectic is evident in the positions articulated in 1927-1928: on the one hand we have to consider Siegfried Kracauer's epochal essay on photography arguing that photographic production devastates the memory image, a position which implies (most likely unbeknownst to both), a severe criticial challenge of Warburg's project to conceive of the *Atlas* as a model of the construction of social memory. On the opposite end of the spectrum one would have to consider the famous "photography debate" of the Soviet Union as it emerges equally around 1927, primarily in the writings of the Soviet theorists and artists Ossip Brik, Boris Kushner and Alexander Rodchenko. And thirdly one would have to consider what remains probably the most important essay on photography of the first half of the twentieth century, written shortly after Warburg's project was interrupted, Walter Benjamin's "Short History of Photography " in 1931, which argues against the media pessimism of Kracauer's essay in favour of a new media culture of politically motivated montage.

To sketch out these oppositions only in the briefest terms we will would have to point first of all to the latent dichotomy operative in collage / montage aesthetics from their inception: the poles of opposition could be called the order of perceptual shock and the principle of estrangement on the one, and the order of the statistical collection or the order of the

archive on the other. The structural emphasis on discontinuity and fragmentation in the initial phase of Dada-derived photomontage introduced the subject's perceptual field to the "shock" experiences of daily existence in advanced industrial culture. While the metonymic procedures of photomontage and their continuous emphasis on the fissure and the fragment —at least in their initial appearance— operated to dismantle the myths of unity and totality that advertising and ideology consistently inscribe on their consumers, photomontage paradoxically collaborated also in the social project of perceptual modernization and its affirmative agenda. But this revolutionary effect of the semiotic upheaval of poetic shock and estrangement was short-lived. Already in the second moment of Dada collage (at the time of Hannah Hõch's Meine Haussprüche, 1922) for example, the heterogeneity of random order and the arbitrary juxtapositions of found objects and images, and the sense of a fundamental cognitive and perceptual anomie, were challenged as either apolitical and anti-communicative, or as esoteric and aestheticist. The very avant-garde artists who initiated photomontage (e.g. Heartfield and Hõch, Klucis, Lissitzky, Rodchenko) now diagnosed this anomic character of the Dada-collage/montage technique as bourgeois avantgardism, mounting a critique that called, paradoxically, for a reintroduction of the dimensions of narrative, communicative action and instrumentalized logic within the structural organization of montage aesthetics.

What we are witnessing in fact, in the mid-1920's already, becoming more decisive in the later 1920's, is precisely a gradual shift towards the order of the archival and mnemonic functions of the photographic collection as the underlying episteme of a radically different aesthetics of photomontage. In terms of its conception of the photographic, it is a shift that originates in the same confidence in photography's versatility and reliability that would also drive Warburg's archival project and his confidence in the photograph's authenticity as empirical document, and the radical emancipatory power of the egalitarian effects of photographic reproduction. The photographic image in general was now defined as dynamic, contextual, and contingent, and the serial structuring of visual information emphasized open form and a potential infinity, not only of photographic subjects eligible in a new social collective but, equally an infinity of contingent, photographically recordable details and facets that would constitute each individual subject within perpetually altered activities, social relations and object relationships. Once again it would be worthwhile to investigate the parallels of the Soviet model of the photographic with the radical reconception of the historic process emerging simultaneously in the work of the French Annales historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre. These parallels between the conception of the historical process and the construction and ordering of the photographic representation become most obvious for example when we read Ossip Brik's argument suggesting that in order...to differentiate individual objects so as to make a pictorial record of them is not only a technical but also an ideological phenomenon. In the pre-Revolutionary (feudal and bourgeois) period, both painting and literature set themselves the aim of differentiating individual people and events from their general context and concentrating attention on them....To the contemporary consciousness, an individual

person can be understood and assessed only in connection with all the other people— with those who used to be regarded by the pre-revolutionary consciousness as background.

This argument implies a radical redefinition of the photographic object itself. It is no longer conceived as a single— image print, carefully crafted by the artist— photographer in the studio, framed and presented as a pictorial substitute. Rather, as was the case already for Rodchenko's definition, it is precisely the cheaply and rapidly produced snapshot that will displace the traditional synthetic portrait. The organizational and distributional form will now become the archive, or as Rodchenko called it, the photo-file —a loosely organized, more or less coherent accumulation of snapshots relating and documenting one particular subject.

Rather than plotting the future models of participatory photographic experience under Socialism, Siegfried Kracauer analyzed the actually existing usages of the photographic image in the Capitalist media practices of Weimar Germany, specifically those governing the illustrated weeklies. Linking the capacity of the formation of memory images to an actual relationship with material and cognitive objects, Kracauer's extreme media pessimism recognizes that it is precisely the universal presence of the photographic image that will eventually destroy cognitive and mnemonic processes altogether. Thus he argues:

> Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in a photographic sense.(...) In reality, however, the weekly photographic ration does not at all mean to refer to these objects or ur-images. If it were offering itself as an aid to memory, then memory would have to make the selection. But 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. Artworks suffer this fate through their reproductions. (...) In the illustrated magazines people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving (...) Never before has a period known so little about itself.

This was the moment when the rise of a photographic media culture allowed a first insight into the newly emerging collective conditions of anomie, the moment when it became possible to imagine that mass cultural representation would cause the destruction of mnemonic experience and of historical thought altogether. Therefore, one of the most enigmatic —and with hindsight ever more plausible— arguments made by Benjamin in 1931 suggested that the historical climax of the medium of photography might have to be situated around 1860, since the photograph at that moment had barely accomplished the transition from the auratic object to the increasingly emptied structure of mere technological reproduction and at the same time, photography —as an emerging emancipatory technology— could still contain the social promise of radically different forms of collective interaction and subjecthood.

The Beginnings of Richter's Atlas

If we now consider how the works of artists of the post war period, and Richter's *Atlas* in particular, positioned themselves with regard to these photographic legacies of the historical avantgardes, we can easily recognize that Richter's collection of found amateur photographs, of journalistic and advertisement photography, inverts the utopian aspirations of the avantgarde on every level: if some of the Soviet and Weimar practices and theorizations had defined photography in a teleological perspective as a cultural project of enactment and empowerment, of articulation and of self-determination, Richter contemplates the reigning social usages of photography and their potential artistic functions from the beginning with an attitude of profound scepticism. If the agitational and emancipatory dimension of photomontage had originated in a desire for the radical transformation of hierarchical class relations and of the structures that determine authorship and production, Richter's *Atlas* seems to consider photography and its various practices as a system of ideological domination, more precisely, as one of the instruments with which collective anomie, amnesia and repression are socially inscribed.

After his transition from East —to West— Germany in 1961, Richter started this collection of photographic images whose ultimate purpose —at least initially— seems to have been even unclear to him: organized according to the most traditional display system of a rectangular grid, the images —at first glance at least— appear to have been chosen solely for their sentimental value of recording instances and subjects from family history. Only one of the images from the first four panels would later serve as a matrix for one of Richter's photopaintings, begun at the time when the initial panels for the *Atlas* were assembled (Christa and Wolfi, 1964). The others —including the third panel, consisting almost entirely of amateur landscape photographs taken during holiday travels— would remain seemingly mute, inconsequential documents. These photographic images appear at first as though they had been torn from of the family album shortly before Richter's flight from East Germany, to serve as souvenirs of a past that was being left behind forever, or as though they might have been mailed to him from his relatives in the East to console the young artist about his recent departure from his loved ones.

If we assume that the initial impulse to form the *Atlas* originated in fact in Richter's recent experience of the loss of a familial and social context, and in the encounter with Germany's self- inflicted destruction of the identity of the nation state, it would be plausible to consider the *Atlas* as one more, and in many ways very different, example in a longstanding tradition of cultural practices, just as Warburg's Mnemosyne *Atlas* on the other side of that historical divide had responded to a similar experience of a particularly acute "memory crisis." But as we had indicated earlier, a different type of 'memory crisis' had been confronted by artists and by theoreticians of photography already in the late 1920s, anterior to the historical destruction of humanist subjectivity, but not anterior to the rise of a photographic mass culture and its devastating (or emancipatory) effects on the auratic work of art and the mnemonic image. Mnemonic desire, it appears then, is activated especially in those moments of extreme duress in which the traditional material bonds among subjects,

between subjects and objects, and between objects and their representation appear to be on the verge of displacement, if not outright disappearance. Undoubtedly this would have been a condition foundational to postwar German culture in particular, entangled in the double bind of the collectivedisavowal of history, the repression of the recent past and an almost hysterically accelerated and expanded apparatus of photographic production to sollicit artificial desire and consumption.

It is now one of the difficulties of positioning Richter's *Atlas* within that double perspective, and we have to relate, if not integrate, those two rather different formations within which the work could be conceived as responding to the condition of this dual "memory crisis." The first one being utterly historical and specific to the social and ideological framework of post -war Germany after Fascism. The second one by contrast, possibly— but not entirely unrelated— to the first, considers the impact of photographic media culture on the project of painting and on the conception of authentic object experience at large. Clearly, the questions raised by Kracauer concerned first of all the devastating impact of the photograph on the artisanally produced auratic work of art which contained what he would call the "monogram of history." In Kracauer's enigmatic definition, this "monogram" constituted the singularity of artistic form, in that it succeeded in bringing the knowledge of death to the deepest resolution within the representation and thereby resisted repression at its most profound level.

Richter, as a subject of the post war period, would now have to rephrase this very question, namely whether it could even be possible to conceive mnemonic images at the moment of the most violent, collectively enacted repression of history, a repression for which photographic media culture had become now, even more than in Kracauer's time, the primary agent. Simultaneously, Richter as a painter would have seen himself —like all other painters of his generation— confronted with the question of whether and how paintings could at all be conceived any longer in the confrontation with the apparatus of photographic mass culture.

The photographic images of family members making up the first four panels of the *Atlas* therefore seem to have served Richter —as they had served for Kracauer in 1927 and Benjamin in 1931 and again for Roland Barthes in 1979 (when the confrontation with the death of his mother made him write a contemporary phenomenology of photography)— as the point from which the reflection on the relationship between photography and historical memory would originate. As though photography's oscillating ambiguity, as a dubious agent simultaneously enacting and destroying mnemonic experience, could at least be fixed for one moment by situating the image in an analogue to the mnemonic imprint of the family relation itself.

After all, this is the imprint where physical contiguity and the referent of psychic inscription could not be questioned, where the causality and materiality of mnemonic experience

seemed to be guaranteed. Whether this mnemonic imprint would be defined as that of genetic and hereditary encoding (the foundation of a proto-racist theory as suggested in the theory of memory developed by Aby Warburg's teacher, Richard Semon), or whether it would trace the more or less successful psycho-sexual organization according to the oedipal laws that determine the formation of subjectivity (e.g. Freud's inherent definition of psychic memory), or whether memory would be conceived of as determined by class and social institution (as proposed in Durckheim's theorization of memory structure): it is in the reflection upon the family image that the power of mnemonic ties to the past and their inextricable impact onto the present could be most credibly verified as material processes, alternatingly —like photography— assuring and assaulting the formation of identity.

The fact that the mobilization of an *Atlas* of remembrance against a massive apparatus of repression did not just result from the private experience of a loss of a geo-political context and social-familial order, but, as we have argued, to an equal degree from the encounter with the rapidly changing functions and structures of the photographic image that Richter discovered after his arrival in the West, becomes apparent already in the fifth panel of the *Atlas* where the homogeneity of the photographic material which had heretofore consisted exclusively of the more or less haphazard collection from the family album is eroded by a peculiar, at first unfathomable, heterogeneity of picture types.

Introducing a variety of clippings from the West German illustrated journals (such as Der Stern), Richter seems to have recorded his first encounters with those mass cultural genres heretofore more or less unknown to him. Having escaped from a country where advertisement of any kind had been prohibited, where fashion photography (let alone soft —or hard— core pornography) were outlawed, and where images solliciting the desire for touristic travel and consumption would have been banned from the photographic public sphere of the Communist state, Richter could now, for the first time, endlessly peruse these images in abundance. It is not surprising then to see that precisely those categories (fashion, travel, soft-core pornography and advertisement) would in fact become the first to disperse the homogeneity of the amateur —and family photographs of the first four panels of the *Atlas*.

In an almost exact analogy to the beginning of Kracauer's essay, Richter thereby juxtaposes the construction of public identity by media culture with the construction of private identity through the family photograph. Memory is thus conceived of in Richter's *Atlas* first of all as an archaeology of pictorial and photographic registers, each of which partakes in a different photographic formation, and each of which generates its proper psychic register of responses. While all of them operate separately (and in relative independence from each other) in the perceptual and the mnemonic apparatus of the subject, they all intersect, constituting precisely that complex field of disavowals and displacements, the field of repression and cover images within which memoryin the register of the photographic order is constituted. What had made Kracauer's observation in the initial paragraphs of his essay so uncanny (in the parallel discussion of the image of the

glamorous movie star and the grandmother) was the realization that —with the rise of media culture— the subject would no longer be primarily constituted within the models of continuity that ethnicity and family, nation state and culture, tradition, class and social customs had provided. Not even the bodily site of the mnemonic appeared any longer as a guaranteed referent, encroached upon as it was by the rapidly shifting fashion system. Instead, newly constructed signs and languages, residing and operating outside of all the mnemonic forms of experience that the family figures had represented, would now enter the mnemonic field, binding the desire for identity in different representational registers altogether.

Thus rather abruptly, in Kracauer's first image, the reader / spectator's libidinal investment is reoriented towards a female figure that he has never known and that will never be known other than in the photographic representation. Her body is no longer the site of the auratic presence of lived experience and lived encounters (like that of Kracauer's grandmother, or Barthes' mother) but it is the body made of an industrially produced representation (the female star) and its technical reproduction. As Kracauer would be the first to point out, it is precisely in the investment of desire into the figure whose body is made up of invisible printed Benday Dots that the libidinal splitting occurs, at the level of the image as much as at the level of the psychic formation, investing the photographic medium with the condition of fetishism in an almost ontological fashion. Kracauer thereby anticipated a whole set of painterly concerns which would reeemerge in the work of Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol in the early 1960s, shortly before Richter would join them in the pursuit of understanding how the registers of fetishistic desire and of sign exchange value had gradually displaced presence, corporeality and the mnemonic experience and how these changes would inevitably alter the face of painting as well. Yet neither Kracauer's theoretical investigation nor Richter's artistic project are motivated by a nostalgic claim to reconstruct a fiction of an authentic identity centered in the body or the aura and the artisanal artefact. This separates their endeavours dramatically from Barthes' Camera Lucida who in fact attempts to resituate the bodily memory within the image of the mother and attempts to imbue it with an experience of phenomenological authenticity.

By contrast, it seems that Richter is engaged in a different project altogether: first of all, he attempts to explore the various registers of photography as the representational system within which historical repression is physically enacted and transmitted. The notorious attraction of post-war German artists to the banality of German consumer culture which governs Richter's extensive perusal of the material of the first four years of the *Atlas* collection (another example would be Polke's iconography) could find an additional explanation here: that it is not just a variation on the themes of Pop Art (which it certainly was as well, inasmuch as Pop Art itself incessantly had posed the question of the possibility of authentic experience under the reign of totalized commodity production). More specifically, what becomes evident in Richter's archive of the imagery of consumption is the underside of this peculiar West German variation on the theme of banality: the collective lack of affect, the psychic armor with which Germans of the post war period protected

themselves against historical insight.

Banality as a condition of everydaylife appears here in its specifically German modality as the condition of the repression of historical memory, as a sort of psychic anaesthesia. Banality as a condition of aesthetic posture, its counterpart, is of course proclaimed by Richter as well, explicitly when he states notoriously that "...the most banal amateur photograph is more beautiful than the most beautiful painting by Cezanne..."

Once again, two attitudes are joined here that make it doubly difficult to recognize the project of the *Atlas*: first of all, in its slightly juvenile assertion of a radical anti-aesthetic position, Richter associates himself publically with an avantgarde posture that had been recently revitalized in Pop Art's rediscovery of Duchamp. From a position quite typical for post-war German artists, primarily oriented toward the New York and Paris activities of the moment rather than toward the overshadowed legacies of the historical avant-garde of the 1920s, Richter explicitly credits the work of Robert Rauschenberg with having provided his introduction to the collage/montage aesthetics, while claiming that he was either totally unaware of the photomontage practices of the Weimar Dadaists or that he was outright hostile to whatever model of political agitation in photomontage he might have seen in the work of John Heartfield during his life in the German Democratic Republic. This paradoxical historical and geo-political shift poses a number of additional questions in the reading of Richter's photographic archive.

First of all it poses the question of how the principle of random accumulation operates under substantially different historical circumstances, i.e. at a moment when randomness and arbitrary juxtaposition are not only functioning as established aesthetic procedures, but also as socially enforced legitimation of anomie disguised as an advanced state of individual independence. Collage aesthetic in Rauschenberg's hands had re-inaugurated the elimination of authorial choice and artistic authority by intrinsically linking authorship to the actual conditions of experience within advanced consumer culture, where the formation of exchange-value residing in the sign solely determines the constitution of the identity of the consuming subject.

Clearly, in the post-war moment, techniques of decentering the subject and dismantling authorial claims had changed once again in the transmission from Duchamp to John Cage, one of the formative figures for Rauschenberg's collage culture. It is not easy to determine whether, in what was now the period of the neo-avant-garde, the radically subversive decentering of the (bourgeois) subject had just become a principle of affirmative indifference towards subjectivity altogether (e.g. Cage's Zen approach); or whether, in the post-war recurrence of these strategies, the politically enforced elimination of subjectivity necessitated this aesthetic recourse to structural, perceptual and cognitive anomie, since this model alone seemed to enact the decreasing validity of concepts of communicative action, self-determination, and transparent social organization.

Lastly, and most importantly perhaps from the perspective of this essay, such an attitude provokes the question of how and whether this insistence on anomic banality (even if given only as a posture) and the aesthetic project of dismantling the armor of psychic repression could ever be reconciled. This question will be partially answered by Richter himself, since already in the twelfth panel of the *Atlas*, presumably dating from around 1964-1965, a first set of images suddenly emerges from within the overall banality of the found photographs rupturing the entire field. This puncturing positions the *Atlas* project suddenly within the dialectics of amnesia and memory that we have attempted to explore in this essay. Functioning in the manner of a punctum within the heretofore continuous field of banal images and their peculiar variation on the condition of the studium, the first set of photographs of victims from a concentration camp functions now as a sudden revelation: that there is still one link that binds an image to its referent within the apparently empty barrage of photographic imagery and the universal production of sign exchange value: the trauma from which the compulsion to repress originated. Paradoxically, it is at this very moment that the *Atlas* also yields its own secret as an image collection: a perpetual pendulum between the death of reality in the photograph and the reality of death in the mnemonic image.

GERHARD RICHTER'S "ALBUM OF PHOTOGRAPHS, COLLAGES, AND SKETCHES"
Armin Zweite

Gerhard Richter (born 1932 in Dresden, Germany)
Atlas, 1962–1997

"I see countless landscapes, photograph barely 1 in 100,000, and paint barely one in a hundred of those that I photograph. I am therefore seeking something quite specific; from this I conclude that I know what I want."[1] This entry in Gerhard Richter's diary from 12 October 1986 is revealing in many ways, but it is also perplexing, if one considers the period in which it was written. The sequence of verbs (see, photograph, paint) is hardly noticeable at first, because it suggests a logical process. He records only a few of the many visual impressions, and of these only a fraction go into the paintings. The medium of photography, in which Richter has been engaged in a variety of ways since the sixties, clearly fills the role of a catalyst for the artist. This is confirmed by the assumption in the second sentence, which speaks of searching, concluding, and objectives, though without specifying the intentions of the artistic act. The photographs appear to function almost like a filter of a process, one which applies only to a small portion of his later work: since 1976–1977, the so-called abstract paintings have begun to dominate in his oeuvre to such a degree that the figurative works seem more like exceptions to the rule. This does not, however, diminish their significance. Richter's strategy, evident in many of his exhibitions, is to confront very large-format abstractions with individual, landscapes or still lifes of modest dimensions. The unusual combination is clearly intended to reveal an identical attitude on which the heterogeneity is based.

Thus, there can be no doubt that photography is a significant aspect of his visual work, but the numbers given in the diary entry (of one hundred thousand impressions barely a hundred photographs, and of those barely one painting) suggest the extent to which the connection between painting and photography has become more lax since at least the mid-1970s, and direct relationships are found only sporadically. New photographs supplement an extensive repertoire of motifs, even though it is utilized less frequently for the paintings. Richter's remark also suggests that to the extent that photography became successively less functional with respect to painting, it was increasingly a means of self-reflection, of memory, or of structural analysis. It would be difficult to explain otherwise why Richter always returns to the camera, particularly when traveling, without following up with a painting of what he has seen. Since he began to use his own photographs as preparatory models for his paintings, this kind of instrumentalization was always there, but never exclusively so, with the result that the medium of photography could exist now and again as an independent genre. The fact that his forty-eight portraits of famous men (1972) also exists as a photographic work (CR 324a) confirms this attitude, as do the photographic books *One Hundred Twenty-eight Details from a Picture*[2] and *Eis*.[3]

But let us return once again to the opening quotation. What is most surprising, surely, is the conclusion that the painter bases on observation of his own behavior. One cannot help but ask how countless impressions, selective photography, and the rare paintings that are based on photographs are supposed to justify conclusions about the intentions of an artistic work, if that which remains, or is newly created, after this double selection process is in the painter's own words merely "something specific." The relation between the sensory, the intellectual, and the intuitive is thus open to debate, and at the same time it opens up the question of the legitimacy of painting today. Still, as before we are left without a precise answer, and, as we will see, there are good reasons for this. The beholder is left to examine photographs and paintings that can perhaps help to explain the motivation behind this double distillation process from sensory impressions to the photograph and from the photograph to the painting, and to give some idea what its aim might be.

All this already suggests in outline that Richter is circumventing the semiotic turn of events in modernism that can be defined as the retreat from the object of the representation to the very possibility of representation. Modernism moves from the semantic to the semiotic, from the realized function of the sign to the autonomy of the sign. Though Richter retains the pictorial methods of modernism, he poses the question of the subject in a new way. Thus, he characterizes his own work as a "principled avoidance of the subject," but at the same time has expressed the hope of "getting a subject handed to me on a plate, as it were: one not invented by me, and for that reason more universal, better, less perishable, more generally valid."[4] It is neither exclusively a case of inventing reality, nor is his effort aimed unconditionally at the imitation of reality, at the reproduction of the actual

in realistic paintings. As improbable as it sounds, Richter seems to want to do both things at the same time. In doing so, he reclaims a universal validity for the manifestation of subjectivity, while that which the painter does not invent but "merely" reproduces is meant to be unmistakable and imperishable. The semantic—that is, the signified—is supposed to be subject to the semiotic—that is, the signifier. But the reverse is also supposed to be the case, a paradoxical configuration that results in the abrupt changes in his complex oeuvre that have become a constant source of irritation.

The few statements by Richter on which these claims have been based show that two traditions intersect in his way of thinking. On the one hand, he holds to high modernism's claim that forms of expression are by nature binding. On the other hand, he sees that these forms of expression are individually conditioned and can only develop solely and entirely from the individual's subjective horizon of expectations, and that, consequently, they lend themselves to an irrevocable relativism. There seems to be no resolution to this contradiction, and a synthesis seems inconceivable, so all that remains is to deal with the aporia and to cause it to be seen and experienced in an exaggerated form. As an abstract painter, Richter does not want to be obliged to make the artistic means of his paintings absolute and to depict the means themselves, as it were. As difficult as it may be, he holds to the transcendental claim of the early nonobjective painters to conceive the anticipatory elements of his works conceptually. As a realistic painter, however, he would like to avoid precisely that "profession of faith in the subject" which alone could extricate his works from the sphere of the arbitrary and noncommittal. Richter's is a modern, self-critical consciousness that is revealed in his verbal expressions as well as in his works. Directness alternates with profound desperation; euphoria in creative work changes suddenly into such lasting disillusionment that occasionally all traces of self-confidence seem to evaporate.

In Richter's work, the contradictions of modernism seem to be driven to extremes in one way and brought into a dialectical relationship in various, mutually exclusive modes of representation. Consequently, he has been repeatedly subjected to the thoughtless criticism that he is reacting to the demands of the market simply because his works are divided into sharply defined groups that are entirely unconnected. There is no justification for such criticism, as the visible ruptures result inexorably from the work. His work takes up a problematic that is only rarely addressed in painting, and it seeks an answer in polarization. The unquestionable authenticity of Richter's work essentially precludes the possibility of using historical parallels to undermine the unique role of his work within the contemporary context. One comment, however, may serve to illustrate the observation that the roots of the irrevocable aporias in his oeuvre are to be found in the classical avant-garde. At the same time, however, it also becomes evident that Richter deliberately makes the suggested contradiction more distinct and pointed, so that not only the subcutaneous connection with the past but also the radical break with it emerge clearly. One is compelled to go back this far precisely because the process in which nonobjective painting developed out of object-based forms of depiction was a gradual one.

In Kandinsky's case, for example, the anarchy of modernism was expressed not least in the fact that people tore from the "reserves of matter" various forms of embodiment could be divided between two poles, "great abstraction" and "great realism."[5] Kandinsky characterized great realism, which in his eyes was most purely embodied in the work of Henri Rousseau, as an effort "to exclude from the picture the externally artistic [element] and to embody the content of the work of art by means of the simple ('inartistic') rendering of the simple, hard object. The outer shell of the object, conceived in this manner and fixed within the picture, and the simultaneous exclusion of accustomed, importune beauty reveal in the surest way the inner sound of the thing. By reducing the 'artistic' element to a minimum, the soul of the object sounds forth most strongly from within this outer shell, because external, palatable beauty can no longer distract us." In Kandinsky's view, abstraction, in contrast to realism, tends "to exclude completely the objective (real) element and to embody the content of the work of art in 'nonmaterial' forms." In abstraction, the inner harmony of the painting is intensified by striking out the real. In abstract paintings, too, it must become possible "to hear the whole world just as it is, without objective interpretation." This circumscribes precisely, if you will, the contrast between the semantic and the semiotic dimensions of art.

For Kandinsky, the contrast between Rousseau "le Douanier" [customs officer] and his own improvisations and compositions was proof of the polarization of modernism, embodied in works that could hardly be more antithetical. Leaving aside for a moment all the necessary qualifications, one could nonetheless ask whether—and if so, to what extent—Richter's "principled avoidance of the subject" can be associated with the "reduction of the 'artistic' to a minimum" that Kandinsky attributes

to Rousseau, and whether Richter, in his realistic paintings, is not perhaps also interested in comprehending the essence of the object, that which Kandinsky calls "soul." Richter would surely not use such terminology, which in Kandinsky's case commixes metaphorical and synaesthetic elements. Richter's sober manner of expression, however, seems to have a similar aim, when we equate what Richter did not have to invent with what Rousseau "inartistically" reproduces. If we ignore the symbolic tradition that is the basis for Kandinsky's reflections, and if we reduce all the differences between abstraction and realism to the phenomenological aspect, then there is one point in which Kandinsky's and Richter's positions are in agreement, namely, that for both the "great difference on the outside" becomes "a great equivalence on the inside." Richter seems to pick up on something that fell apart historically—playing out in the works of very different painters—to develop it once again, though under different conditions, in two opposed complexes in his own work. For Richter, of course, what Kandinsky calls the aim of both tendencies—that is, the revelation of the inner harmony of an object (great realism) or of a painting (great abstraction)—has no relevance anymore.

Where Kandinsky still assumed that an identical spiritual principle was revealed in the polarity of artistic forms of expression, and an unswerving truth is manifested in the works, Richter conceives the world as merely an idea and pure projection. In his eyes, nature embodies the absolutely Other, the inaccessible, and the inhuman.[6] We begin to see decisive differences. Kandinsky harbors the firm conviction that art is an instrument of knowledge and that the work is the point where spiritual powers crystallize, but Richter never shared this idealism. Painting is for him neither a means to appropriate reality nor knowledge of the world. In his opinion, it expresses at most an agnosticism, and the works reflect nothing. As surrogates of reality, they remain finally incomprehensible, absolutely lacking in spirit, and full of horror. A pessimism deriving from Schopenhauer colors many of Richter's statements. They reveal the fundamental contradiction that is the basis of his painting. The artistic act should, on the one hand, reflect its obligation to the spirit of utopia, insofar as Richter believes painting to be "intrinsically capable of giving visible form to our best, most human, most humane qualities."[7] On the other hand, in his view, painting can only create analogies to the ineffable and the nonvisual; it must be "incomprehensible"[8] in order to suggest something that rejects human knowledge on principle. Desperation is the motivation of artistic work, not, as for Kandinsky, emphasis. Richter paints in opposition to better insight, so to speak, because it no longer seems to him possible to comprehend things or situations in painting.[9] Thus, for him, painting is nothing but his "attempt to explore what painting is still able and permitted to do. It was also the sheer obstinacy of carrying on painting, even though nothing seemed to come of it."[10] Only through negation does art express the ineffable, that is, utopia. This is essentially the standpoint of Adorno, who writes in his *Ästhetische Theorie:* "Through the irreconcilable renunciation of the semblance of reconciliation, art holds fast to the promise of reconciliation in the midst of the unreconciled: This is the true consciousness of an age in which the real possibility of utopia . . . converges with the possibility of total catastrophe."[11]

We see, then, how, on the one hand, Richter remains bound to the transcendental claim of painting, but is, on the other hand, aware that this claim can no longer be fulfilled, except as a fiction. Given this understanding, the paintings, no matter whether they are abstract or objective, are merely enigmas or puzzles. "They contain," in Adorno's words, "the potential for the solution; the solution is not objectively given. Every artwork is a picture puzzle, a puzzle to be solved, but this puzzle is constituted in such a fashion that it remains a vexation, the preestablished routing of its observer."[12] Art as "the highest form of hope"[13] obtains its impulse, in Richter's view, above all from the effort to make this state of affairs, which cannot really be understood, commensurable. It is neither possible to say what he meant to convey in his works nor to rationalize the constant change in method that characterizes his work,[14] and yet painting must be understood as a constant attempt to "pictur[e] for oneself what is."[15] The spiritual content does not hover somewhere beyond the facture, "does not hover above the work's facture; rather, artworks transcend their factuality through their facture, through the consistency of their elaboration."[16] No matter what the paintings depict, no matter the formal principles on which they are based, they "appear."[17] But Richter would guard against speaking of the sensory appearance of an Idea in Hegel's sense, because it is precisely that which appears that cannot be named. Richter's art wants to be taken entirely as itself, and it does not permit any view onto the truth about states of affairs that merely appear in appearance and thus sublate it. Art is, in Richter's eyes, appearance in its autonomy, and thus art cannot characterize appearance as appearance. In this view, which hypostatizes aesthetic experience and refers to the act of reflection that paintings bring about, Richter is perhaps following Kant, who freed himself from the determination of a substantial conception of the work of art and believed aesthetic experience existed in the tension between being affected by the

senses and creative realization. In a movement that aims at registering what has happened but is nevertheless unending, the act of reflection produces the kind of distracted action that can never be certain, because it always refers to the senses under the sway of the object or the painting.[18] It is the incomprehensible, unaided autonomy of aesthetic phenomena that invites the idea that something can be mastered, and yet it leaves us entirely in the lurch. There seems to be something that wants to be and is able to be understood, but in the end it does not withstand any attempt to grab on to it. This is not merely a matter of deceived expectations, in which it become clear that the thing whose existence we conjectured cannot be found anywhere; rather, it simply proves to be of different kind than what the expectation of understanding had assumed.[19] In his work, Richter reflects directly on the impossibility of comprehending the work of art or of bringing the aesthetic experience to an end. Both aspects are reflected in the heteronomy of style and subject matter. Not only does his painting embody these irresolvable contradictions, it is also a constant process. "[P]ainting is engaged in acquiring, working out, adumbrating a future for itself. It's a future that has yet to arrive anywhere else: but in the picture it's celebrated in advance, as it were." After everything we have seen thus far, this seems sufficiently decisive and optimistic. But Richter than immediately adds a significant qualification, which amounts to a retraction of his assertion or wish: "If that were to work, yes, that would be good."[20]

In this domain filled with discrepancies and fissures, the painter is like the mythological figure of Tantalus, but with the significant difference that now it isn't even possible to name the goal toward which his efforts are applied. The attitude expressed in such statements is one determined by historical experience that is ultimately without illusions, an attitude that takes on the traditional challenges but, in view of art's lack of role in contemporary society, can only by meet these challenges in a voluntaristic act. In this act, which is stated in a paradox, appearance is asserted in its autonomy. It goes without saying that the insistence that artistic means follow their own laws does not provide a way out of this dilemma. As early as 1966, he noted: "Making is not an artistic act,"[21] and in 1988 he remarked to similar effect that art is concerned with *what* is to become visible; *how* that it is then produced has nothing to do with art or artistic abilities.[22] Such an assertion might lead us to suspect that the intentional object can be comprehended directly in the act of artistic representation, but other statements by Richter lead us to conclude exactly the reverse, namely, that the incomprehensibility of the artwork is the phenomenon that cannot be comprehended and determined. We are presented with categorical contradictions, in which central importance is assigned to aspects of the work's content, but at the same time these very aspects are denied, and in which, on the other hand, form is characterized as an inadequate means even as it seems to become absolute in the work itself. In view of these contradictions, and against the background of such aporias that play the semantic against the semiotic and vice versa, the question of the function of photography in the artist's oeuvre is raised in a new way.

II

Gerhard Richter first attracted attention in the sixties with paintings based on photographs. Around 1964, he began to save the materials that he used, and in 1969 he decided to combine on panels all the photographs that had either played an important role in his work or could possibly have done so. He arranged the photographs, grouped them in sets that could be viewed easily as a whole, and glued them to standardized mounts of 50 × 65 cm, 50 × 70 cm, and 70 × 35 cm. This body of work, which by then had grown to include 315 elements, was first exhibited in December 1972 under the title *Atlas der Fotos und Skizzen* [Album of the photographs and sketches] in a museum in Utrecht.[23] In 1973, an exhibition in the Kunstverein Bremerhaven followed;[24] in April and May 1974, the Galerie Friedrich in Munich exhibited the *Atlas;*[25] and this was followed by a presentation in the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld in February and March 1976.[26] When in the midseventies his focus shifted to abstract works, Richter's interest in the *Atlas* withdrew into the background for a time, but the collection has continued to grow, and it now includes more than six hundred panels. The artist continues to add to this work, which lies somewhere between an autonomous work of art and a matter-of-fact documentation, even though for some time now it no longer belongs to him.

The *Atlas* in its entirety, as it exists today, is dominated by photographs. It contains approximately over four thousand individual enlargements, reproductions, and illustrations clipped from other sources. The first panels contain personal photographs evidently taken from family albums as well as reproductions clipped from newspapers and magazines, some of which include fragments of text. The selection concentrates at first on black-and-white images, but by the late sixties Richter shows a preference for color photographs. The formats vary at first, but soon they become

standardized in order to permit symmetrical groups of 4, 6, 9, 12, 16, 20, etc., individual photographs. Thus, we are not dealing with an arbitrary accumulation; rather, the *Atlas* is distinguished by a strict structure.

In its thematic arrangement, the landscapes, including both city views and alpine images, are separated from the figurative shots. Isolated objects clearly form yet another category. In addition to photographs and collages of his own and those of others, it also includes diagrams, sketches, and plans for installations. The catalogue from 1972 also illustrates a number of Richter's freehand drawings, though these have since been excluded as not belonging to the collection.

It is unnecessary to describe the *Atlas* panel by panel, nor could we demonstrate all the numerous relationships of Richter's painted works to the corresponding photographic models. For that reason, I limit myself in the following to a few remarks about the major groups. References to the paintings are taken from the catalogue raisonné (CR) prepared by Dietmar Elger.[27]

Panels 1 to 15: Figures

Amateur shots of a personal nature alternate with landscape photographs and depictions of consumer goods like automobiles, refrigerators, motor boats, and everyday objects (chairs, telephones, shelves, etc.). Pages from calendars with picturesque regions can be found as well as illustrations from mass media (magazines such as *Stern, Bunte Illustrierte,* etc.) with a particular focus on categories such as fashion, nature, travel, health, and crime. The combination of the heterogeneous material is based partly on criteria of content. The combinations of disparate elements frequently result from formal considerations, for in arranging the images Richter sought to create fields with orthogonal edges in order to subordinate the diversity of the individual bits of information to a homogenous pictorial effect.

Panels 14 and 15 combine material that apparently could not be included anywhere else but that could not be excluded either: furniture (chandeliers, doors), jewelry, art, and sports (the high diver).

Richter used many of the roughly 280 motifs on panels 1 to 15 as models for paintings.

Panels 16 to 20: Concentration Camps

In contrast to Warhol, Richter showed little interest in the perpetrators of the crimes, focusing instead on the victims. There are no paintings based on these disturbing photographs. That these dreadful attestations are rephotographed in shots that are deliberately out of focus (panel 19) and reproduced with distorting colorings (panel 20) suggests that Richter attempted to transform them into artworks, but quickly abandoned the idea. He evidently realized that the horror and terrible suffering that the original photographs reveal could not be subjected to aesthetic manipulations aimed at depersonalization and finally banalization, without jeopardizing the moral stance that Richter had always claimed for art. In the cycle *18. Oktober 1977,* completed in 1988, Richter artistically reflects upon repressed crimes and forgotten sufferings in a way that seems to connect back to these works, though under completely different circumstances (see panels 470 to 479).

Panels 21 to 23: Pornography

Several paintings can be related to this material, though both here and in the other thematic areas it must be emphasized that only a small portion of the shots in the *Atlas* served as models for paintings, and conversely the corresponding source material for several paintings is missing from this compendium. Although in general Richter takes over the photographic models more or less directly, it is striking that the paintings taken from this set of themes are combined images. For example, Richter's *Spanische Akte* [Spanish nudes] and *Pi-Mädchen* [Pi girls] of 1967 (CR 150, 151) are based on more than one reproduction (three for the former, two for the latter).

The photographs from concentration camps did not allow themselves to be transformed into images of the degradation and reification of human beings. In these reproductions from porno magazines, by contrast, this was still possible because these traders in sexuality offer their bodies as commodities. This one-dimensionality apparently proved to be unproblematic in transferring it to another medium, but still it is worth noting that the few paintings based on such subjects play only a marginal role in the artist's oeuvre. Richter does not generally practice social criticism in his painting, though there seem to be hints of it in this complex of works, albeit the manipulations and multiple

exposures (panel 23) signal a tendency to veil the motifs or even make them completely unrecognizable. In 1970, the artist responded to such questions as follows: "Like everyone else, I am constantly critical—of countless kinds of things—but not when I am painting."[28]

Panels 24 to 29: Portraits

Volker Bradke, blurry photographs of studio with a prototype of *4 Glasscheiben* [Four panes of glass] from 1967 (CR 160), Mao (model for Richter's collotype of 1968), two friends.

Pages 30 to 37: Famous Men

In groups of thirty to thirty-six photographs, the heads of 270 writers, philosophers, musicians, artists, politicians, and scientists are collected on eight panels. This selection of important men taken from an encyclopedia served as the starting point for the *48 Porträts* of 1971–72 (CR 324/1–48), first exhibited publicly at the Venice Biennale in 1972. Photocopies with lexicographic data on the forty-eight portraits also found their way into the *Atlas* (panel 38). With regard to the artist's criteria for selection, a diagram (panel 39) makes it clear that considerations of content played only a secondary role. What mattered to Richter was above all a superficial aspect: the position of the heads. In the entire ensemble there are only a few pure *en face* views (Kafka), while all the other men turn either to the right or the left. The most extreme examples are three-quarter profile. Thus, we are presented with a scale of slightly modified head positions in which the sitter's gaze is usually at the viewer. The installation sketches also reveal a rigid formalism that forms the basis of the conception. Richter does not, however, view an axisymmetrical arrangement with Kafka at the center, like the one chosen in Venice, as obligatory. He had other possibilities in mind, even an arbitrary arrangement in a square room. The diagrams reveal Richter's determination to relate the given architectonic circumstances to the inner structure of his series of portraits. The effort to make an abstract principle absolute, as manifested in the *48 Porträts,* also explains why no women were included. Their different features and clothing would have made integration impossible.[29]

As could be seen in Venice, Richter was less interested in the individual portraits than in the ensemble effect. Using floor plans and sketches of the German pavilion, he developed a precise system for hanging the portraits, which was still included in the publication of the *Atlas* made for the exhibition in Utrecht. Later, it was replaced by the corresponding photographs of the installation (panel 41). As a whole, *48 Porträts* and the associated reflections on form demonstrate Richter's attempt to confront classical principles of ordering, like those he also explored in collaboration with Palermo (*Zwei Skulpturen zu einem Raum von Palermo* [Two sculptures for a room by Palermo], CR 297/1–2).

Panels 42 to 57: Personal Photographs

The twenty-seven photographs of Heinz Kühn, minister president of North Rhine–Westphalia (panels 44 and 45), served as preparation for the two portraits (CR 257/1–2); in the case of Brigid Polk (panels 46 and 47), whom Richter portrayed repeatedly (CR 307–9), a few blurry Polaroids were adequate to paint the full figure of this star from Andy Warhol's Factory; for Barbara Nüsse sleeping (panel 57, cf. CR 281), though, the cropping of the photograph was too close, so Richter felt compelled to fill out the photograph by drawing to create a coherent composition. The various uses to which he put the medium of photography are particularly clear in these examples of portraits.

Panels 58 to 88: Experiments

Double exposures, superimposition of several negatives, graphical reworkings of photographs, alongside clippings from fashion magazines (panel 67), images from the Richter exhibition *Gegenverkehr* [Oncoming traffic] in Aachen in 1969, reproductions of warships, the Vatican Museum (panels 71 to 76), stars, balls, small fires (panels 79 to 84). The material on these panels cannot be reduced to a common denominator. It is worth noting especially the technical manipulations, the results of which Richter repeated in his paintings only rarely. The portraits of Gilbert & George (CR 379–84) should be seen in this context. Many of the sequences had an explicitly personal character and did not serve as preparatory material. In several cases, the exploration of the technical possibilities of photography became an end in itself, and occasionally the series are reminiscent of conceptual artworks. *Various Small Fires* by Ed Ruscha comes immediately to mind when looking at panels 82

through 84. The photographs on panels 64 and 65 are models for the graphic works *Funken* [Sparks] and (Hanover's) *Bahnhof* [Train station].

Panels 89 to 105: Abstraction

This complex of works is dominated by details and enlargements of brush strokes, most of which are arranged in blocks. Sometimes the spatial surroundings of the corresponding painting are suggested (panel 95, cf. CR 273, CR 274; panel 96, cf. CR 271, CR 275). The addition of a human figure gives an idea of the size relationships (panel 103). On several of the panels Richter's systematic procedure can be followed easily. Photographs of creamy streaks of paint in red, yellow, and blue are arranged in rows (panel 100) in order to determine the most interesting structural formations. Mixtures of the primary colors are included in a particular sequence and removed from the other photographs (panel 101). In one case (panel 105), the photographs selected as models for paintings are found on the mounting boards used in the work with gradations in tone as a sequence of the coloristic coordination. Corresponding black-and-white enlargements (panel 104) reveal how Richter accentuated the highs and lows by schematically reworking the reproductions and how he considered subdividing the painting into six vertical bands. The *Atlas* only rarely permits precise insights into the procedure such as these (panels 98 to 105) that led to the three large paintings of 1973 (CR 345/1–3). These large paintings, each of which measures 300 × 600 cm, were commissioned for the headquarters of BMW in Munich.

Panels 106 to 124: Cities

The panels contain approximately one hundred aerial photographs of cities. To these are added photographs of models for cities or housing developments and several collages that record ideas for installations. The corresponding paintings were made primarily in 1968 and 1969, and they vary greatly with respect to both artistic solution and size. The spectrum ranges from small formats (53 × 43 cm) to versions that fill a wall (*Stadtbild Madrid* [Cityscape of Madrid], 277 × 292 cm). If the accent in Richter's objective oeuvre up to this point has been on individual subjects, which despite all the slurring of contours and inner form have nonetheless appeared clearly in the paintings, here he is working from models that suggested another procedure, not least because of the abundance of details. It is an expressive style combines the conglomerate of architecture and streets seen from bird's eye view into a plane formed of gray color values. In doing so, the details are considerably less perceptible; indeed, they seem to be canceled out entirely and subjected to an abstract structure. On the other hand, the vividness of the overall situation is still retained in the painting so that one still has the immediate association of "cityscape" when standing in front of one of these works. Still, everything is highly defamiliarized, especially since Richter tries to exclude significant monuments of the cities from his compositions. For example, in the cityscape of Paris (CR 175), the corresponding model (panel 119) reveals that Richter selected just a detail and cropped out the unmistakable Place Charles de Gaulle with the Arc de Triomphe at its center. The installation sketch on panel 123 permits us a similar observation: the aerial photograph placed in the collage has been rotated 180 degrees, creating an irritation that makes it significantly more difficult to read the photograph. A comparison of paintings that were completed somewhat later (CR 249–51) with their corresponding models (panel 121) shows how rotation, reduction, or enlargement of the detail have dissolved the relationship between the image and its model. It goes without saying that the artist's goal was not simply to make his sources unrecognizable. Rather, he seems to resist taking over the entire motif directly. The "principled avoidance of the subject," the strategy of arbitrariness, takes another form with this set of themes than with the figurative paintings. In particular, the paintings of 1970 that were based on city centers photographed from higher altitudes are reminiscent of the rubble wastelands of bombed cites, an analogy that Richter has confirmed in an interview.[30]

Panels 125 to 130: Mountains

The features that emerged in the cityscapes come to the fore even more succinctly in the paintings related to these panels in the *Atlas.* If the first is simply an enlargement and simplification (CR 181) of the corresponding model (panel 126),what is striking about the large alpine panorama is the release of a broad brush script that sums up the details of the preliminary material (panel 130)—a view from Zugspitze over the Ziller Valley and the Stubai Alps—in broad gestures. As with the cities or housing developments seen from above, in Richter's view, it was the latently chaotic element of "mute stuff" in natural or manmade formations that inspired him to give to his depictions a more universal kind of

content.[31] The contrasts of light and shadow, of jagged peaks and broad basins, of steep slopes and deep valleys, of vegetation, snow, and rock are subjected to a dictate of form that at times not only captures the contradictions on a plane but also levels them off (CR 213) so that such works suggest preliminary stages of the painted versions (CR 325 ff.). If in the realistic figurative paintings, for all the arbitrariness of the subject matter, the subjective component of the selection could apparently not be excluded entirely, the mode of representation could at least help avoid anything individual. In the cities and landscapes, this dialectic is reversed in that the motifs seem more universal, more impersonal, and more arbitrary, whereas the style of representation now seems to be borne by a subjective impulse.

Panels 131 and 132: Hitler

These panels with reproductions that Richter made in 1969 but which have left no trace in his painted oeuvre, apart from CR 3, were added in the final stage of preparations for exhibiting the *Atlas* in 1989.

Panels 134 to 181: Landscapes

This group, another one that combines various complexes of motifs, is dominated by structural comparisons that are made with the aid of photographs systematically arranged. A number of the illustrations under this rubric can be connected to painted versions. The models for CR 283/1, 284, and 287 are all found on a single panel of the *Atlas* (panel 136). The panels often call to mind a conceptual work, as when branches, clusters of foliage, underbrush, edges of forests, clearings, and so on, are collected in parallel series of images (panels 157 and 158). The monumental park painting of 1971 (CR 311), measuring 250 × 626 cm, is based on a colorful collage (panel 155) whose mounting board is filled with traces of work. This is an example demonstration of how Richter, without changing the structure of his model, not only displaces the accent by separating out a narrow sequence on the right side that is marked by the two trees standing alone, but also manages an optimal division of the large surfaces of the painting into individual elements. The black-and-white enlargement makes that plausible. Finally, a second photograph of the left section forms the preliminary stage for CR 310, though the man with the cow is left out of the painting.

Frequently, the photographs reproduce particular moods: fog (panels 153–54), moonlight (panel 156), sunsets (panels 164 to 166). Matter-of-fact photographs of New York, for example, or the site of the National Socialist convention in Nuremberg (panels 148 and 151), alternate with kitschy views. The integration of various postcards (panels 175 to 178) indicates that this effect is deliberate. This is also a theme in the paintings. Photographs of a rainbow (panel 169) lead to a corresponding sequence of paintings (CR 261/1–3); individual groups of trees, as unassuming as they might seem (panel 174), can become the starting point for a painting (CR 258), though the *Atlas* also elaborates on the relationship of the painting to the furniture and the spatial ambiance. Summarizing the observations that can be generalized, one comes to the conclusion that there are many overlapping layers in the *Atlas.* The compendium is only partially a collection of models for the paintings; it is too a large extent an instrument of reflections on form that always stand in some relation to Richter's visual work.

Panels 182 to 218: Cloud and Sea Paintings

Without exception, each photograph here reproduces a view of the open sea beneath a cloud-filled sky. What is remarkable is that most are collages, where the edge of the cut is along the horizon: the sea and the sky conform neither in lighting nor in atmospheric mood, and this can be clearly felt even in the corresponding paintings (CR 233 ff.). The irritation is increased in several instances by the appearance of moving water in the upper half of the painting. In at least one case (panel 194), this kind of manipulation serves as the basis for the conception and execution of paintings (CR 244, 245). After a few panels with clear skies and surf are juxtaposed (panels 199 to 202), the panels are dominated by cloud photographs arranged in a strict grid (panels 205 and 206). Here, too, the close connections to the painted oeuvre cannot be missed. The four-part painting *Wolken (Fenster)* [Clouds (Window)] of 1970 (CR 266) goes back to a color photograph that has been reworked and masked (to adjust proportions). In the model (panel 213) for CR 267, one can see how Richter tried out the mixing of paints used for the painting in tiny test patches on the original photo. The large, spectacular cumulus clouds (CR 270/1–3) also have corresponding models in the *Atlas* (panel 212). Panel 218 points to CR 268 and CR 276.

These few remarks ought to suffice here to make it clear that the cityscapes and Alps, seascapes and cloud paintings stand in an inherent relation to one another. This is perhaps easier to see in the photographs and collages of the *Atlas* than in a comparison of the paintings themselves. Whereas the photographs of the first two theme complexes suggested a more spontaneous style of brushwork that could simultaneously augment and resolve the immanent fissures and contrasts, the latter two groups of works privileged a more expulsive style of painting could transform the clouds especially—which by nature lack concise form—into colorful mists and lighter- or darker-shaded veils. In the works of this phase, a painterly bravura is developing that no longer feels a need to secure for itself an objective world, but neither does it want to become an object itself. The juxtaposition of such varied characteristics could easily be misunderstood as eclecticism. Richter himself seemed to confirm such an assessment when in 1970 he stated: "I pursue no objectives, no system, no tendency. I have no programme, no style, no direction. I have no time for specialized concerns, working themes, or variations that lead to mastery. I steer clear of definitions. I don't know what I want. . . ."[32] The polarizations in Richter's oeuvre, which became particularly marked around 1970, point not to this lack of stance that Richter claims for himself in this statement, which is intended as an affront, but rather to an intense search to legitimize his artistic practice. It would be wrong to speak of a cynical attitude; rather, one feels indirectly the knowledge that all styles, all methods, all subjects have long become obsolete. The pseudo-revolutionary pathos of earlier avant-gardes must seem particularly dubious to Richter, as well as to many other enlightened artists, in light of the social contradictions that became impossible to ignore in 1968 and thereafter. Art had no obligatory goal that lay outside of itself, but neither could it connect up to any valid tradition. Relativism seemed insurmountable because it had become so absolute. In this period, when everything seemed simultaneously possible and accessible, one way out, as formalistic as it might seem at first glance, seemed to lie in systematizing the disparate and accentuating mere appearances. The contradictory element needed to be summarized in order to reveal a dialectic unfolding on many levels that could not be grasped from an isolated painting in a museum, a private collection, or an exhibition. The *Atlas* is, at least for the period in which it was conceived, the definitive foundation from which large parts of the painted oeuvre arose. The material that is assembled on these panels is the basis for operations that ties together that which the paintings can no longer unify. The following panels, which move into the center of the compendium, as it were, demonstrate that such thoughts of synthesis could be combined with an undercurrent of harmonic equilibrium.

Panels 219 to 252: Rooms

Earlier panels have already made it apparent that Richter was repeatedly exploring in his sketches the spatial effects of his paintings. On the panels collected here, however, we can see a transformation in that the goal now seems to be to conceive the appropriate architectonic ambiance for large-format paintings. Thus, many of the wall-sized representations give the impression of an opening in the room. In other cases, the wall is clearly separated into partitions into which paintings are inserted. The architecture and the paintings are linked to one another (panels 221 ff.). One collage (panel 223), in which an inner room that is merely suggested opens into a classicizing interior, is particularly informative in this context. Here it is evident that Richter's conceptions for rooms are related not only to comparable works by Palermo but also to older traditions. The other sketches reveal this as well, as when the paintings are given rounded terminations and fitted under lunettes (panel 224). Walls, ceilings, and even floors (panel 222) are broken down by means of illusionistic painting, which is reminiscent of the principles of Baroque decoration, except that Richter separates the planes sharply and occasionally emphasizes the architectonic frame (panel 251, panel 242) to such an extent that the paintings no longer seem like surrogates of reality but must be understood as appearances. This is particularly true of a constructivist subdivision of the walls (panel 250) in which details from cloud paintings are position in rectangular fields according to decorative principles. Many of the sketches suggest megalomaniacal pretensions. The human forms seem tiny in contrast to the cosmic landscapes (panels 234, 249, 243), which occasionally recalls the hybrid ideas of the revolutionary architects. All of the sketches take up the same subjects: clouds in the sky, sea, and mountains. In only two cases does the motif of brush marks become the basis for the overarching conception (panels 252 and 231). All of the ideas are for permanent installations. In exhibitions, such ideas could only be realized temporarily and even then in a limited fashion, as in panel 245 which shows an idea for installing his 1981 retrospective in the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.

What emerges from all these sketches seems, on the one hand, to aim at a devaluation of the autonomy of the individual painting, which is no longer meant to be seen for itself, but instead gains a new function as part of an overall spatial conception. On the other hand, the often oversized formats have a suggestive effect that makes it possible to experience the sublime, bringing into play once again the question of painting's claim on the public. These panels can be read as an attempt to dodge the trend to specialization into various branches and instead to achieve a new symbiosis of space and painting in which each will increase the effect of the other.

Panels 253 to 271: Sketches

For one group of paintings, Richter began not with photographs but with sketches in his own hand. The theme here is essentially the relationship of the picture plane to the picture space, of light and shadow, plasticity and linearity, of rhythm and series, sharpness and blurring, and so on. The contrasts are brilliantly developed in the paintings, and various alternatives are played through in superior style. Richter soon abandoned this complex of works, however, as it evidently seemed to sterile to him. He nevertheless included in the *Atlas* a great deal of material for these works, some of which were quite large. Thus *Balken* [Beams] of 1968 (CR 208/2) corresponds to a drawing (panel 258). The same is also true of *Fenster* [Window] (CR 204) and *Fenstergitter* [Window grates] (CR 207), for which the models can also be identified (panels 257 and 256). Architectonic fantasies for public housing (panel 259) and an underground theater (panel 261) alternate with sketches (panels 262 to 264) for the pedestal and placement of the portrait busts of Palermo and Richter (CR 297/1–2) and designs for furniture (panel 260; see also panels 287 and 288). Several diagrams with constellations are also included here (panels 266 and 267) though their relationship to the paintings on this theme (CR 255/2–4 and CR 224/11–15) is not immediately evident.

Panels 272 to 298: Color Fields

In 1966, Richter created a series of works that marks one extreme in his oeuvre: square or rectangular fields are each given a smooth coat of a single homogenous tone. Sketches from 1966 for an exhibition of individual color panels and a series of portraits are also included here (panel 289). One spies a handwritten remark, which can almost be read as the motto for the later "soft" abstractions: "You see no less by taking a blurry look at one area through a loupe." In addition to the three primary colors and mixtures thereof, one series of paintings also treats the white-gray-black scale. Thus as many as 1024 (CR 350/1–4), and in one extreme case 4096 (CR 359), different tones are united on a single picture plane. Many of these paintings are reminiscent of the sample chips of paint manufacturers, except in Richter's case the distribution of the blue, yellow, and red tones, and all their refractions and shadings, does not proceed systematically but is instead the result of arbitrary decisions that take into account the current taste of the day. In 1973/74, Richter took up this group of works again (CR 350 ff.), though now the selection and sequence of colors was given over to chance. Every subjective component was excluded, as Richter drew lots to choose each tone in the sequence. The *Atlas* contains studies for both these complexes that pertain to the proportion of the paintings, their spatial arrangement, the progression of the distribution of the fields, and so on. In addition, ideas for an unrealized project for Kunst-am-Bau follow (panel 290) are included.

Here the individual colors are cleanly separated, but in the so-called *Vermalungen* [Mispaintings] (CR 325/1–120 ff.) they are mixed. These works can be seen as a negation of everything that had occupied Richter up to this point. Nothing is left here, no motif, no color, no structure. And yet the paintings were too painterly to be considered Minimal Art, as a consequence of the movements on the upper surface of the paint that mark them as traces of a brush. Even at the time, they were considered an expression of indifference, meaninglessness, and avoidance of a statement.[33] Ultimately, they were extreme attempts to represent powerlessness and desperation.[34]

Panels 299 to 309: Vegetation

These panels with photographs from Meerbusch and Corsica are obviously concerned with working out structural problems. Reflections in water are captured along with eddies (panel 301), the delicate branches of bushes on the edge of the shore (panels 299, 300, 302, 303), and exotic forms of leaves and flowers seen close up (panels 304 to 309). In several cases, Richter again takes up the effort to create interesting results through the use of double exposures (panel 306). All of them seem to have been without direct consequences for his painting, with the exception of one small flower painting (CR

425/3). As structural nature studies, however, they are essential requirements for the *Vermalungen* and especially for the abstract paintings up to the present day.

Panels 310 to 321: Landscapes

Of the landscape photographs taken in Italy, only a few have served as models for paintings. For example, panel 312 shows a view of Vesuvius that became the starting point for the paintings of the same name (CR 404–10). The selection and arrangement increasingly confers on the multitude of different subjects and moods the status of an independent genre capable of taking the place of painting.

Panels 322 to 331: Sea Paintings and Clouds

Only a few paintings from 1976–78 correspond to these 153 photographs, and apparently only one painting (CR 411) can be associated directly with a photograph (panel 322).

Panels 332 to 340: Arosa, Davos

These photographs, especially those taken at twilight, with the sun barely penetrating the clouds (panel 333) and the mountainous world immersed in milky light, were the inspiration for several paintings from 1981 (CR 468/1–3, CR 471).

Panels 341 to 359: Greenland

Of the 220 photographs that are collected on these panels, once again only a very few were later used for paintings (CR 476, CR 496/1–2). These photographs from 1972 did, however, form the basis of Richter's *Eis,* a book of photographs published in 1981 by Galleria Pieroni in Rome.

Panels 360 to 362: Venice

Panel 362 tells us something about the process of the genesis of a painting in that Richter has noted several instructions for the work here: "Not this orange-red evening mood as on the model, but hard midday." Wiped traces of paint and pencil sketches on the mounting board show that the photographs were used for models (cf. CR 586/1). The same is true of the photographs on panel 360 (CR 586/2–3).

Panels 363 to 373: Landscapes

This complex of works collects landscape photographs from wide-ranging sources. The photographs on panels 363 and 364 repeat four motifs from panel 312, this time with traces of paint on the mounting board. The overwhelming majority of these photographs, which are arranged by content and composition, have had (thus far, at least) no response in the painted oeuvre.

Panels 393 to 394: Betty Richter

At least two of these photographs of Richter's daughter (panel 394) formed the basis for paintings (CR 425/4–5).

Panels 395 to 396: Palazzo Regale

The visual arts appear in the *Atlas* in very few places. Reproductions of two Baroque portraits (panels 9 and 10), a Picasso painting (panel 15), and reproductions of the Laocoon group in the Vatican Museum (panel 72) are the only exceptions. So it is that much more remarkable that Richter included in this collection two panels with photographs from the Museo Capodimonte in Naples, where, shortly before his death, Beuys installed his last large environment, *Palazzo Regale*. Richter can be seen on many of the unpretentious amateur photographs, either alone or with his daughter. These photographs can certainly be viewed as an homage to an artist Richter admired.

Panels 397 to 401: Candles and Skull

For the first time, we are dealing with photographs that reproduce a situation that was conceived in advance. With the burning candles and skull, Richter is drawing on a traditional *vanitas* motif. In several cases, these consist of collages, as the candles are cropped and pasted onto enlargements. A

whole series of paintings from 1982/83 was made from these photographs (CR 497–99, CR 510–12, CR 523/1, CR 545, CR 547, etc.). In this complex of works, the relationship between the photograph and the painted transformation is particularly close, which must be a result of the special character of the photographs, which Richter conceived with an eye to his paintings. It is also interesting that one particularly carefully composed photograph (panel 397) apparently did not serve as the model for any painting. Moreover, as the sketches on the border make clear, Richter arranged the comparatively complex structure of a burning candle, a tablecloth, a skull, and a white rectangle in the background in such a way that either the candle alone or the skull would occupy the central point of the composition (CR 546/2, CR 548/1–2). This is clearly one of the rare examples in which the drawing mediates between the photograph and the painting, contributing to a process of clarification that is guided by an artistic intention. In several cases, a realistic, large-format preliminary painting is transformed into an abstraction (CR 568/1).

Panels 403 to 413: Abstract Paintings

Here, too, we can limit ourselves to a few remarks. Panel 403 reproduces a color photograph of CR 433/2, a painting from 1978 measuring 62 × 90 cm. The markings on the mounting board and the sketched figure of a viewer suggest that Richter repeated the painting in a larger format (CR 434, 1978, 200 × 335 cm). In the latter version, the individual forms begin to blur. The artist occasionally referred to such works as "soft" abstractions. Panel 405 combines four details of a small abstraction from 1976 (CR 398/1, 65 × 60 cm) which then became the preliminary material for four paintings from 1977 (CR 417–20), each measuring 225 × 200 cm. Something similar can be observed in the details from CR 398/3 and the compositions that derived from them, CR 422 and CR 424. In this case, too, details from a small-format work are enlarged to such an extent (300 × 200 and 250 × 200 cm, respectively) that the individual elements begin to dissolve and the transitions begin to bleed. It is possible that photographic experiments led to this aesthetic of mimetic blurring, as can be seen from panel 407, where a detail of an abstract painting is photographed increasingly out of focus until the structure dissolves into an optical conglomerate. Panels 408 and 409 are also related to this one. Panel 411 is significant in that Richter has preserved fourteen different states of a painting from 1978 (CR 432/4). This example can be understood equally well as a process of artistic intensification or as a sign of the futility of labor: The question arises whether the final state of the painting really represents the optimal solution, or whether the painting had simply passed through a series of states of completion before Richter ceased work on it.

Panels 414 to 421: Personal Photographs

The *Atlas* is above all an instrument for work, and only rarely does it serve to record personal experiences and memories. The photographs combined here show the sculptor Isa Genzken, Gerhard Richter's second wife. Nevertheless, this section of the whole does not come across like a fragment of a private album. The sober gaze of the photographer as he records the scene, which seems to lend the photographs an objective character, corresponds to the often cool, distanced expression of the person portrayed. It would be inappropriate to interpret the photographs psychologically, especially since we know neither the intentions behind the images included nor the criteria for selecting them. Still, it is striking how Richter, consciously or unconsciously, excludes his private life, blocking this aspect out of the *Atlas* almost entirely. It is tempting to ask whether the "principled avoidance of the subject" also includes the private sphere, or to what extent the private sphere allows no stance other than the one that is the basis for the work.

Panels 422 to 439: Landscapes

Of these 166 photographs, several served as inspiration for the most important landscapes of the eighties, for example, two paintings titled *Scheune* [Barn] from 1983/84 (CR 549/1, CR 550/1), *Wiesental* [Valley meadow] (CR 572/4) and *Buschdorf* [Bush village] (CR 572/5) from 1985, and two paintings titled *Domecke* [Cathedral corner] from 1987/88.

Here again, it is striking that, in the selection and combination of the photographs for the panels, criteria for ordering are based primarily on form. Thus, the line of the horizon often passes through several rows of reproductions; the lighting and mood remain the same on a panel as much as possible; corresponding angles of view and perspectives are sustained. Again and again, the point is to develop sequences. The panels thus acquire their own aesthetic and are very much more than a mere

collection of working materials. Richter photographs almost exclusively land that has been cultivated by man, and yet the landscapes very rarely contain people (panel 424). Occasionally, houses can be seen; rural equipment is never on view, nor are industrial products; and even animals turn up only rarely (panel 455). Even so, they are not always idyllic scenes that accentuate the picturesque, but rather regions that suggest that the destruction of agrarian life has not yet taken place here. In the paintings associated with these photographs, this is all exposed as appearance, though in such a subcutaneous way that this kind of romantic irony is superimposed with a blinding illusionism. It only becomes apparent gradually that the paintings have a false bottom; a dimension that, as it happens, is only implicit in the photographs.

Panels 440 to 444: Still Lifes with Apples and Bottles

As in the experiments with candles and a skull (panels 397–401), here, too, Richter arranges the objects into a still life that he then photographs. The arrangement on the mounting boards is based on aesthetic considerations, as arbitrary as the combinations might sometimes seem. With respect to the motif, the photographs point to some smaller-format paintings from 1984 (CR 560/1–3).

Panels 447 to 459: Various Motifs and Landscapes

This group relates to panels 422 to 439 . They need not, therefore, be discussed in detail, except to say that panels 447 and 451 contain the models for two large-format landscapes from 1987 with the title *Chinon* (CR 644 and CR 645) that depict, barely visible on the horizon, the nuclear power plant located there.

Panels 460 to 467: Toronto, New York, Niagara Falls, Sils-Maria

Panels 468 to 469: Overpaintings

These consist of photographs that were almost entirely covered in paint using a monotype process so that their motifs shine through only partially. They are related to all the photographs in the *Atlas* where traces of paint can be seen on the mounting board.

Panels 470 to 479: *18. Oktober 1977*

The ten panels unite one hundred photographs in two groups. The first five panels contain eight photographs in upright format, arranged in two rows of four; on the other panels, there are twelve photographs in oblong format, arranged in four rows of three. This material is related to a cycle of fifteen paintings in various formats, *18. Oktober 1977,* on the deaths of the leading members of the RAF [Rote Armee Fraktion, Red army faction]: Andreas Baader, Gundrun Ensslin, and Ulrike Meinhof. This group of works, unique in Richter's oeuvre, which amounts to an attempt to revitalize the history painting, shows how the aesthetic form of a memorial work amounts to a strategy of forgetting.[35] In painting, Richter approaches a repressed event and at the same time pushes it into the distance, so that it eludes the attempt to bring it into the present. Especially given the background of the many abstract works that have largely defined the artist's work in recent years, the boldness of taking such a risk is all the more admirable.

The photographs integrated into the *Atlas* were made after the paintings were completed, whereas the precise photographs used for the painted versions were deliberately left out of the *Atlas.* The relationship of the image to its reproduction is thus, in a sense, reversed. Only in the *Atlas* does Richter follow up on the reproductions of concentration camp photographs from his early period (panels 16 to 20), for which there are no equivalents in the paintings.

III

Looking over this enormous collection of material as a whole, it is nearly impossible to determine a coherent structure with respect to content. In response to changing interests and projects, Richter would vary the material he found appropriate to integrate into the *Atlas,* finding new groupings or leaving out certain complexes of works that seemed to him in retrospect to be unimportant. A comparison with the publication from the exhibition in Utrecht in 1972 makes it clear that he not only rejected the installation sketches from his exhibition for the Venice Biennale (1972), but also the photographs and sketches that were related to prints and the plans for sculptural monuments.

Freehand drawings were also left out. Neither is a strict chronology to be found; on the contrary, the rearrangement of many complexes is a conscious effort to break down any conceivable ordering scheme. This is done because Richter views the collection not as a sequence of individual sheets, but as a spatial totality that is experienced simultaneously not sequentially. His precise diagrams for the progression of the walls in the exhibition in Krefeld attest to his effort to give spatial form to his own past in the concrete form of his artistic output. The development in a sequence of sheets is meant to be evident at a glance. Ultimately, it is about the simultaneous availability of problems of content and formal complexes that Richter picks up again after substantial intervals.

If, on the other hand, one approaches it from the chronology of the painted works, then the connections become more and more loose. Of the works produced through 1966 (CR 1–144), about half of the subjects can be found in the *Atlas*. For the later paintings, this is true in a much more limited sense, with the exception of the still lifes (candles and skull). In the latter case, Richter leaves nothing to chance. He takes photographs of situations that are arranged according to a preconceived idea for a painting. Whereas the early panels are dominated by figurative motifs, landscape photographs soon come into the forefront, though they are interrupted again and again by experiments in structure and form. Still, it is striking that entire thematic areas are left out. The world of work and the state of society are excluded entirely. Richter takes up historical and political themes only exceptionally (concentration camps, Hitler, *18. Oktober 1977*), which are somewhat at odds with everything else and pierce the otherwise protected sphere of aesthetic appearance like an insurmountable trauma. Art is touched upon in just a few examples (*Palazzo Regale* by Joseph Beuys). Everything private is reduced to a minimum. The photographs of friends (Palermo) and family members (wife and daughter) define two salient positions in the kaleidoscope of images, but they should not be seen primarily as personal disclosures by the artist; the attitude manifested in many of these photographs is too abstract and distanced for that.

If the name *Atlas* (Album) signals an intention to represent, arrange, and make available the entire repertoire of motifs, then this compendium only partially satisfies those expectations. In many cases the panels offer a key to the paintings, especially where the traces of work are clearly evident. Nevertheless, over long stretches the photographs composed in groups and series, the collages, the experiments in form, and the sketches testify an independent course of research that runs parallel to the painted oeuvre. It is not so much the painter who peers through the viewfinder of the camera, but the amateur who is transformed into a conceptual artist only through the prints and enlargements. The *Atlas* comprises highly varied regions that are explored into the smallest detail, but it also touches upon areas in which Richter quickly lost interest, which are, therefore, not explored more deeply.

Although there does not appear to be a binding unity in the content, the heterogeneous elements are subjected to a clear organizational scheme. The solid scaffolding—seen in the blocklike arrangement of reproductions that are generally the same format, the standardization of the mounting boards, and the coherent frame—binds together the disparate content and suggests homogeneity. It is a dialectic of order and latent chaos, of reflection and spontaneity, of universal and individual, of sharpness and blurring, of abstraction and empathy, which develops in a collection of material that is continually overflowing. The *Atlas* gives almost no hint of the personality of the artist, as it is not an intimate diary. Richter is experimenting, documenting, and archiving in such a matter-of-fact way that he himself does not become a subject of that task. Consequently, the *Atlas* is more than the sum of its parts. It can be understood as an autonomous work that combines a manageable amount of diversity with exacting form; it provides fragments of a picture of the world, but it refuses to be taken as a coherent world picture. The *Atlas* is conceived with its exhibition in mind. It is not primarily designed as a biography of works that opens up the iconography of the painted oeuvre, but as an autonomous opus with a well-defined aesthetic that is intended for a public. In the compendium, the obstinacy of the visual sense is systematized, and at the same time the documentation of the aesthetic gaze is divided into facets such that the totality of accumulated information acquires something impenetrable. The *Atlas* is two things at once: a facilitating instrument and an independent object, biographical journey and exercise in content and form—an open work that accompanies and complements the self-contained paintings.

IV

In his beautiful essay *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie,* Roland Barthes notes that a photograph is always invisible. It is not that which we see.[37] What this means is, first of all, the

undeniable fact that in viewing photographs we do not immediately and habitually separate the signifier—that is, the photograph—from the signified—that is, the object reproduced. Starting from a universal observation—that, especially in amateur photographs, we see primarily what is depicted, while in painting we also simultaneously reflect upon the means of representation—Barthes distinguishes between two aspects of photography, for which, for lack of better alternatives, he chooses Latin terms: *studium* and *punctum.* In his definition, the *studium*—Barthes uses the term in the sense of *enthusiasm* or *interest*—triggers a culturally mediated reaction, a universal affect, whereas the second element breaks through this, seizes and irritates the viewer, even giving him or her a prick (*punctum*). *Punctum* is that which goes beyond the universal interest. *Studium,* according to Barthes, is always encoded, but *punctum* is not.[38] *Punctum* is the "beyond," as if the photograph were to awake in us a desire and curiosity to transcend what it permits us to see.[39] *Studium* marks the wide-ranging field of unconcerned desire, various interest, inconsequential taste. At most, it produces a vague, slippery interest in people, events, and things. One is not touched beyond that, either in a positive or negative sense.[40] *Studium* is based on experience and education, and it allows one to make inferences about the photographer and his or her intentions. *Punctum,* by contrast, has an expansive, metonymic quality that can exist in the surprising or disturbing details of the photograph, which fill the whole picture, as it were.[41] Starting from this phenomenology, it seems clear that the photographs in Richter's *Atlas* were selected solely on the basis of *studium.* They are almost exclusively photographs that awake at most a moderate interest; photos that are neither touching nor astounding, neither fascinating nor shocking, with a few exceptions—the photographs from concentration camps, of Hitler, of the members of the RAF and their deaths. The characteristic element is almost always occluded, and the banal and interchangeable are foregrounded, so few of the reproductions in the *Atlas* really capture us. The channeled superabundance, the arrangement into small groups, and the formation of larger series aggrandize the process of leveling-out that is potentially inherent in the overwhelming majority of the works. And yet this blocking of communication leaves one phenomenon untouched that is also expressed pointedly in the *Atlas:* the interblending of reality and the past. What we see in the photographs in the *Atlas,* whether they were taken by Richter himself or are merely found objects, is something that once was, that lies in the past, that no longer exists, at least not in that form. This is particularly true of the photographs of people, but it also applies to the landscapes and still lifes. In both cases, there is no future. In truth, the photograph does not awaken a memory; rather, it blocks memory and becomes its very opposite, its "counter-memory," as Barthes says.[42] The photograph's *noeme* lies in its intractability, in the "that-has-been."[43] The amateur is usually understood to be someone who is either unwilling or unable to achieve mastery of a profession, but in photography the situation is reversed: here, the amateur is the precondition for the professional, because he is closer to the *noeme* of photography.[44]

This 1980 essay on photography by Roland Barthes helps to focus on the concept that occupied Richter from the beginning. A text collage published together with Sigmar Polke in 1966 states succinctly: "I consider many amateur photographs better than the best Cézanne."[45] And in 1970 the painter responded to a question about his criteria for selecting photographs as models for his paintings: "Perhaps the choice is a negative one, in that I was trying to avoid everything that touched on well-known issues—or any issues at all, whether painterly, social or aesthetic. I tried to find nothing too explicit, hence all the banal subjects. . . ."[46] Banality, avoidance of the *punctum,* emphasis on the "counter-memory," that is what Richter sees in the photograph, and he wanted to transfer these principles to painting. In doing so, he wanted to steer clear of everything aesthetic, so as not to set obstacles in his own way.[47] In his eyes, every means was justified to avoid the appearance of art.[48] The genre-specific categories of painting broke down in amateur photographs and magazine illustrations, where the signified was immediately in evidence as something already past. The photograph "had no style, no composition, no judgment. It freed me from personal experience. For the first time, there was nothing to it: it was pure picture."[49] Under such premises, the photograph is, for Richter, not a means to painting; rather, painting is a means to photography.[50] As he understands it, his paintings are photography by other means,[51] and for precisely that reason they cannot be assigned to painting in the traditional sense. Painting "as far as its photographic qualities were concerned—was mostly not so good as photography, because it also had to work as painting, which meant a completely different quality."[52] This other quality that makes painting painting had to be eliminated, and the emphasis had to be placed on precisely that element of painting that is characteristic of the photograph. By favoring the *studium,* Richter places the accent on the *noeme,* but by means of the blurring of his paintings, he breaks down the symbiosis of reality and the past that exists in the photographs. As the reality of the

content decreases, the element of the past increases in magnitude. The signified comes directly in view and simultaneously withdraws. Blurring is imprecision, and that means difference with respect to the object represented.[53] This counteracts the very thing that makes photography valid. Ultimately, it is naive realism that makes it possible to accept as realistic a reproduction that can seem objective not only with respect to its correspondence with the reality of things themselves, but also with respect to its social function. Namely, when society grants the patent for realism to photography, as it were, all it does is confirm by means of a tautology that the image of the real which is true to photography's objective means of representation is also genuinely objective.[54] Seen in this way, Richter's paintings are useless to society as photographs. The blurring disappoints the expectation of the immediate presence of reality, without, however, invalidating the traditional means of perception. Thus, in the artist's view, his painting as a photograph cannot provide a substitute for reality, but at most a "crutch . . . to get to reality,"[55] which forces the viewer to stumble into a zone where language is totally absent,[56] because when the social function has been rescinded, the possibility of communication is also cut off.

The emphasis on a lack of art, that leaves everything mute and points to an ephemeral sphere where things and forms become merely fleeting shadows of themselves, is especially characteristic of the first panels of the *Atlas* and the associated photographs. The idiosyncrasies of Gerhard Richter's oeuvre, however, are also evident when they are seen in the relevant historical context. Just one example will suffice to illustrate that. In 1966, Richter expressed his reflections on the relationship of photography and painting in a surreal fantasy, the very absurdity of which is revealing. "All painters, everybody," he wrote, "ought to paint from photographs. And they should do it the way I do (including the selection process). Then such paintings should be exhibited everywhere, and everywhere they should be hung—in homes, restaurants, offices, stations and churches, everywhere. Then great painting competitions would be held. The jurors would assess the entries according to theme, rendering and speed, and then they would award medals. Every day, on television and on the radio, there would be reports on the latest paintings. Eventually, laws could be passed so that people could be punished for not painting enough copies of photographs. This would have to go on for 400 years or so, and then painting from photographs should be banned in Germany."[57] Such a statement is no doubt reminiscent of Andy Warhol, and in the early sixties Pop Art, as Richter repeatedly emphasized, provided an important impetus for his work.[58] Warhol remarked in passing that he had always wanted to paint pictures of the same size. "I think every painting should be the same size and the same color so they're all interchangeable and nobody thinks they have a better painting or a worse painting. And if the one 'master painting' is good, they're all good. Besides, even when the subject is different, people always paint the same painting."[59] The same principle (painting from photographs) had a far more radical consequence in Warhol's work, in that even the results can not longer be distinguished. But this is precisely what Richter wanted to avoid. So, despite the comparable stance, the differences in their painted oeuvres are striking. Whereas Warhol aims at the surrogates of media reality, and he defines the relationship between the painting and its model as a tautology, Richter, by taking the photograph seriously as a photograph, wants something entirely different. One example can illuminate this difference. Richter, too, painted Jacqueline Kennedy (WV 29), but unlike Warhol he does not reproduce in an endlessly repeatable series the clichéd image of the president's wife in mourning. Instead, Richter makes her unrecognizable, because, as he said, he was embarrassed to paint Jacqueline Kennedy. "It was such a beautiful photo, of a woman crying," as he expressed it later.[60] Neither the incessant superficiality and the abandonment of the simulation of reality nor the aesthetic of consumption interested him; rather, it is the *noeme* of the photograph of the crying woman, which he presents in a singular, irreproducible painting, at the same time slurring and masking the sitter's distinctive features to turn her into an anonymous figure.

Here, too, a paradoxical double strategy manifests itself, one that posits affirmation and negation in one. The authenticity of past events is isolated from the identity of the person affected by them. The dialectical relationship of photography and painting not only promotes the process of depersonalization, but it also blocks the memory of the specific incident. Seen in this way, it becomes possible to understand again, in its full multiplicity of meaning, Richter's attempt to confront the medium of photography. It also reveals the extent to which epistemological doubts pervade his artistic work.

This was decisive for his stance in the sixties, and it seems to have ended with a series of four paintings, *Tourist und Löwe(n)* [Tourist with Lion(s)] (CR368–370/1), based on a film that recorded an accident in a French wild animal park.[61] From the midseventies on, the paintings based on

photographs begin to disclose a different attitude, and thus it is not surprising that Richter gradually began to revise his conception. In 1984, he expressed himself in a way that runs counter to what he said around 1970. Looking back, it seemed to him as if he had always been concerned to bring out the message in the photographs and to emphasize their dignity in transporting them into art.[62] In 1988, he said: "The motifs were never random; I had to make much too much of an effort for that, just to be able to find photos I could use."[63] And when he goes on to say that even in his earlier work he was most definitely concerned with content, and certainly not in demonstrating indifference, one is inclined to say that such a remark might pertain more to the realistic paintings made around that time. The latter frequently seem sentimental, even to the artist, when he introduces personal elements into them.[64]

This is not the place to question the validity of this kind of statement. Instead, let us once more emphasize in conclusion that large parts of the photographic material preserved in the *Atlas* are not merely testimony to indifference, banality, and "counter-memory," for they go far beyond that to sum up a description of loss of epic proportions. More and more, the *Atlas*—having largely abandoned its original intention of keeping his original tasks, materials, and concepts accessible—seems to have become an instrument that holds on to that which was, that which lies in the past, that which cannot be repeated. Although a direct connection to the painted oeuvre is only rarely to be found, perhaps the photographs have for Richter a function that goes beyond that of evidence. The question arises whether they do not perhaps contain, in condensed form, something the abstract paintings are no longer able to transport directly. In the *Atlas,* the world of people, things, and nature appears under the sign of ephemerality. In the abstract paintings, by contrast, everything appears open to the future under the sign of hope. Or at least that is clearly how Richter sees it himself, when he says: "The only paradox is that I always begin with the intention of obtaining a closed picture, with a properly composed motif. Then, with a relatively big effort, I proceed to destroy this intention piece by piece, against my own will almost, until the picture is finished—that is, until it has nothing left besides openness."[65] The *Atlas* and the painted oeuvre correlate in such a way that the richness and complexity of the former, which neither takes the full measure of the artistic arsenal nor catalogues it fully, give it a significance that has hardly been recognized yet for work as a whole. The polarities intersect: With respect to content, the *Atlas* is closed insofar as it points to a past that is overwhelmingly anonymous, whereas the paintings, in Richter's view, preserve a utopian element in the appearance of future possibilities. With respect to structure, the situation is reversed. The *Atlas* is open insofar as it is constantly changing and able to grow, whereas the individual paintings, once they have left the studio, must be viewed as completed. It is not least this binary dialectic and the internal double strategy—which we were able to demonstrate particularly well with reference to the photographs—that make the *Atlas,* despite its austere visual charms, such a fascinating work.

Notes

1. Gerhard Richter, *Gerhard Richter: Werken op papier, 1983–1986; Notities, 1982–1986,* exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Museum Overholland Amsterdam, 1987), 15. [*Translator's note.* Reprinted in Gerhard Richter, *Text: Schriften und Interviews,* ed. Hans-Ulrich Obrist (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1993), 121. Translated by David Britt as *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings, 1962–1993* (London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 130. Cited hereafter as *Text* and *Daily Practice,* respectively.]

2. Gerhard Richter, *One Hundred Twenty-eight Details from a Picture,* The Nova Scotia Pamphlets 2 (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1980).

3. Gerhard Richter, *Eis, 1973–1981* (Rome: Edizione Galleria Pieroni, 1981).

4. Richter (see note 1), 15. [*Text,* 121; *Daily Practice,* 130.]

5. Wassily Kandinsky, "Über die Formfrage," in *Der Blaue Reiter,* ed. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, new documentary edition by Klaus Lankheit (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1965), 147 ff. [Translated in Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds. *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art,* vol. 1, 1901–1921, (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 242 ff.]

6. Richter (see note 1), 11. [*Text,* 115; *Daily Practice,* 124.]

7. Gerhard Richter, interview by Wolfgang Pehnt, *Künstler im Gespräch,* ed. Werner Krüger and Wolfgang Pehnt (Cologne: Artemedia, 1984), 131. [*Text,* 110; *Daily Practice,* 118.]

8. Gerhard Richter, *Abstrakte Bilder, 1976–1981,* exh. cat. (Munich: Jahn, 1981), 16. [*Text,* 91; *Daily Practice,* 99.]

9. Peter Sager, "Gespräch mit Gerhard Richter," *das kunstwerk* (July 1972): 27. [*Text,* 64; *Daily Practice,* 69.]

10. *Künstler im Gespräch* (see note 7), 125. [*Text,* 106; *Daily Practice,* 114.]

11. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 56. [Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor as *Aesthetic Theory,* Theory and History of Literature 88 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 33.]

12. Adorno (see note 11), 184. [*Aesthetic Theory,* 121.]

13. "Gerhard Richter," in *documenta 7,* vol. 1, exh. cat. (Kassel: Paul Dierichs, 1982), 84 f. [*Text,* 93; *Daily Practice,* 100.]

14. Rolf-Gunter Dienst, *Noch Kunst: Neustes aus deutschen Ateliers* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1970), 199. [*Text,* 58–59; *Daily Practice,* 63–64.]

15. Amine Haase, *Gespräche mit Künstlern* (Cologne: Wienand, [1981]), 113. [*Text,* 87; *Daily Practice,* 95.]

16. Adorno (see note 11), 129.

17. Gerhard Richter, interview by Zdenek Felix, quoted in Ulrich Loock and Denys Zacharopoulos, *Gerhard Richter* (Munich: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 1985), 37 n. 53.

18. Rüdiger Bubner, "Über einige Bedingungen gegenwärtiger Ästhetik," from 1973; reprinted in *Ästhetische Erfahrung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 38.

19. Bubner (see note 18), 41.

20. *Künstler im Gespräch* (see note 7), 129. [*Text,* 107; *Daily Practice,* 114–15.]

21. Catalogue from Galerie h, Hanover, 1966; reprinted in "Gerhard Richter," catalog of the thirty-sixth Venice Biennale (Stuttgart: Cantz, 1972), 30. [*Text,* 43; *Daily Practice,* 49.]

22. Gerhard Richter, interview by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, in *Gerhard Richter: Paintings,* ed. Terry Neff, exh. cat. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 18. [*Text,* 131; *Daily Practice,* 140.]

23. Gerhard Richter, *Atlas van de foto's en schetsen,* Hedendaagse Kunst, Utrecht, 1 to 30 December 1972.

24. Helmut Heissenbüttel, "Gerhard Richter," in *Gerhard Richter,* exh. cat. (Bremerhaven: Kunstverein Bremerhaven, 1973).

25. Laszlo Glozer, "Die Vor-Bilder der Bilder," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 97 (24 April 1974): 36.

26. *Gerhard Richter: Atlas der Fotos, Collagen und Skizzen,* Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 8 February to 14 March 1976.

27. Gerhard Richter, *Bilder, 1962–1985,* ed. Jürgen Harten with a catalogue raisonné by Dietmar Elger (Cologne: DuMont, 1986). [*Translator's note.* See also Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Gerhard Richter,* vol. 3, *Catalogue Raisonné, 1962–1993* (Stuttgart: Edition Cantz, 1993).]

28. Dienst (see note 14), 195. [*Text,* 57; *Daily Practice,* 62.]

29. Coosje van Bruggen, "Gerhard Richter: Painting as a Moral Act," *Artforum* 23, no. 9 (May 1985): 91.

30. Van Bruggen (see note 29), 86.

31. Richter (see note 22), 21. [*Text,* 136; *Daily Practice,* 146.]

32. Rolf-Gunter Dienst, *Deutsche Kunst: Eine neue Generation* (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1970), unpaginated. [*Text,* 53; *Daily Practice,* 58.]

33. *Künstler im Gespräch* (see note 7), 124. [*Text,* 105; *Daily Practice,* 112.]

34. Van Bruggen (see note 29), 88.

35. Gerhard Storck, "Ohne Titel (Gemischte Gefühle)," in *Gerhard Richter: 18. Oktober 1977,* exh. cat., Museum Haus Esters Krefeld, Portikus Frankfurt (Cologne: Walther König, 1989), 13.

36. Stefan Gerner, "Ungebetene Erinnerung," in *Gerhard Richter* (see note 35), 51.

37. Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), 18. [*Translator's note.* English translation by Richard Howard as *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 6. Cited hereafter as *Camera.*]

38. Barthes (see note 37), 48 ff. [*Camera,* 26–27.]

39. Barthes (see note 37), 93. [*Camera,* 59.]

40. Barthes (see note 37), 49. [*Camera,* 28.]

41. Barthes (see note 37), 74, 77. [*Camera,* 45.]

42. Barthes (see note 37), 142. [*Camera,* 91.]

43. Barthes (see note 37), 120. [*Camera,* 77.]

44. Barthes (see note 37), 154. [*Camera,* 98–99.]

45. Catalogue of the Gallery h, Hanover, 1966 (see note 21), 32. [*Text,* 49; *Daily Practice,* 55.]

46. Dienst (see note 14), 194. [*Text,* 57; *Daily Practice,* 62.]

47. Dienst (see note 14), 198. [*Text,* 58; *Daily Practice,* 63.]

48. Sager (see note 9), 16. [*Text,* 62; *Daily Practice,* 66.]

49. Gerhard Richter, interview by Rolf Schön, *Deutsche Zeitung,* Stuttgart, 1972; reprinted in "Gerhard Richter" (see note 21), 23. [*Text,* 67; *Daily Practice,* 73.]

50. Richter (see note 49), 23. [*Text,* 67; *Daily Practice,* 73.]

51. Richter (see note 49), 23 f. [*Text,* 68; *Daily Practice,* 73.]

52. Haase (see note 15), 113. [*Text,* 86; *Daily Practice,* 93.]

53. Richter (see note 49), 24. [*Text,* 69; *Daily Practice,* 74.]

54. Pierre Bourdieu et al., *Un art moyen: Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie,* 2d ed. (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1965), 113. [Translated by Shaun Whiteside as *Photography: A Middle-brow Art* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1990), 77.]

55. Sager (see note 9), 16. [*Text,* 62; *Daily Practice,* 66.]

56. Sager (see note 9), 27. [*Text,* 63; *Daily Practice,* 68.]

57. Catalogue from Galerie h (see note 21), 29 f. [*Text,* 42; *Daily Practice,* 47–48.]

58. Richter (see note 22), 19. [*Text,* 131; *Daily Practice,* 141.]

59. Andy Warhol, *From A to B and Back Again: The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 149.

60. Van Bruggen (see note 29), 86.

61. Van Bruggen (see note 29), 86.

62. *Künstler im Gespräch* (see note 7), 130. [*Text,* 109; *Daily Practice,* 117.]

63. Richter (see note 22), 20. [*Text,* 133; *Daily Practice,* 146.]

64. "The paintings are often even kitschy, when I bring all the elements from myself into them, because I'm not just good and rational and all that, but I also put all the rubbish into them." This quotation, attributed to the artist by van Bruggen (see note 29), 91, would have to be checked against the original interview, conducted in German. One wonders whether Richter would have characterized his landscapes from the sixties as "kitschy."

65. Richter (see note 22), 27. [*Text,* 136; *Daily Practice,* 146.]