Unconsolable Contemporary

Observing Gerhard Richter | **PAUL RABINOW**

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Cover art: Gerhard Richter at work. Photograph by Benjamin Katz.
Courtesy of Benjamin Katz and the Gerhard Richter Archive.

To Anthony Stavrianakis

For with friends men are better able both to think and to do. It is those who wish the good for their friends for their friends' sake who are friends most truly.

—ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1155b, 16–17; 1156b, 8–10)

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INTRODUCTION Form and Birkenau

> One readily believes that a culture is more attached to its values than to its forms; that the latter can be easily modified, abandoned, reworked; that it is only meaning that is deeply rooted. This would be to misunderstand how much forms, when they come apart or when they are born, can provoke astonishment or hate; it is to misunderstand that people hold dearly to their ways of seeing, of saying, of doing and of thinking, more than what one sees, says and does. The battle of forms in the West has been hard fought, if not more than that of ideas and values. This battle has taken a singular shape in the twentieth century: it is "the formal" itself, it is the reflective work on the system of forms that has become the stakes of the battle. Form has become a remarkable object of moral hostilities, aesthetic debates and political confrontations.
>
> **—Michel Foucault**

The core intent of this work is to invent, test, and practice one form of the interplay of inquiry and narration. During the course of the narrative, the reader will encounter a series of observations principally (but not uniquely) concerning the German artist Gerhard Richter. As I am neither an art historian nor an art critic nor a cultural studies specialist, my contribution is best characterized as an amateur one, albeit an anthropological one. For a range of reasons that I will explore as this work unfolds, I have been "taken" by Gerhard Richter, his artistic production, and the assemblage of critics asso-

ciated with it and with him, as well as the apparatuses of the institutions of the art world and the theory world with their currently ever-expanding markets of material and symbolic goods.

Given that I am currently, and have for some time now, been thinking, observing, and writing about Gerhard Richter, the question arises: Why focus on this artist? Engaging Richter is a form of disciplinary trespassing that one allows oneself from time to time and at a certain age. Consequently, the simplest answer is that Gerhard Richter makes available for reflection, through his work and his practice, one form of an ethos of the contemporary.

For me the stakes of taking up Gerhard Richter is neither that his work is a special instance of current trends in painting or the art world more broadly nor that it serves as an example drawn to buttress a theory of contemporary painting. To the contrary, one of the most compelling things about Gerhard Richter to me is that he can be seen to embody what Gilles Deleuze names as "a singular life."[1] Hence taking Richter up as an exemplar of his historical period, or as someone doing precisely the same thing as what we as anthropologists of the contemporary are seeking to do, is not only futile; it is at best a betrayal of his singularity as well as of our uncertain efforts to articulate and test the elements of an anthropology of the contemporary, and, at worst, merely crude or as Kant might well have added, "lazy and cowardly."[2]

The problem at hand is: why (and how to) establish a relationship to Richter's practice and production? One simple answer is that we are contemporaries in the standard meaning of the term—we are both living at the same time. That being said, Richter is German, an artist who is at least one momentous generation older; he has lived through a significant set of historical experiences none of which overlap directly with my own or those of my generation yet are not so far removed or different so as to render them exotic or beyond comprehension. Richter's singularity is not fundamentally Other. Perhaps Richter's experiences, his art, his location, his ethos, his practice of discourse and rendering things visible provide a rich repertoire of the recent past (its problems, multiple responses). In fact, it is his very singularity that opens the possibility of non-identification and consequently of adjacency.

One of Richter's practices is to be receptive to interviews, a practice he has entertained and honed for decades now. Many of these are published in his increasingly large volume of writings almost all of which consist in interviews and letters.[3] Richter does not write treatises or art criticism. He

is carefully silent about his personal life although his interactions and interventions with historical trends and events is a topic he is willing to discuss. He has however surrounded himself with a range of people who do write treatises and art criticism for a living. Several of these people also curate exhibitions.

Entering into this circle of critics seems to require some time and patience; familiarity and trust between the artist and those who he allows to interview him has yielded a series of privileged interlocutors: Benjamin Buchloh, Robert Storr, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Perhaps we could say that Richter has engaged a series of critics and curators of modern art; we should ponder the possibility that such a practice is significant, that it itself constitutes an important element in a contemporary ethos. To explore that possibility requires being attentive to the manner in which Richter frames the interviews and the quality of the responses he characteristically provides, refuses, evades, or muses upon.

Whatever else Richter's coy interviews are "really" about, one thing is clear: how to improve—or to judge—his image-making in either a technical sense or even an aesthetic one, is practically nonexistent as a topic. Rather, his "intentions," his "interventions," his "reactions," his "opinions," are queried; encouraging his interlocutors to raise these topics apparently helps Richter understand some range of reaction to his work. Perhaps they are part pedagogic (an artist interested in a strange theoretic discourse), in part strategic (cultivating critics and curators who are making his work public and its reception channeled), in part contributing to his practice of image-making although this third ramification is basically never thematized.

That being said, my relationship with Richter is neither one of identity nor one of identification. Richter has few imitators (none prominent); there is no school or style attached to his name. What captures and concentrates my interest in this regard is the constitution of an assemblage of heterogeneous elements; how it is brought into play; how it is kept in motion; the distinct distances that are kept tensile among and between domains and discourses; the restive and recalcitrant ethos that Richter has harnessed and that animates things.

Thus, at a surface level, this book is about the ongoing experiments of artistic practice as well as about those attempting to say what is going on in such practice. My goal is not to engage directly on either of these registers in

their own terms but rather my intent is to produce a second-order anthropological account that takes these registers seriously—from a position of adjacency. Thus, its concern is how to see and to narrate the 'becoming historical' of what had been taken to be seeable and enunciable for certain self-styled modernists.

Finally, neither the practitioners nor the anthropologist give credence to the existence of an epochal "post-modern," if by that one means the overcoming in a definitive fashion of what has been taken to be the defining elements of the modern project in the arts as well as in thought. Rather, it attempts to forge one way of rendering visible and enunciable a specific reflective relation to the present thereby configuring it as actual. Let's call this process one of forging a contemporary ethos.[4]

Although the bulk of the book concerns the work of Gerhard Richter and a few artists (Alexander Kluge, Pierre Boulez, and others), it is nonetheless intended as an exercise in a contemporary anthropology. One might say the book *concerns* artistic practice and the particular discourses that surround it. That being said, however, the book's work is *about* second-order observations of such assemblages and how they can be indexed, at least implicitly, to a larger problematization. Assembling the *concern* and the *about* provide parameters for an experiment in a contemporary anthropology as well as an anthropology of the contemporary.

Form

One can readily agree with Foucault that during the twentieth century the status of form (or 'the formal') was the site of high-stakes battles. These battles and their presumed stakes were potently charged in the moral, aesthetic, and political realms. Let us call the site of these debates and creations over form—*modernism*.

Of course, during the course of what one might call 'the long twentieth century' there were also, innumerable, concurrent, and at times over-lapping and at times not, confrontations and experiments concerning values and ideas. Max Weber, identified the separation of value spheres—the moral, the aesthetic, and the political—as the defining diacritic of *modernity*.

There has been, and continues to be, much confusion as to what the relations of the modern and modernity have been and should be. Nonetheless drawing an analytic distinction between them is helpful in orienting what

follows. Be forewarned, I do not intend to enter directly into the thicket of issues encompassed by the vast literature on these subjects. This book is not a treatise. Rather, in what I think of as an anthropological fashion—the tentative twining of conceptual work and empirical materials through inquiry—I will explore the experiments of Gerhard Richter as an object of study as well as a source of insight and inspiration concerning the status of the modern and modernity and their ramifications and reconfigurations in the present.

In order to do so, I have invented the term *the contemporary* that I have defined as follows: "Just as the 'modern' can be thought of as a moving ratio of tradition and modernity, so the contemporary 'is a moving ratio of modernity, moving through the recent past and near future in a (non-linear) space.'"[5]

I will utilize a term taken from the German art historian Aby Warburg—*Nachleben* (afterlife, survival)[6]—to situate what I take to be a plausible manner of taking up Richter's practices as a contemporary ethos. One could say Richter acknowledges modernist theory concerning modern art as something that an artist in the late twentieth century has had to come to terms with while letting it be part of what I will argue is—to use a second borrowing from Warburg to which I return below—the *Pathosformel* (form given to pathos),[7] which Richter has inventively integrated into his own image-making and practice.

The manner in which Richter has given form to the challenge of modernism and modernity over the course of decades is best approached, I believe, through a form of chronicle. The chronicle turns on what I consider to be the manner in which Richter has taken up the modern and modernity as inevitable aspects of his work but has found or sought a means of shifting their framing as historical but not determinative of the problem-space of painting. I call that ceaseless experimentation an ethos of the contemporary. There is no postmodern for Richter; rather, there is what, following Aby Warburg and Georges Didi-Huberman, we can call "the afterlife of the modern" (*Nachleben der Moderne*).[8]

Richter himself remains elusive, and at times simply evasive, as to his positions, if any, on values, ideas, and politics. That being said, one of the aspects of Richter's practice that I find highly innovative is precisely the form he has developed of dealing with these domains. Over the course of decades, Richter has cultivated a practice of interviews with learned and theoretically

oriented interlocutors. By so doing, Richter makes it clear that he is aware of the stakes attributed to these domains and their discussions and arguments, but he also makes it clear that as a painter his overriding concern, and ultimately his responsibility, is to paint.

It will not have escaped the astute reader's attention that Michel Foucault himself deployed the interview form to similar ends, albeit fashioned to meet his own highly distinctive purposes. After the frustrations and dissatisfactions arising from his one main attempt to theorize his own practice, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault adopted a critical stance of refusing such theorizing as a matter of principle—and of form. As the demand to explicate his positions on ideas, values, and politics was constant, Foucault responded during the last two decades of his life by adopting the interview form and shaping it to his own ends both as a refusal and as a tentative site of testing for himself and others. He felt freer to offer opinions, at times judgments, at other times snippets of autobiography, always in a conditional mode and always separate from his experiments in form in his books and essays.

I too, naturally in a more modest manner, have turned to interviews for some of the same reasons. Humbling or humiliating comparisons aside, it seems to me that contemporary anthropology for the last several decades has, in a haphazard and uncoordinated fashion, been in search of formal innovation. In my view, the field has not fulfilled the promises of *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (1986) to experiment with and to establish narrative and media forms adequate to our times.[9] In that light, while hoping for better days and attempting to make my own contributions, I have turned to those like Foucault, Richter, and Roland Barthes who—while being keenly aware of and attentive to the stakes of debates and contests of aesthetics, ideas, and politics—have shown us different manners of formal experimentation or experiments in form. I have sought to learn from these experiments—not, of course, to imitate them but to become more attentive to the diverse challenges and different projects taking shape within a problem-space whose contours, limits, and richness we lack the tools to adequately conceptualize. It is in that light that I conceived of this book not as an essay in ethnography but rather as an anthropological test.

Kairos I

In 2014, Gerhard Richter exhibited a series of paintings (and photographic reproductions of the abstract paintings) as part of a larger exhibition in Dresden under the title "abstract paintings." In 2015 he exhibited the paintings and photo reproductions alone in Baden-Baden and this time he gave them the highly resonant name "Birkenau." He also published a book of sixty-three small-format plates, sections of the paintings without any commentary. In 2015, the art critic Benjamin H. D. Buchloh published an essay (in book form with plates) entitled *Gerhard Richters* Birkenau-*Bilder*.[10] Buchloh, Richter's most theoretically sophisticated interlocutor and interviewer, is a distinguished German historian of art and holds the position of Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Modern Art at Harvard. Richter refers to Buchloh as his friend, and there is even a portrait painted by Richter of the two of them side by side. While not explicitly authorized by the artist, *Gerhard Richters* Birkenau-*Bilder* nonetheless was clearly done in cooperation with the artist. Hence, here as elsewhere, the special friendship and access that Buchloh enjoys with Richter provides his interpretations with a prima facie authority. Throughout my book, I concur that Buchloh's views must be taken into account as a significant dimension of the form Richter is developing. Such acknowledgment, of course, does not impose agreement with Buchloh's value positions on aesthetics, morals, and politics, only how Richter gives them form.

As we will also see throughout the course of this book, Buchloh plays a distinctive role of posing questions and interpretations to Richter, often in the high jargon of the Frankfurt School or the journal *October*, perhaps the leading theory journal of the art world for several decades. Buchloh is an associate editor and on the editorial committee as is his thesis adviser, Rosalind Krauss. Richter's responses to Buchloh's questions and interpretations will also play an important role in this narrative as Richter often, very often, expresses a lack of understanding of the questions posed or simply disagrees. I argue that this fact is significant as it seems to illustrate Richter's awareness of the place of modernist discourse in the art world as well as his means of distancing himself from it.

Amnesia and Anamnesis?

In his book on the Birkenau paintings, Buchloh poses the following question, in a fashion typical of his prose and rhetoric: "Can a German artist construct a credible mnemonic representation of the Holocaust with painterly or photographic means?"[11] He then describes how this question or a variant of this challenge has been acutely present for Richter for half a century. The argument is that, for Richter, the Holocaust was the *kairos*—the turning point of the highest significance—with which he had to come to terms.

Buchloh argues that Richter felt compelled, even obliged, to find or invent some form of image for the camps. One alternative was to refuse any image-making, and thereby to respond to the *kairos* by consciously choosing to attempt "any form of an iconically mediated reception of the unrepresentable, and therefore to delegitimate any of these attempts."[12]

This choice was not one Richter would ever settle on.

Wasn't his dilemma, Buchloh wonders, at the heart of all of Richter's painterly production? "The artist returned to the question repeatedly over five decades, and his response remained equally constant in erasing the possibility and negating the credibility of any iconic representation."[13]

This fact does demonstrate an enduring thematic concern, one not at all uncommon for German artists and thinkers as well as for many others both within Germany and beyond, but the stronger claim that it constitutes the heart of Richter's art in a totalizing manner is contestable. Richter's work is both broader and deeper than his timely attempts to come to terms with the Nazis. I am arguing instead that Richter's *kairos* was the relationship of modernism to modernity as they became historical but with a vivid and haunting afterlife.

Versions

Richter's first attempt to come to terms artistically with the Holocaust was during the years 1965–67; it is documented in Richter's long-standing collection of an orderly array of photo reproductions, periodically updated in print, the *Atlas*. According to Buchloh, the effort originated at the time of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials between 1963 and 1965. Richter started to collect images taken from English and American photographers. These were included in the *Atlas* along with many other images from German magazines

and his own photos. Richter juxtaposed the images of the camps with pornographic images. He eventually colored them over in garish colors. Richter initially intended to exhibit them in Düsseldorf but abandoned the project at the last minute. There are various interpretations of these efforts; the most compelling to me are those of Mark Godfrey, a British critic and curator at the Tate Modern, who argues that Richter was attempting to prevent the images from being inscribed in a monumentalist form.[14]

Richter's second attempt was occasioned by his being invited in 1997 to produce a design for the entry hall of the Reichstagsgebäude, the building where the German parliament, the Bundestag, meets in Berlin. The sketches of concentration camp inmates are preserved, once again in the *Atlas*, although Richter's ultimate submission does not include them. He originally thought of using images drawn from the camp photographs but abandoned the project. Richter substituted a vertical set of black, red, and yellow panels echoing the flag of the Weimar Republic. It is hard to imagine the Bundestag authorities approving the camp images in the entryway to the parliament building of the newly unified German Republic, but it must be said that they did approve a monumental construction commemorating the Holocaust, albeit a nonfigural one, across the street from the building.

Richter's third attempt was completed in 2014 (Richter was then eighty-two years old) and exhibited in Dresden. The works in the show were originally entitled *Abstract Paintings* and given a number in Richter's scrupulously managed *catalogue raisonné*. When the exhibition was moved to Baden-Baden in 2015, however, Richter changed the name to *Birkenau*. Birkenau was the largest of the six concentration camps where the Jewish genocide was carried out. It was built in 1940 and put into operation the following year. The Nazis began using the extermination system of gas chambers in the spring of 1942, and Birkenau was the last to cease their use in November 1944.

In a footnote to *Richters* Birkenau-*Bilder*, Buchloh observes that Richter changed the name of the exhibit after the influx of refugees from the Middle East and Africa, along with the rise of the far right in Germany, in particular in Dresden. This claim presumably would not have been made without at least tacit approval from Richter. That being said, it goes against the whole grain of Richter's lifelong eschewal of enabling ideological motives or interpretations of his work. Consequently, as of 2013–14 Richter remained in a liminal state about how to deal with this defining *kairos* of German history.[15]

For Richter, the awareness of a new possibility for image-making was catalyzed by his encounter with Georges Didi-Huberman's *Images malgré tout*. In a review of the book in a Frankfurt paper (11 February 2008), Richter discovered the existence of four clandestinely produced photographs taken (at great risk) from within the concentration camp by unidentified inmates or Jewish guards. At the time he came across the review, he put a copy of the images up on the wall of his studio but did not read the book. We will return to Didi-Huberman and his visit in December 2013 to Richter's studio later in this book.

Technē and *Pathosformel*

At first Richter considered a grisaille style parallel to the tones that he had used in *October 18, 1977*, the group of paintings he made of the deaths of the leaders of the Baader-Meinhof Red Army Faction in Stammheim prison. He worked on this style for over a year before abandoning it. He then produced four large abstract paintings that covered over traces of the representational forms.

Once he was satisfied with this work Richter digitally duplicated the paintings, thereby producing a second set of images, different in the technology of their production and by the fact of their division into four equal quadrants: "The four equally sized canvasses were now covered with a netlike abstraction, an irregular grid structure, cohesive and coherent on all four surfaces; paintings whose chroma and facture one would have to describe as hesitant and confined rather than as articulating expressive gestures."[16] Richter exhibited the digital reproductions across from the paintings. The originals could not be sold (Richter will donate them to a museum), but the digital reproductions are available for purchase. For Buchloh, this strategy of duplication served to "subvert any false monumentality as well as dissolving the fetishization of the singularized and spectactularized painterly object, intrinsically opposed to its mnemonic intentions."[17] Or as a gesture that "any commemorative approach to understanding the Shoah inevitably would have to expand its critical awareness to reflect on the catastrophes of the present and the imminent future as well."[18]

One can agree with the second claim, and I do, while not finding the first claim compelling.

It is uncontroversial but tautological to claim that Richter's painting is his-

torically situated and/or that it is entangled with his autobiography. Today, it is also uncontroversial to maintain that there have been two regimes of denial of the atrocity of the Nazis in Germany: the Communist regime in the former East Germany and the West German postwar culture often characterized as infused with American consumerism.

Buchloh asserts that there has been an ethical imperative to consider these issues as articulated by a line of French and German philosophers. He cites passages from Karl Jaspers's 1946 essay on German guilt. Although he provides no evidence that Richter came to these questions through this literature, it is not controversial to claim that the topic was visible to all. More directly, Buchloh frames Adorno's famous 1949 challenge concerning the possibility or impossibility of art after Auschwitz. Buchloh's formulation is as follows: "Could post-bourgeois subjectivity have a concept after Auschwitz?"[19] Thus, his framing is epistemological, which he links to the formation or lack of formation of a subject position. This insistence on a theoretical framing of aesthetic issues is common among certain traditions of postwar art history and criticism and yet questionable, in my opinion, in its attribution of motives and beliefs to artists.

Buchloh writes that while still in East Germany, Richter understood that the times of avant-garde artists such as John Heartfield and Bertolt Brecht had come and gone.[20] Perhaps Richter concurred with this judgment, although as we shall see Richter admired what he refers to as bourgeois authors such as Thomas Mann while in the East and was surprised to find once he migrated to West Germany that he was supposed to despise them.

The four initial paintings were an answer in line with Adorno about the pornographic as culture after Auschwitz. The subsequent digital reproductions concerned the state and confronting the authorities with a memory of what had been. Although Richter did produce images that might have been considered to serve that purpose, the final project was far tamer with a color scheme reminiscent of the Weimar flag.

Regardless, there were other German artists roughly of Richter's generation, such as Joseph Beuys, who did make reflections on the knowledge of Auschwitz one of the foundations of their painterly projects. Richter kept a respectful distance from Beuys's performativity, his conceptions of nature, and his self-stylization. Yet, he never made this history central to his work in any explicit sense.

Buchloh offers two contrasting interpretations of Richter's self-understanding in 2013. The first: Richter was keenly aware that "the reception of his work in the present occurs precisely under the auspices of a total spectacularization and an economic speculation of artistic production."[21]

The first part of this claim seems wildly exaggerated and not something Richter could possible agree with: after all, he continues to paint ceaselessly and pays scrupulous attention to how his work is distributed. Richter has an excellent and up-to-date website that includes all of his painting as well as links to literature about him, list of current exhibitions, a repertoire of quotes, and so on. The second part no doubt does not escape his attention. Although Richter is generous in allowing his work to be reproduced for academic books and the like, he must be an extremely wealthy man, given the worldwide market for his paintings and their current market value. Buchloh attributes a form of guilty conscience or responsibility for Richter's return to attempts to artistically come to terms with the past crimes of Germany.

Kairos and Form and Casuistry II

Mark Godfrey, art critic and curator at the Tate where he was part of the team that curated the important retrospective of Richter's work, *Gerhard Richter: Panorama, a Retrospective, 2011*, had previously published a book strikingly relevant to these challenges in 2007, *Abstraction and the Holocaust*. Godfrey provides a contrastive—and to my mind a richer and more interesting as well as more accurate—interpretation of the solutions available for those seeking to make images in the wake of major catastrophic turning points in the history of the twentieth century. It is relevant that the major artists and architects Godfrey discusses (Morris Lewis, Frank Stella, Peter Eisenman, and others) all continued other work prior to and subsequent to their forays into the nettles of approaching image-making and the Nazis.

Godfrey underscores the range of possible artistic responses that have in fact been undertaken by numerous artists. It is true that the examples in his book concern non-German artists. Godfrey draws a helpful distinction when he writes: "There is a huge difference between an art historical one such as my own, which asks how specific artists have attempted to engage with the Holocaust at different moments, and a philosophical one, which considers how art should or should not respond to calamitous history."[22]

Although Godfrey did not write about Richter in the 2007 book, he be-

came deeply familiar with Richter's working during the curatorial preparation of the Tate exhibit. He delivered a penetrating and insightful lecture at the conference accompanying the Tate exhibit's opening that deals directly with the thematic that Buchloh raises although adopting a different interpretation of how Richter has thematized them.

Although dealing with earlier material, Godfrey's proviso below applies, I think, trenchantly to Buchloh's interpretations. Godfrey writes:

> If the ideas of Adorno or Lyotard are mistreated, they could lend support to the kind of blanket claims about abstraction and its relationship to the Holocaust that I refuse. Abstraction could seem a vague condition of art after Auschwitz; a refusal to depict what cannot or should not be represented realistically; an art of respectful silence before sublime history.[23]

Godfrey is helpful in providing a discussion of what Adorno actually said (less sweeping than it has been taken to claim) as well as a caution about the whole vexed topic of the challenge of art and catastrophic turning points in history (which I am referring to as *kairoi*).

In 1949 Adorno concluded his essay *Cultural Criticism and Society* with what was to become a celebrated and debated maxim: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." Adorno was not arguing that all artistic production was impossible after Auschwitz, as is often claimed, but rather that lyric poetry was impossible. That being said, Adorno was unquestionably asserting that all writing henceforth would take place within a frame of the historical trauma of the Nazis. Godfrey presents a modified but still powerful interpretation of Adorno's arguments, which is entirely apposite here. Godfrey takes Adorno to be saying: "To instrumentalize art is to undercut the opposition art mounts against instrumentalism."[24]

Framed in this manner, the issue is less one of possibility or impossibility but rather of ethos: how to take this imperative into account? This formulation generalizes the challenge while remaining within the purview of Adorno's historical setting and concerns. One might say, it is a step toward abstraction.

Concept: Differend

Godfrey introduces another step in reframing via Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the "differend" as conceptualizing the problem-space of those attempting to meet the challenge of art and catastrophe:

> The event happened, but though the established discourses will not be able to articulate it, it must be witnessed. The "differend" is the name Lyotard gave to the state of representation for such an event: "The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases yet cannot be." "In the differend, something 'asks' to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away." It was the task of art and philosophy to find differends and witness them: "What is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, in a politics perhaps, is to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them." The concept of the "differend" therefore conveys a sense of urgency (the event must be represented) and frustration (the event has destroyed the representational tools).[25]

Although the subject matter of this initial discussion is the Holocaust, I am arguing that the "differend" is not reducible to it alone but encompasses a wider field of existence and experience, specifically in the multiple events produced within the dynamic and unresolved motions of modernism and modernity.

Godfrey indicates not the impossibility of artistic production but rather the necessity at this point in history of a certain ethos. He writes: "I am arguing that at times, it was necessary and compelling for abstract artists to engage with history without jettisoning the language of their work—just as compelling as it was for other artists who felt instead that the only way to confront history was to reject abstraction."[26]

One can say that a broad problematization at a significant historical conjuncture makes multiple solutions available while foreclosing others. The foreclosure is not absolute and not given in advance in a determinative fashion.

Godfrey elaborates on Lyotard's understanding of the challenge of form under the sign of the differend. One determination, or foreclosure, with which Richter would concur in his own manner, is as follows: "Only that which has been inscribed can, in the current sense of the term, be forgotten."[27]

Stated most broadly the challenge is this: How could one bear witness to a differend through form-giving? Or how could an artistic production save memory without inscribing it in such a way that it will be forgotten?

NOTES

Introduction

The chapter epigraph is from Michel Foucault, "Pierre Boulez, l'écran traversé" (1982), in *Dits et écrits*, 4:220. "On croit volontiers qu'une culture s'attache plus à ses valeurs qu'à ses formes, que celles-ci, facilement, peuvent être modifiées, abandonnées, reprises; que seul le sens s'enracine profondément. C'est méconnaître combien les formes, quand elles se défont ou qu'elles naissent, ont pu provoquer d'étonnement ou susciter de haine; c'est méconnaître qu'on tient plus aux manières de voir, de dire, de faire et de penser qu'à ce qu'on voit, dit et fait. Le combat des formes en Occident a été aussi acharné, sinon plus, que celui des idées ou des valeurs. Mais les choses, au XXe siècle ont pris une allure singulière: c'est le 'formel' lui-même, c'est le travail réfléchi sur le système des formes qui est devenu un enjeu. Et un remarquable objet d'hostilités morales, de débats esthétiques et d'affrontements politiques." My translation.

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 29. With sincere gratitude to Amir Eshel for his confidence and support.
2 Immanuel Kant, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/-3505/1. To paraphrase the beginning of the second paragraph of Kant's essay, most humans are content not to think for themselves because they are lazy and cowardly, even though nature has freed us to be intellectually self-reliant.
3 See Richter, *Gerhard Richter: Writings, 1961–2007*.
4 These distinctions are explored in Rabinow and Stavrianakis, *Designs on the Contemporary*.
5 Rabinow, *Marking Time*, 2.
6 Aby Warburg gave the term a specific meaning by using it conceptually to capture the sense of present but not thematized stylized motifs such as certain gestures that he found enduring from ancient Greek friezes through Botticelli's

paintings. In my inquiry, *Nachleben* refers to those objects, affects, and motions that are excluded or escape from modernist forms but nonetheless exist in the present. Identifying the presence of *Nachleben* in a situation contributes to the articulation of a contemporary mode. This practice foregrounds the challenge of bringing elements of the old and the new into a distinctive form thereby enhancing understanding and freeing one from constraints wrongly taken to be determinative.

7 The term was turned into a concept by the art historian Aby Warburg in his work on the history of style. It has a double sense: the attempt to give form to situations or moods of pathos and the only partial success of such attempts. As both the hybrid referent and concept, the term can play a powerful role in directing anthropological inquiry as well as decisions about an appropriate form of narration. Hence, deploying the term encompasses propositional, judgmental, and narrative registers. The practice of form-giving under the sign of pathos (as object and mood) contrasts with those of irony, comedy, and tragedy.

8 Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, 42.

9 Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

10 Buchloh, *Gerhard Richters* Birkenau-*Bilder*.

11 Ibid., 5.

12 Ibid., 7.

13 Ibid., 8–9.

14 Mark Godfrey, "A Curtain of Trees," in Godfrey and Serota, *Gerhard Richter: Panorama*.

15 In the 2015 exhibit at Baden-Baden, Richter changed the name of the production to "Birkenau." Birkenau was the largest of the six concentration camps where the Jewish genocide was carried out. It was built in 1940 and put into operation the following year. The Nazis began using the extermination system of gas chambers in the spring of 1942 and Birkenau was the last to cease their use in November 1944.

16 Buchloh, *Gerhard Richters* Birkenau-*Bilder*, 26.

17 Ibid., 28.

18 Ibid., 29.

19 Ibid., 12.

20 On these figures and their contemporaries, see Fore, *Modernism*.

21 Buchloh, *Gerhard Richters* Birkenau-*Bilder*, 20.

22 Mark Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust*, 9.

23 Ibid., 9.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 12.

26 Ibid., 18.

27 Ibid., 13.