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Gewalt und Gedächtnis: An Examination of Gerhard Richter's 18. Oktober 1977 in Relation to the West German Mass Media



A Senior Thesis Presented By
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To the Art History Department in Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Honors in Art History
Advisor: Professor Michael FitzGerald

Trinity College
Hartford, Connecticut

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Chapter I

History and Ideology of the Red Army Faction

For the majority of the 1970s, the Federal Republic of Germany was engaged in a “war of six against sixty million.”¹ The totality of the country was divided by the Red Army Faction (RAF), a small group of left-wing extremists that conducted an armed struggle against the perceived authoritarianism of West Germany. Many West Germans were horrified by the RAF’s carefree use of violence while many others admired the group’s unyielding commitment to an idealistic vision of a Germany embattled against the return of fascism. The group’s founders – Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin, Holger Meins, and Jan-Carl Raspe—achieved celebrity status in the country, alternately viewed as heroes and villains, often along generational lines, as is so often the case with Germany since the Second World War. The RAF represents the most extreme manifestation of a Germany at war with itself: the war to determine how the country would atone for its past and how it would shape its future. The “RAF Phenomenon,” as it is sometimes called, began in the country’s student movement and ended in a cemetery in Stuttgart, leaving a trail of bloodshed on both sides in its wake.

Like many Western countries at the end 1960s, the Federal Republic of Germany faced a large degree of organized social upheaval from its younger generations. The West German student movement, generally known as the ‘68er Bewegung, was loosely comprised of the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS), Außerparlamentarische Opposition (APO), and various other protest groups.² The ‘68ers were structurally and ideologically identical to most other student protest movements elsewhere in the West, save for one important detail: in the Federal Republic,

¹ Böll, Heinrich. “Will Ulrike Gnade order freies Geleit?” *Der Spiegel*, January 1972.
<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-43019376.html>

² The Socialist German Student Movement and Extra-Parliamentary Opposition, respectively

the youth revolt also addressed the largely unspoken responsibility of the older generations of Germans for their complicity in the Third Reich. The guilt shared by all Germans for the Nazi past and the atrocities of the Holocaust had been taboo until after the Eichmann trial in 1961 and West Germany's own trials of Auschwitz guards in 1963; Hannah Arendt observed on her return to her homeland in 1950 that "everywhere one notices that there is no reaction to what has happened, but it is hard to say whether that is due to an intentional refusal to mourn or whether it is an expression of a genuine emotional incapacity."³ If Germany was trying to rebuild its cultural identity after the war, the role it played in the 1940s was decidedly understated.

Moreover, many former Nazis returned to the positions of power in government and industry that they were compelled to leave after the war. The reconstruction of the German state immediately after 1945 involved a thorough process of denazification, and many economic and social elites tied to the NSDAP were forced to leave their posts. Individuals untainted by affiliation to the Nazi Party like Konrad Adenauer and Willy Brandt led the newly formed Federal Republic away from its past. But as time passed and the wounds of the war slowly healed, Nazi-affiliated elites reclaimed their roles in society, partly out of the necessity to staff important posts in government and the thriving postwar industry.

West Germany's halfhearted attempt to atone for crimes committed during the war and the reassertion of political and economic power of former Nazi elites did not sit well with the '68ers. Angered by the widespread refusal to acknowledge the collective guilt of the German people and frustrated with the multitude of former Nazis once again in positions of power, these West German youth took up the mantle of peaceful protest in the fight against the rise of fascism. It was their responsibility, they believed, to stamp out the spark of fascism in the Federal Republic and abroad.

³ Kaes, Anton. *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989): 83

The '68ers were present in most major West German cities but were especially visible in the diplomatic island of West Berlin – a stronghold of the left separated from the West German mainland and cut off from the conscription of military aged men. The student movement recruited heavily from the young people attracted to West Berlin by the city's universities, cheap rents, and thriving bohemian scene. The '68ers fielded protests against the American war in Vietnam and the Federal Republic's complicity in that war, as well as against the treatment of the Palestinian people in Israel, believing that these events, among others, showed the signs of budding fascism. The political situation in West Berlin intensified with two incidents: a 1965 protest against the American presence in Vietnam and the 1967 protests against the Shah of Iran's visit to the Federal Republic. These events would dictate the future of the '68er Movement and galvanize its more radical sections into revolutionary action.

In February 1965, 2,500 students marched through the streets of West Berlin in protest against the American intervention in Vietnam. Five hundred protestors strayed from the police-approved protest route and headed towards the America House, a center for American politics and culture in the Charlottenburg section of the city. The protestors lowered the American flag outside the building and threw eggs at its façade; this act of insolence drew horror from the conservative sections of the German public and attracted the ire of the Federal Republic's conservative press, most vehemently from the publications of the Springer Corporation. The '68ers converged on the America House because of the perceived parallels between the Americans in Vietnam and the Germans in the Third Reich. The youth feared a developing police state but instead unexpectedly angered the unscrupulous Springer Press. When U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey visited West Berlin in 1965, a fringe activist wing of the APO, Kommune 1, known for its ridiculous and often sardonic plots, planned to throw custard pies at the visiting dignitary. *BILD-Zeitung*, the

flagship paper of the Springer Press, greatly exaggerated the story, running the headline “BOMB ATTACK ON U.S. VICE PRESIDENT PLANNED IN BERLIN.”⁴ The ‘68ers made a powerful foe in the Springer Press. At the time, founder Axel Springer’s image-intensive publications were the most widely read in Germany and are still today some of the most popular papers in the world. Springer achieved status as one of the most influential conservative voices in the Federal Republic through the promotion of often sensationalized material in his broadsheets. Indeed, many readers throughout West Germany were well aware of the unsubtle editorial slant of the Springer papers but nonetheless consumed the negative coverage of the West German Left, especially coverage against the ‘68ers.⁵ The ‘68ers led a concerted campaign in opposition to the Springer Press. In February 1968, students held the highly attended “Springer Tribunal” at the Freie Universität in Berlin, at which the lead speaker advocated that Springer not be “actually hanged or locked in prison, but rather employed in a productive job, for example as a men’s hairdresser” and that he must be expropriated.⁶ The phrase “Expropriate Springer” became one of the most ubiquitous mottos of the ‘68er Movement.

In the summer of 1967, the Shah of Iran visited the Federal Republic, touring many West German cities before concluding his state visit in West Berlin. Much of the West German public was enraptured by the tales of the opulence and extravagance of the Persian court that circulated in the more colorful sections of the press; the Shahbanou even contributed a piece about her daily life as empress to *Die Neue Revue*, a popular tabloid. Journalist Ulrike Meinhof, writing for *konkret*, a leftist magazine with ties to the SDS, criticized the Shahbanou’s use of “exaggerated”

⁴ Stefan Aust. *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*. (London: The Bodley Head, 2008): 21

⁵ Todd Michael Goehle. „Challenging Television’s Revolution: Media Representations of 1968 Protests in Television and Tabloids” in *Media and Revolt: Strategies and Performances from the 1960s to the Present* ed. Katrin Fahlenbach, Erling Silversten, and Rolf Werenskjöld (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016): 219

⁶ Wencker, Willi. “Der Innere Zugang” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, (Munich, DE) May 11, 2010

statements about life in Iran. “Like most Persians,” the Shahbanou wrote, she liked to summer on the Persian Riviera. Meinhof illuminated the reality of life under the repressive regime of the Persian throne, including the paltry yearly income of “most Persians” and the fact that “most Persians” suffered from hereditary syphilis.⁷ The opposition to the Shah’s visit, however, was not limited to the left-wing press.

Ulrike Meinhof lived an idyllic bourgeois life. She lived in a Jugendstil villa in a wealthy Hamburg district with her husband, Klaus Rainer Röhl, a founder of *konkret*, and their twin daughters. Her life in Hamburg involved summers on the fashionable resort island of Sylt and regular appearances on national news shows. Meinhof was born in October 1934 in Oldenburg to an art historian from a family of prominent Protestant theologians and his wife, who would later take up her own studies in art history. Meinhof’s father died of pancreatic cancer when she was five years old; her mother took in a female boarder with whom she later began a romantic relationship. That woman, Renate Riemeck, became a surrogate mother to Meinhof. In 1955 Meinhof began studies in psychology and education in Marburg, a university town north of Frankfurt. That same year the SPD voted to enact a policy of conscription for military age men, effectively ending the party’s longstanding opposition to the rearmament of the Federal Republic. Meinhof moved to Münster in 1957 and became affiliated with the local chapter of the SDS; she was elected to be spokeswoman of the chapter’s “anti-atomic death committee,” and quickly made a name for herself in leftist circles. Meinhof met Klaus Rainer Röhl the next year. She began writing for *konkret* and by the end of 1961 had married Röhl. She achieved national prominence in the early 1960s after the publication of an article for *konkret* titled “Hitler in You,” in which she admonished against the far-right policies of Christian Social Union (CSU) politician Franz Josef

⁷ Meinhof, Ulrike. “Offener Brief an Farah Diba.” *konkret*, June 1967.
https://socialhistoryportal.org/sites/default/files/raf/0019670602_0.pdf

Strauss.⁸ Strauss attempted to fight the article in the courts but his appeals for trial were struck down. Meinhof's influential piece on Strauss had catapulted her to the forefront of mainstream political discussion and cemented her status as a nationally-acclaimed journalist. Despite her privileged lifestyle, Meinhof nevertheless felt drawn to the student movement.

As the Shah's visit turned towards West Berlin, the '68ers confronted the Persian dignitary. On June 2, 1967, a considerable force of protestors gathered outside the Schöneberg City Hall, where President John F. Kennedy was also welcomed in Berlin, in objection to the Shah's visit. The West Berlin police formed a protective barricade between the protestors and the municipal building, their force bolstered by members of the Iranian SAVAK secret service. A counter protest of Iranian loyalists was also present. As the protests intensified, the Shah's men began to brutally attack the gathered students, beating them with truncheons and wooden stakes. The one-sided attack turned into a melee as the West Berlin police looked on. The protestors retreated, only later to reconvene that evening at the Deutsche Oper as the Shah's party viewed a performance of Mozart's *Zauberflöte*. At the opera the protests once again turned violent. As tensions picked up, the protestors were attacked by the Shah's men, who had been joined by the West Berlin in the melee against the students. In the ensuing riot, twenty-seven-year-old student and pacifist Benno Ohnesorg was shot and killed at point-blank range by a plainclothes policeman, Karl-Heinz Kurras.⁹ Ohnesorg's death was a critical *Wendepunkt* in German history, fueling the fire of anti-authoritarian sentiment that led to the radicalization of the student movement in West Germany. In the days following Ohnesorg's death, between 100,000 and 200,000 West Germans took place

⁸ The CSU is the powerful Bavarian sister party of the conservative CDU

⁹ It is worth noting that, in 2009, Karl-Heinz Kurras was outed as a longtime informant and agent of the Stasi, the Ministry of State Security in the German Democratic Republic.

in protests not only in West Berlin but, for the first time, in cities throughout the Federal Republic.¹⁰

Gudrun Ensslin was present at the riot at the Deutsche Oper, and at the SDS Center on the Kurfürstendamm as protestors convened to make sense of the situation and plan their response to Ohnesorg's death. Ensslin was distraught but called for vengeance. "This fascist state means to kill us all," she stated. "We must organize resistance. Violence is the only way to answer violence." She reminded those present that they were dealing with the "Auschwitz generation," and that "there's no arguing with them!"¹¹ Ensslin vocalized what many of the beaten and demoralized protestors felt. The next day, she and seven other students took place in a protest on the Kurfürstendamm calling for the resignation of Berlin mayor Heinrich Albertz, despite the ban on all demonstrations and gatherings in the city.

Ensslin was born in the Swabian village of Bartholomä in August 1940. Her father was the pastor of the village's Protestant church. She was the fourth of the pastor's seven children and was a model child, taking part in the Protestant Girls' Club and later conducting Bible study sessions of her own. At eighteen, Ensslin completed a yearlong exchange with a Methodist community in Pennsylvania. The Americans liked Ensslin; they thought she was clever, socially committed, and good with languages. Ensslin did not like the Americans, whom she believed were Christian only insofar as it was fashionable. Appalled by the political naivete of Eisenhower's America, Ensslin returned to Germany with a reinvigorated commitment to the political applications of Christianity. Years later, she moved to West Berlin with her fiancé, Bernward Vesper, on a grant from the Study Foundation of the German People. Ensslin enrolled at the Freie Universität and quickly became involved in the city's political scene, working for the Social Democratic Party of Germany's (SPD)

¹⁰ Meinhof, Ulrike. *The Urban Guerilla Concept* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2014): 4

¹¹ Aust. *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*: 27

1965 parliamentary campaign. She became disillusioned with the SPD and traditional politics altogether as the party reached across the aisle to its historical opponent, the Christian Democrats (CDU) and formed the Grand Coalition of 1966. The Grand Coalition enabled the mandatory two-thirds vote needed to pass the 1966 *Notstandsgesetze* emergency laws, which gave the government extraordinary powers in times of emergency.¹² The seemingly omnipotent political union of the traditional left and right opened the door for new forms of political opposition from the Federal Republic's youth. Ensslin would take part in the most radical manifestations of this opposition.

Not long after making her speech on "the Auschwitz generation" at the SDS Center, Gudrun Ensslin met Andreas Baader. Baader was a young delinquent with an unpredictable disposition and a penchant for auto theft. He was born in Munich in May 1943. His father, a historian and archivist, was taken prisoner by the Russians during the war and never returned. Baader was raised by his mother, grandmother, and an aunt. Those close to him thought he was intelligent but selective with his attention. He was also especially strong-willed; his mother remarked that "you either loved him or loathed him."¹³ Baader came to West Berlin in 1963, hardly twenty years old. While many young Germans were attracted to West Berlin because of its freedom and inexpensiveness, Baader was presumably drawn to the former imperial capital because it created some distance between him and the lengthy rap sheet he had acquired in the West. As before his arrival in the divided city, Baader had been in and out of police custody and was not present in Berlin at the time of the Shah's visit. He resurfaced later that summer and became

¹² The West German government had attempted to pass the *Notstandsgesetze* on two previous occasions; both times the motion was struck down as many believed that this constitutional amendment allowed the government to circumvent traditional democratic channels. The *Notstandsgesetze* also drew parallels to the 1933 *Reichstagsbrandverordnung* (Reichstag Fire Decree) passed by president Paul von Hindenburg on the advice of Chancellor Adolf Hitler. The *Reichstagsbrandverordnung* is considered to be one of the key factors for the establishment of the one-party Nazi system, as it allowed the Nazis to imprison anyone considered hostile to the party.

¹³ Ibid. 9

acquainted with Gudrun Ensslin at a party in her apartment. Robert Storr remarks that Ensslin's "righteous passion matched with [Baader's] delinquent impetuosity set the tone of their disastrous joint foray into revolutionary politics."¹⁴

Baader and Ensslin took to one another rapidly and quickly actualized their revolutionary ambitions. They were inspired by another of Kommune 1's pranks, where the communards distributed a sardonic series of leaflets at the Freie Universität mocking a 1967 department store fire in Brussels, in which 300 lives were lost. The leaflets credited the Belgian people for "at last... really involving the population in all the fun of Vietnam" and voiced the hope that further department stores, barracks, and stadiums burn.¹⁵ Baader and Ensslin aimed to fulfill the derisive desires of the communards, and, with the assistance of friends Thorwald Proll and Horst Söhnlein, planted their own firebombs in Frankfurt's Kaufhaus Schneider department store on April 3, 1968. The bombs detonated minutes before midnight (planned to avoid unnecessary casualties), setting the Kaufhaus Schneider and the adjacent Kaufhof department store ablaze. The fires raged through the night and caused nearly 700,000DM in damages.¹⁶ Frankfurt police received a decisive lead the next morning, and shortly after 10:00 a.m. the arsonists were arrested.

Nine days after Baader, Ensslin, and company planted the firebomb in the Frankfurt Kaufhaus, the West German student movement experienced a tragic blow that would mobilize its participants more aggressively than the Ohnesorg killing did. On April 11, 1968, Rudi Dutschke, one of the most prominent and charismatic voices of the APO was shot three times in an unsuccessful assassination attempt by twenty-four-year-old housepainter Josef Bachmann. Bachmann had arrived in West Berlin from Munich that morning, carrying with him two pistols,

¹⁴ Storr, Robert. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977* (New York: Museum of Modern Art. 2000): 48

¹⁵ Aust. *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*: 22

¹⁶ Ibid. 32

ammunition, and clippings from *BILD-Zeitung* and the radical right-wing *Deutsche Nationalzeitung*, calling for the dismantlement of the radical left revolution, “otherwise there will be civil war.”¹⁷ Photos of Dutschke were lined up underneath the articles as if they were wanted posters. Bachmann tracked down Dutschke’s address and waited for him outside the student leader’s apartment. As Dutschke exited the building, Bachmann approached him and, after verifying his victim’s identity, drew his pistol and fired, notoriously calling Dutschke “filthy communist swine” as he pulled the trigger.¹⁸ Dutschke was struck in the head, cheek, and shoulder, but miraculously survived the attempt on his life. Bachmann fled the scene and took shelter in a nearby construction site, where he took sleeping pills in an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide. News of the attempt on Dutschke’s life spread rapidly through West Berlin. Conflicting reports on his wellbeing circulated left wing circles as the ‘68ers waited for conclusive reports. At 6:30 p.m. the news came: Dutschke had survived the attack but was in critical condition. With this news, members of the student movement debated how they would respond to the attack. Those gathered at the SDS Center quickly decided that they should march to the Berlin headquarters of the Springer Press and stop the distribution of its papers. Ulrike Meinhof was present at the SDS Center following the Dutschke shooting.

The protest against the Springer Corporation began at the Technische Universität. The mass of protestors marched toward the Springer building on Kochstrasse, near the Berlin Wall, chanting “*BILD* fired the gun too!”¹⁹ Meinhof did not march with the protestors to Kochstrasse meeting them there instead to cover the protest for *konkret*, but parked her car in a row of others to block the distribution exit of the Springer building. Police present at the headquarters stood by until the

¹⁷ Ibid. 33

¹⁸ Ibid. 33

¹⁹ Ibid. 35

first trucks attempted to leave the premises, at which point they mobilized and cleared the street for the automobiles by tipping the parked cars. The protest at Kochstrasse intensified as the night went on. At 10:30 p.m., thousands of protestors and a significant police presence had gathered at the Springer building. First stones were thrown, then Molotov cocktails. Before long, Springer delivery trucks burned. The next day, photos of the riot circulated in the newspapers, documenting the students' violence. *BILD* naturally made the most of the event. The next day at a teach-in at the Technische Universität, Ulrike Meinhof told the gathered students: "If you throw a stone, it's a crime. If a thousand stones are thrown, that's political. If you set fire to a car, it's a crime; if a hundred cars are set on fire, that's political."²⁰

Meinhof later penned an editorial on the shooting of Dutschke for *konkret*, titled "From Protest to Resistance," proclaiming her newfound militancy. She echoed many of Ensslin's statements about "the Auschwitz generation," but also went so far as to exhort her readers to follow in the footsteps of nationalist and urban guerilla movements such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the Vietcong, and the Black Panther Party. She writes: "It is protest if I say this or that does not suit me. It is resistance if I ensure that what does not suit me no longer occurs."²¹ Meinhof's editorial in *konkret* marked the beginning of her political radicalization. Before long, her protest would become resistance.

As *BILD* trucks burned on Kochstrasse, Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin sat in jail awaiting trial for the Frankfurt arson. In court, the arsonists took up a rather laconic defense, saying nothing at all to the court. They doubted the utility of participating in a "class-based legal system when the script has already been written."²² At the end of the trial's third day, however, Ensslin

²⁰ Ibid. 36

²¹ Ibid. 36

²² Ibid. 37

spoke up. She claimed responsibility for the Kaufhaus fire, implicating Baader, with his consent, but not the others. She explained the political motive behind the attack; defending attorney and future RAF-participant Horst Mahler echoed her, describing the arson as a protest against the Vietnam War and a rebellion against the older generation of Germans that had enabled the reign of terror of the Third Reich. Throughout the course of the trial, Ensslin had a frequent and peculiar visitor in the remand prison: Ulrike Meinhof. Meinhof intended to cover the trial for *konkret* but had been deeply moved by Ensslin's commitment to her political cause and her fervent dedication in carrying it out. Meinhof saw that she had much in common with the Swabian pastor's daughter and admired her readiness to actualize her convictions. Despite Baader and Ensslin's singular admission of guilt, all four arsonists were sentenced to three years in prison on October 31, 1968.

Meinhof never published her story about the trial. A year after the attempt on Dutschke's life, the riot at the Springer headquarters, and her first meeting with Gudrun Ensslin, Ulrike Meinhof quit her job at *konkret*, divorced her husband, and moved with her daughters from Hamburg to West Berlin. There, she produced a TV-drama about reform school girls, titled *Bambule*.²³

The four arsonists were released from prison in June 1969 as part of a provisional policy of amnesty granted to political prisoners affiliated with the APO. Their sentences would be reconsidered in November; until then they were free. There was a necessary component of social work attached to the arsonists' release and they volunteered with the state-run institutions for young offenders, known as "apprentices' collectives." Baader and Ensslin offered the troubled German youth an alternative education free from conformity to bourgeois norms. The apprentices, mostly from the fringes of society, viewed Baader as one of their own, as he had himself cycled

²³ *Bambule*, slang for "riot" or "rebellion," was completed but never aired due to Meinhof's participation in the Baader Jailbreak.

through the same systems. The “Baader Group,” as it was known, attracted a large number of troubled youths. Baader and Ensslin essentially treated the apprentices’ collectives as recruiting pools; Franco-German student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit remarked that Baader had “already seen himself as general of the Red Army. And here were his soldiers.”²⁴ Baader and Ensslin would continue to work with the apprentices’ collectives until the end of their release in November 1969. When their appeals were overturned, however, they went underground and took cover in Paris and Rome before returning incognito to West Germany. Abroad, Baader and Ensslin discussed forming a band of revolutionaries modeled on the urban guerilla concept of the Uruguayan Tupamaros. They resurfaced in February 1970 at the door of the West Berlin apartment of Ulrike Meinhof.

Baader and Ensslin stayed with Meinhof for about two weeks. The latter admired the arsonists, believing that there was a consistency in their lives that hers lacked and she wanted to help them. During their two weeks at Meinhof’s apartment, Baader and Ensslin began forming concrete plans to build up their guerilla army. They decided that they would first need to acquire weapons, funds, and accommodations. By this time the SDS and the APO has fragmented into what David E. Barclay calls “a dizzying array of factions and quarreling sects.”²⁵ This galaxy of revolutionary groups consisted of the Tupamaros-West Berlin, the *Schwarze Ratten*, and the Roaming Hash Rebels, among many others. These groups were ideologically and methodologically disparate but unified in their loathing of the Springer Press and their distrust of the West Berlin police and the existing political structure. Finding revolutionary instruments in West Berlin could be done, if one knew the right people.

²⁴ Ibid. 47

²⁵ Barclay, David E. “Ohnesorg, Dutschke, and the Student Movement in West Berlin” in *Berlin Divided City, 1945-1989* (ed. Philip Broadbent and Sabine Hake): 130

Acquiring weapons was the aspirant guerillas' first priority. Baader and Ensslin contacted friends in the underground and floated ideas about stealing pistols from the Berlin police, but these plans were quickly abandoned. Horst Mahler connected them with Peter Urbach, an old acquaintance of Mahler's, who was known for his access to weaponry—Urbach, in fact, had supplied the Molotov cocktails used at the Springer headquarters riot. Urbach took Baader, Mahler, and others to a cemetery in Buchow in the southeast corner of West Berlin where he had apparently buried a crate of surplus pistols from the Second World War. The men were forced to abandon their excavation because of passersby out for a nighttime stroll. The next day, as Baader drove through Kreuzberg, he noticed that he was being tailed by the police. He managed to evade his pursuers, but his license plate number had been recorded. That evening, Baader and Mahler again met with Urbach, and the men set about digging, again unsuccessfully. After some time, it was clear that their efforts were in vain and they left. On the way back to their safehouse, police stopped Baader's car as if it were a routine traffic stop. This was not the case. Unbeknownst to Baader and Mahler, Peter Urbach was an undercover agent working with West Berlin's Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, the regional office for domestic security. Urbach had set a trap and Baader was taken into police custody. He was brought to Berlin's Tegel Prison to serve the rest of his sentence for the Kaufhaus arson. But Baader would make an early exit from prison only six weeks later.

Ensslin attempted to recruit friends and allies to free Baader from prison. Although the liberation of prisoners was at the forefront of contemporary revolutionary discourse, most of the West Berliners Ensslin knew preferred revolutionary theory to praxis. Baader was frequently visited by friends and relatives in Tegel, among them Ulrike Meinhof, who had visited him five times.²⁶ He had received permission to collaborate with Meinhof on a book she was writing that

²⁶ Aust. *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*: 59

detailed the experiences of young outsiders in society. Baader was an expert on the topic, having worked with troubled youth in the apprentices' collectives and been one himself. Meinhof appealed to the prison governor that Baader be allowed to view the collection of a social studies library in West Berlin, as it was absolutely essential for the book they were working on. The prison governor acquiesced and allowed Baader to be released for one three-hour session.

On May 14, 1970, Baader left Tegel Prison with a detail of police officers to meet with Meinhof at the Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen, an institute for social issues. Baader and Meinhof met in the institute's reading room; they smoked as Meinhof chatted with Baader's escorts, asking them about their personal lives and seeming peculiarly disapproving when the men said that they had wives and children.²⁷ As Baader and Meinhof worked in the reading room, institute employee Georg Linke answered the door. He let in two young women, whom he invited to wait in the institute lobby until the reading room was vacated. Sometime later, Linke heard disturbances coming from the lobby and discovered the two women opening the institute's gate. Two masked individuals, a man and a woman, stormed in, declaring a raid. Linke tried to intervene but was shot in the stomach by the masked man. Injured, he managed to escort the other employees to safety before escaping himself. The masked raiders and the two young women, now themselves armed, entered the reading room. A struggle ensued but the policemen were incapacitated with close-range tear gas pistols the raiders had carried. Baader escaped through the reading room's opened window. Ulrike Meinhof followed, leaving her life above the law behind. The Baader-Meinhof Gang, as it was therefore known, was born.

Baader, Meinhof, and Ensslin were now fugitives. They cycled through several safehouses planning their next steps but knew that staying in West Berlin was not an option. The Middle East

²⁷ Ibid. 7

seemed to be the ideal destination, at least for the time being. In June 1970, twenty West Germans, among them Baader, Meinhof, and Ensslin, and Horst Mahler, made their way to Jordan in two groups. There, they were received by the likeminded PLO. The Germans trained in the Jordanian desert with the PLO for about a month before being asked to leave. Their apparent lack of discipline before their militant hosts, coupled with Baader's brashness and the group's libertine approach to sexuality, irreconcilable with the strict Islamic environment, attracted the ire of their hosts.²⁸ Despite the short duration of their stay, the Baader-Meinhof Gang took home invaluable revolutionary knowledge and a proficiency in conducting the armed struggle of the urban guerilla. By acquiring apartments under false or stolen names, devising an ingenious car stealing system to evade the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), the federal investigative service, and pulling off a series of bank heists, the West German outlaws applied what they learned in Jordan to prepare for its fight against the Federal Republic.

If the Baader-Meinhof Gang was born with the jailbreak at the Central Institute for Social Issues in Berlin, the Red Army Faction (RAF), as the group was later known, was conceived of in hiding in a West German safehouse. Responding to an unsolicited manifesto published by the now-disgraced Horst Mahler, Meinhof penned the official ideology of the group. *The Urban Guerilla Concept* identifies the student movement as the ideological origin of the faction, evaluates the political situation in the Federal Republic as seen by the group, and sets forth the principles of the armed struggle in West Germany. *The Urban Guerilla Concept* is the first use of the name the "Red Army Faction," the RAF's founding document, and its introduction of itself to the world.²⁹

The revolutionary zeal of the RAF belied the group's ideological superficiality. Of all its members, only Meinhof had a real grasp of the theoretical politics that supported the faction's

²⁸ Ibid. 67—70

²⁹ Meinhof. *The Urban Guerilla Concept*: 6

conceptual mission. Baader, Ensslin, and many others counted among a less subtle camp, relying more on unyielding revolutionary fanaticism than on Marxist criticism to drive the struggle forward. *The Urban Guerilla Concept* lays out the imperialist supremacy of the United States and the reemergence of German authoritarianism as the primary ideological targets of the Red Army Faction, but the group sought to align itself with any and all likeminded factions, from the PLO to the East German government. The RAF, however, lacked any real dialogue with the West German left at large. There were parallel revolutionary groups that were considered more or less allies, such as the 2. June Movement (named for the date of the Ohnesorg shooting) and the Revolutionary Cells, but the RAF had no sustained discourse with the '68ers, the APO, or grassroots organizations. In many ways, *The Urban Guerilla Concept* is the RAF's ineffectual attempt to reach out to these groups. Without contacts above ground, the RAF soon found itself ideologically isolated and overestimated its own ability to wrest power from the state. Robert Storr describes the RAF's armed struggle as not just "an ordinary clash of generations, but the collision of contrary and, as far as actual power at their disposal was concerned, grossly unequal manifestations of ideological rigidity and self-deception."³⁰

What the RAF lacked in theory it more than made up for in praxis. The group's approach to conducting armed struggle was to expose the underlying fascism of the state by becoming its target. Acting on Carlos Marighella's influential *Minimanual of the Urban Guerilla* and the Maoist tenet that bringing the armed struggle from the fringes of society to the center of the metropole is the necessary precondition for meaningfully altering the superstructure, the RAF attempted to aggravate the Federal Republic into overreacting, thus exposing the unrelenting and unsympathetic

³⁰ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*: 53

mechanisms of the state. By provoking the state into acting increasingly harshly and unscrupulously, the RAF could expose its latent fascism and recruit others into the fight.

As the RAF continued its crime spree, the group began to be held accountable for anything and everything suspicious that happened in West Germany with increasing fervor. A wave of paranoia swept the Federal Republic, as West Germans reported all apparently suspect activity to the police as the doings of the RAF. The media also picked up on this trend as news agencies zealously began to attribute misdeeds to the RAF. Some agencies published dubious or unconfirmed material. *BILD* published two sensationalized stories in January 1972. The first reported that *BILD* had been in contact with a Hamburg lawyer representing Andreas Baader, who claimed that Baader was ready to give up the struggle and wanted to surrender at the end of the month. Baader read this story himself and indignantly wrote a brusque reply to the German Press Agency (DPA), signing this genuine letter with his thumb print.³¹ The second story, published in March of the same year, claimed that Ulrike Meinhof had committed suicide due to irreconcilable ideological differences with the rest of the RAF. Although the claims about Meinhof's ideological differences and the mounting tensions within the group were not untrue, the former journalist was certainly not dead. Meinhof, like Baader when the previous story was published, was incensed. The story had also surprised BKA men, who had no reports on her whereabouts since late 1971.³² Meinhof resurfaced in Hamburg in mid-March 1972, putting these unsubstantiated rumors to rest.

After a year and a half underground preparing for the armed struggle, the RAF started to promote its political aims with gestures of fiery aggression. In the first half of 1972, the RAF carried out a campaign of bombings against American military installations and West German police stations to protest the perceived imperialist aggression of the Americans in Vietnam and the

³¹ Aust. *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*: 150

³² *Ibid.* 155

reemergent fascism of West Germany. The guerillas targeted military bases in Frankfurt and Heidelberg and police stations in Augsburg and Munich. Additionally, the personal car of a federal judge in Karlsruhe was bombed. As well as its targets in government and the military, the RAF also targeted the Springer Press. On May 19, 1972, several phone calls were placed to the international headquarters of the Springer Corporation in Hamburg. The anonymous callers warned that they had planted a bomb inside the building and that the facility be immediately evacuated. The call was not taken seriously. Shortly afterwards, another call came through, again warning about a bomb. Again, nothing was done. As receptionists chatted about the anonymous calls a bomb exploded inside the Springer proofreading room. Most of the fifteen proofreaders suffered injuries. That day, two more bombs exploded in bathrooms in the building, yielding another two injuries. Another call threatening bombings was placed to the Springer headquarters the next day. This time the Springer Press took the calls seriously and telephoned the police, who discovered and disarmed three further explosive devices. Several days later, an anonymous letter arrived at the DPA, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and *BILD*. The writers of the letter, calling themselves the “2. June Commando,” took responsibility for the *BILD* bombing.³³ The letter continues, “Springer would rather risk seeing his workers and clerical staff injured by bombs than risk losing a few hours’ working time, which means profit, over a false alarm. To capitalists, profit is everything and the people who create it are dirt. We are deeply upset to hear that workers and clerical staff were injured.”³⁴ The Springer building was the target most aggressively and perhaps delightfully attacked during the RAF’s 1972 bombing campaign.

³³ It was common practice for RAF agents to claim responsibility for acts of terror by using pseudonym “Commandos” named after fallen comrades or important events. The 2. June Commando obviously references the date on which Benno Ohnesorg was shot and killed by a plainclothes West Berlin policeman at a protest against the Shah of Iran’s state visit to the Federal Republic.

³⁴ Ibid. 162

While the Springer Corporation was vehemently targeted by the RAF, it also faced verbal attacks from prominent West Germans. Influential novelist Heinrich Böll, responding to a dramatized *BILD* piece that falsely attributed a bank robbery to the RAF, published an editorial in *Der Spiegel* that criticized *BILD*'s sensationalist journalistic practices. Böll took issue with *BILD*'s practice of exaggerating the death toll and spoils of the RAF's activities and attributing unconfirmed crimes and unrelated victims to the terrorists. Böll stated that *BILD*'s embellishment of RAF-related stories were "no longer crypto-fascist, no longer fascistic," but "naked fascism. Incitement, lies, filth." He criticized *BILD*'s unambiguous leading headlines, like "BAADER-MEINHOF GANG CONTINUES TO KILL," the title of the article to which he was responding, as "a call for lynch justice" for the millions of West Germans whose only source of information was *BILD*. He declared that it was time for the Federal Republic to acknowledge its national emergency "of public opinion, which through publications like *BILD* is permanently intensified." The situation in West Germany, as Böll famously saw it, was "a war of six against sixty million."³⁵ While Böll used his publicity to combat the yellow journalism of the Springer Press, he was quickly vilified as a RAF-sympathizer by those whom he criticized.³⁶

In the widespread effort to bring the members of the RAF into custody, the Federal Republic utilized policing tactics that brought the entire country under inspection. Horst Herold, Chief Commissioner of the BKA, called together the leaders of the regional special commissions and representatives of the Bundesgrenzschutz (BGS), the federal border service, to brief them on a nationwide manhunt for the terrorists. For one day, the entire West German police force was placed under the command of the BKA in order to capture persons affiliated with the RAF. On

³⁵ Böll, Heinrich. "Will Ulrike Gnade order freies Geleit?" *Der Spiegel*, January 1972.

³⁶ Böll wrote about his frustrations as a victim of the Springer Press in his 1974 serialized novel *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, about a woman who falls in love with a terrorist and becomes the target of an unscrupulous media house. The novel was adapted for the screen by Volker Schlöndorff and Margaretha von Trotta the following year.

May 31, 1972, Operation *Wasserschlag* commenced; every helicopter in the Federal Republic was mobilized and roadblocks were set on major roads throughout the country. Despite the complete chaos caused by the manhunt, the citizens of West Germany more or less tolerated the effort, contrary to the RAF's bold claims of widespread public support. Although Operation *Wasserschlag* covered unprecedented areas of land, it was largely unproductive as no members of the RAF were apprehended. The operation itself, however, was emblematic of the Federal Republic's willingness to use any means necessary to capture the RAF terrorists.

Chief Commissioner Herold was an early believer in the power of computer processing. The goal of his tenure at the helm of the BKA, which lasted from 1971 until 1981, was to restructure the organization in the image of the American FBI and to turn the BKA into a powerful terror-fighting task force. Under his direction, the BKA installed a complex computer system that collected and organized data on 4.7 million West German citizens and 3,100 organizations, along with a fingerprint archive containing the prints of 2.1 million people and a photographic archive with photos of 1.9 million individuals.³⁷ In his effort to remake the BKA in the image of the FBI, Herold seems to have mirrored his counterparts in East Germany—the Stasi—as much as he did the Americans; many prominent voices in the Federal Republic feared that the country was becoming a police state.

Although Operation *Wasserschlag* was rather unproductive, the BKA was not far behind the core members of the RAF. Concomitant with the nationwide manhunt, an anonymous Frankfurt resident tipped the BKA about suspicious activity in the garage of an apartment building near the city's main cemetery. BKA men entered the garage in the early hours of the morning and uncovered large quantities of explosives and bomb making equipment. The BKA surveilled the

³⁷ Aust. *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*: 141

garage and in the early morning of June 1, 1972, Andreas Baader, Holger Meins, and Jan-Carl Raspe arrived in an aubergine Porsche. The officers approached and pursued the men, who took shelter in the garage. A large body of reinforcements arrived and fired tear gas canisters into the garage, but the men threw them back, alternating throws with shots in vain or in spite of the policemen outside. A few hours later two armored vehicles arrived; one pinned the door shut, trapping the men inside. The standoff continued until a sniper created an opportunity for police to move in by shooting Baader from an adjacent apartment. Andreas Baader, Holger Meins, and Jan-Carl Raspe were taken into custody; the standoff and ensuing arrest was broadcast live to the people of the Federal Republic.

Days after the arrests of Baader, Meins, and Raspe, Gudrun Ensslin was apprehended in a Hamburg boutique when a saleswoman spotted a pistol in her purse and reported her to the police. Ulrike Meinhof was arrested a week later in a Hanover apartment, when the RAF sympathizer she was staying with had contacted the police out of fear for his safety. By June 15, 1972, all of the core members of the Red Army Faction were in police custody.

The consequences of the RAF's policy of provocation were fully realized during their detention in ways that they did not anticipate. The Federal Republic separated the captured guerillas in prisons throughout the country and kept them in conditions of near-total isolation. Meinhof was most affected by the quarantine, kept in a social and acoustic vacuum in the so-called "quiet section" of a Cologne jail, allowed visits from only family for just thirty minutes once a fortnight. She compared the effects of her imprisonment to "the feeling that your head is exploding," and likened the conditions she endured to those suffered in the concentration camps.³⁸ Despite the harsh conditions of their internment, Baader, Meinhof, and the rest of the RAF took a

³⁸ Ibid. 180

noncombative approach to resistance by declaring hunger strikes in protest of the conditions of their detention. The first strike in late 1972 was widely publicized, attracting considerable outcry from the West German public at large. The Federal Republic eased prison conditions after two months of the strike; it transferred the prisoners from the “quiet sections” of their various prisons, granted them permission to be treated by outside doctors, and removed restrictions on visitations, but just as soon as the hunger strike was lifted the treatment of the prisoners was again worsened.

Meanwhile, on the outside, Peter Jürgen Boock, an underground RAF-affiliate, wrote to Baader declaring that he would continue the fight on the outside and attempt to free his imprisoned comrades. Thus, the second generation of the RAF was born. This new wave of guerillas was concerned more with action than planning and would take an approach marked by unprecedented shows of violence.

A back-and-forth of hunger strikes and broken promises like the one in late 1972 ensued in the years leading up to the trial of Baader, Meinhof, Ensslin, and Raspe. Holger Meins died from complications related to the group’s third hunger strike on November 8, 1974. He was repeatedly denied access to sufficient medical attention and wasted away. Meins was made a martyr. His death attracted widespread indignation from the West German public and, as a post mortem photo of Meins circulated in the press, exposed the brutal reality faced by the imprisoned guerillas. Mein’s burial was a media spectacle and was attended by a multitude of West Germans, including Rudi Dutschke, who famously raised his right fist in a salute and proclaimed, “Holger, the fight goes on.”³⁹ Meins’ death was a turning point for the public perception of the RAF, endowing the faction with greater political relevance and newfound moral credibility as the victims of an increasingly ruthless state.

³⁹ Ibid. 211

The guerillas were transferred one by one to Stammheim prison outside of Stuttgart, the Federal Republic's highest security penitentiary. They were held in a high security wing on the prison's seventh floor, cut off from the general population of inmates. A new high security court room was constructed on the prison's grounds to accommodate the RAF trial. Tensions ran high in Stammheim, as the guerillas battled the prosecution as well as one another. Meinhof and Ensslin were especially hostile toward one another, and were frequently detained together for long periods of time. The women disagreed about ideological issues and their dispute fanned the dormant fires of a long antagonistic relationship. Their relationship deteriorated to the point that Ensslin, in a written note to Meinhof, called the journalist "the knife in the back of the RAF" because of her doubts about the efficacy of continuing the armed struggle in Stammheim.⁴⁰ In the RAF, doubt was tantamount to treason.

Over the course of their internment in Stammheim, the guerillas devised sophisticated communications systems and smuggling operations as complex and effective as the car-swapping scheme they had pioneered during their crime spree. Jan-Carl Raspe was especially good with his hands and created a homemade P.A. system between the guerillas' cells that ran parallel to larger prison P.A. system. The network used audio equipment and parts from devices the prisoners were permitted to own and could be quickly disassembled before regular cell searches. The guerillas also engineered a system with the assistance of their attorneys with which they transferred communiques and contraband in and out of Stammheim. A Minox camera was smuggled into the high security wing in a trial run. Once their ability to bring goods and documents in and out of prison had been established, the guerillas had two pistols and ammunition smuggled into

⁴⁰ Ibid. 214

Stammheim which were kept in secret hollowed-out compartments in Baader and Raspe's cells.⁴¹ The weapons were never discovered despite the regular searches of the prisoners' cells.

Two important events that dictated West German antiterror policy occurred while the Stammheim guerillas appeared before the court: the first was the kidnapping of West Berlin mayoral candidate Peter Lorenz; the second was the RAF siege of the West German embassy in Stockholm. CDU politician Peter Lorenz left his home on the morning of February 27, 1975 when his Mercedes was blockaded by a large moving truck not far from his residence. Lorenz was incapacitated, pulled from his vehicle, and taken into a car waiting on the scene. Twenty-four hours later, a photograph surfaced showing the politician wearing a sign around his neck saying "Peter Lorenz, prisoner of the 2. June Movement."⁴² Lorenz's kidnappers demanded the release of six individuals not charged with murder associated with the 2. June Movement, as well as Horst Mahler. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt agreed to comply with the kidnappers' demands and the prisoners were released. Former mayor of West Berlin Heinrich Albertz was contacted, as per the kidnappers' demands, to mediate the transfer. Albertz and the six prisoners boarded a plane to Yemen where the transfer was to occur. Horst Mahler refused to go. The handoff was successful and the next day Peter Lorenz was freed in a West Berlin park, given enough money to telephone his family. The Federal Republic's decision to release the prisoners in exchange for Lorenz set a dangerous precedent that would have far-reaching consequences: it taught those who wished to undermine the state that the best way to do so was by ransoming prominent citizens. The RAF took note of this.

On April 25, 1975, as the Stammheim trials were just beginning, six RAF affiliates armed with pistols and explosives entered the embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Stockholm,

⁴¹ Ibid. 271—273

⁴² Ibid. 221

Sweden. The “Holger Meins Commando” aimed to force the Federal Republic into freeing twenty-six West German prisoners, among them the Stammheim guerillas. They took the embassy staff to the third floor of the building, where they were held hostage as the terrorists placed fifteen kilograms of explosives throughout the building. The terrorists ordered the Swedish police to stand down, or else they would detonate the explosives. When the police force held their ground, the terrorists brought the embassy’s military attaché to the main stairwell of the building, where he was executed in full view of the police downstairs. Contact with the Swedish and West German governments was established. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, deferring to his instincts, gave the order not to give in to the terrorist’s demands; the Swedes supported Schmidt’s decision. Frustrated that the Federal Republic was not acceding to its demands, the terrorist cell led the embassy’s economic attaché to an open window, where he was executed in front of the crowd outside. Just before midnight, a series of explosions shook the building. The terrorists had mishandled the explosives, causing them to explode. Police and firemen entered the embassy and freed the hostages, many of whom were badly burned. Three people died during the raid on the Stockholm embassy: The Federal Republic’s military and economic attachés and one of the terrorists. Another terrorist died from injuries sustained in the blast.

The Federal Republic responded to the Stockholm raid using means that bordered on the unconstitutional. Officers from the Bundesverfassungsschutz, the federal office for domestic security, and their colleagues from the Bundesnachrichtendienst, the federal intelligence service, installed listening devices in the guerillas’ cells on the seventh floor of Stammheim as well as in the lawyers’ visiting rooms. This bugging operation would not be made public for two years, when officials from the state government of Baden-Württemberg had admitted to installing the listening devices to monitor the prisoners. They stated that the bugs had only been activated on two

occasions, the first being the day after the Stockholm raid and the second following the arrests of former RAF defense attorney Siegfried Haag and Roland Meyer, the so-called ringleader of the second generation of the RAF, in late 1976.⁴³ The truth regarding how often the bugs were actually activated has remained shrouded in doubt since their existence was made public and this doubt only intensified with further developments in the story of the RAF.

The trial of Baader, Meinhof, Ensslin, and Raspe began on May 21, 1975. It was agreed to by both the prosecution and the defense that the trial would be recorded in its entirety in order to promote transparency in the proceedings and to maintain a record of the historic case. Shortly before the trial began, however, the Bundestag in Bonn passed revisions to the *Strafproceßordnung*, the Code of Criminal Procedure, that severely limited the defendants' right to choose their own counsel. As a result of the revisions, Baader's lawyers were barred from entering the courtroom. The group was provided with court-appointed defense counsel in addition to their own attorneys except for Baader, who was required to use the court-appointed defenders. Naturally, the Stammheim guerillas refused to even speak to their "compulsory counsel", believing that they could not be trusted.⁴⁴ The controversy surrounding the court-appointed lawyers was so charged that presiding judge Dr. Theodor Prinzing expelled the defendants one by one in the struggle to maintain control of his courtroom as the guerillas attempted to discharge their unwanted counsel themselves. The early interactions between the defendants and the presiding judge set a highly contentious tone for the proceedings that would only intensify as the trial went on.

The guerillas' fitness to stand trial dominated the early proceedings. The defense argued that the long and intense periods of isolation endured by the prisoners and the hunger strikes they carried out negatively affected their ability to defend themselves. Meinhof protested that the

⁴³ Ibid. 227

⁴⁴ Ibid. 234—237

Federal Republic purposefully implemented the conditions of forced isolation to impede the guerillas' mental and social acuity, therefore hindering their ability to represent themselves. The defense appealed for outside medical evaluation to determine the prisoners' ability to stand trial, but its protests were continually denied.⁴⁵ The first twenty-six days of the trial, a period encompassing the entire summer of 1975, were consumed by similar objections. The prisoners' personal information had scarcely been processed by the court due to the continuous challenges posed by the guerillas and their counsel. On the twenty-sixth day of the trial, after Baader and his comrades erupted at the panel of judges, infamously calling Dr. Prinzing a "fascist asshole," the defendants were expelled from the courtroom. Their personal information was processed by the court and the charges against the defendants were officially recorded in their absence. The following days of the trial continued in a similar fashion, but on the thirty-ninth day of the proceedings the guerillas' request was finally granted and outside medical experts were brought into Stammheim. The visiting physicians came to the conclusion that, due to the intense and prolonged periods of isolation and the effects of the hunger strike, the defendants were able to stand trial for a maximum of three hours per day and advocated for limited reform of the conditions of the guerillas' detainment.⁴⁶ On the next day of the trial, however, Dr. Prinzing announced that the proceedings would continue in the absence of the defendants, citing a paragraph of the Strafproceßordnung that makes provisions to ensure that a defendant does not impede the course of a trial by intentionally inducing unfitness to stand. Because of this paragraph, a trial could continue with a defendant in absentia if they themselves were responsible for their unfitness. Dr. Prinzing's manipulation of the Strafproceßordnung showed the guerillas that he was willing to exhaust all options to ensure that the trial move forward, with or without the defendants. The

⁴⁵ Ibid. 238

⁴⁶ Ibid. 245

prisoners, not wanting to relinquish their ability to defend themselves to the authority of the court, reluctantly capitulated and began to cooperate.

As the trial continued relationships within the group increasingly deteriorated. Relations between Meinhof and Ensslin were especially tense. Meinhof began to doubt the utility of conducting the armed struggle from prison; cooperation seemed to be a more painless option. Her doubts were received by the rest of the group as emergent treachery, and she quickly fell out with her comrades. Baader's dealings with the journalist were characteristically blunt, while Ensslin took a more psychological approach. She and Meinhof had frequently been at odds during their four-year internment at Stammheim. Ensslin usually edited Meinhof's RAF communiques, and began to rewrite or redact her texts entirely, in order to "[pay] her back in her own coin."⁴⁷ Ensslin became Meinhof's harshest critic before the rest of the guerillas, going so far as to encourage the others to torment her as well. Meinhof's own doubts about the armed struggle and her questioning of her comrades' fidelities only worsened as they began to turn on her. She believed that she was being intentionally disinformed, and later that the rest of the group had cut her off from information entirely. The situation in Stammheim decisively worsened on May 7, 1976, the 106th day of the trial. The guerillas made their first joint appearance before the court in some time, as Meinhof had been excused from appearing for over a month due to concerns for her health. As the defendants gave testimony, Ensslin condemned the 1972 bombing of the Springer Headquarters as it put innocent lives at risk. Ensslin's denunciation of the Springer bombing distanced the group from Meinhof, who had written the dispatch claiming responsibility for the attack in the first place. Meinhof was decidedly cut off from the group at large and the end of solidarity among the prisoners, compounded by the effects of long-term isolation on her mental state pushed her over

⁴⁷ Ibid. 253

the edge. The morning of May 8, 1976, Ulrike Meinhof was found dead in her cell. She had hanged herself on the bars of her cell window with a strip of her prison-issued towel. She left no suicide letter but had written months before in an essay on revolutionary strategy that “suicide is the last act of rebellion.”⁴⁸

The next day Meinhof’s name was neatly crossed out on the trial agenda in the showcase outside of the courtroom. The defense pursued a narrative of doubt surrounding Meinhof’s suicide. Before the court, Jan-Carl Raspe voiced the guerillas’ belief that she was executed by the Federal Republic as an act of psychological warfare directed at the guerillas. Defense attorney Otto Schily declared that the defense would not participate in the trial until after Meinhof’s funeral, so that her death could be investigated. The circumstances surrounding Meinhof’s sudden suicide are ambiguous, but it is clear that the guerillas attempted to use it for political gain. Her suicide elicited outrage from the German public not unlike that following the death of Holger Meins. Four thousand West Germans attended Meinhof’s burial in the Protestant cemetery of West Berlin’s Holy Trinity Church. Many of the attendants painted their faces white or wore masks in protest of the Federal Republic’s treatment of the Stammheim guerillas.

The surviving terrorists, Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe, wanted to organize the effort to free themselves on the outside and elected former attorney and RAF affiliate Siegfried Haag to head the rebuilding of the group. He drummed up support for the movement in the underground and travelled to the Middle East to refresh ties with the PLO. The PLO had ceased military operations but referred Haag to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), an allied organization. The rest of Haag’s group, including Peter Jürgen Boock and Brigitte Mohnhaupt, met him in Yemen to train with the PFLP, where they, joined by a veritable who’s who of terrorists

⁴⁸ Ibid. 258

including the notorious Carlos the Jackal, prepared for their actions in West Germany and the world at large.

Controversy stuck the trial in 1977. Otto Schily had received information that Dr. Prinzing had shared sensitive information regarding the trial with Federal Judge Albrecht Mayer, who oversaw all appeals regarding the RAF case, through unofficial channels. Judge Mayer had shared this information with Herbert Kremp, editor-in-chief of the conservative daily newspaper *Die Welt*, a Springer publication. Mayer and Kremp were members of the same *Burschenschaft*.⁴⁹ Schily had come into possession of correspondence between Mayer and Kremp in which Mayer had enclosed photographs and testimony provided by Dr. Prinzing with instructions that the material be published to contradict a 1972 report from *Der Spiegel*. Schily motioned to challenge the presiding judge's impartiality, but his appeal was disallowed. Court-appointed defender Manfred Küzel unexpectedly backed up Schily's appeal, moving to challenge the judge once again. Although Küzel's challenge was also rejected, the "compulsory counsel's" challenge had symbolically damaged the presiding judge's credibility. Schily and Küzel exposed the prejudice that had pervaded the judges' panel for much of the trial. Dr. Prinzing was removed from the case as the eighty-fifth challenge to his impartiality was upheld.⁵⁰ He was replaced by an associate judge who presided over the court until the end of the trial. Furthermore, in March 1977, Schily motioned to suspend the trial to investigate longstanding claims that listening devices had been installed in the guerillas' cells. Schily's appeal was corroborated by a *Der Spiegel* story about a nuclear scientist whom the government had illegally surveilled. Schily's appeal was turned down but the surveillance in Stammheim was confirmed two days later when ministers from the state

⁴⁹ *Burschenschaften* are fraternities in the German-speaking world commonly accused of being bastions of nationalism, racism, sexism, and elitism. Their memberships are usually made up of young men of the upper classes.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 276

government of Baden-Württemberg admitted to installing listening devices in the prisoners' cells and in the visiting rooms where they met with their attorneys. Schily once again appealed to adjourn the trial, and the accusations having been corroborated, his appeal was upheld.

Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe were sentenced to life in prison on April 28, 1977 for committing four murders and a score of attempted murders over the course of their crusade against the perceived fascism of the Federal Republic of Germany. The finality of their sentences encouraged their comrades on the outside to intensify their crusade to forcibly free the Stammheim guerillas. From early April until October 1977, RAF members operating in the Federal Republic assassinated Federal Prosecutor General Siegfried Buback in a daring drive-by shooting, killed president of the Dresdener Bank Jürgen Ponto in a botched abduction, and constructed a complex rocket launcher known as a Stalin Organ with which they planned to attack the headquarters of the Bundesgerichtshof, the nation's highest court, in Karlsruhe.⁵¹ None of these endeavors were successful, however, and as time passed Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe grew increasingly impatient with the amateurishness of their comrades on the outside. If further efforts were unsuccessful, they threatened, they would take matters into their own hands by committing suicide. In the final push to forcibly free the Stammheim guerillas, RAF terrorists conspired with the PFLP to execute a plan so audacious that the Bundestag in Bonn would have to acquiesce to their demands. This climactic last attempt, known as the German Autumn, began on September 4, 1977 as terrorists kidnapped Hanns Martin Schleyer, president of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations and escalated on October 13, 1977, as terrorists with the PFLP hijacked Lufthansa Flight 181 on its flight from Palma de Mallorca to Frankfurt.

⁵¹ This plot was abandoned minutes before it was set to be executed, as terrorist Peter Jürgen Boock, who constructed the Stalin Organ, sabotaged the weapon's ignition system so to not put innocent lives at risk

In the eyes of the RAF, Hanns Martin Schleyer was the paradigmatic German authoritarian. He was an economic leader, a symbol of capitalism, and a representative of the institution as the RAF saw it. Schleyer was the president of the country's two most influential employers' associations and sat on the board of Daimler-Benz. He was an early proponent of National Socialism and had served as an officer in the Waffen-SS during the Second World War. For the RAF, Schleyer was the ultimate target; he was a man who perfectly represented their ideological enemy, and of such importance that the Federal Republic would be forced to capitulate. On September 4, 1977, four terrorists attacked Schleyer's motorcade in the vicinity of his Cologne apartment. The terrorists' plan notoriously brought the motorcade to a halt as one of the assailants blocked the cars' path with a baby pram, from which she produced a Heckler & Koch HK43 semi-automatic rifle. The kidnappers opened fire and within minutes Schleyer's bodyguards and police escort were all dead. Schleyer was pulled from the wreckage and carried away to his highly publicized forty three-day captivity. Haunting images of the Employers' Association president-turned prisoner released by his captors circulated in the press and coverage of the story dominated news cycles until his execution on October 19. The prisoners on the seventh floor at Stammheim were kept in total isolation in response to the Schleyer kidnapping, permitted to meet only with government officials and clergymen.

A special commission of the highest political leaders was established by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt to manage the Schleyer kidnapping. The Federal Republic approached the Schleyer situation as it had the attack on the Stockholm embassy: the government in Bonn had taken up a policy of resistance and, by repeatedly delaying the terrorists' deadlines, attempted to handle the situation to its advantage. Bonn negotiated with Schleyer's captors through intermediaries including Schleyer's son and Geneva lawyer Denis Payot, who had been outspoken

about the Federal Republic's treatment of the RAF members. Bonn's intransigent plan was complicated, however, on October 13, 1977, as four PFLP terrorists hijacked Lufthansa 181, known as "Landshut," as it flew from Palma de Mallorca to Frankfurt. Like their German counterparts, the PFLP demanded the release of the Stammheim guerillas, among other terrorists held by governments across Europe. The Federal Republic concentrated all its effort on rescuing the ninety-one innocent hostages onboard the flight as it flew circled over the Mediterranean and the Middle East. A team of highly skilled operatives from the GSG9, the antiterror unit of the BGS, were mobilized and pursued the hijacked airliner as it made its way through the terrorists' planned flight path, set to conclude in Aden, Yemen. Complications with Yemeni officials, however, caused the hijackers to reroute the plane, which by this point was severely damaged by several interim emergency landings. The airliner's flight concluded in Mogadishu, Somalia. In the early morning of October 18, 1977, five days after first being hijacked, Lufthansa Flight 181 was liberated by GSG9 operatives in Mogadishu. Operation *Zauberfeuer*, as the maneuver was designated, resulted in the deaths of three of the four terrorists. None of the hostages were harmed in the raid.⁵² Officials in Bonn celebrated the operation as a success and could now turn their attention to rescuing Hanns Martin Schleyer.

The night of October 17 was quiet on in the high security wing of Stammheim. The prisoners seemed unusually compliant as guards distributed their medications. News of that Landshut had been liberated was announced over German airwaves shortly after midnight on October 18. At 7:41 a.m. on the morning of October 18, Jan-Carl Raspe was found dead in his cell. Cause of death: an apparently self-inflicted gunshot. Authorities searched the cells of the other prisoners and found that Baader and Ensslin were also dead; Baader lay dead on the floor of his

⁵² One of the pilots, Captain Schumann, was executed by the terrorists for informing the authorities on the outside of the strength of the hijacking force after the plane's emergency landing in Yemen

cell, holding in one hand a pistol. He had been shot in the back of the head. Ensslin had been hanged with electrical cables on the window grating of her cell. RAF affiliate Irmgard Möller, who had been transferred to Stammheim after Meinhof's suicide in 1976, was found critically wounded, stabbed several times in the chest.

The events of the night of October 18, 1977—commonly referred to as “Death Night”—are to this day unknown and highly contentious. Those responsible for the deaths of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe are disputed. Lapses in the official record, inexplicable incongruities in forensic evidence, and Möller's contradictory account of the night provide sufficient ground to question the role played by the Federal Republic in the deaths of the Stammheim guerillas. On the contrary, the failure of the last-ditch Landshut hijacking, the untimely ambiguity of the deaths, and reports of the suicide pact from RAF member Brigitte Mohnhaupt, who for a time had been interred with the guerillas in the high security wing at Stammheim, imply that the Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe took their own lives in a “last act of rebellion” against the Federal Republic of Germany.⁵³ The RAF founders were buried in a highly contested service in Stuttgart's Dornhaldenfriedhof cemetery, which was allowed by Stuttgart mayor Manfred Rommel, son of the so-called “Desert Fox,” Erwin Rommel. Mayor Rommel nobly permitted the funeral despite considerable public outcry, stating that “all enmity should cease after death.”⁵⁴

The German Autumn concluded on October 19, 1977, as the body of Hanns Martin Schleyer was discovered in a forest on the French-Belgian border. The Employers' Association president was executed by his kidnapers after forty-three days of captivity. Schleyer was buried with full state honors in a service attended by luminaries of state and industry, including Chancellor

⁵³ Ibid. 258

⁵⁴ Ibid. 419

Helmut Schmidt, BKA chief Horst Herold, and many of those intimately involved with the antiterror measures taken against the Red Army Faction.

The RAF Phenomenon remains an extremely divisive chapter of postwar German history. The RAF is lionized for the intensity of their ideological commitment and equally demonized for its unscrupulous and often foolhardy methods. If anything, the RAF was emblematic of a German identity bitterly contested and a German future wholly uncertain. The events surrounding the RAF have been immortalized in literature, art, and film; each viewpoint has been represented, but debates about the group persist. The RAF's "war of six against sixty million" is a continuation of Germany's struggle to define itself after the atrocities of the Third Reich rather than a conclusion to the nation's search for self-determination.

Chapter II

Gerhard Richter: Beginnings, Over and Over Again

“I am averagely healthy, averagely tall, averagely good-looking. I mention this because that is how one has to look to paint good paintings,” wrote Gerhard Richter in 1966 for the catalog of his joint exhibition with Sigmar Polke at Galerie h in Hannover.⁵⁵ Richter’s humorously self-effacing comment is characteristic of the liminal averageness he has embraced throughout his career, from its “official” beginnings after his emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD) in 1961 until the present. Richter’s embrace of noncommittal banality and corresponding resistance to ideology results from his upbringing under the Third Reich and his employment as a propaganda maker in the socialist German Democratic Republic (DDR). Richter has evaded classification by painting seemingly arbitrary subjects overcast in a grisaille haze and working in continuously evolving styles and genres, but one intellectual issue is ever-present at the center of his work: the viability of painting in the modern age. Richter examines the contemporary doubts about painting, engaging with its limitations in order to pioneer a stronger artform. Richter defends his chimeric approach to his work as it frees him to “explore radically different approaches to making art. Despite his shapeshifting style, Richter’s fundamental artistic problem has always been to “address modern and conceptual objections to painting by absorbing into the medium the terms of its rejection.”⁵⁶

Gerhard Richter was born on February 9, 1932 in Dresden as National Socialism was on the rise in Germany. The Richter family, however, was apolitical like many German families.

⁵⁵ Elger, Dietmar. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 85

⁵⁶ Ibid. 167-168

It should be noted that Elger is Richter’s archivist and that this text is the artist’s official biography. Richter’s hand surely guides Elger’s handling of his biography and is not a totally objective account of the artist’s life.

His mother, Hildegarde, had a profound impact on Richter's intellectual development. She was the daughter of a talented concert pianist, was passionate about music and literature, and had trained as a bookseller, a highly respected profession in Germany. She was acutely attentive to culture and was equally attuned to the lack thereof. Later in life, Richter stated that his mother had "such an elitist way about her... to be a meaningful person, from her perspective, one had to be an artist or intellectual."⁵⁷ Hildegarde exposed her son to the classics of German culture from an early age. Richter was raised on Goethe, Schiller, and Wagner, and especially Nietzsche. The concept of *Bildung*, approximately a cultivation of the spirit, is of singular importance to the German people, and Richter's mother raised her son with precisely this concept in mind. Gerhard was Hildegade's favorite child and she projected her own unfulfilled intellectual aspirations onto her son.

The impact of Richter's father, Horst, on his son was minimal, on the other hand, and his relationship to the family was often contested. He was indifferent and ineffectual and, because of his unmotivated disposition and the high rates of unemployment in late-1930s Germany, had trouble finding work. Horst was forced to take his search for employment to the rural hamlets outside of Dresden. He took a position as a schoolteacher in Reichenau, 80km south of the city and the family relocated with him; Hildegarde was forcibly removed from the culture and refinement of cosmopolitan Dresden, cast away to small Saxon settlement whose greatest attraction was its public swimming pool. The move out of Dresden intensified the divisions between Richter's parents, who had increasingly little in common, but later fortuitously spared the family from the Allied firebombing of the city in 1945. Like many other functionaries of German society in the 1930s, Horst was required to register as a member of the Nazi Party. And

⁵⁷ Ibid. 4

like many other German men his age, he was conscripted into military service at the outbreak of the Second World War. Horst survived the conflict, having been an American prisoner of war, but suffered a fate not unlike that experienced by thousands of German men returning from the battlefield: that of estrangement from his family on return. Horst's difficulties on the Homefront were compounded by the fact that, as a former member of the NSDAP, he was forbidden from resuming his teaching post after the war. Without steady income, and with six years of separation, Horst was a pariah in his own family. He was forced to take up work in a textile mill in Zittau, bordering the present-day Czech Republic, where his son had already been commuting to a college preparatory school.

Gerhard Richter was not an attentive student; he failed nearly every subject at school. After a year he was forced to drop out and transferred to the vocational day school in Zittau, from which he graduated in 1948. Although his early scholastic education was never totally adequate, Richter sated his intellectual appetite by voraciously consuming the books compiled by the Soviet occupational government in public libraries, often plundered from the homes of wealthy Germans. Because of the Soviets, Richter was exposed to literature that had been forbidden by the Nazis, including works by Thomas Mann and Stefan Zweig. The books donated by the Soviets also inspired Richter's first attempts at drawing. He recalls that a nude figure copied from an illustrated book in 1946 was his first serious attempt at drawing. When his parents found the sketch, they were simultaneously appalled by the drawing's explicit content but impressed by their son's budding artistic prowess. The next year, he enrolled in nighttime painting class in addition to his studies at the vocational school, where his education as an artist formally began.

Richter began experimenting with various media and immersing himself in the annals of art history but quickly learned that no one in Zittau could teach him anything more. Motivated to forge on with his development in any way he could, Richter took up work with a sign painter, painting banners for the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling party of the DDR, after finishing at the vocational school. He quickly became bored with this work and quit after six months, thereafter finding employment as an apprentice set designer at the municipal theater in Zittau. Here, Richter was freed from the monotony of mindless painting and was able to experiment with style more audaciously; he was also able to fill in the gaps in his education of the German classics as he painted backdrops for plays by Goethe and Schiller. Richter enjoyed working at the theater but was fired for refusing to do the more menial work associated with the job. Aspiring to leave the stagnation of rural Saxony behind him and aiming to become a professional artist in earnest, Richter applied in 1950 for admission to the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Dresden.

Like most other areas of life in the DDR, the Dresden academy was governed by the arcane policies of preference and partiality of the SED. Navigating these structures was difficult, and Richter learned this firsthand when his application was denied on the grounds that his portfolio was too “bourgeois” for the state-run academy.⁵⁸ Richter had heard a rumor, however, that employees of the East German state were given preference over other applicants in competitive admissions, so he went to work as a painter at the Dewag textile plant and reapplied in the spring 1951 with the same portfolio. This time he was successful, and Richter returned to his hometown after sixteen years to pursue a career as an artist.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 10

From February 13 to 15, 1945, Allied aircraft conducted a bombing campaign over Dresden, decimating the old imperial city, which was known as the *Elbflorenz* because of its baroque beauty and cultural riches.⁵⁹ By the time Richter arrived in the city in 1951, Dresden was still in ruins. Richter recalls walking past piles of rubble and the bombed-out remains of the Frauenkirche, the city's most prominent landmark, on his way to class. Just as the city of Dresden bore the wounds of the war, its academy reflected the aesthetic austerity of the Soviet occupation. Despite Dresden's status as the home city of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's avant-garde movement Die Brücke, the Hochschule had been long regarded as a citadel of conservatism, and this program was modified to meet the needs of the official Soviet aesthetic of Socialist Realism. Richter nonetheless received a thoroughly academic education, first learning to paint from still life and working his way through the canonical genres. The Hochschule promoted military structure as well, with days beginning promptly at eight and ending at five in the afternoon. Richter maintains that the exacting formalistic rigor of the Dresden academy prevented him from becoming a "modern artist."⁶⁰ The strict traditionalism of the Hochschule was deeply embedded in his artistic practice: The Socialist Realist program permitted the study of the Old Masters but movements from Impressionism onwards were deemed "too bourgeois" and therefore inappropriate for study. Richter's state-approved influences were Velazquez, Manet, Caspar David Friedrich, and also Picasso and Renato Guttuso, whose stylistic adventurism was tolerated by the state because of the artists' affiliations with communist parties in France and Italy.⁶¹ The gaps in modern art in the Hochschule program did not totally hinder Richter's hungry curiosity to learn; in order to circumvent the austere stylistic program of the state-run

⁵⁹ Translation: Florence of the Elbe

⁶⁰ Ibid. 11

⁶¹ Storr, Robert. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004): 34

institution, he, like most other students at the academy, kept a parallel, private portfolio which contained more experimental artworks.

The early days of the German Democratic Republic saw a period of limited artistic and intellectual freedom, but this interlude quickly ended in 1949 as secretary of the SED Walter Ulbricht called on artists to promote the values of the *Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Staat*. Art was intended to fulfill a social function and the job of the artist was to represent the worker and farmer as the heroes of the collective struggle toward the utopian socialist future. Socialist Realist art was strictly regulated and was required to adhere to three primary criteria: It must espouse the values of the SED; it must demonstrate a strong commitment to the proletariat; and it must legibly depict scenes “typical” of socialist life, which were often idealized to an extent in order to promote the state ideology.⁶² Bulgarian philosopher Vladislav Torodov reflected that “[Socialist Realism] does not merely reflect the present principle of reality but refracts it and brings it to its final perfection. Socialist Realism implements in a realistic image the very product of changing reality... the Socialist image is a dialectical conjunction between reflection and projection.”⁶³ To accomplish this dual reflection and projection, Socialist Realist artists employed an almost photographic legibility to promote the ideological aims of the Party. The resistance to narrative and legibility that Richter would later employ in his art is a striking inversion of the goals of the dominant artform of his early life.

All students at the Hochschule were required to choose a faculty of study; Richter chose the mural department. His choice to study muralism, an artform with overtly propagandistic applications, is curious in retrospect considering his programmatic refusal of ideology. Richter’s

⁶² Curley, John J. *A Conspiracy of Images: Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, and the Art of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013): 88

⁶³ Ibid. 86

choice, however, was informed by simple practicality: muralists were afforded unprecedented freedom of stylistic experimentation because the assumed demands of wall decoration called for an otherwise unacceptable degree of “formalism.” Richter would be able to exercise a greater degree of stylistic and creative freedom, even under eyes of the cultural bureaucracy. He chose to study under Heinz Lohmar, who had been a minor Surrealist in Paris and was a committed member of the Communist Party of Germany. Richter thought, in spite of his teacher’s steadfast commitment to communist doctrine, that Lohmar was nonetheless cosmopolitan and well-informed, “a little gangster” who, unlike most of the more prominent professors at the Hochschule, had something to offer him.⁶⁴

At the Hochschule Richter was also acquainted with Marianne Eufinger, nicknamed Ema, his first wife. Ema was a student of fashion and textile design and lived with her parents in their Dresden villa. Ema’s father Heinrich was a prominent Dresden obstetrician and early proponent of National Socialism, having joined the party in 1933. Eufinger had been a high-ranking doctor in the Waffen-SS, under whose auspices he oversaw a program of forced sterilization. Eufinger carved out a place for himself as a successful physician in the DDR, working as the preferred obstetrician to the SED and Soviet political elite.

The work Richter produced while studying in the mural department is stylistically orthodox in relation to the approved Socialist Realist aesthetic, depicting the strong and healthy bodies of male and female workers as they work together to enhance their own quality of life and strive to actualize the utopian socialist future. In 1956, his final year at the Hochschule, Richter was awarded a thesis commission for the Deutsches Hygienemuseum in Dresden. His mural, *Lebensfreude* (Figure 1), depicts a pantheon of happy socialist citizens arranged in small, family-

⁶⁴ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 35

like groups but connected to the larger community through the clever architecture of flora. The mural stolidly conforms to socialist doctrine and was judged *Sehr Gut* by the examiners, earning him the certification of official mural painter. Richter graduated the Hochschule in 1956 with enough commissions to work as a freelance artist. He took up a position teaching a public evening class in life drawing for which he was compensated with access to a studio space and a three-year stipend. Richter's newfound professional and financial stability afforded him the opportunity to marry Ema on June 8, 1957.

Richter's later denunciation of ideological art is informed not only by his upbringing in an ideological regime, but also by his role as a creator of ideological images. Regimes across the Eastern Bloc faced social upheaval in the late 1950s, primarily in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The reactionary pushback sought to prevent emigration to the West but also further curtailed artistic expression. Richter felt constricted by these limitations of the arts, and in 1958 penned an acerbic letter to the weekly journal of the Deutscher Kulturbund, entering into a public debate about whether the didactic duty of mural painting restricted creative freedom. He criticized the commissioning boards that mediated commissions between artists and clients for their ineffectiveness and advocated that they not dictate the qualities of an artwork but rather act as a go-between for the client and artist, who instead should discuss such matters.⁶⁵ Even while still in the East, Richter criticized the cultural bureaucracy that distributed or denied success in the art scene of the DDR on the meretricious basis of ideological and stylistic adherence. He criticized the state tastemakers, who "by calling you a formalist could deny you the opportunity to exhibit" and who "gave you a false sense of your own importance. It made you think that you

⁶⁵ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 19

were a great artist, when really you were nothing.”⁶⁶ For Richter, the DDR was becoming an increasingly suffocating environment.

Richter’s status as an artist of some acclaim in the socialist milieu of the DDR did afford him many opportunities that would be inconceivable for artists of lesser rank. Richter was granted greater access to Western art and, in 1959, was granted permission to visit Documenta II. Documenta was founded in 1955 by Arnold Bode and Werner Haftmann to bring the latest in contemporary art to Germany. Strategically located in Kassel, near the border between the two Germanys, the fair sought to promote dialogue and cultural exchange between the BRD and the DDR. The first iteration of the exhibition followed the successive progression of modernism propagated by Alfred Barr and the Museum of Modern Art, highlighting the major European movements before the Second World War and also those that immediately followed it, specifically Art Informel and the various strains of geometric abstraction. Documenta II saw the addition of Porter A. McCray of the Museum of Modern Art to the curatorial staff, and with him he brought an influx of American art to Europe. Members of the New York School were paraded before a larger European audience, bolstering Europeans’ exposure to American innovation, which was previously limited to forward-thinking galleries and ambitious fairs such as the Venice Biennale. Abstract Expressionists and Color Field painters of immense importance – including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Helen Frankenthaler, and Robert Rauschenberg—counted among the American contribution to the 1959 fair. Documenta introduced a generation of German artists to the innovations of their counterparts across the Atlantic; Richter was immensely impressed by the “sheer brazenness” of Pollock and Lucio Fontana and was inspired by the freedom and enigmas of abstraction, which he has

⁶⁶ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 38

pursued ever since.⁶⁷ Because Richter could not afford a copy of the catalogue, he instead took photo after photo of the artworks, initiating another careerlong fascination with the nature of photography and the effects of mechanical reproduction.

If Documenta opened Richter to the possibilities of abstraction, it also reinforced the limitations of working as an artist in the DDR. It became clear to him that the prescribed artistic culture of the DDR stifled his ability to innovate; radical artistic departures from the norm were simply not possible in the Socialist state, and the widespread recognition for artistic breakthroughs which has always been so important to Richter was similarly impermissible. He decided to leave the comfort and success he had achieved and flee to the West in pursuit of unbridled artistic freedom. In 1961, the border between the two Germanys was becoming increasingly tighter as each day passed but there still remained a reliable escape route through Berlin, as the subways and regional rail lines still ran freely across the two halves of the divided city. In spring 1961, Richter and Ema travelled to Berlin and snuck across the border into the Western sections of the city. From there, they travelled to Oldenburg, where Ema's parents had relocated, by way of a refugee camp for migrants fleeing the East. Recounting his escape to the West, Richter wrote the next year that he left Dresden not to "escape 'materialism,'" but to "get away from the criminal 'idealism' of the socialists."⁶⁸

The only possessions Richter brought with him from the East were an album of family photos and a collection of photographs of his body of work, which he organized neatly into binders. He left the original works behind him in the East for good; this part of his life was over. If he took anything away from life in the DDR, it was an absolute and unyielding opposition to ideological commitment that he has maintained ever since. His future work is concerned with the

⁶⁷ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 28

⁶⁸ Ibid. 30

pursuit of the “Third Way” Richter had theorized in Dresden, the liminal space between socialism and capitalism, between tradition and the avant-garde.

Now in the BRD, Richter originally intended to go to Munich, which had a thriving art scene and a prestigious academy, but he was dissuaded by an old friend from the Dresden Hochschule who was living in Düsseldorf. The conservative animus of Munich, his friend argued, would not provide Richter with the kind of creative freedom he desired. He advocated that Düsseldorf, with its own, more liberal artistic climate and equally esteemed academy, the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, would be a better fit for Richter. Düsseldorf was a bustling *Kunststadt* with a flourishing community of artists, an openminded attitude towards experimentation, and a litany of influential gallerists. Many students of the Kunstakademie chose to stay in the city after graduating because of its tolerant environment and supportive artistic community. And Düsseldorf was surrounded by similarly tolerant cities; it was just one city in the artistically vibrant Rhineland metropolis. Düsseldorf and Cologne, the two largest cities in the region, were where real artistic experimentation happened and as such constituted the twin capitals of the German avant-garde. Düsseldorf was home to major figures affiliated with Fluxus, one of the most influential inheritors of the anti-artistic tradition of Dada, as well as the leaders of ZERO, another neo-Dadaist group that imagined the utopian beginnings of a new modernism. Richter would be mentored by ZERO member Günther Uecker during his time in Düsseldorf. Furthermore, the Kunstakademie’s reputation as a stronghold of experimentation was well established; by the time Richter began his studies, it employed a number of important practitioners Art Informel and several influential artists affiliated with Fluxus, with Joseph Beuys joining the faculty later in the summer of 1961. Richter was thoroughly convinced; he and Ema settled in Düsseldorf shortly after arriving in the West in the spring of 1961.

In the summer of 1961 Richter applied to the Kunstakademie to study under Ferdinand Macketanz, who notoriously accepted any and all applicants. Richter was of course accepted but, because of the high number of enrollments, could not start his studies until the winter semester began in October. Nevertheless, he persuaded academy officials to give him informal access to studio space and began working at the earliest opportunity, treating his work like an eight-to-five job. Richter applied to the Kunstakademie not because he felt he needed further artistic training but rather because he longed for the company of artists, with whom he could discuss artistic issues and, more importantly, compete. The academy provided Richter with better company than he could have hoped for: in his time there, he formed important, intense, and sometimes contentious friendships with Sigmar Polke, Konrad Lueg, and Blinky Palermo. Polke, like Richter, was a refugee from the East who had found himself in Düsseldorf after his family was expelled from the reclaimed territory of Lower Silesia, now part of present-day Poland, and relocated in Düsseldorf.⁶⁹ Lueg, who took his mother's maiden name as his *nom de guerre*, was the only native "*Wessie*" of the trio, having been born and raised in Düsseldorf. He was a talented artist but indisputably skilled at navigating the social landscape of the art world. Richter recalls that Lueg was always the most informed and well-connected member of the trio: "he was always lugging around art magazines, and he always had the latest copy of *Art International*. He knew everyone in Düsseldorf."⁷⁰ Lueg eventually fell behind Richter and Polke as a painter and instead became one of Düsseldorf's leading gallerists and art world insiders, operating a gallery under his actual surname name, Fischer. Richter, Polke, and Lueg supported one another as a triumvirate of likeminded artists and worked through aesthetic issues together. Richter stresses the importance of his collaboration with his friends: "a group means a great deal to me: nothing

⁶⁹ Ibid. 40

⁷⁰ Ibid. 40

comes in isolation. We have worked out our ideas largely by talking them through. Shutting myself away in the country, for instance, would do nothing for me... the exchange with other artists –and especially the collaboration with Lueg and Polke—matters a lot for me: it is part of the input that I need.”⁷¹

Although Richter received a thorough education at the Dresden Hochschule, his artistic development was jumpstarted in the West due to the newfound freedoms afforded to him by the creative environment of the BRD. Richter wanted to reinvent himself as an artist and here he was free to pursue whatever artforms he pleased. And he did; in his first year at the Kunstakademie, Richter “painted through the whole history of art toward abstraction,” including his first meaningful experimentations with nonfigurative art, inspired by his mentor, Art Informel painter K.O. Götz. Frustrated, however, by his inability to find himself in the intimidating avant-garde of the Rhineland, however, Richter destroyed his early body work in an act of Fluxus-esque liberation “in some sort of action in the courtyard,” and began anew.⁷²

In an attempt to develop his own unique style, Richter had decided to integrate popular media into his work and found early validation and important inspiration in Roy Lichtenstein’s *Refrigerator* from 1962. *Refrigerator* (Figure 2) appropriates a newspaper advertisement depicting a young housewife beaming at the viewer as she cleans her new appliance. Lichtenstein’s consumer-consciousness, found subject matter and non-artistic style, taken from comic books, confirmed for Richter the possibilities of style without authorship and the legitimacy of image appropriation as an artistic practice. Common media, Richter learned, could be art, too. Richter had been appropriating subject matter from arbitrary media sources for

⁷¹ Ibid. 40

⁷² Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 41

several months by this point; he alternately cites a repainted portrait of Brigitte Bardot and *Party* from 1962 as his first experimentations with found images.

Party (Figure 3), the most famous example of Richter's transition from Art Informel-influenced abstraction to his early photo-based style, is based on an image of Italian television personality Vito Torriani seated with four fashionably dressed women during a night on the town. The image reflects the carefree banality of German television programming during the *Wirtschaftswunder* of the 1950s, which served as a distracting salve for the nation's damaged and unresolved identity after the atrocities of Second World War.⁷³ Richter roughly recreated the original image and mostly maintains its black-and-white palette but paints the legs of one of the women in color. At first, he wanted to leave the image as close to the original as possible, but, still uncertain of the validity of appropriation as artistic practice, attacked the original image by cutting slashes through the canvas à la Lucio Fontana. Richter crudely stitched up the painting's wounds, which he highlighted with splashes of blood-red paint. *Party* has been interpreted as a macabre criticism of the superficiality of German society in the early Postwar era, but Richter was dissatisfied by the work's heavy-handed execution, which he believed contained unwanted "literary effects."⁷⁴ He learned that by adapting the painterly serendipity of Art Informel to figurative work, as seen in *Tisch* (1962) and in his later *Vermalung* works, he could obscure the surface of a painting in such a way that each of its elements are equalized and that no part of a work is more or less important than another, thus eliminating the unwelcome literary effects. The banality of found material, similarly, gave him an avenue he could take to avoid the angsty expressionism of postwar abstraction.

⁷³ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 43

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 44

Richter considers that his career in the BRD began in earnest in 1962 with *Tisch* (Figure 4). Richter found the source of this unassuming painting in an advertisement for a modern table in the Italian architecture and design magazine *Domus*. He painted an illusionistic copy of the advertisement in a grisaille palette and partially obscured the image under a cloudlike haze of brushstrokes. *Tisch* is devoid of literary effects but disrupts the “illusion of representation” without disrupting the image itself.⁷⁵ *Tisch* is a dialogue between seemingly incompatible figurative and abstract artforms, the middle ground Richter sought between traditional modes of representation and the avant-garde. The unartistic quality of the painting corresponds with its equally unartistic subject matter, a seemingly banal and empty table. The arbitrary subject of *Tisch* is for Richter a haven from painterly alteration, free from literary effect, historical bias, and the decorum of painting. It is simply an image of a table, unadorned and frank. Richter maintains that “a photograph, unless the art photographers have fashioned it, is simply the best picture [he] can imagine” because of its absolute and autonomous state. A photo simply conveys information, even if it is technically flawed and barely identifiable.⁷⁶ In the attempt to adopt photographic images into his artwork, Richter appropriates photography’s lack of artistic artifice and its mechanical distance for painting. *Tisch* is of watershed importance for Richter, and accordingly occupies the number one position in the artist’s self-curated catalogue raisonné and the official chronology of his work.

Satisfied with *Party* and *Tisch*, Richter began to use photo-painting as his dominant practice for the majority of the 1960s; an exercise of ambivalence toward figurative painting, Richter’s photo-paintings are established on the foundation of the artist’s opposition to style. Richter believes that there is a fundamental emotional distance in photography because of the

⁷⁵ Ibid. 48

⁷⁶ Ibid. 49

equal value the camera mechanically assigns to its subjects. Its gaze is devoid of style, free of composition, and lacks artistic judgement; the camera does not compose an image, it simply “sees” to produce the unartistic photographic image, what Richter calls “pure picture.”⁷⁷ These images remove the “filter of creative identity” that disrupts the “disembodied objectivity” of the photographic image; by repainting non-artistic images, Richter can remove himself from the creative process of painting, prioritizing the image over the artist.⁷⁸ Richter admires this “disembodied” quality of photography and believes that, when adapted to painting, it can rescue its pictorial ancestor from its own shortcomings. The “death of painting” has been feared since the genesis of photography and experienced a resurgence in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of conceptual art, many of whose practitioners believed that painting was quickly becoming an increasingly irrelevant vestige of bourgeois material culture. With his photo-paintings, Richter sought to examine the relationship between these sometimes-competing methods of pictorial representation, honoring the established qualities of painting just as much as he does the objective distance [*mediale Distanz*], of photography. These artworks attempt to eliminate the differences between the two media, working to transfer the fundamental attributes and vocabulary of photography, specifically its apparent objectivity and unartistic non-composition, onto painting. Richter’s goal was not to “imitate a photograph,” but rather to “make one.” He continues, in a 1972 interview: “If I disregard the assumption that a photograph is a piece of paper exposed to light, then I am practicing photography by other means: I’m not producing paintings that remind you of a photograph but producing photographs.”⁷⁹ Richter used the fundamental qualities of photography, its authenticity and objectivity, to expose the limitations

⁷⁷ Ibid. 50

⁷⁸ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 51

⁷⁹ Elger, *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 52

of representational painting, which, paradoxically, rescues the medium from the “death of painting” discourse of the late twentieth century. In Richter’s practice, painting’s survival as a valid artform in the modern age is directly reliant on its ability to live on as photography.⁸⁰

The characteristic features of Richter’s photo-paintings are their grisaille palette and their trademark blur. Richter retains the black-and-white palette of photography in order to endow the paintings with the documentary character of photography, as well as the unemotional distance that the medium grants its subjects.⁸¹ The blur is more complex, operating on multiple levels. It recreates the technical error of camera shake, when the shutter closes and pulls the photographed image out of focus, referencing the technical limitations of photography as well as the inexact relationship between an object and its perception. Because a painting can never be out of focus, the blurring strengthens the ambivalent tension between painting and photography.⁸² Richter argues that photographic focus can be disruptive, inhibiting the viewer’s perception of the artwork through the disproportionate value it assigns to the portrayed subjects. Richter smears the wet paint of the canvas “to make everything equally important and equally unimportant... so that they do not look artistic or craftsman-like but technological, perfect” and to “blur out the excess of information.”⁸³ Furthermore, the lack of focus is for Richter a visible expression of a philosophical position on the perception of reality: it rejects the possibility of definitive truth. The blur emphasizes the imprecision and uncertainty of perception; it is a pictorial representation of the ambiguity of our sensory awareness of the world around us, marked by transience, incompleteness, and error.⁸⁴ Finally, the blur depersonalizes the situations represented. Richter

⁸⁰ Ibid. 52

⁸¹ Ibid. 85

⁸² Ibid. 85

⁸³ Ibid. 86

⁸⁴ Ibid. 88

considers his mechanical smearing of the painted surface in relation to Warhol's use of silkscreening: "Warhol showed me this modern way of letting things disappear, or at least he validated its possibilities... It was a very liberating act."⁸⁵ The out-of-focus quality of Richter's canvasses removes unnecessary information and distances the photographic reference from its referent. Storr argues that Richter's blur obscures the Barthesian *spectrum*, or the dominant image and its scope, and augments the photo's *puncta*, the striking qualities added to a photo by the viewer, what Barthes calls "that accident which pricks me"⁸⁶ The blur, especially in Richter's group portraits of anonymous families, allows the viewer to block out excess information and project their own associations onto the canvas.⁸⁷

The mechanical reproduction of photography also greatly interests Richter. To promote his first solo exhibition at Alfred Schmela's Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf in September 1964, Richter painted a portrait of the gallerist at Schmela's insistence. *Portrait Schmela* (Figure 5) from 1964 depicts the gallerist in front of a curtained background six times in slightly different poses. The formal divisions of the canvas imitate the photography typical of the common passport photograph booths of the time. This imitation of automated photography removes the artist from the art once again, and also presents the gallerist exactly as he appears, with no consideration paid to his underlying psychological identity, representing only Schmela's physical appearance. Passport photography requires the sitter to suppress emotion during the photo so that their likeness can be captured objectively. Richter, through his pseudo-mechanical portrait of the influential Düsseldorf gallerist, returns the primacy of physical resemblance to portrait painting

⁸⁵ Ibid. 88

⁸⁶ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 51

⁸⁷ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 88 and Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 2010): 27

and totally rejects the subjective, psychological characterization of the subject, as is common in the portraiture of Max Beckmann and Francis Bacon.⁸⁸

Richter sourced images from printed media as well as from personal albums belonging to himself or friends, and was especially drawn to images of ordinary, anonymous individuals, like those depicted in *Familie am Meer* (Figure 6) in 1964. For Richter, this kind of popular photography's greatest virtue is that it is not art. Media photos and everyday snapshots of families are not captured with any artistic pretensions in mind, but rather are intended as records of individuals and events. What these images lack in compositional sophistication they more than make up for in their abundance of raw information; what is lack in expressiveness is made up for in "matter-of-factness."⁸⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, in his analysis of the applications of photography in French peasant society of the 1960s (a milieu not unlike that which Richter sourced many family photos), highlights the sociological functions of family photos. The popular portrait was intended to simply provide a "sufficiently faithful" representation that is precise enough to allow recognition. The frontal composition of these photos offers a clearly readable representation of the photographed individual and expresses the eternal in its opposition to depth. These popular portraits are the undying records of the presence of the sitter.⁹⁰ *Familie am Meer* is based on an anonymous record of a family's trip to the seaside. Popular photographs are, however, inherently ephemeral. News images live and die within a cycle; family photos become anonymous with time. Richter's focus is not to critique the unrelenting cycle of consumption and decay of modern life, like some practitioners of Pop Art, but rather to promote what Robert Storr calls the "iconography of the everyday." Rather than accentuating the lowliness of a popular photo,

⁸⁸ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 74

⁸⁹ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 51

⁹⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre and Marie-Claire (trans. Loïc Wacquant). "The Peasant and Photography" in *Ethnography*, Vol. 5 No. 4 (December 2004): 600-616

Richter instead sought to dignify it by respecting it for what it is, and to endow it with art-historical significance and to situate it in an artistic milieu.⁹¹ He does this because he is “sorry for the photograph, because it has such a miserable existence even though it is such a perfect picture.” His goal is to validate the popular photo and to make it visible. In the artist’s own words, the function of these photo-paintings is one of “sympathy.”⁹²

The appropriation of banal popular photography in Richter’s photo-paintings evidences his interaction with Marcel Duchamp, whom the artist considers to be both an inspiration and an artistic adversary. In 1965, Richter visited an exhibition of Duchamp’s work at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, not far from Düsseldorf. He was inspired by Duchamp’s appropriation of found objects as art and painted *Klorolle* (Figure 7), in response to the Dadaist’s use of readymades. For Richter, Duchamp’s practice of appropriating objects as art by simply calling them art was no different than his own practice based on the use of found photos. By dignifying otherwise anonymous photos as art, Richter could elevate them to the pantheon of art history as Duchamp had done with urinals and snow shovels. He felt that his work was immensely validated by Duchamp’s, but was offended by Duchamp’s attitude towards painting, which Richter viewed as arrogant.⁹³ Painting is sacred for Richter, and Duchamp’s assertions of the “end of painting” in the 1910s troubled Richter tremendously.⁹⁴ He combated Duchamp’s dismissals of painting by creating his own adaptations of the work that apparently ended painting. Richter painted *Frau, die Treppe herabgehend* (Figure 8) from the same year from a magazine advertisement of a fashionable society woman descending a staircase, greatly

⁹¹ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 89

⁹² Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*. 53

⁹³ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 104

⁹⁴ In delightfully Duchampian fashion, only a photo of *Nude Descending a Staircase* was present at the Krefeld exhibition

exaggerating the proportions of the stairway to create a sense of isolation within the canvas. The more famous of Richter's Duchampian works is *Ema, (Akt auf einer Treppe)* from 1966 (Figure 9). This is the first of Richter's works to be completed from one of his own photographs, as well as one of the first to be based on a color photograph. Richter shows his pregnant wife walking serenely down a stairway; his characteristic blur imitates the motion that Duchamp so definitively captured. Richter's canvas is quiet and contemplative in opposition to Duchamp's hurried painting, developing a tension between "the modernist ideal of a rushed, impersonal, mechanistic world and the quieter, more contemplative, classical tradition of painting."⁹⁵ Since the Krefeld exhibition, Richter has considered himself an anti-Duchampian by proving that the figurative tradition had not ended a half century earlier.

Although it appears that his photo sources are arbitrary, Richter uses the artless sentimentality of popular photography to obfuscate the autobiographical elements that they may contain. For the large part of his early career, Richter maintained the assumption that his choice of subject matter was distant and arbitrary, and that only their origins in photography united his subjects. But despite the apparent randomness of his photo-based paintings, many of them are based on images contained in the album of family photos Richter brought with him from the DDR. Richter painted subjects from his childhood to work through the painful memories of life under brutal regime the Third Reich. Although the Richters, like many German families were apolitical members of the NSDAP, they, like many German families, were touched by the chaos of the war and Nazi regime in brutal and unexpected ways. Richter painted *Tante Marianne* in 1965 to commemorate his maternal aunt Marianne (Figure 10). Marianne suffered from mental illness and at eighteen was forcibly sterilized and later starved to death by the Nazis as part of

⁹⁵ Ibid. 106

Aktion T4, the Third Reich's euthanasia program, designed to purify the national bloodstream by culling the "incurably sick" and granting them an "honorable death" [*Gnadentod*].⁹⁶ The 1965 canvas depicts the Marianne holding the artist, who at the time was only an infant. The innocent sentimentality of the canvas belies the brutality of Marianne's death.

Herr Heyde (Figure 11), also from 1965, is often read as the companion piece to *Aunt Marianne*. It depicts two anonymous men, one wearing a policeman's hat, lost in the horizontal blur of the paint. Richter retains the newspaper caption that accompanied the original photograph; it reads, "Werner Heyde in November 1959, as he gave himself up to the authorities." The mysterious text hints at crime and punishment, but story behind the image reveals its connection to *Tante Marianne*: Werner Heyde was a German physician who helped organize *Aktion T4*, the euthanasia program that killed the painter's aunt. After the war, Heyde evaded capture by living under a pseudonym in Germany but gave himself up to the authorities after being exposed in 1959. He committed suicide before he was to stand trial for crimes committed during the war.⁹⁷ The murkiness in which Richter submerges the Nazi doctor obscures his identity; that Heyde appears to be a completely normal citizen, only exposed by the presence of the policeman and the suggestive caption forces the viewer to question who he is and what he has done. Richter's obfuscated treatment of Heyde seems to suggest the presence of further undiscovered Nazis in Germany, many of whom will never be brought to justice for their crimes. Richter relates the portrait of his murdered aunt to the snapshot of her killer and questions the relationships between private and public memory in the guilt-laden postwar

⁹⁶ Proctor, Robert N. *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988): 177

⁹⁷ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 131

Germany, a society which had only begun to acknowledge the role it played in the senseless atrocities of the Third Reich.⁹⁸

Richter paints through familial and national struggles in other works based on his childhood. Richter's maternal uncle, Rudi, an officer in the Wehrmacht, was killed almost immediately after the start of the war. Richter recalls how his family revered Rudi, the family favorite; he was presented to the young painter as a hero, exemplary of what a man should be. In *Onkel Rudi* (Figure 12), also from 1965, Richter paints his uncle proudly beaming in his officer's uniform, full of confidence and cheer, a "young and very stupid" man.⁹⁹ Richter's portrait of his uncle addresses a cultural taboo that many postwar Germans did not know how to address: the "Nazi in the family."¹⁰⁰ Richter attempts to reconcile his family's glowing appraisal of Rudi with his participation in the death and destruction of the war, which took Rudi's life as well as the life of his sister Marianne. *Onkel Rudi* is representative of a "generation that willingly participated in its own destruction and the destruction of the millions it tried to decimate" and attempts to make sense of the myriad ways which the war affected not only Richter's own family but all German families.¹⁰¹

Richter's objectives in photo-based painting are not static, however, and his understanding of the painting and photography and the ways they interact has developed in stride with his artistic practice. Towards the end of Richter's photo-painting phase of the 1960s, his outlook towards photography became increasingly more critical. In the late 1960s, Richter, who at the time was frequently collaborating with friend Sigmar Polke, produced works that call into

⁹⁸ It is worth noting that Richter's first father-in-law, Heinrich Eufinger, also took part in the administration of *Aktion T4*, but was not directly responsible for the murder of the artist's Aunt Marianne

⁹⁹ Ibid. 140

¹⁰⁰ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 57

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 57-58

question the reality of photographic objectivity. *9 Objekte* (Figure 13) from 1969 is a collection of nine black-and-white photographs that portray “wooden constructions” in everyday settings. The ordinary settings suggest the objects should also be ordinary, but in fact they are nonsensical Escherian constructions that in actuality could not exist given the physical reality of the world. Richter altered the photos to manipulate the physical structures of the objects portrayed. The artist’s suspension of the laws of nature demonstrates man’s readiness to trust in the assumed objectivity of photography. Richter’s archivist and author of the official biography of the author’s life, Dietmar Elger, writes that *9 Objekte* and other contemporary projects demonstrate that “the image of reality we create for ourselves is implicitly deceptive, that objective truth does not exist, and that we allow ourselves to be manipulated far too easily.”¹⁰² Richter’s exposing of our trusting willfulness to take photography at face value shows a tinge of the Nietzschean skepticism that has always been present in his work; Richter, in a 1989 interview about his monumental *October Cycle*, continues: “I don’t believe in the absolute picture. There can only be approximations, experiments, and beginnings, over and over again.”¹⁰³

By the end of the 1960s, Richter had grown tired of the incessant critical fixation on his grisaille photo-paintings and became increasingly cognizant of the changing attitudes about painting in the late twentieth century. He transitioned away from his black-and-white photo-painting and began to experiment with abstraction and landscape painting, which would become the two dominant artforms of much of his career thereafter.

Richter had first returned to abstraction in the mid-1960s with a series of “color charts,” paintings based on the charts of paint chips that capture the chromatic spectrum that are ubiquitous presences in art supply stores around the world (Figure 14). Richter had first been

¹⁰² Elger, *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 120

¹⁰³ Ibid. 120

interested in these charts in 1966 when he noticed the clear sense of order they communicated without any message or ideology. Each chart contains a multitude of colored squares or rectangles divided by a thin white grid. Richter's intention with these paintings is to exploit the unartistic and aesthetically neutral character of the found sources to create autonomous, nonobjective images. The totally unexpressive color charts, while not abstract in the purest sense, are a significant departure from Richter's previous photo-based work because of their vibrant chromatic energy yet share the same sense of intellectual and emotional distance present in his earlier photo-paintings.

The end of the 1960s saw a rise of youth-driven social upheaval in the BRD as well as in other parts of the Western world. Many working artists sympathized with the burgeoning left-wing movements like the '68er Bewegung in Germany and produced their own politically charged artworks. At the same time there was an anti-painting animus among artists and art world functionaries, who viewed that figurative works on canvas were increasingly irrelevant in the modern world. Richter's onetime friend Konrad Lueg, who by this time had abandoned his painting and was working as a gallerist under his real surname, Fischer, had moved away from showing paintings in his Düsseldorf gallery, opting instead to exhibit a sculpture- and mixed-media-heavy program populated by conceptual artists such as Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, and Bruce Naumann. Richter, however, was resistant to this strain of anti-painterly thought and continued to work in paint because he believed to do so was to take an apolitical stance in contrast to the dominant political spirit of the avant-garde. In fact, Richter took an aggressive stance against the anti-painting sentiment of the avant-garde by revitalizing an artform of the utmost banality and sentimentality, but also one of immense importance in the tradition of German painting: the landscape.

In 1968 Richter began to paint landscapes based on photographs he had taken during his travels, beginning with a family trip to Corsica. Richter's landscapes are characterized by a distanced view extending over a large, sparse landscape out to the horizon, which is often so low that the sky dominates the composition (Figure 15). Nearly all of Richter's landscapes are done in color but he retains the blur of his earlier works, although it is considerably softened. Elger notes that Richter's work in landscape painting, because they are so completely removed from the political discourse of the time, offer the artist a retreat. Richter recalled in 1970 his motive for taking on such an irrelevant artform: "I felt like painting something beautiful."¹⁰⁴

Richter's landscapes are often associated with the tradition of German Romantic landscape painting, specifically with the work of Caspar David Friedrich. Art historian Oskar Bätschmann notes several similarities in the formal composition of each artist's landscapes: their landscapes are often marked by a deep-set horizon, a high, clear sky, and an unobtrusive foreground with a solitary feature, manmade or topographic, included to lend a sense of scale to the composition.¹⁰⁵ Richter had been moved by Friedrich's landscapes in the DDR, when he was a student at the Dresden Hochschule and had taken efforts to seek out the artist's work during rare state-approved visits to view museum collections in West Berlin. Richter's landscapes have been interpreted as an effort to revitalize the long-forgotten genre through the use of contemporary media by recreating nature through the mechanical reproduction of photography. Divided by more than one hundred years, Richter's handling of the natural world departs from Friedrich's through this use of modern technology, but the works share Friedrich's veneration of the natural world, which is dually coopted for a political (or in Richter's case, apolitical) end: Friedrich's landscapes are often interpreted as allegories of the liberation of the German national

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 171

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 173-174

spirit from Napoleonic domination, while Richter's can be read as subversive respite from the dominant political discourses of the late twentieth century, often inextricable from the creation of art in the first place.

Richter's opposition to the heavily political practice of conceptual art does not preclude his admiration of its practitioners nor his own applications of it. In surely his longest-running project, the *Atlas*, first devised in 1969, Richter turns the production of his art into an artistic event. In the *Atlas* (Figure 16), Richter presents his paintings in a new way by "establishing a second-order level of representation."¹⁰⁶ The project, conceived of in response to the work of conceptual artists Carl Andre, Hanne Darboven, and Lawrence Weiner, all of whom who had exhibited at Konrad Fischer's Düsseldorf gallery between 1967 and 1969, is an ongoing compilation of all of the Richter's source and preparatory materials for the duration of his career, his own self-curated catalogue raisonne. The compilation and exhibition of the *Atlas*, which is now in the collection of the Städtische Galerie Lenbachhaus in Munich, have become important undertakings both as part of and document of Richter's oeuvre. It is grouped not according to chronological succession but rather according to iconography but does offer Richter's own idea of the development of his work, beginning with *Tisch* (1962) which occupies the primary position in the corpus. The *Atlas* was first conceived of out of documentary necessity but has since achieved a readymade status as a work of art in its own right.¹⁰⁷

Despite having shifted his focus away from the grisaille photo-paintings that had brought him considerable acclaim, Richter had not abandoned the practice entirely. He revived this style for the 1972 Venice Biennale, where Richter was the sole representative of the BRD. Germany had traditionally been represented by a number of artists each championing different trends, but

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 169

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 169, 191-193

Dieter Honisch, who was appointed commissioner of the German pavilion in 1970, elected to have Richter represent the country alone. In preparation for the 1972 Venice Biennale, Richter completed *48 Portraits* (Figure 17), a glossary of so-called “great figures” of Western thought and culture. The cycle is composed of painted photos of individuals whose contributions to Western culture have been profound and lasting, including philosophers, poets, psychologists, physicists, chemists, educators, composers, and men of letters from the universally beloved to the virtually unknown. That he chose humanist figures, whose views would be repugnant to the totalitarian regimes Richter lived through, is striking.¹⁰⁸ Richter sourced style-less images of these influential men (he includes no women) from encyclopedias and reference books in order to form a sense of strong visual cohesion and arranged the paintings in a frieze on the walls of the neoclassical German pavilion (Figure 18). Richter’s tones down his trademark blur to promote a high degree of legibility among the portraits. His goal with *48 Portraits* was to challenge the assumption that the goal of portraiture is to capture the psychological essence of the sitter; his portraits are strictly documentary, presenting the heads of famous men which, although they are “themselves full of literature, become completely unliterary.”¹⁰⁹ The effect of this cycle is not unlike that achieved by *Portrait Schmela* in 1964: the reduction of portraiture to the documentary, emphasizing the difference between the “likeness and the life.”¹¹⁰

The *48 Portraits* were only a momentary interlude from the artistic rhythm of abstract work and landscapes that Richter had established since the latter part of the 1960s. He quickly returned to producing abstracts, beginning with minimalist grey paintings, his attempt to develop a form of painting unburdened by subject matter, something that more fully and fundamentally

¹⁰⁸ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 102

¹⁰⁹ Elger, *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 197

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 197

amounted to “painting.”¹¹¹ Richter was interested in painting’s dual ability to illustrate and conceal and sought to explore the process he calls *Vermalung*, which roughly translates to in- or overpainting in English, a way of painting to remove painting which he developed in preparation for *48 Portraits*. He created a number of gestural, but not expressive abstract works completed in an all-grey palette (Figure 19), which Richter argues in a letter to Edy de Wilde, director of Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum “is the welcome and only possible equivalent for indifference, noncommitment, absence of opinion, [and] absence of shape.” He continues, “I cannot think of a color that has less expression.”¹¹² Richter’s grey paintings reflect an absolute rejection of traditional painting as well as the “resignation” of his inner psychological state: these noncommittal, morose works coincide with the most difficult years of his marriage to Ema, which would end a few years later in 1982.¹¹³ Richter maintains that his monochromatic works are fundamentally different than those practiced by other artists, for example those of Robert Ryman, whose paintings were of great influence to Richter. He argues that his paintings are unique because he was “doing it for a different reason, because the paintings have something different to say, and also look different.”

The crises in Richter’s personal life began to manifest in his artwork. The grey paintings began to become virtually indistinguishable from one another, a trend that culminated in eight identical paintings in 1976 that “became more and more impersonal and general until nothing was left.”¹¹⁴ Richter found himself in an artistic cul-de-sac; he needed to start anew, and color proved to be the key to his liberation. He pursued enormous, colorful abstractions characterized by deep saturation and high contrast values, based on detail photos of other works (Figure 20).

¹¹¹ Ibid. 209

¹¹² Ibid. 217

¹¹³ Ibid. 219

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 229

Richter acknowledges the influence Art Informel had on these paintings, as well as the influence they have had on all of his art; he stresses that his personal interest in Art Informel is based on the “arbitrariness and engagement” with the found object/image that follows from Duchamp.”¹¹⁵ His abstract work exists in the liminal space between creation and destruction; Richter paints and then removes paint by dragging a squeegee over the wet surface of the canvas. He continued painting this kind of “abstract picture” [*Abstrakes Bild*] for the rest of the 1970s, culminating with *Strich* (1979), a monumental expansion of a brushstroke completed for a vocational school in Soest, near Essen in the west if Germany, and his work from this period informs his more recent experimentations with abstraction (Figure 21).

Abstract pictures occupied much of Richter’s practice until 1983, when Richter began to paint still-lives influenced by the *memento mori*, the moralistic genre characteristic of the Italian and Dutch baroque (Figure 22). These works mask Richter’s fundamental fear of death through their gentle mood and art-historical significance. By painting beautiful, soft paintings, Richter was able “to take away the fear” of death.¹¹⁶ These contemplative ruminations on the inconstance of life starkly contrast with Richter’s monumental abstract pictures but offer a meditative foundation for his most politically charged undertaking, *18. Oktober 1977* of 1988.

Completed between February and November of 1988 *18. Oktober 1977* (Figure 23), which is the topic of this thesis, addresses the violence and division caused by the Red Army Faction (RAF), the left-extremist terrorist group active in the BRD between 1970 and 1977, whose leaders died mysteriously in Stammheim prison outside of Stuttgart on October 18, 1977. The deaths were officially ruled as suicides but remain unresolved and highly contentious to this day. Richter, working from images published in *Der Spiegel*, *Der Stern*, and broadcast on West

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 231

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 262

German television, revived his black-and-white photographic style for the first time since 48 *Portraits* in 1972, which is in itself a stylistic outlier within the artist's oeuvre. The fifteen works of the *October* Cycle, as the paintings are widely known, are modest in scale and feature a greater degree of sfumato than previously seen in Richter's figurative work. Richter was not sure that he could adequately handle the overtly political and highly divisive subject, even ten years after the conclusion of that chapter of German history. The paintings were debuted in an unceremonious opening at the Museum Haus Esters in Krefeld, a building designed by Mies van der Rohe, and were met with considerable outcry from the public. The paintings' provocative subject matter is unique in Richter's oeuvre, and his return to the photo-painting style, as well as his embrace of narrative, are also noteworthy. These issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

Since the late 1980s, Richter has assumed a fairly consistent rhythm of abstract work and landscape painting not unlike that present earlier in his career (Figure 24). Due to his status one of the world's preeminent contemporary artists, he has also been granted several large-scale public commissions for the Reichstag, the German parliament in Berlin, and for Cologne Cathedral, Germany's oldest, largest, and most grand Gothic cathedral (Figure 25). Richter took on another issue from contemporary history for a 2005 exhibition at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York: the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Richter completed twelve abstract paintings and four pencil drawings related to the attack but kept the most provocative of the works private. *September*, a small, partially abstracted painting depicts the silhouette of the twin towers, overcast in forms somewhere between plumes of smoke and Richter's characteristic abstraction (Figure 26). Richter hesitated to show *September*, not sure if the topic could be painted.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 352

Robert Storr views Richter as an artist driven by doubt about the vitality of his artistic vocation, but unconvinced by the “death of painting” discourse propagated by the avant-garde in the latter half of the twentieth century.¹¹⁸ His style is actually a kind of “no-style,” a chimeric show of evasion and evolution that engages with the whole history of art, from the canonical genres to painterly abstraction. Richter’s oeuvre is utterly unclassifiable and constantly changing, cementing his status as one of the most sophisticated and challenging painters of the modern age.

¹¹⁸ Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*: 6

Chapter III

***18. Oktober 1977* and the West German Mass Media**

In February 1988, nearly eleven years after the violent conclusion of the German Autumn and the apparent suicides of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe in Stammheim Prison on October 18, 1977, Gerhard Richter began work on the series of paintings on the Red Army Faction (RAF) that would become *18. Oktober 1977*. On this date, an unexpected and one-sided armistice effectively ended the RAF's armed struggle against the ostensible fascism and gleeful materialism of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Pandora's Box that had been opened with the jailbreak of Andreas Baader in 1970 was violently shut with the liberation of Lufthansa 181, the death of the ideological nucleus of the RAF in Stammheim, and the terror group's retaliatory execution of industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer. The supremacy of the state was reaffirmed in the aftermath of the German Autumn; where splinter groups claiming allegiance to the RAF continued a symbolic, toothless fight against the dominant order, the state prevailed. Order had been restored in the Republic, but the wounds of the past had not healed, and the pain of history had turned into the dull numbness of unprocessed emotion. Buildings still bore the scars of violence. Loved ones of the terrorists and their victims still walked the streets of German cities. The memory of the RAF was alive, but largely repressed.

18. Oktober 1977 is a cycle of fifteen paintings that portray key people and events related to the RAF, compressing its seven years of violent struggle into a single aesthetic experience. Each of the paintings is based on a found image that the artist sourced from media archives; many were widely published in West German magazines and newspapers as the media fervently fetishized of RAF's reign of terror and its reverberations. Richter revived his early grisaille photo-painting concept to take on the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon, unused for sixteen years since *48 Portraits* in 1972. The paintings that make up *18. Oktober 1977* feature a heavier degree

of the painterly *sfumato* with which Richter obscures the photographic foundations of his canvasses, burying RAF history in the form of original images underneath the thick smoke of paint. Richter's appropriation and obfuscation of found photographs detailing the RAF phenomenon separates these images from their fetishistic and ideological applications in the West German mass media, questioning the verity and objectivity of photography in relation to the political employment of these images during and after the RAF's armed struggle. Richter's recontextualization of RAF photos severs this painful chapter of recent German history from the ideology and sensationalism that dominated its reporting, allowing viewers to come to terms with the memory of the RAF from a place of intellectual distance rather than from a prescribed ideological position.

Richter began work on *18. Oktober 1977* in February 1988 and completed the cycle in November of that year. Of the fifteen canvasses, most are modest in size and all are cast in a dense haze, more exaggerated than that the artist used in his photo-paintings of the 1960s, the conceptual antecedent of *18. Oktober 1977*. The surfaces of the *Oktober* paintings are more painterly than Richter's earlier photo-based canvasses, and do not tend to recreate the palettes of the original images, some of which were in color. Richter elected to work not from the original images as they appeared in the media, but rather from high-contrast, black-and-white photocopies of these photos that eliminated the middle tones of the originals.¹¹⁹ The fifteen paintings have no set visual order; spanning the time period from 1970 until 1977, the *Oktober* cycle negates the real-world timeline of events of the armed struggle of the RAF and the German Autumn. Chronologically, the earliest painting of the cycle is *Jugendbildnis*, a youthful portrait of Ulrike Meinhof. Although Meinhof appears to be no older than a girl in Richter's canvas, the

¹¹⁹ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009): 283

original photo was actually taken in 1970 to promote the journalist's film, *Bambule*. The painting depicting the latest event is *Beerdigung*, which is also the largest of the fifteen canvasses, based on a news still taken at the joint burial of Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe on October 27, 1977 at Stuttgart's Dornhaldenfriedhof cemetery. Of the paintings in between, in chronological order, *Festnahme 1* and *2* depict the 1972 arrests of Baader, Meins, and Raspe in Frankfurt, based on stills from the live-televising of the event. *Gegenüberstellung 1, 2, and 3* portray Ensslin as she is walked into a police lineup, likely also from 1972, her photo taken with a hidden camera as she refused to be photographed. *Tote 1, 2, and 3* are adapted from forensic photos of Meinhof, cut down after her 1976 suicide. The remaining canvasses portray the events of the "Death Night" on October 18, 1977, the date Richter had chosen as the collective title of the works. *Erschossener 1* and *2* are based on postmortem photos of Baader in his cell.¹²⁰ *Zelle* and *Plattenspieler* are adapted from crime scene photos of Baader's cell and record player, respectively; the latter of which was allegedly used to conceal the pistol that ended Baader's life. *Erhängte* depicts Ensslin hanging from the bars of her cell, again based on a forensic photo taken the morning of October 18. The images Richter painted are all based on photos taken by media or police photographers; almost all of them were published in editions of *Der Stern*, a popular weekly newsmagazine, between June 1972 and October 1980, as well as in countless other publications.¹²¹

The RAF phenomenon is an unmistakably political subject for a self-declared apolitical artist like Richter. The artist had not undertaken such a partisan or topical subject before. Richter had previously addressed historical issues of political unambiguity, completing canvasses such as *Uncle Rudi* and *Herr Heyde* (1965) that address the collective German guilt for the atrocities of

¹²⁰ It is worth noting that, while the usual English titles of the *Erschossener* paintings are "Man Shot Down 1 and 2," the root verb from which *Erschossener* is derived, *erschießen*, denotes a death-by-shooting and is used to describe executions by firing squad.

¹²¹ Ibid. 106-111

the Second World War, but these works were separated from their subjects by decades and support an obvious political position. Although eleven years had passed since the conclusion of the German Autumn, the RAF was still a hotly debated topic in West Germany, and at the forefront of the collective consciousness; splinter groups still carried out acts in the name of the armed struggle, and former members of the faction published memoirs gleefully undermining the group's anti-capitalist aims.¹²² So, how did Richter reconcile the overtly political nature of the *Oktober* canvasses with his self-bestowed status as an apolitical painter? Robert Storr postulates that Richter, wracked by aesthetic and moral doubts about the state of painting in the supersized, profit-driven art world of the 1980s (which was divided between formalistic neo-Expressionist and subject-focused neo-Conceptualist work), ever hostile toward ideology, having been brought up in two oppressive states that each unsparingly used images to pursue totalizing ideologies, and ambivalent about the increasingly homologous artistic and political avant-gardes of Europe after the 1970s, found that “the contradictions enmeshing [the Baader-Meinhof Group] –in particular those issuing from the RAF’s apocalyptic absolutism –were a metaphor for those that ensnared him as an artist” at a point in time when he was caught between the pressures of the politics-obsessed art world of the 1970s and that of the voraciously capitalistic 1980s.¹²³ Richter’s dilemma was how to “imbue painting with meaning whose complexity could resist co-option by a sensation-hungry public while at the same time fend off the pressures to reduce painting to one or another of its dialectical components –form or content.”¹²⁴ The RAF allowed

¹²² Acts carried out in the name of the RAF continued sporadically until the official dissolution of the group in April 1998. Later generations of the faction continued to bomb U.S. military installations in Germany and targeted prominent members of government and industry, like Deutsche Bank chairman Alfred Herrhausen, who was assassinated in 1989. Conversely, members of the earliest waves and their allies bought into the media spectacle surrounding the RAF and its deeds and published memoirs, like Bommi Baumann, who offered a rough-and-ready retelling of his exploits, and Astrid Prohl, who published a collection of photographs detailing life underground.

¹²³ Ibid. 97-98

¹²⁴ Ibid. 99

Richter to confront a historically meaningful subject using modern formal innovations in the form of the resurrection of the historical canonic genres of painting, while ignoring the trends and pressures of the art world around him. Richter innovated figurative painting by treating a topical and controversial subject with the anachronistic genre of history painting; the *Oktober* cycle is at once an experiment in formalistic invention and a scathing criticism of the unyielding ideological commitment of its subject.

In preparation for the *Oktober* Cycle, Richter assiduously collected a large stock of images of the RAF from media archives, first in Hamburg from the collections of *Der Spiegel* and then later from those at *Der Stern*.¹²⁵ The RAF phenomenon was the dominant media spectacle of the Federal Republic in the 1970s and 1980s; the public was enraptured by *Fazination RAF*, and tabloids like *BILD* and more reputable publications such as *Der Spiegel* alike gleefully proliferated its scandal. There is a symbiotic relationship between terrorism and media: terrorism provides the press with scandal and shock, fodder for headlines; the media in turn fortifies the mythic image of terrorist groups through its reporting, inadvertently advancing the groups' agendas of anxiety and isolation. In her analysis of the German cultural obsession with the RAF, Maria Stehle tracks the changing media representations of the RAF leading up to and in the wake of the violent crescendo of the German Autumn.

The RAF's ubiquity in the media began with the Baader jailbreak in 1970. Press depictions of the terrorists were determined by editorial slant, current events, and national consensus. Early images of the nascent RAF portray the terrorists as revolutionary globetrotters, who enjoyed elusive movement across national borders and the thrill of life underground. Photos of sunbathing guerillas in Jordan lent an air of luxuriant exoticism to the terrorists' armed

¹²⁵ Ibid. 300

struggle. The idealistic illusion of the Bonny and Clyde-like terrorists, however, was altered after their arrests by reporting of the cruelty of their imprisonment. The group's media image was shifted by events like the death of Holger Meins, whose macabre deathbed photo circulated in the press, depicting the members RAF as "self-starving political prisoners tortured and mistreated" at the hand of the German state.¹²⁶

As the terror outside of Stammheim escalated with the 1975 kidnapping of Berlin mayoral candidate Peter Lorenz and the RAF raid on the German Embassy in Stockholm, the pendulum of public opinion swung in the other direction; West Germans felt threatened by left wing extremism and increasingly voiced support for a tougher state more capable of batting down terrorist threats. Following these events, *Der Spiegel* published statistics indicating that more West Germans supported a strong state, even at the expense of their own rights.¹²⁷ Public support, however, was galvanized behind the RAF after the suicide of Ulrike Meinhof in Stammheim, as citizens once again rallied against the state's unscrupulous treatment of the guerillas.

The relationship between the terrorist actors and the reactive state became increasingly ambivalent; the brazen daylight assassinations of Federal Prosecutor Siegfried Buback and Dresdner Bank CEO Jürgen Ponto in 1977 indicated to West Germans that RAF strategy had shifted from symbolic armed resistance against the state to targeted attacks directed at members of the political and economic elite. Calls for a tougher government were answered with worries about the decay of democracy.

¹²⁶ Stehle, Maria. "The Whole World Is in Uproar: Discourses of Fear, Instability, and Global Change in West German Media, 1977-1980" in *German Politics & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Autumn 2007): 31

¹²⁷ Ibid. 31

The violent tit-for-tat that was the German Autumn significantly shook the Federal Republic, making clear that neither the RAF nor the German government was willing to accede to the other's demands. Stehle, by way of Stuart Hall, argues that the events of the German Autumn initiated a "moral panic cycle" in the media, where the press propagated oscillating fears about both terrorism and the government's response to terrorism, which then converged and overlapped, what Wolfgang Kraushaar, one of the leading scholars of the '68er Bewegung and RAF, termed as a "neurotic reaction."¹²⁸

The reporting in the wake of October 18, 1977 was ambivalent about the successes of the Federal Republic and ironic about who the real victor was. In the immediate aftermath of October 18, *Der Spiegel* ironically quoted a *Wall Street Journal* article that praised the Germans for their "strong and human" response. *Der Spiegel's* dry reporting makes it difficult to tell who is being made fun of: the German government for its singular victory in the years of terror; the foreign press for suddenly declaring Germany's moral redemption in the wake of the atrocities of the Third Reich; or the German public for believing that the demonstrably ill-equipped state was capable of protecting them from terrorist threats. Concerns about the reaffirmed power of the police force in light of the bungling of the RAF situation prompted the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* to worry that further terrorist action would compel the state that had allowed weapons to be smuggled into Stammheim to escalate its antiterror campaign and further curtail the rights of its citizens. The outrageous incapacity of German law enforcement was frequently the target of the media, but the press continued to sow the scandal of the RAF into the 1980s.¹²⁹

Richter compiled one-hundred photos related to the RAF in *Atlas*, his self-curated body of source material, which has been an ongoing project in various forms since the early 1960s,

¹²⁸ Ibid. 33-34

¹²⁹ Ibid. 34-36

and one-hundred and two images comprise his working studio album for the *Oktober* Cycle. The images in *Atlas* are diffuse; many of them are noticeably blurred, photographs of photographs reprocessed with heightened contrast. While there is some cross-pollination of images between *Atlas* and the artist's studio album, the contents of the two compilations are not identical. In contrast to the images in *Atlas*, the studio album photos are sharper in focus, black-and-white copies of the photos the artist found in *Der Spiegel* and *Stern*. Richter originally intended to complete a comprehensive study of the RAF, from its origins to its demise, highlighting the terrorists, their victims, and the members of law enforcement who investigated them, but he eventually narrowed his focus to the main figures and major events leading up to the so-called "Death Night" in Stammheim.¹³⁰ The images that Richter did paint depict members of the RAF in isolation, or material traces of their lives in Stammheim—a cell dominated by a bookcase, a record player, and later three caskets. Richter's canvasses are not painterly accounts of history, but rather individualized confrontations with it. And present in each of these images is death.

In order to approach Richter's *Oktober* paintings, it is best to start with the artist's own remarks. In preparation for the cycle's debut at the Mies van der Rohe-designed Museum Haus Esters in Krefeld, Richter pithily summarized his work:

What have I painted? Three times Baader shot. Three times Ensslin hanged. Three times the head of the dead Meinhof after they cut her down. Once the dead Meins. Three times Ensslin, neutral (almost like pop stars). Then a big, unspecific burial—a cell dominated by a bookcase—a silent, gray record player—a youthful portrait of Meinhof, sentimental in a bourgeois way—twice the arrest of Meins, forced to surrender to the clenched power of the state. All the pictures are dull, gray, mostly very blurred, diffuse. Their presence is the

¹³⁰ Storr, Robert. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2000): 101

horror of the hard-to-bear refusal to answer, to explain, to give an opinion. I am not so sure whether the pictures ask anything: they provoke contradictions through their hopelessness and desolation; their lack of partisanship. Ever since I have been able to think, I have known that every rule and opinion –insofar as either is ideologically motivated—is false, a hindrance, a menace, or a crime.¹³¹

What is first striking about Richter's preparatory comments are the mentions of canvasses that were not included in the completed cycle. Of the "three times Ensslin hanged," only one made the final cut; likewise, only two of the three images of "Baader shot" were included. The painting of "the dead Meins" was omitted altogether. This composition, however, serves as the foundation of Richter's *Abstraktes Bild* of 1988, bits of pieces of Meins repressed underneath the chaotic vortex of abstraction (Figure 27). One of the two discarded paintings of Ensslin, moreover, shines through in *Decke*, also from 1988 (Figure 28). Richter's disfiguration of the referents of these images is in itself a contribution to the overall meaning of the *Oktober* cycle in that it finds new ways to make these images visible, or invisible, a concept that is central to Richter's work as an artist. Robert Storr compares Richter's selective inclusion and omission of RAF images to the selective editing of film stills in the editing rooms of movie studios. While these images "may in themselves be of great interest or beauty," they "detract rather than add to the integrity of the realized whole."¹³²

Erschossener 1 and 2, the canvasses depicting "Baader shot," are based on one forensic photo taken by police on the morning of October 18 (Figures 29—31). They cast the corpse of the urban guerilla in an indeterminate haze that reactively omits the gruesome details preserved in the original photo, recoiling from its naked brutality. Baader lays dead across the canvas, an

¹³¹ Ibid. 95

¹³² Ibid. 96

indistinct piece of furniture and a black mass, a trace of the pool of blood in the source photo, gather around his head. His death is unheroic; Richter's paintings have drawn critical comparisons to David's *Death of Marat* (1793) and Manet's *Dead Torreador* (1864) for their unidealized treatment of the terrorist's death. Richter highlights or neglects the details of each canvas differently. *Erschossener 1* is crisper than its counterpart and is cropped in such a way as to exclude the pistol in Baader's hand, which is present just outside the frame. The artist also tones down the gruesome pool of blood around the terrorist's head. *Erschossener 2* exaggerates the neutralization of the macabre by cropping the image even closer and further submerges the original image into the depths of Richter's haze, cleansing it of the fetishized shock of the original photo.

Erhängte (Figures 32), the only one of the three paintings of "Ensslin hanged" to make the final cut, is a ghastly vignette of the dead Ensslin as she dangles from the bars of her cell window. Like in the *Erschossener* canvasses, Richter subdues the horror of the original photo (Figure 33) by bathing this painting in an indistinct blur but draws the eye to Ensslin's limp, lifeless body by fusing the curtain at the left and the floor below into a large black framing device. Ensslin is pulled into the void by the gravitational pull of the black mass below as the viewer peeks behind the terrible curtain into her cell.

Tote 1, 2, and 3 (Figures 35—37) show "the head of the dead Meinhof after they cut her down." The three *Tote* paintings are based on a single forensic photo (Figure 34), taken after Meinhof's suicide in 1976, and progressively dematerialize the original photo, blurring its details to cleanse the image of its grotesque horror. The postmortem photo of the journalist-turned-extremist is closely cropped and direct; Richter recreates its composition, but with each painting Meinhof retreats further into the distance and progressively into obscurity. *Tote 1*, the largest of

the three canvasses at 62 x 73cm, is also the most distinct of the group, recreating much of the detail of the original photo, specifically the black ligature mark left on Meinhof's neck from the noose she used to commit suicide, in striking black-and-white contrast. *Tote 2* is slightly smaller at 62 x 62cm and immerses the original image in a greater degree of *sfumato*. The black burn on Meinhof's neck is lighter, but still present. *Tote 3* is the smallest of the three canvasses at 35 x 40cm and features the greatest intensity of Richter's painterly smoke. Meinhof is smallest and most distant in this iteration; she and the forensic detail of the postmortem photo both dissolve into the grey haze of the background. Richter uses his blur to erase the graphic details of photograph as it was published in *Stern*.¹³³ The *Tote* subgroup can be interpreted as a visualization of a fading memory; with each canvas, the memory of Meinhof becomes progressively smaller, more distant, and more diffuse.

Gegenüberstellung 1, 2, and 3 (Figures 41—43) portray Ensslin as she is walked into a police lineup shortly after her arrest in 1972 (Figures 38—40). These canvasses are markedly different than those that precede them; Richter remarks that Ensslin appears “neutral,” as though she were a “pop star.”¹³⁴ Indeed, the three paintings of the Swabian pastor's daughter show her as she recognizes the gaze of the camera, returns it with a smile, and looks away, in much the same way a celebrity would greet the paparazzi. By this point in time Ensslin had certainly achieved a high level of celebrity, if not notoriety; the RAF was the de facto media obsession of the Federal Republic and held the nation breathless for the better part of a decade. Images of the group circulated alongside photos of celebrities in the country's tabloids and illustrated magazines. The paintings simulate a succession of movements, as if they were spliced from a newsreel. Richter isolated Ensslin against the grey background of the original photo and cropped

¹³³ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 284

¹³⁴ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*: 95

the images, in which Ensslin is seen standing in awkward full-length, depicting only the terrorist's face and torso as she looks up, smiles, and look away. *Gegenüberstellung*, or confrontation, seems to be a strange title for these candid tabloid snapshots, but in fact Ensslin was unaware of the presence of the hidden camera and had refused to be photographed while in custody.¹³⁵

Beerdigung (Figure 45) is the largest composition of the *Oktober Cycle*, depicting the group burial of Baader, Ensslin, and Raspe in Stuttgart's Dornhaldenfriedhof cemetery on October 27, 1977 (Figure 44). The terrorists' funeral was a hotly contested matter in the wake of October 18; many West Germans believed that they should not be given a proper burial, let alone alongside upstanding Germans. The terrorists' burial was only allowed by Stuttgart mayor Manfred Rommel, son of the German tactician Erwin Rommel, who, like Sophocles' Antigone, advocated for the proper burial of the terrorists, that "all enmity should cease after death."¹³⁶ *Beerdigung* is based on a news still of the terrorists' funeral; the canvas is a largely unintelligible mass caught in a violent windswept blur. Three large white caskets solemnly occupy the center of the composition; their immense gravity attracts the surrounding crowd. Richter flattens the gathered mass and lowers the horizon, bound by an inarticulate ribbon of trees. One of the trees, however, stands out—a simple vertical mass with horizontal branches, reminiscent of a cross. No such element exists in the original photo; many art historians theorize that this inclusion is Richter's. *Beerdigung* has often been compared to Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* (1849-1850) because of its friezelike mass and solemn mood of benediction. Richter rebuffed the scholarly theories about the numerous similarities of his canvasses to important works from the pantheon

¹³⁵ Danchev, Alex. "The Artist and the Terrorist, or the Paintable and the Unpaintable: Gerhard Richter and the Baader-Meinhof Group" in *Alternatives: Global, Political, Local*, Vol. 35, No. 2. (Apr-Jun 2010): 100

¹³⁶ Aust, Stefan. *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*. (London: The Bodley Head, 2008): 268

of art history, namely compositions by David, Manet, and Courbet, stating that “one has half of art history in one’s head, and of course that sort of thing does find its way in involuntarily.”¹³⁷

The next canvasses, *Zelle* and *Plattenspieler*, (Figures 48—49) are material portraits of Baader’s life in Stammheim, based on color photos taken by prison authorities (Figures 46—47) in the aftermath of “Death Night.” *Zelle* depicts Baader’s cell; the composition is dominated by the terrorist’s overflowing bookshelf, counterbalanced by a dark mass of clothing hanging on the left, perhaps a jacket. This amorphous black mass mirrors the silhouette of Ensslin’s corpse in *Erhängte*, creating a startling illusion of equivalency between the two canvasses. *Plattenspieler* portrays Baader’s silent record player, which he apparently used to conceal the pistol with which he was killed; Eric Clapton’s *There’s One in Every Crowd* is on the needle.¹³⁸ *Plattenspieler* is a startlingly mute representation of a record player, a *memento mori* minus removed from art history. Its placid silence is reminiscent of the skull and candle works Richter painted in the early 1980s, and when considered in relation to RAF history, *Plattenspieler* is ironically silent: if “the gun speaks,” after October 18, it, like the record player, fell silent.

Jugendbildnis (Figure 51) is a portrait, “sentimental in a bourgeois way,” of Meinhof. Meinhof appears much younger in Richter’s painting than she does in the source image, a 1970 publicity photo (Figure 50) taken to promote her film on girls’ homes, *Bambule*.¹³⁹ By this point in time, Meinhof, age thirty-six, had become a nationally recognized journalist, married and divorced, raised twin daughters, and was about to leave the comforts of “bourgeois” life behind. Richter considerably softened the composition, especially Meinhof’s demanding gaze in the original. Elger notes that *Jugendbildnis* presents the only subject not directly related to the

¹³⁷ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*: 123

¹³⁸ Saltzman, Lisa. “Gerhard Richter’s Stations of the Cross: On Martyrdom and Memory in Postwar German Art” in *Oxford Art Journal*. Vol. 28, No. 1 (2005): 29

¹³⁹ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*: 106

RAF's armed struggle.¹⁴⁰ Other scholars have noted that Meinhof is the only subject to whom Richter gives a backstory, a prehistory.¹⁴¹ Paired with the other depictions of Meinhof, *Jugendbildnis* provides an innocent "before" to the shocking "after" of the *Tote* canvasses. Storr argues that the sentimentality with which Richter imbues this canvas is an "antidote-in-kind to the true poison of tabloid kitsch" that dominated reporting on the RAF.¹⁴² The youthful Meinhof of *Jugendbildnis* contrasts sharply with the ruthless *femme fatale* she was portrayed as in the media.

Festnahme 1 and 2 (Figures 53—54), the final elements of the *Oktober* cycle, recreate the arrest of Holger Meins. These canvasses are based on frames from the live-televising of the 1972 arrests of Baader, Raspe, and Meins outside of their garage bomb factory in Frankfurt's Hofeckweg (Figure 52). They are heavily obfuscated; Meins is reduced to an indistinguishable shadow as he squares off against the police's armored vehicle. In the first *Festnahme* canvas the armored car is directly facing Meins at a very close distance as he raises his hands in "surrender to the clenched power of the state." *Festnahme 2* is based on a successive still, as Meins strips naked in symbolic submission to the police, the armored car, accepting his surrender, retreated slightly.

Richter's comments following the description of his canvasses reveal the emotional destitution behind the paintings. He aims not to assuage the ever-contentious aura surrounding the RAF but rather to accentuate it and to add to it by bathing its history in uncertainty and indecision: "Their presence is the horror of the hard-to-bear refusal to answer to explain, to give an opinion." Richter takes no stance on the RAF; in fact, he invalidates all possible stances on

¹⁴⁰ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 284

¹⁴¹ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*: 106

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 106

the issue by reducing the images to faintly recognizable memories of memories, far removed from the salacious sensationalism and fervent ideology that enraptured the German public behind or in opposition to the group. The RAF phenomenon was a highly controversial issue both as it unfolded and in the years afterward; by dissolving its memory in painterly turpentine, Richter removes the patina of ideology and, although caustically, exposes the underlying substance the terrorists' error: their humanity.

"I have known that every rule and opinion –insofar as either is ideologically motivated—is false, a hindrance, a menace, or a crime," concluded Richter his remarks on *18. Oktober 1977*. Having been raised under the despotic ideological regime of the National Socialists for the first thirteen years of his life, then to live and work the next sixteen under the political program of the Soviet-controlled German Democratic Republic (DDR) as a propaganda maker at the Dresden Hochschule, Richter has been deeply immunized against ideology in all forms. But he has also been intimately acquainted with it. He is aware of seductive power of ideology and grudgingly acceptant of its existence and inevitability; he deems it unacceptable, however, because ideological commitment is all too human. The inherent overcompensation of ideology, Richter believes, most often leads to immutable error and even irreparable violence.¹⁴³ The RAF phenomenon epitomizes this error. Richter has stated that, having been raised under the repressive ideology of the DDR, he had no sympathy for the RAF, although he admired their conviction; he was impressed by the terrorists' "energy, their uncompromising determination and their absolute bravery."¹⁴⁴ Having spent the first thirty years of his life under the oppressive yoke of totalizing regimes, however, he felt that he could not condemn the State for the way it quelled

¹⁴³ Ibid. 98

¹⁴⁴ Storr, Robert. *Gerhard Richter: Doubt and Belief in Painting*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003): 119

the RAF's rebellion; he had known "other, more ruthless ones."¹⁴⁵ Richter identifies with the idealism of the RAF, but not its ideals, which he believes are ultimately misguided. He paints the terrorists not as heroic, but as "desperate and deluded."¹⁴⁶ Richter believes that the members of the RAF had become victims of their own ideology, not of the ideology of the left or right but of the corrupting influence of ideology proper.¹⁴⁷

Dietmar Elger, Richter's archivist and the author of the artist's official biography, writes that the artist's heavy use of blurring neutralizes the "graphic brutality" of the photographs that were published in the media, consumed by the West German public with a sense of rapacious voyeurism. Richter had previously blurred found photographs in order to equalize the surface of the canvas and to obscure its referent, making "everything equally important and equally unimportant," in the process removing excess information.¹⁴⁸ Richter's blurring, however, is also a visual expression of a philosophical position that rejects the possibility of definitive truth, depersonalizing the situations presented. Richter's position is one of "imprecision, uncertainty, transience, [and] incompleteness." By repainting and decontextualizing photographs of the RAF in his uncertain haze, Richter removes the images and the memory of the RAF from the ideology that accompanied its reporting, which presented the RAF phenomenon in a black-and-white binary of moral good and evil, political left and right, and revolutionary and reactionary. Richter introduces the painful memory of the RAF to the uncertain grey space, the "welcome and only possible equivalent of indifference, noncommitment, absence of opinion, [and] absence of shape" and forces viewers to reconsider their own recollection of history.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 119

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 119

¹⁴⁷ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 307

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 86

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 217

Richter's *Oktober* paintings, like the artist's earlier photo-based paintings from the 1960s, exist in the uncertain interstices between two contemporary media, painting and photography. Painting is the pictorial forbearer to photography, and photography's contemporary hegemony is often viewed as patricidal. The two media treat history differently however, and by exploiting the weaknesses of each, Richter is able to form one stronger cohesive whole. Richter is critically aware of painting's tenuous position in contemporary art; he has always defended his preferred medium and battled against its critics, who, like early proponents of photography, prematurely presaged the death of painting. Richter is also cognizant of the ubiquity and power of photography in the modern world. Having come of age in the aesthetically luddite DDR, he was met by an unfamiliar spectacle of media and consumption on arrival in the West and quickly learned to harness the power of photography for his own practice. Richter does not take as hardline a stance as Baudelaire but utilizes photography in his practice as a "humble servant to... art" by using photographs as the foundation for his figurative work.¹⁵⁰ Richter either bases his paintings on found images or images that he had taken himself. Richter is critical of photography's mostly unchallenged authority in the modern world and believes that we are too trusting of a medium that can be frequently made to lie. By painting from photographs, Richter claims the apparently veristic photographic gaze for painting and rescues the paternal medium from its ostensibly impending death.

Roland Barthes wrote that "death is the eidos of photography," its essential substance.¹⁵¹ All photos are *memento mori* in that they attest to the mortality and vulnerability of the subject; all photographs testify to time's unrelenting march in ways that painting cannot.¹⁵² Barthes

¹⁵⁰ Charles Baudelaire. "On Photography," in Trachtenberg, Alan. *Classic Essays on Photography* (Sedgwick: Leete's Island Books, 1980)

¹⁵¹ Barthes. *Camera Lucida*: 15

¹⁵² Sontag, Susan. *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 2009): 15

writes that, while photography is the aesthetic descendent of painting, it touches art by way of theater because of its connection to death. Actors originally separated themselves from the greater community by “playing the role of the dead,” assuming the simultaneous statuses of life and death.¹⁵³ Barthes finds that photography, through all its effort to recreate life, to be “lifelike,” is a kind of primeval theater, which the “motionless and the made-up face” reveal the dead.¹⁵⁴ Photography imitates the dead through its undying recreations of the living. Photography leaves no space for the contemplation of death. Because “the circle is closed” and the image is eternally static, the photograph is a “denatured theater” where the contemplation and reflection of death are impossible.¹⁵⁵ Painting, conversely, opens up the “experiential space” that photography excludes.¹⁵⁶ Painting takes time to make and time is an elemental part of painting, worn eternally on the surface of the canvas, whereas a photograph is made instantaneously and forever static. Storr writes that Richter’s *Oktober* paintings introduce a contradiction between “painting’s slowness and photography’s speed, between the viewer’s condition, which allows one to spend time, and that of the subject for whom time has ceased to exist.” This space is defined not by our association with the dead but by “our differences and distance” from the dead subject.¹⁵⁷ Death can be contemplated only in the distance between time and eternity. In painting photos, Richter restored temporality to images of death and opened up the experiential space that photography eliminates.

A photograph is not simply an image, but rather a trace of the real, “directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask.”¹⁵⁸ Thus the referent of photography is not the same as

¹⁵³ Barthes. *Camera Lucida*: 31

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 32

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 90

¹⁵⁶ Storr. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*: 104

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 104

¹⁵⁸ Sontag. *On Photography*: 154

the referent of other systems of representation. It is not the “optionally real” referent of painting or sculpture, which may or may not have existed, and may or may not be embellished by the artist, but rather the “necessarily real” thing that has been placed before the lens; without the existence of its referent, there is no photograph.¹⁵⁹ Photographs can be treated as “narrowly selective transparencies” of the real, versus the “narrowly selective interpretations” of the other fine arts.¹⁶⁰ With photography, it is impossible to deny that the referent had appeared before the lens at the time the photo was taken; it is pure reference, a petrified representation of a moment in time that has ceased to exist experientially but continues to exist in a state of infinite reproducibility as a photograph.¹⁶¹ Barthes writes that the *noeme*, or essence, of photography is “*that-has-been*,” that the photograph is an intractable representation of the real, frozen and unchanging in time; it is simultaneously the signifier and the sign, and its essence is to “ratify what it represents.”¹⁶²

The moment of photography records and separates the signifier from its sign, but this separation attests to the sign’s irrefutable presence, already deferred as the shutter slid closed. Photography, however, cannot restore the past, that which has been abolished by time and distance; there’s “nothing Proustian in a photograph.”¹⁶³ It can only attest that what is pictured existed.¹⁶⁴ The photos of the RAF that Richter based his paintings on do not restore the back-and-forth antagonism that oppressed Germany during the RAF’s reign of terror nor the terrorists’ unyielding commitment to their doomed revolution; it can only attest that these things *have been*, that at one point in the past there was a group of six that waged war on a nation of sixty million.

¹⁵⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*): 76

¹⁶⁰ Sontag, *On Photography*: 6

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 76

¹⁶² Ibid. 77, 85

¹⁶³ Ibid. 82

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 82

Photography is authentication in and of itself. It cannot invent, only record. As such, a photograph is a complete image. Nothing can be added to it that was not already in the camera's gaze at the moment of exposure. Its action is already concluded. In this sense, the photograph is without future. It is the past preserved as present; the incorruptible vestige of time passed. Photos, however, have the unique quality of hindsight. Looking back at the source image of *Jugendbildnis*, the portrait taken of Meinhof to promote her film *Bambule*, the viewer sees on the surface a young journalist but, with the passage of time, knows the fate that Meinhof will face: that she will conduct a doomed armed struggle against her country and die in the process. Barthes calls this the *stigmatum* of a photo, "a product of Time" and the "lacerating emphasis" of the *that-has-been* of photography.¹⁶⁵ The viewer knows that, although she is pictured as living and youthful in the photo, Meinhof will die; "this will be, and this has been."¹⁶⁶ Death is contained within the photo and is clearly visible to the contemporary viewer.

Although photographs are innate traces of the real, they are necessarily mute. They cannot create a moral position and can only reinforce one. Sontag writes that the "appropriate context of feeling and attitude" must already exist within public opinion in order for a photograph to make any real impact on it; "a relevant political consciousness" dictates the moral and political effectivity of a photo.¹⁶⁷ West German media relentlessly coopted images of the RAF to scandalize and appeal to citizens' political and moral sensibilities about the group that were already formed or in the process of being formed. News outlets took advantage of these sensibilities, either for or against the terrorists, to make ideological gains and to sell media based on ideology. Every RAF attack was followed by a *BILD* headline exaggerating the casualties and

¹⁶⁵ Barthes. *Camera Lucida*: 96

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 96

¹⁶⁷ Sontag. *On Photography*: 17-19

a partner piece from *Der Spiegel* condemning *BILD*'s sensationalism. Furthermore, the context in which a photo is seen also has an effect on its meaning. Photos of Baader's corpse or record player take on new meaning when published in the left-leaning pages of *Der Spiegel* or in those of the right-wing *BILD*. Viewers associate a prescribed ideological stance to the photos depending on their setting, to say nothing of the reporting that accompanied the photos. By way of Wittigstein, Sontag argues that the meaning of a photo is its use; an identical photo of Ensslin's corpse takes on a different meaning in the pages of the left-leaning *Süddeutsche Zeitung* than it does in the Springer-owned daily paper *Die Welt*.¹⁶⁸

Because a photo shows and does not say, an infinite number of meanings may be attributed to an individual image. The photograph is mute; "it talks through the mouth of the text written beneath it," wrote Godard about his 1972 film, *A Letter to Jane*. The inclusion of a caption, and by extension the reporting that accompanies news photos like those published in *Stern*, assigns meaning and ideology to otherwise mute images. Walter Benjamin advocated that photographers include captions to their photos in order to create an artform which "literarises the relationships of life," rescuing them from "the reportage of cliché which forms only verbal associations in the reader" and simple approximation.¹⁶⁹ For Benjamin, photography's muteness is its greatest shortcoming, and necessarily enables the attribution of myriad meanings to singular images. Sontag notes the importance of the caption but acknowledges its transient interchangeability; she writes that "the caption-glove slips on and off so easily. It cannot prevent any argument or moral plea which a photograph (or set of photographs) is intended to support from being undermined by the plurality of meanings that every photograph carries."¹⁷⁰ For

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 106

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin, Walter. "A Short History of Photography" in *Screen* 13, no. 1 (1972): 25

¹⁷⁰ Sontag. *On Photography*: 109

Sontag, the photographic caption's greatest failure is that it cannot protect the meaning of the photo from the myriad other interpretations which may inevitably be applied to it. Richter views the profound ability of language to alter the meaning of images with great skepticism. None of the paintings that make up the *Oktober* cycle are equipped with captions, which Richter had used on previous occasions throughout his career. *Herr Heyde* of 1965, which portrays Nazi obstetrician and head of the *Aktion T4* sterilization program Werner Heyde reveals the identity of the otherwise incognito war criminal to the viewer through the inclusion of the newspaper's caption. Richter correctly believed he needed to contextualize this canvas verbally in order to make its subject known; Heyde, who had operated a medical practice in the BRD totally unknown until his outing as a Nazi and subsequent suicide in 1959 would have been again anonymous had Richter not exposed him as the subject of his canvas.¹⁷¹ Richter's omission of photographic captions in the fifteen canvasses of *18. Oktober 1977* can be attributed to the ubiquity of the images in the West German press, which would be immediately recognizable to most German, but it is also a refusal to make a statement on the canvasses, instead forcing the viewer to reconsider his recollection of the RAF phenomenon. The *Oktober* cycle, in Richter's words, is the "hard-to-bear refusal to answer, to explain, to give an opinion." By refusing to give an opinion, Richter negates the galaxy of reports and interpretations on the RAF offered by the West German media.

The act of appropriating and obscuring media images is a negation of the objective authority of photography and an admonition against its inherent inclination towards ideological applications. Richter's blur references the inexact relationship between an object and its perception; it is also a visual expression of the technical limitations of photography. He mistrusts

¹⁷¹ Elger. *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*: 131

direct sensory experience and utilizes the assumed credibility of photography to expose the complexity of reality and the fallibility of human perception. By obfuscating supposedly objective photographic images, Richter questions both the verity of photography and our willingness to trust it. In *18. Oktober 1977*, Gerhard Richter reclaims photographic depictions of the members and exploits of the Red Army Faction in order to separate the painful memory of left-extreme terrorism in Germany from the sensationalism and ideology that was inherent in the reporting of these events. Although photographs are traces of the real and attest unequivocally that the photographed subject existed, they are inherently mute, and therefore contain a multitude of possible interpretations. Thus, photos are naturally prime for the imprinting of ideology. By isolating the memory of the RAF obscuring the surfaces of found photographs underneath his grisaille haze, Richter encourages viewers to reconsider their memories of German terrorism in the 1970s, separate from the ideological interpretations of events present in the contemporary media. When asked if it was difficult to confront images of death during the six months he worked on the *Oktober* cycle, Richter responded: “It was hard. But it was connected to work. I didn’t have to look at the dead inactively, I could do something. As I paint the dead, I am occupied like a gravedigger.”¹⁷² By exhuming the unhappily repressed memory of the RAF, Richter raises the image of death to the world and inquires its substance.

¹⁷² Storr. *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*: 140

Appendix of Images
Chapter II



Figure 1: Gerhard Richter. *Lebensfreude*. Deutsches Hygienemuseum, Dresden. 1956.



Figure 2: Roy Lichtenstein. *Refrigerator*. 1962.



Figure 3: Gerhard Richter. *Party*. 1962.



Figure 4: Gerhard Richter. *Tisch*. 1962.



Figure 5: Gerhard Richter. *Portrait Schmela*. 1964.



Figure 6: Gerhard Richter. *Familie am Meer*. 1964.



Figure 7: Gerhard Richter. *Klorolle*. 1965.



Figure 8: Gerhard Richter. *Frau, die Treppe herabgehend*. 1965.



Figure 9: Gerhard Richter. *Ema (Akt auf einer Treppe)*. 1966.



Figure 10: Gerhard Richter. *Tante Marianne*. 1965



Werner Heyde im November 1959, als er sich den Behörden stellte.

Figure 11: Gerhard Richter. *Herr Heyde*. 1965.



Figure 12: Gerhard Richter. *Onkel Rudi*. 1965.

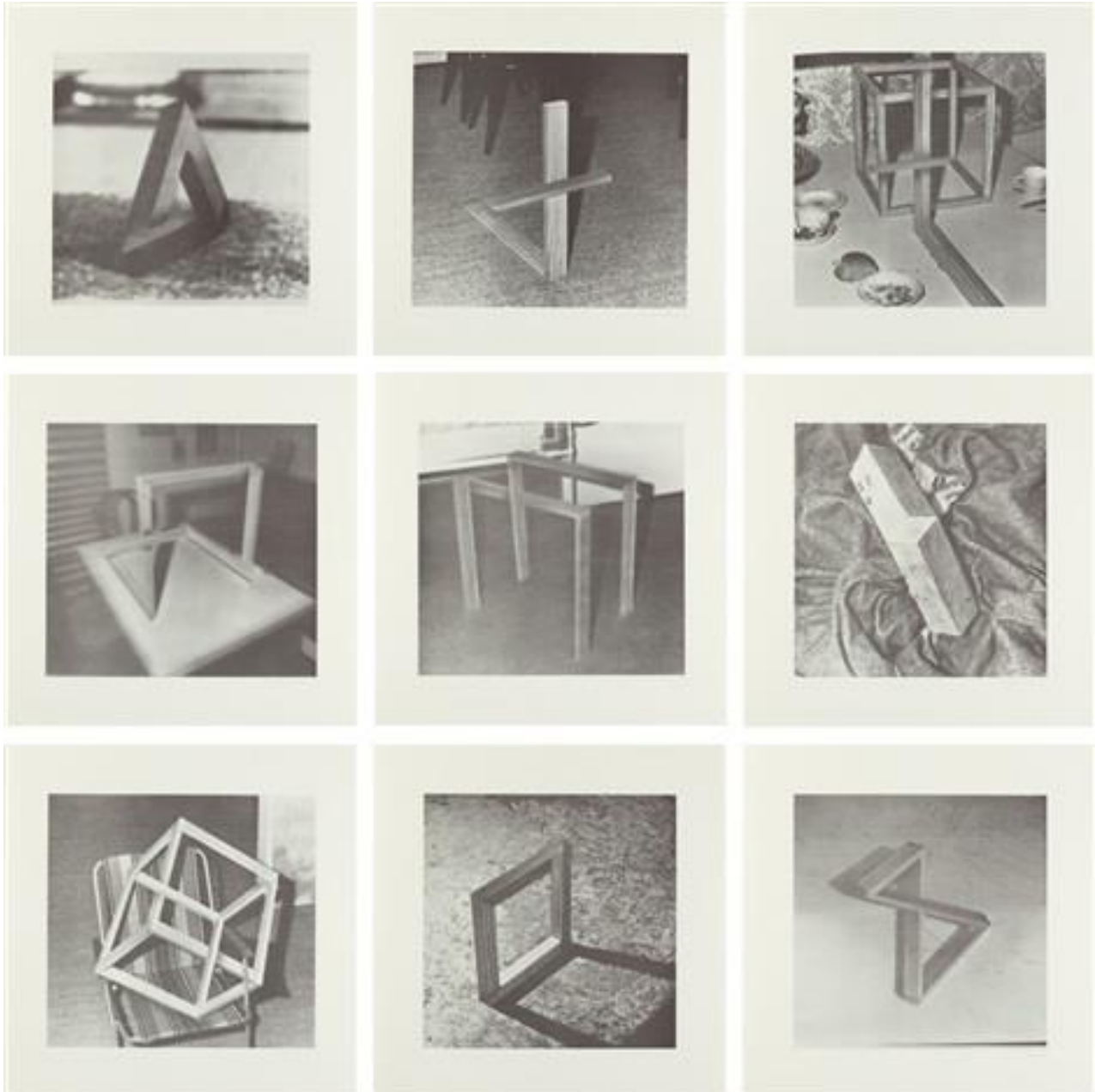


Figure 13: Gerhard Richter. *9 Objekte*. 1969.



Figure 14: Gerhard Richter. *192 Farben*. 1966.



Figure 15: Gerhard Richter. *Korsika (Sonne)*. 1968.



Figure 16: Gerhard Richter. *Atlas*, Panel 9. 1969—Present



Figure 17: Gerhard Richter. *48 Portraits (Thomas Mann)*. 1971—1972.



Figure 18: *48 Portraits* in situ at the 1972 Venice Biennale.

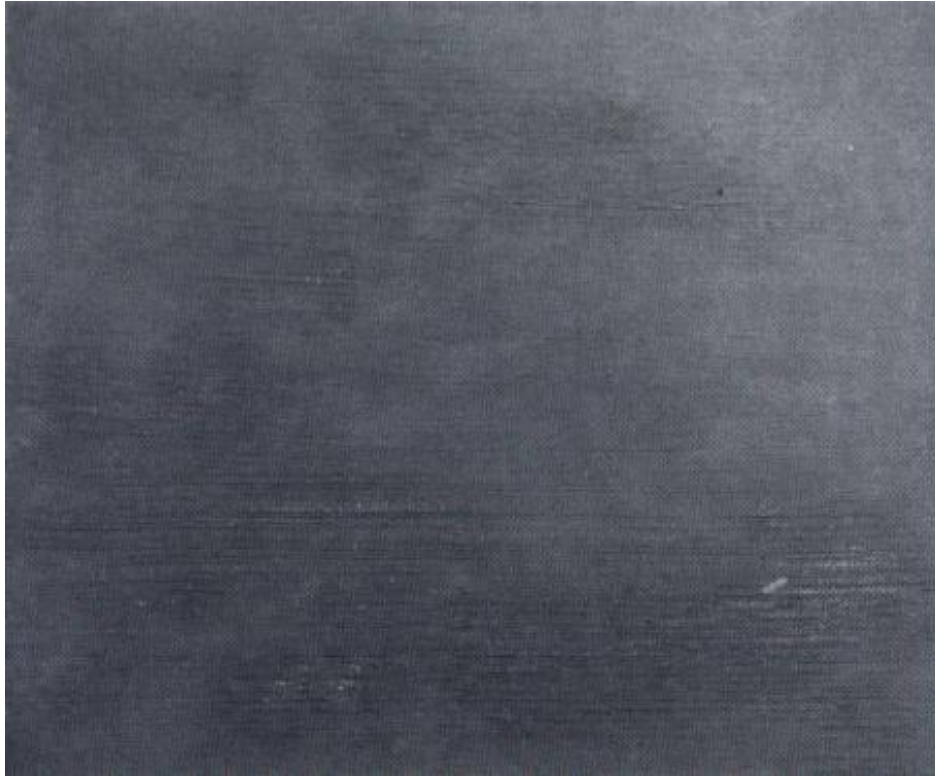


Figure 19: Gerhard Richter. *Grau*. 1973.



Figure 20: Gerhard Richter. *Abstraktes Bild*. 1976.



Figure 21: Gerhard Richter. *Strich*. 1979.

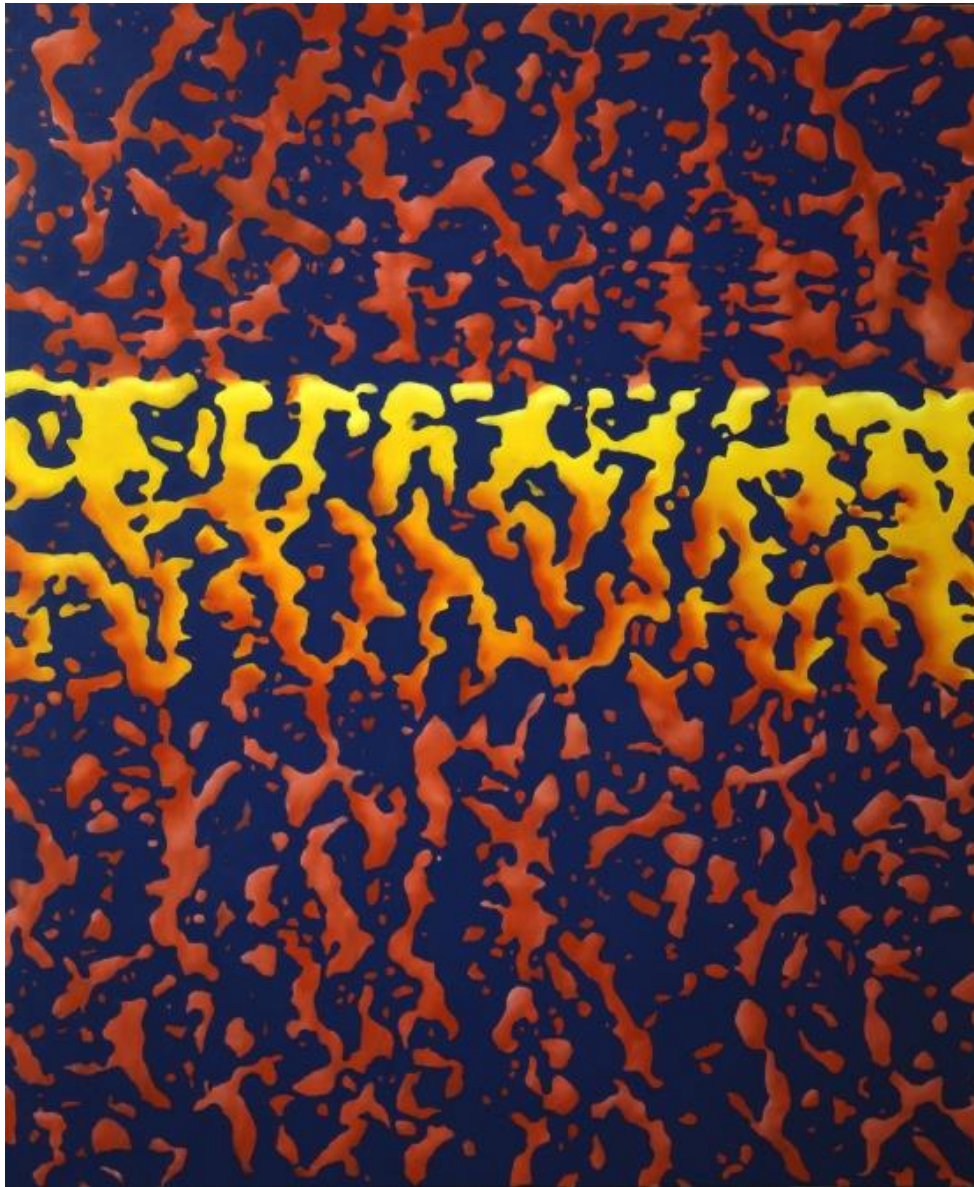


Figure 21.a: Gerhard Richter. *Strich* (detail). 1979.



Figure 22: Gerhard Richter. *Schädel mit Kerze*. 1983.



Figure 23: Gerhard Richter. *Plattenspieler*, from *18. Oktober 1977*. 1988.



Figure 24: Gerhard Richter. *Abstraktes Bild*. 1999.

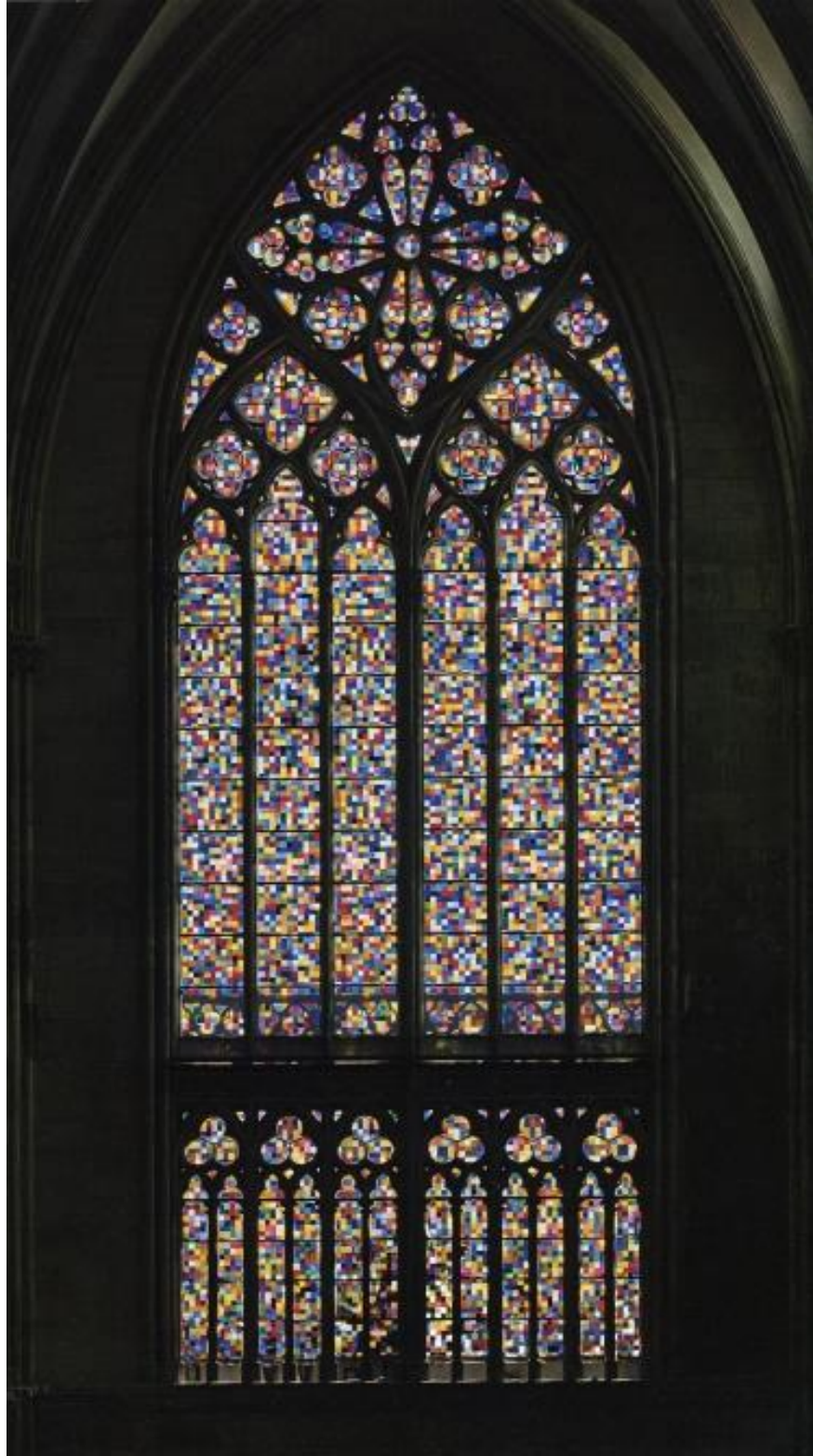


Figure 25: Gerhard Richter. *Kölner Domfenster*. South Transept, Cologne Cathedral. Cologne, DE. 2007.



Figure 26: Gerhard Richter. *September*. 2005.

Chapter III



Figure 27: Gerhard Richter. *Abstraktes Bild (H.M.)*. 1988.

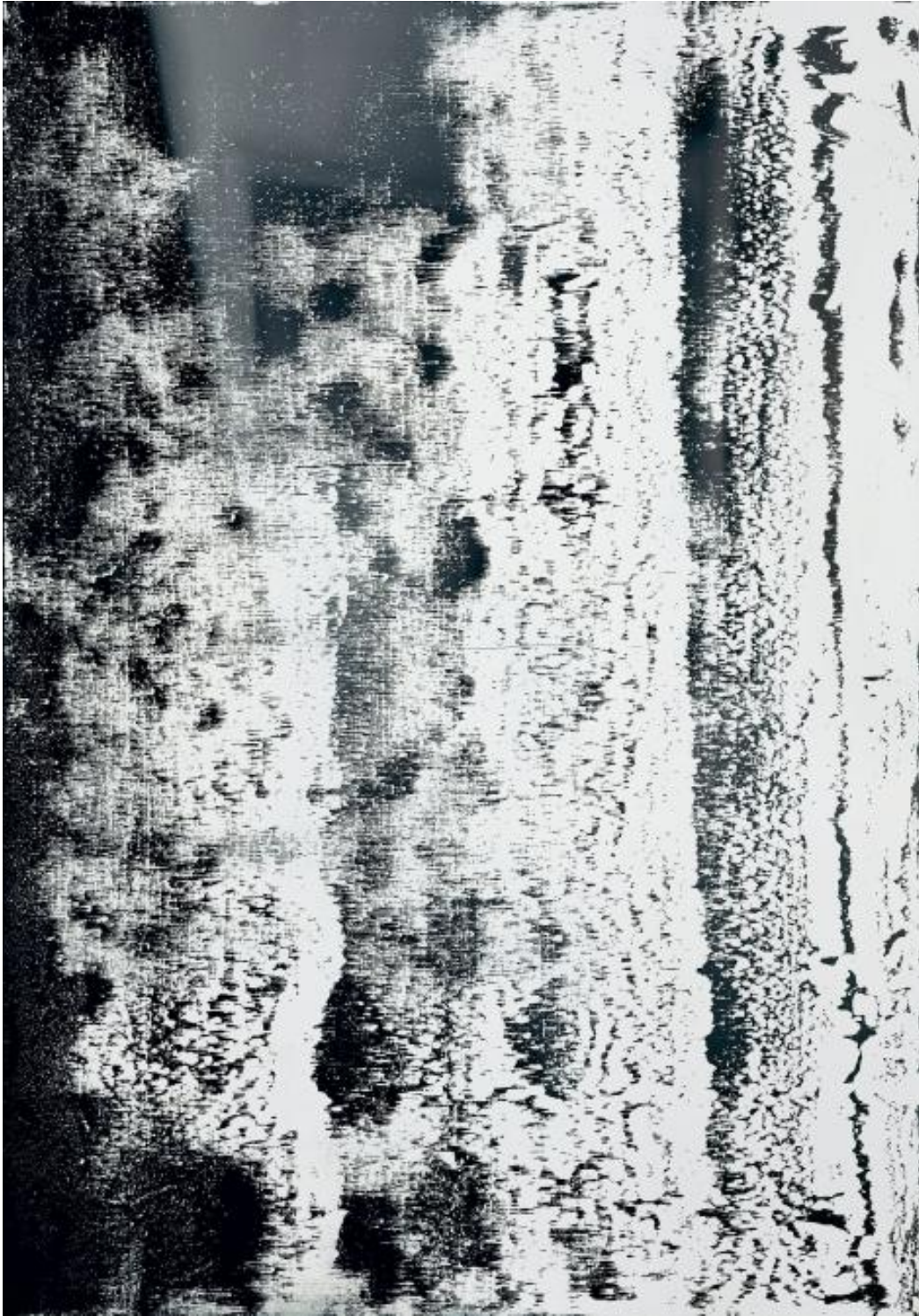


Figure 28: Gerhard Richter. *Decke*. 1988.

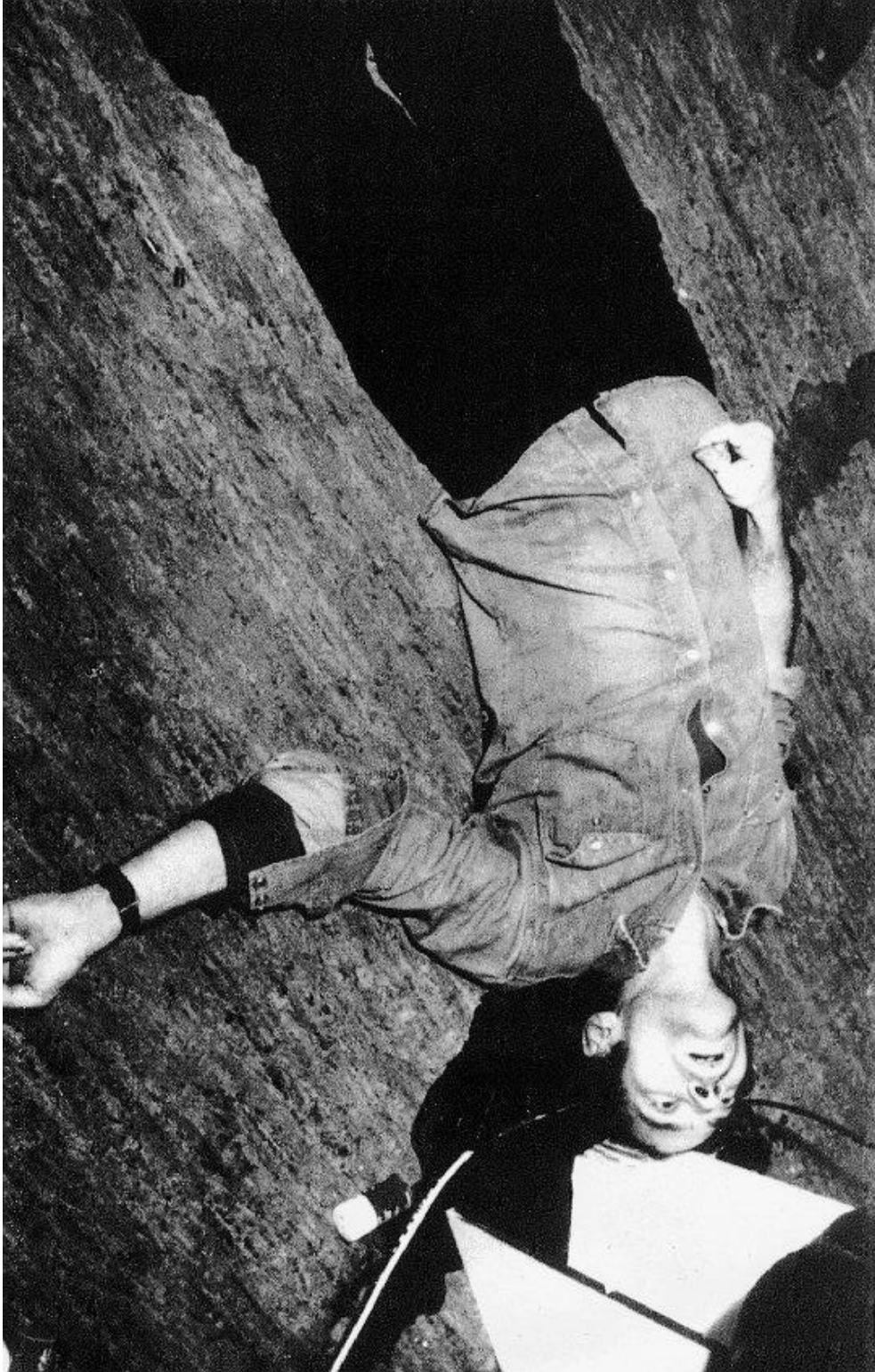


Figure 29: Police photo of Andreas Baader, published in *Der Stern*



Figure 30: Gerhard Richter. *Erschossener 1*. 1988.



Figure 31: Gerhard Richter. *Erschossener 2*. 1988.



Figure 32: Forensic photo of Ensslin hanged from the bars of her cell, published in *Der Stern*



Figure 33: Gerhard Richter. *Erhängte*. 1988.



Figure 34: Forensic photo of Ulrike Meinhof, published in *Der Stern*



Figure 35: Gerhard Richter. *Tote I*. 1988.



Figure 36: Gerhard Richter. *Tote 2*. 1988.



Figure 37: Gerhard Richter. *Tote 3*. 1988.



Figures 38, 39, 40: Gudrun Ensslin as she is walked into a police lineup, probably 1972.



Figure 41: Gerhard Richter. *Gegenüberstellung 1*. 1988



Figure 42: Gerhard Richter. *Gegenüberstellung 2*. 1988.



Figure 43: Gerhard Richter. *Gegenüberstellung 3*. 1988.



Figure 44: Photo source of *Beerdigung*, depicting the burial of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe in Stuttgart's Dornhaldenfriedhof cemetery on October 27, 1977. Published in *Der Stern*.



Figure 45: Gerhard Richter. *Beerdigung*. 1988.



Figure 46: Photo source for *Zelle*. Published in *Der Stern*.



Figure 47: Photo source for *Plattenspieler*. Published in *Der Stern*.



Figure 48: Gerhard Richter. *Zelle*. 1988.



Figure 49: Gerhard Richter. *Plattenspieler*. 1988.



Figure 50: Publicity photo of Ulrike Meinhof, taken to promote her unreleased 1970 film *Bambule*.



Figure 51: Gerhard Richter. *Jugendbildnis*. 1988.



11.



12.

Figure 52: Image sources for *Festnahme 1* and 2, as seen in Richter's studio album.



Figure 53: Gerhard Richter. *Festnahme 1*. 1988.



Figure 54: Gerhard Richter. *Festnahme 2*. 1988.

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