The viewed viewer in Gerhard Richter’s October 18, 1977

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THE VIEWED VIEWER

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As when by night the glass
Of Galilean, less assured, observes
Imagined lands and regions in the moon

John Milton, Paradise Lost

Most artists are afflicted with more than
common stupidity, and this makes them even
more desperate than they need be, and so
they make themselves even more stupid than
they really are, and so they make themselves
artistically impotent – because, by panicking
(consciously or unconsciously) at their own
nonsense, they lose all self-respect and can
produce either nothing whatever or nothing
but unspeakable stupidity.

Gerhard Richter

Art critics have tried to understand Gerhard Richter’s meaning for decades. Yet they have run into the possibility that there may be no chance of ever finding any omniscient manifesto for his works. In interviews with Robert Storr, Richter politely bursts into laughter just when Storr thinks that he has identified the values along what has been called the Richter scale. Richter’s intent in creating October 18, 1977 has proved to be especially enigmatic because he at once decides upon a historical and deeply controversial subject while also placing a sense of responsibility for viewing the works upon the viewer. Consequently, the «Richter scale» is more aptly termed the Richter problematic. I believe that a phenomenological approach proves to be especially useful in apprehending the challenging conundrum that Richter’s artwork poses to viewers. Since phenomenology examines how we perceive rather than what we perceive, this

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mode of philosophical discourse opens up new spaces for an understanding of Gerhard Richter’s work in its inherently experiential quality. Three philosophers in particular have established the underpinnings for any attempt to explore the phenomenology of Richter’s art: they include Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, and Edith Stein. While it could be said that Richter is the judge of any interpretation of his art, I hope that this article’s refusal to claim an understanding of his work will go down the drain with the excess paint of his brushes.

Pierre Bourdieu poses a question about artistic creation that refracts upon itself in the title of his essay, «But Who Created the “Creators”?» The question encompasses its answer and at last forces him to exclaim: «So we’ve come full circle. And we are caught inside»¹. The phases of artistic creation might appear to catch those of us who are interested in art within an endless labyrinth² with no escape. However certain we are of this circulatory labyrinth or its supposed ending³, there remains the impossibility of ever coming full circle. Perhaps the circle already fails to contain any artistic meaning in the first place. Gerhard Richter calls into question Bourdieu’s own question by his double vision of his art: «I want the picture; the single, self-contained construct – even if in the next breath I cast doubt on its self-containment»⁴. He creates by using his brush to cast doubt upon contained phases of history or aesthetic tastes. In viewing Richter’s art, our world as viewers is spatialized according to our interaction with the paintings: this encounter with the «appearance of reality» fills the full circle with rips. As with the pedestrians of New York City described by Michel de Certeau, the viewers of Richter’s paintings «are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize»⁵. The circle of Richter’s art is not local because its location is continually leaving itself in the radical spatialization of what de Certeau calls «sieve-order»⁶. This leads to the question: can sieve-order say anything at all? In fact, the sieve, whatever the pattern written there might say, is a text that a Richter painting «write[s] without being able to read it»⁷. While many critics try with great effort to read the text of a Richter painting, Richter himself argues instead for a phenomenology of perception in October 18, 1977 as his art phases in and out of the ellipses in the circle.

By avoiding⁸ any attempt to pinpoint or interpret the meaning behind his works, Richter offers a two-dimensional world in which his paintings view

¹ Bourdieu 1993: 103
² Michel de Certeau’s view from the World Trade Center apparently allows him to «ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below» (Certeau 1993: 127). However, his view of what he calls «the most immoderate of human texts» (Certeau 1993: 127) demands the endless perforation of this labyrinth into a sieve-order.
³ Robert Brown notes that many critics believed that Richter would end painting.
⁴ Richter 1993: 78.
⁵ Certeau, 1993: 131.
⁶ ibid: 133.
⁷ ibid: 128.
⁸ Karen Wilkin adequately summarizes Richter’s career: «For four decades, this elusive painter has shuttled restlessly among opposed modes, approaches, themes, and even painting languages,
the viewer. Bourdieu’s claim that an objectively drawn correspondence can be established «between the producer […] and his audience»⁹ leads us to the key importance of empathy as the agent responsible for showing the ability of a Richter painting to phase in and out between two subjects. Hence, his paintings enact the «two-sidedness»¹⁰ of the empathetic act as a mode of «perceiving sui generis»¹¹. The two-sidedness of empathy makes each of Richter’s October paintings «an unendurable picture from every point of view»¹² precisely because we cannot draw any objective, one-to-one meanings out of the paintings. In fact, the painfulness of every point of view results from the view as view. Richter forces us to consider each view thus making the unendurable experience of the other’s experiences our own as well:

But when you realize just how much we do refuse our compassion, how calmly we look on while hundreds of thousands starve or are tortured or killed – we never choke on a single forkful. This is more than avoiding compassion in order to survive: it’s almost worse than killing. And the killing goes on anyway, day after day. We can always push the responsibility off onto other people – but it’s really all of us. No other species does this¹³.

At the first glance of Youth Portrait in the October paintings, Richter challenges his viewer’s point of view as such by making our calm absolutely unendurable. Richter demands not a one-to-one view that can match this meaning with that name but rather the two-sidedness of the empathetic act. Any perforation in sieve-order must go through one side to another. Empathy thus perforates Richter’s works. His art expresses ambivalence for two reasons. Firstly, no objective correspondence is possible whether unconsciously or consciously. Furthermore, the ideology of his artwork consists not so much in anti-ideology, as some critics have claimed, but rather in Michel de Certeau’s definition of a nowhen. De Certeau says that the nowhen, is a «synchronic system» which substitutes «for the indeterminable and stubborn resistances offered by traditions»¹⁴. The nowhen characterizes Richter’s nearly utopian desire to displace the event of October 18, 1977 by creating October 18, 1977. Thus, Richter says «[m]y concern is never art, but always what art can be used for»¹⁵. His art is used to present «the act itself of passing by» (Certeau 1993: 131) with each viewing as perforation.

produced Pop-derived and politically engaged figure paintings, dispassionate abstractions, sentimental landscapes, romanticized portraits, and more» (Wilkin 2002: 34).

⁹ Bourdieu 2003: 100.
¹⁰ Stein 1989: 19.
¹¹ Ivi 11.
¹² Richter 1993: 189.
¹³ Ivi 202.
¹⁴ Certeau 1993:129.
Gerhard Richter’s *October 18, 1977* causes an act of perception not simply in a visual sense but also in an empathetic sense. His exhibit enacts a phenomenological reduction impacting not only political views about the Red Army Faction but also aesthetic views about art. By reducing the viewer’s presuppositions, Richter forces the viewer to concentrate only upon their experience of the phenomenon of perception. Consequently, Richter’s art acts as a medium permitting us to see intersubjective experience. *October 18, 1977* forces the viewer to experience de Certeau’s sieve-order as the intersection of subjectivities through empathy. Empathy is the process whereby we perceive what falls through the sieve. Our *habitus* is ordered by this sieve-order. Richter’s artwork creates a clearing for the possibility of empathy as an «encounter between a socially constituted *habitus* and a particular position that is already instituted or possible in the division of the labour of cultural production». The creative impulse of Richter’s works channels itself through empathy. As a result of the two-sidedness of the empathetic encounter, the very form of Richter’s works demands this clash between the social world and the particular position of the viewer with regard to *October 18, 1977*. The paintings in Richter’s exhibition clearly view the viewer thus bringing to the foreground the question of how perception occurs.

As a sifting process, empathy examines the form of intersubjective experience rather than the mere content of ideologies. For Richter, what passes through the sieve is of no concern because he is interested rather in the phases of the sieve as they are perceived through empathy. The phases inhere *how* the viewer sees via the empathetic act. However, the punctures in this sieve are themselves unstable because neither the painting’s point of view nor that of the viewer can be clearly demarcated. The surface of the encounter between the *habitus* of the work of art and the viewer’s position «is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order». As an enactment that is always in flux, empathy allows for an experience of the empty spaces created by this encounter within the sieve by passing them by. As a result, Richter’s art takes up the function of language in its «absolute refusal to make a statement».

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16 Rainer Rochlitz claims that Richter makes a choice to paint images that «are dated, stereotyped, ignorant of the “habitus” which they embody and whose obtuse rigidity are plain for the eye to see thanks to painting» (Rochlitz 2000: 116). However, Richter does not ignore the *habitus* of the photographs as Rochlitz would have it. As I will show, he uses their *habitus* in order to show that the painted image is the medium of his constant perforations.

17 As Martin Heidegger says, «[t]he clearing grants first of all the possibility of the path to presence, and grants the possible presencing of that presence itself» (Heidegger 1993: 445).

18 Bourdieu 2003: 98.

19 Certeau 1993: 133.

20 Bourdieu realizes that space is also crucial to analyzing how the producer and his artistic product interact: «Thus the proper object of a science of art, literature or philosophy can be nothing other than this structure of two inseparable spaces, the space of the products and the space of the producers (artists or writers, and also critics, publishers, etc.), which are like two translations of the same sentence» (Bourdieu 2003: 101).

The *habitus* of language «is empty, but not gone»\(^{22}\). The pictures of Richter’s *October 18, 1977* announce our perception of the work itself because «their presence is the horror and the hard-to-bear refusal to answer, to explain, to give an opinion»\(^{23}\).

1. *The Viewer as Viewed*\(^{24}\)

For Richter, empathy at first appears to act as the sieve responsible for filtering through pessimism in order to arrive at hope\(^{25}\). In his notes, Richter explains that his art embodies the «pessimistic, nihilistic actions and assertions [that] have the sole aim of creating or discovering hope»\(^{26}\). The movement of our perceptions through the sieve-order of his art embodies a modification of the content of pessimism into the form of hope. His works seem to announce a pessimism that turns into hope «through the very act of painting, which becomes an affirmation of self»\(^{27}\). With regard to *October 18, 1977*, Richter says that «I’m not so sure whether the pictures “ask” anything; they provoke contradiction through their hopelessness and desolation, their lack of partisanship»\(^{28}\). Hence the apparent

\(^{22}\) Stein 2000: 12.

\(^{23}\) Richter 1993: 175.

\(^{24}\) Peter Gidal’s notion of the view within the viewing illuminates how we can perceive Richter’s works: «You are left with a painting of nothing, without a useful concept of sublimation or *metaphor*: substitution, one thing for another, an image for a meaning, a meaning for a psychology, a psychoanalytic for an anthropomorphic consciousness, an unconsciousness for an ideology. Without that, each moment is literally, materially, for the viewer, in the viewing, gone at its visible inception. Yet that process, whether a remnant or not, is a painting, a present material nonmemory. The necessary elisions to “make” a memory are processed through the viewer into the uselessness of continual use, making endless finalities» (Gidal 1995: 19). However, what I call the viewer as viewed signifies not only the viewer’s perception of the painting but the painting’s view of the viewer. This view on the part of the painting is a metaphor that Rochlitz also bypasses too quickly. Rochlitz mistakes this interactive nature of Richter’s works for a dialectic that prompts the viewer to gather an excess of information in an attempt to name the genre while trying to classify the paintings’ social status: «If in Richter’s work there is a dialectic of gazes and an interaction with the receptor, it is by means of this generic treatment: the spectator is asked to see not merely the individual image which he has before him but the genre to which it belongs as well as social character of this mode of representation» (Rochlitz 2000: 113). Both Rochlitz and Gidal fail to account for the *viewer as viewed* in that the painting’s role cannot be classified by any means.

\(^{25}\) Serra’s view of Richter’s artwork bypasses the way that his paintings deal with both pessimism and hope: «Perhaps more gratifying still were the comments made to critic Michael Kimmelman by Richard Serra (whose aestheticism and moralism are a match for Richter’s) when Serra saw the *October 18, 1977* cycle on exhibit in New York just after it had been acquired and before it was returned to Frankfurt for the duration of the loan: “I don’t think there’s an American painter alive who could tackle this subject matter, and get this much feeling into it in this dispassionate way […] These paintings aren’t like late Rembrandts, exactly, but they’re disturbing in a way the Rembrandts are. There’s despair in them. And both the Richters and the late Rembrandts are about people recognizing their own solitude through the paintings, which is what we respond to in them”» (Storr 2000: 35). However, Richter’s art does not myopically concentrate on despair.

\(^{26}\) Richter 1993: 177.

\(^{27}\) Danoff 1988: 13.

\(^{28}\) Richter 1993: 175.
contradiction between Richter’s two statements illustrates the two-sidedness of hope as either present or absent. Through the destabilization of the dialectic of pessimism/hope, Richter insists that the viewer’s encounter with the paintings from Youth Portrait to Funeral indicates the empathy of the viewer with the other. Edith Stein explains that «[t]here is a two-sidedness to the essence of empathic acts: an experience of our own announcing another one»29. Integrally connected with the a priori, empathy announces the present moment that is passing-by. As a result, empathy’s role in Richter’s works consists in its oscillations between my experience and that of the other which continually changes the constellation30 of the sieve. Richter’s October 18, 1977 demands not a rhetorical question about how we communicate but rather an a priori question that passes-by in the phenomenon of intersubjective experience – that is to say, how can the viewer be viewed? Richter’s October paintings move viewers away from their presupposition of despair in the exhibit through the hope inhered within the passage through the sieve. By moving through the sieve, viewers are able to experience empathy for the other in the perforation of hope/despair31.

What Richter argues for in the viewing of his art remains presupposed by both himself and his viewers within the a priori. Thus, Richter contends that art realizes the «longing for God»32. Hence, his frustration with language translates the attempt to circumscribe and contain meaning into a sieve-order that allows for the a priori expression of God:

Language can express only what language enables it to express.
Language is only the language of consciousness. “What one cannot say, one does not know.”
That is why all theory is absolutely circumscribed, almost unusable, but always dangerous33.

Richter riddles language with holes in order to allow us to see that the a priori – that is to say, the longing for God – extends beyond the causa sui constraints imposed by the linguistic construction of theories. The perforations of the sieve allow for a fluidity of discourse because nothing is seen as the same: this experience «is a “now” in between a “no longer” and a “not yet”»34. Richter demands

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29 Stein 1989: 19.
30 Michel de Certeau writes that «[d]isposed in constellations that hierarchize and semantically order the surface of the city, operating chronological arrangements and historical justifications, their words …. slowly lose, like worn coins, the value engraved on them, but their ability to signify outlives its first definition» (Certeau 1993: 132).
31 In On the Problem of Empathy, Stein explains: «the experience of foreign consciousness can only be the non-primordial experience which announces a primordial one» (Stein 1989: 15).
33 Ivi: 182.
34 Stein 2002: 37.
that our perception of his exhibit occur in the here and now\textsuperscript{35} since, as a painter of pictures «that weren't paintable»\textsuperscript{36}, he ascribes a linguistic irreducibility to his works\textsuperscript{37}, Pierre Bourdieu realizes this as well with regard to the artist who puts his priceless work on the market with a price tag: the artist in question must then deal with the \textit{emptiness of meaning} imposed by this false value\textsuperscript{38}. However, Richter takes his paintings a step further. He not only encounters this imposition of value as a constraint but he punctures them through his art most especially in \textit{October 18, 1977}. By taking the photographs of the Baader-Meinhof group and painting only the ones that weren’t paintable, Richter makes the punctures, the voids of meaning imposed by interpretation, into the form itself of his artwork.

In an unpaintable\textsuperscript{39} manner, Richter’s work may be understood as a current\textsuperscript{40} in the sense that this perforating process\textsuperscript{41} occurs \textit{ad infinitum}\textsuperscript{42} as the paintings take the value conceptions of the viewers through sieve-order. If each picture is a phase of sieve-order in \textit{October 18, 1977}, then each one reverts back to a «single generative impulse which nourishes everything that transpires in the live becoming of that phase»\textsuperscript{43}. Richter’s exhibit inheres its own phases within a single current because the generative impulse of the perforation always results from the

\textsuperscript{35} Empathy accounts for the way in which we perceive time because it is responsible for the «here and now» of intersubjective experience (Stein 1989: 7).

\textsuperscript{36} Richter 1993: 186.

\textsuperscript{37} Storr remarks that Michael Brenson, in an article for the \textit{New York Times}, «seized upon Richter’s desire “to paint the unpaintable”» (Storr 2000: 35).

\textsuperscript{38} Bourdieu 1998: 12-33.

\textsuperscript{39} Storr discusses Richter’s unpaintable way of painting in both \textit{Gerhard Richter October 18, 1977} and \textit{Gerhard Richter: Doubt and Belief in Painting}.

\textsuperscript{40} In the \textit{Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities}, Stein develops her notion of «lifepower» by comparing it to an electrical current. She believes that lifepower emanates from the community (Stein 2000: 203).

\textsuperscript{41} Richter refers to his art as the process of a \textit{how} including everything and nothing at the same time: «To start off with the “How” is frivolous, but legitimate. Apply the “How”, and thus use the requirements of technique, the material and physical possibilities, in order to realize the intention. The intention: to invent nothing – no idea, no composition, no object, no form – and to receive everything: composition, object, form, idea, picture. Even in my youth, when I somewhat naively had “themes” (landscapes, self-portraits), I very soon became aware of this problem of having no subject. Of course, I took motifs and represented them, but this was mostly with the feeling that these were not the real ones, but imposed, dog-eared, artificial ones. The question “What shall I paint?” showed me my own helplessness, and I often envied (still do envy) the most mediocre painters those “concerns” of theirs, which they so tenaciously and mediocrely depict (I fundamentally despise them for it» (Richter 1993: 129-30). Richter’s inability to have a theme encapsulates the meaning of his work as an expressive process. Though he does not use the medium of language but rather that of art, Richter’s comment can be clarified by Stein’s notion that «verbal expressions are not themes themselves, but only the intermediate points to the theme, namely, to that which they designate» (Stein 1989: 79). Richter’s paintings indeed point to an \textit{a priori} theme.

\textsuperscript{42} As Richter himself argues, his paintings are never finished: «I don’t believe in the absolute picture. There can only be approximations, experiments, and beginnings, over and over again» (Richter 1993: 199).

\textsuperscript{43} Stein 2000:13. According to Stein, this current turns out to be the I: «You can also say the current is \textit{one} because it streams forth \textit{for one I}. Because what lives into the future out of the past, what feels new life bursting out of itself every moment, what carries the whole trail of bygones with itself – that’s the I» (Stein 2000: 13).
empathetic encounter. Richter’s use of grey shades emphasizes the vacuous space created from this encounter. However, it is crucial to realize that this a priori vacuity is not void but only empty. The grey\textsuperscript{44} tones of his exhibition manifest this emptiness of colour\textsuperscript{45}. Richter explains:

I did have a special relationship with grey. Grey to me, was the absence of opinion, nothing, neither/nor. It was also a means of manifesting my own relationship with apparent reality. I didn’t want to say: “It is thus and not otherwise.” And then perhaps I didn’t want anyone to confuse the pictures with reality\textsuperscript{46}. Richter thus counts upon using the absences inherent in sieve-order as the means to express – not what he means – but rather what he didn’t want to say. By defining his art in terms of nothing, Richter in turn reveals that reality in his artwork constitutes a sieve-order.

October 18, 1977 cannot be referred to as the reality\textsuperscript{47} of what happened on October 18, 1977, because the exhibit does not allow for any circumscribed definition of a historical set of events. Art perforates history through the present moment. Edith Stein’s explanation supports our claim:

Although the present moment could not be without past and future, these latter two dimensions of time are not static: they are not containers in which something could be preserved or from which something could emerge; no enduring being can be concealed in them\textsuperscript{48}.

\textsuperscript{44} Storr tries to confine Richter’s use of grey to the past: «Grey was also a way of showing that he was painting the past, and a signal that he had opted for a style belonging to his past» (Storr 2000: 112). Richter does not allow for the past to be quite so neatly partitioned because, as Stein shows, neither the past nor the future can be contained. In fact, Richter tries to move away from the presupposition that October 18, 1977 deals with the past.

\textsuperscript{45} For Richter, grey is not a non-colour: «Grey is a colour – and sometimes, to me, the most important of all» (Richter 1993: 75). His view coincides with Stein’s phenomenological interpretation of the way that we fill the fields of our senses: «But even silence is an occupation of the auditory field; it is now empty but precisely empty of tones and not somehow of colors or something else. It is empty, but not gone» (Stein 2000: 12). As an empty colour, grey is the only colour capable of making «”nothing”, visible [as] the only possible equivalent for indifference, noncommitment, absence of opinion, absence of shape» (Richter 1993: 83).

\textsuperscript{46} Richter 1993: 70.

\textsuperscript{47} Many critics attempt to find a longing for the past in Richter’s works. For example, Michael I. Danoff claims: «For Richter it is acceptable that reality remains incomprehensible» (Danoff 1988: 13). However, Richter does not even go so far as to suggest that he doesn’t understand reality. Rather he makes no attempt to understand reality at all! He says «You realize that you can’t represent reality at all – that what you make represents nothing but itself, and therefore is itself reality» (Richter 1993: 72). Dietmar Elger offers a more useful view of Richter’s historical implications: «he […] touched on the contradiction inherent in his use of the term “nostalgic” to describe his paintings: “I had nothing against describing my perception of landscape as nostalgia. Yet that is an imprecise term; it means a yearning reaching into the past for what has been lost, and that makes no sense. Why should I reach backwards if something is present in the Here and Now.”» (Elger 1998: 21).

\textsuperscript{48} Stein 2002: 39-40.
Richter thus seeks neither to preserve the past nor to create a future from it. On the contrary, his work represents the instability of containing past, present, and future. By manifesting his own changing relationship with reality, Richter argues that the reality of the present moment leads to his depiction of grey which names the absence of opinion, nothing, neither/nor.

His work compels questions that perforate through reality into hole punches rather than answers that would attempt to contain it at all times. Richter explains why he «paint[s] these pictures» in a few phrases: «Deadly reality, inhuman reality. Our rebellion. Impotence. Failure. Death». The emptiness indicated by these phrases points to the sieve-order in Richter’s *October 18, 1977*. He says «my motivation counts for nothing, as far as the pictures are concerned: they are independent of it, because they are themselves a piece of reality». If Richter’s use of grey is meant to prevent us from confusing the pictures with reality, then his statement that the October paintings are a piece of reality at first poses a conundrum to viewers. The deadly reality in the paintings is responsible for creating a sieve-order because of the «leaks of meaning» inherent in rebellion, impotence, failure and death. Richter presents the catalyst for this process when he names nothing as the equivalent of grey: such a naming irrevocably mars our confidence in the certitude of our ideas which are perhaps nothing at all and thus not to be confused with reality.

Richter’s *October 18, 1977* solicits the viewer’s empathy – or feeling-in – the particular space occupied by the German terrorists of the Red Army Faction by means of the naming of nothing. Empathy constitutes the grey area wherein nothing can have being because this process empties out the connotations of words such as «terrorists» and «RAF». The intersubjective experience in which Richter’s paintings announce the experiences of the I demands a continual re-patterning of «sieve-order» – that is to say, the naming of nothing. Richter’s work first of all

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49 Richter also believes that the past and the future cannot be contained: «A painting by Caspar David Friedrich is not a thing of the past. What is past is only the set of circumstances that allowed it to be painted: specific ideologies, for example. Beyond that, if it is any “good”, it concerns us – transcending ideology – as art that we consider worth the trouble of defending (perceiving, showing, making). It is therefore quite possible to paint like Caspar David Friedrich “today”» (Richter 1993: 81).

50 Richter 1993: 175.

51 *Ibidem*.

52 *Certeau* 1993: 133.

53 According to Louis Lavelle, «To name nothing is already to give it being» (my translation, Lavelle 1927: 4).

54 Robert Storr argues that historical information should accompany Richter’s *October 18, 1977* because «such information is needed if one is to fully understand them and absorb their impact. After all, the events they describe occurred over two decades ago» (Storr 2000: 36). On the contrary, Richter’s own art demands a phenomenological reduction that makes such information superfluous. It is the emptying-out of history that concerns him. As Richter states, «the political topicality of my October paintings means almost nothing to me, but in many reviews it is the first or only thing that arouses interest, and the response to the pictures varies according to current political circumstances. I find this rather a distraction» (Richter 1993: 178).
excludes everything except «what is not subject to doubt, […] my experience of the thing […] together with its correlate, the full “phenomenon of the thing”»55. October 18, 1977 constitutes a series of adumbrations upon Richter’s naming of nothing. The various sides inherent in this space provide the medium through which the viewer empathizes. It is on the other side that empathy allows Richter’s art to view the viewer by oscillating between the viewer and the art. In this process of viewing, the viewer begins to fulfill «the need to communicate, the effort to fix one’s own vision to deal with appearances (which are alien and must be given names and meanings)»56. In this continual attempt to give names and meanings to experiences which are then sifted away, the paintings move viewers to consider their need to perceive the other.

Richter’s introductory painting in the October 18, 1977 cycle depicts a young girl, Ulrike Meinhof, who was one of the members of the revolutionary circle. However, the piece is entitled Youth Portrait. Richter’s blurring57 of Meinhof’s portrait accounts for his naming of nothing with regard to «Ulrike Meinhof». As a byword in the media coverage of the RAF, her proper name «operate[s] in the name of an emptying-out and wearing-away of [its] primary role»58. Richter thus advocates that his paintings are grounded in themselves: by means of this phenomenological reduction, he works with «nothing that can be eliminated»59. The proper name of «Ulrike Meinhof» is no longer a signifier relating to the person of Ulrike Meinhof as the signified. In this moment of unpainting, Richter takes the standard function of a Saussurian semiotic relationship and perforates it into sieve-order. As he claims, «[i]n itself art is neither visible nor definable: all that is visible and imitable is its circumstances, which are easily mistaken for the art itself»60. Youth Portrait perforates «Ulrike Meinhof» precisely because her name is blurred when no longer seen through the lens of her circumstances. The artwork inherent in Youth Portrait remains Richter’s naming of nothing with regard to Ulrike Meinhof.

Richter reduces our deadly reality to art alone by this naming of nothing. His artistic reduction radically destabilizes the context of socio-historical meanings for two reasons. Firstly, history’s dependence upon the names of its agents ap-

56 Richter 1993: 11.
57 Storr explains that Richter creates blurs by «feathering the edges of his forms or dragging his brush across the wet, gray pigment-loaded surface of the canvas that shapes and spaces elide» (Storr 2000: 28). However, Richter does not want his artwork to be labeled by this technique of blurring. He refers instead to the fluidity of boundaries that he creates: «I don't create blurs. Blurring is not the most important thing; nor is it an identity tag for my pictures. When I dissolve demarcations and create transitions, this is not in order to destroy the representation or to make it more artistic or less precise. The flowing transitions, the smooth, equalizing surfaces, clarify the content and make the representation credible» (Richter 1993: 36-37). He also remarks that «I […] blur out the excess of unimportant information» (Richter 1993: 37).
58 Certeau 1993: 132.
59 Stein 1989: 3.
pears to Richter as a sham\textsuperscript{61} foundation incapable of supporting the dynamics of social interaction. As viewers, we interact with the figure of the \textit{Youth Portrait} as an anonymous woman not as the infamous Ulrike Meinhof. Her somber gaze meets that of the viewer in the midst of continual fluctuation. Richter seeks «no conscious connections»\textsuperscript{62} as the basis of the viewer’s empathetic communication with \textit{Youth Portrait}. Secondly, the woman’s no-name detaches her from Ulrike Meinhof’s strident ideology as a member of the RAF. By removing her from her socio-historical position\textsuperscript{63}, Richter removes «the materiality from [her] image»\textsuperscript{64}. He places his audience in tandem with her intersubjective experience. The whole of Richter’s series unfolds under her anonymous gaze. Her gaze encounters each viewer one by one since «[p]ainting is looking for just that one person»\textsuperscript{65}. As a result, \textit{Youth Portrait} is never finished but rather in a continual state of \textit{being-perceived} because the woman is always \textit{looking, viewing, and perceiving} the viewer. Richter replaces names with a sieve-order, or a naming of nothing, that highlights the woman’s perception of the other as the viewer. Consequently, the gaze of the woman of the \textit{Youth Portrait} becomes empathetic as an «act of perceiving \textit{sui generis}»\textsuperscript{66} whereby her no-name becomes a part of the viewer’s experience of the exhibit. Therefore, she solicits a reciprocal gaze from the viewer. This communication materializes the very instability that Richter’s blurred portrait expresses by transferring our focus as viewers from the woman to our perception of her. In this manner, Richter prepares us for the next piece in the \textit{October 18, 1977} installation as though the anonymous youth of the \textit{Youth Portrait} were our guide.

Richter continues to use our empathetic experience as the naming of nothing throughout the exhibit by moving from the no-name to the nowhen. As a nonevent, the nowhen best outlines that any one event – such as \textit{Confrontation 1}, \textit{Confrontation 2}, \textit{Confrontation 3} – contains a plethora of sides to be perceived. Richter slows down the progression of cinematic\textsuperscript{67} frames to an absolute standstill in the \textit{Confrontation} sequence. We see Gudrun Ensslin turning to engage with the viewer in the first piece, then looking at those who are taking her picture, and then turning away with a downcast head. Each picture portrays the same

\textsuperscript{61} According to Stein, «[s]ocial life is performance art, a technique for liberating yourself from the weight of existence» (Stein 2000: 290).
\textsuperscript{62} Storr 2000: 164.
\textsuperscript{63} Vincent Lavoie’s dependence on the historiography of Richter skips over the artist’s reduction of all the historical elements associated with the Baader-Meinhof group (Lavoie 1999: 22).
\textsuperscript{64} Storr 2003: 165.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ivi}: 166.
\textsuperscript{66} Stein 1989: 11.
\textsuperscript{67} Storr explains how Richter achieves this standstill in his paintings by means of camera frames: «Suddenly the duration of our gaze is thrown out of sync with the permanent “momentariness” of the image. We cannot match it up again by thinking that in the next photographically unrecorded instant he will turn away, she will turn toward us. Time has stopped twice, in the click of the shutter and in the extinction of a life. Camera-time equals an increment of unchanging eternity» (Storr 2000: 103).
woman revealing different sides of her face while obscuring her meaning. If these frames showing an image were sequenced in milli-seconds as in a film, then perhaps her mouth would move or her eyes would convey a sentiment. As in *Youth Portrait*, Richter destabilizes our view of Ensslin by making this very refusal to make meaning into the focus of the work. He punches holes into any possible meaning that the woman could express by leaving the viewer with a refusal to reply which is initiated by Ensslin’s refusal to speak in the first place.

As a result, the appearance of the pictures is the focal point, or lack thereof, in Richter’s art. He intends to paint the appearance of reality thereby capturing the multiple facets of the «passing-by» of experience. However, Richter anchors this moment of passing-by in attaching it to the empathetic experience. As Stein remarks, the present being of the moment cannot exist isolated just as a point remains on a line and a crest connects to a wave. Since the picture is reduced without any background information that would convey a politically charged meaning for the picture, the woman appears at first isolated and alone. However, the woman in the *Confrontation* series appears attached to the viewer through the empathetic experience: «Art serves to establish community. It links us with others, and with the things around us, in a shared vision and efforts.» Her moment of passing-by announces our perception of the art in which we confront what she has already seen. Thus, her experience finds its anchor in the viewer’s gaze – a confrontation that names nothing by etching it into viewer’s sieve-order.

2. «The Frozen Allegory»

Richter’s depictions of Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof are the viewer’s only direct encounters with living figures during the dénouement of the exhibition. In *Arrest 1* and *Arrest 2*, Richter depicts the arrest of Holger Meins, Andreas Baader, and Jan-Carl Raspe in Frankfurt on June 1, 1972. The arrest scene consolidates the move from no-name to the nowhen. Richter once more empties out their names by refusing to refer to them in the title for the piece. In addition, the viewer

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68 Storr contends that «[t]he contrast between the starkness of the reality Richter chose to describe and the lack of definition resulting from his technique [...] created a muffled dissonance between what the viewer can make out “inside” the picture and what he or she actually perceives as an otherwise visually accessible painting» (Storr 2000: 28). However, Richter paints simply the appearance of reality: thus there is no tension between what he tries to depict and his technique. In addition, Storr’s notion of the conflict between the inside and the outside of the paintings presupposes that one can move in and out of the works. On the contrary, Richter’s paintings view the viewer. The viewer cannot see from the inside out. The viewer can only experience the painting as such.

69 Stein explains that being is never static and remains a becoming in need of time which in turn remains anchored in the present moment, or what de Certeau would call passing-by: «The firm anchorage of time lies in the *passing present*» (Stein 2002: 40).

70 Stein 2002: 38.

cannot even identify the situation: Richter forces us to acknowledge that this is a nowhen occurring in a no-place. He thus performs a reduction of the typical treatment of space «as a fact of nature, “naturalized” through the assignment of common-sense everyday meanings» 72. Since the no-place cannot be doubted, it is in fact the only result of Richter’s reduction. As the Youth Portrait and the Confrontation series perceive the viewer, Richter makes this «blind-spot» 73 at the no-place confront the viewer as well. Arrest 1 and Arrest 2 force the viewer to see the no-place as a continual emptying-out of the supposed place of the arrest in Frankfurt. For viewers, «[w]hat counts is always the seeing» 74 and the no-place sees the viewers’ blind spots.

However, our seeing of Arrest 1 and Arrest 2 presents a double-sided vision in which the viewing of the no-place becomes «interiorized» in a radical way: the no-place is located inherently in the viewer as viewed as well as the «work of art» itself as its «fundamental structure» 75. For Richter, the two-sidedness of the empathetic act inherent in the viewing of the work of art makes sense of the no-place. The shifting from Arrest 1 to Arrest 2 cannot be compared to a cinematic effect as in the Confrontation series: the viewing of the no-place jolts our internal vision as viewers. Each Arrest is «the frozen allegory of modernism as a whole and as a vast movement in time which no one can see or adequately represent» 76. The shift is imperceptible and yet the painting halts our view in midair. Therefore, the blind spot may be the only way to pass through the exhibit in the face of this stultified view because «consciousness and subjectivity are unrepresentable» 77. If Arrest 1 and Arrest 2 cannot depict consciousness and subjectivity, then viewers must ask how they perceive rather than what they see. The blind spot engendered by this frozen allegory refers to the empty field of vision thus showing that «consciousness is consciousness-of-something» 78. Richter forces viewers to see their blind spot as such, which is to be conscious of «this terrorism inside all of us» 79. The paintings’ capacity to see the State and the terrorist within each viewer accounts for how the viewer arrives at the no-place of absolutely arrested motion. In this suspension offered by the painting’s no-place, the viewer sees «place» emptied of all its usual commodities.

As a result of the no-place, viewers concentrate not on what is perceived in the painting – namely the building and the armored police truck – but rather on how they perceive 80. This process of perception leads to the realization that «[i]t is thus

72 Harvey 1993: 203.
73 Certeau 1993: 129.
74 Richter 1993: 216.
75 Jameson 2002: 125.
76 Ibidem.
77 Jameson 2002: 57.
78 Held 2003: 12.
79 Richter 1993: 186.
80 While Terry Eagleton believes that the phenomenological approach is «a wholly uncritical, non-evaluative mode of analysis,» his view bypasses the inherent relationality that phenomenology

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within the intersubjectivity, which in the phenomenological reduction, has reached empirical givenness on a transcendental level, and is thus itself transcendental, that the real (reale) world is constituted as “objective,” as being there for everyone.\textsuperscript{81} The intersection of our view with the painting produces a two-sided vision. The juncture of this two-sided vision accounts for the painting’s frozen allegories in that they are at once constitutive of the world as we see it while responsible for freezing that vision in all of its blurriness. As frozen allegories, the paintings place our \textit{habitus} on hold in order to show that the intersubjective experience of empathy accounts for the no-place. Though the allegory for perception freezes even the progression of history, this inertia builds up a momentum that not only erases but also washes out the objective world. The only space that remains after this reduction is the no-place of intersubjectivity which transcends the viewer. Richter’s paintings are an object only insofar as they appear to the viewer. The real world, as seen in the individual’s \textit{habitus}, can be seen as an object because of the experience of intersubjectivity. Jameson says that “modernity is a concept of otherness.”\textsuperscript{82} Richter counters with his depiction of modernity\textsuperscript{83} as the experience of otherness which eventually culminates in art as the longing for God. Intersubjectivity cannot be conceptualized; it can only be experienced. This cathartic moment leaves us with only the emptiness in our field of vision. This blind-spot can help us to appreciate the \textit{Arrest} series in its refusal to answer because both the empty answer and the blind view co-exist within the two-sidedness of intersubjectivity. The interiorization of the no-place of \textit{Arrest 1} and \textit{Arrest 2} thus indicates the viewer’s blind spot.

In \textit{Cell}, Richter presents a space that is also devoid of any of the attributes that might define it. As a result of the intense blurring, only the title, \textit{Cell}, signifies the designation of this particular space. However, the significance of “Cell” as such sets in motion the oscillation of the no-place with/without attributes. The title allows us to think that the vertical and horizontal lines to the right of the painting are prison bars while this space could just as easily appear as a series of bookshelves.\textsuperscript{84} The title sets the viewer on a tightrope trying to balance the perception of the

examines (Eagleton 1996: 52). Furthermore, he claims that phenomenology «must purge itself of its own predilections, plunge itself empathetically into the “world” of the work, and reproduce as exactly and unbiasedly as possible what it finds there» (Eagleton 1996: 52). Phenomenology demands anything but a reproduction of artistic creativity: in fact, it goes beyond unbiased/biased viewpoints. The phenomenological reduction merely shows how we perceive and this perceiving exists primordially to any attempt on our part to understand the mechanics behind our perception. The effort to empathetically plunge oneself into a phenomenological analysis would destroy the primordiality inherent in a phenomenological analysis. Such an attempt is described by Richter’s comments about artists whose efforts lead them from stupidity to absolute desperation (Richter 1993: 173).

\textsuperscript{81} Husserl 1967: 14-15.
\textsuperscript{82} Jameson 2002: 211.
\textsuperscript{83} Harvey likewise notes the experiential nature of modernity: «Since modernity is about the experience of progress through modernization, writings on that theme have tended to emphasize temporality, the process of \textit{becoming}, rather than \textit{being} in space and place» (Harvey 1993: 205).
\textsuperscript{84} In fact, Richter’s photographic model for Andreas Baader’s Stammheim cell does show these to be bookcases.
attributes of the space with their blurry effacement. Cell acts as a frozen allegory of its own enigmatic pull on the viewer. While the title indicates how the viewer should interpret the work, it brings the viewer within the space of the painting.

By entering the cell, the viewer is forced to empathize with its occupant through the complicity of the terrorism inside of all of us. Cell thus perceives the dividing line between the «State and the terrorist»\(^85\) that goes through each individual's perception. In turn, Cell makes this line permeable thereby throwing the prison bars' ability to confine disorderly forces into question. The function of the “Cell” as a sign «indicate[s] primarily “wherein” one lives, where one’s concern dwells, what sort of involvement there is with something»\(^86\). These three qualities of the “Cell” — the where the viewer lives, the where of their concern, and the interaction of the where with an object — are inherently found within the Cell. Richter thus places his viewers within the signifying of the sign – that is to say, within his painting. However, this remains a signifying shot full of space for the experience of empathy. By spatializing the sign «Cell,» Richter imprisons each viewer within this space because it remains the encounter wherein empathy is experienced as a feeling-in Cell. Our perception as viewers responds to the spatializing of Cell by acknowledging that we live within the “Cell” as much as the terrorists do.

Richter takes the record player out of the context of the cell and isolates it for our viewing. The Record Player appears at first as a commonplace depiction of a record player. Jean-François Chevrier claims that Richter, in his selection of photographs for his paintings, demands an attention to the image itself:

He is not so much interested in the iconic value, nor in the traumatic shock of the thing photographed, but in the latent power of the image itself, which calls for pictorial fulfillment – because this power, in its generality, is already that of painting\(^87\).

For Richter, painting goes beyond the dialectic of the banal/artistic\(^88\). The placement of the record player within the exhibit need not be explained because any attempt at «explaining away»\(^89\) the Record Player in terms of excess or banality would result in removing its artistic significance. Richter places the Record Player in the middle of his October cycle in order to draw attention not to its possible role in Baader’s death but rather to its taking up of space. In this sense of spatialization, the record player as the meaning content of the picture has nothing whatsoever to do with how it constitutes a frozen allegory of the empathetic experience. Edith

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\(^{85}\) Richter 1993: 186.
\(^{86}\) Heidegger 1962: 111.
\(^{87}\) Chevrier 2000: 37.
\(^{88}\) This is very similar to Michel Foucault’s assertion that “[w]hat is interesting is always interconnection, not the primacy of this over that, which never has any meaning” (Foucault 1993: 140). However, I am not looking at the interconnection between the banal and the artistic. Contrary to John T. Paoletti’s view, Richter doesn’t work «at the boundary between art and non-art» because that boundary becomes the perforating function of sieve-order (Paoletti 1988: 2).
\(^{89}\) Stein 1989: 45.
Stein’s study of how the I can be moved by the other without any influence of the meaning content illustrates the motor behind Richter’s record player:

I can be swept along by someone else’s mental life in other ways. For example, it’s possible that through the reading of a book I’m “enlivened anew” and impelled toward a particular mental function. For sure, the enlivening effect isn’t emanating from the printed symbols on the paper perceived by the senses. But the thought processes into which I penetrate by means of those symbols can have a verve and cadence that’s a direct outflow of mental power and vigor. And if I, led by the words, re-realize somebody else’s thought process step by step in understanding, then I “catch wind of” the vigor. It can, on one hand, confront me as a peculiarity of someone else’s mental dealings; but it can also seize hold of me myself. (The meaning content of the words plays no role in this. If enlivening effects emanate from the content – as is altogether possible – then they’re influences that don’t have and needn’t have anything to do with anyone else’s subjectivity). 

Stein here explains the way that the I can be propelled by the thought processes of the other. According to Stein, form is inherently at the juncture of intersubjective experience. If content does exert an influence, then it relates solely to the I and its frustrated desire to form the content it perceives into packaged ideologies. Whether or not the record player emits sound is of no concern; it is the form of the verve and cadence passing through the sieve that conveys the subjectivity of the other. Hence, this sieve-order can have no content because it exists only within the space of the no-place. Richter remarks: «I like to compare my process of making art to the composing of music. There, all personal expression has been subjugated to the structure and is not simply shouted». The form of the cadence allows the I viewing the painting to be freed from all the content-filled ideologies that would prevent each note – or absence thereof – from carrying its tune. The viewers must catch on to the Record Player in order to undergo the «execution» of the work of art.

As a viewer and critic, Robert Brown fails to catch on to Richter’s process of making art in Record Player. Brown writes that «Richter too, in his old age, seems to acknowledge the limited value of the strict ideological constraints he has placed

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90 Stein 2000: 175.
91 Here Richter’s own comments illustrate our point: «When I say that I take form as my starting point, and that I would like content to evolve out of form (and not the reverse process, whereby a form is found to fit a literary idea), then this reflects my conviction that form, the cohesion of formal elements, the structure of the phenomenal appearance of matter (= form), generates a content – and that I can manipulate the outward appearance as it comes, in such a way as to yield this or that content […] The issue of content is thus nonsense; i.e., there is nothing but form. There is only “something” there is only what there is» (Richter 1993: 127).
93 According to Richter, form is necessary to communication: «without form communication stops; because without form you have everybody burbling on to themselves, whenever and however, things that no one can understand and – rightly – no one is interested in […] The form that we have in the art world today […] is entirely superficial» (Richter 1993: 198).
himself under. “Only sometimes am I free of them,” he told Storr.". Brown’s vision of Richter errs in two respects. Firstly, we might note that Michel Foucault claims that «[t]he guarantee of freedom is freedom».

In light of this freeing freedom, we can see that Brown fails to realize that Richter’s intermittent ability to be free of ideologies in fact constitutes the process of his freedom as such. Richter’s artistic freedom results from his continually being-freed from the ideologies that *Record Player* deals with in every cadence. Secondly, Brown claims that Richter’s reproductions of photographs through his paintings «are fictions that strike at the heart of human perception».

On the contrary, Richter offers the two-sidedness of empathy that, if anything, offers a painful acknowledgement that the divide between the state / terrorist strikes *through* every heart thus making any attempt to pick sides impossible. Brown clings so desperately to content – from that of the paintings to the quantity of Richter’s years – that he wouldn’t recognize the sieve if he fell right through it.

Richter’s use of the no-place as a frozen allegory in the *Arrest* series, *Record Player*, and *Cell* purposely removes the content to which viewers and art critics cling in order to make meaning out of the work of art. He thus creates ellipses everywhere in which we are seen by the October paintings. Stein explains how this viewed viewer is thus accompanied:

As soon as I’m conscious of a person paying attention to me – even of the mere existence of persons who could have knowledge of me and my doings – I act like I’m conscious of being under the eyes of a “spectator” who comprehends me and my doings (overt and covert), inspects, me, and evaluates and judges me in every possible respect; or under the eyes of a “companion” (in the very widest sense, grounded in the structuration of the person as such) who can participate in my life.

Richter’s never-ending invention of the sieve makes a peculiar demand upon the viewer. *How* Richter paints focuses upon the empathy between the I and the other. The other becomes the companion for all perceptions and their accompaniment.

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95 Brown 2002: 49.
96 Foucault 1993: 135.
97 Brown 2002: 45.
98 Charles Hall and Paoletti error in nearly the same manner as Brown by holding tenaciously to content. Hall writes that «a series of blurry grayish paintings effectively reproducing snapshots and police photos of members of the Baader Meinhoff gang, and their deaths […] in prison» were put on exhibition at the tca (Hall 1994: 30). As Cork argues, Richter «eludes any facile attempt to pigeonhole his multifaceted work,» especially within the category of blurry (Cork 1992: 49). In addition, he has no conscious connections and thus no interest in reproducing the pictures as such. Throughout his article, Hall misses the point of Richter’s supposed meaning above all when he claims that *Youth Portrait* «means exactly what we will allow it to mean» (Hall 1994: 30). Likewise, Paoletti remarks: «Although there is certainly no consistent program of content in Richter’s prints, his engagement with his own cultural and political history in several of the images cannot be ignored» (Paoletti 1988: 4-5). The critics seem panic-stricken when Richter sends them through the sieve as they hold onto their precious content.
makes the I’s view into a series of hole punches. It is within this no-place that the
viewer comes face to face with the other.

3. A Priori Art

Richter’s paintings of death in *October 18, 1977* confront us by depicting the
power of ideology – whether that of the state or the terrorist – as a mis-alignment
of empathy. Any ideology becomes an illusive attempt to set up equivalences of
meanings thus attempting to contain our perception. As Richter’s artwork shows,
empathy can be neither forced nor contained. In fact, trying to empathize would
constitute «a distraction» from the art itself. While Gregg Horowitz argues that
the paintings make the deaths of the terrorists present «in lingering with the unladen
ghosts of Baader-Meinhof», Richter dispels any such haunting presence of the
«undying dead» by once more emptying out their names with the simple title phrases: *Hanged*, *Man Shot Down 1*, *Man Shot Down 2*, and the *Dead* series.

*Hanged* is perhaps the most difficult and disturbing painting of the entire *October 18, 1977* exhibition. Rather than necessarily depicting death, Richter’s painting
forces us to encounter it «with skepticism and analysis». While the figure in the
three-part *Dead* series looks dead, the person in *Hanged* cannot be distinguished
because of the eerie quality of the lighting. It is as though the entire space of the
room were being engulfed by the darkness. In this sense, the figure seems to move
with the fluidity of the cell. The viewer’s gaze is likewise steered down what John
Milton calls a «pathless way» (70) in his poem, *Il Penseroso*. Richter uses this
pathless way in order to test the sincerity of the viewer’s empathy. Louis Lavelle’s
description of death explores what it means to be sincere before our own perfora-
tion in time.

One is only perfectly sincere in the presence of death, because death is irrevocable, and,
by terminating our existence, confers upon it the character of the absolute.

Richter places us before this absolute puncturing of existence in death and, in
so doing, questions whether or not death’s imposition of sieve-order entails an
ending. Since empathy never establishes one-to-one meanings but only relations, it

100 Richter explains his interest in the power of an idea: «And then the tremendous strength,
the terrifying power that an idea has, which goes as far as death. That is the most impressive
thing, to me, and the most inexplicable thing; that we produce ideas, which are almost always
not only utterly wrong and nonsensical but above all dangerous» (Richter 1993: 193). Further-
more, Richter states «Ever since I have been able to think, I have known that every rule and every
opinion – insofar as either is ideologically motivated – is false, a hindrance, a menace or a crime»
(Richter 1993: 175).

102 Horowitz 2001: 134.
103 *Ibidem*.
navigates death in an always pathless manner that has no defined end. The disturbing quality of *Hanged* results precisely from the indeterminacy of death since, as Gabriel Marcel suggests, this finishing of existence might not be a *désincarnation*\(^\text{106}\). The viewer’s sincerity before death allows for faith, as the longing for God, to be tested by skepticism in order to assure that all ideologies are washed away. Richter uses the sieve-order of death as a frozen allegory whose inherent lack of meaning moves us through the exhibit.

Richter’s focus is not on the particular death of any of the terrorists but rather on death as a «leavetaking»\(^\text{107}\). He paints by way of his compassion for «the death that the terrorist had to suffer»\(^\text{108}\) and their failure in that «an illusion of being able to change the world has failed»\(^\text{109}\). For Richter, death intricately connects with this failure to change the world because the world appears frozen. This in turn compels the leavetaking of the terrorists with no regard for whether their deaths can be named murders or suicides:

> Factually: these specific persons are dead; as a general statement, death is leavetaking. And then ideologically: a leavetaking from a specific doctrine of salvation and, beyond that, from the illusion that unacceptable circumstances of life can be changed by this conventional expedient of violent struggle (this kind of revolutionary thought and action is *futile* and *passé*)\(^\text{110}\).

By viewing death as a leavetaking, Richter reduces death to the functionality of the sieve-order in his art. *October 18, 1977* becomes a leavetaking in which the viewer encounters the refusal to answer as a refusal to see. In this sense, Richter’s paintings of the dead refuse to show death. Therefore, death relates to the *a priori* as the space wherein the picture cannot be viewed as an object but only experienced as the previous fluctuation of sieve-order. Since view by definition fluctuates because of empathy, our ability to see a frozen world in fact refuses to see at all. Richter’s non-view of death reduces the entire world of existence to a credible experience – that is to say, a leave-taking from all my preconceptions which must be abandoned for the *a priori’s* view.

As a leave-taking, death is inherently related to the *a priori* in its refusal to see. However, this relationality is not meant in the sense that death, to use Hannah Arendt’s terms, is «the most common of occurrences, [which] nevertheless strikes me unavoidably alone»\(^\text{111}\). In empathy, death never strikes once because it misses its initial mark and strikes twice. Richter’s portrayal of death in *Dead, Dead,* and *Dead*, leaves the sphere of the singular and enters the horrific. The chilling eeriness of the dead results from our relation to the picture. As viewers, we want to distance

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\(^{106}\) Marcel 1927: 236.

\(^{107}\) Richter 1993: 178.

\(^{108}\) *Ivi*: 203.

\(^{109}\) *Ivi*: 205.

\(^{110}\) *Ivi*: 178.

\(^{111}\) Arendt 2002: 353.
ourselves by taking refuge in our idea of death as a singular / general happening. Marcel’s notion of death as a dépaysement emphasizes death as the movement from one place to another. The transposition of our supposedly frozen view of death through the sieve-order of each painting in the Dead series makes us doubt what we see. By the numbering in the titles of the Man Shot Down series, Richter also throws into question the singular happening of the man’s death. The viewer cannot judge whether or not this man’s death happened in Man Shot Down 1 or Man Shot Down 2. Richter indicates that death can neither be pinpointed as an individual occurrence nor as a general one. His reduction of death leads us to the a priori view so as to remove all possibility of any response.

The relationality of the experience of death inheres a primordial experience that configures the momentum of leavetaking into art. Fully anchored in the space of the primordial, sieve-order allows the viewer to experience «the pure realization of religious feeling, capacity for faith, longing for God» in art as such. Hence, God’s a priori view alone «assuage[s] our need for faith» without the danger of an ideology. However, this predicates that we continually take our leave from ideologies at every moment because of their attempt to make meaning without the a priori. For Richter, mortality becomes the establishment of an empathetic relationship with God that remains predicated upon a dépaysement.

From the standpoint of the non-view, Funeral records an exile not only for the dead but also for the numerous people in the crowd paying their respects to a failed ideology. The non-view thus allows for a remarkable insight into the consciousness of the mourners. Richter defines consciousness as «the capacity to visualize and therefore the belief that keeps us alive». Though we believe in our capacity to visualize, we place our trust in a view that we can never see. The exile inherent in the non-view of Funeral admits that «consciousness is unrepresentable». As the final searing, the exile of the non-view becomes Richter’s last perforating act of mistrust against our eyesight:

I mistrust the picture of reality conveyed to us by our senses, which is imperfect and circumscribed. Our eyes have evolved for survival purposes. The fact that we can also see the stars is pure accident. And because we can’t rest content with this, we go to a lot of trouble – we paint and we take photographs, for instance, not as a substitute for reality but as a tool.

While we may have the capacity to visualize, most of what we see is pure accident. Thus, the panoramic non-view of Funeral allows us to use the unrepresentability of consciousness as a tool for finding the form of the work: «The issue of content

112 Marcel 1927: 252.
114 Ibidem.
117 Ibid: 73.
is thus nonsense; i.e., there is nothing but form»\textsuperscript{118}. Richter identifies faith\textsuperscript{119} with form because it alone allows the \textit{a priori} malleability necessary to artistic creation. In the movement inherent in sieve-order, the \textit{a priori} turns out to be the only survivor of Richter’s reductive leavetaking. \textit{A priori} art thus embodies a continual leavetaking whose mere evocation in \textit{October 18, 1977} constitutes our experience of intersubjectivity.

4. Phenomenology of Dreams

If «Spatial images (\textit{Raumbilder}) are the dreams of society»\textsuperscript{120}, as Siegfried Kra-cauer claims, then Richter’s paintings evoke a way out of these sham dreams into the absolute sincerity of an \textit{a priori} art. Perhaps we might find ourselves caught in a new question: who dreams these dreams? The viewed viewer can no longer decipher these images because such dreams have lived through sieve-order and are no longer decipherable. Richter’s \textit{October 18, 1977} leaves us with a phenomenology of dreams where there is no easy way out. The images depicted see the viewer since sieve-order is the only possible exit. It is an exit into a debut that questions all contradictions with the phenomenology of a dream in which the I learns to empathize with the other. Perhaps empathy is the dream of society in that it has no form that can be deciphered but only the expression of an intersubjectivity blurred in its rite of passage. \textit{Confrontation} thus yields the naming of nothing and that nothing is more haunting that the most certain of images. Richter’s \textit{October 18, 1977} describes a phenomenology of dreams which cannot be interpreted but only viewed as such. Since the viewers of the October paintings are already viewed, they find themselves under the demanding view of the dream. The viewed viewers are always watched by the dream. They ask a new question that not only refracts upon them in viewing \textit{October 18, 1977} but also pulls their dreams through sieve-order in order to discover hope. Such dreams have been filtered through sieve-order. Frame by frame, shot by shot, they are formed into the viewer as viewed by a phenomenology of dreams.

The dreams that Richter depicts in \textit{October 18, 1977} are dreams that presuppose nothing – not even their representation in images. If we are arrested in moving through the sieve, then this frozen allegory has a moment of respite. Turn and see what the dream creates because a dream creates the creators. The phenomenology

\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Ivi}: 127.

\textsuperscript{119} Richter’s view of faith remains integral to his artwork: «Faith, and here I repeat myself, is the awareness of things to come; it therefore equals hope, it equals illusion, and is quintessentially human (I cannot imagine how animals get along without such an awareness); because, without this mental image of “tomorrow”, we are incapable of life» (Richter 1993: 177). Faith includes how we see his paintings: «Whatever the case might be, Richter defends himself brutally against any attempt to perceive, under the guise of irony, his painting as an analytic conceptual paraphrase or a rejection of the content of the painted image. In response to such a temptation, he laconically answers: “One doesn’t escape from faith; it is a part of ourselves”» (my translation, Drathen 1992: 67).

\textsuperscript{120} Witte 1975: 63. My thanks to Professor David Rodowick for helping me find this citation.
of dreams advocated by Richter’s paintings shows viewers who are viewed by the creators of a priori art if only these creators are rich enough to give away their images in the experience of empathy. A priori art gives us the view as such in all the painful beauty of its reflection in our own dreams. The viewed viewer is a dreamer who lacks any images and so presupposes nothing. Consequently, the viewed viewer does not run the risk of mis-aligning empathy. A phenomenology of dreams thus reorders our perceptions by presupposing nothing. If our dreams spatialize, then they spatialize according to an order that punctures all our frozen allegories. Sieve-order can tackle even the most stubborn mediums and make them blurry images of arrested development. If we are still afflicted with a more than common stupidity, then perhaps our lingering obstinacy is due to our self-assurance when even the glass of Galileo and the eyes of Richter are willing to offer those blurry images of a view humbled by what the viewed viewer sees.

As a continual leavetaking, October 18, 1977 could never serve as a stage in Richter’s work as an artist because, as he admits, nothing could follow these paintings. There is no sequel to a dream because it asks for nothing not even a response. October 18, 1977 begins by using a sieve-order to communicate the paintings’ ability to view the viewer. Our dreams are the material that is required by Richter’s use of sieve-order. If we do not come with dreams, sieve-order will spatialize what we do see accordingly. This sieve-order oscillates from the no-name to the no-place and finally to the non-view. Each phase asks nothing of viewers – that is, a nothing which entails our faith in the a priori as such. The a priori moves each phase of sieve-order along by making spatial images of empathy unrepresentable.

There is no one-to-one correspondence but rather the multitude of openings seen through the constellation of sieve-order. Our perception of sieve-order responds to the previous configurations of the sieve but without any effort. Every response catches on to each previous one: «Einstein did not think when he was calculating; he calculated – producing the next equation in reaction to the one that went before – just as in painting one form is a response to another, and so on»121. The relationality of Richter’s paintings makes our perceptual response to each form in the October paintings a perforation that leaves us only with a priori art. Perhaps dreams that presuppose nothing are honest enough to admit that their exit through sieve-order is the possibility of their creation. A phenomenology of dreams has no answers but it admits with humility that it only wanted to show that the essence of empathy is viewed in the viewer as such. If it seems less confident than what we may be accustomed to, then perhaps dreams admit a sense of mortality in which the creation can live beyond the creator. Dreams live under the last request of the viewed viewer transcribed in Richter’s October paintings. You cannot name this last wish but you can follow it with more or less assurance through the stars.

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271
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