

Photographic Installation Strategies En-bloc and In-the-round

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Focusing on exhibitions and drawing comparisons with art and performance works of the late 1960s to mid-1970s, this chapter discusses different installation strategies used to display Gerhard Richter's 1972 piece *48 Portraits* through adaptation of three theater stage models: proscenium, thrust, and in-the-round. The varying effects generated by the reiterations of *48 Portraits* is exemplary here not only because of Richter's move from East to West, but also because his work demonstrates a historical fissure between Socialist Realism and formalist abstraction by embracing a position between photorealism and abstraction, painting and photography. Although now questionable binaries, what was at stake during that time was arts' social function visibly legible in Richter's negotiations and negations, both in terms of display and in refusing an identifiably unique signature style so essential to the Western art market.

Works of this period are of particular importance because they mark a point of transition where the certainties of modernist thinking were being increasingly challenged by post-modern questions that broke with earlier canonical metanarratives, while at the same time inverting modernist debates and thereby continuing their quests from a non-essentialist, destabilizing, and fluid perspective. After the loss of confidence in the heroic paradigms of art production in the 1950s, the nature of avant-garde art production became increasingly problematic from the late 1960s, resulting not only in a different display culture but also in a new dialogue between photography and painting, thus changing the relationship of viewer to artworks as well as resulting in wider cultural change. Artists such as Gerhard Richter who were working on the cusp between modernism and postmodernism, and who were equally concerned with what kind of art to produce at this juncture, included painters such as Anselm Kiefer, Georg Baselitz, and Jörg Immendorf, but also photographers Hilla and Bernd Becher, Anna and Bernhard Blume, Urs Lüthi and Jürgen Klauke, as well as performance artists and others in the same predicament who were unwilling to continue with earlier ideas from either East or West. They became emblematic for provoking a pivotal change in cultural production, possibly causing modernism to "retreat." More than forty years on, these postmodern ways of rethinking art and society came to produce their own problems, including increasingly neoliberalist and apologetic politics, while the utopian search of the modernist project continues.

Documentation

Exhibition Versions

Originally devised for the 1972 German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Gerhard Richter's *48 Portraits* have been associated with an imaginary congregation of independent subjects as well as a model society of enlightened cult figures. On display were forty-eight black-and-white paintings, each depicting the head of a more or less famous man, arranged in one horizontal line around the whole gallery space, their heads successively turning towards the center, thus encircling viewers in such a way that they could never see all the images at once. The grand opening of this Biennale happened more than forty years ago, meaning that I have only ever seen its most famous display in *documentation* rather than in situ, in *installation*.¹

Today the work *48 Portraits* exists in four different exhibition versions: as the initial forty-eight oil paintings on canvas (1971–1972), as forty-eight photographs of these paintings (1972), as a photographic edition (1998), and as part of the ongoing inventory *Atlas* (1969–). This chapter discusses how this artwork is expressed, displayed, and analyzed in its different media states. Collecting installation shots from the site-specific appearances of this work on display in its different manifestations in exhibition spaces around the globe, I wondered: What is the nature of this shifting piece of work? Still, when asking curators about their intentions and their collaboration with Richter when putting together the layout for its respective showing, their reactions seemed mostly concerned with stressing Richter's intention rather than evaluating the effect of the respective hanging of the particular version and how it contributes to and extends the visual, historical, and theoretical discourse around what constitutes the work: *48 Portraits*.

Over the course of my study, Richter and his curators insisted that there is no important difference between the three main exhibition versions, but in my view the extreme range of possibilities extended by the increasingly different display strategies, opens up very different readings of the work, making the way the work is shown part of the work itself. Adaptability could be seen as one of the great strengths of *48 Portraits*. At the same time this floating multi-existence could compromise its conceptual aspects, thus asking how it defines itself *as work*. What follows is an investigation into the expressive display models of *48 Portraits*.

Installation Shots

Even though all installations shots are complicated in nature, they are often the only way to access and discuss works that are completed by their display. Richter's *48 Portraits* lends itself readily to an investigation into how on the one hand artworks are installed in the context of a space, and on the other how these installations are documented. Both these aspects follow aesthetic decisions: showing a work as one unit or separated into parts, with other works or by itself, in straight lines or modernist grids – just as every museum photographer has his/her own style of documenting with again different results from how the artist would record it either for private use or dissemination. At the same time the problem with drawing on photographic documentation of historic installations is that these stylistic devices are often tacit and are in need of being actively analyzed as part of the image and possibly imaginatively subtracted to be able to evaluate the arrangement, because even the most deadpan depiction is never a transparent transcription. This is not

to say that installation photographs of Richter's *48 Portraits* are *performative*, nor that they are exhibited as works in their own right (unless as part of *Atlas*). But, as we shall see, they give evidence of how the work is performative *as and of itself* when well installed – not only because the work is based on performative source photographs (portraits that would not have existed unless the sitter had posed in a studio context), but also because it develops its inherent logic out of an all-over gesture of heads turning towards a center.

Encyclopedic Alterations

Anti-aesthetic Sources

Even though Richter stresses that the idea for *48 Portraits* was indeed much older, he started working on the group of paintings in Düsseldorf in 1971 after an invitation to have the first ever solo show in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, certain that the spatial conditions would be ideal for this work (Elger 2009, 194). Sourcing his models by re-photographing 270 individual portraits of famed men from different encyclopedias, these second-hand images gave Richter the “*raw data*” from which to paint (Storr 2002, 42) – chosen as reference images assumed to be free from any particular style, just like many conceptual artists from the 1960s/1970s turned to snapshots or other use-value photographs because they were seen as banal and therefore “anti-aesthetic” (Storr 2002, 61; Osborne 1992, 104). Richter described this supposed stylelessness in 1966 as follows, “A photograph – unless the art photographers have ‘fashioned’ it – is simply the best picture I can imagine. It is perfect; it does not change; it is absolute, and therefore autonomous and unconditional” (Richter 1995, 56). Accordingly, he used his photographic sources to assess reality “from the bottom,” thus questioning traditional portraiture. These encyclopedic candidates he then started painting on canvas, testing out different kinds of brush strokes and appearances to arrive at a distinctive degree of likeness and difference when copying the small source images onto much larger canvases with the heads more than twice natural size.

It is noteworthy that by this point each of the images had already undergone three photographic stages of alteration: from the original photograph taken of the sitter, over its half-tone reproduction in the encyclopedia, to its re-photographed and re-printed incarnation as reference photograph. Looking across the original headshots in *Atlas*, it is illuminating to see how diverse they are even though Richter's process of reproducing them from different books already standardized their scale as well as changing the visibility of their halftones and respective contrasts by possibly blurring them slightly, distorting them with reflections or perspective while adding new qualities of film grain and photographic printing paper.

Indifferent Choices, Personal History, and the Archive

The fourth stage of the alterations was the choice of *which* of those 270 pre-selected portraits to include. Much has been made of this choosing and sorting of materials, but after some experimenting Richter decided on forty-eight white nineteenth- and twentieth-century men, mostly deceased: writers, scientists, philosophers. But apart from external qualities such as wearing white shirts and dark jackets, displaying calm faces with mouths closed and hands concealed, they have nothing in common. Robert Storr observed

that this undefined element is typical of Richter as it stresses two overall aspects of his way of working – “anonymity and indifference” – undermined if the editing had reflected any personal preferences (Storr 2003, 101). Richter summarized in 1966, “I pursue no objectives, no system, no tendency; I have no programme, no style, no direction. ... I am inconsistent, non-committal, passive; I like the indefinite, the boundless; I like continual uncertainty” (Richter 1995, 58). Still, even though no pattern, no communality, can be established, *who* was excluded and *why* is telling: politicians (to not suggest any ideology), artists (to not hint at an aesthetic genealogy), women (to stress patriarchal cultural legacy and keep the formal unity of dark suits) as well as all non-Westerners and anyone from pre-photographic times. Keeping these opaque criteria of de-selection and recontextualization in mind, the resulting work *48 Portraits* shows Richter more as a collector who picks and chooses and less as an archivist who strives towards completion in order to filter out signification. The work is not an iconic machine, but is presented with an archival gesture and overall look that homogenizes its appearance, thus turning its sitters into specimens of history.

In fact, one could equally talk of Gerhard Richter as a historical case in point: born in 1932, he fled East Germany – and his earlier painting studies in Socialist Realism at Dresden art academy – in 1961. He was accepted at Düsseldorf Kunstakademie in the same year the construction of the Berlin Wall began. Bearing this in mind, Benjamin Buchloh argued that this dialectic of Richter’s “divided heritage” between East and West Germany is not only something that influenced his personal formation, but also played out in his work as a dichotomy between socialism and consumerism, Stalinism and Fascism, Socialist Realism and modernist abstraction (Buchloh 1996, 60–64). Paul Wood adds that Richter enters the Western art discourse at that critical moment when the dominant paradigms of the avant-garde were in the process of breaking up (Wood 1994, 182); when the metanarratives of modernism were in fact on the cusp of being dismantled by the postmodern. Looking for biographical clues to the work, Buchloh further suggested that the conception of *48 Portraits* reveals Richter’s urge to retrospectively identify acceptable father figures denied to his generation, resulting in what is simultaneously a manifesto of dis-identification with the respective paternal images suggested by Nazi and Stalinist leaders and a secondary process of identity construction (Buchloh 1996, 73–75). Richter stressed in response that the absent father was characteristic for his generation in both East and West Germany, which in his view added to the disquieting effect of his work. But he also acknowledged the psychological component of the fact that he never knew his real father and that it took him years to understand what it meant to be a father himself.² And even though his work clearly deals with aspects of cultural paternity and the historical legacy of forefathers, he insisted that the work is “not a restoration. It is a reference to this loss” (Storr 2003, 103). Paternal identification or not, Richter admitted that he “wanted to provoke with these old men because they were so incredibly unpopular then,” at a time when after the 1968 revolts all intellectual endeavors of the cultural past were widely under attack (Leister 2014, 221).

Painting Photography

The fifth stage of modification occurred in the actual painting process: here the close crops and the neutral backdrops of heads with little space around them were decided, the black jackets and white shirts straightened, the heads enlarged, centered and aligned, the size, the proportion of the canvas and the black-and-white oil paint chosen, as well as the *ductus* and *grisaille* developed in which all forty-eight paintings were then carried out. Richter’s

specific method is described by Dietmar Elger as “in-painting” (“Vermalung”; Elger 2009, XIII). It establishes a seamless surface with a quasi-photographic look, based on feathering the wet paint, which has often been compared to photographic blurring (defocused lens, long exposure, camera movement). The photographic conditions Richter was aiming for were more than just a surface effect, but also a claim for the supposedly objective and anti-aesthetic qualities of the technical medium of photography thus describing the non-committal quality he was seeking for his painting: an antithesis to expressive brush strokes as well as illusionistic copying. Obviously, paint on canvas cannot be out-of-focus and Richter always rejected the idea that his painting was *about* blurring just as he always avoided any signature devices. Still, this seemingly unfocused quality of his images is often read as a fleeting impression, similar to an after-image giving a sense of withdrawal or stressing the illusionary presence of a photographic referent: a photographed moment in time rather than the painterly simulation of a photographic object.

The contemporary interaction between painting and photography was noted by Susan Sontag in 1977, “As most works of art (including photographs) are now known from photographic copies, photography – and the art activities derived from the model of photography, and the model of taste derived from photographic taste – has decisively transformed the traditional fine arts and the traditional norms of taste, including the very idea of the work of art.” She continued, “Much of painting today aspires to the quality of reproducible objects. ... Now all art aspires to the condition of photography” (2002, 146–149). Different from other photo-painting that explored how the significance and content of an image changes when translated into a different medium, Richter stressed that his images are not just paintings that cite photographs or photographic imagery translated onto canvas, but that he is actually making photographs by way of painting. “I paint like a camera,” he noted in 1964–1965, “because I exploit the altered way of seeing created by photography” (Richter 1995, 35). And just two months before the opening of the Venice Biennale he stated, “I’m not trying to imitate a photograph; I’m trying to make one. And 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” (Richter 1995, 73).

Reproduction

This painterly production of photographs is partly based on Richter’s palette of gray paint, which he saw as equivalent to indifference: absence of opinion, nothing, neither/nor. This helped him to remain non-committal and quasi form-less while at the same time establishing a photographic dimension, which on the one hand simulated the aesthetics of present-day black-and-white amateur photographs and on the other hand stressed the distinction between painted image and colorful world. But his painted photography was also established through the interplay of four levels of representation: the painted reproduction of a photographic reproduction of a printed reproduction of a photographic portrait. Here the painting method is still to a certain extent mimetic, but it is mimetic of an image-object (Richter’s photograph of the encyclopedic portrait) and *not* of a sitter. This fosters a productive conflict between representational and non-representational aspects of the work, because these photographs are not only the source but also the subject of his painting.

Following Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), photographs of paintings are de-auratized, democratic representatives because they enable many to obtain a copy of an original. Painting a photographic

reproduction could therefore be read as the “auratization” of a given photograph (Ehrenfried 1997, 181–182). But because Richter’s photographic sources are not photographs of paintings but photographs of photographs, *painting photographs* here means painted references to photographic pictures and not to any formerly photographed referent. On the level of visual signification this is important because his paintings are not freely imagined *pre-sentations*, but painterly *re-presentations* of photographic reproductions. At the same time his images are not simply copies or imitations, because he does transform the sourced pre-images (“Vorbilder”) in the process of painting them in order to achieve a different effect – a greater level of abstraction, formal composition, and intrinsic order – so that they become post-images (“Nachbilder”): an appropriation of sources by way of capping their former significance as *notable males* to becoming images citing other iconographies. Surfaces made visible, in other words *simulacra* that no longer portray anything other than the equally concrete and imaginary matrix of hidden sources. Therefore, Richter’s photography sits outside of the two kinds of indexicalities that his work indirectly thematizes: the portrait’s photographic referent (because each portrait leads to another image rather than to a sitter) and the *ductus* of the paintbrush (which was in-painted to such an extent that the surface is void of any visible mark-making). His paintings become *more* real than the world – possibly creating a model for the world in order to understand something about the nature of the visible.

Portraiture as Non-likeness

Consequently, the sixth level of alteration comes into play on the level of portraiture. Based on making the portraits formally similar by means of cropping and amending details, with the effect that their sitters seem to share common traits (Gronert 2006, 85), the work postulates a polemic by investigating modes and codes of de-familiarization, estrangement, and non-likeness within the very genre of portraiture, traditionally embedded in resemblance and the representation of specific persons. Absorbing any individual residue, the *48 Portraits* are therefore on a more abstract level some kind of history painting, only they refer to a history of ideas as such, on an impartial non-ideological meta-level, rather than being a manifesto for any particular heritage other than making relevant their visual legacy (Storr 2003, 102, 117). And since these impassive faces of history themselves don’t give anything away, it is a little surprising that Richter’s conception of portraiture is just as indifferent as his treatment of archival sources. In his own words in 1966, “A portrait must not express anything of the sitter’s ‘soul’, essence or character. Nor must a painter ‘see’ a sitter in any specific, personal way ... [It] is far better to paint a portrait from a photograph, because no one can ever paint a specific person,” continuing, “I never paint to create a likeness of a person or of an event. ... I am really using it only as a pretext for a picture” (Richter 1995, 56–58). His paintings only ever refer to the photographic objects as particular parts of our reality, never to individual sitters. He paints photographs, *portrays* reproductions, and his paintings are therefore always presentations of representations, not of people. Accordingly, Richter’s work problematizes not only portraiture, but also *mediality* – and *48 Portraits* is therefore far from portraying any shared traits of the men depicted, even though he often displays them in a line (like a conventional portrait gallery) and aided by nameplates (successively amending life dates), which could create an overall impression of an abstracted hall of fame. However, even though they are anti-portraits, their authoritarian appearance does not only derive from their source portraits. As much as we might identify some of the sitters, even Richter admitted that he did

not recognize all involved. Rather he painted them *as-if* famous by referring to the aesthetic discourse of depicted importance, which gives the images themselves the authority of frontally and centrally represented icons of culture.

Recontextualization as Work

The seventh stage of alteration comes into play through recontextualization and juxtaposition of the individual paintings as one body of work. To this end Richter not only uses the deceptive organizational paradigm of the inventory discussed above, he also establishes a formal pattern based on a dynamic choreography of head directions and lines of sight all pointing to the center of the composition: the frontal portraits in the middle, slowly turning into three-quarter profiles to both sides, thus describing a full circle, with the ideal viewer positioned in the middle of the revolving composition looking up to the frieze of oversized portraits installed above head level. All images are subordinated under this overall structure thus creating a calculated interaction of partial meanings. What remains is a constellation of heads brought together under a pre-established visual principle without any picture being more or less important; a well-organized crowd that encircles and stares at its viewers but without any shared criteria other than their calculated equal presentation as part of a flawless succession. The flow of the grouping is constructed by classic means of montage, recalling what Roland Barthes in 1970 termed an “obtuse meaning” which exceeds the referential motif and compels an interrogative reading of the signifier (Barthes 1977, 53, 61). This third meaning of montaged parts is indifferent, discontinuous, and distanced in relation to any signified. Richter’s monumental composition might therefore remind us of a pantheon or a heroic panorama, but what is established here is a monument for both mnemonic and amnetic historical processes rather than for anybody or anything in particular. At the same time this decentering and denaturalizing approach to history writing in *48 Portraits* is combined and confronted with a doubly centered arrangement: that of the depicted heads looking towards the middle of the composition, and that of the work looking into the space towards its viewer – possibly laying open the questionable nature of any epic monumentalism.

Post/modern Negation

At the same time *48 Portraits* is based neither on a subversive nor an idealistic or ideological gesture, thus playing off and ultimately denying all partial meanings that enter the work from every side. It is this contrast of promising *precision* and indifferent *negation* that initially holds this modernist-looking work in postmodern suspense. In fact, it does need its quasi-modernist costume to unfold its postmodern nature: a formal structure that leads structural reading astray because it functions outside structuralist frameworks and differs from merely archival gestures through involving the viewer in an ongoing cycle of possible, purposefully undecided significations. But, even though Stefan Gronert stresses that *48 Portraits* concludes the first conceptually-driven phase of his oeuvre (Gronert 2006, 87–88), Richter is not a Conceptual artist.³ His work lingers between poles of realism and abstraction, rationality and chance, indifference and decision, representational and non-representational strategies, modern and postmodern readings, not treated as mutually exclusive but mobilized in order to leave interferences in the work.⁴ As a consequence Peter Osborne relates Richter’s works to what he calls postconceptual painting after the readymade, which integrates a “consciousness of the crisis of painting into its constitutive

procedures” thus deriving its doubly negative logic from a “critical reflection on the concept of painting itself” (Osborne 1992, 111–112). This refusal of conventions therefore includes both its mediation and deployment.

Arguing that Richter’s work is in fact formed out of a conflict with canonical modernism, Wood stresses that there is much dialectical engagement with the ruins of modernism at play rather than simply its deconstruction. This results in an aesthetic value that extends the human experience beyond our day-to-day experience of the world into a relation between spectator and artwork. According to Wood the condition of *after* is therefore that of the *postmodern*, while the contemporary is what is formed not only *after* but also *out of* modernism, “The logic of Richter’s being not-modernist is multiple. It is historically and geographically determined; he is, in fact, a figure of several ‘afters’” (Wood 1994, 182). Correspondingly Guy Debord argued in 1967 that contradiction is in fact dialectical in form and content and therefore able to destroy the society of the spectacle by undoing ideology while being grounded in history, “It is not a ‘zero degree of writing’, but its reversal. It is not a negation of style, but the style of negation” (Debord 2009, 132). While Richter noted down in 1964–1965, “I like everything that has no style: dictionaries, photographs, nature, myself and my paintings. (Because style is violence, and I am not violent.)” (Richter 1995, 35). So, while his encyclopedic collecting and sorting of everyday imagery might be a search for a conceptual panorama, his paintings are statements about painting by appropriating photographic means.

In view of that, an eighth level of transformation will come into play in the overall conception of the work *in installation*: how the group of portraits is spatially established in the respective space, engaging its viewers in a crossfire of gazes. To this end I will use three types of theater stage models to analyze the different configurations of *48 Portraits* as staged by Richter and his curators.

Installation and Spatial Orientation of the Work

Atlas

It is important to note that in 1967 Richter had already started to order his disparate collection of preparatory sketches and reference images into a thematically organized pictorial atlas. His *Atlas* is an *ongoing* inventory in the style of a reference portfolio that also exists in several book versions.⁵ As a work in its own right it was first exhibited by the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst in Utrecht in 1972.⁶ Since 1996 it belongs in its open-ended form to the Lenbachhaus in Munich and has been exhibited in many contexts.⁷ At its 1997 showing at *Documenta X* in Kassel, *Atlas* had grown from the 343 plates originally included to about 650 framed plates, while the Gerhard Richter Archiv in Dresden exhibited 783 plates in 2012, and the Lenbachhaus in 2013 exhibited 802. *Atlas* contains many of the artistic experiments with photographic devices fundamental to Richter’s work: blurring, double exposures, cropping, enlargement of details, collages as well as simulations of displays. Significantly embedding Richter’s inventory in the context of works by other European artists who accumulated images in more or less structured grid formations and photo-montages, Buchloh points out that Richter’s quasi-archival project stands out not for its homogeneity and continuity but rather for its heterogeneity and discontinuity (Buchloh 1999, 117). Collecting, indexing, and editing play a big role both in *Atlas* and in the development of *48 Portraits*, again pointing to the seemingly contradictory mechanisms that operate in his work: chance, concept, and choice. The process of Richter’s thinking about *48 Portraits* is

preserved on twelve plates of *Atlas*: plates 30–37 (270 source portraits); plate 38 (biographies); plates 39/40 (installation sketches); plate 41 (photographic documentation Venice Biennale), each 66.7 × 51.7 cm.

Venice Biennale

In the run-up to the Venice Biennale, Richter not only edited source images and tested ways of painting the portraits in oil, he also made sketches and models of how *48 Portraits* could feature in the neoclassical pavilion – a space that interested him because of its good proportions and light conditions. *Atlas* plate 39 shows that he had initially also considered an aleatoric grouping, but then settled on a principle of head rotations. On plate 40 he sketches the room with a long single row of images running along the walls right above the viewer's head. Plate 41 then contains nine photographs of the installed *48 Portraits* documenting all four walls of the space: the composition gradually shifting from three-quarter portraits on the left wall (with the men looking to the right), to *en-face* portraits on the front apses, to three-quarter portraits on the right wall (with the faces looking to the left), to again *en-face* portraits on the back wall with the entrance; each oil painting 70 × 55cm presented unframed on canvas stretchers, all participants directed to the center of the composition. The installation's front wall is depicted five times – initially with Franz Kafka's portrait in the middle of the arrangement and later with Kafka exchanged for the less prominent Patrick Maynard Stuart Blackett because, as Richter explained, Kafka is too much of a loved figure and therefore stood out too much and could have been read as a personal statement – the reason why Kafka came to hang to the right of the exit with other *en-face* images (Ehrenfried 1997, 46, 60). This rehang stresses two main aspects of the work: the formal-conceptual flow of the composition and the indifferent approach to the persons depicted.

In-the-round (Reverse)

Invited by Dieter Honisch to represent Germany, the Venice pavilion was not just the first time these paintings were exhibited, they were specifically made to operate in this space. What struck me immediately was that Richter conceived the work in terms of a surround-effect similar to the central staging strategies of classical theater in-the-round with the audience enclosing the stage from all sides. This means that a performance can be seen from any angle – 360 degrees – while the performers need to manage these sightlines in relation to their stage positions because they do not act *in-front-of* but *surrounded-by* an audience. Any sequential comprehension of a piece is based on a social, participatory act that puts viewers face-to-face with the work, engaging them in an encounter. Because the viewing platform is located in the auditorium, viewers and actors are effectively in the same space. The in-the-round presentation consequently liberates the performance from restrictions of the *picture-frame-stage* and leads to an informality that increases the rapport between viewers and actors.

Richter's presentation of *48 Portraits* plays exactly with this notion: sometimes it seems as if the portraits encircle a central audience, and sometimes as if the portraits are an audience themselves encircling a centrally positioned stage. The latter is an inversion of in-the-round, with the viewers surrounded by a piece of work that cannot be seen at once, thus turning the viewers into performers. Installing the forty-eight portraits in one communal gesture not only stresses the ideal viewing position in the center, but also an



FIGURE 10.1 Gerhard Richter walking along *48 Portraits* (1972). Installed in German Pavilion at Venice Biennale with portrait of Kafka in the center, June 1972. *Source*: © Gerhard Richter 2016.

ideal position *to-be-looked-at* from all sides. Displayed in this way, *48 Portraits* literally holds its viewers captive; we are not just observers but are faced with a work that returns our gaze in a seemingly reciprocal process. As Jerzy Grotowski asked in 1968: “Can theatre exist without an audience? At least one spectator is needed to make it into a performance” (1980, 32). Unfortunately hardly any attempts to install the work *48 Portraits* after the Venice Biennale have achieved this exchange of gazes, often because the work is part of a bigger exhibition with other works either interfering with the open space at its center or interrupting the continuous line of its circular formation, in the best case resulting in vague approximations of Richter’s original conception.

White Borders

In the same year, Richter embarked on a project he would only finish in 1998: a photographic edition of *48 Portraits*. One set was indeed produced in 1972, following a method he had been exploring for other photographic editions of photo-based paintings since 1966 – usually of images that meant something to him personally, that had been damaged or sold. These multiples would be printed in the same format as the painting, but then mounted on white cardboard and framed under glass with a white border, giving them an even more distinctive look of being a picture *about* a picture with an almost poster-like quality. Similarly in the case of the *48 Portraits*, each photograph was printed in the size of the original paintings – 70 × 55cm – but mounted on white card and framed 100 × 75cm. And even though Richter stresses that he makes no distinction between the forty-eight paintings and the forty-eight photographs,⁸ it is quite striking to see how different they are: re-transferred into the photographic medium, they look much more as if pulled from



FIGURE 10.2 Photo version of *48 Portraits* (1972). Installed at Museum Ludwig, c. 1986. Source: © Gerhard Richter 2016.

an archival registry, more anonymous, more unified, with even less distinction between the individuals and their image. This re-transition into photographic prints is a logical continuation of the work and an extension of its reproductive layering – in fact moving Richter’s project of painted photography on to yet another level of pre-installation alterations. As Storr points out, “Just as the camera delivers a likeness of the object of its attention by impartially screening the information before it, it also reduces the quantity and quality of that information to what can be photographed, thereby distorting the image while seeming to reproduce it” (Storr 2003, 144–145). Richter often added to these modifying factors by slightly defocusing the lens when reproducing the painting. This smoothing out of the texture, yet adding another layer of photographic tracing to the work, again is playing with ideas of photographic referencing based on the fact that any blurry or otherwise distorted portrait will still be indexical even though it is not a mimetic likeness. Accordingly, one could argue that the auratization Richter added to the photographic sources by painting them, is here productively inverted and de-auratized in the process of photographing the paintings, thus suggesting a potentially open-ended simulacral chain of copies, sources, and originals while at the same time stressing the paintings’ photographic origin.

In this context Buchloh implied that the immediate production of “an exact photographic simile edition” was based on a decision of Richter’s “to negate the work’s ... precarious monumentality” (Buchloh 1996, 76) – the possibly hieratic gesture with which

they were installed as an authoritative frieze in the German Pavilion. Yet I am unsure if this necessarily foregrounds a supposedly democratic potential of the photograph in the work, as it also refers back to the totalitarian and homogenizing functions of any archival construction. When reproduced in catalogues the two versions are almost undistinguishable, but when installed as a group the white borders around the prints create a natural distance between the actual photographs.

Museum Ludwig

In 1986 we see Richter trying to adapt the linear composition of *48 Portraits* to the reality of Museum Ludwig in Cologne – often single walls in the midst of prominent staircases. After developing a centrally-oriented grid configuration from his 1966 work *Eight Student Nurses*, the first gridded hanging at the end of August with the images too close together didn't convince Richter. He then sends – fourteen years after the work was initially acquired – detailed hanging instructions, listing seven conceptual points for installation. But even though the grid formation is now the most frequent way of installing the work, Richter starts his text stressing that, “ideally, the 48 Portraits should be hung in one single row.” He continues, “The 48 Portraits can also be hung in various rows on top of each other; in 2, 3, 4 or 5 rows at most, according to the conditions of the premises.” Also, “The individual picture rows must not necessarily form a block” (potentially avoiding the handrail of the staircase while suggesting something incomplete). His next point concerns the number of images, “Of the 48 Portraits, a minimum of 44 must be installed (under the title *48 Portraits*).” Then, significantly, describing the focal composition, he writes, “The line of vision of the portrayed persons must always point from outside towards inside.” Equally he defines the space within the installation as, “The minimum space from floor to the lower border of each picture is 170cm, the space between pictures hanging next to each other: minimal 40cm, maximum 55cm; the space from row to row one on top of the other: minimal 50cm, maximum 70cm (with the vertical distances always bigger than the horizontal ones).” When stressing that the individual nameplates are an integral part of the work, he argues that they, “must be attached to the wall, in the middle, 10–20cm below each portrait.” And comparing the two versions he concludes, “Points 1–4 are equally valid for the photo series; distances from picture frame to picture frame should be a minimal of 5cm; the distance from picture frame to floor should be at least 150cm” (Richter 1986, n.p.).

Proscenium

It goes without saying that the immersive and participatory nature of the originally encircling conception is radically changed by squeezing the forty-eight images into different grid formations with open or closed blocks. Rosalind Krauss suggests that the successful paradigm of the modernist grid is based on its visual structure in which sequential features are rearranged as spatial organizations (1979, 54–55). Richter agreed that the grid display possibly looks more *modern*, but in my view the work also loses its open viewing constellation as the grid suggests a stronger connection between the depicted figures, while the viewer does not feel enclosed but rather towered over by their massive en-bloc formation. At the same time the reduction from row to block reminds one of the difficulty of staging an in-the-round work under a proscenium arch, which reduces the play area to the part

in front of the curtain opposite the audience. The side of the proscenium stage facing the audience is often addressed as a *fourth wall*. Richter's *48 Portraits* in their grid constellation still manage to break the proscenium in order to address its viewers, but in comparison to their former in-the-round installation the effect upon the viewer is much reduced.

Thrust (Reverse)

Conversely, on the occasion of installing the paintings at MoMA New York in 2002, Storr stressed his preference for less immersive ways of installing the work, "since [Venice], Richter has laid them out or ranked them in ways that avoid such visual gags, emphasizing instead the primitive system of the list or grid as a means of bringing order to the disorder of history" (Storr 2002, 63–64). Richter and Storr therefore agreed on an in-between solution, giving the overall impression of a thrust stage, often used in modern theater to undo the concept of the fourth wall. A thrust stage reaches out of the proscenium into the audience with the stage being surrounded on three sides by the audience – in effect *a three-quarter-round*. Similar to Storr's arrangement in two rows over three walls, the reverse of a thrust stage has a central audience that is three-quarter surrounded by the performance, during which viewers can adopt some kind of panoramic vision without having to leave their spot, as there is no action going on behind them. But to my astonishment, the configuration of the protagonists was changed from looking *inwards* to looking *outwards*. With their heads pointing from inside to outside, they now seem to look away from the viewer, as if avoiding eye-contact rather than their sightlines converging at the center of the gallery, suggesting different readings altogether.⁹

Photo-edition

Finally, in 1998 Richter released a second photographic version of the forty-eight paintings, now in an edition of four. In comparison, this second photographic version looks much more like the paintings, being presented in almost the same size without a border. In fact, mounted under matt Perspex the images of the photo-edition appear even more seamless than the paintings in their acquired Perspex box frames, and certainly very unlike the first framed version. Richter's aim of returning the paintings to the photographic realm while not making any distinction between them here is much more embedded in the interchange between photography, painting, and reproduction, and it is therefore much harder for the viewer to decode its referential meanings. One could even argue that the re-transferred multiples move the project to an even more accomplished level of reproductive layering, adding yet another level of pre-installation alterations. Printed from the same negatives as the 1972 photo version, the previously mentioned *en-face* portrait of Blackett was printed in reverse during this process, almost as if Richter wanted to give his viewers a hint which version they are looking at (for example, when reproduced in catalogues).¹⁰

Today, the seven versions of *48 Portraits* are often arranged in discussion with the artist, but increasingly it seems without any working guidelines. Rather, their arrangement now appears to depend entirely on the occasion, with no recommended placement and often without any nameplates. In interview, Richter explained that it is possible to hang them in almost any way as long as they look inside and are installed above eye-level. It is unclear if this means that he has given up on the conceptual aspects of his work, or if the greater availability of the work has led to exploring different ways of installation; but it does seem

to have resulted in many displays that treat the work foremost as a graphic, formal or even decorative pattern: too low, too high, too close together, with too little balance between individual paintings and too little attention to how they establish a communal artistic gesture.

Surprisingly, when installing the photo-edition at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2009, Richter and Paul Moorhouse decided on a triangular grid structure to fit the work high above the escalator in the entrance hall. Indeed very different from earlier linear or square displays, this particular composition of heads could only have been devised and authorized by Richter himself. Moorhouse recalled that Richter welcomed new ways of exploring the familiar. At the same time his prime consideration focused on the formal arrangement: whether linear or triangular the heads had to converge towards the middle, irrespective of the medium.¹¹ This is reminiscent of Benjamin arguing in 1931 that, “the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner” (Benjamin 1999 [1931], 68). Yet, it remains to be seen what is going to happen with this work once it loses its artist to its curators.

Viewing Relations

Contemporary Notions

The Venice Biennale in 2005 saw Tino Sehgal’s performance *This is So Contemporary* (2004) – in the center space of the German Pavilion where Gerhard Richter once staged his *48 Portraits*. There, the three guards suddenly broke out of their invigilating roles and came dancing out of the three corners of the gallery to surround us with a joyful yet unsettling chanting of “ouuh, this is so contemporary, contemporary, contemporary – ouuh, this is so contemporary ...,” possibly trying to involve us in a merry go round. Akin to Richter’s encircling portraits, we experienced these dancing guards not just as engaging but as intimidating as they tried to interact with us through body language, movements, and gazes, bringing dynamics of everyday interpersonal proxemic behavior patterns into the otherwise structured gallery setting. The piece therefore functions like a catalyst: it makes us conscious that we are also performers who play a role when viewing an exhibition, while at the same time questioning how we move and behave in the gallery situation. Initially based on an inverted model of theater in-the-round with the work encircling the viewer, here the performance also highlights how we understand ourselves, not only within the institutional space but also as individuals, thus turning Sehgal’s performers into an audience while bringing the gallery visitors onto the center stage to perform their increasingly self-conscious interaction with the work and with others.

Only three years later Giorgio Agamben published his essay “What is the Contemporary?” in which he outlines what it means to be “a contemporary.” Unlike the fact that all art was once contemporary, he sees in the untimely – in that standing out from the ordinary of a given period – what defines someone’s contemporariness: a disconnection that makes this person, “more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time” (Agamben 2009, 40). In other words, the artist as a contemporary constitutes a fracture that both shatters and welds together aspects of his time. And it is exactly this reflexive double-nature that becomes evident in the different versions of Richter’s *48 Portraits*, thus making every installation into a contemporary commentary, molded by different currents and undercurrents, as it navigates and displays those gaps between modernism and postmodernism, conceptualism and post-conceptualism, biography and collective memory, while making

this an inherent condition of the work. This *kairos* is ungraspable – just as the moment of a photograph is always immediately a thing of the past. But the work itself can cite and therefore make-relevant again, re-evoking and re-vitalizing moments of unfulfilled potentials from the past as part of the Now, reinvigorated not only in the work itself and its installation, but also in the process of trying to make sense of it. As Agamben remarks, “the key to the modern is hidden in the immemorial and the prehistoric,” in making-present the “archaic *facies* of the present” (Agamben 2009, 51). Similarly Richter’s work calls us back to a face of the past that is in itself part of our understanding of the present – and it is this notion that also connects its different versions and installations as part of one, arguably multifold, piece of work.

Modernist Impulses

Undisputedly, the future is often invented with fragments of the past and we can therefore not disconnect contemporary art from its past. However saying this does not assume any historical continuity. A modernist precedent for the rotating strategies used in Richter’s *48 Portraits* can be found in László Moholy-Nagy’s *Multiple Portrait* from 1927. It shows four exposures of a woman’s head – first in three-quarter profile, then with a smile, again *en-face* with a faint smile, and finally turned away again in repose – arranged as a succession of positions in one in-the-round view, as if photographed with a stroboscopic light. Superseding realism, the face here is introduced as some kind of modernist mechanism: the composition revolving around the pivotal smile suggests a dynamic development of facial expression. Seminal for the impression of sequential progress here is the combination of four image-levels into one still image through structuring methods akin to cinematic montage. Unlike Richter’s focal but rigidly arranged installation of single portraits of different men, Moholy’s serial constellation of heads of the same woman has the translucent quality of X-ray images orbiting in the same visual plane. Equally resonant of partial overlappings of Cubist poly-perspectives and simultaneous staggerings of Futurist movement studies, his compound portrait brings together the New Human, its New Vision and the arrival of the New Photographer, which the Bauhaus proclaimed in the 1920s. Moholy-Nagy was part of the Bauhaus staff when writing *Painting, Photography, Film* in 1925. Exploring new perspectives for the medium, he argued that photography’s manipulation of light creates new relationships which enable us to see the world, “with entirely different eyes” (1969, 29) thus modernizing human perception. In particular he was interested in interweaving shapes that, “are ordered into certain well defined, if invisible, space relationships” (Maddow 1977, 437). For Moholy the camera was *the* modernist instrument *par excellence*. One could argue that Richter was equally interested in kinetic processes, impact of movement on vision, succession in a series and formal organizing patterns when orchestrating the flow of the forty-eight component parts of his work. Henry Sayre suggests that in Richter’s work the object does not move, but the gaze does (Sayre 2006, 116–117). He likens his works therefore to other work *in series*, describing painting in Richter not as spatial but as time-based by adding *duration* as a specific modernist quality to the traditional spatial dimensions of height, width, and depth.

Andy Warhol’s infamous façade installation *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* (1964) combined large-scale silkscreens of recent police mug shots of outlaws photographed against light or dark backdrops. Partly combining *en-face* and *en-profile* pictures of the same men in the quasi-sequential manner of depicting a criminal from all sides, his gridded montage also included *blank* spaces. Displaying heads of perpetrators though, Warhol’s work was

a direct account of recent criminal acts and provoked much public outrage (resulting in the work being painted over before the gallery opening). In comparison, Richter's *Eight Student Nurses* (1966) portrays the victims of a crime, while *48 Portraits* may depict those that remained in the face of history after the disasters of the Second World War. One could therefore argue that the cycle *48 Portraits* is in fact not simply a monument ("Denkmal"), but that it can be considered both a memorial ("Mahnmahl") and a cenotaph ("Ehrenmal") – tragic and heroic, commemorative mausoleum and celebratory hall of fame – putting forward those that may be part of our collective and encyclopedic consciousness. It may well appear as a personal pantheon of cultural and paternal figures, but it may also be a panopticon of watchful gazes that acts as an epitaph to our future, yet again a transitory and indifferent double act.¹² Still, different from the rigorous grid formations developed by Bernd and Hilla Becher for their photographic typologies of disappearing industrial structures that entered the Düsseldorf art market at the same time, Richter's accumulation of forty-eight men is not an elegy. The inherent sadness of his work is directed at what *was*, not at its disappearance. Even in its quasi-archival aspect it therefore suggests the faces that can possibly carry a future, rather than archiving and comparing facades of the past.

Museum Theater

The contemporary legacy of *48 Portraits* points to other works of the late 1960s and early 1970s that have been discussed in relation to what is retrospectively referred to as *reader-response theory*, emphasizing reading processes and textual reception that reflect on the relationship between reader and work. Susan Bennett's study of theater audiences derives these aims from the political milieu after 1968 when academia, ideology and with them the supremacy of text and repertoire came under attack to devolve authorities and work towards greater structural openness, including a more egalitarian society (Bennett 1990, 37). She also points out that there is usually a fixed stage/auditorium barrier in a theater, a convention that provides a comfortable experience for the "consumer" who dissolves in the anonymity of the larger collective of the audience, while having a clearly marked space without much physical and visual proximity to others (Bennett 1990, 140–141). Oppositional theater however has long sought to break up these expectations of space in order to reinforce social responses within theatrical pre-performance configurations to foster a more active, "emancipated" spectator. And while the same can be argued regarding viewing assumptions in museums and gallery spaces, I want to be careful with all-too-overenthusiastic notions of audience *participation*, because it might not be the case that all audience interaction is necessarily aimed at the political empowerment of the spectator, but possibly at audience awareness and a deeper shaking up of viewing conventions.

Offending the Viewer

During the same period Peter Handke's play "Offending the Audience" (1965) examined exactly this relationship between audience and performance by disrupting the viewer's all-too-passive onlooking: "This piece is a prologue. It is not the prologue to another piece but ... the prologue to your practices and customs. It is the prologue of your inactivity" (1997 [1965], 27). Handke's piece is above all a polemic about all aspects of going-to-the-theater in the masquerade of a play. It conducts an argument with the theater within

the space of the theater itself that aims to become, “the prologue to your future visits to the theatre” (Handke 1997 [1965], 27). But since Handke’s critique of any theater of representation and its passive consumerism is itself a theatrically staged performance, it arrives at a productive paradox: a manifesto against the theater *within* the theater, possibly beating the theater with its own weapons, thus bringing its problematic and problematized nature right back into its very center. Tom Kuhn suggests that Handke had, “never wanted the public to accept his play, but rather to watch all plays with greater irritation, mistrust and awareness” (in Handke 1997 [1965], xiii). It is a self-reflexive work that addresses its own conditions as its subject matter by recognizing the role of its audience and the mechanism of its environment while at the same time denying them as strategies in the very same work. This self-reflexive methodology is not unlike Richter’s painted critique of painting that fractures the medium itself. As Dietrich Diederichson observed, “The paintings don’t only stand for themselves. They are, so to speak, stage directions for viewing other paintings” (Diederichson *et al.* 1994, 124).

Focusing on Handke’s deconstruction of language, Amy Klatzkin suggested in 1979 that he, “tries to revolutionize the theatre itself by de-naturalizing the foundations of the medium. If he were a sculptor, one might presume, he would take it out on clay” (Klatzkin 1979, 54). And, if he were a painter, one might like to add, he would take it out on paint – via painting the photographic condition of contemporary art. We could therefore ask with Diarmuid Costello, “were a painter to rival the highest achievements of photography, would that make them a great photographer?” (Costello 2007, 75) thus contesting Michael Fried’s understanding of medium-specificity as essential to modernism. Fried asserted in 1967 that, “Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre” (Fried 1998 [1967], 164), while modernist art would seek to overcome theatricality. However it seems that the theatrical is indeed a useful model to understand the conditions of *48 Portraits* and how it operates between the document, the performative, the postconceptual and the minimal. Neither through spectatorial absorption nor the illusion of an absent beholder, but through strategies that break the fourth wall and address the viewer directly, pulling them right into the dramatic action of the piece and into an active viewing position. As a result, Richter’s work makes stylelessness, circulation between media and other postmodern pluralistic readings just as relevant as modernist and possibly formalist concerns, treated not as mutually exclusive but as *coexisting* qualities of the work.

In fact, when interviewed about the Venice Biennale installation, Richter described that, “*48 Portraits* work best when installed like an opera: very high, in one line, all the way around one hall” (von Flemming 1992, 21). One could also argue that in Richter’s *48 Portraits* staging makes the work – that is to say: the stage model chosen for the respective organization. This strategy not only brings the curator into the completion of the work but also the viewer, by locating the question of the work’s contingency, multiplicity, and polyvocality in the audience rather than simply in the material work itself, demanding individual responses from the viewer rather than autonomy from the work. Purposefully undecided incompleteness is certainly what Richter is a master of: leaving contradictions in the work, not buying into ideologies, thus confronting the viewer face-to-face with these indifferences and interferences that make the work. Standing at the front of the stage, Handke’s actors equally address the audience face-to-face, which results in a dramatic conflict between the spectators and the words directed at them, “But before you leave, you will be insulted. By insulting you, we ... can tear down a wall. We can observe you. ... The distance between us will no longer be indefinite.” Then adds, “But we ... will only create an acoustic pattern. ... Since you are probably thoroughly offended already, we will waste no more time before thoroughly offending you, you chuckleheads” (Handke 1997, 28). Richter’s heads don’t

“chuckle,” but equally forming a visual pattern they might be staring back at us with the very same intent, breaking down the very same fourth wall.¹³

Audience Interaction

When examining the potential for audience interaction in installations of Richter’s *48 Portraits*, I am stressing the simultaneous activity of two mutually enhancing stage models: first, as an inversion of theater in-the-round with the performing work surrounding the gallery audience, and second, akin to actual theater in-the-round with an audience of portraits encircling the performing gallery spectator, with the forty-eight audience members viewing *us* on our historical stage from a position of *their* contemporariness. One conclusion is therefore that Richter’s *48 Portraits* might be best staged as a “contemporary” condition asking something of the audience, confronting, contesting, or possibly even offending it. This is far from suggesting that the *48 Portraits* are *historical* now as their contemporariness is current when they are installed as a performative commentary on recent showing conventions to illuminate the way in which viewers interact with both artworks and museum spaces. This stresses what is in my view possibly the most innovative aspect of this body of work: it is conceived so that it folds the somehow problematic viewer-work relationship right back into the work itself, reverting and inverting the conventional roles and positions of both audience and work as that what makes the work *work*. Seen in this way, *48 Portraits* turns into a *prefiguration* or *pretext* for how we look at artworks in the context of the museum, a counter model to former more passive viewing conventions. At the same time it also means that its respective installation is always read against what constitutes the work – just like any *mise-en-scène* is read against its text.

But exactly for the reason that the work is only completed with its installation, each configuration – shifting the portraits’ sightlines and their overall arrangement in a line or grid – changes the relationship with the viewer thus providing different entry points and different readings. It is therefore vital that curatorial inputs do not re-invent, silence, or overpower the complexity of the piece. And even though the in-the-round arrangement is preferred by the artist and is ideal because of its performative qualities and how it engages the audience, few exhibition spaces can accommodate its spatial display mode. One could therefore argue that on the one hand the photographic versions of *48 Portraits* extend and differentiate the immanent meaning of work, but on the other that they indirectly increased the number of installations using compressed and overcrowded grid formations, rather than spatially revolving compositions, therefore possibly simplifying its acquired meaning in installation.

Notes

- 1 The opening of the *36th Venice Biennale* was on 11 June 1972. *48 Portraits* was exhibited in the center space of the German pavilion, its central stage, while the side galleries showed Richter’s Townscapes, Mountains, Clouds, and Green paintings; exhibition catalogue supplemented by an illustrated *Painting Overview* (a catalogue raisonné).
- 2 “Interview with Babette Richter” (2002) discusses the lost father figure, quoting *48 Portraits* as an “intimidating encyclopedia of various male role models.” Richter stresses that his whole generation had lost their fathers: men fallen in war or who returned

- psychologically and physically damaged, some guilty of war crimes. He adds, “Those are the three types of fathers you don’t want to have. Every child wants a father to be proud of” (Elger/Obrist 2009, 442–443). Acknowledging, “it wasn’t until Moritz was born [January 1995] that I started to know what a father is” (Storr 2003, 101). Richter’s mother revealed later in life to him that his father (born 1907, returned from American prisoner camp in 1946, killed himself) was not his biological father.
- 3 Stemmrich stressed that Richter sees *48 Portraits* as part of his constructive works while asserting that he has no ideological construction rather stressing a constructive emptiness in the work (123), while Richter insists that he has never been a conceptual artist or indeed never tried making any Konzeptkunst (Leister 2014). The dematerialization of the artwork after 1968 was seen as an attempt to widen the traditional borders of the genre after the supposed end of painting. Richter felt pushed out through gallerists’ preference of avant-garde American Concept Art.
 - 4 Critiquing Clement Greenberg, T. J. Clark suggests that modernist art always pushed any medium to its limits, to the point where it breaks, thus inscribing the practice of negation into the center of its practice, “The very way that modernist art has insisted on its medium has been by negating that medium’s ordinary consistency – by pulling it apart emptying it, producing gaps and silences, making it stand as the opposite of sense or continuity, having been the symptom for resistance” (Clark 1982, 152–154).
 - 5 “Atlas” does not only give insight into the artistic pre-installation process, but it is also a work itself combining conceptual and Warburgian aspects via camouflaging art historical methods. It establishes and destroys its organization of visual materials in order to montage relations on a substantial yet open-ended scale. In contrast, Richter’s catalogue raisonné starts with number 1 (the image of an erased table) in 1962, following his arrival in the West in 1961.
 - 6 Gerhard Richter: *Atlas of the Photographs and Sketches*, Hedendaagse Kunst, Utrecht, 1.-30.12.1972; paperback publication without text. Sketchbook *Atlas* was initially created in 1970 as a companion piece to his first catalogue raisonné.
 - 7 The Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich acquired *Atlas* in 1996 from the Dürckheim Collection when it included 583 plates (white cardboard, each 66.7 × 51.7cm). Richter pointed out in 1999, “The ‘Atlas’ belongs to the Lenbachhaus in Munich – it’s long since ceased to belong to me. Occasionally I run across it somewhere, and I think it’s interesting because it looks different each time” (Elger/Obrist 2009, 350), but he established a meticulous order how to arrange the plates in exhibition (Friedel/Wilmes 1997, 374–375, 384–387).
 - 8 Richter stressed in 1990 that both versions are of equal value because the paintings based on photographs have not only a similar quality to the photographs, but also because the paintings have their starting point in photographs and their re-transition into photography is therefore part of his intention (Ehrenfried 1997, 49–50, 43,182).
 - 9 Richter stressed that this installation was an experiment and that looking at the installation shot in retrospect it did not look good to him and shall remain an exception, suggesting it might have been better to stick to the well-tested model (Leister 2014).
 - 10 Richter’s assistant Hubert Becker confirmed that both versions have been printed from the same medium format negatives (email 13 March 2015), the 1998 dating photographic edition now showing are in fact in better condition than the paintings actually were in at that time, having accumulated surface cracks and other patina over time.
 - 11 The triangular shape of the installation – with a straight line of twelve images at the top, a line of seven images on the left side, and a diagonal following the line of the handrail on

the bottom/right – was developed by Richter in his studio after his visit to the NPG. The shape of the grid recalls Richter working around the handrail in the staircase of Museum Ludwig in the 1980s.

- 12 Richter complicated this relationship of recent history, crime, responsibility and guilt in his cycle “18 October, 1977” (Baader-Meinhof), 1988.
- 13 This comparison is more closely related to the German original “ihr Glotzaugen” for “chuckleheads,” which personifies the staring eyes of the onlooking mass rather than their mocking mouths. In the first staging of the play, this phrase was repeated many times by all four speakers, individually and in mocking chorus, before bursting into an extended list of 164 insults and stage devices, ending the play on the more conciliatory, “*you fellow humans you*” (31). Final scene “Publikumsbeschimpfung,” directed by Claus Peymann. Theater am Turm, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1966.

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