THE ART OF INTERRUPTION:
A COMPARISON OF WORKS BY
DANIEL LIBESKIND, GERHARD RICHTER, ILYA KABAKOV

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University
2004

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the Jewish Museum Berlin by Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, the painting cycle October 18, 1977 by German painter Gerhard Richter and three installations—Incident at the Museum, or Water Music; Healing with Paintings; and the Communal Kitchen—by Russian artist Ilya Kabakov within the context of Rezeptionsästhetik (aesthetics of reception), associated with Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, and the aesthetic theories of Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Martin Heidegger and Victor Shklovsky in order to illustrate the commonalities between the works of art in terms of thematic content, the use of “interruptive” techniques and their capacity to create the conditions for the possibility of a valid aesthetic experience in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Each of the above works of art addresses issues of memory, loss, mourning or exile, and does so in a manner that, I argue, acknowledges and successfully contributes to the development of its respective medium (whether architecture, painting or installation). Such innovations are revealed to a greater degree, I believe, when the works are considered in conjunction with one another rather than separately. Similarly, corresponding aspects of the theoretical writings by the various authors are illuminated when they are brought into a dialogue around the notion of “interruption” and in tandem with actual experiences with the works of art.
The “interruptive” techniques and particular innovations of these artists emerge as significant tendencies for post-World War II and post-Soviet era art in a European context.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my adviser, Dr. Stephen Melville, and my committee members, Dr. Myroslava M. Mudrak, Dr. Lisa Florman and Dr. Helen Fehervary, for their intellectual support, thoughtful suggestions and patience during this process.

I am indebted my parents, Dale and Corinne Koenig, for their tireless canine assistance, financial support and overall endurance. I am grateful to Mack, Boo and Bailey for many trips to the park.

I wish to express gratitude to John Stone for his friendship and computer wizardry and to my friends at Bicycle Sport in Louisville (Ken, Kerry, Brad, Steve and Alex) for technical support and spirited conversations over the years.

I thank my colleagues at Middle Tennessee State University, Dr. Nancy Kelker, Dr. Debrah Sickler-Voigt, Dr. Nadine Hawke and Rick Rishaw, and at Ohio State, Nora Kilbane, Melissa Wolfe, Aida Stanish, Stephanie Bernhardt, Steve Hunt, Rebecca Twist and Doug Zullo, for their support and friendship.

Finally, I am grateful to Marsha Morrison for her tremendous intellectual and emotional support, patience and understanding over the past eleven years.
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PUBLICATIONS

Research Publications

   Parnassus, the annual publication of the Allen R. Hite Art Institute of the University of

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History of Art
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I began my research with questions of memory and absence: how the memory of something as vast as childhood is momentarily condensed into the smell of hot roofing tar or the sugary crispness of marzipan icing. I wondered how an artist might approach the task, or burden, of other people’s memories, as well as the memory of a people, of a city, or of a nation that finds itself in a moment of crisis? There is no doubt that memory is selective, but what forces must come together to nominate a particular experience or sensation to a coveted position within one’s long term memory?

Questions emerged about physical manifestations of memory, absence and loss: the difficulties surrounding the concept of the “monument” (or memorial) in the late 20th century and the search for a new sculptural and architectural language that could avoid recalling the voice of the perpetrator. During a trip to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp (currently preserved as a memorial) outside of Berlin on a cold, sunny December day, I walked and looked in silence as a tourist to both the location and the reality of being a prisoner (or guard). I supposed that the suffering, the fear, the tedium, the resignation, and the hope that form such an experience are, likely, not recalled in the totality of the camp itself or of the time spent there, but rather in the small, perhaps insignificant, details that became daily companions: the color of the paint peeling from
the wall, the weave of a uniform, the sound of a train whistle, the smell of rotten food. I noticed the rusted green loudspeakers hanging from poles and felt an ominous sense of dread; for some it may have been the loudspeakers, at once watchful and threatening, that became a visual evocation of their misfortune.

In his “Berlin Chronicle” of 1932, Walter Benjamin warned:

He who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments. No image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside—that image, that taste, that touch for whose sake all this has been unfurled and dissected; and now remembrance progresses from small to smallest details, from the smallest to the infinitesimal, while that which it encounters in these microcosms grows ever mightier.1

If one accepts that the fan of memory progresses always toward the infinitesimal, the conventions associated with the creation of a monument, often generalized and larger than life, seem to have emerged from somewhere other than memory itself. A monument typically stands as an external imposition of meaning, rather than something evolving from the details of the experience or the sensation of remembering. My initial investigation turned to works of art that possessed a transformative power similar to the intense sensation of a memory and that addressed, at some level, experiences of absence, loss, mourning or exile. Specifically, I considered the Jewish Museum Berlin by Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, the October 18, 1977 cycle of paintings by German painter Gerhard Richter, and three installations by Russian artist Ilya Kabakov, the Incident at the Museum, or Water Music; Healing with Paintings; and The Communal Kitchen. During the course of my research, my more abstract questions about memory and absence gave way, in the face of my actual experiences with the works, to an interest in the nature of those experiences and the difference between a valid work (one that creates the conditions for the possibility of a valid experience) and
one that fails to find a place within a larger aesthetic/historical conversation.

Like a sudden memory that produces a feeling of uncertainty and a call for reflection rather than a determined fact, the effect of each of these works depended, in part, upon their refusal to transmit a didactic message, their hesitation to direct or demand. Although each of the works has an undeniable connection to an historical period or event (the Holocaust, the activities of the Baader-Meinhof group in 1970’s Germany, the communal living situation in the Soviet Union), the works appear to be transformative in so far as they are necessarily experienced at some remove from their context, in the manner of a “quotation.” In his 1994 book *The Man Without Content*, Giorgio Agamben writes of the power of the “quotation” in relation to the writing of Walter Benjamin:

> The particular power of quotations arises, according to Benjamin, not from their ability to transmit the past and allow the reader to relive it but, on the contrary, from their capacity to ‘make a clean sweep, to expel from the context, to destroy.’ Alienating by force a fragment of the past from its historical context, the quotation at once makes it lose its character of authentic testimony and invests it with an alienating power that constitutes its unmistakable force.²

Although it is important to consider the works in their historical context, in terms of both subject matter and the circumstances surrounding the creation of the work, part of the validity of the encounter with the works is the fact that they also exist in a quotational sense, that they transcend the specificity of their historical moment while simultaneously unconcealing that historical moment by distancing the viewer from a reified understanding of the events in question.

In my quest for an art of memory and absence, I became transfixed by works that operated on this level of “quotation,” sidestepping the comfort of being “about” something or relating a coherent narrative in favor of alienation, defamiliarization, or
bewilderment; an effect dependent to some degree upon a process I would call “interruption.” This process of “interruption” could take a visual form, in that what is presented to the eye is difficult to “see” or make out, or is impossible to bring into “focus,” or is resistant to conventional methods of “reading” or interpreting, or it could take a more fully experiential turn, in that the viewer’s senses are jolted or disquieted by a piece that does not carry through with what it initially appears to promise. Such an interruption, however, does not result in the emptying of the concept of monument or memorial or even a genre such as painting but, rather, creates both a space and a moment for reflection, an opportunity for the self to escape its own limitedness and the mind-numbing force of mere distraction.

While focusing my research upon the effect of such works on the viewer, it is helpful to point out that the process of “interruption” and the concept of a “valid experience” to be considered in my dissertation share certain aspects with a general notion of Rezeptionästhetik (aesthetics of reception), an approach to literature that challenges the objective status of “meaning” in a text and which, I believe, may be translated easily into the realm of the visual arts. Within the “aesthetics of reception,” as explained by the German Konstanz School literary theorists Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, the reader (viewer), in accomplishing the realization of the work, brings something into the world that did not exist before and, thus, takes part in the historical unfolding of its understanding. Thus, by transferring the locus of meaning from the work alone onto the relationship between the work and the viewer, my own experience with the works by Libeskind, Richter and Kabakov takes part in the production of their meaning. This investigation will also consider the capacity of the works to create the sense of “interruption” that I have experienced in relation to their distinct media, as
opposed to a notion of “art” as a general category. Finally, the validity of an experience with the work, first enabled by the process of interruption, is tested by its capacity for conversability: how does the experience of a particular viewer enter into the already-existing dialogue surrounding the works? Does a consideration of the works by these three artists in conjunction with one another create a heightened appreciation for their individual achievements? Are there links between the works beyond certain overlapping thematic concerns (regarding loss, mourning, exile, a longing for escape)? How do the works take into account their own traditions and medium-specific concerns while participating in the general art historical dialogue of the late 20th century? How is it possible that works of art in various media (architecture, painting, installation) manage to create a similar sense of “interruption” while also enabling viewer-specific, valid experiences or new interpretations to emerge that, nonetheless, seem to answer to implied questions already contained within the work? I will demonstrate that the conversation between the works by Libeskind, Richter and Kabakov, beginning with their shared engagement with the process of “interruption,” will help to answer the above questions and support the notion that “validity” of experience is founded upon such concerns.

Daniel Libeskind is associated with “deconstructivist architecture,” a radical approach which challenges the traditional values of stability, unity and harmony and elaborates the flaws and inconsistencies that are intrinsic to any structure, including International Style buildings, despite their appeal to functionalism and purity. Mark Wigley, theorist and architect at Princeton University, suggests that “deconstructivist” architects, such as Libeskind, Peter Eisenman and others, explore the relationship between the instability of the early Russian avant-garde, with its radical geometry and
sense of tension, and the stability of high modernism, infiltrating its aesthetic and slick veneer with the skewed geometry not fully investigated as a “structural condition” during the early 20th century. Wigley, however, emphasizes strongly that “deconstructivist” architecture is not an architecture of demolition, dismantling or disintegration, but rather one of disruption, dislocation, deflection and distortion.  

As mentioned earlier, I am interested in Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin, opened to the public in 1999. Libeskind has described this building as “always on the verge of Becoming–no longer suggestive of a final solution.” This structure is situated next to the “Kollegienhaus,” a baroque administrative building built in 1735 and restored during the 1960’s, on the Lindenstrasse in Berlin. In preparing his design, Libeskind was faced with a number of structural and philosophical issues. The planning committee asked the participants to consider the following: Jewish religion, customs and ritual objects; the history of the Jewish community in Germany and its destruction at the hands of the Nazis; and the lives and works of Jews who left their mark on Berlin over the centuries. Libeskind also hoped, in his design, to work through certain paradoxes inherent to the project: How to give voice to an absent Jewish culture without presuming to speak for it? How to bridge an open wound without mending it? The extension itself, now called the Jewish Museum Berlin, is a jagged, zinc-plated construction with irregularly-shaped exhibition halls intersected by a 27 meter high void that forms the central axis and is traversed by bridges, which link the various parts of the museum. As noted by James E. Young, it is the space inside the building and the voids incorporated into the design that constitute the architecture, while the walls are significant only in that they define the borders.
the baroque Kollegienhaus and the two buildings are bound together in depth, rather than by a visible connection between the facades. Upon entering, the visitor is faced with three roads: one leading to the Holocaust Tower, or “voided void,” as it is described by Libeskind, which is a concrete structure with no entrance from street level and is illuminated only through a narrow window slit near the top of the building; another leading to the “Garden of Exile and Emigration” outside of the building, which consists of 49 concrete columns filled with earth (48 filled with earth from Berlin and the last filled with earth from Jerusalem), all placed upon a ground plate which is tilted at two angles; or the third road leading to the main circulation stair and the central void. Although many of the visitors who were allowed to preview the museum extension before its official opening and before it was filled with exhibits expressed the opinion that the building was successful and provocative without any contents, Libeskind has insisted that

\[
\text{the Museum is not a memorial, despite the fact that there are dimensions of memory built into it. The Museum is a museum— it is a space for the encounter of history: a building and not a memorial.}^9
\]

While the Jewish Museum Berlin may not properly be called a memorial, as a museum it does disorient the viewer, in part through its use of fragmentation as an architectural motif; and while it is a site for the display of historical documents and artifacts, it also emerges as a work in itself, a visual and spatial experience that changes and surprises as one progresses through the building.

During the course of his career, German painter Gerhard Richter has moved freely between works of complete abstraction, representational works and his signature
“photo-paintings” (painted images that are based on photographs but are manipulated so that the figures or objects become “blurred”). His seemingly endless variety of “styles” has led some critics, including Benjamin Buchloh, to suggest that his oeuvre seems to play out the “end of painting,” commenting only upon the history of painting itself rather than any external reality. On the other hand, the fact that Richter paints in both an abstract and representational manner and moves between various genres, including still life, landscape and portraiture, suggests that “abstract painting” itself, instead of being a culmination of the reductive logic that is often assigned to modernist painting and its historical progression, may more properly be considered one among many “genres.”

An aspect of Richter’s work that has become fodder for much discussion is his technique of “photo-painting.” To create a “photo-painting,” Richter manually transfers the photographic image to the canvas and then works over the surface by guiding a dry brush or other implement over the still-moist paint in order to distort the sharp contours and effectively “blur” the painted representation. Richter began experimenting with painting from photographs in the early 1960’s, sometimes creating images in shades of gray, other times in color, portraying famous individuals (Brigitte Bardot, Jackie Kennedy) as well as friends, members of his family or unidentified figures from mass media imagery.

In relation to such works, Richter has offered a number of seemingly contradictory explanations, saying at one point: “All that interests me is the grey areas, the passages and tonal sequences, the pictorial spaces, overlaps and interlockings” and later explaining: “My sole concern is the object. Otherwise I would not take so much trouble over my choice of subjects; otherwise I would not paint at all.” Whether or not
one believes that Richter is only interested in the formal aspects of the image or that he is consumed by the subject matter, his choice of “object” in relation to his various series of photo-paintings has led to unavoidable discussion, and dissension, regarding the subjects portrayed. His earliest series, *Eight Student Nurses* from 1966, is comprised of eight black, white and grey images of the victims of American serial killer Richard Speck, copied from newspapers reporting on their deaths. Richter painted a second series of black, white and grey images in 1971, entitled *48 Portraits*, based upon the style of photographs typically used in encyclopedias. The portraits, all of “dead white males,” include some well-known individuals (such as Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, William James) as well as other largely forgotten figures, but the series is noticeably bereft of political thinkers and leaders. Richter has repeatedly professed his “distaste for all claims to possess the truth, and for all ideologies”\(^{11}\) but the subject matter of his photo-painting series continually provokes ideologically-charged responses and interpretations. Benjamin Buchloh has suggested that the *48 Portraits* cycle works to destroy the “paternal image” and legacy by revealing the fiction of such a “transnational liberal-humanist community” in relation to Germany’s fascist past.\(^{12}\) Others, specifically feminist critics, have attacked the exclusion of women from the selection and, while Richter defended himself by explaining the awareness of feminism in the 1960’s was not as well developed and that images of women would have disrupted the formal continuity, his comments seem less convincing than Robert Storr’s suggestion that Richter is not a “reformer,” but rather one who “represents” our heritage (which happens to be largely paternalistic) and, importantly, does so without reverence.\(^{13}\)

I am interested in the third of Richter’s photo-painting cycles, the *October 18, 1977* series from 1988. This series consists of fifteen paintings based upon black and
white mass-media photographs associated with the German radical/terrorist organizations known as the Baader-Meinhof group and the Red Army Faction. The RAF gained particular notoriety in 1977 when some of its members kidnapped prominent businessman Hanns-Martin Schleyer in hopes of gaining the release of members of their organization who were being held at the Stuttgart-Stammheim prison. In the end, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and J.C. Raspe were found dead or dying in their cells (their deaths were ruled as suicides) on October 18, 1977, and Schleyer was eventually executed by his captors. The photographs used by Richter and the historical figures themselves were instantly recognizable to the German public and carried with them the troubling realization that “terrorists” had emerged from within the German middle-class. Furthermore, this cycle of paintings generates a number of questions regarding Richter’s achievements as a painter: Is he enacting a revival of “history painting?” Does the choice of subject (the Baader-Meinhof group rather than Hanns-Martin Schleyer) reflect an emotional affinity to the group or a political statement? How does Richter’s choice to use ordinary snapshots or newspaper photographs as the basis for his “blurred” photo-paintings affect the perceived relationship between photography and painting? As Gregg Horowitz suggests, are these paintings forcing us to contemplate the problem of “how to live with our undying dead?” Are we witnesses to a painted “memorial” commemorating a moment of profound “failure” in Germany’s history?

The third artist I will consider is Ilya Kabakov, a Russian artist now living in the United States who was associated with Russian underground art of the 1960’s and 1970’s and has been called the “Father of Moscow Conceptualism.” Kabakov is best
known for his “total installations,” often interpreted as re-creations of typical Soviet environments, as well as his use of “garbage” (the detritus of everyday life) and extensive narratives to portray the complex and poignant lives of his numerous fictional characters. Kabakov began showing in the West in 1988, due in large part to the interest and support of the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York, where he exhibited his first large installation, *Ten Characters*, which was initially developed in “albums” (loose leaf books which recounted through texts and drawings the stories of fictional artists living on the margins of society).\(^{17}\) Boris Groys, an art historian and writer working in Germany and one of the most prolific writers on Kabakov, Moscow Conceptualism and Sots art, has explained that

> Each of Kabakov’s installations tells a story, and in almost every case it is the tale of an isolated figure in an uncomfortable, menacing environment. The relationship with their surroundings is shown as an agonistic one: the character makes ironic his environment, and the environment reciprocates. The two levels of irony are generally witty, but their interplay is melancholic.\(^ {18}\)

Groys also suggests that Kabakov’s “total” installations originate “neither in performance nor post-Minimalist site-specific art, like those of his Western colleagues, but in narrative literature, or more precisely, the novelistic tradition.”\(^ {19}\) Kabakov himself has argued that although the “roots of Western installation lie in Happenings and Actions, with the installation consisting of the remains of events frozen in time, the origins of Eastern European installations lie in painting.”\(^ {20}\) In his own writing on the “total installation,” Kabakov emphasizes that an installation, regardless of its theme, should rely upon

> . . . the characteristics of the painting: the illusoriness of its graphic ability, its ‘paintingness,’ and the fullness, the capacity to serve as a universal model. This means a unique sort of ‘total paintingness,’
which is directly connected to the genre of the ‘total’ installation.\textsuperscript{21}

Similarly, the use of “garbage” in Kabakov’s works does not emerge, necessarily, from an anti-art or medium-challenging impulse, as is often assumed in a Western context. Rather, according to Groys,

There is an internal kinship between art and garbage: the work of art and the piece of garbage are equally useless, non-functional, superfluous things, peripheral to the universal traffic in commodities. . . . Garbage forms the great Other of our culture: it is dangerous, poisonous, hostile to humanity, and must be destroyed. . . . At the same time, all cultural forms and products face a final choice after their inevitable historical death: either they are turned into museum pieces or they end up on the ‘garbage-heap of history,’ where they may continue to have an uncontrollable, ghostly and threatening life.\textsuperscript{22}

Kabakov’s installations may appear as collections of garbage, often labeled and carefully displayed, but they also evoke the people and the places where such trash collects: the remnant spaces of human living and the sense that memory is carried by such ordinary provisions for living. While Groys speaks of Kabakov as an “ironizer of subjective inwardness” and, thus, as an artist who must reject the modernist project, Gregg Horowitz suggests that Kabakov’s turning “against such inwardness is the very means of modernism’s own self-critical perpetuation.”\textsuperscript{23}

I will be considering several installations by Kabakov:\textit{Incident at the Museum, or Water Music} from 1992, \textit{Healing with Paintings} of 1996 and \textit{The Communal Kitchen} of 1993. \textit{Incident at the Museum, or Water Music} was a multi-room installation modeled after an old-fashioned museum. The rooms contained fourteen paintings by an invented artist-personage, the Socialist Realist painter Stepan Yakovlevich Koshelev. This show of works by “Koshelev” (who is said to have died in 1934) represents a portion of the works of this “lost” master but, at the moment he is to achieve his recognition, the
rooms housing his work are mysteriously flooded and water streams down from the ceiling, requiring the museum employees to cover large areas of the floor in plastic and place buckets and jars in various locations. What disrupts the viewer’s ability to contemplate the paintings in this “retrospective,” however, creates a different aesthetic experience: the “music” of the water falling onto the plastic (orchestrated by Kabakov’s co-creator, V. Tarasov). 24

*Healing with Paintings*, currently located at the Hamburger Kunsthalle in Germany, is entered through a noticeably worn, beige door standing slightly ajar in an otherwise pristine gallery. Upon entering, the viewer is in a narrow “waiting area,” featuring a cork board with the hours of the “clinic” and an explanation of the treatment, which involves spending a certain amount of time in complete solitude in a small, darkened space with illuminated paintings and music in the background. The viewer can look past a thin curtain into the treatment rooms, fitted with a large, framed painted canvas, a simple cot and a bedside table, but cannot step inside.

*The Communal Kitchen*, presently housed at the Maillol Museum in Paris, requires the viewer to enter via a dilapidated staircase that leads to an equally dilapidated door that, at least for this viewer, resisted being opened. The space itself is lit by a single light bulb and is filled with a variety of kitchen utensils, some hanging from the ceiling, others from the walls and others attached to painted canvases with words, presumably referring to fragments of speech at each corner. The kitchen of a communal apartment is most emblematic of the extreme physical proximity that goes along with the Soviet lifestyle; a curious mixture of isolation and intimacy in which Kabakov strives to find *la condition humane universelle*. 25

As the above works are considered within the context of “interruption,” I am
interested in the distinctness of the media employed by each of the three artists (painting, architecture and “total” installation) as well as the instances when they brush against each other in these works. For example, is it appropriate to position Kabakov’s installations “in between” the work by Libeskind, which effectively transforms “space,” and the paintings by Richter, since Kabakov has claimed that his “total” installations emerged from “painting” and often contain actual paintings? There is also the question of when a new “medium” is created (as opposed to a new “technique”) in relation to Kabakov’s claim of medium status for “installation” as well as Richter’s continuing relationship, as a painter, with photography. I believe that the works to be discussed will support my resistance to the tendency to blur the boundaries between “media,” as is often the case when installations are considered, and will provide material for an investigation of how this insistence on “art as such” as opposed to “art in general” affects our understanding of contemporary art.26

I also wish to situate these three artists within an artistic practice that I am describing as “interruption.” The word “interruption” is derived from the 14th-century Latin past participle “interrumpere,” which means “to break apart” and the meanings associated with this word include: “to halt the flow of a speaker with a question or remark;” “to disturb somebody who is busy doing something, causing him to stop;” “to cause a break in the flow of something or put a temporary stop to something;” and “to obstruct or block a view.”27 I am using the term “interruption” to indicate various phenomena of alienation, discomfort, confusion and “making strange,” described as Verfremdungseffekt (alienation effect) by Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, as ostraneniye (making strange) by Russian literary critic Victor Shklovsky and as Erschütterung (shudder, shaking, shock) by Theodor Adorno.
Brecht and Benjamin describe *Verfremdungseffekt* in relation to a theatre practice that is opposed to the dramatic, naturalistic theatre originally formulated by Aristotle. Brechtian “epic” theatre does not attempt to “reproduce” conditions but rather to “reveal” them. Such “uncovering” (also described as “making strange”) of conditions is achieved by the processes on the stage being interrupted. In his description of epic theatre, Benjamin explained that

> . . . practically no appeal is made to the spectator’s capacity for empathy. The art of epic theatre consists in arousing astonishment rather than empathy. To put it as a formula, instead of identify itself with the hero, the audience is called upon to learn to be astonished at the circumstances within which he has his being.\(^{28}\)

While certain elements of Brechtian theatre might arguably inform one’s understanding and appreciation of Kabakov’s “total installations,” given their resemblance at one level to a stage set or “episodic” scene, I intend to consider this commentary in conjunction with other theories of “alienation” and “interruption” that have emerged from literary and aesthetic theory, and discuss such techniques in relation to all of the artists and works being investigated.

Victor Shklovsky was a Russian Formalist critic best known for his 1917 essay “Art and Technique.” Shklovsky’s critical formula sought to differentiate between literature and non-literature and was centered around the concept of *ostraneniye* (making strange). He argued that when perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic and “algebrization” takes place: the sensations of performing certain actions and the process of communication becomes so habitual that words, phrases and sensations are replaced by symbols. We no longer see objects or feel events in their entirety but only “recognize” them by their major characteristics. Shklovsky insisted that art should force
the viewer or reader to take notice, to “make one feel things, to make the stone stony.”

Shklovsky’s comments in relation to art and its power to prolong perception and reveal the artfulness of an object bring to mind Martin Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in which he uses a van Gogh painting of boots in his consideration of art and its relation to “truth.” Heidegger suggests that painting can disclose a “truth” that is not available to the viewer from an explanation of the boots or the observation of the actual use of the boots, “but only by bringing ourselves before van Gogh’s painting.” Referring to the painting itself, he says:

What happens here? What is at work in the work? van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, is in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealedness of its being.

Both Shklovsky’s and Heidegger’s arguments may be applied to the effect created by the “interruptive” techniques employed by the three aforementioned artists (including Libeskind’s disruption of the space and alienation of the visitor in the Holocaust Tower and Garden of Exile and Emigration, and Kabakov’s confusing entrances, obstructed views and installations that depict moments of “interruption” within ordinary life) but Heidegger’s comments about equipmentality will be particularly useful in relation to the discussion of Richter and his use of photographs as the source, and arguably as the “subject matter,” of his October 18, 1977 series. I will argue that Heidegger’s description of “equipmentality,” which in his essay is attached to the work boots, may be applied to the photographic sources used by Richter. In other words, it is only through Richter’s paintings of these images that the images themselves can become anything other than useful objects (photographs) in the service of the archive or the mass media.
In a recent essay in the Winter 2002 edition of *October* entitled “Aura, Still,” Robert Kaufmann reveals the confluence between specific arguments of Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno in relation to the critical value of the “aura.” As a member of the Frankfurt School and theorist of Marxian dialectics, Adorno had a considerable interest in defending the critical and sociopolitical value of autonomous art:

> It is the dynamic character of auratic or autonomous art... that enables critical thought (and the sociopolitical praxis it can generate) in the first place. . . .the criticality that begins to emerge in auratic Romantic art... is indispensable rather that anathema to Marxian dialectics and other progressive or radically intended methodologies.\(^{32}\)

In relation to the idea of the “aura” and its intentional abandonment (so important to many postmodernists), Adorno suggests that such abandonment is what yields “truly baleful aestheticization (in the form of ‘culture industry’ reifications designed to inculcate conformism rather than critical agency).”\(^{33}\) Adorno uses the term *Ershütterung* (shaking) to indicate the aesthetic process by which the “subject’s petrification in his or her own subjectivity” is broken down by dint of the aura’s dynamic of charged distance.\(^{34}\) Once the “I” is shaken and moved to perceive its own finitude and limitedness, this same “I” may experience the “critical possibility of thinking otherness.”\(^{35}\) I am suggesting that all of the works to be discussed in this dissertation possess an “aura,” in part due to the nearly impossible task of reproducing any of the works accurately through photography or description, but mostly due to the fact of their “interruptive” techniques and effect on the viewer. I believe that it is the first step, the effect of the initial encounter, that opens up the possibility for a genuine aesthetic experience, whether it be called *Verfremdungseffekt*, *ostraneniye*, alienation or *Erschütterung*. Although I do not want to argue against medium specificity, I do want to
suggest that this phenomenon of “interruption” is not medium specific and is exhibited in the architecture of Libeskind, the painting of Richter and the “total” installations of Kabakov.

Although these theorists never specifically addressed the work of Libeskind, Richter or Kabakov in their writings, nor do the artists necessarily acknowledge the influence of the former (with the exception of Libeskind in relation to Walter Benjamin), I believe that my assertions will be supported by much of the commentary surrounding these artists and by my own experience of the works, keeping in mind that the works are linked thematically by their relation to absence, loss, failure and exile. In other words, I am not trying to unearth any hitherto unknown connection between these particular theorists and artists but, rather, I hope to reconsider their works in this context in order to demonstrate their participation in a conversation that is theoretically diverse but, nonetheless, repeatedly oriented to notions of “interruption” and “valid experience” that are fleshed out by the works of art. While reception theory supports an approach that gives careful consideration to the experience of the viewer and his or her contribution to the unfolding interpretation of each work, in this case, by examining the works together, as part of a larger phenomenon, additional aspects of what is means to have a valid experience with a work in the post-World War II and post-Soviet context are revealed, including how each specific medium responds to and adapts its own tradition alongside other developing media.
NOTES

Chapter 1


6. Young, 161.

7. Young, 164.

8. Young, 165.


14. For a discussion of the Baader-Meinhof group and the Red Army Faction as well as the events leading to the deaths on October 18th, 1977, see the appendix of this document.


18. Groys et al, 54.


23. Horowitz, 179.


25. Groys et al, 60.

26. By “art as such” I mean works produced in the late 20th-early 21st centuries that may draw upon other media (such as music for Libeskind, photography for Richter, illustration and painting for Kabakov) but which find their strength by responding most directly to the tradition of their chosen medium (architecture, painting and “total” installation) as opposed to works of “art in general” that tend to collapse the boundaries
between media. The situation for the artists discussed in this dissertation is somewhat different from that of early-to-mid-20th century modernists, who would typically focus upon removing visible influences from outside of their chosen medium (one might think of Clement Greenberg’s emphasis on removing the “literary” from painting or the famous “Form follows function” dictum associated with modernist architecture). Libeskind, Richter and Kabakov clearly value the structure provided by a practice that works within a specific medium and I believe their works offer a counterpoint to other contemporary works that appear to operate within the “post-medium condition” described by Rosalind Krauss.


31. Heidegger, 36.


33. Kaufmann, 49.

34. Kaufmann, 49.

CHAPTER 2

THE PHENOMENON OF “INTERRUPTION” IN THE VISUAL ARTS

In 1962, the same year German painter Gerhard Richter created his first “photo-painting,” art historian and critic Leo Steinberg asked the following questions during a symposium at the Museum of Modern Art in New York: “Do we decide that something is art because it exhibits certain general characteristics? Or because of the way we respond to it? In other words, exactly what is it that the artist creates?”

Steinberg offered his own response:

Victor Hugo, after reading Les Fleurs du Mal, wrote to Baudelaire and in five words summed up a system of aesthetics: ‘You create a new shudder.’ This implies that what the artist creates is essentially a new kind of spectator response. The artist does not simply make a thing, an artifact, or in the case of Baudelaire, a poem with its own beat and structure of evocation and image. What he creates is a provocation, a particular, unique and perhaps novel relation with reader or viewer.”

In his answer to the question of what it is that the artist creates, Steinberg shifts the focus regarding the achievement of any artist from one that considers the work of art as a self-contained entity to one that necessarily includes the reception of the work as part of that achievement. An important or successful work of art is one that creates, as described by Hugo, a “new shudder.” Thus, Steinberg’s preferred method for reviewing a show was described as follows:
Walking around, you observe this and that, passing by all the works that do nothing to you. Then, if any one work seems at all effective, open up at once and explore it as far as you can. Lastly, ponder and evaluate your reaction to this single work; and this, strangely enough, also yields a first generalization: If this one work in the show produced a valid experience, e.g. a new shudder, then the whole movement is justified by its proven ability to produce a valid work.3

My own experience with Gerhard Richter’s cycle of paintings October 18th, 1977 provides an illustration of this “shudder,” which is one aspect of the “valid experience” that I am describing as following from the phenomenon of “interruption.” In the recent retrospective of Richter’s work at the Museum of Modern Art, the fifteen paintings that comprise the series were exhibited together in a single room with an introductory text panel provided at the entrance alongside the image of Ulrike Meinhof as a young woman.4 Although I was well-versed in the historical and political context surrounding the series and with Richter’s technique of “blurred” photo-painting, I was, nonetheless, surprised by my own reaction upon encountering the paintings. I experienced simultaneous levels of confusion. First, the handling of the paint and the “blurring” technique (the use of a dry brush or other instrument on the still-wet paint) created an image that was all surface. When standing near the work, my eyes could not fully penetrate beyond the texture of the paint. When I moved to a more distant position, certain works (Record Player, Youth Portrait, Man Shot Down 1) offered a somewhat “legible,” though “blurred,” image, while others (Arrest 1, Arrest 2, Hanged, Cell, Funeral) disintegrated into a composition of various shades of gray with areas of black. In each case, there was no ideal place to stand in order to bring the work into “focus.” Second, many of the “images” themselves did not correspond directly to the date of the title but, rather, were media images or prison photographs associated with the events leading to the deaths of several members of the Baader-Meinhof group in
Germany (see Appendix). It became evident that Richter’s selection of images referred to a larger, complex narrative but could not properly be understood as “illustrating” or conveying that narrative in any coherent fashion. Third, due to the painting technique and the particular source material used, the cycle steadfastly resisted any clear political interpretation. Despite the highly-charged subject matter (no doubt even stronger for German viewers), Richter’s paintings are neither informative nor prescriptive; they allow for a moment for reflection that stands outside of the parameters of learned history or the documentary potential of photography. During my own moment of “interruption,” I felt the “shudder” that enables a valid experience, rather than the “shiver” that speaks of novelty.

Speaking of the experience of the work that creates a “new shudder,” Steinberg used the term “valid,” which implies something that has a solid foundation, or that is acceptable under law, or that has premises from which the conclusion follows logically, in relation to a work of art that creates a “new shudder.” Within this dissertation, a “valid experience” is defined in terms of the encounter with the actual works by Libeskind, Richter and Kabakov in so far as they enable continual re-engagement, an ability to go on with the conversation initiated by the creation of the work itself but not limited to the interpretation that arose at its first reception. In his text *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Hans Robert Jauss describes such a process in relation to literature:

If the literary text is taken primarily as an answer, or if the later reader is primarily seeking an answer in it, this by no means implies that the author himself has formulated an explicit answer in his work. The answering character of the text, which provides the historical link between the past work and its later interpretation, is a modality of its structure—seen already from the viewpoint of its reception; it is not an invariable value within the work itself.
The answer or meaning expected by the later reader can have been ambivalent or have remained altogether indeterminate in the original work. The degree of indeterminacy can—as Wolfgang Iser has shown—actually determine the degree of aesthetic effectiveness and hence the artistic character of a work.\(^5\)

Regarding the potential for “subjective arbitrariness” between the work itself and the progression of interpretation, Jauss explains that such a gap is bridged “only by the historical mediation of question and answer”:

For the implicit question, which in fact is what first awakens our present interest in the past work, can be obtained only through the answer that the aesthetic object, in its present materialization, holds or seems to hold ready for us. Literary works differ from purely historical documents precisely because they do more than simply document a particular time, and remain ‘speaking’ to the extent that they attempt to solve problems of form or content, and so extend far beyond the silent relics of the past.\(^6\)

The idea that literary works (and works of visual art) remain “speaking,” unlike historical documents, is part of the validity that is tested by conversability, the capacity to inspire an ongoing dialogue that contributes to meaning without becoming fully removed from the implicit question of the work. As with a literary text, for a work of visual art the meaning is “not a definable entity but, if anything, a dynamic happening.”\(^7\)

Also, given that works of art attempt to solve problems of form and content, their validity is tested on the level of the structure as a work itself in relation to the concerns of the medium current at the time of its creation.

In transferring the locus of meaning from the text itself onto the category of “reader,” Iser and Jauss argue that the “literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period” but, rather, must be recognized as having “its own unique history in the history of its reception, which
unfolds its meaning in the first place.” Jauss, in particular, was praised for his ability to navigate between two important but seemingly competing approaches: Marxism and Russian Formalism (including the work of Victor Shklovsky). While the Formalists were credited with introducing aesthetic perception as a theoretical tool for investigating literary works, Jauss wanted to resist their tendency to divorce art from its historical context.

The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees. For it is only through the process of its mediation that the work enters into the changing horizon-of-experience of a continuity in which the perpetual inversion occurs from simple reception to critical understanding, from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them.

Within an “aesthetic of reception” (Rezeptionästhetik), the reader (or viewer) not only “decodes” the text (or artwork) in order to establish its meaning, but the activity of said reader (or viewer) is a participation in the constitution of the work’s possible meanings. Similarly, when considering the works by Libeskind, Richter and Kabakov, the experience (Erfahrung) of the viewer will be the primary focus, specifically, the particular (but not necessarily exclusive) experience of this author.

The use of the term “experience” and the weight it is given within this discussion is, in part, a reflection of the tendency for Marxist (specifically Frankfurt School) philosophers and writers to emphasize that aspect of Kant, when they are willing to consider his writing as a part of their own projects. In his discussion of the aesthetic theory of Theodor Adorno, J. M. Bernstein has written:

Although the notion of experience is not prominent in Aesthetic Theory, its cognates, surrogates, and analogues are: for example, expression, suffering, shudder, aura, mimesis, affinity, the plus or more of appearance.
The “experience” of the reader or viewer, within the context of reception theory and the writing of Adorno, is the process by which the “truth content” of the work may be expressed (or formed, depending upon one’s point of view). Pauline Johnson has suggested that, for Adorno, the “truth content of the work is yielded only by the interpretive work of philosophical criticism” but that, since the modern public “lacks both the capacity and the incentive to abandon its philistine appreciation of the work as mere beautiful appearance,” such redemptive criticism “is a specialized task for the philosopher-critic.”

Throughout his writing, Adorno has suggested that the “experience of the aura” and the process of redemptive criticism “is attained in modernist works of art themselves through a process of negation.” In the section entitled “Society” in Aesthetic Theory, Adorno explained:

> The shock aroused by important works is not employed to trigger personal, otherwise repressed emotion. Rather, this shock is the moment in which recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work; it is the moment of being shaken. The recipients lose their footing; the possibility of truth, embodied in the aesthetic image, becomes tangible. This immediacy, in the fullest sense, of relation to artworks is a function of mediation, or penetrating and encompassing experience [Erzählung]; it takes shape in the fraction of an instant, and for this the whole of consciousness is required, not isolated stimuli and responses.

When Adorno suggests that “recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work,” it is important to consider that statement in tandem with the idea that the “recipients lose their footing” in order to distinguish such a forgetting of one’s self from the uncritical, empathetic experience associated with dramatic (naturalistic) theatre, as described by Bertolt Brecht. The “forgetting” is, rather, the moment of “interruption” that engenders the possibility of critical thinking, not a submission of self into a work
that pretends to smooth out the contradictions and conflicts of reality. The choice, within this dissertation, to employ the term “interruption,” rather than to simply adopt Adorno’s notion of “negation” or “negative dialectics,” is dictated, in part, by the need to situate my own experiences somewhere between Adorno’s critical negativity and the reception theory of Jauss, which allows for valid experiences on the part of viewers who are not specifically “philosopher-critics” but who may still be “shaken” and momentarily released from a reified sense of self and the world. Further, a different term is necessary in this instance in order to acknowledge both theorists without incorrectly conflating all aspects of their approaches, since Jauss would want to separate himself from an author-oriented essentialism that might, for example, be read into Adorno’s admiration for the music of Arnold Schönberg, regardless of audience response. While Adorno and Jauss would agree, according to Johnson, that “the social significance of the aesthetic object is measured in accordance with its ability to promote in the receptor a critical, reflective consciousness of the present,” Jauss departs from Adorno by suggesting that “the value of the art work is determined not by the judgement of the critic but is decided by the work’s historically proven capacity to pleasurably extend the cultural horizon of its various publics.”

While the pieces by Daniel Libeskind, Gerhard Richter and Ilya Kabakov to be discussed in this dissertation may lay claim to the ability to “extend the cultural horizons” of the viewer (not to mention one’s social and political awareness), I am arguing that the potential for such an experience is folded into their capacity to create a “new shudder,” with the understanding that many other works of contemporary art do not provide such an experience, and that this capacity is related to distinct media (in this case, architecture, painting and “installation”) as opposed to a notion of “art” as a general category within which works may float freely.
without fear of boundaries or restrictions.

Although I initially grouped the works of Libeskind, Richter and Kabakov together on the basis of underlying themes such as memory, mourning and loss, my experience with the works themselves revealed the aspects that allowed such themes to be significantly addressed. It began to appear that a crucial component of a “valid experience” must take place before a discussion of meaning or theme could properly begin. Secondly, I began to question the need to establish a particular “interpretation” of the works and became more concerned with what the works do, rather than what they “say” or “mean.” In her 1964 essay “Against Interpretation,” Susan Sontag argues:

In most modern instances, interpretation amounts to the philistine refusal to leave the work of art alone. Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable.  

Instead of striving for the definitive interpretation of the works of art in question, I sought support for a discussion of their worthiness, their capacity to create a “valid experience.” Although Sontag’s essay was written in 1964, I believe many of her comments regarding the state of contemporary culture are still of interest:

Interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there. This cannot be taken for granted, now. Think of the sheer multiplication of works of art available to every one of us, superadded to the conflicting tastes and odors and sights of the urban environment that bombard our senses. Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. All the conditions of modern life—its material plenitude, its sheer crowdedness—conjoin to dull our sensory faculties. And it is in the light of the condition of our senses, our capacities (rather than those of another age), that the task of the critic must be assessed.
Thus, it is imperative that contemporary works of art be considered as objects or experiences that must work within the given culture, in this case, one of extreme sensory overload and dulled faculties, and that part of the task of the artist is to capture the viewer, to create a “new shudder” in a manner that is not dependent upon novelty or shock alone, but, nonetheless, causes an “interruption” in the ceaseless flow of imagery that asks only for mere “recognition” at the expense of the more labored, valid experience, a more originary experience of “perception.”

Although this dissertation focuses upon works of the visual arts and architecture, and I will argue in support of medium specificity and the necessity of limits, the general notion of “interruption” that I am discussing is not something restricted to the visual arts and may take place within art, literature and theatre from various periods and geographic locations. While the interruptive aspects of each piece must perform within an arena of expectation particular to the medium, the sensation experienced by the viewer in each case may be remarkably similar. For example, the frustration of visibility in the Richter paintings is as overwhelming as the limits to coherence and legibility in Kabakov’s *Communal Kitchen*. The disorientation experienced while moving through Libeskind’s Garden of Exile and Emigration, with its angled, treacherous walkways, corresponds to the confusion created by the multilayered nature of Kabakov’s *Incident at the Museum, or Water Music*, in which the disruptive “leak” in the ceiling, buckets and sheets of plastic are not simply evidence of a makeshift repair but are integral to the functioning of the piece. Although valid experiences of art have occurred throughout history, the manner by which a work of art does what it does is specifically tied to a particular historical and cultural context and functions most successfully when those conditions are both embedded within the piece
and simultaneously subverted. This chapter will be devoted to exploring what it means for a work of art to create a “new shudder,” to enable a “valid experience.” While I will be writing about works of architecture, painting and “installation” from the late 1980’s to the present, similar arguments have been made about significant works of art from a variety of artistic periods. I am not attempting to catalogue all of the artists from recent history who have created works which exhibit the capacity to cause an “interruption,” and if I did attempt to do so I would surely overlook many examples in the process. Rather, I am suggesting that certain aspects of these works (and their respective media) and their potential to enable a valid experience within the viewer are revealed when they are considered together and in conjunction with an examination of the phenomenon of interruption. Without having experienced the works as participants in a larger conversation, carried in part by thematic similarities as well as a shared capacity for “interruption,” it would have been difficult to fully perceive the medium-specific achievements of each as well as the role played by the historical and political contexts in determining how each artist approached his medium and why, in the case of Kabakov, a new medium (“total” installation) was deemed necessary.

Although the terms “interruption” and “to interrupt” are most commonly associated with “speech,” I am interested in considering these terms in relation to their secondary meanings:

— to disturb someone, causing him to stop his activity
— to cause a break in the flow of something
— to obstruct or block a view

I wish for the notion of “interruption” to provide a background for specific discussions
of my chosen artists and their works but, in order for that to happen, I will first provide a broad definition and explanation of this concept. I will begin in the area of literary theory, specifically the 1917 essay “Art as Technique” by Russian Formalist critic Victor Shklovsky.

The group known as the “Russian Formalists” took some inspiration from earlier philologists, such as Alexander Potebnya (1835-91), who worked toward a distinctly literary approach to the study of literature, one that would prevent subservience to other disciplines and would avoid falling into a moral or social concern with message or an historical view that neglected the work itself. Potebnya suggested that if the distinguishing characteristic of literature is the way it uses words, then students of literature must study the way words are used. Similarly, I am interested in the way a work does what it does and how it creates an interruption (or new shudder) in relation to the tools of the particular medium to which it belongs.

One of the charter members of the group known as the Formalist critics in early 20th century Russia (and the Soviet Union) was Victor Shklovsky, whose 1917 essay “Art as Technique” is, arguably, the most important statement of early Formalist method. His text contains a theory of both the methodology of criticism and the purpose of art, with the latter being particularly useful for this discussion, given its potential for applicability to the visual arts as well as to written works. Although Potebnya’s aesthetic approach had been popular among the Symbolist poets, Shklovsky begins his text with a lengthy rebuttal of the ideas associated with the earlier critic. He opens by quoting a maxim held dear by Potebnya and his disciples, that “art is thinking in images,” and explains that this notion led to a view of poetic imagery as a tool to “help channel various objects into groups and to clarify the unknown by means of the
known.”\textsuperscript{22} According to Shklovsky, Potebnya’s explanation of poetry implies that it is a special way of thinking which permits an “economy of mental effort” and makes way for “a sensation of the relative ease of the process.”\textsuperscript{23} Shklovsky counters with the suggestion that, if poetry can be said to equal “imagery,” then the history of such “imagistic” art should properly consist of a history of the changes in imagery, when, in fact, images change very little from one century, one nation, even one poet to another. Consequently, the more appropriate approach to poetry is one that is sensitive to new techniques and to the arrangement and development of language, since poets are “much more concerned with arranging images than with creating them.”\textsuperscript{24}

After remarking upon the need to distinguish between the laws of practical language and the laws of poetic language, Shklovsky embarks upon a discussion of the “general laws of perception” and the purpose of art. He explains that

\[\ldots\text{as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic; if one remembers the sensations of holding a pen or of speaking in a foreign language for the first time and compares that with his feeling at performing the action for the ten thousandth time, he will agree with us. Such habituation explains the principles by which, in ordinary speech, we leave phrases unfinished and the words half expressed. In this process, ideally realized in algebra, things are replaced by symbols. Complete words are not expressed in rapid speech; their initial sounds are barely perceived.}\]

It is understandable that, in the course of daily life, there are certain activities that require habitualization, such as driving an automobile or communicating during a business transaction, in order that such activities may be safely and effectively pursued. But, for Shklovsky, to live life in its entirety at this level of engagement, to participate in one’s existence only unconsciously, is tantamount to never having lived at all. He explains that “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one
feel things, to make the stone *stony.*”\(^{26}\) While the *purpose* of art, for Shklovsky, is “to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known,” the *technique* of art is

> to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*\(^{27}\)

The technique that allows for such an experience is described by Shklovsky as *ostraneniye* (defamiliarization or “making strange”) and he cites examples from both poetry and literature in his essay. For instance, Shklovsky mentions that, in his “better pages,” poet Andrey Bely offered many examples of “roughened rhythm,” with the idea that, while smooth or “easy” poetic rhythms may pass by unnoticed, more difficult or “roughened” works force the reader to take notice and attend to them.\(^{28}\) Leo Tolstoy also employed a method of *ostraneniye* or defamiliarization in his prose works, albeit by a different technique. Shklovsky cites numerous examples where Tolstoy makes a familiar object, concept or activity seem strange by either describing it as if seen for the first time or by taking on an unexpected viewpoint as narrator. For example, in the work “Shame,” Tolstoy describes the activity of flogging as “to strip people who have broken the law, to hurl them to the floor, and to rap on their bottoms with switches.”\(^{29}\) In the work “Kholstomer,” Tolstoy defamiliarizes the institution of private property by describing it from the viewpoint of a horse instead of a person.\(^{30}\) In fact, Shklovsky suggests that any reader of Tolstoy could find numerous examples wherein the author uses his method of “seeing things out of their normal context” and, thus, forces the reader to reconsider the meanings attached to common concepts, objects and activities,
including battlefield confrontations and religious rituals. Furthermore, such techniques are employed in erotic writing, as objects or activities (such as bodily parts or sexual intercourse) are frequently described as if seen for the first time or in euphemistic terms, as well as in riddles, which pretend to show the subject by words which appear properly descriptive but begin, during the telling, to not seem applicable after all.

Shklovsky argues that ostraneniye is found “almost everywhere form is found” and he explains that the difference between Potebnya’s point of view and his own is that

an image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object—*it creates a “vision” of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it.*

Finally, Shklovsky insists that “a work is created ‘artistically’ so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception.” I wish to include Shklovsky’s concept of ostraneniye and the slowed perception that should result from techniques of defamiliarization as part of my definition of “interruption” in relation to the visual arts. While the interruptive techniques of the visual arts will necessarily be different from those described by Shklovsky (such as the aforementioned “roughened rhythms” of poetry or the purposefully naive descriptions used by Tolstoy), I believe that there are enough similarities in general approach and intention to make the translation a viable one.

Although Shklovsky’s explanation of ostraneniye does not explicitly include the suggestion that a work of literature might, literally, be “interrupted” in pursuit of defamiliarization, I believe that he would have appreciated the approach of Italo Calvino in his 1979 book *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore* (translated into English as *If on a
winter’s night a traveler in 1981). With this book, Calvino effectively “makes strange” the very act of reading and the process of becoming involved in a narrative. The book is composed of numbered chapters interposed with ten sections of a novel, each with a different plot, style, mood and fictional author. The numbered chapters detail the activities and thoughts of the main characters (the two “readers” of the novel), who have each purchased what they believed to be a new novel by Italo Calvino, only to discover that the book is “defective,” containing only a portion of a novel by Polish author Bazakbal. After returning the books, the “readers” continue to be frustrated in their quest to find a complete novel, as they are continually given only portions by various authors and are unable to find a single, uninterrupted text. Similarly, the reader of Calvino’s book finds herself repeatedly falling into the trap of engaging with a narrative (with the “novel” sections), only to be returned suddenly to the larger narrative of the two “readers.” This experience corresponds to the viewing of certain installation works by Kabakov, which include both the objects associated with the activity of the fictional personage within the space as well as written commentary left by equally fictional “viewers,” causing the actual viewer to migrate between the illusion of the installation and the consideration of it.

The experience of reading the book by Calvino is not something that can be captured in a description of the work, as the sense of interruption is only fully appreciated once one has become thoroughly involved in each section. The act of interruption, which takes place always at a moment of suspense, draws attention to the writing devices employed by Calvino as he adopts the guise of various styles of literature, such as the political novels of eastern Europe or the literature of Latin America. Thus, no matter the disruptive technique or the style of writing employed,
acts of interruption, whether taking the form of a gentle nudge against our habitualized modes of perception or the actual, abrupt termination of a narrative, serve to frustrate the expectations of the reader in a provocative manner. Such an experience is not, of course, limited to literature and a similar phenomenon may be explored within the realm of theatre, specifically in the plays of Bertolt Brecht.

In his approach to theatre, Brecht, the German dramatist and poet who lived from 1898 to 1956, drew many distinctions between what he termed “epic theatre” and Aristotelian, “naturalistic” dramatic theatre. The essential point of epic theatre was to appeal less to the feelings than to the reason of the spectator, denying the phenomenon of catharsis or the uncritical sharing of an experience in favor of a theatrical productions that revealed (rather than simply reproduced) social and political conditions in a manner that encouraged action rather than acceptance.35

The writer and critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) wrote about Brechtian theatre on several occasions and he described one of its defining characteristics as the use of “interruption.” In “What is Epic Theatre (II)” of 1939, Benjamin explained that the task of epic theatre is “less the development of the action than the representation (Darstellung) of situations,”36 with “representation” not indicating “reproduction” in the sense associated with naturalistic theatre but, rather, a manner that “defamiliarizes” (makes strange, uncovers) situations as if they were being seen for the first time.

According to Benjamin, in epic theatre

hardly any appeal is made to the viewer’s empathy. The art of epic theatre consists in producing not empathy but astonishment. In a word: instead of identifying with the protagonist, the audience should learn to feel astonished at the circumstances under which he functions.37

The above phenomenon is most commonly described as *Verfremdungseffekt*, a term
coined by Brecht. The term first appeared in his 1935-36 essay “Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst” (Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting), although Brecht had been discussing aspects of this phenomenon since the 1920’s.\(^{38}\) Moreover, the term was taken, in part, from Shklovsky’s notion of \textit{priem ostraneniye} (device for making strange) and it appeared in Brecht’s vocabulary after a visit to Moscow in the spring of 1935, during which he happened to view a performance by Mei Lan-fang’s theatrical company.\(^{39}\) The techniques described in this essay, and elsewhere in Brecht’s writing, were envisioned as techniques that would hinder the audience from its tendency (or, perhaps, desire) to merely identify with the characters on stage. Such devices could prove useful in the development of an epic theatre. Brecht illustrated his concept as follows:

\begin{quote}

Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage’s characteristic illusions. The audience can no long have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. A whole elaborate European stage technique, which helps to conceal the fact that the scenes are so arranged that the audience can view them in the easiest way, is thereby made unnecessary.\(^{40}\)

\end{quote}

The actor is called upon to appear strange and astonishing to the audience and to raise everyday objects and situations above the level of the obvious and the expected. What might appear as a cold or stilted performance to a European (or American) spectator is more accurately understood in terms of “ritual,” where the actions are clearly understood as a repetition of an incident. Further, whereas the Western actor must go to great lengths to effectively “convert” himself into the figure being portrayed, within Chinese theatre and the epic theatre of Brecht, the actor does not have to maintain a
trance-like state and his performance need not be ruined by interruption or set changes taking place around him.\textsuperscript{41}

As Brecht formulated his own approach to experimental German epic theatre, in writings such as “The Street Scene,” “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect” and “On Experimental Theatre” from 1939-40, he provided numerous methods by which actors could subvert the traditional, naturalistic approach to theatre in order to provoke and motivate the audience in a revolutionary way. For instance, in “The Street Scene,” Brecht suggested that a basic model for epic theatre and a useful experiment for “epic” acting was the phenomenon of “an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place.”\textsuperscript{42}

Part of the benefit of such an approach is the resistance to the idea that events are “inevitable” and impossible to change, which Brecht believed was encouraged by the passive nature of viewing traditional theatre. He explained that, although other bystanders may not have seen the actual accident or, if they did, they might not agree with the eyewitness’ version of the events, they are, nonetheless, able to form their own opinion about the accident, due to the manner in which it is acted out.\textsuperscript{43} Furthermore, Brecht reiterated that, as in the street scene described above, the “engendering of illusion” is excluded from epic theatre. Brecht insisted that the natural attitude adopted by the eyewitness in the street scene could be adopted by his own actors, keeping in mind that such as actor “never forgets, nor does he allow it to be forgotten, that he is not the subject but the demonstrator.”\textsuperscript{44} This technique, which helps to produce the desired \textit{Verfremdungseffekt}, is one of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this
‘effect’ is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view.45

As the eyewitness in the street scene may move comfortably between his demonstration of the events and commentary about those events, Brecht envisioned a method of acting that would similarly prevent the audience from becoming enthralled by the “illusion” of the events and, thus, unable to view them critically. In his “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting,” Brecht suggested that actors in the epic theatre were not required to transform themselves into their characters (as encouraged by the naturalistic method of Stanislavsky) but, rather, should use particular techniques that prevent an empathetic response from the audience and call for a more active, critical approach. For example, an “epic” actor should speak his part “not as if he were improvising it himself but like a quotation.”46 In order to “alienate” the actions and remarks of the characters and achieve the appropriate detachment, the actor might employ the following:

1. Transposition into the third person.
2. Transposition into the past.
3. Speaking the stage directions out loud.47

Finally, Brecht maintained that events must be portrayed as “historical” incidents, which are “unique, transitory” and “associated with particular periods.”48 By historicizing the incidents of the play, it becomes impossible to view the conduct of the characters as “fixed” and “universally human” but, rather, as behavior that is subject to criticism and reform.49

In German epic theatre, Brecht explained that the Verfremdungseffekt was achieved not only through the acting style, but also by the music (choruses, songs) and the settings (including placards and captions), which served to historicize the events.50
In certain works, such as *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*, written in 1941 while Brecht was in exile in Finland, the overall conception of the play, which combines a narrative based upon the rise of Adolph Hitler through the ranks of German politics, a Chicago gangland milieu, and blank verse written in a “grand style” that harkens back to Elizabethan high drama, adds to the feeling of alienation. Brecht hoped to make his audience uncomfortable, both by revealing the parallels between Hitler and his companions and the hoodlums of Chicago’s protection racket and by having such figures talk like characters from a Shakespearean drama. In both instances, the more disconcerting to the audience the better and the more successful the achievement of epic theatre.\(^5\)

In his essay “On Experimental Theatre,” Brecht wrote admiringly of the pioneering techniques of director Erwin Piscator (1893-1966), whose innovative stage sets and projection techniques served to further the “educational” aspects of theatre. Brecht wrote that theatrical experimentation during the early 20th century generally moved along one of two paths, either toward “entertainment” or “instruction,” and he explained that Piscator “saw the theatre as a parliament, the audience as a legislative body” and it was the “stage’s ambition to supply images, statistics, slogans which would enable its parliament, the audience, to reach political decisions.”\(^6\) Through the use of film projections, montage, painted cartoons (including works by artist George Grosz), and often extravagant mechanical contraptions on stage, Piscator’s productions not only historicized the events of the play but also brought the setting itself to life. His projections allowed simultaneous events in different places to be shown (on the stage and on film) as well as the presentation of documents and statistics as part of the background during a scene.\(^7\)
In Piscator’s productions or in *The Threepenny Opera* the educative elements were so to speak *built in*: they were not an organic consequence of the whole, but stood in contradiction to it; they broke up the flow of the play and its incidents, they prevented empathy, they acted as a cold douche for those whose sympathies were becoming involved.54

In his introduction to the 1976 translation of Brecht’s opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, A. R Braunmuller describes Brecht’s opposition to traditional opera as follows:

One of the dirtiest words in Brecht’s lexicon is *kulinarisch* (culinary), typically applied to a work of art. The artist as cook, the art-work food, the audience as consumer: in their relation, nothing but unthinking pleasure and the satisfaction of a manufactured need by unreal means. For Brecht, traditional grand opera, or even the supposedly avant-garde opera of a Stravinsky, did not escape the twin evils of furthering pleasure and transforming itself into merchandise.55

Braunmuller explains that, in order for *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, which was first performed in 1930, to be successful, the music of Kurt Weill and the libretto of Brecht must “offend and repel” its audience.56 As with other examples of Brechtian epic theatre, the work must demand reformation of the society that it reveals and force the audience to move beyond the complacent responses encouraged by more traditional opera. The central concern, in this instance and in the earlier *Threepenny Opera*, was the relationship between the text and music. If music and text worked together to form a single artistic entity, the goal of preventing the audience from irrational, culinary (thoughtless) enjoyment would not be achieved.57

I will conclude this examination of Brechtian epic theatre and its relation to my own concept of “interruption” by returning to Walter Benjamin’s essay “What is Epic Theatre (II)” of 1939. Benjamin used the very term “interruption” in explaining certain
techniques used to achieve the sense of defamiliarization known as *Verfremdungseffekt*. The defamiliarization of situations, according to Benjamin, is cultivated through the interruption of the action.58 As a basic example he cited

. . . a family scene that is suddenly interrupted by the entrance of a stranger. The mother is just about to seize a bronze bust and hurl it at her daughter; the father is in the act of opening a window in order to call a policeman. At this moment, the stranger appears at the doorway. “Tableau” is what it would have been called around 1900. In other words, the stranger is confronted with the situation: troubled faces, an open window, the furniture in disarray. But there is a gaze before which even more ordinary scenes of middle-class life look almost equally startling.59

Benjamin also suggested that epic theatre relies upon interruption as it relates to the act of quoting. In the same way that quoting a text requires one to interrupt its context, epic theatre, in its reliance upon “interruption,” is a “quotable” form of drama. What is “quotable,” however, is not the text but, rather, the gestures. Brecht had also written about the potential for the use of gesture in his “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting,” in that the actor “achieves the A-effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) by being seen to observe his own movements” and he “does not conceal that fact that he has rehearsed it, any more than an acrobat conceals his training, and he emphasizes that it is his own (actor’s) account, view, version of the incident.”60 Epic theatre may be understood as a “gestic” theater, according to Benjamin, because “the more frequently we interrupt someone engaged in acting, the more gestures result.”61

The sense of “interruption” found in Brechtian epic theatre was also achieved through unusual production techniques, including projections (after Piscator), placards and captions, as well as the songs, which are opportunities for the actor to exhibit certain gestures on stage. Such occasions must be strictly separated from the other elements
of the play, with different lighting and a recognition by the actor that he has left the realm of plain speech and started singing. Finally, Benjamin suggested that it was easier to define epic theatre in terms of the stage, rather than in terms of drama, by describing it as “the filling in of the orchestra pit”:

This abyss, which separates the players from the audience as though separating the dead from the living; this abyss, whose silence in a play heightens the sublimity, whose resonance in an opera heightens the intoxication; this abyss, which of all theater’s elements is the one that bears the most indelible traces of its origin in ritual, has steadily decreased in significance. The stage is still raised, but it no longer rises from unfathomable depths. It has become a dais. The didactic play and the epic theater are attempts to take a seat on this dais.

During the mid to late-1930’s, when Benjamin was writing about epic theater, he was also working on his now-famous essay “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” (The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility). This text generated a great deal of discussion between its author and his colleague and friend Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) regarding the implications of the decay of the “aura.” While it is possible to interpret Benjamin’s essay, in part, as a valorization of certain aspects of popular culture, such as the potential of photography and film to enable increased participation in and appreciation of the “arts” by the masses, Adorno was steadfastly opposed to such an embrace of what he termed the “culture industry.” It is important, however, to distinguish between the various arguments being made in Benjamin’s oft-quoted essay. To begin, the title itself requires some clarification. For many years, English-speaking readers were familiar with this essay, which has three versions, under the title “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Recently, in the 2003 reissue of Benjamin’s collected
writings, the translators chose to translate the title literally from the German as “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” What might, at first, appear to be a subtle difference may serve to redirect the focus in relation to Benjamin’s various arguments within that one text.65

For example, the earlier title suggests that the reader might expect a general discussion of “art” in the “age of mechanical reproduction,” whereas the second title, with the all-important “Its,” narrows the focus specifically to the technical reproduction of works of art. While Benjamin did comment upon societal changes and shifts in the processes of perception associated with certain technological developments (such as photography and film), he was careful to distinguish between a “work of art” that may be technologically reproduced through external means (such as a slide of a painting) and works of art that are inherently reproducible (such as films or photographs). When Benjamin explained that “exhibition value” begins to drive back “cult value” (referring to the release of an artwork from its basis in ritual and from a value associated with its uniqueness), he began the sentence with the words “In photography.”66 Thus, many of the comments made by Benjamin regarding the decline of the aura, the potential for mass participation in the arts and changes in the nature of participation and perception are most appropriate to a discussion of film or photography and may not necessarily be applied as readily or effectively when speaking about a modern painting. In footnote 14 to his essay, Benjamin pointed out the difference:

In film, the technological reproducibility of the product is not an externally imposed condition of its mass dissemination, as it is, say, in literature or painting. The technological reproducibility of films is based directly on the technology of their production. This not only makes possible the mass dissemination of films in the most direct way, but actually enforces it.67
Furthermore, when Benjamin distinguished between “distraction” and “concentration” in relation to the emerging type of “distracted” reception associated with the viewing of films, he first accepted the “commonplace” that “the masses seek distraction, whereas art demands concentration from the spectator.” He did not necessarily dispute the idea that “art” demands concentration but, rather, questioned whether the longstanding distinction between “distraction and concentration” could provide the basis for the analysis of film (not painting). The point I wish to make is not that Adorno and Benjamin were of like mind regarding photography, film or even radio but, rather, that their disagreement on these fronts does not preclude the finding of similarities in other areas of their thought. In other words, I do not believe that Benjamin would have suggested that a viewer approach a painting in the same manner as a film (neither in the “age of mechanical reproduction” nor in our current “digital age”) and, therefore, his comments about film viewing and the “profound changes in apperception,” which resulted from the “reception in distraction” associated with such viewing, should not be understood as a prescription for the viewing of works of art in general but, rather, as a description of a symptom of the times. The underlying sense of ambivalence regarding the “aura” in Benjamin’s essay and the careful distinction made between reproducible works of art and works of art that may be reproduced by external means are openings that will allow for the sensible introduction of Adorno’s aesthetic theory to this discussion and I suggest that such opportunities arise elsewhere in Benjamin’s body of work as well.

The connection between Adorno and Bertolt Brecht may prove to be a bit more difficult to sustain, since they usually are not linked together in conversations about aesthetics, given that Brecht is typically understood as one who sought to “destroy the
aura constituted by the nineteenth-century theatre of illusion,”69 while Adorno maintained the potential for resistance within the domain of serious “high” Culture. Both Adorno and Brecht, starting in 1927, along with Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Ernst Bloch, participated in the “Berlin circle,” a group interested in developing a new aesthetics that would be politically committed to the goals of Marxist revolution.70 Also, in his 1998 book Brecht and Method, Fredric Jameson reminds us that one of the many “levels” of the “Brechtian life-enterprise” was the “experimental Brecht”: Brecht as author of Die Massnahme, a play that “has inspired the effort at new forms ceaselessly since its inception,” and dramatist whose theory of estrangement (Verfremdungseffekt) tended to transform even his “more conventional plays.”71 Although the Communist Party would eventually condemn modern art as a manifestation of bourgeois decadence, Brecht defended experimental theater and insisted that new aesthetic techniques could be reworked into revolutionary tools useful for bringing about a critical consciousness of the nature of capitalist society.72

It is helpful to consider the development of Adorno’s (and Brecht’s) thought in relation to the writings of Georg Lukács, specifically his influential 1923 book History and Class Consciousness. Adorno, Benjamin and Brecht were all influenced by Lukács’ proposal that Marxism was a dialectical method that could be used to reveal the contradictions inherent to the social reality of capitalist society as well as his statement that “only the dialectical conception of totality can enable us to understand reality as a social process,” thus tearing aside the illusory forms produced by the capitalist mode of production that prevent true historical knowledge.73 While Lukács envisioned Marxism, as did Brecht, as a method for self-knowledge that leads to action, Adorno ultimately focused on Ideologiekritik, the critical analysis of bourgeois consciousness, rather than
the question of praxis.

In 1930, Adorno was still able to write a favorable review of Brecht’s *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, with its overtly political message, and he shared with Brecht the affirmation of modern artistic techniques as well as the belief that “valid art (and theory) *revealed* social contradictions rather than presenting aesthetic resolution of them.” They differed, however, in that Brecht envisioned a freeing of consciousness from the veil of bourgeois ideology by the proletariat as well as the producers of the art, while Adorno insisted that the criterion for valid art should not depend upon its political effect on the audience but, rather, the critical attitude of the artist or theorist. This tendency in the writing of Adorno also distinguishes it from the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss, which resists placing so much emphasis on the author, but I believe that this distinction operates on the level of degree rather than as a theoretical impasse, since Adorno frequently describes the achievements of successful works of art in terms of viewer response.

On the other hand, Adorno steadfastly supported the music of Arnold Schönberg, which had no conscious political intent and limited appeal for a proletariat audience. Brecht had compared the music of Schönberg with “the neighing of a horse about to be butchered and processed for bockwurst” and Brecht’s collaborator Hans Eisler (who had been trained by Schönberg), at one point recalled hearing Schönberg remark that “the fact that listeners are there appears to be necessary, because an empty concert hall doesn’t sound good.” Nevertheless, Adorno defended the experimental music of Schönberg and its “intellectual elitism”:

> The basis of the isolation of radical modern music is not its asocial, but precisely its social substance. It expresses its concern through its pure quality, doing so all the more
emphatically, the more purely this quality is revealed; it points out the ills of society, rather than sublimating those ills into a deceptive humanitarianism which would pretend that humanitarianism had already been achieved in the present.77

Despite their specific disagreement regarding Schönberg, Brecht and Adorno both shared distaste for the “culinary,” and Adorno’s statement echoes Brecht’s preference for works that resist providing “unthinking pleasure” in a manner that disguises social realities.

For Adorno, Benjamin and Brecht, “truth” was relative to the historical present and some of their theoretical disagreements may have stemmed from each writer having a different interpretation of the historical present, most noticeably during the mid-1930’s. While Benjamin and Brecht supported the Soviet Union and the working-class movement, Adorno clearly did not. While I do not want to discount the serious differences of opinion and approach that existed between Adorno, Benjamin and Brecht, I do believe there are moments within their writings that speak to a similar phenomenon associated with important works of art, and I would like to join those moments together within the concept of “interruption” as it is developed in this text. I should point out that the phenomenon that I have experienced and will elucidate in the following pages is not dependent upon a specific reaction or active response on the part of any particular viewer; in other words, the assertion that a work has the capacity to offer a valid experience does not emerge from any actual change in society or politics resulting from its viewing. Although I am suggesting that these works have the potential to produce a particular effect on the viewer, due to the innovative techniques used by the artists in relation to the medium of the work itself, I am not insisting that all viewers will experience this phenomenon in the same manner nor will they necessarily come to
similar conclusions if they are affected by the interruptive techniques of the works.

Importantly, it is the works themselves that have led me to the theory and not the other way around. I am not applying Shklovsky, Benjamin, Brecht and Adorno to the works but, rather, I was led by the works to a more careful investigation of these writers, given the remarkable overlaps between their writings about aesthetics and the experience of viewing works by Libeskind, Richter and Kabakov.

In his recent article in the journal *October* entitled “Aura, Still,” Robert Kaufman considers a number of elements that connect Benjamin, Brecht and Adorno, suggesting, for example, that the accepted disparity between Adorno and Brecht within the “aura” debate deserves more careful attention. Their famous disagreement is often cast as

> . . . a drama between, on the one hand, an elite, embattled, and hermetic commitment to a high-modernist aesthetic that—for all its antiromantic professions—stands as the inheritor of the transcendental impulse (this is the frequently presented picture of the Adornian position); and, on the other hand, a popular or populist engagement with the more immediate, evidently technical-mechanical situation—the modern experiential reality—of social labor (this is the Brechtian-Benjaminian position).78

According to Kaufman, however, Brecht’s engagement with a type of “aura” in relation to the lyric poetry of English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and his acknowledgment of its critical potential indicates that Brecht and Adorno (and Benjamin) share common ground not only in their rejection of the strictly “culinary” in art but, possibly, in a particular understanding of the “aura” as well.

Kaufman explains that, like Benjamin, Adorno consistently argued for the “critical nature of a modern aura” whose point of departure was located “in romantic lyric poetry.”79 As a basis for much of his aesthetic theory, Adorno contended that the
dynamic character of autonomous (or auratic) art was what enabled critical thought in
the first place and that the criticality that emerged in auratic Romantic art was
“indispensable rather than anathema to Marxian dialectics and other progressive or
radically intended methodologies.” Thus, for Adorno, auratic art did not stand for
bourgeois subjectivity and false consciousness but, rather, for the “new critical
possibilities made available by a kind of art and aesthetic experience that, precisely in its
relentless dedication to the aesthetic, paradoxically winds up being anti-aestheticist. It is
important to understand Adorno’s careful distinction between the “aesthetic” and
“aestheticization.” According to Kaufman,

Adorno contends that the aesthetic allows for the experimental
development of a protocritical consciousness whose aesthetic
play or felt spontaneity mimes social labor insofar as artistic
making and aesthetic experience tend processively to discover
aspects of the social that have been obscured by status quo
conceptualizations of the latter; aestheticization, meanwhile,
is for Adorno the proper name of an unreflective acquiescence
to reification.

Further, it is “auratically invested art works” that allow for the exercise of the faculties
whose development contributes to sociopolitical critique and praxis and Adorno warns
that the “intentional abandonment of the aura” produces “true (truly baleful)
aestheticization (in the form of ‘culture industry’ reifications designed to inculcate
conformism rather than critical agency).” Recalling Leo Steinberg’s quotation of Victor Hugo and the power of the “new
shudder,” it is helpful to consider certain comments made by Adorno regarding auratic
works of art and their critical potential. In the Paralipomena of his book Aesthetic
Theory, a text in which he most fully developed his theories regarding the “aura,”
Adorno wrote:

51
The idea of a value-free aesthetics is nonsense. To understand artworks, as Brecht, incidentally, well knew, means to become aware of their logicality and its opposite, and of their fissures and their significance.  

Following this nod to Brecht, Adorno proceeded to describe the effect of an auratic work of art on the viewing subject:

Although artworks offer themselves to observation, they at the same time disorient the observer who is held at the distance of a mere spectator; to him is revealed the truth of the work as if it must also be his own. The instant of this transition is art’s highest. It rescues subjectivity, even subjective aesthetics, by the negation of subjectivity. The subject, convulsed by art, has real experiences; by the strength of insight into the artwork as artwork, these experiences are those in which the subject’s petrification in his own subjectivity dissolves and the narrowness of his self-posedness is revealed.

Through this experience, termed by Adorno as Ershütterung (shaking, tremor or shock), the subject undergoes a change of philosophical consciousness and the disruption of reification. In the section on “Society” in Aesthetic Theory, Adorno explained that:

Shudder, radically opposed to the conventional idea of experience [Erlebnis], provides no particular satisfaction for the I; it bears no similarity to desire. Rather, it is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude. This experience [Erfahrung] is contrary to the weakening of the I that the culture industry manipulates. . . . To catch even the slightest glimpse beyond the prison that it itself is, the I requires not distraction but rather utmost tension; that preserves the shudder, an involuntary comportment, incidentally, from becoming regression.

Similarly, in the section on “Art Beauty” in Aesthetic Theory, Adorno wrote:

The instant of expression in artworks is however not their reduction to the level of their materials as to something unmediated; rather, this instant is fully mediated. Artworks become appearances, in the pregnant sense of the term—that is, as the appearance of an other—when the accent falls on the unreality of their own reality. Artworks
have the immanent character of being an act, even if they are carved in stone, and this endows them with the quality of being something momentary and sudden. This is registered by the feeling of being overwhelmed when faced with an important work. . . . Under patient contemplation artworks begin to move. To this extent they are truly afterimages of the primordial shudder in the age of reification. 86

Adorno’s modernist assertion that the “aura” opened up the possibility for a “negative dialectics” and for “artworks constituted out of the empirical world and in opposition to it,” 87 finds correspondence with Benjamin and Brecht in the area of lyric poetry, most explicitly in the latter two writers’ engagement with the work of P.B. Shelley. Brecht’s investigation of Shelley proceeded, in part, from an essay written after Lukács’ forced repudiation of his own work of 1923, History and Class Consciousness. In his essay “On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism,” Brecht asked: “What about the realism of lyric poetry?” Robert Kaufman has asserted that “for Brecht, lyric and its ostensibly problematic abstraction and expressivity are necessary rather than hostile to art’s intercourse with reality.” 88 Moreover, some of Brecht’s essays intended for publication in Das Wort during the 1930’s took issue with “Lukácsian realism” and defended the critical value of experimental art. 89 In one particular text, entitled “Weite und Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise (Range and Diversity of the Realist Literary Mode),” Brecht translated and analyzed twenty-five stanzas from Shelley’s 1819 work The Mask of Anarchy and, in so doing, demonstrated how “a vital fusion of aesthetic experiment, speculative imagination, and lyric song may lead to, rather than away from, critical mimesis of the real” with the latter being virtually synonymous with “commitment” for Brecht himself. 90 Finally, in his 1963 essay “Parataxis: On Hölderlin’s Late Lyric Poetry,” Adorno assimilated “the entire Brecht-Benjamin rediscovery of Shelleyan aura” into his own analysis. 91
This extended foray into recent critical arguments regarding the triumvirate of Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno is intended to demonstrate that the joint consideration of certain elements of their writing has theoretical consequences, in that aspects of each writer’s work are highlighted by the comparison, specifically the concepts that feed into a notion of “interruption” and the critical potential of the “valid experience” enabled by works creating a “new shudder.” This comparison also opens into reception theory, with the full understanding that certain authors (Adorno and, arguably, Benjamin) are less inclined than others to focus on viewer response outside of the commentary of critics but that they are, nonetheless, convinced of the fact that successful works of art may exert a tremendous effect on the critical consciousness of any viewer. My goal, however, is not to compress these different thinkers into one, necessarily compromised, figure. Rather, I believe that the similarities that are available to be culled from their various projects may serve as an analogy for my own investigation of “interruption.” Not only do these writers (as well as Shklovsky) provide a foundation for that very concept within the context of the visual arts, the presence of marked similarities within such varied discussions (addressing prose, poetry, theatre, music and popular culture) would seem to support my assertion that interruptive “techniques” appear in various media and respond to various historical conditions but are, nonetheless, connected. In other words, although one responds differently to music than to theatre or painting and artists working within different media are concerned with different formal problems, successful works of art, works that create a “new shudder” and offer a “valid experience,” are marked by the ability to stop one in one’s tracks, to upset expectations (beyond the level of novelty) and to “interrupt” the algebrization of perception that makes up the bulk of our daily lives.

54
Aside from the obvious similarity marked by the appearance of the term “shudder” in both the translation of Adorno’s *Ästhetische Theorie* and the translation of Victor Hugo’s comments about Baudelaire, I want to suggest that all of these writers share a commitment to experimental works of art that resist merely “culinary” effects, that require active concentration, that reveal conditions through defamiliarization, that resist the “culture industry” of commodification, that express alienation in their very constitution and that maintain a distance from the world that proves essential to their critical force. Further, these writers have indicated that formal problems within art are not only related to the particular medium in question but linked inextricably to their historical moment; in other words, it is impossible (and inadvisable to attempt) to reformulate what clearly belongs to an earlier time within a society that has been inalterably changed by the progression of history and shifts in social, economic and political conditions. Thus, although one may discover examples of “interruptive” works of art from various time periods and locations, the techniques of the artists and the conditions revealed should not be expected to correspond to any expectation established by a past work. From this point forward, I will investigate specific examples by Libeskind, Richter and Kabakov in relation to their particular moments, places and media in order to discover how their works create the conditions for the possibility of a valid experience and exist in dialectical tension with an increasingly persuasive pseudo-culture that has, in recent decades, exploded beyond all conceivable bounds.
NOTES

Chapter 2


2. Selz, 127.


4. See the appendix for a thorough discussion of the Baader-Meinhof group and the media images that served as source material for Gerhard Richter’s cycle of paintings October 18th, 1977.


21. Lemon and Reis, 3. For a consideration of Shklovsky’s theory of ostraneniye (estrangement) in relation to his experience as an exile in Berlin during the Russian Civil War and his own literary production during that period (including an account of his tribulations during the Civil War entitled The Sentimental Journey and a fictionalized epistolary autobiography called Zoo; or, Letters Not about Love), see Svetlana Boym, “Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky,” in Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 241-262.


23. Shklovsky, 5.

25. Shklovsky, 11.

26. Shklovsky, 12.

27. Shklovsky, 12.

28. Shklovsky, 10.

29. Shklovsky, 13.

30. Shklovsky, 14.

31. Shklovsky, 15-17.

32. Shklovsky, 19-20.

33. Shklovsky, 18.

34. Shklovsky, 22.


42. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 121.


44. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 125.


59. Benjamin, “What is Epic Theatre?”, 305.

60. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 139.

61. Benjamin, “What is Epic Theatre?”, 305.


65. Although I am relying primarily on Walter Benjamin’s original texts, as translated and re-issued by the Belknap Press in 2003, there is an extensive bibliography of secondary resources on Benjamin and his writings which should be acknowledged. For more discussion of the “Marxist” aspects of Benjamin’s work and his connections to Brecht and Adorno, see Susan Buck-Morss’s 1979 book *Origins of Negative Dialectics* and Fredric Jameson’s 1974 book *Marxism and Form*, which treats the work of Benjamin, Adorno, and Lukács (among others) and their more “Hegelian” (as opposed to Soviet) type of Marxism in relationship to the tasks of literary criticism. For works that address the entirety of Benjamin’s oeuvre as their critical subject, see Richard Wolin’s 1982 *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* and Rainer Rochlitz’s 1998 *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin*. Numerous attempts to apply Benjamin’s famous “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” essay to a variety of more contemporary topics (including Woody Allen’s film *Zelig*, Elvis Presley, Jackson Pollock and Wallace Stevens) may be found in Benjamin’s *Blind Spot: Walter Benjamin and the Premature Death of the Aura*, edited by Lise Patt, Gerhard Richter (not the painter), and Marquard Smith in 2001. Conversely, another work edited by Gerhard Richter from 2002, *Benjamin’s Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Culture Theory*, includes essays dealing with the “ghostly” in Benjamin and investigates why his work resists being easily co-opted by many contemporary cultural programs. Additional sources addressing various political aspects of Benjamin’s writings include a collection of essays edited by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne in 2000 entitled *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, which includes an essay on Benjamin and Heidegger, two special issues of *New German Critique* (from Spring 1979 and Fall 1986), and Lutz Koepnick’s *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power*, which explores the relationship between mass culture and fascism.


69. Witkin, 52.

70. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno,*


82. Kaufman, 49.


88. Kaufman, 60.
89. Kaufman, 62.

90. Kaufman, 63-64.

91. Kaufman, 73.
CHAPTER 3

DANIEL LIBESKIND’S JEWISH MUSEUM BERLIN

Standing within the “Holocaust Tower” of Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin is an experience of feeling lost despite knowing one’s precise location, of surrendering to a quietude that is filled with silenced voices. From the beginning of his project, Libeskind worked with the conception that the “physical space and form should give substance beyond the visible” and that the organization of the building itself should “generate an understanding of the scale of disrupted tradition—and the trace of the unborn.”¹ My own recognition of Libeskind’s achievement took place within the Holocaust Tower, overcome by the palpable atmosphere and the disruption of my self-composure, as the period spent inside the structure effectively interrupted not only my passage through the Museum itself but also my previous comprehension of the events of the Holocaust. Despite my familiarity with both historical facts and a variety of artistic responses to the Third Reich and the Shoah, my physical and mental response to the Tower forced an immediate re-evaluation of that understanding. Because empathy, in this case, is not a feeling that is available to anyone outside of those actually deported to extermination camps, it is not the purpose of the Jewish Museum Berlin to provide a “re-creation” (as opposed to historians who have proposed the reconstruction of Nazi buildings at Sachsenhausen).² Rather, the Jewish Museum Berlin offers the visitor an
encounter with an insistent emptiness, with the absence of the Word, with a Berlin
permanently fragmented by the loss of its Jewish community. As I looked toward the
narrow slit of sky visible through the opening at the top of the Tower, it seemed
misguided to perceive it as ray of hope, a symbol of transcendence, a signal from God.
This was a space containing the words that cannot be spoken and the images that both
the eye and the mind want to refuse; a space that echoed certain descriptions of the
Muselmann, although, importantly, without naming him or reducing him to a
mythologized embodiment of suffering.

In a chapter entitled “The Drowned and the Saved” from his 1958 work Se
questo e un uomo (translated originally as If this is a man and recently reissued as
Survival in Auschwitz), Italian chemist, Holocaust survivor and author Primo Levi
employed the German term Muselmann to describe inmates in the Auschwitz
concentration camp who were “men of decay,” weak and inept prisoners doomed to
selection who “suffer and drag themselves along in an opaque intimate solitude, and in
solitude they die or disappear, without leaving a trace in anyone’s memory.”
Levi is unsure of the origin of this particular usage of the term (meaning literally “Muslim”), but
he is quite precise about the nature of those individuals unfortunate enough to be
assigned such a designation:

All the musselmans who finished in the gas chambers have the
same story, or more exactly, have no story; . . . they are overcome
before they can adapt themselves; they are beaten by time, they
do not begin to learn German, to disentangle the infernal knot of
laws and prohibitions until their body is already in decay, and
nothing can save them from selection or from death by exhaustion.
Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the
Muselmänner, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an
anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of
non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead
within them, already too empty to really suffer. . . . and if I could enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image which is familiar to me: an emaciated man, with head dropped and shoulders curved, on whose face and in whose eyes not a trace of a thought is to be seen.\textsuperscript{4}

In his 1999 text Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben continues the discussion of the Muselmänn and, specifically, the “impossibility of gazing upon the Muselmänn.”\textsuperscript{5} After considering various explanations of the term itself (as a reference to the slow ritualistic movement of such prisoners and their resemblance to praying Muslims; as a reference to the literal meaning of the Arabic word: one who submits unconditionally to the will of God), Agamben relates an account that speaks to the difficulty, even the “impossibility,” of gazing upon such individuals. In a 1945 English film of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, presumably intended as proof of Nazi atrocities for use by the Allied forces, the filmmakers seemed to spare none of the terrible details of the horror of the camp:

At one point, however, the camera lingers almost by accident on what seem to be living people, a group of prisoners crouched on the ground or wandering on foot like ghosts. It lasts only a few seconds, but it is still long enough for the spectator to realize that they are either Muselmänner who have survived by some miracle or, at least, prisoners very close to the state of Muselmänner. . . . this is perhaps the sole image of Muselmänner we have. Nevertheless, the same cameraman who had until then patiently lingered over naked bodies, over the terrible ‘dolls’ dismembered and stacked one on top of another, could not bear the sight of these half-living beings; he immediately began once again to show the cadavers. As Elias Canetti has noted, a heap of dead bodies is an ancient spectacle, one which has often satisfied the powerful. But the sight of Muselmänner is an absolutely new phenomenon, unbearable to human eyes.\textsuperscript{6}

Agamben explains that the Muselmann is the figure in the camp who has
experienced the transformation from human into non-human, who inhabited the “limit between life and death,” and who has passed into a level of existence in which “not only categories such as dignity and respect but even the very idea of an ethical limit lost their meaning.” Further, when friends suggested to Levi that his survival was somehow “providential,” Levi responded that “to claim that a recognizable good was kept at Auschwitz, that something precious was in the camp and carried out into the normal world, is not acceptable and does not bear witness to the good.” While Levi and others have remarked that “the best all died” in the camps, Agamben focuses on Levi’s comments about the *Muselmann* with respect to his death: that it is a commonplace to suggest that his life was no longer a “life” in any recognizable sense of the word, but, more importantly, one must confront the idea that his “death cannot be called death.” Thus, the horror that the *Muselmann* brings to the camp and the extermination camp brings to the world is not the recognition of the degradation to life that was, in fact, common to all camp inhabitants but, rather, the realization that what took place for *Muselmänner* in the camps was not “death” but the “fabrication of corpses”:

> It has already been observed that what defines the camp is not simply the negation of life, that neither death nor the number of victims in any way exhausts the camp’s horror, and that the dignity offended in the camp is not that of life but rather of death.¹⁰

Yet, despite the desolation of the *Muselmann* and the inevitability of his fate, Levi insisted that this figure was the “complete witness,” the gap in every testimony, the “non-human” who lingers after his “death which cannot be called death.”¹¹ Thus, according to Agamben, we are left with Levi’s paradox:

> . . .that if the only one bearing witness to the human is the one whose humanity has been wholly destroyed, this means that the
identity between human and inhuman is never perfect and that it is not truly possible to destroy the human, that something always remains. The witness is this remnant.12

Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin, although not a “memorial,”13 so to speak, seems to carry this lingering remnant within its punctured walls. There are locations in the museum, most explicitly the “Voided Void” or “Holocaust Tower” (as it has become known) and the E.T.A. Hoffmann Garden of Exile and Emigration, within which the visitor is assaulted by the destructive history of the city of Berlin, the cold absence of its Jewish citizens and the inevitable sense of disorientation that accompanies the path of exile and loss. Unlike a work such as Maya Ying Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1981-83) in Washington D.C., which displays the names of all 57,939 American casualties of the Vietnam war on its polished black granite surface, Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin does not afford the sense of “closure” for its visitors for which the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has become so renowned. Although Lin’s work has been described as a “wound” and “long-lasting scar” in the landscape of the capital,14 it does not challenge the visitor’s sense of self or stability, nor does it offer any significant critique of the events and political maneuverings that led to the deaths of thousands of American soldiers (not to mention the violence perpetrated upon the Vietnamese, whose names are not included). Libeskind’s building incorporates the various undercurrents at work during the history of Berlin and acknowledges the absence of its Jewish citizens without erecting a tombstone, without the minimal comfort of knowing death’s place. In order to stand as a legitimate space for this history, Libeskind’s work allows for the Muselmann to be the “complete witness” but it does not provide the means to “bury” or fill the emptiness created by the Holocaust. I believe that Libeskind’s museum is a valid experience, in part, because of the use of
interruptive techniques, such as the “void” (die Leere) that runs through the structure, the “Holocaust Tower” and the “Garden of Exile and Emigration,” and because it confronts the speechlessness of the Muselmann, which is a resignation to the interruption of speech that signals a movement toward death (or, more properly, the “fabrication of a corpse”), and the existence of a (non)human visage upon which we cannot bear to look.

Daniel Libeskind was born in 1946 in Lodz, Poland to survivors of a Polish-Jewish family nearly annihilated in the Holocaust. He was trained first as a musician, a keyboardist who came to the United States with violinist Yitzhak Perlman in 1960 on an American-Israeli Cultural Foundation Fellowship, and he became an American citizen in 1965. He later turned to architecture, studying at Cooper Union in New York (graduated 1970) under John Hejduk and Peter Eisenman and at the University of Essex in England (graduated 1972), with a focus on architectural theory and history. Between 1978-1985 Libeskind was Head of the Department of Architecture at Cranbrook Academy of Art and between 1986-1989 he founded and directed a private non-profit Institute for Architecture and Urbanism in Milan. In 1990, after winning the competition for the Jewish Museum, he opened an architectural practice in Berlin.

Like his mentors Hejduk and Eisenman, Libeskind is typically described as a “deconstructivist architect.” According to Mark Wigley, Professor of Architecture at Princeton University and associate curator of the 1988 Museum of Modern Art exhibition “Deconstructivist Architecture”:

Deconstruction is not demolition, or dissimulation. While it diagnoses certain structural problems within apparently stable structures, these flaws do not lead to the structures’ collapse.

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On the contrary, deconstruction gains all its force by challenging the very values of harmony, unity, and stability, and proposing instead a different view of structure: the view that the flaws are intrinsic to the structure. They cannot be removed without destroying it; they are, indeed, the structure. . . A deconstructivist architect is therefore not one who dismantles buildings, but one who locates the inherent dilemmas within buildings.19

Although Libeskind was well known in architectural circles during the 1980’s and 1990’s for his designs, drawings and collages, the Jewish Museum Berlin on Lindenstraße in Kreuzberg would be his first full commission.20

The competition for the then-described “Extension of the Berlin Museum with the Jewish Museum Department” was opened in December 1988 when Berlin city planners issued an open invitation to all architects of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as to twelve architects outside of Germany, including Libeskind, then living in Milan.21 The project had emerged, in part, from the demand during the 1960’s by members of Berlin’s Jewish community, namely Heinz Galinski (head of West Berlin’s Jewish community) that the city was obliged to build a Jewish museum to replace one destroyed by the Nazis in 1938.22 In 1975 the Berlin Senate established a Jewish “department” within the Berlin Museum and Galinski supported the idea that the history of Berlin’s Jews should be shown as part of the city’s history within that museum, rather than being “ghettoized” in a separate institution. During the 1980’s, the debate continued along two lines: whether to locate the museum outside the Berlin Museum, and where it would be sited if it were located outside the Berlin Museum. The Berlin Museum, since 1969, had been housed in the “Kollegienhaus” (a baroque administrative building designed by Philipp Gerlach for Friedrich Wilhelm I in 1735 and rebuilt during the 1960’s) on Lindenstraße and, finally, in 1988, the Senate decided to
approve financing for a “Jewish Museum Department” that would remain part of the Berlin Museum, in administrative terms, but would have its own, autonomous building.

The competition called for the architect to both “extend” the Berlin Museum and give the Jewish Department its own space.23

The city planners envisioned an Erweiterungsbau (literally “extension”) that would be “both autonomous and integrative” and would not shrink from the difficult questions raised by such a project. In their conceptual brief for the competition, Rolf Bothe (then director of the Berlin Museum) and Vera Bendt (then director of the Jewish Department of the Berlin Museum) listed the three primary areas of consideration:

1) the Jewish religion, customs, and ritual objects
2) history of the Jewish community in Germany, its rise and terrible destruction at the hands of the Nazis
3) the lives and works of Jews who left their mark on the face and history of Berlin over the centuries.24

Furthermore, Bothe and Bendt insisted that the city’s history and the Jews’ history were inseparable and, importantly, nothing could “redeem” or “atone for” the expulsion and murder of Berlin’s Jews:

Nothing in Berlin’s history ever changed the city more than the persecution, expulsion, and murder of its Jewish citizens. This change worked inwardly, affecting the very heart of the city.25

Libeskind’s submission for this competition focused upon the philosophical rather than the technical problems presented by the project. Beginning with the term Erweiterungsbau,” he explained that the “extension” of Berlin’s history and Jewish history “is not merely the extension of a building form, rather it is the extension of both the program and the idea of extending Jewish heritage across the abyss created by the destruction of European Jewry.”26 In addition to the areas of consideration raised by
directors Bothe and Bendt, Libeskind outlined his own:

... first, the impossibility of understanding the history of Berlin without understanding the enormous intellectual, economic, and cultural contribution made by its Jewish citizens; second, the necessity to integrate the meaning of the Holocaust, both physically and spiritually, into the consciousness and memory of the city of Berlin; third, that only through acknowledging and incorporating this erasure and void of Berlin’s Jewish life can the history of Berlin and Europe have a human future.27

Before he designed the actual building, Libeskind situated the museum in his own “metaphysical map of Berlin,” a distorted Star of David overlaid onto a map of Berlin and based upon the former addresses of certain cultural figures associated with that city, including E.T.A. Hoffmann, Rahel Varnhagen, Walter Benjamin, Paul Celan, Hermann Kleist, Heinrich Heine, Mies van der Rohe and Arnold Schönberg.28 This “cultural Jewish topography” was a matrix of relationships between Germans and Jews, which evoked both presence and absence, and provided a “constellation” with which Libeskind could link his structure to Berlin’s cultural past and its current landscape.29 In addition, the windows (or slits) that cut into the walls of the structure are “the actual topographical lines joining addresses of Germans and Jews immediately around the site and radiating outwards. The windows are the ‘writing of the addresses by the walls of the Museum itself.’”30

While many aspects of the symbolism behind Libeskind’s historical matrix and his multilayered drawings for the project were not initially apparent to the jurors (nor to many current visitors), the complexity of the issues associated with such a work seemed to require a structure that was not easily approached nor quickly understood. Because Libeskind left the baroque “Kollegienhaus” untouched, with the only connection between the buildings taking place at the subterranean level, the “relationship” between
the two structures is left unresolved, mirroring the “ruptured link” between Berlin and its Jews. In a lecture from 1995, Libeskind described his work as follows:

The entrance to the new building is very deep, more than ten meters under the foundations of the Baroque building. From the entrance, one is faced with three roads: the road leading to the Holocaust tower which... has no entrance except from the underground level; the road leading to garden; and the road leading to the main circulation stair and the void. The entire plane of the museum is tilted toward the void of the superstructure. The building is as complex as the history of Berlin.

Viewed from above, the structure appears like a jagged line, a zig-zagging corridor next to the stolid symmetry of the “Kollegienhaus.” From the Lindenstraße, the radicality of the design is not as apparent and the façade of untempered zinc, although changeable in the light and startling with its metallic sheen, will eventually turn to a blue-grey shade that echoes the window frames on the Berlin Museum next door. As described above, the visitor faces a choice once inside the museum, whether to move toward the Holocaust tower (the Axis of Holocaust), toward the E.T.A. Hoffmann Garden of Exile and Emigration (the Axis of Exile), or to take the Axis of Continuity up the stairs and into the exhibition halls. The halls are irregular in shape and, although the plan itself is not perceptible to the visitor while inside the building, a sense of disruption, in both the immediate and larger context of the city itself, is undeniably present. The only element of “continuity” within these areas is the presence of the continuous void: a straight line 27 meters high that runs the length of the building. The void, or die Leere, is the space that organizes the museum but is not “part” of the museum, must be traversed by bridges, is not air-conditioned or heated and does not feature exhibits. A total of six voids cut the museum on both horizontal and vertical planes (although it is also tempting to describe the structure as a void repeatedly
interrupted by a building). In its first stages, Libeskind titled the project “Between the Lines,” describing it as “two lines: one straight but broken into fragments, the other tortuous, but continuing into infinity.” Armed with the conventional experience of a museum, however, the visitor most likely encounters the voids as the “interruption,” as they momentarily halt the exhibits and, in some cases, provide a respite from the weight of the experience. The first two voids are accessible to visitors but must never have anything mounted on the walls. In December, 2001 the first, the “Memory” void, contained a large “Menora” by Michael Bielicky and benches were provided for rest and contemplation. The second void contained a collection of circular metal objects in the form of stylized faces, lying on the ground. This work, by Menashe Kadishman, is entitled “Shelechet” (Fallen Leaves). The third and fourth voids traverse several floors and may be seen from the bridges but are not otherwise accessible, the fifth void runs vertically through all levels of the building and the sixth is external and enclosed, known as the “Holocaust Tower.” The “Holocaust Tower” is described by Libeskind as the “Voided Void”: an emptiness materialized as a building, a space that “ends the old history of Berlin” and contains “that which can never be exhibited when it comes to the Jewish Berlin history, humanity reduced to ashes.”

In December, 2001, the halls featured an exhibit entitled “Two Millenia of German-Jewish History,” including text panels in German and English, artifacts of Jewish culture and religion, artworks, maps, photographs, mementos, letters and other documents. When walking through the exhibition halls, the “voids” are marked in black and the displays are halted and then resumed on the other side of the space. Any windows present in the “voids” reveal only grey concrete and the other “windows” (closer to slits in the walls) offer only “glimpses” onto the terrain of Berlin, disallowing
any possibility of gathering one’s bearings by reconnecting to the outside world. As described by James E. Young:

The interior of the building is thus interrupted by smaller, individual structures, shells housing the voids running throughout the structure, each painted graphite black. They completely alter any sense of continuity or narrative flow and suggest instead architectural, spatial, and thematic gaps in the presentation of Jewish history in Berlin. The absence of Berlin’s Jews, as embodied by these voids, is meant to haunt any retrospective presentation of their past here. Moreover, curators of both permanent and temporary exhibitions will be reminded not to use these voids as ‘natural’ boundaries or walls in their exhibitions, or as markers within their exhibition narratives. Instead, they are to design exhibitions that integrate these voids into any story being told, so that when mounted, the exhibition narrative is *interrupted* (my italics) wherever a void happens to intersect it. The walls of the voids facing the exhibition walls will thus remain untouched, unusable, outside healing and suturing narrative.\(^{38}\)

If, after entering the *Jewish Museum Berlin*, the visitor had taken the “Axis of Holocaust,” he or she would pass vitrines filled with artifacts and images down a long passage until a door was reached, the underground entrance to the “Voided Void” (or Holocaust Tower). This structure appears to rise separately from the museum when viewed from the outside but it has no entrance save the subterranean one reached through the museum itself. At the door a text panel explains:

> In this place we are cut off from the everyday life of the city outside and from a view of that city. We can hear sounds and see light but we cannot reach the outside world. So it was for those confined before and during deportation and in the camps themselves.\(^{39}\)

A museum guide opens the door and the visitor is plunged into the dank darkness of the raw concrete interior, accompanied by a resounding slam of the door. Light enters
indirectly through a narrow slit at the top of this void, which stands 27 meters high (the same height as the void that runs through the Museum). This space is not climate-controlled and, even with the passage of several minutes, vision is limited to only the barest perception of the grey walls and the outline of the door.

Libeskind emphasizes that here it is the space, and not the walls that forms a ‘voided void’ where not even exhibition vitrines are allowed. Tour guides who interpreted the forms of the empty structure [when the museum was opened to visitors prior to the installation of the exhibits] here stopped their descriptions, remained outside, and left their groups alone in silent contemplation, letting the space do all the speaking to them.\textsuperscript{40}

The “Holocaust Tower” is the space of the \textit{Muselmann}, the interruption at the end of this particular axis that does not allow for return and that “speaks” to the visitor, in fact, without speech or any other visual information. Although the visitor can see light through the narrow slit and hear sounds from the Lindenstraße, the sense of isolation and powerlessness is palpable and profound. Further, if not for the reassurance of knowing that the guide would open the door at a moment’s notice, the visitor would soon pass into the fear, perhaps hysteria, and eventually the resignation that his or her fate has fallen entirely under the control of others. The space of the “Holocaust Tower” is a space “filled” with the \textit{Berliner Luft}: “the air across Berlin which mixes with the air of history to shape the city,”\textsuperscript{41} and with the testimony of the \textit{Muselmann}, the reminder that much more is absent than can ever be shown or “gazed upon.”

Libeskind’s use of such interruptive “voids” throughout the \textit{Jewish Museum Berlin} pushes the visitor into a reliance upon the haptic rather than the optic, with disorientation produced by the ambiguity of the interior and its labyrinthine form as well as the continual disruption of the more conventional exhibits and explanatory texts.
Although most visitors do not actually perceive the form as a “zigzag” or a lightning bolt, the “fact that the overall form becomes obscure to a person walking through simply adds to the feeling of discomfort, disorientation and disassociation from a wide, environmental context.”

In his 2000 book *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*, architectural historian Anthony Vidler explained that:

> . . . when confronted by the withdrawn exteriors and disturbing interiors of the Jewish Museum . . . we find ourselves in a phenomenological world in which both Heidegger and Sartre would find themselves, if not exactly ‘at home’ (for that was not their preferred place), certainly in bodily and mental crisis, with any trite classical homologies between the body and the building upset by unstable axes, walls and skins torn, ripped and dangerously slashed, rooms empty of content and with uncertain or no exits and entrances. What Heidegger liked to call ‘falling into’ the uncanny, and what for Sartre was the dangerous instrumentality of objects in the world as they threatened the body and its extensions, is for Libeskind the stuff of the architectural experience.

Similarly, after visiting the *Jewish Museum Berlin* in 1999, when it was open to the public for guided tours before exhibits were installed, Peter Chametsky commented that:

> . . . the physical, practical and visceral experience. . . of the Jewish Museum’s dark spaces, oppressive connotations, canted floors (especially in the E.T.A. Hoffmann Garden) and disorienting, intellectually and emotionally challenging program, has been oppressive, indeed sickening.

The experience described by Chametsky and Vidler was echoed in the review by the *New York Times* German correspondent Roger Cohen: “With its towering empty spaces (what Mr. Libeskind calls voids), its zigzag form and its angular walls and windows, the building induces a sense of loss, sometimes even panic.”

In addition to the aforementioned “voids,” the E.T.A. Hoffmann Garden of Exile and Emigration, located outdoors at the end of the Axis of Exile, is another space that
interrupts the museum experience and induces a sense of disorientation associated with both the literal experience of exile and the artistic techniques of “interruption” discussed in the previous chapter. The Garden of Exile and Emigration consists of 49 concrete columns filled with earth, each 23 feet high and spaced 3 feet apart. 48 of the columns are filled with dirt from Berlin and their number stands for 1948, the year of the formation of Israel. The 49th column contains dirt from Jerusalem and stands for Berlin. The columns are planted with willow oaks that will eventually cover the garden with a green canopy. The columns are placed at a 90 degree angle to the ground, but the ground itself is tilted in two angles and is composed of varying sizes of stones, which prevents any sustained degree of comfort and stability for the visitor as he or she moves through the garden and between the columns. Thus, the path of emigration and exile is recognized as an experience fraught with alienation and insecurity and, like the “Holocaust Tower,” the physical presence and the spatial configuration of the location reinforce the “content” without resorting to literal representations or explanations of the experience. Further, the Garden of Exile and Emigration interrupts the visitor’s sense of well-being through its unexpected and disturbing physical effects, forcing a more visceral response to the disruptive nature of such an event.

Libeskind chose to associate the Garden of Exile with the German lawyer and writer E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) for a number of reasons. Already an admirer of Hoffmann’s stories, which include The Nutcracker, The Golden Pot, The Sandman, Mademoiselle de Scudery and Councillor Krespel, Libeskind discovered during his research for the museum that Hoffman worked in the baroque “Kollegienhaus” beginning in 1814 and lived only a few blocks from that location. The architect was inspired to include the non-Jewish Hoffmann as a major presence because of his
historical connection to the site, the fact that Hoffmann, like Libeskind, was trained as a musician (who changed his third name from Wilhelm to Amadäus), and because of the nature of Hoffmann’s fantastic tales and “the use of unexpected, uncanny effects to evoke psychological conditions and responses. Hoffmann’s texts, inhabited by automata and Doppelgängers, explored confusions between the human and not-human.”

For example, in The Sandman, the hero Nathaniel, who is betrothed to the very ordinary but thoroughly human Clara, becomes enthralled by Olympia, Spalanzani the mechanician’s beautiful but “soulless” daughter who, in fact, is an “automaton,” a “wax-faced wooden doll.”

Peter Chametsky has suggested that “Libeskind’s building, clad in a silvery blue, robotic skin made of a traditional, not pre-weathered zinc, could be the offspring of such a union.” This interaction between the “human and the not-human,” however, may also be considered in relation to the Muselmann and the sense of unheimlichkeit (uncanniness) experienced by those who gaze upon such a figure, the individual universally avoided “because everyone in the camp recognizes himself in his disfigured face.”

For Freud, the unheimlich (uncanny) “is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression,” which he links to Schelling’s definition of unheimlich as “the name for everything that ought to have remained. . . secret and hidden but has come to light.” As Freud points out, in his 1919 essay “The ‘Uncanny,’” it is important to note the difference between that which is actually experienced as “uncanny,” which presumably has some relationship to one’s past experiences, and the aesthetic production of a feeling of the “uncanny,” for which he uses the stories of E.T.A. Hoffmann as a prime example.
the *Jewish Museum Berlin*, Libeskind seems to work in both arenas, in that the arguably “repressed” Jewish component of the history of city of Berlin resurfaces in his structure while the visitor may also succumb to feelings of “uncanniness” due to the disorientation and physical distress produced by the encounter with the Holocaust Tower and the Garden of Exile. While James E. Young points to the uncanny, via Anthony Vidler, as “the propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become defamiliarized” as an appropriate way to describe contemporary Germany’s relationship to its Jewish past,\(^53\) it is also possible to understand Hoffmann’s tales as evoking both this sense of the uncanny as well as the alienating but inevitable interactions between humans and “not-humans” (*Muselmänner*) in the camps. As Giorgio Agamben points out:

> Before being a death camp, Auschwitz is the site of an experiment that remains unthought today, an experiment beyond life and death in which the Jew is transformed into a *Muselmann* and the human being into a non-human.\(^54\)

The labyrinthine quality of Libeskind’s *Jewish Museum Berlin*, another possible contributor to such feelings of the “uncanny,” is one of the many aspects of the structure and the design affected by Libeskind’s interest in Walter Benjamin, particularly his arguably “autobiographical” work *Einbahnstraße (One-Way Street)*, written between 1923 and 1926. Speaking about this work, Libeskind explained:

> I used Walter Benjamin’s text, *Einbahnstraße*, neither as a metaphor nor as an inspiration to build a building, but rather to make a building whose use would open up that uni-directional text to other perspectives.\(^55\)

In Benjamin’s work, according to Susan Sontag, “reminiscences of self are reminiscences of a place, and how he positions himself in it, navigates around it.”\(^56\) Further, the fact

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that Libeskind’s project began with an exercise in mapping is not unrelated to his affinity to Benjamin, who, in his Berlin Chronicle, remarked that “I have long, indeed for years, played with the idea of setting out the sphere of life—bios—graphically on a map.”

While this tendency toward “mapping” and the “guidebook” nature of Benjamin’s aphoristic One-Way Street have been much discussed in relation to Libeskind’s work, there are specific passages by Benjamin that speak to both the experience of visiting the Jewish Museum Berlin and the hovering presence of the Muselmann.

While the actual zigzag shape of the Jewish Museum Berlin is only perceptible from the air or from an aerial photograph, the visitor is, nonetheless, faced with a space that is continually disorienting and virtually impossible to “map” during the visit itself. For Benjamin and, apparently, for Libeskind, the ambulatory experience is primary and, if the design is successful, its potency is present within the structure, whether or not the external appearance is perceived. Recurrent themes in Benjamin’s work, according to Sontag, are “means of spatializing the world” and the notion that “to understand something is to understand its topography, to know how to chart it, and to know how to get lost.” In One-Way Street Benjamin explained:

The power of a country road when one is walking along it is different from the power it has when one is flying over it by airplane. In the same way, the power of a text when it is read is different from the power it has when it is copied out. The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes [slices] through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flier is only the unfurled plain, it calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns like a commander deploying soldiers at the front.

Following the above passage in One-Way Street, in the section entitled
Handschuhe (Gloves), Benjamin described the complex nature of an “aversion to animals” and its basis in disgust, touching and a fear of recognition that relates, at a certain level, to the phenomenon of the *Muselmann* in the camps.

In an aversion to animals the predominant feeling is fear of being recognized by them through contact. The horror that stirs deep in man is an obscure awareness that in him something lives so akin to the animal that it might be recognized. All disgust is originally disgust at touching. Even when the feeling is mastered, it is only by a drastic gesture that overleaps its mark: the nauseous is violently engulfed, eaten, while the zone of finest epidermal contact remains taboo. Only in this way is the paradox of the moral demand to be met, exacting simultaneously the overcoming and the subtlest elaboration of man’s sense of disgust. He may not deny his bestial relationship with animals, the invocation of which revolts him: he must make himself its master.60

Like the *Häftlinge* (prisoners) in the camps still struggling for their lives, whose disregard for the *Muselmänner* could reach the point of loathing and outright hostility, the individual fearful of the animal must recognize that his disgust is couched within his fear of recognition, of the possibility that contact, or even a shared gaze, will bring to the surface the kinship he wishes to keep at a distance, that he will deny by asserting his mastery. In Auschwitz, those prisoners able to obtain a position of privilege were sometimes the most removed from compassion:

When he is given the command of a group of unfortunates, with the right of life or death over them, he will be cruel and tyrannical, because he will understand that if he is not sufficiently so, someone else, judged more suitable, will take over his post. Moreover, his capacity for hatred, unfulfilled in the direction of his oppressors, will double back, beyond all reason, on the oppressed; and he will only be satisfied when he has unloaded on to his underlings the injury received from above.61

Another “direction” present in Benjamin’s *One-Way Street* and opened up by
the experience of Libeskind’s museum is the sense of “interruption” and “defamiliarization” created by the voids and the Garden of Exile and Emigration. As in Shklovsky’s explanation of “algebrization” and the “habitualization” of daily life, Benjamin addressed a similar notion of loss in relation to familiarity and comfort:

What makes the very first glimpse of a village, a town, in the landscape so incomparable and irretrievable is the rigorous connection between foreground and distance. Habit has not yet done its work. As soon as we begin to find our bearings, the landscape vanishes at a stroke like the façade of a house as we enter it. It has not yet gained preponderance through a constant exploration that has become habit. Once we begin to find our way about, that earliest picture can never be restored.62

Benjamin’s fascination with becoming “lost” in a city and the effect of such an experience upon one’s perception is carried on within Libeskind’s museum, as it prevents the visitor from finding his or her “bearings” and “habit” is not allowed to do its work.

Another work that must be considered in relation to Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin, given Libeskind’s acknowledgement of his debt to his own musical training and to the work of Arnold Schönberg in particular, is the latter’s unfinished opera Moses und Aron. Before discussing the details of that work, it is necessary to consider the more general role played by music in Libeskind’s practice of architecture. In an 1997 lecture about his Chamberworks drawings from 1983, Libeskind explained that the relationship between music and architecture is “neither solely conceptual nor simply practical” and he suggested that the “immateriality of music and the materiality of matter” (such as architecture, commonly associated with weight and substance) may be understood as potentially reversible, since “one can see very often that the musical experience leaves a far more profound experience than the very biggest of buildings.”63
Further, he reminded listeners of another connection between the fields, in that the “mechanisms of the ear, with the cochlea and other internal organs, are simultaneously intertwined with the mechanisms of spatial balance and sound orientation, that spatial perception is also in the ear.”\(^6^4\) Finally, for Libeskind the notion of “scale” is involved in both the instrumentality of how music is created as well as the production of architecture. In his work, including the *Jewish Museum Berlin*, Libeskind remains cognizant that “not only do sounds, orchestras, music, songs, and voices have a shape, but they have a very particular shape, which I would say haunts or is ghostlike in reference to architecture.”\(^6^5\)

The opera *Moses und Aron*, by Arnold Schönberg, played a very specific role in Libeskind’s approach to the *Jewish Museum* project. The Viennese composer completed the first two acts and the libretto for the third between 1930 and 1932, shortly before being forced to emigrate to the United States in 1933. Although Schönberg would live until 1951, eventually settling in California and composing other works, he was never able to complete the music for the third act.\(^6^6\) Schönberg was an assimilated Jew who had converted to Protestantism in 1898, eventually returning to his Jewish faith in 1933, and, of interest to Libeskind and his cultural “topography” of Berlin, he had worked as a professor of music near the Berlin Museum.\(^6^7\) Schönberg is associated with an experimental method of composition known as “twelve-tone” or “serial” composition, developed as early as 1921:

> Works composed in accordance with this method derive all of their pitch material, melodic and harmonic, from a single ordering (a ‘set’, or ‘series’ or ‘row’) of the twelve chromatic tones, or from a limited group of transformations of that ordering (transpositions, inversions, retrogrades).\(^6^8\)
According to Schönberg, the “twelve-tone” method was a way to promote unity within the composition and he asserted that musical coherence was founded upon repetition, but necessarily a varied repetition that might rely upon independent lines of development for different instruments or combinations thereof.69

For the musically-trained Libeskind, Schönberg’s opera was of interest not only because of Schönberg’s one-time proximity to the Kreuzberg area of Berlin but the nature of the opera itself as well. The text was derived from the Book of Exodus and explores the ideological conflict between the two protagonists, Moses and his brother Aaron, as well as the ban on graven images, the power of the “Word” and the inexpressible nature of God. Moses is granted the ability to comprehend the “idea” by God but the gift of speech is withheld, while Aaron does not grasp the “idea” but is able to communicate and move the masses. After being addressed by God through the Burning Bush, Moses, alongside his brother Aaron, struggles to convince the Israelites that God is invisible and to pull them away from the worship of idols such as the Golden Calf. Yet, while Moses is on the mountain receiving the Tables of the Law, Aaron resorts to fashioning a golden idol to appease the unruly crowd and he justifies his actions by explaining that the “divine idea” cannot be made comprehensible to the people without some sort of representation or interpretation that will necessarily limit it. Moses continually asserts the superiority of abstract thought and despairs at his own inability to express himself without falsification.70

During the final moment of the second act (the last set to music by Schönberg), the orchestra sustains a single note while Moses says: “O Wort, du Wort, das mir fehlt!” (O word, thou word, that I lack!).

In relation to the Jewish Museum Berlin, Libeskind explains:

*Moses und Aron* was written at this time and around this space. It is not coincidental that the sound came to him right here in
Kreuzberg and in Berlin-Mitte. His music is emblematic in every way of what happens to the sound—the conversation between Moses and Aron— which is broken off. Aron speaks on behalf of the people; he is the master of the people’s truths; he wants simple and clear answers. Moses, on the other hand, is hardly able to endure the absence of the Word. At the end of this break there is the call for the Word. And what is very interesting musically is that there is no more singing in this opera. . . . The voice is alone with the orchestra playing one single note—sixty or seventy instruments play one note and then they stop. And the voice calls out; it does not sing; on the contrary, it literally calls out for the Word and for the truth of that absent Word. I think that this is not only a poignantly unsurpassed and unsurpassable 20th century musical experience, but it also possesses an architectural dimension. It represents a dimension of the kind of topography which was created by the devastation of humanity.  

Thus, as the opera is halted musically at the end of the second act with the statement by Moses addressing the absence of the word, Libeskind sought to “complete” the opera “architecturally,” addressing the absence of the deported and missing Berliners using a similar technique of “interruption,” namely the voids within the museum, the Garden of Exile and Emigration and the Holocaust Tower. Further, the absence of the “word” that so torments Moses in Schönberg’s opera and his conviction that God is unrepresentable, an “unaussprechlicher, vieldeutiger Gedanke” (inexpressible, many-sided idea) finds continuation in Libeskind’s work: the speechlessness of the Muselmänner as they march toward a death which cannot be called death and the unbearable image of such individuals are not directly expressed, as that would be impossible, but are, nonetheless, understood in the solitude of the “Voided Void,” the Holocaust Tower. Anthony Vidler has acknowledged Libeskind’s sensitivity to the power of space and the missing voices of Berlin:

As a work and an experience this building stands as testimony to
the power of a certain kind of phenomenological stance before the world, a spatial evocation that, through brilliant and deeply thought formal moves, resonates with all the aura of the terrifying sublime, and that, perhaps more than any modern work of architecture I have ever seen, manages to hold the visitor in spatio-psychological suspense, the closest experience to what I imagine a religious experience of architecture might be.75

While Libeskind’s interest in Schönberg’s opera Moses und Aron and Walter Benjamin’s One-Way Street supports the argument that “interruptive” techniques are at work in his Jewish Museum Berlin, it is important to understand that the aforementioned works are successful (or “valid”) because such techniques are employed in relation to the specific medium of the work itself. For example, Libeskind has remarked that “for an important structural reason, the logic of the libretto [of Schönberg’s opera] could not be completed by the musical score.”76 Although Libeskind frequently acknowledges the impact of Schönberg and Benjamin on his design, the structure achieves its power as architecture because the formal techniques employed are responsive to architecture itself and not “art” in general. Mark Wigley has argued that deconstructivist architecture “disturbs figures from within” and it exploits the weaknesses in the tradition in order to disturb rather than overthrow it. Like the modern avant-garde, it attempts to be disturbing, alienating. But not from the retreat of the avant-garde, not from the margins. Rather, it occupies, and subverts, the center. This work is not fundamentally different from the ancient tradition it subverts. It does not abandon the tradition. Rather, it inhabits the center of the tradition in order to demonstrate that architecture is always infected, the pure form has always been contaminated. By inhabiting the tradition fully, obeying its inner logic more rigorously than ever before, these architects [such as Libeskind] discover certain dilemmas within the tradition that are missed by those who sleepwalk through it.77

With his use of the void that runs straight through the design and punctures the
actual structure in six different places, Libeskind not only acknowledges the absent Jewish citizens of Berlin and disrupts any straightforward “narrative” experience that the museum exhibits might offer but, in so doing, he also responds to the theoretical connection between architecture and deconstruction. According to Mark Wigley, Jacques Derrida, following Heidegger, has argued that “deconstruction” (also described as “destructuring” or “unbuilding”) “disturbs a tradition by inhabiting its structure in a way that exploits its metaphoric resources against itself” and that the edifice is destabilized because “its fundamental condition, its structural possibility, is the concealment of an abyss.” Thus, Libeskind’s “interruptive” techniques respond to both the tradition of architecture itself as well as the “abyss” of Berlin that is concealed within its ground, carried by the _Berliner Luft_ and without which the history of the city would not have been possible. Similarly, Wigley has described the experience of “deconstructivist” architecture as follows:

The more carefully we look, the more unclear it becomes where the perfect form ends and its imperfection begins; they are found to be inseparably entangled. A line cannot be drawn between them. No surgical technique can free the form. . . . To remove the parasite would be to kill the host. They comprise one symbiotic entity. This produces a feeling of unease, of disquiet, because it challenges the sense of stable, coherent identity that we associate with pure form. . . . This sense of dislocation occurs not only within the forms. . . . It also occurs between those forms and their context. . . . This estrangement sets up a complicated resonance, between the disrupted interior of the forms and their disruption of the context, which calls into question the status of the walls that define the form. The division between inside and outside is radically disturbed.

In his description of the _Jewish Museum Berlin_, Bernhard Schneider also describes the “noncongruence between exterior and interior”:

Neither in the window or slit through which we gaze nor on the
section of façade opposite do we find the points of reference familiar from conventional buildings, by which we judge distances and dimensions, and see an obvious conformance between inside and out. Thus our perception of space and structure, and of our own vantage point, is no longer a matter of course—it becomes a new experience.80

When perception becomes a “new experience,” it may be said that the work has created a “new shudder,” that the viewer undergoes “defamiliarization” (ostraneniye, Erschütterung) and that such an interruption in this “space of encounter” opens up the conditions for the possibility of a change in philosophical consciousness. In such a space we are reminded that the “complete witness” to the Holocaust can never be visible, but that we must not take refuge in simply looking away.
NOTES

Chapter 3


2. In 1992 Daniel Libeskind was invited to participate in a competition to decide use of the land adjacent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp (in Oranienburg, outside of Berlin). The competition called for the urbanization of former S.S. barracks and Libeskind was resistant to the idea of using such a site for housing of any kind. The winner of the competition proposed a scheme for housing 8000 persons and Libeskind, who proposed an entirely different, non-housing idea, was given an honorary prize. When local citizens agreed that housing was not appropriate to the site, Libeskind was contacted again, only to face conflict with historians who wished to reconstruct all of the Nazi buildings to “preserve history.” For a detailed account of the project, see Daniel Libeskind, *The Space of Encounter*, pp. 90-91.

3. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 88-89. The concept of the *Muselmann* has a long, complex history in Central and Eastern Europe and this discussion should not be understood as an attempt to sort out that history, although such an investigation would be a worthy project. Rather, I am employing the term only in relation to my own experience with the *Jewish Museum Berlin* as a potential means of understanding what it is that Libeskind brings forth in his building, which is not necessarily available within other museums and memorials related to the Holocaust.


6. Agamben, 51.

7. Agamben, 54, 55, 63.

8. Primo Levi in Agamben, 60.
9. Agamben, 60.

10. Agamben, 70-71.

11. Agamben, 81.

12. Agamben, 133-134.

13. Some visitors to the Jewish Museum Berlin, during the two years when it was open for tours but empty of exhibits, were so moved by the structure itself as to suggest that it remain empty and, thus, become a Holocaust “memorial.” Libeskind, however, considers his building unquestionably a “museum” and, in fact, he took part in the 1997-98 competition for the proposed Holocaust memorial in Berlin (eventually awarded to Peter Eisenman). While some critics and visitors felt that a “memorial” in Berlin was superfluous, since it was already realized in Libeskind’s building, others, such as Peter Chametsky, feared that leaving the museum empty would be to “declare that in the face of the fact of the Holocaust, all other aspects of German Jewish culture become irrelevant and incapable of display or elucidation” (Chametsky 2001, 257). For a thorough discussion of various examples of Holocaust memorials, museums and monuments, in Germany and elsewhere, see James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, and James E. Young, *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. For discussion of the debates surrounding “memory” in relation to the Holocaust, see Dominick La Capra’s 1998 book *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, which includes chapters focusing on seminal aesthetic responses to those events, namely Claude Lanzmann’s film *Shoah* and Art Spiegelman’s comic books *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* and *Maus II: A Survivor’s Tale and Here My Troubles Began*; as well as a collection of essays edited by Cathy Caruth entitled *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, which includes selections by Harold Bloom, Claude Lanzmann, Georges Bataille, among others. For autobiographical accounts which also address issues of exile and emigration, see Ruth Klüger’s *Still Alive* as well as the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University (www.library.yale.edu/testimonies).


20. Young, 163; Chametsky, 245.

21. Young, 162-163.

22. Young, 158.

23. Young, 158-160.

24. Young, 161.

25. Young, 161.


29. Young, 168.


32. Daniel Libeskind in Young, 174.

33. Young, 174.
34. Libeskind, *Jewish Museum Berlin*, 30; Young, 175.


37. While acknowledging the fact that the *Jewish Museum Berlin* was intended as a “museum” rather than “memorial” and the goal of educating the public about the tremendous contributions made to Berlin, the whole of Germany and the world by its Jewish citizens, I felt that the exhibition, for the most part, did not live up to the museum structure itself. The sense of “interruption” that was so powerful in the Holocaust Tower and the Garden of Exile was not as available within the museum, possibly because the display techniques did not take full advantage of the “void” running through the building. A possible topic for investigation would be a careful examination of the objects in the exhibit and the techniques used for their display and their context within the structure by Libeskind, as well as the contrast between the displays in the Kollegienhaus and those of the *Jewish Museum Berlin*. It may be worth considering, in light of recent debates about the nature of monuments and memorials in relation to the events being memorialized, that conventional linear, historical narrative programs may not be well-suited to the new museums being constructed.

38. Young, 178.


40. Chametsky, 256-257.


42. Chametsky, 262.


44. Chametsky, 249.

45. Roger Cohen in Chametsky, 249.

46. Young, 179.

47. Chametsky, 258.

49. Chametsky, 258.

50. Agamben, 52.


52. Freud, 247, 227-233.

53. Young, 154.

54. Agamben, 52.


58. Sontag, 13.


64. Libeskind, *The Space of Encounter*, 52.


68. Haimo, 10.

69. Haimo, 12.


73. The *Jewish Museum Berlin* is not the only work by Daniel Libeskind to openly acknowledge the power of experimental avant-garde 20th century music and its use of “silence.” For his 1990 project *The Books of Groningen*, created on the occasion of the 950th anniversary of the city of Groningen in the Netherlands, Libeskind’s design defined the boundaries of the city and “reflected on the city as a space containing people, life and memories as part of history” (Schönig 1998, 96). As part of the project, Libeskind invited eight different artists and scientists to design certain points on the map of his design, including the German playwright and poet Heiner Müller. Müller’s contribution represented the disciplines of music and theatre and incorporated a musical composition, “Fragmente—Stille: An Diotima,” by Luigi Nono, an Italian composer (and son-in-law of Arnold Schönberg) who was known for working with a variety of noises (electronic and vocal) as well as silence. Similarly, Müller included his poem “Brüchstück für Luigi Nono” (Fragment for Luigi Nono) in his installation, which “created a space of silence that is the silence of Hiroshima and Auschwitz” (Schönig 1998, 100). The poem, which uses “abrupt fragments of language,” addresses the “pain of the impossibility of understanding what happened in the Third Reich” (Schönig 1998, 103). The poem reads:
BRÜCHSTÜCK FÜR LUIGI NONO

DAS GRAS NOCH
MÜSSEN WIR
AUSREISSEN DAMIT
ES GRÜN BLEIBT

In Auschwitz
Die Nagelspur
Mann über Frau
Über Kind

Die zerbrochenen Gesänge

Der Kirchenchor
Der Maschinengewehre

Gesang
Der zerschnittenen
Stimmbänder Marsyas
Gegen Apoll
Im Steinbruch der Volker

Das Fleisch der Instrumente

Welt ohne Hammer und Nagel

Unerhört

FRAGMENT LUIGI NONO

AND STILL THE GRASS
WE MUST TEAR OUT
SO IT WILL
REMAIN GREEN

In Auschwitz
Fingernail marks
Man over woman
Over child

The broken songs
The church choir
of machineguns

Song
From Marsya’s severed
Vocal chords
Against Apollo
In the quarry of people

The instrument’s flesh

World without hammer and nail

Unheard of


75. Vidler, 222.


80. Schneider, 57.
CHAPTER 4

GERHARD RICHTER’S OCTOBER 18, 1977

In his 1988 book Die Souveränität der Kunst (The Sovereignty of Art), Christoph Menke argues that within modern reflection on aesthetic experience, including Theodor Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory, there exists an ambivalence between two traditions, two lines of thought that have characterized aesthetic discussions from Kant to the present day. The first approach is associated with the concept of “autonomy” and holds that aesthetic experience

... is a phenomenon adhering to its own internal logic, and its autonomy vis-a-vis nonaesthetic discourses implies that it occupies its own place alongside these discourses within the pluralistic structure of modern reason.¹

The second approach, which Menke associates with the concept of “sovereignty,” maintains that:

... aesthetic experience is sovereign insofar as it does not take its place within the differentiated structure of plural reason, but rather exceeds its bounds. Whereas the autonomy model confers relative validity upon aesthetic experience, the sovereignty model grants it absolute validity, since its enactment disrupts the successful functioning of nonaesthetic discourses. The sovereignty model considers aesthetic experience a medium for the dissolution of the rule of nonaesthetic reason, the vehicle for an experientially enacted critique of reason.²

Adorno addresses the antinomy between aesthetic autonomy and sovereignty with his central aesthetic category, that of “negativity.” Menke suggests, however, that
the concept of “aesthetic negativity” within Adorno’s writings carries within it two insufficient interpretations (or “misconceptions”) that are joined in a continuous critique of and supplement to one another but may not, in fact, be effectively resolved or overcome by Adorno’s concept.³ Menke describes the two positions as the “social-critical misconception” and the “purist misconception.” The former represents the neo-Marxist legacy in Adorno’s aesthetics and “distinguishes art from society as its critical negation,” thus implying that

\[
\ldots \text{art brings to bear potentialities, capabilities, and insights, which, though still unrealized in society, can, in principle, remove themselves from the esoteric reality of the aesthetic and become incorporated into social relations.}
\]

Conversely, the “purist misconception” insists upon the “insurmountability of the divide” between art and society and holds that “the intensification of lived experience that art promises retains its purity only through its indifference to social reality.”⁵ For Adorno, the concept of aesthetic negativity was a means by which to satisfy the demands of Kantian aesthetic autonomy while also connecting aesthetic experience (even “pleasure”) to the possibility of social critique. In Aesthetic Theory, Adorno writes:

All aesthetic categories must be defined both in terms of their relation to the world and in terms of art’s repudiation of that world. In both, art is knowledge, not only as a result of the return of the mundane world and its categories, which is art’s bond to what is normally called an object of knowledge, but perhaps even more importantly as a result of the implicit critique of the nature-dominating ratio, whose rigid determinations art sets in movement by modifying them.⁶

Gregg M. Horowitz has also addressed the issue of autonomy within Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory in his 1997 essay “Art History and Autonomy.” In his discussion of Hegel’s analysis of art, in which, according to Horowitz, the philosopher enacts a
“retrieval of art for the historical totality . . . in the face of, specifically, the Kantian claim for the autonomy of art,” Horowitz suggests that the fact that art must be retrieved for a totalizing historicism is already a recognition that there is something about art, something about the structure of its mediatedness that is expressed in the claims about its autonomy, that at least apparently resists reduction to historical context.

Within his larger argument that the idea of a “history for art” emerges “only along with the idea of autonomy, only as a consequence of that autonomy,” Horowitz maintains that Autonomous art criticizes society just by being there because the ‘there’ where it is is no ‘proper’ place. This formulation makes legitimate the contradiction within art between art and history that gives rise to the tensions within art history that are my subject. It goes without saying that I will not be offering a way beyond this tension. . . . Rather, following Adorno, I will proceed as if one of the central tasks of philosophical aesthetics is to preserve this contradiction in as much of its richness as the spirit of our age permits.

Additionally, it is important to follow Adorno by not only maintaining the tension between “art” and “history” but also by establishing criteria for the judgment of artworks and the recognition of those that successfully enact such a “tension.” In his discussion of art and aesthetic experience, Adorno suggests:

The dividing line between authentic art that takes on itself the crisis of meaning and a resigned art consisting literally and figuratively of protocol sentences is that in significant works the negation of meaning itself takes shape as a negative, whereas in the others the negation of meaning is stubbornly and positively replicated. Everything depends upon this: whether meaning inheres in the negation of meaning in the artwork or if the negation conforms to the status quo; whether the crisis of meaning is reflected in the works or whether it remains immediate and therefore alien to the subject.
In relation to the above discussion about the tension between autonomy and sovereignty as well as Adorno’s description of “authentic” art, I am suggesting that the 1988 series *October 18, 1977* (based upon photographs associated with the “Baader-Meinhof” activist/terrorist group [see Appendix], active in the late 1960’s and 1970’s) by German painter Gerhard Richter maintains the tension between its status as “art” and its specific historical subject to the extent that it emerges as an “authentic” example of a work that gains its content through a rigorous negation of meaning, in part through the use of interruptive techniques. Richter’s paintings do not function as historical “documents,” nor do they allow the photographs upon which they are based to remain “in focus.” For example, with *Arrest 1* and *Arrest 2*, Richter transforms two photographs of the 1972 arrest of Holger Meins from sharply-focused images packed (perhaps cluttered) with details (the contrast of the stark parking garage with the nearby houses, the bystanders gathered on the sidewalk across the street, the Volkswagen Beetles parked in between boxy sedans) into smeared, textured gray and white surfaces that record, most noticeably, the slow, menacing movement of the amorphous shape of the approaching armored car. The voyeuristic appeal of the photographs (one including Meins as he removes his clothing and another, the basis for *Hanged*, showing the corpse of Gudrun Ensslin still hanging in her jail cell) is dismantled by Richter’s painterly surfaces, surfaces that subdue the “too much visibility” of the original images in order to create a special perception of the object, an aesthetic (rather than aestheticized) experience that requires a critical and active approach on behalf of the viewer.

Gerhard Richter, born in Dresden in 1932, studied art at the Dresden Kunstakademie (Art Academy) from 1952-56, a period during which art training in East
Germany was responsive to the strictures of socialist realism. In 1961, shortly before the construction of the Berlin Wall, Richter and his wife crossed over to West Germany permanently, eventually settling in Düsseldorf, where Richter entered the Kunstakademie for further study. At the Academy, Richter studied under Karl-Otto Götz, an exponent of Art Informel, met students Konrad Lueg (later art dealer Konrad Fischer), Sigmar Polke, Blinky Palermo, as well as Joseph Beuys, then Professor of Monumental Sculpture. During the early 1960’s, Cologne and Düsseldorf emerged as the centers for experimental art in Germany, with an atmosphere receptive to the work of Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni and the Fluxus movement. This German art scene was also witness to a revived interest in the work of Marcel Duchamp, via Wolf Vostell, Joseph Beuys, George Maciunas and the Düsseldorf-based Zero Group and partially resulting from an exhibition of Duchamp’s work held in Krefeld in 1965. Amidst this heady environment of artistic experimentation and new information, Richter “painted through the whole history of art toward abstraction,” and, in 1962, began to make paintings using images from found photographs.

One of the earliest examples of his now-famous “photo-paintings” is Table from 1962, which consists of a foreshortened table (from an illustration in the Italian architectural magazine *domus*) painted in gray tones that has been altered by the use of a brush or cloth soaked with solvent smeared in a circular motion over the center of the painting. According to Susanne Küper, with this work Richter “introduced a process of destruction implicit to painting, which he guided with his hand movements.” In another photo-based work from 1962 entitled *Party*, showing several women and a man drinking and laughing, the canvas itself was punctured or sliced, stitched back together in
various places and splattered with red paint, as if the cuts and sutures were wounds.\textsuperscript{19}

Throughout the 1960’s, as he increasingly distanced himself from the “expressionism” of post-war painterly abstraction and the performance activities associated with many artists of his milieu (with the exception of his 1963 performance with Konrad Lueg at the Berges furniture store \textit{Leben mit Pop—eine Demonstration für den kapitalistischen Realismus}),\textsuperscript{20} Richter would continue to investigate the possibility of “painting from photographs.” As he explained in his notes from 1964-65:

\begin{quote}
The photograph is the most perfect picture. It does not change; it is absolute, and therefore autonomous, unconditional, devoid of style. . . . There is nothing strange about the fact that I paint from photographs (as distinct from, say, making photographic enlargements of them). Everyone who uses photographs ‘paints’ from them in one way or another: whether with brush, collage, silkscreen or photographic canvas is immaterial. The only strange thing is that I want to produce just this kind of picture and no other. . . Perhaps because I’m sorry for the photograph, because it has such a miserable existence even though it is such a perfect picture, I would like to make it \textit{valid} [my emphasis], make it visible—just \textit{make} it (even if what I make is then worse than the photograph).\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

For an artist who had, at the age of seventeen, renounced religion and announced his aversion to all beliefs and ideologies and who was continually rankled by any expectation of “style” or “invention” within his art, the use of photographs as subject or “model” proved to be a welcome relief:

\begin{quote}
Not having to invent anything anymore, forgetting everything you meant by painting—colour, composition, space—and all the things you previously knew and thought. Suddenly none of this was a prior necessity for art.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

During the period from 1962 to 1967, Richter experimented with a variety of photographic sources, including family snapshots, images of people in magazines,
images of airplanes and ordinary objects or locations (such as a roll of toilet paper, a chair, a chandelier, an empty corridor, an administrative building), while also developing his technique of “blurring.” To create the photo-paintings, Richter first transposed the photographic motif onto a canvas, rendering it in gray tones (with the exception of Woman with Umbrella from 1964, Ema (Nude on a Staircase) from 1966 and Small Nude from 1967, which are in color), then he smudged or otherwise manipulated the still moist oil paint with a dry brush or other implement. In his notes from 1964-65, Richter commented:

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 surface, clarify the content and make the representation credible (an alla prima impasto would be too reminiscent of painting, and would destroy the illusion). I blur things to make everything equally important and equally unimportant. I blur things so that they do not look artistic or craftsmanlike, but technological, smooth and perfect. I blur things to make all the parts a closer fit. Perhaps I also blur out the excess of unimportant information.23

The paintings from this period are connected not only by the use of the “photographic model,” however various the subjects, but also by Richter’s evolving technique of “blurring.” Although the extent or degree of the “blurriness” appears to increase as time passes, the nature of the subject matter in the photographic models does not seem to affect the technique. Two works from 1965 may serve as an example: Aunt Marianne and Herr Heyde. The former painting is based upon one of Richter’s family snapshots and shows an infant (Gerhard Richter), approximately six months old, lying on a pillow with a young woman (his maternal aunt) standing behind and leaning towards him. Richter’s aunt, who suffered from schizophrenia, was committed to a mental institution
in Großschweidnitz Löbau from the age of eighteen and died (presumably killed under a system of “euthanasia”) around the time of the Second World War. Richter remembers her as a “frightening presence” who became part of the family lore, as he was often warned when he misbehaved that he would become like “crazy Marianne.”

The latter painting, *Herr Heyde*, is based upon a news media image, possibly from *Der Spiegel*, and the work includes the caption from the original, which reads “Werner Heyde im November 1959, als er sich den Behörden stellte” (Werner Heyde in November 1959, when he placed himself in custody). The individual in the painting, Prof. Werner Heyde, was a leading “euthanasia” doctor in the National Socialist regime who worked after the war in Flensburg (Schleswig-Holstein) under the alias Dr. Fritz Sawade, with the knowledge of local authorities, until his true identity was revealed in 1959. Heyde eventually hanged himself in his cell on February 13, 1964 after being imprisoned for four years awaiting trial. The discovery that Heyde had been living and working comfortably in Germany effectively shattered the post-war amnesia and sparked efforts by Germans to locate “the murderers among us.” Susanne Küper has pointed out that there is no differentiation between the technique used to portray Aunt Marianne (presumed victim of euthanasia) and Dr. Heyde (perpetrator of the euthanasia program) or, for that matter, Richter’s *Uncle Rudi* of 1965, an image based on a photograph of his maternal uncle shown posing in his army (Nazi) uniform. Although Richter always seems to maintain a distance from the subject matter of his photographic models, after the work *Uncle Rudi* was shown in an exhibition in Berlin dedicated to the memory of the victims of Lidice (an atrocity committed by German troops in Czechoslovakia), Richter donated the work to the Czech Museum of the Fine Arts, an act which Robert Storr has argued underscores the notion that “*Uncle Rudi* represents a
generation that willingly participated in its own destruction and the destruction of the millions it tried to dominate.”

These three paintings, at the very least, present a convergence between a family victim, a “public” perpetrator and a family perpetrator, although Richter’s stated neutrality regarding any politically-charged interpretation of the works should remain at the forefront. That is not to say that the content of the photographs is not of interest to Richter, but, rather, that, by enacting a tension between the photographic subject and a painterly technique, the artist creates a perceptual distance between the work and the viewer and allows for the possibility of a “new shudder,” a defamiliarization that demands renewed concentration as opposed to a momentary recognition of the image and its presumed historical import.

In 1966 Richter employed his technique of photo-painting in the service of a group work: a collection of eight paintings that are inseparable and are exhibited under the common title Eight Student Nurses. The paintings are all identical in size (95 x 70 cm) and basic format (head shots rendered in black, white and gray tones and based upon nursing-school photographs) and all of the women portrayed were victims of the same perpetrator: American serial killer Richard Speck. The newspaper clippings upon which the paintings are based are located on Panel 8 of Richter’s massive collection of photographs, clippings and sketches known as Atlas, begun after his move to West Germany and continued (and frequently exhibited in portions) up to the present. Although the repetition of size and format in Eight Student Nurses has a superficial resemblance to certain works by Pop artist Andy Warhol, such as his Thirteen Most Wanted Men of 1964, which was based upon the police mug shots used for wanted posters, Richter’s subjects are victims rather than criminals and his painting technique, unlike Warhol’s approach, does not emphasize the fact that the photographs are
reproducible and were, in fact, frequently reproduced at the time. Robert Storr has suggested that Richter’s paintings “restore a sense of finitude to the human form that had seemingly been superseded by the potential infinity of reproductions” and that he managed to “inject feeling into images that had seemingly been emptied of it by overexposure.” Further, although these particular images are not “blurred” or smudged to a degree that prevents recognition, the slightly schematic facial features and hairstyles have the paradoxical effect of heightening the uniqueness of each young woman.

It is useful, in this instance, to consider certain aspects of photography as discussed by Roland Barthes in his 1980 book *Camera Lucida*. In his quest to determine the nature of photography “in itself,” Barthes distinguishes two concurrent themes within photography: *studium* and *punctum*. He uses the Latin word *studium* to account for an interest in a particular photograph that stems from its reception in relation to one’s ethical and political culture and classical bodies of knowledge. Importantly, Barthes insists, this aspect calls for a “cultural” participation and the effect on the viewer is one of enthusiastic but general commitment. On the other hand, the second element of a photograph, the *punctum*, is described as follows:

The second element will break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest in the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points: precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many *points*. . . . A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).33

While Barthes is reflecting upon photography itself and the manner by which it...
exerts effects upon the viewer, it appears that Richter’s photo-paintings, even at this early stage, tap into the aspects described by Barthes and accentuate the power of the *punctum*, sometimes at the expense of the *studium*. For example, the actual newspaper reproductions of the student nurses killed by Richard Speck, although more legible in a technical sense, nevertheless tend toward homogenization; the women are unified by the nature of their shared, untimely demise as well as their repeated representation as a group. In Richter’s work *Eight Student Nurses*, the “blurring” of the images and the surface texture effectively hinders the perception of details but because the women are not, in fact, identical (despite the format and size of the canvases), the hindrance seems to force the now-schematized differences to *emerge*. As Barthes described:

> When we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies. Yet once there is a *punctum*, a blind field is created.34

Regarding the notion of the “blind field,” Barthes explained:

> Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes, despite its clarity, the *punctum* should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me and I think back on it. . . . Ultimately—or at the limit—in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes.35

It seems that Richter’s act of “painting” these photographs, with his technique of “blurring,” creates works that reveal the *punctum* while the viewer is still looking at the image, without requiring the cast-aside glance. The blind field (in this case, the surface texture and its effect on perception) is present and the reflection that Barthes describes as taking place *after* the photograph is gone from view takes place *with* the act of looking. This phenomenon will reappear in a more pronounced way with Richter’s later
cycle, and focus of this discussion, *October 18, 1977*.

Between the initial period of experimentation with photo-painting (1962-67) and the completion of *October 18, 1977* in 1988, Richter worked in a variety of painting styles and genres. As early as 1966, Richter began his engagement with “color charts,” paintings that recall the commercially-produced sample cards and were created using synthetic polymer paint (as opposed to oil) on canvas, which gives a glossy finish to the colors themselves. While the first “color chart” works played upon the concept of the Readymade, accepting the format and color combinations actually found on such sample cards, the later works from the early to mid-1970’s began to depart from that limitation and allow for improvised color changes and admixtures determined by the artist himself.  

During the later 1960’s and 1970’s, Richter created a number of works using glass, mirrors and, occasionally, movable or installed framing devices. The initial work of this type from 1967, *4 Glasscheiben (4 Panes of Glass)*, included four vertical sheets of glass framed in metal with a central axis that allows each separate frame and glass sheet to revolve. The work has been described as a “sculptural installation” but it clearly responds primarily to issues associated with painting, arguably serving as a “critique of the truthfulness of realist painting, insofar as what one sees behind the glass is not a representation but reality itself,” while simultaneously standing as a “backward compliment” to painting, since the viewer who looks through the glass is able to “see everything but grasp nothing.” Other works from this period include grey monochromes, which exhibit a variety of paint application techniques and surface effects, other abstract works with a limited palette (such as *Rot-Blau-Gelb (Red-Blue-Yellow)* of 1972), a “blurred” but recognizable homage in 1973 to Titian with
Verkündigung nach Tizian (Annunciation after Titian), and a collection of abstract pictures featuring a hazy, non-gestural finish. In 1977, Richter returned to the interest in glass and mirrors, with Doppelglasscheibe (Double Pane of Glass), which is, like Four Panes of Glass, a steel-framed work intended to stand within the gallery (rather than placed on a wall) and that plays with notions of reflection, visibility, the viewer’s engagement with the work as both subject and viewer as well as the concept of “facing.”

Richter created another cycle of paintings based upon photographs in 1971-72 with the work 48 Portraits. The paintings in this group are identical in size (70 x 55 cm) and consist of centered head shots based upon portraits of “famous men” found in an old encyclopedia. Like the cycle Eight Student Nurses, Richter’s 48 Portraits quotes images from a closed context (encyclopedia portraits), but the nature of the collective grouping is less specific, emerging as an assortment of white males ranging from those who still enjoy international renown to others who are largely forgotten. The choice of subject matter and the initial method of display (with Franz Kafka in the center staring straight ahead with others on the right and left gradually moving away from a straight-on view to a three-quarter pose) has generated much discussion and various interpretations for the work. It is necessary to note that Richter began the project with a larger group of encyclopedia images collected in his Atlas, which included political figures (Karl Marx, Ho Chi Minh, V. I. Lenin, Mahatma Gandhi) as well as scientists, writers and composers. From the beginning, Richter did not consider including any women or artists, the latter excluded in order to eliminate any possible interpretation of the work as a display of his own “aesthetic genealogy.” In the final group of 48 figures Richter eliminated all political thinkers and leaders and the remaining men do not appear to offer
any discernible pattern or overriding similarity (save the format itself and their presumed importance to history). Although the figures were not similar in their actual physical appearance, Gertrud Koch, in her essay “The Richter-Scale of Blur,” has suggested:

The serial nature of the display gives the portraits a kind of anonymity. It is not the individual person that attracts attention; rather, the portraits have become part of an accumulation that can be tested in terms of its seriality—a process whereby . . . the viewer’s attention is drawn more to the position of the head.42

It may be the sheer size of the work that most dramatically differentiates it from the Eight Student Nurses as well as the tendency to look for a pattern or explanation for the particular selection of individuals, only to be denied any such conclusion. According to Robert Storr, Richter has spoken on occasion of the need to identify father figures and Storr has argued that “the psychological compulsion to establish a cultural paternity is inextricably connected to the historical disasters of National Socialism and Stalinism” and he links the creation of such a typically totalitarian “pictorial hall of fame” to Richter’s own experience painting Communist banners.43 In this case, however, Richter “expelled all politicians and concentrated on writers, composers, scientists, and philosophers whose achievements in almost every case represented a humanist tradition intolerable to authoritarian regimes.”44 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, one of the most prolific commentators on Richter’s oeuvre, has offered other explanations. In his essay “Readymade, Photography, and Painting in the Painting of Gerhard Richter,” originally published in an exhibition catalogue of 1977, Buchloh describes Richter’s photo-paintings as “painted readymades” and explains that 48 Portraits “no longer draws on the history of collective perception [as opposed to the earlier paintings based on photographs] but rather directly on the ‘dictionary’ of history itself: portrait-
photographs of historical personalities.” Further, although Buchloh suggests that the figures are all people “who left a profound mark upon their time,” he proceeds by remarking that the “criterion for selection... was, primarily the ‘paintability’ of the dictionary portraits” and that the plan of the installation “was based on a simple formal principle” (referring to the placement of a straight-ahead head shot in the center surround by progressively turning heads). Thus, for Buchloh, the “dialectic, between plastic-pictorial presence and iconic-photographic absence [in 48 Portraits] leads to the essence of the work as a monumental enigma.”

In a later essay from 1996 entitled “Divided memory and Post-Traditional Identity: Gerhard Richter’s Work of Mourning,” Buchloh adopts a more focused interpretation of the group of paintings, to which he assigns the function of destroying the paternal image of the German as “fascist” while simultaneously attempting to establish a different paternal legacy, specifically one that acknowledges the artificiality of such a retroactively constructed community of “fathers.” Buchloh writes:

The resulting instability, if not actual breakdown of this fiction of a transnational liberal-humanist community was, then, as integral to its constitution as were the careful omissions that guaranteed its success as an acceptable fiction of paternal history . . . Richter’s pandemic collective functions simultaneously, then, as a secondary elaboration of the process of identity construction and as a manifesto of disidentification.

As Robert Storr has pointed out, Buchloh’s own antagonism toward the reconstruction of such hierarchies is likely more at play in his interpretation than any deep understanding of Richter’s own motives. Although Richter, necessarily, did make a selection in determining the photographic subjects for this group of paintings, his careful avoidance of any possible reading of an “aesthetic genealogy” as well as the conscious
removal of all politicians from final consideration points to and seems to support his stated “indifference” to all manner of ideology and overt political statement. Whether this approach is consistent throughout his career will be considered during the discussion of his third group work, the 1988 cycle collectively known as October 18, 1977.

Between the time of the photo-painting cycle 48 Portraits and October 18, 1977, Richter produced paintings in a variety of genres and styles, continuing to work on landscapes in color (based upon photographs), still-lifes with candles or skulls, as well as a new type of abstract picture. The abstracts from the 1980’s shift from the earlier hazy non-figurative renderings to works with visible layers, often in strident color combinations, which also exhibit the smudging or dragging techniques associated with the photo-paintings. Although it was tempting for some viewers to place such works within the context of the emerging “neo-Expressionist” movement, Richter’s approach was different. In many cases, he had “sacrificed fully developed figurative works on his way to making abstract pictures” and the canvases are not examples of spontaneous raw feelings but, rather, are “carefully prepared.”50 With that being said, Richter was not necessarily anxious to separate himself entirely from the works of other abstract artists. In an interview with Benjamin H.D. Buchloh from 1986, when Buchloh tried to suggest that Richter’s abstract works must be a “negation of content,” “an ironic parody of presentday expressionism” or a “perversion of gestural abstraction,” Richter replied “Certainly not!” and went on to insist that his abstract pictures do, in fact, set up “moods,” each with an emotional, spiritual or psychological quality.51 In spite of Buchloh’s dogged attempts to prove that Richter’s work negates such qualities, the conversation proceeded as follows:
Richter: Surely you don’t think that a stupid demonstration of brushwork, or of the rhetoric of painting and its elements, could ever achieve anything, say anything, express any longing.

Buchloh: *Longing for what?*

Richter: For lost qualities, for a better world—for the opposite of misery and hopelessness.52

In March 1988 Richter began work on the paintings that would comprise the series now known as *October 18, 1977*. The final group of fifteen paintings was completed by November of that same year and, since its initial exhibition in 1989,53 it has generated more written commentary and critical discussion than any of his other works. An indication of the power of the works is evident in the commentary of Richard Serra, who viewed the works during an American tour during the mid-1990’s:

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.54

**THE PAINTINGS**

*All the pictures are dull, grey, mostly very blurred, diffuse. Their presence is the horror and the hard-to-bear refusal to answer, to explain, to give an opinion.*

—Gerhard Richter, 1988

The cycle of fifteen paintings collectively titled *October 18, 1977* was exhibited initially in Krefeld (near Cologne) between 12 February and 4 April, 1989 at Haus Esters, a local museum originally designed as a private residence by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.55 The group signaled both a return by Richter to his earlier interest in the practice of “painting photographs” as well as a “leavetaking” for the artist, ending “the
work [he] began in the 1960’s (paintings from black-and-white photographs), with a compressed summation that precludes any possible continuation.”56 Although the cycle is focused, obviously, upon the tragic events surrounding the Baader-Meinhof group (and Red Army Faction), the selected images do not illustrate incidents that were directly connected nor did they necessarily occur within the same year. The title refers to the night of the three “suicides” of Andreas Baader, Gudrud Ensslin and J.C. Raspe in the Stuttgart-Stammheim prison. Also, the final group of paintings exhibited in 1989 did not correspond to Richter’s description of the project from the 7th of December, 1988:

What have I painted. Three times Baader, shot. Three times Ensslin, hanged. Three times the head of the dead Meinhof after they cut her down. Once the dead Meins. Three times Ensslin, neutral (almost like pop stars). Then a big, unspecific burial—a cell dominated by a bookcase—a silent, grey record player—a youthful portrait of Meinhof, sentimental in a bourgeois way—twice the arrest of Meins, forced to surrender to the clenched power of the State.57

The paintings that constitute the completed series include: the “youthful portrait” of Ulrike Meinhof (Jugendbildnis); Arrest 1 and 2 (Festnahme 1 und Festnahme 2), which depict, insofar as these works may be said to “depict,” the arrest of Holger Meins, Baader and Raspe in Frankfurt/Main in 1972; Confrontation 1, 2, 3 (Gegenüberstellung 1, 2, 3), based on three different images of the Ensslin after her arrest; Hanged (Erhängte), showing the dead Ensslin hanging in her prison cell; Cell (Zelle), showing the interior of one of the Stammheim cells with bookcases and coatrack; Record Player (Plattenspieler), the record player where Baader may have hidden the gun used in his death; Man Shot Down 1 and 2 (Erschossener 1 und 2), based upon two different photographs of Baader dead in his cell; 3 separate works, each entitled Dead (Tote), which show the head, neck and shoulders of Ulrike Meinhof after she was cut down.
from the window grating in her cell in May, 1976; and Funeral (Beerdigung); based upon a photograph of the funeral of Baader, Ensslin and Raspe in the Waldfriedhof in Stuttgart. The canvases mentioned in his December 1988 statement that are missing are one of the images of Baader “shot down,” two of the images of Ensslin hanged, and the deathbed image of Holger Meins. According to Robert Storr, the image of the dead Meins and, possibly, the two Ensslin hanged images, were eventually overpainted. As Storr explains:

Thus, beneath the surface of three abstractions lie layers that are not ‘underpainting’ in the traditional sense but the intact archaeological sediment of deliberately obscured pictures. Their cancellation is a part of the meaning of the finished abstract work insofar as finding new ways to make images visible—or invisible—is at the heart of Richter’s enterprise.58

The paintings do not have a fixed order of installation but, during the 2002 exhibition Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which now owns the series, the Youthful Portrait of Ulrike Meinhof was placed at the entrance to the room dedicated to the series, along with explanatory text, on a wall extension that prevented the viewer from encountering the rest of the paintings until moving past the Meinhof image. Because the photographic portrait of Meinhof, which was printed in Der Spiegel in November of 1977, shows Ulrike long before her “underground” life as a “terrorist” (in a photograph from the mid-1960’s), Ulf Erdmann Ziegler has suggested that it moves “the entire cycle out of the juridical-political context but anchored it in the biography and history of the Federal Republic.”59 Ziegler also remarked that, while the other series in Richter’s oeuvre (Eight Student Nurses, 48 Portraits and the later Sabine with Child, a group based upon family snapshots of Richter’s third wife and baby Moritz painted in color) “come from the portrait genre
and comment on it,” the same does not apply to October 18, 1977 because it includes a “pure interior, a still life and a crowd scene.”60 The cycle does include portraiture (the Meinhof portrait recalls the format of the student nurses) as well as the disturbing “pictures of corpses” (arguably a genre of their own) but it is, according to Ziegler, best described as a “compendium of genres.”61 Further, Ziegler argues that the photo-paintings from the 1960’s reveal Richter’s “fascination with the compulsive nature of the photographic procedure” but that the 1988 group is different because of the painter’s “specific emotional affinity” to the persons portrayed and their lives (especially Meinhof, a member of Richter’s generation) and because the cycle is “about failure—exclusively.”62

Although related stylistically, the paintings are of varying sizes, formats and degrees of blurring. For example, the Meinhof portrait is the smallest (28 1/2 x 24 1/2 inches) while the funeral scene measures 6 feet 6 3/4 inches x 10 feet 6 inches. While the youthful portrait of Meinhof and the Record Player are fairly legible, the arrest scenes, funeral shot and image of Ensslin hanged in her cell are blurred almost beyond recognition. Similarly, within the sets of works of the same figure, including the Meinhof “Dead” series, the Ensslin “Confrontation” group and the Baader “Shot Down” pair, the degree of “de-painting” varies tremendously. Also, the “direction” of the manipulation carried out on the still-moist paint is sometimes vertical, sometimes horizontal but always virtually impossible to detect in reproductions, except when a small portion is highlighted and enlarged. As Ziegler points out, “there is no ideal distance for viewing any of the paintings.”63 Thus, while the cycle itself differs from the strictly repetitive nature of the format of the earlier groups, there is, nonetheless, the repetition of selected themes (the dead Meinhof and the “confronted” Ensslin) and the works are connected
by the fact that each, as a photographic image, had been “tied . . . to specific
criminalistic, political, and mass media purposes.” It is interesting to consider,
however, the effect that might have been created by an exhibition of these same
photographs untouched, perhaps enlarged, but left, otherwise, in their original state.
Such an exhibit would not only point to the effects of the “ubiquitous” nature of such
mass-media imagery, but would also provide an opportunity to test Siegfried Kracauer’s
argument that “photographic production devastates the memory image.”

In other words, do such images serve a commemorative purpose (as a reminder of the subject
whose absence it reveals), or do they, in fact, hinder or even prevent memory work
on the part of the viewer, by “standing in” and relieving said viewer of the need to
“remember” at all?

Part of the fascination with Richter’s work, especially in relation to October 18,
1977, is the transformative power of his painting technique upon images that have been
so thoroughly engaged in the service of special interests or mass-media culture. Kai-Uwe
Hemken suggests that, in this group, “painting has been called upon to convey the
photographs documenting the Red Army Faction to non-functionality.” Similarly, in
the three works of Gudrun Ensslin entitled Confrontation, his painting approach creates
a “gentleness of appearance [which] lends Ensslin a human dignity that she was denied
in the mass media photographic production.” It is clear that Richter’s painterly
approach to these particular images creates a jarring disjunction between their original
“purpose” as police archive photographs and their current appearance as painted,
“blurred” works. Desa Philippi writes that this cycle is different from all previous and
subsequent paintings by Richter, in part, because it refers to a specific political event
but, more importantly, because the material chosen has a “particularly unsettling
resonance that is absent from the other work.” This “disturbing quality” is less about feelings of guilt or morality but, rather, lies

... in the fact that we can recognize their subject and at the same time realize the lack of consequence of this recognition. Perversely, the shock of recognition that fractures, however momentarily, the multiple defenses that sustain the level of repression by which the history of the Baader-Meinhof group is relegated to the social unconscious is premised on an absence of effect. It is followed neither by an emancipatory impulse nor by catharsis. Instead, the viewer... is left with a certain helplessness in the face of these works.

Philippi acknowledges that an interpretation of Richter’s work as responding to the technologies of visual reproduction while continuing to engage with the formal properties and procedures of paintings would allow this cycle to be easily incorporated into his oeuvre but she, nevertheless, insists that there is a “level of discontinuity and displacement in these images.”

In her discussion of Richter’s cycle in relation to photography and the historical moment, Gertrud Koch comments:

I am, for example, not at all sure whether the heated emotional reaction to the October 18, 1977 cycle did not result more from a public-political discourse than from a cathartic effect inherent in the pictures themselves—whether perhaps here the tabooed theme was not overshadowed by the blurred, indistinct image from our memories. ... The picture cycle in question puts on display neither the ‘beautiful souls of terror’ nor the harsh machinery of the state; what they show is blurredness, things out of focus, behind which objects and people disappear.

Although speaking from two different vantage points, both Philippi and Koch seem to agree that Richter’s October 18, 1977 creates what might be called an effect of “non-effect,” a puzzling situation where one looks intently but remains unable to see, unable to find the correct distance from which all will become clear.
Another way of interpreting Richter’s *October 18, 1977* cycle, in relation to “history” or “history painting,” is offered by Kai-Uwe Hemken in the essay “Suffering from Germany – Gerhard Richter’s Elegy of Modernism: Philosophy of History in the Cycle *October 18, 1977*.” Hemken suggests that Richter criticizes history painting by “subjecting it to the philosophy of history” and that it can be understood as an “expression of mourning” that is applicable not only to the terrorists who died at Stammheim but also to the Federal German Democracy’s wasted opportunity for historical maturity during that crisis.73 Hemken argues that Richter approaches the remembrance of past events such as the Baader-Meinhof tragedy from a perspective of the philosophy of history, specifically that of Walter Benjamin. His essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History” addresses the problem of memory work and the conditions and possibilities of historical consciousness and contains the well-known passage about Paul Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus*:

Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm.74

According to Hemken, Benjamin demands a type of “historical empathy” for the past event, brought about by an allegorical view of things. The historical event is isolated from its historical context and transformed as symbol into the present, in the same moment of identifying with the event the recognition of one’s own historical position flashes through one’s mind.75

Thus, Richter’s cycle frees the visual documents that are used as sources from the
“strictures of instrumentalization (police archives, mass media, etc.)” and lets them develop as allegorical symbols in the field of painting. Consequently, through his paintings Richter transforms these documents of the past into allegorical symbols in the present. As painted works, especially blurred images that resist instant readability, these images are not suitable documents to transfer the specific details of an historical event but constitute a work of “mourning” that is visualized through modernism and which reflects upon the limits of memory work in the late twentieth (and twenty-first) century.

Similarly, in his essay “Sustaining Loss: Gerhard Richter and Historical Witness,” Gregg Horowitz describes these works by Richter as “paintings in which the surface of the representation—the arena in which painting’s techniques have developed—interferes with the subject matter of the representation.” While, according to Horowitz, photographs “disable historical witness because they are too vivid, too alive” and photography “deforms memory because it too readily gives form to the past,” Richter’s very active surfaces remind us “of the work representation is, the work—the art work—that stands between us and the subject matter of the image.” Thus, it would appear that it is only this “inability to see” or the painting’s “standing between us and the subject matter” that will allow for the act of remembering or of bearing witness that is ordinarily repressed by the vivid clarity of the photographic image.

In his 2001 book Sustaining Loss: Art and Mourful Life, Horowitz examines Richter’s cycle of paintings (and Ilya Kabakov’s Boat of my Life) in relation to a particular question; the question of “what art can do when it can no longer forthrightly transmit the struggles of previous generations to future ones.” Horowitz describes the transformations of artistic forms typical of modernism, such as those present in the
works of Richter and Kabakov, as “attempts to keep art’s transmissive possibilities alive in the age of transmissive crisis,” in a period when aesthetic theory becomes a “reflection on the lack of an afterlife” and must face the problem of the “traumatic persistence of death in a secularizing age.”

This situation of failure, however, does give rise to a “practice,” that of “sustaining loss, of undergoing it ceaselessly.”

Turning to Hegel’s statement that “art remains for us a thing of the past,” Horowitz explains that “persisting in its pastness is the cultural specificity of art in modern culture,” and suggests, via Freud, that art in our time resists “conceptual clarity despite sustained reflection” and, thus, bears the “dynamic of uncanniness itself.”

In bringing his argument to Richter’s October 18, 1977 paintings, which, he suggests, “force to the surface (to their surface) the unresolved problem of how to live with our undying dead,” Horowitz begins with the following dilemma:

... to give form to the emotion provoked by October 18, 1977 is to locate it so that it may be comprehended and communicated, but to do so is to substitute for the movement an obstacle which brings it to a halt.

The “movement” of which he speaks is the emotion provoked by viewing the paintings and, while I would agree with the idea that Richter’s works bring something “to a halt,” I believe that it is the habituation of looking without seeing that is halted (interrupted), and that the reaction itself would not be possible, in any genuine sense, without that moment. Also, I am tempted to say that the perceived antagonism between “form” (or obstacle) and “movement” (or emotion) is not one that necessarily ends in the destruction of one or the other but, rather, returns us to the antimony between aesthetic autonomy and sovereignty as well as the tension between “art” and “history” discussed in the first pages of this chapter. In other words, is giving form to
movement simultaneously “mastering [movement’s] deforming power” and “losing track
of the movement we wanted to get hold of” or is it the successful articulation of the
危机 of meaning, the only available “meaning,” addressed by Adorno’s concept of
“aesthetic negativity”? Is the loss of cultural transmissability in art a new phenomenon
or is it a matter of its “recognition” or “apprehension” by modernity? Finally, is it
misleading to suggest that Richter forces “to the surface” the unresolved problem of
living with our undying dead rather than to consider that it is only “on the surface,” or
“as surface,” that such an issue may become unconcealed?

The last question leads into the necessary discussion of the relationship between
Richter’s paintings and the photographs upon which they are based (or, more properly,
*after* which they emerge). In his chapter on Richter, Horowitz points out, quite
correctly, that

*October 18, 1977* is not about the deaths of Baader, Meinhof,
Raspe, Ensslin and Meins. It is, rather, about the photographs of
their deaths and of the circumstances which surrounded them, and
in being about those photographs it is about the recycling of their
deaths in the memorial medium of our time.86

Horowitz also addresses the limitations of photography in the face of death and its
seemingly eternal preservation of a “now” long since past:

The only aspect of life which remains beyond the photograph
is its mortality, for while the photograph renders the dead, it
cannot render their deadness, their having once been alive to
return the look now directed at them. It is with the deadness
of the dead, their unburied rotting which is hidden by the
splendid visibility of photography through which it nonetheless
burns a hole, that Richter’s painting forges an alliance.87

At several points within his text, Horowitz calls upon the notion that “photography
killed painting,” which, at one level, seems to contradict the very claims made for
painting in that same text. For example, Horowitz suggests that Richter reveals that “photography killed painting by destroying the relevance of the power of visual mediation for visual orientation in the world”\(^{88}\) and that his large canvas *Funeral* (from the *October 18, 1977 series*)

> does only what painting can do after photography has killed it, which is to insist forcefully that there is more to see than we can at present see, and that we have no idea how to see it. *Funeral* interferes with the afterlife of the deaths it is about by putting an obstacle between our eyes and the funeral procession, by making us not see finally because something keeps moving across our encompassing field of vision.\(^{89}\)

It is my contention that, rather than interfering with the afterlife of the deaths, the obstacle that is the “beautiful” surface of the painting is what allows for the encounter with the “afterlife” of the *photographs* (about the deaths) and that what is experienced is not a “violent gust blowing from the past,” as Horowitz puts it, but a “new shudder” in the viewer’s consciousness. Further, the relationship between painting and photography in Richter’s work need not be seen, necessarily, as a capitulation of painting to the representational powers of photography but may point to the fact that, in the modern period, Richter is able to successfully “paint” a “photograph,” thus achieving an effect not open to one merely “taking” or “shooting” a photograph. For example, in Richter’s works the eye comes to rest on the *punctum* during the process of looking rather than after the glance is cast away, whether is be the white shrouded coffins in *Funeral*, the dark shadow behind Gudrun Ensslin in *Confrontation 2*, or the curve of Baader’s fingers in *Man Shot Down 1*. This notion that painting makes something available that is not otherwise able to be perceived directs us toward a particular reading of Martin Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.”
In his essay, (originally a series of lectures from 1935), Martin Heidegger\textsuperscript{90} uses the example of a van Gogh painting of boots in his consideration of art and its relation to “truth.” At first, Heidegger spends considerable time speaking about his chosen example of a “thing,” a pair of peasant shoes, and he suggests that “We do not even need to exhibit actual pieces of this sort of useful article in order to describe them. Everyone is acquainted with them.”\textsuperscript{91} The decision, however, to employ a van Gogh painting “for the purpose of pictorial representation” (Veranschaulichung) opens up the possibility for Heidegger to examine how painting can disclose a “truth” that is not available to us from an explanation of shoes or the observation of the actual use of shoes, “but only by bringing ourselves before van Gogh’s painting.”\textsuperscript{92} Refering to the painting itself, he says:

What happens here? What is at work in the work?
Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, \textit{is} in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealedness of its being.\textsuperscript{93}

Thus, according to Heidegger, the nature of art is “the truth of beings setting itself to work.”\textsuperscript{94}

Meyer Schapiro attempted, in his 1968 essay “The Still Life as a Personal Object—A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh,” to discredit Heidegger’s argument by pointing out that what Heidegger describes as “peasant shoes” were actually van Gogh’s own boots and by suggesting that the “truth” or “essence” of the boots described by Heidegger as being revealed by the painting was, actually, fancifully imagined by the philosopher and projected onto the work of art. Schapiro goes on to say that he finds nothing in Heidegger’s description of the shoes that would be unavailable outside of the painting as well and concludes by suggesting that Heidegger has missed the artist’s presence in the work, since the objects portrayed are actually van Gogh’s own boots.\textsuperscript{95}
In spite of his art-historical corrections, Schapiro was not able to definitively argue that no disclosure of “truth” could take place on the canvas itself. Jacques Derrida, in his 1978 text *The Truth in Painting*, explains that Heidegger was not attempting to “analyze” this particular picture and that the “truth” presented by the picture 

. . . is not, for Heidegger ‘peasant’ truth, a truth the essential content of which would depend upon the attribution (however imprudent) of the shoes to peasantry. . . . art as ‘putting to work of truth’ is neither an ‘imitation,’ nor a ‘description’ copying the ‘real,’ nor a ‘reproduction,’ whether it represents a singular thing or a general essence.96

While Schapiro’s argument seems to depend upon “real shoes” and the idea that van Gogh’s painting is an imitation or reproduction of them, Heidegger’s overall argument is not dismantled by this art-historical detail. He is careful to differentiate between the fact of “createdness” in the boots that is available to us when viewing the shoes and the “that it is” of createdness that emerges into view from the painted image of the boots. For example, he explains:

To be sure, “that” it is made is a property also of all equipment that is available and in use. But this “that” does not become prominent in the equipment; it disappears in usefulness. The more handy a piece of equipment is, the more inconspicuous it remains that, for example, such a hammer is and the more exclusively does the equipment keep itself in its equipmentality.97

I am suggesting that Heidegger’s description of “equipmentality,” which in his essay is attached to the work boots, may be applied to the photographic sources used by Richter for his cycle *October 18, 1977*. In other words, it is only through Richter’s paintings of these images that the images themselves can become anything other than useful objects (photographs) in the service of the archive or the mass media. Ironically, the ubiquity and decipherability of the photographic sources is the very thing that keeps their

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potential for “truth” or deeper “meaning” concealed. We are too busy seeing the photographs to “see” them just as the peasant woman in Heidegger’s essay is too busy wearing her boots to notice them. While it is tempting to regard Richter’s paintings as openings into a world of meaning that has been concealed by the instrumentalization of the images or their overuse in the media, I would argue that the meaning (or subject) of this cycle does not exist beyond the canvases but takes place on their very surfaces.

Heidegger remarks:

> Because truth is the opposition of clearing and concealing, there belongs to it what is here to be called establishing. But truth does not exist in itself beforehand, somewhere among the stars, only later to descend elsewhere among beings. This is impossible for the reason alone that it is after all only the openness of beings that first affords the possibility of a somewhere and of a place filled by present beings. ⁹⁸

While Gregg Horowitz argues that Richter’s blurred, “alive” surfaces remind us that the work “stands between us and the subject matter of the image,” if one follows Heidegger’s logic, it would appear that the subject matter, the “meaning” or truth of an image must take place entirely on that surface, that whatever may be taken from the experience of viewing the work is only established by the work itself and not as a reference to meaning that already exists outside of it (which is not to say that there are not meanings outside of it, since painting has an orientation to finitude). The visually “interruptive” surfaces of these paintings enact the “tension” between “art” and “history” and satisfy Adorno’s description of “authentic” works of art, works in which “meaning inheres in the negation of meaning” and “the crisis of meaning is reflected in the works.” ⁹⁹

Richter, not surprisingly, has distanced himself from the limit of valuing the series strictly in terms of the subject matter upon which it is based:
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.  

Derrida’s discussion of Heidegger’s essay and Meyer Schapiro’s response to it points to certain difficulties related to translation and meaning that help in this consideration of Richter’s cycle and the tendency of some critics and viewers to focus their attention on either Richter’s own motivation for producing the series or simply the dramatic events associated with the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon. For instance, after remarking that Schapiro uses the word “illustration” for both bildliche Darstellung (pictorial representation) and Veranschaulichung (intuitive presentation), Derrida explains that, for Heidegger, the painting by van Gogh in his essay does not illustrate or present something to sensory intuition but, rather, “it showed, it made appear” and this “appearing of the being-product does not... take place in an elsewhere which the work of art could illustrate by referring to it. It takes place properly (and only) in the work.” Thus, the October cycle does not exist in order to recall an ultimate truth regarding the Baader-Meinhof group which has been clouded by the passage of time nor does it simply “illustrate” the events of that phenomenon.

Similarly, Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin does not simply “illustrate” the Holocaust, although documents and artifacts are included in the exhibits, but, rather, creates a spatial and physical disjunction between the viewer’s expectations and his or her experience within the building in order to offer the possibility of an encounter that is “interruptive;” one that allows for reflection and critique and a valid aesthetic experience. While Libeskind’s approach is appropriate to its medium (architecture) and considers the issues attendant to “memorials” and “museums” as well as the layered
history of Berlin itself, Richter’s approach is equally appropriate to its medium (painting), with its attention to the painterly surface, issues associated with “genre,” such as the “compendium” of genres that constitutes the work (including portraiture, still-life, interior, a crowd scene and images of corpses), as well as the conversation that takes place between painting and photography in the works. For example, Peter Osborne, in his 1992 essay “Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter’s Negatives,” suggests:

> Photo-painting acts to add a moment of cognitive recognition, of historical and representational self-consciousness, to the experience of the photographic image. It creates a space and a time for reflection upon that image which is qualitatively different from that of the photograph itself, haunted as such experience is by the trace of the object.  

Perhaps the desire to maintain the sense of ambivalence between the political content of the cycle and its aesthetic impact played a small part in Richter’s decision in June 1995 to sell the group to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. When shown in German venues, the *October* cycle typically drew strong reactions, particularly in Frankfurt, due to the activities of the RAF in that city. Nevertheless, many German critics were surprised when Richter agreed to send the paintings to New York, even though it was necessary to ask whether the political significance and historically traumatic nature of the series of events made it impossible for German viewers to consider the cycle as a work of *painting*, rather than always as a work of “history” or “documentary” painting. In the New York context, the troubling political history attached to the images would fall away under the eyes of American viewers. Ulf Erdmann Ziegler suggests that, in New York:

> *October 18, 1977* will be understood . . . in its singularity because Richter’s complete detachment from Pop Art manifested itself in this cycle. In New York, the pictures will be more painting and
less politics, in the end.\textsuperscript{103}

Whether it is viewed as “history” painting, photo-painting, an “act of mourning” or a painterly negation of photography’s negation of painting, Richter’s \textit{October 18, 1977} cycle will, presumably, undergo the very test of quality put forward by Richter himself in his own writing. In \textit{The Daily Practice of Painting}, Richter writes:

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).\textsuperscript{104}
NOTES

Chapter 4


3. Menke, 4-5; Menke suggests that Adorno’s concept of “negativity” is too loosely defined and cannot resolve the antinomy that Adorno himself formulates. Therefore, Menke adopts the deconstructive theory of Jacques Derrida in order to reconceptualize the concepts of autonomy and sovereignty in an attempt to outline a new understanding of aesthetic sovereignty (an aesthetically generated critique of reason). A full discussion of Menke’s argument would not be appropriate for this chapter and is not necessary to understand the concepts mentioned in my opening.


10. Adorno, 154.

11. Richter’s father Horst was a school teacher, staunch Protestant and, later, member of the National Socialist party (as were most functionaries of the time) and his mother, the former Hildegard Schönfelder, was a bookseller and daughter of a concert
pianist. In 1935 the family moved to Reichenau in Saxony and later, in 1942, to the
small, nearby village of Waltersdorf. Richter’s father served in the military during World
War II, eventually being captured on the western front by Americans and released in
1946, after which he was unable to return to his teaching post due to his affiliation with
the Nazis. Richter, as expected of boys his age, was involved with the Hitler Youth,
although his mother encouraged him to maintain a sense of cultured distance from such
activities. After leaving grammar school in 1945, Richter enrolled in trade school,
studying accounting, stenography and Russian, and he worked briefly as a painter’s
assistant. By 1948 he had decided to become an artist, moved to the nearby town of
Zittau and worked as a member of a team creating Communist banners for the German
Democratic Republic. After unsuccessfully applying for entrance to the Kunstakademie
(Art academy) in Dresden, he took an apprentice job painting posters of Stalin and
stage sets. For additional biographical information about Richter, see Gerhard Richter,
The Daily Practice of Painting (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998); Robert Storr,
Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting (New York: The Museum of Modern Art,
2002).

12. The city of Dresden, prior to the Allied bombing in February 1945, had been one of the
most important cultural centers of Germany and while it had been the home
of the avant-garde Expressionist group of artists known as Die Brücke (The Bridge),
founded by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in 1905, the Dresden Kunstakademie was a bastion
of conservatism. Although the curriculum of the Kunstakademie had been altered to
accommodate the Communist party policy of socialist realism when Richter entered as a
student, his training was, nonetheless, traditional: drawing followed by painting in oils,
working with portraits, nudes, still lifes and figurative compositions. After four years of
mandatory painting exercises, Richter completed a major commission for his final year: a
mural for the Deutsches Hygienemuseum in Dresden.

13. In 1959 Richter obtained permission to visit West Germany in order to see
Documenta 2 in Kassel, where he photographed much of the work for his own reference
and was particularly impressed by the works by Jackson Pollock and Lucio Fontana.
Despite the immediate and profound impact of Documenta 2, Richter’s eventual move
to the West was a product of both determination and coincidence. Upon returning from
a trip to Moscow and Leningrad in 1961, Richter’s train stopped unexpectedly in West
Berlin and, after placing his luggage in storage, he returned to Dresden to sell his car and
pick up his wife, Marianne (Ema) Eufinger. A friend drove them to East Berlin where,
pretending to be day-trippers, Richter and his wife crossed over into West Berlin via a
subway station, eventually making their way to Düsseldorf.

14. Robert Storr, Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting (New York: The
Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002), 24-30; Gerhard

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17. Richter, 274.


20. Richter collaborated with fellow student Konrad Lueg for the exhibit/performance “Living with Pop— A Demonstration for Capitalism Realism,” held on October 11th, 1963 at the Berges furniture store in Düsseldorf. The event took place during the evening and featured the display of various objects (including a papier-mâché figure of John F. Kennedy, a television broadcasting a programme on Adenauer, the complete works of Winston Churchill, the “official costume” of Prof. Joseph Beuys, a sculpture by Beuys made of wax and margarine) as well as Lueg and Richter as “living sculptures,” seated on furniture that has been placed on raised plinths. This type of exhibit, however, would not prove to be typical of Richter’s work and, despite its catchiness, the phrase “capitalist realism” does not provide any significant insight into Richter’s developing oeuvre, given his steadfast resistance to the assignation of definite political overtones to his works. Additionally, it is questionable to describe Richter as taking part in a German version of “Pop art” simply because the term is used in this instance. The more fruitful comparison to “Pop art” might be to consider the use of repetition in works by Andy Warhol (specifically the “Disaster” series, various prints of celebrities and the “Most Wanted Men”) and Richter’s repetition of format in *Eight Student Nurses* and *48 Portraits* as well as the repetition of specific scenes in *October 18, 1977* (the three shots of the dead Ulrike Meinhof and the two of Andreas Baader “shot down.”


22. Richter, 251, 33-34.

23. Richter, 36-37.


30. Richter, 143.


33. Barthes, 26-27.

34. Barthes, 57.

35. Barthes, 53.


44. Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, 63.


49. Storr, Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting, 64.

50. Storr, Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting, 71-72.

51. Richter, 154, 156.

52. Richter, 156.


56. Richter, 178.

57. Richter, 175.


60. Ziegler, 375.

61. Ziegler, 375.

63. Ziegler, 377.


67. Hemken, 383.

68. Hemken, 383.

69. Phillipi, 119.

70. Phillipi, 119.

71. Phillipi, 120.

72. Koch, 142.

73. Hemken, 381.


75. Hemken, 386.

76. Hemken, 386.

77. Hemken, 388.

During his 1933 address “Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität” (The Self Assertion of the German University), given when he assumed the rectorship at Freiburg University, Heidegger advocated National Socialism as a power capable of saving European culture, and the spiritual mission of the German Volk, from rationalistic, nihilistic modern civilization. Arguments have been made, including Heidegger’s own explanation, which suggest that the philosopher was not a fervent adherent but, nevertheless, compromised himself to maintain his position in order to defend the German university. Heidegger addressed the charges of collaboration and support in a 1966 interview with Der Spiegel, which was published only after his death in 1976, and he claimed to have severed links when he resigned as rector in 1934 and that he was then placed under surveillance. These issues received a great deal of attention in 1987, when the book by Victor Farias, Heidegger et le nazisme, was published in France. Farias’ indictment of Heidegger’s connections to Nazism was harsh and he claimed that Heidegger has already manifested support prior to his rectorship and that his actions were not merely opportunistic. Meanwhile, a 1987 article in the New York Times detailing Paul de Man’s collaboration in Nazi-occupied Belgium during WWII led to much scrutiny of philosophers and literary critics associated with “deconstruction,” including Jacques Derrida in France, who has expressed his tremendous debt to Heidegger.
For those interested in familiarizing themselves with this controversy, see the following texts: Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Günther Neske and Emil Kettering, eds., *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), which includes Hans-Georg Gadamer’s essay “Superficiality and Ignorance: On Victor Farias’ Publication,” which expresses Gadamer’s astonishment that it took so long for the French become aware of these historical facts, but also that, in this context, it is as important to concern ourselves with Heidegger as it ever has been; and Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), which includes texts by Heidegger as well as essays by Herbert Marcuse, Karl Löwith, Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu, among others; and for a strenuous examination of Heidegger’s philosophy in relation to his politics, see Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1987).


92. Heidegger, 35.

93. Heidegger, 36.

94. Heidegger, 36.

95. Meyer Schapiro, “The Still Life as Personal Object—A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh,” in Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 427-431. In this essay, Schapiro sorts through the eight possible canvases by van Gogh showing the shoes described by Heidegger. He determines that the canvas in question, from 1886, in fact shows van Gogh’s own shows and reminds the reader that the artist is not a “peasant” but a man of the town and city. Schapiro also insists that Heidegger’s association of the shoes with peasants and soil is forced and that Heidegger’s description offers nothing that would not be available if looking at an actual pair of shoes. Finally, Schapiro argues that it is van Gogh’s presence in the work, the fact that the shoes are a piece from a self-portrait, that makes the canvas compelling. For a more thorough examination of these issues, the reader may consult all four articles in the Preziosi anthology under the chapter heading “Deconstruction and the Limits of Interpretation.” This section includes the Heidegger essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the Schapiro essay, as well as Stephen Melville’s “The Temptation of New Perspectives” and Jacques Derrida’s “Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing.”

96. Jacques Derrida, “Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing (Pointure),” in


98. Heidegger, 61.


100. Richter, 177-178.


103. Ziegler, 380.

104. Richter, 81.
CHAPTER 5

THE “TOTAL” INSTALLATION OF ILYA KABAKOV

After a brisk walk from the metro on a sunny December day in Paris, I arrived at the Musée Maillol in Paris and inquired about viewing the Communal Kitchen installation by the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov. Although the installation was, technically, “closed” to the public, the museum attendant quickly disproved the myth of French haughtiness and called for a guide to show me to the work. He pulled out a ring of keys and unlocked a wooden door within the exhibition space and motioned for me to take what appeared to be a makeshift staircase down to the lower level. He did not follow. Upon reaching the bottom, I found two worn, painted doors and I tried the knob of each. Unable to budge either door, I wondered if the guide had misunderstood my inquiry and I started to climb the stairs. Before reaching the top, I hesitated and reconsidered my predicament. Not wishing to draw undue attention to myself, realizing my good fortune in having the opportunity to view a closed installation without a guard present, I decided to try the doors again. On the second try, the door positioned awkwardly below the staircase opened with a shove, revealing an octagonal, two-story space illuminated by a single light bulb and filled with paintings, kitchen utensils and a screen covered with wallpaper and text. I entered the Communal Kitchen.
Most of Ilya Kabakov’s permanent installations, like the Communal Kitchen, are located in western Europe; consequently, my research trip to Russia originated, primarily, from a curiosity about “atmosphere,” a desire to experience the lingering remnants of the Soviet Union and the “communal” lifestyle so important to Kabakov’s work. Before leaving for Russia, one of my Russian language instructors arranged a possible visit to a “kommunalka” in St. Petersburg with a relative who happened to be a real-estate agent. After a couple of days of walking the puddled streets of the city, passing the thickly-built old women at each doorway who faced, with their heavy grey mops, the insurmountable task of controlling the snow and dirt sludge mixture that threatened to enter and already held dominion over the roads, I managed to schedule an evening meeting with Ira, my “agent” and guide into a particular type of Russian hell. With a combination of my broken Russian and her German/Russian dictionary, Ira and I proceeded to the first appointment, but only after I was informed that I must pretend, in all seriousness, to be a potential tenant looking for a place to live. After several moments of confusion, while Ira tried to locate the doorway to the apartment building (always a problem no matter how specific the directions), we managed to find an opening and walked the stairs to meet with the current inhabitant, a young woman anxious to find her replacement. She answered the door and we entered an unlit hallway consisting of a row of wooden doors lying over the dangerous holes in the floor. The tenant explained that they had experienced a fire two months prior and repairs had not yet been made. The apartment had no running water and no electricity in the hallway but we were, nevertheless, shown the unusable toilet and kitchen facilities. We finally made it to her room, which did feature electricity, and I feigned interest in the decor and the details of the lease. After leaving the building, I quickly looked up the Russian word
for “condemned.”

The second appointment landed us in a “kommunalka” with seven families sharing one toilet, one bathtub and one large, fully functioning kitchen. Each family had a separate room with a door, which contained all of their possessions except those used within the communal kitchen. In the kitchen area, each family had a separate table for food preparation and an area to store their utensils and pans. Due to the multiplicity of kitchen wares and stoves and the chatter that accompanied the activity of cooking, the room felt quite cramped and the sense of being “underfoot” was unnerving. I also remember the reproachful glare when I stepped into one of the other rooms still wearing my sloppy hiking boots. During a later visit to a smaller communal apartment, its walls papered with newsprint and foyer filled with slippers necessary for entering the individual rooms, I was overcome by an acrid chemical odor. As my face betrayed my discomfort and bewilderment, I was told that the neighbor in the room next door was a “felon who drinks” and, apparently, continued to make his own prison recipe after release. Fortunately, during my brief visit, he did not deign to open his door.

It is difficult for most Americans to imagine such a living situation and it is almost impossible to adequately convey the atmosphere by mere description and, although my intention was, and still is, to dispute the idea that Kabakov merely “re-creates” Soviet environments in many of his “total installations,” I must admit that my understanding of his works was changed by my “kommunalka” encounters in Russia. Robert Storr, the Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, has described Kabakov as, among other things, “Soviet society’s secret anthropologist,” its “principal archaeologist” and “chronicler” following the collapse, and “ironic naturalist.”

Although such labels are appropriate to a certain degree, I believe they are
somewhat misleading, as are the assertions, also made by Storr, that Kabakov necessarily explores “the gap between art and literature” (I would point to the space between painting and architecture as well) and that each of his invented “characters personifies an idea, and all contribute to a composite image of collectivized life and its distorting pressures.” Rather than focus on the so-called “image of collectivized life” as the content or message of the work, I believe it is more properly understood as the form. While I marveled at the verisimilitude of the installations, I became all the more convinced that my initial suspicion was correct: the power of the “total installations” did not reside in their representational accuracy but, rather, in their capacity to disrupt the museum experience in an unexpected way and their engagement with a number of techniques of “interruption.” In other words, the detailed rendering of a Soviet-style communal kitchen, waiting room or bureaucratic office by Kabakov should not simply be understood as the result of a mimetic impulse or sociological critique but, rather, as a complex artistic response to the ubiquitous voices, slogans and didactic texts that permeated Soviet life as well as an investigation into the possibility of a parallel existence of text and image.

For many years, Kabakov has “interrupted” the museum viewer’s expectation in relation to the placement of text within the installation. Instead of positioning the text in the usual manner as an explanation next to a work (of painting, sculpture, drawing), Kabakov disrupts our learned sense of perception by either placing the text within the pictorial space, forcing image and text to act as a unified whole, or creates an exterior text that is either so provocative in nature or consists of a conflicting set of opinions or interpretations of the work that the viewer is momentarily taken aback. Kabakov has explained that, as opposed to the typical comprehension of a painting (object) displayed
A little different situation arises, when we arrange both a commentary and an explanation next to a painting (object) in such a way that both the first and the second form an artistic whole, a unified ‘organism.’ In that case, a commentary and an explanation naturally continue to play the same role as described above, that is an entirely official, elucidating role. But, being placed in the same compositional field with the object described, forming to a certain degree a new whole within it, these texts begin to radiate some new significances, new meanings. . . . This connection between the text and the image begins ‘to work’ in a particularly enriching and intricate way when the ‘commentaries’ are attributed to invented viewers, as if they were comments on the painting (object) ‘left behind before our arrival.’ Reading such commentaries and examining the image, a real viewer feels that he has involuntarily wound up in an infinite suite of opinions, many of which, it seems to him, could belong to him.3

Another possibility arises

. . . when the viewer (not invented but real) has wound up near a large explanation arranged next to the painting. The provocative nature of such an explanation (in contrast to one that is a ‘normal,’ museum-like one), consists in the fact that the viewer gets lost in the choice whether to admit that is it ‘objective’ and, in that case, to accept it ‘by faith,’ or to consider it as a part of the artistic and meaningful whole, and in that case, the explanation belongs to the realm of ‘estrangement’ and new reflection.4

Such works, as described by Kabakov, seem to make manifest the very workings of “reception theory,” in that they acknowledge the role of the viewer (in this case, both real and invented) in the production of meaning and, by either incorporating “viewer responses” into the works themselves or challenging the authoritative nature of the text placard, they refuse the reification of any one interpretation, leaving open the possibility for reflection and the contemplation of the “work” itself as an “organism,” rather than as merely a re-creation or representation of the Soviet lifestyle, however
interesting that may be for non-Russian viewers.

When discussing the nature of the viewer’s experience of his three-dimensional “total installations” and its relation to the typical experience of a painting in a 1995 interview with Robert Storr, Kabakov responded:

I think that today everyone familiar with art knows how to look at a painting. Even if a nail is hammered into it or a stool is hanging before it, everyone knows that it is a painting and there exists a means for looking at it, one developed historically and gained individually by education and a lot of experience. Painting is like a senile grandmother living in a family. She has been crazy for a long time, she urinates and defecates, but everyone in her own family knows how to treat her, how to talk to her. No one is surprised at what she does.

It is a completely different situation with installation art, which is like a little girl who has just been born; she is still an infant, and no one knows what she will grow into. Moreover, she has been born into a family in which the grandmother is still living. . . . I know from experience that virtually no one know how to see the installation as a work of art. The spatial elements pose the same problems as in painting. . . . The origins of the East European installations lie in painting.5

Thus, unlike the Western practice of “installation art,” which Kabakov argues is oriented towards “space” and emerged from “Happenings” or actions (citing the work of Joseph Beuys and Jannis Kounellis), Kabakov’s own body of work, including his development of the medium known as “total installation,” has been intimately tied to the practice of painting and addresses formal concerns that are, arguably, similar to those associated with painting. “Installation art” in general has been attacked on a number of levels, including Rosalind Krauss’ contention that it is “intermedia work, in which art essentially finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital”6 and the argument, (associated with Michael Fried’s response to Minimalism in “Art and Objecthood” and frequently adopted for use in discussions of “installation”),
that such work is not “self-contained” and requires the participation of the viewer in a “theatrical” space. There is, however, a crucial difference between the contention that an installation “requires” the participation of the viewer in order to fully become a work of art (which, I believe, cannot be supported in the case of Kabakov) and a consideration of the works in terms of “reception” and the possibility that the viewer may experience a moment of “reflection” and contribute to the body of meaning associated with the work during its history. In fact, given Kabakov’s propensity to include various interpretations and reactions (by invented viewers) within the work itself, the situation would seem to be entirely different from one in which a viewer is confronted by an “object” that requires some type of acknowledgement or explanation in order to achieve status as a work of “art.” Additionally, although Kabakov suggests that viewers must “learn” how to view installation art, that does not necessarily imply that the work remains in the realm of “objecthood” before that activity transpires but, rather, that such an installation engages with the phenomenon discussed in relation to the other artists in this text, Daniel Libeskind and Gerhard Richter; that is, the capacity for a work to create a “new shudder.”

Ilya Kabakov was born on the 30th of September, 1933 in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, amidst the starving and dying peasants suffering under Stalin’s policies of collectivization and terror. Like Gerhard Richter, Kabakov was initially trained in art during a period culturally determined by the strict aesthetic policies that began in 1932 with the “Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations” (which dissolved the structures established by the avant-garde) and the institution, in 1934, of “socialist realism” as the only acceptable style for all of the arts in the USSR. Like many
doctrines of art, socialist realism does not have a single definition and was more a doctrine of “exclusion” than a fixed concept of artistic practice, except for the directives that artists were required to produce monumental, optimistic images of “heroic Soviet reality” as well as portraits of Party leaders, workers and collective farms.

After Kabakov completed his basic art training in Moscow, he entered the Surikov Institute in October 1951. Although the Surikov had existed after the Revolution as VKhUTEMAS, the Free State Art Studios associated with such avant-garde artists as Vladimir Tatlin, Wassily Kandinsky, Aleksandr Rodchenko and Robert Falk, the coursework had been dramatically altered according to the doctrine of socialist realism and Kabakov would have little exposure to Western art as it developed after the late 19th century and none to the experiments associated with the Russian avant-garde. Kabakov became a part of the Faculty of Graphics and, by 1955, began illustrating children’s books for the Detgiz State Publishers; he became adept at producing innocuous images that did not call attention to the artist or suggest any attempt at originality, a skill that would ensure continued employment throughout his 33-year long official career, during which he illustrated 150 books.

It would be the friendships with fellow artists Oleg Vassiliev and Eric Bulatov, among others, that would help sustain Kabakov’s interest in making work outside of the demands of ideology and the ever-watchful State. By the 1970’s, with his private studio at 6/1 Sretensky Boulevard, Kabakov found himself at the center of an “unofficial” group of artists, sometimes called “Moscow Conceptualists,” which also included the musician Vladimir Tarasov and poet Dmitrii Prigov. During this period, Kabakov adopted the technique of using “characters” to realize his work and he created a number of “albums”: cycles of stories or fables with hand-drawn imagery in which each
character moves from “an insupportable position in the world—in the closet, on the edge, behind a curtain—into the world, into sky, into whiteness, and beyond that to the virtually empty page and death.”

Another aspect of his “unofficial” art was a continuing struggle with painting. Most of his painted works created between the mid-1960’s and the mid-1980’s were made with house paint enamel on masonite and were conceived not as easel paintings on canvas but as similar to the ubiquitous placards, posters and street signs of Soviet existence. The works, however, were not created in support of the reigning ideology (as was the case with certain members of the early-20th century avant-garde) but were, nonetheless, reflective of the visual realities of Soviet life. In their “unofficial” lives, underground artists were dismissive of the aesthetic requirements of socialist realism and were equally suspicious of the legacy of painters such as Malevich, viewing him as an artist who was compromised by his misguided utopianism rather than a beacon of transcendence and individualism. Kabakov described him as “a great artist. An inspirer of terror. A great boss.” Whatever one’s opinion, Soviet artists had to come to grips with Malevich’s legacy as well as the metaphysical implications of concepts such as “whiteness” in the Russian, and now Soviet, context. As art historian Boris Groys has observed, in Russia “... it is impossible to paint a decent abstract picture without reference to the holy light.” Kabakov perceived the ambiguities of whiteness and explored them in many of his works: whiteness as both “ontological depth and existential emptiness... divine radiance and Soviet reality... the subject of pure painting and the evidence of shoddy object-making.”

Groys has also suggested that the white backgrounds in many of Kabakov’s 1970’s works “recall the boards used in public offices to display announcements,
This aspect of Kabakov’s work is one possible means by which to differentiate Moscow Conceptualism from its American counterpart:

The Moscow conceptualists saw in their work not the utopian alternative to the mass culture that surrounded them, as in the case of American conceptualism, but rather a reflection on the functioning of Soviet mass culture, that is, culture operating in the space of an already realized utopia. . . Moscow conceptualists employ the texts of daily life, ideological bureaucratic texts. . . in a distanced and ironic manner. It does not identify with these texts, but cites them as symptoms of that culture within which it lives and that it nevertheless is capable of analyzing from an external position.

Within his larger argument, in which Groys considers text as a “ready-made object,” he points to the particularly “textual” nature of Soviet bureaucracy and daily life and suggests that the integration of such texts into the space of visual art (as carried out by Kabakov) leads to a change in the functioning of the text as such, causing it to lose its authoritativeness: “it takes on just as many multiple meanings as a picture, or in general becomes desemanticized.” Importantly, for the purposes of this discussion, Groys also remarks upon the effect of such a strategy on the viewer’s experience:

In the visual space of conceptalist art, the consciousness of the viewer/reader constantly oscillates between two incompatible modes of perceiving the text: on the one hand, the text is perceived as a ready-made object, like a phenomenon of a purely visual type, like a design, deprived of any meaning, while on the other hand the same text may be read as a fully meaningful statement, possessing a meaning that is specific and even easily accessible for reconstruction.

While Kabakov’s juxtaposition of text and imagery in the visual space of his albums contributed to the development of a “literary” branch of Moscow conceptualism
(including writers such as Lev Rubinshtein, Dmitrii Prigov and Vladimir Sorokin), his own experimentation with transferring such works into a spatial context created the possibility for a reconsideration of text in relation to painting as well.

Kabakov transformed his *Ten Characters* album into an installation form in 1988 and it was exhibited at the Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York (his first show in the United States and initial foray into the “total installation”). In order to make the transition, it was necessary to introduce a spatial design and the space was not predominantly white (like the album) but dark and obscure. The exhibition was created in the manner of a Soviet communal apartment and the objects in each room were understood as “rubbish” left by the inhabitants, each of whom was an artist immersed in his own personal dream. Lest we take the “characters” as literal representations of communal inhabitants, Peter Suchin, in his 1994 essay “The Communal Connection,” warns:

> They are at one and the same moment believable and yet far too eccentric—at least some of them—to be fully believed in as actual once or still existing people, real people trapped (yet not inescapably imprisoned) in the world of the cramped, dull and dilapidated communal culture of the Moscow apartment.

The first character was called “The Man Who Flew into His Picture” and the room contained a white diptych, entitled “Little Figure of a Person Flying in White Space,” leaning against the wall in front of an empty wooden chair. The white surface of the painting was marked only by a barely-discernible gray profile of a person. In the “biographical” text panel for this character (a feature of each of the rooms in the exhibit), Kabakov verbalizes the paradoxical nature of contemplation, exploring the tension between self-exposure and self-concealment and the balance between communication and
isolation that must be sought in the Soviet experience\textsuperscript{28} and he hints at his future technique of incorporating “voices” (both spoken and written) in his installations:

At the same time that he is following the departing figure with all his soul, the other half of his consciousness clearly realises that he is sitting completely immobile in his lonely room, sitting alone in front of an enormous, poorly painted white board. . .

Let others speak. They fill up the room with their voices, their discordant sounds in one’s ears, they are heard from outside and from within the room. They speak so loudly and so clearly, that it is possible to write down their words and entire phrases on separate sheets of paper. It’s as though certain spoken phrases are relevant to his ‘painting.’\textsuperscript{29}

The description of the experience of this “character” in the \textit{Ten Characters} installation seems to parallel Kabakov’s goals in creating a “total” installation, those being the maintenance of the tension between immersion and contemplation and the requirement of a more sustained experience than usual within the museum context.

During a dialogue held with Boris Groys at the Columbus Museum of Art in February 2001, Kabakov spoke about his own strategies for making viewers spend more time on the art, complaining that most people “spend only eight minutes in an exhibit,” that they just “recognize” the work and then move on. Asking to be excused for his “heavy totalitarian past,” he explained that with his “narrative technique” (including text panels within the installation), the viewer reads the text carefully and, through the guided movement, is unable to exit without going all the way around the exhibit. When Groys remarked that Kabakov often includes more text than the spectator can possibly absorb, Kabakov replied that, following his own experience of spending a great deal of time at the Tretyakov Gallery (in Moscow) and being unable to take in everything, he projects this perception onto life in general, that the impossibility of taking in everything is his
view of life and, thus, is a component of his installations.\textsuperscript{30}

In his series of lectures published in 1995 as \textit{On the “Total” Installation}, Kabakov explains that, within his approach to installation that includes the surrounding space as part of the work itself, the viewer

\ldots finds himself controlled by the installation when he is near one, in a certain sense, he is its ‘victim.’ But he is simultaneously both a ‘victim’ and a viewer, who on the one hand surveys and evaluates the installation, and on the other, follows those associations, recollections which arise in him, he is overcome by the intense atmosphere of the total installation.\textsuperscript{31}

Kabakov is after a type of “double” action: “the experiencing of the illusion and \textit{simultaneously} the introspection on it.”\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, by including commentary within some of the works, without making it entirely clear whether the “voices” of such viewers are real or invented, the installation becomes, simultaneously, a illusory “representation” of an environment, a disruption of the space of the museum or gallery, a collection of “characters” and remnants of their imaginary lives and experiences, a cacophony of opinions and observations, and a work of art that attends to the aesthetic concerns of light, space, composition, balance as well as to questions of “genre” and “medium.”

In the \textit{Ten Characters} exhibition, and many others, Kabakov not only presented actual paintings within his installation spaces, he also translated the original two-dimensional album, composed of text and illustrations, into a three-dimensional space. This transfer between mediums was not uncommon during the period of the Russian avant-garde, including El Lissitsky’s \textit{Prouns} (paintings that were later translated into three-dimensional spaces), which he described as “a changing-trains between painting and architecture.”\textsuperscript{33} During the early years of the 20th century, certain Russian artists,
such as Aleksandr Rodchenko and Vladimir Tatlin, aspired to the status of “artist-engineer” (with mottos such as “real materials in real space”) and abandoned painting for forms (mediums?) that were imagined as more responsive to the Soviet environment and its immediate goal of industrialization but, after the 1930’s, traditional painting and sculpture would not be seriously challenged in the official art circles of the Soviet Union. Kabakov (and other “unofficial” artists in his Moscow circle) imagined that the language (both literal and figurative) of Conceptualism was a way for Soviet art to enter into an international discourse but, for Kabakov, it was important to acknowledge the differences between Soviet “underground” conceptualism and that of the West. In 1986, through the voice of fictional character E. Zavshanskaya, “senior Research Fellow at the Academy Archives of the USSR,” Kabakov explained that the difference lies in the Western notion of “quid pro quo,” or X instead of Y. For example, it was not long after Duchamp substituted a urinal for a painting that the Readymade “took its... place next to paintings in museums on an equal footing. That is to say ‘X instead of Y’ only creates a certain confusion at first, but all equilibrium is restored.” In the Soviet Union, however, the ‘Y’ did not exist and so the second element (the conception, idea, fact, thing) that exists “primordially” in the West is “here extremely blurred, vague and its existence is doubtful.”34 Thus, it is not a momentary confusion that Kabakov is seeking, or a challenge to artistic conventions that is smoothed over by time and a bit of experience but, rather, a tension within the piece itself that works on the level of a permanent “interruption” or, in the words of Gregg Horowitz, as a “refusal to be transfigurative.”35

A work that must be considered in a discussion of Kabakov’s installations and their relationship to painting is *Incident at the Museum, or Water Music*, originally
exhibited at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York in 1992. The setting created in this multi-room installation was that of an old-fashioned museum, such as the London National Gallery, with rooms painted either a dark claret or forest green. The rooms contained fourteen paintings by an invented artist-personage, the hitherto “forgotten” Socialist Realist painter Stepan Yakovlevich Koshelev. In what amounted to an amusing parody of “retrospective” exhibitions, the display included text panels with biographical information about the “painter,” a discussion of his “theory of creativity” as well as comments about the incorrect attribution of certain works to Koshelev and the unfortunate “incident” at the opening, written by equally fictional art historians, collectors and critics. Koshelev’s approach to painting, known as “Synthesism” and illustrative of the “communal” attitude of socialist realism, was described as follows:

The essence of this method rested not in distinguishing individual problems or tasks in the practice of painting. . . . but in trying to ‘synthesize’ all of these methods into a singular, highly artistic, alloy, in which all the issues that were examined and developed separately by others would be united into one harmonious counterpoint—into a ‘complex knot,’ as Koshelev himself called it. Nothing, according to this method, should be discarded; everything found its place: the realism of the Peredvizhniks, the formalism of Cézanne, the ‘genrism’ of Mentsel, and the ‘air’ of Corot.36

This exhibit within the “museum” represents a revival of a lost and nearly forgotten “master” in Soviet art history and the catastrophe that ensues seems to fit within the usual Russian sense of humor. At the moment when this Soviet artist (who “died” in 1934) is finally given a modicum of recognition, the galleries housing his work are mysteriously flooded and water streams down from the ceiling, requiring the “museum employees” to cover large areas of the floor in plastic and place buckets and jars in various locations. What disrupts the viewers’ ability to contemplate the paintings,
however, creates a different aesthetic experience: the music of the falling water, which is actually a carefully orchestrated musical score by Vladimir Tarasov, created by the drops falling onto the buckets, jars and stretched plastic in a manner that suggests a particular melody. Writing about this work, Boris Groys has commented:

Art survives every disaster, every collapse, because we are able to see everything with which we are confronted, as art. This ability is not a total ‘aestheticization’ that would anaesthetize us to reality, but merely another opportunity to practise art under all possible circumstances.\(^{37}\)

What is also revealed as a continual thread between the *Ten Characters* installation and the *Incident at the Museum, or Water Music* is the device of the fictional artist, the created personage who allows (or requires) Kabakov to produce “paintings” which are then (dis)placed within the fictional context that is the installation, thus distancing the artist from himself as “painter.” What this context requires of the viewer is that he or she work to understand what is being presented, rather than approaching an object, such as a painting, with the comfort of experience and learned practice. In response to a 1991 installation by Kabakov at the Museum of Modern Art, Robert Storr commented:

My assumption was that the whole point of encountering installation work is to enter a space where you don’t know where you are and you have to learn how to put it together imaginatively. That’s something that once had to be done with modern painting. But now the surprise of modern painting has been made official, whereas the surprise of installation has not. In a way, learning to look at installations might teach people what they have forgotten to see in paintings.\(^{38}\)

Once again, it is necessary to reiterate that the value of Kabakov’s installations must not reside, simply, in their element of “surprise” or as a reminder of what has been lost to painting (especially since I am arguing that Richter is able to produce a similar effect
with his paintings, albeit differently) but that the viewer of Kabakov’s installations is never able to reach a complete state of ease or understanding, even after time is spent with the work. In other words, following the initial experience with the work, which may be “surprising,” the installation continues to produce a sense of discomfort and discomfiture: both a physical feeling of distress and a mental state of confusion, frustration or, perhaps, anxiety that, theoretically, produce the conditions for the possibility of a genuinely critical, reflective consciousness. In response to Storr’s description above, Kabakov explained:

Works of art, I think, consist of a series of traps, or concealments, through which the viewer has to pass. There is a naive notion that past art was easy to understand but today’s art is too closed and yields poorly to discovery. Old paintings, however, are just as closed as today’s; it’s just that they have been discovered many times and a method now exists for revealing them. But there are still a lot of good closed things. I stood before Las Meninas recently, and it was like standing in front of many closed doors.39

Kabakov plays with the idea of “concealment” with many of his installations, as they frequently require entry through an uninviting door within a gallery or museum space and, once inside, the “view” of the work is not always clear or even possible from a single vantage point. For example, to enter the 1996 installation Healing with Paintings, located in the Hamburger Kunsthalle in Germany, one must first locate a yellowish-beige, noticeably worn and scratched door standing slightly ajar in one corner of an otherwise pristine gallery. During my own visit to this location, two of the docents I approached appeared to know of the installation by Kabakov and seemed to think that it was available for viewing but could not lead me directly to the work. The incongruence of the heavily-worn door within the “white cube” of the gallery is the first method by which Kabakov forces us to “see” and perceive in a fresh manner, since the
tendency is to overlook and avoid what appears at first glance to be janitorial closet or an area in need of renovation.

Upon entering the installation, the viewer finds him- or herself in a narrow waiting room, complete with wooden benches, squeaky floorboards and a corkboard with the hours of the “clinic” and an explanation of the method used by “Dr. I. Syromjashina,” which is based upon a treatment discovered by “Dr. I. D. Lunkov” that involves the creation of supplemental conditions for the viewing of paintings in order to treat “nervous and neurasthenic “ ailments. Such conditions include a particular type of illumination (which highlights the painted surface, leaving all else in shadow), a specially prepared space (including an old-fashioned hospital bed on rollers, a wooden side table and flimsy, white curtain to cordon off the room from the corridor) and music accompanying the display. Each of the two “treatment” rooms also contained a large painting in an ornate gilt frame leaning against the wall and raised slightly from the floor by two wooden blocks. The actual paintings, in the vaguely “Cézannist” style of the fictional “Koshelev” from Incident at the Museum, of Water Music, depict either a pastoral scene with classical motifs or a farmhouse setting in pleasant, pastel colors. The soft music in the background was classical. According to the instructions, the “patient” should lie down completely undressed several times a week in solitude in order to derive the benefits from the effects of the “glowing painting.”

Thus, the “content” of this installation is, arguably, an embodiment of the principle of “interruption,” in that the time spent viewing paintings in this carefully constructed (albeit shabby) clinic effectively “interrupts” the stresses of daily life and the process forces the patient to become wholly immersed in the paintings without the usual distractions. The naked “patient” is imagined to engage with the paintings in a
vulnerable, full-body manner and the effects of the artworks are understood to be holistic in nature, harkening back to Kabakov’s frustration with the tendency for museum visitors to engage in only abbreviated encounters with works of art, once “recognized” for their importance or fame. In this instance, the viewer of the installation itself becomes involved in observing a situation meant to create the possibility of observation, conforming to Kabakov’s insistence that the installation create such a “double action”: the experiencing of the illusion and the introspection on it. In this case, the introspection involves both the consideration of the “clinic” and the objects within as a “total” work of art and the contemplation of the peculiarities of viewing “paintings,” even though the specific paintings in this installation are not intended to stand alone. The viewer of Healing with Paintings is first unsettled or “alienated” by the confusing and incongruous entrance and, after entering, witnesses a setting intended to “make strange” the viewing of paintings (within the larger gallery/museum context) in order to encourage a “perception” unavailable under normal circumstances.

In his 1995 lectures on the “total” installation, Kabakov provides the foundation for a reading of installation in relation to, rather than as refutation of, painting. After explaining the “double action” involved in the successful viewing of one of his installations, he contrasts that experience with those forms of art that guarantee a submersion into the illusion (theatre and cinema), which make it difficult to discuss the action internally while also following it (but I would note the exception of Brecht’s epic theatre and certain examples of Soviet avant-garde film). Conversely, according to Kabakov, the immobile forms of painting and sculpture privilege introspection over illusion. In this same discussion, Kabakov historicizes the emergence of installation art by placing it in line with the “other genres of art.” He suggests that the period of the
“installation” follows out of other great “periods” which succeeded one another and
developed logically from one another, those being the fresco, the icon and the (easel)
painting. Eventually the installation, which is not simply a movement or fashionable
style, will replace the painting, having included painting within itself.42

In the above passage, Kabakov uses the term “genre” in a space where “medium”
might be expected, as in the medium of painting vs. the “medium” of installation, but
the “periods” of art that he mentions are all characterized by a certain version (type,
genre) of “painting.” In the first two periods, however, painting is inextricably linked to
what may be understood as a different “medium.” The fresco, as a mural on a wall, is
intimately and fundamentally tied to the architecture that supports it. The icon may be
understood as a spiritual “object,” a physical manifestation of the immaterial substance
of the “other world” as well as a movable “object” of religious contemplation that may
be transported in a procession or placed in the upper corner of an orthodox Russian
home. For Kabakov, the age of the “painting” began with the projection of the
cosmology of the “other world” onto this earth, with painting being the model of this
transformed earthly world. Eventually, this memory fades and the painting becomes an
“object,” or “thing among other things” and installation takes its place as that which
presents a quality of immateriality as well as a refutation of the principle of
profitability, due to the impossibility of repeating the work without its author, the
problematic nature of the “materials” used, and the hostility of collectors who can
neither house such works nor keep them in reserve.43

If the essentialist notion of “medium-specificity” in relation to painting may be
challenged by a reading that focuses upon “its structural articulation, the play of its
limits,” as was the case in the As Painting: Division and Displacement exhibit at the
Wexner Center in 2001, then it may be possible to approach Kabakov’s conception of the “total” installation as a “medium” (or genre, in his terminology) according to such terms, in spite of its arguable similarity to the notion of a Gesamtkunstwerk. Kabakov outlines, in his lectures, the role of particular elements in his works, including time, the object, light and color, music and voice, drama and the painting, in such a way that aesthetic judgment is not abandoned but, instead, encouraged through the careful consideration of each constituent part as well as their success as a conjoined whole (or work of art).

Although many of Kabakov’s installations contain actual paintings and the work *Healing with Paintings* adopts a seemingly reverential attitude toward the power of painting, his advocacy of the “total” installation often results in his work being claimed by proponents of “anti-aesthetic” postmodernism. When considered, however, in relation to the theories of “alienation” and *ostraneniye* discussed in the earlier chapter on “interruption,” many of Kabakov’s installations create an experience that correlates to those described by Theodor Adorno in his discussions of auratic or autonomous art, specifically his distinction between the “aesthetic,” which allows for the “experimental development of a protocritical consciousness” and “aestheticization,” which is the “unreflective acquiescence to reification.” In relation to the notion of the “aura” and its intentional abandonment (so important to many postmodernists) Adorno warned about the “truly baleful aestheticization” (in the form of culture industry reifications) that results from the rush toward all things “antiformalistic,” which are mistakenly understood as having the potential for a more direct criticism of social reality. In a statement that seems to correspond to the suspicions of Soviet “underground” artists toward socialist realism, Adorno contends:
Social and immanent aspects of artworks do not coincide, but neither do they diverge so completely as the fetishism of culture and praxis would like to believe. That whereby the truth content of artworks points beyond their aesthetic complexion, which it does only by virtue of that aesthetic complexion, assures it its social significance.”

Also, as Kabakov insists that great precision is required in the coordination of the parts to the whole of a “total” installation and as I am suggesting that the “double action” associated with viewing a Kabakov installation results in the creation of a certain “tension,” it is possible to see an overlap with certain comments by Adorno:

The concept of tension frees itself from the suspicion of being formalistic in that, by pointing up dissonant experiences or antinomical relations in the work, it names the element of “form” in which form gains its substance by virtue of its relation to its other. Through its inner tension, the work is defined as a force field even in the arrested moment of its objectivation. The work is at once the quintessence of relations of tension and the attempt to dissolve them.

In other words, the fact that Kabakov’s installations have an “illusory” and representative nature should not be taken as evidence that they are primarily works of “re-creation” or that their status as “authentic” works of art resides in their “authenticity” as Soviet spaces but, rather, that the relationship between the space and the objects and the objects to one another, whether paintings, garbage or text panels, is the proper site for contemplation.

While it is possible to argue that the plethora of demonstrations and expositions held in the USSR to demonstrate “victories and achievements” had a determining effect on the development of Eastern European installations, Kabakov has insisted that the influence of painting, “a painting-quality, was definitive in the formation of the ‘Eastern’ installation, moreoever in the most direct, fundamental sense, as the ‘painting
of the world surrounding us.”  

48 He also emphasizes that an such an installation, regardless of its theme, should rely upon:

> . . . the characteristics of the painting: the illusoriness of its graphic ability, its ‘paintingness,’ and the fullness, the capacity to serve as a universal model. This means a unique sort of ‘total paintingness,’ which is directly connection to the genre of the ‘total’ installation.

49 An installation that is conceived with precision will result in the interaction of the three-dimensional space of the installation itself with the essentially two-dimensional perception of each segment; in other words, the viewer finds him- or herself in a “kaleidoscope of innumerable ‘paintings’” but without the lines or edges to create a literal separation. This phenomenon relies upon the idea that whatever is seen from life is preserved in readymade, visual blocks and that the “painting-ness” of everything that is seen in the work will activate the mechanism of that memory and, quite possibly, the viewer will have the sense that these “paintings” have already been seen somewhere.

50 When is comes to the question of actual paintings within certain installations, Kabakov explains that they represent the same fiction as the decorations, lights and other objects in the room but that this should not suggest that there is ultimately no “truth” in this atmosphere of deceit and fiction, but that a “point of truth” does exist and it resides in “that very same painting.” It derives not from the artist’s hand, the authenticity of its style or mastery of technique but, rather, from the original “paintingness” spoken of above, the original “painting of the world” which was beyond the window.

51 Although Kabakov would never agree that installation could be taken up into “painting,” it is clear that painting is perceived as “model” rather than antithesis and that the viewer who becomes immersed in the installation is presumed to be a viewer of “paintings” first and foremost.
In his 1990 article “The Ropes of Ilya Kabakov: An Experiment in Interpretation of a Conceptual Installation,” Andrew Rappaport proposes that a 1985 spatial construction by Kabakov, which would typically be called an “installation,” might be better understood as a “painting,” since the former only describes its technical aspect and does not provide the “semantic richness of the concept ‘painting.’”

He begins with a description:

In the studio sixteen ropes, six and a half meters long, are strung parallel to each other, approximately a meter and a half apart and the same distance above the floor, that is, at eye level. Various small objects and labels are tied to these ropes at eight-inch intervals. Each object is suspended from a short thread at the rope level or slightly lower, and a strip of white paper with an inscription written in black ink is hung below it on a two-inch string. Although the objects and inscriptions are connected to each other by strings, most of the time there is no connection in meaning.

The suspended objects may be loosely categorized as “refuse,” in that they have no marked value and are simply scraps of the material environment, such as cigarette butts, bus tickets, candy wrappers. The inscriptions may also be understood as “refuse” in the sense that they are “scraps” of speech uttered long ago, including a number of obscenities elegantly inscribed on the labels.

While it might be tempting to view such a work as an example of the complete degeneration of contemporary art, Rappaport suggests that such objects, not even worth contemplating, represent for Kabakov a “kind of mystery of our living world” and that his work delves into the qualities of an “insignificant” layer of existence and continues the tradition of “genre” paintings, which often represented the lower classes in art. In his struggle against representation and representability, Kabakov presents an “inscription” or an “object” instead of a representation and he frequently attempts to
correlate the plastic, spatial or narrative components of a “paintings” with words. In so doing, the real objects become plastic “signs” of these same objects and may be exchanged for an accompanying inscription and all are forced into the single category of “rubbish.” In his lectures, Kabakov describes how the different “roles” played by objects in an installation may be played by objects entirely similar to one another in meaning and quality, with the difference being made by their placement in the overall work. This idea that meaning is “entirely applied” and that two similar “objects” can stand for something different within the same work corresponds remarkably to Rosalind Krauss’ interpretation of the newspaper cut-outs in certain Cubist paintings or papier collé works by Picasso as a move from the traditional “iconic representational system” of painting to a “symbolic” one that operates more like a “language.”

Later in his essay, Rappaport remarks that Kabakov frequently juxtaposes words and images in a space where they both lose their specificity, namely the space of “charts or tables.” Rappaport suggests that in the “space” of a painting (conventionally understood as a surface fragment), multiformity is emphasized, which corresponds symbolically to the multiformity of the “quarters of the world.” Conversely, in the space of a page (or any writing surface) the meaning of a word does not change depending upon whether it is placed above or below. Further, in a painting one encounters “atmosphere or the substance of the painterly space,” which has not only geometrical and compositional characteristics but “substance-like qualities” as well. Through the period of Russian and Byzantine icon painting and continuing with book printing and illustration, the tabular frame became interconnected with the painterly frame. While textual space is not connected with the idea of the integrity of a text’s content and a painting is usually understood as a “whole,” even in its fragmentation (a
 delimited fragment of reality), a table represents an intermediate stage between the fragment and the whole, in that each cell is a “fragment of the larger whole which is comprehensible only at the level of the entire table.” What this means in relation to Kabakov’s work is that, in *Ropes*, there is a combination of the “spaces of display, image and text with a vague admixture of the tabular space,” in that the threads seem to perform the function of a cell. Finally, although the viewer is free to encounter and choose from these different spaces, Rappaport believes that

\[ \ldots \text{it is the painterliness that creates the sense of rest, completion and resolution which can be confirmed by the work’s actual likeness to a painting and the fact that it inspires contemplation.} \]

Another author who has proposed alternative interpretations of Kabakov’s installations and investigates Kabakov’s engagement with “modernist” concerns such as those elucidated by Theodor Adorno is Gregg Horowitz, Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University. In his 2001 book *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life*, Horowitz challenges some of the typical interpretations of Kabakov and his installation work; namely the contention that works such as *Toilet* (1992) and *School No. 6* (1993) may be taken as, respectively, an authentic report of Soviet apartment life and an accurate re-creation of a rundown Soviet schoolhouse:

Taking his installations to be works of reportage presumes that unless a work exhibits a privatizing distance from reality it must be fully penetrated by reality. The thought, in other words, is that the only artistic distance there is is withdrawal into subjective inwardness. And it is this thought that Kabakov combats.

Further, Horowitz disputes the interpretation of Boris Groys, and others, that labels Kabakov’s works as “ironic” and the suggestion that he is an “ironizer” of subjective inwardness. Horowitz argues, rather, that, unlike “geniune ironists” such as Barbara
Kruger or David Salle, Kabakov’s practice takes the “issue of artistic flight, or the drive to inwardness, as its central subject matter”:

In its treatment of loss, flight, home and exile, Kabakov’s art is at odds with the private pleasures of irony, and for just this reason it is a preservation, even a salvation, of the failed protest inherent in the modernist project. To put the point bluntly: Kabakov’s disenchantment of the modernist artistic project is not also a disillusionment with its aims, but rather a continuation of those aims made possible by stripping modernism of its affirmative character.63

In his discussion of Kabakov’s 1993 installation The Boat of My Life (a boat-shaped wooden construction filled with 25 packing boxes full of found objects, photographs and texts), Horowitz suggests that a more appropriate name (or translation) would be Lifeboat, since that term is not understood to be a “home” but a craft which survivors use in order to reach a safe haven where “life” will be possible. Horowitz contends that, unlike some of Kabakov’s works, such as the “communal apartment” of Ten Characters, this piece does not even imply that anyone has ever lived in it. Rather, in such a boat life is suspended (interrupted) and the journey or motion of this particular boat has likewise been suspended, “immobilized in a moment of expectancy that cannot be confused with its satisfaction.”64 He goes on to suggest that the refusal to be transfigurative—the fact that this work carries the very past it is fleeing and the objects that could become “art” remain packed in boxes—is the source of lamentation in Kabakov’s art, with a lamentation being “a nonsilence in the face of a loss” and a “song of mourning that strives to reconstitute the space of home in a new register.”65

In his survey of Kabakov’s works entitled “The Movable Cave, or Kabakov’s Self-Memorials,” Boris Groys does, indeed, use the term “ironic” throughout his
discussion, including his assertion that, for example, the albums

. . . aestheticize the incapacity and anonymous failure of their unfortunate protagonists and, through this compelling portrayal of their fate, produce an ironic representation of the very modernist myths whose revival had inspired the Moscow unofficial art scene of the time.66

Horowitz contends that Groys is mistaken because he “infers too quickly from an anti-aesthetic, antitranscendent comportment to an ironic one” and does not account for the fact that,

Insofar as his work embodies a critique of the cultivation of inwardness that reveals it to be a movement toward self-preservation, it repudiates the ironic and superdetached posture, itself so committed to sacrificing whatever is necessary for self-preservation, typical of much so-called postmodern art.67

Horowitz reiterates this point later in the chapter:

Kabakov’s achievement is to break the connection between the repudiation of modern inwardness and the irony that necessitates theoreticism. He criticizes modernist inwardness not from a theoretical point of view, which would translate, and so give ear to, the powerlessness of longing, but rather in order to unlock the longing itself. Kabakov’s art presents the longing as having no object to satisfy it, and so as a reproach to the conditions that have made it necessary.68

Perhaps it is more useful to understand “irony” not in its rhetorical sense, as in the use of words (or images) to suggest the opposite of their literal meaning, or simply as “incongruity,” but rather as it is used by Georg Lukács in his Theory of the Novel. In this text, the term “irony” is used to describe the writer’s attitude toward reality after becoming conscious of the discrepancy between his hope for a meaningful existence and the alienated reality in which he must operate, which is enacted within a novel through the reflexivity of the narrator. For Lukács, irony

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... extends not only to the profound hopelessness of the struggle, but also to the still more profound hopelessness of its abandonment—the pitiful failure of the intention to adapt to a world which is a stranger to ideals, to abandon the unreal ideality of the soul for the sake of achieving mastery over reality.69

Lukács’ concept of irony and his insistence that the self-critical form of the novel does not negate the longing for an organic whole, for the totality associated with the epic form, seem to coincide more comfortably with both Groys’ description and Horowitz’s explanation of the nature of Kabakov’s achievement. Furthermore, according to Peter Hohendahl, Lukács’ defense of the fragmentary, non-organic structure of the novel (at least as a transitional genre) anticipates, to some degree, aspects of Theodor Adorno’s aesthetic theory; namely the notion that aesthetic forms are historical and the assertion that technique is more important than content.70 Within the context of this dissertation, Kabakov has been situated as one of a group of artists who engage in various techniques of “interruption” (a discussion that requires an initial and primary consideration of technique but one that incorporates the “content,” to some extent, within that same technique) and the correlation between the early Lukács and Adorno (and arguably between Groys and Horowitz, within this particular sense of “irony”) gives support to the idea that the interruptive nature of Kabakov’s works is hovering within the already existing commentary but that it has not been articulated in a specific manner.

In order to bring this chapter to a close we must return to the Communal Kitchen, the location left so abruptly at the beginning of this text. This work brings together all of the aspects discussed in this essay in relation to the development of the “total” installation and it will provide the final test for the valid experience emerging from the creation of a “new shudder” and Kabakov’s description of the “total” installation as the offspring of painting. The Communal Kitchen features an incongruous 167
entrance within a museum, actual paintings, items of garbage on strings with labels, ordinary household items, the inclusion of text within the paintings and voices (both written and spoken) in the form of quotes from the ordinary, often banal, conversation characteristic of individuals in such a shared and cramped situation.

The installation, located within an octagonal space approximately 18 feet high, consists of strings of “garbage” with labels hanging from the ceiling, 32 paintings (each with a kitchen item attached at the center) hanging just below the ceiling, more household objects hanging on the wall, and a fold-up “screen” on a shelf with “voices” (utterances) extending around the perimeter of the room. Tables contain translations of texts (including posters, announcements and commentaries) located on the screen and elsewhere in the room. Normally, when the exhibit is open to the public, four voices could be heard pronouncing the phrases on the labels held by the strings. As Kabakov has explained in various essays, the heart of any communal apartment is the kitchen, the location where the lives of the inhabitants intersect, where arguments are raised and, sometimes, settled and where the “howls and complaints of all those who lived there before and all those who live there now blend together beneath the ceiling.”

The sheer amount of objects and words is overwhelming, even though many of the items and phrases are too distant to be viewed directly. As a collection of “statements” and everyday objects, the installation is an archive, where the traces of what has been said are catalogued and the utensils are suspended, taking their place both directly on the wall, as if ready for use, and “within” the paintings, as signs of themselves. In addition, each painting contains two phrases, one in each corner, with the name of the speaker written above. The sentences, however, are not like dialogues, but more like phrases thrown out into emptiness, which, in some mysterious way, find a
response at the other end of the kitchen. The paintings are all similar in format, with text in the upper corners and an object attached at the center, and feature a greenish-gray background. The text is typically in the form of a question and answer, with names above:

Ekaterina Lvovna Soyka  
Whose mug is this?  
Fedyor Sergeevich Malinin  
I don’t know

In these paintings, the words and the object become equal in relation to the monochrome field, with the “real” object placed between “depicted” voices. Recalling earlier installations, the text is no longer a title or straightforward explanation but must be understood as part of the work itself, as a visual element and, simultaneously, an utterance that asks to be pronounced and, thus, to become somehow “spatial.”

Other bits of speech, located on the fold-up screen or on posters or announcements, simply remain as incomplete utterances, fragments of memory usually forgotten:

I’m going to start ironing now. . .

When summer comes, we’ll open the windows and then we’ll wash everything. . .

Put it down, put it down, I’m cleaning up now. . .

And we should have posted an announcement with a fine. . .

Oh it’s nothing, nothing, it will heal, why are you crying so, boys don’t act like this. . .

The Communal Kitchen is, at once, a zone of speaking, a location fraught with the babble of voices, and a space brimming with absence. Like an earlier painting by Kabakov entitled “Where Are They,” which includes an image of a fly and the words “Where is Marina Zakovoyt?” and “Where is Mikhail Ignatievich?” against a white background, the answer is the same: “They’re not here.”
The snippets of “spoken” language in the paintings, the pronouncements on the screen, the utensils forever awaiting their owners and the garbage carefully hung with labels exist within the installation as the objects and sounds that create the atmosphere of a communal kitchen as well as elements in the overall composition of a work of art and such doubling is an important aspect of Kabakov’s oeuvre. In his short essay “Concealment,” he describes a phenomenon that emerged as he began to create large-scale projects:

Between the thing and me a gap had emerged, but not at all in a sense that, well, I couldn’t express myself, I wasn’t clear, I couldn’t find the forms, etc. Not at all. The situation of the gap between what I do and what I have in mind I immediately perceived as normal, moreover, it seemed to me to be most interesting and fruitful. . . intention, which is the most important thing according to the law of ‘concealment,’ should be torn away from the realization, it gives joy only because it is not realized and the possibility of its realization is restricted. . . True, here arises a special duality. I made this thing, but I want to and can be free of it.75

The gap (perhaps “interruption”) between Kabakov and his work, between the producer of the thing and the judgment of it, recalls the moment in Balzac’s story “The Unknown Masterpiece” when the painter Frenhofer, after laboring for ten years on his self-described “masterpiece,” realizes what his students have noticed from the start, that there is “nothing on his canvas” and he calls himself “an imbecile, a lunatic. . . just a rich man who, when he walks, merely walks!”76 In his discussion of Frenhofer in The Man Without Content, Giorgio Agamben writes:

Frenhofer becomes double. He moves from the point of view of the artist to that of the spectator, from the interested promesse de bonheur to disinterested aesthetics. In this transition, the integrity of his work dissolves. For it is not only Frenhofer that becomes double, but his work as well.77
Later, Agamben suggests that it may be in this duality of principles (from the creative activity of the artist and the sensible apprehension of the spectator) that we should seek the “speculative center” and the “vital contradiction” of aesthetics.\(^\text{78}\) This is the duality, the tension that Kabakov finds so provocative, the distress over the perceived loss of the possibility of meaning tied to the impossibility of abandoning that goal, and the constant pull between the situation of artist and of viewer that is embodied within his installations.

Kabakov’s repeated use of author-personages (and fictional “artists”) within his installations (evolving from his earlier albums) should also be understood as a direct response to the repression of the Soviet environment, which forced artists to go “underground,” to live out their existence with a “double-consciousness” (to borrow a term from W.E.B. DuBois) in order to maintain a safe place within society while pursuing their own “unofficial” artistic interests. Within this environment, which did not afford “unofficial” artists many opportunities to exhibit their private works and left them without interaction with outside viewers, critics or historians, the artist “became them himself, trying to guess what his works meant ‘objectively.’” He attempted to ‘imagine’ that very ‘History’ in which he was functioning and which was ‘looking’ at him.”\(^\text{79}\) This “double-consciousness,” however, has continued in many of the works Kabakov has produced more recently in the West, suggesting that the separation, or “pause,” between the artist and his work created by the use of fictional artists is a device of “interruption” that may be characteristic of the post-Soviet era as well. In Kabakov’s case, it is noteworthy that most of his fictional “artists” are, in fact, painters: including “The Man Who Flew Into His Painting” and “The Untalented Artist” from *Ten Characters*, and Stephan Yakovlevich Koshelev from the *Incident at the Museum*, or
Water Music. While Gerhard Richter, having emigrated to the West in 1961, was able to participate in an international aesthetic dialogue as a painter (as did Komar and Melamid, possibly because of their earlier emigration to the West), Kabakov required a distancing element between author/artist and product in his early albums (created in the Soviet Union) as well as within his “total” installations (initiated as three-dimensional manifestations of his albums). By employing the interruptive technique of the fictional artist, Kabakov is able to produce paintings and drawings within the context of the “total” installation without betraying his own sense of their unavailability as genuine aesthetic objects.

Another aspect of “interruption” that Kabakov demonstrates is an interest in the mundane coupled with a keen ability to “make it strange,” to discover the formal possibilities of life’s detritus, both actual and spoken, and to do so within the context of painting. By acting as offspring of painting rather than adversary, Kabakov’s “total” installations also “make strange” the very act of viewing a work, including the paintings held within as well as the “opinions” and “commentaries” that often take their place alongside the other “objects.” The presence of other responses within the context of the work itself necessarily gives any new viewer pause, causing a disruption in the viewing process, a sense that one is always “coming after.”

Finally, the current location of the Communal Kitchen, in the basement of the Musée Maillol in Paris, stands as the final example of “interruption”: a reminder, amongst the “beautiful” works of Maillol, that the significant artists of our own time must attend “to how the living bear the voices of the dead in and as texture of their lives.” While Kabakov cannot, with any degree of seriousness, allow for the realization of an ideal communality amidst the tense struggle between intimacy and hostility,
between the public and private gaze, that is evoked by his installations, neither can he completely abandon the notion of transcendence, whether in the form of one of his *Ten Characters* (*The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*) or in his own comments about the *Communal Kitchen*. During a dinner conversation in February 2001 at the home of Ohio art collector Neil Rector, Kabakov remarked that the experience of art should be analogous to the experience of entering a temple. Perhaps the same sense of “interruption” to both the pace of ordinary life and the space of one’s existence associated with the entrance into a “sacred” space is lurking within Kabakov’s “total installations.” Similarly, when asked the following question by J. Bakshtein regarding his work in the Musée Maillol: “The magnificent name of the sculptor himself, his magnificent friends-artists works exhibited next to his own work, all of that in magnificent Paris—what does your communal apartment have to do with all of this?”, Kabakov replied:

> It doesn’t have anything to do with it at all, and this is emphasized precisely by the location of the installation—down below, in the basement, underneath all of this beautiful magnificence. Among the marvelous sculptures, a door opens and the viewer faces a descent into the underworld: dark, dirty stairs lead down into the gloom, and only having descended into the basement does he enter the installation, a narrow and high room on which the light of day trickles from up above through small windows and muffled voices can be heard. When I put up the installation, I kept remembering the famous Sainte-Chapelle... This communal kitchen was our Soviet chapel for me. The viewer exits through the opposite door, goes up the poorly painted, semi-dark stairs, there is still another door up above, and he winds up again in rooms bathed in sunlight, among beautiful sculptures and paintings.81
NOTES

Chapter 5


2. Storr, 9.


4. Kabakov, The Text as the Basis, 258.


7. After the invasion of the Soviet Union by German troops in June, 1941, the family was forced to flee the area and move east, eventually settling in an Uzbek cottage in Samarkand. Almost by accident, Ilya and a friend, while exploring a curious, European-style building in the neighborhood, ended up at the location of the evacuated Leningrad Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture and, after showing some of his own drawings to the officials, Ilya was accepted into the Academy. Although Ilya and his mother made plans to move to Leningrad when the Academy was restored, after the war ended Solodukhina was unable to obtain permission to live in Leningrad and Ilya’s place was transferred to the Secondary Preparatory School of the Arts in Moscow. Kabakov completed his basic art training in 1951 and was subsequently accepted into the Surikov Institute of Art, entering in October of that same year. For further biographical information about Kabakov, see Amei Wallach. Ilya Kabakov: The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996.

9. Socialist realism was not taught as a course but was culled from an abbreviated exposure to art history (with Western art effectively halted with the Barbizon school) and the proper appreciation for the tradition of Russian realist painting, exemplified by the work of Ilya Repin (Wallach and Ross). Although names like Van Gogh and Cézanne were usually only mentioned for purposes of ridicule, certain principles that were associated with Cézanne (balance and painterliness) were used and taught by leading Soviet painters and the Western understanding of socialist realism often ignores such aspects. For a detailed discussion of socialist realism in the context of literature, see Katarina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). For essays about and examples of the visual culture of the Stalin era, see Boris Groys and Max Hollein, eds., *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era* (Frankfurt: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2003).

10. Wallach, 27-28; Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 12.


14. For a discussion of the situation of “authorship” under Soviet conditions and a consideration of Kabakov as “author-personage” and his use of invented characters (as well as fictional viewers) in his total installations, see Stephan Küpper, *Autorstategien im Moskauer Konzeptualismus: Ilya Kabakov, Lev Rubinstejn, Dmitrij A. Prigov* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2000).

15. Wallach, 56.

16. Wallach, 43.

17. Ilya Kabakov in Wallach, 44.

19. Wallach, 44.

20. Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 47.


25. Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 54.

26. Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 54, 60.


28. Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 63.


34. Ilya Kabakov in Wallach, 52.


37. Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 74.

38. Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 128.

39. Ilya Kabakov in Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 129.


47. Adorno, 292.


53. Rappaport, 173.
54. Rappaport, 173-175.
55. Rappaport, 178.
59. Rappaport, 184-185.
60. Rappaport, 186-189.
61. Rappaport, 193.
64. Horowitz, 185.
65. Horowitz, 183-184
66. Groys, Ross and Blazwick, 35.
67. Horowitz, 178.
68. Horowitz, 183.
71. Ilya Kabakov in Wallach, 224.
72. A connection between Gerhard Richter and Ilya Kabakov that I hope to explore with future research is their overlapping interest in the “archive,” with
Kabakov’s including virtually every object and phrase with which he comes into contact, while Richter’s “archive,” known as Atlas, includes mostly snapshots, mass media images and some drawings by the artist.


74. Kabakov, *The Text as the Basis*, 16.


78. Agamben, 12.


CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The themes of memory, loss, failure and exile, which permeate the works by Daniel Libeskind, Gerhard Richter and Ilya Kabakov, led to my initial consideration of them in tandem. This, in turn, led to an inquiry about the validity of one’s experience before an artwork and the realization that each work was tested not only by its particular achievement in relation to its subject and medium but also by its ability to participate in a larger conversation, a dialogue that emerges when works in various media by different artists in different locations seem to be responding to the same pressing concerns: how to address the aftermath of totalitarianism and how to live with each other (and the dead) in that aftermath? Secondly, although these works of art consider historical events or situations that are not necessarily contemporaneous with their own emergence, they must find their place among the specific artistic developments of their time in order to establish their ongoing significance. This is not to say that the works themselves are not also formative of that same developing tradition but, rather, that it is only by responding to the boundaries of its medium in relation to other media that an artwork finds the manner by which it will most successfully converse. Despite the thematic overlap between the works discussed in this dissertation, it is important to note that the gravity of the subject matter does not guarantee the success of the work in
an aesthetic sense; in fact, the events and situations addressed by these artists threaten to overwhelm and make trivial all but the most nuanced and thoughtful approach. By considering the works by these three artists as components of a larger phenomenon—that of “interruption”—I have demonstrated that each of these works succeeds in creating the conditions for the possibility of a valid experience for the viewer by virtue of that phenomenon (or “new shudder”) in relation to its historical context, its medium and as part of the artistic dialogue of the late 20th century.

Libeskind’s Jewish Museum Berlin nudges the memory of Berlin itself, reminding the city how its landscape, its very Luft, contains the traces of its lost Jewish community; it points to the absence created by both the Holocaust and the path of exile and emigration; it quietly mourns the failure of Germany to protect its own citizens, to find a way out of such darkness; and it becomes the witness for the Muselmann, forcing us to consider the ultimate cost of depravity, to recognize that, however quickly we look away, the fate of the Muselmann is a burden we must share.

Richter’s cycle October 18, 1977 also confronts a failure in the history of Germany, recalling a chain of events that emerged as part of the unfinished business of the Third Reich. Unlike Libeskind’s museum, in which the fear of losing sight of the missing, of their contributions, requires that the building be, after all, a museum for remembering rather than a memorial of absence, Richter’s paintings operate within a context of too much visibility. By painting after these photographs, he confounds both the photographs themselves and the viewer, impeding the easy recognition expected of a history painting as well as the viewer’s desire to gaze upon the unfortunate. Those who cannot bear to look at the Muselmann, the still-living dead, might not turn away from the photographs of the Baader-Meinhof corpses, but perhaps they should.
A “total” installation by Kabakov might appear as a paean to failure, a joyful and carefully catalogued conglomeration of the remnants of a hopeful activity in the face of its own impossibility, its own doomed nature. In other instances, Kabakov erects a memorial to the voices of a space, as the soaring ceiling of the Communal Kitchen traps the phrases and the quotidian detritus accumulated over years of forced proximity and mutual frustration. It might be appropriate to say that Kabakov’s works are not necessarily about exile as much as they exist in exile: cumbersome, obsessive Soviet environments noisily bumping against their neighbors in an otherwise quiet, clean, properly reverent and well-lit museum.

Beyond these thematic similarities, the works offer a further commonality: the experience of interruption in all of its possible meanings: a halting of speech, the disturbance of an activity, a break in the flow, an obstruction to one’s view. This process is necessary to the creation of a “new shudder,” leading to an opportunity for a valid experience, because it frees the works from being understood as simply re-creations or representations. A valid experience entails an ability to go on, a confrontation between viewer and work that disrupts the reification of both, allowing for a developing history of reception that recognizes that the locus of meaning moves about within the dialectical relationship between viewer and the work as well as between the work itself and the other works existing at its borders. An encounter with the Jewish Museum Berlin is enhanced by a familiarity with the “total” installations of Kabakov, and vice versa, in that the role played by the treatment of space within another space is not taken for granted as something that simply follows from the construction of walls; as with the various shapes cut from a newspaper in a papier-collé by Picasso, which may indicate the wood of a violin or newsprint itself, space can also be used within the

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same building to indicate different things, to create different sensations. The space of the Holocaust Tower, like the towering space in the *Communal Kitchen*, seems to contain the voices of the lost or those now distant, voices that, during a particular moment in history, shared with each other an intimacy not of their own choosing and may have endured a fate nearly unimaginable. Alternatively, the space of the void within the museum, like the space between the viewer and the surface of a Richter photo-painting, is a space of obfuscation, an area in which one cannot see what somehow ought to be visible, such as the exhibit within the *Jewish Museum Berlin* or the photograph upon which the painting is based.

A visit to the *Jewish Museum Berlin* does not promise, nor does it provide, a journey back in time, an opportunity to see and feel the instruments of repression, torture and murder, as is inevitably the case with the preserved camps; instead it is entirely an encounter with the present: Berlin as it remains in light of its history, and the visitor, as he or she remains after coming into contact with the aftermath of history, the voids, the disorientation, the irretrievable losses. Similarly, Richter’s paintings do not provide an historical narrative; they do not pull apart the tangled web of interactions that led to such events and they do not allow for fleeting glimpses. The surfaces of the works demand concentration: the tension between recognition of the images and the visibility of the paint itself as “surface” creates a “double action” similar to that described by Kabakov in relation to his installations: the experience of the illusion and the contemplation of it. In this instance, the illusion is the sense that one can escape into the history, while the “presentness” of the experience refuses such a refuge. As Giorgio Agamben has remarked:

> . . . in the work of art the *continuum* of linear time is broken, and man recovers, between past and future, his present space.
To look at a work of art . . . means ecstasy in the epochal opening of rhythm, which gives and holds back.¹

Within a “total” installation, the viewer is asked to come to terms with both the disruption that the work creates in the museum context and the ongoing state of “interruptedness” that resides in the work itself: the painting exhibit that is irrevocably disturbed by the falling water; the “clinic” that is forever between clients, the kitchen with captured phrases literally hanging from the ceilings and visualized on the corners of the paintings.

In all of these examples, the techniques for achieving a sense of interruption are necessarily tied not only to the medium in question, but also the particular historical moment in that medium’s history. In other words, Libeskind addresses the tradition of architecture and the questioning of its own “Modernist” (functional) past, the crisis of the “monument” or “memorial” as it stands in the late 20th century in Germany (and elsewhere), as well as the Jewish Museum’s relationship to the Kollegienhaus, which provides its only entrance. The thematic concerns of the work are, thus, considered, in this instance, within the larger context of architecture and its location in Berlin, but a thorough knowledge of those aspects are not necessary for the visitor to come away with a valid experience. Similarly, Richter’s works are situated within the context of the tradition of painting itself, including its necessary response, or adaptation, to the representational force (or inadequacy) of photography and its own capacity for development and continuity in an increasingly image-saturated and digital age. October 18, 1977, by its very title, indicates a particular moment in time, but the series dismantles the sense that any historical event acknowledges such a limit by enacting the continual encountering that such events demand. We are not in any sense returned to this period in Germany’s history by viewing Richter’s work, rather we are asked to

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participate as the photographs resist their own finitude, as the artist restrains their life-threatening visibility, their tendency to become “dated.” Finally, Kabakov’s installations respond to his own understanding of the tradition of painting within the Soviet context as well as his sensitivity to the “spirit of a place.” In this text, Kabakov’s installations provide the hinge between the medium of architecture and that of painting, since they emerge from painting and continue to respond to painting’s aesthetic while also providing “room” for the voices, the “characters” that linger within the space of architecture. The experience of interruption, therefore, is never limited to one medium or another, but it must find that resistance to which to respond, the boundaries of its piece, lest it become lost in the continuity, the “algebrization” of the ordinary gaze. In these encounters, the viewer does not complete the piece, as that would be a sign of its failure, but each reception contributes to its own developing history.
NOTES

Chapter 6

APPENDIX

THE BAADER-MEINHOF GROUP AND THE RED ARMY FACTION

*Ulrike Meinhof... female protagonist in the last drama of a bourgeois world*
—Heiner Müller, 1985

The group of individuals known collectively as the “Baader-Meinhof Group” (or “Gang,” depending upon one’s political persuasion) came together during the late 1960’s in West Germany (Federal Republic of Germany) amidst a developing atmosphere of youthful rebellion and increased suspicion regarding the older generation’s connection to the Nazi past. The Federal Republic of Germany had been established in 1949 and was based essentially upon the two-party model of government of the United States, with the Left represented by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Center/Right represented by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), with the additional support of the more right-wing Christian Social Union (CSU). Following the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and during the phenomenon known as the “economic miracle,” the primary parties of the FRG formed a “Grand Coalition” by 1966 with Kurt Kiesinger representing the CDU/CSU as chancellor and Willy Brandt of the SPD serving as his deputy and foreign minister.¹ Many leftists had become dissatisfied with the SPD and its move toward the center, starting as early as 1955, when the party voted in favor of conscription and abandoned its longstanding opposition to rearmament.² By 1959-60, the Socialist Student Organization (SDS), a student arm of the SPD known for its

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protests against nuclear armament, came into conflict with the official SPD party line and its most radical members, including soon-to-be editor-in-chief Ulrike Meinhof and other contributors to the left-wing student journal *konkret*, were disallowed from continuing their membership in the SPD. After its party conference in November 1959, the SPD declared that membership in the SDS at any level was “incompatible” with membership of the party itself, thus creating an environment of alienation and disillusionment among leftist and student dissenters.

Although radicals were active in all major cities of the Federal Republic during the 1950’s and 1960’s, Berlin, the former hub of the Third Reich, quickly became the center of postwar radicalism, with its large population of students and its position as a focal point of East/West tensions. While the Vietnam War and United States policies incited some degree of protest among students, including a custard-throwing incident during American Vice-President Hubert Humphrey’s visit to Berlin in April 1967, the focus of the rage would soon become the government of the Federal Republic of Germany itself and its policing tactics. The turning point took place on the 2nd of June, 1967 during a visit to Berlin by the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlevi. Prior to his arrival in the city, Iranians known to have opposed the Shah were taken into protective custody by German authorities on no legal grounds and the path for the Shah’s motorcade was closed to ordinary traffic. In spite of such restrictions, hundreds of students gathered before City Hall to demonstrate against the Shah and when they began to toss plastic bags filled with paint in his direction, agents of the Iranian Savak secret service retaliated by attacking the protestors with wooden staves. The German police officers present at the scene did not intervene and eventually began to assist the Iranians, beating students with rubber truncheons. During the evening of June 2nd, while the Imperial couple of
Iran were attending an opera, demonstrators who had gathered outside of the Opera house were chased and, when captured, bludgeoned by German police officers, plainclothes men and Iranian agents. As the clash erupted into stonethrowing and hand-to-hand combat, one protester was singled out and beaten by officers as he tried to escape. One of the officers on the scene, Karl-Heinz Kurrras, had pulled his weapon (a 7.65 mm pistol) and, according to his testimony, it “went off” and a bullet hit the man’s head above the right ear and entered his brain. The protester, pronounced dead at the city’s Moabit hospital, was Benno Ohnesorg, a twenty-six year old student of Romance languages and literature, a pacifist and active member of the Protestant student community who had been participating in his first demonstration. Many students and radical activists began to fear that the Federal Republic had become a police state and any initial opposition to the use of violence began to wane among such individuals, including the principal players in the “Baader-Meinhof Group,” namely Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin and Andreas Baader.

The Red Army Faction (Röte Armee Fraktion), another name for the “Baader-Meinhof Bande” that includes the second generation of members active after the arrests and/or deaths of its founders (Meinhof, Ensslin, Baader and Horst Mahler), began to emerge during the year 1968 out of the radical wing of the SDS. Starting with the April 1968 arson attacks on the Kaufhaus Schneider and Kaufhof (department stores) in Frankfurt by Baader and Ensslin and culminating in Meinhof’s involvement in a successful plot to free Baader from custody in May of 1970, various events and decisions would result in the transformation of political activists, primarily from middle-class backgrounds, into underground “terrorists” whose faces appeared on wanted posters and whose names were perceived as synonymous with violence, kidnapping and
murder.

ULRIKE MEINHOF

Of the same generation as Gerhard Richter, Ulrike Marie Meinhof was born in Oldenburg, Germany on 7 October 1934. She was the second daughter of Dr. Werner Meinhof, art historian, teacher, curator of the Jena Municipal Museum and member of an old Württemberg family known for producing Protestant theologians. The Meinhofs were part of the “Hessian Dissent” Protestant community, which was opposed to the Nazi regime and to all state control of church affairs. Following Dr. Meinhof’s death from pancreatic cancer in 1940, Ulrike’s mother Ingeborg went back to her own education in art history at the University of Jena and she took in fellow student and anti-Nazi Renate Riemeck as a lodger to help with expenses. Both Ingeborg and Renate completed their studies and preliminary state examinations for teacher certification in 1943 and the Meinhof-Riemeck family eventually settled back in Oldenberg, where the women taught and became members of the Social Democratic Party, while Ulrike attended a Catholic school (the only one with space at the time). After Ingeborg Meinhof’s death following an operation for cancer in March of 1949, Renate Reimeck became a foster mother to Ulrike and her sister Wienke. Riemeck would become a Professor at the Weilburg Institute for Education in 1952 and Ulrike finished her secondary education in 1955 and received a scholarship (Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes) to study pedagogy and psychology at the University of Marburg.

In 1957 Ulrike transferred to the University of Münster and began her serious involvement with politics, eventually being elected speaker of the Münster Committee against Atomic Armaments, a group associated with the SDS, the student arm of the SPD. After officially joining the SDS in May of 1958, Meinhof began publishing
articles and making speeches in protest of nuclear armament and, through such activities, she met her future husband, Klaus Rainer Röhl, then publisher of the left-wing student journal *konkret*. Meinhof began working for the journal in September of 1959, became editor-in-chief by January 1960 and married Röhl on 27 December 1961. During the 1960’s Meinhof gained a degree of fame for her essays in *konkret*, including one that equated then Chairman of the CSU, Franz Josef Strauss, with Hitler and resulted in a lawsuit.\(^{13}\) Meinhof became pregnant in 1962, gave birth to twins after a difficult pregnancy and underwent brain surgery after suffering from debilitating headaches. She returned to her writing in 1964 around the time that the illegal KPD (Communist party) of East Berlin decided to stop funding the journal. Röhl decided to continue anyway and increased circulation by adorning the front page with large-breasted women and by intermingling sex with political and cultural stories. Meinhof did not entirely approve of the new direction of *konkret* and she began focusing her attention on current affairs programs for radio and television that addressed sociological issues including youthful offenders in custody and discrimination against women in the workplace.\(^{14}\) She would become increasingly attracted by the left-wing student movement in Berlin and in early 1968 Meinhof divorced Röhl and moved to Berlin with her children.\(^{15}\) By 1969 Meinhof had begun work on a script for a planned television film entitled *Bambule*, which explored the lives of three girls living at the Eichenhof Youth Custody Home in Berlin. Shortly after filming ended in February 1970, Meinhof was approached by Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, who were looking for a place to stay safe from recognition by the police and others. Meinhof had interviewed Ensslin during the October 1968 arson trial (for the burning of the department stores in Frankfurt) and she agreed to help the two fugitives. It was not long, however, before the flamboyant Baader
was arrested and an escape plan was developed that included Meinhof, who would accompany Baader under armed guard to the Institute for Social Issues under the pretext that they were both doing research. On May 14th, after shots were fired and a member of the Institute staff, George Linke, was seriously wounded, Baader and Meinhof jumped out of the window and Meinhof would begin her “underground” life as one of Germany’s “most wanted.” The already scheduled plan for televising her film “Bambule” that same month was abruptly cancelled.16

GUDRUN ENSSLIN

Gudrun Ensslin was born in 1940 in the village of Bartholomä, fourth child of Protestant Pastor Ensslin and his wife Ilse. Gudrun’s family was sympathetic to left-wing causes, including opposition to rearmament, and Gudrun took part in Protestant Girls’ Club activities. In 1958 she spent a year with a Methodist family in Pennsylvania but was critical of American Christianity, viewing it as primarily a fashion show for churchgoers more concerned with their outfits than their activism.17 In 1960 she began studies in educational theory, German and English language and literature at Tübingen University, where she met Bernward Vesper, son of the Nazi-approved “blood-and-the-soil” poet Will Vesper. Bernward purportedly despised his “Nazi” father and he and Gudrun went on to set up a small publishing house, “Studio for New Literature,” in 1963, which would print articles such as “Against Death: German writers speak out against the atom bomb.”18 Ensslin went on to win a grant to study in Berlin at the Free University and, in September 1966, Vesper was offered a job with the publishing firm of Luchterhand and Ensslin became pregnant. Two months before her son’s birth on 13 May 1967, Ensslin suddenly broke off her engagement to Vesper and was becoming increasingly embroiled in protest activities in Berlin.19 Ensslin was present at the
demonstration against the Shah of Iran, during which Benno Ohnesorg was killed, and, at an SDS meeting that same night, she reportedly exclaimed: “This fascist state means to kill us all. We must organize resistance. Violence is the only way to answer violence. This is the Auschwitz generation, and there’s no arguing with them!”

Also in 1967 Ensslin would meet Andreas Baader and, in April 1968, the two would carry out their plan to firebomb two department stores in Frankfurt. The bombing caused considerable damage but occurred after business hours, so there were no injuries. The resulting arson trial would initially bring together the three main protagonists of the Baader-Meinhof group, as Meinhof interviewed Ensslin and was impressed by her revolutionary fervour. In October of 1968, all of the participants in the Frankfurt bombing were sentenced to three years in prison, but were released in June of 1969, after serving 14 months, and they awaited the results of their appeal. When the sentences were reinstated in November, Ensslin and Baader decided to go underground and eventually ended up on Meinhof’s doorstep in Berlin in 1970.

ANDREAS BAADER

Andreas Baader was born on 6 May 1943 in Munich, son of Dr. Berndt Phillipp Baader, an historian and archivist captured by the Russians in 1945 and reported missing. Andreas was raised by his mother Anneliese, his grandmother and an aunt. The women doted on young Andreas, who was rebellious, stubborn and prone to fighting. Notorious for his pranks and traffic offenses, Baader left school during his last year, enrolled briefly in a private art college and focused most of his attention on creating a flamboyant persona within the “demi-monde” of Munich. In 1963 he moved to West Berlin, possibly to evade punishment for numerous traffic accidents and motorbike thefts or to avoid military service. Baader devoted himself to the available
bohemian lifestyle and became involved in a *ménage a trois* with two painters. He was often spotted at bars wearing lavish outfits, perfume and make-up and was fond of relating fantastic stories about his family connections and sexual exploits. He and his mistress had a child in 1965 and the two men continued to live with her for two years. The future “terrorist” was, for the time being, a playboy and petty thief with no apparent interest in politics.26

Baader was not in Berlin during the demonstrations against the Shah, as he was serving time for a motorbike theft, but he resurfaced in the summer of 1967. Baader would encounter Gudrun Ensslin at a hashish party at Bernward Vesper’s apartment and he was immediately enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate in planning “revolutionary” acts of violence, including his own proposal to blow up a church tower.27 By April of 1968, Baader and Ensslin were planting bombs in Frankfurt department stores and beginning their foray into violent “activism” that would land them both in prison and eventually lead to their deaths in October of 1977.

HOLGER MEINS

Holger Meins became part of the Baader-Meinhof group a few years after moving to Berlin in the mid-1960’s. Meins was born in 1941, attended the College of Art in Hamburg but eventually transferred to the Berlin Film Academy. Meins was known as a quiet and depressive film student who, during his student years, was co-author of a documentary film about the Shah of Iran’s visit to Germany in 1967 and, in 1969, he completed a short film about the making and use of Molotov cocktails.28 Following Baader’s escape from Tegel prison in Berlin (with the assistance of Meinhof, Ensslin and others) on the 14th of May, 1970, Meins’ apartment was searched and the police held a gun to his head. Already predisposed to activism, Meins began attending
meetings with Baader and other members and joined the group shortly thereafter. Baader, Meins and other members of the group eventually migrated to Frankfurt, being fearful of too much attention in Berlin, and they carried on their activities, including the establishment of safe apartments, car thefts, bombings and robbery. Meins, along with Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe, were finally captured after a shoot-out at a Frankfurt garage on the 1st of June, 1972. In fact, by the middle of June of that same year, all of the principal members of the Baader-Meinhof group were in custody, with charges including 7 counts of murder and 27 counts of attempted murder in connection with bombings. While in custody, many of the members of the group engaged in hunger strikes in order to protest their treatment, which included separation from the rest of the prison population, the use of eavesdropping devices and restricted access to their attorneys. Meins, who was completely dedicated to the cause, would be the first prominent Baader-Meinhof member to die, when he succumbed in the Wittlich jail in November of 1974 after the 53rd day of the third hunger strike. The shocking photograph of his emaciated corpse in its coffin was widely publicized and became a virtual “icon” of the radical movement and was one of many photographs associated with the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon collected by Gerhard Richter in his artist’s notebook.

EVENTS LEADING TO THE DEATHS ON OCTOBER 18th, 1977

The first half of the 1970’s was a period marked by numerous acts of violence within Germany and the atmosphere was palpably tense and repressive. In September of 1972 (the infamous “Black September”), a group of Arab militants kidnapped the entire Israeli Olympic team in Munich, an act which ended with the deaths of all eleven Israeli athletes, five kidnappers and one policeman. Also, during this period, another “terrorist” organization known as the SPK (Socialist Patients’ Collective) invaded the
German embassy in Stockholm, demanding the release of 26 prisoners (including the Baader-Meinhof members). The SPK members shot two diplomats and set off bombs that resulted in the deaths of one hostage, one of their own as well as injuries to several others involved. Another group, known as the June 2nd movement (named in honor of the date of Benno Ohnesorg’s death), was responsible for the death of a judge (unconnected to any Baader-Meinhof cases) and carried out the kidnapping of Peter Lorenz, a Christian Democratic politician and candidate for mayor of Berlin, which resulted in his release without having been harmed.31

In 1972, the Berufsverbot (Professional Ban) insisted that all state employees (including most teachers and professors) should be “prepared at all times to uphold the free democratic basic order and to defend actively this basic order.”32 During the early 1970’s, the West German government enacted “anti-terrorist” legislation, including measures that allowed for stricter sentencing for kidnapping and hijacking as well as changes that enlarged the powers of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the expenditure for the Federal Criminal Investigation Office (BKA).33 In September of 1977 a “contact ban” was instituted, which allowed for imprisoned “terrorists” to be placed under temporary isolation from each other and from their defense lawyers in the event of a threat to civilian lives or freedom.34 Police searches and highway roadblocks became routine in Germany during the 1970’s and, by 1979, the BKA had collected files (stored in its computers at Wiesbaden) on 3100 organizations and 4,700,000 individuals.35

Following Andreas Baader’s escape on May 14th, 1970 and the group’s move “underground,” however, their activities did provide some excuse for the public and governmental anxiety regarding the “terrorists among us.” On the 22nd of June, 1970, a
group of German travellers, including Meinhof, Ensslin and Baader, departed from East Berlin on a flight to Damascus, eventually bound for a training camp near Amman, Jordan run by the al Fatah branch of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. While the Palestinians generally viewed the visitors as seekers of “revolutionary tourism,” the Germans expressed an interest in learning guerilla tactics, including the use of firearms and hand grenades. The Germans, however, complained vociferously about the restricted diet and the required separation of the sexes within the camp and caused a disturbance when the women sunbathed nude on a roof in view of young Palestinians.\(^{36}\) The Germans lasted only about a month in the camp but, shortly after their return to Germany, the Baader-Meinhof group managed to organize and pull off three nearly simultaneous bank robberies in West Berlin.\(^ {37}\) The group based its approach, in part, on the writings of Brazilian insurrectionist Carlos Marighella and they seemed to believe that by goading the establishment into overreacting they could expose the true, uncompromising nature of institutional power and would make the “latent fascism that’s predominant in West Germany clearly visible.”\(^ {38}\)

On June 1st, 1972 Baader, Meins and Raspe were captured and by the middle of that month Meinhof and Ensslin would also be in custody. Meinhof’s location was revealed by an informant and Ensslin was arrested when a shop clerk spotted a gun in her purse.\(^ {39}\) From the 16th of June, 1972 until the 9th of February, 1973, Meinhof was held at the Ossendorf jail in Cologne in virtual acoustic isolation: the rest of the building was empty and the lights were left on continuously. Baader was in prison in Schwalmstadt and Ensslin began her custody in Essen but was transferred to Ossendorf, into the cell next to Meinhof, in February of 1974. In April of 1974, both Ensslin and Meinhof were taken to the newly refitted security wing on the 7th floor of the
Stammheim prison in Stuttgart. In October of that year, Meinhof, Baader, Ensslin, Meins and Raspe were indicted for 5 murders and Baader and Raspe joined the women on the 7th floor of Stammheim. In November of 1974, Meins would die after his third hunger strike in Wittlich prison and, on the 29th, Meinhof was sentenced to 8 years for attempted murder in connection with her participation in the Baader jailbreak in 1970. Out of concern for the treatment of the prisoners and at the behest of Meinhof herself, Jean-Paul Sartre visited Stammheim in December of 1974. Sartre chose not to publish his interview with Andreas Baader and later concluded: “This group is a danger to the Left. It does the Left no good. One must distinguish between the Left and the RAF.”

On the 21st of May, 1975, at the steel and concrete courtroom in Baden-Württemberg built especially for the “hard-core” members of the Baader-Meinhof group, the trial of Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof and Raspe began. Dr. Prinzing was the presiding judge of a trial that featured numerous outbursts by the defendants, the absence of a defense lawyer for Baader, the monitoring of conversations between lawyers and clients and bugging of cells at Stammheim. Throughout the trial, the defendants drew comparisons between the accusation of “terrorism” and the acts of the United States government in Vietnam and Cambodia and on the 4th of May, 1976, the last day Meinhof would be present in the courtroom, the defense lawyers moved that United States Ex-President Richard M. Nixon, Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and a host of other politicians be called to give evidence. Meinhof’s long spiral into depression and despair would end during the night of May 8-9th, 1976. Having already severed ties with foster mother Renate Riemeck and her two children and after withdrawing for the most part from her comrades in prison, Meinhof’s body was found hanging from the window grating by a strip of towel in her cell #719. The body was
completely cold at 7:40 am, when examined by the doctor, and her death was ruled a suicide with “no extraneous factors.” Meinhof was buried on May 16th at the Protestant cemetery of the Holy Trinity in the Mariendorf district of West Berlin, accompanied by over 4000 people, some with faces painted white and others wearing masks. Berlin published Klaus Wagenbach spoke by her grave, reminding those present of her commitment to the anti-atomic bomb campaign and her protests against the coalition government and the Vietnam war.

The trial continued against the remaining defendants and by late 1976, officials began to realize that “objects” (including explosives and pistols) were being brought into Stammheim prison. The prisoners were allowed certain privileges, including books, radios and record players in their cells, but Stammheim had been trumpeted as the “safest prison in the world” and officials were anxious to maintain that reputation. Measures were taken to make the 7th floor even more secure and tightly monitored. A verdict of “guilty” against Baader, Ensslin and Raspe was read on the 28th of April, 1977 for a combination of counts of murder and attempted murder. Each was given a term of life imprisonment.

The events that would lead directly to the deaths on the night of October 17-18, 1977 began with the kidnapping of Hanns-Martin Schleyer (President of the Employers’ Association of the Federal Republic of Germany and of the Federation of German Industry, boardmember of Daimler-Benz and member of the “Auschwitz generation” accused by some of having a direct connection with Nazism), which took place in Cologne on September 5th, 1977, resulting in the deaths of Schleyer’s chauffeur and his three bodyguards. The kidnapping was carried out by one of the RAF successor groups and the ransom demanded the release of the RAF prisoners (Baader, Ensslin,
Raspe and Irmgard Möller, a second generation member who had arrived in January of 1977) held at Stammheim. The prisoners undoubtedly heard about the kidnapping on their radios and they were quickly placed in total quarantine and cells were searched, but guards did not find any weapons or explosives at that time. The drama intensified when, on October 13th, RAF and Palestinian guerillas hijacked a Lufthansa Boeing 737 containing 86 passengers headed for Frankfurt from Palma de Mallorca. After stops in Rome, Cyprus, Bahrain, and Dubai, the hijacked plane ended its journey in Mogadishu, Somalia. On the 17th of October, the GSG9, the West German counter-terrorism unit, operating as part of the Federal German Border Guard, successfully stormed the jet, freeing the hostages, killing three hijackers and wounding another.

Shortly before 8:00 am on October 18th, 1977, as they were wheeling in the breakfast trolley on the 7th floor of Stammheim, the prison guards discovered Jan-Carl Raspe in his cell, moaning and bleeding from his mouth, nose and ears. They also discovered a pistol (a 9mm Heckler and Koch) and promptly removed it and called for an ambulance. After Raspe was taken to the hospital (where he would die that same day), Baader’s cell was opened and he was found lying on the floor in a pool of blood, dead from a gunshot wound that entered his skull at the nape of his neck. The next cell to be opened was that of Gudrun Ensslin, who was also dead, hanging by a loudspeaker cable from the narrow-mesh grating in her cell. The fourth prisoner involved was Irmgard Möller, found bloody but alive, having suffered stab wounds to the chest that were not ultimately fatal. The investigators on the case concluded that Raspe must have possessed a small transistor in his cell, over which he heard the broadcast about the freeing of the hostages in Mogadishu, and that he then alerted the other prisoners via a makeshift communications system they had set up weeks prior. Presumably, the
prisoners agreed to a suicide pact and all attempted to take their own lives. The only survivor, Irmgard Möller, however, claimed that, after reading by candlelight until about 4:30 am, she said goodnight to Jan-Carl in his nearby cell and dozed off. She later heard muffled squealing sounds and then experienced a “loud rushing noise” in her head. Möller stated emphatically that she “neither tried nor meant to commit suicide, and there was no suicide pact.”

The so-called “Schleyer affair” came to an end shortly after the deaths at Stammheim, when the French newspaper Libération received word from the kidnappers of Schleyer that his body could be found in a green Audi 100 in the rue Charles Peguy in Mulhouse. He wore the same clothes from the day of his kidnapping and had been killed by three bullets to the head. Schleyer was buried in Stuttgart on the 25th of October and Baader, Ensslin and Raspe were buried in a communal grave in Stuttgart’s Waldfriedhof. Some citizens of the city protested but the Mayor of Stuttgart, Manfred Rommel (son of German war hero Erwin Rommel), insisted that he would “not accept that there should be first and second-class cemeteries. All enmity should cease after death.”
NOTES

Appendix


2. Stefan Aust, *The Baader-Meinhof Group: The Inside Story of a Phenomenon*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: The Bodley Head, 1987), 19. For the information about the Baader-Meinhof group and the Red Army Faction, I am relying most heavily upon Stefan Aust’s 1987 book *The Baader-Meinhof Group: The Inside Story of a Phenomenon*. I believe this text to be the most balanced and accurate, as opposed to Jillian Becker’s *Hitler’s Children*, moreover, Richter is known to have read the Aust book. Supplementary information was garnered from various studies on “terrorism” and from Robert Storr’s text *Gerhard Richter: October 18, 1977*, but Aust’s work is extremely thorough and, because he was acquainted with the principal players, his insights and knowledge about conversations and activities have proven invaluable.

3. Aust, 22-23.

4. Storr, 47.

5. Aust, 33.


16. Aust, 6-9, 74-75.
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