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The Politics of Representation: 9/11 and the Iraq War in the Work of Gerhard Richter.

Dissertation submitted for the Degree of B.A. Honours in History of Art

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Introduction:

The September 11th, 2001 attacks on New York's World Trade Centre, the Pentagon and the attempted attack on the White House, now known by their numerical date '9/11,' mark perhaps the most widely visually documented and distributed instance of a traumatic event in history. The visibility of these attacks and their subsequent representation in the global media became crucial to how they were and still are witnessed, understood and recalled.

The terrorist attack, as a 'leveraging of relative weakness against disproportionate strength'¹ was, according to Robert Storr, 'semiotically speaking...a sudden inversion of symbols never before seen on such a scale or simultaneously by so many people.'² The televised obliteration of the buildings that symbolised the centre of world trade and economic power, and the partial destruction of the Pentagon, the emblem of the world's strongest military, ensured that the attacks of 9/11 immediately became a global spectacle. T. J. Clark has referred to these events and their impact on the US state as an 'image-defeat'³; an attack that was designed to be witnessed by the maximum number of people in ways that would be visually and of course militarily, unprecedented. These comments by Storr and Clark, both eminent art historians, highlight the fundamental role of visual representation within the modern era of the 'war on terror', and are indicative of a much larger body of scholarly investigation into the uses of images surrounding the phenomenon of contemporary terrorism. As W. J. T. Mitchell explains, 'images have always played a key role in politics, warfare and collective perceptions about the shape of history, but there is something new...in the period from 2001' onwards.⁴ Social scientists and art historians alike have been theorising the relationship between the political and the visual in response to the 2001 attacks and the ensuing Iraq War, considering the issues at stake with the visual sensibilities of communicative processes in the post-9/11 era, in both ephemeral images and more traditional forms of art.

As Roland Bleiker argues, though, 'most approaches to the study of world

¹ R. Storr, *September: A History Painting by Gerhard Richter* (London, 2010). p. 32.

² Storr, *September*, p. 32.

³ Retort (Iain Boal, T. J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, Michael Watts), *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London, 2005). p.25.

⁴ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago and London, 2011). p. 2.

politics remain dominated by social-scientific principles,⁵ tending to focus strictly on defense strategies and foreign policy analyses while marginalising the mechanisms of numerous other intellectual and cultural responses. As a result, the role of visual art, for example, tends to be overlooked in terms of its ability to broaden the process of understanding and commemoration of world political events. In the context of the hyper-visual attacks on the World Trade Centre and the documentation of the global war on terror that followed, however, Bleiker suggests that art has the potential to legitimate more nuanced and interdisciplinary approaches to the way we interpret such events. He argues that art is essential to how 'tragic events are viewed, interpreted and remembered'⁶ in the way it can elucidate emotional responses and political critiques, while challenging the forms of representation that dominate the visual landscape after 9/11 (namely photographic and video images reproduced by the mass media). Therefore, it will be the aim in this dissertation to pursue in greater detail some of the visual-political dimensions of 9/11 and the Iraq War and its links to or manifestation in artistic responses.

The quantity and range, however, of cultural engagements with this subject matter is too vast to attempt to survey in the present study. In order to demonstrate some of the possible forms an aesthetic engagement with terrorism⁷ may take in a way that is not generic or only superficial, it is necessary to focus more closely on an individual or body of work. For the purposes of this essay, a number of recent works by German painter Gerhard Richter are particularly useful. Since the attacks on September 11th, 2001, which took place while Richter himself was flying to New York en route to an opening of his new work at the Marian Goodman Gallery, he has produced a number of works that relate directly to 9/11 and the Iraq War. These works are particularly rewarding and challenging to study, not only within (or against) the traditions of his own practice, but also alongside the dilemmas that characterise the mediated visuality associated with terrorism and modern warfare. These recent works are also important to interrogate as they are often overlooked in terms of current scholarship on Richter's work, which tends to favour a more total evaluation of his lengthy career

⁵ R. Bleiker, 'Art After 9/11,' *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 31, no. 1 (January 2006) p.81.

⁶ Bleiker, 'Art After 9/11,' p. 80.

⁷ As Manom Slome suggests, "aesthetics" in its application to the study of terror is to be used 'in a neutral sense, as in a study of the forms and principles by which the images under investigation are used, not with a reference to the word's popular connotations of beauty or value.' in M. Slome, 'Aesthetics of Terror,' *oncurating.org: Politics of Display*, Issue 22 (April, 2014) p.83.

and its stylistic heterogeneity. Much of the interpretative work that has been done on Richter's oeuvre appears to focus on the way it perpetually refuses to commit to a single style or subject matter and even medium. The ambiguities and contradictions present within his career of over fifty years are often approached with the intention of discerning an overarching theme on purely formal terms, namely considering how Richter's work is a self-reflexive attempt to resolve the crisis of representation in painting after photography. This has meant that it is rarer to find a sustained investigation into a small period or individual work, with the notable exception of his 1988 cycle of paintings *October 18, 1977* which was an earlier encounter of Richter's with the subject of terrorism, though in this instance it was the German left-wing Red Army Faction. Lisa Saltzman argues, therefore, that by neglecting the specific context of particular works, we may not consider that 'the situation with which Richter grapples is not only, or not always of an artistic order, but rather of a historical order.'⁸ If this is the case, then it is necessary to look not only at the way in which Richter's art responds to arguments within art history (or its future) but also to the events of world history itself. In doing so, it is possible to consider what visual art may be able to tell us about terrorism, and simultaneously to pursue the question in reverse, considering what effect the visual impact of terrorism might have on the production and reception of the work of art.

Therefore, this dissertation will look specifically at examples of Gerhard Richter's works in response to 9/11 and the Iraq War, in his 2005 painting *September* (Museum of Modern Art, New York) and his book project *War Cut* of 2004 respectively. One of the aims of doing so, alongside this broader investigation into artistic responses to terrorism, is to argue that this era of work represents a sustained investigation by Richter into the circumstances of the global war on terror and the appropriate means of representation for it. Though the small number of works studied should not be considered in complete isolation or as a decisive break from his earlier paintings, a close study of them will hopefully prove that there exists within his oeuvre, smaller cohesive projects that are worthy of independent study, apart from a broader narrative or aesthetic trajectory from another point in his career.

Before any analysis of Richter's works takes place, it will first be

⁸ L. Saltzman, 'Gerhard Richter's Stations of the Cross: On Martyrdom and Memory in Postwar German Art,' *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (March, 2005). p. 27.

necessary to consider in more specific terms what an aesthetic engagement with terrorism might entail, while discussing some of the limits and the effects of visual representations of war and trauma. It is also worth considering in slightly more detail why and how Richter may be an appropriate artist for the following study, considering what approaches may be taken in order to pursue a simultaneous study of the visual-political aspects of the post-9/11 'moment' alongside an interpretation of the form and content of his work. This investigation into theoretical and methodological matters will form the first section of the dissertation, before they are considered in practice through looking at *September* in section two and then *War Cut* in section three.

i) Aesthetics and Terror

Not long after the tragic events of 9/11 took place, a number of cultural figures publicly claimed that the attacks themselves were worthy of appreciation. German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, for example, claimed that 9/11 was 'the greatest work of art that is possible,'⁹ while Young British Artist and serial provocateur Damien Hirst announced that the terrorists created something that was 'visually stunning' and 'an artwork in its own right.'¹⁰ While these opinions of course proved extremely unpopular and controversial, they show that the visual drama and spectacle of 9/11 made some form of aesthetic demand on practicing artists and possibly on the public at large. As Hirst went on to say, our 'visual language has been changed by what happened on September 11.'¹¹ This potential visual paradigm shift that took place after 9/11 has largely been characterised by the ubiquity of transient images disseminated through popular forms of mass communication such as the internet, but also by the US state through the media. Intense strategies for mediating the post 9/11 world were put in place by the state in particular as a means to respond to the visual defeat they had suffered, possibly in the hope of creating images to counter the events of 9/11.¹² These responses, according to Henry Giroux, led to a 'visual culture of shock and awe...made ubiquitous by the internet and 24 hour cable news shows devoted to representations of the horrific violence associated with terrorism,'¹³ that have dominated coverage of the war on terror since 2001. While this may certainly be the case, it is important to consider what issues arise surrounding this model of visual representation, questioning what

⁹ K. Stockhausen quoted in A. Tommasini, 'Music: The Devil Made Him Do It,' *The New York Times Online* (30 September, 2001) <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/30/arts/music-the-devil-made-him-do-it.html> [accessed 04/03/2015].

¹⁰ D. Hirst quoted in J. Roberts, 'Rethinking the Sublime: Is There an Aesthetics of Terrorism,' *Americana e-journal*, Volume 10, No.1 (Spring 2014) <http://americanajournal.hu/vol10no1/roberts> [accessed 10/02/2015].

¹¹ Hirst in Roberts, 'Rethinking.'

¹² J. Stallabrass, 'Spectacle and Terror,' *New Left Review* (January/February 2006) p. 96.

¹³ H. Giroux, *Beyond the Spectacle of Terrorism, Global Uncertainty and the Challenge of the New Media* (London, 2006) p.21.

the images show us and how they do so.

For instance, as Mark Godfrey wrote in 2008, three years before curating Gerhard Richter's 'Panorama' exhibition at the Tate Modern, London, 'the events leading up to the [Iraq] war - and the war itself - could be characterised insofar as visual representation is concerned, in terms of spectacular visibility and near invisibility.'¹⁴ This contradiction between the visible and invisible exists primarily through the visible spectacle of the 9/11 attacks, but also through acts like the symbolic toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad in April 2003, in contrast to the invisible, which is largely linked to the lack of coverage of US inflicted violence, the impact of invasion on Iraqi civilians, the abstracted or distant images of bombing raids and also the censoring of images showing the deaths and injuries of American (or British) soldiers. This dialectic of the seen and unseen suggested by Godfrey, amongst others, indicates that representation within the post-9/11 and Iraq War mediascape is not as clear cut as some of the images suggest. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is this very issue that has proved to be of particular interest to artists and critics in their work on the visual and political battleground of this era of war.

One of the most rigorous and wide ranging art historical investigations into visual responses to the Iraq War and the events preceding it appears in the *October* journal. In June 2007, Benjamin Buchloh, *October* editor (and a chief historian of Richter's work), distributed a questionnaire to artists, writers, academics and curators, asking how they would evaluate the seeming lack of transgressive or critical activity by artists in the context of the heightened visual culture of war that was taking place. Buchloh asked the prospective respondents to consider artists use of medium and the efficacy or limitations of work being made in response to the situation in Iraq. The general consensus among the forty-five published responses, was that there had been a significant revival of documentary work, as photographic and video art forms were able to assume a comparable visual language and equally persuasive form as those that dominated mass media treatment of the unfolding conflict. Yet there was also a degree of cynicism in a number of responses regarding the exclusivity of documentary representations and their claim to politically charged subject matter. As Pamela M. Lee wrote, there appeared to be a reliance on 'large,

¹⁴ M. Godfrey, 'Questionnaire: Godfrey,' *October* 123 (Winter, 2008) p.67.

glossy C-prints of the Middle East' at '(pick your favourite biennial)¹⁵ to perform a political critique.

While this kind of work has didactic worth, Lee suggests that it is actually limited because of its semblance to the dominant means of representation in the media, referring to an emerging genre of "'CNN Realism."¹⁶ Lee's response is representative of a number of others in the *October* questionnaire, who argued that while the documentary format should not be relinquished, artists and audiences should be wary of the appropriation of this style of imagery. Though photographic exhibitions of war-torn lands or mutilated civilians have their value, there is a risk that this kind of work becomes an uncritical mirror of events, 'another trope, a kind of pop'¹⁷ as Manon Slome puts it, which may serve to aestheticise these events without offering the viewer any other insight into the conditions of terror. In order to avoid this uncritical mirroring, of terror writ large in the gallery space, Christopher Bedford argues that visual art should maintain ties to the powerful and prevalent documentary form, but must counter its commercial usage, by presenting 'a productive alternative: a parallel narrative [that] must unfold on the level of form *and* content.' In order to posit what this parallel narrative might look like, it is worth viewing Gerhard Richter as an appropriate artist in this context, considering how and why both the form and content of his work embodies the alternative that Bedford speaks of.

ii) Richter's Alternative

Benjamin Buchloh has often referred to the way in which Richter's work displays a profound investment in the 'impact of photographic media-culture on the project of painting.'¹⁸ Saltzman, meanwhile, credits Richter's *October* cycle of paintings as 'the most sustained form of painterly engagement with the issue of terrorism in the postwar period.'¹⁹ These attributions by Buchloh and Saltzman are only two of an innumerate range that highlight the dual project in which Richter engages throughout his career. The former

¹⁵ P. M. Lee, 'Questionnaire: Lee,' *October* 123 (Winter, 2008) p.98-100.

¹⁶ Lee, 'Questionnaire,' p. 100.

¹⁷ Slome, 'Aesthetics of Terror,' p.84.

¹⁸ B. H. D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive,' *October* 88 (Spring, 1999) p. 138

¹⁹ Saltzman, 'Gerhard Richter's Stations,' p. 32.

indicates that Richter is an artist who closely reflects on the mimetic function of painting after photography, while the latter indicates his interest in art's performance of memory and history in the postwar era. As previously mentioned, these issues of form and content are often considered separately in discussion of Richter's work, yet in the context of studying the war on terror as a war of visual representations, these visual and historical contexts are perhaps closer together than ever, warranting a simultaneous study of the two in Richter's art.

As the sheer quantity of images associated with 'photographic media-culture,' to borrow Buchloh's term, expands and is made available through television, newspapers and the internet, an enormous range of events and experiences are communicated to a constantly growing audience. In 1991, Sean Rainbird wrote about this process in his catalogue essay accompanying Gerhard Richter's exhibition at the Tate Gallery at the time, suggesting that such 'volume and diversity of photographic material...redefined the culture of visual representation in painting.'²⁰ If this was the case in 1991, then surely within the 'visual culture of shock and awe,' that has emerged since 2001, there is also a claim to be made that painting has perhaps been redefined again. Thus, if we can conclude that, firstly, photographic media-culture dominates visual representations of terror and is inseparable from our recollection of recent historical events, and that secondly, it may also be responsible for redefining the culture of visual representation in painting, then it should be possible to situate the presence of this visual-political aesthetic of terror within Richter's work, manifest as both a matter of form and as an issue of historical context.

As Roger Luckhurst warns, however, aesthetic responses to controversial historical matters are often subject to ethical criticism, seen, as previously mentioned, as either an uncritical mirroring of events or perhaps in the case of Stockhausen and Hirst, as an insensitive glorification of a traumatic issue. The result, therefore is that cultural producers are 'often pulled between a demand for documentation versus a call for...the foregrounding of the impossibility'²¹ of representing the reality of the trauma. Richter's work, however, may be seen to confront both aesthetic demands, complying with the need for documentation through his repurposing of images and texts associated with

²⁰ S. Rainbird, 'Variations on a Theme: The Painting of Gerhard Richter,' in *Gerhard Richter: Exhibition Catalogue* (London, Tate Gallery, 1991) p. 12.

²¹ R. Luckhurst, 'In War Times: Fictionalising Iraq,' *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Winter, 2012) p. 714.

media coverage, while also foregrounding the impossibility of representing the realities of war, by positioning his work as somewhere between abstraction and figuration.

The two chapters that follow, therefore, will look at how Richter's art is able to answer the visual and historical demands of representing 9/11 and the Iraq War. As Bedford suggests this must unfold on the level of form and content, the present study will look closely at the media and techniques used by Richter, considering how they relate to the subject matter itself. Section two, *September*, will focus on a 'small, almost abstract depiction of one of the most consequential events in recent world history,'²² while section three looks at Richter's rather unusual juxtaposition of text and images in *War Cut*, that seems to ask 'what role might painting play in a violent world saturated with information?'²³

²² Storr, *September*, p. 43.

²³ M. Godfrey in *Gerhard Richter: Panorama: Exhibition Catalogue* (London, Tate Modern, 2011) p. 13.

II

September

'If...the finest contemporary art is a means for contemplating the unanswered and sometimes unanswerable paradoxes of modern life, then 9/11 is its most demanding possible challenge.'

Sir Brian Urquhart (former UN Under-Secretary-General).²⁴

'Art has always been basically about agony, desperation, and helplessness... We often neglect this side of things by concentrating on the formal, aesthetic side in isolation. We no longer see content in form...the fact is that content does not have a form: it *is* form.'

Gerhard Richter.²⁵

The aim of this section is to see how Richter's response to 9/11 meets the demands of an aesthetic engagement with terror, negotiating documentary representation, while maintaining a distance from this style by foregrounding of another form of representation. In the case of Richter's 2005 painting *September*, this is realised through the appropriation of a media document, which is then rendered in oil paint. The result of this juxtaposition allows Richter's painting to be seen as that which typifies a 'productive alternative'; whereby visual art is able to perform a critique of the dominant, but essentially limited form, of photographic imagery and its associated meanings, allowing new meanings to take their place. To explain this process requires a closer engagement with how such a critique unfolds on the level of form and content.

In Richter's own words, however, cited above, the content of an image is not necessarily separate from its formal elements, but rather, the content *is* formal in itself. In order to consider how this claim may manifest itself practically

²⁴ B. Urquhart in Storr, *September*, p. 6.

²⁵ G. Richter, 'Notes, 1983,' in H. Obrist (ed.) *Gerhard Richter, The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993* (London, 1995) p. 102.

in Richter's 2005 painting, one must question what the content or implications of the original photographic image he uses are and therefore, what is at stake in Richter's repurposing of the image in paint. First, a look at 9/11 as witnessed through photographs.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains that the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre are 'said to be the most photographed disaster in history,'²⁶ producing a spectacle that was witnessed instantaneously worldwide. The result of this circulation of photographic evidence has had a profound effect on the global recollection of the event, meaning it is known 'from photographs rather than from direct experience.'²⁷ This had led to a situation where images, or even simply notions of an image have become definitive icons. As Okwui Enwezor put it, 'the breaching of the two towers by the force of the exploding planes created an indelible iconography.'²⁸ That there is an archetypal image we associate with the attacks is perhaps confirmed by Richter himself, who speaks of 'the standard photo of the two towers with the explosion cloud and the bright blue sky.'²⁹ The standard photo, he claims, 'would not let go of me until I finally tried to paint it.'³⁰ These comments by Richter consolidate the view put forth only months after the attacks by photography critic Sarah Boxer, writing in *Artforum* about how people spent the days following the attacks 'watching, over and over, televised shots of the second plane penetrating the south tower,' while 'newspapers were left to summarize the unfolding of events in single images,'³¹ almost always choosing the same moment of the second plane hitting the south tower for their front pages. Boxer, referring to the impact of this media concretisation of the 9/11 image, describes how 'visual limits were set'³² due to the endless repetition of the same moments, effectively making the images themselves unimpeachable bearers of truth, as 'indelible' and incontestable icons. It is one of the many versions of this same iconic image that appears four times in Richter's

²⁶ B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring, 2003) p. 12.

²⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Kodak Moments,' p. 12.

²⁸ O. Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York, 2008) p. 29.

²⁹ G. Richter quoted in D. Elger, *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting* (Chicago and London, 2002) p. 352. Original interview with S. Beyer and U. Knöfel appeared in *Der Spiegel*, 15/09/2005.

³⁰ G. Richter in Elger, *Gerhard Richter*, p. 352.

³¹ S. Boxer, 'Remains of the Day: Sarah Boxer on September 11 in Image and Print,' *Artforum* (January, 2002) on *The Free Library* http://www.thefreelibrary.com/_/print/PrintArticle.aspx?id=82469488 [accessed 1 April, 2015].

³² Boxer, 'Remains.'

photographic archive *Atlas* (Figure 1) from a newspaper clipping. It was this photograph that Richter would use as the reference image for *September*.

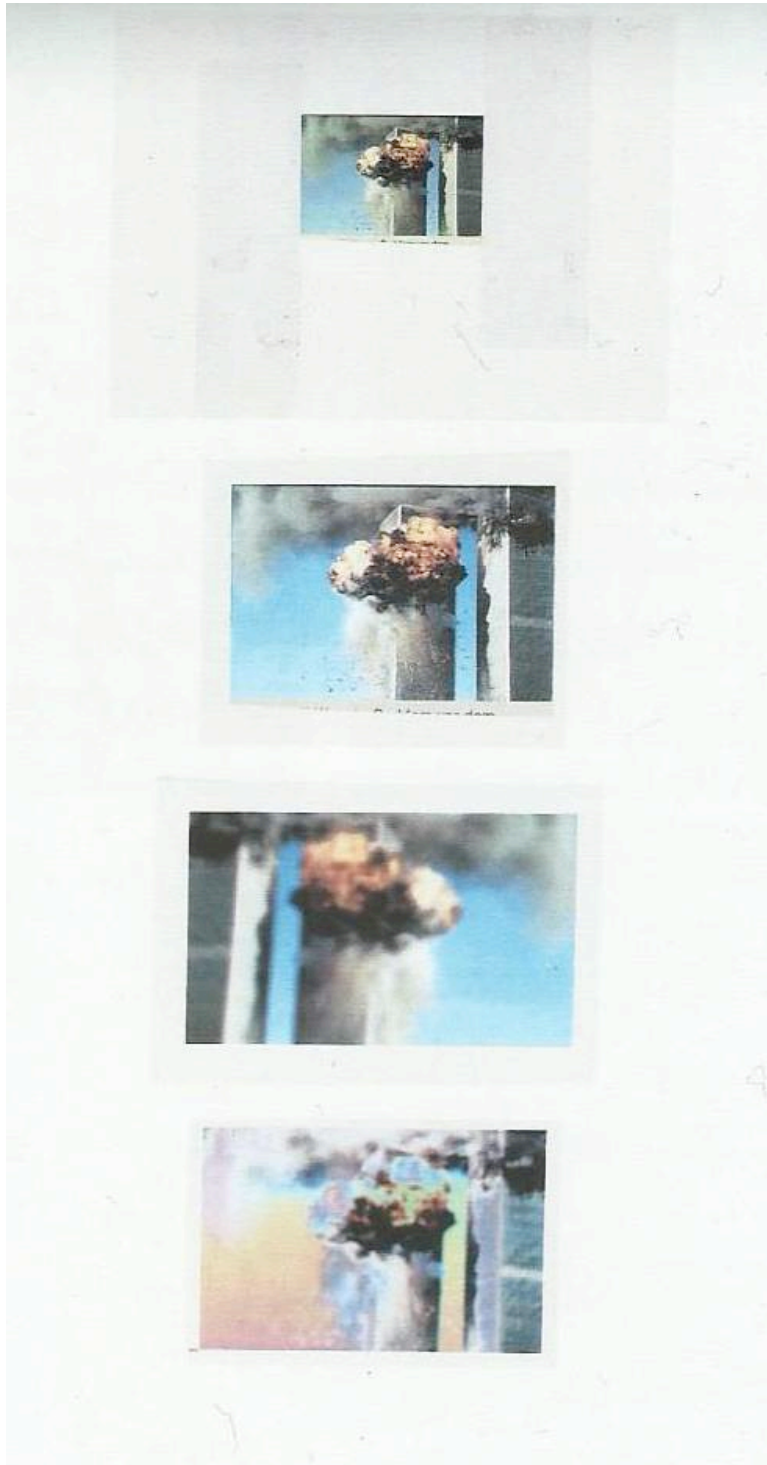
Another unavoidable consequence of the ubiquity of these images was that they came to represent the aftermath of the attacks themselves. On the one hand, this may refer to their role as the kind of photographic memory images that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett references. On the other hand, however, this also refers to their utilisation as an almost propagandistic tool to stimulate support for the subsequent US-led 'war on terror.'³³ As Bedford argues, it was these 'crushing images that helped precipitate military action in Iraq...and that are invoked by the Bush administration...often as a collective image memory' and a constant reminder of the image-defeat T. J. Clark has referred to, suffered by the US on 9/11. These images therefore, play a significant role in the proposed visual paradigm shift after 9/11, as they represent a record of loss and suffering, but also embody the memory of a more sinister aftermath where the photograph is no longer just a mediator of war, but also a participant in war, 'elevated to a prominent feature of social and political power.'³⁴

This kind of implementation of the iconic 9/11 image is likened, by Samuel Weber, to Freud's concept of a "screen memory," where the recurrence of specific memory-images serves to "cover up" rather than to reveal. Weber suggests that the ubiquity of the 9/11 image and its support in the mainstream media has led to its functioning as a 'globally collective "screen memory"...focussing our attention on individual acts while screening out other considerations,'³⁵ or other images and issues. As such, he argues that the 9/11 image has been used to project or represent the justification of military invasion in Iraq, while eliminating or screening out the larger context of the aggression inflicted by the US. As the current study is committed to understanding the unity of the visual and historical contexts to Richter's work, as enacted through content and form, or content as form, we must now turn to *September* and consider how Richter's painting responds to the mediated version of events, where image occupies the roles of document, memory and political tool.

³³ This term was first used by President Bush on September 20th, 2001.

³⁴ Slome, 'Aesthetics,' p.86.

³⁵ S. Weber, 'Clouds: On a Possible Relation of Terror and Terrorism to Aesthetics,' *The Germanic Review*, Vol.88, No. 3 (2013) p.340.



**Figure 1: Gerhard Richter, Detail of *Atlas Sheet 744*, 2006.
in Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (Munich and New York, 2006).**



**Figure 2: Gerhard Richter, *September*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 52 x 72 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York**

Perhaps the most crucial visual characteristic of *September* (Figure 2) is Richter's startling juxtaposition of the documentary image with painterly abstraction. By placing the conventional newspaper image within a radically

altered visual context, Richter's work is able to perform a critique of both the images function as the icon or ultimate version of events, but also its use as a political tool. Richter negates both of these functions and offers an alternative way to visually represent the tragedy of 9/11, while quite literally refusing the image as a "screen memory," by emphasising in the painting the notion of something shown and something hidden. Julian Stallabrass discusses this way in which Richter critically engages photography, suggesting that he 'apes the mechanical reproduction of images in capitalist society, its seriality... and its simultaneous occupation of all aesthetic positions.'³⁶ *September*, therefore, may be seen to recall this seriality and reproduction of the 9/11 image in the US media, while undermining its occupation of aesthetic positions, as uncontested collective memory and as an emblem of US belligerence. He destabilises the iconicity of the image through the smearing and scraping away of paint from the surface of the canvas, encouraging a much greater indeterminacy of meaning.

The visual indeterminacy presented on the canvas surface, however, has its own determinate effect. The blurring of the painting provides a distance from our imagining of the attacks, which as Robert Storr writes in his book length study of *September*, opens 'meaningful gaps between us and the onsite images.'³⁷ The effect of this is to ask the viewer to reconsider or rethink their understanding of the events and images, which 'we know so well that we may have stopped thinking about...and may have stopped allowing ourselves to engage emotionally.'³⁸ *September* challenges the notion that the well-known image underneath is a reliable record of history or of facts. Richter's painting embodies the uncertainty of an image's ability to depict reality, which is amplified through the means of abstraction, as Storr states, 'documentary art's standard claim to truthfulness...is erased by Richter's painterly methodology.'³⁹ Therefore, the image that had formerly monopolised the public memory of 9/11 is rendered as illusory, with a much more dubious claim to the visual representation of terror than it was possibly first thought.

Another effect of making his representation of 9/11 quite difficult to actually recognise, is that it is able to reverse the apparent lack of emotional

³⁶ J. Stallabrass, 'Gerhard Richter: Painting and Mass Media,' *Kalías* (Valencia), No.8, Semestre II (1992) p. 3

³⁷ Storr, *September*, p. 50.

³⁸ Storr, *September*, p. 50.

³⁹ Storr, *September*, p. 50.

engagement with the pictures of events that Storr mentions. Earlier comments by Richter along with preparatory drawings (Figure 3) showing the work in progress reveal that beneath the surface was originally a much more realist rendering of the work. He said the painting itself was a 'very typical photograph of what happened. Colourful - red, yellow, fire.'⁴⁰ Late in the process of painting, however, Richter dragged a palette knife horizontally across the surface of the painting, obscuring the iconicity of the image in a hazy mixture of grey and blue, while also revealing sections of exposed canvas beneath. This has meant that viewers 'must mentally reconstitute a likeness that is in effect disintegrating before their eyes'⁴¹ and through their reconstruction, are forced to reengage with the attacks and their consequences, rather than just the memory of the images. The physical marks and smears from left to right on the surface of the canvas, for example, are part of the disintegration of the pictures claim to representation, yet they themselves chillingly recall the motion of the aircraft. This serves to remove the static iconicity from the newspaper image and the element of the 'decisive moment' or truth captured by the camera, while also asking the viewer to perhaps consider their own memory or understanding of events, when the need to do so may seemingly have been lessened by the acceptance of the photograph as surrogate memory.

Another effect of the painting's veiling of the source image is the subdued shroud of flames around the building at the centre of the composition. Buchloh has argued as recently as 2009, in a more general commentary on Richter's overpainting of photographs, that the layering of translucent levels of paint generates an 'effect of sfumato...where the harshness and persistence of the photographic representations have to be negated by the effacement of their iconicity.'⁴² Given the context of the 9/11 image, this effect of sfumato, or a smoke-like quality is particularly apt for Richter's effacement of the iconicity of the burning south tower. By hiding the blaze beneath a layer of grey paint, only suggestions of what we know is hidden remain visible, constituted as flecks of

⁴⁰ G. Richter in S. Douglas, 'Gerhard Richter,' *blouinartinfo* (January 26, 2010) <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/275611/gerhard-richter#> [accessed February 27, 2015].

⁴¹ Storr, *September*, p. 48.

⁴² B. H. D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter: Voids and Whites: The Last Paintings Before the Last,' in *Gerhard Richter: Abstract Paintings 2009: Exhibition Catalogue* (New York, Marian Goodman Gallery, 2009) p. 95.



Figure 3: Gerhard Richter, Preparatory drawing for *September*, 2005. 52 x 72cm.

muted paint. The purpose of this has often been referred to as a 'push/pull' effect within Richter's canvases, which becomes particularly striking in terms of Storr's claim that the viewer must reconstitute the image before them. As the viewers gaze is disrupted by the blurred surface, they are pushed away from a coherent view of the picture. Simultaneously, however, this invites closer scrutiny of the image (pull), whereby the withholding of information is met by an invitation to involve the viewer, creating an emotional or affective response.⁴³ Storr's analysis of this section of the painting enacts the push/pull reaction, as he demonstrates how this section of warm tones among the cooler blue and greys demands deciphering. He refers to the way this section not only recalls the moment of impact, but the aftermath of this explosion and burning. He refers to the substances that later filled the air around the towers and subsequently across the city, recalling how the air itself was composed of 'the byproduct of vaporised fuselage and building materials, but in large the precipitate of some two thousand seven hundred and fifty-two lives.'⁴⁴ The purpose of this rather macabre interpretation also reveals the limits of one's distanced position through photography, and possibly reveals the merits of painting for those to revisit their personal recollection, as such a thought is very unlikely to cross the mind of those who did not witness the attacks first hand, and especially not those whose experience of the events is solely the media footage.

This is not to say, however, that Richter's painting is somehow more effective only to those who did witness the attacks first hand, as Storr did from across the East River in Brooklyn. Rather, it is another example of a strategy used by Richter to query the visual representation of the attacks and activate the viewer's own memory. In fact, the actual scale of *September* is perhaps another strategy for doing so, as it acknowledges that for most, the attacks were witnessed through the media. As Storr has suggested, its size places it in the realm of the televisual format with which people first witnessed and still witness 9/11. Therefore rather than exclusively enacting the more visceral version of events that those in close proximity to the World Trade Centre may have experienced, this relatively small scale (in comparison to the vastness of the majority of Richter's abstracts) may enact instead the more distant viewers

⁴³ M. Kelly, *A Hunger for Aesthetics: Enacting the Demands of Art* (New York, 2012) p. 103.

⁴⁴ Storr, *September*, p. 49.

'flashbulb' memory of 9/11, recalling the instinctive mental snapshot one takes, storing the details of where, when and how one receives the news of a tragedy or significant historical event.⁴⁵

Thus, *September* becomes a painting that accommodates for ambiguity over conclusive meaning. Richter is able to highlight the limitations of the photographic image as a vessel of historical truth and also negate its occupation of aesthetic positions as collective icon and a justification for war. Simultaneously, he acknowledges the dangers of trying to replace this dominant form of aesthetic engagement with terror by foregrounding the materiality of the paint itself, placing a barrier between the viewer and the image to acknowledge that is impossible to paint such a subject and also perhaps, to deliberately show that painting itself is just another form of mediating events. Richter is able to construct these issues of content surrounding representation and of the details of the attack itself all through formal strategies. The title of the painting itself, without details of the day or year also, may act as a further reminder of the significance of commemorating 9/11. It suggests that the painting has something of a memorial function, mourning the events of 9/11 in perpetuity. It also, however, holds the painting and its content in suspension, reminding us of the events that have occurred since and as a consequence of the attacks.

⁴⁵ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Kodak Moments,' p. 16.

III

War Cut

Every history is really two histories. There is the history of what actually happened, and there is the history of the perception of what happened...The War on Terror, similarly, can be broken down into two histories: what happened, and what was said to justify, explain, and narrate it as it was happening. The difference is that, in our time, both the things done and the things said are filtered through the mass media, and the role of images and imagination...is much expanded.

W. J. T. Mitchell⁴⁶

To refer back to Roland Bleiker's comments in the introduction would be a useful reminder at this point. Bleiker, arguing in favour of a broader commemorative understanding of world politics, argued that artistic engagements with terrorism are essential to how 'tragic events are viewed, interpreted and remembered' He also suggested, as has Bedford and several others, that effective artistic responses should engage the dominant forms of representation that typically do the viewing, interpreting and remembering for us. In the case of the Iraq War (and more broadly the War on Terror, from 9/11 to the present) as W. J. T. Mitchell's comments above suggest, this process has been filtered, narrated and explained through the mass media. Therefore, it is useful to consider another of Richter's works that may engage and subtly critique, as *September* does, the dominant media, in order to produce a parallel or alternative narrative. The aim of looking closely at Richter's 2004 work *War Cut*, is to investigate how he undergoes this process of re-narrating the Iraq war, considering how we may situate the work in relation to the 'visual-political' historical context and the manifestation of this context as content as form in the work. While, once again, being wary of how Richter does not aestheticise trauma, but carefully negotiates documentary evidence and a second form of representation to foreground the impossibility of a comprehensive understanding of events.

⁴⁶ Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*, p.xi

A further comment by W. J. T. Mitchell, that the Iraq war was a 'war of words and images...an updated version of a very old kind of war,'⁴⁷ though perhaps valid in the context of this study, is somewhat problematic, too. When an emphasis is placed on the symbolic acts of war as waged through images, there is a tendency, perhaps, to overlook the reality of the physical, human consequences of war. Yet it is this distance from war and this lack of reality that is embodied in the notion of a war of words and images. It is a pointed comment by Mitchell, that both reminds us of our lack of knowledge or distance from war and how this is largely tied to the ideological implementation of image making. As Julian Stallabrass has written, since 2002 the 'management of the media is now a central element in Pentagon strategy' to ensure the 'full spectrum dominance of the military and media field.'⁴⁸ The idea that the Iraq War was accompanied by a rigorous PR campaign to depict military prowess is perhaps confirmed by the strategy of embedding journalists with troops. Embeds would supposedly grant unprecedented insight, though freedom of movement was restricted to specific troop units, meaning journalists often were encouraged to depict the war favourably, or had no choice but to, while being isolated from the wider effects of the invasion. Furthermore, soldiers themselves tended to implement their own rules for the embedded journalists, meaning that frequently the photography of deaths or injuries of US soldiers was forbidden. The resulting pictures that emerged instead 'tended to produce military spectacle, the extravagant, sublime and sometimes staged display of US power,'⁴⁹ which would then be disseminated through the press. As David Zucchino wrote, following seven weeks embedded for the *LA Times*, the 'access could be suffocating and blinding...I was too close or confined to comprehend the war's broad sweep.'⁵⁰ Therefore, despite this level of access, not to mention the level of media and surveillance technologies available to assist photographic coverage, the content was one sided, the 'textures, tempos, bodies and

⁴⁷ Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*, p.64.

⁴⁸ J. Stallabrass, 'Atrocity in Public Relations,' *Huffington Post* (20th June 2013) http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/julian-stallabrass/atrocity-in-public-relati_b_3463860.html [accessed 17/03/2015].

⁴⁹ Stallabrass, 'Atrocity.'

⁵⁰ D. Zucchino, *LA Times* (2nd May 2003) quoted in J. Stallabrass, *Memory of Fire: Images of War and the War of Images* (Brighton, 2013) p. 35.

banalities⁵¹ of war were obscured.

This control on images was particularly implemented through newspapers and television coverage, which was often filled with pictures of 'hi-tech weaponry in use, of soldiers who looked competent or heroic... and of spectacular battle pictures'⁵² showing the destruction of the Iraqi opposition. At the outbreak of the war, these were the kinds of images adorning front pages, as a number of examples of *The New York Times* show (Figure 4-6). The newspapers are particularly influential in the way the war is recorded and remembered, particularly when considering this 'history of the perception of what happened' and the war as a war of words and images. Newspapers are the most potent form of this combination of word and image and play a particularly important role in the public's understanding of war. Samuel Weber, referring to this role, suggests that images are 'assumed to be...immediately understandable.'⁵³ The text and captions, in combination with pictures, 'tell the readers and viewers to think of what they see...to consider the direct and exclusive property of the image,'⁵⁴ while ensuring no further questions need to be asked. The result of this is that images, often limited in the scope of their subject matter due to the movement of embedded journalists, serve more of a merely illustrative rather than critical purpose. The realities of war were thus removed further by isolating the circumstances to specific media images or tropes that were made to assume a totality of meaning.

Though this type of image-making has since come under scrutiny, and was largely undermined by scandals such as the surfacing of soldier's photographs showing the torture of Iraqi detainees from the Abu Ghraib prison, during the outbreak of war, these images alone occupied the public consciousness. As Michael Kelly argues, in a passage about Richter's *War Cut*, the reality was that it was 'unknown what effect the invasion was having, who and how many were being killed, and what ends were to be achieved.'⁵⁵ In March 2003, the war was largely a blur, visible only through the controlled and authorised images and text of the embedded press and US government and

⁵¹ A. Merjian, 'Diminishing Returns,' *Modern Painters* (April, 2008) p.57.

⁵² Stallabrass, 'Atrocity.'

⁵³ Weber, 'Clouds,' p. 360.

⁵⁴ Weber, 'Clouds,' p. 360.

⁵⁵ Kelly, *Hunger*, p. 118.

U.S. AND BRITISH TROOPS PUSH INTO IRAQ AS MISSILES STRIKE BAGHDAD COMPOUND



16 DIE ON COPTER First Casualties Among Allied Forces Come in Crash in Kuwait

In Iraqi Capital, Sirens Precede Two Direct Hits

Baghdad, March 21 — A night of air attacks with sirens preceding two direct missile strikes on Baghdad...

G.I.s and Marines See Little Iraqi Resistance

Baghdad, March 21 — U.S. Marines and G.I.s saw little Iraqi resistance as they moved toward the city...

U.S. Advances to Be Limited... U.S. Advances to Be Limited... U.S. Advances to Be Limited...

Wave of Protests From Europe to New York

Today's Security... Today's Security... Today's Security...

U.S. BOMBS RAVAGE TARGETS IN BAGHDAD; WAVES OF TROOPS SWEEPING SOUTH IRAQ



Surrenders by Iraqi Forces — 2 Marines Die in Fighting

Support for Bush Surges at Home, But Split Remains... Support for Bush Surges at Home, But Split Remains...

Pol. Indicate One Party Opposes War... Pol. Indicate One Party Opposes War...

U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender... U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender...

U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender... U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender...

U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender... U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender...

U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender... U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender...

U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender... U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender...

U.S. SHIFTING FOCUS OF LAND CAMPAIGN TO FIGHT IN SOUTH



Resistance by Militia Is Delaying Baghdad Battle, Officers Say

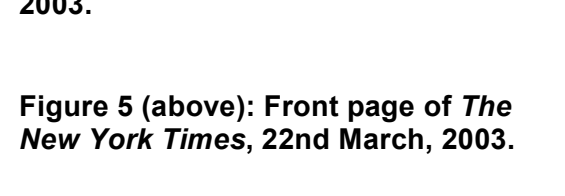
Baghdad Empties of People, But It Fills With Foreboding... Baghdad Empties of People, But It Fills With Foreboding...

Even Some of Hussein's Arab Foes Take a Certain Pride in His Fight... Even Some of Hussein's Arab Foes Take a Certain Pride in His Fight...

Senate Votes to Reduce Bush's Tax Cut Plan... Senate Votes to Reduce Bush's Tax Cut Plan...

Senate Votes to Reduce Bush's Tax Cut Plan... Senate Votes to Reduce Bush's Tax Cut Plan...

U.S. BOMBS RAVAGE TARGETS IN BAGHDAD; WAVES OF TROOPS SWEEPING SOUTH IRAQ



Heavy Iraqi Losses Seen in Big Battle... Heavy Iraqi Losses Seen in Big Battle...

U.S. Soldiers Come Under Fire 100 Miles South of Capital... U.S. Soldiers Come Under Fire 100 Miles South of Capital...

U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender... U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender...

U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender... U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender...

U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender... U.S. Reports Talks Urging Surrender...

was thus 'mainly, an abstraction to the general public.'⁵⁶ Richter himself, was critical of the way the media controlled perceptions of the war, stating, 'when the war started, I heard all these conflicting opinions. I thought the newspaper reports were salutary - impotent and ineffectual as everything else in the face of catastrophe.'⁵⁷ It was this ineffectual coverage in the face of catastrophe that would later become the theme for his major work on the Iraq War, *War Cut*.

War Cut is a particularly unusual combination of text and imagery spread over three hundred and twenty-five pages of a book (Figure 7-8). The book is comprised of two hundred and sixteen 10x5cm photographs taken by Richter in 2002, which are close-ups of one of his 1987 paintings, *Abstraktes Bild* no. 648-2 (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris) (Figure 9). These images were then combined with one hundred and sixty-five extracts from reports written during the outbreak of the Iraq War between the 20th-21st of March 2003. The first edition of *War Cut* took these excerpts from his preferred daily newspaper the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, before the English version was made, which took the text from *The New York Times*. Richter removed the original newsprint formatting of the text, the name of the author, any headlines or bylines and replaced them across the pages in a non-chronological order. They are instead placed within the book as 'the plain presentation of facts,'⁵⁸ side-by-side with the rectangular cropped photographs of an abstract painting. The impetus for this curious format is revealed in Richter's comments on the work, taken from an interview with Jan Thorn-Prikker in *The New York Times*, where he says, 'whatever is real is so unlimited and unshaped that we have to summarise it...the more dramatic events are, the more important the form.'⁵⁹ This notion, that the real is unlimited and unshaped speaks to the inability to depict the unlimited reality of war in any comprehensive sense. Therefore, all Richter is able to do is summarise or give form to events, as he says, 'form is all we have to help us cope with fundamentally chaotic facts...formulating something is a great start...even if that is only by being well organised.'⁶⁰ The form of a book, and the order within the book, therefore, is a way to summarise and organise

⁵⁶ Kelly, *Hunger*, p.119.

⁵⁷ G. Richter in J. Thorn-Prikker, 'A Picture is Worth 216 Newspaper Articles,' *The New York Times* (July 4, 2004) <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/04/books/art-a-picture-is-worth-216-newspaper-articles.html> [accessed 10th February, 2015].

⁵⁸ Richter in Thorn-Prikker, 'A Picture.'

⁵⁹ Richter in Thorn-Prikker, 'A Picture.'

⁶⁰ Richter in Thorn-Prikker, 'A Picture.'

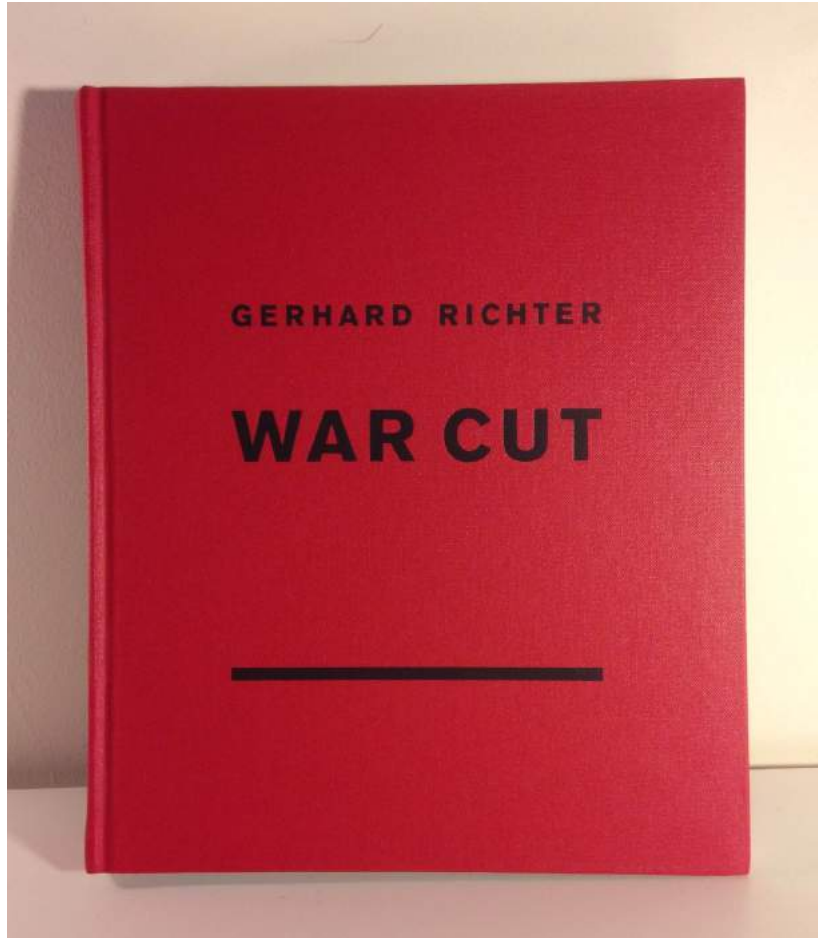


Figure 7: Gerhard Richter, *War Cut* (2004), book. Author's photograph.



Figure 8: Detail of *War Cut* (2004) p. 141-142. Author's photograph.

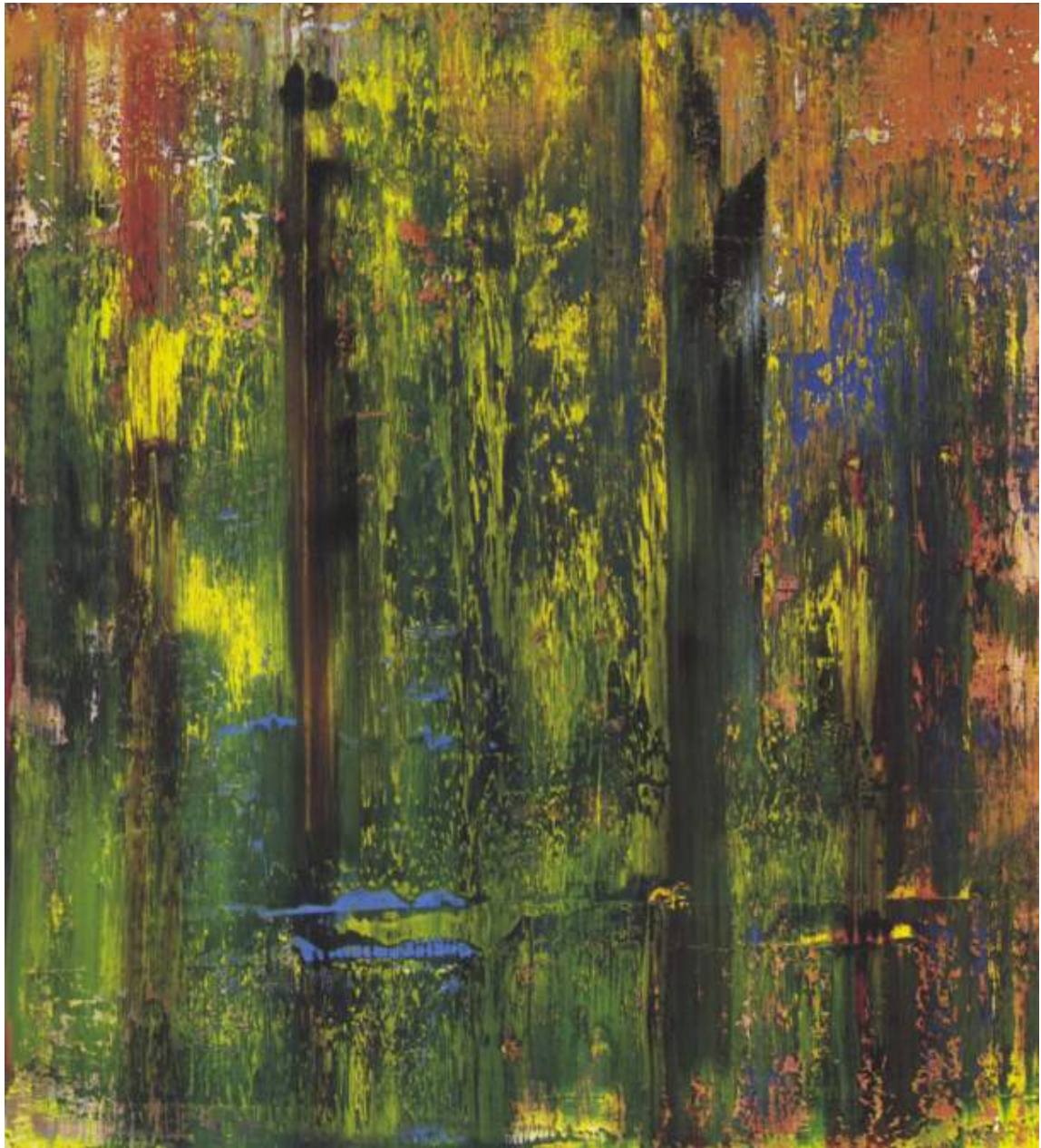


Figure 9: Gerhard Richter, *Abstraktes Bild 648-2*, 1987. Oil on canvas, 225 x 200cm, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

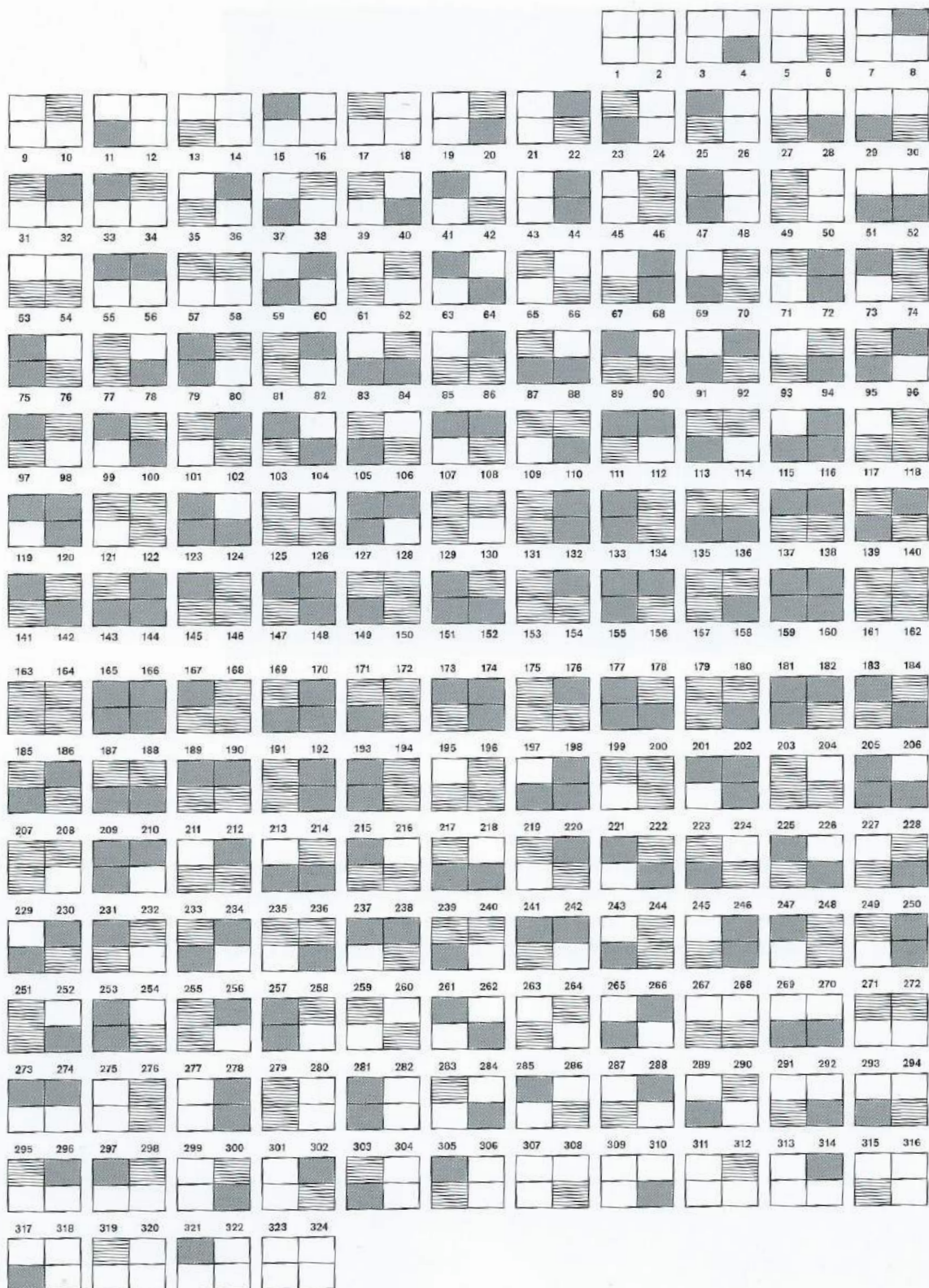


Figure 10: Page layout for *War Cut* (2004)

the fundamental chaos of facts (the history of perception) used to reflect the chaos of war (the history of what actually happened). The detailed layout of the book itself is a means to provide stability (Figure 10), where from page three onwards, after the plain white opening, each double spread is linked to the adjacent double spread, the latter of which provides a mirror image of the former's use of text and image. Pages 3-4, for example, have a single image in the lower right, but no text, which is then paired with 5-6, which has no image and has a block of text in the lower right. This rank and file mimicking and mirroring of text and image continues throughout, and is reminiscent of the control placed on image and text by the media itself, whereby Richter subverts the process of journalistic mediation by exerting his own control on the documents and pictures. The images themselves are subject to a further level of mediation as what they depict is removed or out of context from the original 1987 painting. The illustrations in *War Cut* are decisively not paintings but photographs of a painting, showing only partial truths, and not the bigger picture, quite literally, in the same way war photography is only able to show us a glimpse or fraction of reality.

Richter's deployment of abstract images and unformatted text serves another critical function in this work. As Weber's comments above indicate, there is a tendency to assume images are transparent and thus can be understood based on what they show, reinforced in relation to text and captions that inform the viewer of their meaning. Richter, however, directly reverses the intelligibility of images, by removing bylines and captions, but also through his largely chance-based ordering of images and text, ensuring that no direct meaning can be imposed. Instead the juxtapositions of nonrepresentational images with the disordered sequence of articles means that the relationship between photograph and text is much more unpredictable and subjective, allowing the viewer to speculate about the images possible meaning. James Heffernan, suggests in this way that the images are 'pliable...capable of signifying anything that a block of words projects' and yet are also able to 'radiate a shaping power of their own.'⁶¹ In doing so, they afford the viewer a very different means of visioning the outbreak of war.

⁶¹ J. A. W. Heffernan, 'Speaking for Pictures: Language and Abstract Art,' in R. C. Homem and M. de F. Lambert (eds.) *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image* (Amsterdam and New York, 2006) p. 42.

The images, therefore, fulfill Richter's belief that abstract paintings should be viewed as 'fictive models,' in the way 'they make visible a reality we can neither see nor describe but whose existence we can postulate.'⁶² In the context of the dialectic of visibility and concealment that had been used to describe the emergent aesthetics of terror, this role of abstraction is particularly pertinent. The images themselves allow the viewer to imagine the realities of war, the 'textures, tempos, bodies and banalities' that have previously been identified as missing from war coverage. This is particularly effective in *War Cut*, due to the doubled abstraction of the images, as photographs of an already abstract painting. The procedure of photography allowed Richter freedom to selectively zoom in on sections of the original canvas, or angle the camera at will to create even more ambiguous and open compositions in the smaller images. The new images then become much more varied and detailed than the single original painting and through their juxtaposition with the text are able to have a greater communicative effect.

An image on the forty-fourth page for example (Figure 10), redefines the upright canvas through a close-up low angle photograph. The resulting image assumes something more like an aerial view of a horizontal expanse, of a potential battlefield described by the paints surface. Or, on the one hundred and sixteenth page (Figure 11), the viewer may see the combination of soft green shapes against a blurred orange and red backdrop as a group of approaching figures, perhaps soldiers or their enemies. It is also reminiscent of the 'blurred night vision or thermal imaging,'⁶³ witnessed on televisions at home, the kind of distanced coverage that kept military spectacle at the fore, and the consequences of invasion at bay. Another image, in fact only the second in *War Cut*, on the eighth page (Figure 12), is one that may be influenced by the text more readily. The article on the surrounding pages reveals information about the eight hundred United Nations troops leaving their patrolling and monitoring positions on Iraq's border, prior to US invasion and imminent air strikes. It also discusses how several Asian governments were planning to evacuate their expatriate workers to safety and how many other foreigners and diplomats were making trips across hundreds or thousands of kilometres to leave Iraq. One of its final details is of a television address made by George Bush, urging

⁶² G. Richter in 'Text for Catalogue of Documenta 7, Kassel, 1982' in D. Elger and H. Obrist (eds.) *Gerhard Richter - Text: Writings, Interviews and Letters 1961-2007* (London, 2009) p. 121.

⁶³ Slome, 'Aesthetics of Terror,' p.86.



Figure 11: Detail of *War Cut* (2004), p. 44.



Figure 12: Detail of *War Cut* (2004) p. 116.



Figure 13: Detail from *War Cut* (2004) p. 8.

foreign nationals and journalists to leave the country immediately.⁶⁴ The image itself, therefore, in light of this sense of displacement and rapid movement cross-country, of nationals leaving and troops arriving, takes on something of this motion and commotion. The detail of a typically smudged and smeared canvas of Richter's may invoke the rush of camouflaged soldiers, or of civilians occupying the streets, or possibly the view of the country's terrain as seen from a moving vehicle, perhaps even a plane taking off or coming in to land.

In effect, *War Cut* therefore asks us how we might imagine war and give vision to the topics that are either not shown or are not easily depicted. As Michael Kelly suggests, the details of the paintings become 'surrogates for the images of war that were withheld or closely censored.'⁶⁵ This is not to say, however, that Richter's images reveal a far greater truth of war or directly uncover unseen experience, but are able to suggest an equivalent aesthetic that correlates closely with the experience of war and our knowledge of war as one-sided or fundamentally limited. In fact, a comment within a report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism regarding embedded coverage draws the parallel between *War Cut* and war photography quite well: 'much of it lacks context but it is usually rich in detail. It has all the virtues and vices of reporting only what you can see.'⁶⁶ It is a statement that could just as easily apply to *War Cut*.

⁶⁴ G. Richter, *War Cut* (London, 2012) p. 10.

⁶⁵ Kelly, *Hunger*, p. 118.

⁶⁶ Project for Excellence in Journalism, 'Embedded Reports,' p. 1; cited in Stallabrass, *Memory of Fire*, p. 38.

Conclusion:

'Crime fills the worlds so absolutely that we could insane out of sheer despair...I just wanted to put it on record that I perceive our only hope- our one great hope- as residing in art.'

Gerhard Richter. ⁶⁷

Any cultural activity engaged with a political subject matter may invite the viewer to draw a conclusion based on the efficacy of a given work, and its ability to enact a measurable public response or support of its critique. As T. J. Demos explains, however, 'to ask whether or not art could be effective on the level of international politics can only invite its own negative response'⁶⁸ and this kind of means-end understanding is not necessarily available in Richter's work. *September* and *War Cut* do not operate as activism, they are not a protest and, therefore, the efficacy of the work is uncovered in more subtle ways, and any attempt to make conclusive remarks about the late war on terror work may invite more questions than it answers. Demos continues to quite comprehensively offer alternative terms that one may measure art's efficacy by, based on its capacity to

undertake conceptual and formal investigations that are moving on a subjective, perceptual basis; to modify aesthetic-political space and thereby engender unconventional desires...;to catalyse discursive developments that sustain intellectual creativity and criticality; to create modes of disidentification that counter the limited range of characters produced in mainstream media. ⁶⁹

As we have seen, much of Richter's work engages directly with these criteria, as is revealed within the work itself and through subsequent critical interpretations of it. Richter's art based on 9/11 and the Iraq war can certainly be seen to conceptually and formally investigate its subject matter and is able to move on a subjective, perceptual basis. As Storr says for example, discussing *September*, 'no one sees exactly the same thing, each viewer comes to the work differently prepared to look under different perceptual, cultural and historical circumstances,'⁷⁰ bringing their own memory and active reading to the work. It

⁶⁷ G. Richter, 'Notes, 1986,' in Obrist (ed.) *Gerhard Richter*, p. 125.

⁶⁸ T. J. Demos, 'Questionnaire: Demos,' *October* 123 (Winter, 2008) p. 34.

⁶⁹ Demos, 'Questionnaire,' p. 35.

⁷⁰ Storr, *September*, p. 46.

continually modifies the aesthetic-political space, as much of the present study has discussed, through a synthesis of the visual-political issues embedded as form and content in the work. Perhaps most importantly, however, Richter creates these modes of disidentification that counter the limited visual products in the mainstream media.

As Caroline Jones suggests, the implementation of images by the media during the Bush campaign was a means of producing fear. Visual imagery was a political tool that engendered this fear (by bringing to mind images of 9/11), while also preparing its audience for war and encouraging support for it. Contemporary art, however, reverses fear and produces doubt instead through this disidentification or parodying of media forms. It refuses media-fear by enlisting its mediums (photography, video or newspapers), to in fact create skepticism and conversation, rather than acceptance of their reliability.⁷¹ This is particularly the case in *War Cut*, which directly challenges how much we can know of war as textual and visual object, by offering 'mere journalistic facts which themselves assume the same mysterious chunkiness as the pictorial details'⁷² of an abstract oil painting. It reinforces our lack of perception and demonstrates it to us. One of the greatest effects of these works is this resistance to being purely didactic, instead allowing for indeterminacy. They encourage a reevaluation of the simultaneous role of image as a form of entertainment, information and terroristic weapon by grappling with alternate forms, be it a book or a painting or something else entirely, engaging visual art with the changing historical circumstances of looking and knowing. This indeterminacy is embodied in *Septemeber*, whereby the iconic images of disaster appear quite unassumingly on a small canvas, four years after their first appearance. Richter captures this moment when the world changed, but not with a sense of totality, not as melodramatic or spectacular, but with the disquiet and profound uncertainty that characterised the aftermath of the events and arguably still continues to. Indeed, the war on terror, 'less an event than a global network of confusing alliances and hidden complicities,'⁷³ is still happening and is perhaps more graphic than ever.

Richter's work, in this context, reminds us that there can be no limits drawn on representation and that art must continue to challenge itself, the visual

⁷¹ C. A. Jones, 'Doubt Fear,' *Art Papers*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January/February, 2005) p. 25-26.

⁷² Jones, 'Doubt Fear,' p 35.

⁷³ Luckhurst, 'In War Times,' p. 715.

context in which it operates and its viewers. Or as Demos puts it, to 'catalyse discursive developments that sustain intellectual creativity and criticality.' Indeed, Richter's late body of work certainly sustains creativity, criticality and often peculiarity. Whether this is his intention, or rather the result of the work done by those dedicated to deciphering the oblique nature of his oeuvre, is perhaps beside the point. The discursive nature of his recent works attests to this commitment to sustain both his own interest, and the viewers, and within the context of widening the parameters of knowing terror and visuality, his work continually prompts its own reevaluation in tandem with photographic media-culture. Though works such as *September* and *War Cut* offer estimations of how to give form to trauma and to chaos, other examples of his work since 2001 ensure that that this form remains unlimited. Allusions to 9/11 and the subsequent war are present in other aspects of the work, even when any sense of representation is abandoned. In a conversation about his 2003 glass work *11 Panes* (Figure 14) for example, he discusses the significance of the number of panes, and when the interviewer suggests 'it reminds one of September 11th,'⁷⁴ Richter confirms that this is fine as far as he is concerned. Even his series of *Silicate* paintings of 2003 (Figure 15) and *Strontium* print of 2004 (Figure 16), have been ascribed a place within the post 9/11 work.⁷⁵ Both strontium and silicates featured prominently in environmental pollution reports completed in the aftermath of the attacks, while the cold repetition of anonymous materials recall the former structure of the building from which the given dust samples were taken. Again, a series of *Drawings* (Figures 17-20) from 2005 have been reread following the emergence of the *September* canvas. Dietmar Elger describes how the compositions speak 'openly to the 9/11 motif...showing blocklike vertical structures interrupted by horizontal hatchings,'⁷⁶ while Kate Albers advances this description, implying that the drawings combine to create a sequence documenting 'the explosion of the airplanes on contact with the towers, followed by the towers' collapse, followed by emptiness.'⁷⁷

These reevaluations across and throughout the late works reinforce

⁷⁴ J. Thorn-Prikker, quoted in K. P. Albers, 'Reading the World Trade Centre in Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*,' *Art History*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (February, 2012) p. 171.

⁷⁵ By Albers, 'Reading the World Trade Centre,' p.152-173 and by K. Nielsen, 'Nanotech, Blur and Tragedy in Recent Artworks by Gerhard Richter,' *Leonardo*, Vol. 41, No. 5 (October, 2008) p. 484-492.

⁷⁶ Elger, *Gerhard Richter*, p. 349.

⁷⁷ Albers, 'Reading the World Trade Centre,' p. 169.



**Figure 14: Gerhard Richter, *11 Panes*, 2003. Glass and wood construction
229 cm x 160 cm x 51 cm.**

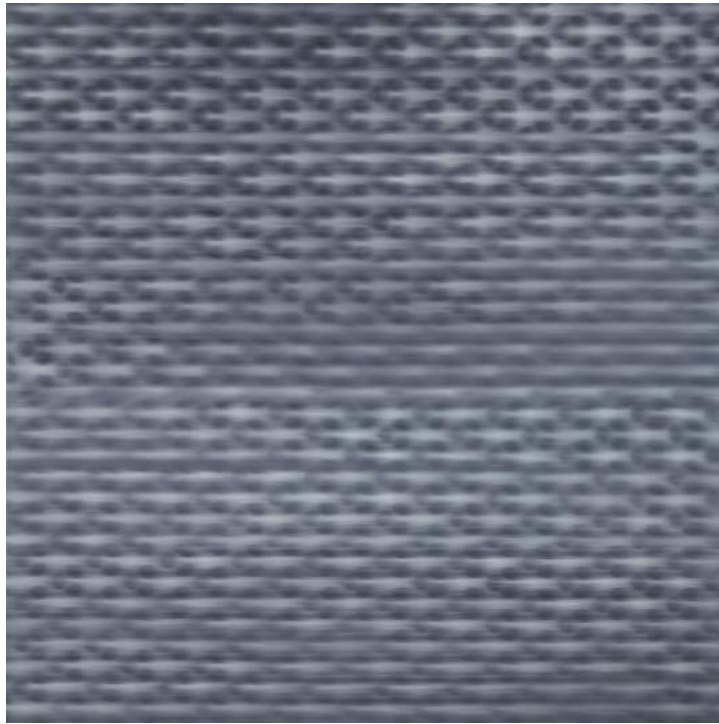


Figure 15: Gerhard Richter, *Silicate*, 2003. Oil on canvas, 290 x 290cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany.

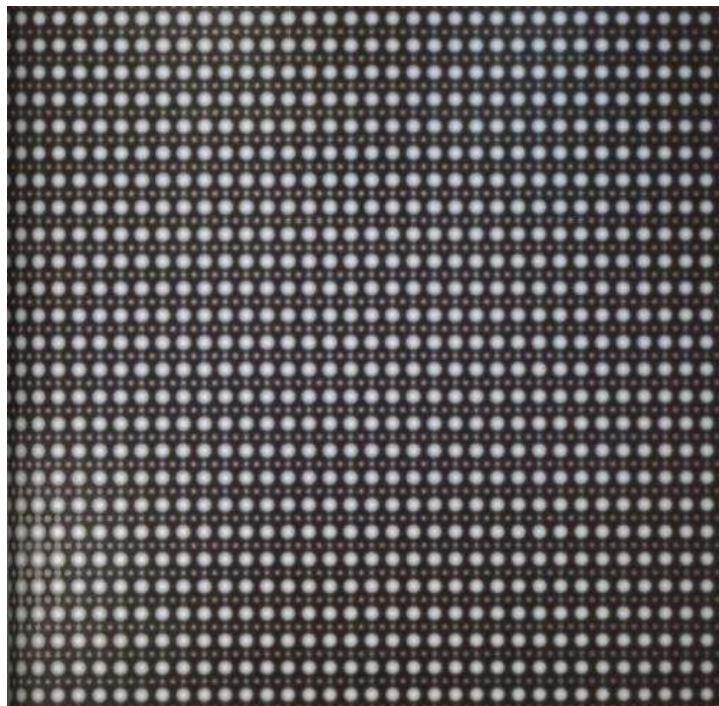


Figure 16: Gerhard Richter, *Strontium*, 2004. C-Print, 910 x 945cm, De Young Museum, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco.

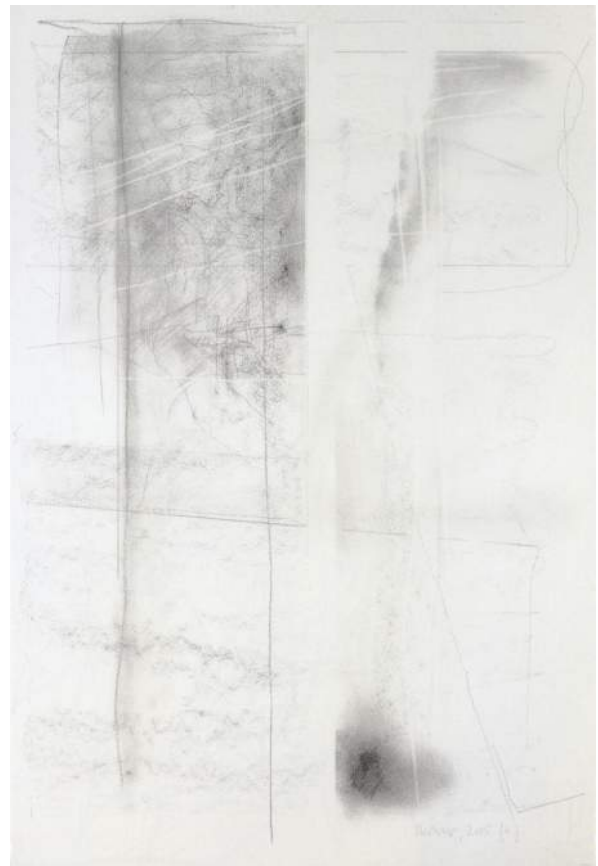
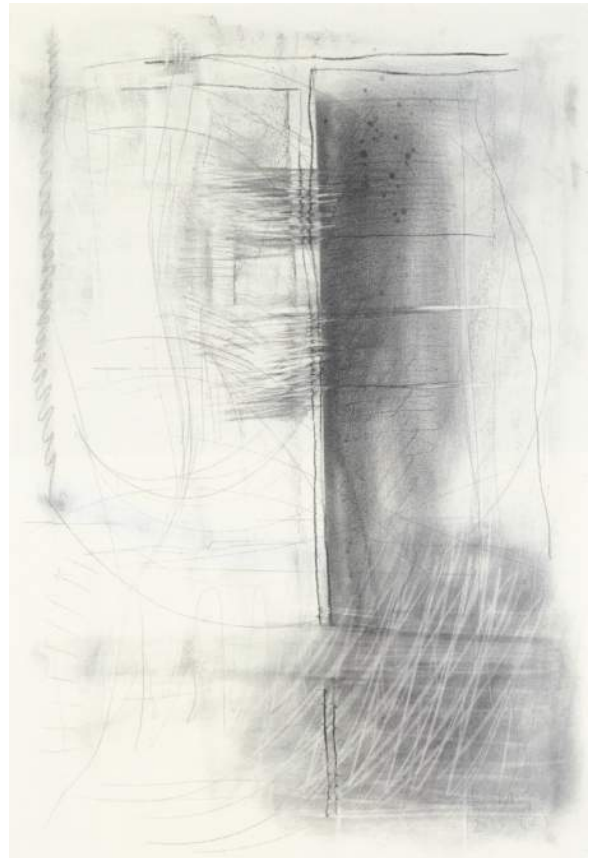
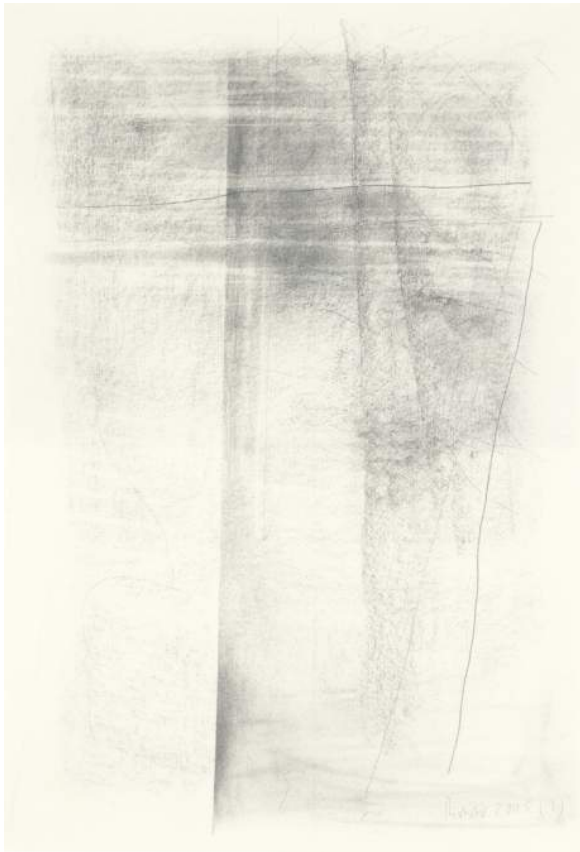


Figure 17 (upper left): Gerhard Richter, *Drawing I*, 2005. Graphite on paper, 151x102cm.

Figure 18 (upper right): Gerhard Richter, *Drawing II*, 2005. Graphite on paper, 151x102cm.

Figure 19 (lower left): Gerhard Richter, *Drawing III*, 2005. Graphite on paper, 151x102cm.

Figure 20 (lower right): Gerhard Richter, *Drawing IV*, 2005. Graphite on paper, 151x102cm.

the inclusivity of modes of representation that can be used to come to terms with traumatic events. They enable a dialogue between images past the limits of a single medium or time period, that go beyond the sum of their parts to form a complex and material interpretation of life and art after 9/11. This is even true of descriptions of *Abstraktes Bild 648-2*, the painting photographed for *War Cut*, the selection of which has been put down to its possible connections with 9/11, present in its 'twin columns of black surrounded by sulfurous reds, yellows and acid greens.'⁷⁸ While the reinterpretation may be anachronistic, it is perhaps justified by the broader theme at work, where a communication between different image conditions is encouraged, and the commemorative value of art is left open and a sense of optimism is restored to the politics of representation, despite the subject matter. Perhaps Mark Godfrey puts it best:

'Recently, we tend to find in Richter's work sorrow, frustration, disgust and loss...he sees how ideologies continue to create horrific violence. But there is always another attitude of hope - hope for his medium and for the purpose of art - hope that painting can be tested, challenged and that new questions can always be asked of it.'⁷⁹

It would be appear they can.

⁷⁸ Jones, 'Doubt Fear,' p. 35.

⁷⁹ Godfrey, *Gerhard Richter*, p. 13.

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Graphite on paper, 151 x 102cm.

