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Review of Gerhard Richter, Thought Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life.

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Gerhard Richter, *Thought Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. 256 pp. ISBN 9780804756174.

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Thought Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life rescues the minor philosophical genre of the *Denkbilder*, the "thought-image"—"a poetic form of condensed, epigrammatic writing in textual snapshots" (2)—and deploys it to re-read seminal philosophical and literary texts by members of the Frankfurt School. In his chapter on Walter Benjamin, Gerhard Richter refers to critical review-essays of *One-Way Street*by Ernst Bloch, Siegfried Kracauer and Theodor Adorno, commenting obliquely on the philosophical uses of the critical review-essay. Reviewed by Bloch and Kracauer in 1928, the same year of its publication, *One-Way Street* sought to rescue the ephemera of everyday metropolitan life by capturing its passage epigrammatically, in a series of condensed philosophical images. In their own abbreviated citations of Benjamin's text, as recounted by Richter, these commentaries re-enact the loosely methodological stance of *One Way Street*. Richter thereby identifies a "textual meeting-ground" for a circle of friends, as well as a constellation of core philosophical, aesthetic and political concerns historically identified with the Frankfurt School (including a shared preoccupation with the material registers of metropolitan existence, their deployment in the form of historical montage for the uses of radical historiography, philosophic reflections on the transaction between the material world and aesthetic form as sited in modern music, the experience of personal homelessness and cultural exile, and the historical catastrophe of Auschwitz). Through the form of the philosophical review, Bloch, Kracauer and Adorno each stage their friend's abiding concern with the question of distance (*Abstand*), the notion of a "stance in perpetual negotiation with its own proper proximity or distance to that which it relates" (53). This matter of positionality—of one's own intimacy with or remove from the text, the approximation of which remains unresolved in the absence of absolute extra-textual measures—might describe Gerhard Richter's own writerly relation to the historical and philosophical legacy of the Frankfurt School.

Equally productive for a critical reconsideration of the literary and intellectual history of the Frankfurt School is the degree of biographical latitude that such a move allows. Shifting arrangements of *Denkbilder* are read across the texts and authors represented in the study, thereby recasting the intellectual history of the Frankfurt School in light of complex personal affinities and extra-institutional exigencies. Richter handles the *Denkbild*as a material form through which these compounded histories become legible in the very indissolubility of their relations. By taking such an approach, Gerhard Richter's uses of the *Denkbild* might itself be construed in accordance with Benjamin's practice of "*rettende Kritik*" (rescuing criticism/critique), which turned on the rescue of superceded forms and histories for the purposes of contemporary cultural criticism. Exceeding its function as the organizing principle of a comparative study of Benjamin, Bloch, Kracauer and Adorno, the thought-image allows Richter to effectively *re-nominate* the Frankfurt School as well as the tradition of Critical Theory associated with it. I shall discuss the scope and efficacy of this strategy, before turning to Richter's literary history of the *Denkbild* and its deployment within his own analysis.

I.

The designation "the Frankfurt School," and its association with works like Adorno's *Minima Moralia* or Benjamin's belatedly representative *One-Way Street* and *The Arcades Project*, serves to authorize Richter's inclusion of institutionally peripheral figures like Bloch and Kracauer within its historical ambit. Richter develops recent directions in the intellectual biography of the Frankfurt School, which destabilize the presumption of a unified "school" by locating its philosophical integrity beyond its official origins in the Institute for Social Research. Bloch and Kracauer are presented as vital interlocutors of core members of the Frankfurt School, so that the dialogue between its official representatives and these two early mentors is demonstrated, as an aspect of life-long *friendship*, to be mutually formative. Placing critical value on the extended *personal* histories maintained between these figures, Richter follows and develops the work of the pre-eminent Frankfurt School historian Rolf Wiggerhaus. For Wiggerhaus, these writers are intellectually related not only through their shared uses of critical materialism, a methodological commitment that characterized the Institute's official program; but also, especially, in their *writerly* deployment of short forms like the essay, the aphorism or fragment, encyclopedic citation, and the montage. Fidelity to the micro-phenomenological method—a recitation of the obsolete or neglected elements of quotidian life, which are placed into a new "cultural syntax" and thereby transvalued into an image of historical redemption—situates the closely aligned figures of Benjamin and Adorno in proximity with Bloch and Kracauer, within the same constellation of aesthetic, political and philosophical concerns. This cluster of micro-messianic thinkers is formalized into a "school" not in a homogenous relationship to institutional origins, but through a shared commitment to the form of the *Denkbild*. (Indeed, with the *Denkbild* as its criterion, Richter's nomination of the "Frankfurt School" is advanced by excluding Max Horkheimer, director of the Institute and Adorno's collaborator in the most cited text of the Frankfurt School, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). Such a deliberate slackening of the "school" from recognizable institutional ties is conceptually pertinent for Richter's argument. Beyond the stakes of a revisionist historical claim, Richter's analysis delineates a tradition of *literary* presentation that might belong properly to the Frankfurt School—a mode of writing that exposes this same identification as interminably, and uncontainably, at odds with its own official origins.

More ambitiously, then, Richter's historiography of the "Frankfurt School" re-functionalizes the term *conceptually*. Richter mobilizes the *idea* of a "school" in order to advance a speculative history of displacement, suggesting a non-identical subject that is always elsewhere in relation to its origins. Put otherwise, the force of Richter's reference destabilizes any attempt to *territorialize* the traditions of the Frankfurt School. "Frankfurt," "Germany," the continuing institutionalization of its textual authority: these coordinates are displaced by an account of transnational exchanges, which unfold across an urban (rather than national) axis involving Berlin, Paris, Los Angeles and New York. Moreover, whether a city of childhood (Benjamin's Berlin), of self-translation or exile (Paris, Los Angeles, New York), each city is conceived not as a system of closed urban signs and references; rather, much like the image of a city's map in Benjamin's *One-Way Street* (discussed at length in the first chapter), they constitute a series of "metropolitan figures" linked together "*into a specific concept of experience*" (46, emphasis mine). And Richter locates not only a geographically but also a *temporally* heterogeneous subject of experience in this textual relay of *Denkbilder*, written for and as responses to absent or missing friends, across metropolitan coordinates that plot the effective *denationalization* of a

presumed first language and its forms. Each urban and textual coordinate in this history of community and dispersal functions as a placeholder for constitutive loss—for losses that are *formative* of life in the present, the "damaged life" of and after the rise of the Third Reich, which Richter cites from the subtitle of Adorno's *Minima Moralia* as the heading of his own study.

> This loss cannot simply be described and then categorized according to generic taxonomies but calls attention to itself *as* loss …. Collectively, my readings of Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch and Kracauer—all careful readers of Freud—show that the philosophical miniatures of the *Denkbilder* can be best understood as unfolding on the far side of [Freud's normalizing] binary opposition between mourning and melancholia. The *Denkbild* enacts a series of engagements with the *constitutive loss* that make a subject *what it is*: the loss of democracy under fascism; the loss of the certainties of the Hegelian "system"; the loss of home in displacement and exile; the loss of stable meaning and readability in modernity; and the loss of the other, such as an absent or dying friend. (34-5, emphasis mine).

If the reference to the Frankfurt School crosses from its origins in the Weimar generation (Bloch, Benjamin, Kracauer) into the experience of the German-Jewish émigré in Los Angeles or New York after the 1940s—the reader recalls that this crossing is punctuated by Benjamin's absence—it allows Richter to resist conventional periodization. *Thought-images* narrates, instead, an intergenerational history of *friendship*. It is here that Richter recasts established receptions of the Frankfurt School, opening for his own readers the question of a proper *Abstand* to history and their own cultural location. Richter re-designates the "Frankfurt School" as a history of extra-territorial solidarities maintained in the face of communal dispersal, and the *Denkbild*, as a formal strategy directed against the coercive coordination of linguistic identity by a hyper-nationalist state. From here, Richter illuminates an intellectual passage between German-Jewish writers of the first half of the twentieth century and Jacques Derrida's recent reflections on post-colonial "monolingualism" in order to exploit this concept's implicit reconfiguration of liberal multiculturalist discourses, and to engage, above all, the politics of friendship. Derrida's so-called "political" writings from the 1990s to the turn of the millennium establish the parameters of a method for Richter, an approach that is maintained through each of his readings. Casting the form of the *Denkbild* as an inherently *dedicatory* mode of address, Richter tilts his own study toward Derrida's axiomatic assertion of the law of friendship in terms of finitude and mourning, thereby multiplying the rhetorical force of each "commemorative" work by running the latter's signature across it.

> The friends, whose complex personal relations to each other were modulated by the genre of the *Denkbilder*, shared this experience of finitude …. The *Denkbilder* that they wrote with, through, and for each other thus can also be read as miniature memorials, small gravestones that commemorate, even before the other's passing, the mourning to which all friendship is exposed. (191)

The short form of the *Denkbild* afforded Bloch, Benjamin, Adorno and Kracauer a genre for a quasi-epistolary circulation of ideas. Further, each *Denkbild* works through a situative heteronomy—in writing for another, the subject fails, in the very movement of its dedicatory gesture, to be fully present to itself.

> Friendship will always have been conditioned by the future absence of the other, even of the self in the other, and by the fact that one or the other will be inevitably left behind—as in 1940, when Adorno received news of Benjamin's suicide during the latter's escape from the Nazis; as in 1966, when Adorno, Bloch and Horkheimer, all in Germany, learnt of Kracauer's unexpected death in New York from a lung infection; as in 1969, when Horkheimer spoke at the graveside of Adorno; and as in 1973, when news of Horkheimer's death reached Bloch. (192)

At once the writing of fatality, the "graveside" knowledge of a present in which one has been perpetually left behind, *Denkbilder* are also promissory. Like Richter's idea of the "Frankfurt School," they are the sign of an irreplaceable bond that opens up the ability to read, as it were, *ahead of one's self*. This rule, by which a historical future is anticipated in the register of finitude ("future absence"), is exemplified through Richter's own strategic interpellation of the utopic dimensions of Frankfurt School thought into the Derridean address to friendship.

The approach is effective in rescuing and renewing the uses of *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, Adorno's classic text on cultural and personal displacement written in his Californian exile, between 1944 and 1947. Richter's treatment of the text is consistent with Adorno's own micro-phenomenological reflections, the 153 aphorisms that mobilize the specificity of subjective experience to interrupt dominant ideological economies of, on the one hand, hyper-nationalism, and, on the other, the "culture industry." Richter's own prismatic reading takes a unique approach, however, passing the text through the lens of its brief opening dedication, the address to the first name of a friend, "Max." Through prosopopoeia, the Derridean appeal to the missing friend, Richter's Adorno "mourns the writerly absence of his friend from his work by *making the voice of the friend part of a ghostly dialogue* and the structuring principle of the entire work" (164, emphasis mine).

Here, Richter disengages from generalizations about this representative text of Adorno that identify it as categorically "aesthetic," that is to say, as enacting an unspecified process or type of literary modernism that rehearses its autonomy or separation from everyday life. Richter cites Hans Robert Jauss's genealogy of modernism from Rousseau to Adorno; but this is a recognizable reading that has been advanced frequently in order to plot Adorno's putative flight from the trauma of politics, signified here by "Hitler" and elsewhere, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as "instrumental reason." Typically concluding with Adorno's belated and introverted turn to "modernist" aesthetics, this reading has been reiterated variously over the past two decades, by social and aesthetic theorists such as Axel Honneth and Albrecht Wellmer. Neil Larson's widely cited *Modernism and Hegemony: A Material Critique of Aesthetic Agencies* is a recent development within this paradigm, in which Adorno's allegedly self-referential poetics are symptomatic of a Nietzschean "totalizing critique of reason"/representation, which is radicalized in the collaboration with Horkheimer. Richter's reading of *Minima Moralia* as turning on a *textual gesture of interruption*—a suspension, literally and conceptually, of his collaborative work with Horkheimer—should be underscored in light of this dominant paradigm.

Richter does indeed rescue and amplify the Nietzschean resonances of Adorno's "melancholic science," insisting that each *Denkbild* deploys something like a poetic persona in narrating everyday life in "administered" societies. Distancing the historical Horkheimer and the

programmatic work of the Institute from the spectralized return of "Max" the friend, Richter points to an actual conversation that has been interrupted by the baleful imposition of "singular, monolithic meaning" (the ideology of fascism, life in exile); and by personal contingencies (Horkheimer's illness) (165). As a remark upon Derrida's politics of friendship, Richter's reading presents these *Denkbilder* as "transcripts of an interior dialogue rather than a monologue or an actual dialogue" (164). A figure of muteness to which writing addresses itself, "Max" is, in other words, an exemplary instance of the *Denkbild*. Naming a spectralized presence within the text, it registers the inherent plurality of the authorial voice. The force of such an address, which is directed toward *missing possibilities* is, indeed, understood within a "politics," and is the structuring principle of Richter's study. It is presented as a strategy for interrupting the multiple genealogical continuities—different ideological traditions that provide the antecedents of Fascism, as well as different *national* histories that produce the politics of hyper-identity—signified by "Hitler." (Such a reading resonates, against Larsen, with Miriam Hansen's far-reaching thesis on a "vernacular modernism," which considers the possibilities of a classical modernist repertoire when it is displaced into a "dialect" of localized, sensually mediated registers.) If "Hitler" signifies the coercive coordination of identity, cultural meaning and origins, *Minima Moralia*'s naming of absence *denaturalizes* this language of origins—what Habermas has termed a "community of descent," the assumption of an innocent bond to language, and thereby, to kin.

This argument has been authoritatively stated by Martin Jay in *The Dialectical Imagination* (1973). Jay's thesis on "permanent exile" introduced the tradition of Western Marxism to an Anglo-American readership, identifying it with the Frankfurt School's philosophical intransigency to fixed cultural origins and their geopolitical coordinates. Richter's discussion of the uses of photographic self-representation in the chapter entitled "Homeless Images: Kracauer's Extra-territoriality, Derrida's Monolingualism" borrows Jay's thesis in order to repurpose it for a commentary on specifically *postcolonial* negotiations of national memory.

Richter positions both thinkers, the German-Jewish Kracauer and the Algerian-Jewish Francophone Derrida, through Adorno's 1965 essay "On the Question, 'What Is German?'" This personalized essay rehearses the painful disenchantment of an intimate "first language" by placing it in the mouth of the returning émigré, the one to whom its uses are no longer natural. The essay—and Adorno's mobilization of the essay *as a form*, as Eva Geulen has argued, highlighting its oral delivery in a nationalized radio address—paratactically connects Kracauer with Derrida. Marking a critical turn in the argument, Kracauer's philosophic preoccupation with homelessness (*Obdachlosigkeit*) is placed within Derrida's contemporary reflections on the European Union (including his reflections on autobiography, in the shadow-memoir *Monolingualism of the Other: or, Prosthesis of Origin*). In this cluster of ethico-political texts, "Europe" is approached both as a geopolitical entity, and as a notion. Arguably, it is Derrida's inflection of the question of a post-national politics beyond the "exhausted programs of Eurocentricism and anti-Eurocentricism" that directs the discussion here (128). Through Derrida (and in implicit tension with models derived from Homi Bhabha), Richter emphasizes the colonial's experience of a curiously *pauperized* first language through which each claim to cultural identity exposes a hybridity at odds with itself; a self that is "clustered around not a core of stable meaning, but a network of differences," neither European nor non-European, both Jewish and non-Jewish (124).

Crucial to this thesis is the startling portrait of Kracauer, printed from its original cracked glass plate and reproduced on the cover of the book. Historically, Richter identifies the photograph with Kracauer's literary *Denkbild*, "Farewell to Lindenarcade," both dating from 1930. "Farewell to Lindenarcade" textually traverses an uncanny physical space, the arcade, in which established histories coincide and distort each others' teleological significance. Here, physical objects (or rather, our encounter with them) are de-territorialized, that is to say, wrenched away from recognizable historical referents. Richter deploys the *Denkbild* in just such a manner, as a point from which to reconfigure Kracauer's major works on film and philosophy of history (from the Weimar period *Denkbilder* of *The Mass Ornament*, the 1960 *Theory of Film*, begun in transit in 1941 in Marseilles, and the major, posthumous *History: Last Things before the Last*). Richter effectively undoes conventional periodizations of Kracauer's works in terms of the usual progression from his "Weimer generation" writings to the later works. Simultaneously, the discussion of photography, cinema and its possibilities for alternative historiographic practices is displaced from its origins in the "exilic imagination"—a tradition of Continental thought that emerges from the German-Jewish identification of "Europe"—to the postcolonial.

In what is perhaps the most dramatic reading of the book, Richter illuminates the image of Kracauer, immobilized in the fractures of the photograph, in terms of the subject's "struggle" to appropriate dominant (colonial or nationalist) means of representation. In an exceptionally close reading, Richter demonstrates that in failing to coincide with itself, the photographed sitter escapes from normative teleologies of belonging and citizenship that are consolidated in the *racialization* of linguistic identity. (Kracauer's non-Europeanized, bizarrely "Asiatic" features already suggested such congenital "failure" to his friends.) Here, the photographic portrait of Kracauer should be considered not only in terms of Richter's remarkable interpretation of it as a de-racialized yet thoroughly embodied "image of homelessness." The force of the reading resides, in my view, in its treatment of the photographic portrait *as a genre*, which has served historically to expose and thereby document

> the multiple displacements of the self that are inextricably intertwined with the ways in which that self struggles to make sense of itself in relation to what it is not: the other culture, the other cultural identities, the other modes of belonging … It is here, in each encounter with a never-before-seen-image that we must allow the visual text to reinvent us … *the photograph itself* can be read as a homeless image of extraterritoriality. (135, emphasis mine)

II.

As a formal negotiation of the cultural frames that both burden and produce identity, the visual *Denkbild* is iterable as well as translatable across different histories of self-representation. Such attention to the generic uses and possibilities of *Denkbilder* is subtended by a condensed literary history of the thought-image, which, as I read it, is organized around a paradox. Identified as an inherently exilic form, the thought-image is excavated, nonetheless, as an irreducible element of *German* literary and aesthetic traditions.

Originating as a marginal speculative and aesthetic form in Hegel's "system," the *Denkbilder* are described as "philosophical miniatures ... that hover between philosophical critique and aesthetic

production …. [u]sually without a developed plot or a prescribed narrative agenda, yet charged with philosophical insight" (2). Richter's intellectual genealogy of the *Denkbilder* conjoins early German Romanticism with its exploitation and reinvention in the early twentieth century. In a compressed commentary on the literary precedents of the modernist *Denkbilder*, Richter essays a tradition that originates on the periphery of Hegel's speculative philosophy in the artwork's insistence on finitude and singularity. For Friedrich Schlegel, Schelling and Höelderlin, the affirmation of appearance (*Schein*) remarked the procedures by which a truth-claim was *materialized* in a given work. Mediating the breach effected by Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy, *Schein* specified the claims of conceptual reasoning in an experience that was both unique and sensuously grounded. Artistic form deployed the singularity of experience with, rather than against, conceptual labor.

This accent in the legacy of so-called German Idealism was retained by German and Austrian writers of the early twentieth century and the Weimar Republic, such as Karl Krauss, Robert Musil, Stefan George and Bertolt Brecht. By modernizing various short forms like the maxim, the aphorism, the pictorial hieroglyph, this generation claimed a "buried poetic tradition" whose authority derived precisely from its marginal position within "great" or systematic philosophic writing. Writers of the emerging Frankfurt School privileged these minor forms to inscribe, in part, their own affinity with contemporaries and close forerunners while also re-functionalizing a "tradition" for their own ideological purposes. From Simmel's micro-phenomenology of everyday objects in commodity cultures, Benjamin's recuperation of the maudlin, that is to say particularly *German*tradition of the mourning play and its uses of the Baroque emblem, to the migration of Nietzsche's aphoristic prose style into metropolitan tropes derived from Baudelaire's "Paris," the micrological gesture valorizes negligible cultural practices, as well as moods considered insignificant to legitimate social and political affects, rendering these into the signs of an alternative cultural semiotics. For the Frankfurt School, the urbane *Denkbild* re-nominates a German literary tradition that is both originary and self-displacing. As a generalizable form, the *Denkbild* marks the paradoxical "position of naming belonging without itself belonging" (19)—in other words, it is a category of writerly resistance deployed against the forced coordination of cultural identity.

Richter's contribution to the understanding of a genre is most innovative in its discussion of Ernst Bloch, and his lifelong adherence to the uses of the sound-figure. In the chapter, "Bloch's Dream, Music's Traces," Richter's formal attention to the musicality of Bloch's writing complicates the presumptive stability and conceptual accessibility of his extensive oeuvre, which is typically characterized as "overtly" or transparently political. Richter interposes Bloch's rhetorically saturated, figurative style into the trajectory of his substantive concerns (the uses of history, the political future of Marxian utopianism, religion); the early *Spirit of Utopia*(1918; 1923), the *Denkbilder of Traces* (1930), the *Heritage of Our Times* (1933), the late *Experimentum Mundi* (1975), these texts do manifest an apparent conceptual availability. Richter's treatments of these texts, however, highlight their acutely stylized prose. Exploiting the inherent *instability* of figurative writing, Bloch suggests that the historically specified content of his work ("religion," "politics") might be perpetually *conditioned*, and so revised, by the tropes through which it is articulated. Bloch's attention to the formal specificity of his own language poses an embarrassing contradiction to the reader for whom the ideological meaning of his *oeuvre* may be arrested in a series of "detachable truth claims" (73).

For Richter, Bloch writes above all, and across his far-reaching socio-political concerns, from the linguistic *limit case* of the musical composition. As a materially conditioned effect of social and historical inscriptions, the musical composition and its performance is a text; yet it stands in a necessarily *non-referential* relationship to the material world. By existing only in the execution of its singular form—in its iterability, the composition is citable but may never be paraphrased—the musical performance differentiates itself from its pre-presentational significance. While unable to participate in the discursivity of language, this peculiar species of textuality manifests, non-mimetically and iterably, "the ways in which all acts of signification point to other acts of signification that exceed their adherence to any particular set of referents" (74). *All* textual signification is, in part, non-denotative and allegorical, a "question of *figures* and *figuration*" (74). Developed by Bloch's *Denkbilder* in *Traces* into a leitmotif, the allegorical sound-figure enacts, even further, the compositional principle of Bloch's own *writerly* practice (outlining a method that was shared, most closely, by Adorno).

Richter removes the matter of Bloch's style from its origins in German Expressionism, aligning it with the contemporary reflections of Jean-Luc Nancy in *Sense of the World*. For both Bloch and Nancy, music is paradigmatic of all acts of cultural signification, understood as "the perpetual manufacturing, performance and displacement of sense … [whereby] presentation *is* its meaning, and its meaning *is* its performance" (80). Richter positions this emphasis on the performativity of cultural meaning polemically, against Kant's devalorization of music in the *Critique of Judgment*; and the privilege awarded there to painting. In valorizing painting for its apparent stability and presence, Kant elevated the visual faculty over others, confirming the epistemological as well as disciplinary powers of the eye: as for other eighteenth-century European thinkers, the Kantian eye would ratify otherwise abstract discourses on universality and freedom. Put differently, Kant's ocularcentrism reifies a *cultural* privilege awarded to aesthetic forms that underwrite the values of stability and presence. Cast, then, in a dramatically interventionist role, and against his self-understanding, Bloch

> rectifies a latent ocularcentrism that unites Kant with so many other thinkers of the eighteenth century … [who] evoke an ideological tradition that regards vision as "the noblest of senses" from Plato to Descartes via the Enlightenment and its fear of darkness all the way to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and the postmodernists …. Bloch dethrones vision as the sense that—owing to its capacity to transform the world into a modern *Weltbild*, or world image, as Heidegger later terms it …—is capable of standing metonymically for all the other senses, able to subsume the variegated perceptions that they offer under the hegemony of the eye. (87-8)

Bloch's synaesthetic inversion of visual and auditory registers presents a "supplement" to (interruption within) Kant's legacy. Of course, Richter's own uses of Bloch re-stage a struggle over the meaning and status of musical traditions that is profoundly *internal* to the "heritage" of German critical theory. Suggesting that this heritage remains non-coincidental, Richter's study enacts the manner in which its promise might be "potentially legible *elsewhere*" (91); in suppressed traditions of cultural performance that resist the colonization of perception through hierarchical visual regimes.

Richter's nomination of "Frankfurt School" writers turns on an ideologically vested account of friendship and exile that implicitly bears, *vis-à-vis* a politics of dispersal and belonging, on contemporary, postcolonial considerations. As a mode of resistance against the instrumentalization of place names and identity for nationalistic purposes, *Denkbilder* enact not only the "concrete and conceptual struggle against the reactionary modes of cultural and political coordination that constituted the so-called conservative revolution in Germany in the 1920's and 30's" (8). *Thought-images* transports the signature of the "Frankfurt School" past its own origins toward cultural uses and contexts that are strikingly unpredictable, perpetuating its legacy in a gesture of consummate fidelity.