

Gerhard Richter and Antoni Tàpies: Matter and Identity

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Abstract

This essay explores several paintings produced by the contemporary artists Gerhard Richter and Antoni Tàpies. The discussion illustrates the artists' use of technique, showing various differences between the two stylistically and conceptually. However, through the exploration of their individual output, a fascinating similarity arises. The similarity offers the following thesis: in their paintings, Richter and Tàpies convey memory and identity through their particular uses of matter and layering. Memory and identity are products of each artist's own history. The histories they represent, both personal and collective, are opaque and socially problematic. Their representation is resolved through the artists' use of reference, symbolism and visual technique. Technique is employed through Richter and Tàpies's specific manipulation of matter and layering, which albeit visually different, lends to the common goal of conveying complex histories. The paper addresses painting's ability to represent the past by re-contextualizing it in the present.

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Dedication

To my family: Nikoleta Tchepileva, George Pantev and Boris Pantev.

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Gerhard Richter and Antoni Tàpies: Matter and Identity

Section I

Introduction

Gerhard Richter and Antoni Tàpies

The artists Antoni Tàpies and Gerhard Richter are globally recognized as two of the most prominent figures in the world of contemporary art practice. My interest in their work stems from the impact of the aesthetic value of their art. I find myself particularly drawn to their paintings, because of the way some of which (if not stylistically abstract, in the case of Richter) border on complete abstraction, as seen in Tàpies's artistic output. When using the term 'abstraction' to describe Richter's and Tàpies's pieces, we should not associate it with the oeuvre of the American abstract expressionists. The artworks by Richter and Tàpies depart from the modern art movement in a number of ways. One particularly salient differentiating factor is the postmodern set of ideas responsible for the works' presence, such as the artists' transparent tendency to look back at and recall history. While the pieces made by Richter and Tàpies are visually and

intellectually distant from American abstract expressionism, they are also very different from one another.

This paper offers a comparative analysis of Richter and Tàpies's artistic output. I analyze the works of each artist in separate sections, highlighting some important differences between them. Yet, I find that the observed differences are countered by an intriguing similarity they share. Works of both artists are marked by a heavy presence of matter and layering. Both Richter and Tàpies employ idiosyncratic ways of manipulating matter, ultimately leading to the creation of visual planes acting as layers. The implications of these techniques point toward the two artists' particular political, cultural and personal histories as driving forces behind the creation of their paintings.

In the introduction of this paper I elaborate the exact meaning of the terms 'matter' and 'layering' in relation to Richter and Tàpies's practice. I then provide a general outline of the two artists' work, discussing their use of technique and style, paying particular attention to the qualities of their paintings that initially sparked my interest. This overview provides the context for a thorough comparison of the artists' select works by means of a close visual analysis.

Matter

The use of matter is of utmost importance when attempting to understand the works of Richter and Tàpies. The two artists treat it very differently, thus

revealing alternative sets of meanings conveyed through their paintings. The term matter, for the purposes of this paper, has a specific meaning. Matter refers to the material that makes up the art object. This object is not made up from one particular substance. However, it is also not a collage of separate materials. Rather, it is a pastiche of several elements responsible for the artwork's basic structure. These then operate synergistically in order to produce the body of the painting.¹ No particular segment stands out as foreign due to its pasting on the surface of the art piece. The elements do not suffer from the violence of cutting nor from the force of pasting.² They are parts seamlessly and organically belonging to the fused entirety of the artwork. As these elements combine to make up of the work's appearance, their material presence becomes emphasized.

Richter's use of matter is subtle. The artist utilizes it in such a way that it does not stand out or possess an independent form and meaning outside the surface of his paintings. It appears as if matter, in his case oil paint, performs as a vehicle for the production of layers. The layers, in turn, alternate in a game of concealing and revealing, something that I discuss in the following section of the paper. The artist's use of technique makes it seem as if the matter he uses lacks tactility, lending it an appearance of flatness. This is apparent especially when Richter implements the gesture of blurring the top layers of his paintings, as seen in his photo-realistic series *18. Oktober, 1977*. Matter, as employed by Richter,

¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 3.

² Briony Fer, "The Cut" in *On Abstract Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 99.

does not stand as a referent for anything in particular. The lack of overt reference towards an immediately recognizable object or concept allows the artist to manipulate matter freely. Thus, Richter's use of material generates a flat body that produces the illusory presence of a multi-layered plane. This trompe l'oeil effect offers an acute sense of spatial distance and exhibits an overlap of various layers. Richter's technique makes it difficult to immediately grasp which plane performs as a background, middle ground or foreground.

By contrast, Tàpies's use of layering has a completely different effect, achieved by his particular handling of matter. Unlike Richter, Tàpies employs matter without exhibiting subtle manipulation. Richter tends to utilize matter as a passive vehicle towards a goal that does not place emphasis on the material itself. The manner in which Richter engages paint proves it difficult to understand matter as an element free of the two-dimensional canvas. Its integration into his paintings does not allow it to act as a referent to anything outside of what it is, the means to an end. Contrary to this, Tàpies often uses objects that possess an alternative purpose and meaning outside the paintings' surfaces. He also transforms matter into physically recognizable objects and concepts. Exemplifying this technique is his work made in 1994, titled *Transfiguració*. In this painting, the artist uses manipulated varnish that overtly resembles a woman's nude body. Another example of his unique handling of matter is seen in his recent work, *Soc terra*, completed in 2004. This work shows soil arranged to be reminiscent of a human hand.

The matter employed by Tàpies is crafted with an approach that transforms raw materials into signs pointing to recognizable referents. Not only does matter take on the form of an entirely new sign, but its basic make-up carries an array of meanings outside of its purpose as a means for the production of a painting. This play of signs occurs from Tàpies's common use of non-traditional materials in his mixed media works. The artist frequently makes use of varnish, spray paint, string, fabrics, concrete – or organic matter such as straw, human hair and soil. As I discuss below, this variety of materials results in the provocative creation of new signs through the suggestion of independent referents. One can see this in the aforementioned work, *Soc terra*. Such use of matter complicates the manner in which Tàpies's paintings could be read and understood. Moreover, the specific placement of matter in terms of layering adds further to the complex significance of the artist's works.

Layering

The second key concept that I employ in this paper is layering. Layering refers to the placement of matter on alternative planes, which creates a variety of effects. Besides offering an engaging visual stimulus, layers point to a particular set of references. Every layer employed by Tàpies is a separate fragment that participates in the painting's make-up. The fragments are also visually distinguishable as independent entities. However, if conceived as independent

entities, the layers lose their collective meaning once removed from the context of the entire work. Layers not only highlight notions of fragmentation and their construction of an entirety, but also refer to the element of time that is already heavily embedded within the process of construction. Every layer, or every fragment, is placed at a particular moment in time during the production of the painting. On the surface, another film is placed thus altering its predecessor determining the outcome of its successor. This interaction between matter and time, ultimately responsible for layering, is a notion that this paper seeks to develop further.

Just as was the case with their approach to matter, Richter and Tàpies use layering in very different ways. When looking at an abstract painting produced by Richter, we are presented by the artist's signature use of a flat plane upon which numerous layers interact. As certain layers emerge, others hide and allow for a multi-dimensional representation of the work. Another effect often present in the works of Richter, adding to the complex reading of his canvases, is his use of the blur. The manner in which the artist blurs the paint, through what appears an effortless gesture, maims the surface of his canvases. The blurred veneer makes his works appear foggy, ghostly, yet at the same time dynamic. This sense of dynamism and movement, can be directly traced back to photography. The viewer is faced with a blurry image of a photograph affected by the shakiness of the photographer's hand, as seen in Richter's photo-series *18. Oktober, 1977*. This presents us with both a detachment from the subject matter skewed by the blur,

and an increased sense of materiality – a controlled human touch that conceals the image retained by the canvas. This preliminary reading of Richter's works thus points to a fascinating constant: the game of revealing and concealing, of mechanical representation merged with traces of the artist's hand evident in the utilization of the blur.

The presence of play between layers seen in Richter's work is contrasted in Tàpies's paintings, for Tàpies's works reveal an alternative set of visual sensations. Unlike Richter, Tàpies is far more direct in his use of layering: every element, gesture, color or material applied in his paintings is presented before us all at once. We are capable of seeing the process of the painting's creation and understanding which marks were placed at which time of its production. Unlike Richter, Tàpies's unique use of layering conceals primary planes as new ones emerge over top in a gesture of stacking. This effect produces a surface that offers an easily identifiable sense of temporality. The artist makes it clear when a new sign is applied upon a previous one, smothering and not allowing the sign's predecessor (and now ground) to surface. This prevents the various layers created by Tàpies from acting as interchangeable grounds, as seen in the technique applied by Richter, whose works tend to create the opposite effect. This is achieved by his skillful ability to employ several layers engaged in the game of revealing and concealing. These layers allow for a multi-plane presence on a two-dimensional ground.

Memory and Identity

So far I have discussed the visual differences between the works of Richter and Tàpies, differences rooted in their divergent approaches to matter and layering. However, there are several similarities imbedded in the meanings of Richter and Tàpies's paintings. Through the use of layering and matter, the works of both Richter and Tàpies embody notions of memory and identity. The specific kinds of memories and identities portrayed by the two artists are, once again, dissimilar. Nevertheless, careful examination of their artistic and intellectual output suggests a common concern with the link between memory and identity. Yet, they approach this link in significantly different ways. These differences become particularly evident when taking the personal histories of both artists into consideration. This paper illustrates the manner in which these notions reveal themselves.

In the second section of this research paper I discuss several of Gerhard Richter's works. The works that I address in this segment are Richter's series of photo-realistic paintings titled *18. Oktober, 1977*. These works are highly political, for they depict several casualties of the Baader Meinhof Movement in Germany, thus establishing a direct link to issues of collective memory. The paper elaborates on the manner in which medium (oil paint, photographs) and layering are manipulated, thus revealing the political implications embedded in this series of paintings. I pay particular attention to Richter's use of the blurring technique,

and its specific meaning as a layer within photo-realistic painting. The series of works consists of fifteen pieces completed in 1988. The section discusses the manner in which Richter's postmodern works dismiss modern painting and its lack of historical representation. For the discussion, I draw on the theoretical contribution made by Fredric Jameson in his *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.³ My juxtaposition of a historicity of modernism and postmodernity's tendency to reflect on past events is introduced through the lens of Richter's artworks for a reason: Richter's output is a powerful example of this idea, seen especially in the artist's focused consideration of Germany's recent history. His works act as examples of how particular symbols could be representative of notions concerning memory and identity.

In the third section of this paper, I conduct a detailed visual analysis of Antoni Tàpies's works *Soc terra*, 2004 and *Formació=deformació*, also completed in 2004. The myriad of visual cues and symbols found within these two works can be easily traced back to previous pieces created by the artist, thus offering a very fertile ground for discussion. Moreover, these two paintings have not yet been closely analyzed by scholars. I find they act as examples for this paper's proposed thesis: to represent the way in which Tàpies employs layering and matter to express issues of memory and identity. The focus will steer away from the first section's attention to the question of historical representation in

³ Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 3.

postmodernity to a very particular example of an artist who overly represents a history through the medium of painting.

The fourth section of this essay brings the efforts of Tàpies and Richter together. Acting as a conclusive comparative analysis between the two artists, this final section will further explore the differences and similarities between them. Such similarities include their common attitude towards painting, its limitations, and its ability to represent history. Another link between Tàpies and Richter that the final segment of the paper addresses is their use of particular referents within their pieces, which ultimately become symbols that begin to signify alternative sets of ideas. The symbolic valence that their paintings retain becomes even more amplified upon establishing a direct comparison between their specific uses of technique. Richter and Tàpies's paintings are discussed as works attempting to represent certain histories. Ultimately, the histories are represented through the use of reference and symbolism. This is done to speculate the inability to show a singular, linear and definite history, memory, or identity.

By explicating how Richter and Tàpies's works of art address issues of memory and identity through the use of layering and matter, this paper offers a foundation from which further analyses could be conducted. Observing Tàpies and Richter in tandem opens a very promising ground for discussion and research. Where I cannot possibly address all of the facets associated with the body of work concerning the artists, I introduce a subject which offers further research

opportunities. This project allows us to see, feel and understand Richter and Tàpies's art in an alternative manner.

Section II

Gerhard Richter

Postmodern Painting and Memory

This section explores the works of Gerhard Richter. The works I analyze are his series *18. Oktober, 1977* (1988) and the piece *Abstract Painting* (1990). I argue that these paintings undermine modern notions pertaining to artistic representations of history. Richter does this by embracing an anti-aesthetic, and anti-modern style of production,⁴ whereupon his paintings begin to act as objects that address issues of memory and identity. This argument is anchored in my analysis of matter and layering.

Between February and November of 1988 Richter painted fifteen works that he collectively titled *18. Oktober, 1977*. The title refers to the date, during the so-called German Autumn (der Deutsche Herbst), when a violent confrontation between the West German state and the Red Army Faction (RAF) occurred. RAF, also known as the Baader Meinhof Group, was a radical left-wing political organization, whose ultimate goal was to dismantle the democratic regime of the Federal Republic by force. The RAF's efforts ultimately resulted in the deadly

⁴ Ulrich Wilmes, *Gerhard Richter: Large Abstracts* (Munich: HatjeCantzVerlag, 2009), p. 58.

disaster that is referenced in Richter's paintings.⁵ The painting cycle, exceptional in Richter's oeuvre, is an artistic project of profound importance due to its representation of this historical event. According to critics such as Dietmar Elger, no other body of work of twentieth-century art have been so widely discussed or provoked such ongoing controversy in contemporary Germany.⁶

In his *18. Oktober, 1977* works, Richter represents the photographs of the Baader-Meinhof casualties through the medium of painting. The artist's collection of pieces confronts us with the issue of the representation of history within contemporary art. In his series, Richter violates one of the most important norms of the modern art period: the repudiation of historical paintings. The deeply ingrained rejection of historical painting, and thus history, during the modernist period was paralleled by an embrace of the notion of the avant-garde. This gesture rejected historic classicism and the failed tradition of the past.⁷ Thus, by creating a representation of a historical event with this particular series of works, Richter illustrates the gap between modernism (and its denial of history) and post-modernism (and its tendency to address history).⁸ The artist not only violates the modernist art paradigm by displaying history within his artworks, but also violates

⁵ Tony Judt, "Diminished Expectations" in *Post War: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 2006), p. 470.

⁶ Dietmar Elger, *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*, "Stylistic Rupture as Stylistic Principle" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 167.

⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 3.

⁸ Idem., p. 3.

a history that is intended to be hidden.⁹ His representations of the Baader-Meinhof group and their execution in the Stammheim Prison in 1977 illuminate memories that have been deliberately obscured by German culture. In this respect, the 1989 exhibition of his cycle of paintings also acts as a symbol of importance closely linked to the issue of historical memory within German identity. The artworks were displayed in Mies van der Rohe's building, Museum Haus Esters, built in 1930 with the intention to commemorate the multitude of deaths of German revolutionary figures killed by the Berlin police in years of unrest during World War I.¹⁰ There is a continuity between the bourgeois 1920s architect Mies van der Rohe, and the bourgeois 1980s painter Richter, from West Germany. Through their commemoration efforts, both resist the constantly renewed 'collective memory' imparted by the state.¹¹ This memory, in turn, has tremendously shaped the contemporary German identity into a fragmented entity continuously experiencing a sense of damage and reconstruction. Richter points to this deeply embedded cultural paradox and successfully represents it within his works of art. With the postmodern device of addressing history, Richter attempts to fill the gap between memory and presence.

In so doing, he counters withdrawal of historical representation, which is a typical characteristic of modern art. This took place due to the notion that painting

⁹ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *October Magazine*, "A Note on Gerhard Richter's October 18. 1977", *October Magazine Ltd.* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1989), p. 93.

¹⁰ Elger, *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*, p. 301.

¹¹ Buchloh, *A Note on Gerhard Richter's October 18. 1977*, p. 97.

cannot act as a clear representation of an event. The outcome of this attitude were artworks that favored modernist autonomy and the rejection of history in favour of a progressive future.¹² With the advent of photography and the desire for artistic autonomy, historical painting had become obsolete. This case is closely linked to the role of painting in post-modernism. The use of novel media in contemporary art and modern painting's tendency to push aside history, have made painting an arguably outdated manner of contemporary expression. Thus, in his Baader Meinhof series, Richter tackles several issues simultaneously: the representation of history within painting, the role of history within current art practice, and also the possibilities for rehabilitation of painting as an art form. With this, Richter gives new life to painting with his innovative works of art.

Richter addresses the breach between recent German history (the Baader-Meinhof events) and the memory of it through a particular use of layering and matter. The tension between the qualities of painting and photography, notably of painting's self-referentiality in relation to photography's ability to represent reality in a transparent way, shows the contemporary difficulties inherent in the production of history painting. The concept of historical experience particular to German culture becoming a collective catastrophe refuses the claim of modern painting's inability to show contemporary history. This is due to its intrinsic characteristic of self-reference. In turn, photography has been seen as the most accurate manner of capturing contemporary history. This is because it excludes

¹² Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 3.

the process of seeing, interpreting and creating within painting – a notion closely linked to modernity.¹³ Richter’s deliberate combination of both artistic mediums challenges their intended function and conceptual capabilities for representation. Through his use of layering and matter, the artist not only illustrates issues associated with German memory and identity but also those pertaining to the history of the mediums utilized in contemporary art. The constant play between paradoxes shown within Richter’s artworks lends further support to the idea that his pieces act as objects seeking to create a space for a discussion concerning history and identity. This argument is corroborated by the following statement provided by Richter himself:

Their presence is the horror and the hard-to-bear refusal to answer, to explain, to give an opinion. I’m not sure whether the pictures “ask” anything; they provoke contradiction through their hopelessness and desolation, their lack of partisanship.¹⁴

The expression of history and identity is seen in the manner in which Richter chooses his subject matter in the work *18. Oktober, 1977*. The victims represented in his cycle of works are not arbitrary, but are rather selected from a very specific historical moment. Richter does not dehumanize the subjects of his works in an

¹³ Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: October 18. 1977* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2000), p. 45.

¹⁴ Elger, *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*, p. 167.

attempt to convey a collective amnesia to death. Instead, the artist represents the act of recalling personal experience in relation to history.

By painting, Richter has attempted to reverse the obsolescence of historical paintings, thus exhibiting another dichotomy typical of the artist's oeuvre. Modernism's rejection of history makes history inaccessible, thus contributing to historical amnesia. How, then, is it possible to paint contemporary history paintings? Richter attempts to address and fill this void in his series of paintings – to reflect contemporary repression through its representation. The Baader-Meinhof Group's recent activities have also, much like fascism, become a subject of collective German repression. What Richter's work proposes, in turn, is for the German culture's collective reflection upon its previous history.¹⁵

In his attempt to commemorate the victims associated with the Red Army Faction whose history has been consciously repressed, Richter opens up a space for the reflection of the group's activities. Richter's paintings not only allow the German audience to consider its ordered history and its controlled memory; they also raise issues pertaining to the notion of painting and its ability to adequately represent issues relevant to contemporary culture.

A fascinating aspect of Richter's paintings is his use of the blur as a technique: all of his photo works appear unclear and foggy. The artist has taken the original image, the photograph, and has represented it by painting it, thus

¹⁵ Buchloh, *A Note on Gerhard Richter's October 18. 1977*, p. 103.

separating the image from its previous form. Then he has transformed the canvas's surface through his use of blurring, in turn, making the image unclear. With this deliberate gesture, the paintings gain the quality of the uncanny. A sense of the uncanny is achieved through the artist's fragmentation of his works' surfaces, with the various layers further separating the work from the event: the actual-life incidents that had taken place during October of 1977. However, I believe that rather than separating the work from reality and further obscuring the event, Richter adds a sense of clarity to his pieces, and thus to the incident itself. The blurring of the surfaces of the paintings make them seem more real, for the uncanny effect of his work lies in the perfect representation of a representation (the painting of a photograph), rather than in the process of obscuring. His works appear ghostly and unreadable, enabling Richter to showcase the inherent dishonesty in representation. This makes his paintings excellent visual signs that exemplify the inability to show a historical event, or memory of it, in an overt and linear manner. The blurring of the Baader-Meinhof images acts as a portrayal of the obstruction of a memory. His works offer a certain solution to the question of painting's capability of clear representation in this particular case. If history and memory cannot be honestly represented through the medium of painting, then the techniques implemented by Richter point to the origin of the problem. The problem is the very murkiness and lack of representation of history altogether. Moreover, the implementation of the blur and the realistic painting of photographs portraying the event, show the very condition of contemporary German memory.

Therefore, Richter's representations of the historical event are accurate: they convey the ghostly presence of a memory, and its blurred existence in contemporary culture.

Richter's abstract pieces show a different way in which the artist addresses memory and identity through the manipulation of matter. The notion of painting's inability to provide a clear representation of history is also seen in his work *Abstract Painting*, 1990. Richter's abstract paintings are usually created using photographs, and then stamping, adding and subtracting of paint to for added visual effect. His *Abstract Painting* shows white paint very finely worked into a grey ground, with clearly visible, regular brushstrokes. The white paint appears only as a highlight, thus giving a slight visual lift to the canvas through the use of optical illusion. This monochromatic image is visually opaque. There are no clearly defined elements present in the painting, such as color, line or shape. It looks muddy, and uncertain. The zones of ambiguity within or around the image that Richter aimed to represent were of greater importance to him than the image itself, which he stated in a diary entry in 1965:

All that interests me is the grey areas, the passages and tonal sequences, the pictorial spaces, overlaps and interlockings. If I had any way of

abandoning the object as the bearer of this structure, I would immediately start painting abstracts.¹⁶

Here, Richter clearly identifies the kind of abstraction that he was aiming to produce, in that his piece shows an ambiguous painterly dimension where matter never fully declares itself.¹⁷ In this respect, the artist's work is strictly defined by process: within his paintings Richter uses blurring and scraping techniques to veil and expose some of the numerous layers present in his pieces. Richter's method is basically additive. He covers up one layer by creating another, a process that frequently involves the deliberate scratching of a painting's surface with a hard-edge tool. He then smears the paint on the canvas, thus producing an austere sense of remoteness and obscurity within the piece.¹⁸

Although these surfaces no longer work as homogenous flat exteriors that aim to provide clear representation through a direct manipulation of matter and layering, Richter does not obliterate representation with abstraction. Instead, starting with an empty canvas he simultaneously attempts to picture negation and presence, thus trying to give his work a substantial definition in the hope of forestalling entropy. The collapse of representation that Richter attempts to avoid

¹⁶ Gerhard Richter, Dietmar Elger and Hans-Ulrich Obrist, *Gerhard Richter: Writings 1961-2007* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2009), p. 33.

¹⁷ Schwartz, Dieter, *Gerhard Richter: Survey* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2002), p. 60.

¹⁸ Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Doubt and Belief in Painting* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003), p. 174.

within his abstract work is one closely associated with the inability to represent history through painting.

Gerhard Richter's process of creation closely considers painting and the historical implications associated with it. Richter challenges the possibilities of unambiguous history and memory. He does so, once again, by the blurring of his canvases. This act consequently leads to the dismissal of a representational surface. In this case, the term 'representational surface' acts as a metaphor for abstract art. The artist fragments the abstract space through his conscious manipulation of layering and matter. However, the fragmentation of the painted surface becomes productive rather than counteractive for the medium of expression. This takes place due to Richter's ability to open up a novel space within which painting can take on an alternative form, a form reached through an embodiment of paradoxes within the discourses in which the artist works. Painting, as previously mentioned, is heavily imbued with modernist ideals – ideals that Richter undoes through his very utilization of the medium. Abstraction is a mode of production characteristic of modernity and its ideologies concerning homogeneity and autonomy. Taking this into account, Richter chooses to work in this vein and push it further through his addition of the blur. This form of creation and technique allows the artist to convey social issues of memory and identity through the use of layering and matter.

The themes of memory and identity permeate many of Richter's works. They are brought up through the artist's particular use of technique, which lends to the rejection of modern ideologies. The rejection of history in the name of the pursuit for something novel and pure is a notion heavily linked to modernism, an idea that today seems obsolete. Richter's works reflect post-modernism's tendency to recall, reflect and represent history. The artist directly addresses the issues responsible for the creation of his pieces, such as *Abstract Painting*.

Richter utilizes a post-modern technique of flattening his surfaces. This is done not in order to represent the obsolete quality of history, and thus of painting, but rather to open up a space for their discussion. Through the use of such tools, Richter's work is suggestive of the existence of an inherent referent that remains constantly intact. The reconciliation of the various differences between modernism and post-modernism has offered an alternative reading of Richter's paintings – a reading supporting the notion that art can convey history – and with it, memory and identity.

Section III

Antoni Tàpies

Signs in *Soc terra* and *Formació=deformación*

This section provides a visual analysis of several paintings created by the Catalan artist, Antoni Tàpies, with the objective of presenting his work in a novel light. My examination of Tàpie's work demonstrates a recurring theme in his oeuvre: the notions of memory and identity on both a personal and a collective level. By further analysis of his pieces, the ideas concerning memory and identity point towards one major issue which Tàpies overtly emphasizes – an acute sense of nationalism and Catalan cultural identity.¹⁹ These themes are directly represented on Tàpies's various canvases, most notably through the use of layering and matter. The two paintings that I analyze here are his works *Soc terra* (2004) and *Formació=deformació*, also completed in 2004.

The fact that both paintings have been produced rather recently opens certain opportunities. One of these opportunities is to discuss individual works which have not been previously debated in existing scholarship. The recent creation of the two paintings also allows me to trace a lineage of recurring themes and motives found in earlier works created by the artist. There are many

¹⁹ Barbara Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1991), p. 14.

recurring techniques that can be noticed in pieces made decades prior to the two images discussed. Drawing on previous authors' treatments of Antoni Tàpies regarding his history, both personal and public, facilitates a deeper understanding of *Soc terra* and *Formació=deformació*.

Antoni Tàpies has been widely discussed in Western European scholarship for a long time now. He has fascinated critics, art historians and other artists alike for many reasons. One of the most prominent was the intellectual ideas the artist openly expressed both verbally and artistically in his active life time.²⁰ His works have often been credited as pieces which retain mystic symbols aiming to represent the artist's personal vision of a culture, specifically the Catalan culture. The complex history of Catalonia is credited as one of the most important factors that affected the work of Tàpies.²¹ The impact of his work is seen through the use of recurring visual symbols, or though his tendency to draw inspiration for his works from the efforts of Catalan historical intellectuals. Most importantly, Tàpies's early paintings (dating back to the 1940s)²² were produced during the repressive rule of General Francisco Franco (1936-1975).²³ Franco's dictatorship facilitated the rise of Catalan nationalism and, to a lesser degree, separatism. Along with other Catalans, Tàpies was driven towards evident acts of

²⁰ Manuel Borja-Villel, *Tàpies: In Perspective*, (Barcelona: MACBA, 2004), p. 87.

²¹ Idem., p. 87.

²² Idem., p. 87.

²³ Antonio Cazorla Sánchez, *Fear and Progress: Ordinary Lives In Franco's Spain* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), p. 6-11.

ethnonationalist affirmation.²⁴ These acts of affirmation took on various forms. The three most evident ways in which Catalan people were affected by the Catalan nationalist movement are as follows: acute sense of preservation of cultural identity in small communities; the transmission of this identity on a more formal level (through the Catholic Church); and the commitment to a national (if not nationalist) ideological vision of Catalonia through the help of underground political parties.²⁵ The first type of expression was manifested in the use of Catalan language as a form of national affirmation. During his rule, Franco outlawed the use of any language other than Castilian (Spanish) in his pursuit of Spanish national hegemony.²⁶ To counter the prohibition of its use, the preservation of small libraries containing books written in Catalan by nationalist intellectuals in cities such as Tàpies's native Barcelona kept Catalan alive as a language. Furthermore, emerging from Catalan people's deep drive towards national, historical and cultural affirmation, a lore romanticizing Catalan culture became pronounced. This lore was transmitted mainly orally, in small communities such as families.²⁷

On the official level of Catalan nationalist expression, a variety of social groups facilitated the transmission and maintenance of Catalan identity on a larger scale. A number of such organizations fell under the umbrella of the Catholic

²⁴ Josep R. Llobera, *Foundations of National Identity: From Catalonia to Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), p.16-20.

²⁵ Idem., p. 16-20.

²⁶ Idem., p. 16-20.

²⁷ Idem., p. 16-20.

Church, though they were quite heterogeneous and included literary, political and artistic organizations. The third way in which nationalist awakening was fostered was through various underground political parties which advocated the cause of Catalan nationalism and separatism.²⁸ During Francoism, Tàpies participated in one of the first post-war movements in Francoist Spain, *Dau al Set*.²⁹ His goal, along with the other co-founder of this political/artistic organization, Joan Brossa, was for that particular re-awakening and preservation of Catalan national identity in its push towards separatism.

The repressive atmosphere of Francoist Spain present between the years of 1936 and 1975 profoundly influenced Tàpies's early and recent artistic output.³⁰ Tàpies employed a variety of post-modern techniques in his works, including the rejection of the use of traditional art media such as oil paint. Tàpies states that his move away from classical materials could be read as spitting in the face of a conservative Francoist society.³¹ His dislike for the topical quality of oil paint is clearly expressed, as his belief is that this medium is reflective of an accepted, conceited and classical world.

Tàpies quickly turned towards the use of non-traditional media, such as found man-made and organic objects, and became obsessed with the material-ness of this particular kind of matter. The artist interpreted his interest in use of thick,

²⁸ Idem., 16-20.

²⁹ Anna Agustí, Georges Raillard and Miquel Tàpies, *Tàpies: The Complete Works, Volume 1: 1943-1960* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1988), p. 104.

³⁰ Sánchez, *Fear and Progress: Ordinary Lives In Franco's Spain*, p. 6-11.

³¹ Borja-Villel, *Tàpies: In Perspective*, p. 51-57.

full-bodied, raw matter as a manifestation of his desire to convey things in their truest form. This drive did not arise from a desire to portray an ideal. Rather, it aimed to represent a total and veritable reality of which everything is physically composed.³² The independent objects which Tàpies began to employ in the creation of his pieces thus suggest that paintings no longer describe things – they become things in themselves. This drive and desire to represent his contemporary world as it was, through the utilization of objects found in this natural world, is suggestive of the artist's direct orientation towards the presenting of reality – rather than its representation. What there was to be presented was a world laden by political unrest and turmoil which could not be avoided, but rather, addressed.

Tàpies's personal belief was that artists had to be cognisant of the social, political and historical realities of their world.³³ Tàpies's stated in one of the interviews conducted by the contemporary Spanish art historian Manuel Borja-Villel: "If I wanted art to be truly the explanation and support of mankind, how could I shun social and political struggles?"³⁴ Tàpies's orientation towards expressing the viable reality surrounding him at that particular time period shaped the manner in which he produced his various canvases.

The works which I am addressing in this paper have not been made during the Francoist period, but rather well after it had ended, in 2004. However, many of the signs and symbols which Tàpies has previously expressed in earlier works

³² Idem., p. 51-57.

³³ Idem., p. 51-57.

³⁴ Idem., p. 51-57.

persist and suggest an specific mark. This mark, unlike the earlier ones striving to make Catalonia an independent state both culturally and politically, could be seen through the lens of the aftermath of an event in time. The marks which Tàpies left in the last years of his life are instead signs of framing, rather than of direct addressing, as seen in his earlier paintings. Framing refers to the re-contextualizing of historical events so they can be understood in a present context. The objects which Tàpies's utilizes do not fall into a state of decay like ruins would, for the way in which Tàpies constructs his signs re-visits and thus, re-contextualizes certain pre-existing frames (both personal and collective).³⁵ On this note, Tàpies's later paintings frame the memory of something which cannot be forgotten. This precise memory is the one of an independent Catalan culture, which is not manifested in a call for separation from Castilian Spain. Instead, the memory conveys an independence of cultural identity and history.

Antoni Tàpies's paintings, *Soc terra* and *Formació=deformació* were produced in 2004 in Barcelona, where Tàpies was born and lived all his life.³⁶ *Soc terra* has been made using soil, spray paint, and pencil on canvas, whereas the latter painting was produced by the use of marble dust, synthetic resin, and oil paint on wood.³⁷ I discuss these works because visually, they encompass a variety of signs which are highly representative of issues concerning memory and identity. In order to further analyze the pieces, first I address the manner in which

³⁵ Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, p. 17.

³⁶ Fundació Tàpies, *Antoni Tàpies: New Paintings* (New York: Pacewildenstein, 2006), p. 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

the artist utilizes matter, and secondly, how this matter produces a variety of layers that speak of the two issues in question.

Matter and Layering

The particular use of matter that Tàpies uses in his painting, *Soc terra*, is typical of his earlier work. In this canvas, one can see that the artist has used earth by its placement on the bottom side of the painting. The long, smeared gesture is uneven, as parts of the soil are more pronounced in certain areas, whereas in others they wash out and appear translucent. The artist has manipulated the soil by deducting from its mass in order to create a negative imprint of a human hand. Essential for this work are the intentional elements with which Tàpies begins to give form to matter. In the titles of his pieces, the artist does not speak of an “arm”, “foot”, or “bed”, but of matter that takes on the form of an “arm”, “foot”, or “bed”.³⁸ Tàpies’s works can be approached in an alternative way: from his writing of visibility. This sense of visibility suggests a truly visual writing that is disconnected and separated from its original referent. Where Tàpies paints a leg or a torso, and in this case – a human hand, there is, in fact, neither a leg, torso, nor a human hand. Instead, there appears the form, or the imprint, of a leg, torso or human hand.

³⁸ Borja-Villel, *Tàpies: In Perspective*, p. 58-62.

This play of presence and absence (the presence of the sign with the absence of the referent) provides clues to some of the main themes found in Tàpies's work. These themes include the expatriated body, the lost body and the absent body. This notion is not immediately evident in the work, but can rather be gleaned from the experience of dispossession that traces the absence through the writing (painting) and through the forms (matter). Such themes can suggest the experience of the wounded, amputated or fragmented body. What becomes clear from this reading of Tàpies's utilization of matter is the idea of the absent body. What is left on the canvas is the body as a trace, or an imprint.³⁹ This speaks to concepts of the body's relationship with memory and identity. The body is the vehicle which collects and retains memories. It is also the vehicle through which identity is expressed. The body, as it is represented in *Soc terra* is thus fragmented and absent. It is a collection of various forms, which symbolize something that is no longer there. The presence is a memory of the body (which in this particular case points to identity).

This memory in Tàpies's paintings is framed to be re-created and affirmed as something like a present ghost. This ghost, in my reading of the painting, refers to the ghost of Catalan memory and identity. It is a ghost that has lost its original substance, and is not an absent imprint. That is not to say that it does not exist. Rather, it embodies itself through other signs, such as dirt. The dirt used for the production of this piece could directly relate to the notion of territorial identity, in

³⁹ Idem., p. 58-62.

a very overt way. This earth has been extracted from Tàpies native city, Barcelona. It is the earth that people assume is theirs, and the earth which the nationalists, throughout recent Spanish history, attempted to sever into a separate state. On this note, another visual cue that is of importance when looking at Tàpies's paintings is his utilization of graffiti.

The use of writing on his canvases appears as hieroglyphic symbols. His interest in this technique can be traced back to his interest in the works of Dadaist and Surrealist painters and intellectuals such as Joan Miró or Andre Breton who utilize the form of automatic writing as part of their working process.⁴⁰ These artists unconsciously created signs that were not linked to a concrete reality. These signs also acted as absent referents out of which a novel symbol, or sign, could emerge. The symbol thus became representative of something outside of itself. Hence, the idea of presence and absence of the body (the thing, the tangible referent) are highlighted. However, what is emphasized in the instance of creating a visual cue resembling graffiti is the perpetrator. This becomes evident because of the Western cultural notion of graffiti as an act of disobedience, and a mark of expression exercised by the underdog. The underdog, in this case, is exemplified by Catalonia. The perpetrator is Antoni Tàpies.

In his essay, *Communication on the Wall*, Tàpies expresses his view of his canvases acting as walls.⁴¹ For Tàpies, the idea and the image of the wall, whether as a symbol of spiritual solitude or political and religious suppression, holds a

⁴⁰ Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, p. 53.

⁴¹ Antoni Tàpies, *Communication on the Wall* (Barcelona: Fundació Tàpies, 1992), p. 12-14.

multitude of various meanings. In his essay, the artist lists the various associations he makes with walls as an open canvas onto which graffiti can be applied. Some of these associations point to literal imprisonment, the passing of time and particularly the signs of human imprints.⁴² These imprints have been made for a particular reason. The reason, beside an expression of the self, is an affirmation of the self. This affirmation takes place upon the placement of an individual mark, representative of a presence. These marks can be considered as ruins. The ruin serves as an archive which retains the memory of something which was and now is gone. People revisit the ruins, and by doing so, they re-affirm their vestigial presence. While these marks have lost the presence of meaning, they signify an absent object and a past. The surface of this past retains a significant amount of layers, both of history and of memories. These memories belong to the perpetrator who has added to the layers of history.

In the same vein, Tàpies's graffiti works could be understood as marks. They begin to signify a ruin, and thus, a ground fertile with time and memories. The signs which he applies have also lost their original meaning, for they pointed directly to political graffiti illegally painted on the walls of Barcelona during the move towards Franco-era separatism.⁴³ The original intention in the past responsible for this graffiti no longer conforms to the context of presence. At the time Tàpies produced *Soc terra*, the original context was not present either.

⁴² Idem., p. 12-14.

⁴³ Anna Agustí, Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Miquel Tàpies. *Tàpies: The Complete Works, Volume 3: 1969-1975* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1992), p. 201.

Instead, the ruin of the past was re-framed and re-visited by the artist in order for it to be understood in the present. The artist does so by constructing new meanings from old referents. This led to the amplification of the idea of the absence of the event which is now lost in time and kept in the cultural memory of the Catalan citizens. However, Tàpies's take on these matters through re-visiting re-contextualized the memory itself in a contemporary vein. Now, the graffiti which he employs on his canvases stand for signs of a ghost, rather than of ruins. This present ghost is the one of cultural collective memory pointing to a particular sense of identity and nationalism which is not exhausted. It is present and translucent, like a fog, or like a blur.

Another sign that I discuss in this painting is the cross, which is a recurring visual symbol found within the works of Tàpies. The particular cross found in the work *Soc terra* is made from dirt. Art historians often see the use of the cross as a direct religious symbol, reminiscent of the Catalan Catholic Church.⁴⁴ This position could be argued, for the very symbol itself retains a much more powerful reference. In contemporary culture, the cross can be read as possessing any of the following significances: a ceremonial symbol found within most cultures, a geographical position (axes crossing), a candidate's voice, a mark of faith, and also erasure.⁴⁵ In Tàpies's own words:

⁴⁴ Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Serge Guilbaut. *Tàpies: Comunicació sobre el mur* (València: IVAM, Centro Julio González, 1992), p. 18.

A cross could be a shape for expressing something spacious; such as the coordinators of space. That could be called its first significance or its first relevance. A cross could equally stand for crossing something out. It could also be a sign of obstruction. An overturned cross, an X so to speak, could be the symbol of mystery, something for the other side. Then I could paint a cross in such a way that a connection is made between two bars, and in doing so convert it into a symbol of the unlimited. So, many different crosses and X symbols occur in my works.⁴⁶

This attitude directly points to the artist's interest in the symbolic. The previous two signs which were discussed in regards to the painting become emphasized. The act of referring to an alternative set of notions is accounted for. In this particular one, the cross itself is representative of a variety of symbols as well. One reference can allude to crossing axes between Spain and Catalonia. The intersection is dramatic, for both axes continue on in their specific directions. However, the point where the crossing occurs is small. Regardless, it is this point that determines the inherent form of the cross, and the direction in which the axes will continue progressing. This sign of infinity serves as a powerful tool within the visual output of Antoni Tàpies. Moreover, in the painting *Soc terra*, this visual tool is imprinted in dirt. As previously discussed, dirt is read as the representation of land, a land carrying Catalan national identity. Tàpies does not always utilize organic matter to represent this symbol. In other paintings, such as *Formació=deformació*, the artist once again utilizes the cross, but this time using paint.

⁴⁶Achim Sommer, *Tàpies, Werke Auf Papier 1943-2003* (Kunsthalle Emden, Atlanta: 2004), p. 27.

In *Formació=deformació*, the cross is not only shown through the manipulation of a medium. It is also transformed in order to resemble a recognizable object – a hammer. Perhaps it is the image of the hammer that is transformed into the cross. This blurring of the two begins to convey the interchangeability between the archive and the ruin. The ruin, thus the cross, stands as a metaphor for Catalonia's past. The archive (the hammer) represents the re-contextualization instilled by the artist's gesture. The remembrance, and the re-visiting of the ruin, is a ruin within itself. The use of matter, as seen in *Soc terra*, points to the play between object and subject. The suggestion of something which is not present but is formed by the manipulated by the artist matter alludes to notions regarding memory. Its representation shows the absence of the actual body. The fact that the hammer has been carved out and subtracted from the positive space of the painting (the thick layer of marble dust and oil paint) strongly suggests the absence of the actual object. The decision to not represent the subject matter through the use of primary materials speaks of the imprint of the form, rather than the form itself. Linked to notions of the absence of an event and the presence of a certain memory, the subject matter of the painting is further emphasized by the artist's use of graffiti writing again.

Unlike in his work, *Soc terra*, the writing found on the surface of *Formació=deformació* was not made using spray paint. The artist instead utilizes the medium of oil paint in order to inscribe the following recognizable words: *DEFORMACIÓ=FORMACIÓ*, seen on the left-hand side of the painting, and

FORMACIÓ=DEFORMACIÓ, seen on the right hand-side of the painting. The words are marked vertically, letter by letter, on either side of the canvas. In this inscription, they are not arranged nor spaced systematically. The letters are placed arbitrarily when considering letter size, the direction towards which the different letters point and overall painting composition. If judged by the words solely by themselves, the painting would appear asymmetrical and unbalanced. However, balance and symmetry do not seem to be of utmost concern for Tàpies. This is illustrated especially when taking into account the nature of these marks. As discussed, the utilization of graffiti had been conducted in order to create a trace. This trace would convey a sense of presence (through the emphasis of the perpetrator's absence).⁴⁷ What the use of graffiti also does is mark a moment of expression, trapped in time. This moment is forever placed in the archive of history. The archive of history retains the memories of graffiti found in the alleys of Barcelona, expressing the citizens' civil unrest and desire for state separation from Franco's oppressive regime. Tàpies's canvas begins to act as a wall. On this wall, the words *formació* and *deformació* could be read. In direct translation to English from Catalan, the signs suggest "formation" and "deformation". As one side of the painting states that deformation equals formation, and the other shows that formation equals deformation. The interchangeability of cause and effect once again point to the fluidity of memory and the manner in which it is layered.

⁴⁷ Borja-Villel, *Tàpies: Comunicació sobre el mur*, p. 19.

It emphasizes the fluidity of identity, and particularly, the fluidity of the matter that Tàpies manipulates.

Tàpies's works provide a fertile ground for discussion. The manner in which he utilizes signs has been mastered through the use of particular kind of matter and through the way the artist has layered the chosen material. All of these factors show Tàpies's intellectual output: his desire to address contemporary politics and a cultural reality through the medium of art. Tàpies addresses issues concerning memory and identity. These notions are traced on both a personal and collective level, for his paintings *Soc terra* and *Formació=deformació* exemplify the use of the symbolic in order to represent the individual and the social. The memories and identities that Tàpies brings forth in his work are ruins. These ruins successfully convey the absence of the whole by representing a mere fragment. However, it is impossible to fully label Tàpies's signs as ruins. This is because the Catalan identity he brings forth is not forgotten. Rather, it has entered the collective memory of his co-nationals.

Section IV

Gerhard Richter, Antoni Tàpies, and History

Thus far this paper has attempted to convey the manner in which Antoni Tàpies and Gerhard Richter have performed as artists independently of one another. Yet, through my research, I discovered many links between their practices. For example, far from being a triumph of modern painting, the works of Tàpies instead demonstrate the limits of modernist approach. The very same idea is professed by Richter in his paintings from the series *18. Oktober, 1977* and *Abstract Painting*.

One of the key limitations of modern art is its refusal to represent the past, in favor for a novel, avant-garde future. Both artists discussed in this thesis, Gerhard Richter and Antoni Tàpies, engage in criticising this position. They do so by dismissing modern notions regarding the autonomy of artwork and art's detachment from its environment and history. The artists create a series of paintings which overtly address and analyze history, particularly focusing on notions of memory and identity.

Each artist's mode of representing history and its reality is highly idiosyncratic. Tàpies's works often tend to convey the inability to represent reality

(history) through the use of overt signs. This is why the artist manipulates signs and remodels the meaning of their referents and significations. During this process Tàpies attempts to directly confront, rather than represent reality. His confrontation occurs when his paintings themselves become the object. The material becomes the thing that stands as a sign for memory and for identity.

Richter's canvases exhibit the inability to represent reality due to the intrinsic ambiguity of history. The blurry memory of history, and thus of reality, is accounted for by a personal, or a collective experience with it. This impossibility of accurate representation of an event, present in the visual and intellectual output of both artists suggests that history proves to be a multi-layered phenomenon, rather than a linear and progressive one. This notion once again disproves the basic conceptual framework of modernity and its firm belief of history existing on a single, transparent plane which is commonly known and globally understood in the same way.

Richter is sensitive to this notion, as seen in his series of paintings *18. Oktober, 1977*. The artist conveys the impossibility to represent the event crucial to German history by his use of the blur. His specific use of technique shows the elemental opaqueness of memory, and thus of history. On the other hand, Tàpies salvages representation by his use of the symbol, suggestive of the existence of a said referent which can never again be depicted in its *true* form. This

impossibility results from the multiplicity of histories determining, and affecting, the referent.

Representation of absence is another common denominator between Richter and Tàpies, a commonality which further complicates the artists' relationship. The way Tàpies manipulates matter is expressive and direct, as previously discussed. In his paintings, matter is tangible, raw and often three-dimensional. Richter's paintings show the artist's manipulation of matter which is flat, classical (oil paint, photography) and two-dimensional. Regardless of this intrinsic difference in the utilization of the medium, both artists ultimately represent a sense of absence. In Tàpies's case, the absence of the referent is amplified by his creation and use of various signifiers (matter). In Richter's case, the notion of absence is apparent due to the artist's use of technique, specifically the blur. Richter flattens his subject matter, making it appear as if it lacks a body, texture, and life. With the flattening of the surface of his paintings, the artist also flattens the sense of time. This, in turn, highlights the absence of the figures represented and their death. The subjects in his series of photo-realistic paintings *18. Oktober, 1977* appear as corpses forever suspended in their particular time, and history.

Both artists attempt to demonstrate history through art that does not follow to the goal of creating absolute representation of reality. Arguably, they do this because they believe that art is intrinsically incapable of offering such

representations. Their works show signs which remind of reality, but these signs, and thus reality, are altered to such an extent that the representations begin to act as ruins of an intended original. These ruins signify a past. The ruins are re-framed by both Richter and Tàpies through their paintings. Their re-framing re-contextualizes history, while the events which the artists attempt to represent gain a different meaning to our contemporary environment. Thus, the artists open a novel space for discussion of memory and identity. This discussion does not necessary have to be verbal. Rather, it is a discussion addressing the existing condition of history and its effects through visual representations. In this attempt to challenge history, both artists deploy notions of memory and of identity: for Tàpies, a personal memories and identity; for Richter, the German past and its effect on the present.

Richter, unlike Tàpies, conceals history through his utilization of the blur. However, the blur's very presence brings Richter's paintings closer to reality. His works show the human hand at work while attempting to capture a photographic image. They convey the inability of photographs to capture a real moment and the inability to represent this moment through painting. All of these factors point to the ultimate failure in the desire to represent an absolute and singular reality. The same principle can also be seen in the works of Tàpies. Antoni Tàpies does not simply represent an impossibility of images. He also tackles the notion of impossibility of clear representation by manipulating matter so that it becomes representative of reality without directly representing it. The ruins whose

memories the artists' works retain are not dead. Rather, they are living on the level of personal and collective memories which play out on a regular basis, and in the everyday of Germany and Catalonia. Tàpies and Richter's work attempts to penetrate beyond the superficial reality of objects and history, in favor of representing the multi-layered nature of memory, identity, and the events which shape these two phenomena.

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