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Regarding Terror: On Art and Politics

Abstract

'Regarding Terror: The RAF Exhibition', held in Berlin in 2005, presented art works and documents dealing with the Red Army Faction (or Baader-Meinhof Group), a left-wing terrorist association active in Germany from the late 1960s until well after the controversial deaths of key members of the group in 1977. For some, the initial plans for the exhibition threatened to turn the RAF into heroes at the expense of any acknowledgement of the RAF's victims. As a result, the government withdrew its funding, the exhibition was reconceptualised, and it was decided to present the material in as unbiased way as possible. The controversy and discussion surrounding 'Regarding Terror' exposes some critical issues regarding art's relationship with politics. It is argued in this article that while individual art works and curatorial decisions influence our responses to political issues, shortcomings exist in the way the relationship between art and its subject matter is implicitly understood. These issues are explored by investigating the extent to which the fears about the exhibition and the debate surrounding it are indicative of a need to rethink the relationship between art and politics in the light of considerations of the implications of art's autonomy and of art's relationship with reality. Such a rethinking would bring into focus the nature of art's responsibility to politics.

In 2003, the German public became aware of a plan by Berlin's Kunst-Werke gallery to host an exhibition dealing with the Baader-Meinhof Group, or Red Army Faction, a left wing terrorist association active in Germany from the late 1960s until its official disbanding in 1998. The initial plan for the exhibition was that it would demythologise this extremely controversial group.¹ Serious concerns were raised by families of victims and by politicians who feared that the exhibition would romanticise the terrorists at the expense of their victims. The debate was played out publicly in tabloid newspapers and this publicity had direct consequences for the staging of the exhibition: the withdrawal by the government of its funding for the exhibition, and the gallery's decision to postpone the exhibition until 2005, in order to rethink the exhibition itself and to acquire funding from other sources. Rather than setting out to demythologise the group, the 2005 exhibition, titled 'Regarding Terror: The RAF Exhibition', simply presented documents and art works dealing with the RAF, with little or no explicit desire on the part of the curators to make comment either on the group or on representations of them.

This exhibition represents an opportunity to investigate some critical issues regarding the relationship between art and politics. An examination of the exhibition, and in particular the assumptions that inform the discussion surrounding it, raise a series of key questions. If art has political responsibilities, how might we characterise these responsibilities? If politics to some degree needs art in order to develop an historical understanding of certain kinds of subject matter, and an opportunity for reflection on that subject matter, what might it mean for art to assume such a role? And if these responsibilities to and for politics coexist with an understanding of art's autonomy, how does this impact on an understanding of art's 'status'? Through consideration of these questions, it is argued here that this exhibition exposes the need to probe deeply our understanding of the relationship between art and politics, requiring nothing less than a reconsideration of our understanding of art.

¹ Rebbert, 2005, p. 58.

The questions that emerge from an analysis of 'Regarding Terror' are tied up with the notion that there is a serious need for art to deal with political subject matter. 'Politics' and the 'political' are used here to refer to that which pertains to public life and the concerns of the state, in this case Germany. Art's capacity to represent and reflect on politics and political history means that art has a potentially significant role in establishing and perpetuating collective political memory: it is in this sense that art has a responsibility to politics. That art is a necessary component of political 'remembering' is an idea which attends to much of the discussion regarding the way that Germany has dealt with its history, and is especially relevant to the exhibition under discussion here.



Gerhard Richter, *Uncle Rudi*, 87 x 50 cm, oil on canvas, 1965. Czech Museum of Fine Arts, Prague, Lidice Collection. Courtesy Gerhard Richter.

Since the late 1980s, critical debate around the representation of the past by German artists has been less to do with whether or not art 'should' deal with political history and more to do, as Andreas Huyssen has pointed out, with *how* art should represent and remember history. The extent of art's agency within this political realm is crucial.² These critical implications extend well beyond the staging of an exhibition such as 'Regarding Terror'. To take just one example, similar ideas preoccupy much of the discussion around Gerhard Richter's work (which was represented in 'Regarding Terror'). For instance, Benjamin Buchloh, in his discussion of Richter's 1965 painting of his Nazi *Uncle Rudi* (1965) (fig. 1), made a significant point when he wrote that the work represents both the *historical necessity* to remember this difficult political subject matter *and* art's inadequacy at providing historical memory.³ Buchloh's passing comment targets the role of art in the presentation of the history of politics, inviting consideration of the potential problems attendant with artists' attempts to use art as a way of constructing or continuing historical memory. In relation to 'Regarding Terror', of central concern is the extent to which art might be understood (or not) to influence political thinking and action; particularly in the ways feared by those members of the public and the government who were most concerned about the exhibition. Both Buchloh's comment and the debate surrounding the initial announcement of the exhibition raise questions not only about art's capacity to influence political thinking and vice-versa, but also about the precise scope of art's responsibility to politics.

According to the curators, the aim of the 2005 exhibition was not to present a political point of view or to influence the public in any particular way. It should also be noted that the exhibition was not concerned primarily with presenting works of art. Rather, the mandate set by the curators was to present 'found' images and documents relating to the representation and history of the RAF, thus holding up a mirror to the representation of the RAF. To this end, alongside the 89 art works by 48 artists featured in the exhibition, 'Regarding Terror' also included copies of newspaper and magazines articles dealing with the RAF from across the political spectrum, as well as television news reports. Curators Klaus Biesenbach, Ellen Blumenstein and Felix Ensslin (abandoned son of RAF member Gudrun Ensslin), wrote that 'The aim of the exhibition is to reveal these public spheres [of various media, as well as art] as diversely as possible by exhibiting what was, and, through the selection of sources and artistic works, to document the possibilities of perception that are structured by the media.' Through the media images presented, they argued, 'one can see what one could see at that time and what, in this "being seen", decisively moulded the "imagining of terror and the imagining of the RAF" in West German society.'⁴ In other words, the curators set out to re-present (but not necessarily comment on or change the meaning of) perceptions of the RAF. Declaring his desire to be impartial, Biesenbach also regularly commented that the list of artists for the exhibition would have been similar to that compiled by anyone conducting an internet search.⁵

Implicit here is the notion that art is an historical document like any other. In attempting to disavow the presentation of any politics of their own – apart from,

² Huyssen, 1989, p. 30.

³ Buchloh, 1996, p. 64.

⁴ Both quotes: Biesenbach, Blumenstein and Ensslin, 2005a.

⁵ Rebbert, 2005, p. 58.

crucially, the need to remember and reflect on history through an examination of art, along with media documents – the exhibition organisers seemed to assume that art's relationship with politics is little different to that of newspaper articles, even if, as the curators themselves noted, the art works often reflect on the representations of the RAF by the media.⁶ The curators' apparently unbiased and uncritical approach to political material was no doubt a response to the controversy surrounding the initial announcement of the proposed exhibition and the resultant withdrawal of public funds. At the same time, the curators sought to use the exhibition format as an opportunity to reflect on the history of the RAF and on perceptions of them in a way not dissimilar to Buchloh's call for art to represent political subject matter, however difficult that subject matter, and however difficult it may be for art to perform that memorialising function. While the exhibition was purportedly about examining the representation of the RAF without taking any political stand, the curators shied away from discussions about the politics of their own desire to stage the exhibition in the first place. They also avoided considering art's intrinsic relationship with its subject matter, and the political and ethical implications of that relationship.

That the curators were relatively successful in sidestepping deeper discussion of the relationship between art and politics is evidenced by the critical response to the 2005 exhibition. Most commentaries also steered clear of raising serious questions about the relationship between art and its subject matter. While many critics argued that the exhibition included some important and interesting works, on the whole, 'Regarding Terror' was considered to be fairly bland and uncontroversial. It is perhaps not surprising that this critical response sits at odds with the culture of fear that surrounded the proposed exhibition in 2003. Those reporting on the exhibition for art journals, for example, noted the curators' reticence to reveal their opinions, and suggested that the exhibition did not, contrary to the fears surrounding the announcement of the show, obviously heroise or romanticise its subject.⁷ Another key issue raised by commentators on the exhibition was that 'Regarding Terror' failed to add anything particularly new to an understanding of the RAF. In other words, the consensus was that the show failed to affect knowledge or opinion in any substantial way. These reactions further suggest that the initial controversy was unrelated to any particular art works (and in this way the debate surrounding the exhibition was quite different to that of the culture wars debates in the U.S., for example), and was instead proportional to the exhibition's political theme, and assumptions regarding art's position in relation to politics. Both critics and the curators largely avoided discussing this issue.

However, the curators did, unavoidably, present an implicit understanding of art's relationship to politics. As Isabelle Graw notes, for example, in the context of an exhibition about the RAF, the meaning of works that directly reference the RAF becomes limited almost exclusively to that of the RAF: the works become an illustration of the exhibition's subject matter.⁸ At the same time, as Graw also notes, the commentary in the exhibition catalogue also reduced the potential meaning of the art works. This need to 'contain' the works' meaning suggests that the works are always threatening to spill over in unseemly ways. The implicit assumption here is that art does have significant political value and influence. Art's relationship with

⁶ Biesenbach, Blumenstein and Ensslin, 2005a.

⁷ Lapp, 2005, pp. 1-4.

⁸ Graw, 2005, p. 181.

politics is, in some instances, a relation that needs to be restrained. In other words, the possibility that art *can* influence political thinking and memory is both implied by the curators' 'reductive explanation[s]' of the works (as Graw puts it) and their concession to the voices of those instrumental in blocking the 2003 exhibition.⁹ The problem with this implicit desire to contain the works' meaning is that the subject matter is so politically charged that there needs to be some deeper discussion of the relationship between art and politics. Questions as to how this subject matter is to be approached, and to what end, need to be considered.

In order to understand just how electric the subject matter was (both for the public, and for the press), a brief historical overview of the RAF is necessary.¹⁰ The Red Army Faction was formed in the late 1960s; the group emerged out of a radical left-wing milieu that drew upon, while going beyond, contemporary anti-Vietnam war and anti-capitalist movements. Key figures in this original incarnation of the group included Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof and Rapse – these are also the figures with which with the majority of the works in 'Regarding Terror' are concerned. The RAF's agenda became centred on making evident 'the fascism that is latent in Germany'; in other words, the RAF's aim was to hunt out Nazis and to provoke the German government, forcing the government to respond in extreme ways and therefore to reveal the government's apparently neo-fascist underpinnings.¹¹

Members of the group were ultimately charged with bombings, hijackings, several individual murders, attempted murders, thefts and other terrorist activities. Hanns-Martin Schleger, for instance, a former Nazi turned industrialist, (and the subject of Hans-Peter Feldmann's *The Dead (Hanns-Martin Schleger)*, (1998) ([fig. 2](#)), a work featured in the exhibition), was taken hostage by the RAF in 1977 after key members of the RAF had been arrested.¹² No RAF member was released in exchange for Schleger, and he was murdered. In October 1977, imprisoned members of the RAF died as a result of either suicide or, as some believe, murder by the authorities. The subject of the RAF is, for all of these reasons, highly controversial and reverberates throughout Germany's twentieth century history.

It should be pointed out that the group are not only of political interest, but have also proven to be a source of popular fascination. Key elements of this fascination are the untimely death of key members of the group means that they remain forever young and idealistic, and that they can to some degree be understood as victims – victims of the state and of Germany's post WWII silence regarding its Nazi past. That their politics, being anti-capitalist and anti-fascist, resonate with those of some contemporary political movements also brings them closer to a contemporary left wing youth politics. RAF's idealism and serious (often deadly) approach to their mission also, arguably, makes them attractive to a much more cynical, world-weary contemporary generation. In this reading, members of the RAF may be understood (wrongly) as innocent victims of both fascism and capitalism, carrying with them an idealism and an audacity contemporary politics can only be nostalgic for.¹³

⁹ Graw, 2005, p. 181.

¹⁰ The exhibition was very well attended, and was one of the most popular exhibitions ever held at Kunst-Werke.

¹¹ Hans-Joachim Klein quoted in Storr, 2000, p. 54.

¹² Gisbourne, 2005, pp. 196-197, and Storr, 2000, p. 44.

¹³ For a discussion of the RAF's politics and personal experiences see Storr, 2000, pp. 41-67.

This nostalgia and romanticism is, of course, one of the main reasons why the exhibition initially attracted so much criticism. That an aura of nostalgia and romanticism does in fact surround the RAF is borne out in part by art works like Hans Niehus' *Hollywood Boulevard*, 2001, which shows Holger Meins' name on a star on the Hollywood Boulevard, complete with an image of his famed record player, not because he was a recording artist, but because the record player he had in his prison cell was allegedly used to conceal the gun he used in his suicide. Similarly, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a fashion known as 'Terror Chic' was popular on the catwalks, leading to the coining of the term 'Prada-Meinhof'.¹⁴ It is then not that artists such as Niehus are setting out to romanticise the RAF, but to reflect on that romanticism.

This reflection does, however, present us with some important questions that were not dealt with explicitly by the curators of 'Regarding Terror'. The key concern here is what it might mean for the RAF to take on the status of Hollywood stars or fashion icons. If the RAF has taken on such a position in popular consciousness, as several artists and members of the German media both seem to suggest, what might be the implications of art's continuing representation of that position? It is this kind of question which philosopher Raimond Gaita poses when he argues that courage and the legitimate use of reason are not the virtues at issue when it is claimed that we should be fearless enough to think (or, we might say in this context, to represent) anything.¹⁵ What is really at stake is a moral question. In this case, it is a moral question related to art's relationship with politics. Some kinds of thoughts are dangerous; irresponsible – even evil.¹⁶ Gaita does not deal explicitly with the implications and effects of art works that reflect upon dangerous ideas. I suggested above that several of the artists in the exhibition were merely drawing attention to an existing set of romantic ideas surrounding the RAF. Nonetheless, the perpetuation of these ideas, even ironically, does ask us to consider how we may or may not continue to understand the position – culturally and morally – of the RAF. In other words, if we accept the proposal that art has some kind of political responsibility, then we need to ask questions about the extent and nature of that responsibility by considering how political ideas are to be represented.¹⁷

However, for a more complete understanding of art's relative ability to deal with politics, we need to probe further into the relationship between art and politics. In the case of this exhibition, the problem of the appropriate representation in art of the RAF is linked to questions regarding Germany's broader political background. The interest surrounding the exhibition runs far deeper than the already fraught theme of a group of terrorists from the 1960s. Any invocation of the RAF draws attention not only to the inadequacy of successive German governments' handling of the group itself (for example, no adequate inquiry has been held into the deaths of key members of the group), but also the fact that the activities of the RAF itself played directly into issues regarding Germany's Nazi past, and specifically Germany's ability to confront and deal with that past. In turn, this plays into the long-standing debate surrounding art's

¹⁴ Connolly, 2002. See also Worley, 1999.

¹⁵ Gaita, 1991, pp. 313-35.

¹⁶ Gaita, 1991, p. 319.

¹⁷ In his lecture on Germany's treatment of its history, Adorno touches on the issue of the significance of the way we remember the past. See Adorno, 1977, p. 126.

capacity to represent history and its ability to enact mourning for that past.¹⁸ To the extent that 'Regarding Terror' brings its subject matter into the public arena, the exhibition, like the work of many other artists dealing with Germany's past, plays a role in creating historical memory and in encouraging awareness of this past, and in so far as it does that, the experience of art is political.

Of course, questions regarding appropriate forms of representation and ways of establishing vehicles for public mourning are also pertinent to monuments, museums and media images. What marks art out as distinct, and what makes art's relationship to politics all the more complicated, is its autonomy. The relationship between art's autonomy and its subject matter is a significant issue since it is on the basis of that relationship that art's relative responsibility lies, and from which questions about art's capacity to deal with history emerge. To put it another way, depending on the understanding of art's autonomy assumed by critics, art can be accorded relative degrees of responsibility. The key question here, a question missing from much of the discussion, is to do with art's autonomy and its relationship with its subject matter, and therefore with politics.

To go some way toward answering this kind of question, we need to take seriously the claim that art and politics are linked, and that art is intrinsically related to its subject matter. If we think that art and politics are not related then it does not matter at all what art represents or how it represents its subject. It is difficult to take such a proposition seriously, however, since even in the case of 'Regarding Terror', an exhibition widely criticised for lacking lustre, the experience of art is political and is related to its subject matter in significant ways. As such, the art exhibited carries with it certain political responsibilities.

The view that art is politically influential and is therefore responsible stands in opposition to the perspective, described by Arthur C. Danto, that art is often understood as at a distance from the activity of politics: a view exemplified by W. H. Auden's idea that politics makes 'things happen', while art does not.¹⁹ Such a view stems from an acceptance of the notion that art is autonomous. This conception of art's autonomy asserts that art is an end in itself, which in turn means that art need not meet any criteria or conform to any restrictions excepting its designation as art. Art is, under this view, completely free and is distinct from non-art objects and events. The autonomous position of art seals art off into a realm of relative freedom, as if art exists outside the realm of politics and ethics. Engaging with art in this way represents, then, a disengagement from the world, including the world of political activity. For those in support of this conception of autonomy, art's disengagement from the world of politics also represents an opportunity for reflection on taboo ideas and issues, and presents a forum through which to begin the construction of historical memory.

Taking an alternative stance, the position of those fearful of art's political capabilities (like those writing for the tabloid media in Germany in 2003) reveals an assumption that art might in fact effect change and that it has the potential to make a significant,

¹⁸ The debates surrounding the work of Kiefer are pivotal in this regard. See, for example, Huyssen, 1989, Rampley, 2000 and Saltzman, 1999. See also Czaplicka, 1995 and Rogoff, 1995 for discussion of similar issues in relation to the work of other artists.

¹⁹ Danto and Auden cited in Goehr, 2003, p. 479.

perhaps ‘negative’, impact. From this perspective, *contra* Auden, art is regarded as something dangerous and powerful. The reason why art is understood to be such a threat also rests on a conception of art’s autonomy – but in this case the consequence of art’s apparently unshackled, extra-political and extra-ethical nature means that it presents a serious threat to those areas of human experience which are explicitly restricted by the demands of politics and ethics. Art comes to represent a potential threat to everything that politics and ethics fight against, and art assumes this role only because of its autonomous position. Both for the conservative media and for the more liberal-minded supporters of the exhibition, art’s autonomy means that it is an end in itself and that it is not intrinsically tied to political or even moral responsibilities. While for liberal thinkers this means that art presents a valuable opportunity to reflect on controversial subject matter, for conservatives it means that art should be, if not censored and restricted, then at the very least segregated from the support of public funding. Both positions assume that art lies somehow outside or above politics, the consequences of which typically divide the critical reception into two camps. The problem with this approach is that it assumes that there is a realm beyond the reach of politics and ethics. If we take seriously the need to consider appropriate kinds of memories, then art cannot be exempt from political and ethical questioning.

While this concept of art’s autonomy is historically linked to art’s secularisation and a gradual rejection of any instrumental or social purpose of art, this understanding of art’s autonomy does not offer a complete account of art’s relationship with politics. As Theodor Adorno explains, art’s autonomy relies on a detachment from what he calls the ‘empirical world’.²⁰ At the same time, however, Adorno explains that this detachment does not involve an absolute break from reality. Works of art communicate with reality and “‘represent” what they themselves [art works] are not’.²¹ In this sense, art works are both autonomous and not: they ‘have a life *sui generis*’, and ‘*fait social*’, the latter a consequence of art’s undeniable relationship with reality.²² This means that art works are both without purpose and, being meant for the world and representing something of reality, have a social function. From this perspective, art’s relationship with its subject matter is complicated: there is both a clear demarcation between art and the political realm with which art works like those in ‘Regarding Terror’ might deal, and those works that are at the same time intrinsically linked with their subject matter, meaning that an engagement with such art entails a relationship with the work’s subject matter. Extending Adorno’s analysis, this tells us something important about art’s status and particularly the status of its responsibilities: art has a social function which means that its engagement with politics cannot be understood to take place in an autonomous vacuum, and therefore is open to being checked against questions about the appropriateness of its representational forms and its potential social impact. At the same time, art’s autonomy means that art assumes a status that separates it from ‘non-art’; a status that allows art to claim authority over its own dominion. To the extent that art has the capacity to impact on politics, while claiming an authority in itself, art’s relationship with politics is both significant and assumes for itself a high degree of responsibility.

²⁰ Adorno, 1997, p. 2.

²¹ Adorno, 1997, p. 6.

²² Adorno, 1997, p. 5, p. 6.

In relation to 'Regarding Terror', there is a need to consider further art's precise responsibility to politics in the light of the nature of art's relationship with its subject matter. Several artists' works in the exhibition provided a significant opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between art and its subject, and upon some assumptions about art's status and its role in politics. One such example was Gerhard Richter's re-photographs of photos taken from media and police images of the RAF, as included in his book of source materials, *Atlas* (1962-) (fig. 3 & fig. 4). These images deal with the deaths of key members of the RAF in prison on 18 October, 1977. Both that they are photos of photos, and that they are extremely out of focus, suggests art's limited ability to represent. Many of the images are so blurry that the subjects are almost unrecognisable. This is more than a statement about our limited apprehension of these individuals and their deaths. The work also acts as an ontological statement that points to the limits of representation and apprehension. Richter shows his subjects as almost literally withdrawing or fading behind the surface of the photograph. The idea that these terrorists are ungraspable is confirmed by Richter's decision to paint these photos of photos in his series (not included in the exhibition) *18 October 1977* (1988), almost as if the repetition of the subject matter and the inclusion of the human touch of paint might help in getting closer to the subject.



Fig. 3. Gerhard Richter, *Atlas*, sheet 470, Baader-Meinhof photographs, 1989.
Courtesy Gerhard Richter.

Although Richter does not put forth his own argument for how these individuals died, or make any explicit comment regarding the RAF's activities or politics, his images can be understood as playing a role in the development and maintenance of historical memory. Richter presents the terrorists as 'beyond representation'; as ungraspable and evanescent human beings. As viewers, we are brought into relation with political

subject matter in a way that encourages us to reflect upon these human beings as such, and upon art as a vehicle for both the representation of its subject (and thereby a way of getting close to it), and of underscoring that same subject's distance. The works both confront us with their subject matter and underscore the distance between the work and the subject. There is scope here for a deeper discussion of what this simultaneous closeness and distance might mean for the art-politics relationship if it is also then combined with an understanding of the implications of art's autonomy.



Fig. 4. Gerhard Richter, *Atlas*, sheet 471 (Baader-Meinhof photographs), 1989. Courtesy Gerhard Richter.

The works by Feldmann and Thomas Ruff included in the exhibition also deal directly with media images relating to the RAF, and reflect on them in interesting and provocative ways. Feldmann's, *The Dead* (1998), for example, consists of copies of clippings from newspapers: photos of those who died as a result of the RAF's activities. That Feldman places victims and perpetrators side by side in a way which often makes it difficult to discern who is who, means that, as in Richter's work, we are encouraged not to judge these individuals, but to recognise their humanity.

In Ruff's, *Most Wanted* (1991) ([fig. 5](#)), reprints of the authorities' wanted posters sourced from German newspapers also prompt a rethinking of the relationship between art and its subject matter. There is a question here as to what happens to these images when they enter the arena of art, and how that change of context influences our understanding of those portrayed. As a result of its designation as art, the images exist as art, which means that if we accept contemporary art's status as autonomous, then the works exist in a realm separated from politics. In the context of Ruff's work, we no longer see the images primarily as 'wanted' images, but as referring us to a series of political and aesthetic issues to do with the nature of art and

the nature of the way art might deal with or represent such highly charged political imagery. Once again, deeper analysis of works and issues like these would bring into sharper focus the nature and extent of art's responsibility to politics.

At the same time, the works by Sigmar Polke and Joseph Beuys included in 'Regarding Terror' make some clear political statements, particularly in relation to art's capacity to influence political thought. For example, Polke's, *Untitled (Dr Bonn)* (1978) ([fig. 6](#)), can be understood as a satire on bureaucrats in the city of Bonn, the then capital of Germany. It shows a faceless paper pusher who plays games to try to deal with the RAF, and includes Baader and Raspe represented on the wall of the bureaucrat's office.²³ Where Polke calls for some criticism of the contemporary situation, Beuys' work can be understood as a redemptive project to reunite history, art and politics. His *Dürer, I'm Personally Leading Baader and Meinhof on a Tour through Documenta 5* (1972) ([fig. 7](#)) deals with German political and artistic history – from Dürer to this work by Beuys, all as existing in Documenta and all as metaphorically and harmoniously coming together. Implicit in Beuys' work is a faith regarding art's capacity to perform a transformative function.²⁴ In this sense, Beuys' work assumes a profound responsibility to effect change and opens up questions about the extent of art's actual capabilities.

Taken together, these key works in 'Regarding Terror' demonstrate some of the diverse ways in which art can bring the viewer into relation with politics, and as such advance a more probing consideration of art's political responsibilities. As I have argued, the art-politics relation is both political and apolitical. It is apolitical since art's autonomy places art in a realm at a remove from the political: art is shown to exist in a privileged realm that allows it to comment on its subject. At the same time, the experience of works like these does bring us into relation with politics – in some cases art confronts us with very specific political ideas – and in this sense may influence political thinking. To the extent that art is able to do that, art has a responsibility to politics. If art is answerable to and has a responsibility to politics, then art is not entirely free and does not exist in a hermetic realm. Borrowing elements from both Buchloh's and Gaita's thinking (as different as their concerns are), it can be argued that, in respect to art's relationship with politics, art needs to be understood not as indifferent, unbiased, insignificant or even intrinsically dangerous, but as something that requires serious investigation. In so far as such views can be found in 'Regarding Terror', and in the discussion surrounding it, this exhibition reveals and unravels some problematic assumptions about art. Analysis of these assumptions suggests that art has a significant relationship with politics, and serves as a reminder of art's role in the perpetuation of memory. A fuller account of the relationship between art and politics would need to factor in art's ontological status and to consider the implications of that status.

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²³ Storr, 2000, pp. 87ff

²⁴ See, for example, Buchloh, 1980.

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