



Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics (Columbia Themes in Philosophy, Social Criticism, and the Arts)

Gerhard Richter

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Gerhard Richter's groundbreaking study argues that the concept of "afterness" is key to understanding the thought and aesthetics of modernity. He pursues such questions as what it means for something to "follow" something else and whether that which follows marks a clear break with what comes before. Or does that which follows tacitly perpetuate its predecessor as a consequence of its indebtedness to the terms and conditions of that from which it claims to have departed? Indeed, Richter asks, is not the very act of breaking with, and then following upon, a way of retroactively constructing and fortifying that from which the break that set the movement of following into motion had occurred?

Richter explores the concept and movement of afterness as a privileged yet uncanny category through close readings of Immanuel Kant, Franz Kafka, Martin Heidegger, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Bertold Brecht, Theodor W. Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida. Through his work, the vexed concepts of afterness, following, and coming after illuminate a constellation of modern preoccupations, including personal and cultural memory, translation, photography, hope, and the historical and conceptual specificity of what has been termed "after Auschwitz." Richter's various threads of analysis—which cross an expansive collection of modern writers and thinkers, diverse historical moments of articulation, and a range of media-richly develop Lyotard's incontrovertible statement that "after philosophy comes philosophy. But it has been altered by the 'after.'" As this intricate inquiry demonstrates, much hinges on our interpretation of the "after," for our most fundamental assumptions concerning modern aesthetic representation, conceptual discourse, community, subjectivity, and politics are at stake.

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