INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
The burden of a national legacy: An examination of Anselm Kiefer's reflections on the German past

Rice, Kolya Michael, M.A.

Rice University, 1994
ABSTRACT

The Burden of a National Legacy:

An Examination of Anselm Kiefer's Reflections on the German Past

by

Kolya M. Rice

Anselm Kiefer's empathic approach to Germany's past, particularly its period of National Socialism, has provoked heated controversy among art critics and historians. The first section of this paper examines and critiques a sample of the discourse on the subject, drawing the primary conclusion that postwar Germany's peculiar cultural and political context, which has been neglected, is of fundamental importance to understanding Kiefer's mediations. The second section juxtaposes a sample of Kiefer's work against this context, drawing attention to the psychological resonances of National Socialism which continue to haunt Germany and which find their way into the artist's work.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I offer my most sincere thanks to all of those who made this project possible.

I would first like to offer my gratitude to Professors Linda Smeins and Ronald Bernier for their tutelage and excellence in teaching; although not directly involved in this project, their influence in my thinking has been profound. Thank you to Patricia and Wayne Smith for reading preliminary drafts of the work in progress and offering much needed moral support. To Scott Woodard and Richard Spuler for their help with translations. Special thanks to Charles Haxthausen for the many phone conversations which helped guide and enlighten me in the initial stages of the project. To my readers Joseph Manca and Diane Dillon for their guidance and suggestions, thank you for all your help.

And finally I would like to offer my most sincere thanks to those three people who contributed most significantly to this project. To Vanessa McRae, for indulging my late night revelations and without whose personal support none of this would have been possible. To William Camfield, whose guidance throughout this paper, both in explicit suggestions and queries and implicitly as a model scholar and an exceptional man; I count myself fortunate to have had the privilege of your teachings. And to Dan Delaney, whose contributions to this project are truly innumerable; I am grateful and feel privileged to call you my friend.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text: First Section</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text: Second Section</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources Consulted</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES:

Figure 1, Das Deutsche Volksgesicht (1979) 111
Figure 2, Nigredo (1984) 112
Figure 3, Die Überschwemmung Heidelbergs (1969) 113
Figure 4, Johannisnacht II (1981) 114
Figure 5, Johannisnacht II (first double page) 115
Figure 6, Johannisnacht II (second double page) 115
Figure 7, Johannisnacht II (third double page) 116
Figure 8, Johannisnacht II (fourth double page) 116
Figure 9, Johannisnacht II (fifth double page) 117
Figure 10, Johannisnacht II (sixth double page) 117
Figure 11, Die Hermannsschlacht (1977) 118
Figure 12, Wege der Weltweisheit—die Hermanns-Schlacht (1978-80) 118
Figure 13, Auszug aus Ägypten (1984) 119
Figure 14, Margarethe (1981) 120
Figure 15, Auszug aus Ägypten (1984-85) 121
Figure 16, Die Meistersinger (1981) 122
Figure 17, Emanation (1984-85) 123
Figure 18, Besetzungen (1969) 124
Figure 19, Athanor (1983-84) 125
Figure 20, Dem unbekannten Maler (1983) 126
Figure 21, Sulamith (1983) 127
Figure 22, Wilhelm Kreis, Funeral Hall for the Great German Soldiers, in the Hall of Soldiers, Berlin, c. 1939 128
Figure 23, Besetzungen (second) 129
Figure 24, Besetzungen (last page) 129
Figure 25, Deutschlands Geisteshelden (1973) 130
Figure 26, Chuwawa/Gilgamesch (1980) 131
Figure 27, Innenraum (1981) 132
Figure 28, Albert Speer, Mosaic Room in the Reich Chancellery, Berlin (1939) 133
Figure 29, To the Supreme Being (1983) 134
Figure 30, Dein aschenes Haar, Sulamith (1981) 135
Figure 31, Dein goldenes Haar, Margarethe (1981) 136
Figure 32, Werner Peiner, German Earth (c. 1940) 137
Figure 33, Titian, Saint Mary Magdalen in Penitence (c. 1530-35) 137
Figure 34, Gustave Moreau, Madeleine au Calvaire (c. 1880) 138
In an informal interview with Steven Madoff in 1987, Anselm Kiefer, anticipating the suspicion that often has greeted his artistic project, posed to himself the seemingly inevitable question: "Are you fascist or antifascist?"
He immediately elaborated:

I need to know where I came out of. There was a tension between the immense things that happened and the immense forgetfulness. I think it was my duty to say what is and what isn't. Now I don't say we have a fascist state. But it's still there. Circumstances are quite good now. But they can change, and then we'll see what happens. In '69, when I began, no one dared talk about these things.\(^1\)

Anselm Kiefer's empathic approach to Germany's past, and especially its National Socialist period, constitutes the most problematic aspect of his oeuvre. From the time that Kiefer's work first gained international recognition at the 1980 Venice Biennale, the subject of Kiefer's so-called "Germanness"\(^2\) has provoked heated controversy among art critics and historians. Werner Spies, setting the tone of German criticism that has only recently abated, wrote a review of Kiefer's works in this exhibition titled "Overdose of Teutonic Zeal," and went on to say: "The harvest and the heritage are reaped. This sower spells danger."\(^3\) Many American critics, however, greeted Kiefer's work with decidedly less suspicion and went to great lengths to praise the artist's courageous remembrance of Germany's past.\(^4\) This controversy, which has now continued for over a decade, has

---


\(^2\) The somewhat ambiguous term "Germanness" has arisen in the art historical discourse on Kiefer and in general connotes Kiefer's explicit and implicit references to German history, culture and myth.

\(^3\) Madoff, (October 1987), p. 127.

offered many relevant and insightful arguments both for and against aspects of Kiefer's aesthetic project; however, no semblance of consensus among scholars has surfaced.

With this in mind, I propose, in the first part of this paper, to examine and critique the contrasting views held by scholars on this issue. In doing this, I seek to make a number of things clear. First, I want to bring these arguments together in one place, to set them side by side so to speak. In doing this, I hope to point out the consistency of the concerns as well as the counter explanations that scholars have voiced; and furthermore, to elucidate the way the scholarship has built upon itself, reacting to and attempting to supplement previous arguments. Second, I believe a critique of these arguments and the critical discourse they employ is necessary. The critical stances against Kiefer's project are based primarily upon a few specific arguments that seek to define an ongoing fascination with fascism and its rhetorical strategies; the validity of these arguments and their applicability to Kiefer's work demand further examination, especially now that Kiefer has articulated more clearly his intentions. Third, and perhaps more as a subtext,

---

5The number of arguments surrounding this issue are vast and diverse; consequently, I can only examine a sample of them. In choosing this sample, I have sought those arguments that I feel are the most substantial and well conceived; arguments that, on both sides of the debate, voice justified concerns and relevant insights and have (in most cases) had the most impact on the continuing discourse.
6I do not mean by this statement to privilege the problematic of artists' intentionality; however, I do find an artist's intentions to be one of many useful tools available to art historical interpretation.

It is only recently that Kiefer has allowed formal interviews. Heretofore, Kiefer had allowed only a few informal interviews, insisting that his words be paraphrased by the interviewer, claiming that his works must speak for themselves. One might speculate that his new willingness to abandon former reticence derives ultimately from a dissatisfaction with published interpretations of his work, with which Kiefer claims familiarity. See Christian Kämmerling and Peter Pursche, "Nachtes fahre ich mit dem Fahrrad von Bild zu Bild: ein Werkstattgespräch mit Anselm Kiefer," Süddeutsche Zeitung, Magazin, November 16, 1990, pp. 24-30; Axel Hecht and Alfred Nemeczek, "Bei Anselm im Atelier," Art (Hamburg), January 1990; pp., 29-47; Klaus Gallwitz, Anselm Kiefer: Über Räume und Völker, Frankfurt (1990).
I want to make clear from the outset my own personal understanding of these arguments and their relevance to the discourse as I see it.⁷

In the second section of this paper, drawing upon the insights provided by the arguments of the first section—and especially the arguments provided by Andreas Huyssen, which I will use as a point of departure—I will add my own more original contributions to this subject, focusing particularly on Kiefer's specific postwar German context. As will become clear below, there has been a curious neglect in the discourse of the specific cultural and political context in which Kiefer produced his work. This context must be taken into account as there are many issues peculiar to postwar Germany which remain to be considered. I will not attempt to encompass Kiefer's entire oeuvre with grand arguments; the problems involved in this sort of method should become clear, if only implicitly, in the first section of this paper. I will attempt to provide an extensive analysis of a few highly relevant works, which then might provide insight further efforts to understand this complex issue.

The first, and perhaps most vicious, of the arguments in this controversy to be examined is that provided by Jed Perl.⁸ The tone and wording of Perl's argument are an indictment.⁹ For instance, Perl's heated attack on Kiefer approaches the slanderous with characterizations such as: "neo-Nazi campiness," "pornographic obsession with Nazi atrocities," "

⁷Although I will strive for "objectivity", I am well aware that even my most self-conscious attempts towards this end will be coloured by my own personal predilections.
⁹In "A Dissent on Kiefer: Letters to the Editor," The New Criterion, December 1988, p. 20, Jed Perl notes that he reads all of Kiefer's work as references to the Holocaust; I see this as a very problematic oversimplification. See Mark Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art, 1987 for one of the most complete visual documentaries of Kiefer's oeuvre. This catalogue of the 1987 Kiefer retrospective documents a diversity in Kiefer's project that Perl summarily dismisses.
voyeuristic sentimentilization of Jewish history," "romantic infatuation with Nazi kitsch;" and the inclusion of a quotation made by a companion of Perl while at the opening of Kiefer's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, '...six million Jews had to die so that all of these people could wear black tie.'

Moreover, these problems, according to Perl, are not the result of a well-intentioned though misguided artist, but rather a conscious effort to play upon contemporary fascination with fascism to gain popularity; as Perl states: "As far as Anselm Kiefer, we can say for sure that no artist has gambled more on the appeal of the Holocaust as a symbol."

It is perhaps the heated tenor of this article that has obscured some of the more important contributions it makes to the discourse on Kiefer, namely a short discussion of Saul Friedländer's Reflections of Nazism: an Essay on Kitsch and Death (1982). Before I return to the insights this theoretical argument might provide, I would like to take a moment to critique what would seem to be Perl's main source for reading Kiefer's works—the catalogue of the 1987 Kiefer retrospective written by Mark Rosenthal.

Speaking of the wave of "profound skepticism and hostile criticism" that greeted Kiefer's retrospective during its stay at MoMA—a dramatic shift from the rave reviews that greeted this exhibition earlier in Chicago,

---

11Ibid. p. 20.
12Perl's article provoked only one overt response that I am aware of, and this response was a demand for a public apology by Peter Scheldahl, "To the Editors:[A reply to Jed Perl]," The New Criterion, March 1989, p. 85.
13Perl also invokes Susan Sontag's concept of "Fascinating Fascism", which was one of the first articulations concerning the ongoing fascination the public has had with fascism and its visual strategies. Since Sontag's contributions to this paradoxical fascination are only mentioned in passing by Perl, and because her work deals with very specific artists (primarily Leni Riefenstahl and Hans Jürgen Syberberg), I have decided not to include a specific section to discuss the relevancy of her work. However, her writings on this subject have certainly contributed to my understanding and will no doubt fillter into my own discussion. See Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," Under the Sign of Saturn, New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980.
Philadelphia and Los Angeles—Charles Haxthausen has noted that "...Rosenthal's catalogue...was arguably in part responsible..."\textsuperscript{14} By this statement Haxthausen did not mean that Rosenthal's catalogue clarified issues in Kiefer's project that should be greeted with skepticism. On the contrary, Haxthausen argues, and I would concur, that Rosenthal's text somewhat naively promoted the very issues of nationalism and moral redemption that figured so largely in this wave of negative reviews; and I would argue that many of Rosenthal's interpretations fundamentally misrepresent the critical spirit that is such a large part of Kiefer's project.

This is not to say that Rosenthal was blithely unaware of the critical and satirical spirit of Kiefer's work. To be sure, Rosenthal often stressed these aspects; but where he did this, he almost always cited a conversation with the artist as a basis for such a reading.\textsuperscript{15} As Haxthausen has noted, "He didn't succeed in giving the reader the skills for reading the work in that way; he didn't show how Kiefer's works deconstructed their own mystifications."\textsuperscript{16} More importantly, perhaps, when Rosenthal was not guided by the artist's own words he often proposed benign readings of works that are intensively critical; and arguably, it was these readings that provided a point of departure for much of the negative criticism of which Perl's article was a part. Haxthausen has provided an example that neatly illustrates this.

\textsuperscript{14}Charles Haxthausen, "America's Spiritual Hero: The Reception of Anselm Kiefer in the United States." Unpublished paper presented at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, March 1991; Jed Perl's article constitutes one of the most substantial arguments in this wave of negative criticism.

\textsuperscript{15}In accord with Kiefer's interviewing policy until recently, these informal conversations were not published and the use of direct quotations strongly protested. Consequently, all of Rosenthal's direct insights provided by the artist own words come to us as paraphrases; the result being what Andreas Huyssen has termed, "problematic attempts at ventriloquism:" "Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth, \textit{October}, (Spring 1989), p. 26.

\textsuperscript{16}Haxthausen, (March 1991), p.16.
In a discussion of a book by Kiefer, *Das Deutsche Volksgesicht* ("The Face of the German People," 1974: fig. 1), Haxthausen has proposed that Kiefer explores the mechanisms of national myth creation. In this book, Kiefer appropriated images from a Nazi photo book of elderly rural types identified through captions with particular regions of the country, mounting these images onto his own homemade volume of coarse-grained sheets of wall paper. As Haxthausen insightfully explains:

Merely the collection of photos under the rubric "The Faces of the German People" serves a *völkisch* myth, but on the following pages Kiefer carries these images onto a new mythic level, by incising the features of these faces in planks of wood, so that these ostensibly archetypal German faces seem to emerge from the mythic German forest. Here what appears to be a seemingly innocent transference of the faces into a different medium is exposed as an insidious rhetorical strategy. Then, at the end, on the last two pages, everything seems incinerated under a thick layer of black. All that remains of the archetypal German face fashioned from the mythic German forest is 'Charcoal for 2000 years,' to cite Kiefer's blackly ironic subtitle—a chemical metamorphosis is here evoked that works counter to the rhetorical metamorphosis of the images.\(^\text{17}\)

In his brief commentary on the same book, Rosenthal writes: "Peasants' faces emerge from the linear patterns of the woodcuts, with the effect that their features are thoroughly one with the land."\(^\text{18}\) Rosenthal recognizes the *völkisch* myth, but he fails to recognize Kiefer's critical treatment of it. Consequently the artist is ingenuously presented as a sentimental proponent of the very *Blut und Boden* myth his work seeks to critically explore. Relying

\(^{17}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 17-18.}\)
upon Rosenthal's readings as heavily as he does, it is hardly surprising that Perl would claim that a part of Kiefer's project entailed reinstating the concept of "Fatherland".\textsuperscript{19}

However, apart from the problems arising from his source for reading Kiefer's works, Perl contributes significantly to the discourse on Kiefer with his brief discussion of Saul Friedländer's essay, \textit{Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death}. In this essay, Friedländer attempts to define what he terms "a new discourse on Nazism."\textsuperscript{20} To define this new discourse, Friedländer proposes to get beneath the politics and ideas to a psychological dimension that constituted the secret attraction of Nazism in its own time, and which is the same attraction that can be felt working at the heart of recent books and films about Nazism.\textsuperscript{21} Central to his thesis is the argument that purely political and socio-economic analyses can not begin to explore the essential aspects of German fascism—the deep levels of fantasy production and reception so important in the constitution of individual and collective identities. Consequently, according to Friedländer, once one moves beyond these other modes of inquiry,

...that leaves the psychological dimension, which, being autonomous, followed its own course. It did not rest on complex arguments nor sometimes on very clear ideological positions.... Nazism's attraction lay less in any explicit ideology than in the power of emotions, images and phantasms. Both left and right were susceptible to them.... It seems logical, therefore, to

\textsuperscript{19}Perl, (December 1988), p. 18.
\textsuperscript{20}The term discourse is used by Friedländer in reference to the latent message of the work rather than its declared intentions.
\textsuperscript{21}Friedländer's attention is focused primarily on the image of the Holocaust in literature and the movies since the sixties, including Hans Jürgen Syberberg's \textit{Hitler, a Film from Germany}, George Steiner's novel, \textit{The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.}, as well as books and films by Michel Tournier, Luchino Visconti, Joachim Fest, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and Albert Speer. It should be noted that Friedländer does not mention Kiefer, or indeed any painters in his discussion.
suppose, a priori, that a new discourse on Nazism will develop at the same level of phantasms, images and emotions. More than ideological categories, it is a matter of rediscovering the durability of these deep-seated images, the structure of these phantasms common to both right and left.\textsuperscript{22}

According to Friedländer, the psychological appeal of Nazism was based upon an unprecedented fusion of kitsch and death.\textsuperscript{23} By draping Nazi ideals in a kitsch imagery that had a strong hold on the middle-class imagination, Hitler succeeded in projecting himself as the ultimate German hero and his cause as the ultimate German cause. Death was especially clouded by kitsch imagery. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Nazis' debased romanticism that harbored a nostalgia for the pre-modern past, an age in which purity is achieved through the cleansing powers of fire and the hero remains faithful unto death. This ideology was evoked, for instance, in each of the many grand funeral spectacles—complete with torches, pyres and flaming wheels—staged to solemnize the death of Nazi war heroes. However, as Friedländer makes clear, this death that the Nazis exalted was,

...not death in its everyday horror and tragic banality, but a ritualized, stylized and aesthetic death, a death that wills itself the carrier of horror, decrepitude, and monstrosity, but which ultimately and definitively appears as a poisonous apotheosis.\textsuperscript{24}

Furthermore, Friedländer argues that a similar transmutation can be found in recent art that takes Nazism as its subject:

Attention has gradually shifted from the reevocation of Nazism as such, from the horror and the pain—even if muted by time


\textsuperscript{23}Kitsch, as Friedländer uses the term (echoing Abraham Moles), is the effect created by the presence of good taste in the absence of taste, the presence of art in ugliness; in kitsch, art is adapted to the majority's ideals of harmony and order, and extreme situations are neutralized and turned into a sentimental idyll.

\textsuperscript{24}Friedländer, (1984), p. 43.
and transformed into subdued grief and endless meditation—to voluptuous anguish and ravishing images, images one would like to see going on forever.... In the midst of meditation rises a suspicion of complacency. Some kind of limit has been overstepped and uneasiness appears: It is the sign of the new discourse.25

Despite the ideological intentions of these artists and writers—to unmask and exorcise the evil of Nazism by probing its sordid corruptions—the resultant works and their aesthetic effects contain a latent undertow that is quite diametrical. The ostensible aim of the artists and writers Friedländer examines involves re-evoking the phenomena of Nazism in all its compelling perversion—in a way, attempting to re-experience the original attraction. However, once the attraction has been reconstituted, the original ideological impulse is overshadowed; what remains active is not the awareness of the horror, but the fascination with the spectacle.

According to Perl, this is the same operation that occurs in Kiefer's works, (although he seems to suspect the artist's initial impulse as well). However, Perl does not give an in depth account of how this manifestation of the new discourse operates in Kiefer's works specifically. His method of explanation is simply to give a brief account of Friedländer's theory, and then draw the connection to Kiefer's works with the brief passage:

Aestheticism, he [Friedländer] says, is a defense against reality. This, it seems to me, is a perfect description of the appeal of Anselm Kiefer. In Kiefer's work, as in many of the works Friedländer discusses, the Nazi past has become a potent but also elusive presence—a sort of texture, made up of the burnt grays and blacks that evoke charred bodies, a sensuous texture,

25Ibid., p.21.
a texture that seduces more than it illuminates. And this seduction serves to divert our attention from the hard facts.\textsuperscript{26}

In effect, Perl, in the passage above, has reduced Friedländer's theory of a new discourse to a notion that the aesthetic effects\textsuperscript{27} of Kiefer's works somehow betray the "truth" of their subject. No attempt is made, by employing a specific example of Kiefer's work for instance, to make clear if the aestheticism that Perl speaks of is indeed "...a matter of the juxtaposition of opposing images of harmony [Kitsch] and death, and of such violently contradictory feelings as harmony and terror"\textsuperscript{28} which is the crux of Friedländer's theory.

Furthermore, an aspect of Friedländer's argument (which according to Friedländer, along the way became his primary goal), is that the new discourse may offer us insights that could not be gained elsewhere.\textsuperscript{29} As Friedländer states:

An analysis of the new discourse clearly shows that it is precisely this reevocation and reinterpretation of the past that helps us to better understand the past itself, especially in its psychological dimensions. Thus theme and aesthetics of The Damned and Hitler, a Film from Germany, for example, allow us to perceive something of the psychological hold Nazism had in its day. Thanks to their reflections in the present, some elements that a direct approach has not clarified up to now are revealed, not so much by what this or that writer or director has intended to say, but by what they say unwittingly, even what is said despite them. In effect, by granting a certain freedom to what is imagined, by accentuating the selection that is exercised

\textsuperscript{26}Perl, (December 1988), p. 15.

\textsuperscript{27}Actually, this passage does not make clear to me if it is the "potency" of the subject matter, or the actual physical/formal qualities of Kiefer's paintings which "seduce".

\textsuperscript{28}Friedländer, (1984), p. 50.

\textsuperscript{29}Perl mentions this aspect only in passing and makes no attempt to reflect on its relevance pertaining to Kiefer specifically.
by memory, a contemporary reelaboration presents a reality of the past in a way that sometimes reveals previously unsuspected aspects.\textsuperscript{30}

I will return to this aspect of the new discourse as it pertains to Kiefer specifically by way of Andreas Huyssen's article, "The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth," which will be examined at the end of this section.

Before continuing on to the next article, a few words should be said concerning Friedländer's methodology. Although I find Friedländer's essay to be insightful and extremely helpful in addressing such a difficult question, one should not lose sight of the fact that it remains an essay, not a study based on previously demonstrated and widely accepted arguments; it is, as Friedländer admits, a brief and often allusive attempt to put forward a thesis. Moreover, as Alan Mintz states in a review of this book:

Friedländer's assertion that the appeal of Nazism derives from the fusion of kitsch and death, as brilliant as it may be, remains largely unsusceptible to proof. The thesis is embroiled in the problems of the nature of literary and artistic perception, in the difficulties of reconstructing the psychological response of people living in an earlier period.\textsuperscript{31}

Friedländer attempts to circumvent the later of these obstacles by positing a correlation between how \textit{we} respond to representations of Nazism in the present and how actual followers of Nazism responded in their own time. In truth, however, Friedländer relies on \textit{his} response. The method is useful, although certainly speculative. This being said, Friedländer's essay remains a

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., pp. 17-18. One can see in this passage how Friedländer effectively displaces—perhaps necessarily and perhaps not—the values of the new discourse from the writer or director (or artist) to the analyzer, who must mediate the effects. This will have a certain resonance when I return to the question of fascinating fascism, and the artist's intention, by way of Andreas Huyssen's article at the end of this section.

very important source for any scholarship on the continuing resonance of
Nazism in the present.

Similar in some respects to Perl's argument is that of Maureen
Sherlock. Sherlock, another skeptic of Kiefer's artistic enterprise, invokes a
number of theoretical arguments to analyze what she terms Kiefer's
"Messianic" or "Apocalyptic" view of history. She suggests that Kiefer's
extensive use of Germanic (as well as other) myth and culture, while perhaps
intended as a critique, falls back on the promise of "...fatalistic theories of an
Armageddon which would set the world right again." This promise, which
Sherlock sees manifested in the "apocalyptic tenor" of Kiefer's works, helps
sustain this Apocalyptic myth that (she posits) is inherent in our Western
culture. Lured into complacency, the viewer is blinded from envisioning the
real possibilities for social action. As she states:

We dream of a final day of reckoning and the promise of
paradise, for example, and are consequently blind to seeing the
real possibilities for changing the course of history in the here
and now. The evocation of apocalyptic deliverance masks the
opportunities for concrete action which alone can create hope in
history.34

Curiously, Sherlock does not attempt to analyze Kiefer's references to
Germany's National Socialist period specifically. Her argument attempts to
elucidate the more general view of history that (in her opinion) Kiefer's work
seems to offer. To this end, Sherlock notes and opposes two general

---

24.
33According to Sherlock, Kiefer's work in general has an "apocalyptic tenor," although exactly what she
means by this characterization is decidedly vague.
34Ibid.
approaches in art that takes history as its subject: the "apocalyptic" and the "specific".

According to Sherlock, a general tendency of apocalyptic visions of history is the invocation of a notion of universality; specifics in history are blurred by multiple references to different times, places and events. She points to Peter Brook's production of *Mahabharata*, Robert Morris's bas relief paintings, and Robert Longo's sculpture installations as examples. Contrary to this are artistic projects that specify history (and oppose what she terms the former's tendency towards "aesthetic fatalism"); projects that attempt to demystify the culture by critically naming the systems of its support. The work of Hans Haacke and Rebecca Horn are examples of this approach, which as Sherlock puts it—quoting Michel Foucault—"name names."\textsuperscript{35}

While one might immediately argue that Sherlock herself has indulged in the very unspecificity she protest to so strongly in "Apocalyptic" works—grouping Kiefer in a very general category with three non-German artists and thus effectively alienating his project from its specific cultural and historical context—there can be little argument that Kiefer's work often makes use of a constellation of signs and symbols that reference diverse historical situations. This aspect of "eclecticism" in Kiefer's work—often noted in critical discourse as a postmodern tendency—deserves special attention. Frederic Jameson's critique of nostalgia in "Postmodernism and

\textsuperscript{35}ibid.
Consumer Society,"36 is a useful tool in addressing Kiefer's use of multiple historical references in his work.37

In this essay, which was one of the first attempts to formulate a cogent argument of what "postmodernism" might be, Jameson examines the "retrospective styling" in such films as Body Heat and Chinatown in an effort to explicate his notion of "pastiche".38 Unlike the traditional genre known as the history film, la mode retro does not attempt to recreate in fiction an earlier historical moment; instead, it reifies the past in the form of a pastiche, utilizing only the surface nuances or "styles" of the historical moment in question. Pastiche, which Jameson concludes is "...the transformation of reality [history] into images..."39 satisfies a nostalgic desire to return to the past, but a past that is decidedly fictional. Pastiche, in effect, empties history of real content and replaces it with abstract and empty signs that veil the historical moment in which they originated.

In an attempt to elucidate how this theory might pertain to Kiefer's work specifically, Sherlock notes Kenneth Frampton's extension of Jameson's argument to some postmodern architecture. Johnson and Burgee's 190 South La Salle Street building in downtown Chicago is one of many examples of what Frampton calls "a cannibalized lexicon of historical references."

Deprived of their historical specificity, these references become pastiche. As Sherlock notes, "All signs, being equal to every other as empty, become available to an architecture of consumption."40 Although she gives no

37Sherlock gives a brief summary of this essay and its relevancy to Kiefer in her article on which I will expand below.
38Because of the generally acknowledged importance of this essay to art history, I am assuming the reader has an understanding of Jameson's argument.
examples, one may infer that Sherlock believes this is the same fashion in which the multiple historical (and mythological) references in Kiefer's work operate. But is this true? Do not Kiefer's works, through their references, call attention to the very question—or possibility—of historical "truth"? Before returning to these questions, I wish to examine Sherlock's other concern: the notion that Kiefer's works offer some notion of "apocalyptic deliverance."

Besides the pronouncement that his work in general has an "apocalyptic tenor," Sherlock provides only one example of the way in which Kiefer's artistic project espouses apocalyptic deliverance. According to Sherlock:

In the title of the 1984 work *Nigrado* [sic: fig. 2], Kiefer proposes the myth of the cataclysm as our only source of hope. It is a return to primordial chaos which signals the first successful moment of the alchemical transmutation of base metals into gold and the spiritual redemption of its individual practitioner. Kiefer's model here is not one of collective political transformation of social life through equitable distribution of the world's gold. Rather, it is that of a heroic Sorcerer's apprentice who will rub the philosopher's stone he finds in the bog to magically restore a lost paradise of immediacy before history.

The presumption is that we, too, will be transformed by these peregrinations, whether we want or not.42

The presumptions, I would submit, are all Sherlock's. First, why does Sherlock presume that this work expounds any notion of historical or social remedy at all? Sherlock seems to rely solely on the title for her interpretation,

---

41 In fact, it could be argued that this is the only specific example of Kiefer's work given throughout the entire article. Curiously, the arguments "against" Kiefer's project are often typified by a lack of, or only a few brief examples (many of which seems to be paraphrases of Mark Rosenthal, as in this case).
a highly problematic method. The titles of Kiefer's works, as in much art, are only one aspect of their totality; and Kiefer has often insisted that the titles or inscriptions should not be taken literally.\textsuperscript{43} If we are to believe Mark Rosenthal, the original impetus for this multi-media painting was inspired by the sight of a field of peat moss in Ireland; and the title, in fact, came to Kiefer sometime after the painting process had begun, when "...he realized that he was, in effect, plowing the land and accelerating the natural process.\textsuperscript{44} Even those viewers who might find themselves in front of this painting without any knowledge of Kiefer's intentions—but with comprehensive knowledge of alchemical doctrine—would, in my mind, be unlikely to link the landscape depicted with "apocalyptic deliverance."

From where then does the impetus of Sherlock's argument on this point derive? I would suggest that, at least in part, the answer to this question may be found in Donald Kuspit's essay "Transmuting Externalization in Anselm Kiefer."\textsuperscript{45} In this essay, Kuspit argues that, "...Kiefer can best be understood as a conceptual performance artist deconstructing the concept of the German..."\textsuperscript{46} Utilizing psychoanalytic theory as an analogy, Kuspit contends that Kiefer's artistic method is essentially a reversal of the concept of "transmuting internalization," which psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut uses to describe structure formation of the human psyche.\textsuperscript{47} According to Kohut's theory, once the psyche has matured to a certain point where it is ready to become autonomous, it withdraws its feelings from "those aspects of the

\textsuperscript{45}Donald Kuspit, "Transmuting Externalization in Anselm Kiefer," \textit{Aris Magazine}, October 1984, pp. 84-86.
\textsuperscript{46}Kuspit, (October 1984), p.85.
object imago that are being internalized," then introjects these now
depersonalized aspects as the structural basis of its selfhood.⁴⁸ According to
Kuspit, Kiefer:

...wants to reverse the process by which the German self came
into being—a process which created a self that had no control on
its aggressive impulses, and which idealized its erotic impulses
to the point of uselessness. Aggression became an all too
concrete part of the German character, and love an all too
abstract part of it. It became split grotesquely into a brutally
materialistic part that made war, and into a sublimely spiritual
part that made music and philosophy.

Sometimes deliberately violating the spiritual part of this
German self—as in his fantasy project flooding the traditional
university town of Heidleberg (1970) [fig. 3]⁴⁹—and sometimes
ruthlessly extending the aggressive part—as in his literal burning
of the earth in Buchen, the name of the old district in which he
lives (1974)—Kiefer means to undo the traditional German self.
By both reenacting its history on an artistic stage, and acting
against it in imagination—literally creating images of destruction
of spiritual symbols—Kiefer clears the ground of the German
psyche so that a new sense of self can grow in native soil. This
process of transmuting externalization of the traditional German
self—sharply split into aggressive and spiritual parts—makes
way for an untraditional (in German society) sense of self, that
is, of a self that seems whole because it is in control of all its
parts.⁵⁰

Kuspit goes on to say that from this "cleared ground," after "purging" oneself
of what is traditionally Germanic (which he argues is the arrogant, destructive

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 49-50.
⁴⁹In Sherlock (June 1988), p. 26, this work is mentioned in passing as an example of "apocalyptic
deliverance."
⁵₀Kuspit, (October 1984), pp. 85-86.
aspect of an incomplete self), one may start anew, and attempt to become "human".  

I would suggest that this reading illuminates exactly what Sherlock protests to so strongly. Kuspit's pronouncement that Kiefer's artistic project involves deconstructing the "German"—an heroic attempt to clear the ground of the collective German psyche to provide for the construction of the "Human" (universal)—is analogous to Sherlock's argument that the artist's work offers the insipid promise of apocalyptic deliverance. Furthermore, the concept of global identity seems more closely linked with the fatalistic aspects of National Socialism than the valorizing tenor of Kuspit's article suggests.

However, the validity of Kuspit's essay (both in itself and as a basis for Sherlock's objections), seems to me largely unsupported. Kuspit makes no attempts to show, by concrete examples of the artist's work for instance, how this "transmutation of externalization" operates. Instead, he seems to rely on his position as an "expert" in the field; his argument unfolds as if from one who has privileged—though undisclosed—access to the artist and his work, which readers are apparently supposed to accept without reservation. Certainly mention is made of parody and irony as artistic strategies that Kiefer uses to undermine historical subjects; but the way in which these

---

51 Ibid., p. 86.
52 In another article, Kuspit again seems blithely unaware of the implications of his rhetoric, where he states: "Kiefer's use of paint is like the use of fire to cremate the bodies of dead, however dubious, heroes, in the expectation of their phoenix-like resurrection in another form. The new German painters perform an extraordinary service for the German people. They lay to rest the ghosts—profound as only the monstrous can be—of German style, culture and history, so that the people can be authentically new.... They can be freed of a past identity by artistically reliving it." Kuspit, "Flak from the 'Radicals': The American Case Against German Painting," Brian Wallis, ed., Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, p. 141.
strategies operate specifically to deconstruct "Germanness" is left unresolved by Kuspit's argument.

I would like now to recount the arguments proposed by two other scholars, Dorothea Dietrich and Jean Fisher. These arguments, I feel, clarify many of the issues and questions raised by Sherlock and Kuspit in that they address the nature in which the signs in Kiefer's work—including, but not exclusively, the multiple historical and mythological references—operate in such a way as to expose their mutability and arbitrariness.

Rather than attempting to encapsulate Kiefer's entire oeuvre with a generalized standpoint like the scholars' arguments I have noted above, in her article, "Anselm Kiefer's 'Johannislacht II': A Text Book," Dietrich offers a thorough analysis of one work which might then provide insight for the examination of Kiefer's other works. I will outline this dense argument below.

Those who are familiar with Kiefer's work will recognize Johannislacht II (1981: figs. 4-10) as one of the artist's many "books". But is it a book? Dietrich's analysis begins with this question of categorization. Johannislacht II certainly appears to be in the format of a book: a cover with six double-spread "pages" made up of photographs (overpainted more often than not) attached to thick rectangles of cardboard. However, the artist's simultaneous use of two and sometimes three semiotic systems—photography, painting and handwriting—defy an easy classification. For instance, the classification "photographic essay" seems close, but then the photographs never stand by themselves; and likewise the

---

term "multimedia painting" seems inadequate since these works have pages and margins. Moreover, this simultaneous use of semiotic codes does not adhere to one system of logic as one expects from a book. For example, the handwritten characters do not "explain" the images, nor do the overpainted photos form a logical narrative. According to Dietrich, this deliberate confusion of codes is, in part, a strategy of Kiefer's "...to engage the reader/viewer in a dialogue, to have him test the codes employed for their possible meaning." The reader/viewer must become an active participant in the construction of the "meaning" of the work, rather than simply reading a meaning that is already there.

Kiefer's simultaneous use of different codes has another (although certainly related) purpose that may be discovered by a closer examination of the images. Although the sequence of images in Johannisnacht II does not form a logical narrative, Dietrich notes that certain symbols are repeated and one may discern several sub-series within the whole. As Dietrich relates in this extended quotation:

The cover photo (the image continues on the left side of the first double-page) [fig. 4] shows a patch of soil with some stalks of wheat. A small fire is burning in the background, apparently about to consume the wheat. Although the photograph is in sharp focus, Kiefer does not permit us a direct look at the image. We are forced to look through the spokes of a wooden wheel, superimposed in dry black paint over the photographic image. The image is contrasted with a different view on the right page of the first double-spread [fig. 5]. Instead of a close-up of nature we are now given a view of a small courtyard framed by the brick wall of a half-timbered house. This view, too, is cut off from direct visual access by a latticework of softly curving

---

ferns, again painted in black over the entire photographic image. As seen in the sharply focused photographic close-up, nature—the soil and the wheat—seems graspable in its nearness and clarity, yet is cut off from the viewer by the coarsely painted wheel with its flames. The paint literally sits on the photograph, and its tactile surface is clearly touchable. But Kiefer carries the analysis of nearness and farness even further. He makes us look at "reality"—the photograph is considered a carrier of truth because the lens does not lie—through the medium of illusion, painting. And while we looked in the first image at nature through man's creation, the wheel, we look in the second photograph at man's creation, architecture, through nature, the ferns. By depicting both the wheel and the ferns with paint, thus making inanimate and animate matter the same stuff, Kiefer indicates that both are products of the artist's craft and, by extension, of the artist's imagination. As such, the inanimate and the animate worlds are revealed as mere constructs of the mind.  

The second and the third double-pages (figs. 6-7) are quite different. Here, the spatial ordering set up in the preceding images—the separation between "foreground" and "background"—is deliberately jumbled. The interweaving of the media—(including instances where smaller photographs are glued to the main photograph, with marks that continue and confuse the distinctions between the images)—as well as the constant shifting back and forth between light and dark, which makes the image seem to flicker, result in spatial confusion. Even the edges of the rectangular pages, which might have lent some support to spatial ordering, are clouded in darkness so that one has the impression of looking out of a dark room into an illuminated space. Moreover, "...we are made to feel like detectives or spies as we discover, upon close looking, an old-fashioned steam engine and tender on tracks."  

---

56 Ibid., pp. 42-43.  
57 Ibid., p. 43.
The fourth double-page (fig. 8) gives no further clues as to the presence of the mysterious train. In fact, the sense of mystery is accented by an image of almost complete darkness, save a small area of ambiguous light and an area of softer gray spotted with small painted sparkles, which is perhaps most readily identified as a starry night sky.\textsuperscript{58}

The next double page (fig. 9), in stark contrast to the dark images of the preceding pages, is clearly presented as a photograph, (with the exception of some dark painted marks at the margins). As Dietrich relates, "the graininess of the photograph, as well as its subject, a tank camouflaged by shrubbery, suggests a reconnaissance photograph of an enemy emplacement, surreptitiously obtained."\textsuperscript{59} However, on turning the page we realize that we have been fooled.

This final double page (fig. 10), an image central to the entire work, the preceding sequence of images is resolved. Here, Kiefer presents a clearly illuminated courtyard, (as well as the source of illumination, a network of spotlights), in which we recognize many of the images from the preceding pages as part of an elaborate stage. As Dietrich relates this moment of denouement:

Our realization that all of the images presented in \textit{Johannismacht} are derived from studio sets, our understanding that not only are the train and the tank children's toys but that what we took as photographs of nature—the ferns, wheat, and soil—are equally hoaxes, sheds light on Kiefer's use of different semiotic codes. As we noticed on page one, Kiefer works with contrasts to ask questions about the nature of artistic activity and the popular perception of artistic media. Using both photography and painting in the same image, Kiefer demonstrates that, contrary to

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.
the popular belief that photography has documentary value, both media can actually be used to create illusions: neither painting with its tactile surfaces nor photography with its sharp image is more real than the other. Neither photography or painting is "true", both create illusions we tend to take at face value. Kiefer also makes clear that, in his case, it is the artist who engages in the making of illusions and that the artist is not unlike the stage director who can arrange the props according to his needs. Kiefer shows us the propensities of art and uses image making as a didactic tool.  

But what of Kiefer's choice of imagery in *Johannismacht II*? Dietrich suggests that this aspect is related to the aforementioned investigation of issues of perception, but in this case, his investigation focuses on the unspecificity of the historical themes that are evoked simultaneously by the title of the work. *Johannismacht* has traditionally referred to the celebration of the birthday of Saint John the Baptist and the celebration of the summer solstice, which fall on the same day. The celebratory feast, not unlike many Christian holidays, draws on both pagan rites (such as the collecting of medicinal herbs and the burning of fires and fire wheels on hilltops), and Christian symbolism. However, besides these two traditional codes, there is a third context that is a result of more recent history. Hitler began the invasion of Russia on this date in 1941 to coincide with the midsummer celebrations. With an understanding of the historical dimension of *Johannismacht*—and the multi-layering of its codification—the symbol of fire, so prominent on the cover of Kiefer's *Johannismacht II*, is revealed as the embodiment of a jumbled code; fire refers to both the purging of power celebrated on Saint John's Day and the destructive power of the "Scorched Earth" policy of Hitler's Russian campaign.  

---

60 *Ibid.*, p. 44.  
However, it must be noted that the three references to which the title of this work alludes may not be as equal as Dietrich's argument suggests. By this I mean that the power of the multiple allusions, in my mind, do not have equal power over the viewer's imagination. It could be argued that the reference to Nazi Germany in this work overshadows the other references, thus changing one's entire perception of the work. For instance, what of the mysterious steam engine and tender on tracks, which Dietrich relegates to the production of a sense of mystery in the work? The referent of this image for me—due in part to the title of the work, as well as the image of the tank on the fifth double page—was the Holocaust, and the efficient mode of transportation used to carry victims to the death camps.\textsuperscript{62} Dietrich's argument does not account for the power that referents to Nazi Germany carry; she does not account for, nor does she take into consideration, the contemporary fascination with fascism.

Dietrich sums up her analysis of Johannisnacht II with the statement:

Kiefer jumbles codes and chooses themes that in themselves embody jumbled codes, thus demonstrating that the jumbling of codes or, rather, the unspecificity of messages is endemic to our culture. Tying his analysis of ambiguity to historical events, here Hitler's world war, Kiefer applies the concept of ambiguity also to the writing and reading, and therefore our understanding, of history. That is why he chooses the book as his artistic medium. Making images not only compares with the making of text—it is useful to remember that graphos denotes both writing and

\textsuperscript{62}Indeed, Kiefer himself seems fully aware of the continuing power of Nazism in this respect—that even the most banal images may produce allusion to the period. Answering the question posed to him about the way the soot-blackened chambers of his brickworks in Buchen and the ash-coloured clothes in his paintings made one think, inevitably, of Auschwitz, Kiefer states: "Yes, but that doesn't come from the brickworks, but rather from our conscience. Such an experience, such an awareness directs our angle of vision to the thing [Auschwitz]. Anywhere we see railroad tracks we think of Auschwitz. That will remain that way for a long time." From Kämmerling and Pursche, (November 16, 1990), pp. 29-30.
reading—but is a reciprocal process between the maker and his audience. The viewer's decision in what he perceives is equivalent to the artist's decision to manipulate what he presents.63

In this work, then, if we accept Dietrich's reading, Kiefer is, in part, offering a critique of historical consciousness. A self-awareness in the reader/viewer is accomplished by one's consciousness of the work's deliberate manipulations. This awareness, I would propose, creates a certain critical distance in which one may ponder the ambiguity of, among other things, our historical consciousness—and our own inescapable involvement in its construction.

For as Dietrich elucidates in her conclusion, how are we to approach a past that is so mutable, subject to manipulation by all, including "the politician who appropriates popular culture for his purposes, the photographer who carries home documentary material without making clear his choices, and the historian who gathers information but always remains master of his presentation...?"64

Contrary to Sherlock's argument, then, the multiple historical references in this work, it would seem, function as a critique of the multivalence of messages inherent in our culture. Moreover, Kiefer's project, at least in this instance, may be understood not as an example of "pastiche," as Sherlock contends, but as an enterprise closely related to Jameson's own. Kiefer draws attention to the way by which historical "truth" is ever allusive—perhaps even impossible to discern—due to innumerable layering of meanings. Furthermore, by referencing Nazism's own appropriations and manipulations, in this case the use of the midsummer celebrations of Saint John's Day as a prop for Nazi expansionism, Kiefer calls attention to

63 ibid.
64 ibid.
Nazism's extensive employment of pastiche, to borrow Jameson's term. The signs of earlier cultures, displaced from their historical moment, were employed to serve Nazi ideology.

There is, one will recognize, a fundamental difference between the way one "reads" Kiefer’s books and the way one reads his paintings. The books, as Dietrich's argument makes clear, have a very pronounced temporal element. Not unlike words or phrases, the individual images are not truly significant by themselves; they acquire meaning only through their syntactical relationship with other images—a relationship which is experienced by the reader/viewer temporally, as one turns the pages. Consequently, one might ask how Dietrich’s insights may contribute to an understanding of Kiefer’s paintings, which, in their structure, are articulated synchronically rather than diachronically? Before turning to Jean Fisher’s article, in which she addresses Kiefer’s paintings and notes many aspects similar to those noted by Dietrich, it seems prudent to briefly examine what might be termed an "operational" relationship between Kiefer’s books and paintings directly. Charles Haxthausen’s contributions are extremely helpful in apprehending this relationship.

According to Haxthausen, the apparent disparity between the structure of Kiefer's books and paintings does not make them operate as differently as one might suspect. Comparing two of Kiefer’s works, the book Die Hermannsschlacht ("The Battle of Arminius," 1977: fig 11) and the mixed-media composition on the same subject, Wege der Weltweisheit: Die Hermannsschlacht ("Ways of Worldly Wisdom: the Battle of Arminius," 1980: fig. 12), Haxthausen elucidates the nature of this relationship:
The individual portraits that are presented sequentially in the former are presented simultaneously, in a single composite image, in the latter. Yet this distinction between the diachronic and the synchronic generation of meaning applies only to the mode of articulation itself, for there are synchronic and diachronic elements in both works, and both types of structure are integral to the experience of each. In the diachronic structure of the book, the synchronic is present in the controlling idea, which speciously unites these disparate figures as agents of nationalist myth. In the mixed-media version, this synchronic idea is also manifest in the very structure of the work, but as we perceive the disparate images from various historical epochs we experience that myth as something unfolding and acquiring new dimensions over time. For Kiefer the link between temporality and meaning is therefore not understood merely syntagmatically, but also genealogically.\(^{65}\)

Furthermore, Kiefer's superimposition of concentric rings over the surface of \textit{Wege der}... may be understood as more than a mere compositional device; it also contributes to the diachronic component as an allusion to the temporal layering of meaning fundamental to the construction and maintenance of nationalist myths—which grow like the rings of trees. With these observations in mind then, one may recognize that the diachronic components in his works are not isolated to his books, but are, in Haxthausen's words, "...a feature of all Kiefer's major compositions...."\(^{66}\)

With this in mind, if one now turns to Jean Fisher's article, which addresses aspects of Kiefer's paintings, one will recognize certain similarities to the discoveries proposed by Dietrich in her analysis of Kiefer's book. Similar to Dietrich's article, Fisher begins her argument by noting that Kiefer often combines different semiotic systems in his paintings. However, while


\(^{66}\)\textit{Ibid.}\
Dietrich noted Kiefer's use of three codes simultaneously—image, text, and photography—Fisher adds a fourth, "nature".

It is important to make clear, before continuing on to her examination of the nature and relationship of these codes, what Fisher sees as Kiefer's fundamental project. This is important because Fisher sketches a basic underlying principle to Kiefer's work which is then supposed to be kept in mind throughout her more thorough examination of the codes Kiefer uses. This technique is useful to a certain extent; although as I think it will become clear, the strength of Fisher's argument lies not so much in her ability to substantiate her initial statement of Kiefer's fundamental project—in fact, no direct attempt is made—67—but rather in the insights her examination of the codes in Kiefer's work provides.

Where Dietrich spent the majority of her time tying Kiefer's deliberate confusion of different semiotic codes to a more generic examination of issues of perception, Fisher contends that this combination of codes comments on nationality by probing the historical processes that affect this identity. According to Fisher, by blatantly displaying the slippage and mutability of the meaning of the signs he uses in his work—signs which are already embodied with cultural references—Kiefer alludes to the construction of cultural identity at a fundamental level. For, as Fisher states: "The slippage and mutability of the meaning of signs render the identity of things uncertain, and it is against the danger of dissolution and non-entity that social forces attempt to bind the fragments of life into a coherent whole."68 Furthermore, because Kiefer's choices of themes often refer to Germany's period of National

67 The basis of Fisher's argument on this point is that the relationship and nature of the codes allude to what she sees as Kiefer's fundamental project. The strength of this allusion, in my mind, is somewhat questionable.
Socialism, Fisher focuses her examination on the way in which the signs in Kiefer's work allude to the construction of German identity in this period specifically. For example, where Maureen Sherlock saw Kiefer's use of signs that reference diverse historical periods as symptomatic of Jameson's notion of pastiche, Fisher sees a direct allusion to National Socialism. The parallel is made clear in this statement by Fisher:

German National Socialism disrupted an idea of history insofar as its image was created from a nostalgia for what had never really existed—an imaginary construct of discontinuous elements drawn from different cultural sources, and whose expression so exceeded the boundaries of its own possibility that reality assumed the theatricality of Das Rheingold itself.69

The most pervasive and immediate of the different semiotic codes Kiefer uses in his work are the text and the image. The text, which takes the form of hand-written "titles" inscribed across the surface of the images, more often than not serves to impregnate the image with references to mythology and history. However, it is quite apparent, as Fisher points out, that the image is not intended as a direct illustration of an implied narrative text. The titles are quite obviously and literally mapped onto the image, drawing attention to the constructed relationship between text and image. Furthermore, according to Fisher;

...in the articulation of these two different registers of representation, a torsion takes place that gives the work a texture of duplicity. This apparent demand for an allegorical reading leads us to digress into other scenes and subtexts beyond those explicitly stated.70

69 Ibid., p. 110.
70 Ibid.: A further observation noted by Fisher, although perhaps more implicitly stated, is that this torsion between the two registers of representation sets in motion a kind of chain reaction, where one allegory leads to another. The information that is given by the works prompts the viewer to search through her
This is something akin to Dietrich's proposal that Kiefer's work engages the viewer in a dialogue and invites her to test the codes, or in this case to test the references alluded to, for possible meanings. However, more important to Fisher is the fact that the titles do not truly "name" the image, but rather draw attention to the apparent disparity between the two, tempting one to bind them together or establish a relationship between the two through allegory.

Fisher attempts to do just this in her analysis of the series Auszug aus Ägypten, ("Departure from Egypt," 1984-85: fig. 13). Here, Fisher first poses the question of why is it Aaron rather than Moses—the ostensible hero of the tale—that Kiefer refers to in this series? She then suggests:

During the temporary absence of Moses, Aaron broke faith with the Mosaic god, sanctioning the building of the golden calf and the Israelites return to former deities. For this lapse he was punished by exclusion from the promised land. Perhaps we may use Kiefer's allusion to this tale as an allegorical rendering of the anti-Christian and anti-Semitic neopaganism that marked the self-destructive course of Nazi Germany.

Furthermore, in this context, Fisher notes other possibilities. She proposes that the work possesses a further, structural duplicity in that it engages different texts—"the pictorial and the written, the "Germanic" and the "Hebrew"—embodying different belief structures, and invoking the familiar notion of "German" identity drawn across an image of "Jewish" difference. With this insight then, the text and the image in these series of works allude

---

own memory, testing different possibilities and moving on to others; this is something similar to Haxthausen's proposal that the viewing experiences Kiefer's works as something unfolding and acquiring new meanings over time.

Fisher, (September 1985), p. 109: The reference is made through the inclusion of an image of Aaron's distinctive rod.

Ibid.

Ibid.
to the fact that Nazi Germany's image of itself intimately depended upon its relation to other's posed as different, primarily the Jewish population.\textsuperscript{74}

For Fisher, Kiefer's inclusion of "reality" in his multimedia paintings also serves to expose mutability and slippage of meaning. "Nature" finds its way into much of Kiefer's work with the inclusion of organic and mineral objects incorporated into a resinous matrix of shellac or oil paint. In almost all instances, these objects function to represent something else—such as in the \textit{Margarethe/Sulamith} (1981-83) series, where stalks of straw represent the golden haired Margarethe (\textit{fig. 14}), or in the \textit{Auszug aus Ägypten} series (\textit{fig. 15}), where molten lead has been poured across the top half of the painting to depict the cloud form in which God revealed himself to the Israelites. Fisher suggests that by employing these traces of nature to represent something else—while they remain quite identifiable in their original state—Kiefer is able to hint at the impossibility of a complete exchange or translation between the media of representation and the thing depicted.\textsuperscript{75} Some essence will invariably be lost in the re-presentation. One's awareness of this phenomenon expands as one's familiarity with Kiefer's works grows. For example, the stalks of straw familiar from the \textit{Margarethe/Sulamith} series are employed in a similar fashion in another work to represent \textit{Die Meistersinger} ("The Mastersingers," 1981: \textit{fig. 16}), and the leaden cloud from \textit{Auszug aus Ägypten} becomes a nuclear pall in \textit{Emanation} (1984-85: \textit{fig. 17}).

\textsuperscript{74}\textit{Ibid.}: Besides this disclosure of the polarity inherent in cultural identity construction, Fisher also suggests that in many of Kiefer's landscapes the "Germanic"—and inevitably its expression in the rhetoric of Nazism—is alluded to by the strikingly tactile surfaces, which"...establish a close association between the painter and painting as site of action, and the land as subject matter. There is an equivalence here with the territorial idea that a reciprocal identity may form between the body and a given ground which, nurtured and well trodden, becomes invested with the self's sense of wholeness and of life-potency.": p. 107.

\textsuperscript{75}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 106.
The photographic image, which Kiefer has implemented in his paintings frequently since 1980, often underlies the entire surface of the work, although it is barely perceptible when the image is heavily overpainted. Curiously, unlike Dietrich, Fisher does not remark on Kiefer's simultaneous employment of photography and painting in his multi-media works as a critique of photographic representation as a carrier of "truth"; for certainly a case could be made for this.\textsuperscript{76} Instead, Fisher suggests that the photographic image in many of Kiefer's works often seems to be employed for a symbolic function. According to Fisher, Kiefer often uses the photographic image—traditionally thought of as a carrier of "truth"—as a symbol of "truth". More specifically, Kiefer, by using the photographic image, is able to allude to a moment of historical authenticity which has since been lost due to subsequent layers of meaning that we have added in the construction of our historical consciousness. As Fisher states:

In several of Kiefer's collages\textsuperscript{77}, the photographic landscape is a barely perceptible scene framed by an irregular border; like memory, it is seen as a distant and fragmentary territory whose remains have no clear identity, no more currency as truth than the marks and leaden blots that deface it.\textsuperscript{78}

Although I find Fisher's examination of Kiefer's use of different semiotic codes extremely helpful, as I noted above, her ability to tie this examination to her initial statement of Kiefer's fundamental project—a probing of the historical processes that affect cultural identity

\textsuperscript{76}For me, the photographic image in Kiefer's works functions both as a critique of the medium as a carrier of truth and as a symbol of this truth. In his densely layered, multi-media paintings, in which the authority of one medium over another is dispelled, Kiefer is able to suggest that not only is the individual medium suspect in its ability to carry meaning, but also that the historical moment that is their theme has also lost its authenticity.

\textsuperscript{77}Fisher uses the term collages for what I have been terming multi-media works.

\textsuperscript{78}ibid., p. 110
construction—is left somewhat in question. Fisher's reliance on the questionable strength of the allusion, rather than a more thorough analysis, is in part responsible for this. One would certainly expect to have the specific cultural and political context of Kiefer's work taken into account in any such analyses. Surprisingly, moreover, this oversight is not only to be found in Fisher's article. In all the arguments recounted to this point in this paper, as well as in many other articles not examined here, there is a surprising neglect of Kiefer's specific cultural and political context. This is especially curious since all of these articles seem to agree, at least on some level, that Kiefer's work has something to do with German identity and/or history.

Andreas Huyssen, recognizing this neglect of Kiefer's particular cultural and political context in the discourse on his work, has written a seminal essay on the subject titled, "Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth."\(^7\) According to Huyssen, this lack of attention to, or plain ignorance of, Kiefer's specific cultural and political context ultimately debilitating a more thorough understanding of his work; and, in many instances, this neglect has resulted in the construction and/or maintenance of stereotypes of national "essence," or Germanness, which fundamentally misrepresent the problematic of national identity in Kiefer's work.\(^8\) With this in mind, then, Huyssen's basic project in his essay is:

...to place Kiefer's aesthetic project in its specific cultural and political context, the context of German culture after Auschwitz out of which it grew and to which it gives aesthetic form, which energized it during long years of little recognition, and to which,

\(^7\)Huyssen, Spring 1989, pp. 25-45.
\(^8\)These stereotypes of Germanness are most apparent in the many one page reviews of Kiefer's work that have appeared in many art periodicals. However, they also find their way into many of the arguments I have noted, though perhaps more implicitly; and one will certainly recognize their use in—most notably—both Jed Perl and Donald Kuspit's articles.
I would argue against facile claims of transcendence and universality, it ultimately remains bound—in its strengths, in its weaknesses, and most of all in its ambiguities.81

Huyssen's most immediate attempt in this article to set forth a context for Kiefer's work involves establishing the continuing resonance Germany's fascist past has on its present, and perhaps more implicitly, how this phenomena has captured the attention of the American public.82 To do this, Huyssen relates Kiefer to three West German cultural phenomena: the new German cinema, neoexpressionism, and the so-called Historikerstreit. First, in chronological order, there was the new German cinema, consisting of the work of Fassbinder, Herzog, Wenders, Schloendorff, Kluge, Sanders-Brahms, von Trotta, Ottinger and many others. Huyssen notes that much of this work was driven by questions of German identity—be it personal, cultural, political and/or sexual; and that all of it was "...ultimately rooted in the acknowledgment that the fascist past and the postwar democratic present are inescapably chained together."83 For example, there are Fassbinder's films about the 1950's, Kluge's films from Yesterday Girl to The Patriot, as well as the various films concerning German terrorism and its relation to the past.84

Second, there were the neoexpressionists—or die neuen Wilden—as they were most commonly called. Again, much of this work seemed to be motivated by questions concerning German identity. However, much more

82An aspect of Huyssen's argument that I will not attempt to relate in depth here suggests why Kiefer's reception in the United States has been met oftentimes with rapt enthusiasm rather than the suspicion it evokes from his countrymen. In short, Huyssen suggests that due to a rather facile understanding of German postwar context, the American public has indulged in a fascination or romanticization of Germany's attempts to come to terms with its past, and has thus been far less critical in their reception of art on the subject; and furthermore, this has oftentimes led to the naive glorification of a subject that deserves a critical eye.
83Huyssen, (Spring 1989), p.27.
84Ibid.
important to Huyssen is that the representational mode used by these artists immediately sparked a debate about the legitimacy of a return to figuration after abstraction, minimalism and concept art. In a similar manner to the way German Expressionism had given rise to one of the most far-ranging debates about the aesthetics and politics of modernism in the 1930's, neoexpressionism's pictorial strategies, and the politics of representation, were immediately scrutinized by critics, leading to the employment of parallels between this movement and the regressive figurative art of Nazi Germany.

Third, there was the so-called Historikerstreit in Germany. In this historians' debate of 1986, arguably for the first time—at least on such a scale and so publicly played out—German historians raised questions about German responsibility for the Holocaust, the alleged need to "historicize" the fascist past, and the problem of German national identity. As philosopher Jürgen Habermas aptly pointed out, the historians' debate about the German past was "...in truth a debate about the self-understanding of the Federal republic." Moreover, as Huyssen points out, underlying the whole debate was the conservative turn in German politics since the early 1980's—what has become known as the "Bitburg syndrome." Furthermore, intimately tied to this was the public debate about proposals to erect national monuments and national history museums in Bonn and in Berlin. According to Huyssen:

---

The various factions of German conservatism are in search of a "usable past." Their aim is to "normalize" German history and to free German nationalism from the shadows of fascism—a kind of laundering of the German past for the benefit of the conservative ideological agenda.  

Regardless of the differing aims and ideological positions held by the historians in this debate, as well as those espoused or grappled with by the individuals of the other two cultural phenomena—the new German cinema and neoexpressionism—and perhaps more to Huyssen's point, all three phenomena attest to how West German culture remains haunted by its past. Anselm Kiefer and his work, as a part of this culture, must be seen against this background of issues peculiar to postwar German culture.

With this in mind, Huyssen sets out to provide a preliminary discussion of how Kiefer's work fits into this particular context. He begins this discussion by noting the fundamental difference between the reception of Kiefer's work in the United States and its reception in West Germany. As I have pointed out above, unlike many critics in the United States—termed Kiefer "triumphalists" by Huyssen—West German critics have been much more skeptical of the idea that Kiefer successfully deals with issues of the German past in his work. "What is it, then," Huyssen asks, "that has Kiefer's compatriots up in arms?"

With what seems to be an incredible naiveté and insouciance, Kiefer is drawn time and again to those icons, motifs, themes of the German culture and political tradition which, a generation earlier, had energized the fascist cultural synthesis that resulted

---

89Huyssen, (Spring 1989), p. 28.
90Peter Scheldahl's article, "Our Kiefer," Art in America, March 1988, pp. 116-126, is a good example of what Huyssen means by this term.
91Huyssen, (Spring 1989), p. 29.
in the worst disaster of German history. ... The problem is in
the very usage of those icons, in the fact that Kiefer's images
violate a taboo, transgress a boundary that had been carefully
guarded, and not for bad reasons, by the postwar cultural
consensus in West Germany: abstention from the image-world of
fascism, condemnation of any cultural iconography even
remotely reminiscent of those barbaric years. This self-imposed
abstention, after all, was at the heart of Germany's postwar
reemergence as a relatively stable democratic culture in a
Western mode.

Why, then, does Kiefer insist on working with such a
controversial body of icons? 92

The answer to this question given by American critics, generally
speaking, has been a facile notion that Kiefer is simply fighting repression;
the lone hero confronting his countrymen with ugly truths they would rather
forget. 93 However, Huysen's attention to Kiefer's specific context reveals a
greater complexity. The issue, according to Huysen, is not a confrontation
between the artist, whose work conjures up uncomfortable truths, and his
countrymen, who want to forget their fascist past. Those who want to forget,
will forget—Kiefer or no Kiefer. 94 Consequently, according to Huysen, the
controversial body of icons in Kiefer's work does not "... challenge the
repressions of those who refuse to face the terror of the past; rather they
challenge the repressions of those who do remember and who do accept the
burden of fascism on German national identity." 95

Furthermore, the largely American notion that Kiefer is some type of
lone hero combating widespread repression is equally untenable with a closer

92 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
93 This rhetoric makes up large part of Rosenthal's catalogue. It also can be seen in the Donald Kuspit
article discussed above, as well as in the many one page reviews of Kiefer's work that have appeared in
American art periodicals since the early eighties.
95 Ibid.
examination of his specific context. According to Huysen, Kiefer's beginnings are firmly embedded in the German protest culture of the 1960s, when talk about fascism, German history, guilt, and the Holocaust was "the order of the day." Besides the contributions of the new German cinema already mentioned, during this time a whole social movement, "...that of the extra-parliamentary opposition and the New Left inside and outside the academy—had swept the country with its agenda of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, the coping with or coming-to-terms with the past." Post-war generations initiated what became a large-scale generational conflict by forcing the question of what parents had done—or more often not done—between 1933 and 1945. Another focal issue was whether former members of the Nazi party should be allowed to hold high-level political positions. Furthermore, the German theaters performed dozens of documentary plays about fascism and the Holocaust, and even scores of television programs brought issues of a common fascist past directly into peoples' living-rooms. "After all," as Huysen states, "1969 was the year in which Willy Brandt, a refugee from the Nazis and an active member of the Norwegian underground during the war, became chancellor and initiated a policy of détente with the East [Ostpolitik] which was based on the public acknowledgment of 'those things.'"

---

96 Indeed, Kiefer himself—at least before his recent interviews, when we heard his voice through the paraphrases of art criticism—is not innocent in supporting such notions. Witness his statement by account of Steven Madoff (October 1987), p. 127; "In '69, when I began, no one dared talk about these things," in light of Huysen's portrayal of context that follows.


98 Ibid.


101Ibid., p. 31.
How does Kiefer's approach to understanding and representing the past compare with these other efforts? Using one of Kiefer's earliest works, a series of photographs entitled \textit{Besetzungen} ("Occupations," 1969: fig. 18),\textsuperscript{102} as an example to discuss what he feels is a central issue governing much of Kiefer's work through the 1970s, Huyssen comes to the conclusion that Kiefer's approach differed significantly from what he calls, in shorthand, "...the liberal and social-democratic antifascist consensus of those years."\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Besetzungen} consists of a series of photographs taken at various locations throughout Europe, most of which are very identifiable historical spaces, (complete with captions to identify them). In all of the photographs the artist is featured performing, citing, embodying the Sieg Heil gesture. The most widely recognized interpretation for this series is that the artist has assumed the identity of the conquering National Socialist who occupies Europe, and then through certain methods within the work, ridicules the gesture through multiple instances of satire and irony.\textsuperscript{104} As Huyssen relates, upon first seeing the artist embodying such a gesture;

The first reaction to this kind of work must be shock and dismay, and the work anticipates that. A taboo has been violated. But when one looks again, multiple ironies begin to appear. In almost all of the photos the Sieg Heil figure is minuscule, dwarfed by the surroundings: the shots are taken from afar. In one of the photos the figure stands in a bathtub and is seen against a backlit window.\textsuperscript{105} There are no jubilant

\textsuperscript{102}A number of these photographs were incorporated into the 1969 book, \textit{Heroische Sinnbilder} ("Heroic Allegories"). In 1973, when Kiefer had his first one-man show at Galerie Michael Werner in Cologne, Werner recalls that: "I would never have shown the \textit{Heroic Allegories}. It was too sensitive." By account of Madoff, (October 1987), p. 125.

\textsuperscript{103}Huyssen, (Spring 1989), p. 31.


\textsuperscript{105}As Rosenthal suggests, this seems to ridicule the miraculous act of walking on water, which it was joked that Hitler did, because he could not swim. A prominently placed wine bottle hints at the source of the figure's delusions of grandeur. (1987), p. 14.
masses, marching soldiers, nor any other emblems of power and imperialism that we know from the historical footage from the Nazi era. The artist does not identify with the gesture of Nazi occupation, he ridicules it, satirizes it. He is properly critical. But even this consideration does not lay to rest our fundamental uneasiness. Are irony and satire really appropriate modes for dealing with fascist terror? Doesn't this series of photographs belittle the very real terror which the Sieg Heil gesture conjures up for a historically informed memory?\textsuperscript{106}

However, Huyssen notes that there is another dimension to this work,

"...a dimension of self-conscious mise-en-scène that is at its conceptual core,"\textsuperscript{107} which, once recognized, reveals how significantly Kiefer's work differs from other efforts of the time. As Huyssen states;

Rather than seeing this series of photos only as representing the artist occupying Europe with the fascist gesture of conquest, we may, in another register, see the artist occupying various framed image-spaces: landscapes, historical buildings, interiors, precisely the image spaces of most of Kiefer's later paintings. But why then the Sieg Heil gesture? I would suggest that it be read as a conceptual gesture reminding us that indeed Nazi culture had most effectively occupied, exploited, and abused the power of the visual, especially the power of massive monumentalism and of a confining, even disciplining, central point perspective. Fascism had furthermore perverted, abused, and sucked up whole territories of a German image-world, turning national iconic and literary traditions into mere ornaments of power and thereby leaving post-1945 culture with a tabula rasa that was bound to cause a smoldering crisis of identity.\textsuperscript{108}

Huyssen reminds us that the horrors perpetrated during the Nazi period effected a certain closure on language, and images specifically with regard to

\textsuperscript{106}Huyssen, (Spring 1989), p. 31.
\textsuperscript{107}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., pp. 33-34.
this discussion of Kiefer; whole avenues of history and tradition, tainted by their perverted use under National Socialism, had been sealed behind a cordon sanitaire of proper coping with the past espoused by the liberal and social democratic consensus in Germany.109 One is reminded of Theodor Adorno's famous dictum that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz. Huyssen quotes Werner Herzog's statement on the subject, where he said, "We live in a society that has no adequate images any more, and, if we do not find adequate images and an adequate language for our civilization with which to express them, we will die out like dinosaurs. It's as simple as that."110

With this context in mind, then, Kiefer's "occupations"—both in Besetzungen and as a central issue that governs much of his work throughout the 1970's and into the early 1980's—seems to address the problem created by the burden fascism has had on images, as Huyssen suggests.111 According to Huyssen, from this perspective, and within the context of postwar German art, Kiefer's "occupations" of the fascist image-space and of other nationalist iconography were indeed a new departure for German art. For unlike literature and film, media in which the confrontation with the National Socialist past had become a widespread concern during the 1960s, the West German painting scene appeared untouched.112

---

109Ibid., pp. 34-35.
110Ibid., p. 34. The quote is from, Images at the Horizon, Workshop with Werner Herzog conducted by Roger Ebert, Chicago, Facets Multimedia, 1979, p. 21.
111Ibid., "He [Kiefer] insists that the burden of fascism on images has to be reflected and worked through by any postwar German artist worth his or her salt."
112Ibid.: With regards to this evasion within the West German art scene, Huyssen notes the dominant trends of Gruppe Zéros light experiments, the situationist-related Fluxus movement, and the experiments in figuration in the work of Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter and concludes: "The focus of these artists, whether or not they wanted their art to be socially critical, was the present: consumer capitalism in the age of America and television." Dorothea Dietrich, in an article on Markus Lüpertz's German Motifs, noted that up to 1970, aside from Kiefer's work, only one work out of all German artists, Joseph Beuys'
Huysen devotes the remainder of his article to the question raised (if not answered) by Jed Perl at the beginning of this paper; namely, does Kiefer's reflection on the fascist image-space and other nationalist iconography indulge or is implemented in the contemporary fascination with fascism, with terror, and with death? His reflection on this question is extremely helpful and bears repeating here.

How does Kiefer fit into the phenomena of fascinating fascism? Unlike Perl's simplistic indictment, Huysen suggests that Kiefer might utilize contemporary fascination with fascism purposefully. His reflection on this question begins with an examination of Kiefer's paintings of fascist architecture (fig. 19), which according to Huysen, and I would concur, "...exude an overwhelming statism, a monumental melancholy, and an intense aesthetic appeal of color, texture, and layering of painterly materials that can induce a deeply meditative, if not paralyzing state in the viewer." Huysen's analysis takes the form of relating his experience of these works while attending the 1987 Kiefer retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where he describes three stages of response and reflection.

Huysen's first stage, as he recounts it, was fascination:

...fascination with the visual pleasure Kiefer brings to the subject matter of fascist architecture. If seen in photographs, such buildings will most likely provoke only the Pavlovian reaction of condemnation: everybody knows what fascist architecture is and

---


113 Specifically, Huysen notes four works from the 1987 Kiefer retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York: the two watercolours entitled To the Unknown Painter (1980, 1982), and the two large oil paintings entitled The Stairs (1982-83) and Interior (1981). In my mind, these works are representative of Kiefer's many other works on the subject.


115 He does this with the caveat that what he sketches as three stages was much more blurred in his mind during the actual moment of viewing, Ibid.
what it represents. Being confronted with Kiefer's rendering of the interior of Albert Speer's Reichschancellery was therefore like seeing it for the first time, precisely because "it" was neither Speer's famous building nor a "realistic" representation of it. And what I saw was ruins, images of ruins, the ruins of fascism in the mode of allegory that seemed to hold the promise of a beyond. True, there is the almost overbearing monumentalism of size and subject matter of these paintings, with central point perspective driven to its most insidious extreme. But then this monumentalism of central perspective itself seems to be undermined by the claims the multiply layered surfaces make on the viewer, by the fragility and transitoriness of the materials Kiefer uses in his thick oil paint, emulsion, shellac, and straw. Dark and somber as they are, these paintings assume a ghostlike luminosity and immateriality that belies their monumentality. They appear like dream images, architectural structures that seem intact, but are intriguingly made to appear as ruins: the resurrected ruin of fascism as simulacrum, as the painterly realization of a contemporary state of mind.116

It is precisely this stage, this "new discourse," which Friedländer warns us of and which Sontag labeled fascinating fascism over twenty years ago. One becomes fascinated with the visual pleasure of the aesthetic of the work, and perhaps the "promise of a beyond," and thus an awareness of the subject of Nazism, in all its horrid truth, is somewhat overshadowed. Huyssen recognizes this as he relates in his second stage of experience.

Huyssen's second stage of experience can be roughly equated to Perl's skepticism (but not outrage). Huyssen speaks of a "...pervasive feeling of being had, having been lured into that fascinating fascism which today compliments fascism's own strategies...."117 One will remember Friedländer's statement that aestheticism is a defense against reality. It is just this historical

116Ibid., p. 38.
117Ibid.
reality, this veracious depiction of the horrors inflicted by the Third Reich, that as Huyssten recounts he was at a loss to find in Kiefer's works.\textsuperscript{118} Huyssten relates that he began to question whether this work was fascism at one remove:

Even as images of fascist ruins, they [Kiefer's works] are still monuments to the demagogic representation of power, and they affirm, in their overwhelming monumentalism and relentless use of central point perspective, the power of representation that modernism has done so much to question and reflect critically.\textsuperscript{119}

One might speculate that Perl's experience of Kiefer's works were quite similar to Huyssten's second stage.

Huyssten, however, relates a third stage of experience—one in which his initial thoughts about Kiefer's "occupations" asserted themselves again, leading to a critical reflection of his two previous stages and what they might mean when viewed as compliments. He poses the intriguing questions:

What if Kiefer, here too, intended to confront us with our own repressions of the fascist image-sphere? Perhaps his project was precisely to counter the by now often hollow litany about the fascist aestheticization of politics, to counter the merely rational explanations of fascist terror by recreating the aesthetic lure of fascism for the present and thus forcing us to confront the possibility that we ourselves are not immune to what we so rationally condemn and dismiss. ... How else but through obsessive quotation could he conjure up the lure of what once enthralled Germany and has not been acknowledged, let alone properly worked through? How else but through painterly melancholy and nightmarish evocation could he confront the blockages in the contemporary German psyche?\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{118}ibid.
\textsuperscript{119}ibid.
\textsuperscript{120}ibid., pp. 38-39.
One will remember the aspect of Friedländer's essay that Perl conveniently overlooked; "...that it is precisely this reevocation and reinterpretation of the past that helps us to better understand the past itself, especially in its psychological dimensions. Thus theme and aesthetics [from the "new discourse"]...allow us to perceive something of the psychological hold Nazism had in its day."\(^\text{121}\) However, Friedländer does not discuss the possibility that such disclosures could be the result of an artist's intention; although this, certainly, does not preclude the possibility.\(^\text{122}\)

From the discussion of Friedländer's essay earlier, one must also remember that awareness of aspects of the original attraction of Nazism may easily be overshadowed by a fascination with the spectacle. Huyssen recognizes this and states:

Here, then, is the dilemma: whether to read these paintings as a melancholy fixation on the dreamlike ruins of fascism that locks the viewer into complicity, or, instead, as a critique of the spectator, who is caught up in a complex web of melancholy, fascination, and repression.\(^\text{123}\)

For these paintings to function effectively in the later respect, as a critique of the viewer, there must be something within them that breaks the visual immediacy of the image to allow for reflection. Huyssen notes that such aspects exist, including the linguistic inscriptions and the dead center positioning of a palette on a black pole common to several of the works in this series (fig. 20). However, while he acknowledges that these linguistic and conceptual inscriptions tend to "break the spell" of the images of fascist architectural monuments as pure an unmediated and to produce an

\(^{122}\)I will return to this in my own examination of the series.
estrangement effect—because the images must be both read and seen—he remains skeptical.

Huyssen's skepticism derives primarily from Kiefer's choice of estranging inscriptions and signs—the written title "to the unknown painter" and the palette—which in combination refer to at once notions of the unknown soldier and to the unknown, unrecognized genius. Jürgen Harten has suggested that these allusions might refer to the classical topos of paralleling the heroism of the warrior with the heroism of the genial artist. Thus Kiefer's use of the romantic motif of a monument to the unknown soldier, here displaced and posited as a monument to unknown artist, could be read as a critique of the myth of artistic genius. However, Huyssen contends that this reading seems a bit forced, since these particular linguistic and conceptual inscriptions, "...are themselves integral to the myths of warrior heroism and aesthetic genius that have been major props of middle-class culture since romanticism." Thus, as Huyssen continues:

A potentially critical strategy of breaking visual immediacy through linguistic markers and conceptually estranging signs on the work's surface ultimately serves only to reinforce the myth it ostensible undermines. Furthermore, the undocumented heroism of the unknown soldier is displaced here into the heroism of that very well-known painter, Anselm K., who may himself fallen for the lure he had set out to combat.

However, one could certainly argue that the simple usage of these dubious (in Huyssen's eyes) inscriptions does not necessarily mean that the works can not

---

125Huyssen, (Spring 1989), p., 39.
126Ibid., pp. 39-40.
have a critical edge. To say it in another way, how else but through evoking these myths on some level could Kiefer then show his criticism of them?

More convincing, in my mind, is Huyssen's second criticism of these linguistic and conceptual inscriptions. According to Huyssen, by pictorially equating the ruins of fascism with the ruins of the house of painting;

Kiefer ends up collapsing the difference between the myth of the end of painting and the defeat of fascism. This is a conceit that seems to draw in highly problematic ways on the phantasmagoria that fascism itself is the ultimate Gesamtkunstwerk, requiring a world historical Götterdämmerung at its end.\textsuperscript{127}

However, despite the problematical nature of Kiefer's choice of linguistic inscriptions and conceptual signs, one could still argue that these paintings, seen on the level of a critique of the spectator who is confronted by such monuments to fascism, continue to function effectively in some capacity; visual immediacy is effectively broken leaving a space for contemplation. Moreover, Huyssen does not attempt to locate or examine the critical distancing devices in the other works in this series, which do not use the unknown soldier/unknown artist parallel.\textsuperscript{128}

Huyssen continues and concludes his discussion of Kiefer's use of fascinating fascism with an examination of the Margarethe/Sulamith series (1981-83), inspired by Paul Celan's famous poem Todesfugue. Rather than relating the entirety of Huyssen's analysis on this series, I will simply recount his analysis of one of the works, Sulamith (1983: fig. 21), which effectively encapsulates Huyssen's major points of discussion and shows how the problematics revealed in the architectural series are circumvented here.

\textsuperscript{127}\textit{ibid.}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{128}I will return to this in my own examination of this series.
The first aspect of this painting that Huyssen examines is that alluded to by the title. As mentioned above, the titles of the *Margarethe/Sulamith* series refer to the poem *Todesfuge* by Paul Celan, a Jewish poet who survived a Nazi concentration camp. In the German context, this reference has deep resonance. As Huyssen elucidates:

In the 1950's, Theodor Adorno had claimed that after Auschwitz lyric poetry was no longer possible. The unimaginable horrors of the holocaust had irretrievably pushed poetic language, especially that written in German, to the edges of silence. But Celan demonstrated that this ultimate crisis of poetic language could still be articulated within language itself when he confronted the ultimate challenge of writing a poem about the very event that seemed to have made all language incommensurate. I would suggest that in the Margarete/Shulamite series...Kiefer succeeds in doing for painting what Celan did for poetry more than thirty years ago.\textsuperscript{129}

According to Huyssen, Kiefer's equation of fascism with the end of painting—revealed as problematic in the architectural series—in light of the context sketched above, takes on a different connotation.\textsuperscript{130} Huyssen suggests that like Celan and Adorno, Kiefer believes that the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis have led to the ultimate crisis of postwar art; "Fascism has not only revealed the extent to which poetry and painting can never be commensurate to the world of historical violence. It has also

\textsuperscript{129}Huyssen, (Spring 1989), p. 40.

\textsuperscript{130}It must be noted here, however, that Huyssen has made a certain leap in his analysis. The equation of fascism with the end of painting, evident in the architectural series with the combination of the conceptual symbol of a palette against fascist architectural ruins, is not so plainly evoked here. In fact, the evocation of this equation is only fulfilled with full knowledge of the particular context in which Huyssen places Celan's poem. To say it in another way, there is no plain evidence that Kiefer's project in this series was to evoke this particular historical context of Celan's work, rather than, for instance, simply evoking the horrors which this poem so empathically articulates.
demonstrated how politics can ruthlessly exploit the aesthetic dimension and harness it in the service of violence and destruction.\footnote{Huysen, (Spring 1989), p. 41.}

As for the image itself, here Kiefer's source is Wilhelm Kreis's fascist design for the Funeral Hall for the Great German Soldiers, in the Hall of Soldiers in Berlin (c. 1939: fig. 22).\footnote{Rosenthal, (1987), p. 119.} Originally planned as a monument to glorify soldiers of the Third Reich, Kiefer has transformed the image into a haunting memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. Blackened by thick, tar-like paint, this cavernous interior boldly evokes in the spectator thoughts of the crematoria used to erase Holocaust victims without trace. The monumental size of the painting, as well as Kiefer's use of an extremely low-level perspective, exacerbate the feelings of dread produced, while the prominent orthogonals of the insidious central-point perspective employed threaten to suck the viewer into this murderous space. Unlike the architectural series, in this work, according to Huysen, Kiefer is successful in his use of the power of fascism. The evocation of the horrors of the Holocaust effectively function to create a critical distance for the spectator, a space in which to contemplate and to mourn. As Huysen concludes,

By transforming a fascist architectural space, dedicated to the death cult of the Nazis, into a memorial for Nazism's victims, he creates an effect of genuine critical Umfunktionierung, as Brecht would have called it, an effect that reveals fascism's genocidal telos in its own celebratory memorial spaces.\footnote{Huysen, (Spring 1989), p. 43.}

As I hope has become clear after this discussion of Huysen's article, the specific cultural and political context in which Kiefer's work was produced is of fundamental importance to understanding his mediations on
the German past. This is not to say that the other scholarly arguments examined thus far in this paper, which do not focus on Kiefer's context, do not contribute significantly to the discourse. However, in retrospect of Huyssen's article, these analyses seem incomplete in their neglect of issues peculiar to postwar Germany, perhaps even, as Huyssen puts it, "ultimately disabled."

With this in mind, then, I propose in the following section to draw upon and add to the contributions made by these articles—especially that of Huyssen\textsuperscript{134}—in an analysis of a small sample of Kiefer's works. In limiting my analysis of Kiefer to a few specific works, I hope to avoid the overgeneralizations that result in grand statements concerning Kiefer's "overall project;" such examinations, in my mind, constrict our understanding of an œuvre that has a subtle complexity. In a similar manner to Dorothea Dietrich's article discussed above, I will seek to provide a more precise examination of specific works which then might contribute to subsequent efforts.

In choosing my sample of Kiefer's works, I have sought those works or series of works in which Kiefer's mediations on the German past are most blatantly manifested; primarily works that, for precisely this reason, have already been discussed in some detail to this point in this paper. Of course, by limiting my analysis in this way, I consequently limit my discussion to certain issues relevant to my sample, and thus neglect other pertinent aspects and questions. However, this paper does not seek to be an exhaustive study of the subject; and, in fact, it is my hope that the discussion to follow will bring to light questions as yet unarticulated, issues so far unraised, and thus

\textsuperscript{134}The cultural and political context that he sketches will inform much of my own analysis, and is certainly something I hope the reader will be conscious of throughout the following section of this paper.
promote further discussion. Perhaps this is, in a way, an aspect of Kieser's own project.
What is past is not dead: it is not even past. We cut ourselves off from it; we pretend to be strangers.

Christa Wolf
*A Model Childhood*

Fundamental to Huyssen's discussion of Kiefer's specific political and cultural context are his attempts to establish the continuing resonance of Germany's National Socialist past on the present. However, while one becomes aware of the importance of this resonance—with the notion that "West German culture remains haunted by its past"—the nature of this phenomenon is never clearly articulated by Huyssen. What exactly does Huyssen mean when he speaks of "blockages in the contemporary German psyche," or elsewhere of "a psychic disposition dominant in postwar Germany?" \(^{135}\) Related to this is the question: how might one more clearly articulate the effect of this "psychic disposition" on Kiefer (and his work)? By this I mean that although Huyssen goes to great lengths to establish Kiefer's cultural and political context, one is predominantly left with the notion that the artist is somehow outside looking in—that although part of the artist's project is fundamentally concerned with his own political and cultural context, he has established a certain critical distance from it. While this is certainly in part true, it neglects confronting directly the question of how is Kiefer himself effected by this context? Though always important, this

---

question, as I hope will become clear below, gains a particular urgency with regard to Kiefer.

One way to pursue these questions more precisely—the nature in which Germany remains haunted by its past and how Kiefer is affected by this phenomenon—is to relate Kiefer and his aesthetic project to a highly influential psychoanalytic study, the *Inability to Mourn*. In fact, this study is what Huyssen is almost assuredly alluding to by way of such terms as "psychic disposition" and "blockages" in the collective German psyche. Those readers familiar with recent analyses of German cinema will recognize this study as the crux of discussions of *Trauerarbeit*, or the "work of mourning." With this in mind, I wish to note from the outset that it is not my intention to narrow the subsequent discussion of Kiefer's work as *Trauerarbeit*, to collapse this examination into purely psychological terms. Although obviously written in such terms and informed by psychoanalytic theory, this study has much to add to our understanding of the resonance of Germany's recent past on the present, and to Kiefer's aesthetic project, beyond discussions of *Trauerarbeit*. To say it in another way, it is perhaps precisely because this study is able to clearly articulate in psychoanalytic terms the nature of the continuing resonance of the German past in the present that it becomes an extremely useful tool for further discussions beyond the purely psychological dimension.\(^{136}\)

In 1967, Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich published a groundbreaking psychoanalytic study, *The Inability to Mourn*, in which they applied to West German society Freud's theory of mourning and concluded

\(^{136}\)For example, in his discussion of German cinema, Eric Santner has attempted to rewrite this study from a perspective informed by postmodern theorizations of marginality and difference: See Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 1-30.
that Germans had not yet "come to terms" with their recent past.\textsuperscript{137} In this study, the Mitscherlichs reiterate repeatedly the apparent absence of any sustained emotional confrontation with the Nazi past in postwar German society. Those deep feelings that might have been expected to follow upon recognition of complicity in abominable crimes performed in the name of the \textit{Vaterland} and the \textit{Volksgemeinschaft} were not to be found; the loss of face among nations seemed to produce no shame; and the testimonies of the survivors of the Holocaust provoked no overt feelings of contrition, no desire to remember and to "work through" an excruciatingly painful common past. According to the Mitscherlichs, and central to their thesis, the population of the Federal Republic had avoided what might—and in psychoanalytical terms what should—have been the psychological reaction to the Nazi defeat in 1945, the direct confrontation with the horrific facts of the Final Solution and, perhaps above all, the loss of Hitler as Führer, namely a massive and widespread fall into depression and melancholy:

To millions of Germans the loss of the "Führer" (for all the oblivion that covered his downfall and the rapidity with which he was renounced) was not the loss of someone ordinary; identifications that had filled a central function in the lives of his followers were attached to his person. As we said, he had become the embodiment of their ego-ideal. The loss of an object so highly cathected with libidinal energy—one about whom nobody had any doubts, nor dared to have any, even when the country was being reduced to rubble—was indeed reason for melancholia. Through the catastrophe not only was the German ego-ideal robbed of the support of reality, but in addition the Führer himself was exposed by the victors as a criminal of truly

monstrous proportions. With this sudden reversal of his qualities, the ego of every single German individual suffered a central devaluation and impoverishment. This creates at least the prerequisites for a melancholic reaction.\textsuperscript{138}

Before continuing this discussion of the Mitscherlichs' study, it seems prudent to rehearse Freud's distinction between two different patterns of bereavement—mourning and melancholia—since it informs much of the Mitscherlichs' diagnosis. According to Freud, mourning occurs when an object that one had loved for its intrinsic qualities, an object recognized as distinct and separate (other) from oneself, is lost. The loss of an object loved in this manner, according to Freud, typically results in mourning:

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn to its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition—it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them.... Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it.\textsuperscript{139}

Once this process of mourning has been completed, the ego "becomes free and uninhibited again"\textsuperscript{140} and is thus able to cathect new love-objects.

\textsuperscript{138}Ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{140}Ibid., p. 245.
Quite different is the process in the case of melancholy, since the loved object fulfilled a different function in the psychological life of the bereaved. A melancholic reaction to loss occurs when the object in question was loved not as separate and distinct from oneself, but rather as a reflection of one's own sense of self and power. The predisposition to love in this fashion is a matter of insufficient strength and cohesion of the self to tolerate, or even comprehend, the reality of separateness.\textsuperscript{141} As Eric Santner states in a discussion of this topic:

The paradox of this narcissism [in the melancholic] is that the narcissist loves the object only insofar and as long as he or she can repress the otherness of the object; narcissistic love plays itself out in the (non-)space where "I" and "you" are not perceived as having hard edges. The grieving that occurs in melancholy is thus more primitive than what occurs in "healthy" mourning, since what is at stake is nothing less than the constitution of the boundaries between self and other, and the integration of that painful awareness of the dangers of separateness.... What melancholy must work through is not so much the loss of a particular object that one had loved and cared for—an object that had appealed to one's pleasure principle—but rather the loss of a fantasy of omnipotence. As Freud says, "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself." The melancholic grieves not so much for the loss of the other as for the fact of otherness and all that that entails. Melancholy, one might say, is a rehearsal of the shattering or fragmentation of one's primitive narcissism, an event that predates the capacity to feel any real mourning for a lost object, since for the narcissist other objects do not really exist.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{141}This is, of course, the same situation in which Freud describes the primary narcissist, the infant, who is unable to comprehend his separateness from his mother.
\textsuperscript{142}Santner, (1990), p. 3.
It should be noted that such concrete designations between patterns of bereavement, as any psychologist would point out, are hardly typical and are rarely found in such pure forms. However, the Mitscherlichs argue that given the predominance of the narcissistic element in the communal fabric of Nazi Germany, one must insist on the priority of the more primitive tasks of mourning (associated with melancholy) facing the postwar German population. Germans would have to "work through" the identifications they had maintained with Hitler and the Nazi ideology of Volksgemeinschaft, and moreover work through the traumatic shattering of this narcissistic relationship which came with the defeat of the regime in 1945, before they could even begin to comprehend the full magnitude of the crimes committed in the name of the Vaterland, much less to mourn for the victims.

However, as the Mitscherlichs insist repeatedly, this process of "working through" never occurred, never in fact started, in postwar Germany. This process, which would have required an inclination to work through a potentially debilitating state of melancholy (in the short run), was precluded due to the employment of psychic defense mechanisms that affected a certain closure to the past. According to the Mitscherlichs, foremost among these defense mechanisms were de-realization of the past, the radical shift of identifications with Hitler and Volksgemeinschaft to the victorious Allies, and finally, the self-constructed identification as victim. As the Mitscherlichs state:

The Federal Republic did not succumb to melancholia; instead, as a group, those who had lost their "ideal leader," the representative of a commonly shared ego-ideal, managed to avoid self-devaluation by breaking all effective bridges to the immediate past. This withdrawal of affective cathecting energy,
of interest, should not be regarded as a decision, as a conscious, 
deliberate act; it was an unconscious process, with only minimal 
guidance from the conscious ego. The disappearance from 
memory of events that had previously been highly stimulating 
and exciting must be regarded as the result of a self-protective 
mechanism triggered, so to speak, like a reflex action. This 
rejection of inner involvement in one's own behavior under the 
Third Reich prevented a loss of self-esteem that could hardly 
have been mastered, and a consequent outbreak of melancholia 
in innumerable cases.143

Furthermore, as the Mitscherlichs immediately elucidate, this de-
realization of the past—this "breaking of bridges"—is not a singular event, 
but rather an ongoing process; these ruptures in the continuity with the past 
must be constantly maintained by expending enormous psychic effort. 
According to the Mitscherlichs, this defense mechanism is in part responsible 
for a great deal of the psychic and even political immobility found throughout 
much of West Germany.

Related to this phenomena is the manic intensity with which the 
German population achieved its "economic miracle", which, the Mitscherlichs 
argue, awkwardly filled the gap left by this de-realization of the past: 
"Because of the persistence of this autistic attitude, a great number if not the 
majority of the citizens of the democratic West Germany have been unable to 
identify themselves with anything beyond its economic system."144 And later, 
in a related statement:

That so few signs of melancholia or even of mourning are to be seen among the great masses of the population can be attributed 
only to a collective denial of the past. The very grimness with 
which the job of clearing away the ruins was immediately

144Ibid., p. 27.
begun—which, in oversimplification, was taken as a sign of German efficiency—itself betrayed a manic element. Perhaps this manic defense also explains why news of the greatest crimes in Germany's history was received with so few indications of outward emotion.\textsuperscript{145}

It is important to note that the Mitscherlichs are hardly alone in either their method of investigation or their diagnosis of this complex subject;\textsuperscript{146} they were arguably not even the first. Theodore Adorno, in a lecture presented in 1959, touched on many of the issues the Mitscherlichs would later elaborate on, including most notably, their primary thesis of the narcissistic foundation of the German population's specular relation to Hitler and to the ideals of Nazism. Indeed, according to Adorno, whose analysis is even more severe than the Mitscherlichs', the postwar German population was never in any danger of succumbing to massive melancholy since they never, in fact, truly severed their identifications with Hitler and National socialism. As Adorno relates:

On the subjective side, the collective narcissism in the human psyche—national vanity, in a word—was immeasurably exalted by National Socialism. The individual's narcissistic drives, for which a callous world promises less and less satisfaction, which nonetheless persist undiminished as long as civilization refuses them so much, find a substitute gratification in their "identification with the whole." This collective narcissism was grievously damaged by the collapse of the Hitler regime; a damage which, however, occurred in the realm of simple fact,

\textsuperscript{145}/ibid., p. 28.
without each individual becoming conscious of it and thereby getting over it. This is the social-psychological relevance of the talk about an unmastered past. Also lacking is the panic that, according to Freud's theory in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, sets in where collective identifications break down. If the great psychologist's theory isn't to be thrown out, there remains only one conclusion: secretly, unconsciously smoldering and therefore especially powerful, these identifications as well as group narcissism were not destroyed but continued to exist.... From the viewpoint of social psychology, it would also be expected that this damaged group-narcissism is lying in wait to be repaired and grasps at everything in consciousness that might immediately bring the past into harmony with narcissistic wishes—but then it also, if possible, remolds reality as if this injury could be made not to have happened. To a degree this was indeed accomplished by economic prosperity and the feeling of "how competent we are."^147

Much the same as the Mitscherlichs, then, Adorno believed that the German population had narcissistically identified with Hitler and Nazi ideology, and more importantly, that this specular relationship had yet to be worked through.

Eric Santner has contributed to this discourse by adding a discussion of the "Jewish Question" as it might have functioned with regards to this narcissistic identity construction. As it has already been mentioned, implicit in the type of narcissistic relationship discussed above is the inability to tolerate (and perhaps even comprehend) otherness; difference is seen as something that intervenes from the outside, "something that could and should be purged from the otherwise pure system seamlessly continuous with

itself."\textsuperscript{148} Referencing Lacan's model for the formation of the self, Santner suggests that the Jews were assigned a role analogous to that of the (evil) father, the role of the ones who intrude into and disrupt the utopian comforts of the Imaginary and strand the children in the abstract space of the Symbolic. Thus the elimination of the Jews can be seen as an attempt to "allow for a fantasy return to the purity of self-identity unmediated by any passage through alterity."\textsuperscript{149} As Santner elucidates:

The destruction of the Jews becomes, according to this logic, part of a group psychological strategy designed to "undo" or reverse the passage through that more primitive labour of mourning by which the boundaries between self and other are consolidated on the ruins of the primary, that is infantile, narcissism. The ideology of National Socialism and the narcissistic identification with Hitler thus promised a utopian world in which one was free to destroy what threatened the claustral intimacy afforded by this narcissism.... A "respecularization" of identity, that is, the simulation of pure, specular reciprocity between self and other, was achieved by finding those one could blame for having disturbed this utopian exchange of gazes. In such a utopia, needless to say, a mature self could never really develop.\textsuperscript{150}

According to Santner, then, the paradoxical task faced by the postwar generation was "to mourn for losses incurred in the name of a society that was in its turn founded on a fundamental denial of mourning in its (self–-)constituting capacities."\textsuperscript{151}

As it has already been pointed out, these bereavement tasks were not faced due to certain psychic defense mechanisms discussed above. Another

\textsuperscript{148} Santner, (1990), p. 5.
\textsuperscript{149}/ibid./
\textsuperscript{150}/ibid., pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{151}/ibid., p. 6.
defense mechanism discussed by the Mitscherlichs, which gains further
resonance in light of Santner's contribution, was to identify oneself with the
innocent victims of Nazi fascism:

Identification with the innocent victim is very frequently
substituted for mourning; this is above all a logical defense
against guilt.... To the conscious mind the past then appears as
follows: We made many sacrifices, suffered the war, and were
discriminated against for a long time afterward; yet we were
innocent, since everything that is now held against us we did
under orders. This strengthens the feeling of being oneself the
victim of evil forces; first the evil Jews, then the evil Nazis, and
finally the evil Russians. In each instance the evil is
externalized. It is sought for on the outside, and it strikes one
from the outside.152

One can see how this defense mechanism effectively allows for the
continuance of narcissistic patterns of object relating; evil continues to be
something which intervenes from the outside into an otherwise pure inside.
Guilt is thus circumvented and displaced. No real mourning can be felt for
the true victims of Nazism when one feels oneself to be a victim:

In these attempts to shake off guilt, it is remarkable how little
attention is paid to the victims.... Now there is only feeling
enough for the cathexis of one’s own person, hardly for any kind
of sympathy with others. If somehow, somewhere, one finds an
object deserving of sympathy, it usually turns out to be none
other than oneself.153

The capacity for empathy and for guilt, as Santner explains, "depends on the
capacity to experience empathy for the other as other. This capacity in turn
depends on the successful working through of those primitive experiences of

153 Ibid., p. 25.
mourning which first consolidate the boundaries between self and other, thereby opening up a space for empathy. And as it has already been argued, no attempt was made to work through these primitive mourning tasks; thus, this "failure" continues to block any real feelings of guilt or sympathy for the true victims of National Socialism.

With regards to the relevancy of this study to the work of Kiefer, a number of questions arise. The Mitscherlich study was published over twenty years ago now, and a over a decade before Kiefer would complete his most intense mediations on the subject. Thus, the durability of many of the issues the Mitscherlichs raise needs to be addressed, especially in light of the context sketched by Huyssen as set forth in the preceding section, where the task of "coming to terms" with the past was taken up by a number Germans. This question cannot be definitively answered here. However, in light of the dire pronouncements of the Mitscherlichs and the complexity of the tasks of mourning confronting Germans as suggested by their study, one would certainly presume that the issues raised are not likely to have simply gone away in the interim, as the Historikerstreit of 1986 might attest. As for the context Huyssen sketched, certainly many Germans have become more aware of the complex tasks facing them, and have, since the publication of the Mitscherlich study, started probing many of the issues involved more

155 Kiefer's mediations on the subject of the German past may be seen to start in 1969 with Besetzungen, span the decade of the seventies, and culminate in the early eighties (c. 1980-83) when, arguably, his most intense work on the subject was produced. Since the early eighties, his work has steadily expanded into other themes.
156 In fact, Eric Santner has suggested a number of ways that those issues addressed by the Mitscherlichs are manifest in some of the arguments of these historians: See Santner, (1990), pp. 46-50; and Santner, "History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma," Probing the Limits of Representation, Saul Friedländer, ed., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 144-148.
intensely. However, it should be noted that in 1967 the Mitscherlichs would claim:

The gulf between literature and politics has been preserved in modern-day Germany. Thus far no writer or artist seems to have achieved any impact on the political consciousness or the social structure of the Federal Republic through his work. Indeed, the number of those who grapple actively with our German past is small, and for the most part rather isolated, without any real influence on the course of things.\textsuperscript{157}

In fact, in her most recent evaluation of the current state of West Germany, Margarethe Mitscherlich attests to the durability of those issues raised in \textit{The Inability to Mourn}, and gives insight into another question that may be raised with regard to Kiefer. \textit{The Inability to Mourn} focused on those Germans who lived through the experience of National Socialism. How might Kiefer, born in 1945, be affected by this phenomena as a "second generation" German? According to Margarethe Mitscherlich,

Since the publication of \textit{The Inability to Mourn}, much has changed in the political landscape of Germany. It is doubtful, however, whether our collective attitude towards the unmastered core of our past has been affected by these transformations. And that is because the working through of the foundations of National Socialism—each individual's involvement in the movement, his or her emotional and spiritual identification with this period—has not yet been achieved. Even those in their twenties today, whose parents passed along their own defenses against the past, continue to live in the shadow of the denial and repression of events that cannot be undone by acts of forgetting.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{157}Mitscherlich, (1975), p. 43; This statement would seem to include the work of the New German Cinema.

Thus, according to this view, the postwar generations of Germany have inherited not so much guilt from their parents, but rather the denial of guilt; they have inherited the psychic structures that impeded mourning in their parents:

You can prohibit Nazi symbols and Nazi organizations; but without a labour of mourning you cannot exorcise Nazi structures from the realms of education and politics, from behavior, from modes of thinking and interpersonal communication. And it is for this reason that we must acknowledge that the younger generation, which feels itself to be innocent, has inherited not a past that has been worked through, but rather its denial and repression.\footnote{Margarethe Mitscherlich, "Rede über das eigene Land," \textit{Reden über das eigene Land: Deutschland 3}, Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 1985, p. 61. The first part of this quote seems, in part, aimed at the (dubious) liberal and social democratic agenda of Verwaltungsbewältigung and its attempts to suppress the more overt aspects of Nazism while neglecting its continuing psychic resonance.}

What does not become clear from the Mitscherlichs' study is exactly what "working through" the past might mean. One could certainly pursue this question by way of the vast amounts of psychological discourse on the subject. However, as I mentioned above, I do not mean to discuss Kiefer's work in relation to a constellation of psychological factors, which is, in my mind, too constrictive. Moreover, the Mitscherlichs' elusiveness on this subject seems to suggest that "working through" the past is something more than simply a set of psychologically informed prescriptions. What the Mitscherlichs' do suggest, with regard to this notion of "working through," is that the Germans must be able to truly see themselves as they were under the Third Reich and discover empathy for their victims:

We Germans should extend our introspection so that we can at last recognize ourselves in such scenes as that of the German
officer in the Danish café,\textsuperscript{160} and on those appaling occasions when one hundred, five hundred, or one thousand bodies lay in front of us, bodies of people we had killed. This would imply a compassionate and poignant acknowledgment of the victims long after the time of horror.

Pschologically, it should not be impossible for us in Germany to become aware in retrospect of what we did under the Third Reich, and to move from a narcissistic form of love toward a recognition of our fellow-men as beings with equal rights. Correcting false and restricted consciousness in this way, discovering a capacity to feel compassion for people never before apprehended behind our distorting projections, would give us back our ability to mourn.\textsuperscript{161}

Concerning Kiefer, this notion of working through the past, I believe, is considerably relevant with regard to an aspect of his artistic procedure that has yet to be thoroughly examined, namely, his attempts to existentially experience the past.

"In the beginning there was the existential confrontation with the problem of fascism, the reflection on my origins."\textsuperscript{162} This, one of many similar statements made by the artist, suggests an aspect of his artistic procedure that demands further examination. Perhaps the best way to pursue this examination is by way of the artist's work \textit{Besetzungen} (fig. 18), where Kiefer's attempts at existential confrontation are most visibly pronounced.

\textsuperscript{160} They refer here to a case study used in their text; A former German officer, (who in his own estimation had never been a convinced Nazi), while a member of the occupation forces in Denmark, caused a violent scene in a café. Some Danish relatives of his were making derogatory remarks about the Nazis, when in response he loudly declared that he could not permit such insolence and threatened to denounce them to German authorities. The memory of this incident, as well as others similar, had been forgotten and only recalled in therapy. He had not been willing to admit to himself just how much he had shared in the collective beliefs of the time; and thus, either consciously or unconsciously, had denied these memories: pp. 33-36.

\textsuperscript{161} Mitscherlich, (1975), p. 67.

\textsuperscript{162} Axel Hecht and Werner Krüger, "L'Art actuel Made in Germany: Anselm Kiefer, un bout de chemin...avec la démence," \textit{Art Press}, November 1980, p. 15.
As mentioned in the preceding section, this work consists of a series of photographs taken at various locations throughout Europe, most of which are easily identifiable historical spaces, (complete with identifying captions). In all the photographs the artist is featured performing, citing, embodying the Sieg Heil salute. As also mentioned, the most widely recognized interpretation for this series is that the artist has assumed the identity of the conquering National Socialist who occupies Europe, and then, through certain methods within the work, ridicules the gesture through multiple instances of satire and irony.\textsuperscript{163} To this Huyssen adds that on a conceptual level, one might also see this series as addressing the nature in which fascism "occupied" and abused the power of the visual—a legacy that continues to haunt Germany. Although I believe these interpretations to be illuminating, I believe they neglect an important aspect of existential confrontation with the past that I would suggest makes up another register of this highly conceptual work; an aspect, which perhaps only becomes fully clear from the artist's statements.

In a number of related statements made in an interview in 1980 which I have condensed below, Kiefer suggests this dimension of existential experience and confrontation:

I do not identify with Nero or Hitler, but I have to reenact what they did just a little bit in order to understand the madness. That is why I make these attempts to become fascist.

In this way, for me, that's where the disastrous actions of Hitler and Nero are able to become clear.\textsuperscript{164}


\textsuperscript{164}The reference to Nero here alludes to two of Kiefer's books from 1969, both titled \emph{The Flooding of Heidelberg}, where the artist creates an imaginary incident, the bursting of the dam on the river Neckar, which causes the innondation of the city. In a manner related to that I will sketch below, Kiefer creates a
I transpose history directly into my life. For me, history is always also my reality. In this sense the action of *Occupations* belongs to the subject of my work. *Connaiss-toi toi même.*

As these statements attest, for Kiefer, the channel to historical understanding lies in personal experience—experience that is gained through a type of reenactment of the past. This method is perhaps related to what Germans refer to as *Verstehen*, an empathic penetration of the past that has been crucial to the German historicist program. *Verstehen*, as a method of historical interpretation, refers to the historian's effort to penetrate his subject's value system and to perceive it, so to speak, from the inside out. I would suggest, that in some respects, this is precisely what Kiefer attempts to

---

166Other statements by the artist alluding to this dimension of reenacting and reexperiencing the past, though not in direct reference to *Occupations*, could be added to those related above. For instance, in an informal interview with Donald Kuspit the artist would claim, "In the United States the artist is thought of as an object-maker. Art is not an object. Art is a way of receiving. And it is full of archaeological potential: In Jeanne Siegel ed., *Art Talk: The Early '80's*, New York: De Capo Press, 1988, p. 90. And in a more recent interview, answering a question posed to him about his "...pronounced ability to experience events from the past existentially and to use them artistically," Kiefer responds that it has to do with his "...basic perception of the world," "When I'm working on, say, Alexander the Great and happen to feel myself occupying one space with him—then that's hardly the result of a history class." And later, in what may be a related statement, "You can't experience the world objectively, in the Other, but only by stepping outside yourself and letting go. And by entering into, you experience the world hands-on, but don't have any consciousness of it. So you have to step out of it again and afterwards you can have an awareness of what took place earlier. Sunk in meditation, you are no longer thinking consciously. That's the crux of every philosophy. *This stepping-out-of-yourself also happens when you create a work of art or look at one, and let me add that I don't find such a tremendous difference between perceiving and creating* (my emphasis): Hecht and Nemeczek, (January 1990), pp. 42 & 43.
168This method is used, for instance, by Andreas Hillgruber to justify the Wehrmacht's defense of Germany's East Prussian front in the winter of 1944-45 in the face of impending defeat. This is one of the primary books that sparked the Historikerstreit: *Zweierlei Untergang. Die Zerschlagung des deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums*, Berlin: Corso bei Siedler, 1986. For an analysis of the problematic involved in this type of method see, Jürgen Habermas, "A Kind of Settlement of damages: Apologetic Tendencies," *New German Critique*, Spring/Summer 1988, pp. 25-39.
do in such works as Besetzungen. That by such reenactments Kiefer is attempting to understand the past from the inside out, attempting to see himself in the position of the conquering Nazi, an effort which the Mitscherlichs' suggest is fundamental to working through this persistent heritage. Moreover, in the final statement above, Kiefer makes clear that he regards this experience, the "action", as the subject, at least in part, of his work.

What I'm suggesting here is that—at least on the level of artistic intention—the work Besetzungen is meant to be seen as a vestige of this reenactment and search for historical understanding, a kind of photographic documentation of this experience. Rather than placing the importance of this work on the way irony and parody is used to ridicule and satirize Nazi megalomania—a dubious mode for dealing with the reality of fascist terror at best, I would suggest that it is precisely this megalomania that Kiefer asks one to examine as he does in his reenactment, a priori to the Pavlovian reaction of condemnation such gestures provoke more often than not. The work invites one to follow the artist's own experience, his attempts to see himself in the place of the conquering National Socialist.

Evidence that this work is meant to be seen on a conceptual level as a vestige of the artist's personal experience of megalomania, a photographic documentation of this reenactment so to speak, can be found beyond the artist's statements in the work itself. Besides the obvious role playing—Kiefer dressed in an outfit that resembles an S.S. uniform with his arm raised in the Sieg Heil salute, (one sees not a Nazi, but rather the artist

---

169Of course it should be noted that Kiefer's methods, strategies, sources, etc. with regard to this existential reenactment are far from clear. I make the comparison to Verstehen only to note a common goal, and not to imply that each is equally valid as method of historical interpretation.
playing the part)—there is also a pronounced temporal element to the work that suggests an experience unfolding through time. This temporal element is immediately evoked on the first page, in what might be termed the unabbreviated title of the work.\(^{170}\) The full title, found on the top of the first photo in a typewritten caption, is "Zwischen Sommer und Herbst 1969 habe ich die Schweiz, Frankreich und Italien besetzt. Ein paar Photo." This title, "From Summer until Fall...," (the photographs were actually taken over the course of two years during several trips abroad),\(^ {171}\) evokes the passage of time; and the inclusion of the words "A few photos" suggests that what we are seeing is only a sample documentation of a larger experience. This evocation of an experience, of something unfolding in time and which we are privy to only a part of, is continued by the structure of the work. It consists of a sequence of "pages", which we experience temporally as we turn from one to the next; and as we turn through the series of images, moving without warning from, for instance, Montpellier to Sète, there is a sense that we have missed something, that something happened in the distance between these two sites, (a few photos); one is drawn in deeper, perhaps supplementing these missing links with ones own imagination. I would contend that in these ways, the experience of the artist, in this case his attempt to personally experience Nazi megalomania, is partially evoked by the work.

But what of the instances of satire and irony in the work? I would suggest that these are attempts by the artist achieve a critical distance in the viewer, to counter (perhaps balance) the obviously dangerous aspects that accompany such reenactments, and to assure others that he is not a proponent

\(^{170}\)The work was published as Besetzungen 1969 in Interfunktionen (Cologne), no. 12, 1975, pp. 133-44, and has since become known by this title.

\(^{171}\)Hecht and Krüger, (1980), p. 15. Since Kiefer posed for the photos, it is unclear who actually took them. I have found no evidence to suggest who the photographer was.
of the megalomaniacal impulses he hopes to understand more fully.\textsuperscript{172} I don't believe it is by accident that the two images that are by far the most ironic or satirical occur on the second and the last page, as if to offer warning at key moments in the viewing experience. The second page photo (fig. 23) shows the saluting figure in silhouette against a backlit window, standing in a bathtub. As Rosenthal suggests, this seems to ridicule the miraculous act of walking on water, which it was joked that Hitler did, since he could not swim; a prominently placed wine bottle suggests the source of the figure's delusions of grandeur.\textsuperscript{173} The final image (fig. 24) shows the figure arrogantly saluting the sea, as if in an effort to subjugate even the powers of nature to his megalomaniacal dreams of conquest. The other images, however, do not have these elements of irony and satire, or at least they are not so blatant. One will remember that Huysssen ascribed irony to the way in which the saluting figure is often miniscule, dwarfed by the surroundings. However, in most instances this aspect could simply be an effort to photograph the huge historical monuments and spaces that the figure salutes;\textsuperscript{174} and in any case, the questionable power of the irony that is established in this way is hardly equal to the symbolic gesture of the figure.

As Huysssen has pointed out, the fundamental problem that arises from this work and from much of the work that would follow—work in which Kiefer deals with icons, motifs, and themes of German culture and tradition inextricably linked to National Socialism—is that they blatantly violate a very strong taboo, a carefully guarded boundary to which much of postwar German political and cultural policy is linked. According to the

\textsuperscript{172}In an informal interview with Donald Kuspit, Kiefer speaks of using irony to create a "precise distance" in the viewing experience; Siegel, (1988), p. 90.
\textsuperscript{174}Those who have attempted to photograph the Colloseum, for instance, will be aware of this dilemma.
Mitscherlichs' study, this taboo is as much a manifestation of the collective denial of the past as it is a blockage for attempts to work through it. However, awareness of problems inherent in this taboo does not mean that it could be rationally dismissed. To experience Besetzung in the manner I have sketched above, one must, as Kiefer does, transgress this very powerful taboo, a task much more complicated and difficult than it sounds. When Kiefer presented this work to his fellow students and professors, he was very severely criticized; his use of irony to create critical distance was not equal to the power of the taboo. In 1973, when Kiefer had his first one man show at Galerie Michael Werner in Cologne, Werner recalls that he would never have shown Heroic Allegories, (a work into which many of the images from Besetzung were incorporated): "It was just too sensitive... You have to remember that this was a time of...putting the war behind us."

How, more precisely, does this taboo operate? According to the Mitscherlichs', one of the especially dangerous aspects of taboos is that they contribute not only to social association—related, for instance, to Huysen's statement that taboo treatment of Nazism "...was at the heart of Germany's postwar reemergence as a relatively stable democratic culture...." Taboos also contribute to social dissociation—exclusion. Once a taboo such as the one we've been discussing is established, it is hard to overcome; it relies on, and in fact comes into being, only through collective, almost uniform support. As the Mitscherlichs' elucidate,

175 According to Kiefer, only the painter Rainer Küchenmeister, once a prisoner in a concentration camp (and so perhaps not directly affected by the taboo), understood his work and even defended it before the commission of the Academy: Hecht and Krüger, (1980), p. 15.
177Huysen, (Spring 1989), p. 30; Of course, according to the Mitscherlichs and Adorno, this economic miracle is implemented in the collective denial of the past.
A taboo shared by many has a unifying effect, because it prescribes a fixed and uniform verdict in relation to an area of conflict. A prohibition that is valid for all is an extremely effective socializing factor, as we see very plainly in all educational practices.... Anyone who defies it, e.g., who frankly discusses a tightly taboo-regulated subject such as the Oder-Neisse line, must be aware (it makes no difference on which of the two sides he lives), for he is likely to find himself quickly rejected by his own group. He himself may then be subjected to taboo, the taboo of untouchability that stamps him as alien, with the original flavor of "uncleanliness" that clings to the notion. He may become regarded as an agent provocateur, a disguised communist (or militarist), a traitor, or at best an enfant terrible. He has turned into an outsider who cannot be depended on to keep to the rules of the game, that is, to the commonly held stereotyped views.178

To what extent might this dynamic explain the almost uniform heated skepticism of Kiefer's work articulated by German critics? This skepticism—articulated in much the same heated tenor as Perl's argument related in the first section of this paper179—first emerged publicly on a broad scale after Kiefer represented West Germany in the 1980 Venice Biennale and has only recently begun to abate.

If there is merit to my reading of Besetzungen as a way by which Kiefer attempts to reenact Nazi megalomania—to transpose history directly into his life—in order to more fully understand and perhaps "work through" the past, then one can see how the benefits of this action are largely confined to the artist. Any intentions the artist may have had with regards to social

---

remedy are shadowed by his treatment of a taboo subject. To say it in another way, by blatantly transgressing a culturally shared taboo, only those predisposed to follow such actions can "share" the experience of the work. Others, due to the divisive dynamic of taboos, will shun the action, see the work only as a violation, perhaps even subject the artist to a similar taboo. As Huyssen makes clear, works such as this one "...do not challenge the repressions of those who refuse to face the terror of the past; rather they challenge the repressions of those who do remember and who do accept the burden of fascism..."180

There is an aspect of this role-playing, this self-conscious mise-en-scène and reenactment, in much of Kiefer's work. In the two books Die Überschwemmung Heidelberg ("The Flooding of Heidelberg," 1969: fig. 3), Kiefer assumes the role of the perpetrator of a disaster (like Nero), who causes the inundation of the city.181 The attic of Kiefer's former studio and home in Hornbach becomes the site of, among other things, the artist's mediations on the subject of Germanic cultural "heroes" in Deutschlands Geisteshelden ("Germany's Spiritual Heroes," 1973: fig. 25); his studio also becomes the "stage" for his many books, such as Johannismacht II, discussed by Dietrich, and elsewhere it serves as the site of his many reenactments of the Iconoclastic controversy.182 Kiefer himself plays the role of protagonist in his works concerning the Gilgamesh Epic (fig. 26).183 To be sure, there is great variation in this aspect of Kiefer's work that I have not accounted for with this brief sketch, but it is an aspect that must be considered.

181Both of these books are fully presented in, R.H. Fuchs, Anselm Kiefer: Verbrennen, Verholzen, Versenken, Versanden, Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Deutscher Pavillon, 1980.
There is this aspect, for instance, in Kiefer's architectural series, discussed in some length by way of Huyssen's article in the preceding section. One will recall Huyssen's three stages of experience and reflection: how he was seduced by the visual pleasure of these works, then wondered whether he had been lured into fascinating fascism, and finally began to question if this might have been the intention of the artist—to confront us with our own repressions of the fascist image-sphere, "...to counter merely rational explanations of fascist terror by recreating the aesthetic lure of fascism for the present and thus forcing us to confront the possibility that we ourselves are not immune to what we so rationally condemn and dismiss."^{184} Furthermore, one remember that Friedländer contends that, "...it is precisely this reevocation and reinterpretation of the past that helps us to better understand the past itself, especially in its psychological dimensions. Thus the theme and aesthetics [of the "new discourse"]...allow us to perceive something of the psychological hold Nazism had in its day."^{185} However, as I mentioned above, Friedländer does not discuss the possibility that such disclosures could be the result of an artist's intention; according to Friedländer, the benefits gained by such works are relegated to what the artist says "unwittingly, even what is said despite them."^{186}

However, this dynamic, the reevocation of the aesthetic lure of fascism and the contemplation of this seduction, I would suggest, was precisely the artist's intention. According to Kiefer,

The buildings I painted were connected with crime, with power.... In those early pictures, I wanted to evoke the question

---

^{186}Ibid., p. 18.
for myself, Am I fascist? You cannot answer so quickly. Authority, competition, superiority...these are facets of my like everyone else. You have to choose the right way. To say I'm one thing or another is too simple. I wanted to paint the experience and then answer.¹⁸⁷

This statement suggests that it was Kiefer's intention to re-voke and contemplate the aesthetic lure of fascism for himself; one may assume he intended these works as a critique of the spectator as well. Of course, this does not let him off the hook. The efficacy of artistic intention, even when such intentions are widely known, is highly questionable. Moreover, as noted in the preceding section by way of Friedländer, such reevocations are double-edged: they may draw awareness to the original aesthetic lure of Nazi, or this awareness may be overshadowed by fascination with the spectacle.

Still, as Huysen contends and I would concur: "How else but through obsessive quotation could he [Kiefer] conjure up the lure of what once enthralled Germany and has not been acknowledged, let alone properly worked through?" If one recalls the Mitscherlichs' study, through denial and de-realization of the past, as well as other psychic defense mechanisms, Germans effected a certain closure on their National Socialist past; it is this collective denial that continues to block the processes of mourning, or working through. By obsessive quotation of the aesthetic lure of Nazism, Kiefer induces the viewer into what for many Germans may have provided some of the original attraction of Nazism. His work asks one to re-experience these earlier attractions and former identifications with National Socialism; to reach beyond the denial to confront the painful memories of how one truly was under the Third Reich. There is, however, another risk involved in this reevocation beyond those already stated. By confronting

German culture with representations of a collective lost object of love—and thus with identifications that have been denied rather than overcome—Kiefer runs the risk of strengthening Germans’ static and melancholic disposition towards fascism rather than combating it.

As Huyssen suggested, then, for these works to function effectively as a critic of the viewer—"who is caught up in a complex web of melancholy, fascination and repression"—there must be something within them that breaks the visual immediacy of the image, something that produces an estrangement effect, to allow for critical reflection. It also must be noted here that to function effectively in this regard, the aesthetic lure must be strong enough that it almost seduces the viewer, drawing one into near complicity; the viewer must experience the (original) attraction before becoming aware of the implications. A delicate balance must be maintained. One will remember that Huyssen noted the linguistic inscriptions and conceptual signs—"to the unknown painter"—and the problematic nature of these choices. I would like now to offer an examination of other works from this series that do not rely on such linguistic inscriptions and visual signs to break the visual immediacy of these images of fascist monuments.

In the works I will examine below, I would suggest that while Kiefer confronts the viewer with the aesthetic lure of fascism, this lure is almost simultaneously undermined by certain (often formal) qualities of the painting itself. For instance, in the work Innenraum ("Interior," 1981: fig. 27), derived from Albert Speer’s Mosaic Room in the Reich Chancellery, Berlin

---

189 Unlike Occupations, where a taboo is blatantly violated, I would suggest that in these works the taboo is somewhat hidden or disguised by the aesthetic lure. Of course, each individual viewer’s level of sensitivity concerning this taboo ultimately determines the efficacy of this method.
190 This is achieved with different levels of success, as I will point out.
(1939: fig. 28), Kiefer confronts the viewer with a monumental (287 x 311 cm) vestige of fascism's aesthetic power. The overbearing monumentalism of Speer's building is left intact, and through central point perspective Kiefer draws the viewer into this massive space where one is dwarfed by the surroundings; the feelings produced are at once awe and fear, even intimidation: vestiges of the original power of the building.

However, quite unlike the building from which it derives, this interior is dark and somber, with a sinister quality that comes from the thick mixtures of black paint, emulsion and shellac that cover its walls; this place is no longer something "glorious," a grand testimony to the Volksgemeinschaft; it is a ruin and one enters with a warning. As one continues to look, further dissonances appear. The central point perspective employed is driven to its most insidious extreme, drawing attention to the way one is manipulated into the deep space of this sinister place. And just as one follows the orthogonals in deeper, the dead center positioning of dark woodcut suggesting flames on the surface of the work draws one's eye back to the foreground, and back to contemplation of that notorious instrument of National Socialist power, fire—and all the fatalistic aspects this symbol now implies.\textsuperscript{192}

Moreover, one cannot help but be aware of the surface of this work, its multiply layered, rich texture, which works counter point to the implied depth of the insidious perspective, and produces an effect that offsets the work's monumentality. As Huysseen relates of the architectural works in general, their multiply layered surfaces of oil and acrylic paints, emulsion, straw and

\textsuperscript{191} In the work Deutschlands Geisteshelden (1973), where Kiefer uses much the same method of central point perspective to draw the viewer into a massive interior, (although in this case the interior is a representation of the artist's former studio in Horbach), there is a faint figure presented only in outline, almost as if to suggest that the viewer assume this figure's place.

\textsuperscript{192} There are woodcuts attached in numerous places to the surface of this painting that have much the same effect.
shellac, have a feeling of fragility and transitoriness; they assume "...a
ghostlike luminosity and immateriality that belies their monumentality."\textsuperscript{193}

A recurrent strategy in many works of the architectural series, this in
and out movement, where one is drawn into the deep recesses of the fascist
architecture but then is led out again to the surface of the work, is, I would
suggest, a very successful way in which Kiefer allows for critical
reflection—a way in which he breaks the spell, so to speak. By drawing
constant attention to the surface characteristics of his work, Kiefer
undermines the most power aesthetics effects his work almost simultaneously
posits—deep spatial recesses enveloped by overbearing (almost paralyzing)
monumentality. One is well aware of the work as a painting, as materials
applied to a canvas in such a way as to produce a certain, in this case
powerful, effect on the viewer; the same aesthetic power exploited by
National Socialism. By confronting the viewer with this aesthetic lure, and
allowing a space for critical reflection, some of the \textit{mystic} of Nazi
power—which I would suggest fuels much of our contemporary fascination
with the subject—can be considered. In \textit{innenraum} particularly, where the
primary focus on the surface of the work references Nazism use of fire, this
method is especially effective; one is poignantly reminded of the fatalistic
implications of National Socialism's exploitation of aesthetic power.

Less successful, I would suggest, is the work \textit{To the Supreme Being}
(1983: fig. 29). The work's formal manipulations function in much the same
manner as the work described above, although in this case their is no \textit{primary}
focus on the surface of the work, and thus less to hold one's eye there.
Furthermore, Kiefer's "substitution" of this aspect in favor of the ostensibly

\textsuperscript{193}Huyssen, (Spring 1989), p. 38.
ironic title of the work is not as effective as his invocation of Nazi atrocities in *Innenraum*. The ironic gesture has a flavor of belittlement, quite incommensurate with the power of either the work's aesthetic or subject.  

Consequently, the aesthetic lure of fascism is certainly implemented, but the critical distancing devices may prove unsuccessful.

There is another aspect of these architectural paintings yet to be discussed in this paper concerning Kiefer's strategy of appropriating Nazi artifacts for his own purposes. As Huysen pointed out, National Socialism effectively appropriated whole avenues of Germanic history and tradition in service of their own ideology, reducing such traditions to mere ornaments of power. Tainted by their perverted use under National Socialism, German culture no longer had recourse to them. In Hans Jürgen Syberberg's film *Hitler, A Film from Germany*, this point is clearly articulated by André Heller when he excoriates the puppet effigy of Hitler with the words: "...you occupied everything...and corrupted it with your actions, everything, honor, loyalty, country life, hard work, movies dignity, Fatherland, pride, faith.... The words 'magic' and 'myth' and 'serving' and 'ruling,' 'Führer,' 'authority,' are ruined, are gone, exiled to eternal time."

Charles Haxthausen has suggested that unlike this pessimistic lamentation, Kiefer's architectural works may be seen as an aggressive counteroffensive. According to Haxthausen, by altering the meaning of the images he appropriates from National Socialism for his own

---

194 Much the same could be said concerning the work Die Treppe ("The Stairs," 1982-83), where Kiefer's ironic treatment of one of Hitler's favorite intimidating devices, monumental staircases, is incommensurate with the power of the fascist rhetoric he presents and invokes.

195 Obviously, the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of these critical distancing devices—perhaps even the need for them—ultimately depends upon the individual viewer.

purposes—images that fueled the National Socialist myth of itself—Kiefer seems to follow the precept of Roland Barthes: that the "...best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an artificial myth." As Haxthausen continues,

By appropriation, Kiefer imposes a new layer of meaning, not only onto myths tainted by their previous appropriation by National socialism, but also upon artifacts produced by the movement itself. Thus examples of Third Reich architecture, themselves appropriations of neo-classicist architectural rhetoric, are "rededicated"—"dem unbekannten Maler", or "des Malers Atelier."

Haxthausen is careful to point out that it would be a mistake to see this remythicizing merely as "...an attempt to beat the national Socialists at their own game," but goes no farther in his analysis than to suggest that such a strategy might "...open our eyes to currently operative myths...."

To add to this, I would suggest that Kiefer's deliberate appropriation and rededication in the architectural works help illuminate the nature in which National Socialism, through various appropriations, built its own myth of itself. As Roland Barthes articulated in his brilliant discussion of myth as a "second-order semiological system" in "Myth Today:" That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second." For National Socialism, one might

197Haxthausen, (January 1989), p. 11.
200Ibid., p. 12.
201Barthes, (1982), p. 99: Although I assume the reader has some knowledge of Barthes formulations in this essay, the terminology he uses in his description of myth as a second order semiological system can be confusing, and so I will recount it here. The signifier and the signified of the first semiological system retain their standard names. However, because the sign of the first semiological system is also the signifier for the second system (myth), Barthes terms the former "meaning" and the later "form." To avoid
say that the signs of earlier Germanic and other cultures, appropriated in
service of Nazi ideology, are reduced to a pure signifying function; emptied
of their historically determined meaning, these signs became mere signifiers
of the Volksgemeinschaft. In his own appropriation and rededication, Kiefer
draws attention to this dynamic, to the relationship constructed by Nazism
between the sign ("meaning") of the first system (namely the associative total
of the concept and image of neo-classicist architecture) and its function as
signifier ("form") of Nazi ideology. One might say, in Barthes terms, that
Kiefer works as a mythologist: "he deciphers the myth, he understands the
distortion." He demystifies Nazism's appropriation strategy and reveals its
"alibi" function by offering his own example of this mythicizing process.\textsuperscript{202}

I would like now to turn to the *Margarethe/Sulamith* (1980-83) series
and devote the remainder of this paper to a discussion of these works. Here,
arguably for the first time, Kiefer began in his work to treat the subject of
Nazism's greatest victims, the Jews. Before this series, Kiefer's mediations
on the German past seem primarily directed towards the fate of postwar
Germany and the continuing resonance of this fascist legacy on Germany
culture. There is little empathy for the true victims of National Socialism to
be found in his work to this point; and as one should recall, it is the discovery
of this empathy which the Mitscherlich's argue would give back to Germans
their ability to mourn, a fundamental step in working through the past.

As noted in the preceding section, the *Margarethe/Sulamith* series
references the famous poem *Todesfuge* ("Death Fugue" 1944-45) by Paul
Celan, a Jewish poet who, after eighteen months of intense labor, escaped a

\textsuperscript{202}Ibid., p. 115.
Nazi Concentration camp near Czernowitz. Earlier, in 1942, both of his parents had been murdered in a camp on the southern Bug River.\textsuperscript{203} One will remember that Huyssen associated this poem with Adorno's famous dictum that, "Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch," ("After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric"), a statement to which this poem has become inextricably linked.\textsuperscript{204} Furthermore, Huyssen suggested that through this poem Celan was able to demonstrate that this ultimate crisis of poetic language could still be articulated within language itself. However, the effectiveness of this demonstration within Germany is hardly as definite as Huyssen's argument implies. John Felstiner, a scholar who has written often on the reception of Todesfuge in Germany, offers a more complex history of this poem, which I believe can add much to our understanding of Kiefer's own series.\textsuperscript{205}

\textit{Deathsfugue}\textsuperscript{206}

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Marguerite

\textsuperscript{206}After reading the various translation of Todesfuge, I have chosen that provided by Felstiner (1992), p. 257-258. He accompanies this translation with an in-depth explanation for his word choices.
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling he whistles
  his hounds to come close
he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground
he orders us strike up and play for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at morning and midday we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Marguerite
your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the air there you won't lie
too cramped
He shouts jab the earth deeper you there you others sing up and play
he grabs for the rod in his belt he swings it his eyes are blue
jab your spades deeper you there you others play on for the dancing

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Marguerite
your ashenes Haar Shulamith he plays with his vipers
He shouts play death more sweetly Death is a master from Deutschland
he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then in smoke to the sky
you'll have a grave in the clouds there you won't lie too cramped

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland
we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink
this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue
he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete
he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air
he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus
  Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith
The story of the reception of Todesfuge in Germany is, generally speaking, one in which the poem's real theme—that German fascism consummately orchestrated human annihilation—was subsumed and forgotten under discussions of the poem as poésie pure. The poem was originally titled Todestango ("Tango of Death"), and was first published in Petre Solomon's Rumanian translation, Tangoul Morti (1947). As a 1944 pamphlet on "The Lublin Extermination Camp" (i.e. Maidanek) explains, while the condemned were marched in endless columns five abreast toward the camp crematorium, "...holding each others' arms... Scores of loudspeakers began to emit the deafening strains of the foxtrot and the tango. And they blared all the morning, all day, all the evening, and all night." a real horror alluded to by the title of the poem and Celan's lines "he orders us to strike up and play for the dance." But only two years after Germany's defeat when knowledge of Nazi atrocities was well known, Solomon felt it necessary to accompany this poem with a note: an assurance that the poem was indeed "based upon data," that in Nazi camps, "some of the condemned were forced to play music while others dug graves." As Felstiner suggests, "This prefatory caution against disbelief inaugurated the working history of Celan's poem."  

Celan changed the poem's title not long after the original publication to Todesfuge, "fugue" calling attention to the poem's repetitive, overlapping and dissonant counterpoint. According to Felstiner, since its first publication in Germany in 1952:

---

Todesfuge figured as a national obsession in Germany, a more
durable if somewhat less passionate obsession than Rolf
Hochhuth's play The Deputy. Hundreds of reviews, essays,
memos, dissertations, critical books, anthologies and teachers'
guides, not to mention countless school and university classes,
have dealt with the poem since 1952, when Celan published it in
Germany as the centrepiece of his first major collection, Mohn
und Gedächtnis (Poppy and Memory). To sample those
responses yields a kind of morality play, wherein Art and
History, imagination and reality, jostle for precedence.209

The prevailing response, according to Felstiner, was to focus on the poem's
aesthetic qualities an deny the painful memories this poem's content so
poignantly articulates.

In a review of this collection from 1953, the Christian poet Heinz
Pointek urged Celan to publish only when "he has something to say which is
really pressing him—but not his études and finger exercises," and classified
his works as "poésie pure, magical montage;" They have the French sheen
and Balkan glitter, the suggestiveness of the chanson and the modulations of
melancholy. They exist wholly on metaphor... Reality is transposed in the
secret script of poesy!"210 In another article of that year the author somehow
perceived in Todesfuge its "removal of everything concrete...its romanticizing
metaphor," and went on to praise the poem's "enchantment", "lyrical
alchemy", Zen Buddhist satori-experience", "clever technique and beautiful
imagery", "A Celan poem is wholly without intention. It wants nothing but
breath, sound, image, effortless and almost singable... Celan is a tender
sculptor."211

209Ibid., p. 253.
211Helmuth de Haas, review of Mohn und Gedächtnis, in Die neue literarische Welt, July 10, 1953, p. 12.
To be sure, not every critic was so enchanted by the rhyme and meter of this work as to miss its fundamental articulation: "he whistles his hounds to come close/he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground." In fact the first review of this collection, a short notice by Paul Schallück, pointed out that the poet had lost his parents in a camp and yet could now "express the unspeakable." "People will come to study Celan's sources and influences, "but we'll remember that we never before have read such verses," and then Schallück quotes the opening lines of Todesfuge.212 But would Germans remember? Or were the memories too painful?

According to Felstiner, Schallück's review represents a minority voice of the early reviews:

...Almost all the early reviewers brought a skewed aesthetic to the poem. Even those who acknowledged Celan's subject, the Nazi death camps, usually stressed instead the 'pure play' of his language, its 'sovereign inner reality', 'unbridled fantasy', purely verbal configurations'. A well known poet and critic, Hans Egon Holthusen, writing for the influential monthly Merkur less than two years after Todesfuge was published, could say that it had 'already become famous'. But what had not hit home was the irreconcilable paradox embedded in the two halves of Celan's genitive, 'Fugue of Death'. Holthusen applauds the poet for 'singing one of the most ghastly and significant events in history...so that it escapes history's bloody chamber of horrors to rise into the ether of pure poetry'. Who, I wonder, was really escaping?213

Furthermore, according to Felstiner, "with an ease that seemed indecent to Celan," during the 1950's Todesfuge was incorporated into anthologies and notably, school textbooks:

Students would spend a few preliminary minutes on 'content preparation', then go on assiduously to analyse the poems prosody and structure. (In a German high-school reader from the 1960s that a friend of mine has shown me, there is firmly penciled in above Todesfuge the word 'Dactylus'.) Having beforehand studied fugues in music class, a pedagogical journal suggests, students might each adopt a motif or voice to perform Celan's poem, 'to make the polyphony audible'—with what effect its hard to know. This journal does advise giving students something historical first (but not about mass murder—better Anne Frank's diary). And 'the point is for this to happen before interpreting Todesfuge'—which seems reasonable enough, unless the point really is to get all that history behind you, because 'a consideration of Todesfuge could easily lapse into a discussion of the persecution of the Jews'.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}, p 253.}

I am reminded here of the Mitscherlichs' statement concerning the "second generation's" inheritance—not of guilt—but rather the denial of guilt; they have inherited the psychic structures that impeded the processes of mourning in their parents.\footnote{See quotations on pages 61-62.}

That Celan was aware of and deeply troubled by the way this type of criticism threatened to place Todesfuge in a pure aesthetic niche is evident in his responses. When in Germany to accept the 1958 Bremen Prize, Celan sought to show how desperate and purposeful his writing was: "A poem can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the (not always greatly hopeful) belief that it may somewhere and sometime wash up on land, on heartland perhaps."\footnote{Felstiner, (April 2, 1984), p. 30.} And later in that year Celan would write to a critic: "For me what counts is truth, not euphony."\footnote{Jean Firges, "Sprache und Sein in der Dichtung Paul Celans," \textit{Muttersprache}, 72, 1962, pp. 266-267.} In 1961, responding to a German
scholar's inquiries about literary models for some metaphors in *Todesfuge*, Celan replied revealingly: "The 'grave in the air', my dear Walter Jens—in *this* poem, it is neither borrowing nor metaphor." But these statements had little effect.

During the 1950's and early 1960's critics began to relate Adorno's famous dictum, ("After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric"), to *Todesfuge*. Many even felt this was the poem from which the statement specifically originated. Soon the poem and the dictum were almost inseparable. The culminating insult came in 1965, when a *Merkur* article, using a debased form of Adorno's statement, questioned poetry not merely after, but about Auschwitz. According to this article, *Todesfuge* and it motifs, "...all of them thoroughly composed in an elegant score—didn't that show far too much pleasure in art, in despair turned 'beautiful' through art?" The article did not think to question who, really, was transfiguring the true historical horror. To charge Celan with eliciting aesthetic pleasure from Auschwitz, especially in light of his own first hand experience of it, is outrageous, and Celan would say as much. In a letter of 1966 mentioning *Merkur*, Celan said, "...now one finally knows where the barbarians are to be found."

However, despite Celan's protests, the (dubious) relationship between poem and dictum, based on misreadings, would not be shaken. Critics harped on the usual themes: "Doesn't he reduce death to a harmless

\footnotesize


\footnotescript{219}Felstiner, (1986), p. 255: Incidentally, Adorno's first essay with this dictum was written in 1949, when he had not even heard of Celan; and Adorno's editor Rolf Tiedmann claims that it was Celan's poetry itself that led Adorno in 1966 to recant specifically his famous dictum.


\footnotescript{221}Felstiner, (1986), p. 255.
woodcarving?" Besides this strict focusing on the aesthetics of the poem, another even more dubious reading of Todesfuge would surface in German interpretations. In 1970 a German teachers' journal articulates unwittingly the denial of guilt and longing for reconciliation that I would suggest aided in the non-acknowledgment of this poem's fundamental subject. Here the journal managed somehow to discover, in the syntax of Todesfuge, Celan's "grief for the hangman", for "the victim of the system". Furthermore the journal suggested that the poem's close—

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschernes Haar Sulamith

—couples the German and the Jewish ideals in "forgiveness", couples Goethe's Margarethe and the Song of Songs' Sulamith in a "loving meeting," rather than, asFelstiner explains, "in the unresolvable chord that turns Shulamith to ashes." This closing couplet, the journal concludes, may also "recall us to the close of Faust," where "the eternal feminine draws us upward."

This type of reading, it has been observed, "...contradicts the very essence of the life and work of Paul Celan." However, what I find more

---

222Ibid.
225Heintz, (1970), pp. 110. It should also be noted that this (primarily German) desire to see reconciliation and spiritual transcendence in Todesfuge is not limited to this one example. For example, German critic Kurt Bräutigam, after citing Celan's phrase "the poem is...under way," asks if "'Todesfuge' isn't under way to human understanding [Verständigung]? "...Wot [Shulamith and Margarete] once again extend their hands to each other?": Moderne deutsche Balladen, Frankfurt: Surhrkamp, 1965, p. 125. In fact, the scholar Jerry Glenn has divided the interpretations of the poem into three categories: those who see reconciliation, those who focus on the aesthetic aspects, those who focus on the articulation of the subject. The first two of these categories, as the discussion above makes clear, are predominant in Germany. See Jerry Glenn, Paul Celan, New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1973.
226Glenn, (1973), p. 70: Glenn also notes Hans Mayer's refutation of such readings in the statement: "Whatever [Celan] may have been, he was not sentimental and ready to form friendships;" Erinnerung an Paul Celan, Merkur, 24, 1970, p. 1150.
important with regard to Kiefer's work is that these readings—both those that see reconciliation and those that focus on the aesthetics and deny the subject—also betray mainly projective needs of postwar Germany; they affront guilt and articulate (unwittingly) a longing to transcend the horrors of the recent past towards an (as yet absent) reconciliation. I would suggest there is an aspect of Kiefer's *Margarethe/Sulamith* series that visually articulates this German longing for transcendence and reconciliation which ultimately denied Celan's real theme in *Todesfuge*: that German fascism consummately orchestrated human annihilation.

Scholars have given little attention to the entirety of the *Margarethe/Sulamith* series, tending to focus, as Huyssen does, on the final work *Sulamith* (1983: fig. 21). However, this perhaps culminating work can not be said to be representative of the series as a whole and actually has more in common with Kiefer's architectural series. Far more characteristic of the series are the two works *Dein aschernes Haar, Sulamith* ("Your Ashen Hair, Shulamite," 1981: fig. 30) and *Dein goldenes Haar, Margarethe* ("Your Golden Hair, Margarete," 1981: fig. 31), which will serve as the primary examples for the discussion below.

In these two works, as in the rest of the series, Kiefer references the two women from Celan's poem, who are themselves personifications of the Jewish and the German peoples respectively. On one level of interpretation, in these works Kiefer seems intent upon giving Celan's personifications visual form, and perhaps accenting them with further allusions. In *Dein aschernes Haar, Sulamith* (fig. 30), there are no traces of the notions of *poésie pure* which German critics attached to Celan's poem. The Jewish Sulamith is portrayed in representational form and is, therefore, a theoretically real human
presence.\textsuperscript{227} In this painting, as in the majority of the works referencing her, Sulamith is represented nude. Her ashen hair, referencing the fate of the woman in Celan's poem as well as the fate of the Jews during the Third Reich, falls in heavy, black (ashy) encrustations of thick paint which cover and obscure her upper torso and seem to threaten to engulf her entire body. The upper right corner of the painting depicts, somewhat abstractly, three tall buildings.

In Rosenthal's view, by juxtaposing Sulamith's naked body with an urban landscape, Kiefer suggests that the "...monstrous acts befalling her are those perpetrated by civilization against a defenseless victim."\textsuperscript{228} However, if one remembers that one of the primary charges against Jews in Nazi propaganda was that they were the mainstays and beneficiaries of exploitive capitalism,\textsuperscript{229} then Kiefer's juxtaposition here specifically recalls National Socialism's antisemitism; the monstrous acts were not perpetrated by the general category of "civilization", but by Nazism specifically.

In contrast to the works on Sulamith, in \textit{Dein goldenes Haar}
\textit{Margarethe} (fig. 31), as in all of the works referencing her, Margarethe is not portrayed figuratively; she is an ideal or personification of the German.\textsuperscript{230} In this painting, as in the majority of these works, Kiefer depicts a high horizon landscape onto which is affixed strands of straw, more often than not composed in a gentle curve. Margarethe's presence is evoked by the title inscribed across the top of the works, which also serves to encode the straw

\textsuperscript{227}Rosenthal, (1887), p. 96.
\textsuperscript{228}\textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{230}\textit{ibid.}
as an iconic reference to her. This reference is strengthened as these curves of straw evoke the blonde hair, and thus Aryan identity, of the German ideal.

The high horizon landscapes of the Margarethe paintings have a double reference. They recall the "old Germany", German's love of the land, the Blut und Boden myth. There is some lyricism here that recalls the German reception of Todesfuge, but it is almost simultaneously dispelled. These landscapes also recall the way in which this myth of the Germanic was exploited by National Socialism in service of its own ideology. Like many of Kiefer's landscapes, these landscapes bear a striking resemblance to landscapes painted by artist's sympathetic to National Socialism, such as Werner Peiner's German Earth (c. 1940: fig. 32). However, Kiefer renders these myths bankrupt. The land is blackened and sullied; some of the ashy encrustations of Sulamith's hair seem to find their way into the deep furrows.

Much the same can be said for the name Margarethe, (in both Celan's poem and Kiefer's series), which references the age-old German Faust myth, best known from Goethe's version; a myth that was also exploited by Nazism. One will recall that Margarethe (also known as Gretchen) represented a kind of pure, ethical love, an almost innate innocence, but through her association with Faust, who aims for a utopian moment of self-perfection (with help from Mephisto), she deceives her mother and kills her infant.\textsuperscript{231} The allusion to National Socialism need not be explained.

There is another level of interpretation of this series that has been suggested by scholars. As Rosenthal has noted, the presence of Margarethe is always implied in the Sulamith paintings by the inclusion of painted black curves or straight lines that echo the shape of the straw. Likewise, in many

\textsuperscript{231}Kiefer points out that in prison, Margarethe lies on a bed of straw; Rosenthal, (1987), p. 99.
but not all of the Sulamith paintings, Margarethe's presence is implied by the inclusion of small pieces of straw.\footnote{Ibid.} Rosenthal contends that this speaks of reconciliation between the Jewish and the German: "In Kiefer's view, Germany maimed itself and its civilization by destroying its Jewish members and so, by frequently alluding to both figures, he attempts to make Germany whole again."\footnote{Ibid.} Alluding to both the Jewish and German personifications in one work will make Germany whole again? This argument, as Rosenthal states it, seems highly speculative, and suggests, wrongly I believe, that in Kiefer's view the horrors of the Holocaust could be overcome by something akin to a simple handshake.

Furthermore, Rosenthal is not the only scholar to suggest this aspect of reconciliation in the *Margarethe/Sulamith* series. Donald Kuspit, basing his argument of his notion of transmuting internalization examined in the preceding section of this paper, suggests much the same:

The idea of the autonomous self is modern, but the post-modern sense of autonomous self frees it from the bourgeois sense of its inevitability—the bourgeois belief that one has a right to an autonomous self, as a sign that one is "destined." Kiefer suggests that this traditional sense of autonomous self is a bankrupt mythologization of it. It must be worked at, created on the basis of a universal sense of being human—as a demonstration of the universal experience of being human. A recent cycle of works, *Margarete-Sulamith*, based on the poem *Todesfuge*...makes this clear. The poem deals with the inseparability of the blonde German Margarete and the dark Jewish Sulamith—with the light and dark sides of the self. The
destruction of the Jewish, leading to the self's loss of unity, is the
destruction of its humanity. The German, in Kiefer's art,
constantly shows itself as the arrogantly incomplete human—the
destructively inhuman. Kiefer wants to destroy the German
tradition that allows this arrogant definition of the human as the
inhuman, that is satisfied with a partial sense of self.... The
phoenix that rises from the flames of Kiefer's destructive German
art is not a revitalized arrogant German self, but a newly human
self.234

Kuspit's evidence that Kiefer attempts to reconcile the German and the Jewish
comes not from the artist's dual references as Rosenthal suggests, but rather
from Kuspit's misreading of Todesfuge itself, "which deals with...the light and
dark sides of the self," on which Kiefer's series is based. That Sulamith and
Margarethe are inseparable in Todesfuge comes not from their being two
sides of the "universal human", as Kuspit suggests, but rather from the fact
that Margarethe is a personification of the German (and more specifically
National Socialism), to whom the Aryan officer in the poem pronounces his
love in his letters before murdering his Jews (Sulamith); the connection Celan
makes between the two has the effect of holding the German accountable, in
no uncertain terms, for the destruction of six million Jews.

Both Rosenthal's and Kuspit's arguments suffer from having little
evidence within the Margarethe/Sulamith series itself that points towards this
notion of reconciliation between the Jewish and the German personifications.
However, because there is a precedence for this reading in the German
criticism of Todesfuge, of which Kiefer could certainly be aware, and because
both Rosenthal and Kuspit have benefited from personal interviews with
Kiefer,235 could there be some truth to this interpretation? I would suggest

---
235These interviews were conducted when Kiefer would not be quoted openly. Thus in Rosenthal's
catalogue, as already mentioned, the artist's statements are articulated as paraphrases, (what Huyssen has
that there is, although it is not presented so uncritically by Kiefer as both Rosenthal's and Kuspit's arguments suggest.

An aspect of the Sulamith paintings that has yet to be mentioned in the discourse is that they partake in the tradition symbolism of Mary Magdalene the penitent. Like many depictions of Magdalene as a symbol for penitence, Kiefer chose to portray Sulamith nude, with long cascades of hair almost covering her entire body (fig. 33). The inclusion of the three buildings in the background of these works may also recall the three crosses that often accompany Magdalene (fig. 34), or suggest the Trinity. Furthermore, evidence that the Sulamith works' resemblance to the traditional symbolism of Magdalene the penitent is not simply a matter of coincidence can be found in Christian doctrine itself. As is well known, in their attempts to demonstrate that the New Testament was a fulfillment of the Old Testament, Christian church fathers sought to show that Old Testament figures were prefigurations of New Testament figures; and within this logic, the Bride of the Song of Songs, Sulamith, became a prefiguration of Mary Magdalene. Even today, when Mary Magdalene's festival is celebrated, it is often celebrated with part of the Song of Songs. 236

But what does this reveal in Kiefer's series? Why would he evoke the traditional Christian symbolism for penitence in this context? Why would Sulamith, a Jew and a victim of the Holocaust be portrayed as a symbol of penitence? It does not seem to make much sense. But what if, on another register, we see Sulamith not only as a personification of the Jews, but rather

---

as that "penitent" side of the German, that side which acknowledges horrible misdeeds, which has, in various ways, been denied by postwar German culture? According to Rosenthal, Kiefer has articulated to him that Germany civilization maimed itself by destroying its Jewish members.\textsuperscript{237} Elsewhere, in a conversation with Kuspit, Kiefer has stated that, "The Jews represent a moral contrast to German intellectuality. I want to embody both German intellectuality and Jewish morality..."\textsuperscript{238} What if we see this series as a visual articulation of this notion of German intellectuality (Margarethe) and Jewish morality (Sulamith)? By invoking the symbolism of the penitent in Sulamith, perhaps Kiefer is suggesting that it is this moral side which German's need to embrace. This reading seems to gain further strength when one remembers that it is Margarethe, in Goethe's Faust, who returns at the end of Part II as the penitent to redeem Faust's various crimes and elevate him to higher sphere's: "Woman Eternal Draw us high."\textsuperscript{239}

Besides the obvious problems involved with seeing both cultures in such stereotypical terms, doesn't Kiefer's postulation threaten to treat the Holocaust as merely a maiming of Germanic civilization? After all, it is not simply Germanic civilization that has been maimed, as we hear Kiefer speaking through Rosenthal's paraphrase; there is also the unimaginable horror of National Socialism's mass murder that can not be captured by the statistics—six million Jews. What of the effect of the Holocaust on Jewish civilization? What of empathy for this? The empathy that seemed to be a part of Kiefer's rendering of Sulamith in Celan's terms—with her ashy hair threatening to engulf her body, alluding to her ultimate fate—is clouded and

\textsuperscript{238}In Siegel, (1988), p. 86.
revealed as deeply ambivalent by Kiefer's other allusion, which treats the Holocaust as the crippling of Germanic civilization. Jewishness (morality) is postulated in terms of the Germanic; it is something Germans need to embrace in order to make themselves whole. Empathy for the Jews, which the Mitscherlichs contend is fundamental to working through the past, is displaced and reinstated as empathy for the fate of postwar Germany. This comes dangerously close to one of the psychic defenses the Mitscherlichs reveal, whereby one identifies oneself as the victim to circumvent guilt: "If somehow, somewhere, one finds an object deserving of sympathy, it usually turns out to be none other than oneself."\textsuperscript{240}

However, to be completely fair, this reading is only one aspect of the series. There is a tension, a deep ambivalence, produced from the two registers in which the Sulamith paintings can be read. If Kiefer seeks reconciliation between the Jewish and the German, for a civilization that embodies the qualities of both, then in this series it is articulated more in terms of desire or longing. Margarethe and Sulamith never come together in one work. Although as Rosenthal revealed, one is often alluded to in the full presence of the other, this, in my mind, does not have the effect of making them one, or whole. Sulamith's presence in the Margarethe paintings occurs far more often than vice-versa; and here she is revealed only as an ashy shadow of the German Margarethe, a kind of specter that will haunt her until it is confronted as fully present.

Let me conclude this paper with a brief discussion of the final work of the series, \textit{Sulamith} (1983: fig 21). Here, the ambivalence of the earlier Sulamith paintings is gone; the horrors of the Holocaust are fully present.

\textsuperscript{240}Mitscherlichs, (1975), p. 25.
Sulamith is articulated as absence. She has been turned to ashes with nothing left save the residues of black encrustations which cover this murderous interior. If we read this work as the culmination of the series, then the longing to embody Jewish ideals in the earlier paintings is here revealed as a lost opportunity; Kiefer raises the hope of redemption only to foreclose it. The point driven home relentlessly in the subject and the powerfully imposing aesthetic is much the same as the message of Celan's *Todesfuge*; there is no escaping the fact that German fascism consummated annihilated six million Jews.

I would agree with Huysen that, here, Kiefer is successful in opening a space for genuine mourning and empathy that is absent or clouded with ambivalence in his earlier works. He is successful because he evokes the terror perpetrated by Germans on their victims. And in as much as it is possible, by experiencing this reevocation, one gains a genuine sense of empathy, and thus a space in which to mourn. Perhaps Kiefer recognized this success, for after 1983 he would turn away from the mediations on Germanic themes and the recent German past that had so thoroughly occupied his work from the start. In any case, although perhaps Kiefer was able to make piece with the past through his work, the legacy of National Socialism remains for many a past that will not go away.
SOURCES CONSULTED:


Wagenbach, Klaus. "'Neue Wilde' teutonisch, faschistisch?," *Friebeuter*, 1980, pp. 138-147.


Figure 1
Double page from *Das Deutsche Volksgesicht* (Germany's Facial Type). 1974
Charcoal on paper, with woodcut
57 x 45 x 6 cm (bound volume)
Figure 2

*Nigredo*, 1984

Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, and straw,
mounted on canvas, with woodcut
330 x 555 cm
Figure 3
Double page photographic images from
Die Überschwemmung Heidelbergs
(The Flooding of Heidelberg), 1969
30.2 x 21.7 x 2.3 cm (bound volume)
Figure 4
Johannismacht II, 1981
Photography, oil, acrylic, mounted on cardboard
Figure 7
Johannismacht II
Third double page

Figure 8
Johannismacht II
Fourth double page
Figure 9
Johannisnacht II
Fifth double page

Figure 10
Johannisnacht II
Sixth double page
Figure 11
Page from *Die Hermannsschlacht* (Arminius's Battle), 1977
Woodcut, with emulsion,
on paper and cardboard
61 x 50.5 x 15 cm

Figure 12
*Wege der Weltweisheit—die Hermanns-Schlacht*
(Ways of Worldly Wisdom—Arminius's Battle), 1978-80
Woodcut, with acrylic and shellac,
mounted on canvas
320 x 500 cm
Figure 13
Auszug aus Ägypten
(Departure from Egypt), 1984
Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac,
and straw on canvas (in two parts).
with lead
379.7 x 561.3 cm
Figure 14
Margarethte
(Margarete), 1981
Oil and Straw on canvas
280 x 380 cm
Figure 15
Auszug aus Ägypten
(Departure from Egypt), 1984-85
Acrylic, charcoal, and photograph, mounted on cardboard, with string
108 x 84 cm
Figure 16

*Die Meistersinger*

*(The Mastersingers)*. 1981

Oil, acrylic, emulsion, and straw

on canvas

184 x 330 cm
Figure 17

_Emanation_, 1984-85
Shellac on photograph, mounted on cardboard, with lead
57 x 81 cm
Figure 18
Pages from Besetzungen
(Occupations). 1969
Photography with captions
Figure 19
*Athenor*, 1983 81
Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, and straw on photograph, mounted on canvas
225 x 380 cm
Figure 20
*Dem unbekannten Maler*
*(To the Unknown Painter)*, 1983
Oil, aquarex, latex, emulsion, shellac, and straw on canvas
208 x 381 cm
Figure 21
Sulamith
(Shulamite), 1983
Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac,
and straw on canvas, with woodcut
290 x 370 cm
Figure 22
Wilhelm Kreis
Funeral Hall for the Great German Soldiers, in the Hall of Soldiers, Berlin, c. 1939
Figure 23
Second page from Besetzungen, 1969

Figure 24
Last page from Besetzungen, 1969
Figure 25
Deutschlands Geisteshelden
(Germany's Spiritual Heroes) 1973
Oil and charcoal on burlap,
mounted on canvas
307 x 682 cm
Figure 26
Chuwawa/Gilgamesch
(Chuwawa/Gilgameshi), 1980
Photograph (1969), with acrylic
and emulsion
79 x 58.5 cm
Figure 27
*Innenraum*
*(Interior)*, 1981
Oil, acrylic, emulsion, straw and shellac on canvas, with woodcut
287 x 311 cm
Figure 28
Albert Speer
Mosaic Room in the Reich Chancellery.
Berlin, 1939
Figure 29
To the Supreme Being. 1983
Oil, aquarex, latex, emulsion, shellac, and straw on canvas, with woodcut
279 x 368 cm
Figure 30
Dean aschones Haar, Sulamith
(Your Ashen Hair, Shulamite), 1981
Oil on canvas
170 x 130 cm
Figure 31
Dein goldenes Haar, Margarethe
(Your Golden Hair, Margarete), 1981
Oil, emulsion, and straw on canvas
130 x 170 cm
Figure 32
Werner Peiner
_German Earth, c. 1940_
Oil on Canvas

Figure 33
Titian
_Saint Mary Magdalen in Penitence, c. 1530-35_
Oil on panel
33 x 27 1/8 in.
Figure 34
Gustave Moreau
Madeleine au Calvaire, c. 1880
Oil on canvas
96 x 104 cm