ANSELM KIEFER
AND THE
PHILOSOPHY OF
MARTIN HEIDEGGER

MATTHEW BIRO
Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger is a work of cultural history that situates the art works of one of the most important contemporary painters in relation to the existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic philosophy of Heidegger. Analyzing the development of Kiefer’s art in terms of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, history, and technology, Matthew Biro demonstrates that the artist’s subjects reflect and transform the philosopher’s theoretical interests and intellectual development. The works of Kiefer and Heidegger, Biro argues, present a constellation of issues that unite German art and theory for most of the twentieth century. Showing the aesthetic relevance of the three stages of Heidegger’s philosophical thought to Kiefer’s work, this book demonstrates the significance of Kiefer’s art works for contemporary art and theory.
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ANSELM KIEFER
AND THE
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MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Matthew Biro
For Ivan, Juliane, and Christine
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Introduction

The need which consumption feels for the object is created by the perception of it. The object of art—like every other product—creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the motive of consumption. Consumption likewise produces the producer's inclination by beckoning to him as an aim-determining need.

Karl Marx

This book is an interdisciplinary argument about the history of twentieth-century German culture. It concerns Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945), one of Germany’s central visual artists of the last half of the twentieth century, and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), one of Germany’s greatest—and most problematic—twentieth-century philosophers. As is the case with most interdisciplinary studies, the aim of this book is to point to more fundamental structures in twentieth-century German culture—configurations that do not necessarily fully appear within any single form of cultural representation and, consequently, cannot always be revealed through a mono-disciplinary analysis. The four configurations or “topics” that will be presented here bridge more than seventy years of German “fine” art and theory. To reduce them to their most schematic forms, they are the topics of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, history, and technology.

The book evolved out of a critique of German postmodernism. As it is employed today in relation to German culture, “postmodern” is often used synonymously with “postwar,” “post-1945,” and “post-Holocaust.” Cultural theorist and historian Eric L. Santner, for example, uses the term to mean “a collection of theoretical and aesthetic strategies dedicated, some directly, some rather more indirectly, to undoing a certain repetition compulsion of modern European history. This compulsion may be seen to have found its ultimate staging in Auschwitz, which can be seen as a sort of modern industrial apparatus for the elimination of difference.” Postmodernism, according to Santner’s interesting
and provocative analysis, is an "obsession with death, loss, and impoverishment,"4 a "leave-taking from . . . the very notion of the redemption of modern life through culture,"5 and, most importantly, the emergence of new or "post-traditional" forms of German identity on both the individual and collective level. As Santner puts it,

The conditions under which stable cultural identities may be consolidated have indeed with and since the Holocaust become radically different; the symbolic order to which a German is subjected, that is, that social sphere in which he or she first learns to say "Ich" and "WIR," now contains the traces of horrific violence. But the conventional sites of identity formation have become destabilized, have become more and more unheimlich, as it were, for a variety of reasons, some of which derive more directly from other, more global, social, economic, and political displacements. In the present historical moment, which, perhaps for a lack of a better word, is called the postmodern, Orient and Occident, masculine and feminine, guest worker and indigenous host, to name just a few of the binary oppositions that figure in the process of cultural identity formation, no longer seem to occupy stable positions. The postmodern self is . . . called on to integrate an awareness of multiple forms of otherness, to identify him- or herself across a wide range of unstable and heterogeneous 'regionalisms,' local knowledges and practices. Furthermore, in the postmodern, the availability of the narratives of European Enlightenment culture as resources of legitimation and orientation, as the projection of a progressive synthesis of this heterogeneity under some teleological master term, has, precisely because of the kinds of transformations taking place, become highly problematic.6

Santner is correct when he argues that postwar German “theoretical and aesthetic strategies” are obsessed with issues of death and loss, suspicious of culture’s effects on modern life, and fundamentally concerned with “post-traditional” identity formation. He is wrong, however, when he asserts that these obsessions, suspicions, and concerns are somehow historically “new” or “post-Auschwitz” – for they are fundamental characteristics of German culture during the first half of the twentieth century as well. Santner’s implicit identification of modernity with “the elimination of difference,” “the narratives of European Enlightenment culture as resources of legitimation and orientation,” and “the projection of a progressive synthesis of . . . heterogeneity under some teleological master term” is highly problematic. The legitimizing narratives and synthesizing teleologies of the European Enlightenment were already radically criticized and deconstructed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By seeing modernity as simply “legitimizing” and “teleological,” Santner ignores modernity’s “low,” “informe,” and deconstructive sides – and hence important strategies through which capitalism, modernity’s economic system, is both developed and criticized.

Instead of developing a concept of postmodernism, this study envisions German art and philosophy of the last two-thirds of the twentieth century through the lenses of modernism and modernity. In terms of the time periods of the works consulted, this book moves from the period of the 1920s, when Heidegger publishes his great work of existential phenomenology, *Being and Time*, through the mid-1990s, when Kiefer moves out of the land of his birth and begins to exhibit his first “post-German” works of art. Through Kiefer and Heidegger, an argument is constructed about the development of an interdisciplinary collection
of “sites” or matrices – “places” worked and reworked in Germany during a historical time-frame that includes the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, the post-war period of West and East Germany, and the beginnings of the “new” period of German unification. In this way, this book argues for a “continuous view” of twentieth-century German cultural history – one that does not posit a “break” or “caesura” in the early to mid-1940s (or anywhere else in the twentieth century for that matter).

This study borrows its concept of modernism from T. J. Clark, who defines it in relation to Manet and nineteenth-century French painting as:

*a kind of scepticism, or at least unsureness, as to the nature of representation in art.* There had been degrees of doubt on this subject before, but they had mostly appeared as asides to the central task of constructing a likeness, and in a sense they had guaranteed that task, making it seem all the more necessary and grand... This shift of attention led, on the one hand, to their putting a stress on the material means by which illusions and likenesses were made... on the other to a new set of proposals as to the form representation should take, insofar as it was still possible at all without bad faith.7

Certainty and doubt about “realistic” representation - the search for new “true” ways of seeing as well as their constant critique and formal dismantling - this dialectic, it will be demonstrated, rests at the heart of the cultural production of Kiefer and Heidegger as well. In their works, they seem to oscillate between the desire to construct a “true” cultural representation and the need to undermine all such representations.

This modernist dialectic characteristic of Kiefer's and Heidegger's cultural representations reflects a more fundamental source: “historical modernity,” the “objective” institutions and material life of Western capitalist societies since their “beginnings” in Europe in the sixteenth century.8 The features of modern society that result from the growth of capitalism are by now well known. Demographic concentration, the division of labor, the mechanization and growth of production, the emergence of civil society and the public sphere, the development of the apparatuses of the bureaucratic state, the rapid increase in avenues of communication, the emergence of the sphere of leisure, and the development of mass culture industries are all “self-reproducing” processes characteristic of today's modern societies in the West. The subjective aspects of the bourgeois capitalist ideology are also well known - that is, the connection between bourgeois self-identity and the concept of the free, rational, and equal subject seeking “fortune” and “renown” in civil society. The dual focus in the works of Kiefer and Heidegger on both subjectivity and modernization mirrors the prominence of these topics in the material life of historical modernity.

The modernism that unites Kiefer and Heidegger, however, is more than just a cultural reflection of the processes of historical modernity. In addition, it can help realize a space in which human beings can begin to achieve quasi-collective forms of self-consciousness about their places and functioning within the modern world - sites of representation through which “we” can at times criticize, understand, and help redirect modernity’s historical development. “We” in this study will always be treated as possible - that is, as nonuniversal and open to revision. Yet, “we,” at certain moments, will be addressed, because “we” are
always necessary as a promise or potential inherent in cultural representation and face-to-face interaction: “we” as the possibility of consensus and a better life.

This dual promissory and problematic nature of the “we” is a function of the modern problem of normativity – something that recurs in more than just the works of Heidegger and Kiefer. As philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas has argued, from Hegel onward, theories of historical modernity have fundamentally reflected on the problem of the self-definition of the “new” or the “future” emerging in the “present.” As Habermas puts it, “Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; it has to create its normativity out of itself.”

With the idea of a new or modern world, in other words, the cultural tradition – understood as the sum total of all available cultural representations – is transformed. It is no longer taken to be something “common” – a set of instructions, concepts, or models that “everyone” follows without question. Instead, the tradition becomes something separated from the present – something that must be criticized before it is used.

As a result of the problem of normativity, constant transformations occur in modern historical experience. That which was previously formless – that which “traditionally” had no name – comes more readily to appearance, a process that seems to develop at an ever increasing speed. In addition, scientific as opposed to either Christian or philosophical forms of representation are more and more taken to be the “final” or “ultimate” forms of truth (although not without provoking significant forms of resistance). Moreover, human bonds that were formerly perceived as natural begin to be treated as what Marx called “external necessity” – that is, in a more abstract, less affective way and as a means toward private purposes. Finally, human beings develop ways of searching their historical present for a longed-for and emerging “future” with which to identify as both individual and collective subjects.

The development of historical modernity makes human beings realize that their representations of the world often fail the criterion of complete generality and that even “communal” and more limited forms of “intersubjectivity” remain, more often than not, ideas, and by no means realities. Not only do the various methods, technologies, and systems for representing the world proliferate, but, more and more, people come into contact with others who possess different belief systems – other ways of viewing and understanding reality. In addition, the groups to which different people belong and through which they define their self-identities multiply at the same time as any one form of collective being loses its claim to absolute generality, intersubjectivity, or “truth.” Intersubjectivity does not simply mean general “conceptual” truth, but rather truth upon which a certain number of people agree. As such, intersubjectivity is necessarily linked to both dialogue and the projection of different forms of possible individual and collective identity. And, in this way, “we” become a function of contradiction, debate, and the public sphere.

When truth becomes public, it becomes dialectical, and therefore it emphasizes both conflict and the construction of a “possible we”: potential points of human commonality or agreement. “Undecidability,” as this study argues, is one response to the contradictory nature of the “we” – its necessity as well as
its inherent dangerousness—which is created by the modern problem of normativity. Undecidability is thus not simply a characteristic of Kiefer’s art. It is also a characteristic of Heidegger’s thinking (albeit to a lesser extent than is the case with Kiefer), as well as a fundamental characteristic of much great art in general. Kiefer, it will be argued, emphasizes his art’s undecidability by linking elements that produce paradoxical or conflicting interpretations to a potentially shared visual perspective. Heidegger, it will be shown, opens up human awareness to undecidability, yet obscures one of his best insights into its nature: namely, its inherent opposition to a universalizing standpoint.

Because of their undecidability, Kiefer and Heidegger are particularly well suited for an examination of the problems of normativity and modern identity formation. Both of them are “suspicious” cultural practitioners—historically their works have provoked an extreme range of responses, from profuse and overblown praise to radical, knee-jerk condemnation. The undecidability of their works, in other words, illuminates a broad and divergent range of meanings at every moment of their history, and, by provoking both assent and disagreement, their works always suggest a multiplicity of possible human identities. In addition, because Kiefer and Heidegger are both fundamentally concerned with the dialectic between the construction and dismantling of different normative, representational systems, today they can help the cultural historian to reflect on the complex interrelations of individual and collective identities—both German and otherwise—available in German culture throughout the twentieth century.

Kiefer, it will be argued, makes “undecidable” works of art—works that permit radically contradictory readings about morally charged subjects.11 And Heidegger anticipates aspects of Kiefer’s “undecidability”—although a comparison of Heidegger’s aesthetics with Kiefer’s art also reveals autocratic and “decisive” aspects of Heidegger’s thinking, elements that seem completely opposed to the conflict of interpretations produced by Kiefer’s works. As Kiefer’s example demonstrates, undecidability can help problematize the “we,” but it also shows that we need it, for in the face-to-face encounter, and the possibility of empathy and agreement that it promises, lies the fundamental human need to move beyond individual existence into a shared sense of community. This “we” must be constantly contested and redefined, depending on the “participants” or addressees it draws in the realms of actual and cultural dialogue. Yet this “we” must be projected as a necessary part of all human being.

Since it too wants to engage its audience in terms of possible ways of being a community, this book also stresses the undecidability of its subjects. It “reads” art and theory dialectically or “polemically” in terms of fundamental problems, conflicts, or contradictions. It does not hesitate to bring out antitheses in the works of Kiefer and Heidegger or ways in which they oppose or seem to disagree with one another (or for that matter, the ways in which this account disagrees with them). By interpreting Kiefer and Heidegger polemically, one can focus on the overall frameworks of contradictions that produce the ambivalent responses and explore the multiple possibilities inherent in different ways of representing the modern “world.” The strategy behind this method of interpretation is simple: it wishes, like Kiefer and Heidegger, to allow modernity and the
problem of normativity to appear in terms of their multiple meanings and forms of truth. It means to open up – rather than reduce – dialogue.

Out of respect for the heterogeneity of the “subjects” under discussion, methodologies and interpretive strategies change here, not only with the nature of the “object,” but also according to the topic or problem upon which the text is focusing. Kiefer’s works – which include performances, books, paintings, sculptures, and magazine and mass-market book spreads – will be read not only polemically, in terms of the conflicts to which they point, but also in terms of multiple levels of meaning – including, but not limited to, the type of spectators and bodies they project, their treatment of representation and abstraction, and the significance of their subjects, practices, and forms. In the case of Heidegger’s philosophy – which includes an early phase of existential and hermeneutic phenomenology, a middle phase of modern and aesthetic theory, and a late phase of “post-metaphysical” thinking on technology – the approach has been to present an ordinary-language explication of a number of his key texts, methods, and concepts, one that looks for tensions or contradictions in his various theoretical models.\textsuperscript{12}

The modernist constellation produced through the conjunction of Heidegger’s theory with Kiefer’s art does not necessarily represent a case of direct influence. Indeed, although Kiefer may have read Heidegger’s writings, the four topics and the repeating problems of normativity and the possible “we” extend far beyond Kiefer and Heidegger into modern German culture as a whole. Therefore, the topics upon which Kiefer labors could also have been given to him through other avenues of cultural transmission.

Kiefer, moreover, discourages interpretations that attempt to link his work too closely with Heidegger’s philosophy. When I wrote him in 1991 asking about his knowledge of Heidegger, he declined to answer. And in 1987, when Donald Kuspit questioned him about his relationship to Heidegger, Kiefer replied:

I’m interested in Heidegger’s ambivalence. I am not familiar with his books, but I know he was a Nazi. How is it that such a brilliant mind was taken in by the Nazis? How could Heidegger be so socially irresponsible? It is the same problem as with Céline: here is a wonderful writer who was a rotten anti-Semite. How do these thinkers, who seem so intellectually right and perceptive, come to such socially stupid and commonplace positions?

I have shown Heidegger’s brain with a mushroom-like tumor growing out of it to make this point. I want to show the ambivalence of his thinking – the ambivalence of all thinking.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition, when questioned by Mark Rosenthal in 1986 as to whether Heidegger’s term “wood paths” [Holzwege] influenced his choice of the “Ways of Worldly Wisdom” [W&egrave;ge der Weltweisheit] painting titles, Kiefer called the similarity a mere coincidence.\textsuperscript{14} Kiefer thus seems to dissuade his interpreters from connecting his works too closely with those of Heidegger. Heidegger, according to Kiefer’s formula for reading his own art, functions as a historical figure to generate ambivalence within some of Kiefer’s own works. That Kiefer’s art as a whole might reflect larger cultural paradigms developed in Heidegger’s thinking is an interpretive “path” that Kiefer does not seem to want his contemporary audiences to travel.\textsuperscript{15}
Yet, as newly published material suggests, Kiefer's habit of distinguishing his vision from that of Heidegger can be dated back to a diary entry that Kiefer made in 1963 as an eighteen-year-old scholarship student traveling in France. (He won a student travel stipend for an essay that proposed investigating the various geographic locations previously explored and painted by Van Gogh.) Here, in the entry for August 28, Kiefer writes about visiting the seashore at Saintes Maries-de-la-Mer and the impression that its "captivating" horizon made on him:

This absolutely straight unending line, which makes no concessions, and which runs as far as the sea runs. Everything orients itself according to this line: the crookedness of the sailboats and the coast. According to this line, we determine the elevation of the land. It is objectively always the same. What would it be like traveling on a boat on the ocean and seeing this line all around one wherever one looks? It is therefore also nothingness. But not the nothingness of Heidegger, which he particularly crosses out, but rather the existing nothingness. For this line is in reality no line, but rather movement, because there, where we see the line, the waves rule also, and the sea is as much in motion there as here. Alone the endless distance transforms the movement into line.16

Kiefer protests a little too much about Heidegger's theoretical models and approaches in this remarkable passage about the horizon. Not only does Kiefer's mention of the crossing out of the term "nothingness" suggest familiarity with Heidegger's texts,17 but there is also much in this description that resonates quite closely with Heidegger's representations of the horizon and nature throughout his philosophical development.

Examination of the German backgrounds, lifestyles, and interests of Kiefer and Heidegger reveals a number of other reasons why these commonalties or resonances between them should not be too unexpected. They are both from small towns in southwest Germany — and have chosen all their lives to reside primarily in the countryside instead of living in a big city. In addition, both were raised in Catholic families and, as their works suggest, they both appear to have rejected the religion of their parents — but only incompletely and with great ambivalence. Moreover, both display a surprisingly similar "iconography" of fields and field paths, horizons and temples, "equipment" and workspaces. Thus, perhaps because of the similarities in their backgrounds, lifestyles, and interests, Kiefer and Heidegger's works "naturally" tend to grow together.

A number of terms used in this introduction — "capitalism," the "bourgeoisie," "identification," and "self-identity" — may give the reader a sense that two of the "methods" employed here to interpret works of art and theory are Marxism and psychoanalysis. And while it is not incorrect to see the following cultural history as influenced by these two approaches — and, in particular, by the Marxist-psychoanalytic approach of the aestheticians Theodor W. Adorno and Siegfried Kracauer — the reader must also realize that Heidegger's thinking as a whole presents a counterdiscourse to both Marxism and psychoanalysis. Heidegger's thinking, in other words, attempts to comprehend and model many of the same phenomena that Marxism and psychoanalysis also claim to grasp and analyze — but through a somewhat different set of terms. Heidegger's counterdiscourse, which employs multiple methods, does not subvert Marxist
and psychoanalytic perspectives, but rather – if treated polemically – augments them and draws them into a richer and more complex unity.

Chapter 1 introduces three methodologies or approaches to phenomena – existentialism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics – that inform the work of both Heidegger and Kiefer. Arguing that Heidegger and Kiefer are concerned with reworking the traditional concept of the subject in terms of a set of shifting points of view, it argues against an important idea of Heidegger's that becomes more pronounced as his thinking develops, namely, his growing belief that all concepts of subjectivity are at best useless and at worst potentially hegemonic. After an analysis of the existential aspects of Kiefer's earliest books and paintings from 1969 through 1971, it is demonstrated that Kiefer's move in 1973 away from images of his own body and toward massive paintings of empty wooden interiors does not constitute a rejection of his early existentialism. Instead, this move suggests a combination of an existentialist perspective with a perspective similar to the one found in phenomenological theory – a perspective that seeks to discover the self reflexively from out of its world. Through an analysis of Heidegger's first great work of philosophy, *Being and Time* (1927), which transformed Edmund Husserl’s method of transcendental phenomenology by making it serve existential analysis, it is suggested that, like Heidegger, Kiefer employs a phenomenological perspective in order to pose questions having to do with authentic and inauthentic self-identity in his art. The hermeneutic aspects of Kiefer's field and field path paintings from 1974 are then examined in light of Heidegger's grounding of existential phenomenology in hermeneutic method in the later sections of *Being and Time*. In many ways recalling Heidegger's arguments in *Being and Time*, Kiefer's 1974 landscape paintings imply that truth is historical and that human existence is bounded and determined by a temporal horizon. Unlike Heidegger's account of human existence, however, Kiefer's works do not suggest that historical truth can ever be absolutely fixed or determined. In turn, Heidegger and Kiefer's different conceptions of historical (or hermeneutically secured) truth appear to explain an important divergence in their respective developments. Whereas Heidegger rejects an embodied point of view entirely around 1930 (and with it essential aspects of existentialist method) and subsequently analyzes phenomena solely in terms of phenomenological and hermeneutic viewpoints, Kiefer fully retains all three perspectives in his later works.

Chapter 2 examines Kiefer's hermeneutic "undecidability" – the intentional ambiguity of his works, coupled with their demands on the spectator to make a clear interpretation in their presence – in relation to Heidegger's "decisive" aesthetic theory of the mid-1930s. In this way, a framework of contradictions is produced wherein the "subjects" of Kiefer's and Heidegger's modernist representations become intersubjective or "collective." Beginning with an account of Heidegger's involvement with the German National Socialist Party from 1933 to 1934, it is demonstrated that Heidegger's highly political aesthetic theory, developed in his 1935 lecture course, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, continues many of the concepts that he stressed in his "official" National Socialist political speeches of a few years earlier. In particular, it is argued that the central contention of Heidegger's aesthetics – that a canon of great works of art can ground
and orient a historical people – is a fairly direct transposition into the sphere of
culture of his primary political assertion from the early 1930s that great intellec-
tual and political leaders were needed to guide Germany into its world-historical
destiny and place among the peoples of the West. Thus, although Heidegger
appears to have become disillusioned with the Nazi cause by the mid to late
1930s, his aesthetic theory recapitulates the same elitist arguments about the
need for strong leaders for which his political speeches have rightly been criti-
cized. Kiefer’s works, on the other hand, appear to directly contradict Heideg-
ger’s assertion of the artist’s and philosopher’s natural leadership abilities.
Through analyses of a number of Kiefer’s books and paintings from 1974
through 1991, it is argued that Kiefer’s consistent undecidability, his rejection of
any single intersubjective perspective, and his frequent evocations of the artist’s
potential violence combine to make Heidegger’s conception of art’s political
function highly problematic. By making works that produce equally valid con-
tradictory interpretations in the minds of their spectators, Kiefer thus suggests
that art’s proper political function is to generate debate and not to imply a clear
course of collective action. In this way, Kiefer’s art presents a dialogic concept
of normative truth – a concept of truth that holds that normativity can only
emerge through a combined historical and contemporary-public debate. This
model of discursive or dialogic truth is fundamentally at odds with Heidegger’s
post-1930 concept of truth – one that believes that normative truth can emerge
through an individual thinker’s exclusive dialogue with his or her cultural tradi-
tion. Through their undecidable nature, however, Kiefer’s works draw attention
to another aspect of Heidegger’s aesthetic theory that seems to contradict and
partially ameliorate its problematic political aspects. This more undecidable side
of Heidegger’s aesthetics, elaborated in his 1935/1936 essay, “The Origin of the
Work of Art,” analyzes the way a work of art produces meaning as a polemical
strife between earth and world – an interplay of phenomena, horizons of mean-
ing, and gaps or absences. This model, which finds fascinating resonances on a
number of different levels in Kiefer’s art, today proves valuable, not only
because it helps one understand the inherently ambiguous or polysemic charac-
ter of all works of art, but also because it demonstrates the complex play of
subjective and intersubjective elements characteristic of most forms of modern
representation – and, in particular, those forms that seek to function politically.

Chapter 3 examines the different though related representations of history
that appear in Heidegger’s and Kiefer’s works. It begins with an account of Hei-
degger’s epochal “history of Being” and in particular with his description of the
modern age as a “destitute time” – a period of radical nihilism and extreme
danger. Through an analysis of Heidegger’s account of the rise of the scientific
“world view” articulated in his classic essay, “The Time of the World Picture”
(1938), it is argued that Heidegger’s conception of his own contemporary
moment – what he called modernity’s “decisive” phase – as a battle of compet-
ing world views presents a global situation in which distinct representations of
ideal individual and collective subjectivities struggle for supremacy. This strug-
gle, which reveals the essence of the danger confronting the modern age, can
for Heidegger be affected by the power of great works of art to produce a “true”
collective world – and thus historical orientation. Through an analysis of the
strategies of appropriation employed in a number of Kiefer's books and paintings from 1969 to 1982, it is argued that Kiefer's works appear to both echo and diverge from Heidegger's model of history. On the one hand, Kiefer's appropriations of American minimalism, pop, and abstract expressionism, which imply a conception of these styles as inherently ideological (projecting different forms of individual and group subjectivity), recall Heidegger's account of modernity's decisive stage. Kiefer, in other words, treats these styles as saturated by sets of preexisting, American meanings, which he plays off against his German subject matter in such a way as to suggest a time in which different world views battle for supremacy. On the other hand, Kiefer's art works, which mix both modern and premodern time frames, seem to repudiate Heidegger's linear account of history as a series of distinct world ages. In addition, Kiefer's art also implies that the contemporary world will never be free of multiple and conflicting representations of the collective. Contrary to Heidegger's position, which potentially prepares for the emergence of a new and dominant collective, Kiefer seeks to articulate a "multiculture" by producing works that both fuse different world views and allow them to retain their distinctiveness.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the complex relationship between art and technology central to Heidegger's postwar theory of technological and aesthetic "revealing" as well as Kiefer's art as a whole. Through an analysis of Heidegger's late essay "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954) it is argued that, after the war, Heidegger drops his claim that the demise of modernity is imminent and instead suggests that the decisive phase of modernity could continue for some time. Attempting to come to terms with the absence of the new phase of world history that he predicted art and philosophy would bring about and focusing on the rapid development of technology as the most characteristic and dominant force in his contemporary world, Heidegger rethinks the political account of art characteristic of his aesthetic theory during the Third Reich. No longer a means to orient the political aspirations of the German nation, art now becomes for Heidegger a way to understand technological revealing - a systematic mode of seeing and knowing conceived as the greatest danger facing his postwar world. An analysis of the manifestations of technology on the thematic, practical, and formal levels of Kiefer's art since the 1980s demonstrates that, like Heidegger, Kiefer also seems to recognize that the essence of his contemporary moment is somehow to be understood in terms of the conjunction of art and technology. Kiefer's emphasis on this conjunction leads the spectator to consider the incredible explosion of forms, images, and interpretive frameworks characteristic of the development of culture in the twentieth century - an explosion that has been powered by the rapid evolution and dissemination of technologies of mechanical and electronic mass reproduction. In this way, Kiefer's art seems to develop the central issues raised by Heidegger's late thinking by focusing on the multiple ways in which mass reproduction affects both human beings and nature.
In those early pictures, I wanted to evoke the question for myself, Am I a fascist? That’s very important. You cannot answer so quickly. Authority, competition, superiority . . . these are facets of me 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. — Anselm Kiefer

A rising out of Renaissance humanism and the Protestant Reformation, the concept of the autonomous, self-legislating subject played a central role in the creation and perpetuation of modern Western society. In its classical form, which the thinkers of the European Enlightenment inherited from René Descartes, the subject was defined as an autonomous individual separate from the world and endowed with the capacities of reason, self-reflection, and action. As such, it soon came to be understood as both the cause and goal of nearly every important aspect of the modern world. In Descartes, for example, the subject was already the origin whose radical doubt, penchant for experimentation, and passion for logical organization produced the new sciences of the seventeenth century. In the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, the developing, yet essentially unchanging, individual also became the primary existence from which the laws and forms of human society were derived and whose liberty and satisfaction they were ultimately supposed to serve. In the three Critiques of Immanuel Kant, the rational subject was further defined as the foundation of all knowledge, ethics, and aesthetic judgment and, in the dialectical thinking of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the driving force and telos of all human history. Finally, in classical economics, the supposedly free subject became the primary director of modern economic life – the owner of either labor power, property, or capital – whose decision to enter into commercial relations with others was the catalyst that lead to the production and eventual triumph of the free-market system. Thus the cornerstones of modern society – capitalism and the bourgeois ideology that evolved out of and supported it – had, as their justification and central point of reference, a particular notion of humanity as essentially rational, active, individual, unique, and free: a person whose inner core was already present at birth and that, although it developed and unfolded, remained essentially the same over the course of the individual’s existence.
Post-Enlightenment thought, on the other hand, began to fragment or decenter the concept of the subject. This entailed questioning the subject’s fixed properties and self-identical inner core. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud began to undermine modernity’s idea of “essential” human properties by showing them to be at least partially dependent on forces and institutions outside the subject—a process that was conceptually furthered by the development of the social sciences. By portraying the individual as determined by social and economic relations, by language, and by the unconscious, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud helped to render problematic modernity’s secure understanding of its nucleus. As a result, a new, more interactive concept of the subject emerged. Human identity was defined as “essentially” in dialogue with society—a result of the developing individual’s interaction with significant others who transmitted values, meanings, and symbols drawn from a shared social world. A product of both pre-individual instinctual drives and shared, often conflicting cultural identities, the subject was both historical—dependent on a social-historical context—and never fully analyzable.

In the twentieth century, the theoretical questioning of the subject’s “essential” properties and “self-identical” core produced new attacks on the concept as well as further attempts to scientifically define the subject once and for all. In addition, beginning in the late 1950s, certain theorists began to posit a “postmodern subject.” Pointing to the interactive, historical, and never-fully-analyzable nature of individuals as well as the increased mixing of social and cultural horizons brought about by the mass media, consumer society, human migration, and global economic integration, these theorists argued that the postmodern subject has no permanent core (biological or otherwise), no innate property free from historical contingency. Constituted by a play of changing forces, the “fragmented” or “schizophrenic” subject, they held, assumes completely different identities at various times. The idea of a unified self—one that maintains a coherent identity over the entire course of its existence—is simply a fiction. Also during the twentieth century, the process of questioning that led to the postmodern subject created an even more radical line of thought: antihumanism. As an approach to culture and society, antihumanism rejects the concept of the subject by generally refusing to discuss or define it. This approach, which characterizes Heidegger’s middle and late periods, focuses on meaning and culture with almost no direct historical reference to the society and the productive situation of the individual “authors” it examines.

Postmodernist and antihumanist positions often misrepresent the actual situation of the subject in the twentieth century. To claim that we are constructed by forces outside our rational control—and even to claim that these multiple sources of construction are constantly reconfiguring—does not force one to say that there is no continuity to human existence. Still less do the facts of social and instinctual construction require one to completely reject the individual subject as a legitimate point of reference. The concept of agency, for example, an inheritance for which we must thank our bourgeois “ancestors,” is still necessary to our own contemporary situations. Indeed, the recognition of the determination of consciousness by a multiple play of shifting forces should instead lead us to
rework our inherited ideas of selfhood in light of the new determinants we discover. It is precisely this open-ended process of reworking the subject from multiple and shifting perspectives that best characterizes both Heidegger’s early phase of philosophy in the 1920s and Kiefer’s entire oeuvre since 1969.

In addition, as the distinction between the Enlightenment and the post-Enlightenment subject suggests, the process of de-centering the subject was well under way during the nineteenth century. Modernity, in other words, is characterized not only by consolidations of the concept of the subject but also by its continual conceptual fragmentation. For this reason, the simple equation of modernism (i.e., much European and some American culture between 1850 and 1950) with an unreflective affirmation of subjectivity and postmodernism (i.e., much European and American culture after 1950) with a strident denial of the subject — as some theories of postmodernism and antihumanism attempt to postulate — is simply untenable. Although the Enlightenment subject appears to be a hopeless ideal, and though the post-Enlightenment critique of the subject did not uncover all its determinants, the concept of the subject still plays a major role in twentieth-century culture as a figure that oscillates between integration and fragmentation. A major characteristic of this century’s culture, in other words, is a set of ongoing processes through which our everyday understanding of the subject is constituted, criticized, and reformulated. Before turning to the specific contributions made by Heidegger and Kiefer to these processes of reworking the subject, I will begin with an analysis of two works by other cultural producers. This analysis is designed, first, to suggest that Kiefer and Heidegger are part of a much broader current in twentieth-century culture and, second, to undermine the distinction between modernism and postmodernism in regard to subjectivity.

Made during the second year of the Weimar Republic, George Grosz’s photomontage-watercolor, ‘Daum’ Marries her pedantic automaton ‘George’ in May 1920. John Heartfield is very glad of it. (Met.-mech. Const.: after Prof. R. Hausmann) (1920) (Figure 1), presents the viewer with a good example of a “modernist” image critical of the concept of an integrated, self-identical subject. In this medium-sized work, set against a geometric and spatially ambiguous city background that recalls the proto-surrealist backdrops of the Italian metaphysical painter Georgio de Chirico, a mostly photomontage “self-portrait” of Grosz as a streamlined, half-mechanical figure is juxtaposed with a drawn and colored image of the Berlin designer and model Eva Peter, who had just become Grosz’s wife. Grosz’s self-portrait directly attacks the expressionist ideal of the deeply subjective and introspective artist. Not only does Grosz depict himself as a cyborg — a figure whose organic parts have been partially replaced by machines — but his eyes are shown to be blank, the top of his head egglike and largely undifferentiated, and disembodied hands seem to feed his brain with a strip of sequential and senseless numbers. In this way, Grosz visually depicts both the mechanization and emptiness of his own consciousness and, thereby, artistically reflects the impact that Germany’s rapid modernization was having on the subject in the early 1920s. Reinforcing the de-centering of the human subject connoted by Grosz’s self-portrait is the treatment of Eva Peter (Daum). Although he does not portray her as a mechanized automaton, he exposes her
breasts and genitals as well as stimulates her nipple with another disembodied hand. Partially stripped bare by the artist, her bridegroom, Peter is misogynistically portrayed as a sexual rather than a cognitive being: a woman who, the artist hints, can perhaps be replaced by the other woman depicted in the upper left corner of the image. In this way, Peter too is represented as a less than fully integrated – or self-identical – subjectivity. Finally, through the technique of
photomontage, Grosz reiterates the critique of subjectivity, so clearly spelled out in his work through the subject matter, on the level of artistic form. Photomontage allows the artist to avoid the direct creation of an image in favor of the more mediated activity of appropriating images or image fragments from pre-existing sources. This technique can thus be seen as partially denying the artist's uniqueness or individuality - a connotation of which the Berlin Dada artists were well aware. As Grosz’s compatriot, Raoul Hausmann, put it, "photomontage ... embodied our refusal to play the part of the artist. We regarded ourselves as engineers, and our work as construction: we assembled our work, like a fitter." Grosz’s ironic wedding announcement thus serves as a clear and intentional example contradicting the assumption that all modernist artists uncritically affirmed a concept of a separate and autonomous human subject.

In a related way, Judith Butler’s groundbreaking work of feminist analysis, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990), leads the attentive reader to the conclusion that not all radical works of postmodern theory deny every trace of an active and at least partially self-determining and coherent human subject. A response to the debates around identity politics that emerged from the new social movements of the 1960s, the “postmodernism” of Butler’s work is suggested both by the rich and variegated mix of theoreticians upon which she draws (Derrida, Foucault, Irigaray, Wittig, and Lacan, to name only the most obvious postmodern sources) and by the basic project of her book: a deconstruction of the opposition between sex and gender assumed by many previous feminist accounts of human identity. According to Butler, “For the most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued.” Thus, although nearly all feminist theory subscribes to some notion of the social construction of identity, which it affirms through the concept of gender as the learned and socially produced part of the human subject, it nonetheless potentially runs astray if it does not fully carry out the deconstruction of the unified female subject begun by the feminist analysis of gender. Instead, by too quickly presuming a “universal” basis for feminism (and ignoring racial, ethnic, class, or regional differences, for example), even radical forms of feminist discourse run the risk of reinscribing an essential core of identity and, thereby, create a false representation of a unified subject in much the same way as the concept of sex is still sometimes used in opposition to gender to redivide “women” and “men.” To combat this danger, already pointed out and analyzed by feminists since the 1970s, Butler argues that socially constructed gender, and not sex, is actually primary. Gender, according to Butler, is “the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or ‘a natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘prediscursive,’ prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts.” The gendered subject, in other words, is entirely a cultural effect: the product of discourses – for example, law, medicine, psychoanalysis, advertising, and the news media – and social institutions, such as the family, the workplace, education, government,
and the military. Thus, there is neither a sexual-biological core nor an essence of human identity, because the concept of sex is produced by and in relation to already gendered — that is, socially and culturally produced — subjects. For this reason, when we retrospectively posit a natural, biological “essence,” we base ourselves on an erroneous assumption that Butler calls “the metaphysics of substance” — “the belief that the grammatical formulation of subject and predicate reflects the prior ontological reality of substance and attribute.”¹³ Because the concept of a biological essence can neither be proved nor disproved, there is no reason to assume it in the first place.

Despite her radical critique of the concept of the subject, however, Butler refuses to let go of it entirely, nor of the question of the continuation of human self-identity over time. The purpose of her deconstructive project is to open up a space for the creation of new human identities, and, for that, a concept of agency is necessary. Butler discovers agency in the process of repetition that is expressed in the human body through performance. We repeatedly perform our identities to both ourselves and others, and it is this performance that ultimately makes us particular “loci” of a certain definite but open-ended set of signifying practices.¹⁴ Although our inherited culture hands us the script according to which we act, our bodies provide us with the possibility of creatively varying our repetition — of enacting cultural representations of identity in such a way that they become substantially different. And because our bodies continue over time and clearly retain traces of their past performances, even Butler’s radical reformulation of the subject retains certain forms of continuity or coherence over time.

As the examples of Butler and Grosz demonstrate, both “modernist” and “postmodernist” phases of the twentieth century are characterized by the attempt to rework — criticize and reformulate — the concept of the subject. In addition, both Grosz and Butler point to the centrality and importance of representation for the formation of self-identities (both traditional and open-ended). Grosz demonstrates this centrality by using recycled photographic representations — cultural stereotypes associated with masculinity — to creatively form his own self-image; thereby he suggests the importance of culture as a determinant of his selfhood. Butler, on the other hand, directly argues for the centrality of representation to the formation of both individual and group identities, and, as she did with the concept of the subject, splits representation into an individual and a collective component. As she writes on the first page of *Gender Trouble*, “On the one hand, representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women.”¹⁵ Representation, in other words, names both the cultural power that controls and constitutes human consciousness through discursive and institutional structures and the free and creative reformulation and assertion of one’s identity as a political, individual, and collective subject.

In this chapter, I will examine the work of Kiefer and Heidegger in light of their respective reformulations — or reworkings — of the subject. Like Butler and Grosz, both Kiefer and Heidegger are highly critical of the traditional concepts
of subjectivity that each has inherited from his respective social-cultural situation. In addition to reflecting the above-mentioned instability inherent in the twentieth-century concept of the subject, their “criticality” is a result, no doubt, of the tremendous pressures brought to bear on both the family and society throughout the twentieth century as well as the more particular psychosocial configurations that informed German society leading up to and during the years in which Kiefer and Heidegger produced their first works. Heidegger’s early experience included the disruption and confusion of World War I and the subsequent instability of the Weimar Republic – a time when a new world appeared to be emerging out of the ruins of the old one. Kiefer, on the other hand, grew up during the “climate of forgetting” that characterized West Germany’s economic miracle of the 1950s and came of age during the time of radical social critique that emerged with the student movements at the end of the 1960s – a time in which another “new” world appeared to be emerging but then did not. Reacting to their respective German social-cultural situations, Kiefer and Heidegger thus unite the twentieth century in their conviction that their inherited forms and concepts of subjectivity must be reworked, that this reworking has political or social implications, and that the process of reworking can take place in the field of culture. And like Butler and Grosz, they recognize the centrality of representation to the processes of constructing, de-centering, and reconstituting the concept of the subject.

Both Kiefer and Heidegger – each in his own way – consciously appropriate three different perspectives or methods available in German culture for the express purpose of reworking their concepts of human identity. They both make use of and combine existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic “points of view.” And although these methods are clearly very central to the development of German philosophy over the last one hundred years, these perspectives also run through twentieth-century German culture as a whole. Existentialism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics are “ways of seeing” or “perspectives on the world” that, sometimes before (as in the case of existentialism) and most certainly after their theoretical articulation, are available to a wide spectrum of cultural practitioners. Thus, although it is well documented that Heidegger read the earlier theoretical formulations of these three approaches – in particular, the works of Søren Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, and Wilhelm Dilthey – one does not need to assume prior theoretical knowledge in the case of Kiefer. In part because of Heidegger’s tremendous influence on German culture since the late 1920s, the central ideas behind existentialism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics were standard components of an educated German’s “intellectual baggage” by the time Kiefer began to contribute to and reconfigure German culture – at least, in their more “commonsense” or everyday formulations.

Despite the striking initial parallels in their approaches to the subject, however, Kiefer and Heidegger radically diverge as they develop. Heidegger’s attempt, in the 1920s, to rework the subject leads him not to a new understanding of subjectivity but, rather, in his middle phase of philosophy beginning around 1930, to a rejection of the standpoint of the individual subject and to an insistence on a privileged, intersubjective, “German-historical” point of view – a point of view that Heidegger believes allows him to speak for the German people
Kiefer's Existentialism

Because his works are more concrete than those of Heidegger, I will begin by introducing the existential approach to subjectivity through a brief analysis of Kiefer’s early books. The adjective “existentialist” has been traditionally used to describe the work of a number of different European figures: most important, the philosophers Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Jean Paul Sartre and the writers Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Kafka, and Albert Camus. As this rather politically, historically, and nationally diverse collection of names suggests, “existentialism” is not a unified system of thought. Indeed, one of its more general characteristics is a distrust of all conceptual systems (including those of science) – a result of the existentialists’ rejection of the idea that human knowledge could ever be formed into a fixed or final doctrine. Existentialism is a nonsystematic, nonrigid method; it can perhaps best be described as an approach to the world that focuses on a particular set of phenomena and that organizes and interrelates the material it examines within a shifting structure of related concepts and fundamental paradoxes.

Existentialist philosophers, novelists, poets, and short-story writers share a common focus on the individual, whom they examine and interrogate through the analysis of different types of lived experience. Generally contrasting how the individual subject thinks and acts in his or her everyday modes (for example, at work or when bored) with the subject’s experience in extreme situations (for example, in the face of suffering, death, or the meaninglessness of life), the existentialists thus investigate the paradoxical nature of human beings – the range of contradictory behaviors we bind together as well as the fact that we are always incomplete (always potentially changeable) until the final moment of our death. In this respect, existentialism comes close to psychoanalysis, because it focuses on both the rational and irrational aspects of the individual and how one attempts to balance the play of forces that constitute one’s inner world.

Existentialism also focuses on how the individual chooses in important situations: moments in which one must make weighty decisions about one’s own...
life or the lives of others. There is thus a general emphasis in existentialist
works on the question or paradox of human free will in the face of social-hist-
erical determinism. Individuals, according to the existentialists, are condemned to
be free. Since there are neither immutable rules of moral conduct nor a fixed
and unchanging human essence, we must, from out of ourselves, choose to
become either one type of person or another – even refusing to choose is ulti-
mately an existential decision. On the other hand, when we make ourselves –
both publicly and privately – we do so in a shared social and cultural context
that allots us certain possibilities and not others. The meanings, in other words,
that we use to understand and act in the world are significations that we have
inherited from our culture and that we do not, for the most part, criticize or
examine. In this respect, then, our personal, social, and historical context
determines us. For this reason, facticity (the situation into which we are born), false
and authentic consciousness, self-delusion, and the deceptive nature of the
crowd are common existentialist themes, since they help us understand how
and when we act freely.

Finally, the existentialist perspective relates all human striving, meaning,
and value to an ultimate void or abyss – variously understood as nothingness,
meaninglessness, or the absurd. Human beings, according to existentialism,
give meaning to an otherwise senseless world. Mired in radical contingency, it
is the individual, in other words, who gives value to brute matter by positing
meaningful possibilities that transcend the mere facts of existence. But because
the existentialist viewpoint always recognizes the subject as the source of the
world’s meaning, existentialism is in the final analysis a tragic world view.
Since we always act in the service of values that come from a human source,
there is ultimately nothing outside the individual that justifies one choice more
than another. For this reason, all action – all self-transcendence – requires a
leap of faith: a willingness to be true to one’s incomplete self-understanding,
because that in the end is all that one has. And although the recognition of the
nothingness that surrounds all human action can lead to nihilism, it is also the
source of the existentialist’s strength. If the world is meaningless, then the in-
dividual becomes everything, and self-transcendence emerges as both an act of
exalted creation and the ultimate responsibility that the subject bears to itself.

In a nutshell, then, an existentialist approach to the subject is one that
focuses on various types of lived experience in relation to moments of funda-
mental decision on both an individual and a collective level.19 It is an approach
that, furthermore, constantly emphasizes the paradoxes of the human psyche
and its development and continually touches upon absurdity and mean-
inglessness as the ultimate limits of all human striving. We see this existentialist
approach very clearly revealed in Kiefer’s earliest series of books from 1969
and 1970, a very important moment in his artistic development. This series is,
for all intents and purposes, his jumping-off point: one of the earliest sets of
works in which he defined many of his recurring themes and images.20 One of
the earliest works in this series is You Are a Painter [Du bist Maler] (1969) (Fig-
ures 2–7), a heavily worn unpagedinated volume, with slightly under one hun-
dred black-and-white photographs made by Kiefer of his everyday environ-
ment. Behind a cover image of a heaven-gazing artist appropriated from the

FIGURE 3. Anselm Kiefer, You Are a Pointer, pp. 4–5.

FIGURE 6. Anselm Kiefer; You Are a Painter, pp. 48–49.

FIGURE 7. Anselm Kiefer; You Are a Painter, pp. 50–51.
totalitarian art of Josef Thorak (who, along with Arno Breker, was one of the most important National Socialist sculptors) (Figure 2), Kiefer assembles images of his Karlsruhe studio in which toy soldiers battle on the top of a kitchen table (Figures 3–5). As the photo-essay progresses, the studio is suggested to be Kiefer’s living space as well – his indexical traces are everywhere (Figure 6); furniture and objects in the room change from image to image; and there appears to be a more private area, where he might sleep. In addition, the images are occasionally captioned with bits of contradictory text, such as the word “losses” scrawled over the picture of a seemingly regimented and precise formation of soldiers on page 16 (Figure 5), and, on page 51, “the marble floor,” written over a largely abstract all-over photograph of crumpled paper on the floor (Figure 7). Along with the blurriness, exposure fluctuations, and scale changes of Kiefer’s photographs, these ironic and contradictory text fragments contribute to the overall ambiguity of Kiefer’s work as a whole. Although Kiefer clearly relates his everyday life and art to the specter of German fascism, it is unclear if he relates to fascism in a critical or a resigned way. In addition, other oppositions, which do not directly map onto the fascist/antifascist dichotomy, are prominent in the work: fact vs. fiction; handwriting vs. photography; bodily touch vs. mechanical reproduction; autobiography vs. cultural stereotyping; and “original” vs. appropriated photographs. This play of oppositions, which creates a rich semantic density around the poles of Kiefer and Thorak, increases rather than resolves the ambiguity surrounding Kiefer’s investigation of his own – as well as his country’s – fascism.

In addition to creating a dark aura of ambiguity, You Are a Painter evokes an existentialist perspective because it so clearly makes manifest Kiefer’s everyday life and processes. The viewer sees where Kiefer works and eats, his lights, his backdrop, his plates, his brush and, more disturbingly, his successive moves in the mysterious toy-soldier game. Like the works of the existentialists, Kiefer’s work is filled with references to his own lived experience – an experience that, moreover, seems to connect different states of mundane and sinister being. Kiefer’s book is also existentialist because it complexly figures, through the title and overblown artist image on the front cover, a fundamental decision in Kiefer’s life – his choice to become a painter. Moreover, in conjunction with the various possibilities held out in the pages (for example: death, breakfast, the “ceremonial” marble floor), the book also seems to pose further questions about his existence as a whole. This type of existentialist question-posing and deciding, characteristic of both Being and Time and Sartre’s Being and Nothingness (1943), is a process of choosing between authentic and inauthentic possibilities for becoming – an ongoing operation concerned with mediating between the individual and the social-cultural (or “objective”). Kiefer expresses his fear of a false mediation through the combination of the Thorak appropriation with an atmosphere of childishness. There are many signs of childishness in Kiefer’s book: the handwriting, the toys, and the jokes, for example. (In one image, it is even suggested that the artist eats his own paint). In addition, the changes in scale, which characterize the transitions between the consecutive images in Kiefer’s quasi-narrative, can be understood as evoking a comic/childish perspective because of their discontinuity as well as their framing of objects so that
things look big in relation to the surroundings. By evoking a sense of childish selfhood in relation to a cultural stereotype (which is also a sign of Nazi kitsch), Kiefer suggests the dangers of unthinkingly imitating identity models drawn from one's immediate cultural past – especially when that past is tainted by the specter of fascism.

Further, through Kiefer's play with the techniques and strategies of war, *You Are a Painter* evokes an existentialist perspective because it suggests an ethical dimension bounded by meaninglessness. By posing a moral choice – to kill and to risk being killed through one's decision to go to war – Kiefer evokes a question that must be made in the face of others, one's community, and one's world. Yet, by posing this question in the context of a rather absurd scenario (the destitute artist planning world domination with toys on his kitchen table), Kiefer suggests that moral choice always takes place within a limited context and with an incomplete knowledge of others. War and childishness, as the work reveals, are united by the concept of the game. For this reason, although human beings must articulate and act according to the ethical meanings that they re-create from their shared historical world, they always run the risk that their ethical choices could be mistaken. By posing questions of the greatest moral concern at the same time as it undermines the authority of the artist by making the artist appear ridiculous, *You Are a Painter* thus radically undermines the idea of the individual as the sole or privileged locus of the rules of moral decision. At the same time, by emphasizing the dangerous character of previous forms of German collective identity through its evocation of Nazism (by means of the conjunction of the soldier and Thorak images), Kiefer's book also casts doubt upon the legitimacy of the rules of conduct promulgated by his society. And the unsettling and pessimistic questions that this contradiction – or "no win" situation – generates suggest why Kiefer's work has elicited so much impassioned critical commentary since 1980.

In three other books made in 1969, *Heroic Symbols* (*Heroische Sinnbilder (symboles héroïques)*)[^23], *To Genet* (*Für Genet*),[^24] and *Montpellier* (*Montpellier*),[^25] Kiefer continues his existential quest for authentic self-identity by questioning how to become a German artist in the aftermath of a fascist or totalitarian society. In these books, Kiefer addresses issues of authentic and inauthentic selfhood, the social construction of identity, and the role that mass reproduction can play in both art and popular culture. He does this, moreover, in a far more direct fashion than he did in *You Are a Painter*: namely, through the avenue of his own body. In *Heroic Symbols* (Figures 8–18), for example, Kiefer presents an amazing array of personal and appropriated images revolving around a series of conceptual art "actions" made in 1969 in which he performed the role of a Nazi by making the "Sieg Heil" gesture in a variety of different contexts.[^26] The book begins with a series of absurd frontal images of the balding, bespectacled Kiefer in big boots and an army coat, standing on a pedestal in a water-filled bathtub in his Karlsruhe studio, and appropriately titled, "Walking on Water (Attempt in the Bathtub)" (Figure 9). These images satirize the Nazis' seriousness about their own ideology and purposes and thus seem critical of fascism. The book, however, quickly moves to a more threatening sequence, "On the Rhine," in which we see Kiefer's profile as he rigidly salutes, framed against a backdrop of

FIGURE 9. Anselm Kiefer; Heroic Symbols, pp. 4-5.
river, forest, and sky (Figure 10). Although Kiefer is always alone, and thus lacks the threatening power of the regimented masses that is behind much of Nazi imagery (in Nazi art, even the images of individuals are made typical and thus masslike), the symmetry of the image and the intensity of his body language make this sequence far less an obvious parody than the opening one. The sequence still seems critical because Kiefer’s salute is wrong – his head is too far down and his arm is too far forward. However, the radical shift in the position of the horizon line between the two facing images could be seen to project a more affirmative view of fascism. Kiefer’s arm appears to move the horizon, making space for his figure and suggesting that through his will he can mold his environment – an association that could be read as glorifying the power of the Nazi state.

After the Rhine sequence, Kiefer presents more photographs of his Nazi performance intercut with watercolor self-portraits in which he depicts himself saluting against different types of landscape as well as appropriated magazine images of Nazi memorial sculptures (Figures 11–13).27 Here, Kiefer represents himself as a tiny figure against an open sky or horizon. Recalling the environmentally dwarfed figures of Caspar David Friedrich, such as Monk by the Sea (1809)28 and Wanderer above the Sea of Fog (c. 1818),29 Kiefer’s figures are the model of romantic absorption – representing a contemplative attitude that the book as a whole seems designed to evoke in the responsive spectator. Images of a typical 1940s household, a line of soldiers being inspected, and abstract
FIGURE 11. Anselm Kiefer; Heroic Symbols, pp. 10–11.

watercolors articulating a field with irregular dots (an image that is later associated by Kiefer with the notion of “sick” or degenerate art) follow (Figures 14–15), along with more Nazi-performance watercolors and the table in Kiefer’s Karlsruhe studio (Figures 15–16). Through the juxtaposition of handmade art with pieces of machined mass-market imagery, the book suggests that we interrogate the relative contributions of “high” art and mass culture to the construction of fascist identity. As in You Are a Painter, Kiefer probes the historical construction of his German identity in relation to appropriated images, his gesture, and the traces left by his activities in his workspace. Late in the book, in a sequence entitled, “King’s Palaces in Upper Bavaria,” Kiefer presents another set of images suggesting the possibilities for German identity available in his culture: a sequence of photographs depicting royal German properties (Figure 17). The sequence climaxes in a series of empty throne rooms: uninhabited chambers awaiting a monarch (Figure 18). Now, the question of fascist or antifascist seems addressed to the viewer. Kiefer’s own body no longer appears in the image—except once in a mirror. And because of Kiefer’s absence, the call to become a German monarch can more easily be read as being addressed to the spectator or reader.

Heroic Symbols is typical of the three books in that it locates Kiefer’s physical body at the center of his process of existential questioning. Like Butler, Kiefer sees the body as the site of cultural transmission: a place where cultural stereotypes defining identity are both repeated and creatively varied. By both

performing and parodying the Nazi salute, Kiefer appears to recognize the centrality of the body to both rote repetition and newness. Moreover, like Grosz, Kiefer chooses the strategy of photomontage for his self-representations. Despite his painterliness, Kiefer is thus from the very beginning an artist who examines the mass-reproduced body in both photographic and mass media forms. Furthermore, Kiefer’s juxtapositions of mechanical and painterly imagery call upon the viewer to compare and contrast the “two” different forms of media. In this way, his books suggest that the development of technologies of mass reproduction have had a tremendous effect on the promulgation of socially constructed modes of individual and collective identity. Thus, because they capture him reenacting extremely violent cultural stereotypes, Kiefer’s photographs of his own body are also significant because they suggest an engagement with the dangers that cultural identities present to human lives. While they are ostensibly about the possibilities suggested by earlier role models – artists and statesmen, heroes and fascists – Kiefer’s body images imply that the uncritical production and consumption of role models can lead to terrifying political consequences. Finally, however, by photographically freezing himself in the roles of different characters, and by presenting these characters sequentially within the same book, Kiefer illustrates the distance between cultural roles and real life.32 We are denied a sense of who Kiefer as a person or a “self” truly is, at the same time as we recognize that, whoever he is, Kiefer is considerably more than the stereotyped identities he portrays (which, because of the ridiculousness of many of the self-portraits, often appear to be ill fitting or assumed).
Thus, while emphasizing the social construction of both the individual and the collective, Kiefer’s body images also make the viewer aware that the individual subject is not reducible to any single role.

With these body images, Kiefer anticipates many of the same issues that crop up in Cindy Sherman’s postmodern photography, which begins nine years later. Like Kiefer, Sherman photographs herself enacting cultural stereotypes drawn from a wide variety of sources: TV, movies, fashion, pornography, advertising, art history, and fairy tales. What still separates Kiefer from Sherman, however, is the fact that Kiefer’s early body images are much smaller and less finished and that, overall, his art tends far more to treat bodies other than his own. Unlike Sherman, who has spent most of her career to date working with photographic images of her own body, Kiefer switches almost immediately away from his own body to the bodies of others and, later, to the implied body of the spectator. At this time, Kiefer also develops a practice of monumental painting, which he has used intermittently to the present day and which is even more evocative and sensuous than Sherman’s extremely rich and saturated prints. Like Sherman, Kiefer aims – on a certain level – to seduce in his art. And although he returns to body images occasionally in later works, Kiefer seems far more concerned with the seductive effects that imagery can produce on bodies other than his own – something that he works on in a very fundamental way through the medium of painting.

The Emergence of the Wooden Interior

Kiefer’s painting between 1970 and 1973 clearly demonstrates his gradual move away from his own body and toward the body of the other. In his earliest oil paintings and watercolors, such as *Every Human Being Stands Beneath His Own Dome of Heaven* (Jeder Mensch steht unter seiner Himmelskugel) (1970) and *Man in the Forest* (Mann im Wald) (1971) (Figure 19), all done between 1970 and 1971, Kiefer plays out existentialist themes of German identity by relating text and self-portraits to simple, almost schematic images of landscapes, fields, and woods. However, perhaps because he avoids the “thick” layered or collaged quality characteristic of his early books that use photomechanical reproduction, the painted works seem “flatter,” less active and engaged. Without his mass-produced appropriations and storyboard-like photography, Kiefer’s existentialist project falters; his thin painting is unable to sustain the seriousness of his themes and questions. Then, significantly, his painting changes in 1973, and, with works such as *Quaternity* (Quaternität), *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* (Vater, Sohn, heiliger Geist), *Faith, Hope, Love* (Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe), *Nothung* (Notung), the *Parsifal* (Parsifal) series, and *Germany’s Spiritual Heroes* (Deutschlands Geisteshelden) (Figure 20), Kiefer’s representations of his own body cease. In place of his body, huge wooden interiors emerge – distorted images of Kiefer’s attic studio, which he uses as a “stage” or “film set” in which to juxtapose symbols relating to a complex set of personal and public identities. As in his earlier existentialist books, both culture and identity are here treated suspiciously – as sources of danger as well as transcendence. Yet, although the
existential German artist themes continue, Kiefer's blown-up wooden attic workspaces are empty of any direct representation of human presence.

Also immediately striking about the wooden-interior series is the large size of the works. In comparison to the earlier paintings and watercolors, the wooden-interior canvases are much bigger and, therefore, far more assertive and aggressive. Furthermore, these paintings make use of a pronounced linear perspective scheme that emphasizes both their banal representational character and their abstract qualities. On the one hand, the viewer can clearly see what the paintings are supposed to represent. The architectural structure of the interior is amply, if schematically, depicted. In addition the wood-grain pattern, which appears pervasively on the walls, floors, doors, and ceilings, initially appears to be an indexical representation, since it recalls the frottage works of Max Ernst, which were "rubbings" or imprints taken from real-world sources. Thus, Kiefer's work seems to represent reality on two different levels: indexicality and the conventions of realistic representation (perspectival representation as well as modeling through tone and color). On the other hand, the more one looks at Kiefer's surfaces, the more one realizes that no indexical relationship exists between Kiefer's lines and a real ("worldly" or "objective") referent. Instead, Kiefer's surface enacts a complex formal play between geometric-linear and
organic-linear elements and thus remains very “flat” and self-reflexive. The linear element in Kiefer’s work is the foreshortened geometry that is used to draw the basic outlines of his environment. The organic-linear element is the wood-grain pattern – not a real-world index (a sign in which the signifier has a causal connection to the signified), but arbitrary sets of complex and curving lines, which keep the eye moving across the surface. In Kiefer’s wooden interiors, the play between the geometric-linear and the organic-linear sets up a regular pulsing sensation – a sort of optical “interchange” or “rotation” – in the viewer’s perception: the straight lines rapidly draw the viewer’s eyes vertically, horizontally, and into depth; and the circular lines cause the viewer’s eyes to more slowly follow regional and concentric pulsing movements on the surface of the canvas. In this way, Kiefer’s wooden interiors create through their formal means the experience of two different viewing temporalities, an experience that both arrests and eventually tires the viewer. Thus, rather than being simply – and emptily – representational (as they first appear to be), upon closer inspection Kiefer’s wooden interiors also seem to be highly concerned with reflexive problems having to do with the effect of abstract form on the processes of vision.

In addition to evoking a formal or self-reflexive aesthetic attitude, Kiefer’s wooden interiors also pose deep personal and social questions concerning possibilities for German identity in a post-Nazi era. The depicted environments are never completely empty. Instead, bits of text – both names and quotations – as well as painted symbols (chairs, swords, snakes, trap doors, and burning fires) are carefully arranged so as to point to the “dangerousness” of Kiefer’s cultural past. Thus, in Germany’s Spiritual Heroes, for example, Kiefer uses a linear perspective scheme with a central vanishing point to create the interior walls, floor, and ceiling of a gigantic rectangular wooden space in which torches burn but which is otherwise seemingly empty. Across the work’s thinly painted, rough burlap surface, and in conformity with both the reduction in size and the recession into depth created by the perspectival construction, Kiefer has written the names of
German cultural figures from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Joseph Beuys, Richard Wagner, Caspar David Friedrich, and Mathild von Magdeburg, for example. (A similar list appeared earlier in Kiefer's book To Genet.) As a whole, *Germany's Spiritual Heroes* appears to be an ambivalent – partly critical, partly admiring – representation of the multilayered Germanic heroic tradition, a dangerous cultural past that Kiefer investigates in search of aesthetic and personal role models. The interior recalls both a memorial hall and a crypt, and the representational fires commemorating departed “heroes” are juxtaposed with what appears to be actual burn marks along the lower edge of the painting. In addition, Kiefer’s childish text, its pedantic title taken from a textbook he found, undermines a simply heroic reading of the image. The irony of having “spiritual heroes” – cultural practitioners who resemble mythical warriors – is therefore emphasized. At the same time the work posits questions about Wagner’s political effect in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it also provokes thought about Beuys’s actions in World War II. Thus, by combining figures from different epochs, Kiefer creates both a rich and ambiguous mix of cultural possibilities and a sense that his cultural past lives on in his present in precisely such a jumbled state.

Although it initially seems paradoxical that Kiefer would move away from the representation of his own body in order to further probe the social construction of his temporal, embodied selfhood, this is precisely what has happened. Rather than obscuring the existential perspective, Kiefer’s absence from the painting’s representational space, as well as the painting’s large size and pronounced perspective scheme, actually reinforces and radicalizes his existential themes. In the first place, *Germany’s Spiritual Heroes*’s size and perspective scheme seem to recall the similar sizes and perspectives of Italian fresco painting during the Renaissance. Like Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* (1495–1498) (Figure 21), in the Church of Sta. Maria delle Grazie in Milan, for example, *Germany’s Spiritual Heroes* opens up the wall upon which it hangs and thereby sucks the viewer into an enveloping fictive space of representational and symbolic elements. However, whereas the perspectival space of Leonardo’s fresco both idealizes and harmonizes its religious subject matter (through the placement of Christ’s head at the center of the image, the balancing of the figure groups, and the harmonious poses), the perspectival space of *Germany’s Spiritual Heroes*, which is skewed slightly toward the left, suggests a rationality and an order gone wild. Upon inspection, Kiefer’s one-point perspective appears more pronounced than Leonardo’s. And because nothing substantial occupies the space between the spectator and the far wall, our eyes move back and forth between depth and flatness more rapidly in Kiefer’s painting than in the more filled interior of Renaissance work. As a result, the spectator feels more controlled. Thus, because Kiefer’s perspective is “forced” and his room empty of human inhabitants, his perspective scheme also seems more violent and domineering. In addition, the conflict between the geometric-linear and organic-linear elements of Kiefer’s surface creates a destabilizing optical rotation, which evokes the rhythmic and monotonous motions of machine production. As Kiefer’s wooden interior implies, it is at times reasonable to have heroes – role models whose stories and relics can represent possibilities for action in our own lives – and at other times completely insane, as demonstrated again and again by social
and political movements that base themselves on the cult of a supreme leader. The perspectival expansion of the wooden room suggests the scientific-rational power of the heroes' followers: the subjects who have supposedly constructed the wooden hall and whose social identity appears to be at least partially formed through their acts of collective historical commemoration. In addition, because of the multiple signs of danger, Kiefer's work suggests that the "followers" have contributed their considerable strength and knowledge to serve some "higher" cause without a visible sign to confirm the moral correctness of their allegiance to this particular group of Germany's spiritual heroes. Finally, the pronounced natural grain of the wood clashes with the geometric structure that confines it and to which it must conform. Nature, which in the Renaissance was understood to harmonize and find completion in human reason, here seems at odds with - perhaps even endangered by - humankind's rational abilities.

Transcendental Phenomenology

Like the other works in this series, the large size and pronounced perspective scheme of Germany's Spiritual Heroes also creates a phenomenological perspec-
tive or attitude in the experience of the spectator. This work evokes a phenomenological point of view in that it suggests that one can “read” selfhood reflexively from out of the world that is one’s lived context. The philosophical method of phenomenology begins with the phenomenologist’s perception of world and his or her knowledge of language and then constitutes the meaning and identity of the real out of these two sources. Accordingly, Kiefer’s move away from his own image and to an image of a linguistically inscribed, largely empty perspectival space as a way of developing his questions about German identity suggests that he develops a phenomenological approach to the subject out of the existential one already in place. Kiefer’s wooden interiors of 1973 also recall the phenomenological method in German philosophy in the first quarter of this century in that Kiefer’s emphasis on single-point perspective recalls Husserl’s concept of intentionality. Because it demands to be viewed from a particular vantage point that the viewer can also choose to avoid, Kiefer’s single-point perspective scheme in conjunction with his existential themes and the lack of human figures makes the spectator self-conscious – aware of his or her own particular position vis-à-vis the painting’s fictive space. Since the painting is empty of human beings, the world it depicts – the spectator is provoked to believe – must have something to do with him or her. Alternately identifying with the space and then stepping outside the relation of identification in order to examine it from a different vantage point, the spectator is prodded to reflect upon the relationship between meanings produced by the spectator and the phenomenal profiles generated by the surface of the canvas. Thus, in the spectator’s contemplation of the wooden interiors, identification and illusionism are constantly produced, broken down, and reconstituted – a process that both generates ambiguity and promotes a self-reflexive phenomenological attitude in the mind of the viewer.

Today, “phenomenology” can be broadly defined as the movement in twentieth-century continental thought that, in varying ways, devotes itself to the analysis of appearance. Founded in Germany by Edmund Husserl – whose slogan, “To the things, themselves,” became its rallying cry – phenomenology immediately gained adherents in Germany during the first quarter of the twentieth century and, later on, in France and America. The most famous practitioners and critics of phenomenology over the years include Heidegger, Max Scheler, and Alfred Schutz in Germany; Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida in France; as well as Edward S. Casey, Don Ihde, and Hubert Dreyfuss in America. In most of its forms, phenomenology has remained a descriptive approach to phenomena that seeks to discover the basic conditions of possibility – or structural invariants – that subsume human phenomenal experience. The method, however, has not escaped numerous changes over the past ninety years. Perhaps the most important early shift in phenomenology was from the initial transcendental mode – developed in the early works of Edmund Husserl and his circle – to a later, existential mode – perhaps best represented by the work of Martin Heidegger in the 1920s and, later, in the 1940s through the 1960s, by the phenomenological works of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

For the purpose of understanding Heidegger’s political concept of art and
his theory of modernity, it is essential to examine the important shift in his use of phenomenological method from the phenomenological-hermeneutic existentialism of his early period to the phenomenological-hermeneutic aesthetic theory of his middle period. This shift takes place in Heidegger's thought in the early 1930s and corresponds to his change in focus from a direct analysis of human existence to a more intersubjective and cultural account of humanity by means of an analysis of his historical present combined with a critique of the history of Western art and metaphysics. Despite the disappearance of the embodied individual as a fundamental point of reference, however, the existential aspects of Heidegger's thinking do not drop out entirely. Instead, in his middle period, Heidegger's existentialism becomes generalized – applied to the German community as a whole. And as I will later argue, this generalization of an existential perspective robs it of its authenticity. In addition, Heidegger's shift from phenomenological-hermeneutic existentialism to phenomenological-hermeneutic aesthetics coincides with the beginning of his intensive investigation of the relationship between science, technology, and modernity and, thus, with his development of a historical account of the end of the modern age. Here, however, in order to understand how Kiefer's wooden-interior paintings create a phenomenological attitude – a particular kind of human self-reflexivity oriented toward discovering the ego as the source of meaning-intending acts through which the outside world is apprehended – it will suffice to define the basic concepts behind the first form of phenomenology: Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method.

According to Husserl's original conception, transcendental phenomenology was to fulfill all the criteria of an empirical science and hence is similar in all essential aspects to any one of the natural sciences. As an empirical science, phenomenology sets for itself a delimited field, bases itself on observation and experiment, proceeds according to an established method, sets strict observable criteria for the confirmation of truth and falsity, and, finally, is developed through the intersubjective activity of a community of researchers. For Husserl, however, phenomenology is not simply one science among many. Instead, its aim is to produce an objective body of knowledge that would ground and unify all the particular natural, mathematical, and human sciences – sciences that, according to Husserl, were experiencing a radical crisis of their foundational principles at the beginning of the twentieth century. Phenomenology is thus the first or primary science, and it provides the other sciences with a secure ground through a twofold process. First, by analyzing the problem of cognition – how we know things with certainty – phenomenology furnishes humanity with a indubitably certain factual base: a collection of experiential contents that are absolutely true. Second, from this factual base phenomenology generates a transcendental "pure logic" upon which the objective meaning and unity of all knowledge depend. This pure logic is a refined and organized account of all the ideal meanings we use when we experience and understand anything: a complex set of a priori, ideal "essences" – organized according to the various regions of knowledge – that permit everything knowable to appear in terms of sensuous intuitions and logical categories.

The concepts of phenomenological reflection and intentionality guide
Husserl’s method of transcendental phenomenology. Phenomenological reflection dictates that each phenomenologist begin with his or her own perceptual experience, which is understood to be the source of all truth or certainty. In order to secure the truth of perceptual experience, the phenomenologist is required to perform two phenomenological reductions that suspend his or her normal beliefs having to do with the reality of the world and the personal relevance that objects have. The phenomenologist then concentrates on describing the contents of his or her experience just as they appear. The phenomenologist, in other words, brackets the idea that there is a real world “out there” that is the source of what appears as well as the idea of his or her own person as the one to whom these appearances matter in some way. Instead of focusing on the world “out there,” the phenomenologist concentrates on worldly phenomena as perceived, meaningful “contents.” At different times in his thinking, Husserl called these bracketed worldly phenomena “noematic correlates” or “cogita.” Through linguistic description and classification, the phenomenologist then seeks the pure essences that permeate and make possible his or her bracketed cogita – structural invariants and fundamental meanings that persist through different experiences of the same type. The structural invariants disclosed by the phenomenologist include such things as the figure-ground relation, the assumption that objects have a latent side hidden from vision, and our tendency to see the world in terms of a central vertical axis with a clearly defined (and non-reversible) top and bottom. A fundamental meaning revealed by the phenomenologist could be something as concrete as a “tree” or a “human being” or as abstract as the things we intend by the terms “the actual,” “the doubtful,” “the problematic,” “the perceived,” “the imagined,” and “the willed.” By identifying cogita, collecting perceptual examples, and imaginatively varying them, the phenomenologist ultimately discovers the essential properties or limits of what can be perceived. In this way, a set of ideal essences is generated – structures and meanings that determine the fundamental form and properties of everything that can be known or experienced with certainty.

The discovery of the essential properties or limits of what appears is only the first stage of transcendental phenomenological analysis. According to Husserl, all perception of something is perception from a particular point of view. He develops the concept of intentionality as a way of emphasizing this perspectival character of all human experience. First, the fact that all experience is intentional means that what is experienced is always experienced as something – that is, it is always experienced under a particular aspect that is the result of the viewpoint that is doing the experiencing. Second, Husserl’s concept of intentionality also implies that the medium through which we experience the world is not a univocal continuum but, rather, a multiplicity of different cognitive acts. In the second stage of phenomenological reflection, the phenomenologist attends to and describes the cognitive conditions that make possible any particular experiential content. Once again proceeding reflexively, the phenomenologist identifies fundamental cognitive functions through the comparison and variation of different cogita. These different cognitive functions are what Husserl calls “noetic correlates” or “cogitatones.” They are the meaning-intending acts that accompany any perception of something. At this stage, the phenomenologist focuses on his or her
different cognitive functions – for example, “willing,” “perceiving,” “imagining,” “deciding upon,” “desiring,” and “remembering” the same object. By means of the comparison and variation of his or her various cogitatones, the phenomenologist discloses, describes, and clarifies the fundamental forms of his or her intentional activity – that is, the types of function, variational structure, and meaning intended by the different cogitatones. In this way, a set of ideal cognitive acts is isolated – meaning-intending projections that supply an additional (but by no means secondary) level of significance to everything knowable.

With the shift to noetic correlates, or cogitatones, transcendental phenomenology becomes reflexive in an additional way; that is, it slowly turns its gaze in the direction of transcendental philosophy’s pure ego, or “possible I” – what human beings have in common by dint of their shared humanity. At this final stage of transcendental phenomenology, the primary concern of the phenomenologist is no longer the ideal meanings that constitute things and beings in the world (although phenomenological description can always be traced back to specific worldly experiences), nor even the world-constituting acts that grant these ideal meanings particular quantities, qualities, relations, and modalities. Instead, the phenomenologist is now concerned with the “unified” perspectival locus to which these meanings and acts all relate. Here, according to Husserl, the phenomenological researcher is not concerned with actual selfhood, but rather with a rudimentary and general sort of subjectivity – a subjectivity that Husserl understands both as a spatial-temporal continuum and as the set of all the transcendental forms within which experience happens. However, as the various noetic acts are discovered and classified, a question inevitably arises as to how the particular or individual subject – as a unified way of perceiving the world – is feasible. Husserl responded to this question by positing the pure ego, which contained and systematically interrelated all the possible forms of intentional activity, as well as all phenomenologically reduced experience of the world. Like the essential structures or limits of the cogita and cogitatones, the essential structures or limits of the pure or transcendental ego were both derived from particular experience and, at the same time, considered to be a scientifically secured model of the possible ego in all its variability.

Transcendental Phenomenology and the Wooden Interior

Kiefer’s earliest monumental paintings, which appeared in 1973, continue his initial German identity themes while at the same time substituting gigantic scale (which addresses the spectator’s body) and a pronounced linear perspective scheme for the direct representation of Kiefer’s own body (Figure 20). These wooden-interior paintings also mark a domestication of Kiefer’s earlier painted representations, which take place in an outdoor context. In the wooden-interior series, an inner “spiritual” world is thus symbolically substituted for an outer “natural” one. In light of the concepts of transcendental phenomenology discussed above, the question previously raised – why Kiefer’s move away from the representation of his own body could help strengthen his existential concerns – can now be answered. In the wooden-interior series, Kiefer interrogates
selfhood reflexively – from out of his world. Recalling the various focal points and the overall movement of the transcendental phenomenologist’s three-stage descriptive, interpretive, and scientific activity, Kiefer’s attic representations “foreground” or “emphasize” basic symbolic meanings that constitute or determine his otherwise empty world as well as a particular point of view from which the world and its meanings are experienced. Kiefer’s wooden-interior representations, in other words, lead the spectator from the experience of a world to the experience of meaning-intending acts (as suggested by the writing and the symbolic objects⁴⁸) and, from there, to a reflection on the subject that has formed and constituted this world through its bestowal of culturally inherited meaning. Furthermore, by working serially – by changing the overall structure and dimensions of his attic “storeroom” as well as the symbols and names that appear within it – Kiefer phenomenologically varies his different existential possibilities for postwar German subjectivity. In other words, by examining different combinations of names and symbols that command and direct his attention, Kiefer creatively plays with the cultural determinants that make him a self – thereby exposing the perimeters or limits of his historically conditioned subjectivity. Wagner, Beuys, Parsifal and the snake are all possibilities that direct and limit Kiefer’s activity of self-transcendence – his engaged living-out of his own life. By examining them both singly and in combination, Kiefer’s works suggest a semimethodical exploration of the various possibilities open to him for becoming a German subject. For this reason, the wooden interiors demand to be seen in series in order to suggest the range or variations of Kiefer’s vision.

Kiefer’s phenomenological perspective has become – since his first moment of monumental painting – a fairly consistent characteristic in his canvases, and it explains much of the hypnotic contemplative activity that his works inspire. In addition, by representing his self-identity, not directly by means of his own body, but rather indirectly through the avenue of the world, Kiefer partially unites his point of view with that of the spectator. His emphasis on perspective, the “emptiness” of his spaces, and his various textually and visually represented existential themes cause the viewer to contemplate what it would be like to be the author of Kiefer’s works: someone who takes credit for the art and affirms that it does indeed project his or her true “perspective” on the world. Thus, although radically particular, Kiefer’s contemplation of his own identity also moves toward a certain type of communal or intersubjective point of view. The viewer is invited – perhaps even forced – to occasionally stand in Kiefer’s shoes. We are called upon to think: What if this work portrayed my self-created environment? And Kiefer’s existential questions are made to interact with those of his historically developing viewing public. In this way, Kiefer actually strengthens the existential aspects of his art. Instead of simply depicting his activity of existential questioning as he did with the body images contained in his early books, he now allows the viewer to share in the mental and physical experience. In addition, however, we can also step outside the ideal vantage point dictated by Kiefer’s perspectival scheme. Thus the phenomenological attitude that Kiefer’s works create necessarily causes the spectator to think about other points of view and other existences. In this way, Kiefer’s works also formally invite their own criticism through the spectator’s reflection upon the
experience that is produced by Kiefer’s forms, themes, and artistic practices. And by so doing, at the same time as they suggest that the individual is always in part produced by the groups and collectives of which he or she is a part, Kiefer’s paintings also suggest that, through a noncoercive dialogue between engaged individuals, social roles may also be creatively reformulated.

One should thus not overemphasize the intersubjectivity (or collective validity) of Kiefer’s works — especially when comparing them with the writings of Husserl and his circle. First, the transcendental phenomenologist intends to disclose the structures and ideal meanings of an “objective” and largely linguistically defined intersubjective world and the forms and meaning-intending acts of a common or transcendental subjectivity. Kiefer, on the other hand, discloses culturally specific symbols — ideal meanings that are not necessarily held in common by the entire group and that are certainly not always objective (i.e., judged to be scientifically true) — as well as a much more limited and ambiguous range of meaning-intending acts. Furthermore, whereas at the third stage of phenomenological reflection the phenomenologist seeks the pure or transcendental ego (understood as the general locus of experiential contents and meaning-intending acts), Kiefer’s project is existential: he seeks his own particular selfhood in light of his “German” social, cultural, and historical context. Thus, although Kiefer’s wooden interiors probe the nature and limits of both worldly things and subjective meaning-intending acts, his investigative focus on these two levels is much more restricted than that of the transcendental phenomenologist. Furthermore, the subject that Kiefer discloses is radically particular in comparison to Husserl’s pure ego.

Yet, despite the fact that Kiefer’s investigation has less of a scientific-objective character nature than that of Husserl, Kiefer’s investigation is not entirely a private enterprise either. Although Kiefer very obviously emphasizes his autobiography and personal practice as an artist in the wooden-interior series — as suggested by the monumentality of the works, the clear identification of the various interiors as representations of Kiefer’s workspace,49 and the indexical traces of his drawing, painting, and burning activities — Kiefer also foregrounds his more intersubjective social construction through ambiguous representations of previous cultural, mythical, and religious figures and events (the German, Biblical, and Norse myth themes). Through their conjunction of ironic childishness with mythic significance, Kiefer’s works suggest that human beings are always the products of multiple forms of collective identity — intersections of “familial,” “racial,” and “national” meanings. In the wooden interiors, moreover, the semantic ambiguity is often heightened as a result of the viewer stepping in and out of the ideal vantage point as he or she contemplates its conflicting meanings. In addition, the contradictions between the complexity of the surfaces and the banality of the representations, as well as the choices of themes and names (many of which bear the historical traces of Nazi appropriation at the same time as they also clearly possess a far greater range of meanings) emphasize this multiple and rotating sense of collective identity. Furthermore, by inviting the viewer to share his subject-position, Kiefer opens his process of identity construction to additional sets of meaning that he cannot possibly anticipate. He can be “answered” — represented and responded to —
through multiple avenues of cultural production. The individual and the collective – the "subjective" and the "intersubjective" – are thus interrelated in Kiefer's work in such a way that neither is subordinate to the other. Rather both maintain themselves in an uneasy and unresolved tension with yet a third term: the scientifically defined "objective" world. And it is precisely Kiefer's development of aesthetic correlates to Husserl's phenomenological attitude – a strategy that allows him to at times merge his body with the body of the spectator – that makes it possible for him to stress and maintain this productive tension between multiple forms of "individual" and "collective" truth.

It is also significant that, in comparison with Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method, Kiefer's phenomenological interiors make no attempt to demonstrate either their completeness or their absolute intersubjectivity – something that gives the spectator an indication of what is perhaps a greater degree of pessimism about science and reason characteristic of late-twentieth-century culture. Kiefer's lists of heroes always seem incomplete and his various symbolic "props" are placed in extremely open configurations; for this reason, it seems as if Kiefer's symbolism is arbitrary and that different figures and symbols could just as easily have been placed in his works. In this way, Kiefer's wooden interiors suggest that objectivity and intersubjectivity are not the same – something that Husserl's faith in scientific method might lead one to believe. Although humans share many meanings in common, this does not mean that all shared meaning is objective in a scientific sense – that is, always true within a particular logically or experimentally confirmable systematic context. Kiefer's double sense of his art as, on the one hand, an attempt to achieve multiple forms of generality through the particular and, on the other, as necessarily incomplete (bound to fail the test of complete objectivity or intersubjectivity) is a primary characteristic of his work from its beginnings to the present day. Speaking, in 1985, on the role of the artist in post–World War II Europe, Kiefer put it as follows: "The structures are destroyed. The class who makes the structures is missing. And what makes our work so difficult is that we must be both now. We must set up laws and at the same time be against them." By both setting up laws – symbolic forms or representations that govern self and group identity – and by simultaneously undermining them through ironic or critical presentations, Kiefer suggests that neither an absolutely common world nor a completely "general" self can ever actually be found.

Heidegger's Existential Phenomenology

More than four decades before Kiefer made his first books and paintings, Martin Heidegger developed a form of phenomenology that, although based on Husserl's method, was also critical of Husserl's concept of the transcendental ego. Unlike Husserl and like Kiefer, Heidegger examined the conditions that make possible the individual, embodied self in the context of a particular social-cultural milieu, and, like Kiefer, Heidegger began with unreduced – that is, lived – experience. Heidegger, who worked closely with Husserl as a young professor at Freiburg from 1916 to 1922, is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking
work of existential phenomenology, *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*], published in 1927. In it, Heidegger employed Husserl’s phenomenological method to analyze human existence—the everyday, embodied mode of being that Husserl had referred to earlier as the “natural attitude” and had attempted to exclude from phenomenological analysis. Heidegger’s work thus transformed transcendental phenomenology by rejecting the concept of the transcendental ego and, instead, began anew by using phenomenology to disclose the conditions of possibility that govern our everyday experience of life as we live it. For Heidegger, this meant putting phenomenology at the service of existential interpretation and asking the question “Who am I?”—a question that Heidegger formulated as the question of the “Being” [*Sein*] of “human existence” [*Dasein*]. By formulating the question this way, Heidegger oriented the analysis of existential phenomenology according to two broad divisions in phenomena—the first between ontic and ontological levels of phenomenological analysis, and the second between authentic and inauthentic selfhood.

By the difference between ontic and ontological levels of phenomenological analysis, Heidegger means the difference between descriptions of ontic states of human existence—everyday, purposive work activity, for example, or having a chat with someone you meet on the street—and interpretations of ontological structures that make possible these ontic states. Unlike Dasein’s ontic states, which are always radically particular (although they can be conceptually grouped into broader categories or types), Dasein’s ontological structures are common to all human beings. Similar to the intentional structures of the transcendental ego, these common ontological structures project a “context of significance” [*Bedeutsamkeit*] by means of which Dasein discloses its world. (Unlike the meaning-intending structures of the transcendental ego, however, Dasein’s ontological structures, Heidegger argues, do not create a fundamental difference—a gap or incommensurability—between consciousness and the world.)

As the starting point for his existential-phenomenological analysis of Dasein, Heidegger chooses ordinary examples of human existence drawn from his own life experience as well as from his culture (the expressed experience of others in the world around him). By carefully describing these various ontic states, Heidegger discovers repeating patterns indicative of primordial ontological structures accompanying all ontic experience. As these various ontological structures are further described, they are reinterpreted on a more fundamental level and shown to form an integrated whole. This integrated whole, which itself is reinterpreted at different levels of Heidegger’s analysis, is eventually discovered to transmit Dasein’s “hermeneutic situation” [*hermeneutische Situation*]—a temporally structured context of significance, which allows Dasein to experience and interact with its world and everything in it. As a whole, Dasein’s ontological structure and the hermeneutic situation it amasses, projects, and passes on are the ground or foundation of all ontic human existence.

Although occupying a foundational role similar to the various forms of meaning-intending acts that make up Husserl’s pure ego, Dasein’s existential structures differ from the pure ego’s transcendental structures for two reasons. First, Dasein’s ontological structures are generated out of unreduced experience—that is, experience from which the world’s reality and the particularity of the
"I" have not been exempted (or "bracketed" in Husserl's sense). Selfhood, others, nature, and the multiply configured intersubjective world are assumed to be essential parts of Dasein's immediate existence and are not, as is the case in transcendental phenomenology, generated in a mediated fashion out of the essential structures of the pure ego. Second, Dasein's ontological structures are different from the variable structures, possibility conditions, and meaning-intending acts of the pure ego because they are fundamentally concerned with the lonely and individuated experience of becoming a self in the midst of one's spiritual, social, and objective world. The development of the "empirical ego" or self, which Husserlian phenomenology treated as a derived phenomenon, becomes the main theme of Heidegger's existential phenomenology.

Heidegger initially defines Dasein's overall structure as "Being-in-the-world" [In-der-Welt-sein]. By this formulation, Heidegger means that as existing, we always live within the context of a world, which he defines as a social and historical horizon that both determines us and provides us with a physical and conceptual space in which we can move, plan, and act. Heidegger discloses Dasein's worldly "horizonal" structure through a phenomenological analysis of instrumental activity - a mode of Being he calls "circumspective concern" [umsichtiges Besorgen]. As this mode of Being, Dasein is involved in unselfconscious, goal-oriented activity. When, however, Dasein's instrumental activity is disrupted - when, for example, the tool I am using breaks down - then the overall structures that govern instrumental activity disclose themselves. Thus, in Heidegger's variation on circumspective concern, the broken tool reveals that my activity is always oriented according to three separate poles in my experience: a goal toward which my activity intends; my own person as that for and by which the work is accomplished; and, finally, things ready-to-hand in my environment that help me - or refuse to help me - accomplish my task. These three poles define Dasein's "workshop world" - the referential or significant context that Dasein projects around itself and that allows Dasein to engage in goal-oriented instrumental activity.

On the basis of his ontic descriptions of instrumental activity, Heidegger defines three ontological structures that make it possible for human beings to project the meaning that forms the horizon of their world: "ontological disposition" [Befindlichkeit], "understanding" [Verstehen], and "discourse" [Rede]. As Heidegger describes them, these ontological structures allow Dasein to experience its world in terms of different types of verbal and preverbal significance - meanings that we inherit from our overall social and historical situation and that we project around ourselves so as to constitute our hermeneutic situation. Ontological disposition produces an initial, preverbal openness to the world - one that makes possible Dasein's moods and feelings about things. Ontological disposition also produces Dasein's sense of the obscure social and historical background that surrounds it - its sense that it is thrown into an unmastered situation in which it must struggle and act. Dasein's understanding is the ontological structure that makes possible its projective, rational, and instrumental activity. As such, understanding projects a complex set of references and assignments on the world, which make possible all forms of goal-directed activity. Finally, Dasein's discourse is the ontological structure that makes possible
all of Dasein’s actual speech and writing.67 Because it allows Dasein to bring significance into language, discourse in combination with the rational projective activity of the understanding makes possible existential interpretation through which Dasein transforms its existence into concepts.68 Moreover, through ontic descriptions of Dasein’s “falling” [Verfallen]—that is, its everyday engrossed mode of existing in the world—as well as the hermeneutic activity of ontological-existential interpretation, Heidegger demonstrates that the three ontological structures can be reinterpreted to exhibit a more primordial ground. This more foundational and hence more unified ground is “care” [Sorge]—a tripartite structure that defines human existence as essentially oriented toward (1) a past into which one is thrown and which one can never completely see or understand; (2) a present, which is one’s field of activity; and (3) a future, which guides one and can provide one with possibilities for becoming an authentic self.70

Dasein recognizes its existential possibility either to be or not to be an authentic self through its ontic experience of its own temporality. Onically, Dasein experiences its temporality by confronting the fact that it will die—a fact it experiences only indirectly through the experience of the death of others.71 From the fact of its own mortality, Dasein recognizes its “potentiality-for-Being-a-whole” [Ganzseinkönnen]: its unavoidable fate that someday it will cease to exist and its development will be ended. For Heidegger, Dasein’s ontic reaction to the thought of its own death is either fear or anxiety. When fearful, Dasein seeks to avoid looking too closely at its end and instead loses itself in its everyday world.72 When anxious, however, Dasein does not turn away from its death and thus learns to recognize itself as a totality. Through anxiety Dasein recognizes its “ownmost” [eigenste] potentiality-for-Being, which individuates it and which it cannot avoid.73 Dasein recognizes, in other words, the potentiality of its existence—that is, recognizes that it develops and that it has the potential to live through its development in either a reflective or an unknowing manner. Dasein’s authentic mode of existence, which Heidegger terms “anticipatory resoluteness” [vorlaufende Entschlossenheit], depends upon uncovering and repeating one’s past—both one’s personal history and the history of the intersubjective community in which one exists. The goal of Dasein’s authentic mode of existence is Dasein’s selfhood or wholeness: a life lived in the awareness of both the authentic and the inauthentic possibilities for existence presented by Dasein’s social and historical world.74

Heidegger distinguishes Dasein’s authentic mode of existence from an inauthentic and far more prevalent mode of existing that he calls “everydayness” [Alltäglichkeit].75 As Heidegger describes it, everyday Dasein is for the most part “fallen” into the world that is present around it. As fallen, Dasein does not confront its “ownmost” potentialities-for-Being but, rather, remains engrossed with the things disclosed in its present. Thus engrossed, Dasein busies itself but does not develop authentically. Although Dasein still pursues plans and goals within the horizon of the present (in that it occupies itself with its projects and things that concern it in the world), it no longer uses its rational understanding to develop an authentic self. This is the case because it has learned to take its possibilities from the “they” [das Man]—the depersonalized mass community that constitutes Dasein’s everyday world.76 Diverted from its authentic future—and
thus from an examination and critique of its past – Dasein wastes its time on earth, pursuing derived concepts and clichéd experience.

As everyday, Dasein de-individualizes itself: it submits itself to the dictatorship of the many. As Heidegger puts it,

In utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services such as the newspaper, every other is like the next. This Being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of ‘the others,’ in such a way, indeed, that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the ‘they’ is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as they shrink back; we find ‘shocking’ what they find shocking.77

A massified nightmare, the “they” world described in Being and Time is highly illuminating. It shows the repugnance with which Heidegger in 1927 views both others in his contemporary world as well as the everyday intersubjective social sphere. And this repugnance, as we can read in numerous histories of the Weimar Republic, is not an uncommon attitude for the time.78 But what does it really mean to reject the intersubjective community that is present around one? What does it mean, in other words, to reject the various groups in which one exists, because one does not find them to be a “true” community? There is a paucity of discussions in Being and Time of authentic being with others in one’s own intersubjective lifeworld.79 And although Heidegger affirms that authentic Dasein ultimately finds its true finite freedom in the authentic “co-historicizing” “in and with its ‘generation,’” Heidegger looks to his historical and cultural past to find his true community. It is for this reason that he must insist that his existential-phenomenological approach toward reworking the subject is equally – and fundamentally – hermeneutic.

The Field and Field Path Paintings

Kiefer’s wooden-interior moment is superseded by a period, spanning 1974 and 1975, during which he explores new themes of cultural identity in the context of field and field path imagery. In these works, which – like the wooden-interior canvases – evoke an existential-phenomenological attitude in the spectator, one can also find concrete examples of a hermeneutic attitude. At first glance, fairly large-scale works such as Cockchafer Fly [Maikäfer flieg], Brandenburg Heath [Märkische Heide], Painting = Burning [Malen = Verbrennen], Nero Paints [Nero malt], To Paint [Malen], and Heaven-Earth [Himmel-Erde] all seem very different from the wooden-interior series. In contrast to the thinly painted, schematic, and representational surfaces of Kiefer’s earlier canvases, these somewhat smaller-scale paintings present richly painted, heavily built-up surfaces. In Cockchafer Fly (Figure 22), for example, the nonobjective qualities of the paint and flat picture field are emphasized to such a degree that the painting’s abstract character threatens to overwhelm the trace representational elements that remain. In addition, Kiefer’s field and field path paintings also represent a return
to the outdoors from the domestic interior (but without the return to his own bodily image) and, thus, seem to deal with more "natural" and less overtly "subjective" aspects of Kiefer's world. While the wooden-interior series creates an oppressive sense of claustrophobia, the field and field path paintings seem far more open and free in that they represent an expansive outdoor horizon rather than confining interior walls. Yet, at the same time, the presence of the same existential-phenomenological perspective that Kiefer deployed in the wooden interior series counterbalances some of the more obvious differences between these two early moments of Kiefer's painting.

Kiefer's characteristic "burnt" field, painted primarily in browns or blacks, with a high horizon line, and evincing strong recession into depth, owes much to the subjectivity-filled models of expressive abstraction from Vincent van Gogh to Pollock. Not only does one become reflexively aware of one's own perspectival and Dasein-like nature through the interaction of the painting's fictive, representational space with one's own, but, in addition, the last hundred years of "abstracting" and, then, "abstract" expressionism have conditioned the contemporary Western spectator to read subjectivity into Kiefer's tactile and gesturally painted surfaces. Thus the paintings' abstract and expressionist form - which comes loaded with preexisting yet radically subjective content - contributes
greatly to the themes of individual and collective identity suggested by Kiefer’s titles and texts. In addition, despite their far greater emphasis on painterly abstraction in comparison to the wooden interiors, Kiefer’s field and field path paintings also rely on representational strategies to create their effects. In Painting-Burning, Nero Paints (Figure 23), and To Paint, for example, Kiefer uses a schematic representation of a painter’s palette to symbolically connect his existential activity of painting to both burning and fire-extinguishing rain. In this way, Kiefer presents his existential choices ambiguously—caught in an undecidable dialectic between beneficial and destructive possibilities.

In the field and field path series, Kiefer uses a number of different strategies to create an existential-phenomenological perspective—a self-aware attitude on the part of the spectator that makes one read selfhood reflexively from out of one’s world. In the first place, the device of the abstract furrows that recede into depth, combined with the high horizon line, serves to draw the viewer into the pictorial space by suggesting an embodied and engaged perspective. As one regards these works, one gets the sense of standing bent slightly forward on the painting’s “ground” and of swinging one’s gaze back and forth from the foreground to the horizon. In this way, a feeling is at times created that we are moving into Kiefer’s world, our bodies inclined in the effort and our eyes constantly scanning. And this feeling of engaged embodiment creates a strong sense of “place” or “situatedness” in relation to the painting’s field and thus potentially engenders self-awareness on the part of the spectator. Second, in addition to its psychological and “path of life” connotations inherited from works such as Van Gogh’s Crows Over the Wheat Field (1890) (Figure 24), the field path, which vertically divides the painting’s surface in a number of Kiefer’s works, suggests
that one is actually traveling within the painting's space as it allows the spectator's eyes to zip back and forth from top to bottom. This sensation of motion, which causes the spectator to alternate between an awareness of the painting's enveloping representational depths (which encourages movement) and the painting's flat, built-up surface (which stops movement), also creates a self-reflexive attitude on the part of the spectator. One can become aware of the displacements in one's focus between flatness and depth and, with this awareness, of one's ability to shift attention and perceive in a doubled fashion. Third, the painter's palette, a roughly oval silhouette, contributes to a self-reflexive, phenomenological attitude by sometimes suggesting a "frame" that directs the spectator's attention. This attitude is phenomenological in that it points to the intentional nature of experience - the idea that all experience is constituted and framed by the projection of individual and collective meaning on the part of a particular human existence.

In light of Heidegger's analysis of the Dasein, it seems clear that the attitude created by Kiefer's paintings is closer in spirit to Heidegger's existential-phenomenological procedure than it is to Husserl's method of transcendental phenomenology. Kiefer seeks different forms of group or collectively defined conditions of human existence through his own particular and unreduced experience. Thus, unlike the transcendental phenomenologist, Kiefer's aesthetic investigations do not initially separate out either the particular "I" or the actual world as a source of pleasure or frustration. Rather, the existential-phenomenological source material of Kiefer's works - his own autobiography and lived environment - is remarkably close to that of Heidegger in Being and Time. In addition, Kiefer's ambivalent sense of his own possibilities resonates with Heidegger's emphasis on the differences between Dasein's authentic and inauthentic existence. Unlike Husserl's pure logic of essences and scientifically defined sets of meaning-intending acts, Kiefer's world - like that of Dasein - seems ringed
by a shadowy horizon: a vista or comprehensive awareness made up of various levels of linguistic and nonlinguistic meaning projected by a particular, self-reflexive entity. This worldly horizon, which suggests both positive and destructive possibilities, is far more shifting and unstable than the structures of meaning disclosed by Husserl’s form of analysis. The existential-phenomenological aspects of Kiefer’s paintings also resemble Heideggerian existential phenomenology in that they appear to be the products of a very secluded, almost anticommmunal experience: like the wooden interiors, the field and field path paintings are empty of other human figures. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the existential-phenomenological paintings begin after Kiefer’s marriage in 1971 and his move to an old schoolhouse in rural, south German Hornbach, where he devoted himself entirely to his family and the making of art. Although it would be unfair to attribute Heidegger’s extreme dislike of everyday being-with-others to Kiefer, it is true that, at this early stage in his career, Kiefer, like Heidegger in the late 1920s, addresses his cultural past far more intensively than he does his contemporary intersubjective community. Selfhood, in both their projects, seems more defined by the past and the history of the German “people” than it does by regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world.

Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, the existential-phenomenological attitude evoked by Kiefer’s field and field path paintings resembles Heidegger’s method of existential phenomenology in that it emphasizes the horizon and time as the foundations of human existence. Kiefer’s canvases signify temporality through the historical references in Cockchafer Fly and Nero Paints (Figures 22 and 23), for example, or the emphasis on the processes of destruction and growth in the field and field path series as a whole. In addition, Kiefer’s works almost always evoke a sense of the past living on in the present, a saturated and haunted atmosphere that supports Heidegger’s contention in Being and Time that the past forms the fund of meaning that allows Dasein to construct its everyday world and project the future possibilities that it discovers within it. Yet, what in the final analysis makes Kiefer’s and Heidegger’s modes of existential phenomenology resonate so well together is their united focus on the horizon as the structure through which both time and collective meaning unfold themselves and appear to lived human existence. In To Paint and Brandenburg Heath (Figure 25), for example, the horizon becomes the destination of the existential-phenomenological path through which the spectator’s self-reflexivity is constituted. In this way, Kiefer suggests that to become self-aware, one must ultimately confront and consider the horizons that bound one’s world — horizons that can only be reached after a long temporal journey or development.

Kiefer’s emphasis on the relationship between the horizon, time, and the historical construction of self-identity is perhaps most clearly delineated in Cockchafer Fly (Figure 22). In this fairly large, mostly abstract painting, which can also be read as a burnt and still-smoking German field, Kiefer depicts a small hill with trees and a twilight sky painted in dark blue above a heavily textured surface of abstractly applied black paint that covers the lower 80 percent of the canvas, accented with touches of white, brown, gray, and red. This abstract and expressive surface would appear totally nonobjective without the representational elements arranged along the painting’s top edge. The painting
thins out considerably as the spectator looks upward—a process of attenuation that corresponds to the transformation of the picture field from an abstract and gestural surface along the bottom and middle portions of the work to a clear representational image at the very place where “earth” meets “sky.” Across the horizon—the line where the painting’s abstract and representational elements both meet and divide—Kiefer has written the lines of a post-World War II German children’s song: “Cockchafer fly, Father is in the war, Mother is in Pomerania, Pomerania is burnt up.” In this way, a historical and collective memory, encoded in an innocent but strangely cruel children’s song, is shown to mediate between heaven and earth. It is a simple addition that allows Kiefer to transform a Van Gogh–like agitated landscape into a mournful history painting suggesting German loss, partition, and the collapse of religious “faith.”

Kiefer’s treatment and positioning of the abstract, representational, and written elements in Cockchafer Fly combine to emphasize the horizon line and associate it with a number of different meanings. The spectator comes to recognize the horizon as the limit or margin where Kiefer’s abstract brushstrokes transform into unequivocal representation—the line where these two opposed aspects of the painting pass into and out of appearance. In addition, through the horizon, Kiefer connects the place where abstraction meets representation to the site of writing. And on this horizon, the written word brings historical loss into the present. In these ways, Cockchafer Fly connects the horizon with the production and decay of linguistic and representational meaning—multiple forms of significance that are shown to emerge from and return into the richness of mute phenomenal appearing. The painting thereby suggests that both image making and language blend to form a meaningful horizon that makes possible the appearing of one’s world as well as the emergence of possibilities for selfhood within it. Looked at from this perspective, the communal past could be said to arise in Kiefer’s art as a verbal and nonverbal horizon of mean-
ing that conditions the appearance of present opportunities that will lead to future (either authentic or inauthentic) results.

Hermeneutics and the Truth of Being

To better understand Kiefer’s focus on time, the horizon, and communal meaning, it is necessary to examine Heidegger’s grounding of existential phenomenology in hermeneutic method. Hermeneutic method has enjoyed a long and celebrated history. In earlier forms it was a tool of biblical exegesis, a method of interpretation characteristic of the “human sciences” (Geisteswissenschaften), and, finally, a mode of continental philosophy that examines the conditions for the possibility of interpretation and historical understanding. As a mode of biblical exegesis, the object of hermeneutic inquiry was the revealed word of the Christian God; in this case, the ultimate truth of hermeneutic inquiry was believed to be guaranteed by a divine author. In Dilthey’s work, as the method of interpretation characteristic of the human sciences, hermeneutics had as its subject the social-historical existence of humanity, which it investigated through its cultural objectifications— institutions, laws, economics, history, politics, theology, literature, and art, for example. In Dilthey’s formulation, the truths of the human sciences were recognized to be historical and thus different from the “timeless” truths guaranteed by the Christian God or the experimental, more “objective” truths of the natural sciences. The subjects of the human sciences— humanity’s social and cultural productions— could not be approached in the same way as either God or the objects of math and physics but rather had to be treated as communicative participants engaged in an equal dialogue with the investigator. Thus the social-historical situatedness of the hermeneutic investigator had to be taken into account along with the social-historical context of his or her “object.” In the twentieth century, in continental philosophy, hermeneutic theory has developed Dilthey’s thinking on the nature of interpretation and historical understanding. Here, in the work of Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emilio Betti, and Ricoeur, questions regarding the role of the cultural tradition in human affairs, the separation and fusing of different historical horizons, and the relative or nonrelative nature of historical truth have been explored and developed.

Like phenomenology, hermeneutics is a reflexive methodology. As such, hermeneutics employs a circular form of investigation that examines the implicit principles of its own interpretations— prejudices in both the good and the bad sense of the term— while at the same time examining its subjects as they appear or manifest themselves. In addition, hermeneutic method investigates the historical standpoint or social-cultural horizon of both the investigator and the investigated “object.” By doing so, hermeneutic method often works toward both an articulation and a fusing of different historical horizons—a recognition of the different values and spiritual objectifications that determine a culture at different historical times and in different geographic places as well as how the past (as tradition) has produced and infused the present day. Finally, although a hermeneutic approach sees truth as fundamentally historical, this need not imply that it treats the results of its interpretation as relative. Although
it cannot offer such regular and predictable truths as those of the “hard” sciences, the truths hermeneutics offers are of another and equally necessary kind. Because it is based on the activity of self-questioning and the concept of a dialogue between equals, hermeneutics is designed to yield practical knowledge—knowledge of the values and principles that bind human beings together. Very different from the much more powerful—and more controlling—knowledge characteristic of the natural sciences, the knowledge produced by hermeneutic method helps build a sphere for public participation through which science and politics can be connected to history.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s existential-phenomenological account of how human beings individuate themselves over and against their de-individualizing social world, the hermeneutic—and thus temporal—aspects of Dasein’s truth come to be of central importance. Transcendental phenomenology’s emphasis on truth’s observable character and testability already included a hermeneutic element. As empirically testable and not-yet-falsified propositions, rather than absolutely certain truths, the truths of transcendental phenomenology were understood as nonabsolute and potentially subject to historical revision. Yet despite this inkling of a historical concept of truth, transcendental phenomenology still assumed that phenomenological researchers who share the same world would eventually arrive at the same truth of it. Thus Heidegger’s definition of truth in *Being and Time* proves to be more relative than that of Husserl, because, for Heidegger, the common historical horizon—the intersubjective social and material world that science and all other common human projects need in order to exist and from which they develop—is assumed to be accessed differently by different members of the same intersubjective community. For this reason, as described by Heidegger, authentic Dasein has an entirely different and more fundamental truth than the vast majority of others who share its social and historical horizon. And in order to disclose this more fundamental or primordial truth, Heidegger’s existential phenomenology and individual and collective human existence must all follow a hermeneutic procedure.

Frequent methodological discussions in *Being and Time* argue that the method of existential phenomenology must be grounded hermeneutically. By this Heidegger means that through existential analysis Dasein must constantly question and reinterpret its own grounds and guiding assumptions. Thus, at each stage of ontological interpretation, Dasein’s structures must be reinterpreted more primordially and then retested in ontic experience. For Heidegger, ontological reinterpretation consists in laying out or articulating the guiding ideas inherent in his analysis—ideas that are implicit, but not articulated, in the earlier descriptions of Dasein’s ontological structures. Retesting means further developing the accounts of both authentic and inauthentic ontic experience so as to demonstrate the better phenomenological “fit” of the newly discovered guiding ideas. These ideas are in turn shown to reorient Heidegger’s earlier analyses, linking the past descriptions of Dasein’s ontic and ontological aspects in a more unified but also more articulated and encompassing configuration. In addition, in order to fully demystify the historically sedimented terms he uses in *Being and Time*, Heidegger also calls for a “destruction” [Destruktion] of “the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial expe-
riences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being – the ways which have guided us ever since."96 This destruction, which was not published in Being and Time, was intended to historically ground Heidegger’s existential-phenomenological account of the structures of Dasein by revealing and criticizing the different strata of meanings that, at various historical times, were attached to the terms used in his text.

Because the ontological structure of care showed Dasein to project a temporally articulated world around itself, Heidegger reinterprets human existence in the final stage of his analysis in Being and Time as foundationally dependent upon three ontological ecstases of temporality: the past, the present, and the future.97 The ontological structures of Dasein’s temporality make possible Dasein’s “disclosedness” [Erschlossenheit], the projection of Dasein’s hermeneutic situation (the totality of its significance) against the meaning of the real – what Heidegger also calls “Being.”98 As fundamentally temporal, Dasein experiences its hermeneutic situation as an integrated experiential context in which it discloses future possibilities for itself on the basis of its understanding of its (private and communal) past, which, in turn, allows it to choose among its present possibilities for action.99 Thus, through his reinterpretation of the ontological structures of care, Heidegger suggests that human existence is essentially historical or hermeneutic in structure.100 This means, first, that Dasein exists within a shared social and historical horizon that it inherits, and, second, that it exists – in both its authentic and inauthentic modes – as a constant process of interpretation.

In all ontic situations, the possibility of Dasein’s authenticity hinges on its actual practice of existential interpretation – its laying out or articulating the existential totalities it projects as its social and historical world.101 This Dasein accomplishes by making explicit the hermeneutic situation, projected by its “fore-structure” [Vor-Struktur], through which it experiences both its world and its possibilities in it. This fore-structure is the system of all involvements that make up Dasein’s world.102 These involvements are inherited by Dasein as the heritage of the historical community from which it descends, particularized and made Dasein’s own by being projected from its particular perspective and with a particular self in mind.103

In Dasein’s everyday, fallen mode, Dasein uses the various inherited systems of instrumental involvements to understand – interpret – both itself and its world, but does not make these involvements the subject of its everyday interpretive activity. Authentic Dasein, on the other hand, brings its fore-structure into language and thereby learns to repeat and appropriate its genuine past. This is what allows Dasein to see authentically for “its time,” that is, from within the midst of the inauthentic everyday world. Instead of allowing its existence to be led by the horizon of its present – the horizon of the inauthentic, massified “they” – existential interpretation allows Dasein to take over possibilities handed down to it by its heritage and thus learn to exploit authentic existential possibilities offered to it by its historical linguistic and cultural communities. Thus Dasein’s authenticity depends on hermeneutic practice: its ability to interpret – or bring to light – its own existential assumptions, which in turn allow it to reach back into its authentic communal history and ground its existence there.104 And because it allows human existence to more clearly understand its own
meaning-projecting structures, Heidegger’s philosophical account of Dasein promises to help him – as well as others in his culture – live more authentically.

The truth that Dasein ultimately seeks is the truth of Being – a truth that is secured both hermeneutically (in terms of historical and cultural development) and phenomenologically (in terms of embodied human existence). In Being and Time, Heidegger defines this truth as the happening of unconcealment – a disclosive event of appropriation in which Dasein projects significance toward Being, and Being, in turn, releases itself toward Dasein. According to Heidegger, in both its authentic and inauthentic modes, Dasein needs a disclosive confirmation of its interpretation – what Heidegger calls the unconcealment of some thing or being from out of concealment. In its everyday mode, Dasein discloses beings in terms of preexisting social, scientific, and instrumental definitions – for the most part unexamined systems of references and assignments. Here, although something is disclosed (that is, something both intellectual and phenomenal appears), it is disclosed in a limited and secondary way. In its authentic mode, on the other hand, Dasein discloses beings in terms of their Being. In Being and Time, Heidegger links “Being” with “meaning” [Sinn], which is understood as both a “ground and an abyss” [Grund und Abgrund]. In contrast to Dasein’s significance – the hermeneutic situation that Dasein projects – meaning is the upon-which of Dasein’s projection. Meaning, in other words, functions in Being and Time as the ground of all interpretation (of seeing something as something), the field of contact where Dasein merges with Being to produce the real, and the reason why no interpretation exists for all time. Being is that which grants itself to human existence, resists it, and ultimately hides from it. It is richer than anything that Dasein can project, more heterogeneous, and more encompassing; it is the reason why Dasein’s projections are met by the things and beings that are. When a thing or being is disclosed in terms of its Being, it is disclosed in terms of the grounds of its possibility. Such a disclosure is a primary happening of truth because it makes possible, unifies, and orients Dasein’s understanding of the world as well as its to-be-achieved selfhood. Moreover, in marked contrast to Dasein’s everyday truth, Dasein’s primordial truth consists of a richer, far more oscillating appearing of something. Primordial truth thus has for Heidegger the character of a sudden “moment of vision” [Augenblick] – a rich experiential happening that transforms the everyday and that marks the event as one in which Dasein meets the real in some fundamental and encompassing way.

For Heidegger in Being and Time, the truth that Dasein projects and the truth that Being grants will ultimately correspond. By phenomenologically describing what is seen, by reflexively analyzing the conditions of its possibility, and by hermeneutically interpreting the significations that constitute the horizon of the engaged individual, Dasein’s projection of significance can be made to harmonize or agree with the meaningful configurations of the world that Being offers it. Although discovered by a single existence, the intersubjective truth of Heidegger’s existential interpretation is secured by the rigorous application of phenomenological and hermeneutic method. Yet, given Kiefer’s more ambiguous evocations of overlapping existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic perspectives in his wooden-interior and field and field path paintings, one may
be left with lingering doubts about Heidegger's phenomenological-hermeneutic
grounding of the truth of Dasein. The tension in Being and Time between
authentic and inauthentic truth – between the primordial and the derived – can-
not be fully counterbalanced by Heidegger's phenomenological emphasis on the
experiential aspect of truth and his hermeneutic critique of inherited historical
concepts and terms. According to Heidegger's account of existence, Dasein
becomes authentic by withdrawing from the community present around it and
by contemplating its individual and historical genesis. And although Heidegger
emphasizes the role that "communication" [Mitteilung] and "struggle" [Kampf]
play in the co-constitution of a common historical destiny (the shared horizon
that makes authentic Dasein truly free), his own communication and struggle is
almost exclusively with the great metaphysical works of the past.109

On both levels of Being and Time - in Heidegger's theoretical account of
Dasein's ontological structure as well as in his own practice of existential, phe-
nomenological, and hermeneutic interpretation - the disclosure of primordial
truth is thus a disclosure in the presence of a single observer and not a commu-
nity. There is no room for discussion or the comparison of experience in Hei-
degger's everyday world, no community of researchers who advance and
recheck one another's conclusions, no family or group to help decide acceptable
or unacceptable behavior. Both Heidegger and Dasein shun the public sphere
that exists around them in their lifeworld.110 Instead, Heidegger, like Dasein,
remains alone, and need for dialogue is directed to the past.111 The concept of
primordial truth articulated in Being and Time thus seems too dependent upon
singular existence and Heidegger's own relation to the historical tradition - and,
hence, the truth of Being appears too relative.

Kiefer and Hermeneutics

It is easy to trace similarities between the hermeneutic aspects of Heidegger's
analysis of human existence in Being and Time and a number of Kiefer's strate-
gies in his early books and paintings. First, like Heidegger's account of how we
exist, Kiefer's self-defining aesthetic investigations suggest that human exis-
tence is a constant process of interpretation and that it is possible to take both
authentic and inauthentic "readings" of our world and our possibilities for self-
transcendence. As I have suggested, in works such as Heroic Symbols and Ger-
many's Spiritual Heroes (Figures 8–18 and 20), Kiefer sifts and evaluates differ-
ent culturally transmitted possibilities for being. Second, like Heidegger, Kiefer's
works suggest that the individual subject exists within a shared social and his-
torical horizon that it inherits from its past and that it projects toward its future.
Kiefer's emphasis on the themes of process and time, his constant evocation of
his cultural tradition, as well as his frequent focus on the horizon - all of which
he relates to his practice of existential questioning - clearly point to this locus
of inheritance and projection. Third, Kiefer's continual citation and incorpora-
tion of earlier visual and literary forms in his works suggests quite strongly
his sense that he belongs to a particular world that both restricts his possibili-
ties and presses particular responsibilities upon him. Thus Kiefer's existential-
phenomenological examination of the temporal horizon that surrounds him seems, like Heidegger's investigation in *Being and Time*, to be conducted in light of the goal of authentic self-transcendence on both a personal and a communal level. Fourth, the workplace – the place of practical activity – is one of the primary sites wherein both Kiefer and Heidegger begin their process of existential-phenomenological questioning. Like Heidegger’s analyses of the workshop world, Kiefer’s constant representations of his studio environments suggest that he too sees the everyday sphere of practical activity as an important springing-off point for existential investigation. Fifth, both Kiefer and Heidegger seem to focus on death as a way to inspire authentic experience. Indeed, in many cases, the oscillating and ambivalent state into which the spectator is brought by Kiefer’s unoccupied paintings could very well be described as a state of anxiety. Caught in the canvases’ hypnotic pull, the spectator feels the work’s bestowal of a certain sense of selfhood at the same time as Kiefer presents the spectator with an incomplete and highly ambiguous set of possibilities. (The ambiguity is often produced by Kiefer’s handwritten lists, which bring together different historical figures and moments, as well as the destructive and regenerative associations that many of his works juxtapose.) Finally, like Heidegger’s analyses of Dasein in *Being and Time*, Kiefer’s aesthetic self-investigations seem to be circular. Kiefer, in other words, often returns to themes, forms, and images that have appeared in earlier moments of his art – a return that seems to be in the service of redefinition or recontextualization.

Yet even if Kiefer, like Heidegger, hermeneutically lays out the authentic and inauthentic structures of meaning that constitute his world, he does not seem to be able – as Heidegger believes he is – to separate the experience of the two. In Kiefer’s works, inauthentic possibilities appear just as rich as authentic ones – every element is caught up in the same rich polyvalence. Thus, while Heidegger believes that a true disclosure is possible (and that the truthfulness of the disclosure is in part marked by the richness or contextual nature of its happening), Kiefer suggests that any disclosure, if constituted properly, can appear to be true (i.e., can happen in a rich enough way). Although one could plausibly understand Kiefer’s wooden interiors as well as his field and field path paintings as aesthetic articulations of his personal and communal fore-structure, there is no sense in Kiefer’s work that his hermeneutic situation will ever be fully understood or demystified. And although Heidegger does not argue that the ecstatic temporal horizon that Dasein projects around itself, and through which it experiences its world, others, and its self-identity, could ever be fully explained and demystified, it is clear from *Being and Time* that he does believe that a true – in the sense of an authentic – account of Dasein’s hermeneutic situation is possible. And it is this true account of Dasein’s hermeneutic situation that will allow for – and be confirmed by – a manifestation of the truth of Being.

The hermeneutic approaches of Kiefer and Heidegger are thus fundamentally different. One does not get the sense from Kiefer’s works that Being – as something nonobjective that would guarantee the fundamental truth or reality of a particular disclosure – stands behind the things and beings manifest in his art. Although Kiefer’s art does suggest the existence of strange and mysterious forces behind what one would normally take to be the real, it does not imply
that these underlying forces are in any way more truthful than the appearances they produce. Thus there is nothing to guarantee any ultimate truth behind Kiefer’s works and, thus, no hermeneutic teleology: no sense that with time and care one’s interpretation will arrive at some completely accurate and encompassing result. For this reason Kiefer’s work seems to evince a far more relative concept of truth than even that of Heidegger.

Two books made by Kiefer during 1974, concurrent with the beginnings of his field and field path paintings, present the viewer with a good example of Kiefer’s complex hermeneutic relativism.112 The first example, *The Face of the German People: Coal for 2000 Years [Das deutsche Volksgesicht: Kohle für 2000 Jahre]* (Figures 26–30),113 is actually two books in one. On the front cover of his own, handmade book of bound charcoal drawings, traced from photographs onto wallpaper and then overprinted with an emulsion wood-grain pattern,114 Kiefer has attached the source that inspired his work: an incomplete book of photographs by Erna Lendvai-Dircksen (Figures 26–27).115 The appropriated book is one of a series that the *Neue Sachlichkeit* photographer Lendvai-Dircksen made between the early 1930s and the early 1940s—a series that was entitled “The Face of the German People” and dedicated to the documentation of the “Germanic people” of specific geographic regions. Although Lendvai-Dircksen’s series of photo-books does not fit into the Nazi cult of youth and beauty advocated by Hitler (the sitters are old and often visibly worn by their

labor), these works strongly emphasize the link between German identity and land by focusing on peasants to reveal the true face of Germany. They thus visually represent — through the serial presentation of similarly sized portraits of peasants from the same geographic location in Germany — the linkage between “blood and soil” [Blut und Boden] that was a cornerstone of Nazi ideology. Kiefer’s title and subtitle, which are written on the front cover of the larger, handmade bottom book, act as a second — or framing — caption above and below each image of the appropriated book as its pages are turned. This framing text functions as an ironic commentary on the “original” images and captions, undermining their pseudoscientific authority and suggesting that, instead of disclosing some racial or collective essence, the appropriated book reveals the ambiguous darkness of the German people. Kiefer evokes this notion by replacing Lendvai-Dircksen’s subtitle (which almost always names a specific region) with an ambiguous reference to coal (a term that refers simultaneously to the product left after something has burned and the fuel that can be used to start a new conflagration).

Then, when the reader finally reaches the underlying, “handmade” volume (Figures 28–30), a new contradiction appears: instead of being a completely original work, as its handmade cover would suggest, Kiefer’s book of photographically based “woodcuts” repeats the faces of the sitters seen earlier — albeit enlarged, cropped, oriented sideways, and constructed in such a way as to simulate a traditional, “handmade” print. In addition, Kiefer has overpainted and overprinted his (now doubly appropriated) images with a wood-
grain pattern, thereby further adding to their obscurity and overall abstract character. As Kiefer’s “own” book nears its end, its pages become completely nonobjective and then fade to black – perhaps another reference to coal in both its “raw” and burnt forms. Kiefer thus extracts from Lendvai-Dircksen’s images that which makes them a little different from the Nazis’ idealized images of Germans: their ambiguity and the blackness of the heavy lines etched into the sitters’ faces. In addition, through Kiefer’s abstraction of Lendvai-Dircksen’s photographs, the sitters are rendered interchangeable with nature, which is represented by the repetitive, quasi-mechanical wood-grain pattern as well as the textual references to coal. Thus, while certain configurations of elements in Kiefer’s book inspire moments of radical criticality, other configurations seem to project a much more fascist position. Even the narrative, which moves to a final stage of complete darkness, suggests a will to both complete destruction and maximum productivity: the image is obliterated, but seemingly because so many reproduced images have accumulated on the surface.

Kiefer’s work thus evokes a hermeneutic perspective that contradicts all commonsense notions of cultural transmission and influence. The juxtaposition of Lendvai-Dircksen’s book with Kiefer’s ironic title/caption sets the stage for his successive complications of the hermeneutic perspective by making the spectator aware of the existence of two different cultural horizons. The first horizon is the National Socialist moment during which the “original” book was...

produced and within which the notion of a German racial type seemed unproblematic, even scientifically provable. The second horizon is that of Kiefer’s post-war historical “present” – a time when the idea of visually proving the existence of a German racial type seems inseparably connected to the horror of the Nazis’ eugenics policies. Given Germany’s collective historical record, within this second horizon, to prove the existence of a German racial type is a violent and mendacious act of representation. Mediating between these two horizons is Kiefer’s handwritten title/caption, which reminds the reader that the past is only accessible through the horizon of the present. As one views the earlier work, one is aware of the contemporary frame that surrounds it and thereby alters its original meaning. The second book of The Face of the German People, Kiefer’s handmade volume of treated, photographically based “woodcuts,” however, undercuts any idea that the two horizons can be ultimately disambiguated and separated from one another. Instead, the work sets up an ambiguous play – or oscillation – between the spectator’s everyday notions of original and copy. As mentioned above, Lendvai-Dircksen’s untreated book of photographs appears to be the “original” – the bibliographic source, appearing earlier in historical time, from which Kiefer’s “handmade” second book is derived. Yet, in comparison to the roughly printed and overpainted “woodcuts,” the clean, mass-produced book of photographs evokes a technologically more advanced – and, thus, later – historical moment. Although Kiefer’s double book clearly suggests that cultural representations repeat and transform themselves with the passage of time, the interplay between the different types of image undermines any clear sense of which image is ultimately more “original.” In this way, The Face of the German People evokes a self-reflexive hermeneutic perspective at the same time that it denies any sense of a final truth of historical interpretation.

In The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen [Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen] (Figures 31–39), Kiefer uses somewhat different methods to evoke a similarly ambiguous hermeneutic perspective – a perspective that denies any ultimate fixed truth or ground to his present-day reality. One in a long series of works in which Kiefer plays out themes relating to the destructive possibilities of art, The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen is a lengthy book made up of black-and-white, double-page photographs depicting different fields and field paths in and around Hornbach, the South German town where Kiefer lived during the 1970s and 1980s. On top of the various images – which evince strong recession into depth and place emphasis, once again, on the horizon – Kiefer has written the name of the region from which the image is supposedly taken. The spectator’s paging activity in conjunction with the ordinaries and engaged perspectives of Kiefer’s landscapes engenders a sense of a walking or driving tour taken through Kiefer’s flat, rural environment (Figures 32–34). This sense is strongly reinforced by a sequence of images between pages 130 and 147 in which a large fire is shown to burn unattended in a field of overturned and broken steel drums (Figures 35–36). Progressively revealing the scene from different angles, the sequence suggests the point of view of a moving spectator who examines the conflagration from different perspectives. Over the last fifty pages, the photographs become more and more occluded by the black, ferrous-oxide wash, which eventually completely obscures them (Figures 37–38). The book


ends with successive images of an abstract black field, overpainted with traces of white and brown, upon which Kiefer’s activated, expressive brush strokes become more and more apparent (Figure 39).

Although *The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen* does not evoke the sense of two distinct historical moments united by the act of interpretation as was the case with *The Face of the German People*, Kiefer’s book of landscape photography nevertheless evokes a hermeneutic perspective. This can be noticed in the constant emphasis on the horizon, which, as I have argued, is one of the central metaphoric-conceptual figures of a hermeneutic approach. In addition, Kiefer’s consistent labeling of the images in *The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen* also evokes a hermeneutic perspective. By this act of labeling, Kiefer suggests a background of linguistically defined meaning that functions as a frame that identifies what the photographs represent. And although there is no reason to assume that any of the photographs were actually taken in the geographic location identified by their handwritten captions, this is precisely the assumption that the viewer normally makes.11 By playing off this assumption, Kiefer makes visible one of the central ideas of hermeneutic theory, namely, that we see and understand things according to a linguistic and aesthetic horizon of meaning inherited from our culture and projected upon our world.

As was the case with *The Face of the German People*, *The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen* evokes a hermeneutic perspective while denying any sense of an ultimate or final truth of hermeneutic interpretation. Kiefer’s book accomplishes this by setting up an ambiguous play of associations between the

![Figure 39: Anselm Kiefer, *The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen*, pp. 204-205.](image-url)
concepts of reproduction and original, on the one hand, and representation and abstraction, on the other. Initially, the juxtapositions of the place names and landscape photographs appear to establish a fairly simple opposition between an original and a representation. By labeling the photographs, Kiefer suggests that they are not simply landscapes "in themselves" to be contemplated for their formal and expressive qualities alone. Rather, the labels suggest that the photographs are representations of an original, understood as a specific geographic place or region in the real world. The sequence with the burning drums, however, makes this simple distinction between original and representation problematic. As the black smoke from the fire begins to take up more and more of the image field of the photographic representation, Kiefer suddenly switches to over-painting the image with black ferrous oxide. In this way, the photographic representation of the smoke is transformed into a hand-painted, black monochromatic field. In comparison to the earlier photographs, the black monochrome pages now appear to be the "originals" - because of their hand-painted character (they seem singular rather than infinitely repeatable) and because they recall the development of abstract or nonobjective painting as a reaction to the invention of photography. According to a - by now familiar - "formalist" art-historical interpretation, "abstract painting" developed in the second half of the nineteenth century (in the work of Manet, Pissarro, Cézanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, among others) in reaction to the fact that painting's primary traditional function - that is, representation - could by that time be better and more easily accomplished with a camera. As a result, modernist artists began to search for a new set of aesthetic concerns for which painting would be the most suitable medium. This set of concerns they found in abstraction, which achieved full "nonobjectivity" around 1912, in the works of Hans Arp, Robert Delaunay, Wassily Kandinsky, František Kupka, Kazimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian, among others: works which were all - in one way or another - geared toward elucidating the formal properties of the specific medium of painting. In light of the development of abstract art, abstraction could be considered "truer" than photography, because what an abstract painting was and what it appeared to be coincided exactly. Abstract painting, in this sense, was the "true" original, and representational photography a mere copy of some real-world source. While evoking this development in his book, however, Kiefer also undermines it, because his monochrome pages still retain a representational function - a result of their status as moments within the photographic sequence as a whole. Within the context of the photo-narrative unfolded on the first 150 pages, the monochrome pages are not abstract but, rather, representations of the smoke that occludes the district of Buchen. That which was deemed (by certain elements of the avant-garde) most original in the first half of this century - the formal presentation of the medium of painting - has been transformed, in Kiefer's book, into a representation. In this way, by blending the spectator's everyday understanding of the distinctions between original, copy, representation, and abstraction, Kiefer once again evokes a hermeneutically ambiguous situation.

Despite the hermeneutic ambiguity generated by Kiefer's works - and despite what initially appears to be a more relative concept of truth - Kiefer's art ultimately betrays far less relativism than Heidegger's understanding of authentic
Dasein's truth as the (quasi-transcendental, quasi-holy) meaning of Being. This is the case because Kiefer's works pose existential questions\textsuperscript{121} at the same time as they implicate the body of the spectator, and, for this reason, they lead to questions of face-to-face intersubjectivity. In other words, because they put multiple viewers in his shoes and create interpretive ambiguity, Kiefer's works are designed to provoke debate within the contemporary situation in which they are apprehended – a comparison of particular perspectives that is missing in Heidegger's work.

The Turning: Heidegger's Theory of Historical Development and His Suppression of the Individual

In \textit{Being and Time}, in addition to the analysis of Dasein, Heidegger also presents the outlines of a theory of historical development in support of the truth of his account. Here, in the major work of his early period, Heidegger understands history as a set of overlapping horizontal forms – constellations of presentencing and absencing – that determine the everyday as well as the authentic understanding of an age. Thus, in order to live authentically, human existence must learn to comprehend these horizons. \textit{Being and Time} prepares the ground for the middle and later periods in Heidegger's thinking in which he puts an even greater emphasis on a hermeneutic approach to historical understanding.\textsuperscript{122} What drops out in Heidegger's middle and later periods, however, is a focus on Dasein as a particular and embodied individual who interacts with others in the everyday, public world. Thus, although Heidegger's thinking remains residually existentialist in that he concerns himself with the existences of collectives or communities – and, in particular, with that of Germany within the historical destiny of West – his self-proclaimed “turning” represents a rejection of any form of authentic existentialism.\textsuperscript{123}

Central to Heidegger's theory of historical development in \textit{Being and Time} is his concept of Being. Heidegger understands Being as a ground and abyss of meaning that both grants itself to the significance projected by human existence and resists or hides from it. As such, Being is the ground of all interpretation as well as the field of contact where Dasein becomes reality and reality becomes Dasein. According to Heidegger, not only the human conception of Being, but also Being “itself,” has developed and changed over time.\textsuperscript{124} Being, in other words, manifests itself as a different horizontal ground in different epochs. In \textit{Being and Time}, this ground fundamentally determines two things: first, an epoch's everyday mode of involvement in its world and, second, its fundamental ontological commitments, as revealed by the definition of Being found in its metaphysics. Heidegger thus attempted to counter the subjectivism or relativism inherent in his account of authentic truth through a theory of historical understanding. According to this theory, Being – as the ground of primordial truth or disclosure – is, for the most part, obscure. This is the case because, throughout history, the meaning of Being has been largely covered up by Dasein's everyday significations. Moreover, the various ontologies in the history of Western metaphysics, which mistake Being for a particular realm of beings, further occlude one's under-
standing of Being. To counteract this occlusion, Heidegger – as mentioned above – called for the destruction of the history of ontology, by which he meant an analysis of the concept of being that exists in the history of Western metaphysics.125 By doing this, Heidegger believed he would be able to accomplish two things. First, he hoped to bring to light the various guiding ideas through which great thinkers either conceived or misconceived Being and thus make contemporary German readers aware of the fundamental definitions that inhabit their history and present-day world. Second, Heidegger believed that he could discover in his encounters with great metaphysical texts junctures at which their conceptual systems split open and allowed for an experience of the true meaning of Being.

Language, in Being and Time, was thus paramount because it was the medium through which Dasein and Being could approach one another. And throughout his middle and later thought, selected works in language (and occasionally visual art), correctly interpreted, would act as normative elements establishing the true, the good, and the beautiful in a compressed and oscillating form.126 Kiefer’s paintings resist this sense of a privileged or elite realm of normativity – a canon of definitive works that grant the beholder access to the experience of Being and, thereby, present a form of truth compelling enough to unify and orient a collective subject from the top down. In addition, they suggest that Heidegger’s elite view of truth was reinforced by his rejection of the embodied, existential standpoint of Dasein during the transition to his more anti-individual, middle phase. Despite its acknowledged need, Heidegger’s destruction of Western ontology never appeared in the form proposed in Being and Time. When Heidegger broke off work on Being and Time with only two-thirds of the existential analytic of Dasein completed, he had finished less than one-half of his entire project.127 No doubt, historical events had something to do with the work remaining incomplete. The manuscript was rushed into print in order to secure Heidegger’s position at Freiburg – the university where he was to become rector a little more than five years later. And although Heidegger continued work on the Being and Time’s destructive project, his historical analysis of Being caused him to reject many of his central existential concepts within the next two years.

The most obvious sign of Heidegger’s suppression of the individual subject is his modified usage of the term “Dasein.” Although the concept of Dasein does not disappear completely from Heidegger’s works of the 1930s, its use decreases and its positive, active character is greatly diminished. Whereas, in Being and Time, Dasein played a primary role in the uncovering of beings in their primordial truth, the active aspect of Dasein now comes to be associated more and more with the forgetting of the truth of Being.128 And as Heidegger’s thought develops, the term “Dasein” is used less and less – except when Heidegger specifically refers to his thinking as it appeared in Being and Time. In addition, after World War II, Heidegger explicitly distances his thinking of the 1920s from his later thought. Although Heidegger’s later comments on his celebrated “turning” [Kehre] from the theory of Dasein elaborated in Being and Time are not often as illuminating as one might wish, at least two are significant. First, in 1947, Heidegger stated that he ceased work on Being and Time because his language was too metaphysical and thus not adequate to his changed conception of Being.129 (For Heidegger, the term “metaphysical” often meant accepting of the
Around the same time, in one of his Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger laments that, instead of challenging the traditional metaphysical concept of subjectivity, his argument in *Being and Time* ran the risk of further entrenching it. Thus, the apparent relativism of *Being and Time*’s concept of primordial truth seems to have bothered Heidegger also and could plausibly have been his primary motive for rejecting the standpoint of the embodied individual.

Yet, as has been argued, most problematic in *Being and Time* is the tension between Dasein’s authentic and inauthentic truth. Authentic truth is grounded in Dasein’s individuated phenomenal experience in relation to its heritage and not in its relationship to others in its everyday lifeworld. Further reinforcing the relativism of his account is Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s being-with-others ([*Mitdasein*]), which is treated as a secondary and derived sort of existential experience. The face-to-face discussion with others about the world and about common possibilities for becoming, the experiences of family, friendship, love, and the public sphere of debate are all missing from *Being and Time*. Thus, what is most surprising about Heidegger’s solution to the relativism and subjectivism of *Being and Time* — his 1930 rejection of the point of view of the individual subject — is the fact that his solution does nothing to alleviate these problems. Indeed, Heidegger’s “remedy” actually makes them worse.

Instead of attempting to make his thinking more open to debate with his contemporary community, Heidegger’s solution for the relativism of *Being and Time* is to change his conception of primordial truth. In his 1930 essay “On the Essence of Truth” ([*Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*]), Heidegger rethinks the relation between Dasein and Being through the introduction of a new concept: “the open” (*das Offene*). A good account of this concept, which appears prominently in Heidegger’s thought throughout the 1930s and 1940s, is contained in Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935/1936). Here, Heidegger describes the open as follows.

In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings. This open center is therefore not surrounded by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know.

That which is can only be, as a being, if it stands within and stands out within what is lighted in this clearing. Only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are. Thanks to this clearing, beings are unconcealed in certain changing degrees. And yet a being can be concealed, too, only within the sphere of what is lighted. Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presence in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a concealedness. The clearing in which beings stand is in itself at the same time concealment.

Although less fully developed in “On the Essence of Truth,” the “open” of 1930 already functions for Heidegger as a third term between Dasein and the real. The concept thus allows him to attribute to Being even greater independence from humans. In his new account of truth, Heidegger retains the argument from traditional distinction between subject and object.)
Being and Time that the traditional conception of truth – as the correspondence of intellect and thing – is derivative of a more primordial truth – as unconcealment, or αλήθεια. Truth as a correct statement – which corresponds to the “facts” – is thus still understood to be dependent on the prior disclosure of things and beings. The site of disclosure or appearing, however, has been relocated by 1930 to a place outside of Dasein – a space into which both Dasein and Being may enter as equal partners. Heidegger furthermore argues that, because primordial truth depends equally upon Being granting itself to humans and humans letting beings appear, freedom belongs to the essence of truth. And because freedom belongs to the essence of truth, truth is thus necessarily linked to untruth. Untruth occurs either when humans misinterpret what appears or when Being refuses to show itself.

This change in Heidegger’s concept of primordial truth grants Being greater independence from humanity and prepares the way for his mature conception of “the history of Being” [Seinsgeschichte], which he develops over the course of the 1930s and early 1940s. Already in “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger understands the history of Being as a history of “errancy” [Irre]. By this he means that the history of Being is shaped by a series of fundamental misinterpretations of Being – misinterpretations in which Being is confused with a particular field of beings. These misinterpretations, which have governed the various historical ages, are by now so numerous and powerful that they have completely occluded modern humanity’s understanding of Being. As a result, we no longer understand Being or the nature of the disclosure that Being makes possible. Thus, for example, one is no longer aware of the fact that all disclosure or appearing is dependent upon a horizon of hidden darkness or concealment from which it arises. Indeed, this misinterpretation of Being has progressed to such an extent, that one is no longer even cognizant of the fact that something has been concealed. What Heidegger calls “the mystery” is the gradual historical concealing of Being’s ultimate concealment (i.e., of the fact that Being always has a hidden side).

Because it points to the interpenetration of truth and falsehood in Western human history, Heidegger’s post-1930 conception of truth is potentially critical. Undermining its potential, however, is the fact that Heidegger does not manage to alleviate the singularity of authentic disclosure – its lack of public scrutiny and corroboration. Instead, Heidegger’s new concept of truth makes Being even more aloof from human communities (and the lifeworlds in which they interact). As a result, the disclosure of Being becomes an almost mystical form of manifestation.

Conclusion

As the conjunction of Kiefer’s and Heidegger’s early works suggests, the project of reworking the subject from existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic points of view is something that has appeared at a number of different times in Germany over the past eighty years. In this way, their works display basic continuities in German culture across the century. At the same time, however, their
respective projects of reworking the subject diverge in certain respects. The development of Kiefer’s art since the mid-1970s does not, like Heidegger’s development in the 1930s, evince a turning away from particular and embodied human existence in favor of a disembodied analysis of different forms of collective subjectivity suggested by Germany’s “cultural tradition” (which, for Heidegger, extends to Latin and Greek culture). Although, in the early to mid-1980s, Kiefer moves away from a specific focus on themes of German identity and begins instead to draw his themes from a more diverse array of world culture, the aspects of his art that refer to individual existence remain both numerous and prominent. Unlike Heidegger, Kiefer suggests that to remain authentic – the reworking of subjectivity must always play between the radically particular, the culturally constructed, and the public-discursive levels of human experience. In other words, contradicting Heidegger’s belief that a combined phenomenological-hermeneutic method is sufficient to secure authentic truth, Kiefer continues to probe questions of individual and collective subjectivity, using visual strategies designed to evoke all three points of view. For this reason, in Kiefer’s works, the cultural heritage – the multiple linguistic and nonlinguistic sign systems handed down to him and used with transformations in his art – is not given a privileged status with regard to the truth. “High” and “low” cultural elements, handwork and industrial technology, repeat in Kiefer’s works in such a way as to blur any clear-cut distinction between true and false disclosure. Thus, because authentic truth can only be won in the face of one’s contemporary public, Kiefer cannot – in radical distinction to Heidegger – discover a canon of works to guide and orient him. Kiefer’s works make us uneasy about ascribing either truth or goodness to them. The myths that he chooses to represent possess neither greater truth nor greater falsity than the myths that he ignores, and a shadow of banality encircles even his most genuine formal innovations. Critics should be suspicious of Kiefer’s art, because his works labor hard to provoke precisely such an attitude.

As Kiefer’s painting develops over the 1970s and 1980s, a gigantic photograph comes to form the base of a massively reworked surface – its one-point perspective a new means to project an overlapping existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic attitude onto the spectator. Over the same period, Kiefer occludes his photographic ground more and more, building up his mechanical surface with paint, sand, lead, straw, and other richly evocative materials. Thus, in Kiefer’s art, an increased formal-material complexity parallels his growing interpretive “undecidability.” And whereas for Heidegger a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective can lead to a true account of the historical development of Being, in Kiefer a hermeneutic phenomenology leads not to truth but to a multiplication of apparently equally valid points of view.
Decisiveness and Undecidability

I think it's fair to say that his [Kiefer's] art has the implicit subject of redemption.
John Caldwell

Kiefer's works are disfigured. . . . There is no utopia here. . . . The scene is one of devastation and desertion.
Mark C. Taylor

Ambivalence is the central theme of all my work.
Anselm Kiefer

This chapter will examine two different responses to the idea that culture can have a political effect through a comparison of Heidegger's theory of the essentially political nature of art with Kiefer's very different practice of making art with political ramifications. Even within the perimeters set up by the approaches of existentialism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, the concept of "political art" has assumed a number of radically divergent forms in twentieth-century Germany. By exploring some of the divergences, one can achieve a better understanding of the problems besetting cultural practitioners when they wish to speak to and for a collective. We must, at times, address others as a "we" - when we desire to establish bonds with others, for example, or when we wish to uncover similarities uniting us to them. Yet the collective subject that "we" invokes must always be linked to open-endedness, potential, and possibility; it must never be linked to essence. Kiefer's art, as opposed to Heidegger's thinking, helps its spectators move toward this insight.

Chapter 1 argued that there are two main differences between Kiefer and Heidegger. While Kiefer maintains an existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic approach to the subject throughout his career, Heidegger transforms his early existentialism around 1930. After this moment, a concern for the particular individual - the decisive feature of what is here termed an "authentic" existentialist approach - becomes of minor concern in Heidegger's thinking. Although Heidegger continues to interest himself in various ways of formulating what could be called the "collective subject," he no longer attempts
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to think how everyday, individual Dasein becomes either authentic or fallen – a
self or a mass human. And although Heidegger believes throughout his lifetime
that some form of phenomenological hermeneutics will lead him to an authen­
tic, communal truth (understood as a rich, contextual type of manifestation),
Kiefer’s works suggest that no authentic, underlying truth can be found by an
individual in communicative isolation from his or her contemporary speech
community.

These two differences between Kiefer and Heidegger can now be sharp­
ened. Although Heidegger does not give up all aspects of the existentialist per­
spective, his is no longer an authentic existentialism because he ignores the fate
of the particular individual in its being-with-others within the context of its
everyday world. Kiefer, on the other hand, may be said to retain an existentialist
perspective precisely because his works continue to evoke questions that relate
their spectators to a highly complex set of conflicting decisions and a comu­
nity of others inhabiting a common life context. Kiefer’s existentialist perspec­
tive thus highlights the dialogic component of existentialism – an element that
is necessary to the approach – and one that connects existentialism with more
contemporary modes of German critical theory (in particular, Habermas). As
Kiefer’s works remind the spectator, to recognize existentialism’s dialogic com­
ponent is to realize that the subject must always temper and adjust his or her
insights by means of debate with others inhabiting the same lifeworld. Only in
this way can human beings reflect historically – that is, think their own tempo­
ral moments critically in terms of the broader historical developments of which
they are a part. And only in this way can human beings articulate the similar
qualities, aspirations, and desires that bind them together as well as the differ­
ces that cause them to always in some senses remain distinct. Without actual
dialogue, an existentialist perspective is likely to degenerate into an empty and
dangerous celebration of unbridled resolve and arbitrary decision. It can, in
other words, be easily used to justify state-sponsored violence if it is general­
ized and detached from the public sphere – a position that some of Heidegger’s
most astute critics have accused the residual existentialism in his writings of the
1930s and 1940s of fostering. For this reason, one could argue that Kiefer
retains his particular dialogic form of existentialism precisely in order to let
truth emerge publicly in his art. In this way, Kiefer’s art provides the spectator
with a good counterexample to Heidegger’s thinking vis-à-vis the issue of nor­
mative truth – that is, those forms of culturally generated truth that bind a comu­
nity together and allow for collective decisions.

This chapter will thus examine the similarities and differences between
Kiefer’s and Heidegger’s respective presentations of how normative truth can be
generated by means of works of art. “Normative truth” here refers to state­
ments, descriptions, or representations that achieve some level of communal
agreement and articulate forms of individual and collective subjectivity (by pre­
senting either authentic or inauthentic modes of being-in-the-world, types of
actions that have moral or ethical implications, and forms of social relations
that should be either followed or avoided). Although it is impossible to define
all the possible types of meaning that normative truths encompass (just as it is
impossible to exhaustively articulate all the different forms of individual and collective subjectivity or the types of statement and representation through which these forms can be made manifest, normative truths may be recognized through their function as the regulative ideals that – either implicitly or explicitly – guide both individual and group action. For Heidegger, works of art produce a normative experience of truth in that they reveal nested hierarchies of meaning that articulate the fundamental structure of values that permeates a particular culture. As such, they can help human beings produce authentic forms of both individual and collective subjectivity. For Kiefer, on the other hand, works of art can at best provoke debate, and a realm of normative truth emerges from his art only when a community gathers to compare and contrast their divergent aesthetic interpretations and the systems of value that lie behind them. In this way, although Kiefer's works project different forms of collective identity (by citing previous cultural symbols and by calling on the spectator to share in the work's perspective and, thereby, empathize with Kiefer's existentialist self-analysis), the works also suggest that the common element uniting Kiefer's different spectators is always open-ended and developing.

The hermeneutic “undecidability” of Kiefer's art – that is, the intentional ambiguity of his works, coupled with their demands on the spectator to decide in their presence – can thus be productively contrasted with Heidegger's “decisive” aesthetic theory of the 1930s and 1940s. Heidegger holds that the normative power of certain great works of art and culture is central to a people's ability to form itself into an integrated community and make essential historical decisions as a group. However, the undecidability of Kiefer's works disrupts Heidegger's contention, first articulated in the middle of the National Socialist decade of the 1930s, that great works of art can help support and unify a historical “people” [Volk]. Kiefer's works uncover shifting constellations of problems - not clear hierarchies of meaning or definite contexts of orientation as certain aspects of Heidegger's aesthetic theory suggest works of art should produce. Thus Kiefer's works do not seem able to directly constitute and historically situate an intersubjective community. Rather, they help humans rethink the ties that bind them to others in the various communities in which they exist as well as the aspects of everyone's self-identity that make “us” always, in some sense, different or outside the “norm.” At the same time, Heidegger's description of the work of art as creating a conflict or “striving” between “earth” and “world” is very useful for understanding the play of different perspectives and different, equally valid interpretations as they emerge and disappear in Kiefer's art. Thus, although Kiefer does not fall victim to the dangerous political naiveté that characterizes Heidegger's aesthetic theory in the mid-1930s (Heidegger's simplistic belief that an exclusively historical dialogue between an elite group of cultural practitioners can form a people's sense of their collective identity), the effect created by the intentional ambiguity of Kiefer's works does seem to support Heidegger's contention that works of art create meaning through a nested play of disclosure and withdrawal from appearance - a play of presencing and absencing in which different aspects of an art work's form, material, and meaning interact but never find a fixed or final point of resolution.
In addition, since the semantic ambiguity of Kiefer’s works causes his viewers to reflect upon both the conditions for interpretation and the nature of art at the end of the twentieth century, Kiefer’s aesthetic practices seem consistent with Heidegger’s conviction that works of art can grant their interpreters insight into the hermeneutic situation of their time. Kiefer’s important insight into his contemporary situation lies in his recognition of the need for public discourse and debate around the existential issues brought up in his undecidable works – and thus a dialogue about the different ways human beings can live both alone and together. This recognition, which appears to motivate his hermeneutic undecidability, also seems to stand behind his consistent emphasis in his works on the disturbing multiple connections between art and violence – connections that Heidegger acknowledges but does not regard as problematic. By reminding the spectator of the possible dangerousness of artistic acts of creation as well as art’s endangered position within the context of the modern world, Kiefer causes his public to examine the interplay between individual and collective identity at the end of the twentieth century – an examination that Heidegger’s aesthetics, with its radical simplification of the issues arising from the relationship between art and violence, effectively suppresses.

Heidegger’s Private National Socialism

Heidegger develops his decisive aesthetics in the years immediately following the period of his greatest political activity – his year in office as the first National Socialist rector of the Albert-Ludwigs University in Freiburg, from April 22, 1933, to April 27, 1934. Heidegger’s political writings from this time show in sharp relief some of the central concerns that occupied him in the early 1930s and that, shortly after “the failure of the rectorship,” as he put it, influenced the development of his aesthetics. As to the facts of this much disputed period in Heidegger’s life, the following points seem well established. After becoming rector, Heidegger immediately joined the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) on May 1, 1933, and remained a member until the end of the war. As Freiburg’s first National Socialist rector, he presided over the Gleichschaltung that was imposed on the university – its coordination within the newly formed National Socialist state. Specifically, this meant that, under Heidegger, the powers of the rector were significantly increased at the expense of the faculty senate, paramilitary training became a component of the university students’ education, the Reich Law for the Re-establishment of a Permanent Civil Service of April 7, 1933 – a law dismissing Jewish and politically undesirable civil servants – was enforced (albeit over Heidegger’s intermittent objections), and book burnings took place outside the university library on the night of May 10, 1933 (again over Heidegger’s protests). In addition, and perhaps most damningly, Heidegger lent his name and considerable oratorical skills to the support of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime in a series of speeches to students and professors in 1933 and 1934 – speeches that were published and circulated widely. In this way, Heidegger
became the most important, internationally recognized German philosopher to publicly support the NSDAP.

Heidegger assumed power in the university because he believed he could thereby help direct Germany's spiritual development at the time, and he resigned from the rectorship when he realized that he was simply the Nazis' pawn and that he would never have any real effect on German politics during the 1930s. As Baden's minister of culture, education, and justice, Dr. Otto Wacker warned him in 1933, his was a "private National Socialism." Yet to be an active fellow traveler in a regime that, already before he had joined it, would deny a certain segment of the German population their right to practice their professions on the grounds of their race is highly problematic to say the least. And in 1948, with a clear knowledge of the Nazi death camps, to refuse to admit his mistakes, and to write feeble excuses to his Jewish former student Herbert Marcuse - that "if you substitute 'East Germans' for 'Jews,' then exactly the same charge can be leveled against one of the Allies, the only difference being that the international public knows very well what has been going on since 1945, whereas the Nazis' bloody reign of terror was actually kept secret from the German people" - is to manifest a monstrous inability to confront one's own practical, moral, and conceptual failings. Yet this is exactly what Heidegger did; and it is precisely this inability to see how a "great" cultural figure could be mistaken that also lurks at the heart of his politicized aesthetics of the 1930s and 1940s.

One of the clearest early manifestations of Heidegger's political understanding of culture is contained in "The Self-Assertion of the German University" [Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität] - his "Rectorial Address" or speech accepting the rectorship of Freiburg University on April 21, 1933. Here, while implicitly criticizing the German university for degenerating into a multiplicity of unrelated disciplines held together by a merely technological organization, Heidegger affirms that, as rector, he will seek to awake "a true and common rootedness in the essence of the German university." For Heidegger, this awaking means, first and foremost, realigning the university so that the various sciences and disciplines would once again be grounded in primordial science, namely, philosophy. This will happen, according to Heidegger, only if we again place ourselves under the power of the beginning [Macht des Anfangs] of our spiritual-historical existence. This beginning is the departure, the setting out, of Greek philosophy. Here, for the first time, Western humanity rises up, from a base in a popular culture [Volksstum] and by means of its language, against the totality of what is [das Seiende im Ganzen] and questions and comprehends it as the being that it is [das Seiende, das es ist].

By placing itself under the power of this Greek beginning, the German university will be in a position to "will" its own "essence." This "will to essence" [Wille zum Wesen] consists of grounding the university in the understanding of science articulated in Greek philosophy, which Heidegger interprets as "the questioning, uncovered standing one's ground in the midst of the uncertainty of the totality of what is." In this way, the German university will radically question Germany's current historical situation and "create for [its] people its world of innermost and most extreme danger, i.e. its truly spiritual world."
By creating such a spiritual world of innermost and extreme danger, the university will play a fundamental political role within the new state, because “spirit” [Geist], according to Heidegger, is the power that most deeply preserves the people’s earth- and blood-bound strengths as the power that most deeply arouses and most profoundly shakes the people’s existence. Only a spiritual world guarantees the people greatness. For it forces the constant decision between the will to greatness and the acceptance of decline to become the law for each step of the march that our people has begun into its future history.24

As created by the university, Germany’s spiritual world will, in other words, guide and orient the German people. It will give them the conceptual framework that will enable them to decide upon and follow a specific course of communal action. In order for this to happen, however, the university must do more than realign itself. It must also bind itself to the German community according to three fundamental duties. The first of these duties is “labor service” – the formation of a “national community” [Volksgemeinschaft], without regard for the particular class and status of its individual members, through the common activity of providing for the material needs of the nation.25 The second duty – or “bond” [Bindung], as Heidegger prefers to call it – is “military service,” which ensures “the honor and the destiny of the nation [Nation] in the midst of all the other peoples [Völker],” and demands the individual’s willingness “to give the utmost in action.”26 (These two types of service, both of which became official National Socialist policy during the 1930s, had the effect of placing German students more directly under the control of the Nazi government.) Third, according to Heidegger, the university must bind itself to “the spiritual mission of the German people” through “knowledge service,” which is entrusted to “the statesman and the teacher, the doctor and the judge, the minister and the architect [who] lead the existence of people and state, because they guard and hone it in its fundamental relations to the world-shaping powers of human being.”27 Thus “knowledge service,” which Heidegger later asserts was always conceived as fundamental vis-à-vis the other two services,28 is directed by a cultural elite. Although Heidegger concedes that there must be a necessary resistance between the leaders and the led29 and, moreover, that the spiritual world set up by the teachers of the university is a “common questioning and a communally tuned saying,” the teachers do their questioning in advance of the students and, thereby, “gain the strength for leadership.”30 The German spiritual world, in other words, is set up through the work of its great cultural leaders, and their work, correctly interpreted and shown in its national-historical significance by the various faculties and disciplines in the university, presents the German people with an image of its historical destiny. Despite the talk of academic questioning and resistance on the part of the community, it is clear from Heidegger’s account that a German spiritual elite is to direct the steps of its people’s “march” into their “future history.”

A good example of Heidegger’s actual practice of spiritual leadership can be gleaned from a speech he made on November 11, 1933, to an audience of university professors in support of a plebiscite announced by the Nazis to legiti-
mate Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations. (Germany officially withdrew from the League of Nations on October 14, 1933; the plebiscite was held on November 12, 1933.) On November 10, the day before Heidegger delivered his speech, it was published on page 1 of the Freiburger Studentenzzeitung, the university's student newspaper. In part, the speech, entitled "German Men and Women," reads as follows:

The German people has been called to a vote by the Führer. But the Führer asks nothing of the people. On the contrary, he is giving the people the most immediate possibility of the highest free decision: whether it — the whole people — wills its own Dasein, or whether it does not will this. This election is absolutely incomparable with all previous elections. What is unique about this election is the simple greatness of the decision to be made in it. But the inexorability of what is simple and ultimate will not endure any vacillation or hesitation. This ultimate decision extends to the furthest limit of the Dasein of our people. And what is this limit? It consists in the primordial demand [Urforderung] of all Dasein, namely that it receive and save its own essence. . . . It is not ambition, not desire for glory, not blind obstinacy, and not hunger for power that demands of the Führer the withdrawal from the League of Nations. It is only the clear will to unconditional self-responsibility in enduring and mastering the fate of our people. . . . On November 12 the German people as a whole chooses its future. This future is bound to the Führer. The people cannot choose this future in such a way that it votes "yes" on the basis of so-called foreign policy considerations, without including in this "yes" the Führer and the movement which is unconditionally devoted to him. There is no foreign politics nor even domestic politics. There is only the one will to the full Dasein of the state [Dasein des Staates]. The Führer has brought this will to full awakening and welded it into one single decision [einzigen Entschluss] in the whole people. No one can stay away on the day on which this will is manifested!

Here, in the same conceptual terms put forward in the "Rectorial Address," Heidegger asserts that Germany's will to essence can be expressed only through the German people's active support of a political action already implemented by the National Socialists. Even more egregiously, Heidegger argues that although Germans "cannot choose" otherwise than to unconditionally support Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, this choice is actually their highest free decision! In this way, the language of free choice and resolve is used to cloak unconditional subservience to the leaders of the total state. Further underlining his masking of mass submission in the rhetoric of individual free will is Heidegger's treatment of the Freiburg students on the day of the plebiscite. According to Karl Löwith, "Heidegger had the Freiburg students march as a unit to the election room and register their approval of Hitler's decision en bloc." It is significant that Heidegger never disavowed his "Rectorial Address." Indeed, although he admitted being wrong about Hitler, as well as to having made a mistake about his own abilities to confront and influence the Nazi movement, he always maintained that his criticism of the university and his proposed solution retained their validity after the fall of the Third Reich. Thus, according to Heidegger's own postwar interpretation of the "Rectorial Address," what he said there about the political function of culture — the essential role played by a people's spiritual world in their communal historical decisions — was also valid in the years following his rectorship. For this reason, it comes as
little surprise that, when one turns to the aesthetic theory he developed in the mid-1930s, the same problematic opposition between elite cultural leaders and a historical people who are led figures prominently in his writings.

**A Decisive Aesthetics**

Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* [*Einführung in die Metaphysik*], the text of a 1935 lecture course first published in 1953, presents a clear account of the political aspects of his mid-1930s aesthetic thinking.\(^3\) It is called a “decisive aesthetics” because, here, as in the “Rectorial Address” and the other speeches he made during his time in office, Heidegger emphasizes the role played by cultural and political leaders in the making of historical “decisions” [*Entscheidungen*]: fundamental interpretations of a people’s nature and world that allow a community to define themselves and, thereby, enter history by acting as a national body.\(^3\) In addition, the term “decisive” is appropriate for Heidegger’s aesthetics because it foregrounds or highlights the consistent emphasis on empty resolve and the sheer fact of taking action that reaches a climax in the writings of his middle period. As Löwith notes, already in *Being and Time*, there is a fundamental stress on Dasein’s resoluteness – Dasein’s readiness to act on the basis of a disclosure of its authentic possibilities-for-Being, which, because they are always its own, cannot be specified further within Heidegger’s text.\(^4\) This emphasis on resoluteness continues in the “Rectorial Address” and the “German Men and Women!” speech, with their strong evocations of willing, rising up, duty, service, and decision. As in *Being and Time*, however, the content of what is to be willed or served is left for the most part obscure. In the “Rectorial Address,” for example, Heidegger exhorts his audience to actively realize a spiritual world projected by the questioning of a cultural elite without suggesting what sort of social structures and hierarchies this spiritual world will require. And in the “German Men and Women!” speech, the German people are told that their greatest “decision” consists of giving their unconditional support to Hitler and the National Socialist Party without any discussion of what specific policies this support tacitly endorses.\(^4\) Moreover, as in *Being and Time*, the active resolve called for in both speeches takes place within a context fundamentally oriented toward the possibility of death and historical disaster.\(^4\) This emphasis on the resolute decision to act in the face of a menacing nothingness is characteristic of Heidegger’s aesthetics as well. It motivates his insistence on the overwhelming need human beings have for great works of art, his celebration of the violent and decisive actions of the creators of such works, and his requirement that healthy communities remain in a state of responsive openness to the hierarchies of meaning set up by their “foundational” works of culture.

Despite the decisiveness of Heidegger’s aesthetics, however, it is also necessary to note that Heidegger understands works of art as essentially multivalent. Art, in other words, always produces and supports a play – or as Heidegger puts it, a “strife” [*Streit*] – of multiple meanings and nonmeaningful, phenomenal presentations. Thus there is much in Heidegger’s aesthetics that is antifounda-
tional in the traditional sense of the term. There is much, namely, that goes against the tendency in human thinking to fix, reify, substantialize, or totalize its truths—a process of defining and setting into place that some people might hold to be necessary for a truth to function as a ground of communal action. Therefore, a strong tension exists between the decisive and antifoundational sides of Heidegger’s aesthetics. Despite the historical and multivalent character that Heidegger ascribes to aesthetic truth, such truths for him have a decidedly political, normative, and foundational function.

Perhaps because of Heidegger’s disillusionment with the politics of National Socialism, Introduction to Metaphysics sounds a far less optimistic note than even the “Rectorial Address,” which, although questioning Germany’s will to greatness in the face of danger and decline, seemed prepared to answer this question in the affirmative. In Introduction to Metaphysics, on the other hand, Heidegger focuses more on the earth’s—and, with it, Germany’s—spiritual decline, a decline that consists of “the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the transformation of men into a mass, [and] the hatred and suspicion of everything free and creative.”43 According to Heidegger, Germany, at the center of Europe, experiences the greatest pressure and the most extreme danger,44 caught as it is “between the pincers of Russia on one side and America on the other.”45 However, as “the most metaphysical of nations,” Germany also has the potential to lead the West out of danger—something that it can do only if it takes a creative view of its tradition, and asks once again the question of the meaning of Being. To ask this question “means nothing less that to recapture, to repeat, the beginning of our historical-spiritual existence, in order to transform it into another beginning [den anderen Anfang].”46

Significantly, “science,” a term that is used in the “Rectorial Address” to name Greek philosophy as the primordial ground of the Western sciences and academic disciplines, is now used in a much more negative sense. Here, Heidegger defines it as a derived phenomenon: something that cannot renew itself and that is based upon—but only imperfectly reflects—the more primordial structures of meaning articulated by Greek culture as a whole. And because the total development of Western science simply repeats and codifies the primary frameworks of Western meaning set up in the first great flowering of Greek culture, science’s perpetuation and eventual dominance—which has the effect of blocking out other frameworks of meaning—is one of the reasons for the earth’s spiritual decline. Therefore, although Heidegger repeats the basic project outlined in his “Rectorial Address”—that Germany and Western civilization as a whole must go back to their origins in early Greek culture in order to begin anew—it is no longer toward metaphysical philosophy (primordial science) in isolation from everything else that Heidegger turns. Instead, in order to renew the German spiritual world and thus bring about the other beginning, Germany must look to the original sources of spirit that created the Greek world: philosophy, as stated in the “Rectorial Address,” but also poetry, art, statesmanship, and religion.47 With the denigration of science to the status of a secondary or derived phenomenon, the role of a cultural and political elite, already given prominence in 1933, is emphasized still further.

The greater part of Heidegger’s book deals with a hermeneutic investigation
of the early Greek understanding of Being through the texts of some of its greatest thinkers and poets: Heraclitus, Parmenides, Homer, Pindar (these last two only briefly) and, especially, Sophocles. This investigation proceeds by way of a series of interpretations of key terms used by these Greek thinkers and poets that pertain either to Being or to humans as those entities who apprehend Being: words such as *physis* (nature), *pólemos* (conflict), *lógos* (speech, reason, or gathering), *phainesthai* (to appear), *alétheia* (unconcealment), *dóxa* (aspect, opinion, or glory), *noía* (apprehension), *deinón* (strange or overpowering), *tēchnē* (craft, skill, or art), and *díke* (framework or dominant order). Interpreting these terms as forms of speech through which the early Greeks disclosed and limited both Being and themselves, Heidegger reveals a complex portrait of a Greek heroic age wherein violent creators disclose both what is and Being through great works of art, poetry, statesmanship, and religion. Through the disclosive acts they inaugurate and preserve in their works, the creators allow their people to enter history for the first time. Underlying Heidegger’s series of interpretations is a sense that Being is always in excess of every attempt to bring it to appearance: an overarching, emerging, and overpowering power, which nonetheless needs the receptive but ultimately violent response of human beings in order to fully exist.

To understand this complex reciprocal relationship between Being and the creators, one must first understand Heidegger’s initial interpretation of Greek Being as both “nature” *[Natur]* and “appearance” *[Schein]*. According to Heidegger, as *physis* or nature, Being is thought by the early Greeks as the power of “emerging and arising, the spontaneous unfolding that lingers. In this power rest and motion are opened out of original unity. This power is the overpowering presencing that is not yet mastered in thought, wherein that which is present manifests itself as something which is.” Being as nature is thus conceived by the Greeks as a force of emergence from out of concealment – the presencing of something that is then accepted by the community as real. At the same time, however, by emerging, Being also distorts itself. Precisely because it appears, Being presents the perceiver with a mere aspect of itself. Moreover, as an aspect, Being in the form of an appearance can be either true or false: a mere false appearance or “semblance” *[Anschein]* that must be rejected or a true disclosure of a being from out its concealment. Even true appearances of the real, however, still manage to distort Being by obscuring its nature as a process of nonpermanent emergence out of a horizonal constellation of meaning: the disclosure of things and beings within the context of their world. Thus, in the case of a true appearance, a thing or being is perceived correctly, but its context is lost. For this reason, according to Heidegger, the Greeks “were perpetually compelled to wrest Being from appearance and preserve it against appearance.”

Heidegger defines the early Greeks’ wrestling and preservation of Being from appearance in terms of Heraclitus’s usage of the term “pólemos” in Fragment 53 of his writings. Heidegger translates “pólemos” as both “conflict” *[Auseinandersetzung]* and “battle” *[Kampf]*. He understands it as a setting apart that simultaneously binds together that which it separates in a tensed and articulated opposition. As Heidegger puts it,
The pólemos named here is a conflict that prevailed prior to everything divine and human, not a war in the human sense. This conflict, as Heraclitus thought it, first caused the realm of being [das Wesende] to separate into opposites; it first gave rise to position and order and rank. In such separation cleavages, intervals, distances, and joints opened. In the conflict a world comes into being.\textsuperscript{17}

Moreover, according to Heidegger, it is this fundamental pólemos “that first projects and develops what had hitherto been unheard of, unsaid, and unthought.”\textsuperscript{58} Pólemos, in other words, is the first articulation of a hierarchy of meaning through which a world emerges from out of phenomena. And it is precisely to sustain pólemos – this battle of wresting and preserving Being from appearance – that the early Greeks needed their cultural and political elite: those whom Heidegger calls “the creators” [die Schaffenden].\textsuperscript{59} This is the case because, in the great works that the creators produce, the originary world-producing hierarchies of meaning are maintained and made accessible to the community at large.

Both Greek Being and the Greek people thus needed the creators, those unique individuals who, by maintaining originary pólemos, bring the new into the world and thereby found or institute the city-state, or polis: the communal-historical space of Greek Being-together. According to Heidegger,

The polis is the historical place, the there in which, out of which, and for which history happens. To this place and scene of history belong the gods, the temples, the priests, the festivals, the games, the poets, the thinkers, the ruler, the council of elders, the assembly of the people, the army, and the fleet. All this does not first belong to the polis, does not become political by entering into a relation with a statesman and a general and the business of state. No, it is political, i.e. at the site of history, provided there be (for example) poets alone, but then really poets, priests alone, but then really priests, rulers alone, but then really rulers.\textsuperscript{60}

Standing alone, these creative figures ground the Greek world; and, like Sophocles’ representations of both Oedipus and Antigone, upon whom Heidegger partially models his description, they stand resolute in their calling to uncover primordial truth – to wrest Being from appearance – even when this means their ultimate destruction.\textsuperscript{61} However, perhaps because they risk destruction, the creators also dare all actions – up to and including those actions that wreak destruction on others. According to Heidegger, the creative one accepts his or her rank and, with it, the right to act as he or she sees fit – even violently and beyond the bounds of all human law. Thus, according to Heidegger’s interpretation of the early Greeks, to exist as a creative subject during the time of the first beginning means:

as violent individuals to use power, to become pre-eminent in historical being as creators, as people of action. Pre-eminent in the historical place, they become at the same time apolos, without city and place, lonely, strange, and alien, without issue amid the totality of what is [Seienden im Ganzen], at the same time without statute and limit, without structure and order, because they themselves as creators must first create all this.\textsuperscript{62}

The creators, a violent elite, thus determine the structure and fate of the city-state, and, at the same time, remain beyond all human law.
The moment of initial creation, according to Heidegger, is a moment of decision: “not a human being’s judgment and choice, but a separation in the...togetherness of Being, unconcealment, appearing, and nonbeing.”63 For this the creator is needed, first, to bring a true thing or being to appearing instead of a false thing or nonbeing, and, second, to demonstrate the horizontal nature of Being – the fact that there is always more to appearing than what appears. “Unconcealment” [Unverborgenheit] is one of Heidegger’s main terms for the happening of truth: the oscillation of a true appearance with and within the ground of its historical Being. It is thus also the task of the creator to make this conflict or oscillation apparent. True creative decisions, for Heidegger, are thus actions or departures “along a distinct path,” that take into account the three poles of Being, appearing, and nothing.64 Such decisions result in works that define what is – allow for true things and beings to appear. In addition, such decisions remind their perceivers of an “overpowering power” of emergence that permeates and surrounds all particular disclosures as well as of the ultimate decay of everything that discloses itself. Thus, although all creative decisions begin with a questioning attitude toward Being and the essence of humanity, they ultimately limit both Being and humanity’s essence in order to give them a form or positive appearance.65 And it is through these violent and heroic first decisions, preserved in works, that the ancient Greeks formed and shaped their aristocratic society.

Heidegger’s decisiveness is at the root of the problematic aspects of his mid-1930s aesthetic theory. Despite the talk of initial questioning as well as the necessary participation of Being in every creative work – Being, according to Heidegger, compels the creative ones to open it up and thus is the dominant partner in the relationship66 – it is still great works that define a world and found a people’s history. Disillusioned with actual politics, Heidegger thus argues in his aesthetics that Germany must turn to its cultural tradition in order to find its leaders. (There is, as he asserts in numerous places in his oeuvre, an essential connection between the thought of the Germans and the thought of the Greeks.)67 As in Being and Time, a sense that an authentic decision needs to be based upon a dialogue with one’s immediate community is missing. And once again, as in the “Rectorial Address” and his “German Men and Women!” speech, Heidegger tries to convince his readers to follow the decisions of a mighty and farsighted few. Thus, despite his differences with Nazi leadership, Heidegger’s aesthetics demonstrates a number of uncomfortable parallels to Nazi political thought – most notably, the reliance on a “principle of leadership” [Fürherprinzip]. In addition, Heidegger’s glorification of resolve, action, and violence, although placed in a very different context than the one in which the National Socialists called for resolute and violent action, is troubling given the historical situation in which Introduction to Metaphysics was written. If the creation of a new world is at stake, then everything, according to Heidegger, is permitted. The National Socialists, themselves, came up with similar justifications for their attempts to build a new world order. Moreover, in both cases, the justification for violent action is based on a natural hierarchy: the Nazis considered themselves to be a “master race;” and Heidegger, for his part, justifies the actions of the creators on the basis of their creative power and their heightened
sensibility or receptiveness to the “call” or address of Being. As he says in Introduction to Metaphysics, “The true is not for every man but only for the strong,”68 “[w]hat has the higher rank is the stronger,”69 and “rank and domination are implicit in Being.”70 These sentences, troubling enough in a “mere” aesthetic theory, become highly problematic when read within the context of Heidegger’s extremely politicized theory of art – a conceptual system that sees the aesthetic, the ethical, and the political as essentially interrelated. Finally, an additional justification for violent action is Heidegger’s perception of his time as one of extreme danger and tremendous social disorder. Like the Nazis, Heidegger sees his immediate historical context as one of radical crisis. And in this context, the production of a new order becomes an unquestioned and absolute good.

Kiefer’s Hermeneutic Undecidability

Within the shared context of the existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic models that unite Kiefer and Heidegger, Kiefer’s undecidability contrasts starkly with Heidegger’s decisiveness. In particular, Kiefer’s undecidability attacks the idea of a universal “we” implied by Heidegger’s concept of Dasein – Heidegger’s sense in Being and Time that he could theoretically represent fundamental structures characteristic of all Western humans – as well as Heidegger’s presumption in his political speeches that he could directly tell all Germans how they were supposed to act. Because of their hermeticism and appropriations from multiple “national” traditions, Kiefer’s works tend to create a de-centered or fragmented spectator – one who is almost always ignorant of one or more of the overlapping symbolic systems that the works bring together. If we contemplate his works long enough, most of Kiefer’s spectators will eventually be alienated by – recognize their own foreignness to – some aspect of his art. At the same time, however, Kiefer’s works continue to evoke a potential “we” in that they offer the spectator the possibility of identifying with Kiefer. Because of their great size, engaged perspective, and human emptiness, they encourage the spectator to imagine Kiefer’s images as the spectator’s own world, product, or perspective. In this way, they suggest that it is possible through representation to project a nonuniversal “we” – a momentarily shared perspective or “feeling of identity” between autonomous individuals, an identity that does not interfere with “our” openness to otherness and difference.

Kiefer’s mournful canvas Iron Path [Eisen-Steig] (Figure 40),71 from 1986, presents a good example of the hermeneutic undecidability of his works. One of Kiefer’s many variations during the 1980s of his early field and field path imagery, Iron Path depicts a bleak landscape upon which a pair of railroad tracks recede sharply into the distance. At the top of the painting, just below the horizon, the two tracks diverge, and directly above them Kiefer marks the sky with a small irregularly shaped piece of gold leaf. A third of the way up the picture, one on each track, cast-iron replicas of old-fashioned climbing shoes are attached to the painting’s surface – the same shoes that were once used by repairmen to ascend and descend telephone and electrical poles. Each shoe is adorned with olive branches, and a lead rock hangs from the one on the right.
Read in the context of World War II history, a history to which Kiefer returns again and again in his art, *Iron Path* represents the Holocaust as an anonymous journey into death—just as the sound of the railroad had suggested the transports in German radio plays of the 1950s. In addition, the anonymity of the image—Kiefer’s refusal to depict the suffering of particular individuals—adds a powerful, melancholic quality to the work.

Every element in Kiefer’s painting seems to be caught up in a rich network of contradictions. Although Kiefer did not make the iron shoes, they are not “real world” objects either—Kiefer commissioned a craftsman to create them for him. Thus, although the shoes appear to be readymades added to the canvas, the “origin” of the shoes is clearly linked to Kiefer’s intentions and his meaning-producing aesthetic decisions. For this reason, *Iron Path’s* climbing shoes betray more intentionality than Duchamp’s readymades, which were not commissioned but simply selected—supposedly according to a principle of “aesthetic indifference.” In addition, Kiefer’s commissioned transformation of the climbing shoes from their real materials into cast-iron replicas robs them of their traditional properties—the movability and lightness central to their function. They thus ambiguously imply movement both upward (their climbing function) and downward (because of their weight and clumsiness). Furthermore, the tracks diverge and potentially offer the spectator two different possibilities—a doubling that resonates with the basic contradiction between the material surface and the foreshortened representation of tracks within a field that organizes the canvas as a whole. At the same time as we are presented with the image of dividing paths on the representational and symbolic levels of the work, we are also presented with
the contradiction between reading-in and reading-across on the painting's formal level. Finally, the painting provokes the spectator to do the impossible because the climbing shoes face out toward the spectator and, in conjunction with the tracks, appear to be a pair of skis that the viewer could potentially put on (they are human size). To do so, however, the spectator would have to place the canvas face up on the ground - an act of aggression against the work and a policy generally prohibited by museums and collections. Kiefer's painting thus seems to mock its own spiritual and monetary value by inviting the spectator to destroy it. (Or, contradictorily, it seems to mock the spectator by demonstrating his or her powerlessness in the face of capital and the cultural institutions of art, for, despite its address, most people will not dare to destroy the work.)

Iron Path is also highly reminiscent of one of the central repeating images from Claude Lanzmann's film Shoah (1985): a frontal and, radically foreshortened tracking shot of moving landscapes and empty rails leading to various death camps. Like Lanzmann's shot, which literally puts the viewer in the position of the train engineer driving his victims to their deaths, Kiefer's image draws its power directly from its banality or prosaic character as well its ability to pull the spectator into the picture. By concretizing the horror of annihilation in the form of empty tracks and a slight gold glow on the horizon, Kiefer manages to depict an event that could be trivialized by a more literal presentation. More disturbing, however, is the way in which Kiefer chooses to grab his viewers. He uses a radical one-point perspective to drag the viewer into the picture at the same time as he asserts the painting's flat surface through the build-up of material and objects on the canvas. In this way, Kiefer evokes in the spectator a strong sense of movement and, then, of sudden impact with a surface that both stops and receives him or her. Suddenly, as we contemplate Iron Path, the anonymous landscape is potentially filled with our own unwilling corporeal presence, and we are caught within the play of the painting's oppositions.

Speaking, in 1990, on postwar German historical consciousness and "our perspective on things," Kiefer notes that, "We see train tracks somewhere, and think about Auschwitz. This will last for a long time." Yet despite Kiefer's understanding of the meaning of train tracks in postwar German consciousness, and although the Holocaust is manifestly the subject of a number of earlier Kiefer works, such as the 1977 book Siegfried's Difficult Way to Brunhilde (Figures 41-42), this resonance in Kiefer's train track imagery is not discussed by Mark Rosenthal in his important 1987 monograph on Kiefer's work. Rosenthal chooses to link the painting's formal structure to the alchemical lead-iron-gold symbolism that Kiefer also encodes into the work. These materials recall the alchemist's project of turning base matter - such as lead and earth - into iron, then silver, and finally gold. Believed by the alchemist to be a speeding up of the natural development of all matter, this transformation was also understood as prefiguring humanity's ultimate spiritual redemption. Thus, according to Rosenthal, Iron Path as a whole, takes up the task of approaching a higher plane of existence...

FIGURE 42. Anselm Kiefer, Siegfried's Difficult Way to Brünhilde, pp. 100–101.
the] combination of the shoes and track suggest horizontal and vertical movement at once. . . . Kiefer at first called this painting *Heavenly Jerusalem*, but his new title accords better with the image in emphasizing the way, rather than the goal. . . . In this case, iron is the key to producing a concrete manifestation of the ‘path.’ By literally forging fundamental materials, it is apparently possible to surmount the given, horizontal movement and take an ascendant, vertical path. Following the long, black night depicted earlier in his career, the artist-alchemist is showing that gold and a New World may, indeed, be attained.26

Rosenthal notes that *Iron Path* was adapted from a photograph Kiefer took in Bordeaux, and not from the images in the Lanzmann film, which Kiefer plausibly could have seen by the time he painted his work. However, Kiefer’s earlier Holocaust themes, as well as the painting’s original title, could have suggested to Rosenthal the possible dangers of his univocal and far too optimistic interpretation. Focusing on Rosenthal’s omission, however, we discover a central interpretive problem that faces the viewer confronted by the intentional ambiguity of Kiefer’s art. What to one spectator might appear as an unsettling – quasi-victimizing – memorial to the victims of German atrocity, to another appears as the artist’s successful achievement of a new world. Although Kiefer consciously works with alchemical imagery, and encourages such interpretations of his work, it is clear that alchemy is not the only symbolic system that underlies *Iron Path*. The historical text – which is also always present in Kiefer’s art – is an equally legitimate system for interpretation. The point here is not to suggest that Rosenthal’s interpretation is wrong. Quite the contrary – Kiefer’s alchemical symbolism does, indeed, also suggest this shockingly affirmative reading. Instead, the point is to recognize the irreducible undecidability of *Iron Path* and the need for any interpretation of Kiefer’s works to always hold out the possibility of multiple and contradictory readings.

But where does this dictate to recognize alternative interpretations of *Iron Path* come from? Is it simply the suspicion, which the painting evokes in the spectator, that any single interpretation that he or she gives to *Iron Path* will seem hopelessly reductive given the work’s formal, material, and symbolic complexity? Although this is indeed one source of the demand placed on the spectator to recognize and develop multiple interpretations of the work, it is not the only one. In addition, the work demands an interpretive response because the existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic attitudes it evokes at times place the contemplative spectator in the subject position of the victimizer: namely, that of the compliant railroad engineer. The view, in other words, that the painting invites the spectator to accept as his or her own, is that of the driver of the train. Through this perspective, which causes its viewers to read themselves into the work’s bleak and desolate world, Kiefer invites the spectator to become party to his own, highly self-critical existential questioning. “Can I,” the painting can cause one to ask, “occupy the same place as those Europeans who participated directly in the horror of the Jewish annihilation?” Because the painting asks such self-critical questions – and, moreover, because it invites one to ask these questions of oneself – *Iron Path* demands a decision: a definitive answer to such questions as “What would I have done here?” and “On whose side would I have been?” It demands, in other words, that the spectator take a stand – articulate a specific set of values that could explain how he or she
would act in such a situation. And because spectators are often uncomfortable with ambiguity, the spectator’s self-critical questioning frequently rebounds on Kiefer. For this reason, Kiefer’s intentions, for the most part as they can be read from his work, become of great importance for the critical reception surrounding his art. However, because there are no ultimate answers to be found in Kiefer’s canvas (generally, his best works support highly contradictory interpretations), the spectator’s search for clear meanings reflects back again on the inquirer and results in an extremely disquieting state of mind. There are no definitive statements here, only a series of highly uncomfortable questions demanding a decision that cannot be found in the work itself. And in this way, Kiefer’s painting points to a larger problem characteristic of the interpretation of culture: the multiplication of different, sometimes equally valid frameworks of interpretation that we can use to understand and explain works of art. His work thus asks us to reflect on precisely how - and with the help of what points of reference - we can adjudicate between different, often conflicting points of view.

Kiefer’s extremely varied critical reception, both inside Germany and abroad, demonstrates quite well this feature of hermeneutic undecidability - a feature characteristic not only of Iron Path but of his best works as a whole. And although many critics mention his intentional ambiguity, few deal directly with the problem of Kiefer’s hermeneutic undecidability; that is, almost no one attempts to explain both how and why many of Kiefer’s works simultaneously support both left-wing and fascist readings. Instead, in the writing about Kiefer, a somewhat simplified account of Kiefer’s critical reception has developed. It holds that the German critical establishment was initially very critical of Kiefer’s work in the early 1980s - a moment during which they considered his art to be regressive, potentially fascist, and damaging to Germany’s image on the international stage - and that it was only later, in the mid-1980s, when Kiefer began to receive positive critical acceptance abroad, that his German critics changed their minds. And although there is a definite truth to this stereotype - Kiefer’s overall critical reception in Germany was initially fairly negative and became more positive only as his international acclaim grew - there are also a number of very important exceptions. As a whole, German critics have always expressed ambivalence about Kiefer’s art, as have, very importantly, the American critics whose positive evaluations were considered instrumental in securing Kiefer’s position as an internationally renowned artist.

This simplified account of Kiefer’s reception thus distorts the nature of his effect on his audiences. It ignores the fact that Kiefer’s reception has been further muddied by the volume of often quite intelligent critical writing on his work that has originated in show and museum catalogues. Such criticism, which does not break down along national lines, demonstrates a far more positive stance than reviews by critics who have a greater institutional distance from Kiefer. Yet, although this has been the case, it is still not true that only curators and art historians employed by museums have commented positively on Kiefer’s works (a charge that was still heard frequently in the German press in 1985 and 1986). The intentional ambiguity of his works, although angering some non-museum-affiliated critics and art historians, has also caused others to respond quite favorably to the undecidable dilemmas that they pose. The sim-
plified account of Kiefer’s reception also tends to separate the spectator who responds positively to Kiefer’s works from the spectator who responds critically—a position that has the effect of denying the works their undecidability and the spectator his or her feelings of ambivalence.

Contrary to this position, engaged contemplation of Kiefer’s works tends to engender both positive and negative reactions in the same viewer. And it is this combined attraction and repulsion that we feel for Kiefer’s works juxtaposed with the existential questions that they raise that potentially generates the sphere of public discourse alluded to at the beginning of this chapter. As mentioned above, Kiefer’s works force their viewers to take a stand vis-à-vis the choices they embody, question Kiefer’s own intentions in making the work, and in general seek outside points of reference in order to compare and adjudicate different interpretations that arise from the ambiguous play of sensory and meaningful elements. In this way, Kiefer’s works engender inquiry into the historical contexts and symbols they employ, empathic projection into Kiefer’s own situation as a postwar German artist, reflection on the frameworks of meaning that we use when viewing his works, and, most important, discourse with others in our lifeworld as to the relative “fit” of our interpretations. Although, of course, not every work by Kiefer instantly generates a public debate, their hermeneutic undecidability tends to gather an interpretive community around them. In this way, by evoking problems rather than solutions, the truth they generate is a public one, and the political effect they seek is to bring people together to discuss differences and potentially find a common ground. Although it would be ludicrous to say that works of art by themselves can generate an active public sphere, Kiefer’s best works at least move in this direction.

Heidegger’s Model of the Great Work of Art

Kiefer creates works that are hermeneutically undecidable in order to help create a public sphere and to allow truth to emerge discursively within his own lifeworld as well as within the lifeworlds of his various spectators (which, at the current moment, may or may not be the same as his own). Interestingly, another aspect of Heidegger’s mid-1930s aesthetics, his account of how a work of art produces its play of multiple meanings, can aid our understanding of the play of contradictory interpretations as they are supported by Kiefer’s works. Heidegger calls this production of meaning by the great work of art in conjunction with its spectators the “happening of truth” (das Geschehnis der Wahrheit). His most extensive account of this characteristic of the work of art—one of the primary forms of “work” he analyzed over his long career—is contained in his 1935/1936 essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” (Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes), which was written concurrently with the lecture course on early Greek philosophy and art that became Introduction to Metaphysics. As he did in Being and Time, Heidegger uses a circular, hermeneutic method of interpretation in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” And once again, he relies on conceptual destruction in order to clear away the everyday preconceptions that block our access to the “true” nature of the work of art. Moreover, although all
direct references to phenomenology are dropped, Heidegger retains numerous aspects of the method, including phenomenology’s procedure of varying that which it attempts to define. Accordingly, Heidegger develops his definition of the work of art through detailed comparisons of the art work with two related types of entity: “mere things” [bloße Dinge] – Heidegger’s example is a granite block – and “equipment” [Zeug], which Heidegger analyzes through a pair of peasant’s shoes. Through his back-and-forth analysis of works, things, and equipment, Heidegger shows how the everyday understanding of each is determined by the matter-form distinction, which, Heidegger argues, most properly belongs to the essence of equipment. Taking the Western dominance of the matter-form distinction as a starting point, Heidegger then questions why we normally take the main characteristic of equipment to be the primary characteristic of all things.83

In order to answer this question, Heidegger analyzes a piece of equipment, not as it exists in everyday life as he did in Being and Time, but as it is represented in a work of art. He describes, in other words, a pair of peasant’s shoes depicted in a painting by Van Gogh. Through Heidegger’s description, the shoes reveal not only themselves but also, as was the case with the works described in Introduction to Metaphysics, the context or world of which they are a part as well as the ground of pure phenomenality and nonarticulated meaning that supports this world. Heidegger’s description is illuminating, and not simply because it presents a detailed example of what he sees as the horizontal network of meaning in which the shoes exist: a constellation of presencing and absencing through which human beings contend with Being and thereby produce the real.84 In addition, Heidegger’s description reveals his romantic, almost kitschy vision of the pure and unspoiled country life of the peasant – another stereotype horribly misused by the Nazis.

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbirth, and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth, and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.85

Through his description of the peasant shoes, Heidegger suggests that works of art allow their spectators to know what a thing or being is in truth.86 In the case of Van Gogh’s painting, the work allows one to see not only the shoes but also that which constitutes their essential nature as equipment, namely, their “reliability” [Verläßlichkeit]. According to Heidegger, the shoes’ reliability is the system of references and assignments through which the peasant woman relates to her “earth” [Erde] and “world” [Welt].87 Thus, as Heidegger puts it, “the work did not, as it might seem at first, serve merely for a better
visualizing of what a piece of equipment is. Rather, the equipmentality of equipment first genuinely arrives at its appearance through the work and only in the work.” For Heidegger, works of art have now assumed the role previously assigned to the disclosive activity of authentic Dasein: they have become an origin of primordial truth. Like primordial truth in Being and Time and “On the Essence of Truth,” the happening of truth in the work of art is a rich and heterogeneous type of disclosure – one that conceals as well as reveals. Heidegger calls this play of presencing and absencing, characteristic of the happening of truth in the work of art, a “strife” [Streit] between earth and world.

By 1935, Heidegger’s conception of the world has changed significantly from the one put forward in Being and Time. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the world is no longer in the first place the world of the individual subject but, rather, as is also the case with his political speeches and Introduction to Metaphysics, the world of a “historical humanity” – a world that Heidegger understands to be a hierarchy of meaning (or a constellation of presencing and absencing) through which a specific human community poses decisive questions having to do with its historical existence. These questions, which concern a people’s “victory and defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and slavery,” resemble authentic Dasein’s questions about its ownmost possibilities for existence and yet are couched on a far more massive scale. Thus, although Heidegger still understands the world as making possible individual decisions as well, the world produced by the art work is above all a site of communal and historical decisions. As such, it is the primary world – the fundamental horizon through which not only the historical community but also everything else that is gains its scope, limits, and trajectory.

The art work’s earth, on the other hand, is the sheltering agent out of which things, beings, and the world arise. According to Heidegger, although we can master the earth through science and technology, we cannot ever really disclose it. Thus, as the sheltering agent of historical existence, the earth shatters every attempt to penetrate it. Instead, the earth appears only as that which is not disclosable in an intelligible way – although its concealment is by no means uniform. Heidegger indicates the nonuniform nature of the work’s “concealment” [Verbergung] by distinguishing between the work’s concealment as “refusal” [Versagen] and its concealment as “dissembling” [Verstellen]. In the first case, nothing appears; in the second, a being appears but presents itself as other than it really is. Although Heidegger explicitly states that the earth is not the same as “matter” [Stoff], it is probably best to understand the earth as indicating the work’s materials, its (nonintelligible) phenomenal presence, and the double concealment that makes possible the work’s disclosure of things, beings, and the world. Through the earth’s concealed aspects (its nature as a hidden foundation for all appearing), the earth is linked to Dasein’s past in Being and Time – the concealed and never fully masterable ground of Dasein’s existence – as well as to the horizon of darkness that is always connected with truth in “On the Essence of Truth,” the hidden background that makes possible both the appearing and the forgetting of Being. Heidegger’s concept of the earth thus highlights the fact that all attempts to create meaning are embedded in a preexisting cultural tradition as well as the fact that all intelligibility is historically
conditioned and, thus, that any particular form of intelligibility potentially exists for only a fixed amount of time.

According to Heidegger, earth and world – the two aspects of art’s truth – are essentially different but never separated. The world always strives to surmount the earth, whereas the earth tends to draw the world back into itself and keep it there. Thus, for Heidegger, the happening of truth in the work of art is essentially a process of oscillation or conflict in which a being first emerges along with the hierarchy of meaning that makes it possible, and then both being and meaning return into the sheltering ground that supports them and hides them from appearance. Heidegger presents his readers with an example of this interchange – or play of presencing and absencing – that is characteristic of the strife of earth and world in a description of an unnamed Greek temple. As Heidegger puts it,

A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple. This presence of the god is in itself the extension and delimitation of the precinct as holy precinct.

Thus, according to Heidegger, by both concealing and revealing the god, the Greek temple makes the god present, thereby bringing the holy to appearance in the rocky valley. The temple, in other words, permeates its site with the significance of the early Greeks’ cosmological and religious world view – a view that sustains the Greeks’ development as a historical people. In this way, the work is seen to gather the community together by providing it with a vision of its common destiny and vocation.

It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. Only from and in this expanse does the people first return to itself for the fulfillment of its vocation.

At the same time, however, the physical and perceptual characteristics of the temple and its site do not simply disappear with the successive presentations of the god, the holy, and finally the world of the historical Greeks. Instead, within the successive disclosures of these nested hierarchies of meaning, the normally overlooked facets of the temple and its site appear with a renewed and overwhelming material presence.

Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the mystery of that rock’s clumsy yet spontaneous support. Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to light the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple’s firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrasts with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea.
Nor is it simply the case that the physical presence of the site is made to alternate with the overarching cosmological and religious significance of the Greek god, the holy, and the world. In addition to these overarching frameworks of meaning, the things and beings that exist within the temple’s precinct are themselves brought to appearance, showing themselves in terms of their own essential forms or outlines. As Heidegger puts it, through the temple, “[t]ree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are.” And although Heidegger does not state it explicitly, it is as if the successive presentations disclosed in his description of the temple take one another’s place, the presencing of one aspect leading to the concealment of another.

This play of disclosure and concealment involving the material and phenomenal characteristics of the artwork, the various types of things or beings it brings to appearance, the particular forms or outlines that surround the things and beings that appear, and the appearance of the primary hierarchies of meaning of the Greek world – the fundamental normative or orienting concepts of the historical-cultural community in which the work arose – is, for Heidegger, the happening of truth in the work of art. And as the happening of the truth, the work allows the open to appear – the horizontal context in which a historical people gains access to both that which is and themselves. In this way, the work of art allows the real to come to appearance, that is, what a given community intersubjectively holds to exist. The real is thus not something ahistorical – something that endures unchangeingly and for all time. Rather, it is inherently historical and configured differently at different times and in different cultures. (This, of course, does not mean for Heidegger that there cannot be overlaps between different historical-cultural moments – i.e., that certain aspects of the real cannot remain substantially the same over time.) For Heidegger, the work of art is essential for a people because it both defines what is real for the first time and shows its historical nature. In this way, a work of art also causes a people to recognize their necessary role in maintaining and developing what has been opened up and articulated by the leading works of their culture.

Heidegger held that great works of art command the agreement and assent of the entire community. Embodying the fundamental decisions of world-historical creators, they produce a new vision of both the world and the “essence” of human nature that starts a given people along a path of communal development. As Heidegger points out in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in addition to needing creators for its production, a great work of art also depends on the existence of a community to receive it. Or, as Heidegger puts it, “what is created, cannot itself come into being without those who preserve it [Bewahrenden].” The preservers are those in a community who receive the work’s “thrust” [Stoß] – who perceive, in other words, what is extraordinary about it. Their preservation consists in standing within the openness that a work has created and exercising a communal will. This mode of communal willing is “not the deliberate action of a subject, but the opening up of human being, out of its captivity in that which is, to the openness of being.” By this Heidegger means that the preservers attempt to enlarge and elaborate the truth set up by the work. But, as communal willing, preserving is also a social and political act – it grounds our “being for and with

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one another” [das Für- und Mitteinandersein]. The interplay between a work and its preservers thus creates a larger thrust, which spreads beyond the preservers to the community at large and helps this larger community decide its mode of being a collective subject. And in this way, art is one of the very important foundations upon which a community begins or enters history.

Unfortunately, despite Heidegger’s insistence on the necessary participation of a work’s audience in the truth it produces, for the same reasons outlined above in the section on Heidegger’s political speeches, the will exercised by a work’s historical community is in actuality a passive following. Although there are certain preservers who do in fact help create the truth of the work of art—and here Heidegger is primarily thinking of “spiritual leaders” like himself—the speech community in which the poets and thinkers actually exist is for the most part not invited to play such an active role in the interpretation of works of art. As in the “Rectorial Address,” the spiritual world opened up by such works can only be interpretively received and transmitted by an exceptional few. The intersubjective, discursive community evoked by Kiefer’s works is thus different from the preservers called for in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Kiefer’s projected community is less elite, larger, and both contemporary and historical. Thus, unlike Heidegger’s writing in the 1930s, Kiefer’s works attempt to provoke an actual as well as a historical dialogue.

**Kiefer’s Paths (Again) and the Neoclassical Architecture Series**

Despite his disappointing account of the preservers, Heidegger’s model of the great work of art provides an interesting framework within which to understand the hermeneutically undecidable conflict of interpretations set up by Kiefer’s *Iron Path*. Although *Iron Path* gives its viewers no sense that the various things and beings that it discloses—for example, the climbing shoes, the tracks, the lead rocks, the olive branches, the barren landscape, and the night sky—in any way add up to a coherent world system, the painting’s production of multiple and differing interpretations fits perfectly Heidegger’s account of the appearance and disappearance of nested hierarchies of meaning in the art work. At different moments in our contemplation of Kiefer’s work, the shoes, the tracks, the gold, the lead, the iron, and the depth/flatness dichotomy each appear in their particularity, only to disappear again as they take part in forming different unifying or general interpretations. In turn, these overarching interpretations—the alchemical path to the new spiritual world, the victimizing train ride to the gas chambers—appear only to be canceled out again by the manifestation of additional elements that contradict and thus undermine any sense of a final or complete meaning. In addition, at other moments in one’s contemplation of *Iron Path*, no overarching interpretation appears. Instead, the spectator is caught up in a rich but seemingly senseless visual play evoked by Kiefer’s heterogeneous formal and material elements.

Furthermore, in light of Heidegger’s interpretation of the unnamed Van Gogh painting, another general interpretation arises that, though not previously discussed, legitimately occupies a place in the set of meanings generated by
Kiefer's undecidable work. Looked at from this "Heideggerian" perspective, *Iron Path* may also be said to disclose the "truth" or essence of equipment. According to this interpretation, the manifestation of the climbing shoes and train tracks in turn direct the spectator's attention to the context that makes them possible - a context that, in this case, is not the reliability of the world of the peasant woman, but the cold, yet well-functioning instrumental world of electricity, transportation, photography, and the technologies of long-distance and mass communication. Indeed, upon closer examination, traces of technology appear all over *Iron Path*’s rough surface. In addition to the cast shoes and the industrial "subject matter," the painting’s reproductive photographic base shows through in its quasi-mechanical one-point perspective, and the work as a whole also asserts its technologically augmented power through its vast scale and its ability to bear the weight that is attached to its surface. By evoking the technological background conditions that made the "Final Solution" possible, Kiefer's work thus points to the dark side of the industrial revolution that has radically transformed the earth over the past few centuries. As suggested by Kiefer’s canvas, this dark side of human technology seems to overpower the needs and desires of modern humans and bend them to its inhuman “will” instead. In addition, because the painting conjoins modern technology with alchemy - an earlier, religiously based human attempt to transform and manipulate earthly matter - *Iron Path* suggests that the human desire to control and shape nature, demonstrated so clearly in the technological age, exists before this instrumental time and foreshadows it.

The technological interpretation produced by *Iron Path* in conjunction with Heidegger’s text also eventually subsides - a result of the painting’s earthly (material-phenomenal) qualities once again coming to the fore. In time, this technological interpretation will quite possibly be supplanted by other equally valid frameworks as yet undisclosed — although it also seems clear from the work that the interpretations supported by *Iron Path* are not infinite. In the end, the painting’s various spectators are perhaps left with the impression that *Iron Path* is, in a certain sense, also "about" the play of presencing and absencing — the successive strivings and multiplications of world and earth — in the “happening” of the work of art. *Iron Path*, in other words, seems, like the antifoundational side of Heidegger’s aesthetics, to demonstrate art’s polemical essence — the fact that the disclosure of a work of art always involves a particular alternation between things, beings, interpretive contexts that grant them a larger meaning, and an enveloping phenomenal ground that both supports everything that appears and at the same time denies it permanence. Yet, unlike Heidegger’s decisive aesthetics — which recognizes the oscillating character of the networks of meaning and the phenomenal profiles produced by a work of art, but paradoxically still holds that works of art help create and define particular historical worlds — *Iron Path* suggests that there is never, at any particular moment in time, only a single historical world to be grounded or defined. Indeed, because of its undecidability, *Iron Path* evokes a sense that there are many different worlds in which members of the same community may exist and that the question today is not how to develop a single, unified world, but rather how to coordinate the array of different collective cultural systems (with differing “levels” of intersubjectivity) in which human beings
already find themselves. The differences of interpretation evoked by Iron Path, in other words, should lead the spectator to recognize – in an open and receptive way – the differences of others and to acknowledge that no one ever stands completely within a single world or upon a single earth. Indeed, one of the central insights that the analysis of Iron Path generates is that one should be suspicious of any dominant framework or single hierarchy of meaning and instead seek to recognize – and live with – differences.\textsuperscript{10}

To preserve Kiefer’s works is thus to keep their undecidability alive, while at the same time elucidating the multiple worlds and earths that each image evokes. Contrary to Heidegger’s formulation of how works of art should be received in order to preserve their truth, an essential part of preserving Kiefer’s works is to engage others in discussions about them. Only in this way do we have any chance to discover a realm of normativity – which, in the case of Kiefer’s art, means arriving at a truth that, more often than not, consists of a network of differences that we can only agree to negotiate. The “we” invoked here – both in this text and in Kiefer’s art – is thus not a universal “we” but a potential “we.” It is a form of address directed to both spectators and readers that posits a point of identification or “common ground” – something that unites “us” as humans – as a means of inviting either assent or disagreement.

Another important (and slightly earlier) moment in Kiefer’s work can help explain this concept of a potential “we.” This moment consists of a series of paintings made between 1980 and 1983 wherein he appropriates the imagery of neoclassical architecture in order to experiment with his themes of German and artist identity. Beginning in the years now often designated as the moment of Kiefer’s “formal breakthrough,” 1980–1982, these works include a series of watercolors entitled To the Unknown Painter [Dem unbekannten Maler], from 1980\textsuperscript{12} and 1982,\textsuperscript{13} as well as the large canvases Interior [Innenraum] (1981),\textsuperscript{14} The Stairs [Die Treppe] (1982–1983),\textsuperscript{15} To the Unknown Painter [Dem unbekannten Maler] (1983),\textsuperscript{16} and Athanor [Athanor] (1983–1984)\textsuperscript{17} (Figure 43). (Like a number of Kiefer’s works, Athanor is based on a photograph of a Nazi architectural monument; in this case the Courtyard of Albert Speer’s New Reich Chancellery in Berlin [Figure 44].) As a whole, these overlaid architectural paintings suggest a new, more self-assured stage of Kiefer’s art, wherein a greatly increased materiality and formal complexity come to play a role in his art commensurate to the one played by his heterogeneous thematic associations.\textsuperscript{18}

Often incorporating oil, acrylic, photographs, woodcuts, and straw, these works reinforce their hermeneutic undecidability with an elaborate and destabilizing visual play. Every part of their surfaces is worked, articulated, and demanding of the viewer’s attention. Yet, while examining the pure formal qualities of the paint and other materials, the spectator keeps discovering representational elements, thereby slipping through the surface and into a fictive architectural space. Through this play between surface and depth – abstraction and representation – the spectator’s eye is kept moving and unable to rest. And as the analysis of Iron Path has already shown, this visual play affects the meaning production and decay of the works’ oscillating interpretations. Like Iron Path, Kiefer’s neoclassical architecture series thus fits important aspects of Heidegger’s mid-1930s aesthetic theory at the same time as it radically tests its limits. More

FIGURE 44. (left) Albert Speer. Courtyard, New Reich Chancellery, Berlin (ca. 1939).
specifically, these paintings multiply the play of earth and world characteristic of Heidegger's model of the work of art but also render problematic Heidegger's fixation on the early Greeks as a historical people who grounded their existence through their art and architecture – a fixation that was to some extent echoed by Hitler and the National Socialists.

In Interior (Figure 45), for example, Kiefer once again represents an empty room with a central vanishing point skewed slightly to the left. Here, a lone fire burns in the middle of the extreme foreground. As in the wooden-interior series, the representation seems to be of a memorial hall, empty except for a burning fire and the suggestion of smoke. Like Germany's Spiritual Heroes (Figure 20), the work evokes a feeling in the spectator that soon the entire structure may go up in flames: not only is fire represented in the image, but the paper and straw scattered on the painting's massive surface suggest that the work itself could be set ablaze. Unlike Germany's Spiritual Heroes, however, which at least began its life as a skewed representation of Kiefer's attic studio, Interior is a copy of the Mosaic Room in the now destroyed New Reich Chancellery in Berlin (Figure 46).\(^\text{119}\) Dating from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Reich Chancellery was the site of the offices of the German chancellor – the most powerful figure in government after the German kaiser.\(^\text{120}\) After the kaiser's abdication on November 9, 1918 and Adolf Hitler's consolidation of the positions of chancellor and president on August 2, 1934, the Chancellery became synonymous with the figure of Hitler and, as the official abode and workplace of the fuhrer of the German people, symbolic of the nation as a whole.\(^\text{121}\) In order to better serve its new function as the symbol of Germany’s “Third Reich,” Hitler had the old Chancellery partially razed and then reconstructed between January 1938 and January 1939.\(^\text{122}\) Designed by the architect Albert Speer to evoke the Nazi’s imperial aspirations, the New Chancellery was consciously constructed to symbolize the new Germany.\(^\text{123}\) In addition, it was also intended to assert the Third Reich’s historical continuity with the great ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome – something that it achieved through its imposing size and mass-produced classicism. Finally, as we see in the surviving photographs of the structure, the New Reich Chancellery’s fascist neoclassical style – projected by the building’s gigantic proportions, its pilasters, the richness and luster of its marble floor and walls, its huge gridlike skylight, and its almost total emphasis on regular horizontal and vertical lines that rhythmically break up the planes of the room – connoted authority, discipline, and permanence: precisely the qualities the National Socialists desired to see manifested in their new German state.

By appropriating and photographically inflating a recognizable Nazi image to create his Interior, Kiefer thus exits the space of his own studio, and, through the device of the one-point photographic perspective, forces his spectators to seek selfhood in one of the sites of the discredited National Socialist regime. (This process of seeking selfhood, as was noted in Chapter 1, is a process in which the spectator moves back and forth from the ideal vantage point – the point of maximum identification – to other vantage points, from which one can critically reflect on the point of maximum identification at the same time as one examines one's own self-identity from overlapping existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic points of view.) The specific Nazi site, however, is over-
laid with various natural and material elements, including oil, acrylic, straw, shellac, and woodcut - materials that recall different types and historical moments of art-making practice. In addition to the formal ambiguity they produce, these elements also create a torn and uneven facture that makes the room seem weathered and antique. The scene looks both old - ancient or imperial - and, through its historical specificity and photographic character, like an image from the twentieth century. Thus it is impossible to assign its subject matter to a particular time frame; neither the Nazi world nor the ancient world seems to quite fit. Nor, for that matter, is it possible to assign any one meaning to the work’s historical juxtapositions. Is Kiefer monumentalizing the National Socialist past - coating it with a rich patina that suggests the tragedy but also the might of this frightful period in German history? Or does Kiefer criticize German history in general, suggesting that the Nazi “interlude” spans more than the years 1933 to 1945? Kiefer’s work, which does not provide enough information for the spectator to decide one way or the other, thus evokes hermeneutic undecidability on both a historical and an intentional level. It therefore challenges the spectator by making us aware of the many situations in which we can determine neither clear-cut historical breaks nor the strategic use to which historical events are put by later cultural practitioners. In this way, Kiefer’s work inspires reflection on the problem of historical consciousness at the end of the twentieth century – on the fact that too many old worlds and old authorities live on in the present and are often accessible through the same signifiers. To distinguish the past from the present and to understand which past the present actually draws upon and for what reasons is today a nearly impossible – yet vitally necessary – task of culture.

Kiefer’s Interior potentially evokes radically divergent interpretations from different spectators. And the nonuniversal “we” that this work helps its spectators visualize is one that is a combination of all the different potential responses. As Kiefer’s international reception suggests, this “we” is the product of a discourse that exceeds national and linguistic boundaries. Moreover, as the product of such an international discourse, the “we” produced by Interior both problematizes the traditional concept of “national identity” and points to the practical discursive ground through which new identities may be negotiated. An “American” spectator, for example, might applaud Kiefer’s act of representation because it suggests a suspiciousness of Germany in the 1980s – a decade that did, indeed, witness numerous attempts to “normalize” the Nazi past. The juxtaposition of the title (literally, “interior space”) with the architectural site could thus be interpreted as showing that the sense of self-identity that the Chancellery was designed to convey – a self-identity that was conditioned to find its fulfillment in absolute subservience to the total state – still conditions German consciousness in the present day. Kiefer’s work would thus be understood as a critical warning to all contemporary Germans (Kiefer included) to look inside themselves and confront the fascist elements within their own psyches. A “German” spectator, on the other hand, might see the work as significantly less critical. The Mosaic Room, one could say, was one of the first rooms one would enter after passing through the Chancellery courtyard. It was separated from Hitler’s offices by another ceremonial room and a long marble gallery nearly five hundred feet
The German spectator might thus read the distance that still exists between the site and the figure of Hitler as emphasizing the distance that exists between contemporary German consciousness and the German dictator. In addition, Kiefer’s “antiquing” of the site does not conform to the way the destroyed room actually looked (Figure 47). In photographs of the destroyed Mosaic Room, we see many examples of the twisted iron debris that Speer deplored because they made ruins look unheroic.126 Instead, Kiefer’s reworked representation of the Chancellery corresponds much more closely to the way in which Speer intended the eventual ruins of Nazi buildings to appear. As Speer put it,

[B]uildings of modern construction were poorly suited to form that ‘bridge of tradition’ to future generations which Hitler was calling for. It was hard to imagine that rusting heaps of rubble could communicate these heroic inspirations which Hitler admired in the monuments of the past. My ‘theory [of ruin value]’ was intended to deal with this dilemma. By using special materials and by applying certain principles of statics, we should be able to build structures which even in a state of decay, after hundreds or (such were our reckonings) thousands of years would more or less resemble Roman models.127

If aware of this fact, such a spectator might thus interpret Kiefer’s representation as serving a project explicitly articulated by the Nazis to control the image
Decisiveness and Undecidability

FIGURE 46. Albert Speer; Mosaic Room, New Reich Chancellery, Berlin (ca. 1939).

FIGURE 47. Albert Speer; Mosaic Room, New Reich Chancellery, Berlin (ca. 1945).
of their empire for future generations—a project intended to cloak their historical moment in a mantle of grandeur.

Other spectators, depending on their background or historical knowledge, will come up with other interpretations—emphasizing a different historical world (the Greek one perhaps) and a different earth (possibly the materials, appearances, and background conditions that both support and undermine an ancient-world interpretation). Thus, for example, one could read Kiefer’s painting as suggesting that the roots of modernity lie buried in classical antiquity. According to this interpretation, the organized form and seemingly mathematical precision of the temple structure could be understood as anticipating the scientific rationality that was to emerge with the development of the West—just as an open roof might eventually give way to a massive, glass skylight articulated by iron supports. Or, to suggest another example, one could read Kiefer’s painting in relation to the moment of Heidegger’s decisive aesthetics. Interpreted as illuminating the world in which Heidegger produced his aesthetic theory, Interior reveals the danger of too decisively or univocally locating normative meaning within the walls of a classical structure. Here, the photographically produced image that forms the design for the paint and other materials to follow—and that thus supports them and juts through their phenomenal configurations—might suggest that Heidegger’s entire concept of the classical is shaped by concerns characteristic of the twentieth century.

Moreover, as suggested by a careful reading of the critical literature, it should be in no way assumed that Germans will necessarily criticize Kiefer or that Americans will always applaud him. Nor, for that matter, should we presuppose that Kiefer’s paintings are somehow only designed for German or American spectators. The Jewish spectator, to pick another potential viewing subject explicitly intended by Kiefer, might—or might not—come up with completely different readings. Or, since a Jewish subject can also be German or American, this viewer might complicate the simple dichotomy articulated above. What is central to Kiefer’s work, however, is that its various spectators converse—both face to face and through successive works of cultural production. If they do, then the “truth” that emerges from their dialogues around Kiefer’s reconfigured Nazi site will include an articulation and commingling of the various points of view or subject positions to which the image speaks. In this way, Interior helps produce its truth as a rich network of differences—a set of conflicting relations that articulate the diverse histories of different cultural groups as well as the disparate pressures they have experienced. Stereotypical concepts of “Germans,” “Americans,” and “Jews” could thereby be broken down, different backgrounds articulated, and a suspicion of univocal interpretations generated. In this way, the hermeneutic undecidability and the multiplication of different worlds and earths created by Kiefer’s work potentially allow its spectators to discursively construct a nonuniversal “we.”

Finally, adding an unpleasant emotional valence to the Interior’s evocation of hermeneutic undecidability on the intentional and historical levels and its multiplication of different worlds and earths, is the implicit violence of Kiefer’s work. Because of its size and its blown-up one-point perspective, and further enhanced by the gridlike articulation of the walls, floor, and ceiling, the gigan-
tic painting forces itself into the viewer’s own physical reality to such an extent that it retards the spectator’s ability to stand in a position other than that of the ideal vantage point. Despite its strong perspective scheme, however, even from the point of maximum identification, the representational space of Interior is multistable. As a result of the material build-up on the photograph through Kiefer’s addition of layers of oil, acrylic, straw, and printed paper, the image seems to shift between projecting backward into the fictive space and projecting forward into the actual space of the spectator. One of the primary destabilizing effects of this material build-up can be seen at the line, below and slightly left of the center of the canvas, representing the back edge of the hall’s windowed ceiling. Above this line, as would be expected, the spectator has a tendency to read the room as projecting back into space. Below this line, however, the spectator is lead – in part by the projecting collage of black-and-white woodcut elements along the bottom of the work – to read the painting’s brown and black back interior wall as projecting forward and into the spectator’s physical space.

Kiefer thus adds a further unpleasant “edge” to the spectator’s sense of Kiefer’s questionable intentions and ambiguous histories by forcing the viewer into a location that is not only identifiable Nazi but also twisting and spatially ambiguous. In this way, Kiefer undermines the solid authority connoted by the classicism of the image. Not only does the shifting image seem unsuited for the authoritarian unification of a community, but the multistable space and jagged, “all-over” surface articulation, which run counter to the work’s representational structure, make the spectator’s eyes move from part to part without ever finding a fixed resting point. The “steadfastness” and “repose” of the Greek temple, which, despite Heidegger’s emphasis on the play of its earth and world, are also prominent characteristics of the work in his account in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” are nowhere to be found in Interior. Thus, while Kiefer’s giant canvas recalls Heidegger’s model of the work of art in its constant movement and its evocation of conflict on multiple levels, it renders problematic Heidegger’s unquestioned assumption that Greek society could function as a historical origin that would renew twentieth-century Germany as well as Heidegger’s contention that great works of art can single-handedly found particular moments in history.

Art and Violence

As suggested by the above analyses of Iron Path and Interior, in addition to the consistent undecidability evoked by Kiefer’s books and paintings, an ominous undertone of violence pervades Kiefer’s art. As we stand before, page through, or move around his various heterogeneous works, we feel Kiefer attempting to control us and manipulate us physically. This undertone of violence is closely connected to Kiefer’s deployment of overlapping existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic perspectives. These overlapping perspectives force the spectator’s mind and body into tainted and multistable spaces where he or she must confront unpleasant questions containing ambiguous possibilities for authentic
and inauthentic self-transcendence. Heidegger’s decisive aesthetics justifies the violent actions of the great creators on the basis of their natural superiority and the importance of their world-historical mission. Although he never mentions the potential cost of their actions in terms of human suffering, Heidegger affirms that the creators are permitted to act violently – beyond the bounds of all law – precisely because their mission is to found or institute a “new” world.

The connection between art and violence in the works of Kiefer and Heidegger will now be explored in somewhat greater detail. In addition to manipulating the spectator’s body through his strong perspectives, Kiefer explores the artist’s potential for violence in a number of other ways as well. Furthermore, Kiefer also explores the related issue of the artist’s potential to endure – and even succumb to – violence. This violent side to Kiefer’s aesthetic interests, which adds an unpleasant or dangerous “valence” to the hermeneutic undecidability of many of his works, is a consistent element in his art. Kiefer’s aesthetic meditations on art and violence deal with many of the same issues raised by Heidegger’s decisive aesthetics: issues having to do with the artist’s rights and duties vis-à-vis the public. Unlike Heidegger’s treatment of artistic violence as ultimately necessary and thus unproblematic, however, Kiefer’s works treat the relationship between art and violence as extremely complex and undecidable. They produce this relation, in other words, as a question to be debated and not as a necessary evil, the existence of which must be stoically borne.

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger portrays the world-historical creator as both a violent individual and a victim of the overpowering violence of Being. Analyzing the words of the chorus in Sophocles’ *Antigone* in order to determine what the essence of humanity was for the early Greeks, Heidegger focuses on the fact that the chorus calls humans “dienoton,” “the strangest” [das Unheimlichste]. Through this characterization of humans as the strangest, Sophocles’s chorus connects the essence of humanity with the “overpowering power” [überwältigendes Walten] – another term, according to Heidegger, that the early Greeks used to indicate Being. For the early Greeks, in other words, both humans and Being are essentially forms of violent power: terrible forces destined to do battle with one another. The ancient Greek subject, essentially understood by Heidegger as creative, is thus the strangest precisely because he or she violently confronts Being, the overpowering power, and “gathers the power and brings it to manifestness.” Through this pursuit of the overpowering power of Being, which he or she brings to appearance in the strife produced by the work of art, the creative Greek moves beyond all human home, limit, and law. Here, beyond the confines of the city, beyond all human boundaries and constraints, the creative one opens up to Being and violently grapples with it in order to bring it into limit and form in a work. By contending with Being in this way, however, the creative individual is necessarily destroyed. As Heidegger puts it,

The conflict between the overwhelming presence of the totality of what is and the individual's violent being-there creates the possibility of downfall into the issueless and placeless: disaster. But disaster and the possibility of disaster do not occur only at the end, when a single act of power fails, when the violent one makes a false move; no, this disaster is funda-
mental, it governs and waits in the conflict between violence and the overpowering. Violence against the preponderant power of Being must shatter against Being, if Being rules in its essence, as physis, as emerging power.\textsuperscript{135}

The creative ancient Greek’s violence and victimization, according to Heidegger, are thus part of the same process. Being, the overpoweringly violent power, compels the ancient Greek creators to disclose it and to use violence to withstand Being’s assault. However, in the creation of a work – and, thus, in the taming and restricting of Being – the creators, themselves, are shattered, destroyed by their attempt to bring Being to appearance.

Heidegger’s account of this doubly violent relationship between the ancient Greek creators and Being is significant for three reasons. First, it articulates an implicit legitimation for the violence of the creators’ actions. Although the creators, with their active disregard for human law, potentially destroy others through their creative activities, these others are sacrificed for the good of the community. Moreover, since the creators are also destroyed through their acts of violent creation, their ruthless deeds are not motivated by personal gain. Thus, because the sacrifices they make are to serve their historical moment as a whole, the violence of the creators is in a certain sense “justified.” Second, Heidegger’s account suggests that the suppression of references to his own body in his writing after 1930 – which marks his rejection of an authentic dialogic form of existentialism and his move to a phenomenologically and hermeneutically secured “intersubjective” standpoint – is connected to his ready acceptance of the destruction of the bodies of the cultural elite in his aesthetic theory. It seems that the language of resoluteness and action that Heidegger adopts in the early 1930s is sustained in the late 1930s by a suppression of all references to the physical body other than a sacrificial, destructive one. That a body could have another function within the political sphere is an issue not broached by Heidegger’s aesthetics. Third, although the great Greek creators originally lived as human beings, their importance to the ancient Greek world, according to Heidegger, stems from the works they passed on to their community. As Heidegger puts it, “The being-there of historical humanity means: to be posited as the breach into which the preponderant power of Being bursts in its appearing, in order that this breach itself should shatter against Being.”\textsuperscript{136} A mere gap or rift to be destroyed when Being comes to appearance, the creator becomes a means used by Being in order to make manifest its normative power or “truth.” Because Being is, for Heidegger, the ultimate origin of the work,\textsuperscript{137} the particularity of the human side of the work’s genesis can be downplayed and finally overlooked.

In marked contrast to Heidegger’s conception of the necessary connection of art and violence in his mid-1930s aesthetic theory, Kiefer’s artistic representations of this relation – which he has probed since almost the beginning of his career – bracket neither the particularity of the artist who produces the work nor the real world and others as potential victims of the artist’s violence. Kiefer’s representations of aesthetic violence thus seem far more complex and critical than Heidegger’s accounts of violence in his decisive aesthetics, precisely because Kiefer’s works also deal with the self-serving causes of the
artist's savagery and the suffering the artist inflicts. To show the complexity of Kiefer's treatment of this issue, a series of examples dating from the 1960s to the 1990s will be briefly analyzed. In the following examples, only the ways in which Kiefer's works conjoin art and violence will be considered. Thus, as was the case with the more extended interpretations of *Iron Path* and *Interior* presented above, the reader should in no way infer that these readings are in any way complete. Moreover, in addition to pointing toward the ultimate openness of Kiefer's works, the following examples are also intended to indicate another characteristic feature of Kiefer's art, namely, that sets of specific works can be selected from his oeuvre in such a way as to illuminate a much larger, general topic or question - a result of the undecidable, interrogatory, and repeating nature of his artistic project as a whole.

In two books he made in 1969, *The Flooding of Heidelberg* [*Die Über­schwemmung Heidelbergs*] I and II, Kiefer combines original and appropriated photographs, oil, and cobalt siccative on paper to produce two ambiguous narratives suggesting the intentional flooding of Heidelberg, home to one of Germany's oldest universities. Mixing images of toy soldier battles, the breakfast table in his studio, a model of the Heidelberg castle, World War II photographs from the *Diary of a Soldier at the Front* [*Tagebuch eines Frontsoldaten*] (a book of photographs shot by a captain in the *Wehrmacht*), and images of Nazi architecture and art appropriated from the newspaper *Art in the Third Reich* [*Kunst im Dritten Reich*] (a newspaper that Kiefer's father collected), these two books reveal an artist plotting the destruction of one of the oldest and best preserved South German towns. According to Kiefer's typewritten text contained in one of the books, this is to be accomplished through the damming of the Neckar river upstream from Heidelberg and the subsequent failure of the dam when the river's pressure grows too great. Here, the artist's victims are the same German “people” and their children whom Heidegger in his writings works so hard to form into a historical community. At the same time, however, by continuing and strengthening the critical examination of German society that finally emerged in German visual art in the 1960s, the *Heidelberg* books may also be interpreted as helping to heal the German people - albeit by violently making them face the undercurrents of savagery that continue in their society.

In addition, Kiefer's two undecidable books also attack the German cultural tradition - for Heidegger, one of the central means of forming a historical community - in at least three different ways. First, they do this by supposedly destroying an important German site where culture is both preserved and passed on. In addition, the *Heidelberg* books attack German culture by degrading themselves through their inclusion of images of Nazi art and architecture. Finally, they attack the visual art tradition in particular by negating a number of aesthetic qualities that, up through the mid-1960s, continued to be affirmed by much German "high art" production. Yet another example of Kiefer's early "antiaesthetic" approach, Kiefer's books stand within the oppositional (and much smaller) "tradition" of anticommodity conceptual art books and publications of the 1960s and 1970s. Like the works of Edward Ruscha, Dieter Roth, Hans Peter Feldmann, and Dan Graham, Kiefer's fragile books foreground the idea behind the work; in Kiefer's case, his performance, in the privacy of his
studio, of the destruction of Heidelberg. The books appear to exist mainly as mementos or records of his supposed action. And their specific materials, composition, and formal effects are designed to undermine the traditional concept of a work of visual art (they are neither paintings nor sculptures and, moreover, seem crudely – even "artlessly" – put together). Like the books of the earlier European and American conceptual artists, Kiefer’s Heidelberg series seems to retreat from both its aesthetic-perceptual and its auratic status (the books are neither traditionally composed nor conventionally beautiful). Unlike the more anonymous mass-produced works of the earlier conceptual artists, however, Kiefer’s books remain largely unique. Although Kiefer has produced multiple editions of a few volumes and in addition has presented works in the form of magazine spreads (in the tradition of Mel Bochner and Graham), his books – although superficially “antiaesthetic” – remain auratic objects. Thus, and in sharp contrast to slightly earlier European and American conceptualism, Kiefer’s works seem designed to emit more of an atmosphere of “originality,” “authorship,” and “uniqueness.”

For this reason, despite their conceptual nature, Kiefer’s works do not seem to perform the important function of “institutional critique” – something that is very characteristic of American and European conceptual aesthetic practice in the late 1960s. In the practices of Feldmann, for example, the German conceptualist who made books of appropriated amateur photographs and mass media images from 1968 to the present, and who gave away anonymous photographic images at art openings and in the museum or sent them out as postcards, we see how concerned conceptual art was (between 1960 and 1975) with dismantling the traditional authority of the artist (by simply selecting the image), creating a more engaged or collective audience (by disrupting the museum- and art-market-created conditions of contemplative and nonengaged spectatorship), and performing a critical analysis of the art market (by giving away works for free or by engaging in commercial mass reproduction). And although the conceptual works and practices of Joseph Beuys from the early 1960s until his death in 1986 have often been criticized for reinscribing the traditional concept of artist through his performance of the artist as medium or shaman (which recalls the nineteenth-century concept of the artist as genius), the creation of an activist audience and a critical analysis of the institutional conditions of art are two of the most consistent practices in Beuys’s art. Thus, while seeming to invert the traditional characteristics of auratic art, Kiefer’s two books – conceptual art “originals” – also seem to “re-negate” one of the central negations or “advances” in European and American conceptual art of the 1960s (namely, institutional critique).142

Kiefer’s Heidelberg books thus appear to oppose two central tenets of Heidegger’s decisive aesthetics. When viewed in light of this series, in other words, Kiefer and Heidegger appear to present radically divergent images of the artist’s relation to the people as well as very different views of the normative power or “truth” of art. Given the undecidability of Kiefer’s series, however, the reflective spectator is constantly provoked to give a more nuanced reading of the relationship between the artist and the philosopher. In other words, Kiefer’s two books keep the various above-mentioned Heideggerian issues alive by opening
them up to debate and reformulation through the multiplication of chains of contradictory interpretations. And it is the violence suggested by Kiefer's series as a whole that, in turn, makes these issues seem so pressing.

In 1974 and 1975, Kiefer produced a series of books, *The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen* (Figures 48–50), in which he visualizes the burning of the area surrounding the town where he lived at the time — the site of an American military installation where, according to the artist, large amounts of flammable benzene were stored.143 As suggested earlier, in the analysis of the prototype for this series in Chapter 1 (Figures 31–39), the fire, although clearly human in origin (the result of burning drums of fuel), does not necessarily have to be read as the result of Kiefer's actions. In the eight subsequent books of the same title, however, Kiefer presents the viewer with a series of rejected paintings that he carbonized, cut up, and then bound into large volumes.144 Completely abstract except for their titles, these books emphasize their built-up, blackened, and flaking surfaces, which alternate with fields of yellowish burlap (the backs of the carbonized paintings), spotted with black and crossed with two different types of tape. Through this process, Kiefer links the strategy of the monochrome canvas to the related concepts of recycling and building on failure. The monochrome, as Yve-Alain Bois has pointed out, is one of the strategies that has been used by twentieth-century artists for the impossible task of ending painting.145 And in his nine burnt volumes, Kiefer seems to recognize the impossibility of ending his practice of painting. His work shows this because he reconfigures his failed paintings into a new form and because he converts the

monochrome into a sign of maximum generativity. In other words, the moment of painting’s most extreme negation and reflection into itself becomes, in Kiefer’s Buchen series, the moment of a new outpouring of form and meaning.

In these compelling works, beautiful in their ravaged state of ruin, Kiefer paradoxically presents himself as both the source and one of the objects of aesthetic violence, destroying his fellow townspeople, the American “occupiers,” and his own creations so that he can artistically begin anew. Through this evocation of a resentment-driven artistic suicide, Kiefer’s series of works suggests the pervasive nihilism already identified by Nietzsche as the primary characteristic of European spiritual life in the late nineteenth century. European nihilism, as Heidegger succinctly defined it in a lecture course in 1940, is “a process, the process of devaluation, whereby the uppermost values become valueless.” For Heidegger, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, this devaluation of the highest values diagnosed by Nietzsche is a result of the triumph of science and industrial technology, which Heidegger understands as a mode of representing the world that has worked all too well. In Kiefer’s series of Buchen books, however, nihilism is represented more particularly as an ambiguous play between a “European” subject’s self-hatred, its hatred of “Americanism,” and its frustration with the concept of art as a source of normative truth. At the same time, however, as the series also suggests, Kiefer’s projected self-hatred and his presumed doubt about the transformative power of art are not so great as to make him stop producing art altogether.

In another book made in 1975, Piet Mondrian – Operation Sea Lion [Piet Mondrian – Unternehmen ‘Seelöwe’], Kiefer connects Hitler’s unrealized plan to invade England by sea in 1940 to the geometric abstract art of the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, the bathtub readymade of Joseph Beuys, and Kiefer’s own basement “staging” area. The book consists of thirty-four double-page images that take the spectator from a snow-covered area outside Kiefer’s basement through a brightly lit window with multiple glass panes to the inside of Kiefer’s cellar, where we are shown a bathtub filled with backlit ice and tiny toy boats. Once inside, the spectator is presented with multiple “bird’s eye” images of the bathtub taken from diverse angles and various distances. The book concludes with a series of shots of the window, now seemingly lit from the outside, upon which water is shown to be condensing. Piet Mondrian thus brings together a set of seemingly unrelated contradictions. First, the book makes a connection between the artist and Hitler through the title and the images of the burning toy boats in the bathtub. Second, the book sets up an analogy between Mondrian’s restricted formal vocabulary of black lines and white, red, yellow, and blue squares and Kiefer’s photographic representations of windowpanes with wooden supports. Third, the book’s reading — the actual turning of its pages — allows the spectator to take the vantage point of Kiefer, the creator and performer of the work, and, at the same time, retain a reflective distance or place apart from this vantage point. In this way, despite the one-point perspective of its “tracking shot” structure, the book as a whole creates multiple points of view. Through the play of these contradictions, the book connects three artists — Mondrian, Beuys, and Kiefer — with the figure of Hitler and, thereby, helps set off a process of existential questioning in the spectator. Furthermore, by trans-
forming Mondrian's radical abstractions back into representations and by substituting the reproducibility of the photographic image for the uniqueness of the painting, Kiefer's book once again seems to devalue (or at least cast a suspicious eye upon) pure painting. It is as if Kiefer sets out in his work to regress Mondrian's geometric abstractions back to the representational elements – for example, the glass and window facades – that were important motifs in Mondrian's early preabstract phase. (In this way, Kiefer's book offers an ironic commentary on Mondrian's project of regressing – gradually breaking down – the various fundamental distinctions upon which all painting rests.148)

In addition, in a painting made in 1976, Piet Mondrian – Arminius's Battle [Piet Mondrian – Hermannsschlacht] (Figure 51), Kiefer connects Mondrian's form of spiritually intended geometric abstraction to a far more ancient battle, which has come to symbolize the inception point of the German nation, as well as to a much more gestural or expressive process of abstract painting (visible in the agitated white and gray brushstrokes that follow the trunk of the tree). The conflict to which Kiefer's title refers is "Hermann's Battle" – an encounter that occurred in the Teutoburg Forest in Northern Germany in 9 B.C.E. In this conflict, three legions of Roman soldiers under the command of Quintilius Varus were ambushed and massacred by a Germanic tribe, guided by a leader named Arminius, who was also known as Hermann.150 An event that has come to symbolize a central moment in the German people's overthrow of Roman rule (and thus a key step in their development of a sense of national identity), the Hermannsschlacht became a widely used symbol of Teutonic resistance to foreign rule in German culture during the early nineteenth century, when Napoleon's troops threatened German self-determination. Here, in the 1976 painting, this fundamental clash is combined with the representation of a tree in a forest that, in the context of Kiefer's other works at this time, might represent a mythical or cosmic tree of life – more specifically, Yggdrasil, or the World Ash – a symbol that was used in human prehistory to represent the fundamental cycles of the growth and decay of the world.151 In addition, thought in terms of the history of twentieth-century painting, Kiefer's painting represents the regression of geometric abstraction back to another basic motif from which Mondrian developed it, namely, trees.

In light of the juxtaposition of the title with the tree image, the inaugural battle can be read as a fundamental conflict repeating across historical time through which the German world is periodically defined and renewed. Moreover, in conjunction with the two modes of (geometric and expressive) abstraction presented through Kiefer's handling of his formal elements, the work resonates with Heidegger's decisive aesthetics in that it seems to recall Heidegger's assertion of the essential parity between military and aesthetic "works" in the formation of the ancient Greek world. As is the case in Heidegger's aesthetic thinking, art – which in Kiefer's painting is also associated with ancient cosmological powers – is represented as helping to fundamentally (and violently) found the polis. On the other hand, the two forms of abstraction, which disrupt the image and also come into conflict with one another, remind the spectator of the repressive nature of abstract painting when its development is treated as a natural teleology.152 Their presence and juxtaposition with the other elements in
the work, in other words, reminds us of the prohibitions against representation and subject matter that historically grew up around abstract art to serve as its legitimization.\textsuperscript{153}

Also in 1976, in four books entitled \textit{Brandenburg Sand [Märkischer Sand]} (Figures 52–57),\textsuperscript{154} Kiefer represents – in a quasi-cinematic form – a sandstorm
of colossal proportions that wipes out a series of cultivated fields identified through the handwritten title as belonging to the Mark Brandenburg region of (then) East Germany. Although the storm can be read as a natural disaster, the images in each book begin in Kiefer’s basement studio space in Hornbach, where electrical wires and suspended glass plates suggest a mysterious human origin for the conflagration that follows. Nature and culture are, from the beginning, intertwined. Moreover, as the series progresses, German nature (in the form of the fields) — a site to which Heidegger sometimes turns for a world-instituting experience of Being — appears to be the artist’s primary victim. But, despite the lack of human beings in the images (which are composed of photographs, linseed oil, and sand), the Mark Brandenburg is not represented as an uninhabited region of the countryside. Instead, Kiefer’s work makes the people of the Mark Brandenburg region appear obliquely through the signs of their cultivating activities, the embodied perspective, and the title, which is a textual appropriation that links it to Fontane. Thus, paradoxically, in the Brandenburg Sand series, nature (in the form of sand) is also the weapon that Kiefer supposedly turns on others in his country who live in a region celebrated by past cultural production — others who are represented not directly but through the traces that they leave in the world.

Adding another level of paradox to the Brandenburg Sand series is the conflict it sets up between nature (sand) and the photographic medium that forms the representational base of each volume. Given the standard uses of photography in modern society, one could plausibly expect Kiefer to use the medium as a way of objectifying nature — of reducing the material world to an image so that it can be more easily manipulated, as, for example, when a photograph is taken of a site so as to preplan excavation and construction. Yet, here, the opposite takes place. Instead of depicting the photographic form as destroying nature, the series presents a story in which the photographic images are slowly destroyed — that is, obscured — by a natural material. Thus, if the books are taken narratively, then it seems that the conflict has been decided: nature has triumphed over photography (a development that is repeated in each of the volumes). However, as the reader turns the pages of Kiefer’s books, the sand literally falls off their surfaces. Thus, the more the triumph of nature (in the form of the natural material) is viewed or performed, the more the natural material is lost, and the more the “unnatural” images of photographed nature appear to dominate the series as a whole. As was the case with his photographic body images in the books of 1969, Kiefer thus undermines any simple reading of the relationship between photography and that which it reproduces. Thus, in the Brandenburg Sand books of 1976, photography — which can potentially destroy nature — can also be destroyed by it. In this way, by creating a form of “nature photography” that generates an undecidable conflict between the two poles of its practice — the natural world and the photographic medium — Kiefer explores nature as both victim and weapon.

Kiefer further explores the destructive character of the physical process of painting in a number of other canvases from the late 1970s and 1980s. In the earlier field and field path paintings of the mid-1970s, Kiefer primarily represented the activity of painting as destructive through images of palettes and


paint brushes engaged in violent activity. Thus, for example, in *Nero Paints [Nero malt]* (1974) (Figure 23), the reddish-brown outline of a painter’s palette is superimposed over a largely abstract “field” of black, brown, and white, which exhibits a strong recession into depth and which oscillates with the painting’s “flatness” suggested by the material build-up of paint and the flat palette outline. Four burning paint brushes, radiating outward from the palette’s top right edge, set the houses of a small town on fire – a painted conflagration depicted against the horizon running along the top of the painting. Once again evoking the Nazi dreams of imperial glory as well as their destructiveness (the image perhaps compares the destruction of Carthage in the second century B.C.E with the Nazis’ scorched-earth policies), Kiefer visualizes the action that he will shortly perform on his own paintings to make the book series *The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen*. And once again, Kiefer’s interest in his own potential violence is examined with reference to his own body through the juxtaposition of the representation of painting as an activity of burning with the indexical traces of his own expressively gestural brush strokes preserved in the hardened oil.

As he builds up his painted surface more and more over the course of the late 1970s, however, Kiefer comes more and more to present – or materialize – the destructive side of the process of painting. In *Tree with Palette [Baum mit Palett]* (1978) (Figure 58), for example, Kiefer depicts a lead palette with spiderlike “legs” or streamers, clinging to a heavily worked oil surface that once again depicts a sacred tree of life. On one level, the painting suggests that the palette is nurtured by the cosmic tree – the palette appears to cling to it, sucking life from its core. By implication, this could suggest that art derives its sustenance from the power of nature. On another level, however, the spider- or fungus-like palette seems malevolent and destructive and thus can once again generate the interpretation that art destroys nature. Adding a third level of meaning to the canvas is Kiefer’s handling of the surface. The image of the tree against a dark backdrop is so built up that the spectator finds it difficult to determine where the image ends and the gesturally articulated background begins. In places extending more than four inches above the surface of the canvas, the swirling, stroked, and gashed masses of paint recall for the viewer the physicality of Kiefer’s process of application as well as the powerful, industrial-material presence of his only partially worked lead and paint. In this way, Kiefer presents the destructive aspects of the process of painting by having the surface literally disrupt his activity of representation. In addition, in conjunction with the second level of meaning mentioned above (the representational palette as destructive), by handling the surface in such a way as to destroy the representational image, Kiefer could be interpreted as using abstraction to hide the tree from the palette. According to this interpretation, abstraction could be seen as protecting nature from the destructive aspects of art posed by its representational power. In this way, the work could be interpreted as contradicting the critical view of abstraction at times evoked by such works as *Piet Mondrian – Arminius’s Battle*.

More and more over the course of the 1980s, Kiefer seems to enjoy physically victimizing his own art. A surrogate for the manipulated spectator evoked by Kiefer’s works, the fragile surface – initially used to disrupt the representational image – itself becomes increasingly disrupted. As such, the surface
becomes another site for the transcription of the artist's violence. Although critics make much of Kiefer's process of layering different materials — and though Kiefer, himself, sees his art as a sort of "archaeology in reverse" — Kiefer's process of ripping and tearing away his surfaces seems equally important to their overall meaning. This process of violation finds one of its demonstrative high
points in his large-scale painting *Jerusalem*. Yet another variation on his early field imagery, executed after a visit to Israel in 1984, *Jerusalem* was created by adding paint to a giant landscape photograph and then covering parts of the image with molten lead and more paint. Months later, Kiefer peeled away much of the lead and the second layer of color to leave a scarred and twisted inner surface to which he then attached a pair of cast-iron skis. As Mark Rosenthal aptly notes, “The effect is of skin that has been violently torn away in a fetishistic or even maniacal activity.” In addition, by attaching skis to the image, Kiefer gives the surface a horizontal association, suggesting that the canvas could be placed on the floor and walked upon. In this way, by debasing the image through the suggestion that it could be taken off the wall and located on the ground, as well as by creating a dense material surface that evokes torn and flayed human flesh, Kiefer presents yet another way in which the physical process of making art seems to violently rebound upon itself. Yet, paradoxically, as the presence of the image still suggests, for Kiefer, art’s violent debasement is ultimately still creative.

Not only does Kiefer materially suggest the discharge of his own violence against his works, he also represents the artist, through the symbol of the palette, as the victim of violence. In the oil painting *Palette on a Rope* (1977), for example, the palette is suspended on a burning rope above a fiery landscape. Here, the representation suggests not only the endangered nature of art but also art’s precariousness. It suggests, in other words,
that the making of art is a balancing act in which the slightest misstep means failure. In addition, the work performs art’s self-destructive violence in another way as well. This is the case because the clumsiness of Kiefer’s depiction and the banality of his choice of symbols (a Nietzschean metaphor rehashed one too many times) together demonstrate that Kiefer’s art is at times victimized by his ambition to be profound. Indeed, when he attempts to realize this ambition solely through the medium of painting – as in his images of angels, animals, and most of his portraits of historical figures from the mid- to late-1970s – his work, more often than not, is less than completely convincing. 163

Much more successful is the darkly humorous book Kyffhäuser [Kyffhäuser] (1980/1981)164 (Figures 60–65), which consists of twenty-three bound, double-page photographic images mounted on cardboard and overpainted with oil and emulsion. (The title, as Mark Rosenthal points out, “refers to the mountains where Germans believed that the twelfth-century Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I, also known as Barbarossa, slept, waiting for the people to summon him.” In addition, the title also appears to be a play on Kiefer’s family name – and thus produces existential connotations.) Here, behind a front cover of a spatially ambiguous image representing a palette on a pole – which suggests both art’s resurrection (through the pole’s associations with a pedestal) and the display of art’s corpse (in a manner reminiscent of the decapitated heads on sticks during the French and Russian Revolutions166) – Kiefer presents a cloudy narrative in which the spectator moves from the outside of Kiefer’s basement studio through the exterior wall (represented by a series of pages completely overpainted with abstract gestural patterns) to an image of a painted palette occupying a corner of Kiefer’s brick basement interior and, then, to a series of burning toy boats in a bathtub that is also situated there. Suggesting the palette’s violent “death” on a watery “battlefield,” these images fade to black and are replaced by an overpainted photograph of a tree labeled “Grave of the Unknown Painter.” This image is followed by the palette on a pole again, this time set against a neoclassical arch, and then by an overpainted appropriated image of a statue of a dead soldier with an altered printed text, which reads, “The Unknown Painter.” Next follows a sequence in which a sculpted palette on Kiefer’s basement floor “revives” itself, its resurrection being represented by schematic black arrows drawn on the photograph’s surface. The palette then flies off in painted form against a photographic backdrop of an outdoor field, only to fall into the sea with a great explosion in what appears to be another appropriated battle photograph. More abstract pages follow, and then the painted palette rises again, making its way along a rope that bursts into flame in the last image (an image that, if not for its later date of origin, could have been the preparatory sketch for Palette on a Rope). Constantly dying and being resurrected, a cross between a fine-art symbol and a Saturday-morning cartoon figure, Kiefer’s symbolic self-image thus seems both a victimizer and a victim.

Kyffhäuser seems more successful than Palette on a Rope for three reasons. Because Kiefer avoids overtaxing his weak skills of illusionistic representation and instead sticks to an inventive set of schematic drawings, abstract paintings, appropriated mass-reproduced images, and “original” photographs of toy models, simple sculptures, and real objects, the book seems more technically profi-

Decisiveness and Undecidability


FIGURE 63. Anselm Kiefer, Kyffhäuser, pp. 34-35.
FIGURE 64. Anselm Kiefer, Kyffhäuser, pp. 40-41.

FIGURE 65. Anselm Kiefer, Kyffhäuser, pp. 46-47.
cient and assured. In this way, Kiefer’s great sensitivity to the contrasts between different types of formal media is foregrounded, and the book as a whole evokes comparisons between different types of image-making practice instead of lapsing into formal flatness. (This also underlines one of the greatest paradoxes of Kiefer’s artistic practice as a whole: namely, that despite not being able to paint figuratively very well, he always seems compelled to represent legible visual subjects.) In addition, because it is rendered ironic by the cartoon elements, the representation of the artist’s destruction seems less overwrought than in *Palette on a Rope*. Kiefer’s irony, in turn, produces a greater sense of distance in the minds of the book’s beholders and, in this way, promotes greater reflection on the part of the spectator. Finally, because it sets up a conflict between the artist’s role as a victimizer and as a victim, the work seems more generative of multiple interpretations and debate. Thus, because *Kyffhäuser* renders the artist’s victimization much more problematically than does *Palette on a Rope*, it seems a much more assured and commendable work.

Despite *Palette on a Rope*, which represents art as a victim, and *Kyffhäuser*, which sets up a conflict between the artist as victim and the artist as victimizer, Kiefer on the whole associates the artist more with the subject position of the victimizer than with that of the victim. This can be seen in his consistent manipulation of the spectator’s body—something that has already been discussed at length in many of the earlier analyses in this chapter and Chapter 1. In addition to using a strong, often photographically produced perspective to draw the spectator into his paintings, Kiefer also works with sequential photographs in a number of his books—a device that reproduces the effect of a tracking shot in a film or video (albeit in a somewhat less fluid way). Like Kiefer’s painted perspectives, this photographic and discontinuous tracking-shot form creates a strong sense of forced embodiment on the part of the spectator—a sense that he or she is being uncontrollably drawn into and through Kiefer’s quasi-fictional world. By manipulating the spectator bodily, by causing us to read our selfhood reflexively from out of inhospitable, ravaged, and conflicting environments, Kiefer’s books and paintings thus victimize us by instrumentally forcing us to assume certain, unwanted subject positions.

What is even more disturbing in Kiefer’s oeuvre than his treatment of the body of the spectator, however, is his evocation and usage of the bodies of others. This disturbing treatment of the other’s body can be seen in two books, *Shulamith* (*Sulamith*) I and II, both from 1990 (Figure 66). These books were created by pressing black hair—the symbolic bodily remains of the Jewish and female other as indicated by Kiefer’s textual reference—between bound sheets of lead. Here, by “preserving” the Holocaust victim’s hair between poisonous lead sheets, Kiefer mimics past German crimes and the Nazis’ habit of keeping material and scientific records of their horrifying “accomplishments.” At the same time, however, although Kiefer does seem to instrumentally use the body of the other as an “object” in his works, he creates two memorial sculptures that, because of their complex combination of literal and abstract qualities, end up being quite successful in provoking critical historical reflection. A mass of delicate lines and washes, they seem expressively painted—and, thus, massively subjective. At the same time, the “painting” and “washes” on the surface
of the books are merely traces of the effects of time on the exterior of the pressed lead— and thus represent objective historical decay. Books that cannot be read, the *Sulamith* series appropriately suggests the self-destruction of reason through its violent bifurcation of reality into subject and object, victim and victimizer. And although the form of the book can still be recycled, Kiefer shows us that its pages—an abstract play of oxidizing lead and hair—have lost that specificity of meaning that can still, for example, be discovered in the pages of a novel.

The use of black—supposedly female hair—recurs throughout Kiefer’s oeuvre from the late 1960s to the 1990s and is only the most obvious example of Kiefer’s manipulation of the body of the other. In addition, in a number of books and paintings from the early 1990s, such as *The Golden Fleece* and *Lilith’s Daughters* [*Lilith’s Töchter*] (1991) (as well as the book series of the same name), Kiefer uses burned dresses to suggest another dangerous manipulation of the body of the other. These works, which strongly evoke
the violence of the artist, are made even more unsettling by Kiefer’s fairly consistent gendering of the victim as female (The Golden Fleece is the exception here). Kiefer’s “quasi-misogyny” is clearly apparent in Lilith’s Daughters, where the dresses are combined with woman’s hair (as well as copper wire, ash, lead airplanes, and a snakeskin) to create an image that can be read as both a family of violent female demons against a materially dense, abstract sky and the hanged corpses of a woman and her five young children against a ruined
Yet the elements that suggest misogyny in Kiefer's empty-dress works are perhaps counterbalanced by the partial reversibility of the relation of victimization, which is also inherent in many of the works. When the spectator turns the pages of the books, for example, their material falls off. In addition, because they resemble clothing that could be removed from the canvas and worn, the various empty dresses of the paintings could perhaps be read as calling to the spectator to touch them and thus possibly injure the work—an interpretation emphasized by the life-size scale of the "painted" works, which evoke both an adult and a child's perspective at the same time. These works—which potentially victimize women through the representation of female figures as both demons and victims—can thus also potentially be victimized by the female (or male) spectator. Working together, the empty-dress works, in conjunction with their different spectators, demonstrate that, once released, violence and victimization run in multiple and conflicting directions.

As the above set of brief analyses make clear, Kiefer treats the relationship of art and violence as an issue that is highly complex and in many ways undecidable. For this reason, Kiefer's evocation of the multiple relations between art and violence in his works represents an important counterexample to Heidegger's treatment of this theme in his decisive aesthetics. First, whereas Heidegger justifies artistic violence as necessary (because it is needed to create and define a world and because the creators serve their people rather than their own particular interests), Kiefer's works are in part critical of the world-historical power of art and, in addition, suggest that artists may also have a personal agenda when they create their works. Second, whereas Heidegger only briefly treats the issue of artistic violence, Kiefer explores in detail its effects on the artist, the spectator, nature, and others. In this way, Kiefer's works examine the question of artistic violence in a much richer and more historically specific manner, and thus they bring up issues that could be used to contest Heidegger's insistence on the absolute right and infallibility of the great creators. Third, whereas Heidegger for the most part ignores the body in his discussion of artistic violence, Kiefer emphasizes both his own body and the bodies of others in order to trace the effects of aesthetic violence in the world and involve the beholders of his works more personally in the issue. Thus, although Heidegger articulates a number of issues that Kiefer later takes up in his undecidable works—for example, the possibility that artistic creation always involves some form of destruction as well as the artist's dual role as victim and victimizer—Heidegger, as Kiefer shows us, did not trace out the implications of his insights. By provoking the spectator to examine these implications—to weigh, for example, the respective destructive potentials of representation and abstraction or to consider the ways in which art might undermine a spiritual world—Kiefer resists simply acknowledging the "necessary" connection between destruction and creation. In so doing, Kiefer adds an important dimension to the process of existential questioning generated by his art works by reminding both himself and the spectator of the problems that potentially adhere to any act of cultural creation. Although by no means rejecting the role of artist who attempts to speak to, for, and about his or her historical community, Kiefer's focus on violence reminds the spectator to remain suspicious of the various types of meaning that works of art produce.
tion, in turn, increases our apprehension of Kiefer’s hermeneutic undecidability and causes us to respond to Kiefer’s art with tough questions and multiple interpretations. In addition, by emphasizing the fact that art is itself endangered, Kiefer’s works also inspire the spectator to seek to protect and preserve the sphere of culture. In this way, Kiefer’s evocation of the issue of artistic violence makes us both critical and responsive – a position that Heidegger’s model of violence is unable to sustain.

**Conclusion**

Although their projects of reworking the subject demonstrate fundamental continuities across more than three-quarters of the twentieth century, both Heidegger and Kiefer have very different concepts of truth and articulate the relationship between art and politics in two very different ways. On the one hand, Heidegger’s decisive aesthetics conceives art as orienting the resolute communal action of a historical people – and thus as directly and unproblematically constituting a collective subject. Consistent with his exclusively “intersubjective” and historical focus after 1930, Heidegger thus understands works of art as setting up a common world and thereby as directly producing a normative realm of truth. Although Heidegger argues that there is a need for preservers – cultural leaders who will interpret the truth of a work of art for their community – there is no room in Heidegger’s aesthetic theory for a contemporary debate to spring up around works of art: a debate that might bring questions of communal identity, decision, and action into both the everyday and the public sphere. Instead, works of art produce from out of themselves an intersubjectively binding truth that a people must be trained to accept and follow. For these reasons, Heidegger’s aesthetic theory shows disturbing continuities with the authoritarian political speeches he made in the service of Hitler and the National Socialist Party – speeches that immediately preceded the development of his aesthetics and for which Heidegger has been rightly criticized. On the other hand, the hermeneutic undecidability produced by Kiefer’s art suggests that any definition of a communal world needs to be tempered by debate with others in one’s contemporary community and, moreover, that this communal world is better understood as a multiplicity of intersecting worlds: a space of interpenetrating points of view held open through everyday and public discourse. By constantly addressing the individual through his works – and, in addition, provoking the spectator to respond to the tough moral and political questions that his art evokes – Kiefer thus shows that the normative realm is only attainable through communal endeavor. As his books and canvases suggest, even works of art, which have been traditionally (and in some ways correctly) understood as self-enclosed and autonomous, only produce intersubjectively binding truth in conjunction with an engaged audience that is willing to interact with the suggestions encoded into the work as well as with others in their lifeworld who feel themselves addressed by the same aesthetic object. Thus, as Kiefer’s works suggest, art can only inspire a debate that will lead to a concept of a possible collective subject – it cannot produce such a subject on its own.
Despite their strong differences as to how art can have a political effect (how it produces normative truths that govern both individual and collective actions), Kiefer and Heidegger both see the work of art as essentially producing a conflict – a battle, to use Heidegger's terms, between earth and world. Why this is the case for Kiefer seems self-evident. It is only by producing a conflict of interpretations that a work of art can actively help construct a public sphere and a possible and open-ended “we.” In other words, only because the meaning produced by a work of art both arises and decays – and only because any overarching interpretation generated by a work in conjunction with the spectator eventually gives way to a different one – is it the case that art can produce debate. By recognizing the inherent conflict at the center of the work of art and by working to intensify this conflict by intentionally producing works that give rise to antithetical interpretations, Kiefer directs his art in a fundamentally discursive direction – a direction in which much twentieth-century visual art travels. On the other hand, given the decisive aspects of Heidegger's aesthetics – given, in other words, the fact that for Heidegger art is supposed to provide leadership and orientation rather than provoking contemporary debate – it is surprising that the model of the work of art as producing a constant conflict between earth and world should be such a central feature in his aesthetic thought of the 1930s and 1940s. There are two reasons, however, why this is indeed the case. Heidegger's recognition of the polemical nature of the work of art is in part a result of the phenomenological aspects of his thinking. Because Heidegger still attempted to carefully observe and describe what appeared to him, it was impossible for Heidegger not to discover the essentially polemical nature of art. In addition, because Heidegger sees great art as producing the new, he also sees a great work of art as necessarily in conflict with the historical moment that comes before it. For this reason, despite the decisive aspects of his aesthetic theory, Heidegger believed that conflict belongs to the essence of art.

The question still remains, however, as to why Heidegger did not see the fundamental contradiction between his contention that art is essentially polemical and the decisive aspects of his aesthetics: his claim that art can directly guide and violently (but truly) orient a historical community. The answer to this question lies in the fact that Heidegger did not think through the consequences of his theory of the essentially polemical nature of the truth of art and Being. Art, in other words, can assume a leadership position in Heidegger's aesthetic theory because he does not adequately explore its dialogic implications. Although Heidegger does recognize the fact that art can produce dialogue – both in the form of conceptual responses as well as in the shape of new works of art – he sees this dialogue as existing almost exclusively between the cultural practitioners of different historical time periods. Because art can only be truly made and authentically interpreted by cultural practitioners of the first “rank,” and because such practitioners are by nature “few” and “far between,” dialogue in Heidegger’s account occurs across historical worlds, not within them. In addition, art can assume a leadership position in Heidegger's decisive aesthetics precisely because he does not examine the implications of its violent nature – the fact that it can turn not only on human beings but also upon itself. That this
is, indeed, the case is suggested by Heidegger’s extremely simplified treatment of the relationship between art and violence, as well as his relatively shallow focus on the body after 1930. And because Heidegger does not examine the implications of art’s equivocally violent nature, he cannot conceive a work of art as combining both truth and falsity – authentic disclosure and “world view” or ideology.

Contrary to Heidegger, Kiefer examines the relationship between art and violence in great detail and, moreover, focuses at length on the heterogeneous bodies of the artist, spectator, and other – bodies that are also at times gendered in complex and nontraditional ways. For this reason, Kiefer’s art suggests the necessary role of the intersubjective community of spectators in the production of the normative – or orienting – truths created through the work. Thus, although Kiefer’s works seem to recognize the human desire – expressed in Heidegger’s aesthetics – to find in culture a source of value that would somehow define and orient a people’s national mission, Kiefer’s undecidability reminds his viewers of the necessarily perspectival character of all art and interpretation, as well as the lack of unity that characterizes even an individual’s perspective. As such, Kiefer’s undecidability stands as an important corrective to any tendency one may have to accept Heidegger’s simplistic and dangerous decisiveness. Thus, not only does Kiefer’s art suggest a moment in German culture that is more suspicious of itself than Heidegger’s moment, but Kiefer’s works also emphasize more strongly than Heidegger’s theory art’s fundamentally dialogic nature.
Modern modern art – that is, art since the World Wars – arises from the conviction that the forms of Western culture, including its art forms, have permanently collapsed. What does the collapse of forms mean? It means that while they may still be repeated, the forms of Western art are no longer capable of arousing deep feelings or affecting major experiences. They can no longer be taken as a guide or developed to a higher level.

The notion that art can be vanguard in 1968 by elaborating the color theories of 1880 could occur only to the bright design students of Art Forum. . . . Being convinced of the collapse of forms is Axiom One of the vanguardism of the past fifty years. It is the basis of the major moves in art, from Dada anti-art to electronic spectacles and mixed media. The modern modern poet or painter, as distinguished from the old modern artist, picks his way among the bits and pieces of the cultural heritage and puts together whatever seems capable of carrying a meaning.

Harold Rosenberg

The “end” of the modernity – the leading concept of postmodern theory – is actually a central position within the history of modern culture itself. It appears, for example, in the theoretical works of Marx and Nietzsche, who, although they analyzed their overlapping historical world in very different terms, both believed themselves to be living within the final phase of a much longer stage in European history: for Marx, the end of the economic period of capitalism and the class ascendancy of the bourgeoisie and, for Nietzsche, the decline of the era of Christian faith and the social-cultural dominance of the peoples of Europe. A sense that modernity is ending or has ended is also prominent in the work of the Dada and surrealist artists – for example, George Grosz and Max Ernst – who made numerous representations between 1918 and the mid-1940s of the destruction or collapse of the modern world. Not surprisingly, as this belief in the end of modernity developed over the past 150 years, it became radicalized. Slowly, as the forces of modernization – which include the growth of technology, the development and consolidation of industry, the rationalization of work, the expansion of city life, the enlargement of bureaucracies, the evolution of consumer society,
the rise of the mass media, and, slightly later, globalization and the commodification of information – became more and more powerful and visible in everyday life, the end of modern history was pushed by cultural critics from the near future into the present and finally (since the 1970s) into the immediate past.

This chapter will compare Kiefer’s representations of his own post-1968 German historical moment with Heidegger’s representations of the end of modernity as it appeared to him in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. Although Heidegger believed that he was living through modernity’s final phase and though many critics and philosophers of the 1980s and 1990s call Kiefer a “postmodern” artist, a comparison of the contemporary moments that each figure evokes strongly suggests that the problems and issues that define modernity continue through the present day. Postmodernism, as the conjunction of Kiefer and Heidegger seems to suggest, is simply modernity’s latest and most “radical” guise.

The end of modernity, according to Heidegger, was the closing of that moment in European history that began with the rise of the natural sciences in the sixteenth century. This moment of closing – what Heidegger came to call modernity’s “decisive phase” – corresponded, he believed, to his historical present in the late 1930s and, moreover, was taking place in a particularly rich and significant way in Germany. In addition, modernity’s end necessarily coincided with the ending of a historical period of much longer duration: the era of Western metaphysics, which came to full expression only in the modern period, but whose origins could be traced back to the early Greeks. Thus, as something that was understood as taking place in his own historical moment, Heidegger’s 1930s theorization of the end of modernity was indeed very different from the various concepts of postmodernism that his thought subsequently influenced – concepts that make the end of modernity part of the late twentieth century’s immediate past. Moreover, instead of seeing his task as simply describing a new historical moment already emerging, Heidegger believed that, in the 1930s, his thinking actually had to help bring the new era into existence. Heidegger, in other words, began to understand his thinking about Being and the development of Western culture as able to help bring about a transformation in the history of the West – a “turning,” as he put it, from the “first” to the “other beginning.” Heidegger’s understanding of his self-imposed “task of thinking” is therefore significant because, as shown in Chapter 2, he believed that works of culture – properly interpreted – were the keys to bringing about a new world. Thus Heidegger’s decisive aesthetics and his theory of the end of modernity are fundamentally interconnected. The latter examined his historical moment as a time of great danger – a time that needed fundamental direction and leadership – and the former suggested the means through which his contemporary world could find such orientation. In this way, Heidegger’s account of modernity’s decisive stage can also be seen as giving further support to his argument about the political nature of art – his argument that “great” cultural figures provide fundamental leadership for their people. And according to Heidegger, this was especially the case in a time of ever growing nihilism – a time that was crying out for figures who could once again make great art, great philosophy, and great politics.
Kiefer, in turn, presents his own contemporary moment in a similar way; namely, as a time of great danger as well as a “present” radically permeated with meaning from the past. As Donald Kuspit has argued, a significant feature of Kiefer’s art is its “archeologism” – its free combination of multiple historical styles and references in a single work. This historicism characteristic of Kiefer’s art – this sense that his works are composed of fragments of past styles and texts – is a central strategy that Kiefer uses to examine his contemporary world and the multiple possibilities for individual and collective subjectivity within it. Thus, in addition to constructing his works in such a way as to promote dialogue on the part of his spectators, Kiefer also constructs a dialogue between different styles and themes within his individual works. Aspects of this pictorial dialogue have already been presented in some of the analyses of Kiefer’s works in Chapters 1 and 2. As was argued, Kiefer seems to examine and compare different forms of representation and abstraction – sometimes allowing them to work together and sometimes pitting them against one another. As will now be demonstrated, in addition to being a key strategy by means of which he analyzes his present, Kiefer’s quotation – or “appropriation” – of preexisting forms and styles also suggests the “saturated” state of his contemporary culture: the fact that many forms and styles in use today come with a long history attached to them, sets of meanings that cultural practitioners recycle as signifying elements within their own works.

By comparing Heidegger’s account of modernity’s decisive stage with Kiefer’s evocation of his post-1968 contemporary moment, this chapter will argue that their respective time periods are characterized as much by similarities as they are by differences. The similarities between the moments of Kiefer and Heidegger have to do with their sense of the saturated nature of their culture as well as their awareness that the dangers presented by modernity are the result of processes that support the withering away of univocal foundational principles and the proliferation of “world views” (what, in Marxist terms, we could call “political ideologies”). In turn, Kiefer and Heidegger are further united by their apparent struggle to locate a mode of apprehension through which human beings can reorient themselves on an individual and a collective level without simply reverting to a past metaphysics (i.e., a single set of foundational principles). The differences between Kiefer and Heidegger stem not from a radical difference in the cultural conditions facing them, but rather from the respective strategies they follow to negotiate their cultural and historical circumstances. Despite his insight into the withering away of epochal principles, Heidegger still tries – through a hermeneutic analysis of Western history into a set of “times” or “epochs” as well as a phenomenological description of his contemporary moment – to work through the saturated nature of his culture to a primordial experience of Being that would orient human beings: a rich authentic experience of the “dispensation” or the “happening” of the “truth of Being.” Kiefer, on the other hand, takes the saturated state of culture as unavoidable and instead attempts to work within this saturation to produce undecidability, and thus dialogue. Kiefer’s art thus does not seem to announce a new moment of German history – something that is central (as a most needed possibility) to Heidegger’s thinking about the nature of modernity during the Third Reich.
It is significant that the one example of modern art discussed in Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" – Van Gogh's painting of the pair of peasant shoes – does not simply disclose the earth and world of the peasant woman but also, in and through these disclosures, the essential truth of equipment, Heidegger's general term for worldly objects that are used by humans in their practical, goal-oriented activities. Unlike the Greek temple, which, in its own time and sphere, discloses an earth and world whose meanings are primarily religious, cosmological, and political in nature, the shoes give rise to an earth and world that, despite the kitschy romanticism of Heidegger's description, have a radically instrumental character. And although it remains undeveloped in the art work essay, this understanding of the modern work of art as revealing the truth of equipment points to a second fundamental current in Heidegger's thought during the Third Reich, which supplements his thinking on aesthetics and without which his full understanding of art cannot be grasped: his development of a concept of modernity understood as an essentially instrumental – and, later, technological – mode of revealing the world and the things and beings in it.

Heidegger's 1920s view of instrumental disclosure – a causal or means-ends way of seeing things – was fairly ambiguous. As concern, in Being and Time, instrumental activity was a fundamental mode of Dasein's being-in-the-world and played an important role in Dasein's authenticity. In addition, however, the instrumental aspects of Dasein's "concern" for the world also played a significant role in Dasein's "fallenness" into the everyday. With his turning to aesthetic theory in the early 1930s, however, Heidegger's view of instrumental disclosure changed and he began to see instrumental or technological revealing as "the greatest danger" facing his time. Characteristic of this new view of instrumental disclosure is his 1938 essay on the nature of scientific representation, "The Time of the World Picture" [Die Zeit des Weltbildes], which marks Heidegger's first attempt to construct a theoretical account of his contemporary geo-historical world and thereby take a position within what Jürgen Habermas later called "the philosophical discourse of modernity." Heidegger's work, in other words, which stands under the twin influences of Ernst Jünger and Friedrich Nietzsche, was nothing less than an attempt to define his historical present – a task that he accomplishes through a phenomenological description of his contemporary moment (which he understands as revealing the "essential" nature of modernity), juxtaposed with a hermeneutic interpretation of the development of Western history through an analysis of its cultural works (which explains how modernity came to be). In addition, as will be argued, there is also an existential dimension to Heidegger's mid-1930s to early 1940s thought – something that emerges in his theorization of his contemporary moment as modernity's decisive stage.

At the center of Heidegger's phenomenological description of his contemporary moment is his account of the essence of modern science. Like his model of the work of art, Heidegger's phenomenological model of the essence of modern science is "essentially" ambiguous – made up of a constellation of "fundamental processes" [Grundvorgänge] that stand in an oscillating or polemical relation
As the ultimate foci of Heidegger's phenomenological method, these processes are to be understood as underlying conditions for the possibility of any particular science. According to Heidegger, the first fundamental process in the constellation of modern science is its character as "research" [Forschung] - the fact that, as a mode of knowing, it operates according to a definite procedure within a delimited realm of "what is" [das Seiende]. Heidegger's term for an interactive system of things and beings, laws and forces, properties and elements. The fundamental event in scientific research is the projection of "a determinate ground plan" [ein bestimmter Grundriß] onto a sphere of what is, for example onto nature. This "projection sketches out in advance the manner in which the knowing procedure must bind itself and adhere to the sphere opened up." The activity of scientific research thus projects a field or system of "representation" [Vorstellung]. According to Heidegger, the field of representation is fundamental to modern sciences because it determines their overall relation to the various spheres of reality that they investigate - that is, the types of phenomena they explore, the sorts of relation and property they seek to uncover, their criteria for experiment, confirmation, and truth, as well as the practical applications they seek to foster. The representational field of a given science thus acts as a filter for what it investigates - a means of abstraction by which the vision and the experience of the real are converted into an investigable field.

The second fundamental process in Heidegger's constellation of modern science is "methodology" [Verfahren]. The methodology of a modern science makes sure that its ground plan will be projected with appropriate rigor and that the science can develop in relation to its object. For Heidegger, different spheres of being require different forms of rigor. Natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, for example, must be exact in order to be rigorous. On the other hand, because they are concerned with living things, human sciences such as history and philosophy must remain less exact in order to be rigorous. A science's methodology adjusts its representational field to reality, thus ensuring that its hypotheses and theoretical constructions will in turn be met by something real. In this way, a science's process of research results in the gradual objectification of its representational field - a process through which reality comes increasingly to show itself in terms of (and, ultimately, as) its systematic scientific representations. In addition, modern science's methodological character ensures its tendency toward ever greater specialization by causing a science to differentiate its field of representation more and more in order to better account for its experimental results.

The third fundamental process in Heidegger's constellation of modern science is "ongoing activity" [Betrieb]. This term designates science's essential nature as a constant activity of externalization, self-criticism, and development. As ongoing activity, modern science creates institutions to house and foster its practices, develops publishing networks to spread its representations, and forms academic bodies in order to reproduce and develop itself over time. And although Heidegger does not mention it, the ongoing activity of modern science also causes it to develop itself both commercially and militarily. Furthermore, as ongoing activity, modern science also has a tendency to run aground. When this
happens, modern science degenerates into “mere business” [bloßer Betrieb]. Science’s ongoing activity becomes mere business,

whenever, in the pursuing of its methodology, it no longer keeps itself open on the basis of an ever-new accomplishing of its projection-plan, but only leaves that plan behind itself as a given, never again confirms and verifies its own self-accumulating results and the calculation of them, but simply chases after such results and calculations.¹²

As mere business, modern science no longer develops. Instead, it seeks to reproduce all reality in terms of an already fixed representational field.

As a whole, Heidegger’s model of modern science presents it as a historically developing constellation of presencing and absencing—a set of interrelated meaning-producing processes that systematically disclose the world and, by developing humanity’s power over it, ultimately reproduce the real as the representational system that at first was merely supposed to investigate it. As a constellation of presencing and absencing, modern science is a self-developing force of systematic disclosure and expression that interrelates humanity and nature. The various processes making up its ambiguous essence—research, methodology, ongoing activity, projection, and rigor—call upon one another to develop and differentiate themselves. Through their polemical or conflicting activity, they branch out from one another and, thereby, also draw together in increasingly more numerous and densely packed social, objective, and conditioning structures.¹³

Like his model of modern science, Heidegger’s phenomenological model of his contemporary moment presents modernity as a historically developing constellation of presencing and absencing—a self-perpetuating set of processes that makes possible certain types of horizonal disclosure that call upon humanity to remake the real in terms of these disclosures. For Heidegger, however, modernity’s constellation of meaning- and objectivity-producing processes is far more complex and encompassing than that of modern science. Indeed, modernity’s constellation contains modern science as one of its elements. As such, modernity is conceived not simply as a greater constellation but also as the overall horizon in which different primary constellations—including that of modern science—exist. These constellations interact with one another, thereby rerouting each other’s representations, activities, and objective institutions into an even greater systematic and developing network: the spiritual-objective reality of the modern Western world.

Heidegger argues that the constellation of modernity consists of five essential phenomena.¹⁴ The first essential phenomenon that defines his age as a whole is the rise of modern science, which begins in the sixteenth century. With the rise of modern science, a new mode of disclosing the world also arises—a mode of disclosure that sees the world as picture or representation. As mentioned above, the development of this mode of disclosure causes humanity to remake reality in the image of its scientific representations. This has the effect of reducing the richness of what is to a limited set of properties,¹⁵ systematically interrelating that which has thus been reduced¹⁰ and, furthermore, relating this newly reduced “objectivity” to the human subject as the source of all its meaning and value.¹⁷ The second essential modern phenomenon is, for Heidegger,
the staggering growth of “machine technology” [Maschinentechnik], most evident in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and, with it, technology’s increasing involvement in every sphere of human existence. Technology’s growth and increasing involvement in everyday life, in turn, indicates a transformation in the meaning-projecting conditions that support human activity – a transformation that furthers our ever increasing conformity to the representational structures of the modern sciences.

The third essential modern phenomenon is the institutionalization of art – that is, the movement of art into the purview of aesthetics – something that Heidegger also criticizes in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” According to Heidegger, art’s institutionalization and the concomitant development of aesthetics cause art to be understood as an expression of human life and thus as the objectification of merely subjective “experience” [Erlebnis]. Instead of being conceived as the response to an authentic disclosure of Being (as Heidegger contended in his decisive aesthetics), art is given a purely human origin. Art’s nature as a world-instituting phenomenon – more a gift from Being than a product made by humans – is thus forgotten. Related to the institutionalization of art is modernity’s fourth phenomenon: the idea that the consummation of human activity is “culture” [Kultur] and thus the production of “values.” By making values the highest goal of human activity, humans perpetuate modernity’s false idea that all meaning comes from and serves the subject. Like modernity’s view of art, its view of culture thus extends and entrenches the scientific world view, reduces the multivalence of reality, furthers the spread of nihilism, and contributes to humanity’s forgetting of the withdrawal of Being.

Finally, the fifth essential phenomenon defining modernity is the loss of the “gods.” According to Heidegger, this situation is not gross atheism but, rather, a situation of indecision about God and the gods – a new void in human existence “compensated for by means of historiographical and psychological investigation of myth.” In the early stages of the modern epoch, loss of religious faith could be ameliorated by a belief in the ultimate mastery of human science and rationality and thus a confidence in the meaning-producing powers of the Western subject. As modernity develops, however, lacunae begin to appear at the horizons defining modernity’s various self-developing scientific representations of the world. Each individual system seems to function, but larger questions as to the ultimate nature and purpose of each system appear to have no answer. For this reason, since the middle of the nineteenth century, modernity has become a “destitute time” [dürftige Zeit], as Heidegger calls it in his writings on the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin beginning in the mid-1930s. Neither God nor the power of science can be relied upon to answer all questions – fill all gaps in human knowledge – as was believed at earlier stages of the modern epoch. And it is this sense that modernity has become less than an absolute source of meaning (the feeling that an inexplicable, incalculable “shadow” encircles all objective functioning) that, according to Heidegger, potentially opens humans up to a new dispensation of Being – an experience of phenomena so great that it will allow them to overcome their modern world.
Heidegger's models of science and modernity thus retain numerous phenomenological elements from his earlier existential analysis of Dasein. The fundamental processes and essential phenomena making up the two models are derived from conditions that Heidegger observes around him in his world and thus relate to Dasein's fundamental nature as "being-in." In addition, in accordance with the direction of phenomenological analysis defined in *Being and Time*, his models of the late 1930s articulate possibility conditions for what is empirically observable (they move from ontic to ontological conditions and back again). Thus, because his models are grounded in observation and composed of reflexively derived possibility conditions, they remain phenomenological. Yet, combined with Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of the fundamental processes of his contemporary historical moment is an account of the past generated by a theory of textual and aesthetic hermeneutics. There is, in other words, a second "origin" from which Heidegger's models of science and modernity draw their truth: the hermeneutically investigated account of fundamental "epochs" and "time spans" of human history. In *Being and Time*, as argued in Chapter 1, Heidegger understood hermeneutic method to be fundamentally suspicious and critical. Historical texts, in Heidegger's terms, were to be approached destructively — that is, in light of the meanings they tried to obscure. By "destroying" key texts in the history of Western metaphysics, Heidegger believed that he could gain access to an authentic experience of Being — a disclosure that was unconstrained by the concepts that had reduced Being over the course of human history by giving it definite form and structure. By hermeneutically investigating the major ontological concepts of the Western tradition — nature, being, substance, substratum, thing, subject, essence, form, matter, world, and humanity, to name only a few — Heidegger also believed that he could define a series of world epochs. Each epoch, according to Heidegger, is characterized by a set of major principles that determine the ways in which everything is disclosed and understood. Moreover, each epoch is understood by Heidegger along the lines of his models of science and modernity — that is, as developing spiritual-material systems, constellations of presencing and absenting that, in conjunction with humanity, produce a given historical world.

A historical epoch, however, is not only defined by its metaphysical texts. As Heidegger states in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, a historical epoch also takes shape through its other forms of great works. By this Heidegger does not simply mean works of visual art, architecture, literature, and music, but also "works" such as modern science or the ancient Greek state. Thus, beginning in the 1930s, the source from which Heidegger generates the various principles that define the Western world epochs has been broadened to include multiple sources of culture. These multiple sources, however, are still approached hermeneutically, that is, as works that illuminate the historical principles forming and governing a particular epoch. Moreover, Heidegger continues to understand culture as fundamentally projecting a metaphysics. For Heidegger, in other words, a metaphysics is not simply a philosophical text articulating what a particular thinker finds to be the foundational concepts of a particular moment. Instead, for Heidegger, a metaphysics is the "actual set" of foundational principles that define an epoch — principles that are initially created by
and then reflected in the entire range of culture of a particular time. These foundational principles articulate how “what is” or “reality” can be – for example, as quiddity (what it is) and existence (that it is). Or, to pick another set of examples, reality can also be grasped – as it was in medieval metaphysics – as res (thing), unum (one), aliquid (something), bonum (good), and verum (true). In these ways, metaphysics comes to limit and define Being – occlude its nature as a multivalent play of presencing and absencing and fix it in the form of a subset of some of its many meanings or aspects.

For Heidegger, Western societies – by which he means the nations of Europe and the United States – have understood their world according to the same overall metaphysical system since the time of Plato and Aristotle. This does not mean than Western metaphysics has not developed. Quite the contrary, it has – so much so, that Heidegger segments Western history into a number of separate epochs, each with its own particular set of metaphysical principles. Yet, according to Heidegger, the sets of metaphysical principles that define the different epochs of Western world history are essentially continuous. In other words, the sets of principles develop out of one another and, moreover, exhibit a clear teleology that leads from classical antiquity to the present day. According to Heidegger, Western metaphysics began in the time of the ancient Greeks, originating in the works of the early Greek thinkers such as Parmenides and Heraclitus and in the public poetry of the great tragedians. Yet, although they began to define it, these early thinkers and artists did not limit Being to a particular set of fundamental attributes or qualities. Rather, it took the “classical” Greeks – Plato and Aristotle – to produce the fundamental formulations of Being that would slowly reduce what human beings ordinarily take to be “reality” to the fixed sets of attributes that dominate the history of metaphysics. Throughout his middle and later periods, Heidegger develops a complex account of the limitation of Being through the development of Western metaphysics – an involved story tracing the various terms through which Being became more and more reduced until, in the modern epoch, it metamorphoses into the antithetical poles of subject and object. To summarize briefly, the development of metaphysics early on transforms the experience of Being into “continuous presence” and recognizes as existing only that which can be connected to some fundamental ground – transformations that eventually produce both modern science and the ultimate superfluousness of traditional philosophy (i.e., metaphysics). Unfortunately, due to space considerations, Heidegger’s complex philological account of the development of Western metaphysics cannot be traced here in the manner it deserves. Instead, his late-1930s characterization of Western metaphysical history in terms of its three main epochs will briefly be examined, as this will at least present a rough sketch of Heidegger’s account of the development of Western metaphysics.

Three Metaphysical Epochs

Throughout his career, Heidegger gives different indications as to the precise number of metaphysical “times” or “epochs” through which Western humanity has passed. In “The Time of the World Picture,” however, he lists three: the
Greek, the medieval, and the modern. This point shall not be debated here; although, from a late-twentieth-century point of view, even the simplest historical account of Western people suggests more differentiation than this. (Kiefer's art, as has already been shown, suggests that this is impossible.) According to Heidegger, a metaphysics defines for an epoch its apprehension of selfhood, that which is (the things and beings it recognizes as real or existing), truth (as either correctness or unconcealment), and the "sense in which, in any given instance, human beings are the measure [MaR]." A metaphysics, in other words, functions as a conceptual system through which a large historical group defines and orients both their individual and their collective subjectivity. Created by a canon of great works, which includes different forms of human culture in the broad sense, each set of metaphysical principles is — as we have learned from Heidegger's account of great works in *Introduction to Metaphysics* — an expression of the communal will of its “people.” Created by the interaction of humans and Being, each set of metaphysical principles defines its epoch by fundamentally shaping and determining its development.

For Heidegger, the ancient Greek self was de-centered. In other words, fundamental to the Greek sense of self-identity was the acceptance of restriction or fate — the recognition that, at any given moment, only a fraction of what is was open or susceptible to human decision. Correspondingly, the Greek sense of what is was determined by their concept of *physis* — Being as presencing or emergence out of concealment. Largely beyond human control, reality impinged on the Greeks, constraining their endeavors and, in part, constructing their internal natures from without. For this reason, the ancient Greeks understood truth as *aletheia*, or unconcealment — as an interplay of presencing and absencing that often revealed aspects of reality that could not have been anticipated beforehand. By recognizing this interplay, the Greeks acknowledged the basic fungibility of their world as well as its bipolarity — its nature as something that humans and Being constructed together. At the same time, however, because they accepted their limitations (because they recognized that they were not the measure of everything), the Greeks did not fight against the historical world set up by their creators but instead accepted both the dialectical openness of Being and the visible aspect of their epoch that the great works of their culture made possible. And by bringing these aspects of their fate together, the ancient Greeks fashioned and furthered their age.

With the transition to the medieval epoch, Western selfhood started to become more centered and reality began to become more predictable — more within human comprehension and control. According to Heidegger, during the medieval epoch, the self came to be understood through its relation to the Christian God. And through church-sponsored practices such as introspection and the examination of one’s conscience — activities designed to secure one’s faith — the medieval person learned (in part) to turn inward to find his or her source of truth. In this way, a first decisive step was made toward the creation of the modern subject. At the same time, however, Christian metaphysics still held that the ultimate source of the truth was God, understood as the primary reality from which everything else was derived. Since humans of the medieval epoch believed that God transcended the self, which at best could be said to
imperfectly mimic Him, they posited a fundamental reality and a truth that necessarily originated outside of or beyond human beings. The self was thus still understood to be produced by a reality that it ultimately could neither predict nor determine, and the world was thus still conceived to contain more than could be imagined by human consciousness. God’s truth, on the other hand, was preserved for the medieval mind in the written word or doctrine of the Christian church, which described the Christian world and the beings and things in it. And as preserved in Christian doctrine, the essence of truth, according to Thomas Aquinas, was “adaequatio intellectus et rei” – the correctness or correspondence of intellect and thing. With this formulation, the Greek understanding of truth as a play of presence and absence was obscured, and truth began to be conceived as the correspondence between what is and human representation. As such, reality began to be implicitly understood as determined by human concepts. For this reason, although God was still assumed to be the measure of all things, the world began to be conceived as a representation.

With the advent of modernity, the self becomes fully centered and reality takes an important step closer to its complete objectification. This is the case because, unlike the medieval epoch, the modern epoch recognizes its own hand in the production of its representations – a recognition that, paradoxically, completes the world’s historical transformation into a human “world picture.” According to Heidegger, the modern concept of self is determined by Descartes’s reformulation of the self as “subject” and his understanding of human consciousness as the locus of all truth or certainty. Thus, with the advent of modernity, human beings replace God as the ground of both what is and truth. The individual subject becomes the sole measure – the center to which everything relates. As subjects, we modern individuals recognize our own tremendous powers of representation and the ability to control nature that springs from these powers. In turn, we do everything we can to increase them. Representation, the mode of disclosure of modern science, thus becomes modernity’s dominant mode of disclosure. As subject, the modern individual objectifies nature to suit his or her every whim. Nature and everything else that appears shows itself, according to Heidegger, only in terms of our wanting, willing, and desiring. Like the medieval epoch, the modern epoch understands truth as certainty – as the correspondence of a human representation and something that is. Unlike the medieval epoch, however, the modern epoch recognizes representation as its own creation. It is thus not afraid to change and adjust its representations so as to objectify nature still further.

Modernity’s Decisive Phase

Central to Heidegger’s historical account of modernity is his conception of his own time as the decisive phase – the moment of potential “turning” or transition from the “first” to the “other” beginning. According to Heidegger, the triumph of modern science reveals the completion of Western metaphysics. By the early twentieth century, Western metaphysical principles had – in the forms of the modern sciences – become so entrenched in human understanding that
these principles had rendered traditional philosophy superfluous. When this happened, modernity became a destitute time – one characterized by nihilism. Modernity’s destitute time is a historical time that has no absolute principles – no absolute form of normativity. Instead, it is characterized by the historical production of competing sets of fundamental principles: principles that are spelled out and disseminated through fields of representation. In his 1938 essay, Heidegger is understandably uncertain as to whether, within the context of the Third Reich, his own continued asking of the question of Being in German philosophy can save modernity from utter destruction. He does, however, speculate in his Contributions to Philosophy [Beiträge zur Philosophie] (written between 1936 and 1938) that, instead of a new metaphysical epoch appearing on the horizon to take the place of the modern one, an entirely different post-metaphysical era was potentially about to open up or institute itself. Not a new epoch governed by a new set of principles, but a historical time in which principles no longer play a foundational role. And with the withering away of principles, as Heidegger understood it, the origin of truth would become plural – that is, Western humans would experience the truth of Being on multiple levels of experiential and cultural awareness. Moreover, despite the momentous nature of this transformation, Heidegger in no way suggests that in a post-metaphysical era all truths would become accessible to everyone.

According to Heidegger, a post-metaphysical era could potentially arise because, in modernity’s decisive phase, human beings as subjects have – through the objectification of their world produced by the modern natural and anthropological sciences – placed before them the task of deciding anew the forms of what is. The real, according to Heidegger, was no longer to be conceived as constant presence – and no longer to be treated as fundamentally produced and reproducible. Truth, moreover, was to be looked for in multiple sources. In addition, in this decisive phase, humans as subjects have placed before them the task of deciding anew the forms of selfhood and community (and, thus, the way in which they are – or are not – the measure of all things).

Only because and insofar as the human being actually and essentially has become subject is it necessary for him or her, as a consequence, to confront the explicit question: Is it as an ‘I’ confined to its own preferences and freed into its own arbitrary choosing or as the ‘we’ of society; is it as an individual or as a community; is it as a personality within the community or as a mere group member in the corporate body; is it as a state and nation and as a people or as the common humanity of modern humans, that human beings will and ought to be the subjects that in their modern essence they already are? Only where human beings are essentially already subjects does there exist the possibility of their slipping into the aberration of subjectivism in the sense of individualism. But also, only where human beings remain subjects does the positive struggle against individualism and for the community as the sphere of those goals that govern all achievement and usefulness have any meaning. And because the “real,” “truth,” individual and collective “subjectivity,” and “measure” are put so fundamentally in question though the completion of metaphysics in representational thinking during modernity’s decisive phase, the possibility has opened up for utterly new conceptions of these terms to appear and for them to function quite differently in human affairs in the near future – a possibility that first needs to be grasped by a decisive and creative few.
Although Heidegger implicitly exempts his own destructive hermeneutic method from the criticism, the historical evolution of modernity into its decisive phase, he argues, was accomplished in a very important way by the modern human sciences. In order to further our own understanding of ourselves as subjects, Western humans eventually developed the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology, which Heidegger designates with a single term “anthropology” in order to indicate the underlying metaphysical position that unites them. These human sciences, however, did not simply serve to develop our self-understanding. Instead, they also served to entrench our self-image as a Cartesian subject. As such, they increasingly divided what is into a sphere of subjectivity that legislates and a sphere of objectivity that is manipulated. The human sciences thus served to perpetuate our sense of the naturalness of our dominance over nature – our sense that nature is there to serve us. And in addition, they served to further promote and develop a mode of disclosure in which human beings are represented systematically in relation to their instrumental potential to human willing and desiring. Thus, paradoxically, what the modern concept of subjectivity obscures and causes us to forget is the essential autonomy, heterogeneity, and difference of other human beings. By supporting the development of scientific representations of human beings, the human sciences permitted the division of humans into a manipulable field. And in this way, we set ourselves up to both manipulate and be manipulated by others.

By setting humans up to be manipulated, the modern human sciences have, according to Heidegger, paved the way for the late 1930s to become a time of struggle between “world views” (Weltanschauungen) – different representational systems developed to lead and organize people. As Heidegger puts it:

The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word ‘picture’ (Bild) now means the structured image (Gebild) that is the creature of the human being’s producing which represents and sets before. In such producing, the human being contends for the position in which he or she can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is. Because this position secures, organizes, and articulates itself as a world view, the modern relationship to that which is is one that becomes, in its decisive unfolding, a confrontation of world views; and indeed not of random world views, but only of those that have already taken up the fundamental position of the human being that is most extreme, and have done so with the utmost resoluteness. For the sake of this struggle of world views and in keeping with its meaning, the human being brings into play his or her unlimited power for the calculating, planning, and molding of all things. Science as research is an absolutely necessary form of this establishing of self in the world; it is one of the pathways upon which the modern age rages toward fulfillment of its essence, with a velocity unknown to the participants. With this struggle of world views the modern age first enters into the part of its history that is the most decisive and probably the most capable of enduring.

Missing from Heidegger’s account of modernity’s decisive phase is an explanation of how the tendency of human beings to view themselves in terms of scientific representations could later become a pronounced desire to objectify and organize themselves through “world views.” At the same time, however, the text does furnish the reader with an important clue for such an investigation: Heidegger’s account of the Cartesian subject’s self-understanding as the
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reference point and “natural” master of everything that is. If, in the eyes of modern human beings, the subject is master, then everything that can be done to liberate and develop the subject is justified. In this way, social control of human beings in all its manifestations – from certain types of educational reform to eugenics in its most brutal modes – can be justified under the sign of the Cartesian subject so long as such control is understood to be practiced on behalf of some ideal human type. A “world view” could thus be understood as any representational system designed to promulgate an image of an ideal individual and collective subject.

Because of the idealism of Heidegger’s historical account (his tendency to describe historical development in terms of the evolution of systematic fields of representation, epochal principles, and modes of disclosure), the material practices that also enable the transformation of the Western subject into the “authoritarian personality” – the ideal subject of the fascist or totalitarian state - are not investigated (as, for example, they are in the Marxist-psychoanalytic thinking of the Frankfurt School). Thus Heidegger’s discussion of “world views” is the closest he gets to a direct examination of the National Socialists in the “World Picture” essay – the party and the “world view” that was most materially present in Germany at the time he wrote this work. For this reason, it is interesting to note that, although the Heidegger of 1938 makes the historical moment of the Nazi state part of a longer period of Western instrumental nihilism (and thus implicitly criticizes the Nazis), Heidegger also argues that the most extreme positions taken during this nihilistic period are the ones most full of potential for the new beginning. Thus, on the basis of this essay, it could be argued that Heidegger still understands the Nazi state to have the greatest potential to experience a “turning” at that moment of Western history – an idea that grants their world view a great deal of importance. More important, however, is the fact that Heidegger’s term “world view” also fits different representations of individual and collective identity produced by artists in the twentieth century – representations that undermine national identity at the same time as they also construct it.

Representation and Abstraction

Despite Heidegger’s insufficiently critical account of modernity’s decisive phase, his theory of history can help us today to understand the ways in which both representation and history are treated in Kiefer’s art. At first, this may seem surprising, since the hermeneutic undecidability of Kiefer’s art seems to oppose the conception of clearly defined world epochs that runs through Heidegger’s hermeneutic account of modernity’s development. As shown in Chapter 2, Kiefer’s art rejects a teleological approach to history as a succession of metaphysical stages. Instead, the spectator is always presented with an intermingling of historical worlds. Moreover, Heidegger’s unproblematic romanticization of the ancient Greeks as the first beginning – the most pure, the most in touch with Being – is seemingly contradicted by Kiefer’s neoclassical Nazi temples and interiors, which suggest the coexistence of both modern and archaic
(mythic) elements in the same work. Furthermore, for Heidegger, the “late” modern worlds of Germany and the other nations of the West are primarily products of a scientific world view objectified through the organized labor of their different national groups, defined by Heidegger as the members of the same language community. In Kiefer’s works, on the other hand, both individual and collective identity are historically produced through a much more ambiguous and dialogic interaction of self and other, individual and society, and “national” and “foreign” elements. Thus, in Kiefer’s art, the modern German world seems much less clear and understandable than the one defined by Heidegger in 1938. For these reasons, the treatment of history in Kiefer’s art seems at odds with Heidegger’s historical account of modernity’s development.

Yet, despite the mixing of different temporal moments in Kiefer’s books and paintings (as well as the sense they evoke that historical epochs have no clear shape or definable limits), these books and paintings are – like Heidegger’s late-1930s theorizing about his contemporary moment – focused on the multiple forms and problems of representation. In other words, Heidegger’s concept of representation as an objectifying projection of a conceptual field upon the real – the product of an elite intersubjective world of German historical creators and the “people” or “state” who labor to realize the elite’s projections – seems echoed by Kiefer’s ambiguous handling of representation in his art works. And by expanding the spectator’s understanding of what the concept of representation may be said to cover, Kiefer’s art suggests that his contemporary moment is in fundamental ways defined and constituted by processes of representation – processes that in a number of ways conform to Heidegger’s earlier theoretical description. As was shown in Chapters 1 and 2, for example, Kiefer typically mixes diverse modes of representation and abstraction, juxtaposing content with a rich formal display of different textures, materials, and gestures (both human and mechanical). In this way, by contrasting pure form and natural material (such as sand and vegetable matter) with representational elements, which tend to define and objectify what they come into contact with, Kiefer’s art seems to recognize the connection that Heidegger makes between representation and humankind’s self-manipulating instrumental rationality. This is apparent in Kiefer’s art in three different ways. First, “real world” objects are used both representationally and symbolically in Kiefer’s works – and thus with fairly clear sets of assignable meanings, something that could set them up for manipulation. (Thus, although Kiefer’s works are ambiguous, this ambiguity is not a result of the objects and texts that they represent having unclear identities. Rather, the overall ambiguity of Kiefer’s works is a result of their recognizable objects and texts adding up to produce contradictory meanings.) Second, handwritten words and phrases are used to assign specific meanings both to Kiefer’s works as a whole as well as individual elements within his works. Once again, this gives rise to a situation in which, despite their ultimate undecidability, Kiefer’s images initially seem easy to identify or “grasp” – the spectator, in other words, first assumes that he or she can easily assign them a recognizable “theme” or “subject.” Third, as shown above, Kiefer’s painted perspective and his discontinuous, tracking-shot book “performances,” which organize his painterly, material, and representational elements, are themselves representations of points of view.
representations that hold possibilities for both centering and de-centering individual and collective subjectivity. In these ways, the treatment of representation in Kiefer's works seems to respond to and develop Heidegger's concept of "world view" from 1938 – an evolving field of representation and objectification set up by a cultural elite in conjunction with both their people's history (the "great" works of their culture) and the collective labor and military service of their contemporary community.

Thus, although Kiefer's treatment of history initially seems very different from that of Heidegger, Kiefer's art ultimately seems to make the same point as the German philosopher: namely, that the contemporary moment is fundamentally defined and characterized by the processes of representation. For this reason, as Kiefer's art suggests, postwar German culture is defined by many of the same issues that, according to Heidegger, defined German culture before the war. And as if in direct response to Heidegger's model of modernity (which sees representation as decisively modern and searches for a means of overcoming representational thought), Kiefer's art suggests, on the contrary, that the modern concept of representation is fundamentally undecidable and hence still contains resources for new forms of culturally productive activity. As has been shown, Kiefer's representations produce symbolic content or "subject matter" – meaning that resembles the political, moral, or religious content of much traditional representational Christian and bourgeois art. In addition, however, in relation to Kiefer's works, the concept of representation has also been shown to fit Kiefer's painterly depiction of some thing or being, his photograph of a recognizable object, his use of appropriated names and texts, his sequential performance of a "point of view," his use of readymades, his strategies of painterly reduction (for example, gestural abstraction and the monochrome), and his visual strategies for evoking existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic perspectives. Thus, in Kiefer's art, representation is represented not only as fundamentally multiple, but also as so pervasive in modern culture that it almost seems to swallow abstraction. For this reason, Kiefer's art can best be seen as continuing and increasing the focus on representation articulated in Heidegger's 1938 model of his contemporary moment and the history of its coming to be.

At this juncture, however, a question arises. If, as Heidegger and Kiefer suggest, the multiple problems and forms indicated by the concept of representation point to a fundamental force in and defining characteristic of modernity – a topic that allows us to understand modernity's historical nature (as both the present as well as the evolutionary process by which the present came to be) – where does this leave abstraction? Where, in other words, does the concept that modernity is fundamentally representational leave what many art historians see as the central modernist visual strategy of the twentieth century – the strategy of artistic production that appears most specific to our own century in the West? In relation to Heidegger's model of modernity, abstraction is almost an absent term. The term, however, has been used to describe the process by which experience or phenomena are transformed into scientific representations and then objects. In other words, within the context set up by Heidegger's theory of modernity, abstraction only seems to function as a moment in the process of representation and objectification. There is thus no appearance in Heidegger's
thinking of the radically formal abstract art of modernism between the wars – a complex field of different types of painting, sculpture, and collage that could have helped Heidegger develop his understanding of some of the “negative” or critical historical functions of art. On the other hand, although Kiefer’s works treat abstraction representationally, they also always treat it as having a moment of “otherness” – namely, as something that possesses an element that comes from outside the subject. Thus, as argued in Chapters 1 and 2, in Kiefer’s art, abstraction is always connected to a moment of denial or negation, a moment of dissonance that can be understood in multiple ways as the denial of content through reflexiveness about form (and the related concept of medium); as strategies of reduction – simplifying the labor of the artist as well as the work of the spectator (through the simplification of the work’s forms of representational and visual identification); and as the evocation of violence (which sets up an undecidable existential play between male and female, victimizer and victim, artist, spectator, and other).

Kiefer’s treatment of abstraction thus always points to the fundamental negativity of modern visual art: the fundamental negativity that is essential – not only to the concept of abstraction – but to the concept of modern art as a whole. This negativity is that aspect of the modern art work that has the potential to stop or arrest the spectator’s contemplation – to suggest, in other words, that acts of interpretation have limits and that art, like reality as a whole, also resists attempts to give it definite meanings. Paradoxically, however, modern art’s negativity has also been essential to its concept because its negativity is the source of its autonomy vis-à-vis the spectator. Its negativity, in other words, is fundamentally undecidable: it is the source of the abstract art work’s “value” within bourgeois culture as well as that aspect of the work of art that can at times undermine this value – that is, make it momentarily unassimilable to the means-ends rationality that dominates modern Western societies. (And although representation has also been used by modern artists to produce negativity, representation appears to perform its negative-critical function less well – less radically – than abstraction.) On the other hand, as essential as abstract art’s fundamental negativity is to the concept of modern art, it never remains the final resting point of the modern viewer’s activity. No matter how radically uninterpretable abstract art attempts to be, it can always be interpretatively recuperated – that is, treated as representing something. Thus, despite the fundamental negativity of abstraction within modernism, abstraction will always ultimately be recuperated by representation and, moreover, project a set of meanings that will include a vision of the individual and collective subject.

Aleksandr Rodchenko’s Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, Pure Blue Color (1921), a set of three flatly painted, monochrome panels, one in each of the primary colors, presents a good example of the fundamental negativity of abstract painting. In addition, it also reveals how abstract form can signify a particular concept of subjectivity. Rodchenko’s work, which was first exhibited in the 5 × 5 – 25 exhibition, at the Club of the Union of Poets, Moscow, in September 1921, is fundamentally negative – critical of the visual tradition and of the interpretative and institutional structures that support the production and reception of works of art – in at least three different ways. First, Rodchenko’s work is fundamentally
negative because it seeks to negate representation in the sense of the depiction of "real world" beings and objects and the use of abstract form to signify spiritual, emotional, psychological, or metaphysical subject matter. This latter negation is made visually apparent by the overall undifferentiated nature of the three monochromes. They seem flatly, even mechanically, painted. And their "flatness" – in combination with the extreme simplicity of their compositional structure – makes it difficult for the spectator to read the work as expressive of a set of complex, humanly intended meanings. As Rodchenko later described his strategy, "I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue, and yellow. I affirmed: It's all over. Basic colors. Every plane is a plane, and there is to be no more representation." In this way, Rodchenko's monochromes can be seen as intentionally attempting to negate the tradition of representation, which stretches back to the beginnings of Western art, as well as the early non-objective art of Malevich and Kandinsky, both of whom still attributed spiritual meaning to their abstract forms. Second, Rodchenko's abstractions are fundamentally negative because, by attempting to do away with all forms of artistic representation, they seek to transform the work of art into a "real object." They seek, in other words, to produce a work that paradoxically undermines its status as an art object – that is, its status as different from "mere" objects in the world. 

Third, Rodchenko's monochrome series is fundamentally negative because it seeks to undermine the traditional social role of the artist in bourgeois society – a role produced and supported by the concept of the artist as genius. According to this concept, the artist is an essentially free, individual, and visionary creator – one who makes unique and valuable objects that express the fundamental beliefs or concerns of his or her time. Rodchenko's panels undermine the concept of the artist as genius, as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh suggests, by responding to and developing the central strategy that Malevich used to produce his square and cross paintings between 1915 and 1919: nonrelational central composition, a means by which artistic decision may be reduced. In addition to being nonrelational, Rodchenko's panels also eliminate all figure-ground and most mixed-color relationships from painting (the latter effect is achieved by reducing the artist's choice of hues to equal amounts of the three primary colors). In this way, Rodchenko's monochrome series negates two of the very few signs of artistic subjectivity (or choice) that remain in Malevich's earlier abstractions: the hierarchical organization of the picture field and all but the most basic form of color balance. As such, Rodchenko's monochromes can be read as his attempt to remove the modern artist from the position of spiritual leader assigned to him or her by bourgeois culture. And by returning the artist to the position of a fellow worker within the new socialist community, Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, Pure Blue Color appears to partake in the post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde's attempt to dissolve the high-art sphere into socialist society. At the same time as Rodchenko reduces the signs of artistic subjectivity in his three canvases, however, his abstract negations also call out into his lifeworld for a new form of collective subject. This is the case because, by making the process of artistic decision and execution far simpler – something that anyone could do – Rodchenko suggests to his audience that they too have the talent to participate in the fine-art realm. In addition, by radically simplifying
artistic form, the panels also make their spectators aware of their own creative input into the viewing experience. In these two ways, Rodchenko's series negates the traditional bourgeois notion of the spectator as passive and thus stands as a provocation to Rodchenko's lifeworld to collaborate in the creation of new forms of individual and collective subjectivity.

In summary, Rodchenko's monochrome series is fundamentally negative in attempting to nullify four aspects of the work of art that many spectators in the early 1920s might have deemed essential to the concept of modern art: representation in both its depictive and abstract senses, the separate status of the work of art vis-à-vis other objects in the real world, the artist's status as a spiritual leader, and the role of the spectator as uninvolved or passive. However, through the interpretive tracing out of these four fundamental negations, Rodchenko's work once again comes to mean or represent something. More specifically, by attempting to provoke reflection on new forms of personal and social being – for example, the artist as a common worker, the audience as artistic creators, and the aesthetic sphere as a place to be occupied by collective as well as individual production – Rodchenko's monochromes come to represent the possibility of new forms of individual and collective identity. Thus, Rodchenko's contemporary, Nikolai Tarabukin, was correct – although perhaps for the wrong reasons – when he claimed that Rodchenko's monochrome strategy "convinces us that painting was, and remains, a representational art and that it cannot escape from these limits of the representational." 52 No matter how "other" a work of art may first appear, no matter how far outside of the conventional structures of "making sense" it initially stands, it ultimately becomes representational.

Kiefer's understanding of this fundamentally negative moment central to both abstract art and modernism as a whole and his sense that all forms of abstraction are ultimately assimilated by representation are the products of his negotiations with a complex field of modern art works and conceptualizations of abstraction. These works and conceptualizations can be discovered both in his prewar European past as well as in postwar American and European art. Indeed, Kiefer's post-1968 aesthetic practices seem a result of an increasingly "doubled" reception of radical and negating abstract modernist practice. As an art student in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, Kiefer was in a position to have access – through either books, magazines, or exhibitions – to the works of Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, and László Moholy-Nagy as well as those of Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Donald Judd. And because Kiefer's works critically engage both representation and abstraction in this complex and historical way, it should come as little surprise that his work also contains a sustained investigation of various types of artistic style – including the twentieth-century "styles" of pop art, minimalism, and abstract expressionism.

As most art historians now recognize, "style" is far more than a set of formal characteristics. Instead, as it functions in relation to works of art, style has become a means for identification – both literally and figuratively. It has become, in other words, a means of situating works within more general or common structures of meaning: temporal periods as well as sets of common techniques, concerns, and forms of representation. In the museum, for example, when a painting of uncertain authorship is acquired, style is one of the primary
concepts that the connoisseur uses in order to make an attribution – and thus to secure the temporal, spatial, and authorial identity of the work. Similarly, outside the museum, modern artists over the past hundreds of years have often viewed style as a means of identifying themselves with part of their tradition – that is, with select individuals worthy of emulation, select instances of “truthful vision,” or certain sets of forms that remain pertinent to their own situations. Style is thus that aspect of the particular work that moves it toward the general – and thus toward conceptuality and language.

Kiefer’s investigation of his “own” stylistic heritage recalls Heidegger’s account of modernity’s decisive phase as a battle of different representational systems. In Kiefer’s art, in other words, both abstract and representational forms are treated as if they represent intersubjective meanings – meanings that fundamentally relate to different modes of individual and group existence. Style is thus handled in Kiefer’s art as potentially helping to either produce or undermine what Heidegger would call a “world view” – a systematic and developing representation of an “ideal” individual and collective subject. And because he suggests that his time is one of competing styles – styles that must be investigated for the types of human identity that they promote, Kiefer keeps alive Heidegger’s sense of late modernity as a site of struggle between developing world views.

The Concept of Appropriation

Kiefer’s use of different strategies of appropriation reveal his fundamental interest in the meaningful “depths” of an image, style, or antecedent (a previous work upon which a new work is consciously based) – that is, the readings or meanings that adhere to it as it develops, becomes institutionalized, forms a tradition, and then, more often than not, is transformed into a stereotype. This fund of meaning can be called the “saturation” of an image, style, or antecedent – the history of its critical reception, which is potentially available to artist and spectator alike within the limits of their particular historical moments. Kiefer uses appropriation to sift and investigate his visual tradition – an investigation that suggests that Kiefer understands both his contemporary moment and his historical past to be riven by competing world views as well as gaps (moments of disjunction, unconsciousness, and death) encoded into almost every aspect of the visual.

The concept of appropriation – the conscious quotation of a preexisting image, style, or historical antecedent – achieved widespread usage in the critical discourses surrounding a number of the American art movements that emerged in the late 1970s. In particular, “appropriation” became one of the operative terms to explain social-critical strategies of postmodern photographers such as Sarah Charlesworth, Sherrie Levine, and Richard Prince, among others, as well as the less critical strategies of the “neo-geo” or “simulationist” artists such as Ashley Bickerton, Peter Halley, Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach, and Meyer Vaisman. In addition, through the work of David Salle and Julian Schnabel, appropriation also became associated with the much debated “revival” of representational or figurative painting beginning in the late 1970s. Used as a label to describe the
an aesthetic strategy of an extremely diverse group of contemporary artists, all of whom dealt either partially or exclusively with found imagery, objects, and styles, “appropriation” thus became, in the discourse of American art criticism, a term designating a supposedly “new” sensibility – the sign of a different attitude toward both images and the world. In brief, this new sensibility was defined as a recognition of the overabundance and overdetermination of images, styles, and previous works. It suggested that there were too many antecedents already circulating in contemporary world culture and that inherent in both representational and abstract art lies a potential for – even a tendency toward – domination. An artist was no longer required to make what would traditionally be considered “new” images; instead, his or her job could simply be selection. Thus, with the advent of an appropriationist sensibility, the artist’s task became that of uncovering the hidden world views concealed in the preexisting cultural material.

As it is used here in relation to Kiefer’s art (which often gets retrospectively – and incorrectly – read through the American concept), the term “appropriation” will carry a somewhat different meaning than in its earlier formulations. Contrary to what is often assumed, “appropriation” was in no way a “new” artistic strategy in the late 1970s. Indeed, it was not new in the late 1960s, when Anselm Kiefer first began to use the technique, nor around 1917–1918, when the Berlin Dada artists began to use it to make their photomontages. Indeed, although it takes multiple forms, some form of appropriation – the activity of taking over a past model or some other “fragment” of history – seems to be a fundamental aspect of all art. In addition, Craig Owens’s influential allegorical interpretation of appropriation, which argues that the new meaning conferred through an act of (recontextualizing) appropriation “replaces” or “supplants” the older meanings that previously adhered to an image, work, form, or style, must be revised in light of Kiefer’s art. Owens’s understanding of appropriation as involving the replacement of meaning seems too reductive when compared to the actual complexity of appropriative practices. Instead, as suggested by Kiefer’s works, the act of appropriation can also bring old and new systems of meaning into dialogue with one another. Kiefer seems highly aware of the saturated nature of images, styles, and works. He is cognizant, in other words, of the fact that they are always more than a particular combination of formal characteristics and that they also always carry with them a set of assumptions, beliefs, and values particular to the time and place in which they arose (as well as the contexts in which they were subsequently received and appropriated). In contrast to Owens’s conceptualization of allegory, Kiefer’s appropriations use the meanings that have been historically associated with their images, styles, and antecedents as raw materials to be combined with other elements – for example, with handwritten names and titles drawn from German literature – in order to create new meaningful configurations.

Whether they were aware of him or not, Kiefer must be seen as a historical antecedent to American appropriationists, for he is interested in many of the issues that later appeared on the American scene: the social-historical construction of identity through the mass media, the critique of originality, and an investigation of how value and desire are produced. And his example – as well
as the examples of a number of other German artists of his generation – must be used when evaluating the American appropriationists’ later achievements. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize important shifts of emphasis between Kiefer and his later American counterparts on issues of ownership, originality, and criticality. First, although issues of property still resonate in the background, Kiefer’s appropriations do not come across as intending to bring the issue of the ownership of an image into the foreground, as do, for example, many of Sherrie Levine’s. In contrast to her appropriations of Edward Weston and Eliot Porter’s photographs, for example, Kiefer’s appropriations keep their sources far less intact. In Kiefer’s work there is always some sort of active transformation – some conscious and critical recasting of the original model, as opposed to Levine’s passive transmission and her reliance on the critical context for clarification. Second, although Kiefer’s appropriations, like those of the Americans, do suggest a contemporary overabundance and overdetermination of images – a state of image saturation – they do not imply as strong a critique of the concepts of originality and autonomy. Kiefer does not, in other words, eschew all forms of manipulation in favor of mere selection and placement, as do many of the works by Koons, Levine, Prince, and Steinbach. Because of this, Kiefer also seems able to preserve a greater sense of agency in his art. Finally, although Kiefer’s appropriations appear to unmask the hidden world views behind certain types of imagery – as do, for example, the rephotographed “Marlboro Man” cowboys of Richard Prince, which provoke reflection on “American” identity – they are not all equally critical. At times Kiefer uses appropriation as a strategy of ideological exposure, but this is only one of its uses.

**German and Non-German**

Before dealing with specific examples of Kiefer’s appropriative strategies, however, it is necessary to turn briefly to the question of the plausibility of seeking American references or meanings in postwar German art. As will be demonstrated, Kiefer’s works – which often deal with specifically German themes by using a formal language derived from a supposedly “foreign” source – are far from unprecedented in the postwar West German context. Born in Donaueschingen, in southern Germany, on March 8, 1945, two months before the end of World War II, Anselm Kiefer grew up in the western half of a newly divided Germany – a country engaged in the twin processes of rebuilding and forgetting. Its cities and industries bombed to rubble, its economy destroyed, the people of West Germany in 1945 had undergone something that the Germans of 1918-1919, who had experienced World War I, had not suffered: the large-scale, mechanized destruction of entire cities within the heart of Germany. As a result, German culture took almost two decades to resume its former complexity. In addition, the post-1945 West Germans were highly suspicious of their own culture – in part, as a result of the National Socialists’ identification of their movement with the ideas and figures of many of Germany’s greatest artists, writers, philosophers, statesmen, and composers, as well as the...
Nazi control and state production of a national mass culture during the mid-century years of rearmament and war. "Year Zero," a common postwar expression for 1945, meant the low point, and not just of twentieth-century German infrastructure. It also meant the low point of German culture's identification with itself. The cultural past – the canon of the German tradition – was suspect, since its misappropriation by the Nazis revealed it to contain dangerous "authoritarian" elements. In addition, the "high-culture" sphere had not really existed in Germany since the mid-1930s – except in the tragic-farical form of the clandestine Nazi market in modern art. "High-art" cultural practitioners had either emigrated, gone underground, or had been dissolved into Nazi mass culture, a stereotypical representational field that projected the authority of the state, ideal images of "typical" German subjects and leaders, and terrifying representations of hated others – most particularly, Jews and communists – through every available technical means.

Culturally administered by the Allied victors – but initially left to its own cultural practitioners – postwar Germany began to reconstruct its high-culture sphere according to an ideal image of the human being. The question of the "new" or "West" German individual and collective subject, as Yule Heibel has argued, was very much the focus of German high culture during the first five years of West German reconstruction. In visual art, this asking the question of the new subject first appeared in the toned-down, expressive-organic abstract art of the Munich ZEN49 Group, which was formed around the painters Willi Baumeister and Fritz Winter and the psychiatrist-collector-aesthetician Dr. Ottomar Domnick to promote abstract art in Germany. This group, which was later to include the painter Theodor Werner, was from early on supported by German museums and critics.

ZEN49 abstraction in turn helped emphasize and promote Western Germany's rapid drift in the late 1940s toward the "West" and eventually toward Western – primarily French and American – visual art. Later, in the 1950s, ZEN49 abstract painting continued to be institutionally supported in Germany, not for its formal radicality but, first, because it presented a safe, easy form of abstraction – an abstraction that dismantled neither the figure-ground opposition nor the semiotic potential of the sign to symbolize "deep" metaphysical or archetypal meaning. It was thus considered "safe" for the war-ravaged German populace – a populace that had only recently been forced to relinquish a totalitarian vision of individual and collective subjectivity and now had to go about developing a Western-style constitutional democracy. In other words, because it prohibited direct "content" (its subject matter is generally vague and mystical), this art was understood by the Allied cultural administrators as the best antidote to the "spiritual" or "psychic" malaise of a population conditioned by Nazi propaganda and terror. The Nazis' totalitarian anti-individualism was to be replaced in art with a complacent form of subjectivism. Moreover, through abstraction, specifically German subject matter – themes that could provoke a relapse into "bad" forms of German identity – was avoided. Second, because the ZEN49 artists were primarily painters, their works could be easily presented within the public and private institutions of German cultural legitimization: the museum, the collection, the exhibition, and the press. In this way, the Allied
administrators hoped that traditional German cultural institutions could help reunite and recondition West Germans and keep them focused on the task of transforming their country into a successful Western-style capitalist society. As the Allied cultural administrators correctly realized, the Nazis used past art in order to construct an idea of “Germanness” – to build a sense of national identity and German destiny. To prevent a similar misappropriation in the future, such themes, as well as the traditional “German” forms and styles encouraged by the Nazis, were to be suppressed through the promotion of abstract art.

Over the course of the West German 1950s, the German museum and critical establishment supported ZEN49 abstract painting, as well as two other forms of expressive-organic abstraction: the paintings of Ernst Wilhelm Nay and Emil Schumacher. The interplay between different types of abstract painting thus tended to overshadow most forms of representation in the German high-art sphere, helping to enforce the prohibition on specifically German subject matter. In addition, “informel,” a form of expressive abstract painting originating in France, was eagerly taken up and developed – another factor that contributed to the non-German character of German art in the years immediately following the war. The internationalism of German visual art, in turn, was supported by the coordinated efforts of the Germans and the Allies (now without the Soviet Union), for it was considered to be a sign of Germany’s further integration into the West. In addition, even though realist artists like Otto Dix continued to paint in East Germany, the German representational tradition exemplified by Neue Sachlichkeit painting and printmaking from the 1920s and 1930s did not seem to interest the West German artists of the 1950s very much. For many of the West German painters and critics of the time, realism was equated with the visual culture of both the defeated National Socialists and the emerging Soviet Union and, thus, with the forces of fascism and communism. Although the still representational but “abstracting” works of such European modernists as Paula Modersohn-Becker, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Ernst-Ludwig Kirchner, and Franz Marc were shown and discussed in Germany over the course of the 1950s, this art was generally examined and assimilated for its form, not its content. Thus, as a whole, West German visual art remained primarily abstract between the end of World War II and the early 1960s – although its formalism was based on a expressive-organic type of abstraction (something that caused it to have somewhat limited ideas about the nature of abstract form). It avoided specifically German subject matter, and, after a period of assimilating the lessons of German modernism, also began welcoming new aesthetic styles from abroad.

Although perhaps well intentioned, this rejection of specifically German subject matter in visual art nevertheless helped strengthen a dangerous tendency in postwar German society to refuse serious inquiry into the Nazi past. With the Soviet separation from the Western Alliance, the complete political division of Germany into Eastern and Western nations by 1949 and the erection of the Berlin wall in 1961, a situation arose in which, to Western eyes, denazification and the punishment of war criminals seemed less important than the immediate transformation of West Germany into a powerful bulwark against communist expansion. The Marshall Plan infused massive amounts of money into the Ger-
man economy, and former Nazis had their sentences commuted or were let off from prosecution entirely so long as they could help counter the Soviet menace. The Christian Democratic West German government, which held power until 1969, effectively steered Germany through a miraculous economic and infrastructural recovery. Yet the price of this recovery was a widespread popular blindness vis-à-vis the immediate past. Nazism was not discussed much publicly nor was it taught extensively in school. In addition, the Nazi past of many German political and economic leaders was conveniently ignored. The “aberration” of 1933-1945, though admitted, was blamed largely on Adolf Hitler, who was seen as a demonic genius who controlled, but did not really represent, the German people. And the post-1945 dominance of abstraction in West German visual art supported this climate of forgetting the Nazi past.

Beginning in the late 1950s, however, subject matter evoking the Nazi past began to reappear in the works of a number of artists living in West Germany: Joseph Beuys, Eugen SchönbécK, and Georg Baselitz, among others, whose art played between representation and abstraction. As a group, these artists were between seven and twenty-five years older than Kiefer, who, born in 1945, properly belongs to the first postwar generation of West Germans. Kiefer’s generation reached young adulthood in the mid-1960s, and the moment that should have witnessed its assimilation into the German work-force coincides with the emergence of the West German counterculture and the New Left — perhaps postwar West Germany’s most important moment of social activism. Thus Kiefer belongs to a radically activist generation of Germans — a generation that produced many individuals who not only rejected the silence about the Nazi past maintained in everyday life over the first two decades of the Federal Republic but who dropped out of economic life in various ways in order to pursue alternative lifestyles. Thus, like the leaders of the counterculture and New Left, Beuys, SchönbécK, and Baselitz can be seen as the slightly older “avant-garde” or the “critical leaders” for artists of Kiefer’s generation. And by returning to German themes, they pointed to suppressed and undigested residues of Nazi complicity that remained to be confronted in German society. Hitler, they suggested, was neither an anomaly nor the sole cause of the German crimes against humanity. Ordinary Germans had played their part in the Nazi horror and, by refusing to confront their culpability, might do so again in the future. For Kiefer, their criticality — in the form of their probing references to the Nazi past — had to be respected. Yet, for reasons both personal and aesthetic, their positions as artistic leaders needed to be undermined — something that Kiefer accomplished through the creation of formally dissimilar art works that continued similar critical concerns.

At the same time as it returned to “German” subject matter, West German visual art in the 1960s as a whole remained open to stylistic influence from the outside and, thereby, retained a distinctly non-German aspect. Pop, minimalism, conceptual art, arte povera, fluxus, performance, and happenings — all of which initially carried the traces of a foreign culture — were quickly assimilated within West Germany’s high-culture sphere. In addition, through a continuing process of assimilating pre-Nazi-era international modernism, West German artists slowly became aware of the achievements of European modernist art of
the second and third decades of the twentieth century – in particular, the negation of painting accomplished in various ways by cubism, Dada, and constructivism. The negation of painting – the continuing focus on the part of many modern painters on the destruction of aesthetic characteristics that were deemed to be part of the “essence” of the art of the immediate past – rapidly became of great interest to the West German artists of the 1960s.

The negation of painting has a long and complex history. Let it thus suffice to say that what appeared in one way in the fundamental semiotic analysis of painting in the works of Picasso and Braque, continued, in the Dada and constructivist phases of modern art, as a formal project designed to transform the concept of the artist from an intuitive “genius” into an ordinary producer. In addition, with the Dada and constructivist negations of painting in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, the high-art sphere became connected with a call for a new, more engaged audience, one whose collective activity was supposed to mirror the new, nonbourgeois society to come. In Dada and constructivism, in other words, the European “high-art” sphere attempted to dissolve itself into everyday life and, in so doing, disrupt all traditional bourgeois values. As the various strategies of destroying painting – through gestural abstraction, collage, the monochrome, the grid, the readymade, nonrelational composition, and the appropriated mass-media image – are repeated in an international postwar context, it becomes less and less possible to tell the exact line of influence they have traveled. It is clear, however, that the various destructions of painting performed in West Germany in the 1960s repeat cubist, Dada, and constructivist strategies to create a “new” type of artist and a “new” type of engaged and potentially revolutionary audience. Still, as is the case with most postwar art after 1950 (and West German art after 1960), it is hard to tell what elements and strategies are reinvented in ignorance of clear prewar historical antecedents and what elements and strategies are part of a conscious dialogue with modernist art of the early twentieth century.

Over the course of the 1960s, as a result of its various historical and foreign influences, a number of transformations occurred in the West German high-art sphere. In the first place, with the renewed interest in subject matter, representation “returned” to West German visual art – that is, it achieved a far greater prominence and critical acceptance than it possessed during the first fifteen years of the Federal Republic. This was a result of Beuys’s very successful – but highly mythical – use of Duchampian readymade strategies as well as the immigration to the West of a number of artists trained in the socialist-realist academies of East Germany. Thus, for example, the neo-expressionist “pandemonium” paintings of Baselitz and Eugen Schönbbeck in the early 1960s used representation to present a wasteland world of stunted figures and fragmented motifs (which recalled “Year Zero”) and seemed to reread the German expressionist tradition through the sizes and ambitions of American abstract expressionism. In addition, there was also a photographically mediated return to representation in the pop-influenced works of Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, Wolf Vostell, K. P. Brehmer, and K. H. Hödicke. In their “capitalist realist” works, Polke, Richter, and others presented painted versions of cropped mass-produced imagery, drawn from either the contemporary world of the international mass-
media and consumer culture or the anonymous world, both contemporary and historical, of amateur photography. Here, in the works of Polke, Richter, and the others, representation seemed to be used against itself in order to foreground the ways in which various forms of realistic depiction can lose their specific or particular meanings.

Second, in West Germany of the 1960s, the question of the negation of painting continued and became increasingly combined with questions of the conditions of art reception under Western capitalism. The institutionalization of the fine-art sphere, restarted by the Allied cultural administrators in the mid- to late 1940s, underwent a tremendous intensification in the 1960s, which witnessed the development of a well-functioning market for contemporary art in Germany – an intensification that the artists could not help but notice and to which in one way or another they responded. Reflection on the institutional backdrop for contemporary art production and reception – often accomplished by formal negations of what was then taken to be the art work’s historically conditioned “essence” – thus became a key strategy in West German visual art during the mid- to late 1960s. For example, the project of negating painting continued in the works of Blinky Palermo (Peter Heisterkamp), who, in 1966, exhibited his first series of “fabric pictures” [Stoffbilder] at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery in Munich. In a formal sense, Palermo’s fabric pictures eliminated key aspects of abstract painting’s “essence,” for example, touch, since Palermo’s factory-dyed surfaces were purchased by the meter in the department store. Yet, dialectically, his machine-sewn pieces of silk (and later cotton) cloth continued painting through their combined materiality and artistically shaped qualities (i.e., their subjective balancing of “mixed” – i.e., nonprimary – colors). Thus, they seem to draw on early-twentieth-century Russian painting’s interest in revolutionary form – consciously understood, as Rodchenko’s example suggests, as the “breakthrough” to “pure” abstraction, the death of “illusionism” or representation, and the appearance of an entirely new function for painting, namely, the transformation of everyday collective life. Also in this vein are Palermo’s roughly thirty wall paintings and drawings, made between 1968 and 1973, which transformed the painterly aesthetic object into the spectator’s experience of a worldly architectural space. In this way, Palermo’s painted installations mirrored the roughly contemporaneous reduction of the art object to its architectural support effected by some of the American conceptual artists such as Lawrence Weiner. (For a good example of this American formally and politically inspired negation of art’s essence – fueled by the essentialist formal teleology that was one result of Clement Greenberg’s theory of art – see, in particular, two of Weiner’s 1968 works, A Square Removal from a Rug in Use and A 36” × 36” Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall. These works literally reduced painting and sculpture to their respective architectural supports: wall and floor. In this way, painting and sculpture were made even more abstract – they appeared literally as negations – and, in addition, the architectural and institutional context was made an integral part of the work. Furthermore, the works of both Palermo and Weiner were also repetitions of such earlier works as El Lissitzky’s PROUN Room at the Große Berliner Kunstausstellung of 1923, which also transformed abstract painting into the architectural experience.
of the engaged spectator. It is, however, unclear if either Weiner or Palermo was aware of the historical antecedent at the time, although this was certainly possible.

Third, with the development of West Germany’s multiple ties to America in the 1960s, there was a rapid assimilation of “American styles” – pop, minimalism, abstract expressionism, and conceptual art – into the West German high-art sphere. In other words, because of the sometimes incomplete reception of early-twentieth-century modernism, many West German artists attributed a foreign character to some of the styles and techniques they employed – even when, as was often the case, the style or technique had “first” originated in Europe. Thus, for example, many of Richter’s abstract paintings since 1966 – which, in a new way, evoked a mechanical element at the heart of gestural expressive painting – recall early-twentieth-century Dada and constructivism’s fundamental strategies of mechanically or technologically mediating the artist’s expressive gesture. Yet, as Richter has said, his knowledge of the German interwar avant-garde – Schwitters included – came to him by way of Rauschenberg, and, in addition, his knowledge of Duchamp was mediated by Lichenstein and Warhol as well as Beuys. Thus, as was probably also the case with Palermo, Richter in the mid- to late 1960s often still took a European or even a German strategy for an American one. This historical blindness helped promote the return of German subject matter in West German visual art because it made it easier for West German artists to examine their own situation by allowing them at the same time to identify with “foreign” modes of image making. It allowed them, in other words, to be simultaneously both German and non-German.

A good example of the growing conjunction in West German visual art during the 1960s of German subject matter and what were coded and received as non-German styles or strategies is Joseph Beuys’s sculpture Fond III (Figure 68), originally exhibited in 1969. Nine huge stockpiles, each constructed out of 100 gray, almost square, rectangular felt sheets, with a shiny copper sheet of the same dimensions placed on top, went through a number of different incarnations, involving various distinct ways of positioning the piles in either open or static configurations. What remained constant, however, was the formal reference to American minimalism – Beuys’s piled sheets most specifically echoed the sculptural cubes of Donald Judd and Tony Smith – in a work designed to subvert the minimalist prohibition against content. Beuys’s “American” reference was quickly recognized by West German art critics at the time. As Georg Jappe noted, “At the very time when minimal art has exhausted itself while still being the latest movement, Beuys demonstrates how minimal art can be integrated and overcome.” At the same time, critics were also highly aware of the symbolic nature of Beuys’s choice of materials and their ultimate connection with Beuys’s wartime experiences. Beuys utilized felt and copper for their reference to – and, hence, meaning as – insulation and batteries. As he told the West German press, “Here the essential idea was the battery. The felt piles (like the smaller ones I have already made) are aggregates, and the copper sheets are conductors. The accumulation of warmth in the felt works for me like a powerhouse, a static action.” The central idea was, in turn, directly related through a number of Beuys’s previous works – sculptures, but also actions (perform-
Thus, specifically German references – to World War II, to Beuys’s role as both victim and victimizer, to the industrial technology that accounted for the magnitude of the Nazi horror, and to the necessity for Germany to collectively heal itself and form a new society while remaining steadfastly oriented toward its past – were in Beuys’s sculpture expressed through what many West Germans read as an American style. Perhaps as a way of dealing with highly sensitive material by articulating it in a foreign formal syntax, or perhaps as a way of making the German themes more accessible to an international audience, Beuys returned to German content through the appropriation of what was perceived to be a non-German formal antecedent.

The significance of Anselm Kiefer’s high-art appropriations lies in their relation to the two tendencies in West German art of the 1960s that are manifest in Fond III: the return to German content, on the one hand, and stylistic internationalism, on the other. Although accused at first by some West German critics of being too German and, a little later, of selling the idea of German repentence to an American market, Kiefer has always displayed this 1960s mode of markedly international outlook in terms of style. And this internationalism is, as the example of Beuys suggests, something that was also expected – or awaited – by the international critical public of the 1970s and 1980s. Kiefer’s internationalism can be clearly seen in his treatment of the styles of minimalism, pop art, and abstract expressionism, which he quotes and appropriates in various ways. Like the slightly older West German artists of the 1960s, Kiefer often interprets...
modernist strategies of the second two decades of the twentieth century as postwar "American" ones – an attribution that is echoed by his European and American critics. Yet, occasionally Kiefer's appropriations seem intended to point to both a postwar American and a prewar European antecedent. Moreover, through the dialogue they set up between various twentieth-century styles and strategies, Kiefer's art works also evoke a sense of what Heidegger defines as a battle of different world views – the conjunction of oppositional fields of representation articulating different ideal forms of subjectivity, an idea that Kiefer transforms in his art into a complex play of representational fields and gaps, as well as centerings and de-centerings of the subject. And for this reason, Kiefer's appropriation of "American" styles also seems to consciously refer to the interwar modernists' use of abstract and representational form to both evoke and undermine individual and collective subjectivity.

**Minimal Art**

The first clear appropriation of a set of antecedent postwar art works that appears in Kiefer's art is contained in *Koll Visiting Kiefer* (*Koll bei Kiefer*) (1969) (Figures 69–73). Koll Visiting Kiefer is a 112-page book made up of bound original photographs showing the Donald Judd and Robert Morris-influenced sculptures of Koll, a fellow student at the Karlsruhe academy, arranged by Kiefer in various ways in his messy studio. As German critic Götz Adriani argues, like Beuys's *Fond III*, Kiefer's book seems critical of early-1960s American minimalism, which sought to deny all subject matter in art – everything outside of the work's pure physical presence. This is the case because, in Kiefer's chaotic and debris-strewn atelier, Koll's rectangular boxlike "primary structures" are positioned and photographed so as to take on a comic life of their own. As the reader turns the pages, the multiple positions assumed by Koll's dark modular structures – in conjunction with the absence of human beings within the studio – suggest that Koll's objects move about on their own. By synthesizing the seemingly sequential images, the spectator thus creates a rudimentary narrative; it appears as if Koll's art struggles to retain its purity amidst the dross of Kiefer's everyday life and work. In this way, Kiefer, who claims to have studied Judd's writings and art quite carefully, restores the "subjectivity" to American minimalism that the minimalists had rejected so emphatically.

The American minimalists attempted to eliminate artistic subjectivity from their art in a number of different ways. They de-skilled the process of making art by adopting industrial techniques. For example, whereas some minimalist sculptors made their own works, other minimalists simply conceived their works and had their actual artistic objects realized by others working in an industrial context. In addition, the American minimalists attempted to eliminate subjectivity by negating compositional elements generally considered necessary to the "essence" of art. Central to the American minimalists sense of pre-1960s American and European art was an understanding of painting and sculpture as being "relational." As the minimalist painter Frank Stella put it, "The basis of their..."
whole idea is balance. You do something in one corner and you balance it with something in the other corner.” In opposition to this form of pre-1960s composition, minimal painters like Stella and Kenneth Noland began to use extremely simple shapes (squares, rectangles, circles), axial symmetry, grid patterns, and commercial brushes, rollers, and paints to reduce to a minimum all signs of artistic touch, decision, balance, and taste. In this way, they partially did away with the figure-ground relationships that produce both hierarchical organization (i.e., a situation in which the figure is read as more important than the ground) and the illusion of depth. Similarly, American minimalist sculptors such as Judd and Carl Andre produced works in which simple, serially repeated, industrially produced modules— for example, flat metal plates, bricks, or rectangular Plexiglas and metal boxes— were assembled into holistic, equally simple geometric shapes. Thus, in addition to getting rid of relational composition, the American minimalists attempted to eliminate subjectivity by reducing their already minimal artistic plan to a simple visual or logical form. As the conceptual-minimalist artist Sol LeWitt put it, “In a logical thing, each part is dependent on the last. It follows in a certain sequence as part of the logic. But, a rational thing is something you have to make a rational decision on each time. . . . You have to think about it. In a logical sequence, you don’t think about it. It’s a way of not thinking. It’s irrational.” And by attempting to separate “logic” from “rationality” in
In this way, the American minimalists reduced the artist's "unique" idea to a common form – a general idea shared by the artist with most others in his or her lifeworld.

In *Koll*, Kiefer does everything he can to overturn the American minimalists' rejection of artistic subjectivity. By using Koll's sculptures as single elements within larger pictorial compositions, Kiefer reasserts the "relational composition" that the minimalists sought to overcome in their work. In addition, although Kiefer de-skills his process of making art – for example, he takes photographs to
produce his images— he still produces a unique, handmade item. Thus, like many works of the American minimalists, Kiefer’s work is fundamentally technological; unlike the minimalists, however, Kiefer’s book very significantly hides its industrial base. Furthermore, instead of referring to basic, communally held logical or visual forms (e.g., identity, contradiction, the circle, the square, the triangle), Kiefer’s Koll book brings the reader back to the particularity of the artist’s decisions, touch, and “taste” — in short, the artist’s existence (what LeWitt called the artist’s “rationality” as opposed to his or her “logic”). Finally, by producing a
book, Kiefer in a certain way synthesizes the divergent material practices of the minimalist painters and sculptors—artists who were careful not to encroach too much on one another's medium during the American 1960s (a result, in part, of the lingering dominance of Clement Greenberg's theory of modernism as well as the development of several of Greenberg's key insights in the mid-1960s by modernist critic Michael Fried). The American minimalist painters worked with issues of deductive structure (the represented shape mirroring the actual shape...
of the final canvas) as well as issues of the artists' process within a very reduced painterly medium (for example, Robert Ryman's monochromes). The sculptors, on the other hand, worked on issues having to do with the relationship between the work and the spectator as well as how the serial repetition of simple modular forms affects the viewer's perception and comprehension of the work. Kiefer's book, in distinction to minimalist painting and sculpture, radically transgresses the traditional "modernist" boundaries of both media. Not only does it combine
elements of minimalist painting (process and flatness) with minimalist sculpture (how the viewer's activity transforms his or her experience of the three-dimensional object), but, in addition, Kiefer's *Koll* book also infuses the medium of film (through its sequential images and quasi-narrative) into the spectator's experience.

Thus, in *Koll Visiting Kiefer*, Kiefer seems to define his own stance as a German artist in opposition to American minimalism, which was then influential in Germany. And as suggested by the book, the primary opposition that divides Kiefer's work from the painting and sculpture of the American minimalists appears to be one of subjectivity versus objectivity. On the one hand, Kiefer's work manifests a far greater sense of subjectivity and existentialism than the works of the American minimalists. On the other hand, in relation to Kiefer's work, minimalism seems radically objective, common, and quasi-scientific. For this reason, the *Koll* book seems to contrast opposing representations of the German and American identity: an American subject that appears to be rigid, soulless, abstract, and technocratic and a German subject that seems messy, subjective, particular, and antitechnocratic. Yet, in one extremely paradoxical way, the 1969 *Koll* book – and Kiefer's art as a whole – is strongly indebted to the American minimalists of the 1960s.

American minimal art, as Michael Fried critically stated in 1967, depends on the beholder and is incomplete without him or her. What Fried pointed to was the fact that American minimalist sculpture's anthropomorphic scale and its reduction or systematization of internal relations tends to transform the spectator's aesthetic experience. Whereas the normal mode of aesthetic apprehension prior to minimalism was still the absorbed contemplation of an isolated work, with the advent of minimalism the spectator's experience is transformed into an awareness of the relationships that exist between the spectator, the work, and their shared institutional space. In other words, in the presence of minimalist sculpture, the viewer becomes aware of his or her own contributions to the experience of the work of art. And in this one way, American minimal sculpture's emphasis on objectivity — or "objecthood," as Fried called it — paradoxically resulted in a radical affirmation of a particular type of subjectivity, namely, that of the audience. Like Rodchenko, the minimalist artist elevated the spectator to the position of a co-creator of the art work. By so doing, American minimalism pointed to a way of conceiving artistic creativity as something communal and shared and, thereby, it evoked a more engaged and interactive concept of the individual and collective subject — one that also allows individuals to disagree with both the artist and one another about different identity choices. In this respect, Kiefer's work as a whole depends on the artist's recognition of the spectator as an active participant in the work of art. Thus, Kiefer only seems to reject American minimalism in *Koll*; in reality, the work incorporates some of the American minimalists' central insights. And in this way, the book seems to problematize the dichotomy between "German" and "American" identity articulated above.

Kiefer displays a similar outwardly critical, inwardly emulative stance toward American minimalism in the three versions of his book *Donald Judd Hides Brinhiinde*, all from 1976. To make these books, Kiefer appropriated a catalogue from a Donald Judd sculpture installation at the Bern Kunsthalle in
1976 and selectively overpainted the installation photographs with black paint. In addition, he pasted images of women clipped from pornographic magazines into the catalogue and surrounded them with Judd-like geometric diagrams. In the largest of the three versions, Kiefer also added pages from articles on abstract artists drawn from art magazines and then overprinted the pages with his familiar cut-board, wood-grain pattern. As in the earlier Koll Visiting Kiefer, ambiguous subject matter is here forced upon supposedly nonexpressive, non-representational American minimalist forms, and, once again, the series seems designed to contradict original minimalist intent. Moreover, Kiefer’s juxtaposition of Judd’s sculptures with naked women suggests a close connection between the objectification and aggressiveness of minimal art – its emphasis on the work’s pure presence and raw physical power – and the objectification and aggressiveness inherent in pornography. Furthermore, by appropriating an exhibition catalogue, Kiefer metonymically refers to the institutional context that Judd’s sculptures indicate through their physical presence. (The spectator of Judd’s works, in other words, is not simply self-aware and aware of the sculptures; he or she is also aware of the interaction of his or her body with the space of the room.) Under the sign of rejecting minimalism, Kiefer thus paradoxically develops this minimalist reference to the institutions of art by presenting three art works that are merely reworked exhibition catalogues.

Like the Koll book, Kiefer’s Donald Judd series appears to be another paradoxical gesture of self-assertion – one that overtly negates certain very central aspects of American minimalist art-making practice only to surreptitiously continue others. Here, in the Judd series, Kiefer seems to attack minimalism with the argument that the minimalist style implies dangerous social and political content and that aggression lies beneath its desire for purity. Thus, as a whole, Kiefer’s book series seems to point to American aggression in the 1960s and 1970s (through its suggestions of American sexism and cultural imperialism) and, by implication, to a more critical stance toward society and the world on the part of at least some Germans during the same period. In addition, by presenting a set of books that represent the institution of art as much as they represent the works of a particular artist, Kiefer seems to critically point to the dominance of art’s financial-support structures in determining what gets apprehended as a work of art. In turn, this aspect of the series could also be read as implying that cultural institutions play a role in the construction of a sense of national identity – that is, what is affirmed to be quintessentially “American” or “German.” Kiefer emphasizes the fundamentally paradoxical nature of his critical gesture, however, by simultaneously producing a set of singular books – works, in other words, that are easily incorporated into the gallery and museum systems. Finally, Kiefer’s series turns the spectator into a reader as well as a viewer – one, moreover, who attempts to sift and compare the meanings that Kiefer produces with the meanings produced by the curators of Judd’s exhibition. In this way, Kiefer’s books attempt to make their spectators critical historians of art – interpreters who compare the works of different times and countries. And by promoting historical comparison and reflection, the Judd series seems critical of any fixed concept of “national” identity.

Kiefer’s appropriations of American minimal art play with a complex set of
forms and meanings that provoke reflection upon different types of social, national, and economic identity. In addition, by emphasizing through contrast the American minimalists’ abstract, quasi-scientific antihumanism — while hiding the more individualistic or particular aspects of their art (namely, their evocation of an engaged beholder) — Kiefer’s books seem to assert his German artistic differences from the earlier American style. This concern to evoke different forms of individual and collective identity — as well as the desire to create a comparative interplay between “German” and “American” modes of existence — continues in Kiefer’s treatment of pop art.

**Pop Art**

After the minimalist works of 1969 and 1976, a second set of appropriations appears in Kiefer’s art in the late 1970s. Between 1978 and 1980, he creates a series of books and paintings that, according to critics on both sides of the Atlantic, appropriate an American pop art style. These works are composed of simulated “woodcuts” — printed with emulsion on paper — of sections of pulsating frottage-like wood-grain patterns (seen earlier in the wooden interiors of 1973) and portraits of famous German historical figures, which the artist juxtaposes and occasionally cuts up. Perhaps the best known example of this series is the large canvas *Ways of Worldly Wisdom — Arminius’s Battle* [*Wege der Weltweisheit — die Hermanns-Schlacht*] (1978–1980) (Figure 74). The painting is one of Kiefer’s most “infamous” works, because, when it was first shown at the Venice Biennale in 1980, it was strongly attacked by a number of German critics, and the notoriety helped Kiefer become a major figure in the international art market of the 1980s. In this canvas as in his other pop works, Kiefer, who cites the influence of Andy Warhol in a number of interviews, appropriates a Warhol-like pop style in order to deal with a specifically German theme: here, the Nazi use of historical personages to create a sense of national socialist identity. To make *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, Kiefer began by printing a series of “woodcut” sheets based on portrait drawings he had made of various German soldiers, poets, philosophers, statesmen, Nazis, and industrialists copied from either books or dictionaries about the Third Reich (i.e., sources that had already been photomechanically reproduced). Kiefer then attached these “woodcuts” — which include images of Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Horst Wessel, Friedrich Hölderlin, Friedrich Alfred Krupp, Heinrich von Kleist, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Martin Heidegger, Immanuel Kant, Otto von Bismarck, Albert Leo Schlageter, Gebhard von Blücher, and Stefan George — to a gigantic canvas. The portrait “woodcuts” form a loose grid around a second series of “woodcut” sheets (sectioned depictions of wood-grain patterns) that together comprise an image of a forest beginning to burn. Identified by Kiefer’s handwritten title running along the bottom of the canvas as “Hermann’s Battle,” the fire is linked to the symbolic inception point of the German nation. In addition, the fire is connected to the portraits by a series of painted black lines and rings. This painted tracery, resembling a spider’s web, unites the curious pantheon of figures with the first sparks of Germany’s “initial” historic battle to create an ominous whole — a net-
like spiritual-material framework that seems designed to both trap and im­
molate the unwary spectator.

By creating this thematically German, stylistically American gallery of
“celebrity portraits,” Kiefer engages in a complex dialogue with two related
works of postwar installation painting: Andy Warhol’s 13 Most Wanted Men
(1964) and Gerhard Richter’s 48 Portraits (1972). (Like Kiefer, Richter also cites
the influence of Warhol on his work.95) Warhol’s 13 Most Wanted Men (Figure
75) was originally a set of twenty-five square silk-screen panels mounted on the
facade of Philip Johnson’s New York State Pavilion at the New York World’s Fair
in 1964. In its original installation, Warhol presented a symmetrical (five-by­
five) array of silk-screen portraits of thirteen men’s faces taken from publicly
displayed “wanted posters” – primarily those of the New York City Police.96
Arranged as a square grid, the work provoked or challenged American concepts
of individual and collective identity in the mid-1960s in at least three different
ways. First, the work questioned the desirable nature of celebrity in postwar
advanced-capitalist consumer culture – that is, the everyday sense that many
Americans had at the time (and still have, for that matter) that celebrity was a
desirable mode of being-in-the-world and that the figures they saw represented
in the mass media were fully rounded individuals worthy of emulation. Despite
recalling Warhol’s serially repeated celebrity icons of the previous years, Most
Wanted Men’s pantheon of portraits were closer to his appropriated tabloid dis­
aster representations in that their subjects were more anonymous. The figures
represented in Most Wanted Men, in other words, were all people whose por­
traits had been taken by the American criminal justice system. Thus, like
Warhol’s “disaster” works of the previous two years, the subjects of artistic rep­
resentation did not come from the popular pantheon established by the Ameri­
can culture industry and, furthermore, represented a celebrity that few people
would desire to possess. In this way, by elevating “improper” subjects to the
status of mass media icons, Warhol’s work seemed to criticize the American
public’s growing desire for (or fixation on) celebrity as well as its increasing
passivity vis-à-vis the media – that is, its willingness to uncritically accept and
consume almost any image that the media offered. Reinforcing this suggestion
of collective delusion and passivity is the gridlike nature of the image as a
whole (which suggests a totally processed or administered vision of the collec­
tive) as well as the inclusion of a few blank canvases (which de-emphasizes the
importance of the individual by suggesting that the faces and the “blanks” are
interchangeable or equivalent).

Second, either consciously or unconsciously, Most Wanted Men repeated
and developed an earlier Dada and constructivist technique, namely, the appro­
priation and juxtaposition of “found” photographic imagery, now transformed
by the fact that Warhol was working within (and with a keen awareness of) an
extremely well-defined, lucrative, and smoothly functioning art market – some­
thing that was not available to the avant-garde artists of the second and third
decades of the twentieth century.97 By replacing the portrait – a traditional
painted form through which the subjectivity and “personality” of the bourgeois
individual was preserved and promulgated – with an “indifferently” selected,
readymade photographic image, Warhol pointedly used the medium of painting
to suggest the problematic status of both the autonomous individual and artistic representation at a time when the fine-art sphere’s multiple interconnections with the culture industry were becoming apparent. In this way, Warhol evoked the early revolutionary moment of twentieth-century modernism and its desire to transform both the subject and everyday life, while at the same time his work—through its participation in the art market and the cult of celebrity—seemed to deny that such artistically inspired transformations of life could occur in American society in the mid-1960s. Not only did Warhol’s work suggest that the dream of many interwar artists for new nonhegemonic forms of individual and collective subjectivity was unrealizable, but, in addition, by debasing the tradition of portraiture, it also implied that the fine-art sphere had lost its ability to figure and disseminate human values in a convincing way. What had previously been a privileged site for the production and reception of normative truths becomes, in Warhol’s hands, a hollow and bitter “joke.”

Third, and finally, Most Wanted Men attacked mid-1960s American individual and collective subjectivity because it presented a pantheon of figures that its New York State sponsors preferred not to show in a context designed to draw both American and international visitors. Perhaps because of his nihilistic romantization of the American outlaw (or because of his coded representation of homosexual desire), once the piece was on display, the World’s Fair officials asked Warhol to remove the installation from public view and replace it with another. (The official reason was that some of the subjects of Most

Wanted Men had already been caught and tried and could thus no longer be displayed publicly.) The officials also rejected Warhol’s second proposal: that the serial array of wanted men be replaced by an array of portraits of Robert Moses, the World’s Fair director and former New York City parks commissioner (among a long list of other state offices). A compromise was reached when the New York World’s Fair officials permitted Warhol to carry out his final proposal: covering the panels with a coat of silver-aluminum paint – a gesture that seemed to emphasize the state censorship of the work.99 By representing New
York State through a collection of some of its least desirable “elements,” Warhol directed the attention of both the American and the international spectator to the American “dark side” – the violence and poverty that also existed in the United States – and thus to the forces that weakened America on both an individual and a collective level. Given the right audience, the exposure of such forces could contribute to a reworking of existing forms of American identity. In addition, by provoking the state to commit acts of censorship, Warhol’s work demonstrated the interest taken by the New York State government in regulating the images that projected a vision of local collective identity. (This perhaps also explains the rejection of the multiple images of Robert Moses, New York’s “master builder,” who, between 1924 and 1968 developed public works projects costing approximately $27 billion. The administrators of New York State wanted to remain relatively anonymous and did not want to be represented as a powerful elite in firm control of the state. Warhol’s inflation and multiplication of Moses’ portrait – a man who exerted tremendous power in New York between 1924 and 1968 without ever holding elected office and who, according to the New York Times, “played a larger role in shaping the physical environment of New York State than any other figure in the twentieth century” might have suggested this idea of a New York ruling elite.)

Richter’s 48 Portraits, commissioned by the West German government to represent the Federal Republic at the Venice Biennale in 1972, was, like Warhol’s Most Wanted Men, designed to appear in a context where it would receive international scrutiny. One of the functions of Richter’s installation was thus to represent West Germany – just as one of the functions of Warhol’s set of portraits was to represent New York State – to both a national and an international audience. For this reason, it is not entirely surprising that, given the antecedent of Warhol, Richter chose the site of the Venice Biennale to reflect upon American pop and the question of the historical portrait painting in relation to the problem of the establishment of the “new” (or post-traditional) individual and collective subject in West Germany after 1945. Richter’s installation consisted of forty-eight equally sized portraits installed in a long horizontal line in the central spaces of the German Pavilion and its apses. Painted in tones of gray – and thus recalling their photographic source material – these works represent an array of male European and American intellectuals: musicians, writers, philosophers, and scientists from the nineteenth and early twentieth century; for example, Gustav Mahler, Franz Kafka, Igor Stravinsky, Max Planck, Albert Einstein, William James, Enrico Fermi, Paul Hindemith, Thomas Mann, Nicolai Hartmann, John Dos Passos, Paul Valéry, Oscar Wilde, and Wilhelm Dilthey. According to Richter, these portraits were selected at random from various mass-market encyclopedias. And the slight blur or photographic out-of-focus quality characteristic of Richter’s painterly handling of the portraits combines with their decontextualization from their original informational sources as well as their seemingly random selection to suggest a mysterious pantheon of role models – a collective with no clear organizing principles (other than the vague idea that the collective should be represented by intellectuals and perhaps an underlying sexism, since the portraits are all male).
Like Warhol’s installation, Richter’s series of paintings challenged dominant concepts of identity within its contemporary context. The installation suggested that it was no longer possible to construct a coherent cultural canon in West Germany after 1945. Playing off the curved white monumentalizing walls of its neoclassical exhibition space, the series confronted the spectator with an assembled row of personages – representative of the “assembly of elders,” or political leaders, of a modern “classical” state. According to eyewitness accounts, the sequence of portraits was arranged (as per Richter’s instructions) “according to the head position of the sitters, rotating slowly and symmetrically from a frontal position in the center of the apse, to a left profile or a right profile, at either end of the sequence.” Because of the concave walls of the installation, such an arrangement would cause the sharp stares of many of the portraits to appear to converge on the spectator as he or she approached the walls – a row of gazes that would heighten the spectator’s sense that these figures were somehow judges or spiritual-political leaders. At the same time, the inclusion of a significant number of non-German personalities within the pantheon, as well as the representation of figures of less than absolute international fame, made the work as a whole seem incomplete – and hence incapable of defining “the tradition” of the Federal Republic. In the early 1970s, Richter was clearly aware of the bankruptcy of the monumental portrait tradition, which – in the forms of Nazi art and Soviet-style socialist realism – had degenerated into idealized representations of leaders and the led. Thus, Richter articulated a central problem faced by his West German moment: the dilemma of having to reconstruct postwar German identity in the face of the bankruptcy of the bourgeois tradition of portraiture (a traditional means by which humans in modern society have reinforced their bourgeois-capitalist individual and collective identities) and the problems of representation entailed by the imperative to accurately depict the central figures and events of the previous forty years of German history. And as Richter’s installation suggested, although the tradition of historical representation needed to be continued in West Germany, West German collective identity should no longer be constructed along national lines.

Richter’s portrait series also challenged contemporary West German concepts of subjectivity by continuing the project of painting – after all the seeming “final” negations of its “essence” since 1848. This gesture was significant because of the traditional associations between the activity of painting and the free expression of human subjectivity in certain types of modern art. By continuing to paint, Richter suggested that – although under attack – the reestablished postwar “bourgeois” concepts of the individual and the collective (as well as the traditional means of asserting these concepts) had to be reworked as opposed to being merely rejected. In particular, Richter’s carefully painted surfaces countered the anti-individualist strategy in modernist painting of de-skilling the painted gesture (rendering it mechanical, something anyone can do) – a strategy practiced by Warhol or, more recently, since the second half of the 1960s, by Daniel Buren and Niele Toroni. Instead of rejecting the practices entirely, Richter continued the activities of painting, portraiture, and the representation of historically specific individuals while at the same time making the spectator critically aware of the difficulty of continuing them as artistic practices.
in West Germany in the 1970s. And by asserting his own skilled and critical artistic subjectivity through the installation, Richter affirmed that even capitalist concepts of identity can play a positive role in the reconceptualization of postwar West German society. Paradoxically, however, Richter’s series suggested even more explicitly than Warhol’s installation—which only hinted at this phenomenon—how technical reproduction and the production of cultic or mass media “personalities” erode history and thus the individual’s sense of the collective of which he or she is a part (or stands opposed to as an “outsider”).

This is the case, because, although the faces are recognizable portraits, they are removed from their dictionary settings. Thus, it is unclear for what aspects of their personalities or historical accomplishments they are on view. The simple mass reproduction of human portraits, Richter’s series suggested, gives the spectator a mere illusion of a tradition—a false sense of orientation that impedes his or her historical investigation into the music, science, philosophy, and literature of these paradigmatic individuals. (Visual artists are conspicuously absent from Richter’s pantheon.) And in these ways, Richter emphasized much more strongly than Warhol the problem of the loss of historical consciousness that affects painted portraiture in the twentieth century.

Finally, 48 Portraits criticized dominant concepts of subjectivity in its contemporary context by reminding its viewers of West Germany’s rapid development of its own postwar art market—a market that in the 1960s followed and emulated the New York art market’s postwar development. By representing the Federal Republic of Germany in an international context through a work that appeared to have an American antecedent—an antecedent, that, in multiple ways, comments upon the commodification of the high-art sphere (its development of multiple ties to capital and mass culture)—Richter suggested that this was potentially the fate of Germany’s high-art sphere as well. Thus, although his work in certain ways asserted his artistic subjectivity (at least in comparison with Warhol, Buren, and Toroni), 48 Portraits also suggested that the “success” of the contemporary German artist depended as much upon his or her ability to manipulate the art market and the mass media as it did on the traditional ideas about the “greatness” of the artist (i.e., heightened sensitivity, taste, skill, the ability to identify and represent the dominant values of a time, and so forth). In this way, Richter’s installation—like Warhol’s before him—suggested that the traditional bourgeois subject was dead and the high-art sphere was losing its special status as one of the privileged sites for the production and dissemination of intersubjectively binding values (regulative principles that could help guide individual and group action). And by implication, Richter’s installation also suggested that commercial interests and the mass media were beginning to play a larger role in visually determining both individual and collective possibilities of existence. In these two ways, 48 Portraits pointed ominously toward the increasing determination of the modern German and American subject by the structures and processes of capitalism.

Warhol’s and Richter’s installations thus both engaged in a complex series of negotiations with the question of postwar painterly portraiture (i.e., whether it could be continued or not), the possibilities that this technique provided for centering or de-centering different German or American forms of identity, and the relation of this constellation of issues to the public sphere and to mass cul-
ture in general. In addition, far more than Warhol (in whose work this remains only an implicit problem), Richter’s installation also explicitly broached the question as to whether history can be accurately represented in the aesthetic realm. Richter’s work, in other words, seemed designed to provoke questions as to whether the artist – who traditionally both glorified his or her human subjects and stood for a heightened form of human existence (the genius) – was able, in the context of West Germany in the early 1970s, to depict actual historical individuals without mystification and without conferring upon them an unearned aura of greatness. And in pop appropriations such as Ways of Worldly Wisdom, Kiefer continues the multiple lines of questioning brought up by these two antecedent works. Eight years after Richter was chosen to represent the Federal Republic at the Venice Biennale, Kiefer received the identical honor – something that might have appeared to him as the perfect opportunity to display a pop-influenced work that appears to reflect upon both 13 Most Wanted Men and 48 Portraits as its paradigmatic historical antecedents.

As Kiefer says, what caused him to select the various political and artistic leaders represented in Ways of Worldly Wisdom (Figure 74) was the fact that power had abused them – that in one way or another the Nazis were able to use these figures to support their cause. And despite the initial German reception in 1980, as critics on both sides of the Atlantic later realized, Kiefer seems, like Richter before him, to appropriate a pop style in order to criticize the contemporary activity of historical portraiture – to show his contemporary community how little they know about their “heroes” and how easily and arbitrarily these figures can be used to justify authority. Kiefer, in other words, appropriates an American installation antecedent – previously appropriated by Richter to analyze the postwar tradition of monumental painting – in order to make a painting that attempts to produce undecidability around (and thus to help demystify) the cult of great German personalities and thus provoke questions as to how the representation of historical individuals affects the contemporary construction of individual and collective identity. Even more explicitly than the Richter installation, Kiefer’s painting deals with the Nazi past; and, even more directly than Richter, he refers to Warhol’s de-skilled painterly technique as a way of commenting on the lingering legacy of Nazism.

Although Kiefer’s work clearly refers backward through Richter and Warhol to the question of the multiple roles of “high” and “mass” culture under German totalitarianism and postwar Western capitalism, its historical reference also extends back still further in time to the photomontage technique of the Berlin Dada artists and the Russian constructivists. This is the case because Kiefer appropriates the technique of photomontage – the physical cutting and pasting together of disparate photographically based elements and texts to produce a larger whole – differently than either Warhol or Richter, while at the same time, like them, transforming it: making it in a certain sense “new.” In Kiefer’s case, “newness” appears in the strategy of giving the avant-garde technique of photomontage an anachronistic disguise (the simulated woodcut). And in this way, in comparison to the installations of Warhol and Richter, Kiefer’s canvas projects additional forms of potential artistic identity and creates an even richer tension between different possibilities of individual and group identity.
As Andreas Huyssen has suggested, when American pop art became popular in West Germany in the mid-1960s, it was identified first with the counterculture and later with “the public and political activities of the anti-authoritarian New Left.” Thus pop art initially had a negating or critical meaning for German spectators in the middle and late 1960s, a set of associations with which the German officials who selected Richter for the Biennale were no doubt familiar. Kiefer’s woodcut icon arrangements, on the other hand, show that a simply critical interpretation of pop is no longer possible by the end of the 1970s. By making ambiguous horizon-fusing reproductions of such figures as Martin Heidegger, Horst Wessel, Immanuel Kant, and Otto von Bismark, Kiefer suggests that, contrary to the initial German understanding of “American” pop as critical, pop is neither univocally American nor univocally revolutionary. Instead, like the subject, pop is always multiple – that is: individual and collective, German and American, postwar and prewar. Thus, like Warhol’s installation, Kiefer’s painting suggests that, although potentially critical, pop tends just as much toward idealization and seduction: a process that creates personalities whose appearances seduce the spectator and with whom the spectator then vicariously identifies. Thus, Kiefer’s historically undecidable juxtapositions of “woodcut” portraits ultimately seem informed by a highly ambivalent attitude toward the mass media and their influence on public opinion – an attitude that seems more explicitly critical than that of Richter in 1972 and one that, moreover, reflects the greater pessimism of Kiefer’s late-1970s social and cultural context. Kiefer’s work, in other words, paradoxically evokes both the increasing conservatism in West Germany in the 1970s (through its apparent monumentalization of problematic subjects) and a late-1970s left-wing German sense that the government, industry, media, and the fine arts were at that moment in time unified in a terrifying and authoritarian alliance. And through this evocation of undecidability on multiple levels, Kiefer’s work provokes comparative historical questions in the minds of its beholders.

In *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, Kiefer’s appropriation of Warhol’s pop style is thus juxtaposed with Teutonic subject matter that questions the West German assumptions in the 1960s of Warhol’s criticality. (Although *Wanted Men* is clearly critical, many of Warhol’s other works, in particular his celebrity portraits, are more – although not exclusively – affirmative.) Although, as Richter’s *48 Portraits* shows, Warhol’s example can be appropriated as a way for the artist to avoid choosing his or her subject matter (and thus deny the role of genius accorded to the artist in bourgeois society), “American” pop, as Kiefer’s work suggests, projects problematic possibilities as well. As the work implies, a lack of a critical attitude toward Nazi attempts to hypostatize and mythologize a standardized image of “Germanness” was one of the preconditions for the horror that engulfed Europe during the years of Nazi rule. And while this nihilism might seem warranted – even “cool” – in the face of American consumerism in the 1960s, it is clearly highly problematic when paired with either the Nazi state or Hitler’s destructive nihilism. Kiefer’s appropriation of a pop style thus clearly warns his spectators against complacency in the production and reception of aestheticized representations of public personalities – an association that is sometimes more covert or subterranean in the work of Warhol and Richter.
Kiefer's warning, however, is made paradoxically in that it comes in the form of a work that clearly emphasizes its commodity status. *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, in other words, is in many respects similar to Warhol's most commercial product, namely, his celebrity portraits, which, between the early 1970s and his death, could also be commissioned and which became Warhol's principal source of income. Thus, although Kiefer has not yet produced portraits on commission and despite the critical contradiction created by the juxtaposition of style and subject matter, Kiefer's work also possesses the same seductive hollowness of Warhol's pop portraits - a seductiveness that made Warhol a millionaire. The spectator responds with desire to the drained-out, larger-than-life forms of Kiefer's aestheticized leaders - he or she identifies with their collective - even as the work signals the dangers inherent in the particular type of representational procedure known as historical portraiture.

Most significant about Kiefer's pop works, however, is the hermeneutic situation that they generate: an undecidable subject position in which the multiple cultural horizons of prewar and postwar Germany and postwar America are brought into relation so as to ask the question of how to represent both authority and tradition. By contrasting form and content across multiple cultural worlds, Kiefer's pop works evoke in the spectator an awareness of cultural differences and allow one to rehearse a variety of different ways to navigate them. For example, through their juxtapositions of historical German personalities of differing "rank," Kiefer's works can perhaps remind us that to idealize the individual and collective subject in the field of representation has often been historically associated with the representation of the other as degenerate: a twin movement of idealization and vilification that often takes place according to national, social, sexual, or racial markers. This is the case because the contrasts the works evoke between "noble" and "base" individuals in the context of a medium associated with mass reproduction can cause the spectator to consider the ways in which the mass media have been used to create images of both "goodness" and "evil." In addition, Kiefer's pop appropriations also suggest - through their evocation of part of the complex history of mutual cultural influence that existed between Germany and America in the twentieth century - that any cultural world is almost always made up of both "national" and "foreign" representations. Kiefer's pop works suggest, in other words, that "culture" is actually and increasingly a "multiculture" - a culture made up of multiple and increasingly porous "national" horizons. Kiefer's pop works thus suggest that Heidegger's model of the world ages cannot exist and that, as interpretive spectators, we must orient ourselves according to the cultural representations of more than one world at any given time. In this way, the spectator's sense of pop as a past style - suggestive of both monumentalizing and critical attitudes toward both individual and collective identity depending on its specific use and context - is permeated with a new undecidability through Kiefer's fusing of multiple horizons. The same painterly techniques that Warhol could use critically in *13 Most Wanted Men* to undermine the institutional sites of cultural legitimation are, as Kiefer's pop works suggest, much more dangerous when used to represent less obviously problematic human subjects. And as Kiefer's pop works suggest, the same Warhol-inspired strategy of eschewing the artistic
choice of a particular human subject – used to such a critical effect by Richter in *48 Portraits* – can also be interpreted as signifying the artist’s passive and affirmative renunciation of agency. Forced to confront Kiefer’s critical examination of the multiple possible ways in which a pop style might produce or undermine a “world view” (an ideal representation of individual and collective subjectivity), his spectators are encouraged to recognize the historical specificity of their particular subject positions as well as the contextual and historical rootedness of all ideal forms of identity. Thus, like his minimalist appropriations, Kiefer’s pop appropriations provoke reflection on the relationship between artistic form and the production and dismantling of human identity. This reflection is also evoked by his appropriations of abstract expressionism.

Abstract Expressionism

In the early 1980s, Kiefer created another series of hotly debated paintings – canvases dealing with themes about the German artist and the Holocaust, whose rich material and expressive qualities recalled the work of the American abstract expressionists, Jackson Pollock in particular. Treading a thin line between representation and abstraction, these works combined oil, acrylic, and strands of brown-yellow straw to create ambiguous landscapes, overlaid – as was often the case with Kiefer’s earlier landscape paintings in the 1970s – with textual references that related the images to World War II. Although there was little discussion in the German press of these works as appropriations of abstract expressionism, this connection was made by a number of American critics over the second half of the 1980s. According to these critics, many of Kiefer’s straw paintings could be read as abstract expressionist appropriations because they emulate the massive scale of the American paintings; their surfaces achieve the same formal “doubleness” or ambiguity characteristic of abstract expressionism, variously described as an alternation between flatness and three-dimensional space or materiality and optical depth; and their organic imagery recalls the natural subject matter that was perceived to form the basis or inspiration for many of the best known abstract expressionist works (think, for example, of the organic water and sky metaphors of many of the titles of Pollock’s drip works, or of Willem de Kooning’s late-1950s landscapes “caught at a glimpse”).

American critics in the mid- and late 1980s were united in their opinion that the connection between Kiefer’s straw works and abstract expressionism was a purely formal one. That abstract expressionist “style” might possess certain types or sets of meaning – meanings with which Kiefer intentionally worked – was simply not considered. Contrary to the American critics, however, these appropriations – like Kiefer’s appropriations of minimalism and pop – appear to work very consciously with sets of meanings that have been previously attributed to abstract expressionist art. Moreover, by tracing out two major trajectories of abstract expressionist meaning in the 1990s (trajectories that are revealed in the reception histories of the American works), it can be demonstrated that, once again, the formal or stylistic associations that Kiefer’s works recycle have
everything to do with the constant construction and dismantling of different forms of individual and collective identity.

Kiefer’s most obviously abstract expressionist moment coincides with the initial straw paintings of 1981–1982. Not only does the linear intensity of the straw that Kiefer attaches to his monumental canvases resemble Pollock’s activated drips and spatters of enamel and aluminum paint, but there is a close compositional correspondence between several of Kiefer’s straw works and Pollock’s 1952 canvas *Blue Poles* (Figure 76) – a massive drip work painted at a time when Pollock was experimenting with ways of reintroducing representational imagery into his art after his not-so-final negation of representation in 1947. To make this canvas, Pollock used a wooden board to imprint eight upright, blue lines on top of a predominantly orange, yellow, and gray drip surface. Standing within an activated, swirling field, Pollock’s repeated, vertical “poles” add to the illusion of shallow three-dimensional space produced by his all-over painted web. Regularly spaced, but leaning in different directions, the poles hint at representation, suggesting metal conductors perhaps present to control the flow of energy also evoked by Pollock’s moving and stopping linear paint trails. And the same formal configuration – upright “poles” against an abstract background – can be found in a number of works in Kiefer’s straw painting series, in particular *Margarete* [*Margarethe*] (Figure 77) and *The Master Singers* [*Die Meistersinger*] (Figure 78), both from 1981.

*Margarete* is a mostly abstract and very large canvas, measuring over five by twelve feet. Here, Kiefer combines straw and paint to create a flat but ambiguous landscape image with multiple vertical axes that rise up out of a broad horizontal band covering the bottom quarter of the surface. Out of this partially overpainted straw bottom, which suggests a natural ground, straw tendrils (evoking plant stalks as well as snakes) emerge upward, penetrating and losing themselves in the grayish oil surface above. These trace representational elements are further augmented by suggestions of painted flames on the tips of the tendrils and by the name “Margarete,” written across the center of the canvas halfway between its midpoint and its top edge. By inscribing this name on the picture’s surface, Kiefer relates his abstract landscape painting to Paul Celan’s “Death Fugue” [*Todesfuge*] (1946) – a poem about the death camps by a Holocaust survivor. In Celan’s poem, an anonymous Jewish narrator, speaking in the third person, describes the violent day and night experience of living under the domination of Death, “a master from Germany.” Death is an anonymous German man, presumably a concentration camp guard, who lives in a house, writes to his beloved in Germany, plays with a snake, and periodically emerges from his domicile to mistreat his Jewish prisoners, order them to dig graves, and eventually shoot them. “Margarete” stands for the idealized German woman – the “golden haired,” absent partner to whom the man writes. Using a fragmented and repetitious language suggesting the breakdown of rational experience, Celan pairs and contrasts Margarete with Shulamith: Margarete’s female Jewish counterpart, whose grave in the air the Jewish slave workers are forced to dig. At the end of the poem, after the Jews are apparently shot, Celan concludes with a synecdochic verbal image of the two absent women: “your golden Hair Margarete/your ashen Hair Shulamith.” Here, in this image, German and
Jew are linked by a mutual longing for their absent beloveds: a mutual longing that perhaps suggests a desire for a different relationship between German and Jew than the one represented in Celan's poem.

In Kiefer's second Pollock-like canvas, *The Master Singers*, the same formal configuration appears: vertical straw elements and the suggestion of a "ground line" are counterpoised to an abstract and vigorously painted flat picture field. Yet here the abstract expressionist form has a different meaning than in *Margarete*. Through the inscription of the title, "The Master Singers," Kiefer alludes to the German practice in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries of holding town-wide singing contests, first given literary form by Hans Sachs and later serving as the theme of Wagner's opera, *The Master Singers of Nuremberg* [*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*]. In *The Master Singers*, instead of the beloved German woman, the straw represents the male German artist — seemingly a stand-in for Kiefer, himself — who, through the textual source, is portrayed in competition with "others" of his kind. (In both works, the straw tendrils tend to be associated with the character or characters indicated by the title because of the verticality of the tendrils, which suggests vaguely anthropomorphic shapes, as well as the fact that the straw tendrils define the only "figures" in the works to which the texts could refer. In *Margarete*, the straw seems to represent the German woman by indicating the strands of her blond hair. In *The Master Singers*, the straw seems to represent the bodies of the German artists, perhaps standing together in a field.) As in *Margarete*, Kiefer links *The Master Singers* to World War II — something that he accomplishes here by choosing a text that refers to the German city of Nuremberg, the site of Hitler's most spectacular rallies and, later on, to the Nazi war crime trials. And although the figure of the artist is presented critically (the straw "figures" are given sinister connotations through their association with Wagner, Nuremberg, fire, and the idea of self-aggrandizing individual competition), the canvas as a whole is in no way directly related to the Holocaust. Thus, in the straw series, Kiefer grafts two seemingly unrelated themes — the Holocaust and the competitive German artist — onto the same basic

formal structure, implying an arbitrary connection between form and subject matter and thus an insincere motive.

By representing events that many critics and cultural theorists deemed "unrepresentable," and even worse by doing so in a way that appeared to cloak the naked reality of genocide in multiple and ambiguous symbolic overlays, these works, it was argued, romanticized, trivialized, or obscured the actual events of the Shoah. And it was precisely the ruined beauty of Kiefer's canvases, along with the sense that his Holocaust symbolism was arbitrary and confused, that made some of his American critics so suspicious. Although the Americans recognized that Kiefer at least superficially assumed the position of a repentant German, he was accused of "bad faith" - of romanticizing the German fall instead of commemorating the Jewish tragedy. And for some, appropriating Pollock's style was taken as a way for Kiefer to beautify his themes - a means of selling their otherwise indigestible content to a gullible audience - and nothing more.

A closer analysis of what Kiefer's two works have in common, however, clarifies why Kiefer's art is not "Nazi kitsch" (as one critic called it) and suggests that, over the course of human history, visual form has become saturated with ever longer strands of interpretive meaning. One of the things that Margarete and The Master Singers have in common is that they both make the same transformations of Pollock's highly publicized and documented process of artistic production. Kiefer's use of straw in place of Pollock's flung, dribbled, or drooled skeins of aluminum and enamel paint suggests a completely different and far more deliberate process of application. Instead of the fundamentally liquid characteristics of Pollock's medium, Kiefer's media emphasize his painting's rigidity, plasticity, and structure - in short, its tendency to emulate sculpture. In addition, the straw carries sets of meaning - linked to its properties as a material used in farming and as a highly flammable source of heat - which are not carried by ordinary paint. As shown by Kiefer's canvases, natural material easily comes to signify multiple "things" when placed within the context of a larger work. Finally, Kiefer's canvases retreat even further into representation than did Blue Poles. Unlike most of Pollock's drip canvases between 1947 and 1950, Margarete and The Master Singers contain clear figure-ground differentiations, recognizable - if ambiguous - organic imagery, as well as a far stronger suggestion of a horizon line. In these three ways, Kiefer's appropriations of abstract expressionism emphasize the deliberateness or subjectivity of Kiefer's art at the same time as they render the concept of the artist as subject problematic or undecidable.

That American abstract expressionism renders the subject undecidable can be seen from its interpretive history. It is significant that, after Greenberg, much of the important American discourse on abstract expressionism since the 1950s has been predominantly subject-oriented - that is, focused on the artist's psyche, process, and actions - and, ultimately, the artist's authentic or inauthentic existence as a whole. As this examination of the artist as existentialist subject was developed in the interpretive history of abstract expressionism, however, a radical antisubjectivism entered the critical discourse. In other words, the abstract expressionist subject was shown to possess sets of fundamental gaps or
contradictions. In the 1990s, it is argued, the "subject" of abstract expressionism is "informe" or "vulgar" – that is, de-centered, riven by conflicting drives and ideologies, the potential for violence, and the constant possibility of degeneration and death. By tracing this overall (subjective to antisubjective) development in slightly greater detail, we can better understand Kiefer's aesthetic transformations in the straw paintings.

The early subjective reading of Pollock and abstract expressionism is clearly presented in the writings of Harold Rosenberg, who developed the existentialist concept of "action painting." Rosenberg first articulated his concept of action painting – painting as "event" – in 1952, in an essay entitled "The American Action Painters," in order to account for what he saw as a new type of American artist. Citing painters such as Willem de Kooning, Hans Hoffman, and Jackson Pollock, among others, Rosenberg noted that what defined this new type of American painter was neither a shared style nor a common theory or discourse about art but, rather, "a consciousness of a function for painting different from that of the earlier 'abstractionists,'" both European and American. The canvas was no longer recognized as a means to represent preexisting meanings or even a figure against a ground. Instead, the canvas was viewed as a record of the artist's "dialogue" with his or her material. In this way, Rosenberg expanded the terms in America in the 1950s with which to speak about abstract art. Unlike Greenberg, Rosenberg wanted the viewer to think about how the artist expressed his or her actions: "Since the painter has become an actor, the spectator has to think in a vocabulary of action: its inception, duration, direction – psychic state, concentration and relaxation of the will, passivity, alert waiting." Thus, without reverting to a traditional concept of subject matter, Rosenberg's reevaluation of American postwar abstraction had the effect of returning to the discourse surrounding American abstract art much of the "subject matter" prohibited by Greenberg's model. For Rosenberg the new painting expressed far more than its formal qualities; from this, "it follows that anything is relevant to it. Anything that has to do with action – psychology, philosophy, history, mythology, hero worship." Rosenberg's writings, in turn, helped to strengthen the second subjective interpretation of abstract expressionism that emerged in the 1960s: the psychoanalytic reading, which often focused on the work of Jackson Pollock. Pollock, it was widely known, had undergone Jungian analysis and was familiar with Jung’s concepts. In addition, through the European refugee surrealists, many of Freud’s psychoanalytic concepts had become a part of the common language of the New York art world and thus were a legitimate theoretical system for post-1960s spectators to see "represented" in Pollock’s art. Finally, Pollock was a very troubled individual, and his public and private displays of drunkenness and other forms of dysfunctional behavior became well known after his death. Thus, there was much material in and around Pollock’s art that could be used by psychoanalytic theorists to produce interpretations that highlighted different forms of conscious and unconscious "subjectivity" reflected in the works. Moreover, many of the issues that psychoanalysis brings up in relation to Pollock – fame, alcoholism, love, self-hatred, violence, hetero- and homosexual desire – could also be said to destabilize a spectator’s sense of centered subjectivity.
through an evocation of powerful and potentially destructive forces that inhabit the unconscious.

This unconscious, de-centering, or antisubjective reading of Pollock’s drip paintings is brilliantly articulated in the writings of Rosalind Krauss and T. J. Clark in the early 1990s. Taken together, their work points to the various ways in which the subject is undermined through abstract expressionist art, to how it is opened up to what it is not – that is, to the nonhuman, nonorganic, mechanical, dead, and so forth. For Krauss, this undermining process is something that primarily happens at the level of the individual subject. Although she interprets Pollock’s painterly process in terms of its indexicality (and thus as a photographlike or ontologically connected record of his actual, historical image-making activity), she emphasizes that, in Pollock’s art, even the index becomes “informe,” a transformation she connects with the psychological concepts of the death drive and sibling rivalry. At the heart of Krauss’s analysis is the idea that, after 1947, Pollock was a “low” artist: one who formally debased and dismantled – in a contradictory fashion – his medium’s “formal condition as painting.” In other words, by experimenting with various formal – or abstracting – techniques and strategies of painting, Pollock reduced art to mute “fact,” “positivity,” or “thisness.” This reduction of the condition of painting to mere positivity was accomplished through the drip process’s negation of various historical limits or lines of demarcation that separate painting from what it is not. Pollock’s drip works canceled figuration by negating any radical distinction between figure and ground. In addition, through their tremendous sizes, Pollock’s canvas murals negated painting’s easel status and identified art with the material presence of the wall. Moreover, by the very nature of his drip technique, Pollock’s canvases negate painting because they were made in a horizontal position – their origin on the floor thus denies their verticality and undermines their transcendental significance. Finally, also through the drip process, Pollock negated his artistic practice of painting by opening it up to chance – a gesture that was influenced by Surrealist automatist practices. In these four ways, Pollock’s drip paintings negate their condition as painting through their form – that is, they push it away from the transcendental, the narrative, and the pure.

As Krauss argues, the play of formal negations performed by Pollock’s differently formatted drip canvases ultimately produce a particular type of body – a corpse or subjectivity undermined from within. The painted drips are indices of the artist’s activity – the purest, most immediate representations of his bodily activities during the art-making process. Yet despite this immediacy, the indexical significance of Pollock’s painterly marks (as well as the dried paint pools indicating the canvas’s horizontal origin on the ground), eventually cuts the spectator’s cognition off from the actual events of painting. They do this because they objectify the artist’s activity – thereby separating the artist’s body from the rational and desiring temporal spirit that animates it. By interpretively responding to Pollock’s painting, the spectator becomes aware that the artist has subjected his own psychophysical presence to dislocation, bifurcation, and dismemberment – a gesture that, once again, points to the fundamental negativity that underlies all cultural productions of unity, conceptuality, and subjective self-presence. For Krauss, Pollock’s technique thus is, at heart, both produc-
tive and violent – the physical inscription of painterly traces that signify the opposite of subjectivity, intention, and history. And as such, Pollock’s drip paintings are fitting images of the “formlessness” – or decay of meaning – that results from the breakdown of certain types of postwar American subjectivity.

For T. J. Clark, Pollock’s drips also help project a de-centering or fragmenting subject – both on the individual and, very importantly, on the collective level. According to Clark, American abstract expressionism in general and Pollock’s drip paintings in particular are often “vulgar” – that is, ugly, fragmentary, and material as opposed to ideal, pure, or beautiful. In abstract expressionism, in other words, the painterly expression of individual subjectivity is often rendered banal – for example, by being made overly expressive, overly representational, or overly symbolic. According to Clark, the vulgarity of Pollock’s drips expresses a fundamental paradox of modern culture – namely, that the various forms through which the bourgeoisie traditionally asserted their class status have become degenerate and empty of meaning. In other words, the forms that connoted and helped perpetuate the traditional bourgeois subject court death in America in the late 1940s. As America’s power grows in relation to Europe (and New York, as Serge Guilbaut puts it, “steals the idea of modern art”), Pollock’s forms move toward signifying “emptiness, endlessness, the nonhuman, and the inorganic.” Pollock, according to Clark, represents yet another sign of the triumph of the “world view” of the petty bourgeoisie – that large stratum of individuals within capitalist societies who identify with the groups who wield social, political, and economic power but have no power to directly influence society themselves. Thus, as Pollock’s works show the spectator, to maintain power the bourgeoisie had to give up its right to speak – they had to let their “inferiors” speak for them. And in this way, a certain “traditional” form of individual and collective identity was banalized and thus de-centered.

Through five decades of art criticism and history, American abstract expressionism has thus come to mean many things. Yet, what still unites all four models of Pollock and abstract expressionism, the subjective ones articulated by Rosenberg and the psychoanalytic critics and the antisubjective ones developed by Krauss and Clark, is a sense that the “meaning” of abstract expressionism – what its “abstract” forms have come to “represent” – has everything to do with the projection and destabilization of different forms of subjectivity and, moreover, that these two “actions” are part of the same process. Thus, taken together, the meanings that historically have been attached to Pollock’s drip canvases can work to produce an undecidable play of multiple forms of subjectivity on both an individual and a collective level. And irrespective of whether Kiefer was aware of the specific writings that grew up around Pollock’s art or not, the issues that they reveal are clearly reflected in his works. Returning to Kiefer’s two “inauthentic” straw works, Margarete and The Master Singers (Figures 77 and 78), it is now clear that they were designed both to project various forms of subjectivity and to render these forms undecidable. Although seemingly unique (and collectable) paintings, Kiefer’s straw canvases also project their “author” as a collective entity – a combination of contributions by Kiefer, Pollock, Celan, Sachs, and Wagner. In addition, through the conflict of interpretations produced by the problematic arbitrariness of the two main narratives (artistic competition and the Holocaust),
as well as the seeming alternation between horizontal and vertical modes of "painterly" image making, Kiefer's two works also undermine his own subjectivity as an artist—taken together they can make him seem "unoriginal" or even "violent" and "brutal." Moreover, Kiefer also accuses himself of brutality—and thus of having formed a defective subjective identity—through his particular appropriation of Celan’s text in the painting Margarete. This is the case because through this textual appropriation, Kiefer emphasizes his own connection to the subject position of the German victimizer: "Your golden hair, Margarete" is one of the few lines in Celan’s poem that seems to be uttered from a German perspective. And by identifying his representation with one of the few subjective images attributed to the victimizer in “Death Fugue” (and by literally writing it, like the male German protagonist in the poem), Kiefer seems to connect a Jewish representation of the German perpetrator to his own person. In this way, in Margarete, Kiefer avoids direct representation of the death camps, attempts to learn about himself from a victim of his parent’s generation, and keeps the Holocaust alive by evoking comparisons between the actions of the “ordinary” German perpetrators of the “Final Solution” and his own contemporary act of painting.

Similarly, The Master Singers also plays with subjectivity-constituting and subjectivity-undermining meanings on multiple levels of representation. Paired with a rich intertextual tradition (which can destabilize self-identity), the painted canvas veers even more than Margarete “back” toward representation (which tends to stabilize self-identity). Perhaps for this reason, it appears more overblown than Margarete—perhaps even a little banal or “tacky.” In addition, Kiefer’s utterly prosaic identification of the tendrils by means of handwritten numbers near their tips projects a repetitive, machinelike rationality—something that manifests the opposite of a “creative vision.” Thus Kiefer, the artist, and the creative subjects that he represents appear in this work as undifferentiated, mass- or herdlike, and crude. Finally, by writing the title along the edge of the canvas’s right side, Kiefer suggests the potential repositioning of his work—perhaps to be stored with only its right edge showing for easy identification. In this way, the work rotates between different sites in the spectator’s imagination—from the ground to the wall to storage, for example—while at the same time reminding us of its objecthood and fragility. It thus invites its spectators to move it, and, because of the conjunction of this address with its fragility, seems to encourage violence against itself and thereby connote organic dysfunction.

It is the historical specificity of Kiefer’s strategy of creating and undermining subjectivity in the straw series, tied as it is to issues of Kiefer’s particular postwar generation, as well as to the history of West Germany in the early 1980s, that makes the straw series so important. In 1982, the year Kiefer stopped working on his abstract expressionist straw series, the social-liberal era of postwar West Germany also ended. The Free Democratic Party left the Social Democrat-led coalition government and formed a new coalition with the conservative Christian Democratic Party. Helmut Kohl replaced Helmut Schmidt as chancellor. With this conservative turn in the German political climate came a shift in cultural and intellectual production as conservative intellectuals, bolstered by the success and mandate of the new government, began to win back still more ground from the liberals and Social Democrats.131 Coming on the
heels of his pop works, Kiefer’s abstract expressionist works were a shrewd and
precise way of presenting the problems of singularity and revisionism, indi-
vidual responsibility and national identity, “Germanness” and “international-
ism” that became major themes in the mid- to late 1980s in the national and
international discourse about Germany and its relations to memory, history, and
the political culture of the West. By creatively responding to an “American”
style, Kiefer’s straw paintings undermine strict divisions between German and
American and show that all forms of subjectivity are in part constructed by
something foreign to them.

**Conclusion**

Kiefer’s appropriations of “American” minimalism, pop, and abstract expres-
sionism between 1969 and 1982 support a number of conceptual models
already articulated in the late 1930s in Heidegger’s phenomenological and
hermeneutic account of modernity as fundamentally representational as well as
his understanding of modernity’s decisive phase as a battle of world views.
Kiefer’s art recycles preexisting cultural representations – representations that
can be formally, thematically, and narratively linked to different forms of indi-
vidual and collective subjectivity (for example, the self, the other, the American,
the German, the bourgeois, the revolutionary, the reactionary, the artist, the sol-
dier, and so forth). This form of production through selection, appropriation,
and reproduction reflects one of the primary insights around which Heidegger’s
theory of modernity revolves: modernity as the constant production and repro-
duction of “new” forms of the subject, a process that speeds up as clear sets of
foundational principles wither away within the horizon of the West and are
replaced by multiple and superimposed frameworks through which to see,
understand, and act. In addition, both Heidegger and Kiefer appear to realize
that all cultural forms for visualizing the world (from quantum mechanics to
“fully” abstract art) are inherently representational. Moreover, both figures also
seem to recognize that so long as these representations have groups that are
drawn to them, they will both saturate (i.e., grow richer in meanings) and
objectify (i.e., produce more and more material results) as the mode of vision
they both create and embody develops over time. There is, in other words, no
perception of the world, no intentional form, no style, that does not collect
accretions of historically produced meaning. And it is by knowing these accre-
tions that human beings can live aesthetically – that is, with an awareness of
the potentialities built into the many ways of viewing the world.

On the other hand, the greater undecidability of Kiefer’s art, its elements that
help undermine forms of individual and collective subjectivity, as well as its abil-
ity to collect a community of interpreters who engage in dialogue, help correct
Heidegger’s mistaken idea that modernity did not have the potential to resist its
own worst aspects. Although Heidegger had desperately hoped in the late 1930s
that Germany was about to step outside the horizon of modernity, Kiefer’s art
seems to dash this hope for some radical form of historical “overcoming.” By
repeating many elements of Heidegger’s vision of the German twentieth-century
world but at a faster rate, Kiefer’s art suggests that there has been no passage into postmodernity – no break in the twentieth century that suggests a fundamentally different context, a decidedly different set of governing rules and procedures. Instead, as Kiefer’s art implies, there has simply been a speeding up and further multiplication of modernity’s already multiple processes of representation, objectification, destabilization, and decay, as well as an increase in its oscillation between enlightenment and myth, subjectivity and its dissolution, poetry and barbarism. As Kiefer’s art seems to posit, no one set of principles – metaphysical or otherwise – today retains complete normative power. But, as his art also shows, this does not mean that the frameworks produced by modernity are not still valid in certain combinations. Thus, contrary to Heidegger, Kiefer’s art suggests that modern culture still contains within itself the power to control its dark side. On both an individual and a collective level, it produces not only diverse forms of representational world view but also various forms of unconsciousness, gap, and subjective breakdown. It can thus continue to reproduce itself “anew.”

Ultimately, as Kiefer and Heidegger suggest, the way people understand history has a lot to do with their approach to modernity. If human beings approach modernity as something past, they cut themselves off from their history – in effect they deny that its forms and processes have any influence on their present. If, however, people approach modernity as something present, their multiple histories can perhaps be gathered and comprehended through the identification of the fundamental forms and processes through which modernity develops as well as the different types of subjectivity it has produced. Through its processes of identification and dissolution (processes that in a fundamental way transpire through the medium of representation), modernity becomes more widespread, densely packed, and efficient over the course of the twentieth century – a development that is both dangerous and full of possibility. Through the openness and questioning nature of their respective cultural projects, Heidegger and Kiefer have added much to the Western understanding of modernity in the twentieth century. And through their examples, they may help subsequent audiences (both today and perhaps again sometime in the future) to reflect historically – that is, to see themselves in terms of both their individuality and the larger social and collective structures of which they are a part.
Art and Technology

I am interested in the connection between spiritual power and technological power, one might even say the technological possibilities of spiritual power.

Anselm Kiefer

Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art.

Martin Heidegger

This chapter examines the relationship between art and technology as it is presented in the later works of both Heidegger and Kiefer. After the war, Heidegger drops his claim that modernity’s breakthrough into the “other” beginning is imminent and argues instead that the hegemony of modern representational systems could – in the “new” form of technological revealing – continue for centuries. Technology, according to Heidegger’s late writings, is a mode of disclosure: it is perhaps the most extreme form of those ways of seeing that have previously been called, in reference to his earlier texts, “instrumental disclosure,” “science,” and “metaphysics.” Its danger, moreover, is of international – not national – scope. For this reason, in the context of Heidegger’s late thinking, art no longer functions as a means to orient the political aspirations of the “German” nation but rather as a means of understanding the nature of technology – and thus as a way of comprehending the greatest danger facing the contemporary Western world as a whole.

In Kiefer’s art, the ways in which technology appears both fundamentally echo Heidegger’s post-1950s theoretical account of art and technology and diverge from or modify it. Although his art reflects and partially confirms Heidegger’s late models of art and technology as historically developing modes of disclosure, technology in Kiefer’s works is – in general – treated more undecidably. Technology, in other words, is represented less negatively and as potentially containing more beneficial possibilities than it is by Heidegger. In addition, the appearance of technology in Kiefer’s art also points away from Heidegger’s thinking and toward Kiefer’s formal “roots” in European and American conceptual art. And through an analysis of the conceptual influences that...
also inform Kiefer’s works, it can be demonstrated that Germany in the twentieth century continues to be in fundamental ways defined and constituted by processes of representation.

**Factory Blues**

At some point in the early to mid-1980s, Anselm Kiefer began to run a factory—that is, he began to engage in a factorylike mode of production. As the analyses of Kiefer’s works in the first three chapters have already partially indicated, as Kiefer’s art develops, his object-making practices evolve from procedures that more closely resemble handwork into procedures that more closely resemble those of mechanized production. Another indication of the evolution in Kiefer’s production methods can be found in the transformation of the infrastructural resources that Kiefer has at his disposal—namely, the rapid development and multiplication of Kiefer’s workspaces during the 1980s. This development began in 1982 when Kiefer moved his atelier from the attic of his home, the former schoolhouse in Hornbach that he occupied since 1971, to an approximately 9,000-square-foot vacant steel-wool production plant in an industrial quarter of the neighboring town of Buchen. In 1986, only four years later, Kiefer built a matching structure adjacent to the original building in Buchen, thereby doubling his space again. A few years later, in the nearby town of Höpfingen, Kiefer renovated and added to his ensemble of buildings an abandoned brickworks, described in 1990 by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* as a “former factory,” with “different work-halls, a shut-down brick forge with three excavation pits, and a helicopter landing pad.” The acquisition of this gigantic building complex, used by Kiefer as a combination storage facility, exhibition space, and “sound stage” for his increasingly spectacular photographic sequences, again vastly increased the amount of production space that Kiefer had at his disposal. In addition to the rapid expansion of his workspaces, other external indications of Kiefer’s shift to a more factorylike mode of production in the mid-to late 1980s included his vastly increased output of works, the more than 400 percent increase in his work force (from four to seventeen assistants) between 1987 and 1990, as well as his tendency to produce increasingly outsized—even colossal—forms of art. In approximately two decades, the artist who began by making books with paper and cellophane tape became the manufacturer of sculptures weighing many tons.

Although he defensively argued in 1990 that his massive artistic enterprise was “anticapitalist” (an argument one finds hard to believe given the high prices his works were commanding by then, as well as his demonstrated sophistication in handling the international art market), Kiefer acknowledged its factorylike nature in a 1989 photographic sequence *Land of Two Rivers [Zweistromland]* (1989) (Figures 79–85). This sequence is published at the beginning of a lavishly illustrated mass-produced art book *The High Priestess*, which is devoted to his massive lead bookcase sculpture *Land of Two Rivers [Zweistromland]* (1986–1989), to which he has also appended the English title “The High Priestess.” Here, in the book’s introductory photographic sequence, Kiefer focuses on the industrial and technological character of his art-making
practices by taking the viewer on a staged journey through the massive deteriorating spaces where he makes and displays his art. The sequence opens in the former souring chamber of the disused brickworks: a huge hall with steel beams under the ceiling, brick walls traversed with stairs and catwalks, and a gigantic excavated dirt floor (previously used to season raw clay before it was molded into bricks). Like segments of the same tracking shot, the photographs take the spectator across an earth environment, strewn with planks and debris, and into another space: the former brick-making area above the factory's kiln, where the bricks used to be fired. Numbered square pillars rise up to a low, barely visible ceiling, and oven vents poke through a dilapidated brick floor. In the middle of the sequence that takes the viewer across the brick-making area, the scene suddenly changes, and one finds oneself hovering over a gradually filling water tank in Kiefer's Buchen studio. Partially obscured by hand-painted emulsion, this composite image depicts a model of a nuclear reactor core that has previously appeared in a nuclear-technology-themed series of books and paintings from the mid- to late 1980s. After the nuclear water tank image, the scene switches back to the brickworks, where the viewer passes through a series of tunnellike rooms containing a latticework of wooden racks where bricks used to be dried. Then, after moving through the maze-like environment, one finds oneself back in Kiefer's Buchen studio, which is explored in a series of photographs focusing primarily on his gigantic double-bookcase sculpture.

Figure 82. Anselm Kiefer, Land of Two Rivers, pp. 44-45.

Figure 83. Anselm Kiefer, Land of Two Rivers, pp. 50-51.
FIGURE 84. Anselm Kiefer; Land of Two Rivers, pp. 54-55.

FIGURE 85. Anselm Kiefer; Land of Two Rivers, pp. 60-61.
The High Priestess/Land of Two Rivers (Figure 86). Set against Kiefer’s studio as a whole – with its huge metal shelves containing the raw materials (sand, lead, straw, wood, and other substances) that he uses to make his art works and its gigantic canvases mounted on wheeled easels and aligned in regular rows – the spectator is presented with a series of shots depicting the making of a single sculpture, from various angles and in several different stages of assembly. Finally, the sequence ends by returning the spectator to the room in Buchen that contains Kiefer’s running-water tank. This time, the tank’s fourteen protruding rods – symbolizing the core of a nuclear reactor – are clearly visible and thus suggest meltdown and imminent disaster.

That Kiefer would choose to represent the making of The High Priestess/Land of Two Rivers – one of his most successful sculptures to date – sandwiched between two fairly explicit references to nuclear energy, and in conjunction with a detailed and comprehensive presentation of his vast and variegated...
factory environment, suggests that he, too, recognizes the centrality to his art of his own growing economic and industrial power. Power has been a consistent theme in the critical literature surrounding his work virtually from the start, as well as a concept that crops up in Kiefer’s own explanations of his art. And power – of the past, of the state, of the artist, and of myth – appears as either a hidden or an explicit theme of a great many of Kiefer’s works from the beginning of his career to the present day. Since the mid-1980s, this theme of power has grown consistently more technological, as electrical poles, nuclear rods, ships, planes, rockets, and film equipment began to appear more and more frequently in his work.

Why should Kiefer’s artistic development and his own aesthetic self-understanding have become so entwined with technology? And what does it mean when, at a certain juncture in postwar German history, the factory becomes a symbol for the site of artistic practice? One way to explain this phenomenon would be to interpret it as yet another pop appropriation – a “German” reworking of an “American” technique. Warhol’s “factory” of course, is the obvious – if superficial – antecedent. Another way to explain the increasing manifestations of technology in Kiefer’s works would be to point to the world in which Kiefer lived when he created this art: a renewed and industrialized West Germany, the economic leader of Europe – a country in which, as in other “first world” nations, the everyday world is saturated with technology to an immense degree. Kiefer’s focus on technology in his art thus suggests an interest in his international aesthetic tradition as well as a desire to mirror his contemporary and globalizing “German” world. In short, like Heidegger, Kiefer also seems to be consciously reflecting on a major power – or driving force – through which modernity continues in his contemporary moment. To fully appreciate the significance of Kiefer’s treatment of technology, however, one must begin with Heidegger’s account of modernity in the 1950s.

Heidegger’s Postwar Analysis of Art and Technology

Throughout the 1950s and the hard years of German social and infrastructural reconstruction, a double-edged analysis of art and technology insinuates itself as a dominant theme in Heidegger’s thinking in essays such as “The Question Concerning Technology” [Die Frage nach der Technik] (1954) and “The Turning” [Die Kehre] (1950/1962). Against a social and political reality that tended to repress feelings of German collective guilt and with a horror of the effects of wartime technology, Heidegger analyzed his social, cultural, and historical situation in terms of the extreme danger it faced and the powers that could save it from such danger. According to this trajectory of Heidegger’s late thinking, “art” [Kunst] and “technology” [Technik] are not collective terms for two different types of things that we might ordinarily find in the world. Instead, according to Heidegger, at their most basic levels, art and technology are both fundamental “modes of revealing” [Wesen des Entbergens]: intersubjective, historically developing ways of seeing given to human beings so that they may unveil and understand the beings and structures that exist around them.
Technological objects display – and their use and proliferation support – a mode of revealing that Heidegger likens to a “challenging” ([herausfordern]). Revealed in this way,

a tract of land is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. . . . Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use.11

This type of revealing does not allow a thing to emerge naturally and freely into its full truth but rather transforms all natural things into energy that can be stored and used as such.15 Technology is, thus, the “greatest danger” facing humankind. Revealed by technology, nature becomes “standing-reserve” ([Bestand]); and, as standing-reserve, the richness and variety of a thing are replaced by a reduced set of properties: the thing’s use value as well as its position in a global network of transformation and exchange.

In addition to producing alterations in nature, technology also transforms human practice. Changes in the ways in which humans perceive things and beings lead to changes in the way they act toward both their worlds and the others with whom they coexist. What humans can technologically manipulate, they use as a means of furthering their own capital and of bolstering their own control. Because most people pursue their own particular goals, deploying technology in the service of personal gain and advancement, humanity as a whole causes the framework of technological relations to grow. Heidegger calls this technological mode of revealing “enframing” ([Ge-stell]) in order to emphasize its nature as a developing historical horizon as well as its characteristic way of revealing all beings – all parts of nature – as systematically interrelated in terms of their energy and use potentials. In addition, although Heidegger continues to largely ignore the individual side of the subject, his term “enframing” emphasizes the perspectival nature of technological disclosure. Thus, enframing is a mode of revealing beings that initially empowers its “spectators” – the people who see and act in terms of it – by making it easier for them to unlock and regulate their worlds and the materials and powers that exist around them.

In contrast to technologically disclosed objects, works of art display a mode of revealing that Heidegger initially characterizes as “bringing-forth” ([Her-vorbringen]). Bringing-forth is art’s multidimensional character: its ability to manifest a thing or being’s multiple causes as well as the many frameworks into which it fits. For example, basing himself on Aristotle’s definition of causality, Heidegger argues that a Greek religious object – a silver sacrificial vessel – equally reveals its material, the silver out of which it is made; its form, its shape or constellational properties; its purpose, the “sacrificial rite” for which it was intended; and its efficient cause, the power that brought it into being, that is, the Greek silversmith and his knowledge of his craft. According to Heidegger, these four causes “send” the sacrificial vessel into appearance. They make it present and start it on its way to its “complete arrival” – its fullest display of itself. As was the case with authentic truth during his existential period as well as the
oscillating happening of truth in the work of art during his middle aesthetic-modernist period, it is the fullness or multidimensionality of aesthetic revealing that is its distinguishing characteristic in Heidegger’s postwar period as well.

As indicated by his critical practice, which extends from Greek drama to the painting and poetry of the twentieth century, Heidegger believed bringing-forth to be to some extent an essential characteristic of art during all stages of human history. However, even though it lives on after World War II, bringing-forth shines most purely for Heidegger in the arts of ancient Greece and is thus in some fundamental sense essentially Greek. Heidegger calls bringing-forth “poësis” to emphasize this Greek character of all aesthetic revealing as well as the naturalness of art’s appearing quality. For the ancient Greeks, poësis was, according to Heidegger, in the highest sense, a natural sort of disclosure, a free and unencumbered growth of something into full maturity and appearance.

Not only handcraft manufacture, not only artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery, is a bringing-forth, poësis. Physis also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth, poësis. Physis is indeed poësis in the highest sense. For what presences by means of physis has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself (en heautōi).

In addition to indicating art’s naturalness, the term “poësis” also reveals the strong linguistic bias in Heidegger’s theory of aesthetic revealing. For Heidegger, all aesthetic revealing is in some fundamental sense always poetical. Paradoxically, as the many nontextual aspects of Kiefer’s art demonstrate, this actually makes Heidegger’s late model of aesthetic revealing less rich or multivalent than it could be.

In the modern epoch, aesthetic revealing is also the source of a “saving power” that will preserve humanity from the great danger posed by technological revealing. As Heidegger puts it, “Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. . . . Such a realm is art.” Works of art, in other words, and the aesthetic revealing they create in conjunction with the spectator, grant human beings access to the essence – that is, the fundamental forms and processes – of appearing. Or, to put it another way, art works do not simply disclose themselves as the multidimensional entities that they are; in addition, they also disclose the fundamental forms and processes of all revealing in general. Thus, although Heidegger does not mention it (because of his continued rejection of the perspective of the individual), one could argue on the basis of Heidegger’s model that aesthetic disclosure benefits both its spectators and its world. First, it benefits its world – the things, beings, and constellations of meaning that it brings into appearance – because, by emphasizing the world’s polyvalence, it does not radically distort that which it represents. Second, it benefits its spectators – the minds that are open enough to receive and project it – because it grants us access to the truth, understood here as the multiple historical frameworks that make possible both truth and falsehood.
Unlike aesthetic revealing, which is truly beneficial to human beings yet might seem vain and devoid of any immediate material benefit, technological revealing, which potentially presents humanity with the greatest danger, seems precisely the most beneficial sort of revealing. In fact, as Heidegger argues, technological revealing is dangerous precisely because it seems so beneficial—so capable of continually enhancing human power. It unlocks the powers inherent in nature and allows humans to bend these powers to their will; this, in turn, extends human vision even further into nature, thereby giving humans the insight and additional power to will even grander projects. The danger of technological revealing thus stems from the fact that it is totalizing; that it seeks constantly to develop itself and shut out other modes of disclosing beings. Because it has been so successful, technological revealing is the dominant mode of revealing in Heidegger’s contemporary postwar Germany, just as aesthetic revealing—which could potentially save humanity from technology—has lost vitality since the Greeks.

The benefits bestowed by technological revealing differ from those bestowed by aesthetic revealing in that they run in only one direction. Technological modes of seeing, in other words, ultimately benefit only the structures and processes of technological revealing and not the people or worlds disclosed through these modes of seeing. In addition, if technological revealing is not checked, humans and nature alike will ultimately be reduced to standing-reserve. Unlike the processes of aesthetic revealing, which derive their multidimensional powers from the projective interplay of creative individuals and Being, technological revealing is more anonymous and masslike. Also unlike aesthetic revealing, technological revealing forces a being or thing to give up its power—a renunciation, moreover, that is complete. That which is reduced to standing-reserve loses its integrity—that “core” of itself that keeps it together as a unity or coherent being. The “object” of technological revealing is thus radically transformed and then ultimately dissolved and dispersed. Since nature and human beings are also inevitable “objects” of technological revealing (both are, after all, also always a part of the material or existing world), both we and our worlds are ultimately threatened with annihilation if technological revealing develops itself to the extreme.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Heidegger’s model of his contemporary global world of technological revealing—a horrifying postwar present that can be redeemed only through the saving power of great works of art and thinking—is both similar to and different from his late-1930s model of modernity. In the 1950s, Heidegger’s conception of the epochal horizon becomes divided—that is, he now argues that every epoch contains more than one constellation of revealing at any given moment. Thus, in addition to the different metaphysical epochs discovered through a textual and aesthetic hermeneutics, there are also two different contemporary modes of revealing, which Heidegger calls “destinings” or “sendings” of Being and which develop historically and form complex relations within each epoch, where they vie for humanity’s acceptance and utilization. Thus, although it is still far less complex than Kiefer’s multiworld representations beginning in the late 1960s, Heidegger’s thinking at least moves toward a more complex—more multihorizonal—account of the postwar German world.
In addition, by the 1960s, Heidegger modifies his historical claim about modernity’s decisive stage. Although modernity has been transformed, the other beginning did not come about in a giant transvaluation or leap, as he had hoped in the late 1930s. Instead, as technological revealing, the primary outcome of modern science, becomes dominant in human thought, traditional Western metaphysical principles lose even their residual normative “value” for human affairs. All the old values are completely destroyed, and even modern science is controlled by a pragmatic orientation that rejects some of science’s most important values (its internationalism as well as its freedom or autonomy vis-à-vis church and state). And by becoming increasingly technological, postwar modernity’s processes of representation proliferate and dominate to an even greater extent.

According to Heidegger, the postwar age can understand itself only when it develops a form of thinking adequate to its own technological nature: an “other” way of cognition that is different from either traditional Western philosophy or modern science. Heidegger was adamant that his “other” or post-metaphysical form of thinking — a form of thinking that was to prepare the ground for an adequate understanding of the modern age — could articulate no direct course of action to change or transform the present trajectory of his contemporary world. Indeed, in 1966, he was by no means certain that any practical form of thinking adequate to the technological age would be developed for the next three centuries! Yet, at the same time, this thinking was essential to the future of the West, for, with the emergence of the postwar “technological age,” metaphysical concepts could no longer be used to understand the present.

To a late-twentieth-century gaze, a gaze that the contemporary spectator shares (more or less) with Anselm Kiefer, there are a number of things that seem extremely shocking about Heidegger’s postwar account of the opposed yet related forms of aesthetic and technological revealing, the intensification of modernity’s structures and processes in the postwar technological age, the inability of all previous metaphysical models to comprehend the present, and the impossibility of immediately developing a form of thinking that could offer practical knowledge to individuals within their respective societies. Heidegger’s account of his contemporary moment, for example, demonstrates appallingly little reflection on the National Socialist period of German history. Instead of deliberating upon his role in the production of a concept of German identity during the time of the Nazis’ rise to power, a concept that for a time helped support the development of German fascism, Heidegger drops his overtly nationalistic claims — the direct references to Germany and “Germanness” — but continues to assert the same canon of works: the early Greek thinkers, Friedrich Hölderlin, Georg Trakel, and Rainer Maria Rilke, for example. Indeed, although Heidegger’s canon is supplemented after the war — Stefan George appears, for example — neither its Weimar- nor its Nazi-era pantheon of figures is ever substantially revised. In this way, Heidegger continues to assert the intersubjective validity of his own prewar critical conclusions in the postwar era — an assertion that seems scandalous in light of the earlier blunders into which Heidegger’s exclusively historical dialogue with his Greek-Latin-German tradition had led.
his thinking. Most problematically, dialogue with others in his contemporary world is still excluded from serious consideration.

Heidegger's account of postwar modernity is also highly problematic in that his account of technological revealing as enframing can be used to support an argument that would shift the blame for the Holocaust from the actual mostly German perpetrators onto the Western "destining" of the technological mode of disclosure. That this shift in blame was at least contemplated by Heidegger is suggested by a portion of a lecture written in conjunction with "The Question Concerning Technology" but never published. Here Heidegger writes, "Agriculture is now a motorized food industry, the same thing in its essence as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and the extermination camps, the same thing as blockades and the reduction of countries to famine, the same thing as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs." Heidegger's refusal to face his lived history - something he himself warns Dasein against in his early existential phenomenology - is proven not only by his terrible political choices in the early 1930s but also by the false assumption that an elite community of cultural producers can generate insights that will automatically create communal agreement: an assumption that Heidegger maintains basically without change from the 1930s until his death in 1976.

Furthermore, although Heidegger ultimately maintained that the "in between" time of modernity continues in the postwar era and thus that the historical need for decision and a new beginning continued to exist after 1945, he could not recommend anything more practical than listening - through art and technology - for a call from Being. Beyond his small canon of poets, artists, and thinkers, Heidegger has nothing practical to give his readers other than the admonishment to remain open to the "great figures" of their cultures and - through them - to normative forces from outside the human realm. As he put it in his last public "testament," his interview on September 23, 1966, about his life, politics, and works, first published posthumously in the German news magazine Der Spiegel in 1976.

Philosophy will not be able to bring about a direct change of the present state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all merely human meditations and endeavors. Only a god can still save us. I think the only possibility of salvation left to us is to prepare readiness, through thinking and poetry, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god during the decline; so that we do not, simply put, die meaningless deaths, but that when we decline, we decline in the face of the absent god.

Although Heidegger's late position is post-metaphysical (in that it converses with but does not remain bound to metaphysical concepts), a more complacent and resigned "world view" could not have been expressed.

As has been argued throughout this study, the claim that postmodernity is fundamentally different from modernity is highly problematic. Not only do modernity and postmodernity contain the same fundamental characteristics, but, like postmodernity, modernity is fragmented, multiple, and historically superimposed. And as the late Heidegger implies, there is much to suggest that
Western human beings remain firmly rooted within the confines, problems, and, very importantly, the possibilities of the modern world. The dominance of technological disclosure after 1945, for example, which is the direct outgrowth of modernity’s processes of representation, seems more modern than postmodern. In addition, Heidegger’s theoretical claim that only a nonmetaphysical, nonscientific form of thought can adequately comprehend the postwar West German moment is disproved by Kiefer’s post-1968 aesthetic practices, which use elements from metaphysical and scientific systems—not to mention myth, religion, and propaganda—to represent practical and political values of the contemporary moment in a way that is both historically specific and critical. What is necessary, Kiefer’s art seems to suggest, is not to think the contemporary moment outside of the traditional concepts that define modernity. Rather what is necessary is to think many modern concepts at the same time—both in terms of their saturation or history and in terms of their effect on the world.

*Kiefer’s Technological Subject Matter*

Heidegger’s postwar account of modernity, however, is valuable to today’s spectator because it points to the very real connections between representation and technology that develop and intensify within modernity’s multiple and repeating historical forms. Technology manifests itself on three main levels of representation in Kiefer’s art: the level of explicit subject matter, the themes and narratives generated by his images and texts; the level of practice, the way Kiefer works, and the tools and systems he relies upon, which reveal themselves through his materials and through the traces he leaves on the surfaces of his art; and the level of form, the styles, media, techniques, and strategies that he employs. These levels, which together comprise Kiefer’s “technological moment,” are of course abstractions from Kiefer’s art. They do not function in isolation, nor do they exist with the same emphasis or play the same role every time. As such, they can exist separately only in theory, and the reader is warned not to confuse the description of a work at a particular level with the work as a whole. At the same time, however, technology strongly and deeply pervades—and is reflected upon from within—Kiefer’s art.

The shift toward an increased display of technology in Kiefer’s art of the 1980s is perhaps most discernible on the level of subject matter. “Subject matter” here means the explicit narratives and themes that Kiefer evokes through his titles and images. Although not strongly emphasized in the critical literature surrounding his work, there is a marked increase in the number and kinds of technological subjects featured in Kiefer’s art beginning in the mid-1980s. It is true, of course, that Kiefer’s work has always contained a certain amount of technological subject matter. Images of World War II military technology as well as mass-produced children’s war toys appear in a number of Kiefer’s works already in the late 1960s and mid-1970s. It is, however, only in 1984–1985 that Kiefer begins to concentrate on technological issues and themes not directly related to World War II, thus significantly broadening his treatment of technology. In addition, since the mid-1980s, Kiefer has also stepped up his production of two- and
three-dimensional works explicitly representing mechanized warfare. Between 1984 and 1991, Kiefer represents four different types of technology at the level of subject matter in his art: electrical, delivery, nuclear, and mass media technologies. This thematic display of technology also binds together a multivalent and undecidable series of associations and meanings.

Electrical Technologies

The first sign of Kiefer’s expanded technological content is the appearance of poles and electrical wires in a number of mid-sized mixed-media works from the mid-1980s, exhibited together for the first time at the Paul Maenz Gallery in Cologne in 1986. In these works, which include Pittsburgh (1984–1985), High Tension Pole (Hochspannungsmast) (1984–1985), Heavy Cloud (Schwere Wolke) (1985), Exodus (Exodus) (1984–1985), Yggdrasil (1985), The Sixth Plague (Die Sechste Plage) (1984–1985), Telegraph Pole (Telegraphenmast) (1984–1985), Transformer Station (Umspannstation) (1984–1985), Breaking of Vessels (Bruch der Gefäße) (1985), and Pole (Mast) (1984–1985) (Figure 87), photographs of poles, steel frames, and high-tension wires, everyday symbols of the transfer of power and information in the twentieth century, are juxtaposed with an abstract material element — generally lead, emulsion, or acrylic — which has been allowed to drip in from the top of the image. Despite multiple thematic overlays effected by the titles (the World Ash, American Industry, the Jewish Exodus out of Egypt, and Johannismacht, among other subjects), these works are united by a consistent pattern. In each, Kiefer juxtaposes an image of electrical transmission with a “celestial” outpouring of rich, only partially controlled, transformable material. Against a supercharged and threatening background, created by the juxtaposition of gestural and abstract material forms with bleak black-and-white photographs of horizons and landscapes as well as the various mythic overlays created by the titles, these works all suggest analogies and passages between human and divine transmissions and transformations of energy.

Taken as a whole, Kiefer’s electrical-technology works thus bind together a series of binary oppositions relating to the transformation of “spirit” and matter into energy and vice versa. Among these oppositions, the two most consistently emphasized are the opposition between the human and the nonhuman or divine and the opposition between solid materials that may liquefy and solid materials that transmit energy but do not themselves change state. Yet despite the repetition of these oppositions, their ultimate meaning is undecidable within the context of the series itself. The spectator, in other words, is given few clues from within the works as to how to interpret the consistent circulation of energy that they all depict. And in this way, their undecidability causes the spectator to redirect inquiry from the works themselves to the context in which they exist and thus possibly reflect on Kiefer and his critics’ discourses on the forms and nature of his art.

What Kiefer calls “metabolism” [Stoffwechsel] – which, for him, stands for the idea of the circulation and transformation of materials – is central to his
understanding of both human history and his own creative process. Indeed, representations of divisions or gaps between different types, or levels, of reality as well the theme of circulation between these levels are continuing traits in much of Kiefer's work from the early 1970s to the present. By the 1980s, Kiefer discursively settles on an alchemical metaphor for, at least, the artistic side of this process. Again following the lead of Beuys, who likened his own
artistic activity in Germany to that of a shaman seeking to heal sickness in his tribal community, Kiefer transforms Beuys’s persona-creating strategy by appropriating for himself the mantle of an “alchemist” — a quasi-religious, quasi-scientific figure who labors to release the transformative potential inherent in the material upon which he works, thereby allowing it to pass from a lower to a higher realm of being.

Attached to the alchemist’s persona comes a formula for reading Kiefer’s art. According to Kiefer, the “ideology of alchemy” is the acceleration of time, as in the lead-silver-gold cycle, which only needs time in order to transform lead into gold. Previously, the alchemist accelerated this process with magical means. That was called magic. As an artist, I do nothing differently. I simply accelerate the transformation which is already inherent in things.\(^40\)

By claiming to be a medium for what is already inherent in the world, Kiefer’s alchemical interpretation of his own art unfortunately overlays his works with a mysticism that reduces their undecidability. Many of Kiefer’s German and American critics, including Gudrun Inboden, John Hallmark Neff, and Mark Rosenthal have accepted this interpretation of Kiefer’s creative process, tracing alchemical metaphors through his work in complex iconographical analyses.\(^41\) And as it is used in relation to the theme of the generation and circulation of energy suggested by the oppositions in Kiefer’s electrical-technology works, the alchemical metaphor tends to indicate a positive resolution to the undecidability of the works — a reading that believes, ultimately, that the circulation of energy will be salutary, that it will lead to identity, power, and salvation. Following this line of interpretation, Inboden, for example, has connected a number of works in this series not only to alchemy but also with the notion of divine emanation drawn from the Kabbalah, and more specifically from the book of Zohar, or Splendor, believed to have been written in the late thirteenth century.\(^42\) According to Inboden’s analysis, the electrical-technology works represent archetypal religious events — states of the world in which heaven and earth have either just separated or are about to reunite.\(^43\) Correctly, Inboden emphasizes a certain element of undecidability in Kiefer’s representations. For her it is unclear whether Kiefer’s electrical-technology works depict a genetic or an eschatological event, whether they depict a world from which God has withdrawn\(^44\) or point the way toward salvation.\(^45\) At the same time, however, she problematically obscures another undecidable element in the works by suggesting that the energy that is shown to circulate in Kiefer’s work is always ultimately some manifestation of the divine. That the energy depicted in the electrical-technology series might also represent ordinary electrical power — or that the generation and circulation of energy could ever lead to permanent destruction, not salvation — is a subject that Inboden does not explore.

Yet, in the works mentioned above, Kiefer’s visual association of the transformation and circulation of matter with technologies involved in the production and transmission of electrical energy goes a long way toward undermining a simple alchemical interpretation of his own creative processes. By connecting the transformation of matter to the everyday production of electricity, his works destroy the spectator’s sense that all transformative processes are always good —
either for human beings or for whatever it is that they are transforming. As twentieth-century history has shown, electricity can also be used as a form of execution, and many human beings are afraid to live very close to a power plant or rows of high-tension wires. And although not all processes that create electricity necessarily destroy their raw materials (for example, solar and hydroelectric technologies), it is also clear that there are many materials (fossil fuels, for example) that do not benefit from being changed into electrical power. A closer examination of Kiefer’s electrical-technology series thus undermines the alchemical interpretation that implies that the material and spiritual circulation represented in his works is always positive. In this regard, the second main association this series suggests – that certain media may transmit energy, while others melt or change state when energy runs through them – is also important. Change and transmission may be dangerous, but not only for that which is transformed and transmitted. Energy production is often also dangerous for the transmitter itself – and, by implication, for the user.

Kiefer’s electrical-technology series thus portrays this energy in a contradictory and paradoxical light. By suggesting both human and divine associations as well as positive and negative consequences, these works force the spectator to examine the phenomenon in greater detail. When is electrical energy a positive force? When does it have negative effects? Has the desire to always generate more power become, in effect, a new “god” or end “in itself” toward which modern humanity strives? The answers to these questions, Kiefer’s works suggest, are far from self-evident. Although electricity clearly resonates with alchemical and kabbalistic metaphors – and the connections are well worth exploring – electricity must also always be thought of in relation to the secular tragedies to which Kiefer’s works also allude: pollution, the destruction of natural resources, industrial accidents, and the unrestrained pursuit of enframing power that, as Heidegger suggests, is perhaps inherent in humanity’s scientific and technological ways of viewing the world.

**Delivery Technologies**

Another series of works, whose beginnings date back the mid-1970s, manifest a different side of Kiefer’s expanded technological subject matter: his intensified focus on what, in a postwar context, might be called “delivery technologies.”

In military terms, delivery technologies are technologies designed to move a payload from one spot to another. The delivery unit can be vehicles, such as tanks, ships, submarines, and aircraft; projectile components, such as bullet and shell casings and rockets; instruments which hurl projectiles, such as guns, artillery, and rocket-launchers; or combinations of these. The payload itself destroys or impairs an enemy’s ability and will to wage war.

the battle ships in *Naglfar* (1988) and *Elizabeth of Austria* (1990), and the train tracks featured in *Iron Path* and *Land of Two Rivers* (1990), a huge, mostly lead painting in progress. Although the term seems less normal or natural than, say, “war technologies,” “delivery technologies” is conceptually more in tune with Kiefer’s works because it also indicates the transportive – literally, moving and load-bearing – character common to all Kiefer’s representations of the machinery of mass destruction. As such, the term reminds one of the strong metabolic or circulatory associations of these representations – a set of meanings that is also prominent in Kiefer’s representations of electrical technologies.

No doubt the appearance of delivery technologies in Kiefer’s work is, in part, a result of the general and growing awareness that, for the past half-century, mobile capacity has played a central role in a nation’s victory or defeat in times of war. By World War II, commanders on all sides placed a heavy premium on mobility, and, as it turned out, it was a country’s ability to wage rapid-fire war and deliver payloads such as food, equipment, manpower, bombs, bullets, and napalm very quickly and over great distances that was decisive in many of World War II’s most important encounters. Two delivery technologies, for example, the airplane and the tank, were behind Germany’s blitzkrieg victories over Holland, Belgium, and France in 1940. Moreover, British and American long-range bombers in combination with Germany’s lack of long-range return capabilities (their V-1 and V-2 rockets were developed too late to affect the outcome of the war) resulted in Germany’s eventual capitulation. Given this historical background, it is easy to believe that Kiefer’s representations of delivery technologies suggest an awareness of the change in the nature of war brought on by the use and development of technology in the twentieth century.

Immediately striking about Kiefer’s approach to war through delivery technologies is the fact that his work includes none of the mangled corpses and broken weapons featured prominently in earlier representations of war by such German painters as Otto Dix and George Grosz. In comparison with Dix’s *The Trench* (1923) or *War Cripples* (1920), for example, one sees that, by focusing on delivery technologies rather than human beings, Kiefer’s series shifts the spectator’s attention away from the suffering of particular individuals and toward larger, more foundational and infrastructural concerns. And although this shift of focus may initially seem quite shocking – part of the horror of war stems precisely from the fact that it de-individualizes human beings and treats them as means or material – this shift may also account for the undeniable power of many of these works. After a long period of inundation with portraits of individual suffering, human beings have grown increasingly callous to such representations. Kiefer’s delivery-technology works, which evoke the violence of war or genocide, yet do not show individual suffering, seem more able to still shock the late-twentieth-century spectator. This is the case because their suppression of the body and the individual mimaetically incorporates a psychological precondition for violence – desensitization or lack of empathy – into the works themselves.
Of all Kiefer’s delivery-technology representations, the most significant ones are the planes and trains. The plane is the delivery technology that crops up most frequently in Kiefer’s work. In addition to the plane paintings mentioned above, planes are also the subject of a mammoth sculpture series that Kiefer began in the late 1980s. Including such works as *Poppy and Remembrance* [*Mohn und Gedächtnis*] (1989), 61 *Jason* [*Jason*] (1989), 62 *Journey to the End of the Night* [*Voyage au bout de la nuit*] (1990), 63 and *Elisabeth* [*Elisabeth*] (1990), 64 this series has grown so quickly and represents its subject on such a physically monumental level that it suggests that Kiefer has a fixation on this type of delivery technology (Figure 88). Kiefer’s nationality and his childhood spent growing up in Germany during the destitute years immediately following World War II provide the most obvious clues to the causes of his aeronautical obsessions. Looked at in the context of German history, and especially from the perspective of Germans who were not active participants in the war, the plane appears as the primary means of the human and infrastructural destruction that eventually caused Germany to unconditionally surrender on May 8, 1945. The inexorable destruction of the land, the nighttime dropping of bombs deeper and deeper into German territory, and the “rain” of terror and loss from above are thus the most obvious meanings that resonate within Kiefer’s images of planes, his aerial views, and his propellers. Although, as his titles suggest, the destruction of Germany is not the sole meaning conveyed by his leaden flying machines, it nevertheless remains one of the primary significations of this particular delivery technology in the context of Kiefer’s work as a whole.

In addition, Kiefer’s paradoxical planes—crude and massive structures made from hammered sheets of lead as well as straw, glass, books, dried flowers, snakeskins, and other materials—produce a particular type of spectator: one that is both threatened and mildly disgusted. In most of their placements, Kiefer’s planes emerge into the spectators’ space from below. Crudely made, and with seemingly random intertextual grafts, Kiefer’s sculptures at times seem comical, low, and brutish. In addition, their undecidable “leaden flight” metaphor is perhaps too much of a cliché, their lead books are possibly laid out too “artfully” upon or within the wings to be able to carry all of Kiefer’s portentous references to Céline, Celan, German history, and world myth. The connections almost seem to be in sight, and then, suddenly, they appear meaningless—canceled out by a confusing profusion of almost random elements and associations. Slowly, as the spectator examines the planes’ surfaces, however, their brutishness gives way to menace. Kiefer’s ability to make and transport these objects as well the infrastructural support needed to withstand their massive weights combine to suggest the economic power of the artist. And as Kiefer’s planes imply, if this was the sort of representation that was economically and institutionally supported at the time, then West Germany in the mid-1980s to early 1990s was a paradoxically conservative time: a time in which the “fine-art” sphere mattered so little that German martyrdom and national identity could be so parodied and travestied within it.

The train and train tracks, which appear less frequently in his art, are also among Kiefer’s most highly charged and often successful images. As argued in relation to Kiefer’s painting *Iron Path* in Chapter 2, by presenting an undecidable
issue of moral choice, mixing multiple temporal horizons, and tilting his own and the spectator’s subject position toward the position of the victimizer (an inflection that allows for contradictory readings), Kiefer’s train track imagery promotes both public dialogue and historical reflection. In addition, by evoking the question of the technological background conditions of the Holocaust, Iron
Path can also make the spectator reflect on technology as a mode of revealing – a way of seeing and acting in the world. In conjunction with one another, Kiefer’s planes and his train tracks appear as opposites. One is the symbol of Jewish martyrdom – and thus postwar German guilt – and the other of German martyrdom, which, in the conservative historical discourse of West Germany in the 1980s, was very much connected with the ideas of a return to a “secure” national identity and a “normalized” historical relationship with the National Socialist past (ideas that Kiefer’s works seem to radically oppose). As a series, Kiefer’s diametrically opposed delivery-technology works thus bind together multiple meanings and refer to circulation of material and human beings both in and out of Germany and in and out of existence. Together, they paradoxically represent destruction from the viewpoint of both the perpetrator and the victim. And as in the electrical-technology works, the processes of circulation evoked by the delivery-technology series seem connected with the ideas of metabolism and changes of state. Unlike the electrical-technology works, however, the change of state is not from human to divine or from liquid to solid but, rather, from nature to wasteland and from person to ash. Instead of leaving the spectator with a strong sense of continuation and circulation between different spheres, these delivery-technology works impart a sense of deadness – though, certainly, Kiefer presents the spectator with enough cues to construct a more positive interpretation should he or she choose. In addition, by creating images of war and annihilation that make no recourse to the human figure, Kiefer’s representations point their beholders toward more global and structural concerns. Are the technologies of war simply a set of “tools” for conducting a more efficient war, or do the technologies used actually help transform human attitudes about violence and destruction? By figuring war through the removal of the figure, Kiefer’s delivery-technology series undecidably points to one of the enabling conditions of war (a critical move) while, at the same time, it acts out war’s brutality on an aesthetic level (a move that makes the spectator uneasy). And in these ways, Kiefer’s delivery-technology works make the viewer more aware of technology as an extremely powerful and ambiguous mode of disclosure.

Nuclear Technologies

In addition to electrical and delivery technologies, nuclear technology is another major technological subject that appears in Kiefer’s art. Marked by the images of rods and Kiefer’s nuclear-reactor-core set, the theme of nuclear technology emerges in a remarkable series of books and paintings made between 1984 and 1987, first exhibited under the title Splitting and Unification (Bruch und Einung) at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York. As their exhibition title suggests, these works portray nuclear power undecidably – as simultaneously charged with both positive and negative powers and associations. More specifically, in Kiefer’s ambivalent series, nuclear technology is shown to possesses the power to fuse as well as the power to divide, the power to give life as well as the power to take life away. Stranger still, most of these works also show nuclear
power as something that binds together the ancient and modern epochs; namely, as a form of elemental power that somehow exists before its historical moment of human, "technological" invention.

In the book *Birth of the Sun* ([Geburt der Sonne](1987)) (Figures 89-94), for example, Kiefer creates a filmlike quasi-narrative around a quest theme that combines the Isis and Osiris story from Egyptian mythology, a title that suggests the creation of a star, and images suggesting nuclear processes. *Birth of the Sun* begins with a double-page image of a lead aircraft, suspended from the ceiling in one of Kiefer's gigantic studios (Figure 90). Along the bottom edge of the image, Kiefer has written "Isis searches for the parts of Osiris," thereby linking his plane to Egyptian myth. According to the myth, Isis is the wife of the Egyptian sun god, Osiris, who has been dismembered and whose body she must find in order to resurrect him. The next eight images resemble sky and landscape photographs, partially obscured by washes of red clay, ceramic bits, and copper wire, which suggest both a plane's perspective as it flies through smoke or clouds in a reconnaissance mission over a desert as well as the travels of Isis as she fulfills her mythical quest for the scattered parts of Osiris's body (represented by numbered shards of broken white ceramic, which the plane "picks up" with the copper wire) (Figures 91 and 92). The book's second half, labeled "Isis weeps," consists of eight double-page black-and-white photographs depicting water streaming into Kiefer's studio "reactor tank" and slowly covering its fuel rods (Figures 93 and 94). Framed by two horizontal bands two inches inside the picture field's top and bottom edge — and created by the printed edges of Kiefer's negatives — the filling movement of the water is presented in a diverse series of shots taken from both a vertical and an aerial (or hovering) perspective. The compression of the image created by the horizontal band, as well as the greater smoothness of the surface, creates a sense of sensory diminishment: the slightly reduced image field makes the "action" seem further away from the viewer, and the loss of tactile qualities implies a dampening of perceptual acuity. Moreover, the red clay wash, which was prominent in the first half and helped to give the sequence a rich, dramatic character, is here nowhere to be found. In comparison to the earlier, more montaged and overlaid black-and-white photographs of the Isis plane, the reactor core sequence thus appears much less vivid as its pages are turned, and the technological "future" seems diminished in relation to the mythic "past." Over time, however, the engaged spectator's contemplation of the horizontally and vertically marked image field breaks up the nuclear imagery into multiple light and dark flat rectangles. In addition, Kiefer has painted lines of liquid silver upon a number of the photographs so as to more directly represent energy discharge — a suggestion that is reinforced by Kiefer's solarization of a few of the images (the reversals in value created by the solarizations can be read as sudden energy spikes or brownouts). Although it loses the color and the materiality of the red clay present in its "mythic" sequence, *Birth of the Sun's" modern" sequence thus also plays complexly between abstraction and representation. Finally, supporting this confusion of time frames created by the complex interweaving of the modern and ancient themes is the image upon which the book ends: the floor of the studio, littered with broken glass and seemingly a broken frame. This image, a possible

FIGURE 90. Anselm Kiefer; Birth of the Sun, pp. 1–2.
FIGURE 91. Anselm Kiefer, Birth of the Sun, pp. 11-12.

FIGURE 92. Anselm Kiefer, Birth of the Sun, pp. 17-18.
reference to the kabbalistic notion of a divine force breaking the vessels that sought to contain it, thus connects the modern age to yet another ancient mythic time frame.

By connecting the idea of the production of nuclear energy to the themes of genesis and divine incarnation, as well as to other religious myths dealing with the origins of evil and the impossibility of containing divine forces within earthly structure and measure, Kiefer’s book suggests the ambivalence that many people feel about nuclear energy. In addition, by mixing up different periods of historical time (each of which changes—or inflects—the meanings of the ambiguously depicted “birth” event), *Birth of the Sun* invites its various spectators to consider nuclear power from a multitude of different vantage points. Moreover, by contrasting the “real” genesis of a star (implied by the title) with the birth of gods and the invention of human technologies, the book hints at parallels between the natural, spiritual, and mortal worlds. Finally, by suggesting religious and mythic analogies for the contemporary phenomenon of nuclear energy production, *Birth of the Sun* implies that the problems presented by nuclear power are enduring ones. And as Kiefer’s nuclear representation suggests, long before it came to live in the Atomic age, humanity wrestled with this paradigmatic “cold war” problem.

The “narrative” of another book in the “Splitting and Unification” exhibition, *Through the Center of the Earth* [*Durch den Mittelpunkt der Erde*] (1987), was, as Neff reports, “occasioned by the nuclear catastrophe at Chernobyl in 1986. When he first heard about the meltdown and explosion in the Russian reactor, said to be burning itself into the earth, Kiefer imagined the core continuing on through to the other side.” In *Through the Center of the Earth*, Kiefer represents a nuclear disaster of unimaginable proportions by means of a series of overpainted black-and-white photographs depicting the meltdown and the core’s progress through the earth. Here he uses an array of elements similar to those used in *Birth of the Sun*: staged reactor-core photographs and material overlays, such as clay, silver, and acrylic. In *Through the Center of the Earth*, however, the spatiotemporal coordinates named by the title are not those of ancient Egypt or Israel but, rather, according to Kiefer, the ones that mark the subterranean passageway that leads Otto Lidenbrock’s band of adventurers from Reykjavik, Iceland to Stromboli, Italy, in *Journey to the Center of the Earth* [*Voyage au centre de la terre*], Jules Verne’s 1864 science fiction classic. Although pre-Atomic age, the narrative indicated by *Through the Center of the Earth*’s title does not have the epic or “religious” connotations of the myth appropriated in *Birth of the Sun*. Instead, the Verne story cloaks the Chernobyl tragedy in the trappings of an early mass-market novel: a story that, in marked distinction to the real event, ends happily with its characters being spit out of a volcano, miraculously unharmed. In drawing his quest narrative from a mass-cultural source, Kiefer creates a similar superimposition of time periods as he did in *Birth of the Sun*. In addition, however, by using a popular source, Kiefer adds an element of irony to *Through the Center of the Earth* that is missing from the other book. By making this new association, *Through the Center of the Earth* suggests that, for better or for worse, the structures of explanation by means of which humanity copes with disaster extend from ancient myths through modern
mass-market stories designed to thrill and entertain - and thus, more often than not, cover over the realities they are supposed to explain.

In addition to the narrative represented through Kiefer’s texts and sequential images, both books also employ a rich and variegated array of natural and produced materials, including red clay, silver, acrylic, glass fragments, bits of porcelain, copper wire, lead, and shellac. Although they are applied over the photographs and texts (the elements that carry most of the narrative burden), Kiefer’s material overlays in no way constitute a “secondary” layer of the work. Indeed, Kiefer’s books are as much concerned with balancing and articulating multiple abstract formal elements as they are with telling a story. In Birth of the Sun, for example, Kiefer paints the first half of the book with a clay wash of various thicknesses, which alternately appears both liquid and earthy or sedimented. He thereby balances two different types of gesture: the push and sweep of his brush in the liquid clay and the splits and cracks opened up in the built-up passages by the natural drying process (an opposition that splits vision into subjective and objective, or natural, poles) (Figures 91 and 92). Moreover, in contrast to the “smoother,” geometric oppositions of Sun’s largely photographic second half (which suggest a more logical form of abstraction), Sun’s first half is concerned with the expressive and affective possibilities of montaged abstract “painting.”

Vastly increasing the material richness of the two books, Kiefer’s combinations of different forms of abstraction – which change both in medium and in emotional affectivity over the course of the “narratives” – are as central to his works as the ambiguous stories he represents. However, because they involve complex contrasts of form, color, gesture, medium, and balance, these formal plays are extremely sensuous and thus help to “drive” the various narratives by focusing and regulating the spectator’s temporal visual attention. In particular, the various types of rhythmic line that Kiefer incorporates help to direct the spectator’s gaze as well as to set up different speeds of vibration. In addition, the heterogeneous materials out of which these abstract passages are composed are selected so as to resonate meaningfully with the narrative action as a whole. In Birth of the Sun, for example, Kiefer’s abstract applications of clay, porcelain, and copper wire to the sky and landscape photographs of the first half further connect the mythical and nuclear themes. It is commonplace scientific knowledge that porcelain is made by firing raw clay and that copper is a conductor for both heat and electricity. The theme of identity within difference already broached by the juxtaposition of the different times and places – drawn from Egyptian and Jewish myth as well as contemporary history – thus finds its counterpoint in the material, which presents different spatiotemporal moments of a unified process of transformation. Kiefer’s book, in other words, plays on the spectator’s practical, scientific knowledge that clay can be turned into porcelain by means of electricity or thermal power, both of which may be conducted through copper. This formal-material suggestion of development and continuity through change binds Birth of the Sun’s multiple worlds more closely together and emphasizes the enduring nature of the problem of nuclear power. In addition, according to Kiefer, the lead cover of Through the Center of the Earth is designed to “protect” the viewer from the core, which is supposedly melting through the book. Moreover, Kiefer’s use of lead and silver, alchemical
materials, in his work imparts to his story a sense of progression through different stages of spiritual development – a graft, which, like the Verne story, perhaps serves to ameliorate the horror of the Chernobyl disaster. Here again, the meanings that the spectator associates with the various types of material – and that bind the materials both to one another and to the world at large – are used to amplify the meaning created by the narrative.

In the “Splitting and Unification” works, Kiefer deals with nuclear energy in such a way as to show both its spiritual and material contradictions and dualities. Dangerous and life-giving, capable of both splitting and fusing, nuclear energy – according to Kiefer’s multilevel and saturated representations – is part of a greater, historical circulation of energy: a stream that issues not only in power produced by human hands but also in the birth of suns and the actions of gods. By superimposing conflicting spatiotemporal contexts, Kiefer’s works reveal “the nuclear problem” as a disastrous, potentially divine force that humans have confronted in different ways throughout history. Moreover, by connecting the generation of nuclear energy to both ancient myth and the science-fiction novel, Kiefer’s works also suggest an expanded, somewhat paradoxical, conception of myth. Myths – understood as a human bestowal of meaningful narratives in response to startling manifestations of forces and lacunae in the midst of the everyday world – can no longer be seen as simply belonging to the past. Today, as Kiefer works suggest, myths continue to be born – although now they often take the form of the popular narrative or tale. In addition to this expansion of the concept of myth into modern mass culture, Kiefer’s nuclear technology works also make the spectator aware of the multivalent and mutable character of different forms of worldly material. On the one hand, on a purely abstract level, Kiefer’s handling of paint, silver, lead, sand, clay, wire, and porcelain shards potentially makes the spectator aware of the richness and multiplicity of nature – that nature, outside of human cognition, already possesses intrinsic “meanings” of its own. On the other hand, Kiefer’s nuclear technology works also suggest that human traces can be left in almost all types of physical matter. And rich matter, his works demonstrate, can be easily transformed – that is, shaped and made meaningful through human activity. Moreover, by evoking alchemical symbolism as well as the spectator’s rational or scientific knowledge of the transformation of raw materials in the production of objects and energy, Kiefer works confer on the materials they incorporate a sense of increased transformability – a greater semantic richness or density that in turn engenders an increased sense of the multiple representational systems through which the materials may be shaped and altered. Nature can easily be brought within the sphere of human goals and purposes. Kiefer’s works acknowledge this fact while also suggesting that nature possesses a wholeness and purpose of its own.

Mass Media Technologies

A fourth type of technological subject matter, which appears in Kiefer’s work in the early 1990s, is mass media technology. In the early 1990s, as Germany’s
period of postwar unification begins, Kiefer starts to explicitly figure the technologies of mass communication and culture in some of his paintings and sculptures. Like the three types of technological subject matter discussed above, these mass media technologies are also presented in a way that combines both positive and negative possibilities. In combination, these works suggest various linkages between the mass media, on the one hand, and myth, art, and social control, on the other.

In *The Golden Fleece* [*Das goldene Vlies*] (1990) (Figure 95), Kiefer links film technology with Greek myth – echoing his earlier juxtaposition of electrical technology with Norse saga in *Yggdrasil* as well as his combination of nuclear technology with Egyptian and Jewish mythology in *Birth of the Sun*. *The Golden Fleece* is a gigantic painting composed of oil, acrylic, emulsion, and ashes on canvas, with glass and ceramic shards, lead, original photography, ashen dresses, gold leaf, and teeth. It presents a maelstromlike environment of grays, whites, andumber, across which vaporizing forms – the “ashen dresses” – appear to fly. To the surface of this cataclysmic scene, Kiefer attaches three reels upon which a long handmade “film” is hung. When viewed up close (as a “fine art” mural object), the reels appear turnable, and the film hangs on them crudely – as something almost rotting. Depassage, both of the painting and of cinema, is a low but clear undercurrent in this work – an undercurrent that is heightened by the somewhat violent and disturbing appearance of the teeth scattered across the canvas. However, when viewed from a distance (as though the painting is a screen in a cinema), the draped film mimics the reins of a chariot, positioned in such a way as to pull the central (and largest) dress forward. And from this vantage point, the work’s crude material elements resolve into a stunning image with powerful mystic overtones. In addition, the handwritten title, the layered mural background, and the real and fake film elements combine to represent affinities between cinema and Jason’s ancient quest. An allusion to the modern-day myths promulgated by films and television? A suggestion that the mythic Jason is like a modern-day character in a film? Or perhaps even an intimation that all quests – all narratives in which both individual and collective identity are fundamentally decided – are media-driven, and, hence, in some sense a pursuit of an illusion? Although the work’s undecidability will not allow the viewer to settle upon any one interpretation, the conflicts and questions broached by *The Golden Fleece* all point to ties between the social creation of myth and cinema as a potential collective experience.

In *60 Million Peas* [*60 Millionen Erbsen*] (1991), the largest of Kiefer’s three lead and steel bookcases, a film reel, a handmade film of painted photographs, and a lead “video surveillance camera” appear. To produce this work, Kiefer created approximately 500 lead folios of different sizes, which he arranged on three steel shelves in such a way as to form a walled rectangular space, six feet high, into which the spectator can enter. Within the lead books arranged on the shelves, actual peas are pressed, which, according to Kiefer, refer to the German national census in 1987 in which he refused to participate. *60 Million Peas* thus combines the subjects of video surveillance, cinema, and the German census with the seemingly nonsensical activity of pressing peas between the pages of oversized lead books. Through these conjunctions, it links mass media tech-
nologies with references to both social record keeping and the preservation of natural materials. Through the material meanings of the lead and peas, Kiefer suggests the potential dangerousness of the various technologies that seek to “preserve” or record organic entities. Lead destroys the peas, rendering them poisonous through its very proximity. By analogy, Kiefer’s sculpture suggests that the same thing may be the case with various types of cinematic, video, and book forms of record keeping or information storage: they can all be used to control and eventually destroy that which they record. In comparison to The Golden Fleece, which does not seem as critical of the media technology it represents, 60 Million Peas creates a much more negative series of associations – associations that are reinforced by the overall claustrophobic feeling engendered by the space as well as the ultimate uselessness of the books, which are too heavy to be opened and read.

Finally, in Editing Table [Schneidetisch] (1990) (Figure 96), another canvas, a sculptural rendition of a flatbed film-editing table, threaded with three strips of film, is superimposed on an abstract night sky. Looked at from the perspective of Kiefer’s earlier palette representations in which he embodied abstract notions of “the artist” and “the art-making process” through the painted or sculpted image of this common almost clichéd painter’s tool, the editing table stretched against the cosmos becomes perhaps a new and slightly grotesque symbol of the artist – grotesque, because together the table and film strips can be read as spider- or monsterlike. Thus, as a whole, Editing Table can be interpreted as a partly satiric, partly serious indication of a developmental path that Kiefer seems to regard his own art as following. It has already been argued that many of Kiefer’s books and photographic magazine sequences – with their different “scenes,” forward tracking shots, cutaways, crane shots, and close-ups – could very well be described as having been directed by Kiefer.
although Kiefer has not yet begun to make films, his interest in sequential artistic forms such as books makes it plausible that, in the future, he might turn his talents in this direction—like a number of other American and German artists who emerged in the 1980s, including David Salle, Robert Longo, Julian Schnabel, Cindy Sherman, and Rebecca Horn. Thus, like The Golden Fleece and unlike 60 Million Peas, Editing Table does not seem particularly critical of mass media technologies. Indeed, the cosmic or infinite associations suggested by the night sky, as well as the art-making associations implied by Kiefer’s earlier focus on the palette, hint, on the contrary, at the richness of these twentieth-century technologies and the multiple possibilities they contain.

As suggested by the representations of technology at the level of his subject matter, Kiefer appears to recognize technology as an important topic around which to produce undecidably. Kiefer’s art in the 1980s and 1990s thus seems to confirm Heidegger’s postwar account of technological revealing as an enframing power that drives modernity’s multiple processes of representation and objectification forward at an ever increasing speed. At the same time, however, aspects of Kiefer’s treatment of technology at the level of subject matter are different from Heidegger’s postwar theorization. Contrary to Heidegger’s postwar theorization, which defines technology as for the most part destructive, Kiefer shows that technology is neither absolutely good nor absolutely evil. In addition, technology is
represented in Kiefer’s art as both ancient and modern: something that correlates with – but also enlarges and develops – Heidegger’s account of the emergence of enframing with the ancient Greeks. Finally, technology appears in Kiefer’s subject matter as something that is fundamentally connected to transformation, circulation, and changes of state. In this respect, Kiefer’s technological subject matter seems to expand the spectator’s concept of what Heidegger emphasized as technological disclosure’s systematic and rapidly transformative nature.

**Technological Practices**

As indicated by the rapid expansion of his workspaces, as well as his own aesthetic representations of his atelier, Kiefer’s aesthetic practices since the early 1980s seem highly dependent on technology. Without technical and industrial power – cameras, mechanical projection techniques, equipment for making “woodcuts,” casting and metalworking machinery, hoists and trucks, spotlights, electrical wire, fork lift, ventilators, electrical power, and industrial brushes – Kiefer’s art would simply not exist. This is, of course, especially evident in the sculptures of the late 1980s and early 1990s – not only his various bookcases but also his growing collection of large, lead versions of World War II airplanes – which use lead in such quantities as to strongly bear the marks of industrial power. Here, Kiefer’s works also impart a sense of his economic power: his ability to buy or rent vast workspaces, purchase machines, hire assistants, and, in general, move and manipulate an immense amount of material. Despite Kiefer’s personal “economic miracle” of the 1980s, however, this practical dependence on technology is not an entirely recent phenomenon in his art. Even though Kiefer’s work did not start out as capital intensive and dependent on technology as it is today – indeed, bookmaking, associated in the 1960s and 1970s with European and American conceptual art’s institutional critique, is a form of art that seems in a number of ways anticapitalist – a definite practical dependence on technology shows through even in Kiefer’s earliest artistic practices. In order to perform in 1969 his landmark conceptual “Occupations” of different cities in Switzerland, France, and Italy, for example, Kiefer had to make use of a camera, film, and either automobiles or the modern travel industry. Furthermore, in order to produce his earliest books, he needed lights, cameras, and access to mass-produced imagery and texts. Given these early technical manifestations, the increase in Kiefer’s technological subjects and practices in the 1980s must be understood accordingly as a development in intensity as opposed to a break from the past – in Kiefer’s case, the late 1960s and the 1970s.

What seems initially strange or undecidable about this technological intensification is that it does not efface the handmade aspects of Kiefer’s art. As Peter Schjeldahl notes, a typical work by Kiefer preserves the traces of its own construction: “Each thing retains the rough evidence of his decisions about it. It has no style other than the manner of its making, which looks simple and self-evident, like something anyone could do.” This blunt, made look to Kiefer’s surfaces, not only their lack of finish but also their retention of the indexical traces of his creative activity, is, in fact, one of the most enduring formal properties of his work, one that continues unabated to the present day. Thus, the first
paradox inherent in the increase in Kiefer’s technological practices in the 1980s is that, despite his ever increasing ability to counteract it, Kiefer chooses on one level of appearing to hide his works’ technological nature. Although one might plausibly expect that an increased reliance on technological-industrial methods in the art-making process would contribute to a diminishing in the appearing or showing through of the artist’s touch (as was the case, for example, with many of the American minimalist sculptors), this is decidedly not the case with Kiefer. Instead of deploying his various technologies as they were seemingly intended to be used – that is, to produce the smooth, regular, and repetitive forms and surfaces that one generally associates with technological modes of production – Kiefer instead uses technological means to produce works that escape uniform finish. Technology is thus linked by Kiefer’s practice not only to power and development but also to neglect, decay, degeneration, and death.

However antitechnological it may at first appear, Kiefer’s practice of using technological means to achieve a handmade look is in reality a complex camouflage for his practical dependence on a growing number of different technologies. And Kiefer’s technological practices help reinforce and entrench his position as a powerful figure in the international art world of the 1980s and 1990s. As suggested above, Kiefer’s practices are technological because they rely on specialized labor power (people who cast, sew, and arrange material and lights) as well as the ownership of considerable means of production. Not only does he command significant amounts of electrical power, human labor, industrial infrastructure, and liquid capital but, in addition, he uses them to great effect in and around his art. In addition, Kiefer’s practices are technological because they are essentially serial – that is, based on repeating a finite set of forms, themes, objects, even colors, in open and changing configurations. Kiefer has over the course of his career developed a system for the production of aesthetic objects that involves the repetition of different narrative, formal, and material elements. On the basis of this, it could be argued that his aesthetic practice as a whole has entered a stage of quasi-mass production. Moreover, Kiefer’s practices are technological in that he creatively “uses” the institutions of the museum, the art market, and the newspaper, magazine, and fine-arts publishing industries in order to “package” his persona and “spin” his messages. As Jack Flam notes, “From early in his career, like Beuys . . . [Kiefer] has been deeply involved in dramatizing himself and creating a public persona based on a romanticized personal mythology.”

This projection of a public persona – made up in part of Kiefer’s public reticence to be photographed, directly quoted, or called upon to present autobiographical details other than the ones that appear in his art works – is also evident in Kiefer’s interviews, which, according to Flam, “like his art works, he has ‘marketed’ as commodities made all the more desirable by their rarity; and in which he is sometimes as portentous and obscure – and always as controlling – as he is in his art.”

Furthermore, as Flam suggests, Kiefer’s practices are technological because he has been a major interpreter, through photography, of his own works – which he has captured in dramatically composed, silvery photographs that seem bent on restoring the ‘aura’ to mechanically reproduced works. Significantly, his photographs are very different from those
usually taken of art works, which tend to be impersonal and 'documentary.' Kiefer's photographs, by contrast, at once dramatize the effect and obscure the details of his work. In and of themselves, they are often very beautiful. But they are also like much of the partisan writing about him, presenting a view of the work that is frankly adoring.64

Kiefer's own photography - as well as that of professionals - has been used to great advantage in the production of magazine spreads as well as sumptuously produced limited-edition and mass market books on Kiefer's art. In this way, Kiefer employs photographic technologies in order to disseminate dramatic representations of his works to a mass audience.

Finally, as another "technological" practice, one could also cite Kiefer's market savvy - his control over the buyers of his art as well as his refusal to remain tied to a single dealer.65 Kiefer's commercial acumen is technological in that it is instrumental, systematic, and geared to an international market. Not only does he control the reproduction and dissemination of his works and image, but he also carefully crafts their "look" in the various print media in which they appear. Thus, although he takes care to safeguard the authority of the market by creating and carefully releasing a series of "original" works, Kiefer is also quite at home using different forms of mass - or reproductive - media both to make his objects and to project and support their imaginary value. Paradoxically, these two seemingly antithetical sides of Kiefer's technological practices, it appears, are not fundamentally different for him. Kiefer does not only represent the artist as a symbolic betrayer of his or her community in his many works, but, in addition, he actively and creatively appropriates multiple mass-media technologies to increase the value of his art.

Kiefer's technologically produced and marketed works thus reflect the developing connections between "fine art," its institutions, the mass media, and Western capitalism over the course of the twentieth century. In addition, however, Kiefer's art also recalls other modern moments (such as Heidegger's in the 1930s) when works of art were more generally understood to be bearers of social and historical values (and thus as potentially having a political effect). Kiefer's technological practices, as they manifest themselves in his art, thus project the possibility of both autonomous and debased forms of art and human identity - and, as such, they can potentially bring their spectators into dialogue. For this reason, although Kiefer is not as overtly critical as many of the "institutional critique" conceptual artists of the 1970s (for example, Buren or Feldmann, who challenge the everyday concept of a work of art far more radically than Kiefer and, thereby, get their audiences to reflect on the social systems that support the production and showing of art), Kiefer's technologically saturated works do position themselves within the institutional frameworks of art and the economy in interesting and critical ways. In addition, by implicating the spectator through perspective, sequential images, scale, and aggressive mass, Kiefer's works are critical because they break down the distinction between art and everyday life within the context of the museum. Moreover, within the framework of the last two decades of the twentieth century, his art works have occasionally called upon the spectator to perform some type of transgressive act - as when, for example, one of Kiefer's works calls out to be touched or destroyed.
Thus, in these various corporal and institutional ways, Kiefer both confirms and
supplements Heidegger's late model of technological revealing as the dominant
force or power driving postwar modernity forward.

Technological Form

As Heidegger's theory of technological revealing suggests—technology is also a
form, that is, a perspective or a framework through which to see the world. As
used in this study, the concept of "form" fundamentally relates to this idea of a
perspective and to the processes of transformation, shaping, and reproduction.
The fundamentally reproductive aspects of form, moreover, give the related
concepts of "style" and "medium" their main—undecidable and historically
saturated—meanings: their webs or networks of conflicting connection between
the individual, or particular, and forms of generality such as the intersubjective,
the collective, the objective, and nature.

Form connects the particular with the general in a number of different
ways. First, "form" reveals the medium through which an aesthetic representa-
tion is produced (and/or reproduced). Since an image always bears the traces of
its medium, the spectator can, by comparing particular images and by abstract-
ing from them, arrive at more general forms: painterly, photographic, and sculp-
tural forms, for example. In addition, "form" reveals signs of "nature" and
"objectivity" in a work of art. Thus, form is also related to the experience of
"otherness," alterity, nature, and the divine—what Heidegger calls "Being,"
"physis," and "artistic disclosure," and which, as has been argued, should also
characterize our everyday discursive and representational interactions with oth-
ers in our worlds. Moreover, "form" is also linked to conscious or intentional
aspects of the work—not only the production of affect and emotion but also the
style(s) of a work, either a "personal" style, which makes all Kiefer's works
appear as issuing "from the same hand," or a "period" style, for example, in
Kiefer's case, minimalism, pop art, and abstract expressionism. Finally, "form"
also reveals the antisubjective, low, and debased: in short, the un- or anti-
conscious aspects of the work of art (as well as the repeating enactments of the
death of a particular modern medium). And although, as both Heidegger and
Kiefer suggest, the personal and the collective are always made out of a constel-
ation of "own" and "foreign elements" (something that Kiefer implies much
more strongly than Heidegger), form is almost always used to emphasize the
collective side of the equation. It is employed, in other words, to bind artists,
other cultural producers, and human communities together—to unify them and
subsume them under a more general set of characteristics or strategies.

The growing manifestation of technology in Kiefer's practice and subject
matter is in part a result of his earlier concentration on technology at the level
of form. This is suggested by his social and historical context: a number of
Kiefer's formal techniques seem to be the result of his early interest in European
and American conceptual art. Numerous critics have remarked upon Kiefer's
conceptual influences, particularly in reference to his early book art and perform-
ances, though also in reference to his paintings. Yet Kiefer's relationship to
conceptual art, as well as conceptual art’s formal similarities with technological revealing, is an area that has been largely unexplored. As an examination of three different types of technological form that appear in Kiefer’s art reveals, these forms develop out of his critical appropriations of conceptual art, and, moreover, all imply, in one way or another, an idea of mass or mechanical reproduction.

**Mass Media Forms**

One type of technological form that appears in Kiefer’s early art is exemplified by Kiefer’s books of appropriated mass-media images that appear in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In these works – some of which also contain handwritten captions as well as painting or drawing – the spectator finds printed images drawn from a variety of mass market sources, including news photographs, fashion, architectural, and pornographic magazines, printed historical and cultural texts, and fine-art reproductions. These images, excised from their original context and sometimes altered beyond recognition, often recall a specific social and historical situation – usually the Nazi era. They evoke a sense of “mass” or “state” culture and history – a mixture of banality and objectivity, which gives their subjects a certain pervasive, unquestionable, and semantically denuded quality.

In one of his earliest books, *The Women [Die Frauen]* (1969) (Figures 97–105), Kiefer employs a series of radically cropped, reproduced images depicting parts of women’s bodies taken from fashion publications and pornographic magazines. Made of yellowed, slightly torn, inexpensive paper and with a crudely taped front cover, Kiefer’s book appears thrown together out of common and somewhat tacky materials and thereby undermines its artistic nature. It seems as much the product of a dysfunctional collector or cataloguer as it does the creation of a traditional artist. In it, fragmented images of women’s bodies, one image pasted on each page, are juxtaposed with a few handwritten texts defining feminine types (“Anne, a teen-princess,” and Gina Lollobrigida) (Figures 102 and 104), as well as natural objects (strands of dark hair and a leaf) (Figures 99 and 100), and fragments of nail polish. As the spectator’s eyes traverse the pages of Kiefer’s book, a violent contrast slowly appears between the bright, carefully cropped, printed images and the pallid and inert natural objects. Mass-reproduced anonymous feminine body parts, which combine with the textual descriptions to suggest idealized and socially approved (albeit fragmentary) representations of femininity, seem both threatening and threatened when paired with the lackluster natural objects. The leaf is brown and clearly dead, and the hair seems suffocated or strangled under the cellophane tape. In addition, Kiefer’s curiouscroppings – which sometimes follow the contours of a feminine body so closely as to suggest dissection (Figures 101 and 105) and at other times obscure the relevant details suggesting a lack of concern for what the image represents (Figures 102–104) – imply a malevolent and out-of-kilter controlling presence. By appropriating mass media imagery in such a way as to suggest its potentially dangerous nature, Kiefer’s book thus implies

FIGURE 98. Anselm Kiefer, The Women, pp. 4-5.


that mass reproduction—technology’s mode of representation—poses serious dangers to both the self and society (for example, by helping to create such “body image” diseases as anorexia and bulimia).

In order to create its specific social-critical effect, *The Women* relies on a particular conceptual mass-media form also found in the early work of Joseph Kosuth: the tripartite division of the work of art into a photographic image, a real object, and a text. Like Kosuth’s installation, *One and Three Chairs* (1965) (Figure 106),87 which presents, side by side, a photograph of a chair, the actual chair from which the photograph was made, and its dictionary definition, Kiefer’s book generates much of its meaning by playing upon this conceptualist formal division between “reality,” on the one hand, and linguistic and photographic representation, on the other. As in the Kosuth piece, to evoke questions concerning the relationships between these three different realms of experience seems an intentional part of Kiefer’s work. Is reality really the primary domain? What is reality? Can different modes of representation affect reality? And can different modes of representation affect one another? By evoking such questions, Kiefer’s book imparts the same self-reflexive concern for the formal medium of art that Kosuth’s installation also inspires.

Even though they share the same tripartite conceptual mass-media form, however, Kosuth’s installation and Kiefer’s book also have a number of important differences. Although the Kosuth image of the chair is something plausibly found in a mass market dictionary, Kosuth uses a photograph that he has made...
himself, whereas Kiefer uses photographs that – because of their origin in popular magazines – seem more distant and less related to his own person. In addition, Kosuth presents the spectator with a wall installation, all parts of which can be perceived synchronously, whereas Kiefer presents the spectator with a book, the whole of which one can only perceive sequentially over time. Finally, in Kosuth’s work, a well-known and easily recognizable image is combined with its proper dictionary definition, and a visually similar exemplar is given to the spectator to experience. Thus, Kosuth attempts to continue the same “thing” across the different domains of being and representation and thereby
maintain a strict equivalence between the realms. Kiefer, on the other hand, does everything he can to present discontinuity between each realm, thus creating a far more ambiguous and metaphorical sense of connection or “passage” between the photographic image, the word, and the object. Instead of a definition, Kiefer gives only a single general name, “the women,” and a few captions describing stereotypical ideals of feminine beauty. In place of the photograph of the entire chair, Kiefer uses printed magazine images, which are sometimes so cropped as to be unrecognizable. And standing in for Kosuth’s actual chair are Kiefer’s bits of hair, leaf, and nail polish. These fragments refer to “women” not directly but through various indirect forms of reference such as synecdoche (the hair, part of a woman, represents women as a whole), symbolism (the leaf represents women as nature), and indexicality (much like a clue, the nail polish represents women through an existential and ontological bond).

Whereas Kosuth’s installation examines the shared – or collective – identity of image, word, and object, Kiefer’s book examines the differences. This divergence between Kosuth and Kiefer appears to be explained by different conceptions of art. For Kosuth, art’s purpose appears to be the formal exploration of its own nature. In “Art after Philosophy” (1969), Kosuth argues that, after Marcel Duchamp, the only art that matters is that art which adds to the concept of art – art, in other words, that articulates new propositions about art’s aesthetic nature. Thus, in early works such as One and Three Chairs, Kosuth chose language as a model for art because he believed that the “traditional” twentieth-century systems of artistic signifiers – colors, shapes, and the physical qualities of paint, for example – could no longer make statements about art’s formal condition, which, through Duchamp, had already been purified to a conceptual level. Inspired by the ordinary-language philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and A. J. Ayer (as well as a post-Greenbergian sense that the “aim” of art was purity), Kosuth argues that only works that take the form of analytic propositions could fulfill the function of art – namely, to expand art’s concept. Such works are “tautologies” in that they add nothing empirical to the spectator’s understanding of a work’s “art condition” – nothing, in other words, that is not already contained within art’s formal definition or logically entailed by it. The intention behind the tautological structure of Kosuth’s One and Three Chairs was thus to present the spectator with a work that was not expressive in itself but that directed the viewer’s attention to the idea of art in abstraction from all other meanings that art could potentially signify about the world or consciousness. Kosuth maintains identity across the realms of reality and representation in order not to bring in extra-aesthetic associations. Kosuth’s work, in other words, should make the spectator think of the definition of art and nothing more. To emphasize greater differences between the domains would only make the work less pure and, hence, less able to fulfill its function of examining different systems of representation. More important, differences between the domains would cause the spectator to focus on the various “things” that were represented as opposed to the idea of representation “in itself.”

For Kiefer, on the other hand, art’s purpose appears to be both the formal exploration of its own nature and the historical exploration of the world. Thus, like Kosuth, Kiefer has aesthetic concerns – he wants to expand the spectator’s
awareness of art's formal and conceptual nature. At the same time, however, Kiefer does not imitate Kosuth's “scientism” – the objective, logical, and semantically purified tautological character of Kosuth's early art. As Kosuth later admitted, because they deny the subjectivity of their own system of representation, his early works, such as One and Three Chairs, affirm a much too narrow concept of rationality at the same time as they deny the individual subject's ability to change reality in a way not specified by the scientific world view.\(^93\) And in comparison with One and Three Chairs, Kiefer's The Women seems to fly in the face of Kosuth's conceptual-formal-scientific paradigm. Thus, although Kiefer's book does appear to be concerned with the definition of art, it seems even more focused on issues of male and female identity, social control, and sexual violence – issues that are worldly, embodied, and existential and that, moreover, connect his art with his historical context through tough, critical questions or points of analogy. Furthermore, if, in addition to mass reproduction, one takes Kosuth's tautological mode of juxtaposition to exemplify a potentially dangerous form of scientific rationality, then Kiefer's emphasis on the differences between reality and its multiple forms of representation could quite plausibly be seen as an attack on precisely such an instrumental rationality – a rationality that Kiefer seems to find exhibited, among other places, in mass market pornographic and fashion magazines. Kiefer's work suggests that pornography and fashion, which project ideal body images of women as sexual types, derive their dangerous power from the ways in which mass reproduction can be used to stimulate human desire and identification. Thus, Kiefer the “victimizer” – the appropriator of the body of the other – does not entirely do his subject a disservice when, in The Women, he appropriates her various signs for his book. Through its emphasis on the violent, identity-defining power of mass reproduction, Kiefer's book demonstrates its “other” mode of revealing by using the same images to produce an awareness in the spectator of the apocalyptic dark side hidden in the technological forms of the mass media. In this way, Kiefer's early book confirms Heidegger's model of aesthetic revealing as both like and antidotal to technological revealing.

**Photographic Forms**

A second technological form that appears in Kiefer’s work is photography. Like many European and American conceptual photographers of the 1970s and 1980s, Kiefer does not use photography as an end in itself. He has never presented an individual photograph as a work of art without first subjecting the print to further manipulation, and he generally prefers to use photographs (either singly or in series) as parts of more elaborate works that also involve other media. In addition, Kiefer's use of the camera does not reflect what is often still taken to be the more “traditional” modernist interest in exploring the formal properties of the photographic medium in isolation from other modes of representation – let alone a desire to purify it.\(^94\) Instead, Kiefer often uses photography to create a representational base for his large paintings and collage works,\(^95\) upon which he adds paint, lead, sand, and other materials in such a
way as to transform the image, making it more expressive and less representa-
tional. In addition, Kiefer often uses photographs as the representational "base"
for his books to suggest short disjunctive narratives—sometimes relating to his
own life and history, sometimes referring to mythic accounts of human and
divine actions, and sometimes suggesting real or imagined disasters. Thus,
although he rejects purely formalist photographic concerns, Kiefer uses photog-
raphy to broach questions concerning the relationship between photographic
form and other aspects of human existence and endeavor. As was argued earlier
in relation to Kiefer’s early body images, Kiefer uses photography to examine
the lived or existential effects that photographic form may have on human iden-
tity. This examination of photography’s impact on human identity continues in
Kiefer’s pop appropriations. In addition, Kiefer also uses photography to examine
the existential effects that photographic form has on both nature and the
concept of art.

Since the 1960s, in addition to photographing himself, Kiefer also photo-
graphs his environment: his various studios, the land around his home, and the
lands of nations, such as Israel, to which he travels. His book of 1976, Branden-
burg Sand IV [Märkischer Sand IV] (Figures 52–57), for example, presents
double-page images of his basement studio in Hornbach and of plowed fields
from various angles and in various stages of plant growth. Over these photo-
graphs, Kiefer glues red-orange sand, as if the places he has photographed are
slowly being effaced by a dust storm of epic proportions. The rough, granular
sand is raked over the black-and-white photographs in varying patterns and
with different degrees of density. In addition, it gradually occludes more and
more of the image’s representational field as the fifty-page book nears its end —
thereby introducing the thread of a narrative into the photographic sequence.
Finally, at the conclusion of the “story,” only a lumpy, irregular, glued-sand sur-
face remains. Its earlier swirling motion has given way to a more static
encrusted baked-on covering, which looks like the face of some alien and
inhospitable planet. As he did in Heroic Symbols (Figures 8-18) and To Genet,
Kiefer once again emphasizes the potentially destructive power of the artist,
who here appears to be identified with nature—that is, the red sand—since the
sequence begins in the artist’s basement, implying a human cause for the disas-
trous sand storm. Here, however, the suggestion of Kiefer’s own dangerousness
—his complicity with the powers of domination—is far less direct. Instead of
overtly portraying himself as a fascist, Kiefer simply represents—in book form—a
story of epic destruction. The spectator is left to infer Kiefer’s malign intent on
the basis of the opening scenes of the destructive “plot-line” and the similarity
of this book (and the series of which it is a part) to two earlier book series—
The Flooding of Heidelberg I-II [Die Überschwemmung Heidelbergs, I-II] (1969)"97
and The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen [Ausbrennen des Landkreises
similar destructive attacks on various parts of his homeland. Thus, as I have
already suggested, Kiefer’s practice of landscape photography in the Branden-
burg Sand series paradoxically explores nature both as a victim of malevolent
human beings and as a violent power. Although the reddish sand (pure nature)
is represented in the narrative as “winning” over the countryside (or human
civilization), it falls off the books' photographic pages as the spectator enacts nature's alleged triumph.

Finally, Kiefer also makes photographs of staged tableaux, which, like his body and nature images, he binds together into books or uses as the basis for giant paintings. In these works, photographs of variously arranged and lit studio sets, occasionally interspersed with appropriated historical images and handwritten narrative themes, are combined with paint and other media, to suggest short, ambiguous narratives. As in Birth of the Sun and Through the Center of the Earth, two of Kiefer's books dealing with nuclear technology, the narrative often follows the form of a quest. In other works, however, the narrative exhibits a different structure. In the book You Are a Painter (1969) (Figures 2-7), for example, toy soldiers train or fight battles on Kiefer's breakfast table in the middle of his trash-strewn Karlsruhe studio. Here, there is no journey, no search, but rather a simple depiction of a slightly ludicrous battle − a "theme" repeated with ships in the two Operation 'Sea Lion' [Unternehmen »Seelöwe«] books of 1975,\(^\text{99}\) as well as in the Iconoclastic Controversy [Bilderstreit] book series of 1980,\(^\text{100}\) in which model tanks appear to battle on the dirt floor of Kiefer's Hornbach basement, a broken clay palette lying between them. Throughout the Iconoclastic Controversy series, it is unclear whether the palette is the object that the tanks attack or the spoils for which they fight. In other books, such as Midsummer's Night [Johannistracht] (1980),\(^\text{101}\) the narrative is simply a progressive disclosure of a scene. Here, there is no story per se. However, the gradual revelation of more and more information about the spatial interrelation of the various images that compose the book potentially gives the spectator a sense of progressive discovery − and, thus, of "quasi-enlightenment."

In all of these books that make use of staged tableaux, photography serves as a means to destabilize the distinction between different forms of art-making practice, such as painting, sculpture, and performance. By creating quasi-cinematic experiences in book form, Kiefer maintains the narrative and temporal aspects of his early performance art while at the same time returning to a more static − more objective − form of presentation. And although Kiefer's individual pages often resemble one of his canvases, they are situated to convey part of a larger set of meanings. Thus, although often very similar in terms of form and content, the individual book pages appear much less autonomous than Kiefer's paintings. In addition, although they possess sculptural properties (and have been used as sculptural objects in Kiefer's bookcase series), most of Kiefer's books first convey fragility − whereas most of Kiefer's sculptures initially convey aggression. Thus, as art objects, Kiefer's books are quite different from either his paintings or his sculptures − which, while heterogeneous, still more or less fit within traditional artistic categories.\(^\text{102}\) In addition, Kiefer's books also subvert the "traditional" concepts of the artist-made book. Kiefer's books are neither sketchbooks, bound illuminated manuscripts, or even the more finished, mass-produced conceptualist books of Ruscha and Feldmann. Instead, they are irreducibly hybrid: art objects that share elements with performances, photographic essays, paintings, sculptures, handwritten texts, and films, yet are not reducible to any of these. By using the photographic form to destabilize the art work, many of Kiefer's books thus help to expand the concept of art, while at the
same time they also mark a return to a more built-up and sensuous modern-art object after its conceptual “dematerialization” in the 1960s and 1970s.

In addition to using photography as the basis for many of his books, Kiefer also uses photography as a ground or first layer for many of his giant canvases. In this way, Kiefer uses photography – the representational medium par excellence – to undermine and question the traditional ideal of a formally unified painterly representation. This aspect of Kiefer’s formally self-critical employment of the photographic medium is clearly shown in his canvas Iconoclastic Controversy [Bilder-Streit] (1980) (Figure 107), which is composed of a large photographic image, pasted on the canvas, depicting a staged scene of three tanks fighting over a divided clay palette on the dirt floor of Kiefer’s Hornbach studio basement. On top of the photograph Kiefer adds the following: sand and shellac, perhaps to represent a swath of desert upon which the tanks fight; paper printed with wood-grain woodcut images, suggesting a wooden floor lying in front of the tanks; and oil paint, depicting flames, fire, smoke, and the outline of a larger palette. On the right lower corner, where one might expect a signature, Kiefer instead handwrites the title.

As critics have noted, Iconoclastic Controversy represents – in a multilayered and semantically collaged form – a struggle over the role of artistic representation. Here, the title’s historical reference appears to be to the eighth- and ninth-century Christian doctrinal debate over the status of representation in religious art. Arguing against the representation of religious personages in visual art, the Byzantine Iconoclasts took the biblical prohibition against “graven images” literally, believing that visual representations of the divine could only confuse or hurt the faithful. The Iconodules, on the other hand, believed that a religious image participates in the divine and thus could lead human minds toward it. By embodying these two theological positions in the forms of tanks, Kiefer alludes to the worldly dangers that potentially threaten art and suggests that theological disputes often emerge out of political ones – and vice versa. In addition, by creating a unified scene across such disparate layers of representational media, Iconoclastic Controversy also represents Kiefer’s position in a more long-standing modern dispute, which continued to rage in painting and sculpture during the 1960s and 1970s, having to do with the purity or radical “abstractness” of the medium. In contrast to the nonobjective strains in American and European art, dominant (although certainly not uncontested) between 1945 and 1960, which emphasized abstraction and the formal qualities of a single medium, Iconoclastic Controversy asserts a type of representation that combines a number of different formal media. By reaffirming representation in a way that crosses traditional media boundaries, Kiefer avoids the regressive character that such a return to representation would entail if performed in an uncritical or ahistorical manner.

Kiefer thus uses the photographic form to its full potential: formally, as a means to open up or expand the concept of art, as well as existentially and historically, as a way of bringing issues of life (human identity and nature) into the realm of the aesthetic. In addition, by bringing together the “formalist” self-reflexivity of Mondrian and Rodchenko’s painterly modernism with the “avant-garde” modernism of German Dada and Neue Sachlichkeit (which sought to
break down the distinction between art and everyday life), Kiefer's technological form demonstrates its continuities with the art of the first half of the twentieth century. Instead of breaking away from a modernist position, Kiefer thus expands the concept of modernism by selecting multiple modern positions to reproduce and recombine. He suggests that photography presents the world with certain dangers—the objectification of both consciousness and nature—as well as certain potentials. It can function, his art demonstrates, as a new means of exploring art, experience, and representation in both general (conceptual) and particular (embodied) modes. And although it is often an extremely important component of his art, Kiefer never accepts pure photography as a complete or self-sufficient form of art-making practice. In this way, Kiefer's art attests to two underlying suspicions that the contemporary spectator might have about photography: first, that it destroys originality, aura, and monetary value and, second, that it seduces the viewer by its representational powers into an ongoing process of acquiring, reproducing, and consuming an ever increasing number of images. An unkind spectator might emphasize the former suspicion, suggesting that Kiefer avoids pure photography as a way of boosting his prices through the aura of singular works. A kinder spectator, however, could read Kiefer's resistance to pure photography as evidence of a desire to use photography to examine both

FIGURE 107. Anselm Kiefer, Iconoclastic Controversy (Bilder-Streit) (1980). Oil, emulsion, shellac, and sand on photograph, mounted on canvas, with woodcut. $14\frac{1}{2} \times 157\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Photograph: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.
art and experience – that is, a desire to situate photography in relation to other forms of seeing and knowing and, in this way, to subject a broad cross-section of representational forms to ideological critique. Both of these interpretations find confirmation in the heterogeneous layers of Kiefer’s photographic works.

Readymade Forms

To some of his canvases of the 1980s and early 1990s, including Departure from Egypt [Auszug aus Ägypten] (1984), Jerusalem [Jerusalem] (Figure 59), The Women of the Revolution [Die Frauen der Revolution] (1986) (Figure 109), Osiris and Isis [Osiris und Isis] (1985–1987), Iron Path (Figure 40), and The Golden Fleece (Figure 95), Kiefer adds cast or mass-produced objects, thereby incorporating another technological form in his art: the readymade. That Kiefer should use readymade forms is not surprising, as he is often quoted as citing the particular importance of Duchamp in the history of twentieth-century modern art. Yet, to date, there has been no direct analysis of the role(s) that readymades play in Kiefer’s works nor of the meanings they might suggest in combination with other elements in his works. As will be argued here, Kiefer’s works clearly recall Duchamp’s revolutionary mode of art making and stress a similar range of properties inherent in the readymade form. Kiefer has noted that he is particularly fascinated by Duchamp’s destruction of the division between art and reality. And the novelty and significance of Kiefer’s readymade strategies can be illuminated through an examination of the ways in which Duchamp’s readymades may be said to expand their spectators’ concepts of art and thereby inspire a critical relationship to their contemporary historical moments or realities.

According to Duchamp’s own understanding of his creation, the readymade was a “conceptual” move, one that was caught up in the history of the revolutionary drive for newness characteristic of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century modernist painting. As conceptual art, Duchamp’s readymades were intended to subvert many of the traditional characteristics of visual art up until that time. They were antitaste – “based on a reaction of visual indifference” – as well as antistyle at a time when much emphasis was put on personal style and the creation of new modes of representing the world. As a form, the readymade removed the artist’s touch from the work of art, in a sense denying both the transformative creative power of the artist as well as art’s essentially human and subjective origins. Finally, by being mass-produced, the readymade denied art’s originality. As such, Duchamp’s readymades may be understood as the “first” works of art that deliberately attempt to eschew “aura,” a concept developed by Walter Benjamin for everything about the work of art that gives it its special uniqueness, presence, authenticity, surplus, or magic – in short, everything that traditionally separates or distances the work of art from other “mere” objects in the world.

Despite its denial of art’s traditional auratic qualities, the readymade did not mark the destruction of art, as the German Dadaist and filmmaker Hans Richter believed, but rather signaled an expansion of its possibilities. Duchamp
understood the tradition against which he reacted as being for the most part a monolithic storehouse of “retinal art” – of which impressionism, Cézanne, and cubism, the styles that comprised his early influences, were the most recent manifestations. As an artist, Duchamp began as a painter and, by subverting the painterly qualities of “retinal” modernism (and Western art in general), he tried to move his artistic practice out of the realm of the physical – which was for him the realm of painting and the representation of the “objective” world – and into the realm of the idea. What Duchamp accomplished through this conscious move to conceptual art, however, was much more than a simple expansion of the concept of art. As Kiefer suggests, Duchamp’s readymade form radically destabilizes the various criteria that the spectator uses to distinguish art from reality. As such, the readymade does not simply expand the spectator’s concept of art; it also challenges everyday conceptions of what constitutes the “nature” and “essence” of the real world.

To make the first “unassisted” readymade, the Bottlerack (1914) (Figure 108), Duchamp purchased a functional, everyday manufactured object (a bottle dryer of the type common to French households at that time), inscribed it with a title or phrase, which he later forgot, and designated it a work of art. Although the original was subsequently lost, Duchamp created five additional versions between 1921 and 1964, the last of which was itself composed of eight signed and numbered copies. These various versions of the Bottlerack have subsequently found their way into important collections, including those of two other significant twentieth-century artists: Man Ray and Robert Rauschenberg. According to Hans Richter, the first version of the Bottlerack was exhibited in New York in 1915, a statement contradicted by one of Duchamp’s letters. In 1936, however, Man Ray made a photograph of the third version of the Bottlerack, which was reproduced both in Life and Cahiers d’Art as well as in Duchamp’s various Boîtes, or portable museums, which he began producing in 1935. In addition, the Man Ray Bottlerack was exhibited twice in 1936, first, as an “original” in Paris, at the Galerie Charles Ratton, from May 22-29, and, later, as a photograph in New York during the Museum of Modern Art’s Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism exhibition. Man Ray’s photograph as well as various accounts of the Bottlerack’s complex history also appear in a number of books on Duchamp, including Arturo Schwarz’s catalogue raisonné, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, first published in 1969.

The Bottlerack – which was created through Duchamp’s simple act of naming or designation as well as the subsequent convoluted history of its replication, exhibition, and documentation – has had a number of lasting and important effects on the way its twentieth-century spectators understand art and distinguish it from reality. In the first place, Duchamp’s readymade form overcomes the traditional division between art and reality by giving rise to a new form of realism in art. Looked at in this way, the readymade may be seen to share the same goal as much of early modern art, including the works of Courbet and the cubists: namely, it strives to be a new and truer representation of the world. Consistent with the methods of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century modern artists against whom he was for the most part reacting, Duchamp accomplishes this greater “truthfulness” in art by shedding conventions that
cause the painter to misrepresent optical reality. Unlike his predecessors, however, Duchamp does not simply resort to a new form of representation designed to supplement the mimetic inadequacies of the older styles. Instead, Duchamp's readymade overthrows representation itself. By being nothing more and nothing less than a literal presentation of an object, the Bottlerack attempts to fundamentally transform the largely mimetic Western visual art tradition—a transformation that is as radical yet completely different from the one presented by the various forms of early-twentieth-century abstraction.

When viewed in terms of its differences from abstract painting, however, the readymade initially seems to objectify and reinforce its spectators' normal conceptions of what constitutes the nature and essence of the real world. In the second decade of the twentieth century, the choice between the readymade and abstraction had to do with the artist's relation to the object—a legacy that he or she inherited from the late nineteenth century. In the context of the nineteenth century, abstraction was often used to break up or dissolve the "real" object seen by the artist. And although this dissolution was first carried out in service of greater mimetic realism, after impressionism and throughout the twentieth century, abstraction was often intended and viewed as rejecting the objective world and instead expressing the subjective, the spiritual, the affective, or the divine. Thus, although it succeeded in emphasizing the objectivity of the medium of painting, the development of abstract painting fundamentally subverted the "objective" nature of the external world. Duchamp's readymade, on the other hand, states the object—and hence the objectivity of the external world—in the most emphatic way possible. By not changing the thing represented—by succumbing to the facticity of the world—Duchamp can thus be seen as further reifying his world's already set, fixed, and known properties. Viewed from this perspective, Duchamp's readymade form reproduces and reinforces its spectators' everyday conceptions of the real. It suggests, in other words, that human beings cannot change anything. Thus, by demoting the real to what already exists (the real as status quo), Duchamp's readymade may serve to cut off its spectators' awareness of possibilities inherent in the world.

Through longer contemplation, however, it becomes clear that Duchamp's Bottlerack both expands the concept of art and destabilizes everyday reality by directing its spectators' attentions to the contexts and assumptions that condition their perception of the world. This is the case because the Bottlerack shows art's dependence on its various relationships: the designation or presentation of something as art by the artist; the work's reception as art by its spectators; the work's place in the institutions of art; and its suitability to the discourses that legitimate and support the concept of art in general. The Bottlerack, in other words, potentially makes its spectators aware of the conditions that make art possible—in particular, those conditions that lie primarily outside the art work itself. Through this laying bare of the multiple social, economic, institutional, and conceptual networks within which a work of art is located, Duchamp's readymade demonstrates all art's dependence on a nonartistic context and thereby expands its spectators' "traditional" concepts of art still further. In addition, the institutional critique of art instigated by the Bottlerack rebounds on reality. Like the work of art, everyday objects are also enmeshed within relationships of designation, reception, legitimation, and display. By making its spectators...
aware of that fact, Duchamp's readymade form thus inspires a more critical relation to what is normally called the "real." In other words, by provoking its spectators to search for the conditions that support and make meaningful everyday reality, readymades can cause them to focus on the construction of perception in at least two different ways. First, the readymade form can cause its spectators to focus on their vision and discourse about what is seen, thus making them aware of the interpretive and multivalent character of their perceptions. It can foster the insight that what its spectators see is not simply a result of visual stimuli reaching their eyes but also a product of what they know about objects in the world.

Second, the readymade form can cause its spectators to focus on the social and material structures of their worlds, which are often taken for granted and which support and condition the everyday conception of reality. It can, for example, cause its spectators to question the ubiquitous character of machined objects and ask for what purpose and through which avenues this plethora of mass-produced items came to encircle their existence—a question that also rings out in Heidegger's late thinking. By causing its spectators to focus on the conditions of their perception of the real in these two senses, the Duchampian readymade destabilizes the real in a positive sense; that is, it opens up everyday reality to criticism and reimagining—the first step in its eventual transformation.

As Duchamp's subsequent readymade practices demonstrate, like the most radical types of painterly abstraction during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, the readymade form was also "doomed" to reappropriation by modernity's representational practices. Duchamp's readymade forms soon became saturated by literature—punning and plays on words—and, in addition, identity issues on both an individual and a collective level. In particular, the clear sexual subtexts of Duchamp's readymades—with their evocations of hetero-, homo-, and transgender perspectives and the multiple connections that they draw between various forms of subjectivity, desire, and commodification—prove beyond a doubt that Duchamp also treated his readymades meaningfully, that is, representationally. (In the case of the Bottlerack, its repeated, phallic-looking, metal prongs place it in a long line of Duchampian bachelors; it thus comes to represent a mechanized form of male sexuality.) Thus, it should come as little surprise that, although Kiefer continues to use the readymade form as a means of expanding his spectators' everyday concepts of art and reality, his use of readymades seems less "pure" or unadulterated—and, consequently, less critical of social and artistic institutions—than that of Duchamp.

As was the case with his treatment of photography, Kiefer consistently employs the readymade as part of a larger work. Thus, unlike Duchamp's readymades, which replace the art object, Kiefer's readymades simply play a role within a greater—but still ambiguous—"whole." As such, Kiefer's readymades destroy the work of art's aura even less than Duchamp's. Nor do Kiefer's readymades promote as strong a sense of confusion between the realms of art and reality. Despite his commitment to auratic art, however, Kiefer succeeds in using readymade forms in new, critical, and historically specific ways—ways that develop both the readymade's formal-conceptual and its existential-worldly aspects or meanings. In The Women of the Revolution (Figure 109), for example, Kiefer combines welded lead picture frames, glass, a wood-and-metal digging
tool, dried lilies of the valley, and a rose, against a weathered background of industrially rolled lead sheets upon which he has also painted and written with emulsion and crayon. Although the “painting” is largely composed of readymades (only the handwritten titles and the abstract markings on the lead are Kiefer’s “own” creations), the readymades are arranged so as to take on a more encompassing meaning from their juxtaposition and arrangement in the context of the work as a whole.

As Mark Rosenthal notes:

Although the setting of [The] Women of the Revolution . . . is not architectural, it too conveys the idea of the memorial. Each figure is named and celebrated by a lead-framed flower, all but one a lily of the valley (only Marie Antoinette is memorialized with a rose, a cliché that Kiefer thought appropriate for her). . . . A wooden garden implement, used to dig holes for planting, hangs with its holder amidst the frames; it can figuratively return the flowers and women to the earth. The trowel-like shape is also a phallic form, and in Kiefer’s iconography it is perhaps the stereotypical male (recall Siegfried and Faust) who causes the sad demise of the martyrs.

When Kiefer introduces a new material, he likes to reflect on its various connotations. He notes, for example, that the lily of the valley is employed in certain heart medicines and, therefore, may refer to the cycle of life and death; furthermore, its fragrance is powerful but short-lived. Beside its other meanings, lead has the capacity to ‘protect’ the lilies, just as a lead shield serves as protection in the x-ray process. According to Kiefer, the lead frames hold the flower ‘corpses’ or the spirits of the women, or both, which have been dispersed into the world.124

As Rosenthal’s interpretation suggests, Kiefer’s highly metaphorical use of readymades in The Women of the Revolution subverts a number of the more radical properties inherent in Duchamp’s readymades. It is true, of course, that by using the flowers and tool metaphorically—and, more specifically, by sexualizing them—Kiefer continues the critical tendency of the Duchampian readymade form, which helps its spectators see identity and the world in a more mutable and transformable manner. At the same time, however, Kiefer’s metaphoric use of the readymade, as well as the careful formal juxtaposition of the various readymades in the “painting,” go against Duchamp’s dictum of visual indifference and his prohibition of taste. This can be seen particularly clearly in the formal “echoing” and balance of geometrically similar elements characteristic of the work’s composition. As a whole, the work presents twelve differently sized rectangular “views” of a rectangular surface that has been welded together out of five pieces. Through the various juxtapositions of different rectangular lead and glass surfaces as well as the visual passage of the frames and the background lines through one another, Kiefer expands painting’s concept of surface even as his readymade forms also represent violence and mourning. In contrast to the Duchampian readymade, which initially evokes a stronger awareness of the contexts and institutions of art, the readymades in Kiefer’s work function much less like “traditional” conceptual art forms and much more like formal and symbolic elements in traditional paintings.

But, as is always the case with Kiefer’s art, first appearances can be deceiving. Despite their initial seemingly less critical and revolutionary relationship to
the concept and institutions of art, Kiefer's readymades do develop certain aspects of Duchamp's formal expansion of art's concept. *The Women of the Revolution*, for example, incorporates picture frames - it makes them part of the work and thus no longer the form that separates art from the historical context in which it functions. In this way, *The Women of the Revolution* makes literal that aspect of Duchamp's readymade that calls its spectators' attention to the contexts that determine their perception of something as art. Kiefer's work - which indicates the art context symbolically rather than through the negation of art's traditional criteria - is thus an interesting extension of Duchamp's original gesture. At the same time, as Kiefer's mostly lead painting clearly demonstrates, no matter how radical the "original" gesture may have seemed, the readymade is a form that easily becomes representational. Thus, by incorporating selected manufactured objects, Kiefer evokes the tradition of antimimetic realism inaugurated by Duchamp's readymades at the same time as he undercuts it. As *The Women of the Revolution* reveals, however, Kiefer's antimimeticism is more complex than Duchamp's in that it incorporates more nonmimetic representation (the written names and the title) as well as a second level of readymade selection (namely, the natural flowers). By creating a distinction between these two forms of selected "objects," the readymade and the natural object, Kiefer's work expands the concept of antimimetic realism and, at the same time, challenges the assumption that - within the context of Kiefer's art works - either level of readymade selection is somehow more "natural" or realistic than the various representational levels of meaning. Finally, *The Women of the Revolutio...
tion develops Duchamp’s concept of the linguistic character of art – the dependence of art on naming. By juxtaposing the two levels of readymade selection with proper names and with a generic concept (“women of the revolution”), Kiefer’s work manages to present a more complex picture of the relationships linking individual instances with general concepts than is suggested by the Bottlerack’s designating function.

In addition to developing aspects of art’s concept not suggested by Duchamp’s readymades, The Women of the Revolution seems more able to expand its spectators’ everyday conceptions of reality. Ignoring for the moment the social-critical power of Duchamp’s caustic irony – an irony that particularly comes out in his sexual subtexts – a single readymade like the Bottlerack could read as signifying Duchamp’s resignation in front of the object. It is, after all, only when spectators are confronted by more than one Duchampian readymade that their many metaphoric meanings become apparent. According to this reading from a single work, Duchamp’s readymade form could suggest a noncritical relation to the real. Because Duchamp does not manipulate his object, because he simply recontextualizes it, the Bottlerack may suggest that the objectivity of the world cannot be altered. Kiefer, on the other hand, clearly manipulates his readymades. He incorporates them into a more encompassing “open” art work; he juxtaposes them; he plays them off other elements. And because its readymades are manipulated, The Women of the Revolution does not possess the potentially complacent meaning inherent in the Bottlerack when examined in isolation. Kiefer thus returns to the readymade a sense of agency partially negated by the “original” Duchampian gesture. And it is in this greater sense of agency – a greater demand in Kiefer’s works that the spectator recognize his or her ability to transform the world – that the temporal distance between Duchamp and Kiefer most clearly manifests itself. For Duchamp, working on the eve of World War I, the gesture of exposing art could perhaps take precedence over a strong affirmation of the agency of the artist. For Kiefer, on the other hand, working long after the close of World War II, a sense of agency – and, hence, responsibility – is something that can never be forgotten. In combination with Kiefer’s expanded contextualizing reference – his ability to cause his spectators to focus on their perception of the work and the world on multiple levels – Kiefer’s readymades perhaps promote a more critical and historical relation to “the real.”

Conclusion

The increasing manifestation of technology in Kiefer’s art on the levels of subject matter, practice, and form seems to confirm Heidegger’s conceptual analysis of his postwar “post-metaphysical” situation in the 1950s and 1960s. First, Kiefer’s art reminds the spectator of the similarities and differences between nature and manufactured objects; it thus recalls Heidegger’s postwar opposition of physis, or nature, to standing-reserve, or objectivity. By presenting different types of things and beings in his art and by showing the spectator the involvement of these things and beings in different systems of verbal and visual representation,
Kiener makes us aware of the polyvalence of objects and the various ways in which this polyvalence can be destroyed. Second, Kiefer's emphasis on the transformation and circulation of materials and energy in his art recalls Heidegger's descriptions of how technological enframing operates as a process of seizing, unlocking, transforming, storing, and transporting - a process that ultimately serves no other goal than its own intensification and development. Third, many of Kiefer's technological representations superimpose time frames and thus suggest, like Heidegger's account of the development of enframing, that technological revealing predates by thousands of years the actual rise of machine and industrial technology in the modern age. Fourth, Kiefer's works, by seeking to examine technology's complex nature and multiple effects, seem in some ways to fulfill Heidegger's call for humanity to confront and comprehend technology in a realm that is both akin to it and different from it: the realm of art.  

The industrial spaces in and out of which Kiefer makes his art are thus the outward signs of an artistic project that has been both practically and formally involved with technology from the very start and that, since the mid-1980s, has gradually disclosed an increasingly intense technological involvement. And Kiefer, like the late Heidegger, reveals technology to be a primal force driving modernity's multiple representational systems. That the factory becomes a site for Kiefer's artistic practice thus appears to be a function of a related set of fundamentally modern concerns that have occupied him since his student days. One of these concerns is the social construction of human identity - the complex interplay between subject and object, self and other, individual and collective. As revealed by his early books using mass media images as well as his own self-portraits acting out German stereotypes, Kiefer's art has long been engaged in provoking questions having to do with the relationship between mass-produced culture and individual and collective forms of subjectivity. Kiefer's work raises this issue in various ways, beginning with questions concerning the world views that lie hidden in reproduced mass-media images. Fashion magazines, pornography, film, and the science fiction novel are all implicated in Kiefer's art as sources that help many Western humans make sense of their identity and their objective and social world. Fueled by technological reproduction, these meaning-conferring sources have become ubiquitous in everyday life - a ubiquity, Kiefer's works imply, that must be accepted and worked through.

In addition to indicating sources of individual and collective identity in the realms of popular and mass culture, Kiefer's art also implicates the fine-art sphere as another source through which world views can be disseminated. As suggested by Germany's Spiritual Heroes (Figure 20), Ways of Worldly Wisdom (Figure 74), Kiefer's lead-airplane series (Figure 88), as well as a number of other works that indicate that his own aesthetic activity is dangerous or destructive, "high" art is also - for better or for worse - a source that provides its spectators with potentially dangerous models for individual and collective identity and action. Kiefer's works suggest that, like popular culture, art's imagery has grown more powerful - and more ubiquitous - as a result of a rich and variegated array of technological means available to its producers. Not only does technology provide the artist with new means of producing, reproducing,
and distributing images, but it can increase the output, size, and sensuousness of an artist's works and – as is perhaps most clearly manifested in Kiefer's gigantic books and canvases based on photographs – give the artist new and powerful means to physically affect the spectator. Kiefer's use of different forms of technology can thus be seen as an attempt to compensate for the diminishing status of "high" art in his society – an attempt to revitalize art in the face of a public that no longer sees the aesthetic sphere as a repository of social and political values or, indeed, of any values that are not primarily economic.

Although quite critical of numerous aspects of technology, Kiefer is in no way simply hostile to it. Quite the contrary. Although less exclusively concerned with purely formal-conceptual issues than Kosuth, Kiefer does work on the definition of art, and questions about the nature and mechanisms of art occupy a definite place in his oeuvre. He explores the nature of representation by juxtaposing painted and photographed images with natural objects, readymades, and language. By so doing, he has broadened the concept of representation to include two types of "objective" reality – natural and machined objects – and has furthermore suggested analogies between various types of visual and linguistic representation. The industrial environment and the technologies it contains thus provide Kiefer with a visual laboratory for an analysis of the conditions and forms of artistic representation – another "modern concern" or reason why he has come to embrace technology and the factory so strongly. In his vast studios, he can create representations out of formally and materially heterogeneous media, explore the multiple aspects or profiles of form, perspective, and tactile surface, compare and contrast the different effects of space and time on the production of meaning, and pair specific themes with an almost infinite variety of formal combinations. Here, too, Kiefer can explore art's conceptual moment – the relationship between art, thought, and language – and, by extension, provoke questions about the nature of art, reason, and other forms of human-meaning-bestowing activity. Indeed, the connections that his focus on technology permits Kiefer to make between modernity, representation, science, and power illuminate with a new light numerous continuing aspects of late-twentieth-century thought and visual culture. Like Heidegger's late theory, Kiefer's works create contrasts between visual art and rational-scientific thought – aesthetic and technological revealing, respectively. And by intensively exploring them in terms of their nature, powers, and effects, Kiefer has produced a body of work that is full of questions and insights and that encourages elaboration on both the aesthetic and the conceptual level.

Paradoxically, another reason why Kiefer chooses the factory as the site of aesthetic production appears to grow out of a modern concern for nature – a nature that he represents as a set of disclosive and externalizing processes more related to art than technology. He uses natural materials to bring out their double-sidedness. On the one hand, nature is shown to be manipulable – matter to be molded, shaped, and given meaning by being suffused with human intention. On the other hand, Kiefer's works also show natural materials to possess a wholeness and integrity of their own – a dense "significance" apart from the human goals and projects that they can be made to serve. By means of technology, Kiefer puts a magnifying glass up to the interface between humans
and nature. Sometimes, he reminds his spectators of individual responsibility, when, for example, he gouges and tears his built-up “natural” surfaces in such a way as to show us his destructive power. Sometimes, he reminds his spectators of the power of nature, as, for example, in his works in which natural materials are used to obscure photographic representations or, in other works, where he suggests that natural forces possess powers similar to nuclear fission and fusion. By giving him a place where he can store and age numerous natural materials – sand, straw, hair, clay, olive branches, silver, and gold – as well as the tools to cause them to undergo a multitude of changes, Kiefer’s factory environment paradoxically allows him to indicate a space for nature outside the field of human endeavor. And in this way, Kiefer echoes Heidegger’s concern for nature in the “technological age” – Heidegger’s sense of its fundamental relationship to art and its need to avoid constant technological disclosure.

As the conjunction of Kiefer and Heidegger suggests, that an aesthetic reflection on the reproduction and proliferation of meaning should happen in the context of a factory environment is not surprising. In relation to culture, technology’s primary significance has always been its ability to multiply forms and facilitate mass reproduction and dissemination. Mass reproduction, transmission, circulation, and transformation now make the innumerable forms, images, and interpretive frameworks that exist in human cultures even more prevalent and readily available. It is thus, at bottom, technology that has fueled the incredible explosion of alternatives that has come to characterize the development of the twentieth century. And the more available these alternatives become – the more images, meanings, and forms one has to choose from – the more difficult it becomes to decide which alternative still has the power to gather assent and thus orient human beings. Kiefer’s undecidability stems from the overabundance of meaning characteristic of the world today – the intense multiplication of frameworks in and through which human beings can achieve understanding. It is for this reason that he has embraced technology and the factory – in many ways the sources of the problem – in his attempt to give form to his world’s contemporary condition.
Conclusion

Corresponding in the collective consciousness to the forms of the new means of production, which at first were still dominated by the old (Marx), are images in which the new is intermingled with the old. These images are wishful fantasies, and in them the collective seeks both to preserve and to transfigure the inchoateness of the social product and the deficiencies in the social system of production. In addition, these wish-fulfilling images manifest an emphatic striving for dissociation with the outmoded – which means, however, with the most recent past. These tendencies direct the visual imagination, which has been activated by the new, back to the primeval past. In the dream in which, before the eyes of each epoch, that which is to follow appears in images, the latter appears wedded to elements from prehistory, that is, of a classless society.

Walter Benjamin

The ruins of the universe are stored in warehouses for sets, representative samples of all periods, peoples, and styles. Near Japanese cherry trees, which shine through the corridors of dark scenery, arches the monstrous dragon from the Nibelungen, devoid of the diluvial terror it exudes on the screen. Next to the mockup of a commercial building, which needs only to be cranked by the camera in order to outdo any skyscraper, are layers of coffins which themselves have died because they do not contain any dead. When, in the midst of all this, one stumbles upon Empire furniture in its natural size, one is hard pressed to believe it is authentic. The old and the new, copies and originals, are piled up in a disorganized heap like bones in catacombs. Only the property man knows where everything is.

Siegfried Kracauer

In the spring of 1993, under the title Twenty Years of Loneliness [Zwanzig Jahre Einsamkeit], Anselm Kiefer presented a roughly ten-foot-high, square sculpture in the main room of Marian Goodman Gallery in New York. Composed of 300 canvases made at various stages of Kiefer’s career, now piled up carelessly on top of one another and strewn with dirt, stone, leaves, ash-covered dresses, and dried sunflowers, the work was described by one critic as “something of a sacrificial heap” – an ambiguous comment on the investment-capital-driven, international art market of the 1980s, during which Kiefer became famous and from
Thirty-six books presented in a random pile in the gallery's back room supported this sacrificial reading of Kiefer's installation. Like his stack of paintings, the mass of books seemed to undercut his status as one of Germany's most "important" or "significant" postwar visual artists. Unlike most of Kiefer's previous books, which are visually and conceptually complex, these books were mass-produced and almost blank — marked only by a few photographs of beach and sky, coffee stains, and yellowish dribbles of a substance that the wall labels identified as the artist's semen. In addition to suggesting an ironic commentary on the notion of the artist as genius, the show strongly implied that a certain period of Kiefer's art was coming to an end. Critics recognized it both as a "bonfire" and a "retrospective" — a masturbatory and self-conscious monument made by Kiefer to himself and to his colossal romantic "isolation."

The two sculptural piles evoked studio cleaning and the desire to make a clean break with more than twenty years of his own artistic past. Coming on the heels of a series of social and personal upheavals — German reunification, the breakup of his marriage of more than twenty years, and his relocation to the south of France — Kiefer appeared to be signaling a stopping point or "break" in his aesthetic development. The sense of "break" conveyed by Twenty Years of Loneliness was, in turn, subsequently underscored by the fact that Kiefer then stopped showing for the space of three years. The Loneliness show and the subsequent exhibition hiatus in the mid-1990s thus raised an obvious question: In what "new" directions would Kiefer's art now turn?

Three years later, the answer appeared. Between 1996 and 1997, Kiefer had gallery shows of new paintings, books, and collage works in Paris, Mexico, London, and Venice — works all dating between 1995 and 1996. In addition, works made in 1996 also appeared in New York (in a group show at the Marian Goodman Gallery and in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art). In these works, Kiefer often juxtaposes images of his naked fifty-year-old body (in a corpse-like position) with fields (now with a lower horizon line than in his earlier field and field path paintings) and images of sunflowers (composed out of natural materials like sunflower seeds as well as emulsion, acrylic paint, and "woodcut" fragments). In other new works from 1995 and 1996, Kiefer depicts himself floating either on or against a background of land masses and water or lying in front of a large pyramid under a sunflower-seed-filled sky. And in all these new works, the themes of Kiefer's paintings seem radically different — Indian yoga, meditation, and Rosicrucianism are the overt systems and quasi-narratives projected by the handwritten titles and representations. Kiefer, moreover, is eager to stress his new art works' differences from his earlier works. As he said in 1997, "In the work I had accomplished earlier, the past assumed proportions that were existential. But with time, that aspect has vanished." In addition, he asserts, the new works have lost all direct reference to German history — a transformation that Kiefer calls "a move from a very focused history to a more global, or perhaps a more geological history." Yet, other than the new titles, such as Sol Invictus (1995) and For Robert Fludd (1996) — with their suggestions of different circulatory concepts, scientific-magic systems, and quasi-narratives — what has really changed in Kiefer's art? The move away from explicitly German themes already appeared in the "Moses
and Aaron” works of 1984, and, as his 1969 *Koll* book suggests, Kiefer has included references to non-German cultures in his art from the very beginning. In addition, Kiefer returns to body images in these new works, and body images are central to some of his most important books and paintings of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, their reappearance in Kiefer’s art of the mid-1990s suggests not a “break” in his artistic project but rather a return to an early, basic artistic motif and set of strategies. Moreover, the reappearance of body images in Kiefer’s art also contradicts his claim made in 1997 about the vanishing of his existential themes – however else they also signify, Kiefer’s body images always retain their existential reference. Moreover, field and pyramid imagery have also appeared earlier in Kiefer’s paintings, and the lower horizon of some of the new works is echoed by a few of Kiefer’s paintings in the 1980s, such as *Emanation* (1984–1986). Further, even the image of the sunflower, which in various forms pervades many of these new works, is anticipated by Kiefer’s Van Gogh-inspired collage *From Paris to Arles* [*Von Paris nach Arles*] (1963) and appears in the *Loneliness* installation in 1993. There are also continuities between Kiefer’s new living-working environment, a former silk factory that he renovated in the rural Ardèche region of southern France, and his older factory and house complex situated in Buchen, Höpfingen, and Hornbach. Moreover, these continuities are strengthened by the fact that Kiefer has moved most of his old materials, books, and other possessions into his new factory in the Ardèche; as he admits, the move from Germany “required 70 trucks.” Finally, Kiefer’s technological practices continue – not only in the massive technologically produced scale of his works but also in his recycling of photographs as the base for many of his new books, collage works, and “paintings.”

That Kiefer’s new work does not represent a radical break from his earlier art but rather demonstrates continuity is not a “failing” of this new art. Ineluctably, Kiefer’s art represents the continuation of – and not a break from – modernity’s various subjective, representational, objectifying, and technological processes. Kiefer’s new works are both beautiful and impressive. They will continue to engender dialogue and debate among their spectators and audiences although, paradoxically, by making his themes more exclusively non-German, Kiefer could cause contemporary debate to focus even more on private and existential issues – exactly the opposite of what he claims to want. The centrality of Kiefer’s own deathlike but also sexualized body to his new works guarantees that his spectators will continue to focus on his own particular lived existence in relation to the collective aspects of his identity also represented in his art – a dialectic that his new works continue to reflect in an extremely powerful fashion.

In addition, the fact that Kiefer persists in making a comfortable living with his art should neither surprise nor be a cause for blame. It has often been the case that modern artists get paid to be critical of both individuals and society. And Kiefer is not the first artist to assume the role of a larger than life “star” or celebrity. Moreover, in comparison to Heidegger’s theoretical development between the 1920s and the 1960s, Kiefer’s aesthetic development from the late 1960s through the end of the twentieth century presents a much more critical and responsible set of transformations. Not only do Kiefer’s works continue to provide
new occasions to rework subjectivity, but they also emphasize the discursive aspects of all cultural representations. In this way, they provide space for debate—and thus for the emergence of normative truth in terms of both historical and contemporary (or “public”) dialogue. In comparison to this more fundamental discursivity characteristic of all of Kiefer’s works since the 1960s, Heidegger’s theoretical development demonstrates a retreat away from the public sphere into an exclusively historical dialogue with an elite set of “world historical” figures. As Kiefer’s art suggests, Heidegger was wrong when he argued that an elite cadre of “thinkers,” “artists,” and “politicians” can produce an intersubjective world of responsible communal action. And as has been argued, Heidegger was mistaken when he assumed that he did not have to subject his own particular vantage point to the test of public debate. These two errors, in turn, allowed Heidegger to assume that his own thinking was radically different from metaphysical thought—an assumption that allowed him to avoid confronting the entanglement of his own theoretical models in the processes and frameworks of modernity. And it was his refusal to engage in modernity as something that still fundamentally contained him, which ultimately caused Heidegger to undermine some of his most brilliant insights.

Heidegger’s early existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic methods of reworking the subject, however, as well as his polemical concept of the happening of truth in the work of art, continue to be of relevance to modern culture today. The dialectic between individual and collective identity always advances through a process of interpretation that attempts to discover a desired future appearing in the present on the basis of a saturated tradition, a tradition that has been separated from the present and therefore one that must be criticized before it is used to identify basic points of reference. This dialectic is clearly shown in Kiefer’s works and could be demonstrated to extend much further in post-1945 German culture. In addition, by raising the question of the relationship between the subjective, representational, and technological aspects of modernity, Heidegger’s late thinking on art and technology presents an important framework through which to evaluate many central aspects of the modern, late-twentieth-century “present”—a framework that asks the cultural historian to think in terms of the development of multiple and intertwined systems. Subjectivity, representation, and technology, as Heidegger has complexly argued, are all bound together in the production of normative truth—truth whereby we live both with ourselves and with others. Technology, as Heidegger demonstrates, is the power or force that speeds up representation and thus saturates all human perception with subjective historical meaning. Moreover, the development of technology has had a dramatic impact on the processes of representation because technology has greatly multiplied the possible frameworks for truth through which modernity develops itself. In these ways, Heidegger’s middle and late thinking continue to suggest important perspectives for today’s cultural historian.

Finally, as Kiefer’s art as a whole demonstrates, the modern play of technology, representation, and subjectivity diagnosed by Heidegger is fundamentally capitalist as well. By opening up twentieth-century art to both its historical context and the lived body—by emphasizing that reproduction means both repeti-
tion and performance – Kiefer expands the concept of modernity beyond Hei-
degger’s middle and late theoretical articulations and toward the concepts of
capitalism as representation and the body as constituted by hierarchies of pro-
duction and reproduction. In addition, however, by critically engaging with the
art market and with the fundamental cultural institutions of modernity, Kiefer’s
art also proves that the modern systems of capitalism provide space for both
criticism and self-development. And as the interdisciplinary conjunction of
Kiefer and Heidegger demonstrates, modernity continues to provide cultural
resources for both true and false forms of historical orientation at the end of the
twentieth century.
List of Abbreviations Used in the Notes


AKM – Paul Maenz and Gerd de Vries, hrsg., *Anselm Kiefer* (Cologne: 1986)


ABBREVIATIONS

SZ – Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1963)


Notes

Introduction

2. See Eric L. Santner, Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); in particular, pp. 7–13 and 50–54.
4. Santner, Stranded Objects, p. 11.
5. Santner, Stranded Objects, p. 12.
8. Although Marx sees the early development of capitalism starting with the growth of towns in the twelfth century, it took until the beginning of the sixteenth century before the two social classes that characterize the capitalist epoch truly start to emerge. Marx defined these two classes as the proletariat – peasants, dispossessed from the land and thus separated from their means of production, who are thrown onto the market as wage-laborers – and the bourgeoisie – the group that controls capital and attempts to extract maximum profit from their economic investment. Furthermore, it is only at the end of the eighteenth century, with the shift from manufacture (characterized by the division of labor) to industrial production (characterized by the development of machinery adequate to the demands of the market) that the bourgeoisie becomes the dominant class in European society – a transition that is signaled by the French Revolution. See Anthony Giddens, Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Max Weber (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 29–34.
10. Marx, Grundrisse, p. 84.
11. As Kiefer says, "[M]eine Arbeiten sollen ganz unscheinbar dabeikommen. Das verwirrt natürlich viele Leute, und vielleicht finden sie es fürchterlich oder können nicht gleich etwas damit anfangen. Wenn sie sich aber eine Weile damit befaßt haben, müssen sie sich eingestehen, daß sie zunächst falsch gedacht haben. Und das ist doch gut. Wenn jemand zuerst falsch denkt, und dann richtig, dann ist das richtige Denken doch viel wertvoller" (Christian Kämmel and Peter Pursche, "Nachts Fahre Ich mit dem Fahrrad von Bild zu Bild": Interview mit Anselm Kiefer, Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin, Nr. 46 [November 16, 1990], p. 27). As Kiefer's statement suggests, he sometimes tries to "end" the undecidability of his works by suggesting that the spectator "first" thinks falsely "then" correctly. I have resisted this impulse in my own analyses of his works.
12. As much as possible, the interpretations and arguments are constructed for nonspecialist (and non-German-speaking) audiences; and, as a consequence, the attempt has been made to define all the technical terms used as well as to give concrete examples wherever possible.


15. Heidegger appears in different forms in a number of Kiefer’s art works. Heidegger’s photograph appears on the cover of a book entitled Martin Heidegger that Kiefer made in 1975, which deals, as Kiefer has suggested, with the ambivalence central to both Heidegger’s thinking and thinking in general. Here, Kiefer presents photographs of a mushroom-covered basement floor upon which he has painted a schematic, brainlike “cloud.” This cloud is presumably a representation of Heidegger (occasionally its structure resembles a face), and its conjunction with the mushrooms suggests both atomic disaster and a potentially poisonous growth. In the middle of the book, the Heidegger cloud appears to participate in the release of dark smoke from a bottle standing on the dirty floor. The rest of the book’s pages are completely obscured by a dark, textured surface of acrylic and oil—repeated monochrome paintings about “nothing” that reinforce the ambivalent disaster motif. In addition, Heidegger appears as the handwritten name, “Martin,” in Kiefer’s 1986 painting Varus [Varus], which deals with the construction of a German sense of national identity through the fashioning and refashioning of the legend of the first “German” military triumph in 9 B.C.E. Furthermore, Heidegger appears as the handwritten name “Martin Heidegger,” in Kiefer’s 1976–1977 painting, Ways of Worldly Wisdom [Wege der Weltweisheit], which deals with the same theme as Varus. Finally, the figure of Heidegger appears as a “woodcut” portrait made from a photograph in Kiefer’s 1978–1980 painting, Ways of Worldly Wisdom—Anninus’s Battle [Wege der Weltweisheit-die Hermanns-Schlacht]. Martin Heidegger is reprinted in Tumult (1987), pp. 57–84. Ways of Worldly Wisdom is discussed later, in Chapter 3.


Chapter 1

2. This argument is characteristic of numerous philosophers and social theorists in the twentieth century. In particular, it is one of the main arguments that unites the conceptualization of modernity articulated by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/1947) with that of Heidegger, beginning in his middle period around 1930. It is important to remember, however, that the argument about the centrality of the subject to the definition of modernity is an argument about the concept of the subject and not the subject itself. As has now been extensively argued, the subject – as well as reflection upon it – clearly exists before the modern age. This is suggested by, among other things, the various types of premodern cultural production that manifest a concern for the self, interiority, self-examination, the divided will, and the conflict between outer realities and inward forms of existence. Indeed, as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Heidegger argue, the separation of the subject from its immersion in its world – one of the decisive characteristics of the historical modernity – is already accomplished in human prehistory. What still separates modernity from earlier stages of human history, however, is the relative increase in theorizing about the subject as well as the subject’s growing centrality as the primary source of both truth and society for modern cultural producers. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1969), in particular, pp. 9–87. English translation by John Cumming, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum Press, 1972), pp. 3–80. On the existence of a concern for the subject in medieval literature, see David Aers, “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the Subject’” in *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, David Aers, ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 177–202.

3. Fredric Jameson, for example, argues that the postmodern era corresponds to the end of the “unique self” or “individual subject.” See Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (1982) in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 114–115. Although this article has been extremely influential in cultural studies, it is interesting to note that Jameson has toned down his claims to some extent. Compare, for example, the original essay cited above to the reworked version of the text that forms the first chapter of his book *Postmodernism*, or, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 14–15. In the reworked version, however, Jameson often still falls back into the stereotypical notion of “the death of the subject.” See, for example, Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 20.

4. Indeed, in the theory and practice of German music, the process of de-centering the subject was already well under way by the end of the eighteenth century. See Karl Brausweig, *The Metaphor of Music as a Language in the Enlightenment: Towards a Cultural History of Eighteenth-Century Music Theory* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Michigan, 1997).


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16. This is not to say that existentialism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics are the only perspectives available in German culture in the twentieth century. Nor are they equally relevant at every moment in time. In the 1950s, for example, existentialism had greater prominence among both German cultural producers and audiences than either phenomenology or hermeneutics. On the other hand, in the 1960s, it was the Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches of the Frankfurt School that were more widespread in German culture. At the same time, however, once a cultural perspective or form is introduced, it continues to recirculate in the new works of cultural production that follow it in time.


18. We see this quite clearly, for example, in the intense stream-of-consciousness descriptions found in the works of Dostoyevsky, Heidegger, and Sartre.

19. Compare, for example, Kiefer’s understanding of existentialism, voiced in 1985: “I see in existentialism the obligation to decide. That is the essence of existentialism and at the same time also what is revolutionary in it. It has to do perhaps with something personal.” ["Ich sehe im Existentialismus den Zwang zur Entscheidung, und das ist eigentlich das Wesen des Existentialismus und gleichzeitig auch das Umstürzlerische. Es hat vielleicht mit etwas Persönlichem zu tun."] Jacqueline Burckhardt, hrsg., *Ein Gespräch/Una Discussione: Joseph Beuys, Jannis Kounellis, Anselm Kiefer, Enzo Cucchi* (Zürich: Parkett-Verlag, 1988), p. 22.


22. From the beginning of his career, Kiefer has been critical of Nazi art; he has never simply appropriated it in a positive way. This is suggested very clearly by a number of his earliest books. In addition, Kiefer's critical stance toward Nazi art is suggested by his signature on a September 6, 1986 petition protesting art collector Peter Ludwig's proposal — in the popular news magazine Der Spiegel — that works by Arno Breker should at least be temporarily exhibited in German museums. The petition protesting Ludwig's remarks, entitled "Keine Nazi-Kunst in unsere Museen," as well as other relevant documents, is compiled in Klaus Staeck, ed., Nazi-Kunst ins Museum? (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1988). For Ludwig's comments, collected in various interviews and newspaper articles, see pp. 13-18. For the petition with Kiefer's name underneath, see pp. 150-153. In part the petition reads, "Die großen Künstler unseres Jahrhunderts wurden verfolgt, mit Berufsverbot belegt, ermordet und ins Exil getrieben, damit eine willfährige Staatskunst mit drittklassigen Werken die ideologischen Gebote der Diktatur verkündete. Nazi-Kunst von künstlerischer Qualität ist uns nicht bekannt. Kunst hat auch mit Ethik zu tun. Deshalb rufen wir erneut öffentlich auf: Nazi-Kunst gehört nicht in unsere Museen."


26. Photographs culled from the book projects make up Kiefer's first art magazine photo-essay, "Occupations" ["Besetzungen"], which appeared as the final essay in Interfunktionen, nr. 12 (Cologne, 1975).

27. In particular, Joseph Thorak's Kopf aus dem Denkmal des Jungen Friedrich II and Albert Wredow's Siegesgöttin mit gefallenem Krieger.

28. 1809-1810. Oil on canvas. 110 x 171.5 cm. National Gallery, Berlin.

29. c. 1918. Oil on canvas. 94.8 x 74.8 cm. Kunsthalle, Hamburg.


31. Much of Kiefer's early imagery is already contained in these books. In various permutations, the fields, monuments, and interiors originally photographed in 1968 and 1969 continue even in his most contemporary productions. See, for example, Kiefer's Noch ist Polen nicht verloren (1968-1968) and Kunersdorf (1969–1988), reproduced in Marianne Schmidt-Miescher and Johannes Gachnang, hrsg., Anselm Kiefer, 2. Auflage (Berlin: Nationalgalerie Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 1991), pp. 104 and 108 (hereafter AKN). Or compare pages 50–51 from The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen (1974) (Figure 33) with Brandenburg Heath (1974) (Figure 25) and Bohemia Lies by the Sea [Böhmen liegt beim Meer] (1996) (in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Thus, despite functioning as ambiguous narratives, these books also function like traditional sketchbooks in the context of Kiefer's work as a whole.

32. Although Kiefer does not present himself playing different roles in Heroic Symbols — which stresses fascist identity — he does do so in To Genet. Here, in the latter book, he depicts himself not only as a proto-Nazi but as a pseudo-Norse god.


34. Kiefer returns to images of his own body in 1981, in the book series Gilgamesh and...
Enkidu in the Cedar Forest, a newspaper spread with the same name published in Artforum in 1981, and in many of his most recent paintings from 1995 to 1996.


42. On Ernst's use of frottage, see Werner Spies, Max Ernst-Loplop: The Artist's Other Self (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), pp. 44-47. As Spies notes, Ernst moved from tracings of natural objects to tracings of embossed postcards and other mass-produced objects.

43. In Kiefer's wooden-interior canvases, an atmosphere of danger is evoked in a number of different ways. Danger is evoked through the menacing nature of many of the objects (fire, snakes, blood, weapons, and trapdoors), names, and texts represented. In addition, danger is connoted by the overwhelming size and emptiness of the works, which can make the viewer feel oppressed. Moreover, danger is evoked by Kiefer's strategic employment of deep red to represent both fire and blood. Further, danger is evoked by the traces left by Kiefer's actual singeing of the canvas (an index not of the real world but of a real-world activity). Finally, danger could also be connoted by the optical flicker or rotation of the surface, which at times can also seem oppressive.

44. Reproduced AKB 109.

45. See AKR 30.

46. The great size of the room suggests that it has been constructed by a collective and not by an individual.


48. Kiefer's handwriting and his symbolic objects suggest meaning-intending acts because they all seem to issue from or address an absent spectator who is also an actor. The handwriting is sometimes positioned on the canvas in such a way that the spectator could have written it, and the various swords, bowls of blood, fires, snakes, burning chairs, doors, and trapdoors evoke in us a sense that we could have placed them there or that we have to respond to their presence. And because they seem to either to come from us or to demand our response, the writing and objects produce a sense that we - at least in part - have helped to construct or determine the attic world.

49. The fact that these interiors are also representations of Kiefer's own attic is a point made by a number of critics and curators. See, for example, AKR 22. See also Walter Grass-
50. In 1990, when questioned about his “artistic strategy” [Künstlerische Strategie], Kiefer replied as follows: “Basically there are two different methods: one can go from the general to the particular, or, one can go from the particular to the general. I do the latter. Mostly I choose an entirely banal, trivial or even vulgar point from which to begin.” (“Grundsätzlich gibt es zwei unterschiedliche Methoden: Man kann vom Allgemeinen ins Einzelne gehen, oder man geht vom Einzelnen ins Allgemeine, und das tue ich. Meist wähle ich einen ganz banalen, trivialen oder sogar vulgären Ausgangspunkt.”) (Quoted in Axel Hecht and Alfred Nemezcek, “Bei Anselm Kiefer im Atelier,” Interview with Anselm Kiefer, Art (Germany), January 1990, p. 41.)

51. As Kiefer said in 1987, “I can only make my feelings, thoughts, and will in the paintings. I make them as precise as I can and then after that . . . you decide what the pictures are and what I am” (quoted in Madoff, “A Call to Memory,” p. 130).


53. The irony or criticality of Kiefer’s wooden interiors is produced by their monumentality in combination with their skewed perspective; the optical rotation or flicker that produces the two different viewing temporalities; the representational banality in conjunction with the abstract complexity of the surface; and the spectator’s movement on and off the ideal vantage point (or point of maximum identification).

54. Instead, the “general” result of Kiefer’s own self-analysis seems to be that selfhood is indeed constructed but that – contra Husserl – the possible symbolic structures that condition our egos are too numerous to describe in terms of a universal set of structures and functions. Thus, in his wooden-interior series, Kiefer suggests that, instead of closing the gaps that appear between the individual and his or her social, historical, and natural context, the ambiguities and contradictions that adhere to identity should be preserved and even emphasized – something that his works achieve.

55. Heidegger’s inaugural lecture, after being admitted to the faculty at Freiburg as a Privatdozent, took place on July 27, 1915. Husserl arrived in 1916. However, it was only after Heidegger’s service during World War I that they began to work together in earnest. Heidegger was thus an established scholar in his own right before he entered Husserl’s circle of phenomenological researchers, and it therefore should come as little surprise that Heidegger’s first major work should be a radical reworking of transcendental phenomenology. Still, the contact between Husserl and Heidegger was intense from 1918 until Heidegger’s transfer to Marburg as a full professor in 1923, and Heidegger’s rapid rise through the academic ranks was in part due to Husserl’s estimation of him as the most promising of all the phenomenologists. See Herbert Spiegelberg, The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), pp. 276-277.

56. Being and Time was originally published as volume 8 of Husserl’s journal, Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung. It also came out simultaneously in a separate edition.


59. Although Heidegger’s expressed purpose in Being and Time is to ask anew the question of the meaning of Being (SZ 1/BT 19), the completed portion of the work deals with an analysis of Dasein, or human existence – that being for which an understanding of
Being is possible (SZ 12/BT 32). Heidegger hoped that by discovering the significance of Dasein - which is literally the meaning Dasein projects around itself in order to exist in the world - he might gain a position from which to interpret the meaning of Being; the true structure of reality that discloses itself in response to Dasein's authentic projection. See SZ 151-152/BT 192-194; as well as SZ 15-19/BT 36-40. ("Dasein" - literally "being there" - is the term that Heidegger uses in place of the various other formulations one could use to indicate "the subject." Because they presuppose a separation or gap between subject and the world - a mainstay of the Western metaphysical tradition, as Heidegger sees it - the various older terms for the subject are unacceptable to Heidegger. I shall here use the terms "human existence" and "Dasein" interchangeably.)

60. For Heidegger's discussion of the difference between ontic and ontological, see SZ 11-15/BT 31-35.

61. The term "hermeneutic" is extensively defined later in this chapter. Throughout his development, Heidegger understands language - as well as Dasein and culture in general - as fundamentally constituted in and through difference in both a spatial and a temporal sense. And it is Heidegger's sense of the importance of emphasizing difference that motivates his consistently positive usage of terms such as "opposition" [Auseinandersetzung], "strife" [Streit], and "battle" [Pelemos] throughout his works. Heidegger's model of language also distinguishes between multiple levels of meaning, which range from the side of Dasein to the side of "Being," or the real. In Being and Time, for example, Heidegger makes a primary distinction between "Sinn" and "Bedeutung" - here rendered as meaning and significance, respectively. Significance, for Heidegger, is the relational totality that is projected by Dasein and that forms its world. By projecting a world, Dasein discloses beings according to their inherent possibilities. Meaning, on the other hand, is the "upon which" [das Woraufhin] upon which Dasein projects its world. As such, meaning is the condition for the possibility of significance as well as a richer, more ontological happening of sense formation (more encompassing, more obscure, and somehow more real). As they are used in Being and Time, significance and meaning thus indicate two poles of an alternating process of transcendence between Dasein and reality: Dasein's projection of a horizon of meaning as well as the dismantling of this horizon through an even richer bursting through of Being. See SZ 87/BT 120; SZ 151-152/BT 193-194; SZ 310-316/BT 358-364; SZ 324-325/BT 371-372. This study does not maintain Heidegger's terminological distinction between "meaning" and "significance," since it could defeat his main idea of the essential continuity or congruence between Dasein and Being. The terms are instead used synonymously.

62. That is, a phenomenon generated reflexively out of the phenomenologist's more direct experience of the pure ego and the world contained within its limits. See Ricoeur, Husserl, pp. 52-53.

63. See SZ 52-62/BT 78-90.

64. See SZ 56-57/BT 83; SZ 66-72/BT 95-102.

65. Instead of translating Befindlichkeit as "mood," as do Macquarrie and Robinson, I use the term "ontological disposition" (SZ 134-143/BT 172-182).

66. Understanding also makes possible Dasein's interpretive activity - its articulation of its hermeneutic fore-structure (SZ 142-153/BT 182-195).


68. Heidegger uses two words in Being and Time that could be translated by the English word "interpretation": Auslegung and Interpretation. Although Heidegger does not completely distinguish their meanings, Auslegung seems to be used in a broader sense to cover any activity in which we interpret something "as" something. Interpretation, on the other hand, seems to apply to theoretical or systematic interpretations and, in particular, to Heidegger's interpretation of Dasein's ontological structure in Being and Time. See SZ 148-161/BT 188-203; SZ 199/BT 243-244; and SZ 231-233/BT 275-276.

69. SZ 166-180/BT 210-224. In ordinary German, "verfallen" more generally means falling apart or breaking down.

70. "The formal existential totality of Dasein's ontological structural whole must therefore
be grasped in the following structure: the Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills in the signification of the term 'care,' which is used in a purely ontologically-existential manner" (SZ 192/BT 237).

72. SZ 252-255/BT 296-299.
73. SZ 251/BT 295.
74. SZ 260-267/BT 304-311; SZ 305-310/BT 352-358.
75. SZ 166-180/BT 210-224; SZ 352-364/BT 403-415.
76. SZ 126-130/BT 163-168.
77. SZ 126-7 /BT 164.

79. Heidegger’s discussions of the “other” [der Andere], “being with others” [Mitdasein] are undeveloped in his thinking as a whole.
80. SZ 384–385/BT 436.
87. Cockchafer Fly and Painting = Burning connect the act of painting with burning and destruction. To Paint, on the other hand, connects painting to rain, nourishment, and growth.
90. “Maikafer flieg / der Vater ist im Krieg/ die Mutter ist in Pommerland / Pommerland ist abgebrannt.” In this case, Kiefer is not the only appropriationist: the postwar children’s song gives a new text to an old tune. Not surprisingly, the prewar text of the song is far less violent. It goes: “Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf / Dein Vater hüt’ die Schaf’ / Deine Mutter schütelt’s Bäumelein / fällt herab ein Träumelein.” There are also numerous other parodies of “Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf,” again using the same melody but different lyrics in German culture. See, for example, Ullmann’s opera “Der Kaiser von Atlantis” (1943/1944).
This use of a text that indicates culture's intertextuality - its recycling and recombinative nature - is characteristic of Kiefer's appropriative sensibility. (See Chapter 3.)


92. Of course, the natural sciences are also historical in that a number of their models and formulas have changed over time. However, despite their historical construction, the natural sciences exhibit a much more regular form of truth - one that exhibits far greater temporal duration. This is due to the greater predictive and practical power of the natural sciences in relation to the human sciences.


94. SZ 382–387/BT 434–439.


96. SZ 22/BT 44.


99. Instrumental activity and entertainment/diversion are both possibilities that are present for Dasein in its world.

100. SZ 310–316/BT 358–364.

101. SZ 150/BT 191.


103. SZ 382–387/BT 434–439.


105. Here, "unexamined" means not existentially interpreted. Thus, for Heidegger, already in Being and Time, there are suggestions that the sciences are in conflict with primordial truth.


107. “Meaning is the ‘upon’ which of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something” (SZ 151/BT 193).

108. “Dasein only ‘has’ meaning, so far as the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world can be ‘filled in’ by the entities discoverable in that disclosedness” (SZ 151/BT 193).

109. SZ 384–385/BT 436. Indeed, the German world “Mitteilung” has literary connotations when used as a synonym for communication. It has less “everyday” connotations than other German words for communication such as “Verständigung” and “Unterhaltung.”

110. Although an important concept in Husserl’s later work as well as in Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action, the term “lifeworld” does not play a role in Heidegger’s conceptual system. It is used here – as another term for the “everyday world” – in order to emphasize an aspect of one’s immediate community ignored by Heidegger, namely, the everyday world as a site of a noncoercive and constructive dialogue. In distinction to Heidegger, I find that the everyday world can potentially function as a place wherein opinions can be compared and consensus reached – even if that consensus is simply to agree on certain irreducible differences. As such, the lifeworld is a place where social norms can be developed and reformulated in a potentially nonhegemonic fashion. (See Chapter 2.)

111. Heidegger further exacerbates this singularity of the disclosure of primordial truth – the projection of a thing or being into the structure of its Being – by making the uncoveredness of the real dependent on Dasein’s ability to uncover. “‘There is’ truth only in so far as Dasein is and so long as Dasein is. Entities are uncovered only when Dasein is; and only as long as Dasein is, are they disclosed” (SZ 226/BT 269).


114. According to Rosenthal, “Kiefer first made charcoal drawings of the individuals, then cut lines in pieces of wood, which he printed on these drawings (Interview, December 1986)” (Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, p. 157, n. 22). Rosenthal does not mention the photographic base of these “woodcuts.” According to Thomas McEvilley, “‘Emulsion,’ in Kiefer’s terminology, means pigment and water bound together with wallpaper glue; it is intended as an analogue of the alchemical combination of fire (color) and water” (Thomas McEvilley, “Communication and Transcendence in Kiefer’s New Work: Simultaneously Entering the Body and Leaving the Body,” in Anselm Kiefer: I Hold All Indias in My Hand [London: Anthony d’Offay Gallery, 1996], p. 17).


116. The drawn and printed woodcuts are based on preexisting photographs. For this reason, Kiefer’s woodcuts are clearly not traditional.


118. In addition to being constructed as a work of art in itself, the volume has also functioned as Kiefer’s photographic “sketch book.” A number of his large-scale canvases from 1974 and 1975, for example, are modeled from the photographs collected in this work.

119. Indeed, the image identified as “Reisenbach” on pages 50-51 (Figure 33) forms the basis for a large field path painting, made in the same year, and identified as “Brandenburg Heath” [Märkische Heide] (1974) (Figure 25). Kiefer’s handwritten labels thus seem to be used metaphorically rather than as a way to label the true source of the image.

120. For an argument of this kind see, for example, Yve-Alain Bois, “Painting: The Task of Mourning” in Yve-Alain Bois, Painting as Model (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 229-244. As Bois puts it, “Photography and mass production were also at the base of the essentialist urge of modernist painting. Challenged by the mechanical apparatus of photography, and by the mass-produced, painting had to redefine its status, to reclaim a specific domain (much in the way this was done during the Renaissance, when painting was posited as one of the ‘liberal arts’ as opposed to the ‘mechanical arts’)” (Bois, Painting, p. 231). See also Thierry de Duve, Kant After Duchamp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 148-149.

121. Although not discussed in the above analyses, the last two books, The Face of the German People and The Burning of the Rural District of Buchen, also pose existential questions. The first evokes the question of an ideal German type; the second plays with the idea of the artist as a victimizer or destroyer.

122. In Being and Time, however, history is conceived simply as the history of ontology and thus is understood in a more limited fashion than in Heidegger’s later works.


124. SZ 15-19/BT 36-40.

125. SZ 19-27/BT 41-49.

126. Heidegger distinguishes metaphysical and nonmetaphysical meanings of these terms. In


129. For example, in his “Letter on Humanism” (1946–1947) Heidegger notes that the third section of *Being and Time*, Part I, “was held back because thinking failed in the adequate saying of this turning and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics” (Martin Heidegger, “Brief über den Humanismus,” WM 325/BW 208).


131. See also WM 198–199/BW 140–141. Here Heidegger links the turning directly to the change in his concept of truth. He furthermore states that this turning was made possible by a turning in the history of Being itself.

132. At one point, Heidegger goes so far as to say, “[T]he expression ‘Dasein,’ however, shows plainly that ‘in the first instance’ this entity is unrelated to others,” although “of course it can still be ‘with’ others afterwards” (SZ 120/BT 156). See also Frederick A. Olafson, *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 70–74.

133. WM 181, 185/BW 123, 127.


137. WM 183–189/BW 125–130.

138. WM 189–196/BW 130–137.

139. WM 193–196/BW 135–137.

140. WM 191/BW 132–133.

Chapter 2


4. Heidegger would reject the term "collective subject" – just as he rejects the term "subject" – because he feels that it supports a false separation between human consciousness and the world and makes human beings the central point of reference and justification for all actions. According to Heidegger, this separation, which is one of the major results of the development of Western metaphysics and its eventual and triumphant transformation into the scientific world view, helps obscure modern humanity's experience of Being. Contrary to Heidegger, I retain the terms "subject" and "collective subject" in this study because a suppression of these concepts leads to surreptitious generalizations of particular points of view into general ones—something that is well demonstrated in the writings of Heidegger's middle and late periods. By retaining these terms, however, I do not wish to suggest that Heidegger's critique is without merit. As similar arguments put forth by the Frankfurt School suggest, the unbridled affirmation of subjectivity is problematic. Yet, as their writings show, one can be critical of this development without rejecting the term. On Heidegger's critique of subjectivity and its relation to the modern scientific world view, see Chapter 3. On the Frankfurt School's critique of subjectivity, see, for example, Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment.


6. I use the neologism "undecidability," rather than a word based on the more usual term, "indecisive," because I want to emphasize the almost "objective" character of the conflict that Kiefer's works evoke. Kiefer's best works are not indefinite or undefined. Instead, they clearly project a set of conflicting interpretations, thereby producing doubts about Kiefer's intentions when creating the work and thus about the existential situation in which the spectator is forced in part to stand. For this reason, Kiefer's undecidable works produce dialogue with others in one's own world because this is the only way to adjudicate the conflict of interpretations they evoke.


9. Heidegger's accounts of the events, which have been disputed by numerous scholars, can be found in "The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," and "Spiegel Interview with Martin Heidegger," both of which are reprinted in English in Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering, Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers, translated by Lisa Harries (New York: Paragon House, 1990) (hereafter MHNS).


11. Heidegger helped draft a provisional new university constitution, which came into effect on August 21, 1933. Among its more important articles were the following: (1) The rector was to be appointed by the minister of culture, education, and justice, with the university being given no say in the appointment. (2) There was to be no term limit on the rector's time in office. (3) The rector appointed deans of the faculties by himself. The new constitution thus had the effect of consolidating power in the hands of the rector. See MH 198-199.

12. MH 151.

13. Heidegger attempted to protect two Jewish professors: Eduard Fraenkel and Georg von Hevesy. Ott, however, suggests that Heidegger's motivations were perhaps not entirely altruistic. When the ministry of education dismissed Fraenkel and kept von Hevesy, Heidegger had to submit to its decision. Von Hevesy left a year later. See MH 206-208.

14. MH 189.

15. See Guido Schneeberger, Nachlese zu Heidegger: Dokumente zu seinem Leben und
As Heidegger wrote in 1945, "On the whole, a threefold consideration determined me to assume the rectorate:

1. At the time, I saw in the movement that had come to power the possibility of an inner self-collection and of a renewal of the people, and a path toward the discovery of its historical-Western purpose. I believed that the university, renewing itself, might also be called to significantly participate in the inner self-collection of the people.

2. For that reason, I saw the rectorate as a possibility to lead all capable forces - regardless of party membership and party doctrine - toward this process of reflection and renewal, and to strengthen and secure the influence of these forces.


17. SDU 30/MHNS 23.
19. Heidegger was elected to the rectorship on April 21, 1933, by the Freiburg University faculty senate. Although the vote was nearly unanimous, a number of professors entitled to vote were not present. Furthermore, an additional thirteen out of ninety-three professors were no longer entitled to vote because they were Jewish. Heidegger’s Rectorial Address was delivered publicly on April 27, 1933. See MH 146–147.
20. SDU 9/MHNS 5.
22. SDU 14/MHNS 9.
23. SDU 14/MHNS 9.
24. SDU 14/MHNS 9.
25. SDU 15/MHNS 10.
26. SDU 15/MHNS 10.
27. SDU 16/MHNS 11.
29. SDU 18/MHNS 12–13.
30. SDU 14/MHNS 9.
31. Germany’s purpose in withdrawing from the League of Nations was rearmament. “Until rearmament reached a certain stage Germany was highly vulnerable to any preventive action which France or the other Powers might take, and the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles could be used to provide grounds for such intervention” (Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny [1952; revised reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1962], p. 321). In service of the cause of rearmament, Hitler thus emphasized the unequal treatment of Germany by the victors after World War I, and he argued that the League of Nations was one of the means by which the victors perpetuated this uneven situation. In his famous “Peace Speech” [Friedensrede], delivered before the Reichstag on May 17, 1933, Hitler called for the victors to finally disarm (Bullock, Hitler, p. 321). After the French refused, “Hitler announced, on October 14, 1933, that Germany was forced, because it was denied equal rights, to withdraw from the ongoing Geneva Disarmament Conference that had opened on February 2, 1932, and the League of Nations” (Bullock, Hitler, p. 322). Bullock’s interpretation is supported by the more recent German historiography; see Ian Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation, 2nd ed. (1985; reprint, London: Edward Arnold, 1989), p. 116. See also J. Noakes and
as did

is absent from Heidegger's
to the election of a single (Nazi) party slate to the Reichstag.

G. Pridham, eds., Nazism 1919–1945, vol. 3, Foreign Policy, War, and Racial Extermination: A Documentary Reader (Exeter, Great Britain: University of Exeter Press, 1988), p. 659. As Bullock notes, "Hitler's cleverest stroke was to announce, on the same day as the withdrawal from the League, that he would submit his decision at once to a plebiscite. This was to invoke the sanctions of democracy against the democratic nations" (Bullock, Hitler, p. 324). Heidegger's speech also uses the rhetoric of collective self-determination to justify Germany's withdrawal from the League, linking this withdrawal – as did the Nazis themselves – to the election of a single (Nazi) party slate to the Reichstag.


34. Löwith, Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism, p. 162.

35. NGKR 198/MHNS 45–46.

36. As Heidegger explained in 1945, "After April 1934, I lived outside the university inasmuch as I no longer concerned myself with 'what went on,' and instead tried, to the best of my ability, to carry out only what was absolutely necessary in my teaching obligations. But in the following years even teaching was more a conversation of essential thinking with itself. Perhaps it touched and awakened people here and there, but it did not shape itself into a developing structure of a definite conduct, which might in turn have given rise to something primordial." (SDU 38–39/MHNS 29.)

37. As he said in 1966, "[T]oday, and today more resolutely than ever, I would repeat the speech on the 'Self-Assertion of the German University,' though admittedly without referring to nationalism. Society has taken the place of the nation [Volk]" (MHNS 46). This sentence is not in the Spiegel interview published in 1976; see NGKR 198. It was, however, included in Heidegger's own copy of the interview, which the Spiegel sent him in 1966 and which he then corrected. The Spiegel printed the "uncorrected" version. The "corrected" version, however, appears in the English translation cited above. Hugo Ott notes that Heidegger does not appear to have ever retracted his "German Men and Women" speech either. See MH 204.

38. As Heidegger states in the Preface of 1953 [Vorbemerkung], although the language has been reworked for publication, there is "no change in the content" (Martin Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik, p. 4. Auflage (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1976), n.p. [hereafter EM]. Martin Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics, translated by Ralph Mannheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. vi [hereafter IM]). For this reason, and despite a few later interpolations, it is permissible, I believe, to take the published text as a more or less accurate document of Heidegger's aesthetic thinking of the 1930s.


40. Löwith, Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism, p. 42, n. 42.

41. The greatest specificity that Heidegger achieves in his speech is the argument that, by withdrawing from the League of Nations, Germany will gain "self-accountability" [Selbsterantwortung]. This self-accountability will ultimately help produce "a true community of peoples" [Volksgemeinschaft] as opposed to the "untenable, bondless reduction to world brotherhood" fostered by the League of Nations. See Martin Heidegger, "Deutsche Männer und Frauen!" in Schneeberger, Nachlese zu Heidegger, pp. 144–146. Richard Wolin, ed., The Heidegger Controversy, pp. 47–49. Once again, specific political content – a set of clearly defined international policy goals – is absent from Heidegger's thinking.
42. In the closing paragraphs of the “Rectorial Address,” for example, after asking his audi­
ence, “Do we, or do we not, will the essence of the German university?,” Heidegger
warns: “But no one will even ask us whether we do or do not will, when the spiritual
strength of the West fails and its joints crack, when this moribund semblance of a cul­
ture caves in and drags all forces into confusion and lets them suffocate in madness”
(SDU 19/MHNS 13).

43. EM 29/IM 38.
44. EM 29/IM 38.
45. EM 28/IM 37.
48. Plato and Aristotle are also analyzed, but primarily as essential contributors to the spiri­
tual decline - thinkers who, despite their greatness and their importance to the history
of Western thought, manage to cover up the power and strangeness of the first begin­
ing. See EM 137–149/IM 179–196.
49. These English translations are naturally only approximations - rough guides to the origi­
nal Greek meaning. In addition, I have followed Heidegger’s own somewhat idiosyn­
cratic German translations of the Greek terms here.
50. See in particular EM 47–48/IM 62, EM 84/IM 110, EM 109–110/IM 144, EM 117/IM
51. “das aufgehende Sichaufrichten, das in sich verweilende Sichentfalten. In diesem Wal­
ten sind aus ursprünglicher Einheit Ruhe und Bewegung verschlossen und eröffnet.
Dieses Walten ist das im Denken noch unbewältigt überwältigende Anwesende, worin das
Anwesende als Seiendes west” (EM 47/IM 61. Translation altered).
52. EM 79–80/IM 104–105.
53. EM 79/IM 104.
54. “Where struggle ceases, what does is not vanish, but the world turns away. What is is
no longer asserted (i.e. preserved as such). Now it is merely found ready-made; it is
datum. The end result is no longer that which is impressed into limits (i.e. placed in its
form); it is merely finished and as such available to everyone, already there, no longer
embodying any world – now man does as he pleases with what is available. That which
is becomes an object, either to be beheld (view, image) or to be acted upon (product and
calculation). The original world-making power, physis, degenerates into a prototype to
be copied and imitated. Nature becomes a special field, differentiated from art and every­
thing that can be fashioned according to plan.” (“Wo der Kampf aussetzt, verschwin­
det zwar das Seiende nicht, aber Welt wendet sich weg. Das Seiende wird nicht mehr
behauptet (d. h. als solches gewahrt). Es wird jetzt nur vor-gesehen, ist Befund. Das
Vollendete ist nicht mehr das in Grenzen Geschlagene (d. h. in seine Gestalt Gestellte),
sondern nur noch das Fertige, als solches für jedermann Verfügbare, das Vorhandene,
darin keine Welt mehr weltet – vielmehr schaltet und waltet jetzt der Mensch mit dem
Verfügbaren. Das Seiende wird Gegenstand, sei es für das Betrachten (Anblick, Bild), sei
es für das Machen, als Gemachte und Berechnung. Das ursprünglich Weltende, die
physis, fällt jetzt herab zum Vorbild für das Abbilden und Nachmachen. Natur wird jetzt
ein besonderer Bereich im Unterschied zur Kunst und zu allem Herstellbaren und Plan­
mäßigen.”) (EM 48 IM/62–63.)
55. In Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger translates Fragment 53 as follows: “Conflict is
for all (that is present) the creator that causes to emerge, but (also) for all the domi­
nant preserver. For it makes some to appear as gods, others as humans; it creates (shows)
some as slaves, others as free beings.” (“Auseinandersetzung ist allem (Anwesenden)
zwar Erzeuger (der aufgehen läßt), allem aber (auch) waltender Bewahrer. Sie läßt näm­
lieh die einen als Götter erscheinen, die anderen als Menschen, die einen stellt sie
heraus als Knechte, die anderen aber als Freie.”) (EM 47/IM 61–62. Translation altered
slightly.) For an excellent account of the importance of Heraclitus’s concept of pólemos
to Heidegger’s thinking, see Charles Gregory Fried, Heidegger’s ‘Pólemos’: From Being to
57. EM 47/IM 62.
58. EM 47/IM 62.
60. "Die polis ist die Geschichtsstätte, das Da, in dem, aus dem und für das Geschichte geschieht. Zu dieser Geschichtsstätte gehören die Götter, die Tempel, die Priester, die Feste, die Spiele, die Dichter, der Denker, der Herrscher, der Rat der Alten, die Volksversammlung, die Streitmacht und die Schiffe. All dieses gehört nicht erst dadurch zur polis, ist nicht dadurch politisch, daβ es zu einem Staatmann und einem Feldherrn und zu den Staatsgeschäften eine Beziehung aufnimmt. Vielmehr ist das Gemeinte politisch, d.h. an der Geschichtsstätte, insofern z.B. die Dichter nur, aber dann wirklich Denker, indem die Priester nur, aber dann wirklich Priester, indem die Herrscher nur, aber dann wirklich Herrscher sind." (EM 117/IM 152–153.)
61. "But we cannot regard Oedipus only as the man who meets his downfall; we must see him as the embodiment of Greek being-there, who most radically and wildly asserts its fundamental passion, the passion for disclosure of being, i.e., the struggle for being itself." ["Wir dürfen aber Oedipus nicht nur als den Menschen sehen, der zu Fall kommt, wir müssen in Oedipus jene Gestalt des griechischen Daseins begreifen, in der sich dessen Grundleidenschaft ins Weiteste und Wildeste vorwagt, die Leidenschaft der Sinsentheilung, d.h. des Kampfes um das Sein selbst."] (EM 81/IM 107.) On Heidegger's understanding of Antigone, see HHDI 63–152/HHTI 51–122.
63. EM 84/IM 110. Translation altered. Heidegger often writes "decision" [Entscheidung] as "de-cision" [Ent-scheidung] in order to emphasize its nature as a separation or a cutting apart of beings and possibilities.
64. EM 128/IM 168.
65. EM 109–110/IM 144.
68. "Das Wahre ist nicht für jedermann, sondern nur für die Starken" (EM 102/IM 133).
69. EM 102/IM 133.
70. The full text of this last sentence is as follows: "Because being as logos is basic gathering, not mass and turmoil in which everything has as much or as little value as everything else, rank and domination are implicit in Being." ["Weil das Sein als Logos ursprüngliche Sammlung ist, kein Geschiebe und Gemenge, wo jegliches gleichviel und gleichwenig gilt, gehört zum Sein der Rang, die Herrschaft."] (EM 101/IM 133.)
71. 1986. Oil, acrylic, and emulsion on canvas, with olive branches, iron, gold leaf and lead. 86 5/8 x 149 5/8 inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David Pincus, Wynnewood, PA. Reproduced: AKR pl. 80, p. 148.
74. 1977. 108 pages. Acrylic and emulsion on original photographs, with a cardboard cover. 26 3/8 x 16 1/2 x 3 15/16 inches. Private collection. Reproduced: AKB 210–223. Other works by Kiefer that deal directly with the Holocaust include the Margarete and Shulamith straw paintings of the early to mid-1980s and his 1990 Shulamith book series.
75. AKR 115 and 127.
76. Although Rosenthal's interpretation has been abridged to some extent, at no point does he suggest that Iron Path could also refer to the Holocaust. This is not to say that he
although not as much as one might want. On the other hand, because Rosenthal has conducted a number of significant — but unfortunately unpublished — discussions with Kiefer about the meaning of his works and reproduced them as part of his own reading of Kiefer’s art, the Rosenthal catalogue is essential for art historians working on Kiefer. It is a collection of clear and articulate interpretations of Kiefer’s art made with Kiefer’s guidance and released with his approval. For this reason, although I disagree with Rosenthal’s univocal reading of Iron Path, my study is in general highly indebted to his pioneering work. See AKR 143.


78. Charles W. Haxthausen notes the discrepancy between Kiefer’s German and international reception in his excellent article, “The Word, the Book and Anselm Kiefer,” *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 133, no. 1065 (December 1991), p. 846. Lisa R. Saltzman develops this point at length; see Lisa R. Saltzman, *Art after Auschwitz: Anselm Kiefer and the Possibilities of Representation* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Harvard University, 1994). The evidence generally cited to prove the fact of Kiefer’s initial rejection by the German critics is the spate of negative reviews, beginning in June of 1980, around the opening of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Curated by Klaus Gollwitz, the director of the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, the German Pavilion was intended to introduce German neoexpressionism to a wider international audience through the work of two of its more prominent practitioners, Anselm Kiefer and Georg Baselitz. Consisting of three rooms, the German Pavilion featured Baselitz’s primitivist wooden work *Model for a Sculpture* (1980) in its central space: a crudely carved image of Hitler raising his right arm in the all-too-familiar Nazi salute. In addition, Baselitz also exhibited three massive oil paintings, *The German School, The Studio, and The Family*, all from 1980. In the two rooms to either side of the main space, a large series of books and paintings by Kiefer, dating from 1970 to 1978, were exhibited under the title “Burning, Wasting, Sinkling, Obscuring” (*Verbrennen, Verholzen, Versenken, Versanden*). Attracting the most attention were the paintings *Germany’s Spiritual Heroes* (1973) (Figure 20), discussed earlier, and four versions of *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, all from 1977 to 1978. (I will discuss one of these latter canvases in Chapter 3 (Figure 74.)) See Anselm Kiefer, *Verbrennen, Verholzen, Versenken, Versanden* (exhibition catalogue), Vorwort von Klaus Gollwitz, Kommentar von R. H. Fuchs (Biennale Venedig 1980: Deutscher Pavillon). Among the German critics who attacked the German Pavilion show were Werner Spies, Peter Iden, and Petra Kiphoff. See Werner Spies, “Überdosis an Teutschem: Die Kunstbiennale von Venedig eröffnet,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr. 126 (2 Juni 1980), p. 19; Peter Iden, “Die Lieben der Kommissare: Zur Eröffnung der diesjährigen Kunst-Biennale von Venedig,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Nr. 128 (4 Juni 1980), p. 7; and Petra Kiphoff, “Die Lust an der Angst — der deutsche Holzweg,” *Die Zeit*, Nr. 24 (6 Juni 1980), p. 42. Interestingly, the left-wing German critic Klaus Wagenbach defended the German Pavilion show, as did Bazan Brock. In addition, Rudi Fuchs, the Dutch curator and later director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, who wrote the commentary to the catalogue on Kiefer’s works for the Biennale, also responded to the show’s critics. See Klaus Wagenbach, “‘Neue Wilde,’ teutonisch, faschistisch?,” *Freunde der Kunst* 5 (1980), pp. 138–141; Bazan Brock, “Avantgarde and Mythos,” *Kunstforum International*, Nr. 40 (April 1980), pp. 86–103; and Rudi Fuchs, “Die Kritik reicht Blut und greift an,” *Der Spiegel* 26 (23 Juni 1980), pp. 157–158. Kiefer’s 1981 show at the Paul Maenz Gallery in Cologne, from January 9 to February 7 also drew negative criticism; see, for example, Jörg Jöhne, “Anselm Kiefer: Galerie Paul Maenz, Köln,” *Kunstforum International*, Nr. 43 (Januar 1981), pp. 148–149. In addition, for perhaps the most articulate attack on Kiefer’s work...
by a German critic (albeit one who had recently moved to North America), see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October*, no. 16 (Spring 1981), pp. 39–68. Slightly later, another German critic, Wolfgang Max Faust, on the other hand, defended Kiefer; see Wolfgang Max Faust, "Deutsche Kunst, hier, heute." *Kunstforum International*, no. 47 (December/January 1982), pp. 24–40.


80. Craig Owens, for example, was highly critical of Kiefer. As Owens put it, "Chia, Cucchi, Clemente, Mariani, Baselitz, Lüpertz, Middendorf, Petoing, Peneck, Kiefer, Schnabel . . . these and other artists are engaged not (as is frequently claimed by critics who find mirrored in this art their own frustration with the radical art of the present) in the recovery and reinvestment of tradition, but rather in declaring its bankruptcy – specifically, the bankruptcy of the modernist tradition. Everywhere we turn today the radical impulse that motivated modernism – its commitment to transgression – is treated as the object of parody and insult. What we are witnessing, then, is the wholesale liquidation of the entire modernist legacy." (Craig Owens, "Honor, Power, and the Love of Women," in Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992], p. 147. Originally published in *Art in America* [January 1983], pp. 9–13.) In addition to criticizing Kiefer, among others, for his aesthetic regressiveness (his "antimodernism"), Owens also finds him politically suspect: "What we are witnessing, then, is the emergence of a new – or renewed – authoritarianism masquerading as antiauthoritarianism . . . The celebration of ‘traditional values’ – the hallmark of authoritarian discourse – becomes the agenda of a supposedly politically motivated art (Syberberg, Anselm Kiefer, but also Gilbert & George)" (Owens, "Honor," p. 149). In addition, the German critics Wolfgang Max Faust and Gerd de Vries evaluated Kiefer positively in their important book on contemporary German art, *Hunger Nach Bildern* (1982). Writing on Kiefer’s paintings, they argue, that "In no way can one read them as examples of ideological propaganda, as criticism has done so frequently until now, because this criticism – without looking carefully – lets itself be determined by Kiefer’s themes alone. His themes are unusual, in a certain way anachronistic and in any case laden with problems. That these themes have brought forth negative criticism is no accident, because they are closely bound to repressions and taboos that are still virulent in Germany." (Wolfgang Max Faust und Gerd de Vries, *Hunger Nach Bildern: Deutsche Malerei der Gegenwart* [Köln: duMont, 1982], p. 72.) Moreover, the German critic Benjamin H. D. Buchloh seems to have moved from an initially positive opinion of Kiefer’s early works to one that is now overwhelmingly negative. Buchloh, for example, published Kiefer’s early “Occupations” series in 1975, when Buchloh was the editor of the German art magazine *Interkonventionen* – an action that led, according to Buchloh, to a boycott of the journal. See Saltzman, *Art after Auschwitz*, pp. 142–143. In his writings since the early 1980s, Buchloh has been extremely critical of Kiefer’s work. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "A Note on Gerhard Richter’s October 18, 1977," *October*, no. 46 (Spring 1989), pp. 89–109, in particular, note 5. In addition, Andreas Huyssen, a German cultural theorist also teaching in the United States, has remained consistently positive on the subject of Kiefer. Huyssen’s writings, which are among the best on Kiefer, are extremely responsive to Kiefer’s intentional ambiguity. See Andreas Huyssen, "Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth," *October*, no. 48 (Spring 1989), pp. 25–45, and Huyssen, "Kiefer in Berlin," *October*, no. 62 (Fall 1992), pp. 85–101.

82. H 57/PLT 71


84. As Heidegger's thinking develops, he becomes more and more explicit that the true and the real correspond. As he puts it in "The Origin of the Work of Art," "The true is what corresponds to the real, and the real is what is in truth." ['Wahr ist, was dem Wirklichen entspricht, und wirklich ist, was in Wahrheit ist.'] (H 35-36/PLT 50.)

85. H 18-19/PLT 33-34.

86. H 20-21/PLT 35-36.

87. Heidegger defines reliability as the essential Being of equipment – that which gathers all things. See H 19/PLT 34.

88. H 20/PLT 36.

89. "Streit" is yet another term – like *p6lemos*, "Kampf," and "Auseinandersetzung" – which Heidegger uses to describe the interchange between human beings and Being as well as the passage back and forth between the appearing and concealing of different aspects of the work of art. Although it is meant to carry connotations of war or struggle, "Streit," like these other terms, is also meant to transmit a sense of a tensed relating to one another of two partners – a relation that allows each partner to retain its differences and, through opposition, reveal its true nature. See H 34-35/PLT 49.

90. H 49/PLT 63.

91. H 30/PLT 45.

92. H 28/PLT 42.

93. H 32-33/PLT 47.


95. H 34/PLT 48-49.

96. H 27/PLT 41-42.


98. H 27/PLT 42.

99. For Heidegger, when something shows itself in terms of its own essential form or outlines, its movement does not stop. Instead, a form or an outline is always a holding together of measure and unmeasure. Hence, it is always oscillating between constructive and deconstructive motions. See H 56-57/PLT 70 and H 68-69/PLT 82-83.

100. H 27-28/PLT 42.

101. H 41/PLT 55.

102. Heidegger develops this idea in "The Origin of the Work of Art" through his definition of the work of art as an "origin" [Ursprung] – literally, a primordial leap. See H 64/PLT 77-78.

103. H 53/PLT 66.

104. H 52/PLT 66.


106. H 54/PLT 68.

107. H 63/PLT 77.

108. According to Heidegger, such preservers are as essential to the work of art as its creator (H 57/PLT 71). And as mentioned above, it is ultimately Being that is the dominant origin of the work of art.
For example, at the end of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger asserts that his reflection on art is absolutely necessary in order for the preservers to perform their much needed function. Without it, they cannot find the “standpoint” [Standort] from which they can receive the trust of the work’s truth, and presumably art cannot exert its world-historical political effect. See H 64/PLT 78.

Heidegger never identifies the work in his text. As Meyer Schapiro notes, there are eight possible paintings of shoes by Van Gogh that were exhibited by the time Heidegger wrote his essay. More than thirty years after Heidegger first wrote and delivered his essay, Schapiro identifies the work that Heidegger writes about as Van Gogh’s *Old Shoes with Laces* (1886) in the Vincent van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, on the basis of a letter that Heidegger wrote to Schapiro in 1965, that identified the work as the one that Heidegger had seen in a show in Amsterdam in March 1930. See Meyer Schapiro, “The Still Life as a Personal Object – A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh,” in Marianne Simonel, ed., *The Reach of the Mind: Essays in Memory of Kurt Goldstein* (New York: Springer, 1968), pp. 203–209.

This does not mean, of course, that today one has to live with and tolerate all differences. The Nazi world view, as *Iron Path* reminds the viewer, was also “different.” Their world view, however, was one that sought to suppress difference, and ideologies that seek to close down the public sphere, as *Iron Path* suggests, should be actively resisted.

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118. AKR 76.


121. Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* (1984), translated by P. S. Falla (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 7–8. Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, p. 309. Hitler was very conscious of the symbolic role that the Chancellery was supposed to play. As he said in the Sportpalast in Berlin to some of the nearly 7,000 workers who had labored on the 1938–1939 remodeling and reconstruction of the building, “I stand here as representative of the German people. And whenever I receive anyone in the Chancellery, it is not the private individual Adolf Hitler who receives him, but the leader of the German nation – and therefore it is not I who receive him, but Germany through me. For that reason I want these rooms to be in keeping with their high mission. Every individual has contributed to a structure that will outlast the centuries and will speak to posterity of our times. This is the first architectural creation of the new, great German Reich!” (Adolf Hitler, quoted in Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, p. 114.)


123. Hitler and the NSDAP were well aware of the ideological function of architecture. As Barbara Miller Lane points out, already “during the early years of the Weimar Republic, Hitler had absorbed the idea, either from the writings of the cultural pessimists of the
turn of the century or perhaps from the radical architects, that great art is the product of national and political greatness" (Barbara Miller Lane, Architecture and Politics in Germany: 1918–1945 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968; reprint 1985], p. 187). In addition, the Nazis had from early on propagandized against modernist architecture as a sign of Germany’s spiritual degeneration. This in turn committed them to a positive architectural policy after they took power in 1933. "The new government accepted this commitment willingly – again and again its leaders expressed the view that Nazi culture and society must find a reflection in a specifically ‘National Socialist’ architecture. On the basis of these views, the new regime instituted a huge building program and accompanied it with an extensive propaganda campaign which constantly stressed the ideological significance of Nazi architecture. In this way, architecture achieved unprecedented political significance in the Nazi state."

(Lane, Architecture and Politics, p. 185.) Despite the ideological nature of National Socialist construction policies, Nazi architecture encompassed a wide variety of styles – a result of the radically differing views on the part of the leaders who commissioned the buildings. The New Reich Chancellery was one of Hitler’s commissions – along with Paul Ludwig Troost’s House of German Art in Munich and Albert Speer’s parade grounds and assembly halls in Nuremberg – and thus reflects his tastes and architectural concepts most directly. "Planned by his personal architects, whose designs he closely supervised, these buildings were intended to express ‘the largeness of scale ... of national life’ and were carried out in a modernized neoclassical style which conformed to Hitler’s desire to bring the ‘Greek spirit’ up to date” (Lane, Architecture and Politics, pp. 190–191).


125. Peter Adam, Art of the Third Reich, p. 256.

126. If the ruins of the building had been left undisturbed, these unsightly elements would in time probably have fallen away – thereby fulfilling Speer’s intentions (as outlined later).

127. Speer, Inside the Third Reich, p. 56. As Speer continues in a footnote, "To this end we planned to avoid, as far as possible, all such elements of modern construction as steel girders and reinforced concrete, which are subject to weathering. Despite their height, the walls were intended to withstand the impact of the wind even if the roofs and ceilings were so neglected that they no longer braced the walls. The static factors were calculated with this in mind.” (Speer, Inside the Third Reich, p. 528.)

128. This play of different forms of depth and surface articulation recalls Greenberg’s discussion of the play between illusionary depth, literal and depicted flatness, and bas-relief in the cubist paintings and collages of Picasso and Braque. See Clement Greenberg, “Collage” in Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture: Critical Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 70–83.

129. Heidegger repeats this argument – in an elaborated form – in his lecture course on “Hölderlin’s Hymn ‘The Ister’” delivered in the summer semester of 1942 at the University of Freiburg. See HHD1 63–152/HHT1 51–122. For simplicity’s sake, I have followed Heidegger’s account in Introduction to Metaphysics. There is much, however, in Heidegger’s Hölderlin lectures that would be interesting to examine in relation to Kiefer, in particular, Heidegger’s readings of Hölderlin’s river hymns, “Der Rhein” and “Der Ister,” which could be related to Kiefer’s large painting The Rhein [Der Rhein] (1983) as well as his book The Source of the Danube [Die Donauquelle] (1977/1978), published in 1978 as a multiple of 500 copies by Kiefer’s (then) dealer Michael Werner in Cologne. (The Ister is another name for the Danube; see HHD1 2, 24/HHT1 2, 21.) Other aspects of Heidegger’s thinking in this lecture that would be interesting to develop in conjunction with Kiefer’s art are, first, Heidegger’s characterization of Being as a ‘hearth’ [Herd] (see


Thus, according to Heidegger, creative man is “strange” [deinon] because he departs from everything familiar and tends toward the strange in the sense of the overpowering (i.e., as Being): “We are taking the strange, the uncanny [das Unheimliche], as that which casts us out of the ‘homely’, i.e. the customary, familiar, secure. The unhomely [Unheimtische] prevents us from making ourselves at home and therein it is overpowering. But man is the strangest of all [das Unheimlichte], not only because he passes his life [sein Wesen verbringt] amid the strange understood in this sense but because he departs from his customary, familiar limits [gewohnten, heimischen Grenzen], because he is the violent one, who, tending toward the strange in the sense of the overpowering [das Unheimlichte im Sinne des Übergewaltigenden], surpasses the limit of the familiar [das Heimische].” (EM 115–116/150–151.)


140. AKB p. 15.


143. Anselm Kiefer, Interview with Mark Rosenthal, December 1986. See AKB 60.

144. Some of the books also contain fragments of original photographs. See AKB 363.


150. AKR 49.

151. AKR 66–72.

152. The sense of teleology is generated by Kiefer’s juxtaposition of Mondrian-like black bands and squares with the trunk and branches of a tree, since this juxtaposition recalls Mondrian’s development of his completely nonobjective form of art by means of successive stages of abstraction from natural motifs such as trees and water.

153. Earlier works in German culture that seem to attack abstract art for its “repressive” nature are *Modern Art* [Moderne Kunst] (1968) and *Higher Powers Command: Paint the Upper Right Corner Black!* [Höhere Wesen befehlen: rechte obere Ecke schwarz malen!] (1969), both by Sigmar Polke. See *Sigmar Polke* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1990), pis. 19 and 22.


155. AKR 35.


159. AKR 121.

160. AKR 143.


163. See, in particular, the paintings contained in the catalogue *Anselm Kiefer: Bilder und Bücher*. These somewhat heavy-handed works are among the least convincing that Kiefer has created and exemplify quite well the reasons why his representational abilities are frequently criticized. See, for example, Robert Hughes, *Anselm Kiefer* in Robert Hughes, *Nothing If Not Critical: Selected Essays on Art and Artists* (New York: Penguin, 1990), in particular, p. 330. (Hughes’s review is reprinted from a 1987 issue of *Time*.) See also Hilton Kramer, “The Anselm Kiefer Retrospective,” *The New Criterion* (February 1988), pp. 1–4.


165. AKR 80.
Chapter 3


2. See, for example, Grosz’s series of city works, such as the paintings *Metropolis* [Die Großstadt] (1916–1917) and *Dedicated to Oskar Panizza* [Widmung an Oskar Panizza] (1917–1918) and many of his etchings of the teens and 1920s. See also Max Ernst’s series of works from 1933 to 1936, which include *The Petrified City* [La Ville pétrolière] (1933) and *The Entire City* [La ville entière] (1935–1936), as well as the series of works he painted in the early 1940s entitled *Europe After the Rain* [L’Europe après la pluie]. For an excellent discussion of the surrealist environment, see Sidra Stich, *Anxious Visions: Surrealist Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), pp. 80–129. Grosz and Ernst were themselves influenced by the theme of the “end of the world” [Ende der Welt, Weltende, or Weltuntergang] in German expressionist poetry, theater, and art – which, in turn, were influenced by conceptual antecedents in Nietzsche’s philosophy.


6. From such works as Jünger’s “Total Mobilization” (1930) and *The Worker: Domination and Form* (1932), Heidegger appears to have taken the following: the basic idea to describe and theorize the historical present; a belief that science and technological progress embody the essence of modernity; and the fundamental image of modernity as a developing horizon or, in Jünger’s terms, a Gestalt. Apparently under the influence of Nietzsche, Heidegger was moved to replace his view of the identity of science and philosophy with a vision of clear separations between science, philosophy, and his own post-metaphysical thinking. In addition, also as a result of his engagement with Nietzsche’s texts, Heidegger developed a notion of the consummation or end of modernity. Jünger’s “Totale Mobilmachung” first appeared in *Krieg und Krieger*, Ernst Jünger, Hrsg. (Berlin: Junker und Dünnpaupt, 1930). An English translation of Jünger’s “Total Mobilization” by Richard Wolin appears in Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy*, pp. 122–139. Jünger’s *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* first appeared in 1932 (published
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8. H 75/QT 118.
9. H 75/QT 118.
10. H 77/QT 120.
11. H 81/QT 123.
13. H 84/QT 126.
14. H 73–74/QT 116–117. Heidegger does not use the term “constellation.” The term is useful, however, because it indicates the complex and oscillating nature of the five central fundamental processes described by his phenomenological model of modernity.

15. H 99/QT 142.
27. Thus, for example, Heidegger distinguishes three fundamental world epochs — each the expression of a substantially different set of metaphysical principles — in “The Time of the World Picture.” Yet, in his 1942 lecture on Hölderlin’s hymn “The Ister,” Heidegger states that “Greek vase paintings, wall paintings from Pompeii, Reichenauer frescoes from the Ottonian era, the paintings by Giotto, a painting by Dürer, and a picture by C. D. Friedrich” all express a different “metaphysical essence” [metaphysisches Wesen]. HHDI 28/HHTI 25. For a more complex historical account of the development of Western metaphysics generated from Heidegger’s writings, see Michael E. Zimmerman, Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 166–190.
32. H 79–80/QT 122.
33. H 86/QT 128.
34. H 85/QT 127.
36. “Nur weil und insofern der Mensch überhaupt und wesentlich zum Subjekt geworden ist, muß es in der Folge für ihn zu der ausdrücklichen Frage kommen, ob der Mensch...”
als das auf seine Beliebigkeit beschränkte und in seine Willkür losgelassene Ich oder als das Wir der Gesellschaft, ob der Mensch als Einzelner oder als Gemeinschaft, ob der Mensch als Persönlichkeit in der Gemeinschaft oder als bloßes Gruppenglied in der Körperschaft, ob er als Staat und Nation und als Volk oder als die allgemeine Menschheit des neuzeitlichen Menschen das Subjekt sein will und muß, das er als neutzeitliches Wesen schon ist. Nur wo der Mensch wesenhaft schon Subjekt ist, besteht die Möglichkeit des Ausgleitens in das Unwesen des Subjektivismus im Sinne des Individualismus. Aber auch nur da, wo der Mensch Subjekt bleibt, hat der ausdrückliche Kampf gegen den Individualismus und für die Gemeinschaft als das Ziel alles Leistens und Nutzens einen Sinn.” (H 90/QT 132–133. Translation altered.)

37. H 86/QT 128.

(H 92/QT 134–135. Translation altered.)

39. A concept that appeared frequently in the writings and speeches of both Hitler and the Nazi “philosopher” Alfred Rosenberg, “world view” had, by 1938— the year Heidegger wrote his first essay on modernity— unavoidable associations with the ruling National Socialist party. Even Heidegger, for example, uses “world view” to describe Nazi ideology in his “Letter to the Rector of Freiburg University” [Nov. 4, 1945], reprinted and translated by Richard Wolin in Richard Wolin, The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 61–66; see p. 64 in particular. It is thus legitimate to ask in what ways the Nazi understanding of “world view” may be made to fit into Heidegger’s account of late modernity. If we examine Hitler’s use of the term, for example, we discover that “world view” is used in a rather broad way to describe what we have just defined as a “representational system developed to lead and organize people” — a basic outlook or set of values that define a social or political group. Furthermore, like Heidegger, Hitler often used the term in the context of a discussion about political division and conflict. Thus, in Hitler’s speech to the Industry Club on January 27, 1932, he affirms that, “unless Germany can master this internal division in Weltanschauungen no measures of the legislature can stop the decline of the German nation;” and “[e]ither we shall succeed in working out a body-politic hard as iron from this conglomeration of parties, associations, unions, and Weltanschauungen, from this pride of rank and madness of class, or else, lacking this internal consolidation, Germany will fall in final ruin” (quoted in Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny [1952; reprint, London: Penguin Books, 1962], pp. 198–199). That there is a clear overlap of meaning between the National Socialist and the Heideggerian use of the term thus seems obvious, and the main parallel, as mentioned above, is the use of the term to designate a system of representation designed to lead and organize a people.

40. In this regard, Heidegger’s concepts of “Germany” and the “Germans” are very different from those of the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s, since his criteria for group belonging are linguistic rather than racial.

41. Which is not to say that abstract art is not objectifying — it is, but in a different way. And as suggested by his Mondrian appropriations, Kiefer is also critical of abstraction in some of his works.
42. Unlike numerous twentieth-century artists, Kiefer refuses to let go of representation entirely because of his belief in the necessity of subject matter. As he puts it, "I believe art has to take responsibility, but it should not give up being art. Many kinds of art are very effective as art. Minimal art is a good contemporary example. But such a 'pure' art is dangerous to content, which must always be there. My content may not be contemporary, but it is political. It is an activist art of sorts." (Anselm Kiefer, Interview with Donald Kuspit, Jeanne Siegel, ed., Art Talk: The Early 1980s, p. 86.)

43. That Kiefer's art is always in some way about its contemporary moment is suggested by the fact that its phenomenological and existential aspects always make reference not only to the life of the artist but also to the embodied experience of the spectator who views the works.

44. For Heidegger, representation mediates not only between subject and object but also between the individual and the collective. Indeed, although Heidegger does not use these terms, one could say that he sees representation as the contradictory project of the self-objectification of the subject on both the individual and the collective level. As such, representation is paradoxically presented as the greatest danger facing mankind during modernity's decisive stage as well as one of the central concepts that creative individuals must confront in order to bring about the turning to the other beginning.

45. Modernist abstraction of the 1920s and 1930s could have given Heidegger new ways to conceptualize the role of both artist and audience, the effect of cultural institutions on the production, dissemination, and reception of works of art, and the political effect of art—that is, the different ways art can call for a new type of individual and collective subject. These issues are often presented too reductively in Heidegger's models of art and modernity in the 1930s and 1940s.


47. This is the case because—even today—human beings still attempt to fit everything that appears to them within a meaningful conceptual system. Abstract works, although explainable, often continue to resist or negate meaning. For this reason, in comparison to representational works, they still seem to be more conceptually shocking to the average viewer—more likely to resist their spectators' projection of meaning upon them and, thereby, more likely to provoke reflection.


50. Instead of succeeding, however, Rodchenko's three monochromes, as Yve-Alain Bois suggests, ultimately demonstrate the impossibility of this gesture. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," in Bois, Painting as Model (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 238.


54. As Owens puts it, “Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other. . . . He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured: allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement.” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism” [1980] in Owens, Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992], p. 54.)


56. Owens is not the only theorist to hold an “allegorical” concept of appropriation. The concept of allegorical appropriation “originates” in Walter Benjamin’s The Origin of German Tragic Drama (1925/1928). Here Benjamin states that “[a]llegories become dated, because it is part of their nature to shock. If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power. That is to say it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. He places it within it, and stands behind it; not in a psychological but in an ontological sense. In his hands the object becomes something different; through it he speaks of something different and for him it becomes a key to the realm of hidden knowledge; and he reveres it as the emblem of this. This is what determines the character of allegory as a form of writing. It is a schema; and as a schema it is an object of knowledge, but it is not securely possessed until it becomes a fixed schema: at one and the same time a fixed image and a fixing sign.” [Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, translated by Josh Osborne [New York: Verso, 1977], pp. 183–184. [Walter Benjamin, Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels in Gesammelte Schriften, 1-1 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 359.] On the intertextual nature of appropriation, a property that is canceled out in Owens’s interpretation, I am in agreement with Mieke Bal when she states in relation to Vermeer that the “concept of intertextuality . . . indifferent as it is to authorial intention, implies precisely that the sign taken over necessarily comes with meaning. This meaning may be changed, and the new meaning that replaces it will carry the trace of its other. The later artist may reject or reverse, ironize or deconstruct, pluralize or marginalize the meaning of the borrowed motif, but it cannot be undone, ignored, and canceled out” (Mieke Bal, “Light in Painting: Dis-seminating Art History,” p. 52, in Peter Brunette and David Wills, eds., Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994], pp. 49–64).

57. Kiefer was born into a Catholic family. His father was an army officer during World War II and, later, a teacher. Until he was six Kiefer lived with his grandmother and played among the ruins in the neighborhood. In 1951, he moved with his parents to Ottersdorf, a region near the Rhine. It was there, he claims, confronted with the presence of “France” across the river, that he first began to think about the nature of “borders” and how to cross them. Kiefer first actually traveled to France in 1963 on a stipend that took him on a journey following the footsteps of Van Gogh. Kiefer produced a diary and sketches during the trip, which has now been partially published in Der Spiegel. He then won a second stipend, which sent him back to France – this time to investigate a Parisian fashion house. After beginning his studies in law at Freiburg University, Kiefer returned to France for three weeks to live in La Tourette, the Dominican cloister designed by Le Corbusier. He then returned to Freiburg to begin studying painting with Peter Dreher. See Hecht and Krüger, “Venedig 1980: Aktuelle Kunst made in Germany,” Art: Das Kunstmagazin, Nr. 6 (June 1980), pp. 48–50. For an English version of Kiefer’s biography see Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal, and Wieland Schmied, eds., German Art in the Twentieth Century: Painting and Sculpture 1905–1985 (Munich: Prestel, 1985), p. 487.
59. Baumeister, like many of his generation, was a reader of Heidegger and connected his abstract art to Heidegger’s thinking. See Heibel, *Reconstructing the Subject: Modernist Painting in Western Germany, 1945–1950*, pp. 3, 145.
60. These artists, for example, are all well represented at *Documenta I* in 1955—the first of Germany’s twice-a-decade, twentieth-century art exhibitions. According to the curators Arnold Bode and Werner Haftmann, *Documenta I* was intended as a historical exhibition focusing on art from 1905 to 1945. It was explicitly designed to reawaken an awareness in Germany of the continuities in artistic development over the course of the twentieth century and featured both abstract and representational artists. However, by 1959 and *Documenta II*, also organized by Bode and Haftmann, the focus had changed—*Documenta* had become a contemporary art exhibition. The purpose of the second *Documenta* was thus to represent a broad array of modernist directions since 1945—a selection that favored abstract artists. See *Documenta I (1955) Exhibition Catalogue (Reprint)* (München: Prestel Verlag, 1995). See also Jan Avgikos, “Point Zero: German Art in the 1950s,” *Arts*, vol. 64, no. 7 (March 1990), pp. 52–59.
63. On the whole, it seems that the reception of prewar modernism was sketchy at best until at least 1970.
64. Beuys was initially a fairly traditional representational sculptor, whose early works echoed the expressive abstraction of natural forms characteristic of such early-twentieth-century German artists as Wilhelm Lehmbruck. It was only later, in the late 1950s, that Beuys adapted Duchamp’s readymade strategy for the representation of German themes. It was through his Duchamp-inspired performances and assemblages in the 1960s that Beuys first gained national and then international prominence.
65. Knowingly or unknowingly, Polke, Richter, and the others all seemed to rely on such Dada techniques as photomontage and the readymade as much as they did on their conscious assimilation of the mass-media appropriations of Andy Warhol and Richard Hamilton (and, in Richter’s case, the “heroicizing” legacy of socialist realism). In the 1960s, however, it is unclear how much these German artists knew about the prewar avant-garde. Richter, for example, consistently cites the influence of American artists on him at this time. See Gerhard Richter in an interview with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (1986), in Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews, 1962–1993*, translated by David Britt (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 132–166.
66. I am indebted to Christine Mehring for bringing a number of Palermo’s works to my attention as well as her insightful understanding of Palermo’s oeuvre as a whole.
71. Although Beuys, who had experimented with felt and primary structures already in the
late 1950s, can correctly be seen as one of the originators of the minimalist style, minimalism was taken to a far greater level of formal and conceptual "purity" or abstraction in the United States in the 1960s. And it is to this American type of minimalism that the brand-new, mass-produced copper and felt sheets, which make up Beuys's art object, seem to point.

73. Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 162.
78. Gőtz Adriani, "Every Present Has Its Past," AKB 13. It should be noted that, by the time Kiefer made his *Koll* book, the American minimalists such as Morris had transformed the hard-edged forms of early minimalism into process and scatter art. Thus, although they were still not producing a radically subjective form of art, the Americans – like Kiefer – were beginning to move minimalism toward a less objective, more "organic" form of artistic production (one that seems to be more reflective of "real time" human, existential processes). Hence, in his *Koll* book, Kiefer attacks early to mid-1960s American minimalism rather than the direction in which American minimalism had by then developed. This situation can be explained by the fact that early to mid-1960s American minimalism was what was being shown and emulated in Germany in the late 1960s. And it was this continuation of early American minimalism in late-1960s Germany that Kiefer's book seems to directly oppose – an association that is reinforced by the fact that Kiefer uses a German follower of American minimalism to recontextualize in his book.
79. AKB 13.
82. The repositioning of the *Koll*’s sculptures can cause the spectator to meditate on Kiefer’s art-making activity.
83. The flatness or objecthood of the photographic image is emphasized in two different ways. First, flatness is suggested by Kiefer's handwriting on the front-cover photograph, which emphasizes its nature as a relatively smooth, two-dimensional surface. Second, Kiefer's shifting of the orientation of the photographic images from horizontal to vertical and back again to some extent breaks their illusionism and causes the spectator to read them as flat articulated surfaces.
84. As far as one can see from Kiefer's photographs, Koll's work seems to be more closely related to Judd's art than to such 1960s German minimal artists as Franz Erhard Walther, Gerhard Hoehme, and Ulrich Rückriem.
85. The greater subjectivity of Kiefer's works as opposed to the greater objectivity of the works of the American minimalists is revealed by a number of basic differences on the levels of both form and subject matter. Whereas Kiefer's works are irregular, those of the American minimalists are largely geometric and hard-edged. In addition, whereas Kiefer's works deal with issues of life and existence, those of the American minimalists deal much more with issues having to do with abstract ideas and physical presence.
Moreover, whereas Kiefer's works reveal only limited seriality (as well as larger variations within the serial displays that do appear), those of the American minimalists show a far more repetitive seriality as well as modularity. Furthermore, whereas Kiefer's works are composed, those of the American minimalists display nonrelational composition. Kiefer’s works also produce specific meanings and narratives, whereas the works of the American minimalists attempt to reduce all meaning and narrative to logical and visual forms. Finally, whereas Kiefer makes works that are both representational and detailed, the American minimalists practice a nonrepresentational and nondetailed form of geometric abstraction.

86. See Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood” (1967), in Gregory Battcock, ed., Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology, pp. 116–147. A similar view of the effect of the minimalist work on the spectator was expressed by Robert Morris when he wrote in 1966, “One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context. Every internal relationship, whether set up by a structural division, a rich surface, or what have you, reduces the public, external quality of the object and tends to eliminate the viewer to the degree that these details pull him into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists.” See Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,” in Robert Morris, Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 15.


88. In 1990, Anna C. Chave made this same connection with American minimalism, emphasizing the sexual associations inherent in some of the minimalists’ titles, as well their erotically charged descriptions of certain works. See Anna C. Chave, “Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,” Arts Magazine, vol. 64 (January 1990), pp. 45–46. Significant about Chave’s argument is the fact that Kiefer’s appropriation of the Donald Judd catalogue seems to follow the same basic interpretation of minimalism, suggesting that Kiefer’s art looks to and plays with the meanings and associations thought to be inherent in the original style. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Kiefer’s or Chave’s interpretation of minimalism, one must recognize that both artist and art historian engage in political debate with a particular form of art. Roughly a year after Kiefer made his Donald Judd series, Donald Kuspit criticized American minimalism for its aggressive and authoritarian nature. Kuspit did not, however, make a connection between minimalism and misogyny. See Donald B. Kuspit, “Authoritarian Abstraction,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. 36 (Fall 1977), pp. 25–38.

89. AKB 31–55. See also Axel Hecht and Alfred Nemeczek, “Bei Anselm Kiefer im Atelier,” Interview with Anselm Kiefer, Art (January 1990), p. 44.

90. See, in particular, Kiefer’s book Arminius’s Battle [Die Hermanns-Schlacht] (1977), as well as the various versions of his canvas Ways of Worldly Wisdom – Arminius’s Battle (1978–1980), the Chicago version of which is discussed below. Reproduced: AKB 202–209; AKB pl. 17, p. 50; AKB pl. 18, p. 52; and AKB pl. 19, p. 53. Other examples of Kiefer’s pop appropriations include both the book and the painted version of The Rhine [Der Rhein] (1983) as well as Brünhilde – Grane [Brühnhide – Grane] (1978). Reproduced: AKB 260–265; AKB pl. 60, p. 114; and AKB pl. 21, p. 57. I call Kiefer’s woodcuts “simulated” because they appear to be based on photographically or photomechanically produced source material. This is clearly the case with the book The Face of the German People: Coal for 2000 Years, discussed in Chapter 1. In addition, the woodcuts discussed in this section are, according to Kiefer, all based on images reproduced in Nazi mass-market publications. Although, in some cases, the original image may have been a woodcut, by the time Kiefer appropriates it, it has been photomechanically reproduced.
and thus technologically mediated. This technological mediation is particularly apparent in the images of Heidegger and Horst Wessel, which are most probably based on photographs (as opposed to a mass-reproduced woodcut "original").


"13 Most Wanted Men" was subsequently recreated and sold as single and dual panel works during the same year.

"Most Wanted Men"'s seriality as well as its vastly increased scale in comparison to the earlier avant-garde examples of appropriated photographic imagery suggests the increased power and ubiquity of the sphere of mass culture in postwar America.


Buchloh, "Divided Memory and Post-Traditional Identity," p. 81.


Warhol's work erodes historical specificity by decontextualizing the portraits. The viewer is no longer given the identity of the represented subject, what he is wanted for, where he committed his alleged crimes, and so forth. However, this erosion of historical specificity is not made explicit in the work.

Anselm Kiefer, quoted in AKR 55.

Thus, for example, referring to Kiefer's appropriation of Warhol's painting technique to make his simulated woodcuts, Rosenthal writes, "Like the American artist, Kiefer looks at the heroes of his country in a deadpan way; the result is a kind of jingoism in which these individuals take on the character of gods. The portrayals by both Warhol and Kiefer leave their subjects slightly hollow, all surface and no inner core. When they burn

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in Kiefer's paintings, we do not witness the incineration of flesh and blood but the cremation of icons" (AKR 51). Götze Adriani reiterates Rosenthal's point in 1991. Referring to Kiefer's woodcut technique, Adriani notes that, "By putting all the woodcut portraits on the same level, Kiefer evens out the responsibilities and the hierarchies. Lining up his secondhand portraits is a history-conscious, original counterpart to Warhol's standardized portrait reproductions of more or less prominent contemporary sitters" (Götze Adriani, "Every Present Has Its Past," AKB 18). That this was indeed also Kiefer's intention is suggested by Mark Rosenthal, who reports that, when speaking about this painting, "Kiefer [says that he] delights in the arbitrariness of his process and in the fact that the people involved cannot defend themselves; he wants to demonstrate that no one truth exists and new histories can be created at will" (AKR 55).

111. Certain historians debate the validity of the term "Holocaust," arguing that the word can potentially mystify the actual events. As Walter Laqueur notes, "'Holokaustein' means to bring a (wholly) burnt offering; it was not the intention of the Nazis to make a sacrifice of this kind, and the position of the Jews was not that of a ritual victim." Walter Laqueur, The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution' (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), p. 7, nn. See also Geoff Eley, "Holocaust History," London Review of Books (March 3-17, 1982), pp. 6-9. The term, however, remains in widespread use.
112. Given Kiefer's ongoing engagement with various styles of American art, it does not seem strange that he should eventually confront the art of Jackson Pollock. What does seem strange is that, unlike his previous appropriations of Warhol and Judd and despite his (later) explicit avowal of the influence of Pollock on some of his canvases, Kiefer's appropriation of Pollock is picked up solely by American critics and not by Germans. Perhaps the main reason for this is that, unlike the later styles of pop and minimalism, postwar American abstraction did not have an instantaneous reception in Germany. Referring to modern art in Germany, Jürgen Glaesemer notes that "there was no such art from 1933 to 1945, so in the 1950s the confrontation was with Klee, Kandinsky, Marc not with the American abstract expressionists, as you might think" (quoted in Steven Henry Madoff, "Klee Time," Art News, vol. 86, no. 5 [May 1987], p. 109). For this reason, Germany assimilated the examples of Pollock and the other American postwar painters well after their initial historical moment was over and at a time when it was also assimilating the later developments of pop and minimalism. Given this multiple focus, it is easier to see how Kiefer's reference could be missed.
114. After this first series, although Kiefer continues to use straw on his canvases, it is not used in as great quantities. Consequently, its characteristics are not as apparent.
even if to the heavily impastoed as been joined to a romantic infatuation for Nazi Kitsch." (Perl, "A Dissent on Kiefer," p. 18). By emulating the rich material sensualness of Pollock’s poured and spattered paintings as well as the projecting acrylic surfaces of “post-Pollock formalist abstraction[ists]” Jules Olitski and Lawrence Poons, Kiefer sells the public “a sensational and even . . . pornographic obsession with Nazi atrocities” (Perl, "A Dissent on Kiefer," p. 17). Thus, like Rosenthal and Schjeldahl, Perl sees Kiefer’s appropriation of Pollock in purely formal terms. And this is precisely why Perl is critical of Kiefer, namely, because Kiefer’s appropriations of abstract expressionism cannot support the various metaphors with which they are imbued through the names and trace representational elements that remain. According to Perl, “To claim for a reductive pictorial structure all the meanings that have been claimed for the Kiefer’s is to confuse the old formalism and the new taste for narrative in the most extreme and disastrous manner. It’s fifty years ago that Clement Greenberg declared the absolute separation of high and low taste in his essay ‘Avant-garde and Kitsch.’ Now, with Kiefer, the sort of optically alluring surface that characterizes what has been called Greenbergian abstraction is joined to a voyeuristic sentimentalizing of Jewish history we’d normally expect to encounter in a TV miniseries or a trashy novel. The end result of Greenbergian taste – the heavily impastoed acrylic surfaces of Olitski and Poons – as been joined to a romantic infatuation for Nazi Kitsch.” (Perl, “A Dissent on Kiefer,” p. 18.)

118. The appropriation also refers to Goethe’s Faust and the Old Testament.


120. AKR 99.

121. As Corinne Robins writes, “Kiefer presents a glorified, mourned-over past that seduces immediately by its presentation of the power of the powerful, powerful even in their fall. Even while half in mourning, Kiefer’s grandiose canvases sport their heavy Germanic coloring with pride, to offer us yet another look at ‘fascinating fascism,’ to use Susan Sontag’s term.” Corinne Robins, “Your Golden Hair, Margarete: About Anselm Kiefer’s Germanness,” Arts Magazine, vol. 63, no. 5 (January 1989), p. 76. Also in this vein, Jed Perl connects Kiefer’s Holocaust works with the shift of attention and the “new discourse” that Saul Friedländer saw developing in the representation of the Holocaust in literature and film from the 1960s to the early 1980s. As Friedländer wrote in Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death, “Attention has gradually shifted from the reevocation of Nazism as such, from the horror and pain – even if muted by time and transformed into subdued grief and endless meditation – to voluptuous anguish and ravishing images, images one would like to see going on forever . . . [I]n the midst of meditation rises a suspicion of complicity. Some kind of limit has been overstepped and uneasiness appears: It is a sign of the new discourse.” (Saul Friedländer, Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death, translated by Thomas Weyr [New York: Harper and Row, 1984], p. 21. Quoted in Jed Perl, “A Dissent on Kiefer,” The New Criterion [December 1988], p. 15.)

122. As Perl puts it, “Kiefer is easy for current taste to assimilate because his sensibility is, at heart, a postwar American sensibility. His sizes are ab ex sizes; and, like an abstract expressionist, he articulates the surface only insofar as articulation reinforces homogeneity” (Perl, “A Dissent on Kiefer,” p. 18). By emulating the rich material sensualness of Pollock’s poured and spattered paintings as well as the projecting acrylic surfaces of “post-Pollock formalist abstraction[ists]” Jules Olitski and Lawrence Poons, Kiefer sells the public “a sensational and even . . . pornographic obsession with Nazi atrocities” (Perl, “A Dissent on Kiefer,” p. 17). Thus, like Rosenthal and Schjeldahl, Perl sees Kiefer’s appropriation of Pollock in purely formal terms. And this is precisely why Perl is critical of Kiefer, namely, because Kiefer’s appropriations of abstract expressionism cannot support the various metaphors with which they are imbued through the names and trace representational elements that remain. According to Perl, “To claim for a reductive pictorial structure all the meanings that have been claimed for the Kiefer’s is to confuse the old formalism and the new taste for narrative in the most extreme and disastrous manner. It’s fifty years ago that Clement Greenberg declared the absolute separation of high and low taste in his essay ‘Avant-garde and Kitsch.’ Now, with Kiefer, the sort of optically alluring surface that characterizes what has been called Greenbergian abstraction is joined to a voyeuristic sentimentalizing of Jewish history we’d normally expect to encounter in a TV miniseries or a trashy novel. The end result of Greenbergian taste – the heavily impastoed acrylic surfaces of Olitski and Poons – as been joined to a romantic infatuation for Nazi Kitsch.” (Perl, “A Dissent on Kiefer,” p. 18.)


124. Shapiro and Shapiro, eds., Abstract Expressionism, p. 79.

125. Clement Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon” (1940), in Shapiro and Shapiro, eds., Abstract Expressionism, pp. 61–74; see in particular pp. 65–66. For Greenberg, the new American painting had no content other than the visual sensation it produced in the viewer. It was not “about” anything. It expressed no idea. As Greenberg put it, “The picture or statue exhausts itself in the visual sensation it produces. There is nothing to identify, connect or think about, but everything to feel” (Shapiro and Shapiro, eds., Abstract Expressionism, p. 70).
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126. Shapiro and Shapiro, eds., Abstract Expressionism, p. 78.


130. On a slightly more distant level of intertextual linkage, Goethe could also be added to this list: in Faust I (1808), Goethe presents Margarete as a tragically innocent, lower-class woman with whom Faust falls in love, seduces, and ultimately destroys.

131. Evans, In Hitler’s Shadow, pp. 15–16.

Chapter 4


11. When asked, for example, what motivated the choice of the German cultural and political figures employed in his two *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* canvases, Kiefer replied, “I chose these personages because they were quite obviously misused by the mighty.” Quoted in Hecht and Krüger, “Venedig 1980: Aktuelle Kunst made in Germany,” *Art: Das Kunstmagazin*, no. 6 (June 1980), p. 52. Kiefer’s comment is translated, in somewhat different words, in AKR 55. See the discussion of *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* in Chapter 3.

12. For the lecture and publication history of these essays, see Martin Heidegger, *Die Technik und die Kehre*, 6. Auflage (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1985), p. 3.


15. “Das Entbergen, das die moderne Technik durchherrscht, entfaltet sich nun aber nicht in ein Her-vor-bringen im Sinne der *poïēsis*. Das in der modernen Technik waltende Entbergen ist ein Herausforderndas, das an die Natur das Ansinnen stellt, Energie zu liefern, die als solche herausgefordert und gespeichert werden kann” (VA 18/QT 14).

16. VA 38/QT 34.


18. VA 39/QT 34.

19. VA 39/QT 35.

20. VA 31/QT 27.


22. NGKR 212/MHNS 60.


25. The advantage of dividing the interpretation of Kiefer’s works into different technological levels is that it allows one to focus on the technological aspects of his works more closely and in greater isolation from other aspects of his art, noting the types of technology that appear, the different ways in which these technologies are brought to the surface, and the different roles they play in relation to other elements in his art. As was the case in the section on art and violence in Chapter 2, the next three sections will analyze a number of Kiefer’s works very briefly and only for their technological significance. In no way is it implied that these interpretations are complete.


27. All these works are reproduced in Paul Maenz and Gerd de Vries, hrsg. *Anselm Kiefer* (exhibition catalogue) (Cologne: 1986) (hereafter AKM).


38. Commenting on Kiefer’s concept of metabolism as well as his frustrating manner of providing too many conflicting interpretations when he talks about his works, Thomas West notes that “most conversation with Kiefer about his art tends more to obscure than to reveal the ‘angle’ or intuitive feeling he brings to his subjects. He speaks willingly—perhaps too willingly—about the details of his work, and though his comments help to elucidate a certain level of meaning, they also tend to hide or make one insensitive to the emotional tenor or mood which underpins the oeuvre as a whole. On this occasion, the closest Kiefer comes to reflecting on his own creative process was when, in front of the huge Brandenburg Sand [Markischer Sand] of 1980–82, he likened the powerful, swirling motion of this painting to a ‘Stoffwechsel,’ a word which can be translated as combustion or metabolism but which literally means an exchange of materials. To the question, ‘Is that moving force supposed to be something moral?’ he answered, ‘No, not moral, not moralistic at any rate. It is history, it is metabolism [Stoffwechsel]... History for me is like the burning of coal, it is like a material. History is a warehouse of energy.’” (Thomas West, “Interview at Diesel Strasse,” Art International, no. 2 (1988), pp. 63–64.)

39. There are numerous examples of this circulatory concern in Kiefer’s work. In Resurrexit [Resurrexit] and Father, Son, Holy Ghost [Vater, Sohn, Heiliger Geist] both from 1973 [AKR pl. 7, p. 24; AKR pl. 9, p. 27], for example, Kiefer juxtaposes an image of a forest with a smaller image of a wooden interior, drawn from his attic studio. In both works the lower, “natural” world is connected with the upper “spiritual” one in a number of different ways. First, in both double images, the roughly finished boards of the upper world both continue and transform the living trees of the lower. Second, in both works, the religious theme, written by Kiefer on the image’s surface, also emphasizes a sense of continuation through change: resurrection, in the first case, and the holy trinity, in the second. Finally, the formal structures of both paintings connect their two worlds as well. The three interlocking triangles of Resurrexit (for Kiefer a symbol of the unity of male and female powers, according to Mark Rosenthal), as well as the spatially ambiguous positioning of the snake—as slithering both into and up the lower image—suggest a notion of passage between the levels. In Vater, Sohn, Heiliger Geist, the strong vertical lines created by the alignment of the windows and the three burning chairs of the top world directly over the three largest trees of the lower image, as well as the writing that bridges the two fields, also suggest continuity across worldly divisions. In the palette and field canvases of 1974, nature, in the image of the field, is once again juxtaposed with spirit or culture—this time given symbolic form as the artist’s palette. In these works the connection between the two levels or realities is causal; the palette is shown either burning or cooling the earth. Finally, as Rosenthal has pointed out, Kiefer’s references to themes drawn from Jewish mysticism and Dionysius the Areopagite emphasize the motif of the circulation of energy between the heavenly and earthly spheres (AKR 138). John Hallmark Neff also stresses the notion of metabolic circulation in Kiefer’s work: “When he [Kiefer] superimposes molten lead ‘clouds,’ or emanations, over his
landscapes or cityscapes, for example, he is careful to ensure that both the upper and lower spheres, the earth as well as the heavens, are visible, to symbolize the reciprocal nature of the flow that moves from the divine down to man and, through human effort to transcend the material world, back up to the divine." (John Hallmark Neff, Anselm Kiefer: Bruch und Einung [New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1987], p. 12, [hereafter AKBE].)


43. Inboden, in AKM 15-16.

44. AKM 13.

45. AKM 18.

46. Early examples of Kiefer’s delivery technologies appear in such canvases as Operation “Sea Lion” (1975) and Bilder-Streit (1980) (battleships and tanks, respectively), as well as the books Piet Mondrian – Operation “Sea Lion” (1975) (battleships), Siegfried’s Difficult Way to Brünhilde (1977) (trains), and the Iconoclastic Controversy series (1980) (tanks). There is a marked increase in the production of such representations after 1984.


49. 1991. Oil, emulsion, shellac, and ashes on canvas, with woman’s hair, original photographs, lead planes, snakeskin, and copper wire. 380 x 280 centimeters. David and Gerry Pincus Collection, Wynnewood, PA. Reproduced: AKN pl. 32, p. 73.

50. 1990. Oil, emulsion, shellac, coal, and ashes on canvas, with lead planes, poppies, lead bands, copper wire, and ashen dress. 380 x 280 centimeters. Susan and Lewis Manilow Collection, Chicago, IL. Reproduced: AKN pl. 27, p. 78.


52. 1988. Lead with finger- and toenails. 195 x 300 centimeters. Mr. and Mrs. Ronald A. Pizzi Collection, Columbus, OH. Reproduced: AKN pl. 21, p. 63.


58. Oil on canvas. Both lost, presumed destroyed.

59. For an interesting account of the various contemporary reactions to Dix’s work in Weimar Germany, see Dennis Crockett, “The Most Famous Painting of the ‘Golden Twenties’? Otto Dix and the ‘Drench Affair’,” Art Journal, vol. 51, no. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 72-80. As Crockett notes, Dix’s works were criticized for being both pacifist and revolting. Kiefer’s works are less openly visceral and inspire more of a sense of mourning than outright disgust. In addition, despite Kiefer’s seemingly pacifist views, his war representations may
also be seen to have reactionary implications because of their greater ambiguity. We could read some of them, in other words, as memorials to the fallen – and by implication tragic – German army.


64. 1990. Lead, glass, woman’s hair, and photographs. 2.3 x 5.95 x 6.22 meters. Private collection. Reproduced: AKN pl. 55, pp. 148-149.


67. As Neff notes, referring to a similar image in Heavy Water, another book in this series, “The broken glass, . . . a visual parallel for a nuclear explosion – the conversion of matter into energy – also suggests to him [Kiefer] the ten sefirot of the Zohar (the visual manifestations of the hidden God), emanations so powerful they break all but the most worthy of vessels” (AKBE 58). This juxtaposition of technological and Egyptian mythic content is also the subject of Osiris und Isis (1985–1987), a large red, gray, and black painting of a pyramid upon which Kiefer has attached copper wire, numbered pieces of a shattered porcelain sink, and a television circuit board. The circuit board, according to Neff, “is Kiefer’s ‘computer,’ which he places at the apex of his composition to ‘organize’ the relations between things material and things spiritual” (AKBE 60). As in Birth of the Sun, Kiefer’s visual combination of the two time frames suggests continuities between mythic and technological powers. In addition, the painting, which appears to represent both a nuclear reactor and a tomb, suggests the terrible ambivalence of these powers – an ambivalence the spectator should take care not to obscure.


69. According to Neff, “To shield the reactor within, the book’s front cover and first page are made of sheet lead, required, Kiefer says, to protect people who are not artists. Inside the shielding is a sequence of four different views of the reactor core, identified by the symbolic fuel rods (Brennstäbe). The solarized photograph on page 3 represents the nuclear flash, which creates two glowing fragments (chunks of intense red clay) that slide toward the bottoms of the next five pages (pages 4–8) as they burn through the earth. As the core passes from the earth’s crust to its molten center, the red clay is transformed from dry grit to a deep reddish wash. A stratum of ‘cooler’ black pigment mixed with the clay signals the reemergence, down and out. (The ambiguous black coronas on page 9, as the artist sees them, are to be read simultaneously, or alternatively, as a tunnel, black holes, or sunspots.) 

“When the reactor pushes toward the surface past the blackened lower edge of page
10, we see a second explosion, visualized through an ominously beautiful shimmer of silver, that expels us up into the clouds, the trajectory marked with a straight silver line.” (AKBE 58.)

70. In German, the translation of Verne's title is Zum Mittelpunkt der Erde and not Durch den Mittelpunkt der Erde. However, as Neff notes, "the title intentionally echoes Jules Verne's fantasy adventure" (AKBE 58). No doubt part of the attraction that Verne's book held for Kiefer stemmed from two facts: first, that the hero of the novel is German and, second, that the map the protagonists follow is reputed to be made by Arne Saksnassem, a sixteenth-century Icelandic heretical philosopher and alchemist. Even with popular culture sources, Kiefer chooses those which emphasize German and alchemical themes.

71. 1990. Oil, acrylic, emulsion, and ashes on canvas, with glass and ceramic shards, lead, original photographs, ashen dresses, gold leaf, and teeth. 280 × 560 centimeters. Private collection. Reproduced: AKN pl. 29, pp. 80–81.


74. Because we cannot read them, the books also perhaps recall the literature that the Nazis banned and then burned—an association reinforced by the books' dark and twisted surfaces. Interpreted in this way, Kiefer can be seen as asserting the superiority of the visual over the verbal in a fairly violent and authoritarian manner.


76. In 1990, Art mentioned that Kiefer was making a film with BBC directors. To date this film has not appeared. See Hecht and Nemeczek, "Bei Anselm Kiefer im Atelier," p. 40. Unlike the other artists mentioned, Horn has been making films since 1970.

77. For example, The Heavens [Die Himmel], Marble Landscapes [Marmorlandschaften], The Women [Die Frauen], Koll Visiting Kiefer [Koll bei Kiefer], The Source of the Danube [Die Donauquelle], Heroic Symbols [Heroische Sinnbilder (symboles Héroiques)], To Genet [Für Genet], and The Flooding of Heidelberg I-II [Die Überschwemmung Heidelbergs I-II], all from 1969. Reproduced: AKB.


79. By emphasizing the technological side of Kiefer's artistic practices, I do not mean to suggest that Kiefer's art making does not have a number of antitechnological aspects. On the antitechnological side, one might note that Kiefer's practice also incorporates natural processes and the disintegration of materials and that he works on pieces over a long period of time. These aspects appear to contradict his increasing practical dependence on various types of technology.


81. Flam, "The Alchemist," p. 34.


88. "The ‘value’ of particular artists after Duchamp can be weighed according to how much they questioned the nature of art; which is another way of saying ‘what they added to the conception of art’ or what wasn’t there before they started. Artists question the nature of art by presenting new propositions as to art’s nature.” (Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy,” in Joseph Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and After [Cambridge, MA.: MIT, 1991], p. 18.)
89. “My initial reasons in the sixties for attempting to use language as a model for art (in ‘theory’ as well as introducing it as a ‘formal’ material in art practice) stemmed from my understanding of the collapse of the traditional languages of art into that larger, increasingly organized, meaning system which is the modernist culture of late capitalism.” (Joseph Kosuth, “Within the Context: Modernism and Critical Practice,” in Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and After, p. 161.)
90. "Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context – as art – they provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist’s intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art is art, which means, is a definition of art. Thus, that it is art is true a priori (which is what Judd means when he states that ‘if someone calls it art, it’s art’).” (Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy,” in Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and After, p. 20.)
91. "[T]he artist, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. He is concerned only with the way (1) in which art is capable of conceptual growth and (2) how his propositions are capable of logically following that growth. In other words, the propositions of art are not factual, but linguistic in character – that is, they do not describe the behavior of physical, or even mental objects; they express definitions of art, or the formal consequences of definitions of art. Accordingly, we can say that art operates on a logic. For we shall see that the characteristic mark of a purely logical inquiry is that it is concerned with the formal consequences of our definitions (of art) and not with questions of empirical fact.” (Joseph Kosuth, “Art after Philosophy,” in Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and After, pp. 20-21.)
92. In 1970, referring to One and Three Chairs and the related pieces, Kosuth notes, "Everything you saw when you looked at the object had to be the same that you saw in the photograph, so each time the work was exhibited the new installation necessitated a new photograph. I liked that the work itself was something other than simply what you saw. By changing the location, the object, the photograph and still having it remain the same work was very interesting. It meant you could have an art work which was that idea of an art work, and its formal components weren’t important. I felt I had found a way to make art without formal components being confused for an expressionist composition. The expression was in the idea, not the form – the forms were only a device in the service of the idea.” (Joseph Kosuth, “Art as Idea as Idea: An Interview with Jeanne Siegel,” in Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and After, p. 50.)
93. As Kosuth, himself, pointed out in 1977, his early tautological pieces uncritically assumed the validity and objectivity of a rational-scientific model of the world – an ahistorical model that illicitly closes itself off from criticism and contrasting viewpoints. Works like One and Three Chairs, which attempt to define art analytically, uncritically support a developmental logic in both science and art that attempts to eliminate all subjectivity from things in favor of the “objective” truth of their formal and physical qualities. See Joseph Kosuth, “Within the Context: Modernism and Critical Practice,” in Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and After, p. 155. This logic denies humanity power and makes people less willing to assert their needs in the face of what seems to be an
unstopable and "truthful" development. See Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and After, pp. 164-165. As Kosuth puts it, "In seeing our cultural processes as self-regulating and 'natural' as we are taught, we are less inclined to demand some say in making our world" (Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and After, p. 155).


102. For an illuminating account on the problems encountered when attempting to define a book by Kiefer as well as the intentional ambiguity of his "narratives," see Dorothea Dietrich, "Anselm Kiefer's 'Johannisnacht II': A Text Book," in The Print Collector's Newsletter, vol. 15, no. 2 (May-June 1984), pp. 41-44.


104. AKB 76-79.

105. American conceptual artist John Baldessari is suspicions of the seriousness and "morality" of Kiefer's works precisely because of the high prices they command. As Baldessari notes, "I've seen a lot of exhibits around the world and in private collections, and it seems to me that I walk in and there's some sort of pantheon of wish lists - or not even
wishes, it’s wishes come true, collections of art that they want. We don’t seem to worry about art unless it makes a lot of money, and all of a sudden it becomes worrisome. I mean, if art that made a lot of money didn’t sell, I don’t think we would worry about it. It’s only then we ask ‘Is it moral?’ ‘Is it not moral?’ You know, Julian Schnabel comes to mind a lot—what if those paintings didn’t sell? Actually they might be kind of interesting! I mean you have to think about that! It kind of looks very moral, doesn’t it? But then we think, God, that sells for a lot of money and then there are those things he says, so it can’t be serious. Then, I think about Kiefer. He seems to be very moral, and there are similarities between Kiefer and Schnabel in terms of how they edit the process of their work. It’s pretty encrusted. And lately, the more I hear about Kiefer’s prices going up, I think, God, I wonder if he’s serious about his paintings! I didn’t think about that so much before, because he got through to me, but then all of a sudden when money comes in it began to cast a doubt in my mind. This is just a private reaction.” (John Baldessari, “The Idea of the Moral Imperative in Contemporary Art,” Art Criticism, vol. 7, no. 1 (1991), pp. 14-15.)

108. 1986. Emulsion and crayon on lead, mounted on chip board, with lilies of the valley, rose, lead, and glass. 110 1/4 x 185 inches. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Reproduced: AKR pl. 64, p. 120.
111. “What fascinates me about Duchamp is the idea of tearing down the wall between the art object and reality.” (“Was mich an Duchamp fasziniert, ist die Idee vom Einreißen einer Mauer zwischen dem Kunstobjekt und der Realität.”) (Anselm Kiefer, quoted in Hecht and Nemeczek, “Bei Anselm Kiefer im Atelier,” p. 45.)
112. In 1956, talking about his motivations for changing styles, Duchamp notes: “It was always the idea of changing, not repeating myself” (Marcel Duchamp, The Writings of Marcel Duchamp, p. 130).
113. Duchamp, The Writings of Marcel Duchamp, p. 141.
114. “It was naturally, in trying to draw a conclusion or consequence from the dehumanization of the work of art, that I came to the idea of the ready-mades” (Duchamp, The Writings of Marcel Duchamp, p. 134).
117. “Futurism was an impressionism of the mechanical world. It was strictly a continuation of the impressionist movement. I was not interested in that. I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. I was much more interested in recreating ideas in painting. For me the title was very important. I was interested in making painting serve my purpose, and in getting away from the physicality of painting. For me Courbet had introduced the physical emphasis in the nineteenth century. I was interested in ideas—not merely in visual products.” (Duchamp, The Writings of Marcel Duchamp, p. 125.)
NOTES TO PAGES 243–255

118. Dimensions, material, ownership, and location variable. See later.
120. Richter, Dada: Art and Anti-Art, p. 88. According to Duchamp, the original Bottlerack was thrown out by his sister and sister-in-law when he left Paris for the United States in 1915. Duchamp’s statement has also been partially contested. See Ecke Bonk, Marcel Duchamp: The Box in a Valise, translated by David Britt (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), pp. 233–234.
122. See Arturo Schwarz, The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, revised and expanded edition (London and New York, 1970), p. 219. As suggested by the earlier photograph of Duchamp’s Bottlerack reproduced here, Man Ray appears to have made more than one photograph of Duchamp’s work.
123. See, for example, Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, translated by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977). Rodchenko, as I have argued in Chapter 3, attempted to counter this intention, as did the American minimalists.
124. AKR 119.
125. VA 39/QT 35.

Conclusion

5. On Kiefer’s divorce, the “collapse in negotiations with the city of Buchen, Germany, to open a vast Kiefer museum,” and his move to France, see Schwartzman, “The Twilight of the Art Gods,” p. 36.
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Jacket illustration: Anselm Kiefer, Das Goldene Vlies (The Golden Fleece), 1990. Oil, acrylic, emulsion, ashes on canvas with glass and ceramic shards, lead, original photograph; ashen dresses, gold leaf, and teeth. 280 x 560 cm; 110-1/4" x 220-1/2". Courtesy: Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo: Tom Powel.

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