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Disorders at the Borders: Memories  
of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the  
Paintings of Anselm Kiefer

M J Wates

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in  
accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, March 2018

## Abstract

In the winter of 2014/15, the Royal Academy in London presented a major Kiefer retrospective, and the artist himself turned 70 in 2015. Furthermore, January 2015 saw the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and the Holocaust has been a recurring theme in his work. The commencement of this project therefore seemed like a propitious moment to attempt to add to the academic literature concerning this artist, which although fairly extensive nevertheless contains a notable gap, namely the extent to which his practice relates to the discourse of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* -- even though it has been often invoked in his connection. The aim of my research is therefore to try to theorize this relationship, with specific reference to Kiefer's painting. I will show that what connects Wagner with Kiefer is an aspiration to borderless-ness, between art and society on the one hand and between the individual arts on the other. I will also show, however, that these are aspects of a single underlying connection, the legacy of the Counter-Enlightenment.

My conclusion will be that a case can be made that Kiefer's work constitutes the continuation into the twenty-first century of principal themes embodied in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but that these same themes are not antithetical to modernism.

## Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ..... DATE:.....

## Table of Contents

List of Plates .....	6
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Chapter Structure .....	14
<b>Chapter 1: What was the <i>Gesamtkunstwerk</i>? .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Enlightenment and its Discontents.....	20
An Extended Family .....	23
The 'Organic State'.....	31
The 'Living Work of Art' .....	40
The Synthesis of the Arts.....	46
Wagner the Revolutionary .....	51
The 'Art-Work of the Future' .....	55
<b>Chapter 2: Anselm Kiefer, History Painter .....</b>	<b>62</b>
A Public Role for Art .....	67
The Sins of the Fathers.....	87
The Year of Protest.....	94
Political Cleanliness Mania.....	102
A 'Restored Modernism' .....	106
The Soil of Germany .....	112
<b>Chapter 3: Synthesis, Purity and Synesthesia.....</b>	<b>130</b>
The Combination of the Arts .....	132
The Confusion of the Arts.....	139
Space becomes Time.....	151
Synesthesia and the <i>Gesamtsensorischeswerk</i> .....	159
The 'Ground of Being' .....	164
Time becomes Space.....	168
<b>Chapter 4: Wagner, Kiefer and Counter-Americanism.....</b>	<b>179</b>
The 'Land of the End' .....	180
The Middle Way.....	188
'Pax Americana' .....	197
Homo Europaeus.....	203
Kiefer's Counter-Americanism.....	206
<b>Chapter 5: The <i>Gesamtkunstwerk</i>, Kiefer and 'Negative Dialectics' .....</b>	<b>218</b>
'The True is the Whole' .....	221
Rationality and Power .....	230
<i>Contra Adorno</i> .....	234
Points of Convergence.....	241
Negative Dialectics in Kiefer's <i>Eisensteig</i> .....	243
Ways of Thinking .....	246
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>252</b>
<b>Plates.....</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>Appendix 1: The <i>Leitmotif</i> .....</b>	<b>260</b>
<b>Appendix 2: <i>Die Versmelodie</i>.....</b>	<b>263</b>
An Image of the Will.....	265
<b>Appendix 3: Subject and Object.....</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Death Fugue.....</b>	<b>271</b>

<b>Bibliography of Works Cited .....</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>Primary Sources.....</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>Secondary Sources .....</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>Online Resources .....</b>	<b>285</b>

## List of Plates

**Plate 1:** Anselm Kiefer, *Hero und Leander* 2005 Oil, emulsion, acrylic, iron and lead sculpture on canvas 280 x 380 cm (Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples)

**Plate 2:** Peter Paul Rubens, *Hero and Leander* 1605, Oil on canvas 96 x 128 cm (Yale University Art Gallery)

**Plate 3:** Anselm Kiefer, *Die Ungeborenen* [The Unborn] 2001 Oil, acrylic, and plaster on lead on canvas 193 x 309 cm (Yale University Art Gallery)

**Plate 4:** Anselm Kiefer, *Valhalla* [*Walhalla*] 2016 Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac and clay on canvas 380 x 570 cm (White Cube, Bermondsey)

**Plate 5:** Anselm Kiefer, *You are a Painter* [Du bist Maler], 1969  
220-page book with black and white photographs, ink on paper  
250 x 190 x 10 mm (Private Collection)

**Plate 6:** Anselm Kiefer, *Untitled (Heroic Symbols)*, 1969 Watercolor, gouache and charcoal on paper 37 x 45 cm (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

**Plate 7:** Anselm Kiefer, *Dem Unbekannten Maler* [To the Unknown Painter], 1983 Oil, emulsion, shellac, latex and straw on canvas 190 x 260 cm (Collection of Celine and Heiner Bastian, Berlin)

**Plate 8:** Anselm Kiefer, *Ikarus - märkischer Sand* [Icarus - Sand of the Brandenburg March] 1981 Oil, emulsion, shellac, sand and photograph on canvas 290 x 360 cm (Marian Goodman Gallery, New York)

**Plate 9:** *Zwischen Wolchow und Leningrad* Cover of *Der Landser* No.3 (c1957)

**Plate 10:** Anselm Kiefer, *Winter Landscape* [*Winterlandschaft*] 1970/1 Watercolor, gouache and graphite pencil on paper 42.9 x 35.6 cm (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

**Plate 11:** Anselm Kiefer, *Varus* 1976 Oil and acrylic on burlap 200 x 270 cm (Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven)

**Plate 12:** Anselm Kiefer, *Margarethe* 1981 Oil, acrylic, emulsion and straw on canvas 280 x 380 cm (The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection)

**Plate 13:** Anselm Kiefer, *Ash Flower* [*Aschenblume*] (1983-97, Oil, emulsion, acrylic paint, clay, ash, earth and dried sunflower on canvas 382 x 761 cm (Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth)

**Plate 14:** Anselm Kiefer, *Nothung* 1973 Charcoal and oil on burlap with inserted charcoal drawing on cardboard 300 x 432 cm (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam)

**Plate 15:** *Laocoon and His Sons* (attributed to Hagesandros, Athenodorus and Polydorus of Rhodes, c175-150 BC, Vatican)

**Plate 16:** Anselm Kiefer, *Iconoclastic Controversy (Bilder-Streit)* 1980 Oil, emulsion, shellac and sand on woodcut and photograph on canvas 295 x 406 cm (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam)

**Plate 17:** Anselm Kiefer, *Morgenthau Plan* 2013 Acrylic, emulsion, oil, metal, fragments of paint, plaster, gold leaf and sediments of electrolysis on photograph mounted on canvas 330 x 560 cm (Private Collection)

**Plate 18:** Anselm Kiefer, *Iron Path (Eisentsteig)* 1986 Oil, acrylic and emulsion on canvas with olive tree branches, iron and lead 220 x 380 cm (The Pincus Collection, Philadelphia)

**Plate 19:** Anselm Kiefer, *Germany's Spiritual Heroes (Deutschlands Geisteshelden)*, 1973 Oil and charcoal on burlap, mounted on canvas 307 x 602 cm (The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica)

**Plate 20:** Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray, and Blue*, 1921 Oil on canvas 59 x 59 cm (Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague)

**Plate 21:** Anselm Kiefer, *Nubes pluant iustum* [let the skies pour down righteousness] 2016 Oil, acrylic, emulsion and shellac on canvas 330 x 570 cm

**Plate 22:** Anselm Kiefer, *Nubes pluant iustum* [let the skies pour down righteousness] (Detail)

**Plate 23:** Anselm Kiefer, *Nubes pluant iustum* [let the skies pour down righteousness] (Detail)

**Plate 24:** Anselm Kiefer, *For Ingeborg Bachmann: The Sand from the Urns (Für Ingeborg Bachmann: Der Sand aus den Urnen)* 1998-2009 Acrylic, oil, shellac and sand on canvas 280 x 560 cm (Private Collection)

**Plate 25:** Anselm Kiefer, *Gehäutete Landschaft* [Skinned Landscape] 2016 Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac and lead on canvas 380 x 570 cm

**Plate 26:** Anselm Kiefer, *The Mastersingers [Die Meistersinger]* Oil, acrylic and straw on canvas 185 x 330cm (Saatchi Collection, London)

**Plate 27:** Jackson Pollock, *Blue Poles* 1952 Oil on canvas 210 x 486cm (National Gallery of Australia)

**Plate 28:** Anselm Kiefer, *Des herbstes Runengespinst - für Paul Celan [The Autumn Runes - for Paul Celan]* 2005 Oil, emulsion, acrylic, plaster, lead, straw, branches and charcoal on canvas 190 x 280 (Gemeentemuseum Den Haag)

**Plate 29:** Anselm Kiefer, *Black Flakes* 2005 Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, burnt sticks and lead book on canvas 330 x 570 cm (Private Collection)



## Introduction

But Kiefer was concerned with a different kind of integrity: that of the undisguised storyteller, the orchestrator of a visual *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a total experience, at once operatic, poetic, and epic. So he pushed the plane back down, using aggressively deep perspective to create the big operatic spaces in which his histories could be enacted. –

Simon Schama<sup>1</sup>

The comment by Simon Schama cited above is typical of what appears to be something of a compulsion amongst commentators on the work of Anselm Kiefer (b.1945) to describe it as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the nineteenth-century concept associated above all with the ‘music-dramas’ of Richard Wagner (1813-83). A more recent example is Dominique Baqué’s remark that it is ‘difficult not to view [Kiefer’s] vast and richly complex oeuvre as a contemporary version of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.’<sup>2</sup> Baqué proceeds in some degree to explain this statement. But her explanation seems to be based on a widespread misunderstanding of Wagner’s concept, to which Schama evidently also subscribes, arising from an almost ubiquitous mistranslation of the term as ‘total artwork’. ‘Kiefer’s work’, she says,

is really ‘total’ in several ways. Art is everything, and everything is art; the work absorbs the totality of the world – its histories, cultures, myths, scientific systems and artistic practices.<sup>3</sup>

A more accurate translation, as Anke Finger and Danielle Follett have shown, would have much more of the sense of a *gathering*, or community, of the arts.<sup>4</sup> This carries nothing of the notion of totality, yet the latter is what continues to form the basis of any comparisons of Kiefer with Wagner. It is thus what informs the

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<sup>1</sup> Schama, Simon *Landscape and Memory* Fontana Press, London 1996 p126.

<sup>2</sup> Baqué, Dominique *Anselm Kiefer: A Monograph* Thames and Hudson, 2016 pp182-5.

<sup>3</sup> Baqué, 2016 p185.

<sup>4</sup> Finger, Anke K and Follett, Danielle (Eds) *The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork: On Borders and Fragments* Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011 p5. Finger and Follett note that a ‘gathered’ work ‘need not be synonymous with a closed or fixed totality’. (2011 p6.)

classification as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Kiefer's very large-scale installation at Barjac in southern France, by various commentators including Kathleen Soriano.<sup>5</sup> Here, the reasoning may stem from the fact that Kiefer has created a complex of buildings on a 200 acre site, consisting of greenhouses, barns, towers, subterranean rooms and passages and even an underground temple in addition to what was previously the artist's home and studio facilities, so that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* reference may derive from the idea of 'total' in the sense of a total *environment*.<sup>6</sup> But this is once again to misinterpret the concept as an expression of a totalizing impulse that is entirely absent from the original definition. The idea of a totality is furthermore a contentious one, with its connotations of totalitarianism. Indeed, this misunderstood aspect of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* -- together with the permanent tainting of the concept due to the Wagnerian connection with the Third Reich and its comprehensive denigration at the hands of Theodor Adorno and others -- is what explains the poor reputation that continues to attach itself to it.<sup>7</sup> We might note also that it is routinely dismissed as reactionary, a hybrid art form thoroughly at odds with the modernist taste for purity. As Juliet Koss comments, 'such a model of artistic interrelation falls beyond the parameters of modernism'.<sup>8</sup> In view of all of this, it might be seen as far from complimentary to Kiefer to equate it with his practice.

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<sup>5</sup> Soriano, Kathleen 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' in Davey, Richard, Soriano, Kathleen and Weikop, Christian *Anselm Kiefer* Royal Academy of Arts Publications, London 2014 p24.

<sup>6</sup> Another common trope in the Kiefer literature that indirectly invokes the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the use of the Wagnerian concept of the 'leitmotif' to refer to recurring themes in Kiefer's work. For example, Daniel Arasse speaks of the 'leitmotif image' of the railway track, whilst Andrea Lauterwein remarks that, with hindsight, 'it can be seen that Kiefer's dialogue with the poet [Celan] is a kind of leitmotif throughout his work'. (Arasse, Daniel *Anselm Kiefer* Thames and Hudson (First published 2001), 2014 p87; Lauterwein, Andrea *Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory*, Thames and Hudson, London 2007 p17.) But this is in some degree to distort the original meaning of the term. The purpose of the leitmotif, a recurring short melody or phrase, was primarily *structural*, serving to give shape to complex musical material (see **Appendix 1**).

<sup>7</sup> See Adorno, Theodor *In Search of Wagner* (First published as *Versuch über Wagner*, 1952) Translated by Rodney Livingstone, Verso, London and New York 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Koss, Juliet *Modernism After Wagner* University of Minnesota Press, 2010 xxii.

From the fact that no explanation for it is ever advanced other than the vague but troubling idea of totality, it is hard not to conclude that the seemingly irresistible connection of the concept with Kiefer is above all a function of his being *German*. One wonders whether the connection would so readily be made if this were not the case. The suspicion arises of an unspoken assumption that there is something exclusively Germanic, a common thread of German-ness, that links the *Gesamtkunstwerk* with Kiefer. And this may be a legacy of the attempt -- to which Andreas Huyssen has called attention -- to construct a recognizable identity for him as a specifically German artist.<sup>9</sup> For national identity, as Huyssen comments, is like a 'trademark' in the commercialization of art.<sup>10</sup> And Wagner's concept, encapsulated in a term of suitably Teutonic unwieldiness, may be somewhat of a piece with 'the use of profound allegory, the multiple references to Germanic myth, the play with the archetypal' that Huyssen identifies in Kiefer's work, all of which are 'held to be typically German'.<sup>11</sup> The connection that has been made with the *Gesamtkunstwerk* may thus be a function of his output being positioned in the art market as representing a posited German 'essence', with all of the problematic assumptions this entails.

There are compelling reasons, then, for suggesting that a thorough investigation of Kiefer's relationship with the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is long overdue. The need has arisen -- and from within the Kiefer literature itself, where the trope so often appears -- to investigate whether or not his work can be meaningfully connected with Wagner's concept. This, then, is the purpose of my research: to attempt to theorize this relationship, and to articulate what, if anything, Kiefer's practice can justifiably be said to have in common with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

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<sup>9</sup> Huyssen, Andreas 'Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth' *October* Volume 48 (Spring, 1989), pp25-45.

<sup>10</sup> Huyssen, 1989 p25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

The concept is frequently cited as the forerunner of many of the interdisciplinary art forms of the twentieth century, including cinema, as Randall Packer notes.<sup>12</sup> It has also been linked with installation art by virtue of the multisensory experience this provides.<sup>13</sup> In assessing Kiefer's relationship with it an obvious approach would therefore have been for me to base my discussion on his installations, as exemplified at Barjac. This is not, however, the approach I want to take; rather, my discussion will be based entirely on Kiefer's *painting*, for it is here that it seems to me that the most illuminating comparison with Wagner can be made, most particularly in respect of the light that it sheds on modernism. By comparing the paintings with Wagner's concept I am, in effect, following Schama's example (even though, as indicated earlier, his remark is informed by a misconception). And there are certainly grounds for connecting Kiefer's painterly output with Wagner. He indubitably continues certain themes that are embodied in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*; but this is not to say that his practice can be characterized as an updated version of the latter. Indeed, the issue as to whether such a thing could even be possible has deeply divided opinion. The view of Matthew Wilson Smith, who has traced the history of the form from Wagner to cyberspace via Brecht, Riefenstahl and Warhol, is that the (so-called) total artwork 'is still a potent aesthetic ideal, always intertwined with technology, continuing to blur distinctions between high and mass culture, artwork and commodity spectacle.'<sup>14</sup> For David Roberts, however, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is historically specific to the modern era.<sup>15</sup> That of the 'post modern' has seen its demise, its lofty utopian ambitions -- a product of nineteenth century evolutionary optimism -- thoroughly at odds with the skepticism of the late twentieth century (in Roberts's view, the notion of a contemporary *Gesamtkunstwerk* would thus be a contradiction in terms). For other writers, its lifespan was even more circumscribed. Angela Merte, for example, has advocated reserving the idea of the

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<sup>12</sup> 'The *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Interactive Multimedia', in Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011 p156.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Follett, Danielle 'Form and Reform: An Interview with Mark Alizart', in Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011 pp142-151.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson Smith, Matthew *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* Routledge, New York and London 2007 p6.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts, David *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* Cornell University Press, New York 2011.

*Gesamtkunstwerk* solely to Wagner's 'music-dramas'.<sup>16</sup> She suggests a different term, that of '*Totalkunst* [Total Art]', for 'concepts that represent an extension into the twentieth century of the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.'<sup>17</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, on the other hand, seems prepared to countenance a *Gesamtkunstwerk* outside the confines of the nineteenth century, albeit only under the strictest Wagnerian terms.<sup>18</sup> But I share the view of Roberts and others who consider the idea of a contemporary *Gesamtkunstwerk* to be anachronistic. Wagner's concept was too thoroughly embedded in his historical moment for it to be transportable to Kiefer's radically different era. Moreover, it was -- as some writers appear to forget -- a *theoretical* entity, its central purpose being to provide a form of social cohesion in a post-revolutionary utopian society. It would thus be very implausible indeed to suggest that Kiefer's work should be seen as its realization, for this would be to assume at the very least that such a society currently exists in Germany.

Kiefer's painterly output does *not*, then, constitute a contemporary form of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*; but it nevertheless has much in common with it. What I will show, in essence, is that Kiefer connects with Wagner in two ways: a mutual commitment on the one hand to the notion that art plays a definite social role, and on the other to the notion of artistic synthesis (that is, the idea that the arts should operate in *combination*). The importance of this in terms of the history of art is that it places Wagner and Kiefer on the same side in two of the major debates in modern aesthetic discourse. In the first place, their shared commitment to the idea of art's public function places them on the same side regarding the question of the proper relationship of art and society. On the *other* side of this debate are those for whom art should exist in a kind of vacuum; it should occupy a separate, autonomous sphere, and concern itself solely with matters of taste and aesthetics. This

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<sup>16</sup> Merte, Angela *Totalkunst. Intermediale Entwürfe für eine Ästhetisierung der Lebenswelt* Aisthesis Verlag, Bielefeld 1998.

<sup>17</sup> 'Konzepte, die eine Verlängerung der Gesamtkunstwerksidee ins 20. Jahrhundert darstellen'. 1998 p11.

<sup>18</sup> Fischer-Lichte, Erika 'Das "Gesamtkunstwerk". Ein Konzept für die Kunst der achtziger Jahre?' in *Dialog der Künste: Intermediale Fallstudien zur Literatur des 19. Und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Festschrift für Erwin Koppen. Moog-Grünewald, Matia und Rodiek. Christoph (Redakteure), Frankfurt/M./Bern/New York und Paris 1989 p63.

corresponds roughly to the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*.<sup>19</sup> It is the view, in essence, that the proper relationship of art and society is no relationship at all. I will show that Kiefer and Wagner stand resolutely in the opposite tradition, represented by the view that art is inseparable from the rest of reality. This is to argue, in effect, for the mutual permeation of art and *life*, and to this extent, to militate against the boundaries between the two. And the notion of boundlessness that this evokes will be the central feature of my discussion (hence the reference to 'disorders at the borders' in my title). I endorse Finger and Follett's view that 'the *Gesamtkunstwerk* should be understood above all as an aesthetic ambition to borderlessness'.<sup>20</sup> It is above all this ambition, rather than the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a specific model, that connects Kiefer with Wagner.

Similarly, Wagner and Kiefer's mutual stance regarding artistic synthesis defines their position with respect to a *second* major aesthetic debate of the modern period, the proper relationship of the arts. The opposing position in this debate is taken by those who argue for the strict *separation* of the arts into tightly controlled and defined zones of competence. Wagner and Kiefer, by contrast, argue that the arts should exist in combination. This was fundamental to the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which the arts – principally music, poetry and dance – operated in concert with each other. And Kiefer likewise employs an eclectic mixture of disciplines in his practice, combining painting with photography, printmaking and even sculpture on some occasions. Since the notion of a combination of the arts

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<sup>19</sup> John Wilcox has traced the emergence of this phrase in aesthetic discourse from its first known use, in the *Journal intime* of Benjamin Constant de Rebecque (an associate of Madame de Staël) in 1810. '...I have a visit with Robinson, pupil of Schelling's', writes de Rebecque. 'His work on the *Esthetics* [sic] of Kant has some very forceful ideas. *L'art pour l'art* without purpose, for all purpose perverts art...' (Quoted in Wilcox, John 'The Beginnings of l'Art pour l'Art', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol 11, No. 4, Special Issue on the Interrelations of the Arts (June 1953), pp360-377 (here p360.)) Perhaps the most paradigmatic statement of the phrase's meaning is by Théophile Gautier, who states that '*L'art pour l'art* signifies a work disengaged from all preoccupations other than with the beautiful in itself.' (*L'Art modern*, 1856, quoted in Wilson, 1953 p376.) By 1845, its use had become 'commonplace'. (Wilcox, 1953 p361.)

<sup>20</sup> 2011, p3.

clearly militates against their being kept separate, it constitutes the second instance in Wagner and Kiefer of an aspiration to boundless-ness.

I will also show, however, that what connects Wagner and Kiefer in broader terms comes ultimately from the legacy of the Counter-Enlightenment, the largely Germanic movement -- emerging in the late eighteenth century and resonating deep into the modern era -- predicated on an opposition to the principles of the Enlightenment. It is in this sense, rather than in terms of a mooted German 'essence', that the thread connecting them can be said to be Germanic. As I will explain, Counter-Enlightenment thinking was embodied from the outset in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to the extent that the concept was founded on the principle of communitarianism at odds with the Enlightenment emphasis on individualism. But the aspiration towards the dissolution of boundaries that is my central theme can be seen as likewise a function of the Counter-Enlightenment, insofar as it contradicts a primary tendency of the Enlightenment, which is to keep things resolutely *separate*. In much Germanic discourse, furthermore, the consequences of the Enlightenment have come to be associated mainly with an Anglo-American tradition (and with America in particular). This, then, is my thesis in a single sentence: what fundamentally unites Wagner with Kiefer is a function of a broad divide between a predominantly Germanic, and a predominantly Anglo-American, intellectual tradition that developed from respective responses to the Enlightenment.

## **Chapter Structure**

It is standard academic practice to define one's terms, and in the case of a complex term like the *Gesamtkunstwerk* this is particularly necessary. Chapter 1 will therefore be devoted to this end. I will establish what for my purposes are the three salient characteristics of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, namely its roots in the Counter-Enlightenment, its intimate involvement in contemporary society, and its constitution as a synthesis of the arts. I will trace its emergence from a well-established Germanic discourse that was opposed to forms of society predicated on

Enlightenment principles of individualism on the grounds that it was felt that these led to social alienation. Inspired by Herder, the early Romantics developed a model of society predicated instead on communitarian lines, in which a vital role would be assigned to art. This role was to provide social cohesion, accomplished by means of a *united* artwork, that is, a combination of the arts, symbolizing social unity and thus serving to reinforce it. It was this that provided the model for Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

The following two chapters will establish the social aspect of Kiefer's practice and its synthesizing nature respectively. In Chapter 2, I will show that -- whilst he certainly should not be grouped with an overtly political artist such as Joseph Beuys -- Kiefer ascribes to art an important social role, namely to raise questions that have a social or moral resonance. This seems to be what in his view constitutes art's function. It is evident that the aesthetic aspect of the paintings is subordinated to the spectator's engagement with issues from a realm *beyond* that of aesthetics, namely society. In common with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the paintings exemplify what Finger and Follett call an aesthetic project 'that refuses to remain only aesthetic'.<sup>21</sup> It is in this way -- by connecting with the social realm -- that the paintings militate against the boundary between the two domains. Kiefer seems determined to restore to art the public role that certain modernist discourses have conspired to take from it, and for this reason I will demonstrate that his practice constitutes a contemporary form of history painting, differing from the traditional form by virtue of a constant admission of art's discursive nature. The chapter will be based around an examination of his exploration of the theme of German guilt for the crimes of the Nazis, since this is the clearest instance of his involvement with a social issue. His engagement with Germany's deeply problematic recent past is a theme that has been explored before<sup>22</sup>; but I will emphasize an issue that it raises that seems to have been

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<sup>21</sup> 2011, p2.

<sup>22</sup> See Arasse, 2014; Huyssen, 1989; Biro, Matthew *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* Cambridge University Press, 1998; *Anselm Kiefer* Phaidon, London 2013; Schütz, Sabine *Anselm Kiefer – Geschichte als Material* DuMont Buchverlag, Köln 1999; Saltzman, Lisa *Anselm Kiefer and Art After Auschwitz* Cambridge University Press, 1997.



overlooked in the literature, the question of collective *responsibility*, which as Hannah Arendt has argued differs from collective guilt insofar as it does not depend on participation in a crime.<sup>23</sup>

In Chapter 3, I will investigate the theme of artistic synthesis in more detail. Both Wagner and Kiefer base their practice on a combination of the arts; but the question is whether or not a recognizable third term arises from the combination, since this is what is implied from the notion of synthesis. Using guidelines developed by Jerrold Levinson, I will show that whereas in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* such a third term emerges, in Kiefer this is not the case. Where they connect more closely is in the context of their mutual attack on the tenets of artistic purity. This takes the form of a convincing demonstration that the criteria according to which the arts have traditionally been divided -- time versus space and sense organ of reception -- are unsustainable. This part of my thesis will draw extensively on the work of Simon Shaw-Miller.<sup>24</sup>

The final two chapters return to the theme of the Counter-Enlightenment. In Chapter 4, we shall see that the latter translated itself in Germany into the tradition of counter-Americanism, the story of which I will briefly trace from Hegel to Heidegger and beyond. I will show how this tradition was fuelled by the disastrous events of modern German history, and that both Wagner and Kiefer can be contextualized within it, the former to the extent that the communitarian ethos embodied in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was seen as the antithesis of American individualism, and the latter to the extent that his remaining largely immune to the influence of the major postwar tendencies in American art can be understood, at least in part, as a symbolic rejection of Americanism.

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<sup>23</sup> See Arendt, Hannah 'Collective responsibility [Originally published 1968]' in *Responsibility and Judgment* Schocken Books, New York 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Particularly *Visible Deeds of Music: Art and Music from Wagner to Cage* Yale University Press, 2002 and *Eye hEar [sic]: The Visual in Music* Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham 2013.

In Chapter 5, I will show that the aspiration to borderless-ness in Wagner and Kiefer – evident from their dissolution of the borders between art and society on the one hand and between the individual arts on the other – can be interpreted as a reaction against the tendency of modernity to separate reality into discrete areas available for intellectual mastery, a tendency that notable commentators have seen as a function of the Enlightenment. I will build on ideas derived from Adorno, a highly significant figure in the literature surrounding both the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and art that takes the Holocaust as its subject matter, as does much of Kiefer's work (albeit indirectly).<sup>25</sup> My approach, however, will be to use his own arguments against him; whereas Adorno argues in favor of autonomy, and against artistic synthesis, I will deploy his concept of 'negative dialectics' in support of the contrary positions.

All translations in the text are my own unless otherwise indicated.

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<sup>25</sup> In addition to the fact of his having written extensively on the subject, Adorno will perhaps forever be associated with the issue of art and the Holocaust owing to his oft-quoted remark that to 'write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.' (Cultural Criticism and Society', in Adorno, Theodor W *Prisms: Cultural Criticism and Society, Spengler, Huxley, Kafka, Proust, Schoenberg, Jazz, Etc* Translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber, Neville Spearman London 1967 p34.) Lisa Saltzman notes that this remark is generally assumed to have been occasioned by his reading of Paul Celan's poem, *Todesfuge* (1997 p30).

## Chapter 1: What was the *Gesamtkunstwerk*?

For our object will naturally be, to discover the meaning of Art as a factor in the life of the State, and to make ourselves acquainted with it as a social product. – Richard Wagner<sup>1</sup>

*In this chapter, I will show how the Gesamtkunstwerk developed from the contemporary debate concerning the proper nature of society, specifically from the communitarian model of society derived from the Counter-Enlightenment and opposed to the model based on individualism derived from the Enlightenment. This informed what for the purposes of my discussion are its principal features as an art form: its social orientation, and its constitution as a ‘community of the arts’.*

One of the more divisive debates in modernity has been regarding the nature of community. In this debate, the principal issue at stake has been whether communities exist on the one hand to provide a sense of fellowship, or on the other to provide individual self-realization. This translates into a question of *focus*; if the former is felt to be paramount in a society, that society’s focus will be on the collective as against the individual. If the latter, this will be reversed. And this is the essential issue, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, behind the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

I will show that Wagner’s great project was a function of the reaction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, experienced most strongly in the German states, against the view that emerged from the Enlightenment that emphasized the principle of individualism. Many important German thinkers of the period found themselves fundamentally opposed to this view, chiefly because it was felt that from

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Art and Revolution’, Reproduced in Wagner, Richard *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Essays* Translated by W. Ashton Ellis, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 1993 (Reprinted from Volume 1 of *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, first published in 1895) p31.

individualism comes alienation, and ultimately social collapse. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* was an expression of the contrary position, which emphasized collectivism, and proceeded from the conviction that it is fellow feeling that keeps communities together. What this view -- which is broadly synonymous with communitarianism -- explicitly *repudiates* is the notion that a community should exist simply to further the self-interest of its citizens. Owing much to the work of Herder, it was very much promoted by the early Romantics around the beginning of the nineteenth century, and forms an important strand of what has come to be called the 'Counter-Enlightenment'.<sup>2</sup> Inspired by Herder's model of community, the Romantics also developed the idea of a unified artwork -- consisting of a combination of the arts -- that would serve to symbolize community feeling and thus to reinforce it. Partially realized in the work of Philipp Otto Runge and others, this proved to be the direct precursor of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. But the Romantics acknowledged, as would Wagner, that the emergence of such an artwork would necessarily be preceded by radical social change; its existence was precluded from contemporary society owing to that society's alienated condition.

Having investigated the ideas of Herder and the Romantics in some detail and discussed how these contradicted the assumptions of the Enlightenment, I will explain how they fed into the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as developed by Wagner in the *Zürich Papers*, contributing to its two key characteristics: a deeply embedded social orientation, and a constitution defined in terms of a combination, or synthesis, of the arts. It is principally these two facets -- albeit in very different form -- that reappear in the work of Kiefer.

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<sup>2</sup> Some scholars recognize three distinct phases within Romanticism, as Frederick C Beiser observes: an early phase, or *Frühromantik*, a 'high' phase, or *Hochromantik*, and a late phase, or *Spätromantik*, approximately from 1797 to 1802, 1803 to 1815 and 1816 to 1830 respectively (Beiser, Frederick C (Ed) *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* Cambridge University Press, 1996 pxii). In this chapter, I will refer principally to the early phase.

## Enlightenment and its Discontents

Although the term itself is resistant to an inclusive definition, and no consensus exists concerning its dates other than that it corresponded approximately with the long eighteenth century, what nevertheless united the disparate elements comprising the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment was an emphasis on, and confidence in, the power of *reason*. It was faith in reason that informed all of the achievements of the Enlightenment, from Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* of 1687 to Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* of 1776. The principal outcome of the movement was consequently the institutionalization of confidence in reason. And a highly significant, albeit indirect result of this was the rise of individualism, that is, the social doctrine that focuses on the individual rather than on the collective. This was partly because when credited with the faculty of reason the individual becomes a unit of *value*, but also because the emphasis placed by Enlightenment commentators on reason led to the promotion of societies constituted on the basis of so-called 'natural laws', laws that are assumed to correspond to principles universally apprehensible by reason and which no reasonable person would refute. As Thomas Hobbes explains in his *Leviathan* of 1651, a natural law is 'a precept, or general rule, found out by reason.'<sup>3</sup> And natural laws tend to be oriented towards issues of consequence for the individual, notably, the preservation and protection of his or her life and property. They correspond with what might reasonably be assumed to be his or her basic *rights*. 'The state of nature, writes John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government* of 1690 (clearly anticipating the 'self-evident' truths of the American Constitution), 'has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one; and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions'.<sup>4</sup> Thus natural laws, which are those that correspond to eminently reasonable principles, favor the rights of the individual. And it is the purpose of

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<sup>3</sup> Hobbes, Thomas *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* First published 1651 Mineola, New York 2006 p64.

<sup>4</sup> Locke, John *The Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* Dover Publications, 2002 Chapter 2, Section 6 p3.

society, Locke argues, to protect such rights. 'Political society', he says, 'is instituted for no other end, but only to secure every man's possession of the things of this life'.<sup>5</sup> Men and women enter into society with one another so that 'by mutual assistance and joint force they may secure unto each other their properties', the things that contribute to 'comfort and happiness'.<sup>6</sup>

It is from an emphasis on reason, then, that individualism comes. And from individualism, in turn, comes liberal democracy, the principle of individual freedom allied to the principle of individual participation in the political process. It is individualism also that yields the capitalist free market, in which individuals are largely free to conduct business independently of interference from government. Thus the twin foundations of modern Western society, liberal democracy and capitalism, proceeded to a large degree ultimately from the Enlightenment and its exaltation of reason. It is in this respect that, as John Robertson comments, the Enlightenment represents 'the monolithic edifice responsible for modernity'.<sup>7</sup>

But the so-called 'Age of Reason' had its discontents. By the end of the eighteenth century, influential thinkers – mainly in the German states -- had begun to raise serious concerns regarding what they considered to be the highly undesirable consequences of the *Aufklärung*, although it was not until 1973, in the context of Isaiah Berlin's eponymous essay, that what their ideas represented would come formally to be designated as the 'Counter-Enlightenment'.<sup>8</sup> And at stake for these thinkers was something very fundamental, so that the period between approximately 1780 and 1815 – the formative years of the Counter-Enlightenment -- consequently saw the appearance of a profound ideological fissure that persisted far into the modern era between the English-speaking nations on the one hand, and

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<sup>5</sup> *A Letter Concerning Toleration* [1689], in Locke, 2002 p143.

<sup>6</sup> *A Letter Concerning Toleration* [1689], in Locke, 2002 p142.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Case for Enlightenment: A Comparative Approach' in Mali, Joseph and Wokler, Robert (Eds) 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment' *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol 93 No5 2003 p74.

<sup>8</sup> See Berlin, Isaiah 'The Counter-Enlightenment' in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* Vintage, 1998. Berlin associates the Counter-Enlightenment principally with Giambattista Vico, Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried von Herder and Joseph de Maistre.

Germany on the other. Stephen R C Hicks does not exaggerate the case when he states that, during this period, 'Anglo-American culture and German culture split decisively from each other, one following a broadly Enlightenment program, the other a Counter-Enlightenment one'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, this is to a large extent the assumption that underpins my thesis, the central conclusion of which is that Wagner and Kiefer descend from the latter program.

The principal cause of this division was the issue of the proper basis of human society, and the bitter disagreement of the Counter-Enlightenment thinkers was with Locke and his disciples over the concept of society based on individualism. But it was paradoxically a writer associated with the Enlightenment, and whose work had served as a chief inspiration for the French Revolution, that can be credited with firing the opening salvo of the Counter-Enlightenment: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Despite his important contributions to Enlightenment thought, Rousseau was responsible for a devastating frontal attack on the Enlightenment exaltation of reason and the individualism that follows from it. Ever since reason had entered human affairs, he says, all 'the subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps toward the perfection of the individual and in fact towards the decay of the species'.<sup>10</sup> Rousseau greatly favors societies founded on collectivism, in which the interests of the groups as a whole – rather than those of the individual -- are paramount, over those founded on individualism. Nowhere is this more apparent than from the oath he formulated for the planned constitution of Corsica. 'I join myself,' Corsican citizens would have been invited to swear, 'body, goods, will and all my powers to the Corsican nation, granting to her the full ownership of me, myself and all that depends on me'.<sup>11</sup> The contrast with the constitution of the Republics

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<sup>9</sup> Hicks, Stephen R C *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* Scholargy Publishing, Tempe, Arizona and New Berlin/Milwaukee, Wisconsin 2004 pp24-5.

<sup>10</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men* [1755] Translated by Donald Cress Hackett, Indianapolis 1992 p50.

<sup>11</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 'Projet de Constitution pour la Corse' [1765] in *The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Volume II Edited by Vaughan, C E John Wiley & Sons, New York 1962 p297.

of France and America, both formulated on Enlightenment principles, could hardly be starker.

Rousseau's ideas were highly influential in Germany, notably on Immanuel Kant -- another thinker routinely identified with the Enlightenment, but whose position is in fact ambivalent, due to the devastating blow to the primacy of reason delivered by the arguments he advanced in his *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781 -- and on Kant's pupil Herder, by whom was first elaborated the notion of the *Volk* that, as we shall see, was of great significance for Wagner. It is principally with Herder that the communitarian view of society, thoroughly at odds with the Enlightenment view, begins in Germany. He is a seminal figure in the genealogy of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, since the concept was above all an expression of the spirit of communitarianism. For this reason, it can be seen as from the outset a function of the Counter-Enlightenment. Let us therefore consider Herder's ideas in a little more detail, and the way that he emphasizes the importance of an individual's embedded-ness in his or her community.

### **An Extended Family**

It was the firm conviction of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) that a community founded on rational principles alone would lack the source of the cohesion that keeps societies together. A successful community -- that is, one that *endures* -- stays together for more compelling reasons. Furthermore, it was in Herder's view a great mistake to attempt to graft onto a community ideals that have not generated organically within it. It was thus a mistake for countries other than France and England -- where the ideals of the Enlightenment had principally been developed -- to adopt those ideals, and this included Germany. 'Voltaire's philosophy has spread,' says Herder, 'but mainly to the detriment of the world'.<sup>12</sup> But neither did he embrace the system of government that obtained at that time in the German states, namely what was known as 'enlightened absolutism'. This showed the partial

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<sup>12</sup> 'Journal of My Voyage in the Year 1769' in *J G Herder on Social and Political Culture* Edited by Barnard, F M Cambridge University Press 1969 p95.



influence of Enlightenment thinking to the extent that it was characterized by a greater degree of permissiveness -- reflecting a limited acceptance of natural laws -- than previous autocratic systems. It was based on a form of social contract, whereby a people gave up certain rights by entrusting power to a ruler in return for protection and the preservation of their remaining rights, to which end the ruler dedicated him or herself. In this way, it represented the meeting of Enlightenment values with old-fashioned despotism, such that whilst power remained concentrated in the hands of an absolute monarch, certain values such as religious toleration and freedom of speech were encouraged. In the words of Frederick II of Prussia ('The Great'), its most notable practitioner, enlightened absolutism was a matter of 'all government *for* the people, but none *by* the people'.<sup>13</sup> For Herder, however, it was a discredited form of government, because it was based on a radical misunderstanding of what it is that motivates human beings to form themselves into communities and nations. It was to correct this misunderstanding that he evolved a conception of nationhood -- novel at the time -- that has proved highly influential.

Herder thinks of a nation not so much as a political institution as what he calls a *Volk*, that is, a *people*. It is a group of individuals united by such things as culture, ancestry, family ties, history, and most particularly, language -- such things as, in short, constitute *ethnicity*. This will be a concept of paramount significance in the formulation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (but shown to be highly problematic by Kiefer, who as Sabine Schütz and others have shown is acutely aware of the historical exploitation of ethnicity in the construction of extreme nationalist discourses such as Nazism<sup>14</sup>). As the Herder scholar F M Barnard writes, a nation in this view 'is no longer simply a group of people governed by a common sovereign'; rather, 'it is a collectivity bound by spiritual ties and cultural traditions'.<sup>15</sup> It is, furthermore, in Herder's view a function of a powerful and fundamental human need, the need to *belong*. Most emphatically, it had nothing to do with the protection of individual

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Beiser (Ed), 1996 pxxiii.

<sup>14</sup> See Schütz, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Barnard, F M *Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History* McGill-Queens University Press, 2003 p50-1.

rights. And this, according to Isaiah Berlin, was something that Herder was amongst the first to articulate; the idea of belonging and rooted-ness ‘was invented largely by Herder’.<sup>16</sup>

United by the bonds of ethnicity, the nation for Herder resembles an ‘extended family’.<sup>17</sup> It also resembles a family to the extent that it is above all the need of the individual to belong, rather than any externally imposed *law*, that Herder believes keeps nations together. A nation *chooses* to stay together because of the sense of identity this guarantees. It is thus akin to a family that remains united ‘not out of physical necessity but out of choice, out of the desire to remain a family’, as Barnard puts it.<sup>18</sup> Where laws and other institutions do exist in a society, these are the result of a natural process of *emergence* (it is in this respect that Herder’s view departs substantially from that of Rousseau, who argues for the *creation* of such institutions by an external law-giver at a given moment in a people’s history, as Barnard notes<sup>19</sup>).

The metaphor of a family aptly suits what is one of Herder’s central contentions: that the separation of humanity into various nations constitutes the *natural* state of affairs. In this way, he is thoroughly opposed to cosmopolitanism. ‘Nature’, he tells us,

has *divided* peoples through language, ethics, customs, often through mountains, seas, rivers, and deserts; it, so to speak, did everything in order that they should for a long time *remain* separated from each other and become rooted in themselves. Precisely contrary to the world-unifying plan of that *Nimrod*, the languages got confused (as the old legend says); the peoples divided from each other. The diversity of languages, ethics, inclinations, and ways of life was destined to become a bar against the presumptuous *linking together* of the peoples, a dam against foreign inundations – for the steward of the world was concerned

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<sup>16</sup> Berlin, Isaiah *The Roots of Romanticism* (Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1965) Chatto and Windus, 1999 p60.

<sup>17</sup> *Werke* XIII, 384 quoted in Barnard, 2003 p45.

<sup>18</sup> Barnard, 2003 p45.

<sup>19</sup> Barnard, 2003 p41.

that for the security of the whole each people and race preserved *its* impress, *its* character; peoples should live beside each other, not mixed up with and on top of each other oppressing each other.<sup>20</sup>

It should not be concluded, however, from the family metaphor that Herder advocates the separation of nations on the basis of race or blood. Barnard and Berlin agree that this is something that Herder emphatically rejects.<sup>21</sup> Rather, ethnicity for Herder is a function of a shared *heritage*. One of the things that it encompasses is folk culture, in which Herder was particularly interested. In 1773, he published a collection of German folk songs, *Voices of the Peoples in Their Songs* [Stimmen der Völker in Ihren Liedern], which was later expanded to include other aspects of folk culture including dance, folklore, music and art (it also formed the inspiration for Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, whose first collection of German folk tales was published in 1812). For Herder, another highly significant marker of cultural identity was mythology, which he saw as a form of knowledge -- closely related to poetry -- insofar that it is a means of *conceptualizing* the world. Myths function by *personifying* the forces that seem to determine reality, thus rendering them comprehensible. This is why, in the earliest mythology, gods appear in all the elements. 'In the roaring waterfall', writes Herder, 'in the ocean, in the storm, in lightening [sic] and thunder, in the sighing air, in all movements of Nature there are effective, acting beings.'<sup>22</sup> Thus myth-making is characteristic of the way in which we explain the world to ourselves. 'Our reason', Herder tells us,

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<sup>20</sup> 'Letters for the Advancement of Humanity [1793-7] tenth collection' in *Herder: Philosophical Writings* Translated by Michael N Forster, Cambridge University Press 2002 pp384-5. The reference to Nimrod may come from Jewish mythology, which associates him with the myth of the Tower of Babel. The traditional Jewish interpretation of the latter, found in Flavius Josephus (a first century Romano-Jewish scholar), explains the construction of the tower as an act of hubris on Nimrod's part, which resulted in the 'confusion of tongues', the creation by God of a multiplicity of languages to replace the originary, single human language.

<sup>21</sup> See Barnard, 2003 p27, Berlin 1965/1999 p60.

<sup>22</sup> 'Über Bild, Dichtung und Fabel', quoted in Steinby, Liisa 'The Rehabilitation of Myth: Enlightenment and Romanticism in Johann Gottfried Herder's *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*' Septentrio Academic Publishing, 2009 pp54-79 (here p60). <http://septentrio.uit.no/index.php/1700/article/viewFile/2760/2613>. Accessed 5 June 2016.

develops only through the creation of fictions. We always look for and create a unity for ourselves out of plurality and shape it into a *Gestalt*.<sup>23</sup>

In ascribing rational qualities to mythology, Herder is again at odds with the Enlightenment *philosophes*, who had dismissed it as irrational, or mere superstition (Voltaire, for example, had seen it as the height of *unreason*. 'It is the case', he sneers, 'that the bulk of the human race has been for a very long time unthinking and foolish; and that perhaps the most foolish of all were those who wanted to find a meaning in these absurd fables, and locate reason in madness.'<sup>24</sup>). Above all, myths are in Herder's view a vital part of a group's particular identity. A mythic figure is a product of the cultural imagination of a society that signifies something of importance for that society. As Liisa Steinby writes, mythology is for Herder 'a collective concept: it is a cultural imagery through which a nation defines itself and its world'.<sup>25</sup> His view -- inherited by the Romantics, and thereafter by Wagner -- is that it is in its mythology that a nation expresses its most basic values and, at the same time, rehearses its sense of community. This is an important idea also for Kiefer, who investigates the role of mythology in the formation of cultural identity in the series of paintings and woodcuts on the theme of the founding myth of Germany, the *Hermannsschlacht* [Hermann's Battle], and elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

But for Herder, what is *most* particular to an ethnic group -- and the strongest bond uniting it -- is unquestionably language. He sees the latter as partly dependent on geographical and climatic conditions, since these have a physiological effect. 'Climate [*Klima*]', he says, 'air and water, food and drink, will have an influence on the linguistic organs and naturally also on language'.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the style and character of a people's literature is dependent on its language. A nation's literature

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<sup>23</sup> 'Iduna, oder der Apfel der Verjüngung' (1796), quoted in Steinby, 2009 p59.

<sup>24</sup> 'C'est que le gros du genre humain a été très longtemps insensé et imbécile; et que peut-être les plus insensés de tou ont été ceux qui ont voulu trouver un sense à ces fables absurdes, et mettre de la raison dans la folie.' Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet), 'La Philosophie de l'histoire' in *The Complete Works of Voltaire* Edited by Theodore Besterman et al, 59 Geneva & Toronto, 1969, p105.

<sup>25</sup> Steinby, 2009 p60.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of this series see Schütz, 1999 Chapter 8.

<sup>27</sup> 'Treatise on the Origin of Language' (1772) in Herder, 2002 p148.

‘which is original and national must form itself in accordance with such a nation’s original native language in such a way that the two run together.’<sup>28</sup> Indeed, there is in Herder a suggestion that a nation is characterized by a unique ‘viewpoint’ or worldview, and this is in part conditioned by language. ‘However different’, he argues,

was the viewpoint from which the nation took cognizance of a matter, the nation named the matter. And since this was never the viewpoint of the Creator – who not only saw the becoming of this matter in its inner nature but also commanded it – but was instead an external, one-sided viewpoint, this viewpoint got imported into the language at the same time too...Precisely thanks to this, it was therefore possible for the eyes of all later people to be, so to speak, accustomed, tied, limited, or at least brought close, to this viewpoint.<sup>29</sup>

It is his faith in language as the key to national traits of character that informs Herder’s study of the Hebrew language, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, published in 1782. For he adamantly maintains that it is in a nation’s language, its poetry most particularly, that clues to such traits are most readily to be found. Languages, Herder tells us, ‘exhibit the most distinguishing traits of character, and the manner in which objects are contemplated by different nations’.<sup>30</sup> In consequence, he attempts to gain access to the *mindset* of the ancient Hebrew poets by means of an analysis of the language they used. This constitutes an approach to hermeneutics based on empathy (*Einfühlung*), the only way, Herder argues, that it is possible to achieve an insight into a society not one’s own. A special kind of imaginative effort is involved. ‘In order to judge of a nation’, he writes, ‘we must live in their time, in their own country, must adopt their modes of thinking and feeling’.<sup>31</sup>

Because, as mentioned above, its literature to some degree determines a people’s mindset, it is in Herder’s view partly thanks to its poetic tradition that the Jewish

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Fragments on Recent German Literature’ (1767-8) in Herder, 2002 p50.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Herder, Johann Gottfried von *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (First Published 1782) Translated by James Marsh, Burlington 1833 p27.

<sup>31</sup> Herder, 1782/1833 p28.

people, compelled to a nomadic existence, have nevertheless succeeded in preserving a highly recognizable identity over the course of several millennia. The national character is encoded in their poetry. Furthermore, the latter serves to preserve the Jewish people's 'primitive conceptions' such as beliefs about the cosmos, which 'they had received as a legacy from the most ancient times,' as well as the histories of their patriarchs and prophets such as Moses.<sup>32</sup> Above all, Hebrew poetry provides the Jewish people with a tenuous link to 'the blissful golden age of their ancestors', the memory of which has no doubt offered some degree of comfort in the bitter trials of their history.<sup>33</sup>

The story of the Jews was evidence of the unique power of a shared heritage, since it seemed to have been precisely this that had kept the nation together over the course of its vicissitudes. Here was conclusive proof, it seemed, that nationality is more than a matter of geography or coercion. But the story also provides Herder (and later also the poet Heinrich Heine, an important associate of Wagner) with a *political* example. For in its original incarnation, the Jewish nation was constituted by a *plurality* – the twelve tribes of Israel – that united itself whilst preserving a degree of independence for its constituent parts. And this, for Herder, serves as the paradigm for an ideal state: a collection of autonomous entities within a larger ethnic group (medieval Germany, in Herder's view, was somewhat of the same order, with its wide variety of relatively independent organizations such as trade guilds). As Barnard observes, the political model favored by Herder is 'a kind of partnership between distinct institutions and associations within a political structure free from any major pressure point'.<sup>34</sup> What he flatly rejects are 'neoclassical contrivances' held together by administrative fiat or military conquest, 'machine-states, without any inner source of life'.<sup>35</sup> And it is Herder's political model, as we shall see, that becomes a further part of his bequest to the Romantics.

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<sup>32</sup> Herder, 1782/1833 p13.

<sup>33</sup> Herder, 1782/1833 p123.

<sup>34</sup> Barnard, 2003 p27.

<sup>35</sup> *Werke* XIII, Quoted in Barnard, 2003 p27.

For Herder, then, it is the sense of *community* -- arising from a shared ethnicity -- that is at the root of nationhood. As Barnard writes, he believes that it is 'an individual's *embeddedness* within a larger whole that forms the matrix (in its most literal sense) of a person's existence and development [emphasis original].'<sup>36</sup> Indeed, ethnicity has, as we have seen, in Herder's view an actually *formative* influence on a person's identity. As Berlin puts it, he believes that 'that which people who belong to the same group have in common is more directly responsible for their being as they are than that which they have in common with others in other places.'<sup>37</sup> Similarly, his normative vision of a nation -- that is to say, what a nation *ought* to be -- consists not of isolated individuals pursuing their own interests, but of citizens engaged in a kind of co-operative venture, jointly deploying what he terms their *zusammenwirkende Kräfte*, their capacity for working together. This is diametrically opposed to the view of society advanced by Locke. Herder's emphasis is unfailingly on the relationship of the individual with the community; and it is above all *this*, his focus on the human subject in the context of his or her community rather than as an isolated individual, that finds its way into the view of the early Romantics, and subsequently into the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It is for this reason that Counter-Enlightenment thinking can be said to be at the very heart of the concept.

The communitarian standpoint advocated by Herder resurfaced in the context of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century debate between Ferdinand Tönnies (whose *Community and Civil Society* was first published in 1887), Emile Durkheim and others regarding the relative merits of *Gemeinschaft* (community) versus *Gesellschaft* (society). As Shearer West writes, Tönnies identified a 'polarity' between the former, which was 'rural, natural based on kinship and family feeling', and the latter, which was 'urban, individualistic and mechanistic'.<sup>38</sup> *Gemeinschaft* came quickly to be associated with 'a better, lost way of rural life', while *Gesellschaft* was criticized as

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<sup>36</sup> Barnard, 2003 p27.

<sup>37</sup> Berlin, 1965/1999 p61.

<sup>38</sup> West, Shearer *The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937* Manchester University Press, 2000 p47.

'egotistical, dehumanizing and urban'.<sup>39</sup> That the important early German Expressionist group known as the *Brücke* aligned themselves closely with the former is evident from their choice of name, which as Shearer notes was in its original form *Künstlergemeinschaft Brücke*.<sup>40</sup> Christian Weikop identifies a clear continuity between this group and Kiefer in the form of the latter's extensive use of woodcut, as for example in his handmade book, *The Face of the German People, Coal for 2000 Years* (1974), which strongly recalls the portrait woodcuts of *Brücke* artists such as Emil Nolde and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.<sup>41</sup>

### **The 'Organic State'**

I turn now to the Romantics themselves, and the movement whose somewhat obscure beginnings in the small university town of Jena belie the astounding influence that it would come to exert in Western civilization. To Berlin, Romanticism represents nothing less than 'the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred'.<sup>42</sup> Its role in the formulation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was a pivotal one, as we shall shortly see. Its influence on Kiefer has also been profound.<sup>43</sup> And it is certainly with the Jena Romantics, properly speaking, that the ambition to borderless-ness that informs the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and unites Wagner with Kiefer enters German aesthetic discourse. But their ideas about art proceeded in large degree from their analysis of modernity, and an appreciation of the former therefore requires some understanding of the latter. In common with Herder, the chief preoccupation of the Jena circle was what they saw as the over-emphasis placed by Enlightenment thinkers on the individual.

Herder had seen the system of enlightened absolutism as anathema because it depended on an artificial, manufactured device (the social contract). It thus

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> West, 2000 p50.

<sup>41</sup> Weikop, Christian 'Forests of Myth, Forests of Memory' in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p45.

<sup>42</sup> Berlin, 1965/1999 p1.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of Kiefer's engagement with Romanticism see for example Weikop, in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 pp30-48.



constituted precisely the kind of 'neo-classical contrivance' to which he objected. To the extent that it was a *principle*, rather than a system of government emerging naturally from a community in the manner favored by Herder, any state determined by enlightened absolutism resembled a machine. Following Herder, and for the same reason, the early Romantics reject it, denouncing the idea of a state run 'like a factory', as Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg) puts it in his essay of 1798, 'Faith and Love'.<sup>44</sup> They agree with Herder that the underlying problem with enlightened absolutism is that it fails to understand the true nature of community. For its central precept is that what motivates the citizenry to enter into the social contract is the desire to seek *protection*; it thus locates the basis of community in self-interest, and ignores the importance of the need to *belong* identified by Herder. Indeed, community feeling *cannot* be the product of a machine state, for one cannot feel allegiance to a principle. And enlightened absolutism, in the Romantic view, disregards this fact at its peril. 'As necessary as such a mechanical administration may be for physical health, strength and efficiency in a state', writes Novalis,

a state goes to ruin when it is governed only in this manner. The principle of the old famous system [ie absolutism] is to bind everyone to the state by self-interest [to the extent that the state guarantees safety in return for obedience]. The clever politician had the ideal of the state where the interests of the state were as self-centered as those of its subjects, yet where the interests of both are so artificially connected that they reciprocally promoted one another.<sup>45</sup>

But for the Romantics it was the identical failing – an emphasis on self-interest at the expense of community feeling – that also undermined classical liberalism, the political doctrine that had emerged from Enlightenment thought. At this time a comparatively new phenomenon in Germany (indeed, the term would not come into general use until the 1830s, as Beiser notes), liberalism nevertheless had some

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<sup>44</sup> Reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p45.

<sup>45</sup> 'Faith and Love', reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p45.

prominent German advocates including Kant and Friedrich Schiller.<sup>46</sup> Its central theme was a determined opposition to all forms of despotism, and a corresponding promotion of individual rights – property rights in particular -- and freedoms. In an essay of 1796, Friedrich Schlegel supplies a verbatim quote of the definition of republicanism in Kant's *Zum ewigen Frieden* [To Eternal Peace] of the previous year that approximately encapsulates the contemporary idea of liberalism. It strongly recalls the motto of the French Revolution, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, as well as the central doctrine of the American Declaration of Independence, 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' 'A republican constitution', Kant had written,

is founded firstly upon the principle of *freedom* for all members of a society (as men), secondly upon the principle of *dependence* of everyone upon a single common legislation (as subjects), and thirdly upon the principle of legal *equality* for everyone (as citizens).<sup>47</sup>

Schlegel and his circle were well aware, of course, that the great liberal experiment in France had by this time degenerated into the Reign of Terror. And what was lacking from the definition as stated above was in the Romantic view any sense of the importance of the ties of allegiance and belonging to which Herder had tirelessly called attention. These are ties that it is incumbent on the state actively to *promote*, since – as Herder's account of the story of the Jews had seemed to prove -- they are what keep a nation together. All that the state after the liberal model seemed designed to promote was the importance of individual rights, and this was potentially disastrous. 'Flight from the communal spirit', declares Novalis, 'is death'.<sup>48</sup> A society whose operating principle is the rights of the individual cannot in any case sustain itself, partly because individuals will feel able to *withdraw* from such a society whenever it suits them, but also because unlimited personal freedom is inimical to society. As Schlegel remarks, 'if freedom were absolute there could be

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<sup>46</sup> Beiser (Ed), 1996 pxxiii.

<sup>47</sup> 'Essay on the Concept of Republicanism occasioned by the Kantian Tract 'Perpetual Peace'', reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p95.

<sup>48</sup> 'Pollen' (1798), reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p26.

no community'.<sup>49</sup> The freedom of members of a community must be limited; as Novalis recognized, 'the nature of every political organization demands this'.<sup>50</sup>

It was certainly not the case, of course, that the Jena Romantics objected to the concept of freedom. But it seemed to them that liberalism was in some degree of a piece with enlightened absolutism, to the extent that it proceeded from an understanding of human nature as wholly determined by self-interest. Such an understanding is the possibly inevitable consequence of considering the individual in isolation, rather than in the context of his or her community in the way that Herder had recommended. As Schlegel comments, 'who wants to know man as a whole must consider him in society'; and it was the failure to do so that accounted, in the Romantic view, for the failure of all contemporary systems of government, since these represented so many attempts to build a community based on the mistaken idea that self-interest was the sole impulse informing human action.<sup>51</sup> 'Much effort', writes Novalis,

has been spent on this political squaring of the circle [ie attempting to do the impossible]...Nevertheless, this formal acceptance of common egoism as a principle has done untold damage. The germ of the revolution of our day rests nowhere but here.<sup>52</sup>

With this reference to revolution, Novalis is speaking literally. For revolution, it seemed to the Jena group, would be the necessary consequence of the fundamental tendency of modernity: ever-increasing social alienation caused by political institutions predicated on an erroneous and reductive view of human nature that failed to take account of the individual's need to belong. As would Wagner, the Romantics envisaged a new social order, founded on communitarian lines, arising in its aftermath. And it would be for such a post-revolutionary utopian society that, as we shall discover, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* would be designed.

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<sup>49</sup> 'Theory of Human Nature', from *Philosophical Lectures: Transcendental Philosophy (excerpts)* Jena, 1800-01, reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p145.

<sup>50</sup> 'Faith and Love', reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p45.

<sup>51</sup> 'Theory of Human Nature', reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p145.

<sup>52</sup> 'Faith and Love', reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p45.

Whether absolutist or liberal, modern societies led to the breakdown of community bonds, and the modern subject, in the Romantic view, found him or herself consequently without a spiritual *home*. For Novalis, Romantic philosophy originated in the resulting sentiment, namely 'homesickness [*Heimweh*], *the urge to be at home everywhere in the world* [emphasis original].<sup>53</sup> But modernity was also spiritually corrosive, to the extent that, with a view to a kind of self-perpetuation, a society founded on the principle of self-interest breeds self-interest in its citizens.

'Everything', writes Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher,

is directed to these ends: increasing possession of things and knowledge; security and aid against fate and misfortune; increased power through the community to limit others. This is all that people now seek and find, whether in friendship, marriage or the fatherland; they do not seek and find help to complete the development of their individuality, or to enrich their inner life.<sup>54</sup>

It was the *anomie* of modern society, and the self-interest in which it both originated and expressed itself, that the Jena circle resolved to abolish. At the same time, however, they recognized the critical importance of personal freedom, with which a sense of belonging had to be combined. The role of the state, in the Romantic view, was therefore to promote in its citizens the latter sense whilst at the same time allowing for an acceptable degree of freedom and autonomy. '*The highest good is community and freedom* [emphasis original]', declares Schlegel.<sup>55</sup> 'Hence he who promotes community and freedom', he continues, 'has done service for humanity'. The problem was how to achieve a balance between these two apparently contradictory necessities: an individual's need to belong, and his or her ineluctable right to freedom. And it seemed to the Romantics that neither the enlightened absolutist nor the liberal reformer could possibly succeed in this regard. Enlightened absolutism achieved a certain sense of community, but it was of a thoroughly

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<sup>53</sup> *The Universal Brouillon: Materials for an Encyclopedia*, No 857, reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p90.

<sup>54</sup> 'Worldview' in *Monologue III*, reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p192.

<sup>55</sup> 'Theory of Human Nature', in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p146.

manufactured variety, and came at the excessively high price of the circumscription of individual freedom. In the liberal model, this was reversed. Unrestrained individual freedom was matched with a complete lack of community feeling. Furthermore, to the extent that both systems were the product of Enlightenment rationality, both took on the aspect of the despised 'machine-state'.

The solution advanced by the Jena group had the character of an 'organic' state, insofar as it was intended to consist of separate, but mutually dependent institutions working together somewhat after the manner of organs in the human body. 'Each person', writes Novalis, 'is a small society'.<sup>56</sup> 'The state is a person,' he observes elsewhere,

just like the individual. What the individual is to himself the state is to individuals. States will differ among themselves as long as people do too.<sup>57</sup>

The organic state would be principally characterized by a large variety of institutions operating at an intermediate level, *between* central government and the individual. What the Romantics had in mind was guilds and other trade associations, local councils and corporations, educational establishments and so on, precisely the kind of organizations to which enlightened absolutism (with its highly centralized government) and liberalism (with its emphasis on individualism) were ideologically opposed. 'Tribunals, theatres, courts, churches, governments, public meetings, colleges and so on,' writes Novalis, 'are, as it were, the special, inner organs of the mystical state-individual.'<sup>58</sup> Since these were autonomous entities, they satisfied the requirements of self-determination, whilst at the same time providing a focus of allegiance and serving to preserve traditions. In this way, the organic state represented a happy compromise of freedom and community. Although its constituent bodies tended to be defined by a hierarchy, it was a hierarchy of a radically different order to that embodied in the machine-state. 'Every human

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<sup>56</sup> 'Pollen', reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p17.

<sup>57</sup> *Philosophical Studies*, No 421 reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p83.

<sup>58</sup> 'Pollen', reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p20.

association that has only a *spiritual* end', comments Schlegel, 'has a character that is different from the character of the state, and we find community with the concept of hierarchy [emphasis added].'<sup>59</sup>

The organic state owed not a little to Herder's concept of multiplicity within unity, but the Romantics -- as in some degree did Herder -- derived their ultimate inspiration from the social structure of the Middle Ages, with its complex system of guilds and other fraternities, as well as the highly developed monastic tradition.<sup>60</sup> This was undoubtedly the model to which they aspired. 'There should be as many families and churches as possible as in the Middle Ages', declares Schlegel, 'not fewer corporations, associations, states within states'.<sup>61</sup> It was in this way that the Jena group sought to resolve the apparent contradiction between the need for community on the one hand and the demands of self-development on the other. In their view, however, this was in any case a false opposition. To sever the ties of community was not to facilitate personal development, but actually to *hinder* it. Conversely, to strengthen those ties was not to stifle such development, but to *encourage* it; for it was a core belief of the early Romantics that the individual only develops through *interaction*. In a manner that we will find symbolically replicated by the individual arts in the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the individual only achieves his or her fullest expression in community. This is an idea that the Romantics constantly reiterate. As Schlegel puts it, 'the vocation of man is attainable only through human society'.<sup>62</sup> 'A person can be a person only among people [emphasis original]', he remarks later in the same essay.<sup>63</sup> Novalis agrees. 'To

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<sup>59</sup> 'Theory of Human Nature', reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p146.

<sup>60</sup> In the twentieth century, Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus school, would extol the virtues of the medieval guild system for similar reasons. See Loureiro, Felipe 'The Revolutionary Mind of Walter Gropius: Architectural Utopias for the Machine Age' *Utopian Studies* Vol 25, No1 Special issue: Utopia and Architecture (2014) pp174-193.

<sup>61</sup> Philosophical Fragments from the *Philosophical Apprenticeship* (excerpts), No 1173 reproduced in Beiser(Ed), 1996 p165.

<sup>62</sup> *Philosophical Lectures*, reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p144.

<sup>63</sup> *Philosophical Lectures*, reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p145.

become and remain a person,' he tells us, 'one has need of a state.'<sup>64</sup> 'The life and needs,' he observes elsewhere,

the activity and viewpoints, of everyone are bound up with the life and needs, the activity and viewpoints, of a more powerful and wide society; a person feels his life connected to a more potent life, and so his fantasy and intellect are broadened with, and exercised by, greater objects.<sup>65</sup>

Schleiermacher makes a similar paean to communal life in his *Monologue II*, 'Self-examination'. 'In isolation', he says,

all the juices of my mind dry up, and the course of my thoughts is arrested. I must go out and join a community with other spirits, to see the many forms of humanity and what is alien to me, to know what can become of myself, and to determine more securely through give and take my own nature.<sup>66</sup>

The purpose of human society, in the Romantic view, is thus to promote and strengthen community feeling rather than individual self-interest. This is a view entirely opposed to that of the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on individualism. Indeed, the Jena circle argued that the German states should strenuously resist the influence of the Enlightenment, and this was a position subsequently restated by two highly influential thinkers, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Contemplating the parlous condition of Germany in 1807, shortly after its comprehensive defeat at the hands of Napoleon, Fichte concluded that it was influence from outside -- in the form of the Enlightenment -- that had brought the nation low. 'All the evils which have now brought us to ruin', he declares, 'are of foreign origin'.<sup>67</sup> In common with the Romantics, he saw the medieval period in Germany as representing a lost idyll, precisely because of the communitarian spirit it

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<sup>64</sup> *The Universal Brouillon*, No 394 reproduced in Beiser, 1996 p88.

<sup>65</sup> 'Fragments reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p92.

<sup>66</sup> Reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p178.

<sup>67</sup> Fichte, Johann Gottlieb *Addresses to the German Nation* [1807] Translated by Jones, R F and Turnbull, G H Open Court, Chicago 1922 p84.

embodied. This was evident for Fichte from the anonymity in which it was cloaked, which attested to the lack of importance attached to the individual. 'Seldom does the name of an individual name out or distinguish itself,' he remarks, 'for they were all of like mind and alike in sacrifice for the common weal'.<sup>68</sup> Conspicuous by its absence from the period was the spirit of self-interest, which Fichte calls 'self-seeking' and deems 'the root of all other corruption'.<sup>69</sup>

Hegel revisited the theme of interdependence that was so significant for the Romantics. Writing in *Phenomenology of Mind* of 1807, he argues that the self only achieves self-consciousness through consciousness of another self. He famously illustrates this contention by means of his account of *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* [Lordship and Bondage]. 'Self-consciousness exists in and for itself', he writes, 'when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged'.<sup>70</sup> And in common with the Jena group, he was opposed to liberalism, but on metaphysical grounds. The state, he believes, is 'the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth'.<sup>71</sup> It provides the mechanism for the coming to self-knowledge of the 'absolute', of which humanity forms a part. Loyalty to the state was therefore loyalty to *oneself*. 'For Law is the objectivity of Spirit,' Hegel tells us,

volition in its true form. Only that will which obeys Law is free, for it obeys itself.<sup>72</sup>

*True* freedom therefore consists in the individual's complete submission to the state. In consequence, the vaunted freedom of the Enlightenment nations was an illusion. In England, for example, there was an 'incredible deficiency' of right and freedom.<sup>73</sup> The principle of liberalism, for Hegel as for the Romantics, is that of atomism. Liberalism, he writes, promotes 'the atomistic principle, that which insists upon the sway of individual wills; maintaining that all government should emanate from their

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<sup>68</sup> Fichte, 1807 pp104-5.

<sup>69</sup> Fichte, 1807 pp8-9.

<sup>70</sup> Hegel, G W F *The Phenomenology of Mind* (First Published 1807) Dover, New York, 2013 p104.

<sup>71</sup> *Philosophy of History* [1830/1831] Translated by Sibree, J Batoche Books, Kitchener Ontario 2001 p54.

<sup>72</sup> 1830/1831/2001 p54.

<sup>73</sup> Hegel, 1830/31/2001 p475.



express power, and have their express sanction'.<sup>74</sup> It would come to be associated more and more with an Anglo-American tradition, against which the powerful Germanic discourse that was beginning to emerge would define itself in opposition.

### The 'Living Work of Art'

The central purpose of the organic state, then, was to reinvigorate the feeling for community that – so the Jena group believed -- had been a casualty of the Enlightenment. But in their view, it was not just modern political systems that had led to its demise. In common with Herder, they recognized that something that had once greatly contributed to this sentiment had seen its efficacy greatly diminished. This was revealed religion, which had suffered a devastating blow at the hands of the Enlightenment rationalist onslaught. The Romantics shared with the revolutionaries in France a sense of 'the death of the Christian God', as Roberts notes.<sup>75</sup> In their anticipated utopian society, the need would therefore arise for something *other* than religion – at least, religion in its traditional form -- to exercise its unifying effect. In France, the response of the revolutionary government to this problem had taken the form of what Roberts terms 'sacred sociology', the attempt to construct a kind of unifying *secular* religion based on the concept of the state as a manifestation of the 'General Will'.<sup>76</sup> A series of quasi-religious public festivals was inaugurated, intended, in Robespierre's words, to promote 'the softest bonds of fraternity'.<sup>77</sup> The series culminated in the Festival of the Supreme Being in 1794. For the Jena circle, however, such a solution would not do. Whatever form any new socially unifying entity was to take, the Romantics were adamant that it should *not* be a function of the machine-state -- the mechanical apparatus of power – as it had been in France. Rather, it had to be sought elsewhere. As the anonymous author (possibly

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<sup>74</sup> Hegel, 1830/31/2001 p472.

<sup>75</sup> Roberts, 2011 p40.

<sup>76</sup> The concept of the 'General Will' derived from Rousseau. When individuals come together to form a new society, 'the individual particularity of each contracting party is surrendered to a new moral and collective body which has its own self, life, body and will', as Rousseau writes in *The Social Contract* (quoted in Hicks, 2004 p99). Thus the individual will becomes *general*.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Roberts, 2011 pp23-4.

Friedrich Schelling) of the *Ältesten Systemprogramm des Deutschen Idealismus* of 1796-7 -- one of the earliest manifestos of Romanticism -- declares, 'We must therefore go beyond the state [Wir müssen also auch über den Staat hinaus]!' <sup>78</sup>

What existed in this realm, in the Romantic view, was art, and it was in consequence to the latter that the Romantics assigned the role of societal unification. And this was entirely in keeping with a commitment to an idea that has been a notable theme in Germanic aesthetic discourse, namely, that art has, and *should* have, a social role. Indeed, there is a suggestion of this idea in what is generally considered to be the founding document of aesthetics as a discrete category of philosophical enquiry, also German in provenance: Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (first published in 1790). For Kant, art exercises a beneficial effect on the mind and facilitates dialogue. Art, he tells us, 'advances the culture of the mental powers in the interest of social communication.' <sup>79</sup> But the distinction of formulating the first articulation of art's social role goes perhaps to Schiller, whose essay *Theatre Considered as a Moral institution* was published in 1784. <sup>80</sup> The author argues that the theatre has a unique and indispensable role in society, teaching moral values (to the extent that the spectator is invited to pass judgment on the conduct of the protagonists), ridiculing inept politicians by means of satire, imparting a sense of compassion (this in Schiller's view is the value of tragedy), and preparing the spectator for the vicissitudes of life by exposing him or her to their depiction (so that 'the inevitable does not catch us wholly unprepared'. Here Schiller anticipates Walter Benjamin's concept of 'inoculation' by around a hundred and fifty years <sup>81</sup>). Furthermore, the theatre encourages religious toleration, teaching us to 'eschew religious hatred' by its negative depiction of religious fanaticism.

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Fornoff, Roger *Die Sehnsucht Nach Dem Gesamtkunstwerk* Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, Zürich and New York 2004 p160.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Hammermeister, Kai *The German Aesthetic Tradition* Cambridge University Press 2002 p37.

<sup>80</sup> [http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/schil\\_theatremoral.html](http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/schil_theatremoral.html). Accessed 15 October 2015.

<sup>81</sup> This emerges in the course of Benjamin's discussion of cinema's predilection for the thrilling, which he compares to a kind of inoculation. For it prepares the viewer for coping with the shocks of reality, consequently rendering them less likely 'to have a traumatic effect.' (Benjamin, Walter 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* Random House, New York 1968 p161.)

The close connection of art with society proposed by Schiller was also perhaps the first intimation of what would be a recurring impulse in European modernism: the impulse, as Roberts puts it, towards 'a fusion of art and life'.<sup>82</sup> For a connection of the kind described by Schiller militates against the boundaries between the two; in this way, it exemplifies precisely the aspiration to *boundlessness* that – as we shall see -- unites Wagner with Kiefer. If these boundaries are dissolved, furthermore, art becomes like life, and life like art. Thus the consequence of the fusion of art and life is the *aestheticization* of society, and this for the Romantics was a highly desirable outcome. Directly anticipating the ideas of Kiefer's early mentor, Joseph Beuys, the early Romantics argued that an individual society or state, as a political entity, could be conceived of as an artwork. 'The highest work of art for man', says Schlegel, 'is the state...Thus *politics* is the height of aesthetics, which is as universal as history'.<sup>83</sup> By dissolving the boundaries between art and life, furthermore, the Romantics were once again opposing themselves to the Enlightenment (the central intellectual tendency of which was to keep things resolutely *apart*), in a way to which we shall return in much more detail in Chapter 5. But the impulse encapsulated in Schlegel's remark is one that the events of the twentieth century would serve profoundly to problematize: the aestheticization of politics. As will be reiterated in the next chapter, this is the attendant danger of the dissolution of the borders between art and life.

It was very clear to the Jena group, then, that the need for a unifying social institution should be met by art. And it is this restoration to art of a central and indispensable role in the life of the community that will become one of the fundamental impulses at the core of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (and also, I will show in Chapter 2, of Kiefer's practice). But how was art to accomplish the task ordained for it? Here, the Romantics looked to the example of ancient Greece. It was scarcely surprising, however, that they would do so; German cultural discourse had been in a

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<sup>82</sup> Roberts, 2011 p29.

<sup>83</sup> Second Epoch II in 'Philosophical Fragments', *Philosophical Apprenticeship* (excerpts), No 580, reproduced in Beiser, 1996 p166.

condition approaching thralldom to this example since the time of Johann Joachim Winckelmann earlier in the eighteenth century, as E S Butler has shown.<sup>84</sup> And, in what for the Romantics constituted the paradigmatic art form of antiquity, they discerned a socially unifying capability. This was Attic Tragedy, as the 30 or so surviving plays of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles are collectively known. For Schelling, this body of work represented ‘the highest incarnation of the “An-sich” and the essence of all art’, as he asserted in a lecture of 1803.<sup>85</sup> In this regard, the Romantics were in some degree emulating Schiller, who had likewise invoked Attic Tragedy in the context of his claim that the theatre constitutes a unifying social force; not only does it serve, he had argued, to articulate those ‘opinions and inclinations’ that contrive to distinguish nations from each other, it also creates a sense of community, for ‘when man becomes his brother’s brother with a single all embracing sympathy’, mankind is ‘resolved once again into a single species’.<sup>86</sup>

What Schelling and his colleagues took from Attic Tragedy was twofold. In the first place, they appropriated the way that its subject matter was taken from mythology, which they felt could in some degree substitute for religion. Indeed, in the Romantic view it was in some ways *superior* to the latter. Not only did it satisfy the human need to feel a spiritual sense – what Schleiermacher calls the ‘intuition of the universe [Anschaaung des Universums]’ – its appeal to the *imagination* was greatly more potent than the trappings of traditional religion.<sup>87</sup> The Romantics consequently argued for the development of a new mythology on which a new poetry would in turn be based. In this way, as the author of the *Ältesten Systemprogramm* puts it, poetry – informed by mythology -- would become, as it was for the ancients, the ‘teacher of humanity [Lehrerin der Menschheit]’ and a new ‘sensual religion [sinnliche Religion]’.<sup>88</sup> Thus the new mythology would obviate the

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<sup>84</sup> See Butler. E S *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: A Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* Cambridge University Press, 1935.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Koss, 2010 p11. The ‘An-sich’ is the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’.

<sup>86</sup> Schiller, 1784.

<sup>87</sup> *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* [1799], quoted in Beiser (Ed), 1996 pxix.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p161.

need for revealed religion whilst connecting the spectator with the *root* of religion, the religious impulse itself. 'Never the contemptuous gaze,' continues the anonymous author, 'never the blind trembling of the people before their wise men and priests.'<sup>89</sup>

But it was above all the *constitution* of Attic Tragedy as a 'synthesis' of the arts that the Jena circle admired. By synthesis, they understood a *combined* artwork to which the individual arts made their separate, but equally important contributions in a spirit of co-operation. This was the paradigm for art, and it was what had characterized the work of the Greek tragedians. 'I notice only', Schelling remarks in his *Philosophie der Kunst* of 1802-3, 'that the complete composition of all arts, the union of poetry and music through song, of poetry and painting through dance, and they in turn synthesized, provides the most composed theatrical phenomenon, as was the drama of antiquity.'<sup>90</sup> The Jena group contrasted this artistic unity with contemporary artistic practice, in which the arts operated in isolation. Indeed, for the Romantics Attic Tragedy constituted an ideal art form in an ideal society (the fact that Greek society was in reality largely dependent on slavery appears not to have given them much pause). The relationship between Greek art and society was seen as interactive and reciprocal; the boundary between art and life was fluid, if not non-existent, and it was for this reason that Schelling could characterize the Greek *polis* as a 'living work of art'.<sup>91</sup> The artistic unity to which the Romantics aspired was furthermore the *original* condition of art. In this light, as Roger Fornoff indicates, they saw in Attic Tragedy a kind of lost 'Ur-unity', the vestiges of which manifested themselves in the contemporary 'plurality' of the arts.<sup>92</sup> From its original condition of unity, art had degenerated into separate entities rather in the manner of a Biblical

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<sup>89</sup> 'Nimmer der verachtende Blick, nimmer das blinde Zittern des Volks vor seinen Weisen und Priestern.' Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p161.

<sup>90</sup> 'Ich bemerke nur noch daß die vollkommenste Zusammensetzung aller Künste, die Vereinigung von Poesie und Musik durch Gesang, von Poesie und Malerei durch Tanz, selbst wieder synthetisiert die componirteste Theatererscheinung ist, dergleichen das Drama des Althertums war.' Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p36.

<sup>91</sup> *Vorlesungen über die Methode des Akademischen Studiums* (1803), quoted in Roberts, 2011 p40.

<sup>92</sup> Fornoff, 2004 p26.

‘fall’. Thus the condition of art resembled the condition of alienated modern society, which the utopian Romantic project was dedicated to *reversing* by restoring to the arts their lost unity.

In keeping as before with the aspiration to boundlessness, the Romantics were arguing, in effect, for the dissolution of a further set of boundaries: the boundaries between the individual arts that kept them separate one from the other. And it is important for the purposes of my thesis to appreciate that in this way they were setting themselves up in opposition to *another* existing discourse, then as subsequently a formidable presence in aesthetic theory: the doctrine of artistic *separation*. A notable exposition of this doctrine had already appeared in the form of a highly influential essay by the playwright – and leading figure in the Enlightenment -- Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, in 1766.<sup>93</sup> As I will indicate more fully in Chapter 5, the doctrine of separation is very much a product of the Enlightenment mindset, in which ‘rational determinations governed the parceling of all disciplines, all fields of knowledge, into discrete areas of competence’, as Brian Wallis puts it.<sup>94</sup> I will show that it is their mutual *resistance* to this mindset that fundamentally unites Kiefer with Wagner. Receiving its classic formulation in the middle of the twentieth century at the hands of Clement Greenberg and others, the doctrine of separation would come – as we shall see -- to be closely identified with a tradition positioned as specifically *American*. For now, let us note simply that in seeking to unite the arts, the Romantics were once *again* contradicting the teachings of the Enlightenment, seeking to bring together that which the latter sought to keep apart.

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<sup>93</sup> See Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* [*Laokoön oder über die Grenzen von Malerei und Poesie*] (First Published 1766) Translated by Edward A McCormick, The Johns Hopkins University Press 1962.

<sup>94</sup> Wallis, Brian (Ed) *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York 1984 pxii.

## The Synthesis of the Arts

For the Jena circle, as suggested above, there existed a direct connection between the condition of the arts and the condition of society. And whereas artistic unity was an expression of the feeling for community, artistic separation was in their view an expression of the *absence* of this feeling, which led to social division and discord. In consequence, the collapse of the artistic unity constituted by Attic Tragedy -- when it came -- occurred simultaneously with the collapse of Athenian civilization, of which it was the 'aesthetic correspondence', as Fornoff puts it.<sup>95</sup> After Euripides, according to Friedrich Schlegel, the Athenians deteriorated 'not only in this or that genre, but in their entire existence, in all arts, in constitution and laws, in private and public customs and actions, from beautiful perfection to luxury, whose still remaining power also soon became exhausted'.<sup>96</sup> Thus ended, in the opinion of the Romantics, the period of the fruitful collaboration of the arts, and the utopian period in human history along with it. The contemporary divided condition of art was a function of the disharmony that had persisted ever since. In any projected utopian society, it would therefore be necessary for the arts to be re-united, for the example of ancient Greece had shown that there was an apparently irresistible connection between artistic synthesis and social integration. The Romantics consequently developed schemes for the reunification of the long-separated arts. 'And so one should draw the arts closer to each other,' writes August Wilhelm Schlegel in *Die Gemählde*, published in 1799,

and seek crossings from one to the other. Perhaps statues may revive themselves as paintings, paintings would become poetry, poetry music, and who knows? A solemn church music may climb once again as a temple in the sky.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Fornoff, 2004 p26.

<sup>96</sup> Schlegel, Friedrich *Studien des klassischen Altertums* [1798] Reproduced in *Kritische Ausgabe* Behler, Ernst, Anstett, Jean-Jacques and Eichner, Hans (Eds), Paderborn 1958 p537.

<sup>97</sup> 'Und so sollte man die Künste einander wieder nähern und Übergänge aus einer in die andre suchen. Bildsäulen belebten sich vielleicht zu Gemälden, [...] Gemälde würden zu Gedichten, Gedichte zu Musiken, und wer weiß? So eine feyerliche

Various suggestions were advanced. The poet and novelist Ludwig Tieck conceived of a fusion of painting and music, outraging the classical proscription against a mixture of spatial and temporal arts. Indeed, Fornoff suggests that Tieck's essay of 1799, *Phantasien über die Kunst*, can be read as a direct riposte to Lessing.<sup>98</sup> Tieck posits an art form characterized by the mutual permeation of tone, line and color. 'When the melody sounds,' he writes, 'certain living rays vibrate in the picture, a powerful art speaks out from the canvas, and tone and line and color permeate each other and mix themselves as one in deep friendship'.<sup>99</sup> There is a suggestion in this image of 'a powerful art' speaking out from the canvas of the unique propensity of synthesis, namely that it *strengthens* the effect of the aesthetic experience. Just as, for the Romantics, the individual draws strength from community, the arts in combination find their efficacy greatly enhanced, achieving what would be impossible in isolation. When we come to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, we shall see that the priceless value of synthesis, for Wagner, resided precisely here.

An ambitious early attempt to realize Tieck's ideas was made by the painter Philipp Otto Runge, a colleague and contemporary of Caspar David Friedrich (whose influence Kiefer has freely acknowledged<sup>100</sup>). This was *Die Tageszeiten* [Times of the Day] (1802-10), a four-part cycle of paintings intended to be displayed in a sacred space and viewed to the accompaniment of both music and poetry. Runge was certainly acquainted with Tieck's theories, having encountered them in the late 1790s and meeting the poet 'in person' in 1801, as Richard Littlejohns notes.<sup>101</sup>

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Kirchenmusik stiege such einmal wieder als ein Tempel in die Luft.' Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p25.

<sup>98</sup> Fornoff, 2004 p27.

<sup>99</sup> 'Wenn dann die Melodie erklingt, so zucken gewiß noch neue Lebensstrahlen in dem Bilde auf, eine gewaltigere Kunst spricht uns aus der Leinwand an, und Ton und Linie und Farbe dringen ineinander und vermischen sich mit inbrünstiger Freundschaft in eins'. Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p27.

<sup>100</sup> 'I very much liked Friedrich,' Kiefer has stated, 'and all the Romantic poets such as Eichendorff... Some people think Friedrich is too Romantic in a clichéd sense, but I think this is not the case. He was a philosopher'. (Interview with Christian Weikop, quoted in Weikop, in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p32.)

<sup>101</sup> Littlejohns, Richard 'Philipp Otto Runge's "Tageszeiten" and Their Relationship to



Writing to his brother in March 1803, he claims that when Tieck saw the preparatory drawings for the cycle he 'fell silent, perhaps for as much as an hour, then he said it was impossible to express in other terms or more clearly what he had always meant by the new art'.<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, it is only in the form of these drawings that the complete cycle exists, since only one of the paintings – *Der Morgen* [Morning] - had been completed (in two versions) by the time of Runge's premature death.<sup>103</sup>

Whereas Tieck's endeavor assigned to music the primary role in any artistic synthesis, for Friedrich Schlegel this role fell unquestionably to poetry, which he saw as supreme amongst the arts. 'The innermost mysteries of art and science,' he writes in *Gespräch über die Poesie*, published in 1800, 'are a property of poetry.'<sup>104</sup> It is Schlegel that is credited with the invention of the concept of 'progressive Universalpoesie [progressive universal poetry]', also variously referred to simply as 'Poesie [poetry]', 'Mischgedicht [mixed composition]' and 'Roman [the 'romantic book']'. The aim, as Jed Rasula indicates, was a kind of 'Über-genre', an absolutely new art form that drew on aspects of existing genres and combined them in unprecedented ways.<sup>105</sup> 'Romantic poetry', Schlegel tells us,

is a progressive universal poetry. Its goal is not merely to reunite all the separate forms of poetry, and to put poetry in contact with philosophy and rhetoric. It also wants to and should now mix, and then fuse, poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and that of nature; to make poetry lively and social and to make life and society poetic...<sup>106</sup>

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Romantic Nature Philosophy' *Studies in Romanticism* Vol 42, No 1 (Spring 2003), pp55-74 (here p71).

<sup>102</sup>Quoted and translated in Littlejohns, 2003 p55.

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of the major trends in early Romantic painting see Morton, Marsha 'German Romanticism: The Search for a "Quiet Place"' *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* Vol 28, No 1 Negotiating History: German Art and the Past (2002) pp8-23 and 106-7.

<sup>104</sup> 'Die innersten Mysterien aller Künste...[sind] ein Eigentum der Poesie.' Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p27.

<sup>105</sup> Rasula, Jed *History of a Shiver: The Sublime Impudence of Modernism* Oxford University Press 2016 p54.

<sup>106</sup> *Athenäums-Fragment* (116), reproduced in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* Edited and translated by Frederick C Beiser, Cambridge University Press 1996 pp116-7.

Other Romantic writers posited a synthesis of the arts under the auspices of opera, directly anticipating Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>107</sup> One of these was Novalis. Writing in one of his posthumously published 'fragments', Novalis advances the notion of 'complete opera', which was to consist of a union of the arts freed from their generic constraints. 'Complete opera, he writes, 'is a free union of all, the highest level of drama'.<sup>108</sup> The philosopher and historian Joseph Görres was another writer that saw opera as the art form best suited for the purposes of synthesis. In his *Aphorismen über die Kunst*, published in 1802, Görres envisages an operatic artwork constituted by a mixture of comedy and tragedy, poetry, painting, music, sculpture, dance and mime. But perhaps the most widely known reference to the synthesizing potential of opera occurs in Schelling's *Philosophie der Kunst*, for it is here that he identifies opera as the most promising context for the staging of the reunification of the arts in approximation of the unifying artwork constituted by Attic tragedy. He recognized that in its *contemporary* form, however, opera was not fit for purpose. Of the drama of antiquity, he notes, 'is left only a caricature, opera, which could – in higher style on the part of poetry as well as the remaining competing arts – most likely lead us back to the performance of the old, jointly with music and dance drama.'<sup>109</sup> The problem was that, due to the expressive power of music, the other arts became its *vehicle*; thus the partnership was an unequal one. And it was not just the Romantics who realized this. Indeed, it was already a familiar refrain in aesthetic discourse, having been articulated by Herder amongst others. Whilst he had been convinced of the unique *potential* of opera as an aesthetic experience, it had been clear to Herder that the terms of the synthesis in opera were flawed. 'There is no reason to doubt,' he had declared (not without irony), 'the exalted effect which an *intelligent* alliance of music, poetry, and the dance, these arts which so

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<sup>107</sup> Kiefer has himself collaboratively produced an opera, *Am Anfang*, at the Bastille Opera (2009).

<sup>108</sup> 'Vollkommene Oper ist eine freie Vereinigung aller, die höchste Stufe des Dramas'. Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p28.

<sup>109</sup> '...wovon uns nur eine Karikatur, die Oper, geblieben ist, die in höherem und edlerem Styl von Seiten der Poesie sowohl als der übrigen concurrirenden Künste uns am ehesten zur Aufführung des alten mit Musik und Tanz verbundenen Dramas zurückführen könnte'. Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p36.

naturally belong together, would produce [emphasis added]'.<sup>110</sup> It was true that a determined attempt had been made to redress the balance, by Christoph Willibald Gluck in his opera *Alceste* of 1767. 'I sought to bring music back to its true function,' Gluck had claimed in the preface to his libretto, 'that is, to support the poetry and to strengthen the emotional expression and interest of the situations, without interrupting the action or distorting it by useless ornamentation.'<sup>111</sup> This, however, was an isolated case. The world would have to wait a little longer for a thoroughgoing reform of opera; but the moment was coming. 'The course of time', Herder had vouchsafed,

will bring us a man who, scorning our present hodge-podge of wordless tones, will realize the necessity of an intimate union of purely human feeling and of the fable itself with the music. From the imperious elevation where the ordinary composer ostentatiously avers that poetry must serve his art, he will descend and...let his music serve the words of the emotion, of the action itself...He will overturn the whole disorganized, ragged framework of operatic sing-song and erect...a cohesive lyric structure in which poetry, music, action, and decoration are all one.<sup>112</sup>

It was unsurprising that, in the feverish adulation that characterized the composer's reception in the latter part of his career, it would be claimed that Herder -- in the manner of John the Baptist foretelling the coming of Jesus -- had been speaking of Wagner.<sup>113</sup>

But the synthesizing project was in any case not yet achievable. The Jena group recognized that Attic Tragedy, the unified artwork to which they aspired, had been a function of a unified society. It had been, in short, *instituted*, not *instituting*, arising naturally from a society of which it was the aesthetic counterpart. And this fact precluded its reappearance in contemporary society, from which the necessary unity

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<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Stein, Jack M *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts* Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1960 p4.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Stein, 1960 p3.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Stein, 1960 p4.

<sup>113</sup> Stein, 1960 p4.

-- the 'ethical totality', as Schelling put it -- was notable only by its absence.<sup>114</sup> The reappearance of a true artistic synthesis could only follow from radical social reform; and thus much more than merely a reformer of opera, the messiah predicted by Herder would have to be a *revolutionary*.

Some fifty years after the heyday of the Romantics, Wagner would adopt many of their principal ideas almost wholesale and incorporate them into his concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This proceeded from his view of modernity, which whilst partly informed by radical political doctrines including anarcho-syndicalism was essentially identical with that of the Romantics, namely that it is social alienation -- brought about by the rise of individualism -- that defines its core. By mid-century in Germany, furthermore, the revolution for which the Romantics had tentatively called had started to look like a real possibility. And Wagner was ready and willing to assist in its implementation.

### **Wagner the Revolutionary**

The condition of Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century was parlous in the extreme.<sup>115</sup> In the first place, it was in the highly anomalous position of not strictly being an identifiable country at all. Not until Unification in 1871 would there *truly* be any such place as Germany. 'Germany?' inquired Goethe and Schiller in a collaborative poem of 1797, 'But where is it? I don't know how to find such a country'.<sup>116</sup> Under the Holy Roman Empire, which existed between the early Middle Ages and 1806, what was referred to as Germany consisted of thousands of separate entities. These had been somewhat rationalized by Napoleon, who had instituted the Confederation of the Rhine; but even after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, when boundaries in Europe were redrawn after Napoleon's defeat, there were still 38 of

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<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p162.

<sup>115</sup> For this brief sketch of the febrile *milieu* from which the *Gesamtkunstwerk* emerged, I am largely indebted to David Blackbourn's *History of Germany 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century* Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 1997 pp67-131.

<sup>116</sup> Quoted in Blackbourn, 1997 preface pxvi.

them. Calls for unification began increasingly to be heard. Nor were they the only challenges to the existing order; greater suffrage was being demanded, and in the countryside, an end to the privileges of feudalism. Such challenges ran counter to the interests of the ruling elite, the entrenchment of whose power was the main concern of statesmen such as Metternich. The noises of dissent were largely ignored by government, or silenced by repressive measures such as the *Karlsbad Decrees* of 1819. But they were only part of the problem facing the authorities, for there were serious economic woes as well. Industrialization in both urban and rural areas was underway, but this meant fewer jobs at a time when the population was steadily rising. Unemployment led on the one hand to a reduction in buying power, creating a vicious circle in which goods remained unsold and more workers were laid off; on the other, it combined with a series of failed harvests to produce recurrent outbreaks of starvation. The twin perils of social discontent and economic crisis, threatening an increasingly politicized and literate society, led inexorably to violence, which first erupted in the uprising of 1830. This was quickly suppressed, but the problems remained and by the 1840s pressure from below was starting once again to build. There followed a period of increasing political ferment, which coincided with the period of Wagner's radicalization. This, however, was in some degree a function of his *artistic* program.

The first part of Wagner's career had been characterized by a conspicuous lack of success. This had led in 1839 to a move to Paris, from which he had high expectations. It had nevertheless proved a complete failure, resulting only in disappointment and bitterness; but it convinced him of several things, amongst them that art was in urgent need of reform. In the first place, it had become thoroughly commercialized, so that a work of art had become indistinguishable from a commodity, and the artist indistinguishable from a salesman. In Paris, Wagner had come bitterly to resent the commercialization that obliged an artist such as himself to 'take his work to the public market [auf den öffentlichen Markt zu führen]', as he remarks in *Le musicien et la publicité*, an essay published in 1841 in the *Gazette*

*Musical*.<sup>117</sup> He wistfully recalled the days when artists enjoyed the exclusive patronage of a noble patron (such as he himself would later enjoy from Ludwig II of Bavaria). In the second place, art was becoming increasingly elitist and increasingly esoteric, placing itself beyond both the means and the level of education of the common people. It had started to separate itself, in short, from the *Volk*. 'Therefore, taken at its best', he wrote later, 'our "cultured" art resembles an orator who should seek to address himself in a foreign tongue to a people which does not understand it: his highest flights of rhetoric can only lead to the most absurd misunderstandings and confusion.'<sup>118</sup> In common with the Romantics, Wagner located the reason for this in the 'decoupling [Abkoppelung]' of art from its roots in mythology, as Fornoff puts it.<sup>119</sup> But he came increasingly to recognize that the problems confronting art were symptoms of a much deeper malaise besetting society itself. The lamentable condition of art was a function of the condition of society, and the reform of the former depended therefore on the reform of the latter. This realization heralded the beginning of Wagner's political consciousness and set him on the path to radicalization; but as Bryan Magee notes, it originated in his desire to reform *art*.<sup>120</sup>

Wagner's return to Germany in 1842 coincided with the period of renewed political tension in that country. He accepted the position of *Kapellmeister* to the state of Saxony at Dresden, and during the next six years completed *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), *Tannhauser* (1845) and *Lohengrin* (1848). But Dresden was typical of German cities at the time in that it was a hub of political intrigue, and Wagner began to move in circles that included the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and other extremists. He joined a group of thinkers, amongst them the architect Gottfried Semper, who met weekly to discuss radical political ideas such as those of the Young Hegelians, whose mantra was that conflict and change according to the principle of the dialectic constituted the nature of life itself. Particularly influential on Wagner at this time was August Röckel, the Dresden Music Director. Fornoff notes that it may have been

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<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p168.

<sup>118</sup>'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p183.

<sup>119</sup> 2004, p171.

<sup>120</sup> Magee, Bryan *Wagner and Philosophy* (First published 2000) Penguin Books, London 2001 p33.

Röckel, who had met the July Revolutionaries in Paris and the Chartists in London, that introduced the composer to the work of Ludwig Feuerbach, whose devastating critique of Christianity, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, had been published in 1841.<sup>121</sup> In this overheated intellectual atmosphere, Wagner's politicization turned rapidly to radicalization, corresponding with a political situation in Germany deteriorating equally rapidly. Soon greater suffrage and economic reform were no longer being demanded, but nothing less than the complete reversal of the social order. It was time to dismantle the entire discredited system by the only means available: revolution. And as Wagner was quoted as remarking, Germany at this moment was like an eggshell that needed 'only a hammer blow [nur eines Hammerschlages]' to bring it forth.<sup>122</sup>

There had already been a series of localized revolts -- in 1844 (the 'Silesian Weavers'), 1846 (the 'Galician Peasants'), and 1847 (the 'Berlin Potato Revolution') -- by the time this blow was duly administered in the form of the full-scale revolution of March 1848. For a time, it seemed as though this might succeed; by the summer of 1849, however, it was all over. The authorities, temporarily stunned by the scale of the concessions achieved by the revolutionaries, finally reasserted themselves in brutal fashion. It was at this point that Wagner, who had taken an active part in revolutionary activity in Dresden, like many others fled abroad to evade the bitter reprisals then being enacted.<sup>123</sup> The future composer of *Parsifal* found himself a wanted criminal, a warrant having been issued for his arrest and published in the Dresden *Anzeiger*. It would be some thirteen years before he saw Germany again.

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<sup>121</sup> 2004, pp176-7.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Fornoff, 2004 p177.

<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Ernest Newman writes that the government evidently 'regarded him as one of the ringleaders.' (Newman, Ernest *The Life of Richard Wagner* Cambridge University Press 1933 p110.) David Trippett writes that Wagner had 'acquired hand grenades and hunting rifles, assumed a role as lookout atop the Dresden *Kreuzkirche*, and printed inflammatory placards demanding "Are you with us against the foreign troops?"' (Introduction to Liszt, Franz 'The Overture to Tannhauser', reproduced in Grey, Thomas S (Ed) *Richard Wagner and his World* Princeton University Press 2009 p251.)

## The 'Art-Work of the Future'

As he later wrote, Wagner had been convinced of the revolution's 'unrestrainable necessity'.<sup>124</sup> Thus far, it had proved to be an unmitigated failure; but he still entertained hopes of its ultimate success. During his long exile in Zürich, he published the series of extended essays collectively known as the *Zürich Papers*, amongst them 'Art and Revolution', 'The Art-Work of the Future', 'Opera and Drama' and 'A Communication to My Friends (as well as the notorious 'Judaism in Music', issued under the pseudonym of K Freigedank)', in which he set out his vision of a utopian post-revolutionary society, and of the revolutionary new art form in which this society would find expression: the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Contemporary German society, in Wagner's view as in that of the Romantics, was the domain of what he calls 'egoism', or self-interest, which had vanquished what he calls 'communism [*Gemansemkeit*]', or feeling for community.<sup>125</sup> The sole concern of egoism was with property rights and the preservation of possessions. 'This loathly care about the Future', he tells us, 'which indeed is the sole heritage of moody, absolute Egoism, at bottom seeks to *preserve*, to *ensure* what we possess today, for all our lifetime.'<sup>126</sup> In the new society that he anticipates in the *Zürich Papers*, however, the situation will be reversed; communism will triumph over egoism. The source of communism, he suggests (clearly in debt to Herder), is to be found in the *Volk*, which is defined by a communal yearning for unity. The *Volk*, he says, 'is the epitome of all those men *who feel a common and collective Want* [emphasis original]'.<sup>127</sup> The *Volk* thus generates 'Necessity [*Nothwendigkeit*]', the need for this yearning to be gratified (the gratification of egoism, on the other hand, Wagner

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<sup>124</sup> 'Art and Revolution' Reproduced in Wagner, 1895/1993 p24.

<sup>125</sup> Wagner claims to have derived this terminology from Feuerbach ('Art and Revolution', in Wagner, 1895/1993 Introduction p29). 'Communism' should not be understood in its modern political sense.

<sup>126</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p206.

<sup>127</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p75.



refers to as 'luxury').<sup>128</sup> This was to be the accomplishment of the revolution: the fulfillment of this yearning, and the creation of unity out of the destruction of egoism. Once accomplished, social unity was to be maintained and promulgated by means of the grand unifying artwork he envisages.

Wagner's artistic model, as it was for the Romantics, is Attic Tragedy, particularly the plays of Aeschylus such as the *Oresteia*. Tragedy, as he tells us, constituted 'the entry of the Art-Work of the *Volk* upon the public arena of political life.'<sup>129</sup> In virtue of its unifying propensity, Attic Tragedy was in his view the pinnacle of art. This propensity arose in part from the communal nature of the spectator's experience, but also from its *formal* constitution as a union of the arts. Tragedy, as we have seen, was a united artwork, a union in particular of what Wagner calls the three 'humanistic [purely human]' arts of Dance, Poetry, and Tone (music).<sup>130</sup> It represented social union in symbolic form. The *Gesamtkunstwerk*, conceived as a re-imagining of Tragedy (not its literal reconstruction), was likewise to be instituted by a union, or synthesis, of the arts.<sup>131</sup> With elaborate metaphors, Wagner characterizes the 'sister' arts as living beings that wither and die in isolation but thrive in union. Indeed, these metaphorical beings can only find completion and self-realization through union with one another. Just as the Romantics had argued that the individual only finds fulfillment in society, Wagner argues that it is likewise through union that the separate arts find completion; through union, somewhat paradoxically, that each finds its 'highest and most perfect expression'.<sup>132</sup> What he indicates by this becomes perhaps clear from his discussion of what served – at least at the time of the *Zürich Papers* – as his primary inspiration, Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* of 1824 ('The Choral'), specifically the setting to music of Schiller's *Ode to Joy* in the last

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<sup>128</sup> In the introduction to *Art and Revolution*, added after reading Schopenhauer, Wagner equates 'Necessity' with the Will.

<sup>129</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p135.

<sup>130</sup> Wagner distinguishes these from the three 'plastic' arts of architecture, sculpture and painting.

<sup>131</sup> Tragedy 'cannot be *re-born*, but must be *born anew*', as Wagner writes in 'Art and Revolution' (in Wagner, 1895/1993 p53). This is because it must be preceded by revolution.

<sup>132</sup> 'Art and Revolution', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p43.

movement. For he sees this point in the symphony as the moment at which the music, having reached the limits of its expressive power, is compelled to enlist the help of poetry in order adequately to express the meaning encoded within it. The introduction of Schiller's text at this point provides the 'necessary, all-powerful, and all-uniting word' into which 'the full torrent of the heart's emotion may pour its stream'.<sup>133</sup> This moment constitutes 'the redemption of Music from out her own particular element into the realm of *universal Art* [emphasis original]'.<sup>134</sup> But for Wagner, it also marks the end of the symphony as an art form, for it shows that it has reached its *limits*. Music must in consequence henceforth ally itself to poetry. Beyond the 'Last Symphony of Beethoven' no 'forward step is possible'; upon it the 'Art-work of the Future [that is, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*] alone can follow.'<sup>135</sup>

Like the Romantics, Wagner invokes a kind of *community* of the arts. Indeed, he claims that in his unified artwork not 'one rich faculty of the separate arts will remain unused'.<sup>136</sup> To architecture will fall the role of set design and construction, the 'special surroundings necessary for the display of the Human Artwork', whilst to painting, that of scenery painting, the 'lively counterfeit of Nature'.<sup>137</sup> And whilst he uses the term exceedingly sparingly (preferring 'the Art-Work of the Future', or later, 'music-drama'), this corresponds with the correct translation of the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a 'gathering', or community, of the arts. This has radically different connotations from 'total artwork', as it is often and erroneously translated. As Finger and Follett explain,

*gesamt* is a past participle used as an adjective, derived from the archaic verb *samenen* (*sammeln* in its present form), which means 'to assemble, gather, collect'. The translation of

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<sup>133</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p126.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p190.

<sup>137</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p184 and 186. It seems that Wagner envisages no clear role for sculpture in the 'Art-work of the future', suggesting vaguely that the theatre affords the sculptor the opportunity to work not with stone, but with the human body itself. 'The same sense,' he writes, 'that led the sculptor in his grasp and rendering of the human figure, now leads the *Mime* in the handling and demeanor of his actual body.' (Ibid p 188.)

*gesamt* as “total” in English and French is not exact, then; the German *total* has a different history from *gesamt*, stemming from the Latin *totus* meaning *gänzlich*, or “completely”. The German word *total* now often carries totalitarian connotations, and *Totalkunst* is in its own right a subject of debate in Germany.<sup>138</sup>

Also like the Romantics, Wagner posits a direct relationship between the condition of the arts and the condition of society, such that artistic synthesis is equated with social harmony and communism, artistic separation with social collapse and egoism. ‘Hand in hand with the dissolution of the Athenian State’, he writes,

marched the downfall of Tragedy. As the spirit of *Community* split itself along a thousand lines of egoistic cleavage, so was the great united work of Tragedy disintegrated into its individual factors.<sup>139</sup>

Artistic union, on the other hand, reflects a society that is not only more cohesive, but more free; just as the separate arts become boundless in union, through the act of transcending barriers and grasping beyond their limitations, so society becomes freer in communism. Artistic isolation and egoism, in contrast, are associated with personal constriction and loss of freedom. ‘*The solitary unit is unfree*’, Wagner tells us, ‘because confined and fettered in un-Love; the *associate is free*, because unfettered and unconfined through Love [emphasis original].’<sup>140</sup>

Once more following the joint Romantic/Attic Tragedy model, Wagner insists that his new art form will derive its subject matter from mythology, of which he shares the Romantic view that it is a function of the genuine religious impulse. He will therefore take his source material from the ‘native Saga of the newer Europeans, but above all

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<sup>138</sup> 2011, p5. The term seems first to have been used in 1827 by the philosopher Karl F E Trahdorff, in the second volume of his *Aesthetics; or, Theory of Belief and Art* (Finger and Follett, 2011 p10). Wagner was evidently not fond of the term, writing to Liszt in 1853 as follows: ‘But above all, too, nothing of the unhappy ‘Gesamtkunst’ in the title! Enough of it.’ (Quoted in Koss, 2010 preface pix.)

<sup>139</sup> ‘Art and Revolution’, in Wagner, 1895/1993 p35.

<sup>140</sup> ‘The Art-Work of the Future’, in Wagner, 1895/1993 p96.

the *German* peoples [emphasis original]'.<sup>141</sup> By this he mainly indicates Norse mythology, as in the tradition of the *Poetic Edda*. The instinct of the authors of these stories 'was a *religious* one withal, unconsciously common to them and rooted in their oldest intuition of the essence of things [emphasis added]'.<sup>142</sup> Thus the *Gesamtkunstwerk* will fulfill the requirement of the Romantics for a new art-religion, providing the context for a communal encounter with authentic religious feeling.<sup>143</sup>

An entity both unified and unifying: what defined the Romantic vision of the ideal artwork is likewise the essence of Wagner's vision of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It was to act on society like a kind of glue. But it was to do so by means not simply of its symbolic force, a unified artwork symbolizing a unified *Volk*, but by means also of the communal experience of individual spectators. 'From out the egoism of his narrowed and conditioned personal sensations', Wagner tells us, the spectator of the Art-Work of the Future finds himself 'again amid the wide communion of all-embracing world-emotions.'<sup>144</sup> Transforming self-interest into fellow feeling, it was to satisfy that longing for unity that for Wagner is the essence of the *Volk*.

Most emphatically, however, Wagner is addressing himself in the *Zürich Papers* to the future. As its name implies, the 'Art-Work of the Future' has yet to be realized. It cannot, as he puts it, 'rise alone'; rather, it is dependent upon 'the advent of those fresh conditions which breed from out themselves the Art-Work of the Future.'<sup>145</sup>

Its realization depends, in a word, on revolution. And this was just as the Romantics

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<sup>141</sup> *Opera and Drama* Translated by William Ashton Ellis, University of Nebraska Press 1995 ((Reprinted from Volume 2 of *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, first published in 1893) p161.

<sup>142</sup> 1893/1995 p162.

<sup>143</sup> Freely acknowledging the influence of Feuerbach, Wagner contrasts mythology with what he calls 'the Christian myth.' (1893/1995 p159.) Fiercely anti-Christianity, he sees the latter as a perversion of mythology. 'Christianity upheaved the religious faith,' he says, 'the ground-view of Nature's essence, and supplanted it by a new belief, a new way of beholding, diametrically opposed to the older.' (1893/1995 p162.) The impulse that Christianity embodied was a 'longing for death.' (1893/1995 p159.) In Greek mythology, by contrast, death featured merely '*as the counterpart of Life* [emphasis original].' (1893/1995 p159.)

<sup>144</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p93.

<sup>145</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p155.

had foretold. Wagner concludes the *Art-Work* essay with an elaborate allegory for the future resurgence of the disenfranchised *Volk*, rising up to satisfy ‘the irrefutable right of its absolute Need [that is, its yearning for community]’, in the form of the story of *Wieland the Smith*, who fashions wings to effect his escape from the repressive King Neiding.<sup>146</sup> The revolutionary zeal in Wagner had not been extinguished in 1849; from his lonely exile in Switzerland, the composer called upon his German readers to ‘annul the State.’<sup>147</sup>

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Wagner never reneged on his commitment to artistic synthesis as a general principle. But the first two essays from the *Zürich Papers* – ‘Art and Revolution’ and ‘The Art-Work of the Future’ – are exceedingly limited in terms of detail. The third essay, ‘Opera and Drama’, has more of the aspect of a blueprint. It is principally here that he addresses himself to the practical problems identified by the early Romantics and others concerning how to achieve the correct balance in an artistic synthesis involving music.<sup>148</sup> But this issue was not fundamental to his concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which this chapter has enabled us broadly to define as follows: a united or combined artwork, providing a form of social cohesion as a focus of community life, symbolically by means of its unified constitution, and as a vehicle for a new mythology intended to take the place of religion. Above all, however, it was a *hypothetical* entity, a facet of a post-revolutionary ideal society. And as I made clear in the introduction, Kiefer’s practice does *not* represent its actualization, not least because this would require the existence in Germany of a utopia of the kind envisaged by Wagner. What lies between Kiefer and Wagner is nevertheless substantial common ground, consisting of three aspects of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. These are firstly that it can be seen as a function of the Counter-Enlightenment (to the extent that it was based on the collectivist principles of the latter that were

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<sup>146</sup> ‘The Art-Work of the Future’, in Wagner, 1895/1993 p209.

<sup>147</sup> 1893/1995 p194.

<sup>148</sup> For a brief exposition of Wagner’s innovative solutions to these problems, see **Appendix 2.**

deeply at odds with the individualism associated with the Enlightenment); secondly that it was to play a crucial social role, and was thus an expression of the view that holds that art should be involved in society; and finally that it was to be constituted as an artistic unity. In the following two chapters, I will show how Kiefer's work connects to the *Gesamtkunstwerk's* firmly embedded social orientation and its constitution as a synthesis of the arts. In the last two chapters, I will revisit the theme of the Counter-Enlightenment.

## Chapter 2: Anselm Kiefer, History Painter

'I believe art has to take responsibility, but it should still not give up being art .... My content may not be contemporary, but it is political. It is an activist art of sorts'. – Anselm Kiefer<sup>1</sup>

*That it has a social dimension is one of the things that connect Kiefer's work with the Gesamtkunstwerk, the art form designed by Wagner for a future communitarian society. Because it undermines the strict separation of art and life into separate spheres, a social element in art is also a function of the aspiration to borderlessness that is my broader theme. My purpose in this chapter is to provide an account of the form this social dimension takes in Kiefer.*

In 1975, Anselm Kiefer published a series of photographs in the magazine *Interfunktionen*. It had formed part of his 1969 Diploma show in Karlsruhe, and the reason he had waited so long before making it public was no doubt because he was concerned about the furore that would result. And his concern was justified. For this series – known as *Occupations* -- comprises eighteen photographs in which the artist appears in a variety of locations in France and Italy performing the Nazi salute. Such was the sensitivity surrounding the *Sieg Heil* that the gesture had since 1945 been actually illegal in Germany, as Gillian Kennedy notes.<sup>2</sup> Had the photographs been taken in Germany, Kiefer would likely have faced criminal prosecution. Even as it was, there was scarcely any more provocative action he could have chosen. The reaction of the critics, predictably enough, was outrage; for it seemed, quite simply, that Kiefer was promoting fascism. This was how it appeared to the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, for example, who demanded to know who was 'this fascist who thinks he's an antifascist'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Donald Kuspit, June 10 1987 Reproduced in Siegel, Jeanne (Ed) *Art Talk: The Early 80s* Da Capo, New York 1988 p86.

<sup>2</sup> Kennedy, Gillian 'Hailing the Past: Anselm Kiefer's *Occupations*' in *Re-bus* Issue 7, Summer 2015 p36.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Weikop, Christian 'Occupations': A Difficult Reception', in Weikop, Christian (Ed) *In Focus: Heroic Symbols 1969 by Anselm Kiefer*, Tate Research Publication, 2016, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/heroic-symbols-anselm-kiefer/difficult-reception-occupations>. Accessed 3 March 2017.

In a career hardly lacking in controversy, this has been probably the most contentious episode. But the *Occupations* series has been frequently discussed, and my concern is in any case with Kiefer's paintings rather than his photographs.<sup>4</sup> I mention it because this inflammatory gesture graphically demonstrates the fact that, from the very beginning of his career, he has stood resolutely in the opposite camp to those who argue for the 'autonomy' of art, that is, the idea that art should confine itself strictly to the aesthetic realm. 'There is too much *ars gratia artis*,' he has commented,

which does not provide much material for thinking. Art is very incestuous: it reacts to other art without thinking about the world. It is best when art responds to things outside itself, out of a deep need.<sup>5</sup>

He has remained thoroughly committed to the view that art has a purpose *beyond* the merely aesthetic, and that it can play a definite role within society. And this fact forms the first compelling connection with Wagner, whose *Gesamtkunstwerk* was -- as we saw in Chapter 1 -- intended as not only an aesthetic program, but also an instrument of social cohesion in a post-revolutionary society. In this chapter, my purpose is to articulate how Kiefer's commitment to art's expanded purpose expresses itself in his painting.

The ability of art to play a social role has been a recurring theme in Germanic aesthetic discourse in the modern period. As well as in Romanticism and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, it appears for example in Schiller's notion of 'aesthetic education', Kant's connection of aesthetics with ethics (later rehearsed by Wittgenstein), the idea of art as an organon of truth (advanced by Schelling, Hegel

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent and comprehensive account of the series see Weikop, Christian (Ed) 2016.

<sup>5</sup> 'Es gibt zu viel *ars gratia artis*, die dem Denken nicht viel Stoff bietet. Die Kunst ist sehr inzestuös: sie reagiert auf andere Kunst, ohne über die Welt nachzudenken. Am besten ist es, wenn Kunst auf Dinge außerhalb ihrer selbst reagiert, und zwar aus einem tiefen Bedürfnis heraus.' Interview with Donald Kuspit, 1988, quoted in Schütz, 1999 p29.



and Heidegger amongst others), and Critical Theory's view of art as potentially dialectical.<sup>6</sup> There is also a strong tradition of post war German artists displaying a commitment to the social role of art, amongst whom the figure of Joseph Beuys (1921-86) undoubtedly looms largest. Beuys – a political activist as much as a practicing artist -- is often cited as a mentor of Kiefer's. Mark Rosenthal notes that their association was closest in the early 1970s.<sup>7</sup> The intensely social orientation of Beuys's work is perhaps most aptly demonstrated by his concept of 'social sculpture', the essential premise behind which is that all those things that, in the manner of sculpture, shape and give form – including private discussion and even thought -- can be regarded as creative, and consequently as art. Thus what shapes and gives form to society falls into this category. This was the idea that his artworks were intended to promote. 'My objects', he states,

are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture – or of art in general. They should provoke thoughts about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpture can be extended to the invisible materials and used by everyone. THINKING FORMS – how we mould our thoughts or SPOKEN FORMS – how we shape our thoughts into words or SOCIAL SCULPTURE – how we mould and shape the world in which we live: SCULPTURE AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS; EVERYONE IS AN ARTIST [capitals original].<sup>8</sup>

Because it also shapes society, politics in Beuys's view (which strongly recalls the attitude of the Jena Romantics) can be regarded as artistic. 'Real future political intentions', he says, 'must be artistic'.<sup>9</sup> The impulse towards the aestheticization of politics to which this amounts has led to much severe criticism of Beuys, notably by

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the German aesthetic tradition, see Hammermeister, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Rosenthal, Mark *Anselm Kiefer* Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987 p11.

A strong commitment to socially engaged art is evident in another notable ex-student of Beuys, Jörg Immendorff (1945-2007). Immendorff declared himself opposed to painting that 'is self sufficient and does not comment on any problem [die sich selber genug ist und zu keinem Problem Stellung nimmt]'. (Quoted in Schütz, 1999 p38.) As Schütz puts it, his goal was painting that aspired to 'purify itself of its distance from society [von ihrer Gesellschaftsferne zu läutern]'. (1999 p38.)

<sup>8</sup> 'Introduction', in Kuoni, Carin (Ed) *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* New York 1990 p19.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Bishop, Claire *Installation Art: A Critical History* Tate Publishing, London 2005 p104.

Benjamin Buchloh.<sup>10</sup> The aestheticization of politics, Buchloh claims (citing Walter Benjamin's argument), is an integral part of fascism.<sup>11</sup>

We might contrast Beuys with Hans Haacke (b 1936), who whilst strongly committed to the social role of art adopts a very different strategy. His installation-based practice can be thought of as primarily concerned with institutional critique, exposing the systems of exchange underpinning the art world, for example. The reverse of Beuys's approach, this represents the politicization of aesthetics. The difference between the respective priorities of Beuys and Haacke was dramatically illustrated by the controversy resulting from the cancellation of the latter's 1971 exhibition at the Guggenheim in New York owing to the inclusion of his *Shapolsky et al: Manhattan Real Estate*, an exposé of slum housing ownership. Ideologically at odds with Haacke's conception of art's social function, Beuys refused to endorse a resulting call to boycott the museum, leading to widespread criticism and an open letter from Broodthaers published in a Düsseldorf newspaper, thinly disguised as a newly discovered letter from the composer Jacques Offenbach to Wagner.

Whilst Kiefer's position differs radically from that of both Beuys and Haacke -- and also from that of Wagner -- it is clear that the question of the relationship of art and society is one that preoccupies him, and that he is committed to finding a useful role for art. And it is from the emphasis he places on *content* that this commitment is chiefly evident. The paintings are highly intentional objects -- that is to say, they seem to be *about* something, even though what this might be this is subjective and dependent upon individual interpretation. Thus interest arises not merely from their formal constitution; rather, the experience of the spectator is as much an *intellectual* one as an aesthetic one. The paintings refer to something beyond the realm of art -- and to judge from their customary very large scale, something Kiefer considers important. And this fact places him firmly in a painterly tradition deeply

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<sup>10</sup> See 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique', in Buchloh, Benjamin H D *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* The MIT Press, 2003 p61.

<sup>11</sup> See 'The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Benjamin, 1968 Epilogue p242.

unfashionable since the middle of the nineteenth century, namely history painting. It is to this tradition -- that encompasses Titian, Poussin, and David amongst many others -- that Kiefer, as a painter, is in some degree an heir.

Traditional history painting drew its subject matter from facets of human society: from mythology and other literary sources as well as from recorded history. In this way, it was necessarily embedded in society, upon which it depended for its source material, and in which it sought to play a useful part by illuminating some aspect of reality. Thus the relationship between history painting and society was characterized by a kind of symbiosis. Similarly, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was, as we have seen, embedded in the society from which it arose -- the social and political nexus of the early nineteenth century. It was an aesthetic response to what Wagner saw as a political reality: the alienating tendency of modern capitalist society. It was this that his artistic project was designed to ensure against. In common with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, then, Kiefer's practice -- which amounts to a contemporary or updated version of history painting -- illustrates the mutual imbrication of art and society, militating against the boundaries between them.

The chapter will take the following form. Having outlined the basic precepts of the genre of history painting, I will cite three examples from Kiefer's output to indicate how he both adheres to, and departs from, this tradition. The rest of the chapter will concern itself with his engagement with a particular historical issue, namely German guilt for the crimes of the Nazis. This is an aspect of his work that has been theorized before, and my reasons for revisiting it are twofold. Firstly, I want to advance a new interpretation, based on the concept of collective responsibility, which differs -- as we shall see -- from collective guilt. This will necessitate a reevaluation of the representation of the Third Reich in Germany in the postwar period. Secondly, it is the clearest instance of his engagement with a social, indeed highly *political* issue, and hence -- to the extent that it exemplifies the interrelationship of art and society -- the clearest illustration in his work of one aspect of the aspiration to borderlessness that he shares with Wagner and that is the principal theme of my thesis.

## A Public Role for Art

From the inception of the first European art academies in the latter part of the seventeenth century, painting was divided according to a hierarchy, a division on the basis of relative status. This was the 'hierarchy of genres', evolved in the course of the deliberations of aesthetic theorists including Charles Le Brun, Giovanni Pietro Bellori, Roger de Piles, André Félibien, Sir Joshua Reynolds and others. What was known as history painting was at the top of this hierarchy, followed by portraiture, 'genre' painting (scenes of everyday life), landscape, and finally still life. It was first recognized as a category by Leon Battista Alberti. In *Della Pittura*, his treatise of 1435, Alberti used the word 'istoria', the Italian word for story from which the word 'history' derives, to describe painting based on a story -- usually taken from history, the Bible or classical mythology -- from which it illustrated a particular moment, usually seen as decisive in some way. By the late seventeenth century, there was also a considerable demand amongst patrons for depictions of recent or contemporary events. An early example of this trend is Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolfe* of 1770 (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), which illustrated an event from just eleven years earlier.

The reasons for history painting's elevation to the top of the painterly hierarchy were partly to do with the technical difficulties it posed. For the human figure was deemed the most challenging subject in painting, and since it typically featured large numbers of them history painting made considerable demands on a painter's technical ability. More important, however, was the fact that it carried a moral message. It was in this way that history painting pointed beyond itself, to the world of human affairs. In particular, it was intended to illustrate virtuous behavior. As David Green and Peter Seddon note, it had 'an ethical and moral dimension in which viewers would in some sense perceive virtue, relevant to their own time and one of a universal timeless kind.'<sup>12</sup> In this respect, it had a *didactic* function, and this

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<sup>12</sup> Green, David and Seddon, Peter (Eds) *History Painting Reassessed: The Representation of History in Contemporary Art* Manchester University Press, 2000 p7.

endowed it with it an importance reflected in both the grandiose, large-scale format of most history painting and the fact that, for several centuries, it was deemed by the academic establishment to be the most significant work a painter could do.

It is this venerable tradition that Kiefer continues, and in several ways. In the first place, there are obvious continuities such as the huge scale in which he is accustomed to work, and his frequent references to literature and mythology. As well as allusions to modern poets such as Paul Celan and Ingeborg Bachmann, the paintings abound – as we shall see -- with references to mythological and mystical traditions, notably the *Kabbalah*. In the second place, and perhaps more importantly, his work recalls traditional history painting to the extent that, without being didactic, it seeks to induce the viewer to consider issues beyond the aesthetic realm. This, for Kiefer, is what constitutes art's public role, his commitment to which links him with Wagner. Yet at the same time, although it is clear that his work is very far indeed from a literal reconstruction of history painting, even to suggest a continuity is to connect him with a genre that in certain quarters has been largely discredited. And for this, there have been two principal reasons.

The first of these was the advent of modernism, notably in the form of Impressionism, which mounted an attack on academic art directed principally at history painting (although the first subversive blows had already been struck by Courbet some years earlier by means of his great trilogy of Realism, in which subject matter appropriate to 'genre' painting was transposed to the epic dimensions normally associated with history painting). Indeed, with its emphasis on mundane contemporary life (as well as formal considerations such as the relative importance of color and line), modernism 'was to a considerable extent built upon the rejection of history painting', as Paul Barlow observes.<sup>13</sup> In the twentieth century, two further developments in modernist discourse contributed to the devaluation of the genre. In the first place, increasing value began to be placed on the autonomy of art, and its isolation from society and freedom from any didactic or moralizing

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<sup>13</sup> Barlow, Paul 'The Death of History Painting in Nineteenth-Century Art?' *Visual Culture in Britain*, Volume 6, Number 1 Summer 2005, pp1-13 (here p1).

aspirations such as were at the core of history painting. Clive Bell was amongst the commentators -- heirs to the tradition of *l'art pour l'art* -- who began to insist that art should be purely a matter of aesthetics. 'Art transports us', Bell tells us, 'from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation.'<sup>14</sup> Comparable sentiments were later to inform Michael Fried's concept of 'opticality'. The second development was the rise of abstraction, which dispensed altogether with the figuration upon which history painting depended. For Clement Greenberg, a major champion of abstraction, the idea of any kind of narrative in painting was in any case anathema, since this was the territory of literature. Then, during the period of the Cold War, the issue acquired political dimensions, with abstraction promoted as the official style of the Western democracies, whilst history painting -- in the form of Socialist Realism -- remained the preferred style of the Eastern bloc, where it served the ends of propaganda at the hands of painters like Mykhaylo Khmelko. The privileging of abstraction, of which the most notable exponents at the time were the Abstract Expressionists of the New York School, was largely responsible for the relocation of the center of advanced art from Paris to New York in the 1950s.

The second reason for the devaluation of history painting has to do ultimately with modern epistemology, which has come to be characterized by a kind of *scepticism*. Beginning perhaps with Nietzsche, and greatly reinforced by post-structuralism, the belief has become prevalent that access to truth of any kind is always limited in some degree. Truth, Nietzsche famously opined, is merely a 'mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, some commentators insist that objective truth is wholly *inaccessible*. 'It is meaningless', declares Michel Foucault, 'to speak in the name of—or against— Reason, Truth, or Knowledge.'<sup>16</sup> To some extent, this conviction comes ultimately from Kant's demonstration of the limits of reason. But even if a less extreme position is taken, it must be admitted that unequivocal truth is a highly elusive quantity. Any statement we might make about

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<sup>14</sup> *Art* (1931), quoted in Green and Seddon (Eds) 2000 p10.

<sup>15</sup> *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873), quoted in Hammermeister, 2002 p147.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in May, Todd *Between Genealogy and Epistemology* Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993 p2.

reality depends on the information at our disposal, which not only is always limited, since there is no such thing as omniscience, but also may come from an unreliable source. And the fundamental problem confronting any enterprise that seeks to construct a *narrative*, or story, would in any case remain: that in order to be coherent, a narrative must be selective. It can thus only ever be partial and incomplete. And this applies also to the writing of history, since this is likewise a form of narrative (indeed, as mentioned above the idea of a story is embodied in the word 'history'). Strictly speaking, rather than history there is therefore only *histories*. And as some commentators have argued, the choice as to which facts to include in a historical narrative – or perhaps more importantly, which to *exclude* – is always informed by ideology, whether or not the writer is aware of it. As Hayden White comments, there is thus no 'value-neutral mode' of constructing a historical narrative.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear how uneasily this view of truth sits with history painting's didactic function, and the access to moral truth this presupposes. History painting is no more entitled to claim authoritative truth than any other discursive practice. At the same time, however, the demise of the genre, and the reduction of painting in much modernist discourse to a matter of aesthetics, has raised the possibility that something of value to society may have been lost. And this is a loss that Kiefer, for one, appears to regret. The following three examples of his work may suffice to show how he achieves the difficult feat of restoring to painting a public role whilst simultaneously maintaining a certain critical *distance*, thereby avoiding the sense of authority at odds with the conviction that truth is only ever partial.

What may be particularly instructive is a comparison of Kiefer's treatment of the myth of Hero and Leander from 2005 (**Plate 1**), with that of Peter Paul Rubens from 1605 (**Plate 2**), a classic example of traditional history painting, with its large scale, moral content, and literary source material. The myth, from Ovid's *Double Heroïdes*, concerns Hero, a priestess of Aphrodite, and her lover Leander, who swims across

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<sup>17</sup> 'The Burden of History', *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1978 p47.

the Hellespont nightly for their trysts. One night, Leander is drowned in a storm, and Hero throws herself from her tower in consequence. The story has featured numerous times in art and literature. Other notable painted versions are those of Domenico Fetti from 1621, and William Etty from 1827. It is also the subject of a highly abstract treatment by Cy Twombly from 1985. Rubens depicts the *denouement* of the story, when Leander's lifeless body is washed ashore and Hero jumps to her death. The moral of the tale seems clear. Both protagonists had in some sense sinned against the natural order of things by their illicit love; Hero was guilty of the sin of faithlessness to her vow of chastity, whilst Leander, with his reckless disregard for the power of nature, was guilty of the sin of *hubris*. Their actions resulted in a reprisal at the hands of nature itself, representing the natural order against which they had trespassed. In essence, the story is a morality tale regarding the consequences of a lack of *restraint*, and it seems likely that it is in these terms that Rubens's audience would have interpreted the painting.<sup>18</sup>

As well as its reference to the same myth, Kiefer's version shares its large-scale format with that of Rubens. It also has a moral message, and it is in these three respects – literary subject matter, large scale and moral content – that it relates to traditional history painting. Where it *departs* from that tradition is by introducing what is in effect a critique of representation, self-consciously admitting its own discursiveness and hence its *limited* access to truth. Kiefer presents us with what in some respects resembles a traditional seascape: an image of a wave as it breaks on a shore. A notable antecedent may be Courbet's *The Wave* (1869, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main). Apparently washed ashore in the wake of the wave, however, is a model warship, presumably taking the place of Leander, although there is no reference to the myth other than in the title. The implication would seem to be that, just as Leander kept crossing the Hellespont, the warship will keep returning on every tide, and this may symbolize the constant reoccurrence of war in human

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<sup>18</sup> The stoical message of the painting lends weight to the suggestion that Rubens was a follower of the contemporary neostoic thinker, Justus Lipsius (see Morford, Mark P O *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* Princeton University Press, 1991).



history.<sup>19</sup> The painting forms part of the series dedicated to the Russian Futurist poet Velimir Chlebnikov, who developed a theory that great sea battles occur every 317 years (or multiples thereof), but there is certainly more to the image than a naive illustration of Chlebnikov's ideas. The individual elements of the painting are an ancient myth of love and death, the eccentric ideas of a somewhat obscure Russian poet, and a toy warship. A connection seems to be mooted, then, between various forms of discourse -- mythology, pseudo-science, and perhaps painting as well (in the form of the painterly tradition the image evokes) – and war. And this appears to be a favorite theme of Kiefer's, namely how knowledge – presented as our various attempts to conceptualize or represent the world to ourselves -- is implicated in human suffering. Yet at the same time, he seems at pains to avoid any suggestion of dogmatism. And this he does partly by ensuring that any meaning discernible in the painting is *implicit* rather than explicit, but also by devices that subtly critique the discipline of painting itself. For painting, as a form of representation, is itself part of the discursive structures that, Kiefer seems to suggest, have problematic consequences. In some degree, *Hero und Leander* adheres to figurative conventions, having a strong linear perspective and a perceptible -- albeit indistinct – horizon line, creating a sense of recession. At the same time, there is a complete lack of *aerial* perspective and tonal variation, which destroys the recessive effect and diverts attention to the surface of the painting, as does the model warship, which has been attached to it. As well as elements of figuration, furthermore, the painting exhibits elements of abstraction, in the form of the area of flat brownish-gold paint. Seeming to serve no figurative function, this has been applied in places in a spattered manner reminiscent of the techniques of Abstract Expressionism. Thus the painting evokes certain oppositions – depth versus surface, figuration versus abstraction—between which it seems, so to speak, unable to decide; and it is this *indeterminate* aspect that undermines any authority that it

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<sup>19</sup> There may be a suggestion here also of the concept of 'eternal return'. In essence, this is the idea that time is not linear, but cyclical. Although found in ancient philosophy and several major religions, in modern times it has been perhaps most associated with Friedrich Nietzsche (see 'Notes on the Eternal Recurrence', *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Volume 16 Edited by Oscar Levy, Translated by Anthony M Ludovici, Macmillan 1911).

might aspire to, revealing instead its artificial, discursive aspect. There is a suggestion, in short, of what Craig Owens calls 'a critique of representation, an attempt to use representation against itself to challenge its authority'.<sup>20</sup> Thus *Hero und Leander* is evidence of a profound tension in Kiefer, between his commitment to art's moral role in society on the one hand, and his acute awareness of the compromised nature of representation on the other. Any aspiration to project a moral insight must always be tempered by an acknowledgement of art's discursiveness.

As a further example of the way that Kiefer both recalls the tradition of history painting (in terms of scale, literary references and high moral purpose), and departs from it (in terms of the absence of narrative), let us consider *The Unborn* [*Die Ungeborenen*] (2001)(**Plate 3**), another typically enigmatic work. We notice firstly its formal constitution and huge size (around six square meters). Although the support in this case is canvas, it has been entirely covered with sheets of lead. Linen smocks of various sizes have been scattered over the surface of the painting, and a small tree -- uprooted from the earth (roots and all) and dipped in white plaster -- fixed to the center. As well as having a symbolic role, the tree -- present in *literal* form rather than in the form of a depiction -- serves to disrupt the conventions, and hence the authority, of representation, providing the self-critical element that is an almost ubiquitous feature of Kiefer's work. In places, Kiefer has attached strips of paper with long sequences of numbers and letters inscribed on them. The only concession to tradition, aside from the support, is a thin layer of paint. Suggestive of a night sky, this has not been applied with a brush but once again spattered in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Jackson Pollock; and the way that it thus recalls an established painterly idiom -- Abstract Expressionism -- is perhaps the principal reason why the work remains recognizably a painting, since there is precious little else that conforms to the traditional form.

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<sup>20</sup> Owens, Craig 'Representation, Appropriation and Power', *Art in America* 70, No 5 (May 1982) p9.

What then are we to make of this mysterious artifact? As before, there is no clear narrative, only some suggestive *hints*. In particular, there is reason to suppose that reference is being made to the *Kabbalah*, the Jewish mystical tradition.<sup>21</sup> Looking almost as if it has been petrified, the skeletal tree in the center may represent the ‘Tree of death’, which in the Kabbalah is the reverse or occult side of the *Etz Chaim* or ‘Tree of life’. The latter refers not to an actual tree but to a symbol of central importance to the Kabbalah, a display in diagram form of the ten *Sephiroth*, the spiritual emanations of the divine. Each of the *Sephiroth* corresponds with one of the ten *Qliphoth* on the Tree of Death, one of which is Lilith, the female demon. Likely to descend from a much older mythical tradition, Lilith has often featured in Western literature, as for example in Goethe’s *Faust*. In other paintings, Kiefer refers to her explicitly, as in *Lilith’s Daughters* [*Liliths Töchter*] (1991, Private collection). This features larger versions of the smocks in *The Unborn*, and it is from this fact that we may assume a reference to her here, even though Kiefer does not explicitly provide one. In mythology, Lilith is often portrayed as a child killer, so that the smocks may stand for her victims. But this connection with the Kabbalah might only occur to a viewer aware of Kiefer’s interest in the subject, and his knowledge of the work of Robert Fludd, the Elizabethan metaphysician and alchemist – and fellow student of the Kabbalah – whose second volume of his treatise *Utriusque cosmi historia* of 1617–21 features a drawing of the ‘Sephirothic Tree of Life’.<sup>22</sup> And this -- the way that the painting demands of the viewer a certain prior knowledge -- was another highly characteristic feature of traditional history painting (indeed, history painting in the style known as Mannerism was often deliberately obscure in terms of its references, a fact attributed by John Sherman to a desire on the part of the artist to flatter the sensibility of his client, the ‘connoisseur who can interpret it’<sup>23</sup>). In the case of *The Unborn*, previous knowledge is also required regarding the numbers on the strips of paper. These have been taken from the NASA catalog of stars, in which

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<sup>21</sup> See Dan, Joseph *The Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Kiefer produced a series of works dedicated to Fludd that includes the handmade ‘book’ illustrating the process of growth and decay in a sunflower field, *For Robert Fludd* (*Für Robert Fludd*) (1995-96, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao). For a discussion of Kiefer’s interest in Fludd, see Arasse, 2001/14 pp262-7.

<sup>23</sup> Shearman, John *Mannerism* Penguin, Harmondsworth 1979 p162.

every star known to astronomy is designated by a number. Kiefer has painted the long numbers by hand, and in the context of what seems to be the general theme of death, they become suggestive of the numbers – applied by tattooists who were often unskilled -- on the arms of the Jewish victims of the Nazis. It seems, then, that a connection is being made between the myth of Lilith on the one hand and genocide on the other, so that we might understand the painting, in common with *Hero und Leander*, to signify the adverse role of mythology in history (notably its appropriation by nationalistic discourses). Perhaps the ‘unborn’ ones are the children that the countless victims of history were prevented from having, and the empty smocks are theirs. Seen in this light, the painting becomes a metaphor for the squandered potential, the lives unlived, that is the inevitable corollary of war. But what might be the significance of the lead? In alchemy, it was thought that the metal is capable of transformation into gold, and this idea is suggestive of the idea of *transcendence*. And Kiefer’s interest in alchemy is, of course, well known.<sup>24</sup> Thus we might perhaps infer that the lead symbolizes the possibility of our transcending the cycles of inhuman behavior by which our history has been beset.

As a final example, in order to bring this discussion as up to date as possible -- and since it provides an obvious connection with Wagner -- let us take *Valhalla* [*Walhalla*] (**Plate 4**), one of several eponymous paintings from an entire exhibition on the same theme from 2016-17, shown at the White Cube gallery in London.<sup>25</sup> At almost twenty-four square meters, this is an enormous painting. The title comes of course from Norse mythology, in which Valhalla is the mythical home of slain warriors. It is destroyed during *Ragnarök*, a prophesized series of cataclysmic events heralding the end of the world. As well as featuring in Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* (first performed in 1876), and on numerous other occasions in painting and literature,

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<sup>24</sup> For discussions of references to alchemy in Kiefer see Rosenthal, 1987 p127; Arasse, 2014 pp242-48; Baqué, 2016 pp23-4.

<sup>25</sup> Another contemporary artist whose work has called renewed attention to Wagner is the radical theatre director, performance artist and filmmaker Christoph Schlingensiefel (1960-2010), who directed a controversial production of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 2004 and later undertook a project to build a community opera house in Burkina Faso, West Africa, somewhat after the model of the *Festspielhaus*.

Valhalla is also the name of a neo-classical monument near Regensburg in southeastern Germany, designed by Leo von Klenze and completed in 1842, commemorating over two hundred distinguished figures from German history. Commissioned by Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria in support of tentative contemporary moves in the direction of unification, the monument is a powerful symbol of German nationalism. Kiefer has depicted a group of tall, perilous-looking towers, to which he has attached strips of paper, similar to those in *The Unborn*, with the names of some of the figures from the Valhalla monument, including Geiseric (king of the Vandals), Hermann von Salza (Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, a military and religious order), Veleda (prophetess of the Bructeri, an ancient Germanic tribe), Saint Matilda, Marbod (an ancient German king), Walther von der Vogelweide (a poet of Middle High German), Wolfram von Eschenbach (a knight and epic poet) and Albrecht Dürer amongst others. The towers have been a recurrent feature of his work, appearing mainly in three-dimensional form as concrete casts taken from shipping containers and stacked on top of one another. It is thus that they appear at Barjac, and in his permanent installation at the Hangar Bicocca in Milan entitled *The Seven Heavenly Palaces*, from 2004.<sup>26</sup> They also formed the set of his 2009 opera, *Am Anfang* (produced in collaboration with the composer Jörg Widmann). With their suggestion of *ascent*, whilst being unstable and precarious, they seem to represent the religious impulse for him -- mankind's faltering attempts to transcend the material realm. In *Valhalla*, they are partly obscured by an area of blue-black paint covering the top of the painting, which appears to be seeping downwards as if it will gradually obliterate the entire image. Having no apparent referent, and owing something to the conventions of color-field abstraction, this area of color clashes with the painting's predominantly figurative nature; and with this conjunction of abstraction and figuration, Kiefer once again draws attention to the discursive aspect of his discipline, that is, its constitution as a

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<sup>26</sup> This title seems to combine references to the *Hekhalot* literature -- Jewish revelatory texts in which are recounted stories of ascents into heavenly palaces -- with references to the idea, found in Islam and ancient Mesopotamia as well as in the *Talmud*, that the heavens are divided into seven (see Scholem, *Gershom Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and the Talmudic Tradition* The Jewish Theological Seminary Press 1960). There may be also a reference to the towers found in Christian literature, such as those of Jericho and Babel from the Old Testament.

series of *conventions*. The painting's authority is further challenged by the layer of real clay at the bottom of the painting, which serves to subvert the latter's ontological status as representation in a manner similar to the tree in *The Unborn*. As always, then, Kiefer is careful to offset any statement that he wishes to make with a frank admission of the limitations of painting, emblematic of our limited access to truth; but what statement is he trying to make in this case? Something seems on the point of collapse and obliteration, and in this imminent devastation are evidently implicated religion, mythology and nationalism. Thus the painting appears to foretell a disaster in which human institutions have played a part.<sup>27</sup> I suggest, however, that what may also be apparent from the painting is the possibility of *renewal*. This is evident from the clay, which may harbor the seeds of new life, and from the inchoate mass of blue, which seems to seethe with a kind of energy. And this interpretation is strengthened by the fact that, in mythology, the *Ragnarök* predicts the emergence of a new order from the ruins of the old. Thus the painting may signify an ending, but an ending that is merely one episode in a perpetual cycle of endings and beginnings.

As is clear from these three examples, Kiefer's work provides considerably more than an aesthetic experience, and is content-driven, engaging the viewer's critical faculties and directing them towards issues in the realm of human society. To do this seems to be what for Kiefer constitutes art's purpose. In this respect, his work represents an updated, self-critical version of traditional history painting, which likewise addressed itself to the moral and ethical realm and thereby fulfilled a

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<sup>27</sup> An alternative, and less apocalyptic, interpretation may be that the painting stands for what has sometimes been called the 'end of history' -- not a collapse as such, but somewhat paradoxically a kind of *triumph*: the final victory of Western democracy. The latter is seen as the end because no further *development* is possible beyond it. In the view of certain commentators, notably the political scientist Francis Fukuyama, this moment is consistent with the end of the Cold War, when any political alternative was effectively neutralized. 'What we may be witnessing,' wrote Fukuyama at the time, 'is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.' (Fukuyama, Francis 'The End of History', *National Interest* 16, Summer 1989 pp3-18 (here p3).)

definite social role. I turn now to a consideration of his response to a specific issue, the question of the consequences for modern Germany of its Nazi past, and in particular the question of German *guilt*. This was amongst the more pressing concerns in German life in the post war period, and it was perhaps inevitable that a painter such as Kiefer – committed to the attempt to find a useful role for art -- should feel impelled to confront it. I want to look closely at the relevant period in his career, because it provides the clearest evidence of that with which I am principally concerned in this chapter, namely the way that his work undermines the boundary between art and society; for it is this that forms the first principal connection with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

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Kiefer was born in March 1945 in Donaueschingen, in the Black Forest, too late even to have much memory of the Second World War, still less to have had any involvement in it. He is thus a member of the generation known as the *Nachgeborenen*, those ‘born after’, and this puts him in a different position to the previous generation of artists, many of whom – such as Beuys, who had been a pilot in the *Luftwaffe* - had actually fought in the war. But like the rest of his generation, he could not escape the war’s seismic impact, and the legacy of crimes of such unprecedented magnitude. And for the first twenty years or so of his career, when he was still resident in Germany, he seems to have been largely preoccupied with assessing the consequences for a modern German such as himself of this bitter inheritance.

The suggestion that Nazism features in Kiefer’s work, and that he is in some degree confronting its presence in the German psyche, is not in itself a subject of much debate. His output from the 1970s and 80s abounds with references to the Third Reich, ranging from the explicit, such as the *Occupations* series and depictions of Nazi architecture, to the allusive, such as quotations from the poetry of Celan and references to events such as the Nazi book-burning and *Kristallnacht*. There are also frequent references to Wagnerian opera, which owing to Hitler’s predilection for it

and its use in Nazi propaganda has become indissolubly linked with the Nazis.<sup>28</sup> All of this, predictably enough, led at the time to considerable controversy, provoking the accusation that the artist was promoting a neo-Nazi agenda. In Germany, critics seem at the very least to have been mortified by Kiefer's references to the fascist skeletons in Germany's closet. A correspondent in *Der Spiegel* wrote in 1982 of the artist's 'painfully embarrassing nationalist motifs', whilst another saw in Kiefer only the 'dark' German past, 'whispering, embarrassingly remembered ('How grand we were!)'.<sup>29</sup> In general, however, the reaction of German critics was hostile in the extreme, typical of the way that, for a substantial proportion of his career, Kiefer's work has been 'almost universally reviled' in his native country, as Lisa Saltzman writes.<sup>30</sup> His 1980 contribution to the Venice Biennale, for example, collectively titled *Verbrennen, Verholzen, Versenken, Versanden* [Burning, Lignifying, Sinking, Silting], was largely condemned in Germany as perpetuating Nazi ideology and glorifying the country's Nazi past. But his unforgivable offence in the eyes of the critics, Saltzman suggests, was to do this in an international forum. What really worried the critics was how the idea of a *German* seeming to promote fascism would affect the *Deutschland Bild*, the perception of Germany abroad; for the latter is something to which the nation continues to be highly sensitive as it negotiates a new identity post Nazism. There is, as Saltzman puts it, in Germany a 'constant awareness

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<sup>28</sup> For example, the *Awaken Chorus* from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* was used in Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda film, *The Triumph of the Will* (1935).

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Schjeldahl, Peter 'Our Kiefer' (First published 1988) in *The Hydrogen Jukebox: The Selected Writings of Peter Schjeldahl, 1978-90* University of California Press 1991 p290.

<sup>30</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p103. There were partly stylistic and aesthetic grounds for this hostility, as Saltzman indicates. Amongst these was the issue of figuration. In the 1960s and 70s what was broadly valorized by the critically powerful 'New Left (whose mouthpiece was constituted by journals such as *Argument* and *Tendenzen*)' was art that had some affinities with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* of artists such as Otto Dix and George Grosz. Whilst figurative, this style was perceived as having a critical edge. This form of 'critical realism' informed the work of groups such as *Junge Realisten* in Düsseldorf. The 'expressionistic' style, with which Kiefer and others such as Georg Baselitz (b1938) were associated, was also figurative, but largely vilified by critics such as Benjamin Buchloh as elitist and *bourgeois* ('KIEFER: A Painter from Germany', in Saltzman, 1999).



of the external gaze'.<sup>31</sup> It was perhaps for this reason that the German critics felt it incumbent upon them to be seen emphatically to condemn any suggestion of a neo-Nazi agenda in Kiefer.

That such an agenda is what explains them nevertheless remains a possible interpretation of Kiefer's allusions to Nazism. At the same time, many other theories -- in my view far more plausible -- have arisen. Schütz sees Kiefer's engagement with the Third Reich as in some degree an attempt to account for the successful appeal of the regime to the German people. 'Kiefer's art', she writes, 'is aimed at presenting and interpreting the intellectual and cultural historical background for the turn of the Germans towards fascist ideology'.<sup>32</sup> In particular, she argues, he draws attention to the way that the Nazis plundered aspects of German cultural identity -- notably mythology -- in the course of their construction of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>33</sup> Another highly effective Nazi tactic, also thematized by Kiefer, was to identify themselves with illustrious figures from Germany's past 'as a cultural legitimization of their own eclectic pseudo-ideology'.<sup>34</sup> For Kiefer, Wagner serves as 'a prime example [eine Art Paradebeispiel]' of a cultural figure exploited in this way by the regime, which to a large degree accounts for Kiefer's frequent references to Wagnerian opera.<sup>35</sup> Thus the principal lesson to be drawn from Kiefer's work, in Schütz's view, is that since 1945 it has fallen to artists constantly to guard against the

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<sup>31</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p100. As Saltzman adds, invoking a concept from psychoanalysis, identity is 'formed through the gaze of the other.' (1999 p111.)

<sup>32</sup> 'Kiefers Kunst zielt auf die Darstellung und Deutung der geistes- und kulturgeschichtlichen Hintergründe für die Hinwendung der Deutschen zur faschistischen Ideologie.' (Schütz, 1999 p24.)

<sup>33</sup> Schama argues that Kiefer sees mythology as highly problematic because of its vulnerability to this kind of appropriation. His project, according to Schama, is partly to illustrate the 'unacceptable historical consequences' of the German heroic and mythic tradition. (1996 p123.) Mythology for Kiefer is implicated in history. He recognizes that it is 'a force hard to resist, but which leads up the forest path, to a wooden grave'. (Ibid.)

<sup>34</sup> '...als kulturelle Legitimation ihrer eigenen eklektizistischen Pseudo-Ideologie.' (Schütz, 1999 p25.)

<sup>35</sup> Schütz, 1999 p168.

present or future possibility of their work playing a part 'in the emergence of ideologies and false consciousness.'<sup>36</sup>

For Matthew Biro, Nazism features in Kiefer as part of his project to document, 'through both action and creation', the *process* whereby identity is constructed.<sup>37</sup> If one subscribes to the doctrine – prevalent since the time of Freud -- that denies the existence of a fixed self, this process becomes a matter of *choosing* an identity. We must choose 'to become either one type of person or another'.<sup>38</sup> But the choices available are limited to the examples available from one's social and historical context; and in the case of Kiefer, a modern German, this context includes the example of fascism. Thus when he invokes the Third Reich in his work it is as if he is assessing its potential as a source of role models (if only with a view to *rejecting* it). 'In those early pictures', he has stated,

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.<sup>39</sup>

This, Biro suggests, is what he is asking himself in one of his earliest photographic books, *You are a Painter [Du Bist Maler]* of 1969, which features on the cover an image of a work by the Nazi sculptor Josef Thorak and contains a series of photographs of Kiefer's studio in Karlsruhe, in which he is evidently reenacting battle scenes using toy soldiers (**Plate 5**).<sup>40</sup> The impression is of the artist experimenting with something before putting it into practice. He is literally *toying* with the militaristic mindset of Nazism. And this, for Biro, is how the latter features in this period in Kiefer's work: as something that has had to be evaluated in the course of the investigation of his own identity. References to it are a product of his seeking 'his

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<sup>36</sup> ...am Zustandekommen von Ideologien und falschem Bewußtsein'. (Schütz, 1999 p361.)

<sup>37</sup> Biro, Matthew *Anselm Kiefer* Phaidon, London 2013 p9.

<sup>38</sup> Biro, 1998 p19.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Arasse, 2014 p122.

<sup>40</sup> See Biro, 1998 pp19-24. Rosenthal notes that a German military tradition existed of using toy soldiers as a means of teaching military strategy (1987 p35).

own particular selfhood in light of his “German” social, cultural, and historical context’.<sup>41</sup>

Saltzman sees Kiefer’s project in this first part of his career partly in Freudian terms.<sup>42</sup> She cites the conclusion of the 1967 study by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn*, that contemporary German society was in a condition of what Freud had termed ‘melancholia’, an unhealthy state of mind that prevents the proper process of mourning for a loss – in this case the loss of absent, lost or discredited *fathers* (specifically the loss of Hitler as an ‘ego ideal’ as a result of the revelation of Nazi crimes<sup>43</sup>). And for Saltzman, Kiefer’s work of this period is expressive of precisely such a condition of melancholia, for there is a sense from the former of being trapped in the repetitive cycles that characterize the latter. We find the artist almost obsessively reiterating a limited number of themes. Thus when he repeatedly impersonates a Nazi officer in the *Heroic Symbols* series of watercolors, it is a case of compulsive ‘identification’ with the lost paternal figure (**Plate 6**).<sup>44</sup> And this produces the impression that, imprisoned in the dismal cycles of melancholia, he thinks of himself as a *victim*. Kiefer assumes, in Saltzman’s view, a ‘subject position of victimhood’.<sup>45</sup> That he thinks of himself in this way is for Saltzman evident from the way that he uses the motif of the painter’s palette (another recurring feature of his paintings after around 1974), which she takes to be a synecdoche for the artist himself. For it often appears in a position of imminent *danger*, as for example in *Palette on a Rope* (1977, Private collection), in which the rope from which it is suspended seems to be on fire.<sup>46</sup> The implication is that Kiefer faces a comparable existential threat, and in his case it is the threat to selfhood arising from being entirely circumscribed by the legacy of the past. For Kiefer as for all contemporary Germans, Nazism ‘frames’ his identity.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in another series of paintings, the

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<sup>41</sup> Biro, 1998 p42.

<sup>42</sup> Saltzman, 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p4.

<sup>44</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p60.

<sup>45</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p66.

<sup>46</sup> Rosenthal notes that this image may derive from the description of a tightrope walker in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1987, p66).

<sup>47</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p62.

palette appears against a background of identifiable Nazi architecture, as in *To The Unknown Painter* (1983) (**Plate 7**). Here, the palette, mounted on a kind of altar, is surrounded by the ruined but monumental architecture of the forecourt of Albert Speer's Reich Chancellery, symbolizing the oppressive lingering presence of Nazism in the psyche of the 'unknown' painter (that Saltzman takes to be Kiefer<sup>48</sup>). Indeed, in these paintings it is as if the palette is *entombed* within the buildings, so that they become 'shrines to Kiefer's own sense of victimhood'.<sup>49</sup> And from a tomb, there can be no escape, just as no escape can be expected from the closed circle of the melancholia to which Kiefer, and Germany, has fallen victim.

Huyssen is another commentator who has written persuasively about this period of Kiefer's career.<sup>50</sup> He says of these very large-scale depictions of fascist architecture that he found himself at first seduced by their hypnotic sensuous appeal, before realizing that this was the same way in which the Nazis had disguised their barbaric regime. Thus for Huyssen what the paintings call to mind is the aestheticization of politics, at which the Nazis were highly adept. But like Saltzman, he feels that what Kiefer's work from this period ultimately signifies has to do with the possibility of Germany transcending its past. Whereas for Saltzman, however, Kiefer is projecting the melancholic mindset that makes such transcendence impossible, for Huyssen what he is suggesting is that such transcendence cannot be enabled by art. A comparison of their respective interpretations of Kiefer's *Ikarus – märkischer Sand* [Icarus - Sand of the Brandenburg March] (1981) (**Plate 8**) is revealing of their differing viewpoints. This painting is similar to many from this period in that the reference to Nazism is somewhat veiled. Indeed, it would not be evident at all to a viewer unaware of the fact that the 'Brandenburg March' was a German army marching song used by both the *Wehrmacht* and the SS and named after the district of eastern Germany of which it is the regional anthem (and where, incidentally, both Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen concentration camps were located). The painting

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<sup>48</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p68. Saltzman incorrectly identifies this building as the Mosaic Room (1999 p67). The latter features instead in *Interior* (1981) (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam).

<sup>49</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p68.

<sup>50</sup> Huyssen, 1989.

depicts the mythical Icarus as a winged palette brought violently to earth in a ploughed field in which a fire seems to be burning. Saltzman sees it as representing Kiefer -- in the form once again of the palette -- weighed down by the burden of Germany's history of destruction, symbolized by the conflagration on the ground that has presumably served to melt the wax in his wings.<sup>51</sup> Huyssen takes a different view based on the idea that the palette represents *art*, not Kiefer himself.<sup>52</sup> That it is here merged with Icarus suggests that it may signify *classical art* -- so that the painting may stand for the demise of the precepts informing classicism, such as mimesis, in the wake of the Nazi era -- or art joined with myth; but either way, the conclusion is that the painting speaks of the *failure* of art to enable Germany to escape its history. The winged palette remains mired in the furrows, unable to take to the air. The implication is that art can no longer aspire to those spiritual heights at which Germany might transcend -- and perhaps achieve redemption from -- its past. 'The stronger the stranglehold of history,' writes Huyssen,

the more intense the impossible desire to escape into myth. But then myth reveals itself as chained to history rather than as history's transcendent other...Kiefer's fires are the fires of history, and they light a vision that is indeed apocalyptic, but one that raises the hope of redemption only to foreclose it.<sup>53</sup>

Huyssen sees Kiefer as doing for painting what Celan does for poetry, namely confronting by means of painting the event (the Holocaust) that has so drastically curtailed its power -- just as Celan confronts by means of language that which has made 'all language incommensurate'.<sup>54</sup>

In some degree, Daniel Arasse's view of this period of Kiefer's career constitutes a composite of those of Biro, Saltzman and Huyssen.<sup>55</sup> In common with Biro, he sees Kiefer's project as identifying those cultural determinants that make him a self; but

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<sup>51</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p63.

<sup>52</sup> Huyssen, 1989. Arasse takes a similar view (2001 p104).

<sup>53</sup> Huyssen, 1989 p45.

<sup>54</sup> Huyssen, 1989 p40.

<sup>55</sup> Arasse, 2001/2014.

he recognizes that for Kiefer these are compromised by the fact that Nazism has tainted every facet of German *Kultur*, including painting. He agrees with Huyssen that Kiefer's solution, as a painter, is to use painting to confront the cause of painting's demise; and this explains Kiefer's engagement with Nazism. But it also serves as an act of mourning, not for Nazism 'but for German *Kultur* itself, in so far as it constitutes the substance of his own artistic identity'.<sup>56</sup> It is intended to purge painting of the contaminating stain of Nazism. Thus, with the concept of mourning, Arasse invokes Freud, as does Saltzman; but he differs from the latter to the extent that Saltzman sees Kiefer as unable to transcend the unhealthy stage of melancholia.

It is to this debate surrounding Kiefer's engagement with Nazism that I want to make my own contribution. In part, my intention is to *debunk* what has been something of a recurring trope in the literature, namely that Kiefer, by addressing the Nazi era, was in some degree breaking a *silence* concerning it. Schütz is one of many commentators who have suggested this, arguing that the Third Reich was the subject of 'a taboo [ein Tabu]', which 'had a significant influence in postwar Germany until the 1960s and ensured that critical questioning of history had largely failed to materialize'.<sup>57</sup> Saltzman also subscribes to this view, claiming that it is precisely the sense of a 'repressed' memory that emerges from Kiefer's engagement with Nazism.<sup>58</sup> Lara Day concurs, observing that it would appear 'that Kiefer's ambition was to disturb the semblance of complacent calm or silence'.<sup>59</sup> And Kiefer has himself stated that, in this period of his career, he took it upon himself to force a confrontation with Nazism because this was something that had previously been strenuously avoided in contemporary German society. He has claimed that, when he was growing up, it was a subject that 'no one dared talk about'.<sup>60</sup> His intervention has also been associated with the student protest movement of the late 1960s,

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<sup>56</sup> Arasse, 2001/2014 p140.

<sup>57</sup> '...die deutsche Nachkriegszeit bis in die sechziger Jahre wesentlich bestimmt und dafür gesorgt hatte, daß kritische Befragungen der Geschichte weitgehend ausgeblieben waren.' (Schütz, 1999 p9.)

<sup>58</sup> 1999, p69.

<sup>59</sup> Day, Lara 'Inhabiting Collective Guilt and the Inability to Mourn', in Weikop, Christian (Ed) 2016. Accessed 10 January 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Huyssen, 1989 p30.

which has been seen as the occasion when the younger generation first confronted their parents' generation with the sins of their past. Again, Saltzman seems to endorse this picture, characterizing 1968 as the moment of a 'dramatic confrontation between sons and fathers'.<sup>61</sup> Both of these views, however, are misleading. An investigation of the postwar period in Germany will show that it was neither the case that the Nazi era was not discussed, nor that the goal of the student movement was to bring it to the fore. Thus the picture of Kiefer as continuing the project of the '68ers' by dragging National Socialism into the German public consciousness for the first time is not accurate, for it misrepresents both the story of Germany's engagement with its past and the aims of the student movement.

Whilst the Nazi era had featured in postwar discourse, there was nevertheless an issue that seems largely *not* to have been addressed. And for a modern German such as Kiefer, it might perhaps be assumed to carry the most weight. It is the issue of whether or not his own and all subsequent generations of Germans should feel in any way a sense of ongoing collective *responsibility* for the crimes of the Nazis, by which is of course principally indicated the Holocaust. We shall see that this is one of the questions that Kiefer addresses; and I will show that his work can be interpreted as an argument in favor of such responsibility, so that to be a German is to accept responsibility for the crimes of the nation's past.

In what follows, I will examine the representation of the Nazi era in the decades after the war, as well as the student movement, showing how it was not so much the Nazi era that was not confronted, but the question of ongoing collective responsibility. I will then consider a representative sample of Kiefer's paintings from the early part of his career, to show how he engages with this question. My first task, however, must be to explain the concept of collective responsibility in a little more detail, along with its ethical justification.

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<sup>61</sup> 1999, p69 and 49.

## The Sins of the Fathers

Historical crimes belong to the *past*. The Holocaust is still comparatively recent, but it had run its terrible course by May 1945. In a couple of decades from now, it will have faded from living memory, and the urgency of the question of blame will diminish as all of those who could be even remotely tainted by guilt – by virtue of passive compliance, for example -- will have died. But is there a sense in which some form of responsibility for it will nevertheless continue to attach itself to Germany, even after the punishment or death of the actual perpetrators? In the case of crimes of such magnitude, must a nation feel a sense of responsibility *in perpetuity*?

As we shall see, this question regarding the Holocaust has been raised a number of times since the war. The same question – whether or not a nation must accept responsibility for historical crimes – might just as easily be posed in regard to Britain and its enthusiastic involvement in the slave trade, for example. But in the case of the attempted total extermination of the Jews, the very enormity of the injustice embodied in that event, and its unique horror, has made the question more pressing. In any case, the answer that some – but by no means all -- commentators have given to the question is *yes*; the German nation must accept collective responsibility for the Holocaust, and this responsibility will obtain so long as the nation itself exists.

The concept of collective responsibility turns on a distinction between responsibility and *guilt*. This distinction is based on the idea that the latter carries with it a sense of *participation* in a crime, for which some form of retribution can be expected, whereas the former does not necessarily carry such a sense. There is, as Hannah Arendt remarks, consequently 'such a thing as responsibility for things one has not done; one can be held liable for them'.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> 1968/2003 p147.



This idea seems gradually to have evolved over the course of the postwar period, beginning with the work of the philosopher Karl Jaspers. Directly after the war, Jaspers published a short study intended to clarify the question of guilt in the context of the unprecedented nature and scope of Nazi crimes.<sup>63</sup> He distinguishes four types of guilt, and four corresponding jurisdictions in which appropriate punishments are administered. The first of these is *criminal* guilt, which applies to those who violate 'unequivocal laws', whether natural, national or international.<sup>64</sup> Criminal guilt is subject to the jurisdiction of a criminal court. The second is *political* guilt, the guilt of an entire state for the deeds of its government (this is to be distinguished from *collective* guilt, which implies a measure of *direct* participation in a crime that is not necessarily indicated by political guilt. The participatory element in the latter consists in participation in the political process). In the case of a state that has waged and lost an aggressive war -- such as Germany in 1945 -- the jurisdiction for political guilt 'rests with the power and the will of the victor'.<sup>65</sup> Punishment is determined in terms of reparations, for example. The third type is *moral* guilt. This is guilt incurred by a departure from one's own moral standards. The jurisdiction is one's own conscience (Jaspers suggests that the moral recovery of the German nation is dependent on each individual German assessing their actions under the Third Reich in terms of moral guilt. This self-examination was to some extent put into practice in the context of what became known as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the 'overcoming of the past'<sup>66</sup>). Finally, there is *metaphysical* guilt. What Jaspers seems to mean by this is guilt arising from a failure,

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<sup>63</sup> Jaspers, Karl *The Question of German Guilt* (First Published as *Die Schuldfrage: Von der politischen Haftung Deutschlands* 1947), Translated by E B Ashton, Fordham University Press, New York 2000.

<sup>64</sup> Jaspers, 1947/2000 p25.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Emerging towards the end of the 1950s, the concept was at first mainly associated with the work of the historian Hermann Heimpel, and represents the attempt to free the future of Germany from the intolerable burden of its past by means of historical study directed mainly towards personal recollection and confession. 'Historical scholarship offers freedom from history [*Geschichtswissenschaft verleiht Freiheit von der Geschichte*]', as Heimpel put it (quoted in Berg, Nicolas *The Holocaust and the West German Historians* Translated by Joel Golb The University of Wisconsin Press 2015 (originally published as *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erforschung und Erinnerung* Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2003) p136).

in the face of evil, to act in accordance with the demands of absolute solidarity, the solidarity that is a function of humanity's collective *spiritual* bond. Metaphysical guilt, in Jaspers' view, is the subject of *divine* jurisdiction. As an example of a confession of metaphysical guilt, we might cite Adolph Arndt's famous statement made in the course of the 1965 debate in the Bundestag regarding the extension of the statute of limitations for Nazi crimes. Arndt, the legal expert of the Social Democrat party, confessed to a sense of guilt arising from just such a failure to act in accordance with the requirements of solidarity. His frank and public admission of personal guilt is considered 'a shining moment in German parliamentary history', as Marc von Miquel writes.<sup>67</sup> 'I did not go onto the streets', declared Arndt,

and cry out as I saw that the Jews were being transported by truck out of our midst. I did not don the yellow star and say: Me too! I cannot say that I did enough.<sup>68</sup>

The uncompromising demands of solidarity, as Arndt indicates, should have dictated that he sacrifice *himself*, so that he shared the fate of the Jews.

Jaspers' attention was directed towards the plight of contemporary Germans – almost all of whom had participated in the regime if only as its ordinary citizens -- as they struggled to cope with the immediate aftermath of the war. By the beginning of the 1960s, however, a discourse began to emerge that focused on the *ongoing* consequences of the Nazi era. And it is here that we see a distinction starting to be made between guilt, which depends on participation, and responsibility, or liability, which does not. Writing in 1963, the historian Rudolf von Thadden differentiated firmly between collective liability and collective guilt, arguing for the 'collective liability of the German people' for Nazi crimes.<sup>69</sup> And since liability does not depend

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<sup>67</sup> Miquel, Marc von 'Explanation, Dissociation, Apologia: The Debate over the Criminal Prosecution of Nazi Crimes in the 1960s' in Gassert, Philipp and Steinweis, Alan E (Eds) *Coping with the Nazi Past; West German Debates on Nazism and Generational Conflict, 1955-1975* Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford 2007 (First Published 2006) Gassert and Steinweis (Eds), 2007 p57.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in von Miquel, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds), 2007 p57.

<sup>69</sup> Thadden, Rudolf von '17. Juni: Nach zehn Jahren' *Neue Sammlung* 3 (1963): 383-87, here 387].

on participation, it will extend into the future. 'The murder of the Jews', writes von Thadden, 'will be attached to Germany's name even when every personal memory of it will have faded'.<sup>70</sup>

It was not only the fact that responsibility for a crime was seen as independent of actual involvement that meant that it could be extended indefinitely into the future, however; what was also starting to be proposed was that it was actually *inescapable* that responsibility for Nazi crimes should be carried forward in this way. This is the central conclusion of an emerging discourse that would receive its perhaps most paradigmatic formulation at the hands of Jürgen Habermas in the context of the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s – to which we shall return -- based on the idea that any society is unavoidably the product of its past. To deny the historical basis of a society – even if it is a shameful one -- is therefore to deny the conditions of its existence. Already by 1959, this was recognized by the historian Alfred Heuss. Observing that the repression of the memory of Germany's recent past would have precisely this effect, Heuss lamented the 'auto-suggestive drive' of the Germans to 'repress our recent past and thereby pretend that we are *unhistorical* beings [emphasis added]'.<sup>71</sup> Modern Germany is unavoidably the product of the society that produced the Final Solution, and this indissoluble link – which will endure as long as the German nation continues to exist – is the reason why responsibility for Nazi crimes is transferable. This is the concept of collective responsibility, the responsibility of members of a society for actions in which they did not participate, but for which they are liable in virtue of membership of that society (it is similar to Jaspers' concept of political guilt, except that the latter applies to citizens of a culpable criminal regime such as Nazi Germany). There is nevertheless no suggestion of retribution in the case of collective responsibility. Rather, its force is such that a society cannot *dissociate* itself from the crimes of its past.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Heuss, Alfred *Verlust der Geschichte* Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1959 p61.

Prior to Habermas' formulation in the 1980s, perhaps the clearest statement of collective responsibility was that of Hannah Arendt, a former pupil of both Jaspers and Martin Heidegger. The main purpose of her essay on the subject is to debunk the notion of collective *guilt*. She may have been thinking in particular here of an essay published three years earlier by the writer Martin Walser, 'Unser Auschwitz', in which the author argues forcefully in favor of collective guilt, a concept whose possibility he sees many thinkers since the war as having conspired in *denying*. 'The idealistic thinkers of domestic and foreign origin,' writes Walser, 'have since 1945 been helpful in proving to us that there is no collective guilt'.<sup>72</sup> He calls for a broader acceptance of guilt across West German society for Nazi crimes based on the fact that everything that a society does is done in the name of that society. 'If...the people and the state are still meaningful designations for a polity or a collective that occurs in history,' he argues,

in whose name law is spoken or broken, then everything that takes place is conditioned by this collective, and the cause for everything is to be sought in this collective. Then no act is merely subjective. Then Auschwitz is a broad German issue. Then all belong to any part of the cause of Auschwitz...One did not have to be in the SS after all.<sup>73</sup>

Whilst Arendt agrees about the importance of society regarding questions of guilt and responsibility, she feels impelled to reiterate the distinction between the two, namely that guilt requires direct involvement. There is consequently 'no such thing', she writes, 'as being or feeling guilty for things that happened without oneself

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<sup>72</sup> 'Die idealistischen Denk-Künstler, inländischer und ausländischer Herkunft, haben uns seit 1945 hilfreich bewiesen, daß das eis keine Kollektivschuld gebe'. Walser, Martin *Unser Auschwitz: Auseinandersetzung mit der deutschen Schuld* (First published 1965) Verlag, Hamburg 2015 p115.

<sup>73</sup> 'Wenn... Volk und Staat überhaupt noch sinnvolle Bezeichnungen sind für ein Politisches für ein Kollektiv also, das in der Geschichte auftritt, in dessen Namen Recht gesprochen oder gebrochen wird, dann ist alles, was geschieht, durch dieses Kollektiv bedingt, dann ist in diesem Kollektiv die Ursache für alles zu suchen. Dann ist keine Tat mehr bloß subjektiv. Dann ist Auschwitz eine großdeutsche Sache. Dann gehört jeder zu irgendeinem Teil zu der Ursache von Auschwitz...Es muß einer doch nicht in der SS gewesen sein.' Walser, 1965/2015 p117.

actively participating in them'.<sup>74</sup> And the problem with the concept of *collective* guilt in Arendt's view is that, by disseminating blame, it *weakens* individual guilt, leading in some cases to exoneration. With respect to 'what had been done by the Hitler regime to the Jews,' she tells us,

the cry "We are all guilty" that at first hearing sounded so very noble and tempting has actually only served to exculpate to a considerable degree those who actually were guilty. Where all are guilty, nobody is.<sup>75</sup>

Against the concept of collective guilt, Arendt sets her definition of collective responsibility, for which two conditions have to be present. 'I must be held responsible for something I have not done', she proposes,

and the reason for my responsibility must be my membership to a group (a collective) which no voluntary act of mine can dissolve, that is, a membership which is utterly unlike a business partnership which I can dissolve at will.<sup>76</sup>

As noted above, Arendt's concept of collective responsibility resembles Jaspers's concept of political guilt. Indeed, Jaspers himself sometimes refers to the latter as political *responsibility*. Germans 'are politically responsible', he declares,

for our régime, for the acts of the régime, for the start of the war in this world-historical situation, and for the kind of leaders we allowed to rise amongst us.<sup>77</sup>

For Jaspers, the mere fact of 'being German' entails a feeling of co-responsibility 'for what Germans do and have done'.<sup>78</sup> But he is writing as a member of the generation in Germany that had lived through the Nazi era, the generation that had in consequence  *nolens volens*  participated in the regime, whereas Arendt is at pains

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<sup>74</sup> Arendt, 1968/2003 p147.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Arendt, 1968/2003 p149.

<sup>77</sup> Jaspers, 1947/2000 p72.

<sup>78</sup> Jaspers, 1947/2000 p74.

to separate responsibility from direct participation; and the result of this is that responsibility can be devolved to subsequent generations. In Arendt's view, members of a society *inherit* responsibility for crimes of that society's past, crimes of which they themselves are not personally guilty. 'Every government, she maintains, 'assumes responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessors and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of its past.'<sup>79</sup> This is the non-negotiable price we pay, in her view, for communal life, the fact 'that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men.'<sup>80</sup> Whilst the modern German nation cannot be said to be collectively *guilty* of the crimes of the Third Reich, then, it can nonetheless be said to be collectively *responsible*.

It is not altogether surprising that the idea of ongoing responsibility in Germany for Nazi crimes was not popular in the decades after the war. It must have seemed, after all, a highly unpalatable notion. And if we look at the story of West Germany's engagement with the Nazi era in that period, we will find that whilst it is untrue that what characterized this engagement was predominantly *silence*, what appears to be the case is that the question of collective responsibility was either unacknowledged, or avoided in favor of a view of the past that would more easily facilitate national spiritual regrowth. Even as early as 1965, the far-right political writer Armin Mohler had insisted on 'drawing a line [*einen Schlußstrich ziehen*]' under the Nazi past in order for Germany to become once again 'a normal nation'.<sup>81</sup> The 1980s would see renewed calls for this settling of accounts with the past, as we shall see when we come to the issue of the *Historikerstreit*. Firstly, however, let us look in some detail at how the Third Reich was represented in Germany in the period leading up to the protest movement of 1968 -- the period that also encompasses Kiefer's formative development.

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<sup>79</sup> Arendt, 1968/2003 p149.

<sup>80</sup> Arendt, 1968/2003 p158.

<sup>81</sup> *Was die Deutschen fürchten*, quoted in Scholtyseck, Joachim 'Conservative Intellectuals and the Debate over National Socialism and the Holocaust in the 1960s' in Gassert and Steinweis, (Eds) 2007 pp249-50.

## The Year of Protest

The 1960s were a tumultuous decade, witnessing profound social and cultural changes whose impact is still felt today. And perhaps the most eventful year in that highly eventful decade was 1968, the year that saw the protest movements right across Europe that came to symbolize the spirit of *rebellion* with which the 1960s are most associated. These movements were mainly directed against ruling elites, who responded to them with varying degrees of repression. But the history of the protest movement varied from country to country. And in the case of Germany, what 1968 has tended to be remembered for is that it marked the point when Germany's deeply problematic recent history was first brought into the open, and what has sometimes been seen as the 'silence' of the period since the war broken, a silence, it has been suggested, that had been actively enforced. As Joachim Scholtyseck indicates, a 'chorus of critical voices' has portrayed the years leading up to 1968 as a 'far reaching repression of all that concerned the Nazi regime and the Holocaust'.<sup>82</sup> This has even been seen as constituting a kind of 'second guilt.'<sup>83</sup> In this discourse, 1968 has been characterized as the return of Germany's repressed past, corresponding with the moment when the generation of Germans born either during the war or just after it – that is to say, Kiefer's generation -- came of age, and forced the issue of the Nazi era.<sup>84</sup> But how far does this picture resemble the truth? Did 1968 serve to bring 'the past out of the closet' in Germany, as Elizabeth L B Peifer asks?<sup>85</sup>

The conventional view, as might be expected, is in reality far too simplistic. In the first place, it misrepresents the student movement itself. As Hermann Lübke contends, the argument that the latter was 'a response to the unwillingness of the

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<sup>82</sup> Scholtyseck, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p238.

<sup>83</sup> Scholtysek, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p240.

<sup>84</sup> In 1968, Kiefer was 23 years old. He entered Albert-Ludwigs University in Freiburg im Breisgau to study law and Romance languages in 1965, later switching to study art at the School of Fine Arts, also in Freiburg, as well as at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe. He graduated in 1969 (source: Biro, 2013 p142).

<sup>85</sup> Peifer, Elizabeth L B 'Public Demonstrations of the 1960s: Participatory Democracy or Leftist Fascism?' in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p195.

fathers' generation to face its National Socialist past' is one of the 'myths' of the 68er generation.<sup>86</sup> It had less to do with enforcing the confrontation of their parents' generation with their involvement in the Third Reich than with exposing the unacknowledged *persistence* of the past and a perceived resurgence in fascist tendencies in West German society. In the second, the idea that this past had been entirely *absent* from discourse in the preceding years is very far from the truth. But what *was* absent from the debate was an engagement with the highly contentious issue of collective responsibility. I want therefore to provide a brief account of Germany's relationship with the Nazi era in the years leading up to the student protests, and how this issue – of critical importance for the future of Germany – was consciously or unconsciously avoided.

Whilst it seems that there was a general reluctance on the part of the generation that had fought the war to discuss their experiences with their children, it is emphatically *not* the case that the memory of the Nazi era was repressed in Germany until 1968. As early as 1947, the liberal weekly *Die Zeit* had warned against this possibility, as Christoph Müller writes.<sup>87</sup> And throughout the Adenauer era, this warning 'was regularly repeated'.<sup>88</sup> Serious academic research into the period had commenced not long after the end of the war. Nor had the Nazi era been absent from either popular culture or education prior to 1968. But the overwhelming concern in Germany in the post war period had necessarily been with *reconstruction*; and it was this fact that tended to inform the representation of the recent past in all three of these areas – research, popular culture, and education. To a large extent, all other considerations were subordinated to this overriding concern, to which it is easy to see how the somewhat unappealing notion of collective responsibility might have seemed inimical.

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<sup>86</sup>'Der Mythos der 'kritischen Generation': Ein Rückblick', quoted in Schmidtke, Michael 'The German New Left and National Socialism' in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p176.

<sup>87</sup> Müller, Christoph Hendrik *West Germans Against The West: Anti-Americanism in Media and Public Opinion in the Federal Republic of Germany 1949–1968* Palgrave, 2010 p14.

<sup>88</sup> Müller, 2010 p14.



The focus of academic research was with explaining the emergence in a civilized European nation of the barbaric regime of the Nazis, and on this issue opinions were and continue to be divided. Essentially, there have been two opposing viewpoints, which in some degree crystallized in the remarkably bitter and highly public dispute of the late 1980s known as the *Historikerstreit*, or 'historians' controversy'. In the first place, there is the view that National Socialism was the culmination of German history, the teleological endpoint of Germany's *Sonderweg* or 'special path'. The latter was a function of a defect in the national character that made Germans susceptible to authoritarianism, resulting in the country's *deviation* from the main thoroughfare of European democracy. The *Sonderweg* approach tends to present German history as a paradigm of 'flawed national development', as Charles S Maier puts it.<sup>89</sup> The picture of Germany that emerges is somewhat like that of a patient who periodically exhibits the same symptoms of a disease of which the Third Reich merely constituted a kind of chronic outbreak. This narrative, which seems somewhat apologetic to the extent that it locates the roots of Nazism in a national character trait, is associated both with the political Left, and with the structuralist or 'functionalist' approach (Maier credits the Marxist historian Tim Mason with the introduction of the functionalist/intentionalist opposition), that is, the approach based on the idea that Nazi villainy was the outcome of internal pressure from 'below' as well as of authority imposed from 'above'. It thus argues for a form of collective *guilt*, whereby blame for Nazi atrocities is disseminated widely over the regime; the issue of the collective responsibility of modern Germans, however, does not arise.<sup>90</sup>

The other view is that the Nazis were simply part of more general twentieth century tendencies, the urge to totalitarianism in particular. This so-called 'totalitarian'

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<sup>89</sup> Maier, Charles S *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1997 p102.

<sup>90</sup> Eric Michaud has argued that the concept of the *Sonderweg* perpetuates Nazi ideology. 'To dig up from a 'German' past evidence that would permit tracing of the *Sonderweg*, ' he writes, 'the 'special path' allegedly taken by Germany and leading to Nazism, unlike other European nations, is to attempt to reconstitute Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* [race ancestry], a phantasmagorical 'ancestral inheritance', but this time with all the guarantees of 'true science'. (Quoted in Arasse, 2014 p132.)

approach has been associated both with the political Right, and with the 'intentionalist' or 'top down' approach, based on the idea that responsibility lay with what Nicolas Berg calls a small but barbaric 'band of criminals', a-historical aliens visiting their crimes as much on the German people as on the rest of Europe.<sup>91</sup> In this view, Hitlerism is seen as an aberration, an unrelated episode in the larger narrative of German history, and guilt for Nazi crimes as limited to the Nazi elite alone. And this is the picture that has frequently been seen as the most congenial for the purpose of Germany's spiritual regeneration. Nazism has to be portrayed as an anomaly, for as Gerhard Ritter -- one of the leading historians writing in the immediate post war period -- put it, 'a *Volk*...that has doubts about its past no longer has any real hope in the future'.<sup>92</sup> Nor has the impetus behind this approach to writing about the Nazis always come from the historians themselves. It has sometimes been imposed from above, as was the case with the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, or IfZ [the Institute for Contemporary History]. Founded in Munich in 1949 with the specific mandate of addressing the period of the Third Reich, the Institute had laudably objective aims; it was nevertheless dependent on public funding, and thus accountable to a government decidedly on the defensive regarding Germany's recent past. It was no surprise, therefore, that its main emphasis turned out to be on positioning the Nazis as an isolated phenomenon disassociated from German national identity, as is clear from the remark by Hans Rothfels -- who was influential in the Institute's founding and a leading contributor to the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, its associated journal -- that his efforts, and those of many others, were 'aimed precisely...at bringing about international recognition of the distinction between Germans and National Socialists'.<sup>93</sup> Recognizing this distinction is necessary, as historians associated with the totalitarian approach continue to maintain, in order for Germany to construct what Maier calls a

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<sup>91</sup> Berg, 2015 p21.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Berg, 2015 p71.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Berg, 2015 p160.

'usable identity'.<sup>94</sup> And we will find it reiterated again and again as Germany struggled to come to terms with its past in the post war period.<sup>95</sup>

By the early 1950s, the Third Reich had also entered West German popular culture, in the form of movies (such as Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* [The Murderers Are Among Us], released in 1946), novels (such as Heinrich Böll's *Wo warst du Adam* [Where were you Adam?], published in 1951), illustrated magazine features, and the first *Landserhefte* (Plate 9). These were comic books based around the figure of the *Landser*, or ordinary soldier, doing battle with a generalized enemy (sometimes referred to as 'Ivan', since in this period the Russians still represented a credible threat) and projecting an image of straightforward loyalty and courage. As Habbo Knoch writes, the German soldier emerges from these pages 'not as a Nazi, but as a heroic and tragic figure, not as a Prussian militarist, but as a brave, unpolitical warrior who was at once the innocent tool and victim of a terror

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<sup>94</sup> Maier, 1997 p32.

<sup>95</sup> The historical debate is highly politicized, not least to the extent that historians on the 'Left' have been seen to gratify international demands (particularly from the USA) for Germany publicly to assume a greater measure of responsibility; whereas historians on the 'Right', in virtue of their tendency to relativize the crimes of the Nazis (by bracketing them with other genocidal episodes in the twentieth century), have been seen to open the door for a 'conservative nationalism,' as Maier notes (1997 p32). For the conclusion to be drawn from their argument would appear to be that the Nazis - in comparison to the Stalinist regime, for example - were perhaps 'not as bad as all that', so to speak, and it is clear how this conclusion could give succor to the political Right by palliating the worst excesses of Fascism. But during the period of the Cold War, a political turn in this direction would have had very serious potential consequences for the entire European balance of power, since it would have been likely to distance West Germany from the other Western democracies. The former was playing a hugely significant role in NATO, but the alliance was a fragile one. At times in the 1970s, as Geoffrey Williams writes, its collapse had seemed 'imminent', with the possibility mooted of American withdrawal (Williams, Geoffrey *The Permanent Alliance: The European-American Partnership, 1945-1984* A W Sijthoff, Leyden 1977 p341). At the same time, Soviet armaments production was on 'something akin to a war tempo.' (Williams, 1977 p317.) The threat from the East seemed frighteningly real, real enough to prompt Williams's study of the consequences for European security in the event of NATO's demise. And it was clear to some that the very last thing that was needed was to alienate the West as a result of a resurgence of the Right.

regime'.<sup>96</sup> Thus whilst the subject matter was drawn from the Nazi era, it was presented in such a way that what was stressed were positive virtues of which the nation could be proud as it attempted to reinvent itself. This was characteristic also of the depiction of the war in contemporary literature and drama. Carl Zuckmayer's play *Des Teufels General* [*The Devil's General*] is typical in this regard. Loosely based on the last days of Ernst Udet, the German fighter ace who killed himself in 1941, it was performed more than 3000 times between 1947 and 1950.<sup>97</sup> Its central theme is that of a courageous figure cruelly deceived by a villainous regime that ultimately destroys him. One contemporary critic wrote of the audience at the play's premiere that it 'hailed the alleged tragedy of a follower coming too late into an insight into the true connections'.<sup>98</sup> A narrative was emerging – soon to be formalized in historical discourse as the 'totalitarian' view of Nazism -- in which the Nazis were portrayed as a nefarious group of miscreants, not substantially different from other twentieth century totalitarian regimes, who numbered amongst their victims the German people *themselves*. The effect of this was to obviate the question of collective responsibility for Nazi crimes by limiting guilt to the Nazi elite alone and distancing them from the rest of the population, as seems to have been felt necessary in order to afford the German people any prospect of spiritual revival.

At the same time, it would appear that the Nazi era, whilst not completely absent from the curricula, did not receive much attention in German schools. If so, this may likewise have been a function of the general emphasis on reconstruction, and the focus on the *future* rather than on the past that this entails, as opposed to any conscious policy to minimize the importance of the Third Reich. But by the end of the 1950s there was certainly a widespread *perception* that insufficient attention to the period was paid in schools. This corresponded with a time when the subject of National Socialism was re-entering the public sphere in dramatic fashion. In 1958, following the establishment in Ludwigsburg of the Central Office of the State Justice

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<sup>96</sup> Knoch, Habbo 'The Return of the Images: Photographs of Nazi Crimes and the West German Public in the "Long 1960s"', in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p34.

<sup>97</sup> Schütz, 1999 p88.

<sup>98</sup>: ...der vermeintlichen Tragödie eines zu später Einsicht in die wahren Zusammenhänge gelangenden Mitläufers zujubelten'. (Quoted in Schütz, 1999 p 89.)

Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes [*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Gewaltverbrechen*], ten former members of a Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* were prosecuted in Ulm in the first in a series of Holocaust related trials of Germans by Germans that would culminate in the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials of 1963-5.<sup>99</sup> The early 60s also saw the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem – an issue made more contentious, and hence more newsworthy, in virtue of the sensational circumstances and questionable legality of his capture – as well as ongoing and ‘highly visible’ debates on the issue of the statute of limitations question, as Belinda Davis notes.<sup>100</sup> For the younger generation of Germans, the almost ubiquitous presence of the Third Reich in public discourse must have contrasted sharply with its *absence* from family life, due to their parents’ ‘general refusal’ to talk with them about their own experiences in this period.<sup>101</sup> The very paucity of information from this source no doubt contributed to the fascination that the period began to hold for the younger generation. At any rate, a survey conducted by the *Institut für Meinungsforschung* in Allensbach in 1960 found that 42 percent of young people believed that the information provided by schools about the recent past was poor.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, ‘growing numbers’ of intellectuals and public officials began to lobby for greater emphasis to be placed on the period, as Scholtyseck indicates.<sup>103</sup> This, combined with pressure from progressive parents and children themselves, led the Conference of State Ministers to issue new guidelines for the teaching in schools of recent German history.<sup>104</sup>

But if the history of the *photographic* record of the Holocaust is anything to go by, the way that material regarding the Third Reich was presented in schools seems to have been once more somewhat biased in favor of the general goal of regeneration.

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<sup>99</sup> The Nuremberg trials had been undertaken by the Allies.

<sup>100</sup> Davis, Belinda ‘New Leftists and West Germany: Fascism, Violence, and the Public Sphere, 1967-1974’ in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 pp211-12.

<sup>101</sup> Davis, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p211.

<sup>102</sup> Siegfried, Detlef ‘Don’t Look Back in Anger: Youth, Pop Culture and the Nazi Past’, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p146.

<sup>103</sup> In Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p242.

<sup>104</sup> Jaraus, Konrad H ‘Critical Memory and Civil Society: The Impact of the 1960s on German Debates about the Past’, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p22.

Knoch has made a study of this record, which, until 1955, when Leon Poliakov and Josef Wolf published a documentary anthology, had been entirely absent from the public domain since 1946.<sup>105</sup> Illustrated magazines began to feature this material in 1956, intensifying their use of it after 1960. Between 1958 and 1962 it was the subject of a series of small exhibitions. And school textbooks began incorporating the photographs in 1958, although mainly in conjunction with war images unrelated to the Holocaust, by which they were outnumbered. It seems that it was in any case a rule until the 1990s for textbooks only to use the more palatable Holocaust photos – in which the victims were at least still alive -- rather than the profoundly shocking atrocity images, and these were often paired with images of German ‘resistance fighters’, those Germans that had resisted the regime; alternatively, an image of concentration camp inmates arranged in rows might be paired with a photo of the *Hitlerjugend* arranged in similar rows. The implication was that they were *all* victims. Thus the emphasis was once again on the victimhood of the German people on the one hand, and the exclusive guilt of the Nazi elite on the other. A meaningful engagement with the past was sacrificed in favor of what was seen as furnishing the best possibility of the nation’s spiritual recovery.<sup>106</sup>

To a not inconsiderable extent, the Nazi era also featured in the magazines directed at a younger audience that began to emerge in the late 1950s and 60s, such as *Twen*, founded by Willy Fleckhaus and Adolf Theobald in 1959. Targeted primarily at high school and university students, *Twen* was typical of this literature in that it consisted

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<sup>105</sup> Knoch, in Gassert and Steinweis, 2007 pp31-49.

<sup>106</sup> Towards the end of the 1960s, education in Germany began to show the influence of the pedagogic ideas put forward by the Frankfurt School. These aimed at overcoming authoritarian tendencies in society by developing a student’s critical and reflexive consciousness, and were taken up by the radio program *Funkkolleg Erziehungswissenschaft* (Radio college of Pedagogy). The accompanying book, which had a print run of 400,000 copies, was highly influential on the next generation of teachers (Schmidtke, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p188). Coming to terms with the past began to be seen as dependent on a new mindset: it became ‘the long-term task of the morally guided internalization of a consciousness.’ as the sociologist Clemens Albrecht has noted (quoted in Schmidtke, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p188).

of a mixture of 'music and fashion, sexuality and politics', as Siegfried writes.<sup>107</sup> When it featured, the Nazi era was set up as the example *not* to emulate. The editors' most important message to their readers was that they should 'not repeat their parents' mistakes'.<sup>108</sup> But what this mainly served to emphasize was the *contrast* between the generations; thus the Nazi era became a weapon in the armory of the younger generation to use against their parents in the inter-generational conflict for which the 60s are mostly remembered. 'We just had to say "Dachau"', one '68er' later remarked, to 'make them feel unsure'.<sup>109</sup> Although they were curious about it, the younger generation distanced themselves from the Nazi past. There was no sense of a pressing need to *confront* it, and certainly no sense of a shared responsibility. Indeed, as Scholtysek notes it was estimated around the time of the Eichmann trial that 90 percent of West Germans did not 'consider themselves to be implicated in the Holocaust and did not believe that they ought to feel guilty in any way'.<sup>110</sup> On the contrary: the trial merely served to reinforce the impression that only a few individuals had been responsible, to whom blame could be exclusively attributed.

### **Political Cleanliness Mania**

It was not the case, then, that in the West Germany in which Kiefer and the other '68ers' had grown up the Third Reich had been subject to some kind of taboo. It had been a permanent fixture of both popular culture and academic research almost since the end of the war, and although it may have featured insufficiently in the school system in the first decade or so, steps were taken in the 1960s to rectify this. But, as we have seen, engagement with the Nazi era had mainly served what were perceived as the requirements of spiritual regeneration, principally by distancing the Nazis from ordinary Germans and limiting blame for their atrocities to the Nazi elite, or else as providing raw material for the generational conflict. Apart from those of a

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<sup>107</sup> Siegfried, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p148.

<sup>108</sup> Siegfried, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p151.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Siegfried, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p156.

<sup>110</sup> Scholtysek, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p242.

few isolated voices, no demands had been heard to confront the issue of to what extent – if at all -- the younger generation should feel a sense of collective responsibility for Nazi crimes. And whilst the protest movement of 1968 brought certain *other* issues concerning Germany's murky past to the fore – principally, the perceived *continuation* of Nazism into the present – this question remained largely unaddressed.

The roots of the student movement, in Germany as elsewhere in Europe, lay in the rise of the transnational New Left in the late 1950s. Although European in origin, the New Left also found its way to America, where the sociologist C Wright Mills popularized the term with his 'Letter to the New Left' of 1960.<sup>111</sup> Mainly oriented towards anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, the New Left was also 'significantly influenced' by the peace movement, as Martin Klimke writes.<sup>112</sup> A principal target of its criticism – including in the USA -- was the USA itself. Not only was the latter the world's largest capitalist economy, possessing a highly vocal anti-communist lobby and a fearsome nuclear arsenal, it was also perceived as imperialist, its image as 'protector of the free world' having been irredeemably tarnished by its involvement in the Vietnam War, as Schmidtke notes.<sup>113</sup>

In Germany, the *avant-garde* of the New Left was the Socialist German Student League [*Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*, or SDS]. Founded in 1946, this was originally 'closely affiliated' with the Social Democrats; at the beginning of the 1960s, however, it switched allegiance to the New Left.<sup>114</sup> In common with the latter, the SDS was opposed to the anti-communist stance of the West but rejected orthodox Marxism. It 'positioned itself' closer to 'Critical Theory', the *theoretical* Marxism of the Frankfurt School.<sup>115</sup> The SDS shared the view of prominent Critical Theorists

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<sup>111</sup> See Mills, Wright C 'Letter to the New Left', *New Left Review* 5, Sept-Oct 1960 pp18-23.

<sup>112</sup> Klimke, Martin and Scharloth, Joachim (Eds) *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008 p3.

<sup>113</sup> Schmidtke, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p180.

<sup>114</sup> Klimke, 'West Germany' in Klimke and Scharloth (Eds) 2008 p98.

<sup>115</sup> Klimke, in Klimke and Scharloth (Eds) 2008 p98.



such as Adorno that revolutionary change could no longer be expected from the proletariat, whose dialectical potential had long since been neutralized by the effects of the 'culture industry'.<sup>116</sup> As students, members of the SDS looked instead to *themselves* and other groups occupying a marginal position in society to institute change.<sup>117</sup>

The SDS shared with the German New Left the broad political outlook of the international movement, including its anti-American stance, which in Germany expressed itself in a variety of ways, from eggs being thrown at West Berlin's Amerika Haus in 1965 to the abortive 'pudding assassination' of visiting US vice-president Hubert Humphrey two years later and the Vietnam Congress of February 1968 at the Technical University Berlin (which attracted an audience of around five thousand<sup>118</sup>). What made the issue of Vietnam more pressing was the perception that, in virtue of its alliance with America, West Germany was itself indirectly responsible for the war.<sup>119</sup> However, the concerns of both the SDS and the German New Left also pertained to issues unique to Germany, and chief amongst these was the perceived persistence of Nazism in German society. Despite its ostensible destruction in 1945, the Third Reich was felt to constitute a lingering presence. In the first place, the majority of older Germans, in varying degrees, had been involved in the regime – even if only in the form of passive compliance; and this, it began to be thought, compromised their authority.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, it was a widely known, albeit unacknowledged, fact that many prominent figures were former Nazis, immunized against prosecution by what Norbert Frei has called *Vergangenheitspolitik*, or the 'politics of the past'.<sup>121</sup> Some of these were members of the judiciary, prompting the SDS to compile lists of Nazi perpetrators still active in the legal system, and in

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<sup>116</sup> Klimke, in Klimke and Scharloth (Eds) 2008 p100.

<sup>117</sup> The proclivity of the SDS for *activism* led ultimately to its alienation from the Frankfurt School, and Adorno in particular, who saw revolution as a futile activity in capitalism's 'administered universe.'

<sup>118</sup> Klimke, in Klimke and Scharloth (Eds) p101.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Siegfried, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p154.

<sup>121</sup> Frei, Norbert *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und die NS-Vergangenheit* Beck, Munich 1996 pp13-14.

1959 to organize an exhibition highlighting the issue, 'Unredeemed Nazi Justice [*Ungesühnte Nazijustiz*]'.<sup>122</sup> Secondly, as well as in the anti-communism that formed a principal target of the international New Left, vestiges of the Nazi mindset were still evident in the form of thinly concealed anti-Semitism and authoritarianism, as Siegfried indicates.<sup>123</sup> Concerns about these worrying tendencies in German society began to be publicly aired by the New Left, mainly in the pages of the magazine *Das Argument* (founded in 1959).

The impetus for the protest movement of 1968 was the fatal shooting by police of Berlin university student Benno Ohnesorg at a demonstration occasioned by a visit by the Shah of Iran in June 1967. The New Left intellectual Hans Magnus Enzensberger immediately condemned the shooting as the expression of what he referred to as 'political cleanliness mania [*politischer Reinheitswahn*]', the reluctance to tolerate non-conformity that was characteristic of Germany's long-internalized authoritarian thinking (according to the Left, the motor force of its *Sonderweg*).<sup>124</sup> And the conclusion of Enzensberger, shared by the SDS, was that the only effective way of reversing the erosion of democracy that this entailed was the assertion of the right to dissent, upon which democracy depends, by means of organized protest.<sup>125</sup> In the absence of such protest, political cleanliness mania would result in the unimpeded rise of a 'new fascism'.<sup>126</sup> This was the call to action. In the aftermath of Ohnesorg's death, membership of the SDS was hugely expanded, and the numerous demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, walkouts, attacks on media outlets (such as the Springer publishing house) and other forms of activism that constituted Germany's year of protest followed. Internal divisions, together with the incapacitation of its leader Rudi Dutschke owing to an assassination attempt, led by 1970 to the movement's demise, although it experienced an afterlife in the far more radical and violent form of the Baader-Meinhof Group, also known as the Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Fraktion*).

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<sup>122</sup> Klimke, in Klimke and Scharloth (Eds) 2008 p100.

<sup>123</sup> Siegfried, in Gassert and Steinwies (Eds) 2007 p154.

<sup>124</sup> Schmidtke, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p181.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

The consequence of 1968 was a change in the perception of Nazism in the German consciousness, such that attention shifted from its status as a fairly remote facet of Germany's past to the possibility of its recurrence. In Peifer's words, the demonstrators 'were breaking out of the complacency and blind obedience that they felt that had led the German people to the Third Reich and the Holocaust'.<sup>127</sup> In the terms of the Leftist historical discourse, it was an attempt to interrupt the dismal cycle encoded in the *Sonderweg*. What the movement did *not* achieve, however – because this was evidently still not generally considered an important question – was any conclusion as to the issue of collective responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi era.

### **A 'Restored Modernism'**

Before we return to Kiefer, let us briefly consider the representation of the Nazi era during the postwar period in his particular field, namely painting. And this was one area of West German culture in which the Nazi era largely did *not* appear, at least in the context of officially promoted art; for during the first two decades after the war, painting primarily took the form of abstraction, meaning that the question of subject matter – whether or not it was taken from the Third Reich – did not arise. But there were complicated reasons for this. It is once again a mistake, as we shall see, to see the preponderance of abstraction in West German painting as part of a general repression of the subject of Nazism.

As Jost Hermand writes, immediately after the war abstraction had been merely one amongst a certain 'plurality' of styles.<sup>128</sup> It had begun to acquire the attributes of a recognizable movement with the publication in 1947 of the collector Ottomar Domnick's book, *Die Schöpferischen Kräfte in der Abstrakten Malerei* [Creative Forces in Abstract Painting], which championed the work amongst others of Fritz

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<sup>127</sup> Peifer, in Gassert and Steinweis (Eds) 2007 p195.

<sup>128</sup> Hermand, Jost 'Modernism Restored: West German Painting in the 1950s' Translated by Bidy Martin *New German Critique*, No. 32 (Spring - Summer, 1984), pp23-41 (here p23).

Winter and Willi Baumeister, who became central to the group known as ZEN49 founded in Munich two years later. But painting was still characterized by a degree of diversity, as was evident from the exhibition entitled 'Deutsche Malerei und Plastik der Gegenwart [Contemporary German Sculpture and Painting]', held in Cologne in 1949, which included work by figurative painters such as Otto Dix and Max Pechstein as well as abstract work by Baumeister, Winter and others. Beginning around 1950, however, a notable preference on the part of policymakers towards abstraction began to make itself felt, and over the course of the Adenauer administration, it became the 'official style of a restored modernism', reflecting the resumption by the new republic of progressive aspirations after the interruption of the Nazi era.<sup>129</sup>

Of paramount importance in the privileging of abstraction was the patronage of the *Kulturkreis* [Culture Committee] of the *Bundesverband der deutschen Industrie* [Federal Association of West German Industries], founded in August of 1951, which propagated the official taste for abstraction by means of endowing prizes, granting stipends and purchasing paintings which were subsequently gifted to museums.<sup>130</sup> From 1954, it also published the periodical *Jahresring*, a forum where critics such as Werner Haftmann 'applauded the triumphant march of abstract modernism'.<sup>131</sup> Haftmann's book, *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert* [Painting in the 20th Century], in which the author lends his support to the "Great Abstract Movement", was published the same year.<sup>132</sup> Strongly committed to abstraction, Haftmann was influential in the Kassel *Documenta* exhibition series that commenced in 1955.

Not all commentators at the time approved of the loss of figuration. An attack on abstraction was launched by the Austrian art historian Hans Sedlmayr, whose *Verlust der Mitte* [Loss of Center] was first published in 1948.<sup>133</sup> Sedlmayr identified abstraction with the loss of both religious faith and the crucial social role of art.

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<sup>129</sup> Hermand, 1984 p39.

<sup>130</sup> Hermand, 1984 p36.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Hermand, 1984 p33.

<sup>133</sup> See Sedlmayr, Hans *Art in Crisis: The Lost Center* (First published in English 1957) Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick and London 2007.

Baumeister was forced to issue a rebuttal to these claims. And a celebrated and highly public dispute regarding the issue took place in 1954 between the figurative painter Carl Hofer and the leading practitioner of abstraction, Will Grohmann. But West German visual art in this period nevertheless 'remained primarily abstract', as Biro notes.<sup>134</sup> And this continued into the 1960s with the importation into Germany of other styles based on abstraction such as Minimalism, op-art and kinetic art.

How, then, do we explain this? As noted above, the dominance of abstraction has in retrospect been seen by many as a function of a general policy of observing silence with respect to Germany's fascist past. By means of abstraction all 'troublesome figurative content' could be avoided, as Weikop comments.<sup>135</sup> The author, graphic artist and sculptor Günter Grass is amongst those who saw the move to abstraction in these terms. For Grass, the failure to confront the past equated with a form of moral *retreat*, of which the taste for abstraction was symptomatic, as he made clear in a speech delivered in 1985 on the theme of the art of the postwar period and the quarrel of Hofer and Grohmann. 'This,' says Grass,

was no ordinary dispute. It was about the perception or non-perception of reality, as seen in a country that was defeated and divided, that had genocide on its conscience, and that, in spite or because of this, was busily engaged in repressing – or as I say, making non-objective – all that might evoke the past and act as a drag on its headlong retreat into the future.<sup>136</sup>

That abstraction functioned to repress the past is clearly also Hermand's view.<sup>137</sup> But he undermines his own argument to some degree by drawing attention to the partly *aesthetic* considerations behind the privileging of abstraction, notably the precepts of formalism, an awareness of which seems to have informed the theatre critic Friedrich Luft's 1955 remark, reminiscent of Greenberg's interpretation of abstraction, that 'not meaning, but formal relations determine the quality of a work

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<sup>134</sup> Biro, 1998 p158.

<sup>135</sup> Weikop, Christian 'Occupations / Heroic Symbols', in Weikop, Christian (Ed.) 2016. Accessed 3 April 2017.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Saltzman, 1999 p12.

<sup>137</sup> Hermand, 1984 p28.

of art today.<sup>138</sup> Other commentators, showing the influence of the theories of Wassily Kandinsky, saw in abstraction a metaphysical dimension, and a spiritually therapeutic quality greatly beneficial in contemporary Germany. Amongst these was Baumeister himself, whose *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* [The Unknown in Art] was published in 1947. Belief in the metaphysical attributes of abstraction informed the 1962 Frankfurt exhibition entitled 'Kirche und abstrakte Malerei [The Church and Abstract Painting]', a display of abstract works thought to intimate the Hereafter and in consequence able to cast a ray of light 'into the darkness of our existence', as one observer remarked at the time.<sup>139</sup>

But what also informed the dominance of abstraction – as Hermand also notes -- were *ideological* considerations, and these were perhaps threefold. Firstly, abstraction was equated with the concept of *freedom*, and thus served to symbolize Germany's release from the years of repression under the Nazis. Freedom in abstraction consists in the absence of the restraint imposed by subject matter. As the philosopher Arnold Gehlen asserted in *Jahresring*, abstract painting constituted for the younger generation of Germans the expression of 'true freedom.'<sup>140</sup> Figuration in painting, by contrast, was equated with the *loss* of freedom. And it was in this way, in virtue of the values of freedom that it embodied, that abstraction was enlisted in the service of the ideological war against the East, where the highly figurative Socialist realist style predominated. Indeed, West German painters who retained a predilection for figuration started to be suspected of Communist affiliations.<sup>141</sup> In general, as in the case of both Dix and Pechstein, such painters found themselves excluded from major exhibitions.<sup>142</sup>

Secondly, amongst writers associated with the Frankfurt School, abstraction was seen to have *dialectical* potential. Writers such as Adorno consequently threw their not inconsiderable critical weight behind it. As he makes clear in his 1962 essay

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<sup>138</sup> 'schri kunst schri. ein almanach alter und neuer kunst', quoted in Hermand, 1984 p31.

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in Hermand, 1984 p32.

<sup>140</sup> 1959/60, quoted in Hermand, 1984 p31.

<sup>141</sup> See *Der Monat*, (1954/55), 65-71, 320-323.

<sup>142</sup> Hermand, 1984 p30.

‘Commitment’, Adorno favours abstraction over art that seeks to impart a *message*.<sup>143</sup> This is because messages are based on concepts, and all concepts are in his view forms of identity thinking, that is to say, forms of intellectual *domination*. It is identity thinking that is responsible for all forms of social injustice – including fascism -- and it is the role of art to subvert it by dialectical means. Abstraction, which belongs to the category to which Adorno refers as ‘autonomous art’, has dialectical potential precisely because it does *not* seek to impart a message. Its power resides instead in its *form*.<sup>144</sup> As we shall see in Chapter 4, there are echoes of this idea in the work of Benjamin Buchloh; indeed, it is what chiefly informs his attack on Kiefer’s use of figuration.<sup>145</sup>

Thirdly, and perhaps the single most important reason behind the elevation of abstraction, there was the fact that, by the late 1940s, it had become the dominant painterly idiom in the dominant Western democracy, the USA, and by endorsing it the fledgling nation symbolically aligned itself more closely with the West and affirmed its commitment to democracy.<sup>146</sup> Promoting abstraction helped to facilitate the nation’s ‘rapid drift’ towards the West, as Biro puts it (later on, and

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<sup>143</sup> ‘Commitment’, Translated by Francis Macdonagh, in Adorno, Theodor, with Benjamin, Walter, Bloch, Ernest, Brecht, Bertholt, Lukacs, Georg and Jameson, Fredric *Aesthetics and Politics* Verso, London and New York 1977.

<sup>144</sup> As Saltzman notes, Gertrud Koch (founder of the feminist journal *Frauen und film*) contends that the Jewish identity of many of the members of the Frankfurt School, including Adorno, may partly explain their preference for abstraction over figuration, because of the Second Commandment, the biblical prohibition on graven images (1999 p18). Adorno himself frames the practice of abstraction as having ‘something of the old prohibition of graven images.’ (Quoted in Saltzman, 1999 p20.)

<sup>145</sup> Kiefer’s predominantly figurative approach may owe something to his principal tutors, Peter Dreher (b1932) in Freiburg, who was and has remained a predominantly figurative painter, and Horst Antes (b 1936) in Karlsruhe, who also offered ‘a figuratively expressive alternative’ to the prevailing aesthetic, as Rosenthal notes (1988 p12).

<sup>146</sup> Hermand comments elsewhere that ‘many recent studies have proven’ that German exhibitions of American abstract expressionism were promoted by the CIA, and these contributed greatly – along with French *art informel* – to the success of abstraction in West Germany (‘Resisting Boogie-Woogie Culture, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop Art: German Highbrow Objections to the Import of “American” Forms of Culture, 1945-1965’, in Stephan, Stephan, Alexander (Ed) *Americanization and Anti-Americanism: The German Encounter with American Culture after 1945* Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford 2005 p72).

perhaps for the same reason, West Germany would prove equally receptive to other stylistic influences from the outside such as Minimalism and Pop art).<sup>147</sup> At the same time, it served to *distance* it from communist countries such as the GDR, which as mentioned above favored Socialist realism. And painting is among the more readily adaptable of the arts for large-scale exposure (including exposure abroad), such as in public exhibitions and via reproduction in the press, meaning that its subliminal political message could be broadcast to a wide audience.

It is not the case, then, that the rise of abstraction in West German painting after the war was *solely* a matter of avoiding a critical engagement with recent history, the visual equivalent of the *Stunde Null* [zero hour] of a Germany 'devoid of a past', as Saltzman puts it.<sup>148</sup> Aesthetic and ideological factors played a part, and possibly a far greater one. Nor did the dominance of abstraction remain unchallenged throughout the postwar period; towards the end of the 1950s, figuration began to reappear in the work of Joseph Beuys, Eugen Schönbeck, and Georg Baselitz amongst others, often with subject matter drawn from the Nazi era. A watershed moment in this regard had been represented by Beuys' highly referential *Auschwitz Vitrine* of 1955. And in 1959, the journalist Jürgen Beckelmann spoke up in defense of figuration at the First Baden-Baden Art Discussion, drawing attention to figurative painters and graphic artists such as Albert Heinziger and Otto Pankok, as well as to newly established groups like *Tendenz*, *Figura* and *Junge Realisten*.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Biro, 1998 p157.

<sup>148</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p13.

<sup>149</sup> Hermand, 1984 pp40-1. We might also note the activities of *Gruppe Spur*, formed in 1957 by the painters Heimrad Prem, Helmut Sturm and Hans-Peter Zimmer amongst others and disbanded in 1967. Associated with Guy Debord's *Situationist International*, the Spurists were an anti-art group, opposed to abstraction in particular. 'Abstract painting', they declared, 'has become an empty aestheticism, a place where the lazy of spirit frolic, looking for a convenient pretext to harp on worn-out truths'. (Spurist Manifesto, November 1958, reproduced in *Archives Situationnistes: Volume 1: Documents traduits 1958-1970* <http://www.worldcat.org/title/archives-situationnistes-vol-1-documents-traduits-1958-1970/oclc/490075517>. Accessed 7 November 2017.)



## The Soil of Germany

It is fallacious, then, to characterize the post war period in Germany as one in which all mention of the Nazi era was suppressed. References to Nazism may have been largely absent from painting, but this is not wholly attributable, if at all, to a deliberate policy of repression. Rather, we have seen that what *was* notable by its absence from German society was an engagement with the question (mooted by Arendt and others) of ongoing collective responsibility for Nazi crimes. And turning now to Kiefer, I will show that -- in certain works -- this is precisely the question he seems to address.

The concept of collective responsibility – that members of a society can be held liable for crimes to which they were not themselves party – depends in turn on the concept of society itself, as an entity that exists over *time*. Without a history, a society is not identifiable as a community. Thus whatever else it has, a society has a *past*; and to repudiate certain aspects of that past is therefore to undermine the concept of society itself. This is why every nation must assume collective responsibility ‘for the deeds and misdeeds of its past’, as Arendt puts it. It is not the same individuals, but the same *society*, that carried them out, and their force is in consequence still binding on that society. Hence it is not possible for modern Germany to repudiate the crimes of the Nazis whilst simultaneously laying claim to the music of Beethoven, for example. Both are facets of the past upon which its existence as a society depends.

I will show that it is possible to interpret Kiefer’s engagement with Germany’s troubled past as informed by this idea, namely that to be a contemporary German entails acceptance of collective responsibility for Nazism. Let us turn to the paintings themselves for evidence in support of this interpretation. I mainly want to draw attention to the way that Kiefer combines, in the same artwork, references to the cultural achievements of Germany’s past – things for which Germans are entitled to claim responsibility as a people -- with references to the *Dritte Reich* (although these references are mostly veiled and allusive). In this way, he is evoking a legacy

constituted as much by the worst, as well as the best, of German history and culture. These are opposite sides of the same coin, and responsibility for one entails responsibility for the other.

Let us begin with a very early work, Kiefer's watercolor *Winter Landscape* [*Winterlandschaft*] (1970/1) (**Plate 10**). This lacks the scale and literary subject matter of history painting, but it contains many of the themes in Kiefer to which I want to draw attention. The countryside in winter is a subject he has depicted on many occasions. It is a trope also beloved by the Romantics, rendered for example by Caspar David Friedrich in two paintings, both also entitled *Winter Landscape* (c1811, National Gallery and Staatliches Museum, Schwerin).<sup>150</sup> Indeed, it is a symbol that seems to be deeply ingrained in the German consciousness. It has been a recurring feature of German poetry, such as in several poems by the nineteenth century Swiss-German author Gottfried Keller, including *Winternacht*, *Winterabend* and *Winterspiel*. Kiefer has himself cited Heine's *Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen* of 1844, as well as Schubert's 1828 *Winterreisen* song cycle, as an inspiration for this painting.<sup>151</sup> Thus there is an entire tradition of the theme of winter in German painting, poetry and music present 'in the background', so to speak. And Kiefer's use of watercolor calls to mind a second illustrious German tradition, going back to Albrecht Dürer, who produced a series of botanical, wildlife and landscape

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<sup>150</sup> References to Romanticism are common in Kiefer's work and have been much discussed. Indeed, some commentators have characterized Kiefer as a Neo-Romantic, presenting a contemporary version of the 'sublime (see for example Roos, Bonnie 'Anselm Kiefer and the Art of Illusion: Dialectics of the Early Margarete and Sulamith Paintings' [https://www.academia.edu/226071/Anselm\\_Kiefer\\_and\\_the\\_Art\\_of\\_Illusion\\_Dialectics\\_of\\_the\\_Early\\_Margarete\\_and\\_Sulamith\\_Paintings](https://www.academia.edu/226071/Anselm_Kiefer_and_the_Art_of_Illusion_Dialectics_of_the_Early_Margarete_and_Sulamith_Paintings), 2014).' Others have suggested that his dialogue with Romanticism is part of a complex interrogation of art's problematic place in history. (See for example Rampley, Matthew 'In Search of Cultural History: Anselm Kiefer and the Ambivalence of Modernism', *Oxford Art Journal* 23.1 (2000) pp75-96). The argument is that all forms of discourse, including art, are ambivalent, to the extent that they can be exploited either for good or evil, and Kiefer chooses Romanticism to illustrate this most likely because the Romantics were much favored by the Nazis, who appropriated Romantic imagery in the service of ideology (this exemplifies the aestheticization of politics, of which the Nazis were masters and of which Kiefer demonstrates an acute awareness).

<sup>151</sup> See Weikop, Christian in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p32. Heine's poem satirized German militarism and nationalism.

watercolors. More recent German exponents of the medium include Adolph Menzel and Emil Nolde. Through choice of subject matter and choice of medium, then, Kiefer calls forth two important parts of Germany's cultural legacy. But in his painting, a severed head intrudes jarringly into the pastoral scene, and the snow is spattered with blood.<sup>152</sup> And although there is no direct reference to National Socialism, an *indirect* reference nevertheless exists in this image of blood in the landscape, since it evokes the Nazi doctrine of ethnicity based on ancestry and territory known as *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil). As well as being the title of a 1933 Nazi propaganda film, the phrase is used to refer to Heidegger's controversial inaugural address at Freiburg University in the same year, originally entitled 'The Self-Assertion of the German University' and known more often as his 'Blood and Soil' speech.<sup>153</sup> But whether or not the painting refers specifically to the Third Reich, it is hard to imagine a more literal representation of ongoing responsibility for past cruelties than this image of the fields of Germany contaminated with blood. And by means of an image simultaneously suggestive both of an illustrious cultural heritage and of suffering and death, Kiefer shows that these things cannot be *dissociated*. He succeeds in evoking the dual nature of Germany's compromised patrimony; as well as some of the proudest achievements of western civilization, it comprises some of its most barbarous crimes.

The idea that Nazism has metaphorically permeated the soil of Germany is also apparent from some of Kiefer's large-scale landscapes from the mid 1970s, such as *Cockchafer Fly* [*Maikäfer flieg*] (1974, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin) and *Brandenburg Heath* [*Märkische Heide*] (1974, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven),

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<sup>152</sup> Saltzman suggests that the head is a self-portrait, so that the painting evokes Kiefer's sense of victimhood (1999 p71). But I agree with Arasse that this psychological interpretation is 'reductive'. (2001/2014 n24 p330.)

<sup>153</sup> This is due to the philosopher's remark in the speech that 'the spiritual world of a people is not the superstructure of a culture any more than it is an armory filled with useful information and values; it 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.' (Heidegger, Martin 'The Self-Assertion of the German University', Rectoral address at the University of Freiburg, 1933. English version translated by Karston Harries, *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (March 1985) p.467-502.)

although the Nazi references are somewhat arcane.<sup>154</sup> They consist firstly in the fact -- noted by Arasse amongst others -- that depictions of ploughed fields, such as Werner Peiner's *German Land* (which was selected in 1937 by the Nazis for the first Grand Exhibition of German art), were highly popular with Nazi propagandists and the proponents of *Blut und Boden*.<sup>155</sup> Further references consist in the titles of the paintings. *Cockchafer Fly*, which depicts a charred landscape, takes its name from a German nursery rhyme, dating from the period of the Thirty Years' War. Kiefer has inscribed the words of the rhyme on the horizon line: 'Your father is at war, Your mother is in Pomerania, Pomerania is burned to the ground [Dein Vater ist im Krieg, Deine Mutter ist in Pommerland, Pommerland ist abgebrannt]'. The scorched earth imagery evokes the Nazi policy on the Eastern front, as well as the 'Nero Decree' of 1945 (named after the supposedly deliberate burning of Rome in 64 AD), that was intended to destroy German infrastructure in advance of the Allied victory.

Pomerania was an area lost to Germany after the war. *Brandenburg Heath*, as noted earlier, was a German army marching song (we should also note of these two paintings that they display the strange mixture of representational conventions that we have encountered before in Kiefer and which he uses to critique his own discipline. *Cockchafer Fly* occupies an indeterminate place between figuration and abstraction, the principal concession to the former being the depiction of a horizon line, whilst *Brandenburg Heath* features strong linear perspective juxtaposed with a

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<sup>154</sup> Peter Seddon has observed that a notable feature of traditional history painting was the use of landscape to reinforce a painting's moral message, operating as 'a powerful metaphor', its 'psychic geography' reinforcing 'both the particular human psychological reactions that may be depicted and the wider moral lessons that are construed from them.' ('From eschatology to ecology: the ends of history and nature', in Green and Seddon (Eds), 2000 p84.) Kiefer's symbolic use of landscape thus constitutes another link with traditional history painting. Rampley argues that his landscapes reference the doctrine of Romantic Anti-Capitalism. The latter embodied a nostalgic yearning for a pre-lapsarian, pre-industrial golden age. There was also an urge to connect with the pre-linguistic or primordial, with which Rampley suggests that Kiefer's concern with materiality (sand, straw, lead etc) can be seen as in keeping, to the extent that it is a function of the attempt to overcome the 'mediation of representation'. The doctrine was appropriated by the Nazis, so that it serves an example of the way that art is implicated in the unfolding of history, and hence that artists are not neutral figures. (Rampley, 2000.)

<sup>155</sup> Arasse, 2001/2014 p123. See also Soriano, in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p27.

total *absence* of aerial perspective).

*Varus* (1976) (**Plate11**) displays both large scale and historical subject matter, two of the classic attributes of history painting (what it conspicuously *lacks*, as is usual with Kiefer, is anything resembling a narrative). The title refers to the battle of Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD, also known as Hermann's Battle [*die Hermannsschlacht*], at which an army led by the German hero Hermann annihilated three Roman legions led by Publius Quinctilius Varus, sparing Germany from the Roman yoke. The battle is a founding episode in the story of the German nation, frequently recounted in art and literature. Kiefer's version, however, is only tangentially suggestive of it (the same is true of the later series of very large woodcuts in which he revisits the subject). He has depicted a wintry forest, with a bloodstained snowy path leading through it.<sup>156</sup> Although there is no evidence that the actual event took place in winter, the painting might at first glance be taken for a straightforward depiction of the battle's aftermath; but it quickly becomes apparent that there is substantially more to it than this.<sup>157</sup> The blood appears to be dripping downwards, so that it is as if the painting *itself* is bleeding. There may be a suggestion here of the damage done to art by the cataclysmic events of modern history, a theme in Kiefer to which Huyssen, as noted earlier, has called attention. And Kiefer has inscribed onto the image the names of various figures from German literature and history, so that it is clear that a series of connections is being proposed (this use of lettering in a visual medium partly constitutes the self-critical aspect of the work, drawing attention to the conventions of representation by subverting them. Similarly, by emphasizing the surface of the canvas, the fictive blood spatters subvert another painterly convention, namely the creation of a sense of *recession*, achieved in this case by the trees in the painting becoming progressively smaller.). As well as Hermann and his wife Thusnelda, these

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<sup>156</sup> Weikop notes a similarity with Baselitz's *The Tree* (1966, Froelich Collection, Stuttgart), with its 'bleeding' branches (in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p33). Schama notes a debt to Friedrich's *The Chasseur in the Forest* (1813, Private collection) (1996, p127).

<sup>157</sup> Adrian Murdoch places the battle some time in the autumn (see Murdoch, *Adrian Rome's Greatest Defeat: Massacre in the Teutoburg Forest* The History Press, Stroud 2008).

figures are the poets Johan Christian Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) and Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803), the dramatists Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) and Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1801-1836); the poet and novelist René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef [Rainer] Maria Rilke (1875-1926); the philosophers Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814); Duchess Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (Queen Consort of Frederick III)(1776-1810); and finally two of the more illustrious figures from Germany's history of military strategy and warfare, Alfred Graf von Schlieffen (1833-1913) and Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher (1742-1819). Two further figures are referred to by their first names only: 'Martin' and 'Stefan' – the former is presumably Heidegger (1889-1976), and the latter the poet Stefan George (1868-1933)).<sup>158</sup> How, then, are we to link these figures together? Some of them are already connected to the battle to the extent that they wrote about it (Klopstock's poem *Hermann und Thusnelda* was published in 1752 and later set to music by Schubert, and both Kleist and Grabbe wrote plays on the theme of the battle). More importantly, however, there are two implicit connections with the Nazis. Firstly, in the blood-spattered snow there is once again a suggestion of the doctrine of *Blut und Boden*, strengthened by the reference to Heidegger, who as is well known was at first an ardent supporter of Hitler. A second link consists in the fact that many of the figures were popular with the regime, including George, Rilke, Kleist, Grabbe (whose play about Hermann was 'venerated' by the Nazis), Queen Louise (admired by the Nazis as a paragon of female virtue), and of course Hermann himself.<sup>159</sup> And we can interpret all of this in several ways. Most of the figures have in some degree contributed to human knowledge, and by placing them in a context also suggestive of barbarism Kiefer may intend the image to signify one of his favorite themes, namely the ambivalent role of knowledge in human history. Alternatively, since the figures are mostly associated with the

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<sup>158</sup> This is likely because Kiefer refers to Heidegger and George in other works, notably the series of woodcuts from the early 1980s (also on the theme of the battle), *Wege der Weltweisheit -- die Hermanns-Schlacht* [Ways of Worldly Wisdom – Hermann's Battle].

<sup>159</sup> See Schmutz, Janine 'Dokumentation Wege der Weltweisheit', in Dickel, Hans, Gallwitz, Klaus, Schmutz, Janine and Schütz, Sabine *Anselm Kiefer: Wege der Weltweisheit/Die Frauen der Revolution* Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck 2007-8 (Exhibition Catalogue) pp45-6.

Enlightenment and early modern period, we might interpret the painting more specifically as a visualization of Adorno's theory (to which we shall return) that modern rationalism equates with a form of intellectual domination that leads ultimately to political totalitarianism. I want to propose a third interpretation, however, based as before on the concept of German collective responsibility. For in common with *Winter Landscape*, the painting is evocative of two aspects of Germany's past, the culturally acceptable one constituted by its tradition of poetry, drama and philosophy -- the aspect with which modern Germans might seek to identify -- and the culturally *unacceptable* one constituted by its militaristic tradition and legacy of barbarism -- the aspect from which they might seek to *distance* themselves. By combining references to both in the same painting, Kiefer seems to want to imply from *Varus* that such distancing is not admissible. Both aspects are *equally* a part of the past on which Germany's existence as a nation depends. To repudiate the one is to repudiate the other, and to claim authorship of the one is to claim authorship of the other. The Germans, as a people, are responsible for both.

We might also note the fact that in Germany the forest is considered a highly resonant symbol of *Deutschtum*, or German-ness, owing to the fact that at the commencement of their history, the Germans seem to have been a forest-dwelling people. In consequence, the symbol of the forest has become part of the means by which Germans have rehearsed their membership of a definable community. It has featured countless times in Germanic mythology and folklore, and seems to be profoundly embedded in the national psyche.<sup>160</sup> As Weikop notes, there appears to be a characteristically German feeling for the arboreal, for which the psychologist Elias Canetti has even coined a term: *Waldgefühl*.<sup>161</sup> Forest imagery features very often in Kiefer (Weikop refers to this as his 'arboreal expressionism'<sup>162</sup>). In *Varus*, however, a chain of associations links the forest with the Third Reich. Thus an image

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<sup>160</sup> For an account of the importance of the forest in German cultural memory see Schama, 1996 pp75-120.

<sup>161</sup> Weikop, in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p35.

<sup>162</sup> Weikop, in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p46. Weikop's implication is that in Kiefer's work the tree takes the place of the human body, which is a principal trope in German Expressionism.

suggestive of German-ness is linked with barbarism, implying that both are equally constitutive of the 'idea' of Germany. Indeed, the painting seems to illustrate the view that the two have always been intertwined; as Schama comments, it traces the 'historical beginning of *Deutschtum*' to an act of *violence*.<sup>163</sup>

In *Margarethe* (1981) (**Plate 12**), we return to the theme of Nazi preoccupations with the land. Along with *Sulamith* (1983, The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection), this is one of a pair of paintings based on the poem *Todesfuge* [Death Fuge] by the Romanian-born poet, Paul Celan, the text of which is generally provided alongside the paintings when they are exhibited (see **Appendix 3**).<sup>164</sup> Thus the paintings display the literary connections characteristic of traditional history painting. As elsewhere, references to the Holocaust are allusive rather than explicit, suggesting the event only obliquely; but for a German viewer the subject matter of *Margarethe* and *Sulamith* would be obvious from their titles alone, clearly referencing Celan's poem, which has become a potent symbol of the Holocaust in post-war Germany, being read aloud in the Bundestag on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of *Kristallnacht* in 1988.<sup>165</sup> In the poem, *Margarethe* appears to be the lover of a concentration camp guard (and *Sulamith* her counterpart amongst the inmates); but it is also the name of the central female character in Goethe's *Faust* (and *Sulamith* also that of a character in the *Song of Songs*). Thus *Margarethe* is a figure in which a signifier of the German cultural tradition on the one hand and the Holocaust on the other are fused. As a female figure, she also has connotations of fertility, and these

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<sup>163</sup> 1996 p127.

<sup>164</sup> For a comprehensive account of Kiefer's engagement with Celan see Lauterwein, 2007.

<sup>165</sup> In Saltzman's view, Kiefer's use of allusive or 'indirect' representation arises from the paradox of how to represent an event that in many respects is beyond representation (the Holocaust). (Saltzman 1999.) She argues furthermore that Kiefer's work constitutes the dialectical intertwining of a Hebraic ethics of unrepresentability (the injunction against 'graven images') and a Hebraic ethics of bearing witness. In the poem, references to the Holocaust are more explicit. Death appears in the guise of a blue-eyed 'German-born master', who whistles to his dogs and has the Jews dig a grave 'in the clouds', to which they will rise 'like smoke'. He has the victims 'play for the dance', which may refer to the well known practice in the concentration camps of forming orchestras consisting of inmates; it may also refer to Psalm 137, in which the exiled Jews in Babylon are made to 'sing the Lord's song in a foreign land'; or to Heinrich Heine's poem *The Slave Ship*, in which the captives are made to dance.



are strengthened by Kiefer's use of real straw -- functioning in part as yet another of his critiques of the conventions of representation -- stuck to the canvas to act as a synecdoche, evoking the character's 'golden hair' referred to in the poem, and hence her Aryan identity, as well as generating associations with the Nazi obsession with the land.<sup>166</sup> Straw is also suggestive of Germany's pre-industrial age (to which Goethe belongs), so that there is a suggestion of history and *continuity*. And it is, of course, a crop residue, used as a fertilizer to sustain the cycle of growth. Thus, melded together in the form of Margarethe, the twin poles of Germany's historical and cultural legacy will enter symbolically into the nation's very soil, to be passed on to subsequent generations.

Straw also features in the *Meistersingers* series of 1981-2, which can be interpreted in the same way. For the straw, with its suggestion of continuity, is again combined with the use of a signifier – Wagnerian opera --- that is redolent of high culture at the same time as it linked to the Third Reich. And the titular Mastersingers hail, of course, from Nuremberg, the spiritual center of the Nazi regime (and the title of a related painting by Kiefer from 1982 (Private Collection)).

I have noted that the use of straw in these paintings functions as a metaphorical way of suggesting that responsibility for Nazism will be passed on to future generations of Germans, just as straw passes on its genetic material in the soil. It also serves to subvert the conventions of representation. Elsewhere in Kiefer's work, the use of different organic materials functions in the same way. An example of this is *Ash Flower* [*Aschenblume*] (**Plate 13**). This painting, in common with *Interior* [*Innenraum*](1981, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), depicts Speer's Mosaic Hall from the Reich Chancellery; but this time Kiefer has attached a giant dried sunflower onto the canvas, embedded in a layer of clay. He has also covered the surface of the painting with ash, another organic material, like straw often used as a fertilizer.

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<sup>166</sup> Gilmour links Kiefer's use of straw, sand, and other 'non-art' materials with Derrida's concept of 'original representation', that is, representation that seeks to subvert the 'theological' status of signs by juxtaposing signs with items from 'real life' (see Gilmour, 1988 pp57-77).

Indeed, it is as if the ash has fertilized the clay from which the sunflower appears to have sprung. But ash has somewhat ambivalent connotations, since it is the product of cremation, and in the context of imagery drawn from the Nazi era this carries an obvious association. Thus the painting may be seen to signify the possibility of Germany's spiritual recovery and redemption from the sins of the Nazi era; at the same time, it acknowledges that these sins can never be erased. A new Germany may arise like the sunflower in the painting, but from clay constituted by its Nazi past and fertilized by ash from the crematoria of the Holocaust. Germany, in other words, can never be free of its history, because its existence in some degree depends upon it.

As we have seen from his use of the painter's palette, Kiefer sometimes depicts himself in metonymic form when he is investigating the cultural determinants constituting his identity. This is the case in what are known as his 'Attic [Dachböden]' series of paintings, so called because they are set in a wooden attic identified by Soriano as representing his studio in Hornbach, which may also function as a synecdoche for the artist himself.<sup>167</sup> The highly emphatic perspective in this series – achieved by the use of very straight lines – provides another link with traditional history painting, which tended to place emphasis on drawing and line (this, as Green and Seddon note, was because drawing – in contradistinction to color – was associated with rationality and the intellect, to which history painting made a conscious appeal<sup>168</sup>). But as in *Varus*, Kiefer creates visual dissonance by establishing a strong sense of recession that is simultaneously denied by means of the wood grain pattern on the timbers, which emphasizes the surface of the paintings. The series makes direct reference to Wagnerian opera, and the mythology upon which it draws.<sup>169</sup> It comprises *Parsifal I, II and III* (1973, Tate), on the theme of the myth forming the basis of Wagner's eponymous 1882 opera, and *Nothing* (1973)(**Plate 14**), which derives its title from the name of the sword of Siegfried, the hero of Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, first performed in 1876. In the latter painting, the

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<sup>167</sup> Soriano, in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p24.

<sup>168</sup> Green and Seddon (Eds), 2000 p7.

<sup>169</sup> For a detailed account of the Attic series, see Schütz, 1999 Chapter 7.

bloodied sword is firmly implanted in the floor beneath the written inscription 'Ein Schwert verhiess mir der Vater', the title of the aria from Act 1, Scene 3 from *Die Walküre*, perhaps to indicate both the way that myth has been just as firmly implanted in the artist's consciousness and the constitutive power exercised by *verbal* discourse, that is, literary tradition and folklore, on the formation of identity. But to invoke Wagner post World War Two is inevitably to invoke the Third Reich (indeed, Hitler had himself been depicted as Siegfried in a 1933 publicity poster, as Weikop notes<sup>170</sup>). Thus Siegfried's sword functions as a double signifier, simultaneously a symbol of high culture and Nazi barbarism, the 'good' and the 'bad' from Germany's past. These are the two strands of the historical legacy to which Germany is inescapably joined -- and will continue to be so as long as a community calling itself the German nation persists.

To sum up: I have shown that certain of Kiefer's works from this period can be interpreted in terms of the concept of collective responsibility, which does not depend on personal involvement in a crime. In the postwar period, the representation of the Nazi era had been largely directed towards the question of *guilt*, and was consequently preoccupied with the actual perpetrators of Nazi barbarism. Thus it was not that Kiefer was breaking the silence concerning the Third Reich -- as we have seen, such a silence had never properly speaking obtained -- but redirecting attention towards the question of continuing responsibility, since this was an issue that arguably had greater relevance to his own and future generations of Germans. This he accomplishes by invoking the cultural achievements for which the German people claim responsibility at the same time as he invokes National Socialism. Both are products of the past on which the existence of Germans as a recognizable people depends; and this same people is consequently responsible for both.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Weikop, in Davey, Soriano, and Weikop, 2014 p25. See also Arasse, 2001/2014 p140.

<sup>171</sup> There is a suggestion of this idea in a remark of Nietzsche's. 'For since we are the outcome of earlier generations', he writes in *Untimely Meditations*, 'we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain. If we condemn these aberrations and

The vexed question of German guilt and responsibility continues to be debated, and was the subject of the *Historikerstreit* in the 1980s, with a brief examination of which I would like to conclude. My reasons for doing so are twofold. In the first place, the *Historikerstreit*, which was conducted in a highly public forum (and was, as mentioned earlier, divided on politically partisan lines), attests to the importance of the issue of guilt for contemporary German society -- and this in turn attests to the social orientation of Kiefer's practice, and its embeddedness in his own historical moment. Secondly, we will see that, to the extent that his work adds strength to the argument that contemporary Germans must accept ongoing responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis, Kiefer anticipated the most important outcome of the debate: a categorical and public announcement to this same effect.

In the decades leading up to the *Historikerstreit*, dominance in intellectual circles had tended to oscillate between the opposing historiographical viewpoints of Left and Right. In the 1960s, the Left had dominated, with its associated stress on internal elites in Nazi Germany. It was the specter of the return to the mindset responsible for Germany's *Sonderweg* that had also informed the student protest movement. Things started to change in the 70s, with the *Tenzenwende*, the shift in trend that saw the rise of the Right and greater emphasis on the impact of international factors on the workings of the regime, along with 'a widely shared mood that Germans could take pride in much of their history,' as Maier notes.<sup>172</sup> That the argument crystallized when it did was partly due to the 50th anniversary of various events associated with the Third Reich. The controversy surrounding the commissioning of two museums, the *Haus der Geschichte* in Bonn and the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin also fuelled the intensification of the debate, for it was seen by the Left that the museum projects largely served the Right's project to 'stress that the Third Reich's Final Solution was not the culmination of German

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regard ourselves as free of them, this does not alter the fact that we originate in them.' (Nietzsche, Friedrich 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' (1874) in *Untimely Meditations* Edited by Daniel Breazale, Translated by R J Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press 1997 p76.)

<sup>172</sup> Maier, 1997 p50.

history'.<sup>173</sup> The immediate impetus, however, was the publication in 1986 of two texts by historians associated with the Right. These were Andreas Hilgruber's book *Zweierlei Untergang. Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentum*, and an essay in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* by Ernst Nolte, 'Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will'. It was these that prompted the intervention in the debate by Jürgen Habermas, who published a series of articles in *Die Zeit* fiercely critical of the views of the revisionists.<sup>174</sup>

For Habermas, there was a clear potential danger to the continued *rapprochement* with the West encoded in the revisionist project. The danger consisted in parenthesizing the crimes of the Nazis with the other crimes of the twentieth century. As outlined above, this project could serve to strengthen the political Right, thus antagonizing those nations in the West that had fought the Second World War with the ostensible aim of destroying fascism.<sup>175</sup> But it also had the effect of deflecting the question of responsibility, and it is this issue that Habermas instead

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<sup>173</sup> Maier, 1997 p135.

<sup>174</sup> Habermas's attack on the revisionist historians is partly based on his concept of 'post-conventional' identity, which he distinguishes from 'conventional' identity on the grounds that the latter is based on conventional or traditional values, such as are derived from national, political, occupational or religious affiliations (values that tend *not* to be arrived at by the subject by independent choice). These values are attributes of a non-reflective consciousness. Post-conventional identity, by contrast, is based on values *other* than those of convention (values arrived at by choice, by means of rational and critical reflection). Where conventional values are particular, post-conventional values are universal, to the extent that they transcend the limitations of nationality etc. The enterprise of the revisionists such as Michael Stürmer seemed to be the construction of a viable identity out of the memory of past greatness, purged of the stain of Hitlerism. As Stürmer himself put it, theirs was 'a new search for an old history', that is, an attempt to locate German national identity in the past. (Quoted in Maier, 1997 p44.) It was the search for identity predicated on conventional values, and this was in Habermas's view misguided. 'Those who desire to send all Germans back to conventional forms of their national identity', he writes in the first *Die Zeit* article, 'are destroying the only reliable foundation for our ties to the West.' ('A Kind of Settlement of Damages (Apologetic Tendencies)' *New German Critique* 44 (1988), 39 (First published in *Die Zeit*, 11 July 1986.) The loyalty of the German people must be not to the past, but to the values of democracy. The only worthwhile patriotism, he tells us, is 'a patriotism of commitment to constitutionalism.' (Quoted in Maier, 1997 p45.) For Habermas, conscious alignment with the universal values enshrined in the Western liberal democracies constituted the only way for Germany to break free of the cycle of national failure encoded in the concept of its *Sonderweg*.

<sup>175</sup> See above, n83.

confronts head-on. ‘Does something of this liability’, he asks in his second *Die Zeit* article, ‘still transfer to the next generation and the generation after that?’<sup>176</sup> To this rhetorical question, his answer is in the affirmative: contemporary Germans must accept responsibility for the Holocaust. His reasoning, in essence, is that the *possibility* of a society -- which Germany post World War Two has been endeavoring to reconstruct -- partly depends on a sense of its own past, and this must include the crimes of that past. He poses a second rhetorical question: ‘Can one assume the legal succession of the German Reich, can one continue the traditions of German culture, without accepting the historical liability for the form of life in which Auschwitz was possible?’<sup>177</sup> This time he answers in the negative. If there is to be a legal successor state to the Third Reich (the FRG) to which the tradition of German culture can pass, along with this comes responsibility for the ‘form of life’ that produced the death camps. The former cannot be had without the latter. Habermas’s position, in Maier’s words, is that a collection of people who wish to claim existence as a society or nation ‘must thereby accept existence as a community through time’; they must therefore acknowledge that ‘acts committed by earlier agents still bind or burden the contemporary community’.<sup>178</sup> Collective identity entails collective responsibility. Thus for Habermas, the continued existence of the FRG demands acceptance, on the part of its citizens, of responsibility for the crimes of its Nazi antecedents – the same conclusion that we can draw from the paintings by Kiefer that I have been discussing.

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My theme in this chapter has been the social aspect of Kiefer’s work, which is one of the ways in which he connects with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and – insofar as a social

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<sup>176</sup> ‘Überträgt sich etwas von dieser Haftung auch noch auf die nächste und die übernächste Generation?’ Habermas, Jürgen ‘Vom öffentlichen Gebrauch der Historie’ in *Die Zeit*, Nov 7 1986 <http://www.zeit.de/1986/46/vom-oeffentlichen-gebrauch-der-historie>. Accessed 20 November 2016.

<sup>177</sup> ‘Kann man die Rechtsnachfolge des Deutschen Reiches antreten, kann man die Traditionen der deutschen Kultur fortsetzen, ohne die historische Haftung für die Lebensform zu übernehmen, in der Auschwitz möglich war?’ Habermas, Nov 7 1986.

<sup>178</sup> Maier, 1997 p14.

dimension in art militates against the boundary between art and life -- an expression of the aspiration to boundlessness that is the ultimate source of this connection. We have seen how, in Kiefer, this social aspect resides in the reference his work makes to the larger world beyond art, and the invitation it presents to the viewer to engage with difficult but important issues, such as the question of German guilt. His commitment to art's social role links him with traditional history painting, of which his work can be thought of as a contemporary version, combining aspects of the latter with a constantly reiterated acknowledgement of art's discursive nature.

The social element in Kiefer and Wagner, whilst radically different in terms of the form it takes in each, is undoubtedly a point of similarity between them. Yet as I indicated in the introduction, a comparison of Kiefer with Wagner runs the ever-present risk of anachronism. It is not simply a considerable period of time that separates them, but the unbridgeable schism in German and world history represented by the Second World War. Kiefer's world is in consequence almost unrecognizably different from that of Wagner. It is partly for this reason that I have investigated the respective historical contexts of Kiefer and the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in some detail, to draw attention to their embedded-ness in radically dissimilar circumstances. So whilst a social aspiration is common to both, in both it is a function of their historicity.

Kiefer stands alongside Wagner in diametric opposition to a powerful modernist discourse that seeks to keep art and society thoroughly *separate*. Influential critics such as Benjamin Buchloh already see Kiefer as hopelessly reactionary due to his preference for figuration (whilst others such as Donald Kuspit see his work as having a critical edge for precisely the same reason), and his failure to honor the strict autonomy of art only delivers grist to their mill.<sup>179</sup> The dissolution of the border between art and life leads to the aestheticization of society, and hence, as has been mentioned, to the aestheticization of politics. A desirable outcome for the

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<sup>179</sup> See Buchloh, Benjamin H D 'Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression' in Wallis, (Ed) pp107-36; Kuspit, Donald B 'Flak from the "Radicals": The American Case Against Current German Painting' in Wallis (Ed), 1984 pp137-51.

Romantics, this is nothing of the kind for any modern commentator familiar with its apotheosis in the form of the Nazi Rallies at Nuremberg. But I want to conclude this chapter by suggesting that the distinction on which artistic autonomy turns – between art that relates to society, and art that does not -- is unsustainable.

Various movements within modernism have, of course, been predicated on a social agenda, including Futurism and the Bauhaus movement (to cite two obvious examples). And the interrelationship of art and society is already implicit in certain definitions of modernism. If we define the latter as an aesthetic response to the conditions of modern society, for example, so that the task of modernist painting becomes to find painterly forms adequate to these conditions (to find forms, in other words, which *signify* modernity), this is clearly to posit a relationship between art and society, such that the one is the reflection of the other. Or let us suppose, as some commentators do, that modernism refers to art possessed of a *critical* edge, that is to say, it stands in some degree in opposition to a dominant ideology. This is the view of T J Clark, for example. Modernism is defined, Clark believes, by the attempt to conjure resistance to the ‘normal understanding of the culture’.<sup>180</sup> But this is once again to assume a relationship between art and society, such that the former performs a critical exercise on the latter. A relationship between art and society is thus integral to both of these views of modernism, and hence of modernist painting. As Jonathan Harris writes, the latter is the consequence of the ‘mutual implication’, or dialectical interaction, of the aesthetic and social realms.<sup>181</sup>

Autonomous art is the goal of that strain of modernism that seeks to *deny* any such interaction. In painting, its paradigmatic form is abstraction. Yet even this ultimately fails to rid painting of its social bonds, to the extent that its banishment of figuration can be understood as an attempt symbolically to *renounce* contemporary society. ‘My struggle against bourgeois society’, wrote Barnett Newman to Sidney Jarvis in

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<sup>180</sup> Clark, T J ‘Jackson Pollock’s Abstraction’ in Guilbaut, Serge (Ed) *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal, 1945-1964* MIT Press, 1990 p220.

<sup>181</sup> Harris, Jonathan ‘Stuck in the post’? Abstract Expressionism, T J Clark and modernist history painting’ in Green and Seddon (Eds) 2002 p21.



1955, 'has involved the total rejection of it.'<sup>182</sup> Seen in these terms, abstraction emerges as just as much a response to the conditions of modernity as was the work of Manet, for example. Indeed, some commentators have discerned a critical propensity in some varieties of abstraction. Clark is amongst them.<sup>183</sup> He views the work of Jackson Pollock as constituting a gesture of resistance, arising from its refusal to resolve itself into a single reading. This prevents the 'normal understanding' referred to above. 'His [Pollock's] painting is a work against metaphor', Clark observes,

against any one of his pictures settling down into a single metaphorical frame of reference. He wishes to cross metaphors, to block connotation by multiplying it. He intends so to accelerate the business of signifying that any one frame of reference will not fit.<sup>184</sup>

It is clear from this – the idea that not even abstraction, the *ne plus ultra* of artistic autonomy, exists in a kind of hermetically sealed condition, immune to contamination by society -- that autonomy may be unattainable. Even Adorno, amongst the most implacable of autonomous art's advocates, was obliged to concede that perfect artistic autonomy is illusory. An artwork is unavoidably a product of the society in which it is produced, and to which it is inherently connected. 'The configuration of elements of works of art into a whole', he writes in his *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970), 'obeys immanent laws that are related to society out there'.<sup>185</sup> The project to separate 'text' from 'context' in art is a futile one. As

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<sup>182</sup> Newman, Barnett *Selected Writings and Interviews*, Edited by John P O'Neill, University of California Press, 1990 p201.

<sup>183</sup> See Clark, in Guilbaut, Serge (Ed) 1990; 'In Defense of Abstract Expressionism' *October*, 69 Summer 1994 pp234-8.

<sup>184</sup> Clark, in Guilbaut (Ed), 1990 p201.

<sup>185</sup> Quoted in Hammermeister, 2002 p201. Peter Bürger sees autonomous art as a form of ideology or false consciousness, insofar as it *conceals* its relationship with society. 'The relative dissociation of the work of art from the praxis of life in bourgeois society', he writes, 'thus becomes transformed into the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society.' (Bürger, Peter *Theory of the Avant-Garde* [First published 1974] Translated by Michael Shaw, Minnesota University Press, 1984 p46). Artistic autonomy for Bürger is thus 'an ideological category'. (Ibid.)

Jacques Derrida famously remarked, 'il n'y a pas de hors-texte.'<sup>186</sup> And if all art has a social, and hence political dimension, one can say of an artwork only whether it is more politics than art, or more art than politics.

The distinction that has been supposed between autonomous art on the one hand and art that concerns itself with a realm supposedly 'beyond' art -- the realm of society and politics -- on the other thus reveals itself to be a false one, and a central precept of a significant modernist discourse collapses. In the next chapter, we will observe the instability of the foundations of a second, equally important pillar of modernism, artistic *purity*.

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<sup>186</sup> Derrida, Jacques *De la grammatologie* Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1967 pp158-59.

### Chapter 3: Synthesis, Purity and Synesthesia

The more dominant a particular sense or the apparatuses used to support and supply it may seem to be, the more it will implicate other senses, and therefore the more complex and the less “pure” the dominion will become. – Stephen Connor<sup>1</sup>

*In Chapter 1, we saw that the constitution of the Gesamtkunstwerk as a synthesis, or combination of the arts, was fundamental to Wagner’s social agenda. In this chapter, I will be more concerned with the importance of synthesis as a formal model, which is highly significant for Kiefer. Because synthesis in art is opposed to purity (a thoroughly central concept in much modernist discourse), the synthesizing aspects of Kiefer and Wagner have considerable impact on the relationship of their work to modernism, which will form a major secondary theme in this chapter.*

Whether to move closer together, or further apart: this, to some degree, has been the conundrum facing the arts in the modern period. Philippe Junod has characterized it as the ‘centripetal’ versus the ‘centrifugal’ tendencies in art, whereby the disciplines seek either to approach, or to distance themselves from, a central area of common ground.<sup>2</sup> Another way of expressing it is as the choice between artistic unity on the one hand and separation on the other. Of the former (which equates with the ‘centripetal’ urge), the paradigmatic example is the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and in this chapter I will show that it is unity that likewise characterizes Kiefer’s work, thus forming the second major connection between them. Artistic unity takes the form of a combination of various arts in a single

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Edison’s Teeth: Touching Hearing [2004]’, quoted in Shaw-Miller, Simon ‘Music as Imminent *Gesamtkunstwerk*: Absolute Music, Synesthesia, and *The Lucky Hand*’ in Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011 p193.

<sup>2</sup> See Junod, Philippe ‘The New *Paragone*: Paradoxes and Contradictions of Pictorial Musicality’ in Morton, Marsha L and Schmunk, Peter L (Eds) *The Arts Entwined: Music and Painting in the Nineteenth Century* Garland Publishing, New York and London 2000.

artwork, and Kiefer's work qualifies as such in virtue of his frequent combination of painting with other disciplines, notably photography.

In Chapter 1, I referred to the 'combination' of the arts somewhat interchangeably with artistic 'synthesis'; but a greater degree of rigor is now required. For logically speaking, the concept of synthesis involves the emergence of a recognizable third term from its constituent parts, and the question therefore arises whether or not this is what is entailed in a mixture of the arts. In this context, I want to apply the ideas of the philosopher Jerrold Levinson, who has provided a useful analysis of combined artworks, to which he refers as 'hybrids'. For the purposes of this chapter, his analysis is helpful in assessing the extent to which true synthesis features, or does *not* feature, in Wagner and Kiefer respectively.<sup>3</sup> I will therefore begin with a brief summary of Levinson's account of hybridity, followed by an evaluation of Wagner and Kiefer in the terms of this account.

The choice between unity and separation in art is very far from a neutral one. For a powerful discourse exists in favor of the latter, and argues that existence in a kind of splendid isolation constitutes the proper condition of the arts in modernity. In this discourse, the urge to unity is seen as reactionary and anti-modernist; it is seen to result, furthermore, in a kind of confusion or incomprehensibility. In order to avoid this, proponents of artistic separation have sought to preserve the arts in what they have seen as their 'pure' form. Artistic separation is consequently synonymous with artistic 'purity (a term that has clear ideological overtones)'. This is the discourse to which both Wagner and Kiefer, in their various ways, stand in opposition, and no proper appreciation of the significance of either in art historical terms can be gathered without an understanding of its principal tenets. To provide a brief account of these will therefore be my second task.

My conclusion will be that, in addition to the concept of synthesis (or rather, hybridity), what unites Kiefer with Wagner is that both undermine the basic tenets

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<sup>3</sup> Levinson. Jerrold 'Hybrid Art Forms' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* Vol 18, No 4 (Winter, 1984), pp5-13.

of purity, exposing the instability of the foundations on which the doctrine is built. This they accomplish in two ways: by subverting the distinction between temporality and spatiality on the one hand, and the idea that each art is mono-sensory in terms of its reception on the other. I will show that, by contradicting the latter concept, they lend weight to Merleau-Ponty's contention that perception is synesthetic, and that art can bring this fact to conscious awareness.

### **The Combination of the Arts**

A synthesis of any kind involves the combination or mixture of separate elements to form a unified entity. It is the reverse of 'analysis', the *separation* of an entity into its constituent parts (in consequence, artistic purity is sometimes referred to as 'analysis'). In the case of the arts, the emergence of a unified entity does not necessarily follow from the mere fact of combination. This is why Levinson has developed his concept of hybridity, of which synthesis is merely one variety. A hybrid art form may produce a synthesis, or it may not.

Levinson distinguishes hybrid art forms from those that can simply be 'decomposed' into two or more elements.<sup>4</sup> Hybridity does not apply to an art form that employs different genres from the same discipline, for example, such as painting that contains elements of both landscape painting and portraiture. Similarly, the use of different media in the same art form – that is, different *materials* – does not qualify it for hybridity. For Levinson, the latter results only from a combination of arts, and these must be *preexisting*. Thus opera is a hybrid because its two principal constituents, song and drama, had had a prior existence before the invention of opera. Modern cinema is likewise a hybrid because it consists of drama, photography and music. As Levinson puts it, '*hybrid art forms are art forms arising from the actual combination or interpenetration of earlier art forms [emphasis original]*'.<sup>5</sup> Thus his view is that the basis of hybridity is partly a *historical* one. And a

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<sup>4</sup> Levinson, 1984 p5.

<sup>5</sup> Levinson, 1984 p6.

‘pure’ art form, which he calls a ‘thoroughbred’, is defined as one that does *not* consist of such a combination, and because it is thus defined *negatively* this renders thoroughbred art forms ‘logically secondary’ to hybridity.<sup>6</sup>

Levinson divides the category of hybridity itself into three subdivisions: juxtaposition, synthesis, and transformation (Simon Shaw-Miller glosses these as multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and crossdisciplinary respectively<sup>7</sup>). In juxtaposition, the arts are simply placed alongside each other and do not interact. The operating principle is *addition*. An example of this is when a song is set to music; no third term is created, and both constituent parts are imaginable in isolation. As Levinson points out, however, the *combination* of these elements nevertheless impacts on the listener, causing him or her to listen in a different way than if they were presented separately. The aesthetic experience, in short, is an enhanced one. Synthesis, by contrast, involves a degree of interaction, so that the identities of the constituent parts are lost. The operating principle is *fusion*. Levinson claims that Wagnerian opera is the prime example of synthesis, and I will shortly test the validity of this claim. Transformation is similar to synthesis, but it involves an *unequal* relationship amongst the constituent arts. Its operating principle is *alteration* rather than fusion. An example is the work of Alexander Calder, whose ‘mobiles’ are basically sculptures, but to the extent that they incorporate movement they also approximate to the territory of dance. Because they clearly belong much closer to sculpture than dance, however, the synthesis is only *partial*.

Levinson proposes a further criterion regarding hybridity, namely whether the effect is ‘integrative’ or ‘disintegrative’. The former -- of which he again cites Wagnerian opera as an example -- applies where the arts combine to produce a unitary reading, the latter where the result is multiple or contradictory readings.

In the light of these ideas, let us assess the concept of hybridity in Wagner and Kiefer, beginning with the former. As a ‘gathering’ of the arts, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*

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<sup>6</sup> Levinson, 1984 p8.

<sup>7</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2002 pp11-29.

clearly qualifies for hybridity in Levinson's terms, comprising dance, theatre, poetry, music, painting and architecture, all of which arts had existed for centuries. I share Levinson's view that it is an integrative art form, since its individual elements work together to form a common end. The spectator is made to see 'the one in the many'.<sup>8</sup> Into which of the categories of hybridity it falls, however, is perhaps not so clear.

Wagner's preferred term for his project was 'Music-Drama', and in this idea there is certainly the suggestion of synthesis (or interdisciplinarity). As Shaw-Miller notes, what he aspires to is essentially 'sung drama', and this is a category that is neither song, nor drama, but a fusion of the two.<sup>9</sup> Because the singing and the acting take place at the same time -- and are executed by the same performers -- they cannot be separated, as is the case in juxtaposition. Sung drama is thus very different from a drama with songs, which in Wagner's estimation most nearly characterized contemporary opera. Because its constituent arts were not properly integrated, the latter had the aspect, as he puts it, of 'the mutual compact of the egoism of the three related arts.'<sup>10</sup>

In most other respects, however, what is indicated conforms most nearly to the category of juxtaposition (multidisciplinarity). The elements of dance, poetry, painting and music that constitute the *Gesamtkunstwerk* could all theoretically be extracted without losing their identity. Even the form of text setting that Wagner pioneered, to which he referred as *Versmelodie* [melodic verse] and which he himself considered an ideal fusion of music and poetry, also falls into this category (see **Appendix 2**). The verse could conceivably be recited minus the accompaniment, and the music played without the verse (although to greatly diminished effect).

To sum up, then, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* undoubtedly has the attributes of hybridity, characterized primarily by juxtaposition/multidisciplinarity, with some elements of

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<sup>8</sup> Levinson, 1984 p12.

<sup>9</sup> 2002 p14.

<sup>10</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p153.

synthesis/interdisciplinarity. It is also an integrative art form. Turning now to Kiefer, we will find that the issue of hybridity is considerably more complex, and Levinson's definitions are only of partial use.

Kiefer's work features three different modes of hybridity, the first of which corresponds with Levinson's category of juxtaposition/multidisciplinarity. This applies to the many works in which Kiefer combines recognizable art forms. One of his preferred combinations is painting and photography, sometimes with the addition of woodcut, as in *Iconoclastic Controversy [Bilder-Streit]* (1980) (Plate 16), which consists of a painting on top of a woodcut on top of a photograph. This qualifies as juxtaposition because the constituent elements do not interact, but have been simply placed on top of each other. And whilst they could not be separated without destroying the artwork, they could nevertheless be considered in isolation by means of an imaginative effort, albeit rather strenuous. The difficulty arises from how to classify this combination, since no such category as a photograph/woodcut/painting presently exists. I suggest that it most nearly conforms to painting, however, and for two reasons: the nature of the support, which is canvas (the traditional support), and the fact that both woodcut and photograph are partly obscured by paint, which renders the painted element predominant. But we are nevertheless *aware* of the presence of the other arts. We see the many in the one, so to speak, and this is what Levinson indicates by 'disintegration'. And the effect of this is to produce incomplete or fragmented readings, owing to the radically different propensities of the constituent arts. For example, the sense of depth established by the photograph is disrupted by the extreme 'flatness' of the woodcut, which draws attention to the painting's *surface*. These contradictory signals are part of what Biro has called Kiefer's 'hermeneutic undecidability', the obdurate refusal of his work to resolve itself into unified readings.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hermeneutic undecidability is 'the ability of a cultural representation to generate not just ambiguity but a conflict of interpretations: radically contradictory readings of the same set



The combination of painting with photography is one Kiefer has continued to deploy, as in a series of paintings from 2013 including several versions of *The Morgenthau Plan* (**Plate 17**), *Freia's Garden* (Private collection) and *Ignis Sacer* (Private Collection). In all of these, however, the photograph is almost completely hidden.<sup>12</sup>

The category of juxtaposition also applies to Kiefer's frequent combination of painting with sculpture, such as when he attaches lead books to the paintings, notably in a series from 2006 that includes *Black Flakes* (Private Collection) and *For Paul Celan, Ash Flower* (Private collection).<sup>13</sup> The books do not, perhaps, conform to the traditional notion of sculpture, but nevertheless qualify for three reasons: they are *representations* of books, they are hand made three-dimensional objects, and whilst lead is a highly unorthodox choice of material, it is at least a metal, one of sculpture's traditional materials (the other is stone). Similar to the books are the lead models of warships that Kiefer has often used, which count as sculptures for the same reasons. These appear notably in the series dedicated to the Russian Futurist poet Velimir Chlebnikov from 2004. In all of these cases, the effect of the hybridity is disintegrative rather than integrative, as we perceive the objects quite distinctly from the paintings to which they are attached. The same dilemma as to classification arises as before, however, since painting/sculpture constitutes another

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of signifiers'. (Biro, Matthew 'Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the Memory of the Holocaust' *Yale Journal of Criticism*, Volume 16, Number 1, Spring 2003, pp. 113-146 here p117.)

<sup>12</sup> The use of photography in painting – a device that, amongst his contemporaries, Kiefer shares perhaps most notably with Gerhard Richter (b 1932) – may be seen as part of the project to reassess the status and role of painting after photography. For several reasons, including the way it throws into question the concepts of authorship and self-expression, photography represents painting's 'other', and by juxtaposing it with painting Kiefer seems to subscribe to the view, articulated by Thierry De Duve, that it has become necessary for painting's survival explicitly to 'include a specific adversary which, since Niépce [Nicéphore Niépce, now usually cited as the inventor of photography], had lodged in it like the Trojan horse: photography.' (De Duve, Thierry (1980) 'Irreproducible Ryman' in Colaizzi, Vittorio and Schubert, Karsten (Eds) *Robert Ryman: Critical Texts Since 1967* Ridinghouse, London 2009, p125.) The idea seems to be that doing so constitutes a kind of *inoculation* against photography's attack on painting.

<sup>13</sup> This practice strongly recalls the 'combines' of Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), paintings that incorporated various objects attached to the canvas.

unrecognized form of hybridity. But since the sculptural element is usually comparatively minor, the support is canvas and the paintings themselves correspond approximately to a recognized art historical category – usually landscape painting – we might continue to classify them as paintings.

As we have seen, Levinson specifically excludes from the concept of hybridity *multimedia* artworks, that is, artworks composed of mixed media, where this refers to a mixture of materials rather than of disciplines. In Kiefer's case, however, the use of media very often includes straw, sand, broken glass, lead and other materials that might appear to have no business appearing in an artwork.<sup>14</sup> In Chapter 2, we noted some of the many instances of Kiefer's use of straw. The series from 2013 referred to above makes considerable use of stalks of wheat. Sand, having made an early appearance in *Iconoclastic Controversy*, is a notable aspect of the pyramid series of paintings from the 1990s that includes *Sand From the Urns* [*Der Sand aus den Urnen*] (1998-2009) (**Plate 24**). Broken glass is a feature of *Falling Stars* [*Sternenfall*] (1999, Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania). A recent instance of the use of lead is *Skinned Landscape* [*Gehäutete Landschaft*], from 2016 (**Plate 25**). *Ash Flower* [*Aschenblume*] (1983-97) (**Plate 13**) features both clay and ash. All of these materials are presented *literally*, that is to say, not in the form of depictions, so that what we have is multimediality of a very different order from the use in the same painting of both acrylic and oil paint, for example. Yet neither do these paintings constitute a combination of an art with another art; rather, they represent a new form of hybridity altogether, namely a combination of representation with non-representation, of art with non-art. But the effect of this conjunction of material presented literally with depiction -- *presentation* in conjunction with representation -- is nonetheless once again disintegrative, because it creates highly dissonant

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<sup>14</sup> Rosenthal observes that the use of extraneous materials forms a link between Kiefer and the Italian movement of the late 1960s known as *Arte Povera* (1987, p95). In Kiefer, the commonest are straw, lead and sand, and Rosenthal suggests that the significance of these for him consists in their behavior when subjected to *fire*. Straw burns and becomes ash; lead is purified; sand offers resistance (ibid).

readings. In this regard, the paintings are thoroughly ambiguous objects, seeming to occupy a liminal space between art and life.

The third form of hybridity in Kiefer relates to his use of 'found' objects, which differ from sculptures to the extent that they are not representations, but the things *themselves*. This is a second instance of literalism in Kiefer, but not as before in the form of the material composition of the paintings, but of objects *attached* to them (by means of wire or similar fastening). The 2013 series features a variety of such objects, from a set of metal weighing scales to an old pair of shoes. Similar instances include *Ash Flower*, referred to above, featuring a dried sunflower (a favorite material of Kiefer), *Winter Forest* (2010, Gagosian Gallery, New York), one of many paintings featuring tree branches, *Osiris and Isis* (1985-7, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), featuring porcelain, copper wire and a circuit board, and *Iron Path [Eisensteig]* (1986) (**Plate 18**), featuring olive tree branches and a pair of lead overshoes. In *The Last Cartload [Das letzte Fuder]* (2005, Private collection), a wooden chair has been attached to the canvas. Once again, the effect is disintegrative, but because they are not representations, these objects cannot count as sculpture, and the paintings in consequence cannot count as hybridity in Levinson's terms. We might think of them as another case of a combination of art and life. Alternatively, however, we might think of them in terms of art history, as a combination of art historical categories. The literal presentation of objects is usually associated with conceptual art, as perhaps most paradigmatically in Marcel Duchamp's notorious *Fountain* of 1917. Another classic example of conceptualism is Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* of 1965 (to which we might understand Kiefer's use of the chair in *The Last Cartload* as a direct reference). Thus in art historical terms, what the combination of a more or less traditional account of painting with this form of literalism amounts to is the combination of 'auratic' art with conceptual art.<sup>15</sup> The hybridity here seems to consist in the juxtaposition of

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of 'auratic' art comes from Walter Benjamin, who equates the aura of an artwork with 'uniqueness'. ('The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations* Translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York 1968 p223.) His chief concern is to contrast auratic art with photography. Whilst

these two categories, so that the paintings are at one level a form of art about art and its history.

In common with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, then, Kiefer's work is characterized by hybridity, although of a radically more complex order, consisting as much of a combination of art with non-art or of art historical categories as of a combination of the arts. Unlike the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, furthermore, synthesis is never achieved, and the effect of the hybridity is disintegrative rather than integrative.

As mentioned earlier, the significance of hybridity in art historical discourse is that it stands in opposition to artistic purity, or separation, by which much modernist discourse has set a great deal of store, so that -- to the extent that it constitutes a *denial* of purity -- hybridity in art has been routinely dismissed as reactionary. I want to show that, in addition to the concept of hybridity, what we can discern in Kiefer and Wagner alike -- and forming the most compelling connection between them -- is a robust and ruinous *attack* on the central precepts of purity. In the process, it will become apparent that such an attack, somewhat paradoxically, was also implicit in artistic practices thought to be paradigmatically exemplary of these precepts. My discussion will thus serve, in part, to shed retrospective light on modernism.

It is first necessary, however, to identify precisely what the precepts of artistic purity *are*. Briefly, they might be summarized as separation on the basis of time versus space, medium specificity, and sense organ of reception.

### **The Confusion of the Arts**

Separation -- the obverse of hybridity -- has a long history in art. Indeed, the idea of separation is encoded in the word 'art' itself, which derives from the Latin *ars*, meaning 'practical skill', a word already in classical times associated with separation

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the latter is capable of producing multiple identical images from a single negative, the quality of uniqueness found in auratic art is necessarily lost. Photography substitutes 'a plurality of copies for a unique existence.' (1968, p221.)

based on a *hierarchy* -- the distinction between the so-called 'liberal' and 'illiberal' skills, the former of which, as the name would imply, were deemed superior to the latter.<sup>16</sup> The liberal skills comprised those considered suitable for a freeman in order to equip him usefully to contribute to society, which largely involved participating in public debate ('liberal' was derived from *liber*, meaning 'free'). They consisted of the *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy). The 'illiberal' skills comprised *manual* skills such as painting and sculpture, skills having commercial applications (and hence associated with the *lack* of freedom consistent with the need to earn a living). This sharp hierarchical division was a function of the deeply inequitable classical society, which consisted of a privileged male elite on the one hand, and -- constituting the greater part of the population -- a disempowered class of women and slaves on the other. And by positing a form of hierarchy among the arts, the liberal/illiberal distinction served to reinforce the hierarchy that obtained in society. In this way, it functioned as *ideology*, that is, it served the ends of an existing power structure.

The distinction was revived in the 'scholastic' tradition of the middle ages, then somewhat challenged during the Renaissance, when artists including Leonardo da Vinci attempted to raise 'illiberal' manual art to liberal status on the basis of its intellectual component (the use of the term 'liberal arts' persists even until today in certain universities, where it equates with those subjects also known as the 'humanities'). It is doubtless that this enterprise was partly informed by commercial considerations, for painting and sculpture were attracting increasing patronage amongst the incipient middle class, and to raise their status would translate into higher prices. Leonardo also contributed to the contemporary debate known as the *paragone*, the project to derive a hierarchy of the arts (in Leonardo's view, painting

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<sup>16</sup> See Curtius, Ernst Robert *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (First published 1948) Translated by Willard R Trask, Princeton University Press 1973; Castle, E B *Ancient Education and Today* Penguin, 1961.

was at the pinnacle).<sup>17</sup> And the hierarchizing impulse reappears even within the context of an individual discipline, as in the case of painting, which as we saw in the previous chapter was subject to the division formulated in the first European art academies in the seventeenth century -- and persisting until well into the nineteenth -- known as the 'hierarchy of genres', in which 'history' painting was at the top, followed by portraiture, 'genre' painting or scenes of everyday life, then landscape, animal painting and finally still life.<sup>18</sup> It was, of course, no accident that history painting was elevated in this way; it served the ends of ideology by means of its didactic tone and moralizing aspirations, and the civic virtues that it sought to promulgate.

In addition to the project to separate the arts according to various forms of hierarchy, and beginning approximately with the aesthetic debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, attempts began to be made to separate the arts on what might be called an *ontological* basis, that is to say, to separate them on the basis of what were perceived to be their fundamental characteristics. Amongst the first, and most paradigmatic, of such attempts was Lessing's *Laokoön* essay of 1766 (referred to in Chapter 1). The playwright develops his argument in the course of an analysis of a highly celebrated piece of Hellenistic sculpture, *Laocoön and His Sons* (**Plate 15**). This work, which depicts the eponymous priest of Poseidon killed with his sons by a serpent sent by the god for attempting to expose the ruse of the Trojan Horse, had been characterized in classical times by Pliny as the greatest of all artworks and had also been the subject of a laudatory 1755 treatise by Winckelmann.<sup>19</sup> Lessing's main purpose in the essay is to divide the arts into two categories, the *spatial* and the *temporal*.<sup>20</sup> The basis of *mimesis*, or imitation (since

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<sup>17</sup> See Plett, Heinrich F *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* De Gruyter, Berlin and New York 2004.

<sup>18</sup> See Lee, Rensselaer W *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* Norton Simon, New York 1967.

<sup>19</sup> See Richter, Simon *Laocoon's Body and the Aesthetics of Pain: Winckelmann, Lessing, Herder, Moritz and Goethe* Wayne State University Press, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> As Shaw-Miller notes, Kant also divides arts on the basis of the spatial versus the temporal. Space is the medium of the 'formative arts [painting, sculpture etc]', time

the time of Aristotle held to be the goal of art), is in his formulation that the sign 'must indisputably bear a suitable relation to the thing signified'.<sup>21</sup> If the thing to be imitated is an object in space, then painting or sculpture is the appropriate art, because these are able to give an indication of spatial relationships. These are *spatial* arts. If the thing to be imitated is an object in time (that is, an event or action) then poetry is appropriate, because it is able to give an indication of events unfolding in time. Poetry is thus a *temporal* art (music is another, because it depends on time for its operation and perception). 'Objects or parts of objects', Lessing tells us,

which exist in space are called bodies. Accordingly, bodies with their visible properties are the true subjects of painting.

Objects or parts of objects which follow one another are called actions. Accordingly, actions are the true subjects of poetry.<sup>22</sup>

In Lessing's view, it is imperative that the arts restrict themselves to their proper domains. 'It is an intrusion of the painter', he says, 'into the domain of the poet, which good taste can never sanction, when the painter combines in one and the same picture two points necessarily separate in time.'<sup>23</sup> If painting, 'by virtue of its symbols or means of imitation, which it can combine in space only, must renounce the element of time entirely, progressive actions, by the very fact that they are progressive, cannot be considered to belong among its subjects.'<sup>24</sup> Conversely, the poet errs when he supplies copious descriptions of objects, thereby imparting a temporal dimension to a process that, in life, could be undertaken 'at one glance'.<sup>25</sup> For Lessing, the failure to observe this rigid division – a failure which he was convinced was becoming widespread, in the form in poetry of 'a mania for description' and in painting of 'a mania for allegory' -- represents a departure from classicism, and consequently an artistic *decline* (the Romantics, of course, argue

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the medium of music and the other arts of the 'beautiful play of sensations.' (Quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p20.)

<sup>21</sup> Lessing, 1766/1962 p78.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Lessing, 1766/1962 p91.

<sup>24</sup> Lessing, 1766/1962 p77.

<sup>25</sup> Lessing, 1766/1962 p91.

precisely the opposite: artistic decline consists precisely in the doctrine of separation, as promoted by Lessing).<sup>26</sup>

Lessing's thesis constitutes perhaps the first systematic attempt to separate the arts according to their logical prerequisites. It is an early intimation of the project to articulate the *essential* nature of the individual arts, the project that would culminate in twentieth century modernist criticism. That such a project was deemed necessary was due to the retreat of artistic purity in the face of synthesis, which even in the time of Lessing had, as noted above, already begun. Over the course of the nineteenth century, beginning perhaps with Romanticism and greatly accelerated by the advent of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, this retreat became a rout. But then the artistic pendulum began to swing the other way. Arguments in favor of purity and thoroughly hostile to the concept of synthesis began to reappear, such as advanced by the literary critic Irving Babbitt, whose *The New Laocoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts*, directly referencing Lessing, was published in 1910. This was followed in 1940 by perhaps the most paradigmatic statement of artistic purity, referencing both Lessing and Babbitt – Clement Greenberg's *Towards a Newer Laocoon*. In common with Lessing, what motivates both Babbitt and Greenberg is the impulse towards separation, achieved by means of fixed artistic borders.

Babbitt's essay takes the form of a polemic against the 'general confusion of the arts' that he observes in contemporary artistic practice. The failure to recognize the sanctity of artistic borders as established by Lessing, Babbitt maintains, has resulted in a strange form of artistic miscegenation. 'To take examples almost at random', he writes, 'we have Gautier's transpositions d'art, Rossetti's attempts to paint his sonnets and write his pictures, Mallarmé's ambition to compose symphonies with words.'<sup>27</sup> Babbitt traces this tendency, the first flowering of which was constituted

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<sup>26</sup> Lessing, 1766/1962 p5. Lessing invokes the so-called 'witty antithesis' of Simonides, the ancient poet, who is credited with the definition of painting as a 'silent poem' and poetry as a 'speaking picture'. (See Lessing, 1766/1962, Translator's Introduction pxii).

<sup>27</sup> Babbitt, Irving *The New Laocoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York 1910 preface pix. Théophile Gautier



by Romanticism, back to what he calls Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 'warfare in the name of feeling against everything formal and traditional.'<sup>28</sup> He equates what is 'formal and traditional' -- that is, what Rousseau inveighs *against* -- with classicism and the strict observance of artistic boundaries; he equates it, furthermore, with *reason*. The abandonment of these restraints, and the of erasure of artistic boundaries, he equates by contrast with 'the region of *instinct* [emphasis added] that is below it [reason].'<sup>29</sup> There is a suggestion in *Babbitt*, then, that loss of artistic purity is a sign of degeneracy. Thus he writes of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that in it 'all the separate arts are to melt together *voluptuously* [emphasis added]'.<sup>30</sup> The breaking down of artistic barriers, he tells us, achieves 'the emotional and instinctive unity that the child enjoys', although he allows not without irony that it may not always go so far 'as what the Germans expressively but disagreeably call priapism of the soul'.<sup>31</sup> The debate surrounding purity, as Shaw-Miller puts it, becomes in *Babbitt's* hands 'as much a moral one' as it is a 'merely neutral' formal one.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it rapidly becomes ideological, so that it is reduced to the terms of an East/West dualism in which artistic impurity is equated with the 'barbarian' Orient, and purity 'by implication' with the 'civilized' Occidental.<sup>33</sup> *Babbitt* claims for example that Romanticism succeeded in transferring the center of literature 'from Rome to Byzantium. . . . Now the capital of a language thus pushed over to its extreme frontier is very near the barbarians'.<sup>34</sup> The 'confusion' of the arts, he tells us, introducing a decidedly colonialist inflection into the debate, 'Is merely a special aspect of a more general malady, of that excess of sentimental and scientific

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referred to his efforts to record in poetry his responses to painting and other art forms as 'transpositions'; Dante Gabriel Rossetti was in the habit of attaching sonnets to his paintings, as in *Proserpine* (1874, Tate); the reference to Stéphane Mallarmé may be to his poem of 1897, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, in which the words are set out on the page so as to resemble a musical score.

<sup>28</sup> *Babbitt*, 1910 p15.

<sup>29</sup> *Babbitt*, 1910 p16.

<sup>30</sup> *Babbitt*, 1910 p173.

<sup>31</sup> *Babbitt*, 1910 pp105-6.

<sup>32</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2002 p4.

<sup>33</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2002 p29.

<sup>34</sup> *Babbitt*, 1910 p144.

naturalism from which, if my diagnosis is correct, the occidental world is now suffering'.<sup>35</sup>

Greenberg likewise argues strongly in favor of the principle of artistic separation established by Lessing and revisited by Babbitt. 'There has been', he writes, clearly referencing the latter, 'such a thing as a confusion of the arts'.<sup>36</sup> It is this that has led to the 'mistakes of painting and sculpture in the past several centuries'.<sup>37</sup>

Greenberg proposes that to each age there is a 'dominant' art form, and the artistic 'confusion' regretted by Babbitt is the result of the other arts attempting to imitate its characteristics. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the dominant art form had been literature, and in the case of painting its influence had resulted in a misguided attempt to encompass *narrative* (here Greenberg sounds much like Lessing, with the latter's spatial/temporal distinction). In the nineteenth century, it was music that had become dominant. In Greenberg's view, this had led to an unfortunate tendency in the other arts to emulate the *effect* of music – seen as the evocation of a *mood* (he seems to be thinking here mainly of Symbolism). This was the latest example of the tendency of the arts to overreach themselves by encroaching onto the territory of another art form. The jumbled mess that resulted is nevertheless being untangled, he suggests, by a return on the part of the avant-garde to purity, which consists, by contrast, in the arts restricting themselves to their natural domains. 'Purity in art', he tells us, 'consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art.'<sup>38</sup>

Somewhat paradoxically, given that it was the desire to emulate music that had led in Greenberg's opinion to the most recent version of artistic confusion, it is nevertheless music that he sets up as a paradigmatic example for the other arts to

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<sup>35</sup> Babbitt, 1910 p185.

<sup>36</sup> Greenberg, Clement 'Towards a Newer Laocoon', *Partisan Review*, July-August 1940 Reproduced in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds) *Art in Theory, 1900-1990* Blackwell, Oxford 1992 pp 555-60 (here 555).

<sup>37</sup> Greenberg, in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds), 1992 p555.

<sup>38</sup> Greenberg, in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds), 1992 p558.

follow; but only to the extent that music provides a *formal* model.<sup>39</sup> It is not music's effect, but its form to which the other arts must aspire; and this form is characterized by *autonomy*. To say that music is autonomous in this way is to say that it communicates its content, or meaning, by means of its form, and not by means of resemblance or reference to anything other than itself. We need no extra information, in short, not even the addition of lyrics, in order to apprehend its meaning. Music is autonomous in the sense of standing alone, of self-sufficiency; thus another way to describe it might be to say that it is 'absolute'. To the extent that its content is entirely a function of its form, we might also say that in music, the two things -- form and content -- are synonymous. What the modernist avant-garde had discovered, writes Greenberg, was 'that the advantage of music lay chiefly in the fact that it was an "abstract" art, an art of "pure form."' <sup>40</sup> Its example had shown that an artwork has no need to transcend its borders if its content already resides in its form; artistic purity, and an end to the possibility of confusion by which art has in Greenberg's view periodically been beset, is therefore to be achieved by the content of all artworks, irrespective of discipline, likewise becoming a function of their form. This explains the preoccupation, in modernist criticism, with materiality, which becomes not simply one of many concerns of an artwork, but its *only* concern. Thus Greenberg's project is far more radical than both Lessing's and Babbitt's alike, for it strikes at something very fundamental. In effect, he reinvents the nature of subject matter, which in a modernist artwork becomes *itself*. The task of an artwork is to perform an exercise in self-criticism, that is to say, an exercise in defining its own formal constitution -- what it is that constitutes itself as itself, a painting as a painting, a sculpture as a sculpture, and so on. It is to perform an exercise in what has come to be called 'medium specificity', a demonstration of the medium in terms of which it has been constituted -- pigment and support in the case of painting, say, or stone or metal in the case of sculpture -- for this medium represents the unique signature of the discipline. It is 'by virtue of its medium', Greenberg insists, 'that

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<sup>39</sup> We should note that, in what is usually referred to as 'postmodernism', the example of music again becomes important, but this time owing to its constitution 'as a field of activities, a discourse or discursive practices', as Shaw-Miller writes (2002, preface px).

<sup>40</sup> Greenberg, in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds), 1992 p557.

each art is unique and strictly itself'.<sup>41</sup> It is in these terms that he explains the advent of abstraction, that is, the absence of figuration. It was the result of the realization on the one hand that figuration in painting or sculpture is suggestive of a narrative and thus encroaches upon the territory of another discipline (literature), and on the other that the subject matter of any discipline should be the raw materials at its disposal. The subject matter of art had accordingly become its own materiality, and its content the unadulterated sensuous experience generated by that materiality. 'The picture or statue', Greenberg tells us,

exhausts itself in the visual sensation it produces. There is nothing to identify, connect or think about, but everything to feel.<sup>42</sup>

The purity in art for which he strives, then, and the return of the various arts to their proper domains, is to be achieved by the fusion in each of form with content. And Greenberg maintains that it is in America – with the rise of Abstract Expressionism -- that these developments have been most fully worked out, at least in the field of painting. Whilst he scrupulously avoids a triumphalist tone, it is clear that Greenberg believes that the modernist avant-garde had relocated to America. 'By no one, in recent years,', he says, 'have [painting's] expendable conventions been attacked more directly or more sustainedly than by a group of artists who came to notice in New York during and shortly after the war.'<sup>43</sup> This represented 'the first time that a generation of American artists could start out fully abreast -- and perhaps even a little bit ahead -- of their contemporaries elsewhere.'<sup>44</sup> Thus a narrative emerges in which artistic purity begins to assume a decidedly American aspect (so that, as we shall see in the next chapter, synthesis in art can be understood as a form of counter-Americanism).

In the guise of a cultural frontiersman, Greenberg stakes out the territory for each art based on a division in terms of their respective media, which are seen as defining

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<sup>41</sup> Greenberg, in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds), 1992 p558.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> "'American-Type' Painting' (1955), Reproduced in Greenberg, Clement *Art and Culture* Beacon Press, Boston 1961 p209.

<sup>44</sup> "'American-Type' Painting,' in Greenberg, 1961 p211.

the essential nature of each. But he makes a further division, based on the sense organ to which they address themselves. Once again, he invokes the example of music, which addresses itself – he claims -- exclusively to the ear. ‘Only by accepting the example of music’, he maintains,

and defining each of the other arts solely in the terms of the sense or faculty which perceived its effects and by excluding from each art whatever is intelligible in the terms of any other sense or faculty would the non-musical arts attain the ‘purity’ and self-sufficiency which they desired.<sup>45</sup>

Here, he is revisiting an argument previously advanced by the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (grandfather of the composer) in his *On the Main Principles of the fine Arts and Sciences* of 1757. It rests on a binary division of the visual versus the aural, so that an art can be only one or the other. But the effect of this division, as Rasula comments, is rather as if ‘painters were deaf and composers blind’.<sup>46</sup> It is striking, furthermore, that no account is made in this discourse of the sense of touch, even though this has played a considerable role in various modernist practices, notably Cubism. This is an early indication of a theme to which we shall return: the discrepancy between modernist *criticism* and practice.

Such, then, have been the principal elements in the arguments in favor of purity. It is upon these that Kiefer and Wagner, in different ways, mount an attack.

Yet it must be straightaway acknowledged that Wagner *himself* would deny that he intends anything of the kind. It is clear that by combining the arts, his project militates against their separation; but in his own way, the composer is as much of a purist as Lessing and Greenberg. For his ultimate aim, somewhat surprisingly, is to strengthen the identity of the individual arts. The paradox, however, is that this is to be achieved by means of unity. He insists that it is in *combination* that the individual arts discover their own essential nature, defining themselves in contradistinction to

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<sup>45</sup> Greenberg, in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds), 1992 p557.

<sup>46</sup> Rasula, 2016 p24.

each other. They discover themselves, in short, by discovering what they are *not*.

‘That which would separate itself’, Wagner tells us,

must, necessarily, first have that from which to separate. He who would fain be nothing but himself, must first know what he is; but this he only learns by distinguishing from what he is not: were he able to lop off entirely that which differs from him, then were he himself no differentiated entity, and thus no longer cognizable by himself.<sup>47</sup>

The effect of combination, then, is that the essence of each art is made to stand out in relief, so to speak. This is analogous with the notion, which Wagner shares with the Romantics, that the individual only achieves individuation in community. It is ‘only in the fullest of communion with that which is apart from him,’ he says, ‘in the completest absorption into the commonality of those who differ from him,’ that the individual can ‘ever be completely *what* he is by nature [emphasis original].’<sup>48</sup>

Thus an art has no need to impinge on the territory of another art, no need of ‘that which lies beyond its power of being’.<sup>49</sup> What is beyond its wherewithal is supplied by the neighboring art, which ‘*is that* in its place [emphasis original].’<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, Beethoven’s *Choral* symphony served for Wagner as an example of one art (music) arriving at its own limits and passing on the baton, so to speak, to another (poetry). And this idea of an art admitting of its own limitations and recognizing the potency of another is symbolic for Wagner of the moment when ‘egoism’ becomes ‘communism’. It is precisely at this point that ‘the egoist become[s] a communist, the unit all, the man God, the art-variety Art’.<sup>51</sup>

It is emphatically not the case, then, that Wagner sees himself as opposed to artistic purity; indeed, his entire project is in his view dedicated to maintaining it. ‘Purity of

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<sup>47</sup> ‘The Art-Work of the Future’, in Wagner, 1895/1993 p98.

<sup>48</sup> ‘The Art-Work of the Future’, in Wagner, 1895/1993 pp98-9.

<sup>49</sup> ‘The Art-Work of the Future’, in Wagner, 1895/1993 p103.

<sup>50</sup> ‘The Art-Work of the Future’, in Wagner, 1895/1993 p104.

<sup>51</sup> ‘The Art-Work of the Future’, in Wagner, 1895/1993 p94. As noted in Chapter 1, Wagner does not refer to communism in its modern political sense.

the art-variety', he tells us, is 'the first requisite for its comprehensibility [emphasis original].'<sup>52</sup> His belief, as Koss observes, is that 'the interrelation of the arts provided the necessary conditions for ensuring the autonomy of each'.<sup>53</sup> The effect of unification is to strengthen the identity of the individual arts. In this respect, Wagner's unified artwork has been radically misunderstood in modernist criticism, and the misapprehension that he seeks to undermine purity and autonomy has partly informed the 'marginalization' of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the discipline of art history, as Koss notes.<sup>54</sup> We might note also that Lessing – whose ideas were well known to Wagner and are cited in *Opera and Drama* -- has been understood as implacably opposed to artistic synthesis, whereas in a later work than the *Laokoön* he himself 'speculated on a synthesis which would respect the limitations of the separate arts while using them to supplement each other', as Stein points out.<sup>55</sup> Wagner, it seems, was not the enemy of purity, nor was Lessing the enemy of synthesis *per se*.

Yet it cannot be denied that there is a notable inconsistency in Wagner, for he seems to argue both for and against purity. At the same time as he maintains that the identity of the arts in the unified artwork will not be compromised, he also suggests that the constituent arts will be subject to a kind of 'mutual permeation'; and it is difficult to reconcile this concept with the idea of purity.<sup>56</sup> He states confusingly that each art 'can be absorbed within the other', whilst simultaneously preserving 'her own purity and freedom, her independence as *that* which she is.'<sup>57</sup> Logic would seem to dictate that both things cannot be possible (other than perhaps in terms of Hegel's concept of *Aufheben*, or 'sublation' -- with which Wagner is highly likely to have been familiar from his association with the Young Hegelians -- whereby in a synthesis the identity of the constituent elements is both preserved and destroyed).

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<sup>52</sup> Wagner, 1895/1995 p120.

<sup>53</sup> 2010, p17.

<sup>54</sup> 2010, pxxiii.

<sup>55</sup> 1960, p4.

<sup>56</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p107.

<sup>57</sup> 'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p189.

But as I have indicated, with the exception of song and drama the arts do not for the most part interact in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, so the question largely does not arise.

It might appear, then, that a highly unlikely ideological kinship begins to emerge between the arch synthesist Wagner and the arch purist Greenberg; both are ultimately dedicated to the purification of the individual arts. The only difference between them would seem to be that, for the former, this is to be achieved by unity, and for the latter, by separation. As we shall shortly see, however, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* nevertheless contains at its heart a fatal challenge to purity, in the form of something of which Wagner was himself aware. What this is will perhaps become most forcefully apparent in the light of a consideration of artistic purity's interrogation at the hands of Kiefer.

### **Space becomes Time**

Unlike the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, there is no question of Kiefer's project being ultimately in the service of the doctrine of purity. On the contrary, it seems designed at every step to undermine the latter's central tenets. These, as mentioned earlier, are essentially separation according to time versus space, medium specificity, and specific sense organ. And in Kiefer, each of these is outraged.

Kiefer places himself immediately at odds with Greenberg by reintroducing conventional subject matter. As we have seen, medium specificity holds that the only proper subject matter for painting is *itself*, and its own materiality. It is unlikely, furthermore, that Greenberg would approve of Kiefer's copious use of extraneous materials in his paintings. These materials have no place in the esoteric aesthetic domain envisaged by Greenberg. Indeed, it is almost as if Kiefer's challenge to purity is a *literal* one, whereby he contaminates the surface of his canvases with these defiantly non-art materials. What I particularly want to draw attention to, however, is the way that Kiefer achieves the introduction of an indubitable element of *time*,



violating Lessing's proscription against temporality in a spatial medium (painting).<sup>58</sup>

A temporal element also brings the experience of painting closer to that of music, precisely the effect that Greenberg wishes to avoid. But how does Kiefer accomplish this? In what ways can a painting be said to imply the fourth dimension?

The first and most obvious way in which Kiefer achieves a temporal dimension in his work is through the sheer length of time it takes to decode his paintings; for these are highly complex works, and it is simply impossible to comprehend them in a single glance. For example, let us consider *Operation "Sea Lion [Unternehmen "Seelöwe"]* (1975, Private collection), a characteristically enigmatic work. Gilmour's account of this painting evokes the bafflement that an initial encounter with Kiefer's work can provoke. 'While this painting appears to revive the landscape tradition,' he writes,

it opens up a strange scene for us to contemplate. The land itself seems constituted by the soldiers' bodies, whose individual forms are visible or implied, yet overpainted so as to convey the abstract impression of a single collective mass. At the center of the canvas a large, elongated tub rests, filled with water on which three ships are afloat, with a flame ignited above the one in the middle. Overarching the scene, three empty orange chairs, whose color reiterates that of the flame below, rest on a transparent platform, giving the appearance that they rule over the soldiers, the ships, and the landscape. What strange

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<sup>58</sup> The theme of time appears often in Kiefer's work and forms one of the connections with Romanticism. Arasse has noted a connection with Romantic ideas about time in the context of the series of very large paintings the artist started to produce in 1996 depicting pyramids and other ancient brick buildings in an advanced state of decay (2001/2014 pp259-97). Arasse sees these primarily as an expression of time's immutable power. *Sand From the Urns [Der Sand aus den Urnen]* (1998-2009, Private Collection) is one from this series (although the painting is dedicated to the poet Ingeborg Bachmann, the title comes from a 1948 collection of Celan's poetry). The use of real sand - the product of mineral action taking place over an unimaginably vast timescale - in this and other paintings in the series heightens the sense of the *ungraspable* nature of 'deep' or geologic time, and as Arasse points out, this view of time links Kiefer with the Romantics since it corresponds with an aspect of the Sublime. (2001/2014 p279.) Furthermore, the favorite motif of the Romantics for the 'immemorial power of time' was the spectacle of ruins (such as Caspar David Friedrich's *The Abbey in the Oakwood [Abtei im Eichwald]* of 1809-10 (Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin). (2001/2014 p279.)

scene is this, which makes use of the conventions of realistic representation without giving us a familiar reality to contemplate?<sup>59</sup>

Whilst the elements of the composition can be immediately grasped, what the painting *means* clearly cannot. Rather, this demands no small degree of analysis.<sup>60</sup> This may seem a facile observation, but it nevertheless contradicts a view first advanced in the Renaissance, namely that painting communicates its meaning to the viewer *instantaneously*, and that this is a positive virtue. Such was the view of Leonardo da Vinci; indeed, it was the basis of his claim in the context of the *paragone*, referred to earlier, for the superiority of painting over poetry. Writing in his *Trattato della Pittura* (first printed in 1651), Leonardo states that 'the work of the painter is immediately understood by its beholders'.<sup>61</sup> Poetry, on the other hand, transmits 'more slowly than the eye...which transmits with the greatest accuracy the surfaces and shapes of whatever presents itself.'<sup>62</sup> This facet of painting was seen as a virtue partly because the dimension of time has traditionally been associated with the 'material, the finite, and the mortal', as Andrew Kagan writes.<sup>63</sup> In the *absence* of time consistent with the supposed simultaneity of sight, then, there is an intimation of the eternal. Hans Jonas, a pupil of Heidegger, is amongst those who have advanced this argument. The 'nobility of sight', Jonas tells us, derives from the status of the present moment as the holder of 'stable contents' as opposed to the 'fleeting succession' characteristic of non-visual perception.<sup>64</sup> The contrast between sight and the senses that depend on time is the 'contrast between eternity and temporality'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Gilmour, 1990 pp5-6.

<sup>60</sup> Gilmour's interpretation is that the painting is simultaneously a reconsideration of modernist practices of representation and an allegory of political power, and the way that this depends 'on imaginary forms parallel, in some respects, to the functioning of imagination within vision'. (1990, p32.)

<sup>61</sup> Da Vinci, Leonardo *Paragone: A Comparison of the Arts* Translated by Irma A Richter (First published 1651) Oxford University Press 1949 p61.

<sup>62</sup> Da Vinci, 1651/1949 p61.

<sup>63</sup> Kagan, Andrew A *Absolute Art* Grenart Books, St Louis 1995 p52.

<sup>64</sup> Jonas, Hans *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* University of Chicago Press, 1966 p145.

<sup>65</sup> Jonas, 1966 p145.

In the twentieth century, Robert Delaunay reiterated the view of painting as an instantaneous art form in his 1912 essay (adapted by Apollinaire) 'Réalité, Peinture pure'. Alone amongst the arts, Delaunay suggests, painting is capable of communicating simultaneously. Writing in the 1960s, Michael Fried -- Greenberg's *protégé* -- advanced the same idea. In painting, Fried tells us, 'at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest'.<sup>66</sup> But certain precedents also exist for the view that, on the contrary, to apprehend the meaning of a painting requires time. There are intimations of this idea in a remark made by the poet John Dryden, in his essay 'A Parallel of Poetry and Painting' of 1695. Dryden is discussing Poussin's *The Institution of the Blessed Sacrament* (1640, Musée du Louvre, Paris). 'Here is but one indivisible point of time observ'd,' he writes,

but one action perform'd by so many persons, in one room and at the same table: yet the eye cannot comprehend at once the whole object, nor the mind follow it so fast; tis consider'd at leisure, and seen by intervals.<sup>67</sup>

What the painting communicates, Dryden suggests, cannot be assimilated all at once. Much more recently, Martin Kemp and Marina Wallace have also drawn attention to the time demanded of the spectator by complex imagery, particularly where content is a function not so much of narrative but iconography. Such imagery, Kemp and Wallace tell us, 'is not to be looked at glancingly or casually'.<sup>68</sup> And Kiefer's work adds weight to this insight, his multi-layered images, together with the very large scale of many of the paintings -- often exceeding nine square meters -- ensuring that the act of viewing them takes place over time. The interpretative effort that needs to be deployed renders an encounter with his work a highly time consuming enterprise.

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<sup>66</sup> Fried, M *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* University of Chicago Press, 1998, p167.

<sup>67</sup> *The Works of John Dryden: Prose 1691-1698: De Arte Graphica and Shorter Works Volume XX* University of California Press, 1989 pp54-5.

<sup>68</sup> Kemp, Martin and Wallace, Marina *Spectacular Bodies: The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now* (University of California, 2000).

This fact seems in itself to contradict the traditional view of painting as a purely spatial art form; but Kiefer *explicitly* interrogates the spatial/temporal distinction by means of incorporating *text* into his paintings. This constitutes the direct conflation of a temporal art (literature) with a spatial one, outraging the purist proscription. As was mentioned earlier, Kiefer is liable to transcribe onto his canvases lengthy passages from poets such as Celan, as in *Der Rhein*. And – to make another simplistic, but nonetheless true, remark -- to read the text adds to the time involved in looking at the paintings. A similar result is achieved if a poem is displayed *alongside* a painting, as was the case at Kiefer's retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy, where (also as mentioned earlier) *Margarethe* and *Sulamith* were exhibited next to the text of the poem from which they take their titles -- Celan's *Todesfuge* -- so that the paintings were viewed in conjunction with reading the poem.<sup>69</sup>

In the context of time in Kiefer we also return to his extensive use of found objects. The significance of this is once again the *literal* nature of their presentation. Rather than offering a *representation* of a chair or an olive branch, for example, Kiefer offers us the actual objects. And because this means that they have no aesthetic content, the viewer's attention is directed *away* from the artwork, towards the context in which viewing is taking place (most likely an art gallery or exhibition space). The viewer, in short, becomes aware of his or her *situation*; and implicit in the latter is an awareness of *time*. That literalism creates this temporal effect is Fried's argument in his 1969 essay on Minimalism, 'Art and Objecthood (Minimalist artworks are literal in the sense that, in common with found objects, they are not representations; for example, Robert Morris's boxes made from mirror glass are *just that*, boxes made from mirror glass)'. 'The experience of literalist art', writes Fried, 'is of an object in a

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<sup>69</sup> Kiefer is not, of course, the first painter to exhibit his work alongside poetry. J M W Turner also did so, attaching a quotation from Milton's *Paradise Lost* to the frame of his *View in the Lake District: Above Coniston Fell* (1797- 8, Tate). ('Ye mists and exhalations, that now rise From hill, or steaming lake, dusky or grey Till the sun paint your fleecy skirts with gold In honor to the world's great Author rise'). Rossetti is another painter to have attached poems to paintings, as in *Proserpine* (1874, Tate) – consequently attracting Babbitt's wrath, as mentioned earlier.

situation - one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder'.<sup>70</sup> A 'situation' has duration, and it is for this reason that Fried characterizes Minimalism pejoratively as 'paradigmatically theatrical'.<sup>71</sup> In his view, this is of course a highly undesirable state of affairs, because it contradicts the interdiction against the mixing of temporal and spatial genres; but it is the effect that Kiefer nevertheless achieves, delivering a blow to a principal tenet of modernist criticism in the process.

Other formal means are applied to the same end, notably the combination in the same painting of different viewing modes. Of this, *Germany's Spiritual Heroes (Deutschlands Geisteshelden)* (1973)(**Plate 19**) is a revealing example.<sup>72</sup> Here, as in *Iconoclastic Controversy* (mentioned earlier) and many other paintings, Kiefer employs devices that establish illusionistic depth in combination with others that simultaneously *deny* it; and this draws attention to the *process* of looking. The sharp orthogonals of the planking create a strong impression of recession, at the same time as the wood grain pattern on the timbers – which has been rendered in charcoal in a stylized, non-realistic fashion -- draws the eye back to the surface of the canvas. It is the abrupt *conjunction* of these two viewing modes that makes the viewer conscious of them (a similar effect is achieved by Kiefer's frequent mixture of figuration with elements of abstraction, as in the case of *Hero und Leander*, mentioned in the previous chapter, in which an area of color having no apparent referential function has been added to a relatively straightforward seascape). The effect of this self-consciousness is to focus attention once again on his or her situation, engaged in the viewing process. But Kiefer also creates a sense in the viewer of being somehow situated in the fictive space of the painting *itself*. For we are drawn into the composition, firstly because of the painting's very large scale (over 18 square meters), which makes the *depicted* space appear to be the

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<sup>70</sup> Fried, Michael 'Art and Objecthood (1969)' <http://www.scaruffi.com/art/fried.pdf>. Accessed 12 November 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Fried, 1969.

<sup>72</sup> Wagner's name is inscribed on the painting, along with that of Beuys, Friedrich, and the symbolist painter Arnold Böcklin amongst others. Rosenthal draws attention to the 'theatrical' nature of the setting. (1987, p26.) Lauterwein notes that it 'appears to be based on a photograph of the communal hall in a Hitler Youth hostel.' (2007 p56.) It is suggestive of Valhalla, which features in the *Ring Cycle*.

continuation of ours, and secondly because of the absence of figures, for since it would appear to be no-one else's space, we assume it must be our own. In all of these ways, then, Kiefer creates a sense of situated-ness, and consequently of duration.<sup>73</sup> A further temporal dimension is created by the combination of highly emphatic vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines in the composition, which keeps the viewer's eye in almost constant motion around it; and movement, of course, requires time. In this regard – the use of straight lines to create motion and hence temporality – a connection might be made between Kiefer and Piet Mondrian.<sup>74</sup> As Harry Cooper has noted, the vertical and horizontal lines that create the composition in many of Mondrian's paintings in the style he called 'Neo-plasticism' such as *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray, and Blue* (1921) (**Plate 20**), have this same effect, which for Mondrian – a committed Theosophist -- had spiritual connotations; in his view, for a painting to point *beyond* itself to a temporal dimension was analogous with the phenomenal world pointing beyond itself to a metaphysical realm.<sup>75</sup>

But an attentive reader may have noted something of a tension here. For Mondrian's work -- a paradigmatic example of pure abstraction and a major component of the twentieth century modernist canon -- might be assumed to be consistent with the *ne plus ultra* of artistic purity; and a sense of temporality is therefore perhaps the very *last* thing we might expect to find in it. Yet not only is it very much in evidence, as I

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<sup>73</sup> Anna Brailovsky sees a connection between this aspect of Kiefer's work and the so-called 'distancing effect [*Verfremdungseffekte*]' found in Brechtian theatre. (See Brailovsky, Anna 'The Epic Tableau: *Verfremdungseffekte* in Anselm Kiefer's *Varus*' *New German Critique* No 71, *Memories of Germany* (Spring-Summer 1997) pp115-138).

<sup>74</sup> Kiefer explicitly references Mondrian in his 1976 painting, *Piet Mondrian-Hermannsschlacht*. (Visser Collection, Retie, Belgium). In the opinion of Ernst van Alphen, the painting symbolizes Kiefer's *Bilderstreit* [artistic struggle] with abstraction, represented by Mondrian's *oeuvre*, which 'emblemizes a pictorial tradition that he wanted to leave behind.' (Alphen, Ernst van *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory* Stanford University Press, 1997 p6.)

<sup>75</sup> See Cooper, Harry 'Popular Models: Fox-Trot and Jazz Band in Mondrian's Abstraction' in Leggio, James (Ed) *Music and Modern Art* Garland Publishing Inc, 2002.

have just demonstrated, but it was also a quality to which Mondrian himself aspired in his work. Nor is he alone amongst modernist painters in this regard. Indeed, for some the issue of temporality was thoroughly central to their practice, as in the case of Morgan Russell, the founder (with Stanton Macdonald-Wright) of what is known as ‘Synchromism’. The latter refers to painting consciously intended to evoke time by means of ‘color rhythms’ – that is, the organization of color into periodically *recurring* patterns, with the temporal dimension arising from the time implicit in the notion of recurrence. Thus Russell wrote of his color rhythms that they ‘lend a painting a temporal dimension; they create the illusion of the painting developing over a period of time, just like a piece of music.’<sup>76</sup>

The rhythmic possibilities of color were known also to the painter perhaps most closely associated with the idea of temporality in painting, Paul Klee. What Klee understood, as Shaw-Miller comments, was above all that ‘the roving eye can take things at its own pace’.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, that painting had a temporal element could, in the words of Klee himself, be ‘easily proved’.<sup>78</sup> And time was likewise a central concept in Cubism, where it was associated with the idea of a subject moving through space to accommodate cubism’s multiple perspectives. This was what was indicated by the critic Roger Allard’s claim that Jean Metzinger’s work represented ‘elements of a synthesis situated in time’.<sup>79</sup> Metzinger himself remarked that whereas ‘formerly a picture took possession of space, now it reigns also in time.’<sup>80</sup> More recently, Rasula has reiterated this view of Cubism, observing that the latter’s multiple viewpoints cannot fail to evoke temporality ‘like a line of footprints on a beach’.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Rasula, 2016 p44.

<sup>77</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2002 p147.

<sup>78</sup> *Diaries*, quoted in Duchting, Hajo *Paul Klee/Painting and Music* Prestel-Verlag, Munich and New York 1997 p9.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Kern, Stephen *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* Harvard University Press, 2003 p143.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Kern, 2003 p145.

<sup>81</sup> Rasula, 2016 p44. Other commentators have nevertheless *disputed* this aspect of Cubism. Stephen Kern argues that ‘no matter how many successive views of an object are combined, the canvas is experienced in a single instant (aside from the time necessary for the eye to scan the surface).’ (Kern, 2003 p22.) Painting, in short, is ‘incapable of expressing time.’ (Kern, 2003 p22.)

What we begin to see, then, is a marked divergence between modernist *criticism* on the one hand and modernist *practice* on the other. Greenberg's antidote to the artistic *mélange* in which the arts were in danger of losing their identity took the form of the other arts emulating music's absolute form; but he could not see, or refused to see, that this would not banish the temporal from painting. Indeed, as Rasula points out, the effect of abstraction – the logical conclusion of the doctrine of medium specificity – is an *increased* emphasis on time, due to the distending of 'the instantaneous quality of the glance'.<sup>82</sup> This renders the experience of abstract painting for the viewer 'more proximate to the sensation of music'.<sup>83</sup> Rather than moving painting and music further apart, medium specificity serves in this way paradoxically to draw them closer together.

Thus far, we have seen that Kiefer's work constitutes an attack on two of the principal tenets of artistic purity. Its figurative and synthesizing nature contradicts the precepts of medium specificity, and the presence of a temporal element – achieved by means of complex imagery, the incorporation of text, literalism, and various formal devices -- belies the assumption that painting is a strictly spatial discipline. What we also begin to see from a consideration of time in Kiefer is that it is likewise a considerable presence in practices often cited as canonically modernist. I turn now to the way that his work also undermines the remaining central axiom of purity, namely that each art addresses itself exclusively to a specific sense organ.

### **Synesthesia and the *Gesamtsensorischeswerk***

As was mentioned earlier, the division of the arts on the basis of the sense organ by which they are perceived has generally been a binary one: an art directs itself either to the eye (as is the case with sculpture and painting), or to the ear (as with poetry and music). No account is taken in this discourse of the other three senses, which are

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<sup>82</sup> Rasula, 2016 p18.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.



relegated from the aesthetic sphere.<sup>84</sup> What Kiefer accomplishes, however, is the reintroduction to the latter of the neglected sense of *touch*. This is the result of the intensely tactile quality of the paintings, which stimulates this sense in the viewer. It is a quality that becomes more and more prevalent in his work after around 1980, when surface ‘physical materiality and visual complexity’ started to become ‘major sources of interest’ in the paintings, as Rosenthal observes.<sup>85</sup> In part, the tactility of the paintings is a result of Kiefer’s proclivity for multiple layers of thick impasto paint. A striking recent example of this can be seen in *Nubes pluant iustum* [Let the skies pour down righteousness], from 2016 (**Plates 21-23**).<sup>86</sup> Here, the fictive vegetation has been built up in so many layers that it has become almost three-dimensional. One could be forgiven for assuming that instead of paint, Kiefer has modeled his forms in clay; and the sculptural effect is heightened by his customary practice of applying shellac (a resin secreted by the female lac bug) as a glaze, so that the paint starts to resemble smooth enamel pottery. Greenberg would have called this ‘furtive bas-relief’, precisely the kind of tactility to which he objected, since its effect is to move painting closer to sculpture.<sup>87</sup>

Also contributing to the tactile element are the many extraneous or non-art materials used by Kiefer, which produce a wide variety of textures, from the grittiness of the sand in *For Ingeborg Bachmann: The Sand from the Urns* (**Plate 24**), to the softness of the straw in *Margarethe* (**Plate 12**), and the rough surface and sharp

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<sup>84</sup> As Shaw-Miller notes, Hegel is amongst many commentators to have ‘dismissed’ the ‘lower’ senses of touch, taste and smell from the aesthetic domain on the grounds of their association with sensuous pleasure. (2013, p21.) But the idea that there are only five senses has itself been subject to question. For example, the linguist Sean Day has argued for an additional sense of *temperature*. And the idea of a ‘sixth sense’ was a familiar one even in the time of Aristotle, who proposed the idea of a ‘common sense [sensus communis]’, for those operations of perception that cannot be explained in terms of the senses considered individually. (Shaw-Miller, 2013 pp10-13.)

<sup>85</sup> 1987, p76.

<sup>86</sup> The title of this work comes from a liturgy used at Advent known as ‘The Advent Prose’. The Latin text begins ‘Rorate coeli desuper et nubes pluant iustum [Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness].’

<sup>87</sup> ‘After Abstract Expressionism’, in Greenberg, Clement *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance 1957-1969* (Edited by John O’Brian) The University of Chicago Press 1993, p126.

edges of the sheets of lead in *Gehäutete Landschaft* (Plate 25). And he is in the habit also of leaving his paintings *outdoors* for extended periods, where they interact with the elements to create a further set of tactile effects. Baked hard by the sun, the paint is liable to crack, or flake and peel off, whilst other materials dissolve in rainwater or fuse together. On occasion, Kiefer will subject his canvases to electrolysis, in which an electric current is applied, resulting in a chemical reaction and the formation of a sediment. Alternatively, he will scrape or hack away areas of thickly encrusted paint with a palette knife, creating an even more variegated surface.

The result of all of this is that the experience of the viewer becomes a *multisensory* one, in which both vision and touch are mobilized. Operating on a combination of the senses, Kiefer's work -- to borrow a phrase coined by Shaw-Miller -- is a *Gesamtsensorischeswerk*.<sup>88</sup> But the source of the sensual stimulus is one and the same, namely, the paintings. We *see* the texture of the paintings, without actually having to touch them. And what this shows is the way that touch is *implicated* in vision, and that the two faculties in some degree operate in concert. The experience of the spectator, in short, is a form of what is known as *synesthesia*. This is the condition whereby the stimulation of one sense produces a response in another, so that sounds are 'seen', and colors 'heard', for example. In neuroscience, which has been aware of it since the end of the nineteenth century, synesthesia is generally seen as pathological. Yet it has also been suggested that the pathological condition recognized by neuroscience is merely the extreme form of *normal* perception, 'the end point of a continuum on which sensory correspondences vary in strength,' as the psychologist Lawrence E Marks puts it.<sup>89</sup> Synesthesia, in short, may represent the norm, and the fact that we are unaware of this is due to cultural indoctrination.

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<sup>88</sup> Shaw-Miller, in Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011 p191.

<sup>89</sup> Marks, Lawrence E 'On Colored-Hearing Synesthesia: Cross-Modal Translations of Sensory Dimensions' *Psychological Bulletin* Vol 82, No 3 May 1975 p316.

Literally, synesthesia refers to two or more sensations taking place at the same time, as Shaw-Miller notes (from the Greek 'syn'= together, and 'aisthesis'= sensation).<sup>90</sup> The term seems to have been coined by the psychiatrist Jules Millet, whose book *Audition Colorée* was published in 1892, but there are intimations of the concept considerably earlier.<sup>91</sup> There is for example a suggestion of the idea of the mutual dependence of the senses in Herder's remark that sight and hearing 'decode each other reciprocally.'<sup>92</sup> We might say the same of the philosopher Robert Vischer's claim, in the context of his theoretical statement concerning the doctrine of *Einfühlung*, that 'we can often observe in ourselves the curious fact that a visual stimulus is experienced not so much with our eyes as with a different sense in another part of our body'.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps most notably, however, synesthetic perception is evoked in Baudelaire's concept of sensory 'correspondences', from the eponymous poem of 1857 (part of the *Fleurs du Mal* cycle). 'Like lingering echoes from distant places', writes Baudelaire,

Reverberating in a profound unity  
Vast as night and as light  
Perfumes, colors and sounds correspond.<sup>94</sup>

The contrary, that the senses did *not* interact, seemed to Baudelaire most unlikely. It 'would be really surprising', he remarked later (in the context of a discussion of Wagner's music), 'if notes were not able to suggest colors, if colors gave no idea of notes, and notes and colors could not convey thoughts.'<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Shaw-Miller, in Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011 p192.

<sup>91</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2013 p12.

<sup>92</sup> 'On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul (1778)', quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p34.

<sup>93</sup> *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics* (1873) quoted in Koss, 2010 p69.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p22.

<sup>95</sup> 'Tannhäuser in Paris (1861)', quoted in Metken, Günter 'Wagner and the Visual Arts', in Müller, Ulrich and Wapnewski, Peter (Eds) *Wagner Handbook* Harvard University Press, 1992 p356.

It is certainly striking that, to a considerable degree, synesthetic perception seems evident in everyday experience, most particularly in the phenomenon of cross-sensory metaphor, such as when sounds are described as 'bright' or 'dark'. This may be because human thought processes are themselves 'largely metaphorical', as the linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson observe.<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, it may be proof of the synesthesia that, in the view of certain commentators, constitutes the true condition of perception. In this light, cross-modal metaphors are seen as rather akin to what psychologists refer to as *parapraxis*, whereby an apparently inconsequential 'slip of the tongue' is revealing of a deeper psychological truth.

One of the twentieth century writers to have made a considerable contribution to the debate regarding synesthesia was Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), who believed that awareness of the synesthetic nature of experience – which he saw as the norm -- has been repressed from consciousness. He believed, furthermore, that painting could restore this awareness. And we can see Kiefer's work as illustrative of this idea, namely that painting serves to reacquaint us with the synesthesia at the core of perception.<sup>97</sup> Before considering this aspect of his work, however, let us go into Merleau-Ponty's theory in a little more detail.

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<sup>96</sup> *Metaphors we Live By* (1980/2003), quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p10.

<sup>97</sup> An indirect connection between Kiefer and Merleau-Ponty already exists via Beuys and installation art. As Claire Bishop writes, Merleau-Ponty's theories had a considerable impact on artists and critics in the 1960s. (Bishop, Claire *Installation Art: A Critical History* Tate Publishing, London 2005 pp50-4.) In particular, it was seen that his ideas about the relationship of the body to the environment provided a way to theorize the emerging discipline of Minimalist sculpture, the effect of which, as was mentioned earlier, is to draw attention to the environment in which the viewer finds him or herself. And it is this aspect of Minimalist sculpture that is routinely cited as why it can be considered the 'crux' between traditional sculpture and installation art, amongst the pioneering practitioners of which was Beuys, well known as an early mentor for Kiefer, who is himself noted for his installations almost as much as for his paintings.

## The 'Ground of Being'

Synesthetic perception, Merleau-Ponty tells us, 'is the rule'.<sup>98</sup> This is the conclusion he reaches in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (first published 1945) in the course of his broader phenomenological project, which is to discover how it is that we render the world *intelligible* to ourselves. His particular goal is to explain how reality discloses itself to us in ways *other* than via the conceptual. He is thus opposed to Idealism. And in keeping with the re-orientation of experience away from the mental and towards the physical that characterizes Phenomenology -- in virtue of which the latter comes under the rubric of materialism -- he looks not to the mind, but to the *body*.

Merleau-Ponty proposes that there is a primordial, pre-cognitive or 'ground' level of perception, the level of what he calls our 'brute and savage being'.<sup>99</sup> And at this level, there is no distinction between the senses. Such distinctions, as for example the distinction of sight from touch, are 'unknown in primordial perception'.<sup>100</sup> Thus the ground level of perception is characterized by synesthesia. At this level, 'I perceive in a total way', he tells us, 'with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once.'<sup>101</sup> The separation of the senses into discrete entities occurs at a higher, cognitive level of perception.

At the ground level of being, the senses -- operating as a synesthetic unity -- enable

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<sup>98</sup> *Phenomenology of Perception* (first published 1945), quoted in Shaw-Miller, in Finger and Follet (Eds), 2011 p195.

<sup>99</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice *The Visible and The Invisible* (First Published 1964) Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern University Press, 1969 p200.

<sup>100</sup> 'Cézanne's Doubt [First published 1945]', in Johnson (Ed) 1993. The American psychoanalyst Paul Schilder had earlier reached the same conclusion. In 1950, Schilder wrote that 'we should not forget that every sensation is generally synaesthetic. This means that there does not exist any primary isolation between the different senses. The isolation is secondary.' (Quoted in Shaw-Miller, in Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011 p195.)

<sup>101</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 'The Film and the New Psychology (originally delivered as a lecture, March 13 1945)' *Sense and Non-Sense* Translated by Hubert Dreyfus, Northwestern University Press, 1964 p50.

the formation of complex bodily skills that constitute what Merleau-Ponty calls 'motor intentionality' to distinguish it from intentionality, which is a function of cognition.<sup>102</sup> In effect, motor intentionality represents a form of *knowledge*. Thus when Merleau-Ponty writes that the perceiving mind is 'an *incarnated* mind [emphasis added],' he means not simply that perception is dependent on bodily sensation, but that the body itself acquires a kind of understanding.<sup>103</sup> An object, in short, is 'understood' by the body, and it is this paradoxical fact, he contends, that is absent from the idealist account of perception.

The intelligibility of the world, then, depends for Merleau-Ponty at least in part on the bodily skills of motor intentionality; but we are necessarily *unaware* of their operation. Were we so aware, perception would become impossible, because our attention would be directed towards them. Awareness of motor intentionality, and its synesthetic basis, must therefore be *withdrawn* from experience in order for experience to take place. It is for this reason that we have 'unlearned how to see, hear, and generally speaking, feel,' as he puts it.<sup>104</sup> Part of this 'unlearning' is constituted by the mental separation of the five senses, a separation that various discourses have served to reinforce -- not least the doctrine of artistic purity, which as we have seen insists upon it. In Michel Foucault's view, a watershed moment occurred around 1600, at the beginning of what he calls the 'Classical' age, the point from which 'the eye was thenceforth destined to see and only to see, the ear to hear and only to hear.'<sup>105</sup> The philosopher Michel Serres, who shares Merleau-Ponty's view that synesthetic perception constitutes the norm (although he does not use the

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<sup>102</sup> 'We are brought to the recognition of...something which is an anticipation of, or arrival at, the objective and is ensured by the body itself as a motor power, a "motor project"...a "motor intentionality."' (*Phenomenology of Perception* (First published 1945) Translated by Colin Smith, Routledge, New York and London 2008 p114.) As Sean Dorrance Kelly notes, certain developments in neuroscience since the 1990s have added weight to Merleau-Ponty's basic distinction between cognitive and bodily understandings of space. ('Merleau-Ponty on the Body', *Ratio* XV December 2002 pp376-391.)

<sup>103</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice *The Primacy of Perception* Edited and Translated by James M Edie, Northwestern University Press, 1964 p3.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Shaw-Miller, in Finger and Follet (Eds), 2011 p195.

<sup>105</sup> *The Order of Things*, quoted in Shaw-Miller, in Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011 p192.

term synesthesia, referring instead to the 'mingled' body), likewise sees the separation of the senses as the result of cognitive activity.<sup>106</sup> 'The intellect, perhaps,' writes Serres, 'and language most certainly, carry out this performance of isolation and selection.'<sup>107</sup>

But it is nevertheless possible to *rediscover* the hidden synesthetic dimension of experience; and this, in Merleau-Ponty's view, is the task for which painting is ideally equipped.<sup>108</sup> He sees painting as uniquely able to give expression to what might be called the 'silent' domain of pre-reflexive bodily relationships and engagements by which the body gathers information about the world. In this way, painting shows how things become determinate and intelligible. 'Light, lighting, shadows, reflections,' he writes, 'the painter's gaze asks them what they do to suddenly cause something to be and to be *this* thing, what they do to compose this talisman of a world, to make us see the visible'.<sup>109</sup> He believes that painting can reawaken in us a sense of those corporeal skills whose existence within us we have forgotten. 'Quality, light, color, depth', he writes in the context of the Lascaux cave paintings, 'which are there before us, are only these because they awaken an echo in our bodies'.<sup>110</sup> It is this echo that painting serves, figuratively speaking, to amplify.

The task of painting, in short, is for Merleau-Ponty to reconnect us with the ground of being. In his estimation, pre-eminent in this regard is Cézanne, but Kiefer's work accords perhaps equally well with his theories to the extent that it shows how touch and vision operate in concert. By drawing attention to texture in a context in which we would not normally expect it to feature – painting – Kiefer makes us aware that it

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<sup>106</sup> *The Five Senses* (1985/2008), quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p17.

<sup>107</sup> *The Five Senses* (1985/2008), quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p43.

<sup>108</sup> Merleau-Ponty's ideas concerning art are mainly articulated in three essays, 'Cézanne's Doubt (1945)', 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence (1952)' and 'Eye and Mind (1961)'. Even though he himself had privileged painting, it is in connection with installation art that his ideas are most often invoked, as it has tended to be seen as a better illustration of his theories than painting due to a perception that the experience of painting is a *mediated* one, and consequently requires a degree of conceptualization (see Bishop, 2005 p50).

<sup>109</sup> 'Eye and Mind', in Merleau-Ponty 1961/1993 p128.

<sup>110</sup> 'Eye and Mind', in Merleau-Ponty 1961/1993 p125.

is, in fact, an ever-present but unacknowledged aspect of vision. The paintings serve to illustrate Merleau-Ponty's contention that 'we see...the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects [emphasis added]'.<sup>111</sup> In this way, they reveal the synesthetic nature of ground level visual experience. At the same time, the paintings contradict the assumption of modernist criticism that painting addresses itself solely to the eye.

As was the case with the temporal element of Kiefer's work, however, consideration of its tactile aspect draws attention to the way that – despite the purist interdiction – an appeal to the sense of touch has also been a feature of modernist *practice*. As mentioned earlier, tactility has at times been a quality consciously sought in modernist painting, perhaps most notably in Cubism. Braque described the Cubist spatial approach as 'tactile' or 'manual', because it enabled him 'to make people want to touch what has been painted as well as look at it'.<sup>112</sup> Once again, then, it seems that modernist criticism is at odds with modernist practice. Some commentators have also drawn attention to the tactility present in abstraction. For example, Thierry de Duve sees it as an important factor in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, writing of the 'tactility visible on the surface or stratified in thickness' in his paintings, a 'tactility of adhesion in the works made on the wall, or indeed of detachment in the canvases mounted at some distance from the wall on little metal braces', and the 'tactility of sharpness in the unframed/reframed works'.<sup>113</sup> It is hard also to deny the tactile quality in much of the work produced by the movement known as *Art Informel*, such as Alberto Burri's *Sacking and Red* (1954, Tate), which as is evident from the title features a rough piece of sacking attached to the canvas. Even Greenberg himself, apparently forgetting his own rules, has observed an appeal to the sense of touch in the work of Jules Olitski. 'The grainy surface Olitski creates

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<sup>111</sup> 'Cézanne's Doubt', in Merleau-Ponty 1961/1993. Merleau-Ponty adds that 'Cézanne even claimed that we see their odor'. (Ibid.)

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Richardson, John *A Life of Picasso* Volume 2: 1907-1917 Jonathan Cape, London 1996 p105.

<sup>113</sup> De Duve, in Colaizzi and Schubert (Eds) 2009 p105. De Duve suggests that abstraction's emphasis on tactility was intended to illustrate painting's *irreproducibility*, which was seen as an advantage over art forms based on mechanical reproduction.



with his way of spraying', comments Greenberg,

is a new kind of paint surface. It offers tactile associations hitherto foreign, more or less to picture making, and it does new things with color.<sup>114</sup>

And this was despite his earlier remark that, with Manet and the Impressionists, 'the question stopped being defined as one of color versus drawing, and became one of *purely optical experience* against optical experience as revised or modified by tactile associations [emphasis added]'.<sup>115</sup>

What this entire discussion of Kiefer and purity has revealed is that his work has both a temporal and a multisensory aspect, and this constitutes an attack on purity insofar as it involves the transgression of the boundaries between the arts defined by time versus space and specificity of sensory reception. And at this point we return, finally, to Wagner; for, as we shall see, the effect of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is transgression of precisely the same kind. It arises from what might seem a contradiction in terms, namely the fact that music is *visual*.

### **Time becomes Space**

We have seen that what Kiefer achieves is to bring the synesthetic condition of the senses back to consciousness, to make *visible* the mutual imbrication of touch and vision. And in this respect, a meaningful connection exists with the experience of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is likewise a multisensory one. For Wagner, the source of the unique power of the combined artwork undoubtedly lies in its multisensory appeal. This is nevertheless still limited to sight and hearing, for the composer subscribes to the view that aesthetic experience is confined to these faculties. They

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<sup>114</sup>'Introduction to Jules Olitski at the Venice Biennale' in Greenberg, 1993 p230.

<sup>115</sup>'Modernist Painting [1961]', reproduced in Frascina, Francis and Harrison, Charles (Eds) *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* Harper and Row, London 1982.

constitute, he tells us, 'the entire art-receptive man'.<sup>116</sup> As he explains in 'Art and Revolution', the eye perceives expressive visual signals, whilst the ear perceives expressive sounds and expressive speech. In the context of the 'original Union' of the arts (that is, Attic Tragedy), these three areas of expression were the domain of dance (with its expressive gestures), music, and poetry respectively. In combination, these were able to address the *whole* spectator, someone 'who not only hears but also sees'.<sup>117</sup> In common with Kiefer, what Wagner accomplishes in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – by pairing music with a visual experience – is a manifestation, or amplification, of the synesthesia that characterizes perception. But there are cogent arguments that music is *itself* synesthetic, to the extent that it is always accompanied by a visual element. And what the *Gesamtkunstwerk* makes manifest is thus precisely this element, which is already latent in music. It is for this reason that Shaw-Miller characterizes music as 'an imminent *Gesamtkunstwerk*'.<sup>118</sup>

The question of the relationship of the sonic and the visual underpinned the nineteenth century debate regarding 'absolute' versus 'program' music, a central figure in which was the influential Viennese music critic – and Wagner's *bête noire* - Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904). We have encountered the idea of music as absolute in the context of the discussion of artistic purity. Music is 'absolute' to the extent that it is able to operate *independently*, that is, without the help of anything outside itself such as a text. That it is able to do so began to be recognized as a result of the proliferation of instrumental music after around 1800 -- notably in the form of the symphony -- when music became less frequently paired with song. Used as a category, 'absolute' music refers to music that stands *alone*. It is in this format that music has exercised a profound influence on modernism. On the one hand, the non-referential aspect of absolute music was greatly valued by the Romantics, who saw

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<sup>116</sup>'The Art-Work of the Future', in Wagner, 1895/1993 p100.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. Shaw-Miller notes that Aleksandr Scriabin's *Mysterium*, an unfinished work begun in 1903, was a later version of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that attempted to incorporate the senses of both taste and smell as well as vision and hearing. (2002, p62.)

<sup>118</sup> In Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011.

this 'abstract' quality as an intimation of the infinite, as Peter Vergo notes.<sup>119</sup> It was for this reason that E T A Hoffman could claim of music, in his essay on Beethoven of 1813, that it is 'the most romantic of the arts – one might almost say, the only genuinely romantic one – for its sole object is the infinite'.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, absolute music served as we have seen as the exemplar of the fusion of form with content so prized by twentieth century modernist criticism, providing the paradigmatic model of artistic purity.

Hanslick was absolute music's staunchest advocate. It was not that he was definitely *opposed* to music that compromised its autonomy by an alliance with poetry, for example, but that he considered this to be of significantly lesser merit than 'pure' or absolute music. 'The union of poetry with music and opera', he tells us, 'is a morganatic marriage.'<sup>121</sup> For this reason, Hanslick was not a fan of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. But his particular scorn was reserved for what is known as 'program' music, or music that seeks to evoke an image or narrative. Program music, in short, is *referential*. Notable examples include Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* of 1830, as well as the descriptive music of the river Rhine with which Wagner's *Ring Cycle* begins. For Hanslick, program music was a symptom of a kind of degeneracy. This is evident from his contemptuous dismissal of the program symphonies of Franz Liszt as 'vision-promoting medicine', that is, as akin to a hallucinogenic drug.<sup>122</sup> The problem, as he saw it, with program music was that it seemed to undermine precisely what was most valuable in music, namely its lack of referentiality. To link music to an image destroyed its absolute status.

There are grounds, however, for suggesting that the absolute/program opposition is a false one. As Shaw-Miller has argued, the visual is *always* present in music, and in a number of ways. The visual element that distinguishes program music is as much a

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<sup>119</sup> Vergo, Peter *That Divine Order* Phaidon, London and New York 2005, p276.

<sup>120</sup> 'Beethoven's Instrumental Music', Reproduced in Harrison, Wood and Gaiger (Eds) 2000 p1034.

<sup>121</sup> Quoted in Shaw-Miller, in Finger and Follett (Eds), 2011 p200.

<sup>122</sup> *The Beautiful in Music* (1854), quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p40.

part of so-called absolute music, which has proved to be something of a chimera. Music, in short, is never 'alone'.

Shaw-Miller is a pre-eminent commentator in the field of the visual component of music, of which he identifies at least three aspects.<sup>123</sup> The first of these is the visual representation of music in the form of *scores*. These have played an important role in music's acquiring equal status with the other arts, for which purpose it 'needed to be visible'.<sup>124</sup> It needed to exist in some kind of concrete form. The accession of music to fine art status was ritualized by the purchase of canonical musical scores by national museums, where they could be viewed alongside a nation's masterpieces of painting and sculpture. Much more recently, the importance of the score as a visual object has been emphasized by the appearance of what are known as 'graphic' scores, which depart radically from conventional musical notation (using symbols that are at best only suggestive) and on occasion might easily be mistaken for examples of abstract art. For example, Shaw-Miller notes the similarity between Earle Brown's score for *December 1952* -- which consists entirely of vertical and horizontal lines of varying width -- and the grid system employed by Mondrian.<sup>125</sup> The role of the performer in these cases is to offer his or her interpretation of the visual cues. Informing the concept of graphic scores, then, is the presupposition of a direct connection between the visual and the sonic, such that images can suggest sounds.

There is also a decidedly visual aspect in the discursive practice constituted by modern concert-going, from the stage lighting to the concert hall setting and architecture, the attire of the spectators and the movements and gestures of the performers. Indeed, since at least the nineteenth century, public concerts have had the aspect of social occasions, associated perhaps as much with seeing and being seen as with listening to music. And as Shaw-Miller observes, part of the significance

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<sup>123</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2013.

<sup>124</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2013 p36.

<sup>125</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2013 p64.

of John Cage's notorious 4'33" was to reveal the various visual attributes of the discourse surrounding music by means of *silencing* the latter's sounding element.

Most important of all regarding the visual in music, however, is the *mental* visualization that seems inescapably to accompany listening to music, whether or not this is intended, as in program music. Just as images suggest sounds, sounds suggest images. As Leon Botstein has observed, we find in music 'an inexhaustible supply of landscapes, emotions and story lines'.<sup>126</sup> The way that music produces images in the listener's mind is particularly evident from the *ekphrasis* that has so often accompanied it, whereby it is almost universally described in visual terms. An illuminating example of this is Hoffmann's description of the music of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (first performed 1808). 'Does not the lovely theme of the *Andante con moto* in A Flat major', asks Hoffmann,

sound like the voice of a propitious spirit that fills our breast with hope and comfort? But even here the awful phantom that seized our hearts in the *Allegro* threatens at every moment to emerge from the storm-cloud into which it disappeared, so that the comforting figures around us rapidly flee from its lightening-flashes [sic].<sup>127</sup>

Later in the symphony, the full orchestra 'bursts forth,' it seems to Hoffmann, 'like a shaft of blinding sunlight'.<sup>128</sup> And what is significant about his remarks is that they were intended to celebrate music's absolute status, that is, precisely its *freedom* from anything outside itself; yet they have the opposite effect, showing instead that the harder music struggles for independence, the greater is its need to enlist the help of the visual.

The visual imagery that music suggests to us seems independent of volition. It arises – so it would appear – of its own accord, and this is likewise a central characteristic of synesthetic experience, which is *involuntary*. To the extent that it produces

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<sup>126</sup> 'Hearing is Seeing: Thoughts on the History of Music and the Imagination (1995)', quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p162.

<sup>127</sup> *Kreisleriana*, quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 pp33-4.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

unwilled imagery in the mind of the listener, it therefore seems not unreasonable to characterize listening to music as a form of synesthesia. And even Hanslick, absolute music's greatest champion, is prepared to acknowledge this. 'In pitch, intensity, tempo, and the rhythm of tones,' he writes,

the ear offers itself a configuration whose impression has that analogy with specific visual perception which different sense modes can attain amongst themselves. Just as physiologically there is a substituting of one sense for another up to a certain limit, so also aesthetically there is a certain substituting of one sense impression for another.<sup>129</sup>

Thus in the form of music's visualization in scores, the multiple visual aspects of the discourse of which music forms a part, and the visual imagery it conjures in the mind of the listener, visibility seems to accompany music like an omnipresent shadow. And what Wagner achieves by marrying sound to vision in the context of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is to *reveal* this shadow. Just as Kiefer's work attests to the way that touch is implicated in vision, then, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* attests to the way that vision is implicated in hearing, making visible music's silent visual partner. And it seems that Wagner is not unaware that it does so. Indeed, there is an intimation of something similar to synesthesia in his writing, so that in some degree he anticipates Baudelaire. 'We thus see', he writes in *Opera and Drama*,

that where the Hearing is to be roused to greater 'sensuous' interest, the messenger involuntarily has to address the eye as well: Eye and Ear must mutually assure each other of the higher-pitched message, before they can transmit it convincingly to the Feeling.<sup>130</sup>

The idea of the 'mutual assurance' of the senses seems highly suggestive of sensual interaction. Later on, however, after his encounter with the work of Schopenhauer, Wagner began to think of the connection between music and image in *metaphysical* terms, as is evident from a series of essays from the early 1870s ('Beethoven', 'Music of the Future' and 'The Destiny of Opera'). Essentially, his argument in these essays

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<sup>129</sup> *The Beautiful in Music* (1854), quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p40.

<sup>130</sup> Wagner, 1893/1995 p318.

is that the music in an artistic synthesis expresses the essence that is embodied by the dramatic action, and *vice versa*. The music is a reflection of the inner life of the characters on stage, and conversely, the drama 'actually taking place before our eyes is a visible image of the music,' as he puts it in 'Beethoven'.<sup>131</sup>

Embodied within music, then, and amplified by the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is a contradiction of the modernist precept that art forms are mono-sensory phenomena. Music addresses itself to vision as well as hearing, just as painting addresses itself to touch as well as vision (as Kiefer demonstrates). But from the presence of the visual element in music we might also draw the somewhat startling conclusion that music -- the paradigmatic temporal art -- has a *spatial* component, for what is visual is also spatial. This constitutes a *second* devastating challenge to purity provided by music and made abundantly manifest in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in which music is translated into visual and therefore spatial form. In Kiefer and Wagner alike, then, the seemingly immutable boundary between the temporal and the spatial is fatally undermined. Just as Kiefer draws attention to the temporality of a spatial medium, Wagner draws attention to the spatiality of a temporal medium, showing that music is not only not purely sonic, but also not purely temporal. Thus the vaunted undiluted purity of absolute music as an art form of pure sound and temporality turns out to be an *Ignis fatuus*. And if this is so -- if not even music is pure -- artistic purity may be unattainable.

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What has this comparison of Kiefer with Wagner in terms of synthesis and purity revealed? In the first place, that the work of both is characterized by hybridity. In the case of Wagner, this consists in a combination of the arts that mainly takes the form of juxtaposition, although the concept of 'sung drama' can be seen as a genuine synthesis. Hybridity in Kiefer takes the form of juxtaposition, but of a much more complex order than in Wagner, consisting of a combination of art historical

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Stein, 1960 p164.

categories and of art and non-art as much as of individual disciplines. Whereas the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is an integrative art form, furthermore, Kiefer's work is highly disintegrative. Where they most closely coincide is that both mount an attack – despite Wagner's purist credentials -- on the doctrine of purity, and in two principal ways. Firstly, both undermine the purist precept that holds that the effects of each art are perceptible by one sense only. And by giving an indication respectively of the tactility in painting and the visibility in music, Kiefer and Wagner add weight to Merleau-Ponty's conviction that art can bring to consciousness the synesthesia that constitutes the true condition of perception. Secondly, both show that to distinguish between the arts on the basis of time versus space is a false distinction. Temporality can be shown to be a component of painting, and spatiality a component of music.

A further set of conclusions from the present study concern the light that it sheds on modernism. For the comparison of Kiefer with Wagner has led us to consider the temporality and multisensory appeal of his work, and this has in turn drawn attention to the presence of both of these elements in various and canonical forms of modernist painting. And the consequences of this are twofold. In the first place, as has been mentioned, it demonstrates the not inconsiderable dissonance between modernist theory and praxis, and in the second, it throws into question the distinction between the postmodern and the modern. For the former is generally defined in contradistinction to the latter, to the extent that it represents the transgressing of those artistic boundaries deemed indispensable to the modernist project; yet it seems that these boundaries were also being regularly crossed in modernism. Modernism, in short, was never pure. Indeed, the very art form held up as a paragon of purity to which the other arts should aspire – music -- turns out to be composed of a hybrid of sound, vision, time and space. But the *futility* of the impulse towards purity in art is something of which certain commentators have long been aware. Amongst these is Rosalind Krauss. That purity is unachievable is the conclusion she reaches in *A Voyage on the North Sea*. Nothing, she tells us, can 'be



constituted as pure interiority'.<sup>132</sup> Purity in art is a chimera. What was impure in painting, for example, was held to be temporality and an appeal to any sense other than sight; yet both turn out to have been present in modernist painting all along. As Juan Suárez pithily remarks, 'modernism seems to have always been postmodern.'<sup>133</sup>

The impulse towards separation that informs the doctrine of purity has its counterpart in the discursive separation of the sensorium into the five senses, which modernist criticism both partly depends upon and serves to reinforce. And informing both forms of separation is a strongly ideological element, evident from the terms in which these discourses are framed. In particular, it is clear from the way that the *opposing* viewpoints are characterized. Thus the promotion of the synesthetic interpenetration of the senses has been seen as advocating a form of regression, as for example by the Zionist social critic Max Nordau, in whose view synesthesia is 'a retrogression to the very beginning of our organic development'.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, Babbitt equated artistic synthesis with degeneracy, as noted earlier. But the ideological nature of the project of modernist criticism is clear already from its characterization of artistic separation as the 'purification' of the arts, a word having connotations of *hygiene*. For purification entails the excision of what is 'impure'; thus artistic separation is associated with health, and a society that advocates it – post World War Two America, for example, which was Greenberg's *milieu* -- is by implication a healthy one.

Above all, however, the notion of artistic purity is a form of *essentialism*. This is because the 'pure' form of an art is synonymous with its essence, and the belief that of each art there exists such a form is what must underlie any attempt at separation; for the possibility of the latter presupposes the existence of these pure forms *capable* of being separated. It is this belief that unites the arguments in favor of

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<sup>132</sup> Krauss, Rosalind *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* Thames and Hudson, New York 2000 p32.

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in Rasula, 2016 p2.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2013 p23.

separation advanced variously by Lessing, Babbitt, Greenberg and Fried. Yet concealed within the project to purify the arts there lies a paradox. For it is predicated on a *prohibition* -- the injunction against the mixing of the arts -- and to prohibit a thing is to admit of its possibility. 'There would be no need', as W J T Mitchell points out, 'to say that the genres *should not* be mixed if they *could not* be mixed".<sup>135</sup> Thus predicted in its own core belief is the thing artistic purity seeks to deny; a thing which, moreover, strongly militates against the notion of essentialism, because it suggests that the immutable artistic borders upon the existence of which the possibility of separation depends are not, in fact, immutable after all. And this may explain why the argument for purity seems often to be informed by *anxiety*, so that it seems to be with some relief that Greenberg claims that the arts 'lie safe now, each within its "legitimate" boundaries'.<sup>136</sup> It is as if the crossing of preordained artistic boundaries carries with it the threat from some menacing 'other'. Accordingly, we see the use of terms derived from warfare entering the vocabulary of the debate; for the fear of the other 'manifests itself in terms of assault', as Shaw-Miller notes.<sup>137</sup> Thus the history of avant-garde painting, Greenberg tells us, 'is that of a progressive *surrender* to the resistance of its medium [emphasis added]'.<sup>138</sup> Elsewhere, he casts the arts in the character of wild animals which, having escaped their bonds, have been intrepidly 'hunted back to their mediums.'<sup>139</sup> It would seem from this almost as if there is a positive physical *danger* to be expected from the arts exceeding their boundaries.

The project of modernist criticism, in short, begins to acquire the nature of an *apophysis*; like the Player Queen in *Hamlet*, the advocates of purity protest too much. Implicit in the argument for artistic separation is the possibility of artistic synthesis, and if such a synthesis is possible, it follows that the borders between the arts cannot be fixed. But this conclusion has been openly acknowledged even within the discourse of artistic purity itself, so that doubts have appeared about the

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<sup>135</sup> *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986), quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2002 p4.

<sup>136</sup> Greenberg, in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds), pp557-8.

<sup>137</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2002 p32.

<sup>138</sup> Greenberg, in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds), 1992 pp558.

<sup>139</sup> Greenberg, in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (Eds), 1992 p558.

possibility of the project's realization. Lessing, for example, acknowledges that his temporal/spatial distinction may not be strictly enforceable. He admits that 'bodies do not exist in space only, but also in time...On the other hand, actions cannot exist independently, but must be joined to certain beings or things'.<sup>140</sup> What are advanced as essential differences between the arts turn out instead to be 'differences only of degree or focus', as Shaw-Miller notes.<sup>141</sup> Thus music is a temporal art, with a degree of spatiality. Its focus is on the sonoric, but it is also visual. Similarly, painting is a spatial art, but with a degree of temporality. Its focus is on the visual, but it is also tactile. This is the conclusion, I suggest, to be drawn from any project predicated on synthesis rather than separation. Synthesis in art constitutes the *denial* of essentialism, revealing differences between the arts to be not essential, but artificial, the product not of nature, but of discourse. From the fact that the genres can be mixed, we can gather that artistic borders cannot be precisely located; and if this is the case, if it is impossible unequivocally to define such borders, it follows that there can be no such thing as a 'pure' or essential form of a discipline.<sup>142</sup> What is implicit in any synthesizing project in art, then, is above all a fatal blow to the concept of artistic purity. Such is the devastating consequence, for the paradigmatic tenet of modernist criticism, of the silent critique constituted by artistic synthesis.

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<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2002 p9.

<sup>141</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2002 p10.

<sup>142</sup> To give Greenberg his due, he admitted in a 1978 postscript to 'Modernist Painting' that 'pure' art 'was a useful illusion'.

## Chapter 4: Wagner, Kiefer and Counter-Americanism

The whole great tendency of the Germans ran counter to the Enlightenment, and to the revelation of society which, by a crude misunderstanding, was considered its consequence.

–Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>

*In the preceding two chapters, I established connections between Kiefer and Wagner in terms of the relationship of art and society on the one hand and artistic synthesis on the other. My larger theme, as indicated in the introduction, is their mutual connection with a principal legacy of the Counter-Enlightenment, namely the deep fissure between German and Anglo-American culture in the period since approximately 1800. It is to this theme that I now turn, showing that Wagner and Kiefer can both be contextualized within the long tradition of German counter-Americanism, which from its outset was associated with the Counter-Enlightenment.*

It seems that America has always loomed large in the German consciousness. The fabled land of plenty and opportunity, America has from its inception maintained a hold on the German imagination, as is evident from the scale of German immigration to that country, particularly during the mid to late nineteenth century. Nor has Germany resisted the lure of all things American, from Hollywood movies to jazz and American pop music. But German attitudes to America have been marked by a profound ambivalence. As much as it has felt its attraction, Germany has been *repelled* by America. It would appear that, in Germany, there has been something about the very *idea* of America that has provoked hostility, a deeply felt antipathy to what the nation has been seen to *represent*. Throughout the modern period, there has existed a powerful discourse of anti-Americanism alongside the affirmative view of America. This anti-American feeling was, of course, greatly exacerbated in the twentieth century by Germany's comprehensive defeat by American-led coalitions in

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich 'The Dawn' Reproduced in Kaufman, Walter (Ed) *The Portable Nietzsche* Penguin 1954 p197.

two world wars, and the wide-scale Americanization – the more or less forcible imposition of American cultural, political and economic values – that took place in Germany following the second of these. And the sentiment has since been periodically reinvigorated, as for example during the Gulf War of 1991 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Anti-Americanism is clearly not unique to Germany; but the sense that it is in some degree an ideological loggerhead with America has translated itself there into a recognizable tradition that defines itself in contradistinction to Americanism, the core values of which it seeks in some way to reject. This is the tradition of German *counter*-Americanism. It has a long history, but its central themes have remained remarkably consistent. To a large extent, it descends from the Counter-Enlightenment; since America came to be associated -- by many notable German commentators and thinkers -- more than any other country with the consequences of the Enlightenment, the Counter-Enlightenment translated itself into counter-Americanism. In this chapter, I will briefly trace the evolution of the latter as a repository of ideals seen as increasingly under threat from Germany's ideological 'other' across the Atlantic, and show that it is to this tradition that Wagner and Kiefer both belong -- the former to the extent that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was an embodiment of the communitarian ethos seen to be at odds with American individualism, and the latter to the extent that his obdurate resistance to the major American post war styles in art has the effect of a symbolic rejection of Americanism.

### **The 'Land of the End'**

Somewhat paradoxically, expressions of German antipathy toward America begin around the start of the large-scale German migration to that country, in the 1830s. One of the earliest occurs in the work of Hegel. As we saw in Chapter 1, Hegel was firmly opposed to Enlightenment liberalism and the promotion of individual rights on which it was based, and these were precisely what was embodied in the American

constitution. In the introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (first published posthumously in 1837), he locates the essence of America in self-interest dedicated to personal enrichment. In America, he tells us, the ‘fundamental character of the community’ lies in the ‘endeavor of the individual after acquisition, commercial profit, and gain; the preponderance of *private* interest, devoting itself to that of the community only for its own advantage [emphasis original].’<sup>2</sup> Neither does the country constitute a proper ‘state’, an organized political community, for such a thing in Hegel’s view is only evolved over time in response to shared challenges such as the threat of invasion or religious or economic crises, for example. It is from these things that the community impulse arises. In America, the ‘necessity for a firm combination’ does not as yet obtain.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, the attention of Americans is directed solely toward the business of colonizing the country’s vast open spaces. ‘Only when, as in Europe,’ Hegel asserts,

the direct increase of agriculturists is checked, will the inhabitants, instead of pressing outwards to occupy the fields, press inwards upon each other — pursuing town occupations, and trading with their fellow-citizens; and so form a compact system of civil society, and require an organized state.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of the Romantics, a general hostility to America was mitigated in some degree by the attraction they felt towards American freedom from the constraints of the past, as well as the prospect of access to wild, untamed nature with its promise of the sublime, as James W Ceaser notes.<sup>5</sup> Mainly, however, in keeping with the anti-Enlightenment mindset informing Romanticism, they strongly rejected the idea of a society founded on rational ideals. America, in short, fitted the Romantic description of a ‘machine-state’. Nor was there anything resembling a *Volk* after Herder’s model, which the Romantics contrasted with the American model of a nation as a *principle*. In Ceaser’s view, the work of the Romantic poet Nikolaus Lenau, who visited America in the 1830s, constitutes the ‘classic summary’ of the

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<sup>2</sup> Hegel, 1837/2001 p102.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel, 1837/2001 p103.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Ceaser, James W *Reconstructing America: The Symbol of America in Modern Thought* Yale University Press 1997 p168.

Romantic view of America.<sup>6</sup> Prior to his visit, Lenau (the so-called 'German Byron') was evidently full of anticipation, extolling the beauties of the wild American landscape he expected to find and on which he was counting to fire his poetic imagination. 'I want to send my imagination to school in the North American jungles', he writes in a letter of 1832,

I want to hear the noise of Niagara and sing Niagara songs. That is necessary for my education. My poetry lives and weaves in nature, and in America nature is more beautiful, more powerful, than in Europe. An immense stock of the most glorious images awaits me there, an abundance of divine appearances still virgin and untouched, like the soil of the primeval forests.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, Lenau's enthusiasm did not long survive his arrival in America, although things cannot have been helped by a bout of serious illness. He seems to have been struck by a general insipidity at odds with his Romantic sensibility, and complained that he had been unable to find 'a courageous dog, a fiery horse, or a man full of passion'.<sup>8</sup> More devastating, however, and proving more abiding in German anti-Americanism, was his diagnosis of America as a land of spiritual emptiness. 'These Americans', he writes,

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<sup>6</sup> Ceaser, 1997 p173. Along with Wagner, Lenau features in Kiefer's *Germany's Spiritual Heroes* (Plate 19), referred to in the previous chapter.

<sup>7</sup> 'Ich will meine Phantasie in die Schule, in die nord-amerikanischen Urwälder schicken, den Niagara will ich rauschen hören und Niagaralieder singen. Das gehört notwendig zu meiner Ausbildung. Meine Poesie lebt und webt in der Natur, und in Amerika ist die Natur schöner, gewaltiger als in Europa. Ein ungeheuer Vorrath der herrlichsten Bilder erwartet mich dort, eine Fülle göttlicher Auftritte, die noch daleigt jungfräulich und unberührt, wie der Boden der Urwälder'. Quoted in Baker, Thomas Stockham *Lenau and Young Germany in America* (Doctoral Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University 1897) p6.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081793543;view=1up;seq=7>.

Accessed 2 April 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Rubin, Barry and Rubin, Judith Colp *Hating America: A History* Oxford University press, 2004 p16. In this regard Lenau may have been providing lip service to the infamous 'degeneracy theory' of the Count de Buffon and Cornelius de Pauw (a Dutch diplomat at the court of Frederick the Great), amongst others. This was the pseudo-scientific theory popular in the latter part of the eighteenth century that held that animals and humans in America were inferior to those in Europe, and degenerated more quickly.

are shopkeepers with souls that stink towards heaven. They are dead for all spiritual life, completely dead.<sup>9</sup>

It was in American womenfolk, for Lenau, that this emptiness was most apparent. The eyes of American women, he writes with striking misogyny, 'are nothing more than gaping basement windows'.<sup>10</sup> When they sing, he continues, one senses 'the echo of a terrifying inner hollowness'.<sup>11</sup> America, he concluded (expressing what has since become a commonplace), was a profoundly materialist society. 'The American', he writes, 'knows nothing, he seeks nothing but money'.<sup>12</sup> He noted a lack of songbirds in America, which he felt was symptomatic of its spiritual condition. 'The nightingale is right,' he writes, 'when he does not want to come to these louts'.<sup>13</sup> The lack of songbirds subsequently became a familiar trope in anti-American discourse, such as in these lines by Hoffmann von Fallersleben from 1843:

And so no grapes hang from your vine  
Nor do your flowers have a scent,  
No bird can even sing a line,  
And poetry is life spent.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, this spiritual emptiness is attributed to the absence from America of community feeling. There is no possibility in America, a nation of immigrants, of anything resembling a *Volk*, an identifiable community having existed over time and united by a shared heritage. But a lack of community feeling, for Lenau as for Hegel, is in any case inevitable from the prioritization in America of individual rights. It is a

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Rubin, and Rubin, 2004 p16.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Gulddal, Jesper *Anti-Americanism in European Literature* Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011 p64.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Rubin and Rubin, 2004 p17. Rubin and Rubin note that there is perhaps a degree of hypocrisy in Lenau's critique of American materialism, since his trip had in part been undertaken in order to invest in a property in America, which he duly accomplished, buying land in Pennsylvania. (2004 p17.)

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Rubin and Rubin, 2004 p16.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Rubin and Rubin, 2004 p17.



community defined in terms of self-interest rather than mutual bonds, a community, in a word, without *roots*. 'With the expression *Bodenlosigkeit* [rootlessness]', writes Lenau, 'I think I am able to indicate the general character of all American institutions; what we call Fatherland is here only a property insurance scheme.'<sup>15</sup> He coins a telling phrase to encapsulate his bleak view of America. It is, he tells us, 'the true land of the end, the outer edge of man'.<sup>16</sup> Later on, his experiences inspired Ferdinand Kürnberger's *Der Amerikamüde* (1855), a fictionalized account of Lenau's American sojourn that became one of the more widely read novels of the time, thus helping to embed anti-Americanism in the German psyche.

The poet Heinrich Heine was another vociferous critic of America also associated with the German Romantics. Heine regarded himself as a follower of 'the great Herder', endorsing the latter's view of ancient Israel as a model community.<sup>17</sup> According to Magee, Heine was a 'greatly admired' acquaintance of Wagner, supplying the composer with the original inspiration for both *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser*.<sup>18</sup> In America, so he believed, what purported to be limitless freedom was in reality nothing but the most rigid conformity. The nation was like an enclosure of farmyard animals, a 'pig-pen of Freedom Inhabited by boors living in equality'.<sup>19</sup> Such is Heine's scornful indictment of American liberalism. So far from being free, Americans were in thrall to that 'most extensive of all tyrannies, that of the masses'.<sup>20</sup>

The depth of the contempt for America expressed by Lenau and Heine is more than enough to test the reader's sympathy. But the very bitterness of their condemnation attests to the depth of the ideological division separating the Romantics and America regarding the issue of community. The allegiance of Herder, the early Romantics, Fichte and Hegel was, as we saw in Chapter 1, to the principle of communitarianism,

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Ceaser, 1997 p173 .

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Werke* V 60, quoted in Barnard, 2003 p67.

<sup>18</sup> Magee, 2001 p355.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Ceaser, 1997 p171.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

which defined itself in opposition to the principle of self-interest. By the time that Wagner came to formulate the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, America -- as a result of the polemical attacks launched by the likes of Lenau and Heine -- had come to be identified as the epitome of the latter, precisely the besetting sin of modernity that his project was intended to counter. It is for this reason that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be seen as an expression of what would later be designated as counter-Americanism, embodying an implicit critique of America in the form of a model of community derived from the Counter-Enlightenment and the polar opposite of the model derived from the Enlightenment thought to obtain in America.

Anti-American feeling in Germany increased in proportion to the influence of America in Europe, which towards the end of the nineteenth century began to intensify. And now a new and highly resilient refrain entered the discourse, arising from concerns regarding the perceived de-humanizing effects of American-style materialism and mass culture. The threat embodied by Americanism started to be seen as above all a *spiritual* one. As Fritz Stern comments, from the 1870s 'conservative writers in imperial Germany expressed fear that the German soul would be destroyed by 'Americanization', that is, by mammonism, materialism, mechanization and mass society.'<sup>21</sup> In particular, America was seen as the source of the techniques of mass production, with its associated mindset oriented towards gigantism, an urge to endless *quantity* akin to the cravings of an insatiable monster. Mass production was the embodiment of the relentless pursuit of *more*. This was a new kind of spiritual malaise, and amongst those in whose view it had already begun to spread to Europe was Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche can certainly be placed in the tradition of the German Counter-Enlightenment. In some degree, he follows Rousseau insofar as his principal objection to the Enlightenment is that its elevation of the faculty of reason caused the separation of mankind from *instinct*. After reason entered human affairs, he declares, 'men no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating,

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<sup>21</sup> Stern, Fritz *The Politics of Cultural despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* University of California Press, 1961 p33.

unconscious and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their 'consciousness,' their weakest and most fallible organ!<sup>22</sup> He sees the modern history of Germany as the story of the struggle between the Counter-Enlightenment, which descended from German philosophy, against the Enlightenment, which descended from English philosophy. "They are no philosophical race,' he says,

these Englishmen: Bacon signifies an attack on the philosophical spirit; Hobbes, Hume, and Locke a debasement and lowering of the value of the concept of 'philosophy' for more than a century. It was against Hume that Kant arose, and rose; it was Locke of whom Schelling said, understandably, *je méprise Locke* [I despise Locke]; in their fight against the English-mechanistic doltification of the world, Hegel and Schopenhauer were of one mind...<sup>23</sup>

For Nietzsche, it was in American mass production that the adverse spiritual consequences of the Enlightenment were most apparent. Writing in *The Gay Science*, he bemoans the 'breathless haste with which they [the Americans] work'.<sup>24</sup> The 'distinctive vice of the new world', it is 'already beginning ferociously to infect old Europe' and 'spreading a spiritual emptiness over the continent'.<sup>25</sup> The 'constant chase after gain' characteristic of Americanism reduces existence to a kind of numeric calculation, from which the things that really made life worthwhile were crowded out.<sup>26</sup> In America, he says, one 'thinks with a watch in one's hand'.<sup>27</sup> But his warnings were no discouragement to German industrialists, and following the Paris World Exhibition of 1900, American production methods were adopted on a large scale in Germany, as Christoph Müller notes.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Genealogy of Morals*, quoted in Hicks (2004) p56.

<sup>23</sup> *Beyond Good and Evil*, quoted in Hicks (2004) p56.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich *The Gay Science* (First published 1882) Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books New York 1974 Book 4 Section 329 p258.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, 1882/1974 p258.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Müller, Christoph Hendrik *West Germans Against The West: Anti-Americanism in Media and Public Opinion in the Federal Republic of Germany 1949–1968* Palgrave Macmillan 2010 p90.

The period leading up to the First World War saw the emergence of counter-Americanism, or *Konträr-Amerikanismus*, as a recognizable discourse. Michael Ermarth writes that the term came into public circulation in around 1910 in a series of works by the Expressionist Austrian writer and journalist Robert Müller, who insisted – whilst remaining a little vague as to detail -- that it represented the most promising European pathway to the future.<sup>29</sup> What counter-Americanism would ensure was above all the preservation of European ‘cultural diversity and distinctiveness’.<sup>30</sup> It was chiefly in this way that Müller distinguished his ‘still incipient’ concept from anti-Americanism.<sup>31</sup> The central idea was that counter-Americanism should seek to mitigate or resist the perceived adverse affects of Americanization. In this way, it constituted an alternative *modernism*, an alternative discourse on modernity to that embodied in the concept of Americanism.<sup>32</sup> But counter-Americanism has not, as we shall see, always been distinguished by its humanism.

The debate surrounding increasing mechanization and the standardization of culture resumed in Germany following the interruption represented by the First World War, which had served further to inflame anti-American feeling owing to the ruinous terms of a peace treaty largely dictated by America (it must have seemed bitterly ironic, furthermore, that the democratic ideals sought since 1848 in certain quarters within Germany came to be forcibly imposed from without. ‘The ideals championed by the revolutionaries of 1848,’ writes A J P Taylor, ‘thus triumphed by American order.’<sup>33</sup>). Indeed, as Philip Gassert comments, the Weimar years are a ‘key period [*eine Schlüsselperiode*]’ in the history of Germany’s *Amerikadiskurs*, since it was during this period that it was first generally acknowledged that the ongoing

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<sup>29</sup> Ermarth, in Stephan (Ed) 2006 p33.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Later writers would invoke a similar, corrective form of modernism under the guise, variously, of ‘serum modernism’, ‘second-order modernity’, ‘reflective modernity’ and even ‘transmodernity’ (see Beck, Ulrich, Giddens, Anthony and Lash, *Scott Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* Stanford University Press, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, A J P *From Sarajevo to Potsdam* Thames and Hudson, London 1956 p51.

transformation of both German and European culture was largely consistent with Americanization.<sup>34</sup> America itself came to be 'metonymic for modernity [metonymisch für Modernität]'.<sup>35</sup> And various writers continued to alert Germans to the dangers of American-style modernization. Writing in *Amerika und der Amerikanismus*, published in 1927 with the provocative subtitle 'Das Gegenstück zu Henry Ford [‘the counterweight to Henry Ford’]', the historian Adolf Halfeld argued that the culture of Europe, 'German culture in particular', was destined for annihilation 'at the hands of an America that is geared to materialism and the mechanization of life'.<sup>36</sup> Americanism, he continued, sets 'a goal that is one-sidedly economic, in opposition to the mental reservations of the human spirit'.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, writing in the same year, the philosopher and psychologist Richard Müller-Freinfels commented in *Der Deutsche Gedenke* that the threat to Europe lay not 'in the introduction of American machines as such' but 'in the leveling of the mind which they have produced in America'.<sup>38</sup> It is against this tendency that Europe had in consequence to mobilize itself, emphasizing 'its valuation of quality as opposed to quantity, organic life versus mechanization, personality against uniformity'.<sup>39</sup>

## The Middle Way

The period between the wars saw the emergence of radical versions of counter-Americanism in the work of three writers in particular, all of whom are to some extent indebted to Nietzsche: the historians Arthur Moeller Van den Bruck and

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<sup>34</sup> Gassert, Philipp 'Was meint Amerikanisierung? Über der Begriff des Jahrhunderts' *Merkur* 54 No 9/10 Sept 2000 785-96 p790.

<sup>35</sup> Gassert, 2000 p790.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Kroes, Rob 'Anti-Americanism and Anti-Modernism in Europe: Old and Recent Versions', in Stephan (Ed) 2005 p206. Gassert notes that contemporary discourse tended to 'decouple Americanism understood as technical rationalization and the introduction of mass production from political Westernization and Democratization [Amerikanisierung im Sinne technischer Rationalisierung und der Einführung der Massenproduktion von politischer Verwestlichung und Demokratisierung abzukoppeln].'(2000, p790.)

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Kroes, in Stephan (Ed) 2005 p206.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Kroes, in Stephan (Ed) 2005 p207.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Oswald Spengler and the soldier and author (and entomologist) Ernst Jünger. This corresponded with a changing view of Americanism, one that focused on its consequences for the natural world, identifying Americanism most particularly with the transformation of nature into a *resource*, a commodity to be exploited. The latter was the consequence of man's ever-expanding technological prowess, which has been given freest reign in America (as well as in Russia, in the view of Spengler and Jünger). As Van den Bruck (best known for having popularized the phrase 'The Third Reich' in his eponymous book of 1923) proposed, this was the essence of *Amerikanertum* [Americanism]; it lies in 'the decisive step', he writes,

by which we make our way from a dependence on the earth to the *use* of the earth, the step that mechanizes and electrifies inanimate material and makes the elements of the world into agencies of human *use* [emphasis added].<sup>40</sup>

But such increasing mastery of nature, in Van den Bruck's view, is not to be regretted; rather, it constitutes human progress. He believes that there is a problem, however, in that Americanism also makes it impossible fully to *exploit* what it has itself made possible. This is precisely because of its roots in Enlightenment rationality. Strongly recalling the Counter-Enlightenment arguments against individualism, Van den Bruck argues that only a nation based on *community* rather than rational principles is constitutionally capable of taking advantage of the advances achieved by modernity. Such a nation, in his opinion, is Germany. In this context, he advances his version of counter-Americanism, a political solution he labels 'German socialism' and describes as a 'corporate conception of state and society'.<sup>41</sup> Socialism in this view is a function of 'rootedness, proper order, and structure'. It 'may need', Van den Bruck adds ominously, 'to be brought about by revolution.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Ceaser, 1997 p174.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

We can, of course, see clear intimations of the ideology of National Socialism in Van den Bruck's ideas. The same is true, but to an even greater extent, in the case of both Spengler and Jünger. In common with Van den Bruck, both locate modernity in the changed relationship of mankind with nature. 'Civilization itself,' Spengler asserts in his *Man and Techniks* of 1931,

has become a machine that does, or tries to do, everything in mechanical fashion. We think only in horse-power now; we cannot look at a waterfall without mentally turning it into electric power; we cannot survey a countryside full of pasturing cattle without thinking of its exploitation as a source of meat-supply.<sup>43</sup>

This constitutes a view of modernity as a mindset, or form of thinking, geared in this case toward the production of technology and informed by an urge towards ever-increasing domination over nature and exploitation of its resources. Spengler calls this 'technologism [*die Technik*]', and associates it equally with America and Russia, which he sees as essentially indistinguishable to the extent that differences in political ideologies fade into insignificance in comparison with technologism, the *real* motor force of modernity. In contrast with Van den Bruck, he feels more of a sense of impending *crisis* occasioned by the unstoppable course of progress. But the crisis consists not so much in the consequences for the world of unrestrained exploitation, as in the potential *failure* of humanity to see the journey on which it has embarked through to its ultimate conclusion. Disaster for humanity will come not from going too far in its exploitation of nature, but from going not far enough. Clearly anticipating the *Führerprinzip* of the Nazis, Spengler argues that to see the project of modernity through will take one thing: the inflexible rule of a strong leader, and this is something that America, with its allegiance to democratic principles, is unable to produce. The aspiration to *equality* central to Americanism, in Spengler's view, is fundamentally misguided, since it fails to recognize the inherent *differences* between men. "'Equal rights'", he sneers, 'are contrary to nature [and] are the beginning of

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<sup>43</sup> Spengler, Oswald *Man and Technics: A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life* (First published 1931 as *Der Mensch und die Technik*) Translated by Charles Francis Atkinson and Michael Putman, Arktos Media Ltd London 2015 p80.

the irrevocable decline of society.<sup>44</sup> 'Society rests', he continues, 'upon the inequality of men'.<sup>45</sup>

In common with Van den Bruck, then, Spengler sees Americanism as woefully inadequate to the task of coping with the changing nature of mankind's relationship with the world, and this shortcoming is due precisely to its adherence to the principles of the Enlightenment. But the entire West, he notes, is prone to what in his view is the same debilitating weakness for democracy. He is therefore highly pessimistic about the future of humanity; but if *anyone* will evolve the capacity to work through the grave crisis of modernity, it will in his estimation be the Germans. In this respect, Germany is 'the key country of the world'.<sup>46</sup> This is because the German people are equipped 'to experience world-historical problems, to form them and solve them inwardly'.<sup>47</sup> He nevertheless has little to offer them in the way of practical advice or recommendations, beyond the observation that profound social change must be an essential prerequisite for any positive outcome.

Jünger's ideas resemble those of Spengler in most ways. Like Spengler, he equates modernity above all with technologism; also like Spengler, he recalls the attitude of the Counter-Enlightenment thinkers by dismissing the ability of societies based on rational principles -- which he contrasts with societies that have evolved organically -- to cope with the crisis of modernity, which he likewise sees not as the inexorably intensifying exploitation of nature, but as the unpreparedness of modern society to deal with this development. Where Jünger differs from Spengler is in his prescription for change. He proposes a kind of metaphorical middle way between the discredited systems of Americanism, on the one hand, and Bolshevism, on the other, both of which he rejects owing to their foundation in intellectual concepts; but from them, he retains the idea of mass planning. The society envisaged by Jünger is one that has been organized from top to bottom for a single purpose: to meet the unique

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<sup>44</sup> *The Hour of Decision: Germany and World-Historical Evolution* (First published 1933) University Press of the Pacific, 2002 p92.

<sup>45</sup> Spengler, 1933/2002 p92.

<sup>46</sup> Spengler, 1931/2015 pxvi.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*



challenges of modernity, free of the encumbrance of ideology.<sup>48</sup> It will thus resemble a mass collective *army*, somewhat in the manner of the society later created by the Nazi policy of *Totaler Krieg*.

It is of course with Heidegger, however, that the issue of America and technologism is most associated. But the philosopher is not remotely sanguine about the unrestricted exploitation of nature, and sees the potential consequences of the latter as nothing short of catastrophic. Technology, in his view, is similar to art in that both, at their most fundamental level, are 'modes of revealing [*Weisen des Entbergens*]', that is to say, ways in which the world reveals or discloses itself to us. Modes of revealing like art and technology make it possible for us to *interpret* the world. Technological revealing, or 'enframing [*Gestell*]', consists in discovering the *use* value of an object, such as in terms of its use as energy. To discover an object's use is in Heidegger's terminology to 'challenge [*herausfordern*]' it. 'A tract of land', he explains,

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.<sup>49</sup>

Technological enframing is in Heidegger's view the consequence of a way of thinking about reality that began with Plato and was reinforced by Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes. The tendency of this thinking is to see the world as an object to be *mastered*. With it, Heidegger tells us, there began 'that way of being human which means the realm of human capability as a domain given over to measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Jünger, Ernst 'Total Mobilization', in Wolin, Richard (Ed) *The Heidegger Controversy* MIT Press, 1993.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, Martin *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, quoted in Biro, 1998 p201.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, Martin *The Question Concerning Technology* Translated by William Lovitt, Garland Publishing New York 1977 p132.

Technological enframing, which is a function of this mindset, might *seem* to be unequivocally beneficial, to the extent that it enables the harnessing of natural resources for the general benefit of mankind; Heidegger's view, however, is on the contrary that it represents the greatest possible *threat* to modern humanity. The danger of technological enframing inheres in its *totalizing* aspect. In the first place, it denies all other forms of disclosure, limiting our understanding of nature to the terms of a single aspect (its use value). In the second, it sees all of nature as a potential resource, so that there is no reason why it should not be extended to human beings; we are, after all, also part of nature. In this way, we would become simply another resource, part of a totalized 'standing reserve [*Bestand*]' of energy into which technological enframing seeks to transform nature.<sup>51</sup>

The latter would be but a foretaste of the apocalyptic end result of technological enframing, towards which two modern nations are in Heidegger's view implacably headed: Russia and America. Recalling Jünger, Heidegger characterizes Europe as standing in between these two technological monoliths, occupying a kind of 'middle' position. 'Europe lies today', he claimed in a series of lectures delivered in 1935 and published in 1953 as *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 'in a great pincer, squeezed between Russia on the one side and America on the other'.<sup>52</sup> Both, he tells us, are characterized by 'the same dreary technological frenzy'.<sup>53</sup> But of the two, America

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<sup>51</sup> A startling anticipation of Heidegger's concept of technological enframing can be found in the work of Schleiermacher, one of the early Romantics discussed in Chapter 1. 'Yes, indeed,' he writes in 1799 with withering irony, 'whoever is content that only man governs the physical world; that he discovers its powers only for his needs; that space does not weaken the spirit but quickly executes any action that the will demands of it; that everything shows itself to be standing under the command of thought so that the spirit reveals itself everywhere; that every crude piece of matter becomes animated; and that mankind enjoy its life through its feeling of mastery over the body; whoever thinks that this is the ultimate end of humanity should join in this loud song of praise of our time.' (Monologue III, 'Worldview', Reproduced in Beiser, 1996 p186.) See also Wagner's remark that science has 'dissected Nature into fragments, without ever finding the real bond between these fragments.' (1893/1995 p158.)

<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, 1953/59 p45.

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, Martin *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (First Published as *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 1953) Translated by Ralph Manheim, Yale University Press 1959 p37.

represents the greater danger. This is because for Heidegger as for Lenau it is a land without *history*, and therefore lacks the sense of responsibility to the future that a sense of history brings with it (this was in contrast with Russia, where the teachings of Marxism had at least imparted an acute historical consciousness). With America, the land of root/lessness and technological thinking, Heidegger contrasts Germany, the land of rootedness and 'poetic' thinking – that is to say, thinking that is *not* informed by the urge to domination at the heart of technological enframing. Germany, he tells us is in this respect 'the most metaphysical of nations'.<sup>54</sup>

A second urgently threatening challenge to civilization identified by Heidegger as emanating from America is rampant consumerism. For consumer culture is predicated on *reproducibility*, and this undermines authenticity, replacing the unique with the uniform. Consumerism for Heidegger is a function of the impulse that seeks to subsume the particular under the universal. In common with technological enframing, it is thus a function of a mindset, namely, the deeply problematic modern attitude towards reality. Also in common with technological enframing, it contributes in consequence to what Heidegger sees as the central tendency of modernity: the estrangement of modern man from *Being*. 'Being today', laments Heidegger, 'means being-replaceable'.<sup>55</sup> In this context, he quotes the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. 'Now is emerging from out of America', Rilke had written,

pure undifferentiated things, mere things of appearance, sham articles.... A house in the American understanding, an American apple or an American vine has nothing in common with the house, the fruit, or the grape that had been adopted in the hopes and thoughts of our forefathers.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, 1953/59 p38. Here, Heidegger uses 'metaphysics' in a positive way; later in his career, he identifies metaphysics as something to be 'overcome', to the extent that metaphysical thinking is the root cause of technological enframing.

<sup>55</sup> 'Four Seminars', in *Questions Three and Four* Gallimard, Paris 1976 p456.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Ceaser, 1997 p198. West notes that Rilke was 'associated' with the *Worpswede* group, an artists' colony that flourished around the start of the twentieth century, Rilke's 'poetic vision of rural harmony' growing 'out of their

It will be in America, Heidegger adamantly maintains, that the ultimate consequences of the defective modern mindset -- of which technological enframing and unrestricted consumerism are manifestations -- will unfold. America will be the *Katestrophenhaft*, the site of catastrophe. This will entail the reduction of thought to the level of *calculation* (here Heidegger recalls Nietzsche). Modernity will culminate in the age of 'total thoughtlessness', at which point 'man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature -- that he is a meditative being'.<sup>57</sup>

This, then, is Heidegger's profoundly bleak view of Americanism: it is 'the still unfolding and not yet full or completed essence of the emerging monstrousness of modern times.'<sup>58</sup> He suggests, furthermore, that the spiritual disease afflicting America carries within itself the urge to propagate. Following Nietzsche, Heidegger sees Americanism as an invasive spiritual force, insinuating itself into the European soul. Indeed, it is intent upon European *destruction*. 'We know today', wrote Heidegger on the eve of the Second World War, 'that the Anglo-Saxon world of Americanism is resolved to destroy Europe'.<sup>59</sup> In Germany, he wrote elsewhere, things have 'already gone so far as on occasion to produce the disastrous effect that Germany actually feels herself ashamed that her people were once considered to be "the people of poetry and thought"'.<sup>60</sup>

Heidegger resembles both Spengler and Jünger in that the solutions he proposes to the desperate problem he sees as facing modern humanity, whilst lacking in detail, are radical in the extreme. Anticipating Adorno, he rejects the idea that hope is to be found in any established political ideologies, such as liberal democracy, for all such ideologies -- to the extent that they subordinate particular notions to generalized

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idolization of rural life'. (2000, p44.) His name is inscribed on Kiefer's *Varus* (**Plate 11**).

<sup>57</sup> *Discourse on Thinking* (First Published as *Gelassenheit* 1959) Translated by John M Anderson and E Hans Freund, Harper Row, New York 1966 p56.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Ceaser, 1997 p196.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Ceaser, 1997 p199.

<sup>60</sup> 'Andenken, Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung' *Gesamtausgabe* Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt 1975 Vol 52: 134).

concepts -- are the product of the same mindset that has set humanity on the road to calamity. These things cannot be part of the solution to a problem of which they are themselves a part. In modernity, such hope as is to be had can come only from a system that is in some sense *sui generis*. In order for a people such as the Germans to survive the devastating onslaught constituted by Americanism, they must subject themselves to a program informed by their *particular* attributes as a *particular* people, that serves above all to guarantee their *particular* destiny. As Gregory Bruce Smith comments, the 'reemergence of rootedness', is for Heidegger to be had 'in closed, tradition-dominated wholes'.<sup>61</sup> A 'revitalized Germany' would 'require its neighbors likewise to seek their roots and accede to their history'.<sup>62</sup> Heidegger's reasoning, which led him to advocate an extreme form of nationalism, was what prompted him -- disastrously for his own subsequent reputation -- to lend his support to National Socialism. For only the latter, he remarked as late as 1966, had seemed to him to attempt 'to achieve a satisfactory relationship of man to technology'.<sup>63</sup>

The Nazis themselves were, of course, virulently anti-American, actively promoting anti-Americanism in accordance with Nazi doctrine that held America to be Germany's ideological enemy (and by now, they could draw upon a considerable discourse in support of this claim). As Gassert notes, steps were taken to reverse the process of Americanization that had been a marked feature of the Weimar Republic. The Nazis 'licked the wounds ['leckten die Wunden']' into which 'the poison of Americanism ['das Gift des Amerikanismus']' had penetrated in the Weimar period, and 'sought to combat its symptoms in the German psyche [sie suchten dessen

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<sup>61</sup> Bruce Smith, Gregory 'Heidegger's Postmodern Politics' *Polity* 24 No 1 (Fall 1991) p164.

<sup>62</sup> Bruce Smith, 1991 p167.

<sup>63</sup> 'Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten', Interview in *Der Spiegel* 31 May 1976 (Interview took place 23 September 1966) p214. As Ceaser notes, Heidegger's ideas have exercised a 'profound influence' on subsequent thinkers. (1997 p211.) In the post war period, through the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and others, his anti-Americanism, now shorn of any references to National Socialism, came somewhat paradoxically to be fused with Marxist ideology, producing the intellectual foundation of the European Left. It has been mostly because of this that anti-Americanism has become a deeply embedded strain in European thought.

Symptome im Bewußtsein der Deutschen zu bekämpfen]'.<sup>64</sup> But the public attitude of the regime towards America was in fact deeply disingenuous, since the Nazis had shamelessly appropriated American techniques of mass culture and mass production. These had nevertheless to be *distanced* from America, Nazi Germany's bitterest foe. They were consequently positioned as functions of a 'German rationalization [‘eine deutsche Rationalisierung’]', since the latter term 'without the adjective would not have been free of Western connotations [‘ohne das Adjektiv nicht von westlichen Konnotationen frei gewesen wäre’]'.<sup>65</sup>

But the war in which the Nazis embroiled the world resulted in the utter ruination of Germany, followed by the deeply painful irony of the nation's reconstruction broadly in the image of America. And so commenced the period of Germany's most intense - and most conflicted -- engagement with its former enemy.

### **'Pax Americana'**

The end of the war inaugurated the long-lasting era of relative peace in the Western Hemisphere -- perceived as largely guaranteed by American military power -- sometimes known as 'Pax Americana'. At the same time, as Müller notes, American influence in Germany became 'direct and formative', to the extent of American involvement in almost every aspect of the construction of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the Americanization of West Germany constitutes what the historian Arnulf Baring has called the 'real revolution' in Germany, rather than anything achieved by the 1848ers.<sup>67</sup> That it took place principally during the FRG's crucial founding period -- the first decade or so after the war -- has in all probability rendered the effects of Americanization indelible.

The immediate consequence of the war was that the defeated nation was divided into four zones of occupation, each assigned to one of the four main Allies: Britain,

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<sup>64</sup> Gassert, 2000 pp790-1.

<sup>65</sup> Gassert, 2000 p791.

<sup>66</sup> Müller, 2010 p90.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Ermarth, in Stephan (Ed) 2006 p32.

the USA, the Soviet Union, and France. Then in 1949, the two German states (East and West) emerged. West Germany consisted of the former British, American, and French zones. The *Grundgesetz*, or 'Basic Law', was established, defining the constitution of the FRG.<sup>68</sup> Broad powers were ceded to Konrad Adenauer's nascent government by the 'Occupation Statute', which came into force at the same time. But West Germany remained nominally under the control of the Allies. For the first six years of its existence, the condition of the FRG was one of only 'semi-sovereignty', as Michael Geyer notes.<sup>69</sup> It was not until May 1955 that the Allied occupation of West Germany came formally to an end. Fully ten years, then, were to elapse after the war before the people of West Germany could call themselves truly free.

For the second time in 27 years, Germany had found itself the subject of a catastrophic and humiliating military defeat at the hands of an American-led alliance, and forced to submit to non-negotiable terms and conditions set principally by America. This was followed by ten years that took the form, in essence, of an American occupation.<sup>70</sup> Given all of this, it is scarcely surprising that there was no small degree of anti-American feeling on the part of the indigenous population during this period, as contemporary polls showed.<sup>71</sup> To the bitterness of defeat was added resentment at the 'loss of autonomy and control' in the years following the

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<sup>68</sup> The FRG is seen as the 'successor' state to the German *Reich* -- that is, Germany as defined at the time of Unification in 1871 -- rather than to the Nazi regime, which as Justin Collings notes is characterized in the dominant post-war narrative as a 'criminal' state and illegal from the outset. (Collings, Justin *Democracy's Guardian: A History of the German Federal Constitutional Court*, Oxford University Press 2015 pxxiv.)

<sup>69</sup> Geyer, Michael 'America in Germany: Power and the Pursuit of Americanization' in Trommler, Frank and Shore, Elliot (Eds) *The German-American Encounter: Conflict and Cooperation between Two Cultures, 1800-2000* Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford 2001 p121.

<sup>70</sup> The observer Richard Merritt has summarized the overall US posture during the immediate post war period as 'modified colonization' whilst noting that many contemporary sources expressed a deep concern regarding the imposition of "our own particular way of life on the Germans" and its possible long term consequences. (Quoted in Ermarth, in Stephan (Ed) 2005 p39.)

<sup>71</sup> See Geyer, 2001.

war.<sup>72</sup> And there had been times, it must be said, when this had been exacerbated by American conduct towards its defeated foe that seems to have been informed by a spirit of vindictiveness, as in the case of the Morgenthau Plan (never implemented) and its notorious successor, 'Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS] 1067', which constituted the basis of US policy in occupied Germany until 1947.<sup>73</sup> Both of these were highly punitive in import and had as their main goal the virtual abolition of German industry and the reduction of the economy to one permanently based largely on agriculture.<sup>74</sup>

Nor was the establishment of democracy, the central plank of the reconstruction policy of the American-led coalition, universally welcomed in West Germany. As Müller notes, the new federal government contained a number of 'right-wing anti-democratic radicals', and the early 1950s saw an organization known as *Die Erste Legion* ['The First Legion'] gaining some prominence.<sup>75</sup> This, as the *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* reported in March 1951, was strongly opposed to the implantation of foreign political systems such as liberal democracy into Germany.<sup>76</sup>

Anti-American feeling was nevertheless tempered by the fact that the period of occupation largely coincided with the remarkable national recovery known as the *Wirtschaftswunder*, or 'economic miracle'. Sovereignty shared with America, it seemed, was good for the economy. And this ambivalence continued to characterize West German attitudes regarding America even after the period of occupation had concluded. Military alliance with America, for example, was widely supported, although only after it had started generally to be believed, in the aftermath of the Berlin Crisis of 1961 (which concluded in the partition of Berlin) and the Cuban Missile Crisis of the following year, that America had essentially won the Cold War;

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<sup>72</sup> Geyer, 2001 p124.

<sup>73</sup> Kiefer completed a series of paintings on the theme of the Morgenthau Plan in 2013, as noted in Chapter 3. See Calvocoressi, Richard *Anselm Kiefer: Morgenthau Plan* [Exhibition Catalogue] Gagosian Gallery, 2013.

<sup>74</sup> See Fulbrook, Mary *A History of Germany 1918-2008: The Divided Nation* Wiley, Chichester 2009.

<sup>75</sup> Müller, 2010 p66.

<sup>76</sup> Müller, 2010, p70.



previous polls in Germany had indicated a *decline* in the belief that America would prevail over Russia in the event of a nuclear conflict (in 1952, 36 percent believed the USA would win, whereas by 1957 this figure had decreased to 17 percent).<sup>77</sup> At the same time, pollsters noted a ‘malicious joy’ that the USA had lost out to Russia in the space race owing to the successful flight of the *Sputnik* in 1957.<sup>78</sup> A similar reaction was later observed in the context of the Vietnam War, American involvement in which had by the 1960s begun to look to many (in Germany and elsewhere) like neo-imperialism. Those West Germans harboring a lingering anti-American resentment felt a shiver of *Schadenfreude*, or grim pleasure, from the tarnishing of the virtuous image of America as the repository of liberal values. ‘It was very attractive’, as Belinda Davis writes, ‘to be able to displace “the fascist” to the other side of the Atlantic, all the more to the country that asserted its moral authority to (West) Germans in having liberated them from the Nazi regime.’<sup>79</sup>

It was very far from the case, of course, that American influence in West Germany ended with the end of the period of direct American involvement in its affairs. The federal government continued in some degree to dance to an American tune. The looming presence of America in the background was perhaps most keenly felt during the debates of the mid 1960s concerning the extension of the statutory period for war crimes, when Jewish leaders in America lobbied Congress to apply pressure on the West German government to have the period extended, as Lily Gardner Feldman notes.<sup>80</sup> Speaking in the Bundestag in March 1965, Justice Minister Bucher duly noted ‘petitions from foreign individuals’ and the ‘appeals, resolutions and protests which have reached us from organizations and federations abroad’.<sup>81</sup> Most

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<sup>77</sup> Geyer, 2001 pp128-131.

<sup>78</sup> Geyer, 2001 p128.

<sup>79</sup> Davis, Belinda ‘New Leftists and West Germany: Fascism, Violence, and the Public Sphere, 1967-1974’ in Gassert, and Steinweis, (Eds) 2007 p212.

<sup>80</sup> Gardner Feldman, Lily ‘The Jewish Role in German-American Relations’ in Trommler, Frank and Shore, Elliot (Eds) *The German-American Encounter: Conflict and Cooperation between Two Cultures, 1800-2000* Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford 2001 p182.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Hindenburg, Hannfried von *Demonstrating Reconciliation: State and Society in West German Foreign Policy toward Israel, 1952-1965* Berghahn Books 2007 p159.

particularly, however, American influence continued strongly to be felt in the area of culture, which was subject to 'increasing synchronization' within the framework of the American-led Western alliance, as Hermand writes.<sup>82</sup> Nowhere was this more so than in the area of popular culture. Geyer notes that the decades after the war saw the 'extraordinary rise' in West Germany of 'an American-inflected popular culture.'<sup>83</sup> Everything from 'music to advertising aesthetics', from 'modern style and taste to automobile design' was strongly influenced by American models.<sup>84</sup> Direct transatlantic imports included Hollywood films, as well as musical styles such as jazz, and later on, rock-and-roll (for some writers, such as Jean Amery, the Americanization of Germany was embodied in the figure of Peter Kraus, the so called 'German Elvis Presley'<sup>85</sup>). And here again, indigenous attitudes were marked by ambivalence. American-style popular culture was broadly speaking consistent with what Adorno meant by the 'culture industry', a pernicious and insidious force serving to neutralize the true function of culture, namely, to counteract the alienating tendency of modernity.<sup>86</sup> But opinions, in general, divided more or less along *generational* lines. American pop culture was enthusiastically embraced by the younger generation, who sought to differentiate themselves from their parents by aspiring to be "more American than the Americans", as Ermarth writes.<sup>87</sup> Hermand notes that at the same time older Germans 'decisively rejected' this form of Americanization as the 'Coca-Cola colonization of Germany'.<sup>88</sup> Thus the Americanization of German popular culture became a weapon in the inter-generational conflict. As Müller has observed, the 1950s saw a steadily increasing generational gap corresponding with the 'Americanization' of the younger

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<sup>82</sup> Hermand, Jost in Stephan, (Ed) 2005 p74.

<sup>83</sup> Geyer, 2001 p121.

<sup>84</sup> Geyer, 2001 p126.

<sup>85</sup> See Amery, Jean *Teenager-Stars. Idole unserer Zeit*, Rüslikon, Zürich 1960.

<sup>86</sup> See Adorno, Theodor W *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* Routledge, London 1991. As Hermand writes, when Adorno returned to Frankfurt in 1949 after his enforced exile in the USA, he was at first encouraged by what he called the 'humanistic intellectuality' that he unexpectedly found in Germany, as he noted in his essay 'Auferstehung der Kultur in Deutschland ['Resurrection of culture in Germany].'(Hermand, in Stephan (Ed) 2005 p68.) His initial optimism rapidly gave way to despair in the face of the encroachments in Germany of the 'culture industry.'

<sup>87</sup> Ermarth, in Stephan (Ed) 2006 p44.

<sup>88</sup> Hermand, in Stephan (Ed) 2006 p73.

generation and the 'anti-Americanization' of the older.<sup>89</sup>

In 1949, the politician (and psychologist) Willy Hellpach, articulating a sentiment that had featured in anti-American discourse since the time of Nietzsche, encapsulated the perceived dangers of Americanism in one word: excessiveness [*Unmass*]. This operated at the level of both the individual, where it equated with insatiable acquisitiveness, and the collective, where it equated with relentless national aggrandizement. Excessiveness was, declared Hellpach, 'the most dangerous inner enemy of all predominant power'.<sup>90</sup> And in the period of national stocktaking following the extraordinary accomplishments of the early 1950s, 'substantial elements' in various groups including the churches, unions, and political parties, echoing the sentiment expressed in the 20s by Müller-Freinfels, voiced powerful objections to the immoderate emphasis in West Germany on material enrichment, self-interest, and mental conformism at the expense of spiritual enrichment, community spirit and mental individualism.<sup>91</sup> Behind all of which, although not necessarily articulated, a constant refrain of anti-Americanism 'played in the background'.<sup>92</sup>

If there was one American import in particular which provoked the wrath of anti-American critics more than any other, it was the supermarket. The latter, as Müller indicates, came to epitomize 'everything that was supposedly wrong' and undesirable about post-war Americanization.<sup>93</sup> And this was despite the fact that the first supermarkets had appeared in Germany in 1938, and adopted by the co-operative movement with the laudably public-spirited intention of raising living standards for the poorer classes.<sup>94</sup> By the mid 1960s, the supermarket had nevertheless become in certain quarters a symbol not only of crass consumerism but

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<sup>89</sup> Müller, 2010 p90.

<sup>90</sup> Hellpach, Willy *Pax Futura: Die Erziehung des friedlichen Menschen durch eine conservative Demokratie*, Braunschweig, 1949 p258.

<sup>91</sup> Ermarth, in Stephan (Ed) 2006 p40.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Müller, 2010 p91.

<sup>94</sup> Müller, 2010 p103.

also of Germany's loss of autonomy, and its subordinate condition to the USA in the restructured international pecking order. 'In 1945,' claimed the extremist *Deutsche Freiheits Partei* (German Freedom Party),

Germany was torn apart, and the Western part was turned into a supermarket.

They stripped the German people of their belief in Germany and replaced it with a belief in profit, hot sausages, and the only true 'free world' [*alleinseligmachende 'freie Welt'*]. The largest 'partner' USA intended to turn the Federal Republic into its overseas branch.<sup>95</sup>

### **Homo Europaeus**

The increased pace of Americanization in Germany following the war, then, together with the resentment engendered by occupation, prompted an intensification of the anti-American feeling that had, as we have seen, existed in Germany since the time of the Romantics. But also receiving a renewed impetus in the post-war context of intensified Americanization was the discourse of counter-Americanism, now in a more moderate form having been stripped of the highly radical accretions that had accompanied some of its previous incarnations. The central impulse of counter-Americanism -- to offset the more undesirable aspects of Americanism -- features strongly in the postwar work of the sociologist Alfred Weber, although Weber himself, in common with Heidegger, sees Russia as a comparable threat. He rehearses the doctrine of the middle way that we have encountered in Jünger and Heidegger. Writing in 1949, recalling Heidegger's image of the 'pincer', he identified three great ideological blocs largely constituting the modern world: democratic capitalism (or 'Americanism'), democratic socialism (or 'Europeanism'), and Soviet Communism ('Sovietism').<sup>96</sup> These corresponded with three modern human 'types',

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<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Müller, 2010, p104.

<sup>96</sup> Weber, Alfred 'Geschichte und Gegenwart', in *Der Monat* 2, No. 14 (1949). As Ermarth notes, *Der Monat* turned out to be secretly funded by the CIA, which was happy to promote the discourse of counter-Americanism via the pages of *Der Monat* in order to offset accusations of excessive American dominance in the region (in Stephan (Ed), 2006 p40).

*homo americanus*, *homo europaeus* and *homo sovieticus*.<sup>97</sup> In contrast with the overreaching urge to self-enrichment and aggrandizement common to the first two of these, the chief characteristic of *homo europaeus* was an aspiration to more equitable values, as well as a greater respect for nature in contrast with the rapaciousness associated with America and Russia that so alarmed Heidegger and others. It falls to *homo europaeus*, in Weber's view, to follow the middle way, a path of moderation between the *Unmass* of the other chief protagonists of modernity.

It was a comparable urge to preserve Germany from the worst excesses of Americanism that informed the policies of the principal architects of the new republic, such as Wilhelm Röpke, Walter Eucken and Alexander Rüstow as well as Adenauer himself, who were 'careful but insistent' in rallying European culture and Western humanism in resisting the dominant tendencies of modernity, as Ermath notes.<sup>98</sup> In an address delivered in 1953 in San Francisco, Adenauer gave expression to the long familiar German anxieties concerning the depersonalizing effects of modernity (by now implicit in the concept of Americanism), from which, in common with Adorno, he identified a direct link with totalitarianism. 'The danger of depersonalization', he asserted, 'is very much wrapped up with the development of modern technology. Depersonalization and massification open the way to the total state'.<sup>99</sup>

Similar concerns were still preoccupying Röpke in 1961. The 'free expansion of the economy', he wrote, 'must not lead to the perversion of genuine human values'.<sup>100</sup> In practical terms, West German social policies drew on a wide range of sources including Catholic social doctrine and Scandinavian practices as well as the hard-learned lessons of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi period.<sup>101</sup> Economic policy

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<sup>97</sup> See Weber, Alfred *Kulturgeschichte als Kultursoziologie* Munich, 1950.

<sup>98</sup> Ermath, in Stephan (Ed), 2006 p41.

<sup>99</sup> Poppinga, Anneliese and Adenauer, Konrad *Geschichtsverständnis, Weltanschauung und Politische Praxis* Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart 1975 p171.

<sup>100</sup> Röpke, Wilhelm *Die Lehre von der Wirtschaft* Erlenbach, Zürich 1961 p190.

<sup>101</sup> Ermath, in Stephan (Ed), 2006 p40.

showed the attributes of what the commentator Rudolf Pechel dubbed *Wirtschaftshumanismus* (economic humanism), a ‘third way between capitalism and socialism’.<sup>102</sup> This was characterized by an emphasis on the dignity of the individual worker as well as on obligations to the consumer in the form of product aftercare, for example.

It seemed to some, furthermore, that *intellectual* steps could be taken in the service of counter-Americanism. The possibility existed of the preservation of a kind of ‘Europe of the mind’. As Gassert notes, certain commentators in Germany, including the sociologists Hans Freyer and Arnold Gehlen, the lawyer Ernst Forsthoff and former members of the pre-war ‘Tat Circle [*Tatkreis*]’ such as the journalists Hans Zehrer and Giselher Wirsing, saw the intellectual realm as the space in which the humanistic legacy of Europe could be preserved.<sup>103</sup> Their idea was that Europe ‘would take over the intellectual leadership [*die geistige Führungsrolle übernehmen würden*]’ of the transatlantic community, whilst the Americans ‘had military and political pre-eminence [*den Amerikanern die militärische und politische Vorberrschaft zufalle*]’.<sup>104</sup> What was envisaged was a relationship between America and Europe somewhat akin to that between ancient Rome and Greece, in which the former, having absorbed the culture of the latter, had continued to *defer* to Greece in intellectual and cultural matters whilst exercising its hegemony. This had after all been a familiar pattern in world history; as Gassert notes, ‘the conquerors had regularly assumed the culture and values of the conquered [*die Eroberer regelmäßig die Kultur und die Werte der Eroberten übernommen hätten*]’.<sup>105</sup>

Calls consequently began to be made for the creation of this ‘Europe of the mind’, or at least for a determined resistance to what the writer Rudolph Pannwitz termed the continent’s ‘cultural colonization’ by America. ‘We must resist and preserve ourselves’, Pannwitz told his German audience in 1958,

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<sup>102</sup> Pechel, Rudolf ‘Trilogie der Vernunft’, *Deutsche Rundschau* 70, No 8 (August 1947) pp84-5.

<sup>103</sup> Gassert, 2000 p793.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

from American cultural colonization and its overweening domination. That requires that we must become much more than a merely economic Europe – but rather a genuine, strong, and concerted European *Reich*, as a community of peoples and a federation of states. Our thousand year old religion of humanity and humanism allows us to eschew all ideology, but never to forfeit the primacy of man over his world and never to give up on the type *homo europaeus*.<sup>106</sup>

Turning now to Kiefer, we shall see that he seems to have taken Pannwitz's advice. This is evident from the way that he has remained immune to the major trends in post war American art, at the same time as he has adhered to artistic values identified in American cultural discourse with Europe. In common with the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, his work is thus emblematic of a rejection of Americanism, and a concomitant reaffirmation of Europeanism.

### **Kiefer's Counter-Americanism**

That it has the effect of such a rejection is somewhat ironic, since it is Kiefer's reception in America that – whilst far from uniformly positive -- has been the principal factor in the critical and commercial success he continues to enjoy. As Huyssen comments, American critics 'have gone to great lengths in praising his Germanness, the authentic ways in which he deals in his painting with the ghosts of the fatherland, especially with the terror of recent German history'.<sup>107</sup> Many of them identify him as 'the greatest German artist of the postwar era', as Saltzman

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<sup>106</sup> 'The Transition from Today to Tomorrow [1958]', quoted in Ermarth, Michael 'Counter-Americanism and Critical Currents in West German Reconstruction 1945-1960: The German Lesson Confronts the American Way of Life', in Stephan, (Ed) 2005 p46.

<sup>107</sup> Huyssen, 1989 p25. Buchloh is clearly a major exception, as is Arthur Danto. Kiefer's work, writes Danto, is 'empty, stripped of brightness and warmth by an act of showmanly will in order to transmit a sense of false despair'. (Danto, Arthur C 'Anselm Kiefer' *Encounters and Reflections: Art in the Historical Present* Farrar Strauss Giroux, New York 1990 p239.) It is 'a heavy-handed compost of shallow ideas and foggy beliefs'. (1990 p241.)

notes.<sup>108</sup> One critic's praise of Kiefer as 'an art pathfinder for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' is typical of the kind of accolades he has attracted in America.<sup>109</sup> All of this is in marked contrast to his reception in his native country, which as noted in Chapter 2 has at times been downright hostile. For his widespread approval across the Atlantic, and the financial rewards that have resulted from it, he is consequently no doubt grateful. But it seems unlikely -- given that his formative years coincided precisely with its most vigorous period in Germany -- that the issue of Americanization would not preoccupy him. We saw in the last chapter that the synthesis versus purity debate is configured in somewhat nationalistic terms; Kiefer is thus already adopting an anti-USA stance in virtue of the deeply synthetic character of his work. And his attitude to Americanism also emerges from the way that he has resisted the influence of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, conceptual art and Minimalism, all of which defined themselves in contradistinction to the European tradition and were in varying degrees orientated towards the USA. As Schama comments, Kiefer -- in common with Beuys before him -- has 'meant to reject the a-historical and cosmopolitan modernism of the art coming out of New York.'<sup>110</sup> Where he has appropriated elements from American styles, it has been with a *critical* intention. Let us consider these styles in their chronological order, and the nature of Kiefer's engagement with them.

Developed in the 1940s and 50s by painters working mainly in New York including Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning amongst others, Abstract Expressionism was proclaimed by practitioners and critics alike as a specifically American style, and one that represented a complete departure from a European tradition seen as in terminal decline. The chauvinistic tone of this discourse emerges strongly from Newman's short essay of 1948, 'The Sublime is Now', which turns on the distinction -- found in the work of Edmund Burke and other Enlightenment commentators -- between the Sublime and the beautiful. For

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<sup>108</sup> Saltzman, 1999 p101. According to Saltzman, his 'apotheosis' in America followed in the wake of his retrospective there in 1987-8. (1999, p102.)

<sup>109</sup> *Christian Science Monitor* March 1988 quoted in Huyssen, 1989 p28.

<sup>110</sup> Schama, 1996 p124.



Newman, art exists to connect mankind with the former, the exalted realm of 'absolute emotions'.<sup>111</sup> European art, he suggests, has comprehensively failed in this regard, owing to its persistent confusion of the beautiful with the Sublime, and the mistaken belief that the latter could be apprehended by what he calls 'plastic' means, that is, by means of figuration or forms derived from geometry (as in the case of Mondrian). Modernism, in the European model, was 'unable to move away from the Renaissance imagery of figures and objects except by distortion or by denying it completely for an empty world of geometric formalisms'.<sup>112</sup> It had therefore 'became enmeshed in a struggle over the nature of beauty: whether beauty was in nature or could be found without nature'.<sup>113</sup> Artists in America, 'free from the weight of European culture', had solved this problem 'by completely denying that art has any connection with the problem of beauty.'<sup>114</sup> Symbolizing the opposition of New and Old Worlds, the theme of a bold, innovative American art versus an outmoded, moribund European counterpart is constantly reiterated in the essay. 'We are freeing ourselves', Newman declares, 'of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting'.<sup>115</sup>

As noted in Chapter 2, abstraction had been the style most heavily promoted in Germany in Kiefer's formative period. This promotional effort on the part of the Federal government was covertly funded in part by America, and it is therefore possible to see the dominance of abstraction in Germany as in some degree an American *imposition*.<sup>116</sup> It thus served as a potent symbol of Americanization in Germany, and whilst Kiefer appropriates certain aspects of it, he ultimately repudiates it. Several commentators have noted appropriations from Abstract Expressionism in Kiefer's 'straw' paintings, including the two versions of *The*

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<sup>111</sup> 'The Sublime is Now' [1948] reproduced in Danchev, Alex (Ed) *100 Artists' Manifestos From the Futurists to the Stuckists* Penguin, 2011 p326.

<sup>112</sup> 'The Sublime is Now' in Danchev, (Ed), 2011 p325.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> 'The Sublime is Now', in Danchev (Ed), 2011 p326.

<sup>116</sup> See Hermand, in Stephan (Ed), 2005 p72.

*Mastersingers* (Saatchi Gallery, London and Private collection, New York)(**Plates 26**), and *Margarethe* (Private collection) (**Plate 12**), all from 1981.<sup>117</sup> In particular, a visual resemblance has been noted with Pollock's *Blue Poles* of 1952 (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)(**Plate 27**).<sup>118</sup> The eponymous poles – made with the end of a board, dipped in blue paint -- resemble the tendrils of straw in Kiefer's paintings, and the paintings also all share a large scale and shallow sense of depth. Pollock was, of course, probably the prime exponent of the variety of Abstract Expressionism dubbed by Harold Rosenberg 'action painting', a somewhat anomalous genre in that it has been theorized both as emphasizing, and undermining, the artist's subjectivity.<sup>119</sup> Rosenberg himself sees it as the former, to the extent that it provided an indexical record of gestural activity on the part of the artist, and hence of his or her corporeal reality. Rosalind Krauss, by contrast, sees it as the latter, because it depended on the radical separation of this activity -- in the mind of the viewer -- from the artist's cognitive activity, and this undermines the sense of a stable authorial self.<sup>120</sup> And in Biro's view, Kiefer's straw series can be interpreted in both terms, providing a further connection with action painting. The figurative elements in the series create the impression of a single author, whilst the paintings' intertextuality -- the references to other figures, including Celan, Wagner and Goethe -- create the impression of an authorial *collective*.<sup>121</sup> But the differences in Kiefer's work from Abstract Expressionism clearly outnumber the similarities. As Biro also notes, his slow and deliberate working practice is in complete contrast to Pollock's highly spontaneous approach, which involves the use of liquid paint.<sup>122</sup> And whilst the straw paintings have certain elements in common with color field abstraction (the other variety of Abstract Expressionism), notably

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<sup>117</sup> See Biro, 1998 pp182-91; Rosenthal, 1987 p104; Shjeldahl, 1988/91.

<sup>118</sup> Biro, 1998 p183; Rosenthal, 1987 p104.

<sup>119</sup> Rosenberg first used the term in his 1952 essay, 'The American Action Painters'. The essay is the source of his oft-cited remark that at 'a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act... What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.' ('The American Action Painters,' *Art News* 51 No 8 (Dec 1952) p22.)

<sup>120</sup> See Krauss, Rosalind *The Optical Unconscious* MIT Press, Cambridge 1993 pp243-329.

<sup>121</sup> Biro, 1998 pp187-8.

<sup>122</sup> Biro, 1998 p186.

large areas of flat color, in most respects they are closer to figuration. Although in both *Mastersingers* paintings the figures have been reduced to straw ciphers, a basic figure/ground relationship is established by means of a setting (of sorts) involving what appears to be a body of water, and *Margarethe* is essentially a 'depiction of flourishing plant life', as Rosenthal notes.<sup>123</sup> The figurative nature of the paintings is evident also from the paintings' titles, for these establish definite subject matter, showing that the signs are in some degree iconic. Here as generally in Kiefer, furthermore, this subject matter is drawn from the very 'impediments' of memory, association, legend, myth and so on to which Newman objects. In general, then, Kiefer decisively rejects this most American of styles, and commits himself instead to figuration.<sup>124</sup>

It is above all the *relational* quality of Kiefer's work that sets him apart from the main trajectory of American art since the war, which has been to undermine this aspect of art. This is the case with both Minimalism and conceptual art, which in an important way are closely connected, insofar as both embody a fundamental reappraisal of the art object that descends ultimately from Marcel Duchamp, and one of the most radical gestures in the entire history of art. In 1917, Duchamp submitted a porcelain urinal to an exhibition by the Society of Independent Artists in New York. Entitled

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<sup>123</sup> Rosenthal, 1988 p99.

<sup>124</sup> Other contemporary German artists, whilst to some degree appropriating its outward appearance, have advanced an implicit *critique* of Abstract Expressionism centered once again on the question of authorship. There are suggestions of this in the work of both Blinky Palermo [Peter Heisterkamp](1943-77) and Sigmar Polke (1941-2010) for example. Palermo's 'fabric paintings [*Stoffbilder*],' a series of over 60 works produced between 1966 and 1972 and made from colored textiles purchased from commercial suppliers, can be seen as interrogating the concept of authorial agency. The same is true of the series of paintings Polke produced in the 1980s using various chemicals and materials that he mixed together on the canvas and allowed to interact. Polke has also parodied the notion of artistic inspiration. 'I stood in front of the canvas', he has said, 'and wanted to paint a bouquet of flowers. Then I received orders from higher beings: no bunch of flowers! Paint flamingos! First I wanted to continue painting, but then I knew that they were serious [Ich stand vor der Leinwand und wollte einen Blumenstrauß malen. Da erhielt ich von höheren Wesen den Befehl: keinen Blumenstrauß! Flamingos malen! Erst wollte ich weiter malen, doch dann wußte ich, das sie es ernst meinten]'. (Quoted in Schütz, 1999 p38.)

*Fountain*, the piece is probably the best known of what he called his 'readymades', ordinary manufactured objects that he re-designated as artworks. From his letter of complaint written following the urinal's hasty removal from the exhibition, it is clear that his intention had nothing to do with aesthetics, but was to 'create a new thought' for the object.<sup>125</sup> This 'new thought' was directed towards the discursive practice of exhibiting art, and the privileging of certain objects that this entails. It was directed, in short, *away* from the object itself, and it is this relocation of meaning and interest that later on becomes the operating principle of Minimalism and conceptual art alike. And it is also precisely the aspect of Minimalism and conceptualism -- the way that, in both, the art object itself is to some extent *negated* -- that Kiefer emphatically rejects.

In Minimalism, which flourished during the 1960s and 70s, the influence of Duchamp can be discerned in the way that form, in both sculpture and painting, is reduced to simple geometric shapes. Because aesthetic content is therefore limited, interest is directed outwards, towards the viewer and his or her interaction with the artwork. 'The better new work', wrote the Minimalist sculptor Robert Morris,

takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms of the newer aesthetic...One is more aware than before that [the viewer] himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under various conditions of light and spatial context. Every internal relationship, whether it be 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.<sup>126</sup>

The way that Minimalism redirects the viewer's attention is very clearly demonstrated by Morris's *Untitled*, 1965 (Tate), which consists of four perfectly symmetrical cubes made from mirror glass. The viewer's attention is literally

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<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Williams, Robert *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction* Wiley-Blackwell 2009 p198.

<sup>126</sup> 'Notes on Sculpture' (1966-7), quoted in Williams, 2009 p223.

reflected away, and by seeing his or her reflection he or she becomes aware of occupying the same space as the artwork and interacting with it. Thus the relationships generated by the sculpture are between the spectator and the object, as opposed to internal relationships arising from compositional elements.

As with Abstract Expressionism, many of the most important practitioners of Minimalism were American. Along with Morris, these included Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd and Agnes Martin amongst others. Also in common with the Abstract Expressionists, these artists saw their work as in some degree constituting a rupture with the European artistic tradition, against which the movement defined itself. In Judd's view, Minimalism solved 'the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors – which is riddance of one of the salient and more objectionable relics of European art.'<sup>127</sup> Implicit in this remark, then, is the identification of Minimalism with America.

Kiefer's work is clearly at odds with Minimalism to the extent that he reintroduces subject matter, for this provides a relational tie to the world of precisely the kind that Minimalism wishes to sever. As we saw in Chapter 2, he is thoroughly opposed to art that seeks to isolate itself from life in this manner. It is for this reason that he rejects Minimalism. As Rosenthal comments, he 'cannot abide an art form which, he imagines, lacks the powerful impulse of life experience'.<sup>128</sup> And as Biro suggests, he attempts a critique of American Minimalism in the form of his 112-page photographic booklet from 1969, *Koll Visiting Kiefer*.<sup>129</sup> This consists of photographs of Minimalist sculptures by a student colleague of Kiefer's arranged in the latter's cluttered studio, so that the sculptures become part of the compositions, visually interacting with the other elements of the photographs. In this way, Kiefer reasserts the aesthetic relationships that Minimalism tries to banish from art. Furthermore,

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Williams, 2009 p221.

<sup>128</sup> Rosenthal, 1987 p155.

<sup>129</sup> Biro, 1998 pp164-172.

because the photographs are presented in the form of a book, a 'rudimentary narrative' is established.<sup>130</sup>

It is nevertheless true that Kiefer *shares* something with Minimalism, to the extent that, as we saw in Chapter 3, he employs various devices that have the effect of producing a sense of situated-ness in the spectator (the aspect of Minimalism to which Fried objected so strongly). But this is largely achieved by means of internal relationships within the paintings, such as the juxtaposition of recession and surface. Furthermore, it is never at the expense of subject matter. Thus in Kiefer it is not only the relationship of the spectator to the paintings that counts, but also the relationship of the paintings to the world.

Pop Art – the 'obvious child of American history and culture', as Schama puts it – was in fact as much a British invention as an American one, but Kiefer's critique of Pop is directed at its chief American exponent, Andy Warhol.<sup>131</sup> Biro and several other commentators interpret Kiefer's use of woodcut portraits – most notably in the *Hermann's Battle* series from the early 1980s – as an interrogation of Warhol's celebrity portraits, such as *13 Most Wanted Men* (1964).<sup>132</sup> Kiefer has stated that American Pop Art dominated thinking at the Karlsruhe Academy, where he trained.<sup>133</sup> At this time, it was considered subversive, having a 'negating or critical

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<sup>130</sup> Biro, 1998 p164. A similar effect is achieved in the three versions of Kiefer's book referencing Judd, *Donald Judd Hides Brünhilde* (1976), in which he interposes photographs from an exhibition catalogue of Judd's work -- selectively obscured with black paint -- with images of women taken from pornographic magazines. His aim, in Biro's view, is once again to 'contradict original minimalist intent'. (1998 p171.) Biro identifies a precedent for his critique of Minimalism in Beuys's installation *Fond III* (first exhibited 1969), in which Beuys uses forms derived from Minimalism at the same time as he re-establishes subject matter by using materials symbolically suggestive of his wartime experience.

<sup>131</sup> Schama, 1996 p124.

<sup>132</sup> Biro, 1998 pp172-82. See also Rosenthal, 1987 p51. Biro refers to these works as 'paintings', due perhaps to their canvas support and the use not of printer's ink, but emulsion.

<sup>133</sup> *Interviews*, Dec 1986 quoted in Rosenthal, 1987 p156 n4. The German variety of Pop Art is often known as 'Capitalist Realism [*Kapitalischer Realismus*],' after the title of a 1963 exhibition in Düsseldorf featuring early work by Polke, Richter and others.

meaning' when applied to the cult of celebrity and other facets of Western style capitalism.<sup>134</sup> But Biro argues that Kiefer's intention is to demonstrate that rather than being unequivocally critical, the Warhol-esque portrait can serve the ends of ideology. For many of the portraits in the *Hermann* series are reproduced from a 1935 book by the National Socialist historian Karl Richard Ganzer, *Face of the German Leader: 200 Portraits of German Fighters and Pioneers, Across 2000 Years*, a book intended to legitimize Nazi ideology by forging connections with Germany's illustrious past. Thus the Nazis in some degree anticipated Warhol's device of group celebrity portraits, but in their case it was with a view to evoking a spurious lineage for their ideology by aligning themselves with figures from Germany's past with whom they claimed a spiritual kinship. And Kiefer's use of woodcut -- a craft with a long and illustrious history in German art from Dürer to Ernst Ludwig Kirchner -- is therefore apt, since it evokes the idea of a German 'essence', as was promoted by the Nazis. Indeed, it was no doubt for this reason that they claimed the invention of the medium for Germany, as Schütz notes.<sup>135</sup> It seems then, that Kiefer's appropriation of American Pop Art is intended to expose its *flaws*.<sup>136</sup>

Conceptual art, which in common with Minimalism descends from Duchamp, began to flourish in the late 1960s. It holds that it is not the art object itself, but the *concept* -- or intention -- informing it that is what matters. Aesthetic content is deliberately kept to a minimum, in order to deflect the viewer's attention away from this aspect of the object and towards *other* aspects of it, the 'entire constellation of conceptual, linguistic, institutional, and cultural factors that condition the way we deal with objects', as Robert Williams notes.<sup>137</sup> Notable early practitioners included

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<sup>134</sup> Biro, 1998 p180.

<sup>135</sup> Schütz, Sabine 'Anselm Kiefer's *Wege Der Weltweisheit – Die Hermannsschlacht*. Eine Deutsche Genealogie' in Dickel, Gallwitz, Schmutz, and Schütz 2007-8 p18.

<sup>136</sup> As Hermand notes, Pop Art had been the subject of 'a short-lived wave of protest from West German high-culture devotees.' (In Stephan (Ed), 2005 p74.) In 1964, the journal *Das Kunstwerk* [The Work of Art] dismissed American Pop Art as "supermarket art" or "non-art" based on mere "unimaginative banalities" in contrast to the elitist art of abstract painting. (Quoted in Harmand, in Stephan (Ed), 2005 p74.) This was an exception to the general tendency of the German art establishment -- noted in the previous chapter -- to endorse Artistic imports from America.

<sup>137</sup> Williams, 2009 p199.

Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth, the latter of whom furnished an important manifesto of conceptualism in the form of his essay of 1969, 'Art After Philosophy'. Acknowledging his debt to Duchamp, Kosuth reiterates the view that aesthetics are 'conceptually irrelevant to art'.<sup>138</sup> The seemingly natural connection between art and aesthetics is not natural, but merely the result of a historical coincidence. Kosuth also articulates an idea that has become common currency in the last few decades, namely that the purpose of art is art's self-interrogation. 'Being an artist now', Kosuth tells us, 'means to question the nature of art'.<sup>139</sup> An artwork becomes 'a definition of art'.<sup>140</sup> Seen in these terms, the traditional pursuits of artists, such as painting and sculpture, are no longer valid, since rather than providing new definitions of art they correspond to existing definitions. 'If you make paintings', Kosuth declares, 'you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art'.<sup>141</sup> And this is to accept an outmoded, and *European* tradition. To make painting is to accept 'the nature of art to be the European tradition of a painting-sculpture dichotomy'.<sup>142</sup> Once again, then, the discourse is inflected in terms of an America versus Europe opposition.

At the start of his career, Kiefer briefly aligned himself with conceptual art. This was apparent from the *Occupations* series, the point of which for the viewer was not to consider the photographs as aesthetic objects, but to consider what his action signified – what was indicated by a contemporary German performing the Nazi salute. The use of photography in this case was essentially to document the action, to provide a visual *record*. And the conceptual orientation of the series was no doubt the reason for its acceptance for publication in *Interfunktionen*, since under the editorship of Benjamin Buchloh the magazine served as a forum for conceptualism. As Gwen Allen has pointed out, Buchloh strongly believed in 'the political

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<sup>138</sup> Kosuth, Joseph 'Art After Philosophy' Reprinted from *Studio International* (October, 1969)[[http://www.lot.at/sfu\\_sabine\\_bitter/Art\\_After\\_Philosophy.pdf](http://www.lot.at/sfu_sabine_bitter/Art_After_Philosophy.pdf). Accessed 10 June 2017.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Arthur R Rose, 'Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner', (February 1969) reprinted in *Arts Magazine* 63, No 6 (February 1989)

<sup>140</sup> 'Art After Philosophy'.

<sup>141</sup> Rose, 1969/89.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*



possibilities of the magazine as an alternative distribution form for conceptual art.<sup>143</sup> After the *Occupations* series, however, Kiefer turned away from conceptual art in favor of painting, to which he appears to have made a definite commitment some time in the early 1970s. His allegiance to conceptualism had in any case not been very strong; even the photographs of the *Occupations* series are, it must be admitted, artfully composed. The occasional references to conceptual art that he continues to make – as in *The Last Cartload*, which as noted in the last chapter features a wooden chair attached to the canvas, unmistakably recalling Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* – seem mainly intended to reinforce a sense of painting's discursive aspect by juxtaposing it with 'literal' objects rather than to promote conceptualism.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, as a painter he is automatically at odds with the latter, since painting cannot -- according to Kosuth -- interrogate the nature of art. As a *figurative* painter, he stands in clear opposition to abstraction, and also to Minimalism, because figuration represents a relational tie to the world and is thus antithetical to Minimalism. And it is above all Kiefer's embrace of figuration that transformed Buchloh from an admirer of Kiefer's to one of his fiercest critics, and Kiefer -- in Buchloh's view -- into a reactionary.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Weikop, Christian 'Occupations': A Difficult Reception', in Weikop, Christian (Ed.), 2016. Accessed 5 May 2017.

<sup>144</sup> It seems clear too that, in Kiefer, such objects continue to have a referential value, whereas in conceptual art it is this quality that is necessarily banished. In this respect, his use of found objects is similar to that of Beuys. For example, whilst the latter's *Bathtub* of 1960 recalls Duchamp's factory-produced readymades, Beuys acknowledged that it was intended to have a symbolic, relational function. It had, he claims, 'nothing to do with the concept of the readymade' but 'relates to the reality of being born in such an area and in such circumstances'. (Quoted in Buchloh, 2003 p52). As Buchloh comments, Beuys thus reintegrates the object 'into the most traditional context of literary and referential representation: *this* object stands for *that* idea, and *that* idea is represented in *this* object'. (2003 p52). And it is precisely because of his departure from conceptualism, and a return to the traditional understanding of meaning, that Buchloh castigates Beuys.

<sup>145</sup> See Buchloh, in Wallis (Ed), 1984. Whilst recognizing that Kiefer's work can be understood as a gesture of defiance 'against the dominance of American art during the entire period of reconstruction', Buchloh sees its figurative aspect as affirmative of the status quo. (In Wallis (Ed), 1984 p125.) The periodic return in art to figuration has, according to Buchloh, always coincided with the resurgence of repressive regimes, as was the case with the so-called 'Rappel à l'Ordre' of 1926, which heralded the rise of fascism. This is because figuration relates to classicism, and therefore evokes order and stability. A society that promotes figuration is thus

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promoting the idea that such order obtains, and this is a vital requirement of authoritarianism. 'It is endemic', writes Buchloh, 'to the syndrome of authoritarianism that it appeal to and affirm the "eternal" or ancient systems of order.' (In Wallis (Ed), 1984 p111.) Abandoning its subversive, critical function, figurative art can only be affirmative of a dominant ideology. It entails the transformation of 'the subversive function of aesthetic production to plain affirmation.' (In Wallis (Ed), 1984 pp117-8.) Donald Kuspit published a riposte to Buchloh in defense of the use of figuration by Kiefer and other German painters such as Baselitz (see Kuspit, in Wallis (Ed), 1984 pp137-51). The return of figuration, in Kuspit's view, is critical precisely in virtue of the fact that it represented the negation of an established idiom, namely abstraction, which having been long since subsumed into the mainstream culture had lost its critical edge. 'Abstraction today', he writes, 'does not, as it once did, force us back on ourselves in a searching critical process. Instead, today it is painterly figuration that comes to us as critically significant, forcing us to be self-conscious and self-critical in relation to it.' (In Wallis (Ed), 1984 pp143-4.)

## Chapter 5: The *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Kiefer and ‘Negative Dialectics’

If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true – if it is to be true today, in any case – it must also be a thinking against itself. If thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims. – Theodor Adorno<sup>1</sup>

*In the previous chapter, I began to explore the way that Kiefer and Wagner are connected by the theme of the Counter-Enlightenment, which translated itself into counter-Americanism. In this last chapter, continuing this theme, I will show how their aesthetic aspiration to boundlessness is likewise a function of the Counter-Enlightenment, since it can be understood as an attack on identity thinking, the mindset associated by Adorno and others with the consequences of the Enlightenment.*

In 1942, Theodor Adorno (1903-69) wrote an appraisal of the work of his friend and colleague Walter Benjamin, who had killed himself two years earlier rather than face imprisonment at the hands of the Nazis. Of Benjamin, Adorno remarked that ‘almost the entire effort of his philosophy can be defined as an attempt to rescue the particular’.<sup>2</sup> But the very same can perhaps be said of Adorno himself. For over the course of his career, his central concern hardly varied: a commitment to the particular as against the general, to that which resisted inclusion in the comprehensive. He strove by all possible intellectual means to obstruct the subsumption of the particular under the universal; for the need to impose

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno, Theodor W *Negative Dialectics* Translated by E B Ashton, Continuum, New York and London 2007 (first published 1966) p365.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Notizen zur neuen Anthropologie’, quoted in Buck-Morss, Susan *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* The Free Press, New York 1977 p189.

uniformity, and thus eliminate the possibility of dissent, is the central impulse of all forms of political domination. Against the latter, what is individual and particular is consequently the only defense. And the overwhelming tendency of modernity -- in Adorno's view -- is still towards such domination, despite the defeat of fascism in 1945. The chief target of his critical enterprise was therefore the homogenizing tendency of modern society; but he resolutely maintained that this is itself a function of a similar tendency in the realm of consciousness, namely, modern rationality, which is likewise conditioned, he argued, by the elevation of the universal at the expense of the particular. This, then, was his astonishing claim: that a causal relationship exists, such that modern rationality itself has led to the various and unspeakable barbarisms of modernity. It is likely, moreover, indeed inevitable, that it will lead to others. What he sought to do, in consequence, was to avert -- or at least to delay -- the disaster towards which he believed modern society is headed by exposing the flaw in modern thinking.

Adorno is one of several commentators, known collectively as the 'Frankfurt School', loosely associated with the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, the Institute for Social Research, founded in Frankfurt in 1923 with the stated purpose of accounting for the failure of modernity to deliver what seemed to have been promised by the Enlightenment, namely the abolition of social injustice. 'Enlightenment', declares Adorno (with Max Horkheimer),

understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth radiates under the sign of disaster triumphant.<sup>3</sup>

The joint enterprise of the Frankfurt School writers represents an attempt to explain this state of affairs by means of a detailed analysis -- or critique -- of modernity, known in consequence as 'critical theory'. It is as providing this critique's philosophical underpinning that Adorno sees his 'negative dialectics', the name he

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<sup>3</sup> Adorno, Theodor and Horkheimer, Max *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Translated by John Cumming, Verso, London and New York 1979 p3.

gives to his philosophical undertaking. Negative dialectics constitutes its ‘theoretical foundation’, as Brian O’Connor notes.<sup>4</sup> In this way, his project constitutes a pragmatic application of philosophical ideas to social reality; but this practical orientation is thoroughly in keeping with his essential outlook, which in common with that of all thinkers of a Marxist persuasion can be broadly characterized as materialist.

In this chapter, having outlined the main elements of his thinking, I will show that Kiefer and Wagner can in some degree be aligned with Adorno. In the case of Wagner, this is admittedly a highly provocative assertion, since the philosopher -- together perhaps with Nietzsche -- is well known as having been the composer’s fiercest and most vociferous detractor. We shall nevertheless see that the aspiration to borderless-ness that I have identified in Wagner and Kiefer can be interpreted as an attack on the Enlightenment-style enclosed systems of thought that he warns against.

Although the eponymous book was not published until almost the end of Adorno’s life and career (in 1966), the ideas behind negative dialectics were those with which he had been preoccupied since the 1930s. For reasons that will perhaps become apparent, however, negative dialectics should not be seen as a methodology. Nor does Adorno set his ideas out in a systematic way. His essential thesis is nevertheless very clear; it is that that modern consciousness is in thrall to a flawed form of rationality, articulated in idealist philosophy and reinforced during the Enlightenment. It is with a brief account of this rationality that we must therefore begin.

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<sup>4</sup> O’Connor, Brian *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* The MIT Press 2005 Preface p. ix.

## **'The True is the Whole'**

Idealism is the philosophical school, highly influential in western civilization since classical times, based on the not unreasonable assumption that experience is fundamentally 'ideal', or mental, to the extent that it is dependent on the mind's perception. This is not the same as to say that reality *itself* is mental (although that this possibility cannot be discounted is the contention of solipsism, idealism's extreme form, which holds that the perceiving self is all that can be known to exist); idealism simply posits a perceiving subject on the one hand, and the material world, or object, on the other, experience of which is filtered through the interface of the mind. Thus idealism is based on the subject/object dualism, in which the former is *prioritized* over the latter in virtue of the fact that experience is a function of subjectivity; there can be no experience, idealism claims, without an experiencing subject. This view of perceptual experience as consisting of the subject's mental inspection and evaluation of the world, which was a prominent feature of classical thought, was reinvigorated during the Enlightenment by such thinkers as René Descartes. 'Perception', writes Descartes in his *Discourse on Method*, 'is solely an inspection by the mind'.<sup>5</sup> This is why many materialist philosophers (including Adorno and Heidegger) consequently identify the Enlightenment as a pivotal moment in the history of human subjectivity.

Idealism – as for example in its Cartesian form -- is generally associated with what is known as a 'representational' theory of knowledge. This is the view that our senses provide us with raw sensory data regarding an object on the basis of which we form mental representations, or concepts, about it. These allow us to classify the object -- as a chair, apple, tree etc -- in order to comprehend it. Thus the idealist subject (what Descartes calls the *res cogitans*, or 'thinking thing') stands at two removes from the object (the *res extensa*, or 'extended thing'), separated from it by his or her concepts. 'I now know', Descartes tells us, 'that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and

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<sup>5</sup> 1637, quoted in Mirzoeff, Nicholas *An Introduction to Visual Culture* Routledge, London and New York, 1999 p43.

that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen but from their being *understood* [emphasis added].<sup>6</sup>

Experience in the idealist view, then, is essentially a matter of conceptualization (in the form of a kind of classification or categorization).<sup>7</sup> And idealism holds that no aspect of any object is unavailable to this process, so that it is therefore possible to achieve complete knowledge of an object. This represents the complete truth concerning it, and hence Hegel's claim that 'the true is the whole'.<sup>8</sup> Idealism calls this complete knowledge 'identity' -- in the sense of *sameness* -- of thought and object, whereby the concept matches the object in every respect (indeed, it is the requirement of idealist rationality that there can be no ultimate *nonidentity* between thought and object, as Brian O'Connor notes<sup>9</sup>). Idealist rationality is consequently also known as 'identity' thinking.

Arising from the idealist account are two major implications. The first of these is the problem of *particularity*, to which we shall shortly come. The second is the problem that, by this account, our knowledge of reality must be at best indirect, since it has to pass through the filter of our understanding. Knowledge is knowledge of our representations, not of objects themselves. This is the basis of Kant's distinction between the *noumena*, or things in themselves, and *phenomena*, or things as we experience them. Knowledge of the former must remain permanently beyond our grasp. 'The true correlative of sensibility', Kant tells us, 'the thing-in-itself, is not known, and cannot be known.... and in experience no question is ever asked in regard to it.'<sup>10</sup> But his far-reaching and highly influential conclusion from his

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<sup>6</sup> *Meditation 2* (1641) Reproduced in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Adam, Charles, and Tannery, Paul (Eds.) Paris 1904 Volume 7 p34.

<sup>7</sup> The process whereby sensory information resolves itself into concepts is what Kant refers to as the 'synthesis of the manifold'. It is 'the act of putting representations together and grasping what is manifold in them in one cognition.' (Kant, Immanuel *Critique of Pure Reason* First Published 1781 Translated by Guyer, P and Wood, A Cambridge University Press, 1987 p77.)

<sup>8</sup> *Phenomenology of Mind* (First Published 1807), quoted in Jarvis, Simon *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* Polity Press, Cambridge 1998 p172.

<sup>9</sup> 2005 p78.

<sup>10</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) quoted in O'Connor, 2005 p62.

epistemological inquiry in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that the subject's very isolation from the world means that he or she actively constitutes reality, in terms of the *a priori* forms and categories of the understanding. This direction of attention towards the subject's share in the constitution of reality is what Kant indicates by his 'Copernican Revolution'.

It seemed to Hegel – whose contribution to the idealist account of subjectivity was, by any standards, a groundbreaking one – that he had obviated the problem of the noumenon.<sup>11</sup> This is the consequence of his theory of the way that thought and object achieve identity, which (in contrast to the somewhat static picture that emerges from the ideas of earlier thinkers such as Descartes) produces a dynamic picture based on the notion of *change*. Writing in *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), he argues that consciousness operates according to a developmental process that is dialectically constituted, that is to say, it is based on *contradiction*, entailing successive stages that contradict each other. These stages are usually referred to as 'thesis' and 'antithesis', which combine to produce 'synthesis', although Hegel himself uses for these the terms 'abstract', 'negative' and 'concrete' respectively. A conceptual judgment that we form about an object constitutes the abstract stage. It provides a degree of knowledge of the object, but this remains only partial. Closer inspection reveals other attributes that stand in some way to contradict, or negate, the original impression, in the sense that they show it to be incomplete or wrong. The combination of abstract and negative produces the concrete stage, the fully realized, or complete, conception of the object. The point is reached, Hegel claims, 'where knowledge is no longer compelled to go beyond itself, where it finds its own

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<sup>11</sup> Hegel's position regarding the Enlightenment, like that of Marx, is an ambiguous one. Whilst he is a rationalist, and assumes the possibility of full rational knowledge, he is at odds with the Enlightenment belief in universal values, arguing that values are contingent and dependent upon the epoch in which an individual lives, which differs from other epochs according to its historical location in the process of the working out of 'absolute spirit'. As John E Toews writes, Hegel connects reason 'to the necessity of cultural and temporal difference rather than the universality of nature'. ('Berlin's Marx: Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, and the Historical Construction of Cultural Identities' in Mali and Wokler (Eds) 2003 p167.)



self, and the notion corresponds to the object and the object to the notion.<sup>12</sup> This is the stage of identity. Thus the Hegelian dialectic constitutes a gradual movement from partial to complete, a kind of triumphal progress towards absolute knowledge. But it is also fully conceptual, a matter of ‘conceptual adjustment’, as O’Connor puts it, in which a concept is modified in the light of other conceptual material.<sup>13</sup> And the operation of thought, for Hegel, is a microcosm of the operation of every domain of reality, including philosophy, art, nature, society, and ultimately history, which represents the operation of what he calls ‘absolute spirit’ as it moves from abstract to concrete in a process of progressive self-realization. This is the meaning of his claim that ‘what is rational is actual [real]; and what is actual is rational.’<sup>14</sup> It is in this way, by arguing that the structure of rationality is identical with the structure of reality, that he is able to collapse Kant’s distinction between noumena and phenomena.<sup>15</sup>

We come now to Adorno, who to some extent accepts Hegel’s thesis. What he accepts is that we conceptualize the world in the way Hegel suggests, by means of a process in which thought adjusts itself until an object has been satisfactorily grasped. What he vehemently denies, however, is the possibility that an object can be known *absolutely*. And this, he argues, is due to the other major problem associated with idealist epistemology, namely the fact that it requires the pre-determination of meaning.

The difficulty emerges in considering the question of an object’s particularity, all statements regarding which necessarily terminate in paradox. In essence, the issue is how an object can both be particular, in the sense of being an individual object, and universal, in the sense of being a member of a class or category. And idealism is itself

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<sup>12</sup> Hegel, 1807/2013 p48.

<sup>13</sup> O’Connor, 2005 p17.

<sup>14</sup> *Philosophy of Right*, quoted in Jarvis, Simon *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* Polity Press, Cambridge 1998 p169.

<sup>15</sup> The problem of the noumena has been a major concern in modern epistemology. Other thinkers cited in the present inquiry for whom it has been a central issue include Herder, the Romantics, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. See **Appendix 3**.

not unaware of the problem. Hegel addresses it in his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, in the context of his discussion of predicative or 'immediate' judgments. 'The untruth of the immediate judgment', he writes,

lies in the incongruity between its form and its content. To say 'This rose is red' involves (in virtue of the copula 'is') the coincidence of subject and predicate. The rose however is a concrete thing, and so not red only: it also has an odor, a specific form, and many other features not implied in the predicate red...The subject and predicate in the immediate judgment touch, as it were, only in a single point, but do not cover each other.<sup>16</sup>

To say that the rose is red may be true, but it ignores the innumerable other aspects of the rose, which are *excluded* from the judgment. As Adorno explains, 'every single object subsumed under a class [in this case, the class of red things] has definitions not contained in the definition of the class'.<sup>17</sup> Thus immediate judgments have an intrinsic exclusivity. And the strength of the copula 'is' in the judgment has the effect of conflating the two terms, as if redness and the rose were 'identical', in the terms of idealism. This is the 'incongruity' of form and content to which Hegel refers; the statement's form produces content at odds with reality. For such identity clearly does *not* obtain, since on the one hand not all that is red is a rose, and on the other, red is not *all* that the rose is.

It seems that Hegel, having made this observation regarding particularity in his *Logic*, nevertheless refuses to allow it to diminish his faith in the omniscience of the concept as advanced in his *Phenomenology*. As Adorno writes, particularity is ultimately among those things in which Hegel, 'agreeing with tradition, expressed his disinterest.'<sup>18</sup> But as stated above, the problem of immediacy might seem to be merely a semantic issue, pertaining to the confusions arising from the inadequacy of language; in fact, it pertains far more nearly to the inadequacy of *thought*. Particularity is a quality of an object that it is simply impossible to apprehend (at

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Jarvis, 1998 p165.

<sup>17</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p150.

<sup>18</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p8.

least if reality is conceived in terms of the idealist subject/object dualism). As Adorno points out, a concept says of an object only what it *already* knows, since to conceptualize an object is to define it in terms of a pre-existing category. In his view, this is the essential problem with idealist rationality, namely that subjectivism necessarily stipulates meanings *in advance*. This was the flaw in Hegel's thesis. 'The Hegelian system in itself', says Adorno, 'was not a true becoming; implicitly, each single definition in it was already preconceived.'<sup>19</sup> We recognize and conceptualize Hegel's rose as red, for example, because it corresponds to our pre-existing concept of redness. As Adorno puts it, 'thought extracts from the object only that which is a thought already'.<sup>20</sup> Thus identity thinking leaves 'no room for the qualitatively new.'<sup>21</sup> To conceptualize an object, then, does an injustice to what is unique about it. It is furthermore to describe an object only in terms of something else (the pre-existing category); it is to say nothing of the object itself. Indeed, it is in a sense to say only of the object what it is *not*. For a conceptualized object becomes like a cipher, standing for, or representing, a class of objects; and a thing cannot *be* what it also represents. Identity thinking, Adorno tells us, 'says what something falls under, of what it is an example or a representative – and what it therefore is not itself.'<sup>22</sup>

This difficulty will arise, furthermore, whatever we say about an object. Whether we say, for example, of a rose that it is red, or that it is a flower, or even that it is a rose: to say all of these things is in effect to say what the object itself is not. Thus at the same time as constituting our only gateway to the world, concepts impassably bar our way to it; access to an object is prevented by the act of conceptualization. Concepts are 'the organon of thinking,' says Adorno, 'and yet the wall between thinking and the thought'.<sup>23</sup> From this paradox there is, it seems, no escape.

This is why Adorno claims that idealist rationality cannot achieve the identity to which it aspires. Something about an object will necessarily always remain elusive,

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<sup>19</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p27.

<sup>20</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p27.

<sup>21</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p155.

<sup>22</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p149.

<sup>23</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p15.

beyond conception; and this is due to the very structure of thought. Indeed, identity thinking, to which Adorno also refers as 'instrumental reason', does a kind of violence to objects, *reducing* them by failing to take into account their inarticulable particularity.<sup>24</sup> The possibility of identity, the exact correspondence of concept and object, is an illusion, for objects are necessarily greater than their concepts. The former, as Adorno tells us, 'do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder'.<sup>25</sup> The mistake of identity thinking is in his view to imagine, or to pretend, that they do. This is why he maintains, in a reversal of Hegel's famous dictum, that 'the whole is the false.'<sup>26</sup>

Adorno refers to this 'remainder' by a variety of terms including the *Nichtidentität*, or the 'non-identical', and 'the indissoluble "something"'. The ungraspable singularity of an object, it is what resists inclusion in the concept of identity; it is, as he puts it, 'the utmost abstraction of the subject-matter that is not identical with thinking'.<sup>27</sup> And with his contention that objects *exceed* their concepts in this way, Adorno reverses idealism's priority of the subject over the object. As O'Connor puts it, the 'irreducible independence' of the latter grants it 'the status of priority.'<sup>28</sup> This reorientation of experience, towards the object and away from the subject, is what more than anything else characterizes Adorno's project as materialist, and places it within the broad trajectory of twentieth century materialist thought that runs from Husserl to Derrida via Heidegger (indeed, the *non-identical* both recalls Heidegger's

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<sup>24</sup> Instrumental reason, as Jarvis writes, is 'reason used as a tool without regard for the specific qualities of the object'. (1998 p120.) O'Connor notes that members of the 'second generation' of critical theorists such as Habermas have directed attention away from epistemology to the rationality implicit in communicative norms, towards 'communicative reason' rather than instrumental reason. (2005, p168.)

<sup>25</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p5. As Murray Dineen points out, Ashton's translation, which is the standard one, is in this case rather free. 'Contradiction' might be closer to the original German than 'remainder'. A more literal translation might read 'objects do not go into their concepts...these get into [go into, produce a] contradiction with the traditional norm of adequacy.' (Dineen, Murray *Friendly Reminders: Essays in Musical Criticism After Adorno* McGill-Queens University Press 2011 p13.)

<sup>26</sup> *Minima Moralia*, quoted in Jarvis, 1998 p172.

<sup>27</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p135.

<sup>28</sup> O'Connor, 2005 p60.

*Dasein* and anticipates Derrida's *différance*). In contrast to idealism, materialism places its emphasis on the phenomenal, or material world, and consequently might appear the more straightforward position to maintain. In reality, it is by far the more difficult, precisely because, as we have seen, the phenomenal world turns out paradoxically to be highly elusive. Materialist thinking, as Jarvis notes, needs to find a way 'to think about that which appears to escape conceptuality'.<sup>29</sup>

One way to accomplish this might be to liquidate the idealist dualism, and evolve an entirely new account of reality; but this Adorno considers impossible. Idealism has so conditioned modern rationality that the dualism cannot be un-thought. In consequence, reality cannot be understood in terms other than subject and object. 'We cannot, by thinking', says Adorno, 'assume any position in which the separation of subject and object will directly vanish'.<sup>30</sup> The alternative is somehow to reintroduce the non-identical into experience; and since the idealist dualism is not to be abandoned, it is this that he seeks to do. What he is *not* proposing, however, is to introduce the non-identical into experience at the expense of the interpreting intellect, so that experience is reduced to the level of an encounter with 'brute' reality, reality unfiltered by conceptualization (such as is conjured by Sartre in his 1938 novel *Nausea*, for example, in which the protagonist encounters a world rendered terrifyingly unintelligible by the inability to function of his interpretive faculty). Rather, he proposes a subject/object relation characterized by a form of

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<sup>29</sup> Jarvis, 1998 p150.

<sup>30</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p85. It is in this respect, as well as his Marxist orientation, that Adorno departs substantially from Heidegger, with whom he otherwise shares a considerable amount. After World War Two, Heidegger began to seek ways consciously to reverse the 'forgetting' of being [*die Seinsvergessenheit*] that he considered to bedevil modernity. In 1949, he added an introduction entitled 'The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics' to his *What is Metaphysics?* of twenty years earlier, in which he proposed finding a way back to an originary form of thinking that did not entail the separation of thought from being. He sought what he calls elsewhere the 'overcoming' of metaphysics (by which he indicated the entire Western philosophical tradition predicated on the idealist dualism, and the metaphysical conundrum it generated). (Heidegger, 1971 Appendix p141.) And it was the possibility of a subsequently transformed 'sojourn [*Aufenthalt*]' for modern humanity that preoccupied him for the remainder of his career, as Richard Capobianco notes. (Capobianco, Richard *Engaging Heidegger* University of Toronto Press, 2010 p81.)

what he calls 'mediation', or reciprocity, in which subject and object alike contribute to the formation of meaning. The subject is neither fully passive, nor fully constitutive. In mediation, Adorno tells us, subject and object 'constitute one another as much as...they depart from one another'.<sup>31</sup> What this comes down to in practice, above all, is the awareness that meaning is produced in part *contingently*, in the course of an encounter with a particular object that is not seen simply as 'a case of the general', as Buck-Morss puts it.<sup>32</sup> This is well illustrated by the objection Adorno raises to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological account of meaning, cited by Buck-Morss.<sup>33</sup> Husserl attempts to establish a transcendental realm of 'thought objects', whose meaning is uncontaminated by an object's particularity and the heterogeneity that this entails. He uses the example of a tree in his garden, arguing that its meaning is a function of 'intentionality', the act of conceptualization, and this meaning withstands the merely empirical consideration that the tree is an object that *changes*, being for example subject to seasonal variations, and liable to be cut down for firewood and burnt. Adorno argues the opposite; the meaning of the tree is *precisely* the fact that it can change. '*Particular things*', he writes, '*can burn up* [italics original]'.<sup>34</sup> Thus the 'truth' of the tree resides 'in just that heterogeneity which Husserl had tried to eliminate', as Buck-Morss writes.<sup>35</sup>

In general, negative dialectics amounts to a kind of skepticism, a refusal to accept a view of reality dogmatically presented as absolute. More of an attitude of mind or philosophical stance than a method, it is, as Adorno puts it, 'the consistent sense of nonidentity'.<sup>36</sup> Where identity thinking constitutes the negation of negation (whereby the negation of the abstract results in the 'positive' concrete), negative dialectics negates this positive result. To state the matter somewhat cryptically, negative dialectics is the *negation* of the negation of negation. But Adorno is keen to

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<sup>31</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p174.

<sup>32</sup> Buck-Morss, 1977 p76.

<sup>33</sup> Buck-Morss, 1977 pp71-2.

<sup>34</sup> 'Die Transzendenz des Dinglichen und Noematischen in Husserls Phänomenologie (1924)', quoted in Buck-Morss, 1977 p72.

<sup>35</sup> Buck-Morss, 1977 p72.

<sup>36</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p5.

point out that the negative that results does not undermine the epistemological value of the dialectic. He seeks, he tells us, 'to free dialectics from [its] affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy.'<sup>37</sup>

But in what way, it might be asked, does Adorno's epistemological project form the basis of his social critique? It is time to show how he makes the crucial connection between modern rationality and modern society, how he justifies his claim that identity thinking has the devastating consequences for society he attributes to it, and how his project therefore becomes the reversal of identity thinking – the project to which, as I will show, Kiefer and Wagner make their contributions.

### **Rationality and Power**

The point for Adorno is that modernity is entirely permeated by the demand for identity, for this is what is indicated in any conceptualization or categorization -- which, as we have seen, come to the same thing. The demand for identity is the demand for a form of *totality*, a totality that -- also as we have seen -- cannot in reality possibly be achieved. This constitutes what Adorno calls the 'untruth' of identity thinking, its *false* claim to totality, so that an identity, or total correspondence, is posited between a concept and its object where no such identity exists. A *single* aspect of an object is made to seem comprehensive; something *exclusive* is made to seem *inclusive*. And for Adorno this has very problematic social consequences. By way of example, he offers the tendency to define an individual solely in terms of his or her function in society, which has the effect of negating all those other aspects that constitute the same individual. There is a contradiction, he writes,

between the definition which an individual knows as his own and his "role", the definition forced upon him by society...such a contradiction cannot be brought under any unity

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<sup>37</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 preface xix.

without manipulation, without the insertion of some wretched cover concepts that will make the crucial difference vanish.<sup>38</sup>

The effect of such categorization, then, is the liquidation of heterogeneity; it makes the 'crucial difference vanish', as Adorno puts it. The contradiction (what Hegel had called the 'incongruity') between form and content, between what is implicit from the categorization and the truth, is glossed over. And not only is this a reductive process, doing an injustice to the particularity of the subject matter, it is also easy to see how it serves the interests of power, which depends on uniformity and the negation of potential dissent. Indeed, the ramifications of the process of categorization are sinister in the extreme. It is categorization, for example, that allows for the possibility to differentiate a particular nation in terms of certain character traits, thereby creating the false impression of unity deployed in the service of nationalist discourses. It is likewise categorization that allows for separation on the basis of race, as has indeed been enacted many times over the course of history with the pernicious consequences that need hardly be elaborated. That which resists inclusion in the 'wretched cover concept' – whether it be the Jew, the immigrant, the homosexual or any other embodiment of *otherness* – must be marginalized, or eliminated altogether. 'A matter of urgency to the concept', Adorno tells us, 'would be what it fails to cover, what its abstractionist mechanism eliminates, what is not already a case of the concept'.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the social implication of Adorno's thesis start to become clear: it is that identity thinking is the servant of power. The former can be construed, in fact, as an instrument of ideology, the false consciousness by which power structures perpetuate themselves. Indeed, this is the conclusion of Adorno's other major work, co-authored with Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* [Dialectic of Enlightenment] of 1944. So far from leading to 'disenchantment' and a progressively rationalized social order, Adorno and Horkheimer argue, the Enlightenment merely resulted in the increasing 'mythification' of reality, in which, in the manner of myth, illusion is

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<sup>38</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p152.

<sup>39</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p8.



presented as if it were reality; moreover, it is accepted unreservedly as such. This is the ultimate consequence of identity thinking, which confuses form with content so that an identity is assumed where none obtains in reality. Ideology, Adorno maintains, 'lies in the implicit identity of concept and thing'.<sup>40</sup> Appearance, in short, is accepted as truth, and this translates into uncritical acceptance of social realities as part of the 'given' world, 'without regard for their historical becoming', as Buck-Morss notes.<sup>41</sup> Thus both monopoly capitalism and political totalitarianism, for example, can be falsely presented as part of the settled order of things. The requirement of ideology is that such things be taken for granted. Dependent on the confusion of form with content, ideology, as Adorno puts it, consists in 'a posited thing posing as being-in-itself'.<sup>42</sup>

As Buck-Morss has shown, Adorno's ideas derive at least in part from Györgi Lukács.<sup>43</sup> Like Lukács, Adorno discerns an interrelatedness of modern consciousness and modern society. Also like Lukács, he holds the former to be predicated on a falsehood (the false totality of identity thinking). And once again like Lukács, he concludes that modern consciousness is unable to recognize the truth of modern reality and the injustice that characterizes it. It is unable to see through the veil of mystification in which ideology cloaks itself; the impoverished condition of modern rationality prevents it. But Adorno also *departs* from Lukács, with respect to praxis. Lukács retains his faith in the proletariat as the subject, as well as the object, of history, counting on this class for the overthrow of capitalist hegemony. For Adorno, however, what would result from such a reversal would merely be the substitution of one form of ideology for another. The potential revolutionary impulse embodied by the proletariat has in any case long since been emasculated, in Adorno's view, by what he refers to, with withering irony, as the 'culture industry'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p40.

<sup>41</sup> Buck-Morss, 1977 p54.

<sup>42</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p21.

<sup>43</sup> 1977, particularly Chapter 2.

<sup>44</sup> Adorno's thesis is that forms of mass culture such as cinema are targeted at the proletariat with the intention of neutralizing resistance in a totalized society. The proletariat spectator, in Adorno's view (contrastingly with Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'absent-minded critic'), has been reduced by 'the repetitiveness, the self-

In consequence, he does not seek a political solution; he never equates ‘theoretical praxis with revolutionary political praxis’, as Buck-Morss puts it.<sup>45</sup> He places more emphasis, instead, in effecting a change in consciousness. And this is because he maintains that identity thinking is not simply the servant of power, but is *itself* an embodiment of power relations. That he believes this to be the case is highly evident even from his choice of vocabulary; for it is always in terms of *domination* that he characterizes the subject/object relation in identity thinking. The subject always needs to have the ‘upper hand’, so to speak.<sup>46</sup> Thus in the quote cited above, he talks of a definition ‘forced’ onto the individual. Elsewhere, he tells us that the concept ‘tolerates nothing outside it’;<sup>47</sup> the object is ‘the thing to be mastered’;<sup>48</sup> ‘the least surplus of nonidentity feels to the subject like an absolute threat’.<sup>49</sup> Alternatively, he employs the imagery of *consumption* to suggest the way the subject negates the object’s independence, and along with it the possibility of contradiction. The subject, for Adorno, seems akin to some ravenous monster. Identity thinking, he says, is ‘the belly turned mind’.<sup>50</sup>

To the extent that it strives to eliminate difference, then, identity thinking constitutes a form of domination. Modern rationality *teaches* us to think in this way, to conceptualize the world in terms of a kind of ‘zero sum’ game. Identity thinking has been inculcated into us. And it is Adorno’s chilling conclusion that, along with it,

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sameness, and the ubiquity’ of mass culture to a state of stupefaction, as he writes in ‘On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening (in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* Routledge, London 1991 p138)’. Adorno’s ‘culture industry’ makes for automated reactions, weakening ‘the forces of individual resistance’. (1991 p138.) Indeed, the defining characteristic of Adorno’s spectator is one of induced *regression*.

<sup>45</sup> Buck-Morss, 1977 p36.

<sup>46</sup> There is a suggestion of this view of the subject in Heidegger’s remark that we ‘must understand this word *subiectum*... as the translation of the Greek *hypokeimon*. The word names that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself.’ (*The Question Concerning Technology* Translated by William Lovitt, Garland Publishing New York 1977 p128.) Thus man becomes ‘the relational center’ of the world. (Ibid.)

<sup>47</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p172.

<sup>48</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p175.

<sup>49</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p183.

<sup>50</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p23.

has been inculcated the urge to domination that it embodies. Humanity, in short, has been *brutalized* by its own rationality. 'The principle of dominion,' he writes, 'which antagonistically rends human society, is the same principle which, spiritualized, causes the difference between the concept and its subject matter'.<sup>51</sup> Thus it is that he can claim that it is barbarism 'in which bourgeois thinking ends'.<sup>52</sup> This is why he dedicates himself wholeheartedly to the reversal of identity thinking, and adopts the unremittingly contrary stance outlined in his negative dialectics. The whole point of the project of negation, as Buck-Morss writes,

was to resist repeating in thought the structures of domination and reification that existed in society, so that instead of reproducing reality, consciousness could be critical, so that reason could recognize its own nonidentity with social reality, on the one hand, and material nature's nonidentity with the categorizing consciousness that passed for rationality, on the other.<sup>53</sup>

We begin, finally, to see why the particular is so paramount in Adorno's universe. It is because it constitutes the *single* defense, not only against the impulse to totality and domination, but also against the spiritual degradation of humanity.

### ***Contra Adorno***

I have gone into negative dialectics in some detail, as it constitutes the foundation of Adorno's thinking. It would be impossible to assess his relationship to Wagner and Kiefer, as is my intention, without having some grasp of it, and of how it explains why his entire project is dedicated to a single purpose: to expose the *untruth* of identity thinking, namely the fact that 'the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived,' as he puts it.<sup>54</sup> Any concept, or category, is in his view founded on this

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p48.

<sup>52</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p56. For Adorno, identity thinking is 'bourgeois' because he sees it as the mindset of capitalism. This is part of what he takes from Lukács (see **Appendix 3**).

<sup>53</sup> Buck-Morss, 1977 p189.

<sup>54</sup> Adorno, 1966/2007 p5.

falsehood, which modern rationality has taught us to overlook. It is this facet of modern rationality – its self-induced blindness to the untruth of identity thinking -- that political ideologies have ruthlessly exploited, and continue to exploit, positing an identity where none exists. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ideologies of totalitarianism. But the impulse toward domination, which is at the core of the latter, is only the domination encoded in identity thinking writ large; and it is for this reason that Adorno maintains that all hope for humanity resides in the change in *consciousness* constituted by the reversal of identity thinking. All of his other writing, including his social commentary and his ideas about art, proceeds with remarkable consistency from this conviction.

As mentioned earlier, I will show a degree of kinship between these ideas and Wagner and Kiefer. Adorno, of course, can have had no experience of Kiefer's work; but he was highly familiar with that of Wagner. And the idea that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* could be said to exercise a beneficial effect on society, let alone that it could be characterized as having 'dialectical' potential – that is to say, *critical* potential to reveal the truth of the world – would, it must be straightaway said, strike Adorno as the most extreme folly. As the author of a deeply hostile critique of his music, *In Search of Wagner* (1952), Adorno has the distinction of being Wagner's bitterest critic (with the possible exception of Nietzsche<sup>55</sup>). Whilst he advances compelling justifications for his condemnation, his antipathy to Wagner is no doubt at least in part a result of the latter's anti-Semitism and the association of his music with the Third Reich (Adorno was half Jewish on his father's side and had been forced into exile by the Nazis in 1934, so his resentment is understandable); and I will show that there is some common ground between Wagner and Adorno – the latter's polemical arguments to the contrary notwithstanding – just as there is between Kiefer and Adorno. In effect, my approach will be to deploy Adorno's own arguments against him.

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<sup>55</sup> See Magee, 2001 pp286-342 for an account of the vicissitudes of Wagner's relationship with Nietzsche.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I established that both Wagner and Kiefer are committed to the idea that art should play a public role. This is evident in Wagner's case from the fact that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was intended to provide a focus of community life and symbolize the spirit of communitarianism by means of its formal constitution as a kind of community of the arts, and in Kiefer's case from the way that he seeks to provoke debate and encourage the spectator to engage with issues such as the question of German responsibility for the Holocaust and the role of myth in human history. With this commitment to art's public role -- which serves to undermine the boundary between art and society -- both oppose themselves to the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, the doctrine that seeks to keep art and society firmly *separate*. And this consequently sets them at odds with Adorno, who stands on the opposite side of the art and society debate.

By contrast with Wagner and Kiefer, Adorno is an advocate of the strict autonomy of art. But this is not because he is opposed to art's exercising an influence in the world. On the contrary, he views the importance of this influence as nothing less than critical. Art for Adorno represents the only faint glimmer of hope for humanity in modernity's 'administered universe'.<sup>56</sup> It is the sole area of human activity to furnish a possibility of countering the adverse effects of identity thinking. Paradoxically, however, this possibility depends on art's remaining separate from society. For Adorno, art's task must be to seek in some way to effect a change in the mindset on which modernity is predicated -- a change, in other words, in modern consciousness. And this cannot be achieved by art that sets out to change modern *society*, for such art inevitably proceeds from a conceptual framework, in the form of an agenda. It is thus already constituted in terms of the thing it needs to subvert, namely, conceptual thinking. It is for this reason, as Adorno explains in his 1962 essay 'Commitment', that he is opposed to 'committed' art, that is, art that seeks

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<sup>56</sup> This phrase, which Adorno sometimes uses, is borrowed from Herbert Marcuse (*One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (First Published 1964) Routledge 2002).

directly to involve itself in society by conveying a political message.<sup>57</sup> His essential argument in the essay is that what concerns itself with concepts and messages already contains a kind of ‘accommodation to the world’, as he puts it, and therefore does not challenge it.<sup>58</sup> Rather, it tacitly accepts and participates in the status quo. Concepts are of no dialectical use (that is, of no use in contradicting the present condition of society), because they are themselves predicated on identity thinking. To apply them dialectically would therefore amount to an attempt to use instrumental reason to overturn itself. It is simply not possible, in short, to *think* oneself out of identity thinking, for this would be a contradiction in terms; and hence ‘committed’ art is a useless tool. This is what Adorno seems to mean from his remark that the ‘content of works of art is never the amount of intellect pumped into them’.<sup>59</sup> Instead, art’s dialectical capacity resides for Adorno in its *form*; for it is here that the non-identical is laid bare, in the guise of those elements that refuse to be integrated into the whole. ‘The unresolved antagonisms of reality’, he tells us, ‘return again in the works of art as the immanent problems of their form’.<sup>60</sup>

I want to show, however, that the urge to separate art from society, and restrict it to its own rarefied domain, can be seen as a function of the mindset that Adorno seeks to *abolish*. A notable consequence of the urge to domination embodied in identity thinking, for Adorno as for Heidegger, is the division of reality into what the latter calls ‘object-spheres’, separable and discrete areas of knowledge.<sup>61</sup> This impulse is a function of identity thinking’s view of reality as consisting of objects awaiting conceptualization and mastery by the subject. As we have seen, such mastery is illusory, owing to the reductive propensity of thought. True identity of subject and object can never be achieved. And the strict autonomy that is enforced between the object-spheres – exemplified by the jealous way in which academic disciplines tend

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<sup>57</sup> ‘Commitment’, in Adorno (et al), 1977. To a considerable extent, this essay can be seen as a riposte to Jean-Paul Sartre’s essay of 1948 ‘What is Literature?’, in which Sartre had invoked the concept of commitment in art, understood – as Adorno puts it – as an undertaking ‘to awaken the free choice of the agent.’ (1977 p180.)

<sup>58</sup> ‘Commitment’, in Adorno (et al), 1977 p193.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Commitment’, in Adorno (et al), 1977 p194.

<sup>60</sup> *Ästhetische Theorie*, quoted in Hammermeister, 2002 p202.

<sup>61</sup> Heidegger, 1977 p124.

to protect their fields of specialization – is assumed to reflect a similar autonomy of their subject matter, so that ‘the order of things is the same as the order of ideas’, as Adorno observes.<sup>62</sup> Whereas the truth is that object-spheres *create* their subject matter, objectifying an area of the world that, as Heidegger puts it, ‘comes into being in and through representedness’.<sup>63</sup> The result is what Adorno means by posited things posing as beings-in-themselves, discursive entities masquerading as natural ones. And it is in these terms that the creation of art as an object-sphere eminently separate from society, and the rest of reality, can be seen. An identity is assumed between art -- a posited thing -- and its subject matter, producing a false impression of totality precisely of the kind that Adorno inveigles against. Thus Wagner and Kiefer *resist* this assumption of identity by means of introducing into their artistic practice the constant awareness of what is non-identical with art, namely, society. The weakening of the boundaries between art and society that occurs as a result serves to undermine identity thinking, the tendency that seeks to divide reality into discrete, circumscribed – and thus master-able – zones of authority.

I demonstrated in Chapter 3 that a further connection between Wagner and Kiefer exists in the form of their mutual attack on artistic purity. I want to show now that this also constitutes a second attack on identity thinking, insofar as purity in art can be seen as a function of the latter. But it must first be stated that here again Adorno himself would disagree. A champion of artistic purity, he seems to have viewed artistic synthesis as ideology, an attempt to hide the deeply inequitable nature of modernity by creating a false impression of unity. It is an attempt to ‘paper over the cracks’, as it were, seeking to portray in its constitution as a unity a *social* unity that does not obtain in reality. Writing jointly with Hanns Eisler in *Composing for the Films* (1947), in the context of a discussion of the cinematic practice of incidental music (which he regrets), Adorno argues that it is the *separation* of the arts that should be emphasized, as this more truly reflects the condition of a society defined by alienation. ‘The alienation of the media from each other,’ he writes,

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Der Essay als Form’, quoted in Jarvis, 1998 p138.

<sup>63</sup> Heidegger, 1977 p130.

reflects a society alienated from itself, men whose functions are severed from each other even within each individual. Therefore the aesthetic divergence of the media is potentially a *legitimate means of expression*, not merely a regrettable deficiency that has to be concealed as well as possible [emphasis added].<sup>64</sup>

He makes a similar remark in *In Search of Wagner*. Adorno's view seems to be that artistic synthesis, in disingenuously positing a social unity that is conspicuously *lacking* from modernity, is analogous with identity thinking, to the extent that the latter disingenuously posits a unity of subject and object. 'Wagner's music', he tells us, 'simulates this unity of the internal and external, of subject and object, instead of giving shape to the rupture between them.'<sup>65</sup>

Adorno returns to the concept of synthesis in a 1967 essay, 'Art and the Arts'.<sup>66</sup> His argument here seems to be that the impetus behind the erosion of the 'demarcation lines' between the arts is that it is in this way that the arts supposedly approach the essence of art.<sup>67</sup> The individual arts, he tells us, 'aspire to their concrete generalizations, to an idea of art as such'.<sup>68</sup> But this 'idea' of art for Adorno is certainly not simply the sum total of the arts. It is, he writes, 'no more the concept embracing the arts than the orchestra contains the spectrum of all possible

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Rasula, 2016 p50.

<sup>65</sup> Adorno, 1952 p27. Synthesis, in Adorno's opinion, is in any case a form of dilettantism, a 'jack of all trades' approach to artistic production that sees a practitioner in one discipline hubristically assuming expertise in another. This is therefore his view of Wagner, which he shares with Thomas Mann, a passage from whose essay 'Leiden und Grösse Richard Wagners' of 1948 he quotes with approval. 'The idea of uniting all the arts', writes Mann, 'is itself dilettantish and, in the absence of the supreme effort entailed in subjecting them all to his [Wagner's] overwhelming genius for expression, it would have remained at the level of dilettantism. There is something dubious about his relations with the arts; insane though it sounds, there is something inartistic about it.' (Quoted in Adorno, 1952/2005 p19.)

<sup>66</sup> 'Art and the Arts [1967]', in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A philosophical Reader* Edited by Rolf Tiedemann Translated by Rodney Livingstone (et Al) Stanford University Press, 2003 pp368-387.

<sup>67</sup> Adorno, 1967/2003 p368.

<sup>68</sup> Adorno, 1967/2003 p373.



timbres.<sup>69</sup> The ‘innermost principle’ of art in Adorno’s view is that of utopia, but art is only utopian in respect of its dialectic capacity, that is, in respect of its capacity to contradict the present unjust society and thereby hint at the *possibility* of a utopian, just society.<sup>70</sup> Whilst this capacity is potentially contained in each art form, ‘such an idea of art in the arts is not positive, it is not simply present in them, but must be thought of exclusively as negation [emphasis original]’.<sup>71</sup> Paradoxically, the utopian promise of art will only be realized when art becomes redundant and disappears, when ‘the utopia encoded in every work of art has been fulfilled’.<sup>72</sup> The dissolution of artistic boundaries, for Adorno, proceeds from the spurious notion that art is *itself* utopian, and its promise can be realized simply by the arts coming closer together. Positing the falsehood that utopia is attainable in a totalized society, artistic synthesis is in his view affirmative, not critical.

Once again *contra* Adorno, however, I maintain the opposite: that it is artistic *purity*, not synthesis, which is affirmative. As we saw in Chapter 3, the doctrine of purity is predicated on the division of the arts according to rigidly delineated areas of competence. It is thus consistent with the attempt to divide the world into masterable areas of knowledge, to which the arts are assumed to be individually adequate. Furthermore, it operates on the principle of *exclusion*. It seeks to exclude from its definitions of the arts what it considers improper or foreign to each. In the case of painting, for example, it is ‘temporal action and comprehension’ that has been excluded from the definition, as Shaw-Miller notes.<sup>73</sup> Seeking to divide reality into discrete areas and to exclude from these whatever is uncongenial, artistic purity, in short, can be seen as a form of identity thinking, and consequently as participating in the totalizing impulse at the core of modernity. As we also saw in Chapter 3, however, Wagner and Kiefer mount a sustained attack on this doctrine. In effect, they introduce what is non-identical to the ‘pure’ definitions of music and painting. Thus the *Gesamtkunstwerk* makes visible the visual elements of music – so that the

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<sup>69</sup> Adorno, 1967/2003 p383.

<sup>70</sup> Adorno, 1967/2003 p386.

<sup>71</sup> Adorno, 1967/2003 p383.

<sup>72</sup> Adorno, 1967/2003 p387.

<sup>73</sup> Shaw-Miller, 2002 p34.

stage action becomes 'deeds of music made visible', as Wagner himself puts it.<sup>74</sup> This contradicts the definition of music as a purely temporal, purely sonic art form, drawing attention to what is not contained in the purist account of music. Similarly, the temporal and tactile elements in Kiefer's work contradict the definition of painting as a purely spatial, purely visual art form, drawing attention to what is not contained in the purist account of painting. In this way, the mutual synthesizing project of Wagner and Kiefer serves to negate the false identity of concept and object informing the doctrine of artistic purity, and to reintroduce into the arts what this doctrine has sought to exclude.

### **Points of Convergence**

Thus far, I have used Adorno's own theories to argue against him on the one hand that both autonomous art – art that strives to keep itself separate from society – and the drive towards artistic purity can be seen as products of identity thinking, and on the other that both art that blurs the art/society distinction and the drive towards artistic synthesis can be seen as an *attack* on such thinking, insofar as they undermine the boundaries of the object-spheres of knowledge it seeks to establish. Accordingly, I have argued that both Wagner and Kiefer stage such an attack, although Adorno would refuse to see their work in these terms. The doctrine of purity – to which they are resolutely opposed -- had, as has been mentioned, by Kiefer's time come to acquire a decidedly American accent; and this brings us to another facet of their interrelationship, namely that all three – Adorno, Wagner and Kiefer -- would at least be in agreement regarding their attitude to Americanism, which (explicitly or implicitly) is a negative one. Adorno himself is thoroughly, and overtly, hostile towards Americanism, which he sees as responsible for the utter destruction of the particular. 'The disgrace in America', he says, 'consists of the fact that precisely here, where the particular is totally destroyed by the general, where in place of experience there exists the repetition of the ever-identical, the attempt is

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Shaw-Miller, 2002 p38.

made to represent the particular as if it survived.<sup>75</sup> Above all, America in Adorno's opinion is responsible for the worst excesses of mass culture, to which he refers as the 'culture industry' to distinguish it from popular art, since this, in his view, it is emphatically *not*. Mass culture consists instead of 'products tailored for consumption'.<sup>76</sup> It is thus a function of capitalism. Falling 'completely into the world of commodities', cultural products are subsumed into a single value, the profit motive.<sup>77</sup> They are, moreover, entirely homogenous; there is no room for difference, no room for 'the individual'.<sup>78</sup> It is thus that the culture industry, in Adorno's view, embodies the realization of 'subsumptive' reason – the subsumption of the particular under the universal that is the consequence of identity thinking. And it is the culture industry that is responsible for the neutralization of the only remaining potentially revolutionary force in modern society, the proletariat.<sup>79</sup>

So Kiefer and Wagner share with Adorno their rejection of Americanism, which in the long German tradition from Hegel to Heidegger discussed in the previous chapter has been seen as more or less identical with the negative consequences of the Enlightenment. And there is further evidence, as well as from their mutual aspiration to boundless-ness, that they share Adorno's principal aim, namely to subvert the Enlightenment mindset from which these consequences have followed. In the first place, Kiefer's work can be seen to evoke the non-identical (and thus to fulfill Adorno's criterion for art), and in the second both Kiefer and Wagner invoke traditions in their work informed by forms of rationality *other* than that associated with the Enlightenment.

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<sup>75</sup> 'Notizen zur neuen Anthropologie [1942]', quoted in Buck-Morss, 1977 p189.

<sup>76</sup> Adorno, Theodor 'On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening' in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* Routledge, London 1991 p85.

<sup>77</sup> Adorno, 1991 p34.

<sup>78</sup> Adorno, 1991 p31.

<sup>79</sup> The *Gesamtkunstwerk* was in Adorno's view the forerunner of the culture industry, inducing a collective 'sommnambulance' in the population and rendering it incapable of perceiving the rising forces of totalitarianism, as Dineen comments. (2011 p115.) In common with Siegfried Kracauer, Adorno viewed it as *denying* the possibility of critical thought (See Kracauer, Siegfried and Levin, Thomas Y 'The Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces' in *New German Critique* No. 40, Special Issue on Weimar Film Theory (Winter, 1987), pp. 91-96).

### **Negative Dialectics in Kiefer's *Eisensteig***

It is Adorno's belief that the less a work of art aims at totality and the more it allows its disparate elements to remain un-reconciled, the greater the work, for it is in this way that it symbolically makes more clearly visible that which the administered universe seeks to conceal. 'A successful work,' he claims, 'Is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure.'<sup>80</sup> These expose the falsehood at the core of modernity and thus hint at the possibility of another *true* reality. An effective artwork is infused not by the author's intention (to propagate a political agenda, for example), but by an intention that Adorno characterizes as 'its own gesture towards reality'.<sup>81</sup> It thus serves as an analogy for 'that other condition which should be'; it points, he claims, towards 'the creation of a just life'.<sup>82</sup> In order to function dialectically, then, artworks must resist the urge toward harmonious totality and contain instead moments of irreconcilable dissonance, the more of them the better. Such moments are analogous with the non-identical, and in bringing them to the consciousness of the spectator, art impedes -- however briefly -- the seemingly irresistible progress of society towards totality.

For Adorno, a paradigmatic example of what we might term non-identical intrusion is provided by the composer Gustav Mahler's practice of inserting folk or popular melodies into his symphonies, as in his First Symphony in D Major (first performed in 1889), in which the third movement contains a funeral march based on the children's song *Frère Jacques* (*Bruder Martin* in German), transposed to the minor.<sup>83</sup> The jarring intrusion of a piece of doggerel into a 'high' art form has a disruptive

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<sup>80</sup> 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in Adorno, 1967 p32.

<sup>81</sup> 'Commitment', in Adorno (et al), 1977 p190.

<sup>82</sup> 'Commitment', in Adorno (et al), 1977 p194.

<sup>83</sup> See Adorno, Theodor W *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* Translated by E Jephcott, University of Chicago Press 1992.

effect, analogous with the fissures in society. Indeed, the effect is almost as if the proletariat itself has briefly intruded on the territory of the elite, forcing the issue of cultural privilege. 'The parade step of musical logic,' writes Adorno, 'is disrupted by reflection on the social wrong that art-language irrevocably does to those denied the privilege of culture.'<sup>84</sup>

Adorno's discussion of Mahler is part of his extensive writings about music, about which he was extremely knowledgeable. He almost never writes about visual artists, although he briefly discusses Klee in his *Commitment* essay.<sup>85</sup> But I want to show how Kiefer's paintings typically achieve what Adorno demands of art, in as much as they deny the possibility of a single or unequivocal reading and are thus evocative of the non-identical. I will take *Eisensteig [Iron Path]* (**Plate 18**) as an example.

A railway track recedes away from us steeply towards the horizon, along which are grouped various indistinct forms that may indicate buildings. In essence, the painting might be characterized as a 'landscape', to the extent that it depicts the visible features of an area of land; but this is clearly no ordinary landscape painting. In places, olive tree branches have been applied to the canvas, and a real pair of lead overshoes adorns the fictive railway tracks. The scene may represent the recent past, or the present day; we cannot tell. We likewise cannot tell what time of day, or time of year, is depicted, although there is a suggestion of snow. There is a fairly clear horizon line, but no formal distinction between land and sky. This, in short, is a landscape painting of a highly unorthodox kind, so that straightaway Kiefer offers a challenge; he invokes a category, namely 'landscape painting', a genre with an illustrious tradition in the history of art, only to challenge it by means of this object that both fits into, and firmly resists, inclusion in the category. To the extent that it contains strikingly obvious discrepancies – in Adorno's terms, non-identical elements -- with our customary experience of landscape painting, I suggest that the painting functions dialectically, *negating* a calcified system of art-historical identity thinking rather in the same way that Mahler's symphonies can be seen to function

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<sup>84</sup> Adorno, 1992 p32.

<sup>85</sup> 'Commitment', in Adorno (et al), 1977 pp194-5.

dialectically in virtue of their use of folk song as a means of challenging our expectations of a symphony.

But the painting embodies the principle of contradiction in other ways also. On the one hand, the sharply receding railway tracks establish a sense of plunging perspective and recessive depth; on the other, the objects attached to the canvas, the lack of aerial perspective and the thickly applied paint all bring the viewer's attention firmly back to the surface. At the same time, the painting both *represents* reality, and presents it directly (in the form of the real objects). These contradictory impulses have the effect of jarring dissonance, which also characterizes the painting's iconography. The train tracks cannot help but evoke the transportations to the concentration camps, so that it is clear that the Holocaust is the painting's thematic subject. 'We see railway tracks somewhere,' Kiefer has remarked, 'and we think of Auschwitz'.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the viewer seems to be placed uncomfortably in the position of the train driver. The painting is thus indirectly suggestive of the blackest infamy; yet the olive branches, traditional symbols of reconciliation, carry the suggestion of redemption. The metal overshoes seem similar to those worn by deep sea divers, but although there is consequently an indication of the idea of weight and *descent*, this is also contradicted; for lead is one of the 'base' metals thought by alchemists to be capable of transformation into gold, often used as a symbol of the divine (and featuring in the painting in the form of a piece of gold leaf near the top). Indirectly evocative of lightness and aspiration to the spiritual, lead thus carries with it the notion of *ascent*. And the descent/ascent opposition may operate in a different register to suggest the idea of the dual propensity of mankind towards both barbarism and altruism, or perhaps its dual nature as both earthbound and transcendent, both matter and spirit. But all of these oppositions are effectively irreconcilable, so that the painting refuses to resolve itself into one all-inclusive theme, coherent message or content. As soon as each such meaning suggests itself, it is immediately contradicted, and the only theme, if there can be said to be one, is ambivalence.

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<sup>86</sup> Quoted in, Biro, 2003 p134.

Biro sees the numerous contradictions in this painting as consistent with his concept of 'hermeneutic undecidability', referred to in Chapter 3, by which he means the refusal of a cultural artifact to supply a unitary reading.<sup>87</sup> He argues that this aspect of Kiefer's work is part of the legacy of Beuys, whose installation *Auschwitz Demonstration* (1968) (Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt) he views as a paradigmatic example of the same aspect in the work of the older artist. To the extent that it prevents a consistent interpretation of the painting -- that is to say, its *conceptualization* -- this undecidability is also analogically suggestive of the non-identical, which as we have seen is what denies the idealist claim to omniscience. Thus the painting both thematizes the Holocaust and attempts to negate the mental tendency that, according to Adorno, was its ultimate cause.

### **Ways of Thinking**

To the extent that it is suggestive of the non-identical, then, Kiefer's work can be seen as contradicting identity thinking. And further weight is given to the conclusion that Enlightenment rationality is a principal target for Kiefer and Wagner alike from the fact that both invoke ways of thinking about reality that are at odds with it. In Wagner's case, this is most apparent from his very extensive use of mythology. As we saw in Chapter 1, the latter is fundamental to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, since Wagner sees the recounting of its myths as the primary means by which a *Volk* rehearses its sense of community. This is a view that he inherits substantially from Herder. But during the Enlightenment, mythology had as was mentioned tended to be dismissed as irrational, or mere superstition. It is *against* this view that Wagner sets himself at odds by contributing, in common with Herder and the Romantics, to the rehabilitation of myth.

In Kiefer, what we find -- as well as references to mythology -- are numerous references to the tradition of *esotericism*. The latter refers to a wide range of

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<sup>87</sup> Biro, 2003 pp132-6.

doctrines that stand to some extent in opposition to the mainstream of Western thought, represented in modern times principally by the legacy of the Enlightenment, which in many cases esoteric traditions long predate. Over the course of the present study we have already seen how Kiefer makes frequent reference to three such traditions in particular, namely the Kabbalah, alchemy, and the work of Robert Fludd.

The first historical references to the Kabbalah -- the Jewish mystical tradition -- date from the thirteenth century, but it purports to connect with an arcane oral tradition that descends from Moses, as Joseph Dan notes.<sup>88</sup> According to Kabbalists, it therefore represents 'millennia-old divine truth'.<sup>89</sup> As we saw In Chapter 2, *Die Ungeborenen* is one of several of Kiefer's paintings that indirectly refer to it. Lilith, who is an important feature of the tradition as well as of earlier mythology, features many times in his work. Other reference to the Kabbalah include his 2011 installation *Shevirat ha-Kelim* [*The Breaking of the Vessels*], (Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris/Salzburg), which is named after the story in the Kabbalah concerning the vessels containing the *Sephiroth*, or emanations of God, that shattered because they were unable to contain the divine light within them.

Alchemy is the proto-scientific practice that has come to be mainly associated with the quest for the so-called 'philosopher's stone', a material thought capable of transforming base metal into gold by means of the process known in alchemy as the 'magnum opus'. Introduced into Europe in the early Middle Ages, the practice may have originated in ancient China.<sup>90</sup> References to it in Kiefer arise from his frequent use of lead (the principal ingredient of the magnum opus), as for example in *Eisensteig*, as well as from paintings such as *Athanor* (1983-4, Toledo Museum of Art), and *Nigredo* (1984, Philadelphia Museum of Art), which take their titles from

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<sup>88</sup> Dan, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Dan, 2007 p6.

<sup>90</sup> See Maxwell-Stuart, P G *The Chemical Choir: A History of Alchemy* Continuum, London 2008.



the furnace used in alchemy and the first stage in the alchemical process respectively.<sup>91</sup>

Himself a student of the Kabbalah, the Elizabethan physician and cosmologist Robert Fludd reexamined and promoted mystical texts by fifteenth century writers such as Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. Perhaps most notably, however, he is associated with the concept of the microcosm and macrocosm, the idea that the part reflects the whole (and *vice versa*). This is also the subject of Nicolas de Nancel's *Analogia Microcosmi ad Macrocosmum* of 1611. Theories based on the concept proceed from the principle of *analogy* rather than that of *mathesis universalis*, the principle of universal mathematics propounded by Descartes and Leibniz amongst others and one of the cornerstones of the Enlightenment. Fludd's work, defiantly at odds with the contemporary intellectual climate, drew him into conflict with scientists such as the astronomer Johannes Kepler, with whom he had a celebrated exchange of letters.<sup>92</sup> As well as referencing Fludd himself in the series of works dedicated to him, Kiefer frequently evokes the microcosm/macrocosm concept, perhaps most notably in *Every Plant has His Related Star in the Sky* (2001, Guggenheim New York), which is suggestive of Fludd's idea of a direct connection between the earthly and celestial realms.

It is partly because of his references to Fludd and the microcosm/macrocosm argument that Baqué has argued that Kiefer 'inhabits and revives' what Michel Foucault calls the Renaissance *episteme*.<sup>93</sup> Foucault uses the latter term to indicate that which at a given historical moment 'defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge', as he explains in *The Order of Things* (first published 1966).<sup>94</sup> The

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<sup>91</sup> Baqué notes that Kiefer's interest in alchemy arose from his discovery of Lorenzo Lotto's 'intarsia' panels (a form of inlay similar to marquetry) for the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo, which incorporate references to alchemy. (2016, p297 n2.) Kiefer has himself related his creative process to alchemy, as Richard Davey notes ('In the beginning is the end and in the end is the beginning', in Davey, Soriano and Weikop (Eds), 2014 p50).

<sup>92</sup> See Huffman, William H *Robert Fludd* North Atlantic Books 2001.

<sup>93</sup> Baqué, 2016 p26.

<sup>94</sup> Foucault, 1970 p168.

Renaissance episteme – which preceded that of the Enlightenment, to which Foucault refers as the ‘Classical’ age -- was in Foucault’s view dominated by relations of *resemblance*, that is, ways in which things were similar to each other.<sup>95</sup> One of these relations was analogy, of which the microcosm/macrocosm relationship was the paradigmatic example. And I agree with Baqué to the extent that it seems to me that these numerous references to various esoteric traditions – the Kabbalah, alchemy, and the work of Fludd – equate with an attempt on Kiefer’s part to access different mindsets, to find ways of interpreting the world *other* than that based on rationality inherited from the Enlightenment and predicated on identity thinking.

In this context we might mention also Kiefer’s interest in the doctrine of ‘eternal return’. Although often mainly associated with Nietzsche, this is an ancient concept, based on the idea that time is not linear, but cyclical. It thus contradicts both the rational, Enlightenment view of time, and a central teaching of the Abrahamic religions (which include Judaism, Christianity and Islam), each of which are *eschatological*, that is, they claim that humanity has a final destiny. This is in contrast with some of the non-Abrahamic religions, notably Hinduism, which postulate an endless cycle of destruction and recreation. As I proposed in Chapter 2, we might see a suggestion of the concept of eternal return in Kiefer’s *Walhalla* series. It may also be what accounts for his interest in the work of Chlebnikov (see above, p69).<sup>96</sup>

Yet at times there is a sense from Kiefer’s work that alternative ways of looking at the world, and the insights these might yield, are permanently barred to us. This is my interpretation of his use both of runes, and lead books. The runic alphabet was used by Germanic and Scandinavian tribes prior to the adoption of the Latin

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<sup>95</sup> See Foucault, 1970, particularly Chapter 2, ‘The Prose of the World’.

<sup>96</sup> Kiefer’s penchant for esotericism forms another compelling link with Beuys, who shared his interest in alchemy (as Alain Borer notes, it is this that partly explains Beuys’s regular use of fat, which he saw as a ‘supremely alchemical material’), as well as his interest in the concept of the microcosm and macrocosm, which he derived from his study of the work of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Swiss alchemist, Paracelsus. (Borer, Alain *The Essential Joseph Beuys* Thames and Hudson 1996 pp21-26). Another esoteric tradition of great importance for Beuys was Anthroposophy, the philosophical school founded by Rudolf Steiner. Borer calls Steiner ‘the shadow behind Beuys’. (1996 p27).

alphabet and at least as early as the first century AD.<sup>97</sup> The name 'rune' comes from the German root word for 'secret', and there is evidence that the symbols were originally credited with magic powers. In the *Poetic Edda* (the principal source of Norse mythology, much drawn upon by Wagner), their invention is attributed to the god Odin. In modern times, they have been a feature of certain esoteric practices, including Neopagan religions such as *Armanism* (associated principally with the Viennese occultist and novelist Guido von List). In Kiefer, they generally appear in the form of sticks applied to the canvas. A notable example is *Des herbstes Runengespinst - für Paul Celan [The Autumn Runes - for Paul Celan]* (2005) (**Plate 27**). Taking its name from a line in *Septemberkrone*, an early poem of Celan's (inscribed at the top of the painting), this features runes that seem to be derived from the Scandinavian *Futhark* variant, including the symbols for 'hall', 'horse', 'gift', 'water', and 'joy'.<sup>98</sup> But runic script is an *unattested* language, that is, its reconstruction is based largely on hypothesis. Thus there remains about it an aura of *mystery*, a suggestion of truths to which we no longer have access.

Lead books have been a recurring feature of Kiefer's paintings, as for example in *Black Flakes* (2005) (**Plate 28**), in which the stick runes make another appearance. And the lead book is in keeping with the use of the runes, for here as elsewhere in Kiefer the point about its use seems to be that it cannot be read. Like the runes, these unreadable books provide a symbolic way of evoking a lost or inaccessible form of knowledge, inaccessible because we cannot transcend the limits of a modern consciousness constituted in terms of identity thinking, and the impulse to domination that – if we follow Adorno – this embodies.

If my interpretation of Kiefer's runes and lead books is correct, we might see these paintings as an illustration of a paradox at the heart of negative dialectics, arising from the fact that philosophy cannot escape the reified condition of modern rationality. Logically speaking, negative dialectics must be a product of the mindset Adorno seeks to abolish, and therefore at risk of becoming ideological. Buck-Morss

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<sup>97</sup> See Page, Raymond Ian *Runes* The British Museum Press 2005.

<sup>98</sup> See Page, 2005 pp15-16.

puts the problem well. 'The real issue', she writes, 'is whether Adorno's attempt at a revolution within philosophy, modeled self-consciously after Schönberg, in fact succumbed to the same fate, whether his principle of anti-system itself became a system.'<sup>99</sup> The 'just life' of which he speaks may be unattainable, for any attempt to destroy the mental structure separating us from it may itself become part of the structure. But this is no reason, perhaps, why such attempts should not continue to be made.

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<sup>99</sup> 1977 p189. Buck-Morss is referring to the fact the Schönberg's revolutionary tone row became part of 'a new musical dogma.' (1977 p188.)

## Conclusion

The purpose of my research has been to assess the relationship between Anselm Kiefer's paintings and Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and what I have shown, in essence, is that what connects them can be traced to the Counter-Enlightenment via Romanticism. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* itself was an embodiment of the communitarian ethos, common to Counter-Enlightenment thinkers and the Romantics, built on an opposition to the principle of individualism associated with the Enlightenment. It was designed by Wagner to promote the community feeling that, it was felt by these commentators, was what kept societies together and was lacking from those formulated on rational Enlightenment principles. The aspiration towards the dissolution of boundaries (between art and society and between the individual arts) that informed it was inherited by Kiefer and was related to its communal purpose; but this aspiration can also be seen as a function of the Counter-Enlightenment, to the extent that it militates against the tendency of Enlightenment rationality to divide reality into discrete areas available for intellectual mastery. I have shown also that the Counter-Enlightenment translated itself into counter-Americanism, and that the latter is implicit in the work of both Wagner and Kiefer, the former insofar as the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was an expression of the principle of communitarianism, and the latter insofar as the paintings are evidence of a resistance to artistic styles originating in, and principally identified with, the USA. What Kiefer has in common with Wagner, in short, is ultimately a symptom of a schism in Western culture between a Germanic tradition descending from the Counter-Enlightenment on the one hand, and an Anglo-American tradition descending from the Enlightenment on the other.

In conclusion, I want briefly to assess the implications of my thesis in terms of the history of art, specifically in terms of the overall project of modernism. I would tentatively define the latter as the attempt, on the part of the artists, writers and

thinkers of the past two centuries or so, to define the relationship of modern humanity with modern reality. And I suggest that whether or not to classify Wagner and Kiefer as modernists depends on the status regarding the modernist project of both the Counter-Enlightenment and Romanticism, since it is from the former via the latter that, as we have seen, they both descend.

The relationship of Romanticism with modernism is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, its influence on certain modernist discourses is widely acknowledged. For example, Symbolism and Expressionism are both closely related to Romanticism, since they share the latter's conviction that significant parts of experience are beyond the wherewithal of words and concepts to articulate. It is this conviction that informs Romanticism's interest in myth, which is a legacy of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers such as Giambattista Vico, for whom, as Berlin puts it, myths 'are not, as enlightened thinkers believe, false statements about reality corrected by later rational criticism, nor is poetry mere embellishment of what could equally well be stated in ordinary prose.'<sup>1</sup> Surrealism is a third modernist movement that descends ultimately from Romanticism. It can be seen as a function of the Romantic emphasis on the non-rational, informed by the view that human life and motivations cannot be explained solely in terms of rationality but are determined in no small degree by non-rational factors such as instinctual drives. This attitude is an additional legacy of the Counter-Enlightenment. Although there are suggestions of it from considerably earlier in history (Berlin discerns intimations in the writings of the Sophists, for example), it was with Counter-Enlightenment figures such as Johann Georg Hamann that it started to become a recognizable doctrine in the modern period.<sup>2</sup> 'What is this much lauded reason', asks Hamann, 'with its universality, infallibility ...certainty, overweening claims, but an *ens rationis* [abstract entity], a stuffed dummy . . . endowed with divine attributes?'<sup>3</sup> It was this view that found its way into Romanticism, and subsequently into Surrealism.

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<sup>1</sup> Berlin, 1998 p247.

<sup>2</sup> Berlin, 1998 p244.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Berlin, 1998 p251.

On the other hand, Romanticism *itself* has been characterized as reactionary, partly because of its reverence for earlier epochs including antiquity and the medieval period, which creates a tension with the modernist exaltation of novelty and innovation (epitomized in Ezra Pound's exhortation to 'make it new!').<sup>4</sup> The Romantic aspiration to borderless-ness is also at odds with the predominant modernist preference for autonomy and purity. The same criticisms have been applied to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and for the same reasons. But as we have seen over the course of the present study, autonomy and purity, whilst they have featured strongly in certain modernist discourses (notably modernist *criticism*), they have been conspicuously *absent* from others. Autonomy, the impulse to keep art and society strictly separate, is clearly not a feature of Futurism, Surrealism, or the Bauhaus, to cite three examples of many avant-garde movements predicated on a radical social agenda. What unites them with Romanticism, and consequently with both Wagner and Kiefer, is their common enemy: 'aesthetic' art, or art that has separated itself from life by relinquishing its societal role. As I explained in Chapter 2, it is in any case ultimately unsupportable to maintain that artworks can be wholly separated from their social context, as even the most ardent advocates of autonomy have been obliged to concede.

A well-rehearsed art historical narrative is that artistic synthesis – the obverse of purity – was relegated to a highly peripheral role in modernism, and that it experienced a resurgence in postmodernism. This is what is indicated by the

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Barnard, 2003 p57. But the Jena group themselves saw the values of the Middle Ages as *anticipating* those of the French Revolution. In this respect, the Middle Ages seemed to them thoroughly modern. 'Never was there more liberty, equality and fraternity', says Schlegel, 'than in the Middle Ages'. (*Philosophical Apprenticeship* (excerpts), No 1255 reproduced in Beiser (Ed), 1996 p165.) What was more, 'these were their best in Germany'. (Ibid.) As Beiser points out, the re-appraisal of the Middle Ages had in any case been underway for some time, having been instigated by Herder (amongst others) in his *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* of 1774 (1996 pxxix). Thus the Romantics were simply adding to an established discourse. Nor were they reactionary in the political sense. Endorsing the liberal call for increased participation in the democratic process, they set themselves at odds with conservative thinkers such as the jurist and social thinker Justus Möser.

equation of the latter with the collapse of 'medium specificity'. As we saw in Chapter 3, however, the synthesizing impulse was evident in those many instances of modernist practices dedicated to exploring the *temporal* aspect of painting, such as 'Synchromism' and the work of Paul Klee. It was likewise a highly significant feature of the *Blaue Reiter*, the early twentieth century movement founded in Munich by Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc and others. This has led Roberts to characterize the *Blaue Reiter Almanac* of 1912 as 'the most significant document of the will to the integration of the arts of the pre-war avant-garde'.<sup>5</sup> Shaw-Miller sees the modern period as corresponding not with modernism but *modernisms*, a dualism defined by the co-existence of what he calls 'formal modernism', identified with purity, and 'contextual modernism', identified with the multisensory, synthesizing experience that descends from the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>6</sup> These existed to some extent in parallel with each other (although, as I have suggested, purity is something of a chimera, and the differences between the arts are not essential but a matter of *degree*). Shaw-Miller is one of a growing number of commentators who have begun to think of modernism in these pluralistic terms, and to argue against the concept of a definite rupture separating modernism from postmodernism.

It begins at any rate to appear that neither Romanticism, nor the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, should be excluded from the modernist canon, since scarcely any characteristic of either cannot be discerned in later modernist practices. Thus the themes embodied in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that Kiefer revisits were not absent in the intervening period but have been a feature of modernism all along, co-existing dialectically with the discourse of autonomy and purity that was a function of the Enlightenment. I share Biro's conclusion, although for different reasons, that '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

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<sup>5</sup> 2011, p154.

<sup>6</sup> 'Modernist Music' in Brooker, Peter, Gasiorek, Andrzej, Longworth, Deborah, and Thacker, Andrew (Eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* Oxford University Press, 2010 pp599-617.



governing rules and procedures.’<sup>7</sup> And if we accept Wagner (let alone the Romantics) as a modernist, and the *Zürich Papers* as a modernist manifesto, this places the advent of aesthetic modernism considerably earlier than is generally thought -- over half a century earlier in the case of Virginia Woolf’s claim for December 1910 as the date that ‘human character changed’.<sup>8</sup> But in backdating modernism I am only following the example of T J Clark. Indeed, I am not going quite so far, for Clark has located the inauguration of the modernist project in 1792, and the first exhibition of David’s *Death of Marat*.<sup>9</sup>

The status of Romanticism -- and therefore of both Wagner and Kiefer -- regarding modernism depends finally, however, on the Counter-Enlightenment, since this was its ultimate source. The question therefore arises as to whether or not the latter was a reactionary moment in human history, an attempt to extinguish the source of the illuminating glow cast on reality by the Enlightenment. Was it, in short, an attack on *progress*?

Perhaps the first point to make in this regard is that it is a mistake to see the Counter-Enlightenment as opposed to *reason*. It may have sought to expose the latter’s flaws, and to argue the case for those aspects of experience that are in some degree supra-rational, but this does not amount to an attack on rationality itself. Nevertheless, as Mark Lilla writes, some of the premises on which its affiliates -- amongst whom we might number any thinker in the modern period who identifies the cause of the perceived adverse effects of modernity in the Enlightenment -- base

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<sup>7</sup> Biro, 1988 p192.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Shiach, Morag ‘Periodizing Modernism’, in Brooker, Gasiorek, Longworth and Thacker (Eds), 2010 p22.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, T J *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* Yale University Press, 1999 p15. We should note, however, that such a date finding exercise is ultimately futile. As Geoff Gilbert has observed, the quest for a definite starting point is ‘doomed to failure’, since the only history that modernism has, properly speaking, is ‘its institutional history’. (Quoted in Shiach, in Brooker, Gasiorek, Longworth and Thacker (Eds), 2010 p20.) Gilbert is no doubt thinking here of commentators such as Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, who was responsible in 1936 for the institutionalization of a highly influential narrative of modernism based on a teleological trajectory from Impressionism to early abstraction.

their thesis are, it must be admitted, somewhat questionable.<sup>10</sup> Not least of these is what is known as the 'diachronic fallacy', often expressed as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. This is the assumption that what comes after an event must be the *result* of that event. Thus the mistake of the Counter-Enlightenment has been a readiness to assume a causal relationship between the Enlightenment and all that has followed it. A second problem has been a tendency to overestimate the Enlightenment's influence. Technology may have changed out of all recognition in its wake, but the *essential* nature of human life, along with the motivations underlying it, has likely remained substantially the same, and human beings are likely no more or less enlightened because of it. 'The heavens opened,' writes Lilla, 'and then they closed.'<sup>11</sup>

As we have seen, all Counter-Enlightenment thinkers view the consequences of the Age of Reason as disastrous. It might reasonably be argued, however, that the consequences of the Counter-Enlightenment have been far worse. As we saw in Chapter 4, it is possible to connect it with the extreme nationalism that has had so catastrophic an influence in modern European history, even though this nationalism was a serious distortion of the ideas of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers such as Herder. And the legacy of the Counter-Enlightenment is still very much with us, and in ways that are perhaps not greatly welcome. Roger Hausheer is one of many commentators who discern a direct connection between the pluralism that was such an important feature of Counter-Enlightenment philosophy and the relativism that that has come to characterize much of contemporary life, with the consequences that, at best, are highly ambivalent.<sup>12</sup> If all values are tolerated, all must be considered equal.

But was the Counter-Enlightenment reactionary? It has certainly been *perceived* as such, notably by Berlin, who whilst he may not have coined the term is certainly

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<sup>10</sup> 'What is Counter-Enlightenment?' in Mali and Wokler (Eds), 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Lilla, in Mali and Wokler (Eds), 2003 p8.

<sup>12</sup> 'Enlightening the Enlightenment,' in Mali and Wokler (Eds), 2003. See also Hicks, 2004.

responsible for its popularization. He sees its leading figures such as Hamann and Herder as *politically* reactionary, in the sense of being anti-liberal. Writing in *The Magus of the North*, for example, he repeatedly lambasts Hamann as a reactionary for his opposition to the reforms instituted by Frederick II of Prussia.<sup>13</sup> Beiser has mounted a convincing defense of these thinkers, however, arguing that Frederick's reforms were conceived in a spirit not of liberalism, but of paternalism.<sup>14</sup> They were designed 'to consolidate the control and power of the central monarchy'.<sup>15</sup> It is nevertheless quite unsupportable to argue that Spengler, Jünger, Heidegger and those other twentieth-century German heirs to the Counter-Enlightenment discussed in Chapter 4 were motivated by liberal sentiments. Their ideas represent the ultimate consequences, perhaps, of the intellectual subordination of the individual to the greater good. To my mind, however, and even though we might find their lack of humanism thoroughly repellent, this anti-liberalism does not render their ideas reactionary, derived as they were from what in its own way was a compellingly logical critique of modernity.

And this is why we can think of the Counter-Enlightenment, despite its flaws, and despite the extreme political ideologies it has engendered, as representing above all a form of modernism. No less than any other modernist discourse, it proceeded from a philosophical analysis of the conditions of modern reality, conditions that were and continue to be -- broadly speaking -- seen as the consequences of the Enlightenment. It is from this tradition that Wagner and Kiefer both descend.

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<sup>13</sup> Berlin, Isaiah, *The Magus of the North: J G Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism* Murray, London 1993 pp4, 23, 121.

<sup>14</sup> 'Berlin and the German Counter-Enlightenment,' in Mali and Wokler (Eds), 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Beiser, in Mali and Wokler (Eds), 2003 p108. Counter-Enlightenment thinkers also launched an attack on what they called the 'tyranny of reason', the use of reason to justify oppression. Here they anticipated Berlin's warning against the abuse of what he refers to as 'positive liberty (see Berlin, Isaiah 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Liberty* Edited by Henry Hardy, Oxford University Press 2002 pp166-217)'.

## **Plates**

**All Plates removed due to copyright reasons**

## Appendix 1: The *Leitmotif*

This term, which translates as ‘leading motif’, is somewhat resistant to an inclusive definition, admitting to ‘multiple practices and multiple interpretations’, as Matthew Bribitzer-Stull writes.<sup>16</sup> In Wagner, the leitmotif occurs as a recurring short melody or phrase associated with a theme or individual character in the drama. As Roger Scruton puts it, the Wagnerian leitmotif is

the short, pregnant phrase that would arise out of the drama, gathering to itself the emotion associated with some event, idea or character, and thereafter woven into the musical fabric, so as to carry the memory of its original appearance.<sup>17</sup>

Here for example is the *Entsagungsmotiv* (renunciation) leitmotif from Act One, Scene One of *Das Rheingold*, Part One of the *Der Ring des Nibelungen* cycle, which recurs in Act One, Scene Three of *Die Walküre*:<sup>18</sup>



Although he did not coin the term, it is with Wagner that the leitmotif is primarily associated. Thomas Grey credits the critic Hans von Wolzogen with propagating its use after first Bayreuth Festival in 1876, at which Wagner’s *Ring* cycle was first performed.<sup>19</sup> But its antecedents are in earlier music. Carl Maria von Weber used a similar device in his opera *Euryanthe* of 1823, in which at least thirteen such melodic fragments appear in the orchestral score. The leitmotif has much in common also with the *idée fixe* used by Hector Berlioz, as for example in his *Symphonie Fantastique* of 1830; and Wagner is known to have been a close student of Berlioz, admitting privately to the London critic Edward Dannreuther that he had made a ‘minute study’ of Berlioz’s instrumentations ‘as early as 1840’, as John Deathridge and Carl Dahlhaus write.<sup>20</sup> Bribitzer-Stull also discerns the probable influence of

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<sup>16</sup> Bribitzer-Stull, Matthew *Understanding the Leitmotif: from Wagner to Hollywood Film Music* Cambridge University Press 2015 p9.

<sup>17</sup> Scruton, Roger *The Ring of Truth: The Wisdom of Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung* Allen Lane 2016 p148.

<sup>18</sup> Source: Dunning, Alan ‘Guide to the Ring’s Musical Motifs’ Appendix to Heise, Paul *The Wound That Will Never Heal* Wagnerheim.com

<sup>19</sup> ‘Leitmotif, temporality, and musical design in the *Ring*’ in Grey, Thomas S (Ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* Cambridge University Press, 2008 p87. It was Wolzogen also who was first responsible for identifying and giving names to the leitmotifs in Wagner’s later dramas (see Scruton, 2016 pp157-161).

<sup>20</sup> Deathridge, John and Dahlhaus, Carl *The New Grove Wagner* Macmillan, London 1984 p21.

Franz Liszt on Wagner's formulation of the concept. Wagner had been collaborating with Liszt by the middle of the 1850s, and married his daughter Cosima in 1870.<sup>21</sup>

The device was developed in the course of Wagner's radical overhaul of the traditional operatic form, meeting the need for a new organizational principle to replace the arias and recitative around which opera had previously been built and which he was intent on abolishing. 'These Melodic Moments', writes Wagner in *Opera and Drama*, referring to what would come to be known as the leitmotifs,

in themselves adapted to maintain our Feeling at an even height, will be made by the orchestra into a kind of guides-to-Feeling [*Gefühlswegweisern*] through the whole labyrinthine [*vielgewundenen*] building of the drama.<sup>22</sup>

By such means, he continues, the form can 'for the first time shape itself into a necessary, a truly unitarian, ie an *understandable* one [emphasis original]'.<sup>23</sup>

As a primary structural tool, the leitmotif became a crucial facet of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Indeed, Grey considers it 'perhaps the most important....element of Wagner's "new path"'.<sup>24</sup> It is nevertheless one of Adorno's principle targets in his criticism of Wagner. Adorno contrasts the leitmotif unfavorably with the technique of 'developing variation' as exemplified by Beethoven. Because it must necessarily remain substantially the same in order to be recognizable, the leitmotif is not capable of significant development; and Adorno, writing in the context of a comparison of Feuerbach with Schopenhauer, sees this stasis as analogous with a kind of *resignation*, as advocated by the latter. 'The abandonment by the one who uses leitmotif', Adorno tells us,

of real thematic-motivic work, the triumph of the compulsion to repetition over the productive imagination of developing variation, says something about the resignation of a collective consciousness which sees nothing more ahead of itself.<sup>25</sup>

Because it passively accepts the *status quo*, stoical resignation of this kind – of which the leitmotif is a cipher -- is in Adorno's view strenuously to be resisted. As Scruton notes, however, Adorno seems somewhat to miss the point. The function of the leitmotif is a structural one, supplying a much-needed organizing principle in works that are typically of much greater duration than a symphony. Furthermore, Adorno takes no account of what for Wagner is the most important aspect of the leitmotif: its *dramatic* function. 'It is true', writes Scruton,

that Wagnerian motifs are not developed as Beethoven would develop them. To subject them to a purely symphonic elaboration would be to deny their dramatic meaning, and to

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<sup>21</sup> Bribitzer-Stull, 2015 p168.

<sup>22</sup> Wagner, 1895/1995 p346.

<sup>23</sup> Wagner, 1895/1995 p347.

<sup>24</sup> Grey, in Grey (Ed) 2008 p87.

<sup>25</sup> Adorno, Theodor W *Gesammelte Schriften* Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1997 (Vol 14, p245).

destroy their most important feature, which is their memory....the Wagnerian leitmotif remembers other things, besides music. It remembers events, emotions, ideas, encounters and characters. It is freighted with a precious dramatic cargo that cannot risk spilling into the kind of oceanic polyphony of a Beethoven sonata movement.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Scruton, 2016 pp154-5. Scruton has identified 186 leitmotifs in the *Ring Cycle* (2016, Appendix pp309-55).

## Appendix 2: *Die Versmelodie*

The question posed by the Romantics with regard to synthesis in the context of opera had been how to achieve a proper balance between the arts in view of the overpoweringly strong effect of music. And Wagner was well aware of this problem. Like the Romantics, he was convinced that opera – particularly the French and Italian varieties, of which he had at one time been an admirer – was in thrall to a flawed model constituted by an inequitable relationship amongst the constituent arts. Everything was subordinated to the music, which instead of being a *means* had become an *end*. The ‘error’ in the art of opera, he explains, is ‘that a Means of expression (Music) has been made the end, while the End of expression (the Drama) has been made a means’.<sup>27</sup> It is consequently the question of how to correct this fault that Wagner principally addresses in ‘Opera and Drama’. As we shall see, however, the ideas that he advances were later subject to a radical reappraisal.

As had been acknowledged, the difficulty in opera was how to achieve a balance between the arts. In particular, the problem was how to combine poetry and music in such a way that the latter did not overwhelm the former, and this for Wagner is the core issue. He argues that an ideal synthesis depends on the closest possible *emotional* conformance between the two. As Stein writes, Wagner demands ‘a melodic configuration at every point so intimately fused with the poetic verse that the melody would be felt as the actual musical counterpart of that text’.<sup>28</sup> In this way, text and melody are to form an indivisible unit, which Wagner terms ‘*die Versmelodie* [melodic verse]’. And he suggests a variety of devices in order to achieve this. Amongst these is the use -- in the text or libretto -- of *free* rhythm, rather than a set rhythm such as iambic pentameter, for example, as this obviates the need for the rhythm of the words to coincide with the rhythm of the music. This means that the rhythmic emphasis in the music can be used to accentuate certain words in the text, bringing out their emotional import rather than merely duplicating their rhythm. As Wagner puts it, this fits ‘the necessary Accents of emotional discourse to a rhythm instinctively entralling to the ear.’<sup>29</sup>

Wagner also recommends the use of what is known as ‘alliterative’ verse, that is to say, verse that employs alliteration rather than rhyme as a means of indicating the underlying metrical structure.<sup>30</sup> Mythological poetry often takes this form, as in the

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<sup>27</sup>1895/1995 p17.

<sup>28</sup> Stein, 1960 p71.

<sup>29</sup> Wagner, 1895/1995 p264.

<sup>30</sup> Wagner refers to this as *Stabreim*, which is an abbreviation of *Buchstabenreim* [‘spelling-rhyme’]. William Ashton Ellis, the translator of Wagner’s prose works, cites the definition of alliterative rhyme from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* as rhyme that is ‘indifferent to the *number of syllables* in a couplet; but imperative is the number of *accented syllables*, of which there must be four (two in each half), the *first three* beginning with the *same* letter,’ (in Wagner, 1893/1995 p132) as well as that from Brockhaus’ *Conversations-Lexicon* that in a couplet of alliterative verse ‘the first half should contain *one* or *two* rhyming initials



Old English epic *Beowulf* and much Germanic mythological literature such as the *Muspilli* (as well as the *The Nibelungenlied*, an early thirteenth-century epic set on the Rhine in the Middle Ages, and the *Edda* of Iceland, upon which Wagner would extensively draw in the *Ring Cycle* and *Tristan und Isolde*). The advantage of alliterative verse use from the point of view of synthesis is that it establishes a connection between things, and thus contributes to *meaning*. As Wagner observes, alliteration fuses ‘like objects into one collective image’.<sup>31</sup> Thus the signifying content, or meaning, of alliterative verse is at least partly present in the alliteration, and since the latter also coincides with the metric scheme of the verse, it is much easier to align alliterative text with a melody in such a way that the signifying content of the text coincides with the rhythmic emphasis of the melody.

In music, there are also innumerable *harmonic* devices that can be used to inflect an emotional mood in a text. In an example in ‘Opera and Drama (the *only* concrete technical example in the entire essay)’, Wagner shows how the device of *modulation* (change of key) can be used to such effect. He takes the couplet ‘Die Liebe bringt Lust und Leid/doch in ihr Weh auch webt sie Wonnen [Love brings delight and sorrow, but into her woe she weaves delights]’, and suggests introducing a modulation coinciding with ‘Lied’, and a modulation *back* to the original key coinciding with ‘webt’. This will mean that ‘Leid’ is now *harmonically* connected to ‘Weh’ as well as in terms of meaning, and that ‘Lust’ and ‘Wonnen’ are now connected in the same ways. At the same time, the *contrast* between ‘Lust’ and ‘Leid’ is heightened, as they’re now in different keys, and the contrast between ‘Weh’ and ‘Wonnen’ is heightened for the same reason. Thus the musical device serves to elucidate the meaning of the words. As Wagner observes, this capacity to link certain elements in a text together in this way is unique to music, ‘in her faculty of harmonic Modulation,’ in virtue of which ‘she exerts a binding sway upon the “sensuous” Feeling such as no other art has force for.’<sup>32</sup>

Stein cites Alberich’s curse from *Das Rheingold*, composed shortly after Wagner completed the *Zürich Papers*, as an example of other ways the composer achieves in practice the intimately close connection between word and melody for which he is arguing.<sup>33</sup> ‘Bin ich frei?’ sings Alberich, ‘Wirklich frei? so gruss euch den meiner Freiheit erster Gruss! Wie durch Fluch er mir gerriet, verflucht sei dieser Ring [Am I now free? Really free? Then let my freedom’s first greeting greet you! As by a curse it came into my power, cursed by the ring!]!’

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[alliterations], the second only *one*...but that this rule was extended to allow the use of *two* rhymes also in the second half.’ (Ibid, pp123-3.) Ashton Ellis cites a couplet from the last scene of *Siegfried* as an example of Wagner’s use of alliterative verse: ‘Lachend muss ich dich lieben/lachend will ich erblinden.’ (Ibid.)

<sup>31</sup> Wagner, 1895/1995 p227.

<sup>32</sup> Wagner, 1895/1995 p292.

<sup>33</sup> Stein, 1960 pp84-5.

Bin ich nun frei? Wirk-lich frei? so gruss euch denn mei-ner

6 Frei - heit erst - er Gruss! Wie durch

10 Fluch er mir ge - riet, ver - flucht sei die - ser Ring!

The pauses in the first four measures heighten the exclamatory nature of the first two phrases, and emphasis is placed on the sarcastic ‘wirklich [really]’ by means of the dramatic distance in pitch from the preceding E and the following F Sharp. Between measures 9 and 12, the melody gradually ascends, coinciding with a series of long vowel sounds – ‘durch’, ‘Fluch’ and ‘geriet’ - that seem to prolong and intensify the slow ascent, before reaching its highest note, the E that also coincides with the emotional climax of the text, ‘verflucht [cursed]’. Thus, in these several ways, the melody precisely conforms to the text, serving not to obscure its meaning but actively to elucidate and intensify it.

### An Image of the Will

*Das Rheingold* was Wagner’s first operatic project after the completion of the theoretical elaboration of his ideas in the *Zürich Papers*. As he had revealed in ‘A Communication to My Friends’, it was intended to form the prelude to a mythologically based series of three operas that he was planning, which would eventually become the *Ring Cycle*. But he had not got very far with this project before he abandoned it, and work would not be resumed for twelve years. This was because, in the autumn of 1854, Wagner had one of the most decisive experiences of his life: his discovery of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* of 1818. And not only did this encounter signify the end of Wagner’s revolutionary aspirations, so that henceforth his politics would be characterized by an attitude of *resignation*, it also radically transformed his concept of artistic synthesis.

As Wagner states in his autobiography, it was the poet Georg Herwegh that introduced him to Schopenhauer’s work.<sup>34</sup> And the consequences for Wagner the artist were dramatic; firstly, he became convinced of music’s intrinsic *superiority* to the other arts. He fully accepts Schopenhauer’s argument that music is an intimation of the metaphysical Will, the ultimate reality beyond the phenomenal world. This argument depends on the Kantian view that reality is constituted by the dualism of

<sup>34</sup> See Magee, 2001 p134.

the noumena, or 'things in themselves', and the phenomena, things as we experience them. The former represent the essence of things, to which we can have no access whatsoever. It is with the noumena that Schopenhauer, in Book III of *The World as Will and Representation*, identifies the Will. The phenomena, on the other hand, are the 'Ideas' of the Will, its 'objectifications' or representations, and are the product of our senses. The mimetic arts, such as painting and sculpture, contrive to provide images of such objectifications. They are thus representations of what are *already* representations. Music, on the other hand, does not work in this way; rather than seeking to represent their products, it operates on the senses directly. And it is the way that music seems able to *bypass* the phenomenal world that led Schopenhauer to claim that it is a direct intimation of the Will. 'Music, having no connection with the Ideas,' he tells us, 'is independent of the phenomenal world...Music is by no means, like the other arts, an image of the Ideas; but an image of the will itself, whose objectifications the ideas are'.<sup>35</sup> This rendered the experience of music a uniquely powerful one. 'It is for this reason', Schopenhauer continues, 'that the effect of music is so much mightier and more penetrating than that of the other arts; for these arts speak only of the shadow, music however of the essence.'<sup>36</sup>

Following his reading of Schopenhauer, Wagner became likewise convinced of the supremacy of music. No longer was it somehow *lacking*, so that it required the addition of words to make good its deficiency, as he had asserted in the 'Art-Work' essay. Now, his 'creed', as he calls it, became that 'music can never, regardless of what it is combined with, cease being the highest, the redeeming art.'<sup>37</sup> Echoing the words of Schopenhauer, he notes that its nature 'is such that what all the other arts only hint at becomes in it the most indubitable of certainties, the most direct and definite of truths'.<sup>38</sup>

The exalted status of music meant, however, that there was no longer any possibility of an equitable relationship amongst the arts. Worse, Schopenhauer had also argued strongly *against* the idea of an artistic synthesis involving music, for this was to do it a disservice. When music exists in combination with other arts, he claims, 'the mind is diverted, distracted, stupefied...and is thus made unreceptive to the sacred, mysterious, intense language of tones.'<sup>39</sup> Wagner nevertheless remained staunchly committed to artistic synthesis, and in a series of essays from the early 1870s ('Beethoven', 'Music of the Future' and 'The Destiny of Opera'), we find Wagner struggling to justify music's inclusion in a synthesizing enterprise in spite of Schopenhauer's objections. Essentially, his argument in these essays is that the music in a synthesis is still consistent with an inarticulable essence, but it is the essence that is embodied by the dramatic action. The music is a reflection of the inner life of the characters on stage, and conversely, the drama 'actually taking place

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Stein, 1960 p114.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Stein, 1960 p114.

<sup>37</sup> 'On Franz Liszt's Symphonic Poems {1857}', quoted in Stein, 1960, p116.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp116-7.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Stein, 1960, p150.

before our eyes is a visible image of the music,' as he puts it in 'Beethoven'.<sup>40</sup> Thus the source of the synthesis in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is no longer the fusion of poetry with music in *Versmelodie*, but the synthesis of dramatic action with music.

In his later work, including the rest of the *Ring Cycle* (*Valkyrie*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*), *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Parsifal*, this emphasis on dramatic action rather than on text causes Wagner to move away from the complex and detailed system of text-setting he had devised in 'Opera and Drama' and towards a much looser, freer interplay of action and music that he himself equated with a form of improvisation. The ideal synthesis, he now claimed, consisted of 'mimetic-musical improvisation of consummate poetic value fixed by the finest artistic judgment'.<sup>41</sup> The terms of the synthesis may have changed, but Wagner remained devoted to the principle nonetheless.

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Stein, 1960 p164.

<sup>41</sup> 'The Destiny of Opera', quoted in Stein, 1960 p167.

### Appendix 3: Subject and Object

Adorno was not, of course, the first to draw attention to the paradox at the core of identity thinking. Indeed, it has been a central concern of continental philosophy in the modern period, and emerges in the work of other thinkers whom we have encountered over the course of the present study, including Herder, the Romantics, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. The inherent problem in identity thinking proceeds directly from the idealist claim that cognition is fully conceptual, that is to say, that it is through conceptualization alone that the world becomes comprehensible. One solution to the problem might therefore be to find ways in which such comprehension might be achieved in ways *other* than via concepts, and this is what these various thinkers have attempted. As Steinby notes, Herder rejected ‘the purely conceptual systems of the Rationalist philosophers’, and tried to derive explanations of experience not predicated on conceptualization.<sup>42</sup> Thus in *Versuch über das Sein*, a short essay written in around 1760 for his teacher Kant, he argues for an alternative prerequisite for knowledge to Kant’s *a priori* categories in the form of a kind of unmediated experience of being, which is purely sensory and resistant to analysis. ‘It is the first, *sensory* concept’, Herder tells us, ‘whose certainty is the foundation of everything [emphasis added].’<sup>43</sup> Here Herder seems strongly to anticipate Merleau-Ponty’s argument, referred to in Chapter 3, that bodily experience constitutes a form of *knowledge*.

A comparable attempt to obviate conceptualization is embodied in the Romantic concept of the ‘absolute’, which was evolved in some degree in reaction to the reductive propensity of thought resulting from the idealist paradigm. As Hammermeister comments, Romanticism ‘can be understood as a response to the Kantian dualism of noumena and phenomena.’<sup>44</sup> That the Romantics were well aware of the inherent problem in conceptualization is clear for example from Novalis’s consideration of Fichte’s paradigmatic statement of identity (whereby ‘a is a’). Novalis observes that to represent an object is in a sense to *divide* it, to the extent that the representation is necessarily distinct from the original. ‘In order to make “a” more clear,’ he writes, ““A” is divided. “Is” is posited as universal content, “a” as the determined form. The essence of identity can only be presented in an *illusory proposition* [emphasis original].’<sup>45</sup> In common with materialist thinkers, the Romantics saw identity thinking’s estrangement from an object – its inability to conceptualize particularity – as an estrangement from the object’s *being*. ‘Precisely because thought and being are separated,’ writes Schelling, ‘thought can only continue in its simple identity, without ever reaching to the objective or real.’<sup>46</sup> But

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<sup>42</sup> Steinby, 2009 p58.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Steinby, 2009 n24, p73.

<sup>44</sup> 2002, p64.

<sup>45</sup> *Fichte Studien*, quoted in Nassar, Dalia *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795-1804* University of Chicago Press, 2014 p23.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Nassar, 2014 p241.

the Romantics also sought various means of dissolving the dualism from which the estrangement from being inevitably follows. As Dalia Nassar indicates, the concept of the absolute represented one such means, particularly as formulated by Schelling. In his *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* of 1800, Schelling advances an explication of the absolute as a reality neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective that *precedes* the dualism, existing prior to the separation of thought and object that follows from conceptualization. But he is aware that to *define* the absolute would therefore be a contradiction in terms, for to do so would be to conceptualize an entity that is supposed to transcend the process of conceptualization. The 'very desire to demonstrate the absolute', he writes, 'does away with it.'<sup>47</sup> There is nevertheless an indication of what he means by it from his remark that he seeks the point 'where thought and being come together absolutely, where there is no longer the question of a connection between the concept [or subject] and the object, where the concept is simultaneously the object, and the object the concept.'<sup>48</sup>

Insofar as all three posit a reality *not* constituted in terms of the idealist dualism, the Romantics seem somewhat of an accord with both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Heidegger postulates a form of originary transcendence that he calls *Dasein*, a kind of primordial, unconscious understanding into which we are *socialized*. It is thus not an understanding based on concepts. At this originary level of being, the idealist dualism becomes meaningless, because *Dasein* defines itself through its context. It is therefore inseparable from the latter, unlike the traditional subject, which defines itself as *separate* from its context. '*Dasein* exhibits itself', says Heidegger, 'as an entity which is in its world but at the same time is by virtue of *the* world in which it is'.<sup>49</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, there exists a ground level of being characterized by the subject's self-awareness as an entity that both perceives and is *itself* perceived. The subject's coming into consciousness, for Merleau-Ponty, takes place when the body 'sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching.'<sup>50</sup> Both perceiving and perceived, the individual is in some degree inseparable from the rest of reality, and this is why for Merleau-Ponty the subject/object dualism is a false one. As Paul Crowther explains, his view is that -- at the primordial level of being -- we operate 'in and upon the world without making any explicitly conscious differentiation between ourselves as the subject of experience, and the world as the object of it.'<sup>51</sup> The separation of reality into subject versus object occurs later, and is the result of conceptualization. At the ground of being, as in the case both of *Dasein* and the experience of the absolute, the idealist dualism does not obtain.

Adorno's conclusion, that modern rationality is ideological, he inherits from Georg Lukács, and it is important briefly to clarify the way that he both connects with the latter, and departs from him. Writing in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923),

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Nassar, 2014 n18 p316.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Nassar, 2014 p241.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, Martin *History of the Concept of Time* (First Published 1925) Indiana University Press, 1985 p202.

<sup>50</sup> 'Eye and Mind', in Merleau-Ponty 1961/1993 p124.

<sup>51</sup> Crowther, Paul *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness* Oxford University press, 1993 p102.

Lukács argues that consciousness in bourgeois society has become 'reified', or 'fetishized', by which he means that it follows the fetishized form of commodities, as proposed by Karl Marx.<sup>52</sup> What Marx indicates by 'commodity fetishism' is the process whereby the relationships involved in the production of goods in capitalist (or 'bourgeois') society, which are in fact relationships among people, are made to appear as if they are relationships among objects. A product of human labor embodies a set of human values; amongst these are the value attached to the effort expended in its production, its usefulness or 'use value', and certain social values, including the value encoded in the worker/capitalist relation (which is based on exploitation). Having been placed on the market, however, a product becomes a 'commodity', which entails the cancellation of these multiple values and their replacement with a single one: that of the commodity's 'exchange value', its value in relation to other commodities. In the process of commodification, a set of human values thus becomes a value between *things* (hence the term 'reification'). In essence, the commodity stands for something other than itself; it is a representation, or rather, a *misrepresentation*, of a social reality, which it serves to obscure. Furthermore, the commodity seems to acquire a species of autonomy, behaving as if it has a life of its own. It becomes a kind of independent being, in the manner of a pagan fetish. Lukács argues that in modernity, this fetishization has permeated 'the *total* outer and inner life of society', even as far as the realm of modern consciousness, so that the thought objects of the latter are characterized by a comparable illusion of autonomy.<sup>53</sup> In reified consciousness, the illusion consists in the way social facts appear to be independent of historical processes. Where commodity fetishism obscures the social origins of a product, reified consciousness fails to discern the social origins of social facts (here we see the connection of reification with identity thinking's confusion of form with content). The effect of reification is the confusion of what Lukács calls 'second nature', that is, a product of ideology, with 'first nature', a 'given' or independent reality. In bourgeois society, he tells us, 'the commodity structure of all 'things' and their obedience to 'natural laws' is found to exist already in a finished form, as something immutably given'.<sup>54</sup> Thus the problem for Lukács with thought that has become reified is that it loses its power to recognize social fact. In consequence, as O'Connor notes, it loses 'its critical capabilities'.<sup>55</sup> Reified consciousness, in brief, results in a loss of *agency*.

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<sup>52</sup> See Marx, Karl *Capital* (First Published 1867) Volume 1, Book 1, Part1:4 Lawrence and Wishart, London 1971.

<sup>53</sup> 'The Phenomenon of Reification', in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcc05.htm>. Accessed 12 March 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> O'Connor, 2005 p10.

## Appendix 4: Death Fugue

Black milk of daybreak we drink it come evening  
we drink it come midday come morning we drink it come night  
we drink it and drink it  
we spade out a grave in the air there it won't feel so tight  
A man lives at home who plays with the vipers he writes  
he writes in the German-born nightfall  
the gold of your hair Margarete  
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are aglitter he whistles his hounds  
out  
he whistles his Jews off has them spade out a grave in the ground  
he orders us play up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you come night  
we drink you come midday come morning we drink you come evening  
we drink you and drink you  
A man lives at home who plays with the vipers he writes  
he writes in the German-born nightfall the gold of your hair Margarete  
the ash of your hair Shulamith we spade out a grave in the air there it won't feel so  
tight

He yells you there dig deeper and you there sing and play  
He grabs the nightstick at his belt and swings it his eyes are so blue  
You there dig deeper and you there play loud for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you come night  
We drink you come midday come morning we drink you come evening  
We drink you and drink you  
a man lives at home the gold of your hair Margarete  
the ash of your hair Shulamith he plays with the vipers  
he yells play sweeter for death Death is a German-born master  
yells scrape the strings darker you'll rise through the air like smoke  
and have a grave in the clouds there it won't feel so tight

Black milk of daybreak we drink you come night  
we drink you come midday Death is a German-born master  
We drink you come evening come morning we drink you and drink you  
Death is a German-born master his eye is so blue  
He shoots with lead bullets he shoots you his aim is so true  
a man lives at home the gold of your hair Margarete  
he lets his hounds loose on us grants us a grave in the air  
he plays with his vipers and dreams a dream Death is a German-born master

The gold of your hair Margarete  
The ash of your hair Shulamith



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