

Out of the Darkness: Creating New Contexts of Meaning in Anselm Kiefer's
Citation of Nazi History

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ABSTRACT

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Anselm Kiefer (1945-) is a German artist who has seemingly attracted more attention than almost any other artist of his generation. Many of his largescale paintings address Germany's Nazi past. While a large degree of literature already exists on Kiefer's oeuvre, this thesis explores his photographic series *Occupations* (1969), a page from his book *Heroic Symbols* (1969), and paintings *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* (1978) and *Nero Paints* (1974). It is through an analysis of these specific images that I address the main concepts of performativity, citation, and allegory; arguing for the efficacy of Kiefer's art and its intervention on the visual and semiotic infrastructure of the Nazi past.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Within art historical discourse, German artist Anselm Kiefer holds a canonical place as one of the most important artists of his time. There is a substantial amount of literature dedicated to his work, as his powerful imagination, thought-provoking use of religion, myth and history, and controversial application of national iconography has continued to fascinate scholars.¹ Some of his most prominent and most consistently discussed works include his *Occupations* photographs, his paintings of the battle of the Teutoburg forest, and his evocation of the Holocaust in the paintings *Margarete* and *Shulamite*. These works appear to form a trifecta, as much of the research I have conducted speaks to the fact that scholars continue to address these particular photographs and paintings together.² However, my thesis addresses a slightly different coordination of Kiefer's works. While I analyze two of his *Occupations* photographs, a page from his *Heroic Symbols* book, and one of his Teutoburg woodcuts, I read these against his epic work, *Nero Paints*. I believe it is worth examining each of these works on their own terms, and to read them together. *Nero Paints* has a small amount of writing dedicated to it, and I therefore believe it is worth analyzing to offer some new insights on the subject of Kiefer's oeuvre. Aside from there being little written on *Nero Paints*, I believe the painting also needs to be explored in more detail because of how it contributes to understanding Kiefer's earlier work as a whole. His choice to insert a palette in the center of the painting is one of the more explicit references that

¹ Some of these scholars include Daniel Arasse, Andréa Lauterwein, Andreas Huyssen, and Matthew Rampley; each of whom have written extensively on Anselm Kiefer's oeuvre, and have been used as sources in the pages that follow.

² All the sources listed in the above footnote address Kiefer's *Occupations* photographs, *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, and *Margarete and Shulamite* paintings; supporting my argument for the consistent grouping together of these works.

Kiefer makes to working through his own role in the Nazi past. I believe this painting is therefore the most significant regarding Kiefer's attempts at personally understanding and remembering his country's history. Ultimately, it is from my analysis of these photographs and paintings that I will demonstrate the efficacy of Kiefer's work in intervening on the visual and semiotic infrastructure of the Nazi past.

This thesis analyzes four works by Anselm Kiefer; specifically, *Occupations* (1969), *Heroic Symbols* (1969), *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* (1978), and *Nero Paints* (1974). Based on an in-depth analysis of each of these pieces, I aim to address the different ways Kiefer uses his art to detach various Nazi motifs from their semiotic and historical contexts. By doing this, Kiefer provides his viewers with a new understanding of German history and culture during the Second World War. More importantly, he devises strategies to resist that history repeating itself. Kiefer makes a series of intentional choices that direct the viewer's visual experience of German landscape and history, and this must be taken into consideration. As a German himself, Kiefer was familiar with Nazi aesthetics and their claims to what was deemed "authentically" German. His father, Albert Kiefer, experienced the Nazi regime firsthand and wrote about it in his autobiography.³ His writings touched on his own career as an artist after the war, his commitment to naturalism and landscape, and his role as a member of the German Army's Thirty-Fifth Division.⁴ Kiefer was therefore able to draw on his father's recollections and the persistence of Nationalist iconography in this manner. Since Anselm Kiefer was born at the end of the war (March 8, 1945), he was one generation removed from the cultic ideology of the Third Reich, and therefore had to grapple with its elements before he could provide the viewer with a

³ Paul B. Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and The Politics of The Right*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 93.

⁴ Ibid.

fuller and more nuanced understanding of them. He subsequently calls on us as viewers to experience both his implication in and alienation from this terrible history; creating a discomfort with German myth and ideology in a way that is critical and, at times, satirical. By doing this, we can truly begin to comprehend the complexity that lies within Kiefer's art, and the pieces I've chosen to discuss.

In this thesis, I analyze Kiefer's work through several concepts, examining how he deconstructs aesthetics appropriated by the Nazi regime through performative gestures that alter the representation of German visual history. To analyze Kiefer's use of photography, I will explore the issues of reproduction, authenticity, the aestheticization of politics, and audience. From this, I will investigate the role the human body plays in the production of meaning. Citation will be my next focus as I examine the ambiguity of Kiefer's artworks, and how they can be analyzed from the risk they pose that they perpetuate what they aim to critique if they are not cautious. I will look at what exactly it is that Kiefer cites, namely various Nazi aesthetics⁵ and gestures. My main focus will be on his reproduction of the Nazi salute in *Occupations*, and his use of German physiognomy in his painting *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*. This will then lead into the subject of the landscape and the German people and how they defined their identity in relation to it. I explore the ways Kiefer addresses Walter Benjamin's notions of authenticity and how they can be used as a tool to disrupt identification with historic narratives of oppression, culminating in a different means of perception and visual experience. I raise the concept of

⁵ The term 'Nazi aesthetics' is used here in relation to Carsten Strathausen's article of the same name, referenced later on. He uses it to describe the mass party rallies, celebrations, and propaganda posters. The term itself is controversial in that many of the visual elements used by the party were appropriated and even outright stolen from other cultures. Therefore, the topic of what really constitutes a 'Nazi aesthetic' is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is something to be explored at a later date.

contamination, showing how Kiefer twists the Nazi fear of toxic elements invading their social and racial fabric to show how in fact it was the Nazis that contaminated history. The last concept I will discuss is the relationship between image and text in *Nero Paints*.

1.2 Photography and Kiefer's *Occupations* Series

Kiefer's *Occupations* series consists of photographs of Kiefer dressed in a Nazi uniform throughout several landscapes, performing the Nazi salute. The setup of the image, however, clearly detaches the scene from what was typically associated with this gesture. There are no crowds, no flags or banners, just Kiefer, small in scale and alone in various settings that are clearly not from the actual Nazi period, but rather, a distinctly post-Nazi era.⁶ They depict a kind of alienated postwar landscape, as while tourist attractions, they are now empty except for his lone figure. Unlike the sleek-haired and pressed attire of the Nazi soldier, Kiefer's hair is uncombed and the uniform he wears is disheveled. He appears as an imposter in an altered landscape. It is within this context that Kiefer's work can be examined through the writings of Walter Benjamin as a theorist of the relative "authenticity" and "genuineness" at play in photographs.

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin argues that the authenticity of a work of art is based on its aura, its "here and now" quality. But the authenticity of the *jetzzeit* is also available to photographs, a medium of mechanical reproduction.⁷ Benjamin believes that "*In making many copies of the reproduction, it substitutes for its unique incidence a multiplicity of incidences. And in allowing the reproduction to come*

⁶ Andréa Lauterwein. *Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 31.

⁷ *Jetzzeit* is defined by Oxford Reference as "a notion of time that is ripe with revolutionary possibility, time that has been detached from the continuum of history."

*closer to whatever situation the person apprehending it is in, it actualizes what is reproduced.”*⁸

There is therefore a subversive and radical potential in photographs; allowing every person that sees them to actualize what they reproduce. They are no longer subject to the gazes of certain classes, shaped in galleries and museums, as everyone now has the potential to identify with the image. There is a break with the bourgeois identification with the history of the victor that the genuineness of art has seemed to always disclose. Benjamin writes about the “ownership structure” and its change due to the formation of the masses. He therefore correlates the manipulation of photography and film with fascism and the oppressor, as he states that “The violation of the masses, which in a leader cult it forces to their knees, corresponds to the violation exercised by a film camera, which Fascism enlists in the service of producing cultic values.”⁹ Photography’s ability to assemble the masses in rebellion of those in control speaks to Marx’s ideology of the rise of the proletariat. Photography is therefore consciously deployed in fascism because of the fear of its unconstrained ability to create a break in the continuum of history and the victor.

Kiefer’s photographs are carefully constructed. This constructedness points to Benjamin’s argument that the political potential of mechanical reproduction lies in its overcoming of “authenticity.” Benjamin’s problem with authenticity is that it is identified with the history of the victor, so that when we value the authenticity of a work of art, we are taken in ritualistically by the history of the victor. Yet, works of art nevertheless enact the function of “bearing historical witness.” This means various things for Benjamin, the first being that a photograph’s ability to overcome authenticity lies in its reproducibility since it loses its aura;

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* ((1936) New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008), 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

freeing the image from ritual and tradition. It is because of this that the photograph can now possess political potential, and be disassociated from the victor to now bear historical witness to the vanquished and oppressed. However, Benjamin warns that this potential can become corrupted through ideology, resulting in the fascist politicization of art.¹⁰ The photograph's ability to bear historical witness deals largely with the fact that history, ritual, and tradition are often linked. Therefore, the photograph offers an opportunity to show a break with these elements so that the history they depict is not repeated; shattering the image of the victor. In this context, Kiefer's photos reenact the age of Hitler's Nazi regime, and are historical in the most political sense that Benjamin explains. Benjamin links mechanical reproduction, photography, and socialist politics. He establishes that there is a ritualistic element that has always been a problem in art, but also says that now the larger problem has become politics. Historically, the process of reproduction frees art from its given ritualistic function.¹¹ Reproduction however, results in a loss of "aura" and consequently, Benjamin says that the social function of art is uprooted; subsequently, art can develop political content.¹² Kiefer thus uses the photographic medium in a complex way, as he charts a history of the vanquished Nazis to show the folly of their own identification with a history of victors; giving voice to those oppressed instead.

While Kiefer's images initially appear to simply accept and replicate Nazi history, he layers them with complex readings that remove them from their original associations, allowing their political content to be altered by new interpretations and semiotic contexts. As Benjamin most persuasively articulates, "...photographs become exhibits in the trial that is history. That is

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* ((1936) New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

what constitutes their hidden political significance. They...call for a specific type of reception...they unsettle the viewer, he feels obliged to find a specific way of approaching them.”¹³ Kiefer therefore draws upon the concept of *jeztzeit* and produces images that unsettle the viewer, requiring that they approach the image differently in order to question the set up of the image’s authenticity. Benjamin states that fascism has a fascination with technology and acquiring aesthetic pleasure from it, which can be seen through the Nazi use of photography. This was largely important in the dissemination of images of Hitler. By having a photograph of Hitler, the people could see him ‘eye to eye,’ viewing him as one of them, while at the same time the savior of their nation.¹⁴ While Hitler was very particular about how and when he was photographed, he used this medium as a means of historicizing himself as the great messiah of the German people. Kiefer consequently challenges precisely this mediatic manipulation in his *Occupations* series, once again resisting the historical role of the victor.

1.3 Authenticity & Contamination: Kiefer’s Alterations of Nazi Aesthetics

When discussing Kiefer’s use of Nazi aesthetics and authenticity, I draw from Lutz Koepnick’s book *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power*¹⁵ and Carsten Strathausen’s article titled “Nazi Aesthetics”¹⁶ to delve deeper into the subject of the aesthetics of power and how the Nazi regime used this idea to create a Nazi aesthetics. This in turn leads into my analysis of authenticity and contamination in relation to Nazi ideology and how this is translated in Kiefer’s images. Koepnick addresses Benjamin’s iconic notion that fascism is ultimately the

¹³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴ Claudia Schmölders, *Hitler’s Face: The Biography of an Image* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 76.

¹⁵ Koepnick, Lutz. *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Carsten Strathausen, “Nazi Aesthetics,” *Renaissance & Modern Studies* 42 (1999). March 3, 2016. Doi: 10.1080/14735789909391486.

aestheticization of politics.¹⁷ He says that one of the key aspects of Benjamin's aestheticization thesis deals with how we should not make any quick conclusions about what he calls "the universality of aesthetic politics in modernity."¹⁸ Koepnick attempts to break down these connections between fascism, aesthetics and modernism in the following way when he says that "...fascism reckons with the fact that industrial culture has fundamentally changed the ways in which people look at what surrounds them. Aesthetic politics redefines not merely the canon of beautiful objects but also how we see them..."¹⁹ This relates to the idea that the goal of the fascist spectacle was to organize the "modern experience" in order to use people's sensory perceptions for political ends.²⁰ However, Koepnick writes that while fascism does in many ways rely on peoples' feelings it also aims to neutralize their senses. Fascist aesthetics therefore "assaults perception...and denies the private body as an autonomous site of corporeal pleasure."²¹ This argument is the backdrop for Kiefer's interventions in his *Occupations* photographs. More specifically, he uses his own body as an autonomous site. When there is no aura and no authenticity or genuineness, art is displaced from tradition, making it open to political deployment. Benjamin seems to say that there is clearly great political potential in severing art from the presumption of authenticity, and correspondingly, the aesthetic sensibility for the victor. The principle of authenticity was used by the Nazi regime to their great advantage as they created a political aesthetics that would result in a distinct form of "Nazi art."

¹⁷ Koepnick, Lutz. *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 189.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

Likewise, critical theorist Carsten Strathausen's article "Nazi Aesthetics" analyzes Nazi aesthetics and the subject of authenticity. Following Benjamin, Strathausen discusses the relationship of aesthetics to politics, indicating how art was openly used by Nazis to serve that regime's political interests. For Strathausen, the Nazis created a politics of perception: "German fascism secretly exploited the conventional nature of vision while denouncing it publically, a maneuver that further underlines the self-contradictory nature of Nazi aesthetics."²² He ties this to "reality" and "authenticity" and the regime's distinctive definitions of these. They used art to materialize their ideology in a way that mirrored their fascist visions, helping to manipulate the population's perceptions not only visually, but also in terms of how they too defined reality and authenticity.²³ This brings into question the idea of authenticity and Benjamin's critique of it. It also ties back to the subject of photography and its use as propaganda, with Hitler himself having practiced and studied his gestures with a professional photographer.²⁴ Strathausen therefore addresses an important issue in the subject of Nazi aesthetics, as he looks at manipulated perception and spectator identification all in relation to Nazi propaganda and the camera.

Both Benjamin and Strathausen's writings are pertinent to Kiefer's work in several ways. It is important to stress the ways in which these struggles over authenticity, Nazi aesthetics, and ideology permeated all German life, culture, and art at the time. The Third Reich produced a fear of everything that was not truly 'German' contaminating its culture and society when in reality, it was they who were contaminating everything with their ideology. Kiefer uses his performances to create a reversal of terms, subsequently contaminating Nazi ideology in order to loosen it from

²² Carsten Strathausen, "Nazi Aesthetics." *Renaissance & Modern Studies* 42 (1999): 14. March 3, 2016. Doi: 10.1080/14735789909391486.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 10.

its original context. He does this in many ways, but Andréa Lauterwein sums it up perfectly when she discusses how his parodies result in a satirical mockery of the Nazi Party, taking everything out of its original “forbidden” or taboo context to provide a new way in which to analyze and talk about Germany’s past.²⁵ This idea of contamination is also prevalent in his painting *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, as Kiefer’s decision not to name the men portrayed results in its own form of contamination. Arasse summarizes how this happens when he writes about the painting and how the two German “heroes” that were praised by the Nazis (Wessel and Schlageter) are namelessly placed on the same level as other “canonical” figures from German history.²⁶ Arasse says that by doing this, it is enough to “...contaminate everyone else in the picture... their secret presence becom[ing] a challenge to the whole.”²⁷ This notion of contamination thus becomes central to Kiefer’s work, as he challenges the way in which Nazi ideology was disseminated through the ironic nature of his appropriation of it.

My analysis of Kiefer’s photographs is also informed by Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. One of the elements of photography that Barthes addresses is the concept of the “object of the lens,” that may morph, change, and pose according to the position of the camera.²⁸ While the object poses, it knows it is there, the photographer knows it is, and the two converge to produce an image to the viewer.²⁹ What is vital here is that according to Barthes, the photograph is where one may be both themselves as well as this “other;” this object of the

²⁵ Andréa Lauterwein. *Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 31-32.

²⁶ Daniel Arasse and Anselm Kiefer. *Anselm Kiefer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 125.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* ((1980) New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

lens that is a “cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.”³⁰ This is pertinent to Kiefer’s *Occupations* because while he is presenting the viewer with an image of a Nazi soldier conducting the Sieg Heil, he is in fact playing a role, using the photographic context to become this object of vision. We also must take into consideration that he is posing, and therefore expects that the viewer is aware of his artifice, making this scene less offensive than initially presumed. Kiefer’s work therefore uses the conventions of photography to subvert the conventional image of a Nazi salute at the same time. Barthes’ writings convey just this message, as he says that “photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks.”³¹ Therefore, while many initially reacted to Kiefer’s work as repellant and offensive, its impact is subtle and invokes further reflection.

One of the final elements of Barthes writings that I will use in conjunction with my exploration of Kiefer’s *Occupations* series is his discussion of how society interacts with and interprets a work of art. For Barthes, society must be able, as viewers, to remove images from the standard technical aspects by which one judges them. He writes that “the photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah: ‘Technique,’ ‘Reality,’ ‘Reportage,’ ‘Art,’ etc. ...to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness.”³² This is significant in relation to Kiefer’s photographs in that his images have countless small yet significant nuances which command viewers’ focus; dislodging the image from a standard reality and allowing the image to come forward amid innumerable details and elements. These details formulate an alternative semiotic texture to the image of the Nazi, and are the ground on which Kiefer can undertake his reenactment of history.

³⁰ Ibid.,12.

³¹ Ibid., 38.

³² Ibid., 55.

1.4 Performativity and the Human Body

Kiefer's photographs can also be understood as performative acts. Barthes opens the way for thinking of photography as performative when he states that "photography is a kind of primitive theater."³³ This thought lends itself to a reading of Kiefer's oeuvre as a series of satirical performative gestures. I draw from theorist Judith Butler's elaboration of the concept of performativity to analyze Kiefer's practice. In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler deals with the idea of performative rights. She says "...when bodies assemble on the street...or in other forms of public space...they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field..."³⁴ Butler elaborates that as a free body, we have a right to appear, to use our body to perform, and insert ourselves in the middle of a political discussion. In this way, Kiefer uses his body to insert himself in the discussion of Germany's Nazi history, while at the same time removing bodies who would otherwise appear.

Butler writes at length about how bodies enact meaning, and how they are not "self-enclosed kinds of entities," as they are almost always outside of themselves, moving through their environments and interacting with one another.³⁵ In this, she expands on how society has an issue with photographs, as people do not want to feel or experience what is happening in images of war and destruction.³⁶ It is an issue of not wanting to open one's body up to move outside of itself and interact with another individual.³⁷ This is what makes it uncomfortable to see Kiefer

³³ Ibid., 32.

³⁴ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015), 11.

³⁵ Ibid., 149.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

enacting a parody of the bodily position of the Nazi salute: it seems to invite the viewer to occupy the pose as well, even while it is a stigmatized and deeply troubling stance. Butler also addresses those who seek to expose the performativity of the body; when we attempt to expose one another, and make each other vulnerable, we simply end up binding ourselves to those we initially want to overcome. There is therefore a vulnerability rather than an invulnerability, as Kiefer positions himself in the place of those he is seeking to expose. Unlike the soldiers that thought they were untouchable, Kiefer presents himself to the viewer specifically to be scrutinized and judged. This is enhanced by his choice to stand alone, in front of massive monuments and the vast sea.

One of the final aspects of performativity to be addressed will be taken from Butler's essay titled "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." Butler analyzes what it means to dramatize, saying that to dramatize and to reproduce are both basic forms of embodiment.³⁸ By acknowledging the body as a way to dramatize and enact, we may more clearly understand how certain cultural conventions are able to be embodied. I suggest that Kiefer uses his photographs to break with the cultural conventions of the Nazis. He uses his body to enact and embody Nazi aesthetics, while at the same time refusing to follow the current cultural conventions that still maintained reproducing such gestures was taboo. I will also be looking at Butler's reference to anthropologist Victor Turner and his work on ritual social drama where she quotes him as saying that "...social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a

³⁸ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 521. Accessed April 7, 2016. Doi: 10.2307/3207893.

set of meanings already socially established...the performance renders social laws explicit.”³⁹

Kiefer therefore takes social action through the performance of his work as he repeats his gesture throughout multiple images. In doing so, he lays bare the social laws of the time and how what they had been repressing needed to be addressed.

1.5 Citation: Loosening Signifiers of Nazi Aesthetics

In this thesis, I also address Kiefer’s photographs through the notion of citation. The theorist that I will rely on to further this analysis is Mieke Bal; more specifically her article titled “The Politics of Citation.” Bal situates the issue by asking “To what extent is it acceptable to adopt illustrative material in a critical analysis of ideologically fraught practices of representation, and if at all, under what conditions?”⁴⁰ Bal’s argument is based on her exploration of the colonial exploitation of images of the nude female figure and the reproduction of these in more recent photobooks. She questions whether (mostly male) scholars are fostering the ideologies they aim to criticize in their duplication of these images. In response to this, we may look to Kiefer’s *Occupations* photographs, and whether he has the right to reproduce such emotionally charged material, and to what end. Bal is critical, saying that there are many conditions that are to be met for a challenging citation to take place. There is a responsibility that lies with the artist and the critic alike that requires diligence in the citation of racist, sexist, and otherwise politically charged historical documents. Bal provides various ways in which to be more politically responsible and in turn, more effective with intellectual criticism. One entails how the artist or critic must be thoughtful in what they choose to reproduce.⁴¹ There needs to be

³⁹ Ibid., 526.

⁴⁰ Mieke Bal, “The Politics of Citation.” *Diacritics* 21.1. (1991): 28. Accessed February 29, 2016. Doi: 10.2307/465209.

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

some form of explanation or commentary on what is being done so that the viewer can actively engage with the work in the same thoughtful manner.⁴² Another deals with how a critical analysis that involves the critic themselves can become more successful through making the “narrative dimension” of the images more explicit.⁴³ I would argue that Kiefer’s photographs have a clear narrative dimension to those who are critical as Bal suggests, and this criticism is in many ways one of the most important elements of Kiefer’s *Occupations*. Kiefer possesses the self-awareness that Bal demands of the artist/critic. Bal argues that all too often, historians assume an objective voice, while at the same time subjectively enjoying the perspective they are criticizing. She writes that “The very assumption that scholarship can stay out of (or above) ideology...is ideological itself.”⁴⁴ It is because of this that she suggests that critics must not assume objectivity, requiring self-reflection and subsequent critique whereby they surface their own subject positions, which Kiefer does. He does not assume objectivity; rendering his subject matter in a way that places himself in the role of the individual who is being examined.

There is also a heavy responsibility on the viewer to be cautious when absorbing and interpreting what they see. Bal cites several rules that viewers must follow when looking at a work of art which can apply when analyzing Kiefer’s photographs. The main rule I find most interesting in relation to Kiefer’s images is when Bal requires that we as viewers place ourselves in the place of the subject in the photograph.⁴⁵ This is one of the more contentious elements of Kiefer’s series, as no one in Germany at the time wanted to put themselves in a position of discomfort over such a sensitive subject. He also points to how we need to still be critical in the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 29.

present. If we look at his *Occupations* photographs, it is evident that his images are not simply an example of “objectionable practice[s] from the past,” but as representations meant to confront viewers with the artifice of those objectionable practices; insisting on their malleability in the present.⁴⁶ Kiefer’s work is a reminder that the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime needed to be confronted and dealt with to avoid their recurrence in the future. It is from Bal’s writings that I hope to demonstrate how Kiefer undertakes a genuine politics of citation. He removes the political connotations from the gesture as he reproduces it via performance. By taking the uniform and the gesture out of their original semiotic and historical contexts, and placing them in a photograph that depicts Kiefer alone, alienated and disheveled, Kiefer is very conscious of not “simply” repeating and exploiting what he is aiming to criticize.

1.6 Challenging the Naturalness of the German Landscape

This thesis also explores the role of landscape in Kiefer’s work. Landscape is a primary organizational schema of Kiefer’s painting *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*. The landscape has a history of being linked to German culture and identity, and to show this, I will discuss Thomas Lekan’s *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity 1885-1945*.⁴⁷ Upon specifically analyzing the landscape in relation to *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, I will be using John Eidsmoe’s “The Battle That Saved the West: Arminius (‘Herman the Liberator’) and His German Warriors Crushed Three Roman Legions in the Teutoburg Forest,” Martin Winkler’s *Arminius the Liberator: Myth and Ideology*, and Peter Arnds article “On the Awful German Fairy Tale: Breaking Taboos in Representations of Euthanasia and the Holocaust.” Each

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁷ Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity 1885-1945* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004).

of these sources will contribute to an understanding of the German landscape, its ties to mythology, and the role these play in Kiefer's painting.

In German history, the notion of the landscape as something cultural rather than natural is a fundamental fact. Going back to the First World War, the romantic aestheticism of the nineteenth century was replaced with a new understanding of what the natural landscape meant to the German people and their sense of *Heimat*, or nationhood.⁴⁸ By differentiating themselves and their land from other nations, Lekan notes that the German people believed that their ethnicity grew organically from the soil, which is an idea that would be taken later on by Hitler and the Nazi regime and used to support the goal of purifying Germany.⁴⁹ Lekan writes that this new rhetoric about ethnicity and the soil "...glorified the primordial, biological bond between the German *Volkstum*, a racist-tinged formulation of *Volk*, and its central European homeland, arguing that German ethnic character grew from the soil of the *Heimat*."⁵⁰ The idea of the landscape, according to Lekan, became increasingly more and more cultural in its determination, and preservationists in Germany did all that they could to align the landscape with the heart and soul of the people. Foreign cultures and races were held responsible for any instance of environmental degradation, and the definition of the landscape grew to become increasingly more and more xenophobic.

By the time the National Socialist regime gained control in Germany, the subject of landscape had reached a point where it was solidly and inextricably linked to the German *Volk*. By making appeals to blood and soil, the Nazi regime was perpetuating Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl's notion of "*Land und Leute*," which recognized the role of the landscape in solidifying

⁴⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Germany's national identity using nature.⁵¹ During Nazi control however, the landscape was no longer cultural in the broader sense of the word that defined the landscape, but rather, became strictly racial by definition. Lekan best sums up the way that Nazi Germany cultivated its view of the landscape in the following passage. He writes:

The Nazis grounded their belief in racial character on supposedly objective laws of the natural world; [Germany's] past, present, and future were thus eternally connected by blood...both *Volk and Landschaft*, Blood and Soil, would renew themselves in a never-ending cycle of birth, growth, death, and rebirth. As the poet Karl Broeger remarked: ... 'Germany will not die.'⁵²

Lekan suggests that Germany's relationship to the land was tied to its understanding of its ethnicity. There was a cycle, and that cycle's death stage ultimately entailed the death of anyone who did not come from the soil, of pure German blood. It was only through this, that Germany could be "reborn," and therefore in essence continue this now purified cycle so as to never die. Landscape is therefore important to my overall analysis of Kiefer's *Occupations* photographs because it demonstrates the ways in which the landscape was culturally shaped.

This relationship is not just present in the photographs though, as Kiefer's painting *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* draws on the subject of the landscape in another dynamic way. The painting's full title is *The Ways of Worldly Wisdom – Battle of the Teutoburg Forest*. In this painting, he depicts a German landscape – the Teutoburg forest. He also draws on the landscape in relation to myth – particularly the myth of the battle that took place in the forest. I will begin with Eidsmoe's article "The Battle That Saved the West" to contextualize the historical events

⁵¹ Ibid., 154.

⁵² Ibid., 251.

that occurred. As Eidsmoe explains, the story is centered on a German chieftain named Hermann (Latinized Arminius) who was born as a prince of a tribe called the Cherusci.⁵³ He was raised in Rome as a hostage but received military training there; however, he eventually returned to his homeland and attempted to unite some of the northern Germanic tribes in the fight for freedom from Rome.⁵⁴ Arminius tricked Varus, a Roman commander, by spreading a rumor of rebellion which resulted in Varus leading three legions of men across the Rhine to the Teutoburg forest in September of 9 A.D.⁵⁵ Due to Arminius' quick thinking and strategizing, the Germans defeated the Romans in a resounding victory, and in many ways this event immortalized Arminius as a great German leader.⁵⁶ It also forever mythologized the battle and the forest, morphing it into a German cultural tradition that was eventually adopted and distorted by Hitler and the Third Reich.

In his book *Arminius the Liberator: Myth and Ideology*, Martin Winkler suggests that while Arminius was not necessarily one of the main figures in German history used in Nazi ideology, he was not entirely neglected either.⁵⁷ His ties to the Teutoburg forest and his victory there created a sense of mythical spirituality that bound the German people to their land even more, as Winkler himself not only explores Arminius and the myth, but also the ideology it resulted in, and its place in National Socialism. He quotes another author's work, namely Paul

⁵³ John Eidsmoe, "The Battle That Saved the West: Arminius ("Hermann the Liberator") and His German Warriors Crushed Three Roman Legions in the Teutoburg Forest – and in so Doing Redirected the Course of History." *The New American* 25, no. 20 (2009): 35. Accessed April 7, 2016. <http://go.galegroup.com/subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA209475758&v=2.1&u=guel77241&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=451f63e98e7ccdc511d5a57f431b1db5>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 35-36.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁷ Martin M. Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator: Myth and Ideology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 86.

Albrecht's *Arminius-Sigurfrid*, where he discusses the growing power of the Third Reich. He talks about the German people and their mission, and Winkler quotes him as saying "If we correctly understand our mission, we will have to start anew where the First Reich had begun to build up the edifice of Germanic greatness... In reality, the First Reich of Germanic blood and spirit is the confederacy of states created by Arminius."⁵⁸ Again here we see a racially determined Germanness based on the idea of blood and soil, now enshrouded in the myth of the great German Arminius and his strength in defeating the Romans to keep Germany free and pure as a nation. I extend my analysis from this history to analyze the relationship these theories have to Kiefer's *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*.

Comparative literature scholar Peter Arnds writes about the connection between landscape and myth in his article "On the Awful German Fairy Tale: Breaking Taboos in Representations of Nazi Euthanasia and the Holocaust." Arnds establishes how the Nazis in particular viewed the defeat of the Romans in the battle of the Teutoburg as a sign of German superiority due to the purity of their blood.⁵⁹ However, he also analyzes how Kiefer takes the unrealistic and overly inflated ways in which this myth and Nazi ideals were rooted in German tradition, and displays them in his painting.⁶⁰ Arnds discusses how Kiefer uses "portraits" of various prominent German thinkers and places them around what appear to be several thin, burnt trees.⁶¹ He also writes that the words "Die Hermann-Schlacht" represent the ideology of

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁹ Peter Arnds, "On The Awful German Fairy Tale: Breaking Taboos in Representations of Nazi Euthanasia and the Holocaust in Gunter Grass's 'die Blechtrommel,' Edgar Hilsenrath's 'der Nazi & der Friseur,' and Anselm Kiefer's Visual Art." *The German Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (2002): 436. Accessed March 20, 2016. doi:10.2307/3252212.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Arminius and its current (at the time) place in German intellectual life.⁶² This myth and its tie to the landscape is one of the main focuses of Kiefer's painting, and the other is the subject of physiognomics.

1.7 A Critique of Nazi Aesthetics: German Physiognomy and *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*

One of the many impressive elements of Kiefer's photographs and paintings lie in his ability to satirize and thoroughly critique various elements of Nazi aesthetics. As previously discussed, some of these elements consist of his reproduction of the Sieg Heil, his references to German mythology and landscape, and his referencing of former German Romantic painters. They also include his interest in the spectacle and lack thereof, the appropriation of photography as a kind of Nazi propaganda, and finally, his use of German physiognomy. This element is most explicitly seen in Kiefer's *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*. Before addressing the connection between physiognomy and its role in Kiefer's artwork though, physiognomy must be explored as a practice, and for this I have relied on Richard Gray's book *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz*. As the title suggests, the book begins with Gray's exploration of the writings of Johann Caspar Lavater, the Swiss pastor who is considered the "father" of physiognomics. From this, Gray discusses the linear progression of this concept and its popularity and distortion in German thought throughout history; looking particularly at Germany's use of it during World War One and World War Two.

Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801) is in many ways the most prominent, early theorist of physiognomics. He believed that through his study of humans and the human body, a trained individual could recognize and therefore determine, as he called it, "*the inner nature of a human*

⁶² Ibid.

being on the basis of his or her external qualities...”⁶³ For Lavater, physiognomics was meant in many ways to be used to understand and love one another, or so he claimed. Lavater worked very hard to find a way to contribute a scientific, and therefore seemingly rationally grounded aspect to physiognomics to make it appear less superstitious and, to be candid, absurd. One of his many critics, a physicist named Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, warned against physiognomics and the dangers of it.⁶⁴ He summarizes his concerns when he writes, “Now that crude superstition has been banished from the more refined world, I wanted to make sure that a more subtle form of prejudice did not sneak its way back in, one that would prove even more dangerous than crude superstition because of the mask of rationality it wore.”⁶⁵ Lichtenberg’s insight in this comment pointed to a shift in the German Enlightenment during the eighteenth century where it became increasingly important to protect all Enlightenment ideology from unreason.⁶⁶ This would, one would think, exclude the subject of physiognomics; however, the German interest in exactly this – the unreasonable, the inexplicable – is precisely what kept the subject within the bounds of the Enlightenment discourse.⁶⁷ Its popularity subsequently persisted, and Gray cites various critics who, along the way, consistently pointed out that physiognomics had no real scientific basis; having nothing to do with the promotion of human understanding and love but rather, prejudiced presuppositions about other people in order to claim superiority over them.⁶⁸ Gray discusses the continued growth of physiognomics from this standpoint, and how it gained a fervent revival particularly during the 1900s.

⁶³ Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004), xlv.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Physiognomics seems to have gained momentum during the years just prior to the First World War, and can be seen in the “proto-fascist” and racial ethnology of Hans F.K. Günther and psychology of Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss.⁶⁹ Gray argues that these two men are the best known examples of the racialized version of physiognomics that emerged during the Weimar Republic, which reached its zenith during Nazi rule.⁷⁰ Hierarchies became more prevalent, and the German individual, characterized as “...strong, upright, daring [and] industrious...” was at the very top.⁷¹ This contributed to the way the Third Reich was able to use the tradition of the study and application of physiognomics to give its own racist ideas validation based in ‘scientific truth.’⁷² Austrian philosopher Rudolf Kassner is yet another individual whose writings were used to further a racial physiognomy in Germany, and he explains the superiority of the German, Nordic race through a pointed description of very specific physical characteristics such as “blue eyes, blonde hair, muscular build, harmonious physical proportions, a long and narrow face, and so on.”⁷³

It is from this description of physiognomics that I make a connection to Kiefer’s painting *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*. The painting is acrylic and shellac on woodcut on paper; the woodcut being a traditionally German medium. More than the medium, I focus on the portraits he paints, as they all make reference to individuals who were important German military, political, musical, literary, and philosophical figures. This idea of a work of art consisting of many of Germany’s “illustrious men” in portrait form is fascinating, as what would to the untrained eye appear as an

⁶⁹ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 107.

⁷² Ibid., 136.

⁷³ Ibid., 238.

homage to these men is in reality a very carefully constructed critique of German ideology.⁷⁴

While some of the men depicted have been discerned – Horst Wessel and Albert Leo Schlageter – most of them remain unnamed, resulting in the viewer having to try and guess who Kiefer included in the painting.⁷⁵ Through using physiognomics, one can presumably determine that the men he depicts are German, as they appear as strong industrious men with solid jaw lines and chiseled faces. However, he randomly groups them, resulting in a non-canonical figuration.⁷⁶ This is part of the irony of his work, as Kiefer demonstrates how, in the end, in spite of each figures physiognomically determined Germanness, no one individual is really distinguishable from the other. He therefore intentionally, and ultimately satirically, perpetuates Nazi typologies; allowing him, as theorist Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, to undermine Nazism and the way they politicized their aesthetics from within through the actual repetition of their symbols and ideologies.⁷⁷

1.8 Image, Text, and *Nero Paints*

The subject of the relationship between image and text is the final concept I want to address. I find it useful when analyzing the final piece of Kiefer's that I have chosen to explore – *Nero Paints*. One of the main reasons for this lies in the implications of the title in relation to what Kiefer has painted. It is also important as a starting point when attempting to analyze this painting since there is very little that has been written on it to date. This is, therefore, my way of inserting myself and my work into the overall discussion of Kiefer's art, as it is an area of his

⁷⁴ Daniel Arasse and Anselm Kiefer. *Anselm Kiefer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 123.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, DVD on Netflix. Directed by Sophie Fiennes, 2012. <https://www.netflix.com/watch/70260306?trackId=14170287&tctx=0%2C0%2C4d51b0b-9a68-4750-a52e-08aea584091e-62667025>.

oeuvre that I believe could use more exploration. I will begin with a review of Craig Owens articles “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism” and “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2.” These articles will help me establish the framework in which to analyze the relationship between the titles of Kiefer’s works and their visual elements. In addition to these, I will also use Edward Champlin’s article “Nero Reconsidered,” R.M. Frazer’s “Nero the Artist-Criminal,” and O.K. Werckmeister’s “Hitler the Artist.”

The central theme in Owens’ articles deal with allegory. For centuries allegory has been condemned as what he calls an “aesthetic aberration, the antithesis of art.”⁷⁸ Owens writes that in spite of this, allegory is significant because it is how one text is read through another.⁷⁹ However, he is most interested in how allegory takes place within a work of art, referring to it as allegorical imagery.⁸⁰ Allegorical imagery, according to Owens, is appropriated imagery, as “the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other...he adds another meaning to the image.”⁸¹ I connect this to Kiefer’s work, in which he takes culturally significant gestures and imagery from the Nazi era, adding another meaning to them. In doing this, Owens would say that he is not just adding a new meaning though, as he is also replacing one meaning with another.⁸² Owens suggests that photography is a privileged medium to undertake art’s allegorical impulse. He advocates that one of the strongest desires of allegory is its “appreciation of the

⁷⁸ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism.” *October* 12 (1980): 67. August 5, 2016. Doi: 10.2307/778575.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity,” and he directly links this with the practice of photography as he argues that it is the best at representing an art that desires to “fix the transitory, the ephemeral, in a stable...image.”⁸³ This pertains to Kiefer’s work and his *Occupations* photographs in particular; however, this notion of the allegory does ultimately apply to all the works by Kiefer I have chosen to analyze.

In addition to this, Owens discusses aesthetics in relation to allegory. According to Owens, there is a “blatant disregard for aesthetic categories” in the reciprocity that allegory offers between the verbal and the visual.⁸⁴ The struggle between the verbal and the visual lies in how they are understood, as Owens writes that words are usually treated as “purely visual phenomena” and visual images are typically analyzed as “script to be deciphered.”⁸⁵ It is therefore key that when one studies the relationship between text and image, they understand the dichotomy that exists between the two. Words therefore, are not just visual phenomena but are also meant to be deciphered, and images are not just script meant to be deciphered but also visual phenomena. Both are at play with one another, and a clear, well-rounded reading of a work of art, in this instance, must consequently involve an analysis of the title as well as the visual imagery depicted. However, there is often a failure on the part of the viewer, to comprehend this and to read the signs that the artist offers them. It is in this vein that I shift my focus from Owens’ first article to “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2.”

In this second half, Owens still addresses allegory, but he also addresses signs and text in more depth. Allegory again is seen as a literary or graphic element in which one object can signify two different things. However, Owens links this to the problem of reading and the

⁸³ Ibid., 71.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

legibility and illegibility of signs.⁸⁶ Allegory is not just tacked on to a work of art but is a structural possibility that is inherent in a work of art, however it is not realized, or “actualized,” until the activity of reading occurs.⁸⁷ In this reading, the artist often creates an allegory so that it may alter the viewer/reader’s behavior. The reader becomes central to how a text or image is read, as they are inextricably linked to it. While the reader is the space in which all text unites, Owens makes clear that the destination of the work is no longer personal; as the reader must exist without “history, biography, psychology.”⁸⁸ This simply means that the reader is just someone who can have all the elements of the text constituted within him. How then does this relate to Kiefer’s artwork? The viewer/reader has no choice but to interact with the work since they are its destination. I will therefore explore how Kiefer’s work is a specifically postmodern approach to Nazi history, in its rendering of an allegorical impulse.

The final chapter of this thesis focuses on the painting *Nero Paints*, created in 1974. I discuss it in relation to the following three arguments: first, I continue my discussion of Craig Owen’s concept of allegory and his specific discussion of the relationship between image and text. Kiefer’s titles are just as important as – if not more than – what he visually depicts in the work. I show how Kiefer makes certain visual and historical connections that bring about thought-provoking questions of psychology and morality. Second, I draw from Edward Champlin’s article “Nero Reconsidered.” Champlin explores the various aspects of Roman Emperor Nero’s personality and life, including both his accomplishments and his short-comings. Hitler is paralleled in various respects with Nero, namely in regards to the idea of the “artist-

⁸⁶ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2.” *October* 13 (1980): 62. August 5, 2016. Doi: 10.2307/3397702.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

criminal” and the burning of their homelands. Why then, were both men, terrible as they were, adored by many of their people? Champlin offers a rationalization in his article when he quotes Scholar M. Perrie’s study on Ivan the Terrible. He offers her explanation for why people loved Ivan as a means to understanding why people loved Nero, quoting her as saying “Because the terror is directed against enemies and traitors, real and imaginary, it is not seen as an expression of...personal viciousness and savagery, but as an indication of...strength and...resolution to pursue the interests of the state, and to avenge injustice against the people.”⁸⁹ This clearly not only offers a “justification” as to why Nero was so popular, but also offers an illogically logical reason for why Hitler was so popular as well.

Third, I draw from O.K. Werckmeister’s article “Hitler the Artist.” I discuss how Nero the artist-criminal connects to Hitler the artist-politician. In the German tradition, a political leader was in many ways described as an artist; one who could “shape” historical reality and bring “artistic creativity to statecraft,” elevating one above a mere politician.⁹⁰ I explore the connection of these two men through their use of fire, as each are different in relation to this definition of a political leader. Nero was considered an artist-criminal or artist-arsonist if, according to Champlin and Frazer, he indeed was the one who set fire to Rome. Hitler used it as well, however he receives the title artist-politician. Werckmeister quotes Bertolt Brecht’s 1934 poem “The Roman Emperor Nero” in an attempt to compare Nero’s burning of Rome for “the pleasure of the spectacle” to the burning of the Berlin Reichstag which, Werckmeister says,

⁸⁹ Edward Champlin, “Nero Reconsidered,” *New England Review* 19, no. 2 (1998): 108. November 22, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/40243335>.

⁹⁰ O.K. Werckmeister, “Hitler the Artist,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1997): 272. November 22, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/1343984>.

Brecht believed had been secretly propagated by Hitler and the Third Reich.⁹¹ There is a clear, causal link between Nero and Hitler as artists, but also as politicians and ultimately, arsonists.

Kiefer's painting *Nero Paints* is one of the least explored works from his oeuvre. Upon attempting to find scholarly books or articles written on it, I came upon only one source – Paul Jaskot's *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and the Politics of the Right*. Jaskot's assessment explores how the painting is one of Kiefer's earlier works (1974) and is 220 x 300 cm, consisting of a very heavily worked, multi-layered surface. The work depicts a burnt field in relation to Hitler's "Nero Decree" at the end of the war. In the center of the painting Kiefer has inserted an artist's palette with brushes protruding from it, spouting "fire" at the barns in the background.⁹² One of the readings that Jaskot offers is that Kiefer is raising two significant moral questions. The first deals with whether contemporary artists were truly capable of depicting such sensitive subject matter, and the second questions the culpability of other artists regarding their actions in the Nazi past.⁹³ While these are indeed significant questions to address and ponder, I believe that a reading of the painting in relation to its title is missing, and is worth exploring at greater lengths. What does the title imply in linking Hitler to a mad Emperor? What are the dangers of implying that what Hitler did was an act of madness and not something clearly and consciously planned? Was Nero really mad or was he simply a clever man? Why does this connection matter, or does it? What does all of this say about Kiefer, the real artist, and what he is trying to accomplish? These are some of the questions I hope to address as I explore *Nero Paints*.

⁹¹ Ibid., 287.

⁹² Paul B. Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and the Politics of the Right* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 91.

⁹³ Ibid.

1.9 Conclusion

My first chapter will deal with Kiefer's *Occupations* series and *Heroic Symbols*, and will cover the subjects of photography, performativity, authenticity and contamination, and citation. The chapter will be split into four parts as I begin with my analysis of his use of photography and his unpacking of the Sieg Heil. The second part of it will deal with the performative nature of Kiefer's gestures, as well as his displacing of signs to create a reversal of terms. How Kiefer addresses the subject of contamination, and the problems of citation and its ambiguous nature per Bal will follow. My second chapter will solely address the subjects of landscape and physiognomy in Kiefer's painting *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*. I will explore landscape, myth, and German identity, as well as Kiefer's use of physiognomy as a way to contaminate and satirize one of the practices of Nazi Germany. My final chapter will review *Nero Paints*. I will apply Craig Owen's concepts about the relationship between image and text and the use of allegory, while also offering my own interpretation of the relationship between the title of the painting and its visual content. This chapter will therefore aim to contribute to the current discourse on Kiefer's work by exploring one of his least explored paintings. Ultimately, I hope to offer a different perspective to Kiefer's work overall; tying these elements together to show the ways in which Kiefer follows through with the notion of "enjoying the symptom" in order to deconstruct it and offer a reversal of terms.

Chapter 2: Occupations and “Enjoying the Symptom”

2.1 Kiefer’s *Occupations* Series and the Notion of “The Symptom”

In the summer and autumn of 1969, German artist Anselm Kiefer travelled throughout Europe to create his controversial photographic series, *Occupations*. At the time, the photographs were collectively titled *Heroic Symbols*; a title chosen based on a 1943 article that was published in an official Nazi art magazine, *Art in the German Reich*.⁹⁴ The various cover designs of the magazine were created by Richard Klein, an artist who had obtained high standing in the National Socialist regime.⁹⁵ His specialty was largely in producing “Nazi emblems, medals, trophies, stamps and all manner of ‘heroic symbols.’”⁹⁶ The specific issue that inspired Kiefer’s images and books included representations of “patriotic paintings, portrait busts, iron crosses and photographs of military memorial monuments.”⁹⁷ At the end of the issue was a reproduction of a wall relief from 1938 by Arno Breker titled *Retaliation*, which depicted a heroic and muscular figure.⁹⁸ This was one of the various ‘heroic symbols’ created by Breker for Hitler’s unrealized *Hall of Soldiers*.⁹⁹ Kiefer’s appropriation of photographs from the magazine, as well as other National Socialist publications, demonstrates his refusal to partake in the collective process of hiding and ignoring the tainted patriotic symbols of Germany’s past.¹⁰⁰ He does this by “deconstructing the canon of heroes in German cultural history, in particular signaling how the

⁹⁴ Christian Weikhop, “Occupations / Heroic Symbols,” in Christian Weikop (ed.), *In Focus: Heroic Symbols 1969 by Anselm Kiefer*, Tate Research Publication, 2016. Accessed November 1, 2016. <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/heroic-symbols-anselm-kiefer/occupations-heroic-symbols>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Nazis called up and misused the past in order to legitimate their own extreme nationalistic and warped worldview.”¹⁰¹ Kiefer’s *Occupations* photographs are therefore tied to this magazine issue in that they attempt to deconstruct this ideology of heroic symbols and the German ‘hall of heroes.’

Kiefer published eighteen of his photographs from his series in a photo-essay in the German art magazine *Interfunktionen* in 1975, and it was here that the works were re-titled *Occupations*.¹⁰² While there is therefore quite an extensive list of photographs to choose from the series, I will address only two; both photos chosen were taken in France, one in front of the statue of King Louis XIV at Montpellier [Figure 1], and the other in front of the Mediterranean Sea by Sète [Figure 2]. In each of the photographs from the *Occupations* series, Anselm Kiefer is the subject. The artist himself poses in both images dressed in a Nazi uniform performing the Sieg Heil gesture. Since Germany was still in a position of cultural change, as they attempted to erase all traces of their Nazi past, the photographs were incredibly controversial and to many, offensive. Kiefer was bringing to the forefront not only the taboo gesture, but the painful memories that accompanied it. However, there are many hidden meanings within the photographs, as they are not just evoking and replicating Nazism. Kiefer’s goal was to dissociate the images from the original connotations they provoke.

I consider Kiefer’s photographs a form of engaging and performatively destabilizing signifiers of Nazi history. I connect this to a practice of, what theorist Slavoj Žižek calls “enjoying your symptom.”¹⁰³ Said to have been initially created by Karl Marx, the symptom

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

existed largely in relation to the analysis of the commodity, yet later became important to Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalysis of dreams.¹⁰⁴ Symptoms themselves are meaningless “traces,” whereby their meaning is constructed retroactively rather than by being dug out from the past.¹⁰⁵ Žižek says that because of this, it is the analysis of the symptom that produces the truth; the “signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning.”¹⁰⁶ Žižek furthers this by stating that once we enter the realm of the symbolic, “Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way.”¹⁰⁷ I take it that Kiefer’s practice produces such historical ruptures, altering the meaning of the Nazi content so as to disrupt any easy historical absorption of the Nazi regime.

Žižek explains that by partaking in, or flirting with, Nazi gestures, one is not necessarily propagating Nazi ideology. He uses the German rock band Rammstein as an example, stating that while they may imitate certain dark, militaristic gestures alluding to fascism on stage, they also liberate them from their “Nazi articulations,” by taking them back to their “pre-ideological state.”¹⁰⁸ They become pre-ideological to undertake a critique of ideology itself. One of the ways this happens is through the extraction of the “kernel of enjoyment;” something grounded in fantasy.¹⁰⁹ By removing this seed of enjoyment from the pre-ideological state, the pre-ideological state cannot be manipulated, resulting in whatever is being appropriated to no longer possess its

¹⁰⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*, DVD (Netflix). Directed by Sophie Fiennes, 2012. <https://www.netflix.com/watch/70260306?trackId=14170287&tctx=0%2C0%2C4d51b0b-9a68-4750-a52e-08aea584091e-62667025>.

¹⁰⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 140.

original meaning or value. Something like the Nazi salute, then, is able to be disassociated from the ideology it was attached to for so long. For Žižek, the engagement of semiotic play with the symptom enables a disruption of the Nazi symbolic; by enjoying its elements through “suspending the Nazi horizon of meaning,” and the band undermining it from within.¹¹⁰ In this vein, I argue that Kiefer reenacts the symptoms of Nazi aesthetics in order to destabilize their schematizing hold on German history. This is accomplished through his use of photography, gesture, and landscape.

2.2 Photography as a Medium: Aura, Authenticity, Mechanical Reproduction, and Bearing Historical Witness

One of the most obvious elements of Kiefer’s *Occupations* series is his choice of medium – that of photography. In his book, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes discusses how the photograph can be the object of three specific practices – “...to do, to undergo, to look.”¹¹¹ Each of these contribute to the notion of the “observed subject” and the “subject observing,” which is evoked and constituted by the object of the lens.¹¹² This is incredibly important to the study of photography, and the study of Kiefer’s photographs. The object of the lens essentially explores the subject being observed by the camera. When one is in front of the lens, everything changes, as they are now aware that they are “posing;” transforming themselves into the image.¹¹³ In his *Occupations* photographs, Kiefer stands not as a realistic interpretation of a true-to-life Nazi soldier, but rather, is posing and transforming that image through the demands of the camera. He is both himself and the “other,” resulting in what Barthes calls a

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* ((1980) New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 9.

¹¹² Ibid., 10.

¹¹³ Ibid., 10-11.

“cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.”¹¹⁴ This is crucial in understanding the way that Kiefer thus subverts the conventional image of the Nazi salute, as he expects the viewer to be cognizant of his artifice.

The viewer takes in what appears to be a Nazi soldier performing the Nazi salute, reminding the German people and the rest of the world of the atrocities that everyone – particularly the Germans – wanted to readily forget. However, what appears to be unpleasant and taboo is really satire, as it is Kiefer himself in the Nazi uniform; unkempt and uncombed, all the while carefully posing. As art historian Andréa Lauterwein succinctly summarizes, the serious nature of the photographs is belied by the various detachments from actual Nazi imagery – there are “no adoring crowds, no forests of flags and torches...just one little Nazi, ridiculously small, all on his own, lost in his surroundings that are all too obviously contemporary.”¹¹⁵ We can subsequently hear echoes of Benjamin in that “the comedy of the serious incorporates the most extreme horror.”¹¹⁶ The use of satire therefore results in Kiefer attempting to shrink Hitler and the regime to such a small scale to better cope with this traumatic history. Kiefer contaminates Nazi ideology to loosen it from its original, historical context. His reproductions and performances of the Nazi salute challenge the power of the gesture, as the gesture itself ultimately fell into disintegration following the collapse of the Party when Germany lost the war.¹¹⁷ While he has every intention of being satirical and critical in his photographs, he does so at the expense of his work being rejected and deemed insensitive due to such heavy and

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁵ Andréa Lauterwein, *Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 31.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 34.

traumatic subject matter. However, Kiefer is acutely aware of what it truly means to “enjoy the symptom” to subvert it from within.

While both photographs from Kiefer’s *Occupations* demonstrate how he is at odds with the image of Nazi control, it is emphasized when compared with one of the several pages found in his *Heroic Symbols* book [Figure 3]. Maintaining his original title for *Occupations*, the book consists of various photographs and watercolor paintings, and was also done in 1969. In the paintings from this page, Kiefer depicts himself in such a way that he appears almost as a toy soldier performing the salute.¹¹⁸ In both paintings he is standing on dry land with his back to the water. Again, Kiefer is seen to be conducting the Sieg Heil, and while they maintain a sense of performativity, and are just as critical as the photographs, Kiefer’s choice of medium offers a different effect. Unlike the hard, straight lines present in photographs, watercolor’s fluidity provides a dreamlike, whimsical quality to the image, undermining the serious nature of the taboo gesture.¹¹⁹ The use of colors creates a kind of animation that does not exist in the black, white, and sepia of his *Occupations* photographs. The figures end up appearing as little colorful cartoons, making the Nazi elements Kiefer is depicting seem all the more absurd in nature. The delicate paint also deflates the overall aggressive nature of the Sieg Heil; matched by the “childlike nature of the saluting figure depicted, who seems dwarfed by his surrounding, a diminutiveness emphasized by the grown-up attire of an overcoat and riding boots.”¹²⁰ The way he paints his figures results in a subversion of the masculine, rigid properties of the salute;

¹¹⁸ Christian Weikhop, “Heroic Symbols Artist Books: Incubating Ideas,” in Christian Weikop (ed.), *In Focus: Heroic Symbols 1969 by Anselm Kiefer*, Tate Research Publication, 2016. <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/heroic-symbols-anselmkiefer/artist-books>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

painting the wrist in a limp, flimsy manner rather than erect salute.¹²¹ The lack of details in the faces and clothing also make it difficult to interpret these mini caricatures as Nazi soldiers. These watercolor paintings therefore enhance how one can read his *Occupations* photographs, where he performs the same gesture with the same irony; all the while offering the viewer a different kind of challenge to the idea of Nazi control and power.

Barthes points out that photography's ability to be subversive lies in its ability to not frighten and repel, but rather to make the observer *think*.¹²² Our interpretation therefore depends on our ability as viewers to remove the photographs from their standard, technical contexts; allowing the images themselves to come forward with all the subtle details and nuances. As Barthes argues, the photographer can make his photographs dangerous by endowing them with various functions – “to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, [and] to provoke desire.”¹²³ Kiefer does just this, as both photographs do not just call up the past for Germany and the German people. Their effect is not necessarily to “restore what has been abolished,” but rather, to attest that the barbaric mobilization of the country that the German people saw and underwent did indeed happen.¹²⁴ Kiefer then draws on history, but he also makes connections that move his images beyond simple reproductions of the Sieg Heil, to an act of critical witnessing.

Walter Benjamin's ideas on aura, authenticity, mechanical reproduction, and bearing historical witness are pertinent in this regard. Each of these concepts are operative in Kiefer's

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* ((1980) New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 38.

¹²³ Ibid., 28.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 82.

Occupations photographs. Historically, the idea of the aura meant that a work of art possessed some inherent “magical” quality that made it unique. Benjamin argues that in the age of mechanical reproduction and subsequent reproducibility, the aura of a work of art begins to shrink.¹²⁵ It is no longer uniquely connected to or present in a particular time or space since a reproduced work of art is, per Benjamin, never fully present.¹²⁶ This aura is directly linked to authenticity, so it therefore follows that if a reproduced work of art loses its aura, it also loses its basis in a foundation of perceived authenticity and uniqueness. However, for Benjamin, since a work of art’s aura used to be dependent on ritual and tradition, the loss of these two things means that mechanical reproducibility freed the work of art for the very first time from “its existence as a parasite upon ritual.”¹²⁷ With the emergence of mechanical reproduction art could be disconnected from past uses and interpretations to be used and understood anew. It was no longer to be controlled by ritual, but could be connected to a leftist politics that was not identified with the ruling class.¹²⁸ When art is naturalized through the rhetoric of authenticity, it becomes prone to being deployed through ideology for fascist means. This is therefore where reproducibility and the withering of the aura become crucial dimensions of Kiefer’s practice, as he manages to break ritual, tradition and the fascist politicization of art from within its very terms of articulation. His photographs take on an entirely new meaning as they no longer identify with or repeat this history. In the context of Benjamin’s writings, Kiefer’s photographs demand a certain type of reception and contemplation. Rightly so, they unsettle the viewer, as one feels “obliged to find a

¹²⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* ((1936) New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2008), 7.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

specific way of approaching them.”¹²⁹ While they bear a certain type of historical witness, it is the kind that stresses that the representation of history must not be naturalized and aestheticized. Unchangeable and real as it is, it must not be repeated through the identification with an ideal image.

2.3 Authenticity in Relation to Nazi Aesthetics: Ideology and Contamination – Oppositions and Ironies

Kiefer’s *Occupations* photographs grapple with Nazi aesthetics and the aesthetics of power, more broadly. Fascist aesthetics, when originally “conceived,” were defined as being anaesthetic; they were meant to assault perception, numb the senses, and deny the “private body as an autonomous site of corporeal pleasure.”¹³⁰ The purpose, then, was to organize the individual and the collective to force them to identify with “that which forces them into submission and conformity and, ultimately, fosters their destruction.”¹³¹ This kind of aestheticization was clearly abused by the Nazi Party as they redefined the political sphere as the point where legitimate authenticity comes into existence.¹³² There is an irony that extends from Kiefer’s photographs in that he opposes the ideology he seems to be reproducing. He does not expect the viewer to alter their individual perception by submitting it to some grander thought. His photographs are meant to explore the concepts of Nazi aesthetics and to challenge them. When Benjamin defines aesthetic politics, he is addressing how “political dictates drape modern mass culture as art and thus transform the popular into a tool of domination and

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Lutz Koepnick, *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Power* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 4.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 3.

manipulation.”¹³³ The Nazi salute then, however “popular” it was, became a means of manipulation as the Party used it in various other photographs as art form.

Part of the performativity of Kiefer’s photographic gesture lies in an exploration of the origins of the salute itself. In reproducing this gesture, Kiefer demonstrates the way that the Nazi Party essentially performed the gesture into existence; showing the overall performativity of Nazism itself. One of the ways to explore this is through Scholar Tilman Allert and his discussion of the salute in relation to the performative nature of a greeting. Allert argues that greetings are signifying structures that “carry their own meanings, set their own preconditions, and entail to some extent their own outcomes.”¹³⁴ He therefore correlates the salute to standard notions on the act of greeting and how deformed they became in Germany as they were replaced with Heil Hitler and the gesture. The salute was made compulsory in July of 1933 and spread rapidly, as everyone was expected to “perform” it at any time.¹³⁵ However, unlike other greetings that typically banded people together, this one isolated. The right arm (specifically) was to be rigidly extended from the body and raised up to eye level, with the palm of one’s hand to remain fully open.¹³⁶ In doing this, one created space and estrangement between the person being greeted. What is also important is the choice of the right hand over the left, as the right was seen as the site of authenticity, therefore making the gesture itself appear authentic rather than a performative creation of the regime in attempts to manufacture a social norm. There is also the fact that the gesture did not stop at the arm, as it called for “tension and rigidity throughout the

¹³³ Ibid., 23.

¹³⁴ Tilman Allert, *The Hitler Salute: On the Meaning of a Gesture* (2005). Trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Picador, Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 5.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 40.

body, indicative of concentration and solemnity[.]”¹³⁷ Kiefer draws from Charlie Chaplin’s comedic reenactment of Hitler in *The Great Dictator*, where he shows how the gesture looks “ridiculous and grotesque once divorced from its ideological and social context.”¹³⁸ In Kiefer’s photographs, he disassociates the salute from its ideological and social contexts in order to demonstrate the performative nature of the gesture. It was one of the ways in which the Third Reich grossly altered communication and normal greetings, deforming their purpose. In turn, Kiefer deforms the gesture in his photographs through his alteration of the context that surrounds it; emptying the gesture of its signifiers and previous historical connotations by conducting it in the middle of nowhere with no one to see it or respond to it.

The idea of authenticity within the Nazi visual regime was largely based on the way the Nazi Party created a politics of perception, as they used and exploited the visual to further their agenda. This exploitation was used to virtually create their own version of “reality;” as art was an important means to helping them materialize their ideology in a way that also led the masses to define reality, and ultimately authenticity, in the same way.¹³⁹ Hitler himself was so concerned with how he appeared overall to the masses that he would rehearse and study his gestures in front of the camera with the assistance of a professional photographer.¹⁴⁰ How then, can Nazi aesthetics be authentic in this context when they have a history of being manipulated? Kiefer tackles this by presenting the viewer with a visual challenge, as he demands that we take note of the fact that he too is creating a rehearsed gesture in front of the camera. Therefore, it is the subject matter of the image that strikes the viewer as manipulated, as we only see specifically

¹³⁷ Ibid., 46.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹³⁹ Carsten Strathausen, “Nazi Aesthetics.” *Renaissance & Modern Studies* 42 (1999): 14. March 3, 2016. Doi: 10.1080/14735789909391486.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

what Kiefer chooses to show us. The entire subject of authenticity is in question as he not only interrogates the gesture itself but the ideology that surrounds it. Everything is subsequently up for debate in Kiefer's *Occupations* – is the photograph “authentic” since its reproducibility means it has lost its authentic, auratic property? Is what it presents no longer authentic either, since the gesture was something manipulated by Nazi ideology and has now been removed from that context? Does the fact that Kiefer is posing, using his body as an autonomous site, override the dogma of the Party of conformity and submission? I would like to argue that the answer to each of these inquiries is yes, as the abundance of irony present in the photographs makes this quite clear.

This irony leads to one more prominent element present in *Occupations*, and that is the idea of contamination. As Lauterwein points out, Kiefer ultimately shows that “...every symbol dug out by the Nazis is inevitably contaminated, and this contamination engenders a kind of atmosphere of guilt which, retrospectively, also infects the cultural context that preceded it.”¹⁴¹ This guilt is part of what makes his photographs so difficult to accept, as he brings these elements to light, forcing his viewers to confront their own conceptions (or misconceptions). The Third Reich began their contamination by not only manipulating the populace into conforming to their ideology and brand of aesthetics, but also by excelling at the creation of a mass fear of everything that was not truly “German.” Their use of the historical concept of blood and soil resulted in National Socialism being readily accepted and followed, all the while breeding intolerance. This intolerance led to a fear of contamination of society and culture,

¹⁴¹ Andréa Lauterwein, *Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 37.

whereby nationalist and socialist ideas reached a climax, particularly in relation to the Jewish population. In Joseph Goebbels “Why Are We Enemies of The Jews,” he says the following:

We are nationalists because we see in the nation the only possibility for the protection and furtherance of our existence... We are socialists because we see in socialism the only possibility for maintaining our racial existence... and the rebirth of the German state... We are enemies of the Jews, because we are fighters for the freedom of the German people... He [the Jew] has corrupted our race, fouled our morals, undermined our customs, and broken our power. ¹⁴²

This fear of the Jews having the ability to corrupt the German race and culture ultimately culminated in the strategic plans to expel the Jewish population in Germany through, first their containment in concentration camps, and ultimately in their murder. Hitler did not just believe that they corrupted German culture but that they contaminated it, blaming them for essentially everything that was morally and culturally wrong in Germany at the time. In this logic lies one of the cornerstones of Kiefer’s photographs as he demonstrates the irony of the German ideology. While the Nazi Party promoted the idea that it was the Jews who were corrupting German culture, it was they who were contaminating the nation with their parasitic ideology.

This duplicitous logic of signification is redeployed in Kiefer’s landscape images. In his photograph of him by the sea at Sète, Kiefer takes up an older nationalist iconography, with an explicit reference to painter Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (c.1818).¹⁴³ Friedrich’s painting was originally interpreted as a memorial to soldiers who died

¹⁴² Joseph Goebbels, “Why Are We Enemies of The Jews?” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes et. al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 137-38.

¹⁴³ Andréa Lauterwein, *Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 35-36.

during the wars against Napoleon, so its patriotic, propagandistic quality was subsequently exploited later by the Nazi Party.¹⁴⁴ Kiefer's play with the idea of contamination comes full circle in this photograph; he shows how the Nazis used older iconography, appropriating its ideological framework into his own images, and re-pitches it with subtle differences. He takes Friedrich's painting and alters the Nazi appropriation of it; rather than its use as a patriotic piece of propaganda, Kiefer references its interpretation as a memorial. He therefore attempts to memorialize the most recent events in German history through his redeployment of Friedrich's image.

2.4 Kiefer's Performativity: The Significance of The Role of The Human Body

The subject of performativity in Kiefer's images ties directly to photography's notion of the pose. Philosophical in nature, performativity and the theory of acts draws on what it means to *do*. One of the many concepts explored by action theory deals with how to explain the ways that social agents constitute reality through gestures and all kinds of symbolic, social signs.¹⁴⁵ These gestures, products of the autonomous, human body, are important when understanding the body as not only an historical idea but also as a set of possibilities to constantly be realized.¹⁴⁶ This is argued by philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and theorist Judith Butler extends his phenomenology to her own analysis of how bodies gain meaning in their "mediated expression in the world."¹⁴⁷ She quotes Merleau-Ponty's argument that the fact that the body is a set of possibilities "signifies...that its concrete expression in the world must be understood as the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519. Accessed April 7, 2016. Doi: 10.2307/3207893.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 521.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

taking up and rendering specific of a set of historical possibilities.”¹⁴⁸ Kiefer uses his body to explore these possibilities in *Occupations*, adding yet one more complex layer to the overall understanding of his work. Butler argues that “One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries.”¹⁴⁹ I believe this concept is explored in Kiefer’s photographs, as he is acutely aware of the role of his body as an autonomous site where his body both *is* and *does*, offering varied possibilities not only in terms of action but also interpretation and existence.

Butler argues that to dramatize and reproduce are both forms of embodiment, and that by acknowledging that the body can do this, we can understand how various cultural conditions can be embodied as well.¹⁵⁰ In this way, Kiefer’s body dramatizes the scene, as he is the focal point and the one personifying the ideology and criticism that provide the photograph with its many dynamisms. He also embodies reproduction, not only in terms of the gesture, but also regarding the photographs themselves. However, his subversion of the gesture and the ideology behind it undermines and breaks with the cultural conditions that maintained that reproducing the gesture was taboo. In addition to this, he raises the ritual of social drama. Butler addresses this using the work of anthropologist Victor Turner. According to Butler, Turner’s theory is that “...social action requires a performance which is *repeated*.”¹⁵¹ In many ways, Kiefer’s repetitive performance of the Nazi salute in the various photographs results in a form of social action, as he demonstrates the need for recognition of a history that desperately needed to be remembered and never again repeated.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 519.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 521.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 526.

Another way to approach *Occupations* is to focus on some of the other historical components of the photographs and the role that they play in our overall understanding of these works. The first photograph shows Kiefer standing in front of the statue at Montpellier, with a large, empty foreground space, the artist and statue in the center, and two tree lines off to each side in the background. The sky is empty, and the minimal amount of buildings, people, and nature in the photograph results in the central focus being on Kiefer and the monument. In this image of Kiefer in front of the statue of King Louis XIV, we see that the king, as well as Kiefer, have their arms raised in the air. There is a fascinating parallel that can be drawn here between Kiefer's reenactment and his choice of monument. Louis XIV, in many ways like Hitler, was a strong and powerful leader both feared and loved. The King was presented as invincible, as a hero whose public image was often not only favorable but also revered and sacred.¹⁵² There was a myth that surrounded him, and it is argued that statues like the one Kiefer stands in front of were fashioned to promote a form of narrative; to provide a sense of movement combined with that of spectacle to create a kind of "theater."¹⁵³ If we look at this statue in the image as such, we can view the photograph itself as a type of drama, a stage that Kiefer takes full advantage of as he offers up his own performance in conjunction with what is already taking place. In addition to this, Kiefer also performs the monument, therefore exposing the overall performativity of Nazism itself. He removes the Nazi elements he cites in this photograph from their original contexts by reproducing them in a fully dramatized, narrative "theater" performance. His interaction with, and performance of, this monument is central to ultimately understanding the satirical nature of the image. This frontal figure mimics the monument, and the vulnerability that

¹⁵² Peter Burke. *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 7.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Kiefer makes explicit lies in the distinction between the powerful, monumental statue, and Kiefer's small, disheveled and very real body.

In the image of Kiefer in front of the Mediterranean Sea by Sète, we see Kiefer without the formal jacket of the uniform, standing on a bed of rocks, as the waves crash against them. He is not facing us, but rather is looking out onto the sea. As mentioned earlier on, a key component of this photograph deals with Kiefer's referencing of Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. However, its significance does not just lie in the Nazi Party's contamination of the painting's previous iconographical connotations. The vast emptiness that Kiefer is looking out on, and connecting with, is in many ways reflective of the barrenness of Germany after the Holocaust. His decision to interact with the sea demonstrates how he was one of very few who chose to acknowledge that desolate darkness. He also draws on Friedrich's painting not just through his reference of the landscape, but also through his use of the Rückenfigur; the lone traveler who appears in the midst of the landscape. The purpose of this figure is to draw our attention to him, as space and the landscape organize themselves around him.¹⁵⁴ We as viewers therefore are not the first or only person in the landscape, as the Rückenfigur remains "spatially and temporally before [us]."¹⁵⁵ In Friedrich's painting, as in Kiefer's photograph, all lines of sight join upon him, as if "landscape were the mapping of world to body" and it is because of this that the "replacement of the geography of the view by the body of a viewer, thematizes the nature of our own viewing experience[.]"¹⁵⁶ Kiefer draws on this to alter our experience as viewers, as we almost want to be in his place now since his presence disrupts our own. This

¹⁵⁴ Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1990), 190-91.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 210-11.

therefore creates the interaction that Kiefer is aiming for, as he embodies the landscape and performs with it and to it, and we partake in it.

Kiefer also establishes that bodies can be used to insert oneself into political discussions, as he inserts himself into the discussion of Germany's Nazi past by using his own body. Butler argues that when bodies appear in public spaces, "...they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field[.]"¹⁵⁷ However, while Kiefer is in fact exercising his performative right to appear inserting himself in a discussion of Germany's history, at the same time he removes his work from the political connotations attached to said history. He removes the political context behind the uniform he wears, the gesture he reproduces, and the sites he visits, all to call into question the terms of representation. Thus, he assembles his body in its plurality. There is also a vulnerability that connects Kiefer to the people and the ideology that he seeks to expose. Butler argues that "...we assume that those we seek to expose...all seek to deny a vulnerability by virtue of which they are obstinately...bound to the others they seek to subjugate."¹⁵⁸ There is then a symbiotic relationship between Kiefer and the ideology he is trying to expose. We can look at him donning the Nazi uniform and placing himself in the position of the many men – and even women – subjugated during Nazi rule, as now being subjugated themselves through his art. Not only this, but Kiefer again taps into this vulnerability as he positions himself in the place of those he is seeking to expose, subjugating himself as well. In the photograph at Montpellier, the viewer can discover this bodily vulnerability in a couple of ways. His portrayed lack of confidence opens him up to being scrutinized and subjugated to our gaze. He also poses alone, with no one else

¹⁵⁷ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015), 11.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

around, making him the sole focus. This makes him vulnerable because he is the main subject, exposing his body to all the criticisms of the image. He also makes the salute itself vulnerable. Part of its power was its association with mass spectacle, of its exchange with other individuals. Kiefer removes these elements, making the salute nothing more than a superfluous gesture with no power or ability to command. In the photograph of him at Sète, his back is to us, so there is no exchange of gazes. This results in him being the object of the gaze, removing some of his power as he cannot look back at us. Ultimately, it is not just Kiefer and his own individual body that is significant in these images, as is clearly seen by the interconnectedness of the artist, his viewers, the content of the images, and what they invoke.

Butler argues that bodies are not “self enclosed kinds of entities.”¹⁵⁹ They move beyond themselves and open onto and interact with, other bodies.¹⁶⁰ She explains this experience in the following way:

...if our...visual...capacities comport us beyond ourselves, that is because the body does not stay in its own place...there are certain photographs of the injury or destruction of bodies in war...that we are often forbidden to see precisely because there is a fear that this body will feel something about what those other bodies underwent, or that this body, in its sensory comportment outside itself, will not remain enclosed...and individual.¹⁶¹

Butler’s analysis of the represented “body in war” illuminates what Kiefer provokes in his viewers with these two photographs. Even though they are not images of injury or destruction,

¹⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015), 149.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

they evoke a shared sensation of that body's mobilization in a stance that is imbricated in the context of war. Kiefer implicates the viewer in that body. He also forces the viewer as well as himself to incorporate the Nazi, ultimately forcing us to imagine ourselves in the position of someone who contributed to Nazi terrors. This is perhaps the reason his photographs were initially not accepted and deemed offensive.¹⁶² It was not because they were insensitive. They were "forbidden" because no one wanted to visually experience and revisit the trauma of the past, let alone occupy the position of the person who should take responsibility for that trauma. Kiefer, however, consciously chose to use his body to explore this, as he opened it up to move outside of himself to engage with others. He calls on everyone to experience his work, to have all bodies interact with his represented Nazi body, across boundaries, towns, countries, and continents. I believe this is one of the many purposes of these photographs; to create a performative exchange by which a heterogeneous public imagines itself in the position of the Nazi subject.

The question then becomes a matter of how exactly one determines if Kiefer's gesture is in fact a performance and not a serious salute in support of the Nazi ideology. To determine this, one must attempt to read the way in which Kiefer uses his body. In anthropologist Ray L. Birdwhistell's *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication*, he argues that "Performer, recorder, receiver, and spectator accede to a convention," and that the performer-audience "ritual" that exists is reliant on this convention.¹⁶³ It therefore becomes increasingly difficult for there to be a break in this convention, particularly for an artist like Kiefer whose

¹⁶² Andréa Lauterwein, *Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 31.

¹⁶³ Ray L. Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication* (Philadelphia, Penn: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 150.

photographs rely on the interaction of the viewers or audience with his performances. To begin, he must get his viewers to see that what he is doing is, in fact, a performance. Birdwhistell is useful in establishing how to distinguish performative acts. He writes, “The distinction between the performance of an act...and the comprehension of the nature and functional significance of the act in context must at all times be kept in mind[.]”¹⁶⁴ It is clearly important to understand that there is a natural difference that exists between the performance itself and how it is received and understood. Birdwhistell continues, “To imitate another successfully requires a cooperative audience; the actor establishes an agreement with his audience to attend to certain aspects of a performance. That agreement is seldom open and explicit.”¹⁶⁵ I believe that this is one of the more difficult and complex aspects of Kiefer’s photographs. While his imitation is as explicit as possible, his audience is not necessarily cooperative. This is in many ways one of the reasons why his photographs have a history of being misinterpreted. The friction between Kiefer’s successful reproduction and message and his uncooperative audience subsequently resulted in his performance not being recognized as such. I would like to argue that it is because the satirical nature of his photographs was too much for his audience to absorb. If you look at the image of him by the sea at Sète, he stands with his back to us. He does not face us and defiantly look out at the viewer in the self-assured manner of a real Nazi soldier. In the image of him at Montpellier, he faces the viewer this time, but his disheveled and slouch-like posture indicates the satirical manner in which he reproduces the gesture. His uniform is not pristinely intact and he is not standing at full attention – both of which would be unacceptable for a true regime member. In this way he mocks the conviction that these soldiers had as he carelessly imitates

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 154.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

them. These performative elements of Kiefer's photographs therefore ultimately hearken back to Žižek's argument that the only way to subvert Nazi ideology is to deconstruct its shape and form.

2.5 Citation: Loosening of Signifiers and The Right to Reproduce

Kiefer's *Occupations* photographs articulate what theorist Mieke Bal refers to as the politics of citation. Central to Bal's analysis is how far one can go before the adoption of certain visual material is no longer deemed acceptable. Her focus is largely on the kinds of material that deal with "ideologically fraught practices of representation."¹⁶⁶ For Bal, this is explored regarding the juncture between historical recovery of colonialist images and the latent eroticism of postcolonial analysis. She focuses on the depiction of nude and semi-nude images of African women, and whether the reproduction of these images further promotes colonial ideology rather than criticizes it. She also addresses how this subject has been largely discussed via male scholars, resulting in a gendered interpretation. The reproduction of images— in this case Kiefer's reproduction of the Nazi salute — is tied to much of what Bal is seeking to examine in her writings, as one of Bal's biggest questions is, if one repeats "the gesture of appropriation and exploitation one seeks to criticize if one reprints as quotations the very material whose use by predecessors is subject to criticism[.]"¹⁶⁷ Bal explains this when she argues that instead of blaming the scholar for their use of the material, often times the "other" is blamed. For her, this begs the question of whether the scholar's use of the material is really fundamentally any different than their predecessors. Kiefer's choice to reproduce various Nazi gestures and aesthetics from Germany's painful past has been misconstrued in many instances as fostering the same ideology he is trying to be critical of. However, his photographs are not just "illustrations

¹⁶⁶ Mieke Bal, "The Politics of Citation." *Diacritics* 21.1. (1991): 28. Accessed February 29, 2016. Doi: 10.2307/465209.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

of an objectionable practice from the past but...representations confronting the reader-viewer of the present.”¹⁶⁸ Kiefer uses his art to confront his viewers, not just with elements of the Nazi past, but with elements of the present. By placing former ideology in current contexts, he reminds his viewers to be cautious, as the past has a way of inserting itself in the present in ways that are not necessarily always recognizable.

When analyzing Kiefer’s *Occupations* photographs, we are required as viewers to reflect on what the artist is presenting us with. The responsibility of the viewer is substantial, as Bal argues that “you are what you watch.”¹⁶⁹ This logic can clearly become discomfoting if what we are looking at is indeed a vulgar exploitation of violent ideology and practices from the past. It is therefore not just up to the artist to be critical, but for us to be as well. Various “rules” are presented by Bal that can be applied to the exploration of these particular photographs. The first of these is that the viewer must put themselves in position of the individual they are looking at.¹⁷⁰ As stated previously, this is clearly an issue in Kiefer’s images due to the discomfort of the viewer when asked to put themselves in the artists’ place. However, it is important that this is done so that another of Bal’s rules may be applied; namely, to “reflect on what this experience means to [us].”¹⁷¹ It is therefore required that we as viewers not only practice an exchange of ourselves with Kiefer in the photographs, but that we also acknowledge what the experience means. I would like to argue that the biggest challenge in doing this lies in the inability of individuals to be self-reflexive. It is not necessarily an easy thing to put oneself in the place of the artist; in mentally donning his Nazi uniform and signaling the Heil Hitler. It requires that

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

there be “a tight solidarity between knowledge of the ‘other’ and self-knowledge, the latter in the shape of self-reflection and subsequent critique.”¹⁷²

Kiefer’s *Occupations* photographs possess a variety of complex layers that speak to the importance of self-reflection, not only of the artist, but also of us as viewers. Each of the images in this series reveal the importance of the loosening of Nazi signifiers in order for Kiefer to imbue them with new meanings. While his appropriation of the Sieg Heil and his use of performativity are some of the more prominent elements of the photographs, Kiefer’s interaction with nature – seen in the images of him by the sea – is equally important. It reveals the significance of the subject of landscape in relation to German history, ideology, and ultimately, his own work. Landscape is therefore not only prevalent in his photographs, but also in his painting *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, which will be addressed in the chapter that follows.

¹⁷² Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015), 26.

Appendix 1

Image removed due to copyright

[Figure 1]
Anselm Kiefer, *Occupations (Besetzungen)*, 1969.

Image removed due to copyright

[Figure 2]
Anselm Kiefer, *Occupations (Besetzungen)*, 1969.

Image removed due to copyright

Figure 3]
Anselm Kiefer, *Heroic Symbols*, 1969 (p.11).
Book. Photographs and watercolor on paper on cardboard.
Würth Collection, Künzelsau.

Chapter 3: *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* – A Study in German Landscape &

Physiognomy

3.1 *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* – Some Context

In the previous chapter, I suggested that landscape has been important in imagining German history, culture, and identity. Anselm Kiefer explores landscape at length in the specific painting to be analyzed here, titled *Ways of Worldly Wisdom – Battle of the Teutoburg Forest* [1978; Figure 4]. Kiefer made the painting in acrylic and shellac applied to a woodcut on paper.¹⁷³ He had been dealing with this subject matter since 1973, as he began to examine German history and culture, revealing Nazi contamination as “more diffuse but more radical and more pernicious.”¹⁷⁴ This painting was the first in Kiefer’s series titled after the painting itself; presenting Germany’s “‘illustrious men’ in portrait form.”¹⁷⁵ The painting’s overall subject matter draws from the battle that took place in the Teutoburg Forest in 9 A.D. between various German tribes and three Roman legions, as well as various significant historical figures presented as portraits in the midst of the forest. Kiefer addresses the Nazi appropriation and manipulation of the myth of this battle and the German leader who won it, Arminius. Within this context, Kiefer not only addresses the Nazi use of myth as a means of leverage to influence the German people, but also the land itself and the significance of the Teutoburg forest as a symbol of German identity. It is therefore important to assess the overall historical significance of the German landscape, before looking at how it was used as cultural propaganda by the Third Reich. It is from this that one can begin to analyze how Kiefer uses landscape as a key organizational

¹⁷³ Daniel Arasse and Anselm Kiefer, *Anselm Kiefer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 122.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

device in his painting, which will be explored at greater length and detail in the pages that follow.

3.2 The German Landscape: Cultural or Natural? An Exploration of German *Heimat*, Identity and Nazi Manipulation

Historian Simon Schama has written that “Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock.”¹⁷⁶ Throughout Germany’s history, landscape took on precisely this role, as it became more of a cultural construct than a natural one. This cultural construct is directly linked to the term *Heimat*. Simply put, *Heimat* means homeland; however, it holds a much more complex meaning when addressing the German landscape in the context provided here. The term carries a “burden of reference and implication” that is not adequately explained by the simplistic definition of homeland.¹⁷⁷

Historian Celia Applegate argues that “For almost two centuries, *Heimat* has been at the center of a German moral – and by extension political – discourse about place, belonging, and identity.”¹⁷⁸ The significance of landscape and its link to German identity is therefore explained by *Heimat* in that the land is where one is born; where one constructs a “social identity.”¹⁷⁹ It is because of this logic that the land has a history of being used to create a deep connection among the people and the ways in which they define themselves. This role of landscape in shaping German identity results in “...trees and waterfalls...[standing] alongside historic buildings, battle monuments, and commemorative plaques as testaments of Germany’s deep historical and

¹⁷⁶ Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity 1885-1945* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 9.

¹⁷⁷ Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (University of California Press, 1990), 4.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

organic roots.”¹⁸⁰ This is seen in Kiefer’s work as he goes from images that depict monuments and historic buildings to landscapes; however, even his images of these architectural structures still consist of landscape – even if it is in the background – maintaining that the key thread that runs throughout each of Kiefer’s images is this notion of a “cultural landscape,” as the two are intertwined.

The idea of the landscape as something that can be molded and manipulated through culture results in a reworking of how we understand *Heimat*; particularly when the land and this concept of homeland starts to become militarized. In theorist Thomas Lekan’s writings, he quotes Franz Goerke as saying the following:

The German landscape in its unending diversity, solemn and yet festive on the North Sea coast, full of magic in the lowlands, lovely and charming in the mid-lying hills and majestically exalted in the high mountains – this German landscape... says to you...this is your *Heimat*, this is your Fatherland, this you must protect against enemies...for this your sons summon life and blood to protect it for you.¹⁸¹

Describing the German landscape in this manner allowed for the German nation to entrench its identity in the land. It was believed that the “German ethnic character emerged organically from the homeland soil,” resulting in the Nazi Party ultimately appropriating this concept to further their ideology of blood and soil, and the subsequent “purification” of the nation.¹⁸² This alignment of the landscape with the “heart and soul” of the German people began to become

¹⁸⁰ Lisa M. Todd, “Localism, Landscape, and Hybrid Identities in Imperial Germany,” *Central European History* 39, no. 1 (2006): 126. Accessed January 10, 2017. Doi: 0.1017/S0008938906000057.

¹⁸¹ Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity 1885-1945* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 74.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 75.

increasingly xenophobic over time, as it was continually interpreted to imply that only those ethnically German, who had roots in the land and were Aryan, were truly members of the *Heimat*. Kiefer therefore explicitly refers to this ideology in *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* as he produces portraits of various men who all contributed, in one way or another, to this “engineering” of German identity.

Kiefer’s *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* deals with this imagined link between the German *Volk* and the land. Aware of the historical relationship between landscape and the people, the NSDAP perpetuated Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl’s notion of “*Land und Leute*” and its ability to solidify Germany’s national identity through nature.¹⁸³ No longer just cultural, it had also become racial under Nazi rule, which Lekan points out when he writes that the Nazis “grounded their belief in racial character on supposedly objective laws of the natural world. . .both *Volk and Landschaft*, Blood and Soil, would renew themselves in a never-ending cycle of birth, growth, death, and rebirth.”¹⁸⁴ This cycle would include the birth and growth of the new Aryan race, the death of all those who were not a part of it, and the subsequent rebirth of a new, “pure” Germany; stronger than ever before. There was a belief that the nation needed to eradicate all foreign cultures and even plants, as anything that was not native to the country was not to be trusted.¹⁸⁵ The notion that anything foreign was to blame for Germany’s failures, particularly after the First World War, opened the way for a “discursive wedge for racist and eugenicist forms of homeland rhetoric,” resulting ultimately in a “fear of ethnic infiltration and racial pollution.”¹⁸⁶ Therefore, racial characteristics came to define the state of the landscape rather

¹⁸³ Ibid., 154.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 251.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 145.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 147.

than historical or cultural and social styles.¹⁸⁷ Kiefer's painting is explicit in visually presenting us with this ideology as one of the works many layers; as the landscape in the painting is shaped by the German men that are in the midst of it. British cultural geographer Stephen Daniels argues that to "imagine a nation is to envision its geography," therefore creating "a portrait of the nation."¹⁸⁸ Kiefer therefore appropriates this logic as he offers the viewer a portrait of the German nation through a combination of the Teutoburg forest and individual men. This forest in particular gives credence to the notion that the German forest is ultimately what helped transform the "abstract and artificial concept of nation into a tangible and natural experience."¹⁸⁹ *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* provides a visual and tangible representation of how Germans constructed their version of nationhood and belonging, but it also alters this mythology.

Ideology is another important factor in the understanding of landscape, nationhood, and what Kiefer depicts in his painting. The Nazi Party was incredibly articulate about the Germany they envisioned, as the interests of the powerful are said to be what shape the land; eventually inscribing ideologies on the environment itself.¹⁹⁰ The ideology of a superior race was of utmost importance, and the landscape was the perfect tool to use to ingratiate this idea of the people and the soil, as the land is "always a form, an expression and a characteristic of the people living within it...[it] is the distinctive mark of that which a race feels, thinks, creates, and does[.]"¹⁹¹ Kiefer takes this into consideration in this painting; however, its multiple layers demonstrate a complex critique of the ideology that surrounded these notions of German superiority. The

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁸⁸ Jeffrey K. Wilson, *The German Forest: Nature, Identity, and the Contestation of a National Symbol, 1871-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 8.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹¹ Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity 1885-1945* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 245.

painting depicts various images of “great” German men, all in the setting of the Teutoburg forest. However, the portraits appear to take over the forest, as they are placed all over the canvas – lined up across the top, sides and bottom – replacing the vegetation with their faces. These men are therefore the leaves that grow out of this rhetoric, resulting in the forest representing the place of growth for these seeds of superiority. The only indication of the forest is the thin grouping of trees in the center of the image. Kiefer therefore demonstrates just how much the landscape had lost its natural definition in exchange for a cultural one. He also shows the racial definition of the landscape created by the Nazi regime. In reference to the Nazi practice of burning books, and hence interfering with the public’s knowledge base, Kiefer situates a fire in the center of the painting at the base of the tree; the fire appears to grow and spread; implying that it will ultimately burn up and consume everything in the image.

The significance of the woodcut in German art history is well-known: it reached its apex in Germany during the Renaissance, particularly due to the work of artist Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). A master at creating high-quality woodcut prints, Dürer was greatly admired in German culture long after his death because he was such a key artist on the cusp of German modernity. Dürer’s contribution to this art-form made it important enough in Germany’s art history for the German Expressionists to appropriate it years later during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The woodcut continued to maintain this connotation because it was considered to best exemplify pre-modern, authentic German “folkishness;” in turn solidifying it as a characteristically German art-form.¹⁹² Kiefer’s referencing of the Expressionists use of the woodcut adds one more

¹⁹² Matthew Rampley, “In Search of Cultural History: Anselm Kiefer and the Ambivalence of Modernism,” *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 87. March 10, 2016.
http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/3600462?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

dimension to his exploration of the medium and of the politics of romanticism.¹⁹³ While Kiefer makes reference to Friedrich in his *Occupations* photographs from the chapter before, here he now brings “the visual arts of the twentieth century explicitly into the equation.”¹⁹⁴ Rampley argues that in doing this, the painting allows itself to be read as “a commentary on the discourse, so central to Expressionism, of the primitive as a locus of authenticity, and on its place within the romantic anti-capitalism which anticipated Nazism.”¹⁹⁵ All of this ties to the forest, the primitive Teutons, and the relationship between forms of modernism, Nazism and their use of the woodcut as one more means of building up a sense of nationalism and German identity. It is precisely this nationalism and sense of Germanness that Kiefer seeks to question and ultimately disrupt, and I believe that his strategic use of the woodcut is essential to the overall understanding of the painting and what he is trying to impart.

3.3 The Relationship Between Landscape and Myth: The Story of The Battle of The Teutoburg Forest

Why then, did Kiefer choose the Teutoburg forest as the German landscape to critique in this painting? What precisely made it so special to the German past? The Teutoburg forest had a history of being mythical and primeval, a far cry from the orderly, managed spaces of most of Germany’s other forests.¹⁹⁶ It is a space that evoked images from the past, when “heroic Teutons defended a morally upright Germany from the wanton excesses of Rome.”¹⁹⁷ These “heroic

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Jeffrey K. Wilson, *The German Forest: Nature, Identity, and the Contestation of a National Symbol, 1871-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 11.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 19.

Teutons” consisted of German tribes, led by a man named Hermann (Latinized Arminius). While Rome wanted to expand its power and its own laws and culture, the Germans wanted to keep their Teutonic laws and way of life.¹⁹⁸ It was because of Arminius that the Germans were victorious. Born a prince to a Germanic tribe called the Cherusci, Arminius was raised as a hostage in Rome.¹⁹⁹ While there, he received military training and became a citizen and an officer. He eventually returned to Germany as he had never forgotten his roots.²⁰⁰ He managed to unite various northern Germanic tribes to fight against the invasion of Rome, led by a commander named Varus.²⁰¹ Arminius’s strategy was reputedly brilliant – create a rumor that a couple of German towns east of the forest were openly revolting against Rome, and have it reach Varus.²⁰² Varus did indeed catch wind of the rumor, and proceeded by leading three legions of a total of 20,000 men across the Rhine and into the forest.²⁰³ They reached the Teutoburg Forest in September of 9 A.D. and the battle ensued, with some scholars believing it was over in approximately an hour and others arguing that it lasted three days.²⁰⁴ Regardless of how long it lasted, it ultimately resulted in a resounding win for Arminius and the Germanic tribes. This battle and subsequent victory therefore immortalized the Teutoburg Forest in German history. It

¹⁹⁸ John Eidsmoe, “The Battle That Saved the West: Arminius (“Hermann the Liberator”) and His German Warriors Crushed Three Roman Legions in the Teutoburg Forest – and in so Doing Redirected the Course of History,” *The New American* 25, no. 20 (2009): 34. Accessed April 7, 2016. <http://sfx.scholarsportal.info.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/guelph/docview/218080318?accountid=11233>.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

was the place where the German people stood their ground, keeping the Rhine as the boundary for Roman expansion in the years to come.²⁰⁵ Now a symbol of German unity, the battle consolidated the tie of German identity to the landscape.

In the center of the composition, Kiefer painted three skinny tree trunks side by side. At the base of this are branches, or logs, used to fuel the growing fire that is rising, inevitably consuming the trees. Surrounding this are the various portraits of German men which consist of over 25 different individuals, each framed in their own small square. Over top of all of this, Kiefer has painted several large, concentric circles. The painting itself is largely monochromatic as it is done in black, white, and has two or three small areas done in sepia. Most of the portraits are balanced between the artist's use of these "colors," however the circles are done in solid, thick, heavy black paint. The circles are the rings of an oak tree, a species that holds a special place in German landscape history. Nationalist iconography all throughout Europe has a past of appropriating trees as emblems of the nation due to their mythical and symbolic properties.²⁰⁶ Germany in particular began its arboreal tradition around the time of the French Revolution, choosing the oak tree as the symbol of the nation.²⁰⁷ The oak was described as steadfast, and was meant to represent Germany weathering the political turmoil at the time.²⁰⁸ Stubborn and massively rooted, the oak was deemed solid and in many ways, unchanging.²⁰⁹ Historically, there are those who have come to see the oak as an important symbol of "Germany's aberrant political

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Jeffrey K. Wilson, *The German Forest: Nature, Identity, and the Contestation of a National Symbol, 1871-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 200.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

culture,” seeing as it “epitomized the kind of martial, reactionary nationalism that eventually bore fruit under National Socialism.”²¹⁰

The oak is also significant in its meaning to the Teutons themselves. Early social theorist Friedrich von Hellwald argues that “the ancient Germans had chosen the oak for its ‘serious, firm, solid, honest, unbendingly upright character (which would rather be ruined than surrender its will) ...and regarded it as a symbol of German strength and true German spirit.’”²¹¹ These notions of strength and willingness to be ruined rather than succumb to the will of another were perfect for the Nazi Party to eventually appropriate and use for itself. In addition to this symbol of German strength and spirit though are the practices of the Teutons that revolved around the forest. Hellwald says that the Teutons “‘held their religious assemblies and war councils under them, and decorated their heroes with oak garlands and buried their princes and military leaders under their protection.’”²¹² There is clearly great irony in this statement as it appears in Kiefer’s painting. What he depicts is in many ways one giant funeral of all Germany, its Nazi ideology and the “illustrious men” who contributed to its creation, and eventual demise. However, unlike the Teutons, who decorated their heroes with oak garlands and buried their princes and military leaders under the protection of the trees, Kiefer does not bury these men; he simply leaves them here unnamed. There are no garlands to decorate them; rather, there is a giant fire meant to burn and destroy everything in the forest; particularly these men. It does not matter how unbending the oak is either; just like the Nazi ideology, the metaphorical fire Kiefer creates here will eventually consume everything.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 201.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

The rings of the oak tree are significant for other reasons as well. To begin, the way they are painted over the canvas are in many ways symbolic of a grid, imposed onto the image to hold its content down.²¹³ Theorist Matthew Rampley contends that these black lines and rings “confront the spectator like a violent imposition on the heads portrayed, formally bound to the thick black trunks of the forest trees, as if to evoke the cycle of political violence both of the Arminius episode, and of the contemporary events[.]”²¹⁴ I believe it is also violent in the sense that the only way one can see the rings of a tree is when it is cut down; demonstrating how the Nazis imposed their violent ideology on others, “cutting them down,” and in the end, how they too did ultimately succumb to their own violence.

The Nazi regime used war history to convince the people of their cause by manipulating Teutonic history. This is specifically seen through the way that they immortalized the hero of the battle, Arminius. His role in the battle added to the mythical nature of the forest, binding the people to their land even more. The National Socialists did not hesitate to exploit the battle, and Arminius, in their propaganda. Writer Paul Albrecht’s “novel of the German people,” reprinted in 1935, made the German people aware of how important Arminius was, saying “In reality, the First Reich of Germanic blood and spirit is the confederacy of states created by Arminius. Without his heroic life...we as Germans would today be children of Romanic culture. A people that does not honor its ancestors’ origins is not worth its grandchildren’s future.”²¹⁵ This ideology was precisely what the NSDAP needed to continue its version of German history and

²¹³ Matthew Rampley, “In Search of Cultural History: Anselm Kiefer and the Ambivalence of Modernism,” *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 87. March 10, 2016.

http://www.jstor.org/subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/3600462?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Martin M. Winkler, *Arminius the Liberator: Myth and Ideology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 85.

the “inevitable, necessary” lead up to Nazi rule. It also deepens the notion of blood and soil keeping Germany pure from Roman culture. Arminius was therefore considered a “great German” because his superiority in politics and war was used by the Party to align Hitler with him. Scholar and Party member Willy Krogman furthered this in a lecture he gave when he said that ““the unification of the Germanic tribes under Arminius’ was the precursor of ““the powerful experience of the most recent past, which sinks in ever more deeply and rallies around Adolf Hitler, the Führer, who has welded together the German nation, pulling it back from the chasm of perdition.””²¹⁶ This focus on Arminius’ place in German history is important to Kiefer’s painting in a couple of ways. To begin with, we can see Kiefer’s clear reference to him from the script at the bottom of the painting, which reads “Wege der Weltweisheit: die Hermanns-Schlacht.” While Kiefer never depicts Arminius himself, it is not necessary, as he is practically synonymous with the forest.

Arminius is also significant in that all the other men depicted are also great German “heroes” from modern German history so that the painting comes full circle from past events to the present. While he does not name any of the men in the painting, the portraits are in fact based on those in a 1937 book titled *Face of the German Leader: 200 Portraits of German Fighters and Pioneers across 2000 Years*.²¹⁷ However, whether it is the allusion to Arminius, or one of the other “great men,” Kiefer demonstrates that they all share the same fate. Brilliant writers,

²¹⁶ Ibid., 115.

²¹⁷ “Anselm Kiefer – The Paths of World Wisdom: Hermann’s Battle,” Guggenheim, Bilbao, 2017. <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/works/the-paths-of-world-wisdom-hermanns-battle/>. Accessed May 1, 2017.

While Kiefer has drawn on this book and the specific individuals noted in it, he has also made a conscious choice to not name any of the men he depicts. Therefore, while worth mentioning, the book is not integral to my project. It is simply referenced to establish that there is, in fact, ways to determine who the men are that Kiefer paints.

composers, military leaders – it does not matter to Kiefer, as he seems to imply that “the world-wisdom of the Germans,” which can be seen by the tree roots, “lies at the origin of the political violence and its justification, symbolized in the event of the battle of the Teutoburger Wald.”²¹⁸ Kiefer’s stance on this is a pacifistic one, as his painting shows how unjustifiable and destructive political violence is, not just in general, but also specifically in terms of Nazi violence. He questions their justification as he shows what this violence has done to the German landscape itself. The black paint with the fire is in many ways symbolic of ashes, which in turn ties to one of the regime’s chosen methods of exterminating their prisoners in the concentration camps and burning their bodies in furnaces. He also questions the “world-wisdom” of these individuals; these German men who are all unnamed but knowable. This issue leads to the importance of the portraits themselves and the role of the study of physiognomy in Kiefer’s work.

3.4 A Brief History of The Study and Practice of Physiognomics

The practice and study of physiognomics has a long and complex history. For many scholars, the Swiss pastor named Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801) is considered the “father” of physiognomics. Physiognomics was believed to be “capable of supplying valid and accurate information about the super-sensual character of the human ‘soul’ based on interpretive conclusions drawn from its sensual manifestations.”²¹⁹ Lavater studied the human body, believing that one could acquire a trained eye which would enable him to recognize, “*the inner nature of a human being on the basis of his or her external qualities*[.]”²²⁰ In the simplest of

²¹⁸ Peter Arnds, “On the Awful German Fairy Tale: Breaking Taboos in Representations of Nazi Euthanasia and the Holocaust in Gunter Grass’s ‘die Blechtrommel,’ Edgar Hilsenrath’s ‘der Nazi & der Friseur,’ and Anselm Kiefer’s Visual Art,” *The German Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (2002): 436. March 20, 2016. doi:10.2307/3252212.

²¹⁹ Richard T. Gray, *About Face: German Physiognomic Thought from Lavater to Auschwitz* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004), xxx.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, xlv.

terms, all of this means that one could determine the inner character of a person based on an acute awareness and understanding of their physical appearance. Since Lavater was a pastor, he claimed that his main purpose for cultivating physiognomic thought was to promote human love and understanding.²²¹ However, Lavater maintains the role of one of the precursory thinkers who contributed to the Nazi creation of racial physiognomics, regardless of what his claimed intent was. One of his most controversial contributions to physiognomic thought was the hypothesis that “the authentic, primordial form of the human being manifests itself in the ‘firm features’ of the body, particularly in the structure and shape of the bones.”²²² This idea of being able to determine the innermost characteristics of someone – of their soul and psyche – based solely on the structure of their bones was fascinating to 19th-century scholars. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe made it clear that this was practically an impossible approach that needed to be questioned, seeing as “‘class, habit, possessions, [and] clothes’ have the capacity to modify human appearance and conceal the individual’s nature.”²²³ Yet, Lavater spent years reworking his approach to make it scientific, verifiable knowledge. He argued that while individuals could appropriate cultural elements to alter their exterior, it was the job of the physiognomist to segregate “what is fixed in someone’s character from what is habitual,” and to therefore “[judge] the human being *according to what he really is*, and not according to his exterior ornamentation.”²²⁴ According to this logic, one must be able to separate clothing, jewelry, and excess from what a person “really is,” making physiognomics that much more complicated. In spite of this however, its practice was quite popular in Germany, so when the Third Reich began

²²¹ Ibid., 3.

²²² Ibid., 32.

²²³ Ibid., 33.

²²⁴ Ibid., 78.

to use it for the Party ideology, it seemed to be a way to give scientific validity to its genocidal program.

Kiefer's use of physiognomy in *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* is manifold, beginning with Lavater's obsession with the silhouette. Kiefer uses the forested landscape to organize each of the portraits head-on. There are potentially two that could be interpreted as silhouettes, however, we can still see parts of the other side of the face. Each of the portraits are also a combination of light and dark – white and black – making them lack the quality of a true, solid black silhouette. The reason this is so interesting is due to the fact that Lavater felt that the silhouette was the best and most appropriate form of physiognomic representation. He believed that the silhouette “excludes ‘pathognomic’ features of the face,” which he discredited as “‘arbitrary’ signs of character, while emphasizing precisely the firm features of the face and skull to which he ascribed central significance.”²²⁵ His preference for the silhouette was therefore key to the way that physiognomics worked for him, as it demonstrated the tendency of his method to “reduce everything individual to a limited, quantifiable set of norms.”²²⁶ Kiefer takes this ideology and completely turns it around, as he depicts each of the men from a frontal angle. He subsequently shows the absurd nature of Lavater's logic as he offers up images of all these various German men and presents them in a manner contrary to Lavater's suggestion for how to precisely determine their “Germanness.”

3.5 Satirization of Nazi Germany, Physiognomic Thought, and the Role of the Woodcut

Kiefer explores this notion of Germanness through the Nazi appropriation of physiognomics, and even though Lavater himself claims he did his best to avoid establishing any

²²⁵ Ibid., 51.

²²⁶ Ibid.

kind of hierarchy in his work, there was still a scale that resulted in the German being at the top, characterized as a “strong, upright, daring, [and] industrious man.”²²⁷ Kiefer criticizes this “racial hygienic theor[y]” in *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* as there is no hierarchy of the portraits in the painting. The title of the painting is mocking, as it points to the Nazi logic and how all the men depicted were cultured, educated, and yet for all its grand history, it generated the Nazi regime. The fact that they believed that they were superior based on their physical appearance is in many ways reduced here, as Kiefer’s choice of woodcut and paint make the features of the men less realistic and harder to read. It is because of this that Kiefer appears to be mocking the typical visual description the Germans offer of themselves by referring to stereotypes of them as “flabby, red-faced and fair-haired, with ‘cold’ or ‘steel-blue’ eyes and either ‘sensual’ or ‘cruel, thin’ mouths.”²²⁸ If we look at the portraits that Kiefer has created, they are in fact difficult to read. They are quite textured due to the medium, so there is detail in the lines of the faces and in the highlights of the hair; however, his choice of black and white eliminates the possibility of the stereotypical blue eyes, fair hair, and strong faces. In doing this, he makes it difficult to establish Lavater’s notion of true Germanness. A lack of silhouette, and the inability to read the bone structure of the men depicted all make modern day viewers acutely aware of how difficult it would be to say these men were German. While those at the time of the painting may have been fully capable of determining who some of the men were, Kiefer’s decision to leave them unnamed creates some confusion. This confusion has a purpose though, as he uses this painting

²²⁷ Ibid.,106-107.

²²⁸ Colin Storer, “The German of Caricature, the Real German, the Fellow We Were Up Against,” *Journal of European Studies* 39, no. 1 (2009): 40-41. April 9, 2016. Doi: 10.1177/0047244108100806.

as a platform in which to address these theories of racial hygiene and how they all “burn up” in the forest.

Kiefer also draws on the visual ideal of the male Nazi as represented in the cartoons and propaganda posters of German cartoonist Hans Schweitzer (pseudonym Mjölönr); examples of which are in Peter Paret’s article “God’s Hammer.” The way that Schweitzer visually depicted the German people in his cartoons is in many ways a kind of caricature or exaggerated physiognomy, as he was known for his representation of the “Mjölönr type,” or the “idealized Nazi.”²²⁹ In Figure 9 in Paret’s article, Schweitzer depicts a civilian version of this type, meant to symbolize “the entire German people, ‘unshakeable,’ as the legend has it, ‘determined to fight, certain of victory.’”²³⁰ The man is sketched in profile, with a strong furrowed brow, a set gaze, and a rigid jaw; unshakeable and ready to defend his homeland. This type, albeit as a soldier, became a consistent image synonymous with the Third Reich, and a survivor of World War II states, “‘We were always shown the same type of brutal and grimly taught fighter,’ always characterized by ‘physical strength, fanaticized will, muscles, hardness, and the undoubted absence of any intelligence.’”²³¹ This notion of the ideal Nazi, as one who possessed brute force and strength, is contested in Kiefer’s painting. He enters this debate on the Nazi or German caricature by defying Schweitzer’s definition of the ideal German. The men he depicts in his painting are only in portrait form so no bodily musculature is visible. Kiefer also demonstrates the absurdity of the notion of an absence of intelligence, as the men he depicts are cultured and educated men rather than aggressive, hardened soldiers. In doing this, Kiefer’s use of caricature

²²⁹ Peter Paret. “God’s Hammer,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 136, no. 2 (1992): 230. March 24, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/987170>.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

not only satirizes Lavater's concept of German physiognomy, but also the Nazi caricature as presented by one of the foremost propaganda creators of the Third Reich.

Kiefer further addresses the subject of physiognomics through painting rather than photography. Scholar Leesa Rittelmann writes about the relationship between physiognomy and photography in Germany and how the study of physiognomics had a resurgence in the mid-1920's and 1930's, where it achieved its "fullest visual expression" in portrait photography.²³² One of the most prominent portrait photographers during the time of the Third Reich was Erna Lendvai-Dirksen, as her work set the tone for both professional and amateur photographers during Hitler's reign.²³³ Her photography mostly focused on representing the true Nordic race, and she was particularly fascinated with the farmer and his relationship with the land. Her intense commitment to the people and Germany's "great destiny" were tied to her admiration of Hitler, who she described as a genius; arguing that he was the nation's last salvation and that everyone had an obligation "to contribute to a new formation of the decaying German physiognomy."²³⁴ Critics during this time were reminiscent of a time where "one would have smiled, if one spoke of physiognomy or of determining one's inner worth, character, type of predisposition...based entirely upon an assessment of their external bodily features[.]"²³⁵ This discussion of physiognomics and its prevalence under the Third Reich therefore demands an analysis of its relationship to Hitler himself. I would argue that this connection is important and that it has not been addressed at sufficient depth, seeing as Kiefer makes a conscientious decision

²³² Leesa Rittelmann, "Facing Off: Photography, Physiognomy, and National Identity in the Modern German Photobook," *Radical History Review* 106, (2010): 146. April 9, 2016. Doi: 10.1215/01636545-2009-024.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

to leave him out of the portraits he produces. Again, we see a connection between physiognomics and photography, as scholar Claudia Schmölders argues that “No face bears more eloquent witness to the desire for and the impotence of physiognomic interpretation than this [Hitler’s] face, in which half a nation...wanted to recognize pure, undiluted futurity[.]”²³⁶ In spite of this, Kiefer does not depict Hitler in this painting, and it is worth exploring why, since physiognomics is so intertwined with the man. One of the most obvious reasons is that he would be recognizable even without being named, and that he wanted to leave him out of the forest of knowledge. Titling the painting *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, but leaving him out of it is a direct commentary on how Hitler’s ideologies were in no way wise. Also, Kiefer alters his place in the history he is creating here. While Arminius was seen as a leader and a protector in history, Hitler’s attempts at obtaining the same status are derailed. Instead, he is remembered – as he should be – for the terror and atrocities he committed. Kiefer therefore does not allow him to physically have a place in this painting and the history it calls upon. Rather, he symbolically represents him through his ideologies, such as physiognomy, since it was exploited in relation to Hitler’s own appearance. The implication is that each of these men shared characteristics and physical traits with Hitler, and Kiefer’s assessment of this is made clear as he in turn “judges” and chooses each man to depict.

What, then, ultimately connects each of these portraits to the landscape of the Teutoburg forest in which Kiefer sets them? The viewer may look to the metaphor that Schmölders references regarding the face as landscape.²³⁷ In the painting, we see multiple faces, all of which have contributed to the German landscape. They are also landscapes in and of themselves, as

²³⁶ Claudia Schmölders, *Hitler’s Face: The Biography of an Image* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 3.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

they are entwined with the land and the history, and the only way in which this can be read is through their faces to determine who they are and the contributions they have made. I believe this gives them dual purpose, as the faces become landscapes themselves as well as constituent parts of the actual natural landscape. The knowledge each of them is meant to have possessed, and their contributions to German enlightenment, is overly inflated though in this image.²³⁸

While in many ways, Germany felt that they were “out of the forest;” that they had intellectually grown and moved beyond their primordial beginnings, the Nazi ideology set them back. Kiefer shows this lack of real progress by placing all of these representative intellectual heads back in the ancient, mythical forest again, showing that Germany had taken a step back rather than forward.²³⁹ There is no hierarchy in this painting, as not a single person’s contributions are placed above any of the others. The selection of historical men he chooses and the order he places them in is not consistent or chronological.²⁴⁰ Kiefer creates a labyrinth of men and lines around the fire in the forest, and in this is where he produces yet one more complexity as he again touches on the subject of Nazi contamination. While he does not explicitly name any of the men he depicts, he does include two German “heroes” that were exalted by the Third Reich named Horst Wessel and Albert Leo Schlageter.²⁴¹ By intertwining these men with other established and accomplished men from German history and culture, Kiefer contaminates everyone and everything in the painting.²⁴² Leaving everyone unnamed contributes to this, as the

²³⁸ Peter Arnds, “On the Awful German Fairy Tale: Breaking Taboos in Representations of Nazi Euthanasia and the Holocaust in Gunter Grass’s ‘die Blechtrommel,’ Edgar Hilsenrath’s ‘der Nazi & der Friseur,’ and Anselm Kiefer’s Visual Art,” *The German Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (2002): 436. March 20, 2016. doi:10.2307/3252212.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Daniel Arasse and Anselm Kiefer, *Anselm Kiefer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 124.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 125.

²⁴² Ibid.

unknown presence of the Nazi men challenges the painting as a whole.²⁴³ This obscuring of hierarchy and “haunting” of the image with the presence of Nazis is done in various ways. By not offering any names, Kiefer creates a tension in how we as viewers emotionally respond to the painting. This results in a contamination of not just the painting then, but of our thoughts as well, as this haunting presence of the Nazi reminds his viewers how quickly their ideology spread. No one could be certain if their neighbor supported the regime, resulting in a paralyzing fear as to who was a Nazi and how many people their logic had reached and was adopted by.

This painting is a challenge in many ways, not just because of the portraits of the Nazi men, but because of the combination of German history, mythology, and physiognomy. Kiefer takes these elements and the original connotations attached to them, and places them all in this particular forest, and sets fire to it all. This fire results in the death of not just these men, but of German history, and of the forest. The black rings and the lines “grow” out of the forest, as do the heads, resulting in a contamination of the vegetal growth as the Nazi disease spreads throughout the image. This Nazi presence is a disease that grew out of Germany, out of the ideological “soil” that the Party was so quick to use to their advantage; and its poisonous roots, if you will, spread like wild fire. Ultimately, the effect that this idea of contamination has on *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* as a whole speaks to how quickly and deadly something parasitic can be, especially if it is guised as something such as “wisdom.”

Kiefer’s exploration of the German landscape and the study and practice of physiognomics in *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* marks a major contribution in the discussion of German history in art. After World War II, it appeared that there was a cultural collective amnesia amongst the people, and writers and artists who were producing work in the aftermath were shying away from

²⁴³ Ibid.

representing their nation's most recent past. However, German writer W.G. Sebald argues that it was not an amnesia, but rather, a conscious decision to repress the collective memory because it was too vast and too painful to cope with and talk about.²⁴⁴ The taboo that was placed on talking about or representing the war and the Holocaust resulted in many individuals eventually attempting to break the silence; and while Kiefer's work came approximately ten years after this taboo was broken, his work was still provoking feelings of anger and dismay. In his *Occupations* photographs from the previous chapter, as well as the painting discussed in this one, we see a wide range of subject matter and ideology that is addressed through visual means; and while visual representation – such as Kiefer's depiction of the forest and the use of physiognomy – is clearly a main, key component of this painting, there is something to also be said about the titles of his works. When looking at the title of this painting in relation to its aesthetic components, one can fully see Kiefer's vision of a Germany history turned chaotic and degraded.

²⁴⁴ W.G. Sebald, *On The Natural History of Destruction*. Translated by Anthea Bell, (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2004).

Appendix 2

Image removed due to copyright

[Figure 4]

Anselm Kiefer, *Ways of Worldly Wisdom – Battle of the Teutoburg Forest*, 1978.
Acrylic and shellac on woodcut on paper, 340 x 410 cm.

Chapter 4: *Nero Paints* – The Significance of The Relationship Between Image and Text

4.1 *Nero Paints* – Context, Color and Symbolism

In the final chapter of this thesis, I am going to discuss Kiefer's painting *Nero Paints* (1974; Figure 5). This painting appears to be in the margins of the scholarship on Kiefer's work, as very little has been written about it. My purpose here is therefore to add to the discourse on Kiefer's oeuvre through my analysis of this seemingly forgotten work. While *Occupations* and *Ways of Worldly Wisdom* have been explored in conjunction with one another, they have yet to be explored together with *Nero Paints*. While the previous chapters have examined subjects such as photography, performativity, landscape, and physiognomy, this chapter explores the relationship between image and text.

Nero Paints is a large oil on canvas painting (220 x 300cm), done in the style of Abstract Expressionism, with a layered, heavily worked surface. The painting depicts a great, barren field which takes up essentially all the foreground, with some hills, trees, and barns in the background. In the center of the field, an artist's palette is depicted with four paintbrushes protruding from the top, pointing towards the barns. The field is painted in thick sporadic layers, as the brown, black and white all bleed into one another, creating the textured appearance of piled dirt. The artist's palette is red with a slight bit of orange highlighting the right side and is done as only an outline. The brushes are painted in yellow, and in the background Kiefer has painted the hills green and the sky a violet blue. The trees are painted in black rather than green, to coincide with the field and its burnt, ashen quality. The paintbrushes in the painting appear to be setting fire to the barns in the background. Moreover, the artist's palette appears to be melting because of the immense

heat. The palette in the center of all of this in many ways acts as a bullseye or aerial target, used during the blitzkriegs, marking the overall scene with nothing but death and destruction.

It has been suggested by scholar Daglind Sonolet in “Reflections on the Work of Anselm Kiefer” that Kiefer’s work underwent an important change in style during the early 1980’s. In the paintings that predominantly depict soil, “the absorption of color field technique and Abstract Expressionism get Kiefer away from an austere realist mode, and give his work a rich texture, and dramatic depth.”²⁴⁵ This is true of some of his work in the 1970’s as well, particularly when analyzing *Nero Paints*. His rendering of the dirt in this field possesses these elements of rich texture that provide the painting with greater depth, as does his choice of largely dark, earthy tones. Daniel Arasse points out that Kiefer’s work is in many ways a labyrinth of associations.²⁴⁶ He reuses motifs, physical objects and colors that result in an overlapping between works; something that disables us from instituting any kind of strict, chronological principle to his oeuvre as a whole.²⁴⁷ Much of Kiefer’s color palette in this particular painting is in fact dark, which does follow with the theme of death present in the image. The field itself takes up most the painting; it is abstract and relies on Kiefer’s use of these colors to create the illusion of rows of dirt.

Kiefer’s heavy use of black throughout the canvas is oppressive and asserts the thematic of death on the viewer. The way he paints the field in such thick, encrusted and heavy layers makes it almost unappealing to look at. However, in layering the canvas in this way, by applying such thick amounts of paint, Kiefer creates what actually looks like a sculpted surface. The

²⁴⁵ Daglind Sonolet, “Reflections on the Work of Anselm Kiefer,” *Cultural Values* 3, no. 1 (1999): 37. Doi: 10.1080/14797589909367151.

²⁴⁶ Daniel Arasse and Anselm Kiefer, *Anselm Kiefer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 19.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

charred trees appear as objects that are protruding into the space, and they not only take away from the vitality of the scene, but they ultimately signal a lifeless environment and the impossibility of new growth. This also speaks to the way that Nazism contaminated the homeland, as it turned its nation into ashes because of its twisted ideology. Kiefer's combination of color and subject matter is therefore incredibly important when ultimately attempting to understand this painting since these elements, and the overall effect of the painting, is in many ways the first thing that viewers react to. Kiefer is also conscious of Hitler's use of color and his understanding of how it could be used to have an inflammatory effect.²⁴⁸ Kiefer therefore includes the three colors of the Nazi flag in this painting – black, white, and red. Hitler's use of the black swastika, placed inside a white circle, with a red background, was not only striking, but also had “a potent subconscious effect.”²⁴⁹ Kiefer includes each of these colors in *Nero Paints*, alluding to the Party's color ideology in a subtle yet significant manner, in many ways creating a similarly powerful effect on the subconscious.

In addition to the significance of Kiefer's use of color is the subject matter of the painting, and the symbolism of the artist's palette in its center. Scholar Paul B. Jaskot offers his interpretation of these elements when he explains that the field Kiefer is depicting is of the March Heath. The fields of the March Heath were historically known as being sites of Prussian battle during the eighteenth century.²⁵⁰ Kiefer relates the fields to Hitler's scorched earth policy towards the end of World War Two. It is here that he also begins his association with Roman Emperor Nero. On March 19, 1945, Hitler issued the “Nero Decree;” calling for the destruction of the German

²⁴⁸ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2003), 50.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁵⁰ Paul B. Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and The Politics of The Right*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 91.

infrastructure due to the hopeless nature of the state of the war.²⁵¹ According to Hitler, once the enemy entered Germany, they would find nothing but “scorched earth.”²⁵² The purpose was to not only leave nothing for the enemy to destroy themselves, but also to show that with the end of National Socialism came the end of the nation.²⁵³ Hitler’s policy never had the chance to actually take shape however, as Minister of Armaments and War Production Albert Speer opposed the plan and implemented various measures to block it from happening.²⁵⁴ In an English translation of one of Speer’s letters to Hitler, he writes about his disbelief regarding Hitler’s plans, saying “...unless I have misunderstood you – it is clear and evident that if the war is lost the nation will also be lost...when...I read your destruction order and shortly later the evacuation order...I can no longer believe in the success of our good cause...I therefore beg you not to carry out a step so destructive of the nation.”²⁵⁵ While Speer’s reputation was less than desirable, he is credited with helping stop the unnecessary and radical destruction of the various production facilities in occupied territories and in Germany.²⁵⁶ Kiefer’s painting now takes on another dynamic, as he is not depicting an event that actually happened. He therefore draws on previous events, such as the burning of Rome, written descriptions of the policy itself, and various other destroyed landmarks to create a visual representation of what it may have looked like if the policy had indeed

²⁵¹ Hitler’s “Scorched Earth” Decree (Nero Decree) (March 19, 1945), in United States Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*. Supplement B. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1948. Speer Document 27, pp. 950-51. English translation edited by GHI staff. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1590.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Heinrich Schwendemann, “Drastic Measures to Defend the Reich at the Oder and the Rhine: A Forgotten Memorandum of Albert Speer of 18 March 1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 38 (4): 597. doi:10.1177/00220094030384005.

happened. We can acquire knowledge of how to visually depict this policy with phrases such as “Every housing block...must become a fortification where the enemy either bleeds to death or the occupying forces bury man upon man in its ruins,” and “The Führer showed how his destruction mania was intent on making a ‘desert’ out of Germany.”²⁵⁷ When reading this, one can begin to see Hitler’s policy enacted in Kiefer’s painting and the implications of what it would have done to the German landscape if it had been followed through.

Kiefer inserts himself in this discussion in a very specific way, as he paints an artist’s palette in the center of the scorched field. Paul Jaskot offers a very pointed analysis of what the palette means, first offering the most obvious explanation of how it references Kiefer as the one presenting the scene, but also as an active participant in it.²⁵⁸ “The act of painting and the subjective gesture of the artist collapse into the historical role of the cultural producer as a participant in crimes of national self-destruction.”²⁵⁹ This act implies not just the artist, but also German society as a whole. Everyone who blindly followed the Nazi regime and put it into power, who performed the Sieg Heil, and contributed to the camps and various other war crimes, added to the self-destruction of the nation. Kiefer’s question is a moral one, as he asks how contemporary artists could represent a historical atrocity such as this one, as well as how responsible similar artists were for their roles within the recent Nazi past.²⁶⁰ The palette implies the artist, but the scene implies all of Germany, as we are reminded of the relationship of blood and soil and the nation in its entirety. To present his viewers with this message, Kiefer uses both

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Paul B. Jaskot, *The Nazi Perpetrator: Postwar German Art and The Politics of The Right*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 91.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

transparent imagery and abstract form in order to bring the past and the present together.²⁶¹ To begin, he “dutifully records the historical crimes of the father’s generation in the obvious symbolic and traditional iconography, such as the palette.”²⁶² However, his use of layered paint, a clearly contemporary form of painting, results in a mystification of his previous iconographic choices.²⁶³ In doing this, Kiefer provides a combination of old and new, past and present, in order to create two very different understandings of himself as the perpetrator of what he is depicting. He grapples with this idea by first presenting himself as “an ideological agent who configures the past in symbolic and allegorical terms, quite distinct from the democratic and rationalist public...that vehemently rejected the resurrection of these terms in art or politics[.]”²⁶⁴ Kiefer uses elements to visually interpret Germany’s past at a time when the nation was at a crossroads artistically and politically. However, he does not just hold the position of some ideological agent; he is “the every day artist who also participates in the crimes of the past, no different potentially from current citizens[.]”²⁶⁵ This tension between those who lived through the war and those who were born after, and who are held responsible are notions rendered explicit in *Nero Paints*. In the painting, we see guilt, not just of the artist for what his countrymen did to their homeland, but also of the artist himself, as he ponders his role as well. As Kiefer performs the act of painting the canvas, of creating the scene; he is performing the outcome of the policy and therefore of Nazi ideology. This performative quality links the artist in yet another way with his subject matter. Nero did theater performance, recited poetry and played the lyre, and Hitler painted and sketched architectural buildings. Their rule, respectively, was

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 92.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

also largely based on performance, so this theme persists through this painting; connecting Nero, Hitler, and Kiefer himself as a result. Ultimately while Jaskot's analysis offers an incredibly valid and significant reading of Kiefer's painting, it is only one of many possible analyses. Not much literature exists on *Nero Paints*, and Jaskot's examination of the painting focuses on the centralizing notion of the role of the people and the artist in the guilt of the most recent German past. However, Hitler's scorched earth policy, or "Nero Decree," and the title of the painting itself, draw a connection between Nero and Hitler that is crucial to understanding the relationship between the image and the title of the work.

4.2 Nero The Artist

Emperor Nero ruled Rome from 54 AD to 68 AD. He was loved and adored by some, and despised and thought to be insane by others. The questioning of his mental state is valid however, as Nero is said to have "murdered his mother...married and executed one stepsister, executed his other stepsister...castrated and then married a freedman...melted down the household gods of Rome for their cash value," and of course, is said to have fiddled while Rome burned.²⁶⁶ The fire happened at night on July 18 or 19 in 64 AD and lasted for nine days.²⁶⁷ From the fourteen regions of Rome, it is said that only four remained untouched, seven were badly devastated, and three were completely destroyed.²⁶⁸ One account says that Nero took on the role of the good emperor, as he returned to the city from Anzio and automatically began to take measures (some deemed heroic) to relieve the suffering of the Roman people, and to rebuild

²⁶⁶ Edward Champlin, *Nero*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 36.

²⁶⁷ Edward Champlin, "Nero Reconsidered," *New England Review* 19, no. 2 (1998): 103. <http://www.jstor.org/subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/40243335>.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

much of the city with a new and more sensible building code.²⁶⁹ However, there were also rumors that the fire was Nero's fault, and that it was caused by his own agents so that he could "have the glory of rebuilding Rome as 'Neropolis,'" with some even going so far as to say that his soldiers forbade people to fight the fire.²⁷⁰ This rumor leads one to question what exactly Nero did if he indeed let Rome burn. According to two sources – Seutonius and Dio Cassius – Nero had a deep desire to see Rome burn for various reasons. Seutonius quotes someone as saying "'When I am dead, may the earth be consumed by fire,' and Nero retort[ing] 'Nay, rather while I live.'"²⁷¹ In addition to this, we have the account of Dio from which we learn that Nero was obsessed with Priam and the fall of Troy. According to Dio, Nero would consistently say that Priam was lucky to live to see the destruction of Troy, thereby showing Nero's desire to suffer as Priam did and watch Rome be devastated.²⁷² This lends to the idea of the Emperor setting fire to Rome himself specifically so that he *could* fiddle while it burned.²⁷³ Ultimately, this fire is one of the various components that creates this picture of Nero as an artist-criminal.

Literary scholar R.M. Frazer argues that this picture of Nero as the one to set the fire, while possibly just a rumor, fits with his character, as he was not mentally sound, and was deemed a sadist.²⁷⁴ Frazer coins the idea of Nero as an artist-arsonist, as his crimes possess an artist's touch since Nero was a poet, an actor, and a musician. He tended to weave his love of antiquity with his love of theatrics, both contributing in the culmination of his offenses.

²⁶⁹ Edward Champlin, "Nero Reconsidered," *New England Review* 19, no. 2 (1998): 103.
<http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/40243335>.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ R.M. Frazer, "Nero the Artist-Criminal," *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Oct. 1966): 17. <http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/3296636>.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

However, despite his offenses, Nero was quite popular outside of courtly circles and amongst non-Christians, and more importantly, he was very serious about his love of the arts.²⁷⁵ If we look past the indecent nature of an emperor performing on stage and the criticism of Nero's acting, writing, and lyre-playing, we can see a man who was quite passionate and imaginative; however, this passion and imagination – this mad creativity – is entirely nefarious, as it results in the devastation of Rome.²⁷⁶ In many ways, his rule was a performance, and his combination of art and life created a blurring of boundaries throughout his reign, adding to his seeming madness. While he continues to be seen throughout history as a “monster,” he remains fascinating.²⁷⁷ He committed suicide at the young age of thirty; growing even more popular after his death. How the Roman people could look back on Nero so fondly after the atrocities he committed is problematic, and the answer appears to lie in something that scholar Edward Champlin says, in that, “To be a hero it is not at all necessary to be a good man.”²⁷⁸ While Nero was clearly not a good man, he was reconsidered as a hero after he died. His popularity was twofold, as it was not just the myth of Nero that was popular. There were many who did in fact dearly miss him, and who held onto the belief that he did not actually commit suicide and would eventually return to Rome and the people.²⁷⁹ Explanations as to why he was beloved and missed by so many are offered via a comparison to Ivan the Terrible. In various Russian folktales, Ivan is a popular character, and because the terror he wreaked was directed towards enemies, it was not seen as a

²⁷⁵ Edward Champlin, “Nero Reconsidered,” *New England Review* 19, no. 2 (1998): 103. <http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/40243335>.

²⁷⁶ Edward Champlin, *Nero*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 82.

²⁷⁷ Edward Champlin, “Nero Reconsidered,” *New England Review* 19, no. 2 (1998): 103. <http://www.jstor.org.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/stable/40243335>.

²⁷⁸ Edward Champlin, *Nero*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 34.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

manifestation of his own personal viciousness.²⁸⁰ Rather, it was viewed “as an indication of his strength and his resolution to pursue the interests of the state, and to avenge injustice against the people.”²⁸¹ This explanation is useful when attempting to explain Nero’s popularity both when he was alive, as well as for centuries after his death. His ability to manipulate the truth, as well as ancient myths and legends created an ambiguous, slightly crazed and obsessive character. He was a dreamer who loved stories and the theater, especially since it gave him the ability to take on multiple roles in addition to that of emperor.

This persona of the crazed leader who eventually destroys his own nation is important to Kiefer’s painting, and the image’s direct relation to Nero is rendered explicit in the title. The desecrated fields depicted have dual meaning, as they are symbolic not only of Nero’s burnt Rome, but also Hitler’s “Nero Decree” to scorch Germany. This correlation is made not only between both landscapes, as there is a link between both leaders as well. This is yet again implicit in Kiefer’s title of the painting, as “Nero’s painting,” or artistry, is through fire. Hitler too has artistry here in the painting through his use of fire and destruction as well, and he too bares similarities not only to Nero, but also the explanation given regarding Ivan the Terrible. Hitler’s rule was a tumultuous one, and one of the questions here deals with the themes of artist, politician, criminal, hero, villain, and insanity. Claudia Schmölders addresses the specific theme of insane rulers in relation to historian Ludwig Quidde’s work from the late 1880s.²⁸² Quidde discovered a photograph of German Prince Wilhelm (1882-1951), with an inscription on it that said “‘oderint dum metuant’ – let them hate me, as long as they fear me.”²⁸³ This saying was

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 35.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Claudia Schmölders, *Hitler’s Face: The Biography of an Image* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 18.

²⁸³ Ibid.

made famous by Roman Emperor Caligula, who Quidde was using in a satire aimed at Wilhelm, taking the shape of a historical portrait of Caligula.²⁸⁴ In both Caligula and Wilhelm, Quidde found “disturbing traces of mental abnormality,” which lead to further exploration by psychiatrist Ernst Müller.²⁸⁵ Müller used Caligula’s coins to physiognomically read his “degeneracy,” stating that he had “a sickly body, which bore the mark of degeneracy...he had...epilepsy, and suffered from insomnia. The emperor was mentally inferior.”²⁸⁶ The comparison was also made to the later Kaiser Wilhelm (1859-1941)²⁸⁷, and since none of these traits were present, he was deemed mentally fit. However, after his abdication, Müller’s assessment changed, as he wrote that Wilhelm was an “‘overbred degenerate,’ endangered by ‘psychopathy and weak nerves.’”²⁸⁸ While this theory of mental illness remained largely out of public circulation for quite a while, it was still present, and the interesting parallels made between Caligula and Wilhelm are plausible between Nero and Hitler as well. This connection is made stronger by exploring the idea of Hitler as mentally unfit, as we have already seen Nero’s instability. It is also important to analyze Hitler as the artist-criminal in relation to Nero as such, and these are some of the ideas I will elaborate on in what follows.

4.3 Hitler The Artist

Adolf Hitler, like Ivan the Terrible, and like Nero, has acquired the title of a monster – and with due cause. However, like both despots, Hitler also gained popularity among his own

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 19.

²⁸⁷ To clarify, the previous Wilhelm that was mentioned was referring to the crown prince (1882-1951), whereas here I am now referring to emperor Kaiser Wilhelm (1859-1941). Kaiser Wilhelm was the crown prince’s father.

²⁸⁸ Claudia Schmolders, *Hitler’s Face: The Biography of an Image* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 19.

people. One of the many explanations for how Hitler managed to be elevated to such a beloved status comes from O.K. Werckmeister's examination of the traditional German idea of the political leader. He explains that the belief was that the political leader should be an artist, one who could shape historical reality; someone who could "[bring] artistic creativity to statecraft, superior to a mere politician."²⁸⁹ Hitler was elevated beyond that of a mere politician, and it was in many ways because of his aesthetic talents that he managed to maintain such a mesmerizing grip on the German people.²⁹⁰ What some rulers accomplished through fear, he managed to achieve through seduction.²⁹¹ Throughout his life, Hitler would lament that he became a politician against his will, and is quoted saying "If someone else had been found, I would have never gone into politics; I would have become an artist[.]"²⁹² However, his passion for the arts was as intense as his racism, and in many ways one could not exist for him without the other. While it is difficult to reconcile Hitler the artist with Hitler the monster, Carl Burkhardt, the League of Nations Commissioner in Danzig, offers up his explanation saying that "The man had a dual personality...the first being that of the rather gentle artist and the second that of the homicidal maniac."²⁹³ This split is significant, because by only examining one side, we miss the other, and both facets are what contribute to a more thorough understanding of this seemingly crazed individual. It is Hitler's connection with art that is most prominent in Kiefer's painting, so it is what will be analyzed in more depth since it holds the most relevance for this project.

²⁸⁹ O.K. Werckmeister, "Hitler the Artist," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, No.2 (1997): 272. 10.1086/448829.

²⁹⁰ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2003), xii.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*, xi.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, xiii.

Hitler's family was relatively uncultured, yet somehow, he began as a child to acquire an artistic disposition, with his sister Paula stating that he developed an "extraordinary interest" in 'architecture, painting, and music.'²⁹⁴ As a teenager, he consistently went to the theater and the opera, joined a musical society, and continued to pursue his personal artistic endeavors by drawing and painting.²⁹⁵ His first and only job before he enlisted in the military, from the time he was eighteen until he was twenty-five, was that of an artist.²⁹⁶ However, in spite of his passion, he possessed minimal talent; he was rejected twice by the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, and was only able to make a meager living off of the selling of his paintings. As time went on, Hitler realized that his artistic career was not going in the direction he had hoped, and a career in politics therefore offered itself to him at just the moment he seemed to need it. How this man could have such a sincere dedication to the arts, while at the same time advocate for totalitarian rule, war, and racial genocide goes back to the explanation of a dual personality. Comments that point to his possible mental instability largely focus on his time spent in prison after his failed coup attempt in November 1923. It is said that while in prison and "waiting to learn his fate, Hitler fell into a deep depression. His friends had to talk him out of thoughts of suicide."²⁹⁷ This would not be the only time that suicide would come up, as it is eventually how he died after realizing he had lost the war. Much of what Hitler managed to achieve prior to his death was based on theatrics and brilliant performance. He took the practice of politics as an art-

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ O.K. Werckmeister, "Hitler the Artist," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, No.2 (1997): 273. 10.1086/448829.

²⁹⁷ *Hitler: A Career*, DVD on Netflix. Directed by Joachim Fest and Christian Herrendoerfer, 1977. 00:25.

<http://www.netflix.com/watch/80106791?trackId=14170287&tctx=0%2C0%2C0f90cbb7-831b-464f-99d0-f381408a3feb-32016465>.

form beyond what anyone could have imagined, to the point where he could, in an “unguarded moment, style himself ‘the greatest actor in Europe.’”²⁹⁸ Even Goebbels said that Hitler left nothing to chance as he would constantly rehearse his speeches, as if he were an actor preparing to go on stage.²⁹⁹ This interplay of the actor/performer on stage, and the politician on stage, show just how much Hitler used the arts as ideological propaganda. His keen use of the spectacle, and of using the stage as a way to elevate himself shows the different ways that he and Nero used their art. Nero’s love of acting in many ways overpowered his concern for ruling, as his main focus was on his theater performances, his poetry, and his music. Hitler used art to influence the political realm, making ruling his first and foremost priority and his art an appendage to it, albeit a major one at that. However, both ultimately ended up using their art for destructive means; not only regarding themselves, but their homelands as well.

The use of fire, while significant in relation to Nero, is also important when solely analyzing Hitler’s propaganda, as he often held torchlight processions for the Party at nighttime.³⁰⁰ These were largely held at night for theatrical purposes, as the processions themselves were fairly uneventful. The addition of the torches also contributes to the idea of how the “fascist cult of fire was an omen of the fire that was to consume the world.”³⁰¹ In this respect, we see Kiefer’s painting as the outcome of this “omen.” The painting offers a visual interpretation of how the fire consumed Germany, while pointing back to antiquity and Rome in

²⁹⁸ Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2003), 43.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁰⁰ *Hitler: A Career*, DVD on Netflix. Directed by Joachim Fest and Christian Herrendoerfer, 1977. 01:29.
<http://www.netflix.com/watch/80106791?trackId=14170287&tctx=0%2C0%2C0f90cbb7-831b-464f-99d0-f381408a3feb-32016465>.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

the title. German poet Bertolt Brecht points to just how “recklessly Hitler was able to project his ideological notions about art into reality” by addressing his resolve to impose his vision on society at any cost.³⁰² He does so specifically in his poem from 1934 titled “The Roman Emperor Nero,” in which he compares the burning of Rome with the burning of the Berlin Reichstag.³⁰³ He believed that both were done for the “pleasure of the spectacle,” since he felt that Nero is the one who set fire to Rome, as Hitler and his government were the ones who perpetrated the Reichstag’s burning.³⁰⁴ Brecht writes about their connection in his poem, as he says,

“The Roman Emperor Nero, who likewise / Wanted to count for a great artist, is said to have as he watched / Rome burning on his orders, on a tower / Plucked his harp. On a similar occasion / The Führer, watching a burning [Parliament], took out / His pencil and drew / The dashing ground plan / Of a new splendid building.”³⁰⁵

While their chosen art-forms varied, in the end, they were not that different. This connection is important, since Kiefer’s painting allows us to see both men as artists, politicians, and ultimately criminals, whose crazed mental character resulted in their imposed destruction on their respective nations. It is through the title of this painting however, that these associations come to fruition; and it is therefore important to understand what precisely is at play in this relationship between image and text that makes these readings possible.

4.4 Image and Text: The Creation of an Allegorical Impulse in Kiefer’s Painting

Most of the interpretations of *Nero Paints* have been based on the title of the painting. Kiefer’s choice is intentional; in such a pointed naming of the work, he creates what theorist

³⁰² O.K. Werckmeister, “Hitler the Artist,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 23, No.2 (1997): 287. 10.1086/448829.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Craig Owens calls an allegorical impulse, and this is the last element of the painting to be analyzed. Owens explains how allegory first materialized in response to an estrangement from tradition, resulting in a “conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present” emerging as allegory’s two fundamental ‘impulses.’³⁰⁶ This impulse creates a relationship that can actually occur *within* a work of art, and Owens addresses this by means of allegory as appropriated imagery.³⁰⁷ The artist who uses allegory uses confiscated imagery, as he “lays claim to the culturally significant,” but “does not restore an original meaning,” creating his own instead, and replacing that which came before it.”³⁰⁸ Kiefer takes advantage of culturally significant imagery in this painting, as it relates to the relevant ideology at the time, and creates new meanings in his appropriation of it. His use of allegory is also significant in that allegory possesses a disregard for aesthetic categories or boundaries, which is most prominently seen in the mutuality that it proposes between the visual and the verbal.³⁰⁹ Owens’s argument is key here, when he says that too often, words are treated as “purely visual phenomena, while visual images are offered as script to be deciphered.”³¹⁰ Kiefer lays this bare in his painting as he demonstrates that there is no boundary between the title and the visual imagery; one needs to take both into account. The title and the painting itself cannot be interpreted separately, and they most definitely should not be interpreted by the strict terms that Owen says we all too often tend to refer to. Since the ideology and cultural imagery that Kiefer draws on in the painting is not

³⁰⁶ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism.” *October* 12 (1980): 68. Doi: 10.2307/778575.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

necessarily made explicit at first glance, the viewer has no choice but to analyze the imagery as script to be deciphered, and the title not just as visual phenomena.

An allegory can signify multiple things, yet it tends to become overcomplicated when viewers fail to read the signs that artists provide them with. The problem however, lies not in the viewer's inability to read the sign, but rather in the fundamental unreadability of the sign itself.³¹¹ There is an ambiguity in signs where multiple meanings can exist, and in relation to allegory, signs become complicated in that "one and the same object can just as easily signify a virtue as a vice."³¹² Signs can thus "problematize the activity of reading," something which "must remain forever suspended in its own uncertainty."³¹³ Reconciling with this uncertainty is challenging, since allegory is the "structural interference" of two specific levels of language – the literal and the rhetorical/metaphorical.³¹⁴ While "a literal reading will 'deconstruct' a metaphorical one...literal language is itself rhetorical, the product of metaphoric substitutions and reversals;" therefore, "such readings are inevitably implicated in what they set out to expose," resulting in allegory.³¹⁵ This comes into play when reading the title of Kiefer's painting, as its literal reading deconstructs the image's metaphorical one. By saying that Nero paints, Kiefer has exposed Nero's art-form as one of arson and devastation; rendering the allegory in this painting explicit through the combination of the literal, the metaphorical, the title, and the visual composition. The significance of the text and its interpretation in relation to the painting lies in the reader/viewer and not in the author/painter. The text is focused on the reader/viewer,

³¹¹ Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2." *October 13* (1980): 60. Doi: 10.2307/3397702.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 61.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

as they are the space on which “all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed....a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.”³¹⁶ The reader of this image and its title is therefore the destination; however, they cannot make it personal, as they need to simply be “that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted,” without letting their own history and psychology become an influence.³¹⁷ This reading of the title becomes further complicated by Owens’s quoting of Roland Barthes where he says “[*Our*] reading remains suspended between the image and its description, between definition and approximation.”³¹⁸ There is contextual meaning then, suspended between the image and the title that can only be read by bridging the two.

The use of allegory in *Nero Paints* renders the painting’s metaphor explicit, contributing to the dichotomy between the literal and rhetorical. It also demonstrates Kiefer’s acute awareness of the importance of the relationship between image and text, and how the idea of the allegory is not something to just be attached to a work of art as an afterthought. The allegory is a “structural possibility inherent in every work,” and its use in a contemporary painting such as Kiefer’s makes that potential actualized through the activity of reading.³¹⁹ In Kiefer’s case, allegory is therefore realized through the reading of the title. His work, however, is clearly a work of consciousness. Reproducing various elements of German history and ideology allow him to use allegory in the painting as a symbol of mortality, which follows what Owen’s says about how allegory represents “the inevitable dissolution and decay to which everything is subject.”³²⁰ This explanation fits perfectly with Kiefer’s ashen, scorched field, as he shows the decay not only of

³¹⁶ Ibid., 68.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 75.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 64.

³²⁰ Ibid., 70.

the land, but of German ideology and history itself. The allegory also speaks to the potential for opposites, as “*Nero Paints*” could just as easily be read as “Nero Destroys.” As the viewer deciphers these elements, they undertake what Owens’s says is the “unavoidable necessity of participating in the very activity that is being denounced, *precisely in order to denounce it.*”³²¹ Are we as viewers, partaking in Nero painting this landscape – in Kiefer painting it – or are we part of its destruction? While Kiefer himself physically paints this scene, it is a scene which portrays death and annihilation. Kiefer and therefore we as viewers, need to be mindful of the use of allegory in the image, and how we determine the painting’s meaning based on our reading of it.

Kiefer continues with this theme of partaking in, and citing, various elements of Nazi history in order to offer a new interpretation; creating a contemporary approach through this use of the allegorical impulse. The title of his painting becomes crucial to our understanding of it, as seeing a painting in conjunction with its title ultimately affects how we as viewers process it.³²² A psychological study on the influence of information in relation to the understanding of paintings showed that “short verbal information in the form of titles, besides the purpose of identification, [serve] as a guide to the interpretation of an artwork.”³²³ While some paintings titles are in tension with the visual imagery, they are still an important part of the viewers aesthetic experience, as they can often result in the viewer describing the painting through the title.³²⁴ While meaning can often be conveyed through a work of art’s title, it is important to

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

³²² Helmut Leder, Claus-Christian Carbon and Ai-Leen Ripsas, “Entitling Art: Influence of Title Information on Understanding and Appreciation of Paintings.” *Acta Psychologica* 121, no. 2 (2006): 176. Doi: 10.1016/j.actpsy.2005.08.005.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 178.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

hearken Owen's writings about the mutability of the text versus the image and the interplay that exists between the two. It is because of this that Kiefer's chosen title for this painting has proven to be just as important as the visual imagery, if not more so.

Appendix 3

Image removed due to copyright

[Figure 5]

Anselm Kiefer, *Nero Paints*, 1974.

Oil on canvas, $86^{5/8}$ x $118^{1/8}$ in (220 x 300cm).

Conclusion

Theorist Theodor Adorno wrote in *Cultural Criticism and Society* in 1949 that “After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric.”³²⁵ While this statement has a history of being taken out of context, it has come to function as a “moral and aesthetic dictate for the postwar era.”³²⁶ One can interpret Adorno as simply saying that to attempt to produce art after the Holocaust is cruel and almost impossible. However, Adorno’s statement is in many ways a call for the fundamental ability of the arts to communicate knowledge, and most importantly, to bear witness. Anselm Kiefer’s work attempts – and quite successfully – to do just this, as he deals with the issues of representation, repression, ideology, history, and their role in Germany’s past and present. There is an “aesthetic, ethical, and historical gravity to his work,” which culminates in the various images that have been discussed in this thesis.³²⁷ Kiefer’s *Occupations*, *Heroic Symbols*, *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, and *Nero Paints* all bear witness to the various ways that the Third Reich distorted – and at the time therefore reflected – German cultural and social life. These images also provide a voice to those who were silenced, as he reminds the German people about the atrocious crimes they and their government committed against the part of their population that they wanted to so readily forget about. Kiefer therefore demands that this history be worked through, as he interferes in the visual and semiotic foundation of the Nazi past in his art.

In *Occupations*, *Heroic Symbols*, *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, and *Nero Paints*, Kiefer draws on the various themes of performativity, citation, and allegory to further explore how precisely to neutralize different signifiers of Nazi history and expose them. He takes a satirical

³²⁵ Lisa Saltzman, “To Figure, or Not to Figure” in *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*, ed. Catherine M. Soussloff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 67.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid., 79.

approach in how to visually produce his examination of this, however his work is always created under a critical lens. Kiefer partakes in many of the elements he seeks to expose, as he does so with the intent to subvert them from within. His work has consistently been criticized, being deemed 'proto-fascist,' and accused of fostering the ideology he is aiming to condemn. However, if one takes a closer look at the images addressed in this thesis, one can see the ways in which Kiefer actually disassociates the aesthetic elements, gestures, and ideologies he reproduces from their original semiotic and historical contexts. By grouping these images together, and by addressing them through such particular themes and theories, I hope to have proven how effective Kiefer has ultimately been in his addressment of German Nazi history. It is by doing this that Kiefer's work creates new contexts of meaning, particularly in relation to his citation of Nazi history. As a result, he dislodges various Nazi elements from their original connotations, offering new interpretations on a subject that demands the kind of bearing witness that only Kiefer can provide.

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