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Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer,
Joseph Beuys, and the Memory of the Holocaust

Between 1981 and 1990, German artist Anselm Kiefer explicitly referred to the Holocaust in a number of his artworks.¹ Kiefer's complex Holocaust representations—which appeared during a decade in which West German politics was rocked by intense debates having to do with a citizen's relationship to the collective past—evoked considerable critical response both for and against his ability to authentically represent his country's history.² At the heart of the critical debate around Kiefer's art and German politics in the 1980s, in both West Germany and the U.S., was the question of how textual, visual, and televisual cultures mediate an individual's relationship to the past, and thus how cultural representations reshape lived human events. For this reason, as was the case with much German art and visual culture since the mid- to late-1960s, the cultural imperative or normative principle was still, in Theodor Adorno's words, "coming to terms with the past"—and, more specifically, coming to terms with national socialism.³ In the 1980s, however, the terms of the debate had shifted; the imperative was no longer just to remember, but rather, how and what to remember. This essay explores the relationship between representation and event in Kiefer's multimedia artworks and examines the problem of Holocaust memory in relation to West German art and visual culture since World War II.⁴ It focuses on the ways in which Kiefer's art engages an evolving constellation of problems, discourses, and representational strategies that developed in West German culture and abroad in response to the events of the Holocaust. In particular, it will examine Kiefer's relationship to Joseph Beuys, the controversial West German artist, who, between the 1960s and the 1980s, was one of the first German visual artists to deal with issues of Holocaust representation in a number of significant performative, sculptural, and environmental works.⁵

The central problem of Holocaust representation with which Kiefer had to grapple in the 1980s and early 1990s was an intensification of the fundamental predicament inherent in Holocaust memory. Holocaust memory is what Primo Levi calls "the memory of offense," a

wound that can never heal. Anchored by this wound, and frozen in time, the victim and the perpetrator retain their original relationship in memory until both die. As Levi puts it, the “oppressor remains what he is, and so does the victim.”⁶ In other words, they are united: determined by past events that will to some extent always control their existences. For Levi, it is imperative that the memory of the Holocaust be preserved, both by the oppressors and by the victims. Yet, as Levi correctly points out, “a memory that is recalled too often and that is expressed in a verbal form tends to set as a stereotype—a form tested by experience, crystallized, perfected, and adorned—which settles in the place of the raw record and grows at the expense of the original memory.”⁷ In other words, by filtering and stereotyping their memories through representation and repetition, both the perpetrators and the victims shield themselves from their own original experiences. In the case of the victims, the trauma of oppression causes them to repress their past hurt—to substitute a screen-experience for it, or to otherwise filter out their bad memories of too great intensity. In the case of the perpetrators, guilt and fear cause a defensive reconstruction of the past—false memories that often emphasize the perpetrator’s powerlessness in the face of the Nazi state. Nonetheless, in each case, the result is the same: either consciously or unconsciously, the subject falsifies his or her memories of the original events, and, through repetition, eventually accepts these falsified memories as true. Holocaust memory thus potentially destroys the event by putting a substitute in the place of the actual experience.

This problem of Holocaust memory was relevant, as Adorno pointed out in 1959, to the postwar West German situation as a whole. The problem of the falsification of memory—i.e., the repression of history on the level of the individual subject—was something that, in post-1945 German society, could potentially cause the population to reject their new democratic government.⁸ A weak, postwar West German subject, Adorno thought, was potentially fascist, and this subject’s authoritarian elements lay in his or her “immaturity.” Average West Germans possessed psyches, in other words, in which personal feelings of powerlessness were combined with a damaged “collective narcissism”—a repressed but still potentially strong identification with the collective body or nation as a whole.⁹ Therefore, because adult West Germans were not being encouraged to come to terms with their history on either an individual or collective level during the first twenty years of the Federal Republic, true commitment to one form of society over another—for example, democratic capitalism as opposed to national socialism—could not be developed. If a new non-democratic, nationalist form of government could appear within the context of the cold war ideology promoted by the U.S. and Western Europe—a government that appealed to this damaged collective narcissism—the

German population might collectively switch allegiances. Democracy, as Adorno put it, “has not domesticated itself to the point that people really experience it as their cause, and so consider themselves agents of the political process. It is felt to be one system among others, as if one could choose from a menu between communism, democracy, fascism, monarchy.”¹⁰ To prevent this, West Germans continued to need democratic education; their schooling needed to include a confrontation with anti-Semitism as well as a strengthening of their weak sense of selfhood.

When, in the early 1980s, Anselm Kiefer began to represent the Holocaust from a postwar West German perspective, Adorno’s project of democratic education had long since been taken up in multiple fields of science and culture. Kiefer was born in 1945 and started university in 1966—a time when the German New Left was beginning to popularize its ideas.¹¹ In 1981 he was 36, already showing internationally, and had just achieved representation in New York.¹² The New Left’s utopianism—its belief that education and the critical unveiling of the past would allow people to finally found a “true” society—had run aground over the course of the 1970s. Moreover, any sense that “coming to terms with the past” was simply a question of confronting one’s personal history was long since over. It was not Kiefer’s personal history—a history that he could actually remember—with which he had to come to terms. Rather, it was his country’s history that he had to confront—a history he could only come to know from the verbal and written accounts of others and from other forms of visual representation such as photography, sculpture, and film—representations he experienced in the lifeworld around him.

One such representation is the well-known but unauthored documentary photograph that depicts the deportation of a group of Jewish men, women, and children from the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 (see Figure 1). This photograph appeared consistently over the course of the first thirty-five years of West German visual culture.¹³ Not only is it similar to the often more brutal photographs shown to German non-participants after the war as evidence of German crimes, it also appeared in Alain Resnais’s documentary *Night and Fog* (1956) and in Ingmar Bergman’s fiction film *Persona* (1966), both of which achieved wide international circulation after their releases. The photograph presents a good example of the problem of Holocaust representation as it breaks beyond the sphere of memory of the participants and into the minds and worlds of people like Kiefer, who did not take part in the actual events. On the one hand, the photograph preserves the particular event in all its brutal realism. By showing the round-up of terrified women and children by armed and uniformed German soldiers, it is in some ways the clearest and most unambiguous documentation of the Holocaust. Because of its indexical relation to its murdered sub-



Figure 1. Photographer unknown, *Warsaw Ghetto* (1943). From the *Stroop Report*.

jects, its detail, and its unrehearsed documentary character (conveyed, for example, by the somewhat haphazard organization of the human figures as well as the multiple directions of their gazes), it suggests the truth or actuality of these events. Moreover, because of the clear power discrepancies between the victimizers and the victims (emphasized by the prominence of Jewish women and children in the photograph), it (still) provokes outrage at Nazi atrocities. By selecting the most innocent victims of the Holocaust—the children, who in no way could be considered combatants—it shows the utter senselessness and viciousness of the Nazis' projects. Furthermore, as Marianne Hirsch has argued, the image of the child encourages viewer identification and projection.¹⁴ Such images, she argues, can open up spaces for "postmemory," acts of spectatorial identification with the oppressed other, which do not either stereotype or fully assimilate him or her, and that help those who were born after the events develop an open and ethical relationship to the past.¹⁵

The photograph, however, also presents a number of dangers to its viewers. The first is the power to desensitize: by looking at such images, we become accustomed to them. Photography generally distances its spectators from the event; through repeated viewings, this separation is increased.¹⁶ In addition, documentary representations of the Holocaust have the potential to exploit their human subjects. The terrified women and children depicted in the photograph did not consent to have their picture taken. At that moment in 1943, in the extremity of the deportation situation, they were defenseless—a fact

that their thinness, the “unguarded” nature of their body language, and their frightened expressions show very well. By representing their powerlessness, the photograph can thus be seen to victimize them for a second time, repeating (albeit in a less violent form) the violation of the Jews’ autonomy initially perpetrated by the Germans. Furthermore, although the photograph can produce creative and responsible forms of spectatorial identification, ones that are split between an awareness of self and an awareness of the victimized other, it can—through its realism—also produce a feeling in the spectator that he or she has understood the past. In this way, the photograph can promote a sense that this traumatic moment of human history has been “mastered” and that it no longer needs to be confronted.

Although it still bears traces of its original ontological context, an isolated photograph of the Holocaust is thus even more severed from the past than a memory image.¹⁷ Although Holocaust participants can repress and distort their memories, they cannot get rid of them fully or alter their character entirely. Repressed trauma continually threatens to break through in human experience in a multiplicity of ever-changing forms. A photograph, on the other hand, despite its ontological connection to past events,¹⁸ can be made to signify a number of radically different historical “realities.”¹⁹ Depending on cropping and contextualization—that is, juxtaposition with other forms of imagery or text—the same photograph can be used to indicate a number of fundamentally different states of affairs. Thus, although documentary photographs can seemingly represent in a truthful way the terrifying brutality of the Holocaust, they can also be used to distort events, and their too frequent reproduction and exhibition can also, perhaps, begin a process that leads to a toleration of such actions. The necessity of using photographic records to remember the Holocaust must be tempered by an awareness of the limitations of the medium and the tendency that many people have to overestimate the veracity of photographic evidence.

Before Kiefer, Joseph Beuys was another West German artist who attempted to confront problems of Holocaust representation. His *Auschwitz Demonstration* (1968) stands in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt (see Figure 2).²⁰ Beuys’s conceptual “sculpture” is significant for Kiefer’s art, and not just because Kiefer, who was a student of Beuys in the early 1970s, would have been familiar with it. Rather, it is significant because it succeeds in evoking a particular combination of hermeneutic undecidability and reflexivity in the aesthetic experience of its various viewers, a conjunction that is central to Kiefer’s works as well. “Hermeneutic undecidability” is the ability of a cultural representation to generate not just ambiguity but a conflict of interpretations: radically contradictory readings of the same set of signifiers.²¹ As is exemplified by the works of Kiefer and Beuys,



Figure 2. Joseph Beuys, *Auschwitz Demonstration* [*Auschwitz Demonstration*] (1968). Vitrine with sculpture and objects (1956 to 1964). Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt. Copyright 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

such representations often juxtapose different historical time frames and forms of signification—juxtapositions that provoke their spectators to compare and contrast different temporal and spatial contexts. “Reflexivity” here means physical and existential viewer self-consciousness evoked by a particular set of visual and linguistic signifiers—a self-awareness that asks the viewer to engage with the artist’s representation and its relationship to the environments and life contexts to which it refers and through which it passes. As such, reflexivity is connected to the attempt to dissolve art into life and, thus, potentially, has political consequences.

In the context of the development of West German art as a whole, Beuys’s vitrine could properly be said to belong to the middle phase, a moment that has often been characterized as that of the international “neo-avant-garde.” A number of art historians and critics have used this term to characterize the work of artists, like Beuys, who appropriated early-twentieth-century artistic strategies initially developed by Dada, constructivist, and surrealist artists in order to partially negate the aesthetic object and thus empower their audiences.²² Often the term carries pejorative connotations, suggesting, as it does, that the recycled strategies employed by the neo-avant-garde artists produce none of the critical and destabilizing effects characteristic of the

“original” negations carried out by the artists of the historical avant-garde, the Dada, constructivist, and surrealist producers who wished to end the production and consumption of art as a specialized practice separate from the course of everyday life.²³ Instead, in the hands of neo-avant-garde artists, recycled art-negating gestures become simple means of making seemingly new instances of contemporary art, products that do not seek to overturn the institution of modern art as a specialized sphere focused on its own history and means of expression, but rather that continue modern art’s traditional function as a privileged and fetishized commodity within the capitalist market economy.

Although clearly commodified (Beuys sold the vitrine before its final assembly), the object still managed to inspire social and political critique. Beuys’s apparently non-artistic vitrine negated the two dominant—and much more conventional—concepts of modern sculpture in effect in West Germany until the 1960s: the biomorphic-abstract sculpture of Karl Hartung, the forms of which were derived from natural objects, and the more abstract metal and wire works of Hans Uhlmann and Norbert Kricke, who used industrial materials and linear forms to define non-objective shapes in space. As was the case with earlier American neo-avant-garde artists during the late-1950s and early-1960s—the pop art painter Andy Warhol, for example, and the minimalist sculptor Carl Andre—Beuys used readymade images and objects to undermine postwar expressive and constructive models of abstraction. Like Warhol and Andre, whose forms seemed “new” or “shocking” in relation to Piet Mondrian (the pioneering abstractionist who continued his practices in New York in the 1940s) and Jackson Pollock (the premiere American neo-avant-garde artist of the 1940s and the early 1950s, a painter who suggested continuities with the prewar period by amplifying the expressive strand of abstraction that became more and more prominent in the middle third of the twentieth century), Beuys appeared radically different and destabilizing in relation to Hartung, Uhlmann, and Kricke. Thus, although he was actually repeating earlier prewar strategies (transmitted to him by both prewar and postwar sources), Beuys’s art was initially experienced as highly provocative in his West German context and, therefore, for a time, possessed shock qualities and distancing effects that were in some ways comparable to that of the historical avant-garde.²⁴

The *Auschwitz Demonstration* is a vitrine containing a collection of objects dating from 1956 to 1964 and assembled by Beuys in 1968.²⁵ They include a cast metal relief image of a fish, a faceless clay figure of the crucified Christ and an old wafer carefully positioned in a discolored white soup dish, a desiccated rat on a bed of dried grass in a round wooden sieve, a bent and broken carpenter’s ruler in another grass-lined sieve, a drawing of a starved girl with a sled, a folding photographic map of Auschwitz ripped from a book or a brochure, four

rings of blood sausages with plus or minus signs painted on either end, sun-lamp goggles, more moldy blood sausages and sausage fragments arranged on a corroded metal disc with a discolored mirror in its center, two round medicine vials containing fat, a brown bottle containing iodine, a blank aluminum tag on a string, and two rectangular blocks of wax on top of a double-burner electric hot plate.²⁶ Because of the complex set of meanings and representational relations these glass-enclosed objects embody, Beuys's vitrine potentially produces a hermeneutically undecidable experience when spectators attempt to assemble the vitrine's elements into larger, more overarching interpretations.

On the one hand, Beuys's work is successful in evoking the shocking brutality of the Holocaust without instrumentalizing the victims through direct photographic representation. The existence of the death camps is very clearly indicated by the aerial panoramic photograph of Auschwitz showing its fence, its rows of barracks, and the train tracks leading to the gas chambers and crematoria—a photograph that details the functions of the various structures that it depicts in cold bureaucratic language printed on its reverse side. In addition, the violence and horror of what transpired in the death camps is indirectly (but pointedly) suggested by the hairless, mummified rat, which seems to have curled in a fetal position as it died, as well as the blocks of wax on the burners, which suggest the Nazis' instrumental and utterly inhuman reduction of their victims' bodies to soap, skin, hair, and other materials that could be reused. The vials of fat, which through their titles suggest the transformation of bodies from solid to liquid states, and the sausages, which are tied up in a manner that suggests both confinement and the securing of materials against complete disintegration, continue this theme of the Nazis' monstrous appropriation and destruction of their victim's bodies.²⁷ And finally, the pencil drawing of the emaciated girl, her skeletal hands covering her pelvis in a pathetic attempt to hide her nakedness, literalizes the shocking connotations of the assembled materials by tying the objects back to familiar images associated with the history of the death camps, namely the naked and starved victims who populate numerous photographs of the camps taken after their liberation.

On the other hand, Beuys's *Auschwitz Demonstration* also seems initially quite sinister and perhaps even historically misleading. The vials, goggles, measuring stick, and burner, for example, suggest a technological ground or basis underlying the "final solution." By emphasizing the undeniably important relationship between the Nazi state, rationalization, and industrial technology, these elements perhaps imply that the National Socialists were blinded and misled by the tools and technologies they employed.²⁸ The technological components, in other words, might suggest that the Germans who wielded them were

unavoidably separated from their victims due to the distancing nature of much industrial technology. Because the executioners no longer had to see, hear, or select their victims in order to kill them, and because the numerous “ordinary” Germans who participated in the destruction of life did so only in ancillary roles (driving and scheduling trains, participating in deportations, manufacturing and transporting materials that were then used in mass murder, etc.), the magnitude of the Nazi horror could, through this interpretive strategy, be deflected upon the industrial means that were used to carry it out. In addition, within the interpretive context set up by the vitrine, the Jewish victims are potentially associated with dead rats, blood sausage, blocks of wax, and vials of fat—comparisons that suggest the Nazis’ anti-Semitic propaganda and dehumanizing language of hate. Because of their radically ambiguous presentation, it is unclear if Beuys is criticizing such stereotypes in his art or giving them new life. Finally, both the crucified sculpture of Christ and the wafer—which together symbolize the commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice in Christian ritual—suggest a redemptive aspect to the Nazis’ slaughter of innocents. Like the Judeo-Christian term “Holocaust” itself, these symbols of Christian religion—such as the fish, the secret symbol of Christ, which suggests the suffering of the early Christians under the Romans—can, in the overall context of the vitrine, imply that the destruction of the Nazis’ victims could result in a higher good.²⁹ Given Beuys’s role as a pilot in the *Wehrmacht* or German air force in World War II, a role that he also represented in his heterogeneous art, a number of objects in the ambivalent Auschwitz vitrine could potentially suggest a strong element of revisionism.³⁰

Longer contemplation of Beuys’s vitrine, however, produces non-revisionist, critical readings as well. The ugliness of the work (in particular, the rat and the sausages) conveys the inability of the German artist to create anything beautiful after the Holocaust. It thus suggests Beuys’s meditation on the horror of these events, and it implies that to him German art after Auschwitz could never be the same. In addition, Beuys’s vitrine constructs a context in which the viewer is encouraged to imagine multiple connections and analogies between the actions of various technologies (suggested by the machined elements), human drawing and shaping practices (suggested by the sketch of the emaciated girl, the sculpted crucifix, and the fish relief), and multiple processes of organic development and decay (suggested by the rat, the sausages, the grass, and the fat elements). By provoking the spectator to think about relationships between these different types of processes, it possibly gets him or her to speculate on how to overcome stereotypical barriers between science, art, technology, and nature created by the drive towards specialization characteristic of modern societies. Creating a context in which the spectator is encouraged to rethink

the interrelations between these supposedly separate “spheres” of human endeavor, Beuys’s work potentially projects a radical utopianism—a sense that late Western capitalist societies are ready to be transformed and their divisions healed through the collaboration of an artistic neo-avant-garde with a politicized and engaged populace.³¹

Finally, two of the objects collected in the vitrine—the hot plate and the sculpted figure of the crucified Christ—were first used in two artistic “actions” or performances carried out by Beuys in the mid-1960s, which dealt with physical and spiritual transformation and the circulation of energy between material and conceptual realms. In the first action, which took place during a Fluxus performance at the Festival of New Art in the Technische Hochschule Aachen on July 20, 1964, the hot plate was used to help ritually introduce Beuys’s signature material of fat, a substance that suggests both the bodies of the Nazis’ victims, and—through Beuys’s life story, which was slowly publicized over the course of the 1970s—a material that can help promote healing. A performance that inspired a violent audience reaction (in part because it took place on the twentieth anniversary of an unsuccessful attempt on Adolf Hitler’s life), the action marks Beuys’s emergence as a media-personality, and it is often cited as an example of how Beuys’s early performances inspired reactionary responses on the part of contemporary German audiences, and thus how his work could expose problematic impulses within his own society.³² In the second action, which was entitled “Manresa,” and which took place in the Gallery of Alfred Schmela in Düsseldorf on December 15, 1966, the soup-plate-crucifix was connected to an electrical generator. In this action, which referred to the spiritual and physical regeneration of Ignatius of Loyola and interconnections between the spiritual, the natural, and the technological worlds, Beuys appeared to advocate transforming Christian impulses into secular socially-responsible ones.³³ For spectators who could recognize the performative contexts from which these two objects in the *Auschwitz Demonstration* emerged, these elements might suggest the need for a critical social engagement in contemporary German society and for the transformation of traditional belief systems into more open and politically-engaged conceptual approaches.³⁴

In addition to producing undecidability through its conjunction of formal and material elements, Beuys’s *Auschwitz Demonstration* vitrine attempts to engage the contemporary art-going public by shocking its viewers and promoting reflexivity on art and vision in the modern world. In the first place, Beuys’s vitrine is ugly—its presentation of slowly rotting meat and dried out rat flesh actually repels the viewer. It causes the spectator to ask, “How can this be art?” and thus to reflect on the role of the postwar German artist and how and why his or her materials have changed since the war. In addition, although

some of Beuys's objects are actually sculpted—specifically the figure of Christ and the fish relief—most are simply selected and assembled. In this way, the structure of the work has become more fragmented or “open” than is the case with more traditional forms of twentieth century sculpture; the work's parts have greater independence from the whole and thus retain more elements of meaning from their previous states or contexts. The assembled elements thereby bring with them traces of German history—traces that the spectator is encouraged to incorporate when interpreting the work. Furthermore, although very complexly arranged, Beuys's work seems to simplify—or de-skill—the art-making process by making it less dependent on traditional technical proficiencies. Its spectators, in other words, are initially made to feel that they too could have made Beuys's vitrine. In this way, the work promotes what Beuys termed “direct democracy”—his complex call to his beholders to creatively remake themselves and their society.³⁵

The reflexive character of Beuys's *Auschwitz Demonstration*, which provokes its spectators to think about both themselves and their historical context, is strengthened by the institutional nature of the vitrine itself, which collects heterogeneous representations and connects them to a larger exhibition that deals with Beuys's identity as a post-war German artist. The vitrine exists as part of an installation that is intended to be taken as a whole. It is a single element within the “Beuys Block,” a seven room permanent exhibition, acquired by the Hessisches Landesmuseum in 1970 from the industrialist Karl Ströher.³⁶ Consisting of sculptural works and drawings from 1949 until the late 1960s, selected and arranged by Beuys himself, the “Block” is a retrospective collection of many of his most important “sculptures” and “relics.” It is a multi-room experience with different forms of display—some of the sculptures and objects lie exposed against the floor or wall, others are encased in glass or arranged in vitrines. As a whole, the Block, which takes up more than a third of the top floor of the Landesmuseum, invites comparison with the permanent installations on the two floors below. All of these installations focus on the natural sciences—more specifically, paleontology, geology, and zoology—and tell the story of the earth's broader development. In contrast to these other exhibits, which present narratives of natural history, Beuys's installation presents a retrospective history of his own personal development as a West German artist. Many of the objects and sculptures—like those contained in the *Auschwitz Demonstration*—were first used in Beuys's actions in the early and mid-1960s. They thus carry traces of Beuys's public persona as a self-defining individual and as an artist who is self-consciously trying to heal psychic wounds and project a new form of German collective subject in the late-1960s and early-1970s.³⁷ To a neo-avant-garde audience that had followed

Beuys's career—or a more everyday audience who might have known something about his art through the newspapers—the *Auschwitz Demonstration* could thus appear as a necessary “stage” in the development of German identity: something that had to be conceptually experienced by the individual as part of his or her psychic or moral development.

Beuys's vitrine corporeally emphasizes or “embodies” this idea of reconceptualizing what it means to be a “German” on both an individual and a collective level in light of the Holocaust by its position within the Block as a whole. The *Auschwitz Demonstration* is situated near the middle of the Block's seven rooms—an extended temporal experience during which the spectator is frequently encouraged to think of the works in existential and embodied terms. The vitrine marks the beginning of the most claustrophobic part of the installation: rooms five through seven. After the *Auschwitz Demonstration*, there is almost no space to pass between the multiple rows of vitrines, and the spectator is simultaneously threatened and provoked by the fragile assembled elements. The beholder moving between the vitrines, in other words, is made to feel transgressive by the fact that it would be easy to disturb or destroy the art in this section of the Block; the spectator potentially has power over the art and at the same time fears being punished for hurting it. In this way, the work refers the spectator to his or her own physical experience of the environment at the same time as—through its qualities of ugliness, openness to history, and de-skilling—it makes the spectator aware of his or her intellectual contribution to the aesthetic experience. By connecting the spectator's body and physical perceptions to sculptural representations and traces of Beuys's actions both before and after World War II, the vitrine promotes historical reflection on German identity in relation to the Holocaust as a comparison of artifacts from different time periods, a play of undecidable interpretations, and reflexive self-awareness about the social and historical construction of human identity.

As both Beuys's vitrine of 1968 and the documentary representation of the Holocaust of 1943 suggest, the problems besetting Holocaust memory are greatly exacerbated when these events reach the level of objective cultural reproduction. Like Holocaust memories, cultural representations can often distort or disguise events. In addition, they can also desensitize, dulling the spectator to the vision of human pain. Finally, they are potentially exploitative because they use the sufferings of others as raw materials. As Beuys's neo-avant-garde vitrine demonstrates, these difficulties could be negotiated around 1968—but not easily, and certainly not without an audience who knew something about Beuys's art from the news media or other publications.³⁸

The situation confronting Kiefer in the early 1980s was much worse. With the proliferation of depictions of the Holocaust, critics

began to denounce an increase in reactionary representations—depictions that blocked understanding as opposed to developing it.³⁹ In addition, the terms of the debate on memory and the Holocaust had shifted since the late 1960s. Now, the question was no longer simply education but whether such education had overstepped its bounds. There was an increasing backlash against Holocaust representation and, with it, a sense that certain aspects of the past needed to be forgotten. Moreover, like the rest of his generation (and unlike Beuys), Kiefer had no personal experience of World War II, and thus no direct existential connection to the events of mass murder.⁴⁰ He had no “memories”—distorted or otherwise—upon which to base his historical representations. Finally, Kiefer’s aesthetic situation was different. Beuys’s neo-avant-garde dismantling of “traditional” modern art forms had long since lost its ability to shock the art-going public. As Beuys had already shown in detail by the mid-1970s, traditional forms of art could be expanded to include books, environments, performances, films, even public protests and political activity. By 1980, such neo-avant-garde art-making strategies were becoming significantly overused. With the growing perception of Beuys’s “neo-ness” (a sense that he was repeating prewar avant-garde strategies), it seemed as if no new forms of art could appear in Germany that would provoke—and, thereby, promote—critical historical reflexivity.⁴¹ Instead, a highly debated and historically self-conscious return to representational painting and sculpture began to gain institutional and critical attention and support—a style of art making that attracted the names “neo-expressionism” and “postmodernism” for its return to an earlier, supposedly bankrupt, twentieth century style and its presentation of the specter of German fascism.⁴² According to many critics, both social and aesthetic, a “new conservatism” appeared to be taking form—both in art and in West German society at large.

As this “postmodern” atmosphere transformed German aesthetics and society during the 1980s, the representation of the Holocaust in the context of German history became an issue of great interest as well as a site of much contention. As is well known, the West German “historians debate” was begun by the philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas when he accused the historians Klaus Hildebrand, Michael Stürmer, Andreas Hillgruber, and Ernst Nolte of variously promoting a “new revisionism”—a form of history writing that identified with the German participants and represented them as victims, that relativized the Holocaust by comparing it to other events of genocide, and that partially excused it by suggesting that German crimes were reactions to earlier “Bolshevist” threats of annihilation. In addition, Habermas criticized the conservative historians’ call for a form of history writing that would endow “higher meaning” to historical events and integrate the West German community along na-

tional—as opposed to international—lines. As he put it in an article entitled, “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” published in *Die Zeit*, on July 11, 1986:

There is a simple criterion that distinguishes the people involved in this dispute. The one side assumes that working on a more objectified understanding releases energy for self-reflective remembering and thus expands the space available for autonomously dealing with ambivalent traditions. The other side would like to place revisionist history in the service of a nationalist renovation of conventional identity.⁴³

As the example of Beuys suggests, Habermas’s call for self-reflective remembering and his insistence on the necessity of autonomously dealing with ambivalent traditions were concerns to which at least some West German artists had given visual form for the past twenty years. However, in order for public and inclusive memory work to be realized, what was needed, according to Habermas, was free and non-coercive discourse and an interpretive commitment to the “unavoidable pluralism of modes of understanding.”⁴⁴ Significantly, it is Kiefer who, over the course of the 1980s, manages to promote precisely these discursive and pluralistic practices in his art—in part by adapting the strategies that produce hermeneutic undecidability and reflexivity in Beuys’s *Auschwitz Demonstration*. In other words, by adapting Beuys’s neo-avant-garde strategies to the self-consciously anachronistic practice of “postmodern” history painting, Kiefer continued to keep the Holocaust alive in West Germany, and, moreover, managed to do so in a critical and historically specific way. For this reason, although the “neo-expressionist” return to a seemingly more traditional form of painting and sculpture was termed “regressive” by a number of critics (and Kiefer was considered to be one of the primary exponents of this return), closer examination of Kiefer’s work in the 1980s suggests a different story. Kiefer’s work could promote critical discourse and reflexivity because he was also engaged in a transformation of painting through the production of a highly material and metaphoric painterly surface—a surface upon which a number of different types of signifiers were generally combined. Although Kiefer—much more than Beuys—recognized the fundamentally repeating and recycling nature of modern art and culture, he continued to negotiate this problem by increasing the citational possibilities of his representations: their multiple references to different forms of social and cultural “texts.” After a few false starts, Kiefer could, in other words, shock his audiences, first, by giving neo-avant-garde strategies an outmoded disguise drawn from a supposedly repudiated and discarded past and, second, by expanding the metaphoric possibilities of his formal elements: the lines, painting, photographs, texts, and raw and produced materials that form the various strata of his multilayered representations.

Kiefer’s early attempts to represent the Holocaust occur in a series

of paintings completed between 1981 and 1982. In these works, Kiefer refers to the Holocaust intertextually through the appropriation of names and phrases from Jewish poet Paul Celan's "Death Fugue" [*Todesfuge*] (1952)—a poem about the death camps by a Holocaust survivor.⁴⁵ In Celan's poem, an anonymous Jewish narrator, speaking in the third person, describes the violent day and night experience of living under the domination of Death, "a master from Germany." Death is an anonymous German man, presumably a concentration camp guard, who lives in a house, writes to his beloved in Germany, plays with a snake, and periodically emerges from his domicile in order to mistreat his Jewish prisoners, order them to dig graves, and eventually shoot them. "Margarete" stands for the idealized German woman—the "golden haired," absent partner to whom the man writes. Using a fragmented and repetitive language suggesting the breakdown of rational experience, Celan pairs and contrasts Margarete with Shulamith, Margarete's Jewish counterpart, whose "grave in the air" the Jewish slave workers are forced to dig. At the end of the poem, after the Jews are apparently shot, Celan concludes with a synecdochic verbal image of the two absent women: "your golden Hair Margarete/ your ashen Hair Shulamith." In this image, German and Jew are linked by a mutual longing for their absent beloveds—a mutual longing that perhaps suggests a desire for a different relationship between the two races than the violent one represented in most of Celan's poem.

Central to the poem's overtone of moral advocacy—the hope it holds out that human relations could and should be different—is a set of metaphoric transformations that link the stanzas into a whole. The first metaphor in this series is the "black milk of daybreak,"⁴⁶ with which the poem opens and of which the Jews are said to drink at different moments over the course of the "action." According to the various recitations of the times of the day that repeat over the course of the poem, the Jews' drinking of the black milk is linked to the constant circulation of time between morning, noon, and night. As the poem continues, the image of black milk becomes both ashen smoke and a burned corpse—images that are first suggested by the metaphor "a grave in the air,"⁴⁷ which the Jews must dig. Over the course of the poem, the oscillating image of the cloud-corpse is at moments further transformed into images of living (golden) and dead (ashen) hair, which in turn evoke and refer back to the earlier poetic images. Through this set of metaphoric transformations—milk, smoke, corpse, and hair—Celan's poem links nourishment with death and the lover's address to his absent beloved with the cruel orders of a demonic, technologically-estranged murderer. Particularly through the undecidability of hair—which stands for both the living and the dead—Celan's poem suggests the essential reciprocity of all human relationships: the fact that the world is in a constant state of transformation and that, like

the world itself, hierarchical relations between humans are constantly being refigured.⁴⁸ In other words, in conjunction with the poem's occasional switching of subject position (between the collective Jewish gravediggers and the singular death-dealing "master from Germany") and its constant contrasts of loving and murderous relationships, the metaphoric transformations of "Death Fugue" suggest that the evil one commits upon one's "enemies" can easily rebound on oneself and those that one loves.

In comparison to the complexity and power of Celan's poem, Kiefer's first attempts to represent Celan's "Shulamith," in *Your Ashen Hair, Shulamith* (1981), an oil painting on canvas, are less than entirely successful.⁴⁹ The work depicts a naked woman with a mane of dark hair. "Your ashen hair Shulamith" is written along her back and head, and dark phallic skyscrapers thrust upward in the background. Here, although the canvas plays between image and text (and thus possibly promotes self-consciousness about the nature of representation), Kiefer's decision to directly represent or illustrate the Jewish victim—something that Celan avoids—results in a neo-expressionist stereotype: an image that sexualizes her, and thus identifies her too unproblematically with nature. Shulamith is depicted seated, with her ankles crossed, and her arms held rigidly by her side in a captive position. In addition, in the context of Kiefer's image field, the phallic-humanoid buildings become stand-ins for the absent Germans of Celan's poem—despite their numbers, because of the technological mastery that they evoke, the skyscrapers seem less likely to represent the absent Jewish men. This identification of Shulamith's captors with the modern city and technology does nothing to undermine the unequal gendering of the nature-culture distinction set up by Kiefer's handling of his lush female nude. Furthermore, by representing Shulamith bound and naked, Kiefer also reinforces the stereotype of Jews as defenseless and easy to kill. The representational content of the work does not, as a whole, produce enough undecidability. Moreover, Kiefer's first painted Holocaust representation is not particularly interesting in terms of form. Although working in a radically different medium than Beuys, and thus avoiding the danger of simply repeating the older artist, Kiefer cannot produce the formal and conceptual self-reflexivity and play of different identities characteristic of both Beuys's and Celan's Holocaust representations. As demonstrated by his later work, Kiefer's primary formal strengths lie in his inventive juxtapositions of painted forms with materials such as sand, straw, lead, clay, and ash. Because he cannot yet communicate the memory of the Holocaust through a set of metaphoric formal transformations similar to those created by Celan's poem—metaphoric formal transformations that are hinted at by Beuys through his use of unconventional materials in the

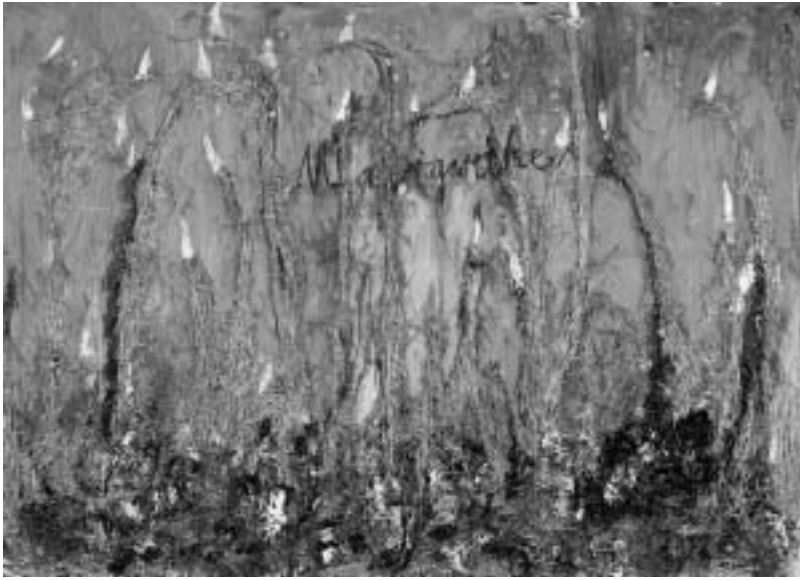


Figure 3. Anselm Kiefer, *Margarete* [*Margarethe*] (1981). Oil and straw on canvas. 110 × 149⁵/₈ inches. Private Collection. Copyright 2003 Anselm Kiefer.

Auschwitz Demonstration—Your Ashen Hair, Shulamith seems to fail its subject.

Margarete (1981), on the other hand, another oil painting on canvas, avoids the various problems that compromise Kiefer's painted *Shulamith* (see Figure 3). In this larger work, Kiefer combines straw and paint to create a flat but ambiguous landscape image with multiple vertical axes that rise up out of a broad horizontal band covering the bottom quarter of the surface. Out of this partially overpainted straw bottom, which suggests a natural ground, straw tendrils—evoking plant stalks, snakes, and squiggles of energy—emerge from below, penetrating and losing themselves in the grayish, gesturally-painted oil surface above. These trace representational elements are further augmented by suggestions of painted flames on the tips of the straw tendrils and the name “Margarete,” written by Kiefer across the center of the canvas. In this work, Kiefer juxtaposes gestural, linguistic, material, and mimetic elements that semantically resonate with his apparent appropriation of an abstract expressionist style (suggested by the straw and the gestural passages of painting on the canvas)—an appropriation that has been noted by a number of American critics and supported by Kiefer himself.⁵⁰ Recalling Pollock's 1952 drip canvas, *Blue Poles*, yet deliberately changing Pollock's much more fluid way of creating activated line on canvas, *Margarete* highlights questions having to do

with the artist's actions and his mental state when confronting the image field. Although Kiefer's activated straw does not directly encourage a psychoanalytic reading in the way that Pollock's flung skeins of paint do, the twisting tendrils nevertheless draw meaning from the history of Pollock's critical reception—a history that often reads Pollock's drip canvases as arenas within which he acted, or tablets upon which the indexical traces of his conscious and unconscious activity were inscribed.⁵¹ This interpretive history is supported by the painting's heavily-worked surface, which reveals not only Kiefer's slashing gestures, but also how natural materials can resist such gestural activity. As is the case with Pollock's drip paintings, the spectator focuses on the artist's application of his material, and thus on the question of the artist's actions. Also evocative of associations having to do with the artist's own existence is the fact that, instead of directly representing the victim as he did in *Your Ashen Hair*, *Shulamith*, in *Margarete*, Kiefer seems to pick the subject position of the German victimizer. This is the case because "Your golden hair, Margarete" is one of the few lines in Celan's poem that appears to be uttered from a German perspective, and by identifying his representation with one of the few subjective images attributed to the victimizer in "Death Fugue," Kiefer seems to connect a Jewish representation of the German perpetrator to his own person.

Through the central material of straw, Kiefer's work produces a sense of spiraling transformation similar to the development of metaphors in "Death Fugue." Recalling the ambiguous character of the hair in Celan's poem, the straw in *Margarete* represents both something that is dead and something that can be used to help produce more life.⁵² In addition, through its juxtaposition with the handwriting and the representational imagery, the straw suggests the production of both language and likeness out of abstract line: the emergence of various types of identifiable and meaningful representation out of "pure" graphic phenomena. Moreover, in conjunction with the painted flames, the straw evokes an intermingling or a play between likeness and reality, picture and world. According to Kiefer's depiction, the actual straw is about to be consumed by the painted fire—something that implies that both reality and different forms of representation interact with and affect one another. In *Margarete*, Kiefer avoids direct representation, attempts to learn about himself from a victim of his parent's generation, blends different cultural horizons, and keeps the Holocaust alive by evoking comparisons between the actions of the German perpetrator in the death camps and his own contemporary act of painting. In addition, by producing a materially and conceptually rich, painted surface—one that suggests passages between different representational systems—Kiefer expands the potential of representational painting in the late twentieth century by showing



Figure 4. Anselm Kiefer, *Shulamith* [*Sulamith*] (1983). Oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, and straw on canvas, with woodcut. 114³/₁₆ × 145¹¹/₁₆ inches. Saatchi Collection, London. Copyright 2003 Anselm Kiefer.

how it can transform itself into an entire range of opposites, including, but not limited to, “abstract surface,” “drawing,” “language,” and “natural object.” And in this way, the formal and existential reflexivity produced by Kiefer’s work interacts with its undecidable citations to suggest both the difficulties and the necessity of remembering and depicting the past. Historical trauma, *Margarete* suggests, cannot be represented unequivocally or even statically. It can—and must—change over time. By working through the dense network of cultural representations that connect the present day with the past, however, those who come after may remember and commemorate monstrous and largely unrepresentable events of historical trauma through representations that acknowledge—and thereby contribute to—a process of continuous dialogue and investigation.

Kiefer develops the self-reflexive, existential strategy characteristic of his treatment of the Holocaust in *Margarete* in his next Holocaust representation, his second version of *Shulamith* (1983) (see Figure 4). This massive canvas, which is based on a 1939 photograph of Wilhelm Kreis’s *Funeral Hall for the Great German Soldiers*, constitutes a spectator through its massiveness, emptiness, and strong recession into depth. The canvas’s huge scale, lack of human figures, and exaggerated single point perspective, in other words, help make the spectator self-conscious—

aware of his or her own particular position vis-à-vis the painting's fictive space. The work's formal structure thus creates a situation in which the spectator is prompted to read his or her selfhood reflexively out of the encompassing world that the artist presents—a movement from the world to meaning-projecting acts to a world-constituting ego that recalls the method of phenomenological analysis.⁵³ “If this is my physical world,” the painting prompts the beholder to ask, “then who am I? And what are my possibilities for action?”

By producing reflexivity in this way, *Shulamith* (1983) gives its varied audiences the possibility to identify with its “point of view” or, by literally and figuratively stepping to one side of the point upon which the work's perspective converges, the possibility to disagree—to reject or disown the vision the canvas presents. By avoiding direct representation and connecting the spectator's lived bodily experience to the ambiguous and claustrophobic hall, Kiefer fashions a representation that once again manages to recall the Holocaust in a way that recognizes the problems of individual and perspectival distortion to which its events are subject. In fact, the work produces irreconcilable interpretations. It juxtaposes, for example, German and Jewish victimhood: the space is a tomb for Shulamith as well as a memorial hall for fallen German soldiers. The painting provokes the spectator to ask, “Exactly who has lost more?”—a question whose shocking obscenity can produce historical labor, attempts to reimagine the collective with which future generations would wish to identify after the events of mass annihilation. Kiefer's representation is thus inclusive (it blends cultural horizons), while still remaining undecidable and productive of debate. As was the case with Celan's poem, Kiefer's painting sets members of different cultures in dialogue. And in conjunction with the work's projection of a perspective through which the artist and the work's various spectators can momentarily share a common point of view—a possible “we” or provisional collective identity—*Shulamith's* address to spectators from different cultures evokes a potential community whose conversation can keep the significance of the Holocaust alive.

Like the second *Shulamith*, Kiefer's dark canvas, *Iron Path* (1986) (see Figure 5), manages to grapple powerfully with the problems of Holocaust representation. One of the many variations during the 1980s of the field and field path imagery that Kiefer developed in the early 1970s, *Iron Path* depicts a bleak landscape upon which a pair of railroad tracks recede sharply into the distance. At the top of the painting, just below the horizon, the two tracks diverge, and directly above them Kiefer marks the sky with an irregularly shaped piece of gold leaf. A third of the way up the painting, one on each track, cast iron replicas of climbing shoes are attached to the oil, acrylic, and emulsion surface—shoes resembling a type once used by repairmen to ascend and descend telephone and electrical poles. Each shoe is adorned with



Figure 5. Anselm Kiefer, *Iron Path* [*Eisen-Steig*] (1986). Oil, acrylic, and emulsion on canvas, with olive branches, iron, and lead. 86% × 149% inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. David Pincus, Wynnewood, PA. Copyright 2003 Anselm Kiefer.

olive branches, and a lead rock hangs from the one on the right. Read in the context of World War II history, *Iron Path* represents the Holocaust as an anonymous journey into death—just as the sound of the railroad had suggested the transports in German radio plays of the 1950s.⁵⁴ In addition, the anonymity of the image—Kiefer’s refusal to depict the suffering of particular individuals—adds a powerful, mournful quality to the work.

Iron Path is also highly reminiscent of one of the central repeating images from Claude Lanzmann’s film *Shoah* (1985): a frontal and radically foreshortened tracking shot of moving landscapes and empty rails leading to various death camps.⁵⁵ Like Lanzmann’s shot, which can put the viewer in the same position as the train engineer driving his victims to their deaths, Kiefer’s large image draws its power directly from its banality or prosaic character, as well as its ability to pull the spectator into its representational space. By concretizing the horror of annihilation in the form of empty tracks and a slight gold glow on the horizon, Kiefer manages to depict an event that could be trivialized or exploited by a more literal presentation. Initially disturbing, however, is the way in which Kiefer chooses to grab his viewers. Recalling the second version of *Shulamith* (see Figure 4), which lacks human figures, has a radical one-point perspective, and possesses a film-like *scale*, Kiefer here employs emptiness, perspective, and a film-like *format* to drag the viewer into the picture, at the same time as he asserts the painting’s flat surface through the build-up of material and objects on the canvas. Through the suggestion of rushing movement toward a layered material surface, the canvas sounds an overtone of violence:

Iron Path invites its spectators to collide head first with a seemingly solid object. Unlike the first *Shulamith*, but like *Margarete* (see Figure 3) and the second *Shulamith* (see Figure 4), *Iron Path* once again presents the spectator with the opportunity to identify with the subject position of the victimizer, namely, the railroad engineer. Through his deployment of an emphatically-drawn perspectival space, Kiefer makes each and every spectator party to his own, highly self-critical existential questioning. “Can I,” the painting causes one to ask, “occupy the same place as those humans who participated directly in the horror of the Jewish annihilation?” In this way, the violence of Kiefer’s formal strategy can be registered as a representation of German self-criticism, and thus the work seems a convincing and apropos response to some of the ethical problems entailed by the representation of historical trauma.

Iron Path also produces undecidable interpretations. Speaking in 1990 on postwar West German historical consciousness, Kiefer notes that, “We see train tracks somewhere, and think about Auschwitz. This will last for a long time.”⁵⁶ Yet, despite Kiefer’s public statement about the mournful meaning of train tracks, the fact that their forms signify loss and horror beyond belief, *Iron Path* also produces disturbingly redemptive readings, interpretations that suggest that something good has emerged as a direct result of mass murder. As Mark Rosenthal notes, Kiefer also encodes alchemical lead-iron-gold symbolism into the work through the lead rock, the iron shoes, and the gold cloud of smoke. These materials recall the alchemist’s project of turning base matter—such as lead and earth—into iron, then silver, and finally gold: a transformation that was understood to prefigure humanity’s ultimate spiritual redemption. Thus, according to Rosenthal, *Iron Path* can also be interpreted as representing a movement to

a higher plane of existence [T]he vertical effort begins in the human, earthly realm and rises compellingly toward a horizontal [T]he railroad tracks emphasize both the idea of moving across the land and a vertical posture . . . [and the] combination of the shoes and track suggest horizontal and vertical movement at once Kiefer at first called this painting *Heavenly Jerusalem*, but his new title accords better with the image in emphasizing the way, rather than the goal In this case, iron is the key to producing a concrete manifestation of the ‘path.’ By literally forging fundamental materials, it is apparently possible to surmount the given, horizontal movement and take an ascendant, vertical path. Following the long, black night depicted earlier in his career, the artist-chemist is showing that gold and a New World may, indeed, be attained.⁵⁷

This disturbing conflict of interpretations between the mournful-critical and the falsely-redemptive readings of *Iron Path* reveals the central interpretive problem that faces the various spectators confronted by the intentional undecidability of Kiefer’s Holocaust representations: How can the beholder avoid reducing their multiple and contradictory significations? What to one viewer can appear as an un-

settling—quasi-victimizing—memorial to the victims of German atrocity may to another appear as the artist's successful achievement of a new world. Although Kiefer consciously works with alchemical imagery, and encourages such interpretations of his work, it is clear that alchemy is not the only symbolic system that underlies *Iron Path*.⁵⁸ The historical record—which is also always present in Kiefer's art—is an equally legitimate system for interpretation. Kiefer's various spectators must thus recognize the need for any interpretation of Kiefer's art to carefully and consistently generate multiple and contradictory readings—something that can be achieved by focusing on the many binary oppositions inherent in his works as well as the multiple social and cultural contexts to which they may refer.

Indeed, upon closer examination, every element in Kiefer's painting seems to be caught up in a rich network of contradictions—antitheses that draw *Iron Path's* spectators into producing additional interpretations. The climbing shoes are not “real world” objects but rather cast iron reproductions—a transformation that robs them of their traditional properties, namely, the movability and lightness central to their function. Thus, they ambiguously imply movement both upward (their climbing function) and downward (because of their weight and clumsiness). In addition, the tracks diverge, and potentially offer the spectator two different possibilities, travel to the right *or* travel to the left—a doubling that resonates with the historical idea of the Nazi selections of death camp victims. Furthermore, in light of Celan's poem, the gold leaf “cloud” on *Iron Path's* horizon seems to put Margarete in the place of Shulamith—a substitution that emphasizes the fundamental reversibility of violence. These various contradictions encoded in the work challenge the spectator—pushing him or her to reflect on the activities of genocide in changing ways by searching for additional points of reference from which to produce new readings.

The idea of the ubiquity of technology suggested by the climbing shoes and train tracks, for example, directs the spectator's attention to the context that makes these instruments possible—a context that is not the natural world, but rather the cold, well-functioning instrumental world of electricity, transportation, photography, and technologies of long distance and mass communication. When looked at from this point of view, traces of technology appear all over *Iron Path's* rough surface. In addition to the cast shoes and the industrial “subject matter,” the painting's reproductive photographic base shows through in its quasi-mechanical one-point perspective, and the work as a whole also asserts its technologically augmented power through its large scale and its ability to bear the weight of the heavy materials that are attached to its surface. By evoking the technological background conditions that made the “Final Solution” possible (the idea that technology produces an enabling “framework,” a context that is both phys-

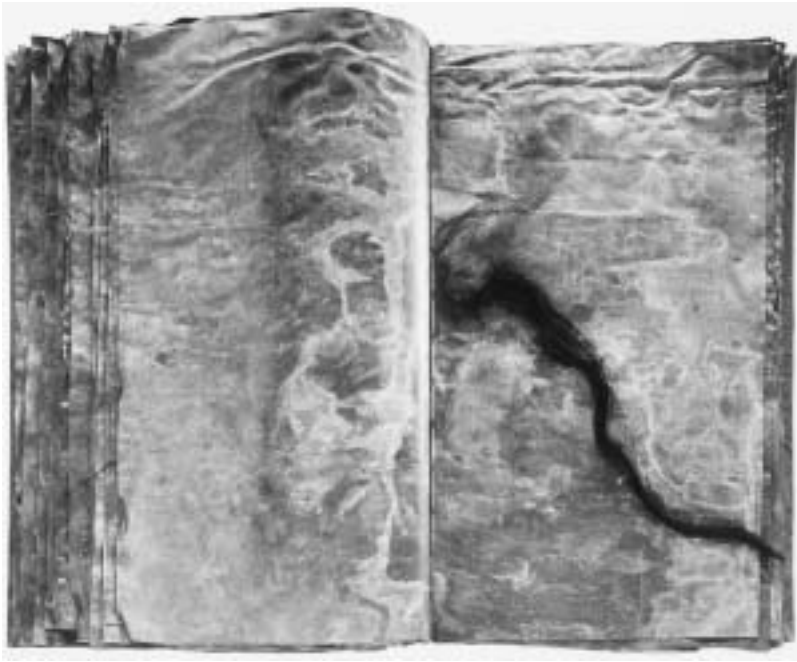


Figure 6. Anselm Kiefer, *Shulamith I* [*Sulamith I*] (1990), pp. 32–33. Book, 64 pages. Soldered lead and woman's hair. $39\frac{3}{4} \times 24\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{16}$ inches. Private Collection. Copyright 2003 Anselm Kiefer.

ical and conceptual), Kiefer's work also suggests that technology is not neutral or value free and that its rapid development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may have changed human behavior for the worse.⁵⁹ Through its support of these multiple frames of reference, *Iron Path* shows the memory of the Holocaust to be alive as a creative and discursive practice.

Given the fact that Kiefer's works emphasize the fundamental polysemia and productivity of works of culture (the idea that the "meaning" of such works lies in the further activity—both cultural and social—that they produce), it is not entirely surprising that Kiefer would turn to the form of the book to create his third and fourth versions of the Jewish victim, *Shulamith I* (see Figure 6) and *II* (1990). As a symbol of the spiritual striving and highest achievements of many human beings—a form in which the abstract concepts of law, religion, philosophy, and science can be embodied—the book is common to a vast range of figures and cultures. It is, as a popular dictionary of iconography suggests, "too widely used to be by itself a useful aid to identification."⁶⁰ Nearly omnipresent for long periods of Western history yet radically indeterminate, the book form thus embodies many noble aspects of human striving and, moreover, stands as a sign of the

need that most people have to go beyond themselves, to communicate, to form larger communities, and to connect themselves to one another across space and time. It was in certain ways to radically contradict this fundamentally “spiritual” character of the book that Kiefer appears to have created these two “unique,” yet “identical” works.

Kiefer produced the two *Shulamith* books by gluing black hair between soldered pages of lead—pages he had previously allowed to oxidize in large sheets before he cut them into book form. Here, by “preserving” black hair between poisonous metal plates (hair that suggests that of the Holocaust victims in Celan’s poem), Kiefer mimics past German crimes and the Nazis’ habit of keeping material and scientific records of their horrifying “accomplishments.” In this way, Kiefer seems to invert the noble connotations of the book form—something that is emphasized by the material meanings of the two books’ elements (their contrasts of poisonous lead with organic hair) as well as the fact that Kiefer here appears to coldly and instrumentally use the body of the female, “racial” other as an object in his works. In addition, by making two works that are constructed according to the same semi-automatic process, Kiefer appears to “mass produce” the victim’s representation. In other words, by inexplicably doubling *Shulamith*, Kiefer perhaps suggests her replaceable nature and lack of individual importance.

At the same time, however, because of the complex contradictions between their literal, figurative, and abstract aspects, the *Shulamith* books powerfully embody the contradictions of Holocaust representation. A mass of delicate lines and washes, they seem expressively painted—and thus highly subjective. Yet, upon inspection, the “painting” and the “washes” on the surfaces of the books reveal themselves merely to be traces of the effects of time on the rolled lead—representative of objective historical decay. As books that cannot be read, the *Shulamith* series appropriately suggests the self-destruction of reality through their lack of text as well as their violent bifurcation of reality into subject and object, victim and victimizer. In addition, by returning to Celan’s central metaphor of “ashen hair” while at the same time avoiding almost all signs of language,⁶¹ Kiefer creatively acknowledges his enormous debt to the past. This past, as the *Shulamith* series of 1990 suggests, is both a highly metaphoric cultural tradition which is exemplified by Celan’s poetry and which forms the inspiration for Kiefer’s emphatically material surfaces, and a set of historical events, which, as a child of the victimizers, Kiefer feels compelled to complexly remember and represent. The past, as Kiefer’s works imply, gives the present inspiration and charges it with responsibility.

The paradox of Holocaust representation that emerged over the course of West German history revealed itself in the conflict between the moral imperative to remember and the impossibility of represent-

ing a past that by its singularity, incomprehensibility, and horror evaded clear representation. Developing Beuys's example, but without Beuys's personal experience and in very different media, Kiefer's best Holocaust representations managed to confront this paradox directly. They are memorial images that initiated their spectators into the issues of Holocaust memory and representation, connecting these problems to the lived experience of the postwar German artist as well as to that of the work's various audiences and, very importantly, to the subject positions of both the German victimizer and the Jewish victim. In relation to Beuys's example in the 1960s and 1970s, Kiefer's representations were significant because they marked a moment of translation of neo-avant-garde strategies into a seemingly anachronistic genre that the neo-avant-garde had largely avoided: namely, a form of large scale representational "history painting"—one that, in the 1980s, was often characterized as "postmodern" for its appropriative and ambiguous nature. Although the postmodern, neo-expressionist representations of German history made by Kiefer and a number of other German artists in the 1980s were called "cynical" and even "Nazi kitsch,"⁶² and despite the fact that many forms of postmodernism fit mythologizing and conservative positions,⁶³ Kiefer's best Holocaust representations demonstrated that this did not have to be the case. By evoking hermeneutic undecidability and reflexivity in conjunction with a highly material and metaphoric painterly surface (one that implied the constant reproduction and transformation of the world and, thus, the world's status *as* representation), history painting, Kiefer's work suggested, could be continued in the 1980s in a way that was critical, historically specific, and convincing. Kiefer's best Holocaust representations make memory an existential and creative act—a process that circles between the self, others, the world, cultural representations, and the original events these representations still indicate. In this way, Kiefer's art suggests that the memory of the Holocaust will remain—even after the original participants are no longer able to bear witness.

Notes

- 1 Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the University of Chicago, the University of Michigan, Harvard University, the College Art Association Annual Conference, the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, and the Denver Art Museum. I am indebted to my various commentators and interlocutors at these talks for their help in thinking through the issues examined here; they include Norman Bryson, Edward Dimendberg, Julia Hell, David J. Levin, Geoff Manaugh, W.J.T. Mitchell, Peter Nisbet, and Scott Spector. In addition, I would also like to thank Christine Mehring for her careful reading of this essay in manuscript form, and Lisa Bessette for her rigorous copyediting. Finally, I am grateful to Lisa Saltzman, whose book-length examination of Anselm Kiefer's art in relation to the Holocaust, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), inspired this investigation.

- 2 For strong criticisms of Kiefer's ability to represent history see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "A Note on Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*" in *October* (Spring 1989): 89–109 and Isabelle Graw's interview with Buchloh, "View: Gerhard Richter: '18 Oktober 1977'" in *Artscribe International* 77 (September/October 1989): 7–9. For accounts of the debates over the representation of German history both in German and American politics, see: Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989); Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate*, ed. and trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); Geoffrey Hartman, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); and *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, trans. James Knowlton and Truett Cates (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993).
- 3 See Theodor W. Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" (1959) in Hartman, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, 114–129. See also Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* (New York: Grove Press, 1975).
- 4 Today, thanks in part to the heterogeneous forms and materials of so much twentieth century art, the term representation can be used to refer to a number of different types of signifying relation. "Representation" can consist of a mimetic connection between a visual likeness produced in a nonlinguistic medium—for example, a realistic painting or sculpture—and the real world object that this copy signifies. Charles S. Peirce called this connection an iconic relation, emphasizing that such a signifying relation makes no assertion about the actual existence of that which it represents: "The icon has no dynamical connection with the object it represents; it simply happens that its qualities resemble those of the object, and excite analogous sensations in the mind for which it is a likeness" (Charles S. Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in Justus Buchler, ed., *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* [New York: Dover, 1955], 114). In addition, "representation" can also be used to name the arbitrary or symbolic connections between linguistic signs—either words or phrases—and their denotative and connotative meanings: connections that are far more conventional and abstract than those of realistic painterly or sculptural representations, although they are just as disconnected from the actual object. Peirce called the symbol a "conventional sign, or one depending on habit" (Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic," 113). "The symbol," he noted, "is connected with its object by virtue of the idea of the symbol-using mind, without which no such connection would exist" (Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic," 114). Furthermore, as exemplified by photography, film, and video, "representation" also occurs as an indexical relationship between a cultural copy and its real world referent, one in which the likeness is connected to its original as an effect is connected to a cause. "An index," Peirce wrote, "is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object" (Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic," 102). In reference to photography, Roland Barthes called this indexical character of certain representations, their "that-has-been," which is ultimately a corporeal relationship between signifier and signified, one, moreover, that was always mediated by an awareness of death. "The photograph," he wrote, "is literally an emanation of the referent. From the real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed" (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, [New York: Hill and Wang, 1981], 80). Through its indexical characteristics, in other words, a representation potentially reminds the beholder of something that existed and that has subsequently ceased to be. I here emphasize the most famous of Peirce's three triadic definitions of the sign to remind the reader at the outset of the multiple forms of signification through which meaning is communicated by representations. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, most—if not all—representations communicate

in multiple and hybrid ways. Furthermore, in the wake of the readymade strategies of the Dada and surrealist artists, “representation” can also be used to indicate the situation that occurs when a fragment of reality—either a mass produced object or one that is produced by nature—is used to evoke sets of meaning that fall outside the object’s everyday significance and that, consequently, have been given to it by a social, historical, scientific, aesthetic, or literary tradition. As will be shown, this “symbolic” or “allegorical” use of the readymade strategy, which often communicates its meaning through all three types of signifying relation, became one of the central strategies that West German artists used to confront the Holocaust. Finally, in addition to being employed in the above senses, “representation” will also be used here to name the construction of an embodied perspective or “point of view”—a visual form that promotes both self-reflexivity and openness to the world.

- 5 Gene Ray has made a convincing case for the centrality of the Holocaust to the art of Joseph Beuys. See Gene Ray, *The Use and Abuse of the Sublime: Joseph Beuys and Art After Auschwitz* (Ph.D. dissertation) (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami, 1997); see also Gene Ray, ed., *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York: D.A.P., 2001), in particular, pp. 55–74.
- 6 Primo Levi, “The Memory of Offense,” in Hartman, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, 130.
- 7 Levi, “Memory,” 130–131.
- 8 Adorno, “Past,” 118.
- 9 Adorno, “Past,” 121.
- 10 Adorno, “Past,” 118.
- 11 After making his *Abitur* in 1965, Kiefer began to study Law and French at Freiburg University. After three semesters, he quit and began, in 1966, to study art at the Freiburg Art Academy under the conceptual painter Peter Dreher. Kiefer remained at the Freiburg Academy until 1969, when he graduated with his “Occupations” work. In 1969, Kiefer moved to Karlsruhe, where he began to study at the Karlsruhe Art Academy under the figurative painter Horst Antes; he then switched to Joseph Beuys’s class at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in 1970. In 1971, Kiefer moved to Hornbach, but continued to visit Joseph Beuys at the Düsseldorf Academy for critiques and discussions. Kiefer stopped these visits in late 1972 or early 1973. See Anselm Kiefer, “Selbstbiographie” in *Anselm Kiefer: Bilder und Bücher* (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1978), 103. A translation of Kiefer’s autobiography appears in Mark Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer* (Chicago and Philadelphia: The Art Institute of Chicago and The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987), 11, 12–14. For other accounts of Kiefer’s biography, see Hecht and Krüger, “Venedig 1980: Aktuelle Kunst made in Germany,” *Art: Das Kunstmagazin* 6 (June 1980): 48–52, and Kynaston McShine, ed., *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 350.
- 12 For an account of Kiefer’s dealer history, see Paul Taylor, “Painter of the Apocalypse,” *The New York Times Magazine* (October 16, 1988): 48–51. Kiefer’s fame as an artist grew considerably in 1980, when he was one of the two featured artists at the German Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, and was strongly criticized by a number of German critics. For the debate that Kiefer inspired at that time, see Werner Spies, “Überdosis an Teutschem: Die Kunstbiennale von Venedig eröffnet,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 126 (June 2, 1980): 19; Peter Iden, “Die Lieben der Kommissare: Zur Eröffnung der diesjährigen Kunst-Biennale von Venedig,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* 128 (June 4, 1980): 7; Petra Kippstoff, “Die Lust an der Angst—der deutsche Holzweg,” *Die Zeit* 24 (June 6, 1980): 42; Klaus Wagenbach, “‘Neue Wilde,’ teutonisch, faschistisch?,” *Freibeuter* 5 (1980): 138–141; Bazon Brock, “Avantgarde and Mythos,” *Kunstforum International* 40 (April 1980): 86–103; and Rudi Fuchs, “Die Kritik reicht Blut und greift an,” *Der Spiegel* 26 (June 23, 1980): 157–158.
- 13 Perhaps the most important source for this photograph in West Germany was “The Stroop Report,” first published in 1960 and reprinted numerous times in the 1970s. See Juergen Stroop, *Es gibt keinen jüdischen Wohnbezirk in Warschau mehr* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1960). The image also appeared in art catalogues. See, for example, *Faschismus: Renzo Vespi gnani* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1976).
- 14 “Less individualized, less marked by the particularities of identity. . . children invite multiple projections and identifications. Their photographic images elicit an affiliative and

- identificatory as well as a protective spectatorial look marked by these investments” (Marianne Hirsch, “Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy,” in Mieke Bal, *et al.*, eds. *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* [Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999], 13). See also, Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (2001): 5–37.
- 15 Hirsch, “Projected Memory,” 8–10.
 - 16 The idea of using photography to produce psychic distance, for example, was already an important issue in German culture in the early 1930s. It is central, for example, to Ernst Jünger’s thinking on the medium. For Jünger, the distancing effects of photography enable humans to both withstand and commit an ever-increasing amount of violence. See Ernst Jünger, “War and Photography” (1930), trans. Anthony Nassar, in *New German Critique* 59 (Spring/Summer 1993): 24–26; Ernst Jünger, “On Danger” (1931), trans. Donald Reneauin, in *New German Critique* 59 (Spring/Summer 1993): 27–32; and Ernst Jünger, “Photography and the ‘Second Consciousness’” (1934), trans. Joel Agee, in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings* (New York: Aperture, 1989), 207–208.
 - 17 Detailed comparisons of photographic images with memory images appear in Germany already in the 1920s. See Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography” (1927) in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 47–63. Kracauer radically distinguishes photographic and memory images. For him, memory images preserve the truth of a person’s history: “Truth can be found only by a liberated consciousness which assesses the demonic nature of the drives. The traits that consciousness recollects stand in a relationship to what has been perceived as true, the latter being either manifest in these traits or excluded by them. The image in which these traits appear is distinguished from all other memory images, for unlike the latter it preserves not a multitude of opaque recollections but elements that touch upon what has been recognized as true. All memory images are bound to be reduced to this type of image, which may rightly be called the last image, since it alone preserves the unforgettable. The last image of a person is that person’s actual history” (Kracauer, “Photography,” 51). Photographic images, on the other hand, destroy history: “The photograph is the sediment which has settled from the monogram, and from year to year its semiotic value decreases. The truth content of the original is left behind in its history; the photograph captures only residuum that history has discharged” (Kracauer, “Photography,” 55). Walter Benjamin, however, argues that this dichotomy between (false) photography and (true) memory cannot be maintained as a radical opposition. See Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography” (1931), in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven: Leete’s Island, 1980), 199–216. Indeed, according to Benjamin, the separation of a photograph from its “original” ontological context is the precondition for its production of historical truth through captioning. “The camera will become smaller and smaller, more and more prepared to grasp fleeting, secret images whose shock will bring the mechanism of association in the viewer to a complete halt. At this point captions must begin to function, captions that understand the photograph, which turn all the relations of life into literature, and without which all photographic construction must remain bound in coincidences” (Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” 215). For Benjamin, photography can thus be used to produce both historical truths and historical falsehoods.
 - 18 On the ontological character of the photographic image, see Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. See also André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 9–16. Rosalind Krauss explores the shifting ontological character of the photographic image—its continual play or movement between signification and reality—through the concept of the “index”; see Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 203.
 - 19 The idea that the same photograph could be used to represent entirely different states of affairs was one of the foundational assumptions behind much photographic theory and practice in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century. See, for example, the grass retouching of photographs in Walther Stein, hrsg., *Um Vaterland und Freiheit: Wirklichkeitsaufnahmen aus dem grossen Kriege nebst einer Einführung* (Siegen und Leipzig: Her-

- mann Montanus Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1915), a book that purports to be “objective” war reportage. See also Ernst Jünger, “Einleitung” in Edmund Schultz, hrsg., *Die veränderte Welt. Eine Bilderfibel unserer Zeit* (Breslau: Wilh. Gotl. Korn Verlag, 1933). The propagandistic use of photographs characteristic of Nazi and Communist visual culture also reflects this cynical understanding of the radical polyvalence of photographic images.
- 20 The work is more commonly dated 1956–1964—a dating that is derived from the years of origin of its constituent parts. I date it 1968 here, because 1968 was the year in which the *Auschwitz Demonstration* was first assembled as a whole. See Mario Kramer, “Joseph Beuys: ‘Auschwitz Demonstration’ 1956–1964,” in Eckhart Gillen, hrsg., *Deutschlandbilder: Kunst aus einem geteilten Land* (Köln: DuMont, 1997), 293.
- 21 On the concept of hermeneutic undecidability, see Matthew Biro, *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75–134. The extremely strong positions that critics often take—either for or against Kiefer’s art—reflect this characteristic of Kiefer’s works. In literary theory, the distinction drawn between ambiguity and undecidability is often made in terms of the distinction between ambiguity and indeterminacy. See Timothy Bahti, “Ambiguity and Indeterminacy: The Juncture,” *Comparative Literature* 38.3 (Summer 1986): 209–223. Andreas Huyssen is also extremely responsive to the hermeneutic undecidability of Kiefer’s art. See Andreas Huyssen, “Anselm Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth,” *October* 48 (Spring 1989): 25–45; in particular pp. 37–39.
- 22 On the concept of the neo-avant-garde, see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), in particular pp. 55–82. See also Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde,” *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 41–52, and Donald Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), in particular pp. 1–27.
- 23 Beuys mentions being exposed to Dada art through their magazines around 1940 or 1941, although he claims that Dada art didn’t affect him very much. See Georg Jappe, “Interview with Beuys About Key Experiences” (September 27, 1976), trans. Peter Nisbet, in Ray, ed., *Joseph Beuys*, 190–191. As Benjamin H. D. Buchloh argues, however, the initial strategic models that Beuys drew upon were not taken from examples originating in the prewar context. Rather, because of the vast appetite of West German collectors and museums for contemporary art from the United States and France after the war, the initial models of avant-garde art-making came to Beuys from foreign neo-avant-garde movements—specifically American abstract expressionism and French *Nouveaux Réalisme*. (According to Buchloh, Jackson Pollock, Yves Klein, and Arman are the main paradigms for Beuys.) See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Reconsidering Joseph Beuys: Once Again,” in Ray, ed., *Joseph Beuys*, 75–89. At the same time, as Beuys’s art developed in the 1960s and 1970s, it constructed a dialogue, not only with the prewar “historical” avant-garde, but also with other neo-avant-garde movements such as American pop and minimalism. Beuys’s relationship to American minimalism is particularly interesting. American minimalist art actually began to be shown in West Germany around 1967. Carl Andre’s works, for example, were first shown in Düsseldorf at the Konrad Fischer Gallery between October 21 and November 28, 1967; in addition, *Minimal Art*, an important traveling exhibition that included the works of Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Robert Morris, among others, opened at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in The Hague on March 23, 1968, at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf on January 17, 1969, and at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin on March 23, 1969. However, sculptures by Beuys made in the late 1950s (for example, *Rubberized Box* [1957]) anticipate Beuys’s “minimalist” works of the late 1960s and 1970s—works that were thought to respond to the American mode of sculptural production. See, for example, Georg Jappe, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (February 11, 1969), quoted in Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 162. Thus, although the scale of his more abstract works from the late 1960s and 1970s (such as *Ford III* [1969]), as well as his selection of certain types of industrial materials, appears to have been influenced by the American minimalists, Beuys’s “minimalism” is not simply an adaptation of a foreign style. Instead, it is a creative refiguration—one, moreover, that is done with an awareness that American minimalism itself had historical antecedents. Thus, by the late 1960s, Beuys was engaged in a simultaneous dialogue with an international group of contemporary and past

- artists. (Beuys, for example, struck up a friendship with Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer in 1964. See Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, and Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys: Leben und Werk* (Köln: DuMont, 1981), 13, 125, 139–146.) One could therefore say that, by the time Beuys created the *Auschwitz Demonstration*, he was simultaneously engaged with both avant-garde and neo-avant-garde paradigms.
- 24 For press documentation proving that Beuys's art could continue to provoke outrage and debate well into the 1980s, see Johannes Am Ende, et al., *Joseph Beuys und die Fettecke: Eine Dokumentation zur Zerstörung der Fettecke in der Kunstakademie Düsseldorf* (Heidelberg: Edition Staeck, 1987).
 - 25 The vitrine—which consists of objects and artworks that Beuys previously exhibited separately or used as props in his Fluxus-inspired performances during the early and mid-1960s—was first assembled in its current form in the summer of 1968 for the exhibition “Collection 1968 Karl Ströher” in the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich. It was re-assembled in its final form and current location in Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt in April, 1970. See Kramer, “Joseph Beuys: ‘Auschwitz Demonstration’ 1956–1964,” 296, 293.
 - 26 Following the order of my inventory, the titles and dates of the objects are as follows: *Fish* (1956), *Cross* (1957), *First Rat* (1957), *Lightning* (1964), *Sick Girl with Ambulance in Background* (1957), *Auschwitz* (1957), + – *Sausage* (1964), *Sun Lamp Goggles* (1964), *Akku [Battery] (Sausage)* (1963), *Bottle with Fat (Solid)* (1962), *Bottle with Fat (Liquid)* (1962), *Iodine (Bottle)* (1962), *Non-Identification Tag (Aluminum)* (1960), and *Heat Sculpture* (1964). See Eva Beuys, et al., *Joseph Beuys: Block Beuys* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1997), 64. For the fullest discussion of the titles and identities of all the objects in Beuys's *Auschwitz Demonstration*, as well as their previous usage in his actions, see Kramer, “Joseph Beuys: ‘Auschwitz Demonstration’ 1956–1964,” 293–303. According to the editors of *Joseph Beuys: Block Beuys*, the *Sun Lamp Goggles* also appeared in Beuys's Aachen action.
 - 27 On the titles of the two bottles with fat, see note 26 above.
 - 28 On the relationship of Nazism to rationalization and technology, see Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). On the relationship of genocide to rationalization and technology, see Detlev J. K. Peukert, “The Genesis of the ‘Final Solution’ from the Spirit of Science,” in Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan, eds., *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1993), 234–252.
 - 29 As Walter Laqueur notes, “‘*Holokaustein*’ means to bring a (wholly) burnt offering; it was not the intention of the Nazis to make a sacrifice of this kind, and the position of the Jews was not that of a ritual victim.” Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's ‘Final Solution’* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), 7n. See also Geoff Eley, “Holocaust History,” *London Review of Books* (March 3–17, 1982): 6–9.
 - 30 Beuys introduced a new version of his life story that was more firmly grounded in historical fact around 1970, the year that the *Auschwitz Demonstration* was installed in Darmstadt. In an effort to tie his art more directly to German politics, and in particular to the events of World War II, Beuys began to connect his use of felt and fat—anti-art materials that he began to employ in the early-1960s and that reflected his interest in depicting warmth in plastic terms—to his wartime experiences, specifically, to a wintertime plane crash in which he almost died during the war. According to Beuys, after his plane was shot down over the Eastern Front, his unconscious body was discovered in the snow by Crimean Tartars, who covered his wounds in fat, wrapped his body in felt to preserve its warmth, and took him down from his mountain-top crash site on a sled. The materials that he used in his art were thus meant to signify this experience, their autobiographical meaning interacting with their difficult, anti-art forms in such a way as to get his audiences to reflect upon the destruction that Germany had both experienced and wrought, and the ways in which it might begin to better reformulate and rebuild itself. For an excellent discussion of the history of the development of this story as well as an extremely evenhanded account of the historical events upon which it was based, see Peter Nisbet, “Crash Course” in Ray, ed., *Joseph Beuys*, 5–17.
 - 31 On the concept of the historical avant-garde as politically engaged and able to break down the distinction between art and real life, see Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, in particular pp. 55–94.

- 32 See Adriani, *et al.*, *Joseph Beuys*, 125–133. See also Uwe M. Schneede, *Joseph Beuys, Die Aktionen: Kommentiertes Werkverzeichnis mit fotografischen Dokumentationen* (Ostfildern-Ruit bei Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje, 1994), 42–67.
- 33 See Adriani, *et al.*, *Joseph Beuys*, 169–173. See also Schneede, *Joseph Beuys: Die Aktionen*, 146–165, and Kramer, “Joseph Beuys: ‘Auschwitz Demonstration’ 1956–1964,” 299.
- 34 In 1979, while discussing his *Auschwitz Demonstration* and related works with Caroline Tisdall, Beuys stated, “I do not feel that these works were made to represent catastrophe, although the experience of catastrophe has certainly contributed to my awareness. But my interest was not in illustrating it The human condition is Auschwitz, and the principle of Auschwitz finds its perpetuation in our understanding of science and political systems, in the delegation of responsibility to groups of specialists and the silence of intellectuals and artists. I have found myself in permanent struggle with this condition and its roots. I find for instance that we are now experiencing Auschwitz in its contemporary character. This time bodies are outwardly preserved (cosmetic mummification) rather than exterminated, but other things are being eliminated. Ability and creativity are burnt out: a form of spiritual execution, the creation of a climate of fear perhaps even more dangerous because it is so refined.” See Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, 21–23. Although an overstatement for which Beuys has rightly been criticized, this declaration confirms the general thrust of this particular interpretative trajectory suggested by the *Auschwitz Demonstration* vitrine. Unable to transform the past or redeem his own involvement in it, Beuys used his art to produce critical awareness about the aspects of his contemporary society that he believed could potentially lead to similar catastrophes. Although his statement risks relativizing the Holocaust, it suggests the moral imperative behind his ambiguous evocation of this monstrous moment in German history.
- 35 On Beuys’s aesthetic-political activities and his concept of “direct democracy,” see Joseph Beuys, *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Writings by and Interviews with Joseph Beuys* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990).
- 36 Ströher bought 142 works, Beuys’s entire exhibition at the Städtisches Museum, Mönchengladbach in September and October of 1967. See Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, trans. David Britt (New York: Abbeville, 1991), 127. On the Mönchengladbach exhibition, see Adriani, *et al.*, *Joseph Beuys*, 182–186.
- 37 On Beuys’s introduction of biographical elements drawn from his experience of World War II into the horizon of interpretive concepts that surrounded his work, see Nisbet, “Crash Course.” As Nisbet notes, these concepts were introduced during the 1970s, and when they grew too dominant in the 1980s, Beuys began to distance himself from his biographical experiences as the primary interpretive framework in which to understand his work.
- 38 Beuys’s popularity grew with the rise of the German student movements in the late 1960s, and his committed environmentalism and his pedagogic reform efforts identify him as a left wing critic of the state until his death in 1986. Yet Beuys has been accused of fascism throughout his career. For criticisms of Beuys, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Twilight of the Idol,” in *Artforum* 18.5 (January 1980): 35–43, and Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, “Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim,” *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 3–20.
- 39 See, for example, Saul Friedlander, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
- 40 Beuys was a radio operator and bomber pilot on the Eastern Front, and thus he is not directly connected to the events of genocide. At the same time, however, since he was alive at the time that these events occurred—and because he struggled unwittingly for their continuation—Beuys does have a certain existential connection to the events that Kiefer does not possess. On Beuys’s experience during the Third Reich, first as a Hitler Youth and then as a soldier, see Adriani, *et al.*, *Joseph Beuys*, 19–26.
- 41 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh was the most articulate and vehement in this regard, see Buchloh, “Twilight of the Idol” (1980), 35–43.
- 42 “Neo-Expressionism” was a term used by both German and American critics to describe a very loosely-associated international art movement that originated in Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s and that became dominant in the 1980s. A reaction against what was perceived to be the stark and sterile character of minimalism and conceptual art, the

- neo-expressionist artists returned to the figure and to representation in general, making art in an expressive and gestural manner that was perceived as intentionally citing past artistic movements such as German expressionism, French fauvism, and American abstract expressionism. The principle artists associated with neo-expressionism included Georg Baselitz, A. R. Penk, and Anselm Kiefer in Germany, the Italians Sandro Chia and Francesco Clemente, and Julian Schnabel in the United States. Other German neo-expressionists included K. H. Hödicke, Markus Lüpertz, Bernd Koberling, Rainer Fetting, Helmut Middendorf, and Salomé (Wolfgang Cilarz) among others. See Klaus Honnef, *Contemporary Art* (Benedikt Taschen, 1988), Kynaston McShine, ed., *Berlinart 1961–1987* (Munich: Prestel, 1987), and Thomas Krens, et al., eds., *Refigured Painting: The German Image 1960–1988* (Munich: Prestel, 1989). On Kiefer's postmodernism see Donald B. Kuspit, "Archaeologism: Postmodernism as Excavation," *Dialogue* (January/February 1988), reprinted in Kuspit, *The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 531–537; see also John C. Gilmour, *Fire on the Earth: Anselm Kiefer and the Postmodern World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
- 43 Jürgen Habermas, "A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing" (*Die Zeit*, July 11, 1986), translated and reprinted in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler*, 42.
- 44 Habermas, "A Kind of Settlement of Damages," 43.
- 45 Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 1, Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert, eds., (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 41–42.
- 46 *Schwarze Milch der Frühe* (line 1)
- 47 *ein Grab in den Lüften* (line 4)
- 48 Benjamin remarks on the undecidability of hair in the baroque *Trauerspiel* and on the centrality of this undecidability to one of the fundamental paradoxes of allegory, namely, its focus on the destruction of the body as a means of redemption. See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso Books, 1977), 215–220.
- 49 Shulamith is an intertextual reference to the "Song of Songs." Margarete, her female counterpart in "Death Fugue," is also intended to refer intertextually to "Gretchen" in Goethe's *Faust*. In the context of Kiefer's art in the early 1990s, Shulamith becomes intertextually related to another figure, "Lilith," a female demon discussed in the Old Testament and in Jewish myth. On Lilith, see Isa. 34:14 and Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1978), 356–361.
- 50 On the connections between Kiefer and Pollock, see Peter Schjeldahl, "Anselm Kiefer," in *Art of Our Time: The Saatchi Collection*, vol. 3 (London: Lund Humphries, 1984), 15; Nancy Grimes, "Anselm Kiefer," *Artnews* 84 (1985), 131–132; Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer*, 104; Jed Perl, "A Dissent on Kiefer," *The New Criterion* (December 1988): 14–20; and Corrinne Robbins, "Your Golden Hair, Margarete: About Anselm Kiefer's Germanness," *Arts Magazine* 63.5 (January 1989), 73–77. For Kiefer's own comments on Pollock see Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer*, 155.
- 51 For an existential reading of Pollock, see Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters" (1952), in David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, eds., *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Rosenberg, "The Concept of Action in Painting" (1968) in Harold Rosenberg, *Artworks and Packages* (1969; reprint, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 214–216. For psychoanalytic readings of Pollock's drawings and paintings, see C. L. Wysupth, *Jackson Pollock: Psychoanalytic Drawings* (New York: Horizon Press, 1970) and especially, Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), in particular, pp. 121–202 and 275–327.
- 52 Kiefer sees straw as a sort of "manure"—an energy source that keeps things warm in the winter. See Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer*, 95.
- 53 On the significance of phenomenology for Kiefer's art, see Biro, *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*. In the case of *Shulamith* (1983), "the world" is suggested by the depicted hall with a fire burning in the back, "meaning-projecting acts" are suggested by the handwritten title in the top left corner, and "the world-constituting ego" is suggested by the point in front of the canvas at approximately the spectator's eye level where its fictive perspective seems to converge.

- 54 For example, Günther Eich's *Träume*. See Günther Eich, *15 Hörspiele* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 53–88.
- 55 Lanzmann's shot often also puts the front part of the train into the image. See Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (1985). *Shoah* had its premier in West Germany in February 1986 at the *Berliner Festspiele*, and it was first shown on West German television (ARD 3) in the spring of 1986. See <http://www.txt.de/trotzdem/titel/shoah.html> (12/12/2002).
- 56 "Wir sehen irgendwo Bahngleise und denken an Auschwitz. Das wird auf lange Sicht so bleiben." Anselm Kiefer quoted in Christian Kämmerling and Peter Pursche, "'Nachts Fahre Ich mit dem Fahrrad von Bild zu Bild': Interview mit Anselm Kiefer," *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* 46 (November 16, 1990): 28–30.
- 57 Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer*, 143.
- 58 According to Kiefer, alchemy is "the acceleration of time, as in the lead-silver-gold cycle, which only needs time in order to transform lead into gold. Previously, the alchemist accelerated this process with magical means. That was called magic. As an artist, I do nothing differently. I simply accelerate the transformation that is already inherent in things." [Das war ja die Ideologie der Alchemie: die Beschleunigung der Zeit, wie in dem Blei-Silber-Gold-Zyklus, der nur Zeit braucht, um Blei in Gold zu verwandeln. Der Alchemist beschleunigte diesen Prozess damals mit Zaubermitteln. Das wurde als Magie bezeichnet. Ich als Künstler mache nichts anderes. Ich beschleunige bloss die Verwandlung, die schon in den Dingen angelegt ist.] Kämmerling and Pursche, "'Nachts Fahre Ich mit dem Fahrrad von Bild zu Bild,'" 30.
- 59 On the concept of technology as a framework or mode of seeing, knowing, and acting in the world, see Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). On the relationship of Kiefer's art to Heidegger's late thinking on technology, see Biro, *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, 193–252.
- 60 James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 50.
- 61 Writing only appears on the books' covers—and there is only one word: "Shulamith"
- 62 For devastating criticisms of Kiefer's art in English, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," *October* 16 (Spring 1981): 39–68, and Craig Owens, "Honor, Power, and the Love of Women," in Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 147. (Originally published in *Art in America* [January 1983].) The reference to Nazi kitsch is from Perl, "A Dissent on Kiefer," 18.
- 63 On the idea of multiple postmodernisms and on the relationship of postmodernism to conservatism, see *New German Critique* 33 (Fall 1984), particularly the essays by Andreas Huyssen, Fredric Jameson, Hal Foster, Jürgen Habermas, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Gérard Raulet. See also Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 3–22, 83–105.