

#M0054428 NC

T2060

NC 0021267 9



The National College of Art and Design

Fine Art / Painting Department

**"Modernity, the Forest and Cultural Healing,  
In the Art of Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer"**

**by Niall Flaherty**

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design  
and Complementary Studies, in Candidacy for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts (in Fine Art) 1998





## **LIST OF CONTENTS**

<b>List of Illustrations</b>	<b>page 2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>page 3</b>
<b>Chapter One: Beuys and Kiefer's response to Modernism</b>	<b>page 7</b>
<b>Chapter One Illustrations</b>	<b>page 18</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Germany's journey through the Forest</b>	<b>page 23</b>
<b>Chapter Two Illustrations</b>	<b>page 33</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Confrontation, Reconciliation and Cultural Healing</b>	<b>page 41</b>
<b>Chapter Three Illustrations</b>	<b>page 51</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>page 56</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>page 60</b>



## List of Illustrations

Figure One:	<i>Fat Chair</i> , 1963.
Figure Two	<i>Felt Suit</i> , 1980.
Figure Three	detail from <i>Operation Sealion</i> , 1975.
Figure Four	<i>No Title (Bathtub)</i> , 1960.
Figure Five and Six	details from <i>Operation Sealion</i> , 1975.
Figure Seven	<i>Operation Sealion</i> , 1975.
Figure Eight	<i>Overcome Party Dictatorship Now!</i> , 1971.
Figure Nine, Ten and Eleven	<i>7000 Oaks</i> , 1984-86.
Figure Twelve	<i>Varus</i> , 1976.
Figure Thirteen	<i>The Chasseur Enters the Forest</i> , 1813.
Figure Fourteen	<i>Woodcuts from the Hermannslacht</i> , 1979.
Figure Fifteen and Sixteen	<i>Ways of Worldly Wisdom</i> , 1976-1980.
Figure Seventeen and Eighteen	<i>Coyote</i> , 1974.
Figure Nineteen	<i>Untitled</i> , 1983.
Figure Twenty	Consecrated Hall.
Figure TwentyOne	Sulamith, 1983.



## INTRODUCTION

Born in 1921, Joseph Beuys grew up in the German town of Kleve, spent his teenage years in the Hitler Youth, and went on to fight in W.W.II., going first from radio-operator to Stuka-bomber pilot, and then a paratrooper. Despite the severe wounds he suffered during this time, Beuys managed to survive the war and was released from a Soviet Gulag in 1947, a decorated soldier. These events however are just the contested footnotes of a long and productive life. Beuys went on to become the most important voice in post-war German Art, a radical influence on the burgeoning student and environmental movements and the instigator of arguably the most significant development in Art since Duchamp's ready-mades. His invention of 'Social Sculpture' revolutionised the role of Art in society.

Within Art History, Joseph Beuys is seen primarily as a shamanic figure, an artist whose expanded concept of 'social sculpture' centred on his ability to communicate to people and, through this communication, affect positive societal change. It was Beuys' intention to develop the true creative potential of all people. Through the statement that 'everyone is an artist', he set out his agenda that the creative element in every individual, could help to improve and heal the world after W.W.II, not through 'Art' as might be understood by painting and sculpture, but through a broader 'expanded concept of art', as a universal multi-disciplinary force for change, a rejection of the heritage of modernist attitudes.

Beuys was trying to unify all people, east and west, male and female, in a form of 'elementary humanism'. It was Beuys' view that education was the means of communicating his message. He enrolled in Dusseldorf Academy of Art in 1947 to study sculpture and, until the time of his death in 1986 he was actively involved in restructuring





that institution according to his expanded concept of art. In that time Beuys carried out some 70 Actions (or 'Performances'), and produced over 50 installations (both art-forms, in which he was to become a major influence), he mounted 130 solo-exhibitions, gave numerous lectures, held seminars, interviews, and discussions. He was also heavily involved in politics, co-founding the German Green Party, the German Student Party, the Animals Political Party and the Free International University for Creativity and Inter-disciplinary Research.

He said his greatest work of art was to be a teacher. His enormous sense of mission he brought to bear against the modernity which had helped provide the excuses and mechanisms of the Holocaust. Art, for Beuys had become a beacon amidst the tottering and corrupt society surrounding him, with which he felt he could initiate a healing process; "No materials or approach was anathema to him", (Rosenthal, 1985, p.14). Beuys' ambivalence to the modern world is also seen in his involvement with animals; as symbols for our animal nature and as other possible forms of intelligence. Beuys' radical Actions, and his determination to expand beyond 'Modern Art' brought him many followers. They studied with him in Dusseldorf, or joined in the many discussions and seminars he led. Anselm Kiefer was one of those who came to Dusseldorf, to show his work to Beuys, and join in the discussions about expanding art. Kiefer was to describe Beuys as his teacher "in the largest sense of the word", (Rosenthal, 1985, p.12).

Anselm Kiefer was born in Donaueschingen in the Black Forest region of Germany in 1945, at the very end of W.W.II. He grew up in a very different Germany to that of Beuys, he went to study with Beuys at a point when his Art was going through a change of emphasis. Like Beuys, Kiefer was tired of the New York-centred cosmopolitan modernism that dominated the art-world. He tried to produce art which synthesised the artistic traditions both of pre-war and ancient art, and to go beyond them to an investigation of German





cultural history, exploring the historic traditions which produced the Holocaust. Kiefer says that Post-war German artists have a responsibility to reflect and work through the burden that Fascism places on images. Kiefer's project has concentrated on the re-articulation of a German heritage which pre-dated the rise of Fascism, and with the resulting sense of fragmentation of identity in the German national psyche. His work attempts to redeem German consciousness, as a consequence of Beuys' call for healing.

Both Beuys and Kiefer rejected Modernism and its formal constraints of specialisation, its conception of education and the conception of a modern unified subject, modelled on Enlightenment ideals. Their approaches, while not identical in all regards, share the attitude of 'looking back' while moving forward. They look at the pre-modern world in attempting to find a future for culture after Auschwitz.

In Chapter One we will look at Beuys' Expanded Concept of Art, his rejection of specialisation in Art, and his determined concentration on ideas in Art. Kiefer was Beuys' student and also rejected the principle of specialisation that identifies the 'modern artist'. Kiefer rejected Greenburgian formalism in painting, which reflects his rejection of modernist assumptions generally and his work, like Beuys', is at odds with the ideas behind Modern Art. For Beuys and Kiefer Art is based on a principle of 'performance' which calls the Modern aesthetic and the Modern subject into question.

In Chapter Two we will inquire into the German fascination for the Forest. Based on ancient Roman ideas on Germanness and the "Hermannschlacht", the victory of Hermann and a small force of German spearmen over the Roman legions at the Battle of Teutoberg Forest in 9 AD. This event became the focus of German cultural theorists like Wilhelm Friedrich Riehl, who identified it as the beginning of Germany as a identifiable country.



This historic attachment between Germany and its forest, would eventually be put to use as a weapon of anti-Semitism. We will also look at Germany's subsequent strange relationship with environmental conservation, historically the province of the Right-wing, and only since W.W.II the monopoly of the Left, with the involvement of Joseph Beuys. Kiefer paints a chart of German heredity, linking all parts inextricably to Germany's path through the forest, from the Hermannslacht to the Holocaust. Beuys and Kiefer's art, by dragging up the painful past, confronted a Germany steeped in amnesia.

In Chapter Three we will be looking at how both Beuys and Kiefer confront memory to produce healing. Beuys stressed the idea of transformation adopting the shaman's role in society. Beuys thinks humans can reach the evolutionary point where we can leave behind the need for leaders, and the idea of Gods, to become a social organism comprised of active creative individuals, whose goal is the democratic making of a utopian society- a social sculpture beyond the limitations of Government. Beuys used his body to fill the fissures between cultures, while Kiefer identified the space of the picture plane as the site within which past and present could be reconciled. No longer representing the wooden environments of Germany's primitive past, but the stone environment of 'civilised' post-war Germany. Kiefer confronted the blockages in the contemporary German psyche to accept his own guilt for the Holocaust, he confronts us with this aspect of ourselves and offers art as the means to initiate healing.





## **CHAPTER ONE: Beuys and Kiefer's rejection of Modernism**

### **The Expanded Concept of Art**

Joseph Beuys has been described as "the last of the old time German Expressionists, or ... the first universal post-modern man", (Kouni, 1990, page 5). His main contribution to 20th Century Art, is the idea of an Expanded Concept of Art, an education based expansion which takes as it's main focus the rejection of specialisation in Art practice and a determined concentration on ideas in Art, ideas indeed as sculptural forms to be communicated through speech. Thus displacing the 'aura' that Walter Benjamin described as surrounding the art object, from artwork to artist himself.

Rosalind Krauss referred to Beuys's expanded art as the "Expanded Field", (Borer, 1996, p26) a term she applied to the mind-set of 1960's sculpture. Beuys's post-war attitude was largely existential, but he became intrigued by the anthroposophical writings of Rudolph Steiner. Beuys's expansion of art embraced much of Steiner's philosophy, and as a result many believe Steiner to be the most important source of inspiration for Beuys. Steiner's doctrine of Anthroposophy was developed from the Theosophy movement of Madame Blavatsky, which was an esoteric doctrine that aimed to generate internal forces of the spirit, which was the origin of the call to turn the body into the temple of the spirit. Beuys' own ideas however, centred on an existentialism born of his War experiences. He believed in a world without God, and beyond the certainties of unified religions.



Beuys' primary response to Steiner was a result of Steiner's "Appeal to the German people and the civilised world", published in 1919. Written after W.W.I. it concerned a Germany devastated by the War in the trenches. Considering Beuys' own harrowing experiences of War it is easy to understand how Steiner's words would strike a chord with the young man who in 1947 was released from a Soviet Gulag to return home almost crippled with wounds. Joseph had first served merely as a radio operator in the Luftwaffe, then as the War wore on he served as a Stuka pilot flying dive-bomber missions over Russia. Finally after a near fatal crash, he went on to serve as a member of a paratrooper regiment, and again he was near-fatally wounded, this time from bullets to the stomach and chest. Steiner wrote:

"Half a Century after setting up it's Imperial edifice, the German Nation was confident that it would endure forever... today that edifice lies in ruins... this experience has revealed that the thinking of half a Century, and in particular the ideas of the War years, were a tragic error. What were the causes of this error? Whether the strength of such reflection can be mustered today is the issue upon which the survival of the German Nation hangs. This future hangs on the ability of the German people to ask themselves in all seriousness: how did I go wrong? If the Nation faces that question today, then the awareness will dawn that half a Century ago it founded an Empire but neglected to set that Empire a task arising from the essence of German National identity. " (Stachelhaus, 1987, p19)

Beuys's strong response to Steiner is reflected in the fact that had Steiner been listened to at the time, the life of Joseph Beuys could have been very different indeed. Beuys incorporated into his Expanded Concept a three-fold conception of a new social organism as laid out in Steiner's Appeal. The Government's all encompassing control of Economics, Law and Culture Beuys agreed must end. He felt that no-one should have control over both Law and Culture, both Economics and Law, etc., a situation which was previously shown to be dangerous in National Socialist Germany. Ultimately, it would be for the people not the Government to decide what constituted Culture. In conversation with Caroline Tisdall, Beuys stated: "There has to be a structure of Laws, but not established from above by a minority of





politicians who also control economic interests. The basic legal structure (the Constitution) has to be realised by the majority through an elementary democratic process of Culture."(Kouni, 1990, p31)

### **Social Sculpture**

Beuys's Expanded Concept of Art then is not Art as it is normally understood, but includes the entire Culture around it, Law and even Economic life. This is why he came to refer to it as 'Social Sculpture', society as an ongoing sculptural process, created by the people through democratic consent. His well known and much quoted statement that "Everybody is an Artist", means so much more in this context, and refers to his belief that under social sculpture everyone must include a creative element in their daily life to participate in society's evolution. The Modernist works of Art, (e.g. an Abstract Expressionist painting by Jackson Pollack, an Artist much admired by Beuys for his energy), seem empty of this social element. Beuys wished to mark "the threshold between the traditional concept of Art, the end of Modernism, the end of all traditions, and the Expanded Concept of Art as Social Sculpture, a precondition for a new social evolution."(Stachelhaus, 1987, p67).

As Beuys called into question the very definition of Art as well as how society was formed, he was well placed as a Professor of Sculpture at Dusseldorf Art Academie to educate a new generation of Artists into his conception of Social Sculpture. Beuys taught that warmth was the key element of Social Sculpture, which he said represented fraternity and collaboration. Beuys was to come into conflict with the Academie authorities, when he said that no student who was interested in learning from him would be turned away. In 1971 Beuys circulated a memo within the faculty



which read that any student failing any course from any other department would be eligible to join his class. As word went out his class grew from some forty students to almost ten times that number, and led to his most bitter fighting with his employers-the Interior Ministry for North-Rhine Westphalia. Though Beuys experienced many difficulties, including losing his post for over two years, he was during this time to tutor some of the most important European Artists of the next fifteen years, including Jorg Immendorf, Albert Oehlen and Anselm Kiefer.

The attitude Beuys had adopted was most clearly expressed when he said: "those who feel they have something to teach and those who feel they have something to learn have the right to come together". Beuys even set up the 'Free International University of Creativity and Inter-disciplinary Research' with Heinrich Boll in 1972, which though present at different Actions and Seminars, including a contingent from Belfast at Beuys' '100 day talk' Action at Documenta 5, they never managed to get the funding necessary to find permanent premises. Beuys wanted to make the point that education was not about separating winners from losers, and creative success could not be judged according to the academic tradition. He said: "I am here to speak about the possibilities for Artists, the whole question of potential, and everybody's ability to achieve that for themselves in their own particular way. Artwork for the social organism and creativity as national income!" (Stachelhaus, 1987, p8)





## Plastic

Beuys described the traditional making of sculpture as made from two methods: the subtractive method involving carving or chipping away, which he called 'Bildhauerei' and the additive, modelled sculpture he called 'Plastic'. Beuys identified the additive method of Plastic to be the one which best carried the warmth principle of Social Sculpture. His use of animal fat, and felt made from animal hair as his primary sculptural materials, though confusing and distancing for some people had a definite conceptual basis, which can be understood if looked at in particular examples of his work. Despite his explanation that these materials were used to cover his burns and protect him from the cold, by the nomadic Tartar people he says found his near-dead body, after his crash in the Crimea, it should be understood that storytelling falls into Beuys' conception of social sculpture also, and tales which involve fat and felt are also plastic sculptures. An even more likely reason Beuys used fat was that the town of his birth, Krefeld, is home to the largest margarine factory in Germany. These products and their consistency had a biographical meaning for him then less dramatic than the Crimean story he made popular. For felt, we need look no further than Beuys' felt hat. After his War injuries Beuys always felt cold without headgear, and insisted on always wearing a hat when out in public, he was also said to have been embarrassed by the scarring on his head. The warmth that Beuys associated with his home town and a warm head are enough reason for Beuys to use these materials, but there are others.

To Beuys, fat like society is in a state of constant change, it's "flexibility and responsiveness, it's fluctuations in temperature, made it possible for fat to act and appear in a chaotic way, to constantly evolve"(Stachelhaus, 1987, p.71). Beuys is referring to the way in which fat never dries out, remains active and 'additive' always



'plastic' so that any artwork that contained fat as an element would constantly evolve with its environment. In his sculpture, "Fat Chair"( **Fig.1** ) for example, Beuys placed into an ordinary domestic chair a thick wedge of animal fat (between the seat and the back of the chair). Named "Stuhl" in German, this visual and verbal pun relates the animal fat to the ongoing processes of the human digestive system, the chair becomes an alternative image of the person who sits in it, a changing conceptual portrait of humanity in constant 'movement'. In this way Beuys relates the use of animal fat to our own nature as animals and as constantly in motion, even when apparently still( as when we are seated).

Similarly felt keeps in 'warmth' and is used by Beuys to symbolise the concept of insulation in his warm sculptures. Felt is produced as a pounded mass, a result of animal hair and wool fibres being applied in layers back and forth across each other almost arbitrarily, to make a textile whose layers are bound together with soap. Therefore felt is already a plastic sculpture in Beuys' terms. He produced a "Felt Suit"( **Fig.2** ) in multiple form as the uniform of the new social sculptors, who carry the creative element of warmth insulated with them out into society. With the "Fat Chair" and the "Felt Suit", Beuys showed how he could use non-traditional sculpture materials in a conceptual way to communicate his ideas. The objects he created however only function as documents of his expanded social sculpture. The Art for Beuys took place in the communication of meaning, at lectures in which he explained these works and his ideas to a sometimes confused but always captivated audience. Central to Beuys' rejection of Modernist theory on the art-object, was that his explanation of the object was more important than the object itself, the object became documentary evidence of the Artist's concept. "One of the most important statements of my enlarged understanding of art, is that it is not only the materials that make Social Sculpture, but that thinking is a sculptural process, and that the expression and communication of these thoughts is also art."(Kouni, 1990, p.73)





## **Kiefer's Response**

Anselm Kiefer's response to Beuys' rejection of Modernism, was to adopt the use of non-traditional materials and to broaden his approach to his practice. Kiefer's use of materials has the same conceptual, almost literal meaning as Beuys', for instance Kiefer used straw on the surface of his canvases, to symbolise a similar process of change as Beuys' animal fat. Kiefer's broad-based practice was a multi-disciplinary approach which involved painting, photography, performance and the making of artist's books, thereby rejecting the principle of specialisation that identifies the 'modern artist'. In this regard especially, Kiefer follows Beuys, for though many identify Kiefer primarily as a painter, Kiefer's paintings are actually the product of a period of research involving his entire practice. In the case of "Operation Sealion", for example, form, subject matter and content of the work, all contradict central modernist precepts. Modernist painting as theorised by Clement Greenburg can not be reconciled with the textured and broken surfaces of a Kiefer painting. Kiefer's rejection of formalist painting reflects his rejection of modernist assumptions generally, and his work, like Beuys', has almost a pre-modern quality.

## **Operations**

The subject matter of 'Operation Sealion' concerns the naval plans of the German High Command during W.W.II to invade Britain by sea, intended to be carried out by the Navy if the Battle of Britain were a success for the Luftwaffe. As Fate would have it these plans were never put into action. Kiefer uses his knowledge of historic events, as they were and as they might have been to create an elaborate spectacle around the subject of Operation Sealion. He photographed toy battle-ships in a



National Socialist issued bath.( **Fig.3** ) These baths were given to every household in Germany during Nazi rule, as part of a programme to raise the basic standard of hygiene of the German people. Joseph Beuys had also used a National Socialist bath when he listed in one of his catalogues from the sixties, entitled 'Life course/Work course' that in 1921 he 'first exhibited' his social sculpture from within a Nazi bath.( **Fig.4** ) Beuys described being washed of afterbirth as his first expansion of Art. Though Beuys' work was a comment on the 'Urinal' and ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp, Kiefer used the National Socialist bath to great effect in his many photographic 'performances', and as source material for his paintings. Kiefer's use of the bath also relates to the historic situation of Fascism in Germany.

For the photographs Kiefer sailed his tiny battle-ships in the bath, setting some alight. The bath can be seen to be within the confines of the artist's studio. These photographs were then stitched together into an artist's book, the 'performance' with the boats documented in book form they were then used as source material for paintings on the subject of Operation Sealion.( **Figs.5&6** )Kiefer's photographs evoked the War-rooms of the German generals who planned the attack. The toy ships accentuating the way in which these leaders 'played' with life. History becomes the subject of a project (as the 'Modernist Project'), to controlled by the authorities of Military, Government and big business. 'Operation Sealion #1', (**Fig.7** ) the painting which Kiefer based on this series depicts the same Nazi bath in the lower half of the picture, in which are three miniature battle-ships, the central ship is ablaze. Above the bath, in the middle-ground of the painting, in an expressively painted multitude of tiny people, apparently in military dress. Above them is the outline of some transparent platform, in the centre of which are three empty chairs.





The surface of the painting includes the use of sand, straw and shellac, as well as painted marks. The finished painting is very much at odds with the modern art which resulted from the ideals of Enlightened thought:

"Modernist Art falls within that dream of our improved history, with many of the modernist practitioners having regarded their use of abstraction as a sign of progress in Art. This is the reason for the opposition of some critics to the work of Anselm Kiefer, since they see his use of materials, his attitude to the past and his representational conventions as a rejection of modernist ideology."(Gilmour, 1990, p53).

### **The Cartesian Subject**

Central to this modernist ideology is the artist's invention of a personal, private style that links the idea of the individualism of the modern artist to Rene Descartes ideas on subjectivity. This Cartesian subjectivity, based on the axiom 'Cogito Ergo Sum'('I Think Therefore I Am'), is based on the idea of our identities as thinking people continuing in our bodies from birth to death. That this thinking person (or 'subject') remains unified and whole in it's identity as long as it continues to think, and that this subject has a unique perspective which is also unified. This thinking has produced a tradition in Art of a particular system of unified perspective in painting, which when a painting is seen by a viewer, they are convinced that they are seeing through the eyes of the painter, seeing what he sees, as if through a window.

But as William V. Dunning states in relation to post war subjectivity : "the twentieth century European sense of self, is no longer truly unified or indivisible, but is instead composed of parts and pieces of other culture."(Dunning, 1993, p.132) A view mirrored by Stuart Hall when he talks about the 'post-modern' subject as an



identity which differs from the Cartesian conception of the subject which Greenbergian Modernism favours, in that it is "historically not biologically defined, but becomes formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways in which we are represented and addressed in the cultural systems which surround us." (Hall, 1992, p.279). The Modern self then, whether recognised as the Cartesian, or Enlightenment subject, is derived from a very European sense of self dependant on the continuity of memory, and buffered by the certainties of Empire, Nationality and God. Modern painting therefore is based on a personal and private vision of the world made available through painting, it presupposes the 'specialness' of individual expression, but is dependant on a po-faced sincerity which can permit no irony, and no subconscious intention. The modern artist who does not appear completely sincere, is denounced as a 'fraud'. However, for Beuys and Kiefer Art is a performance.

For Beuys this performance is a shamanic action, and for Kiefer it becomes a re-enactment of the follies of the past, not from his own perspective, but through the character of those denounced by history. Operation Sealion does not portray Kiefer's view of war, but holds the futility of others actions up for ridicule. Kiefer becomes the generals playing with battle-ships to expose the play for what it was. He uses a collection of individual signs in his painting, the bath, the people, the platform, the chairs, even the title, which mean something only when read in relation to each other, and seen in context with his photographs. These signs require a complex reading, an intertextual approach which allows for differing interpretations. Clement Greenburg, on the other hand states: " Visual Art should confine itself exclusively to what is given in visual experience and make no reference to anything given in any other order of experience." (Greenburg, 1982) Kiefer's painting makes plain reference to historic sources, literary themes, performance, and employees a dramatic irony.

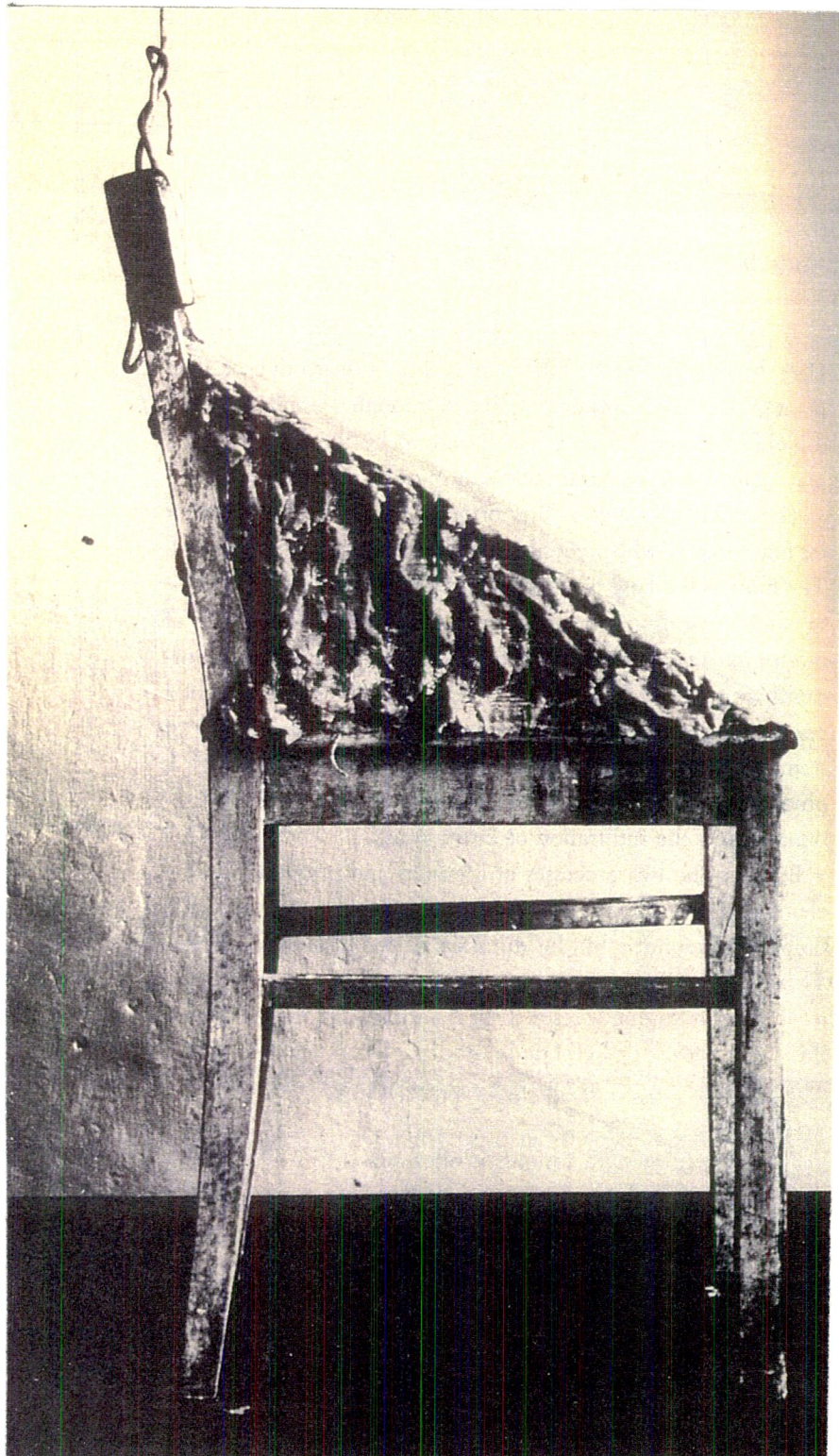




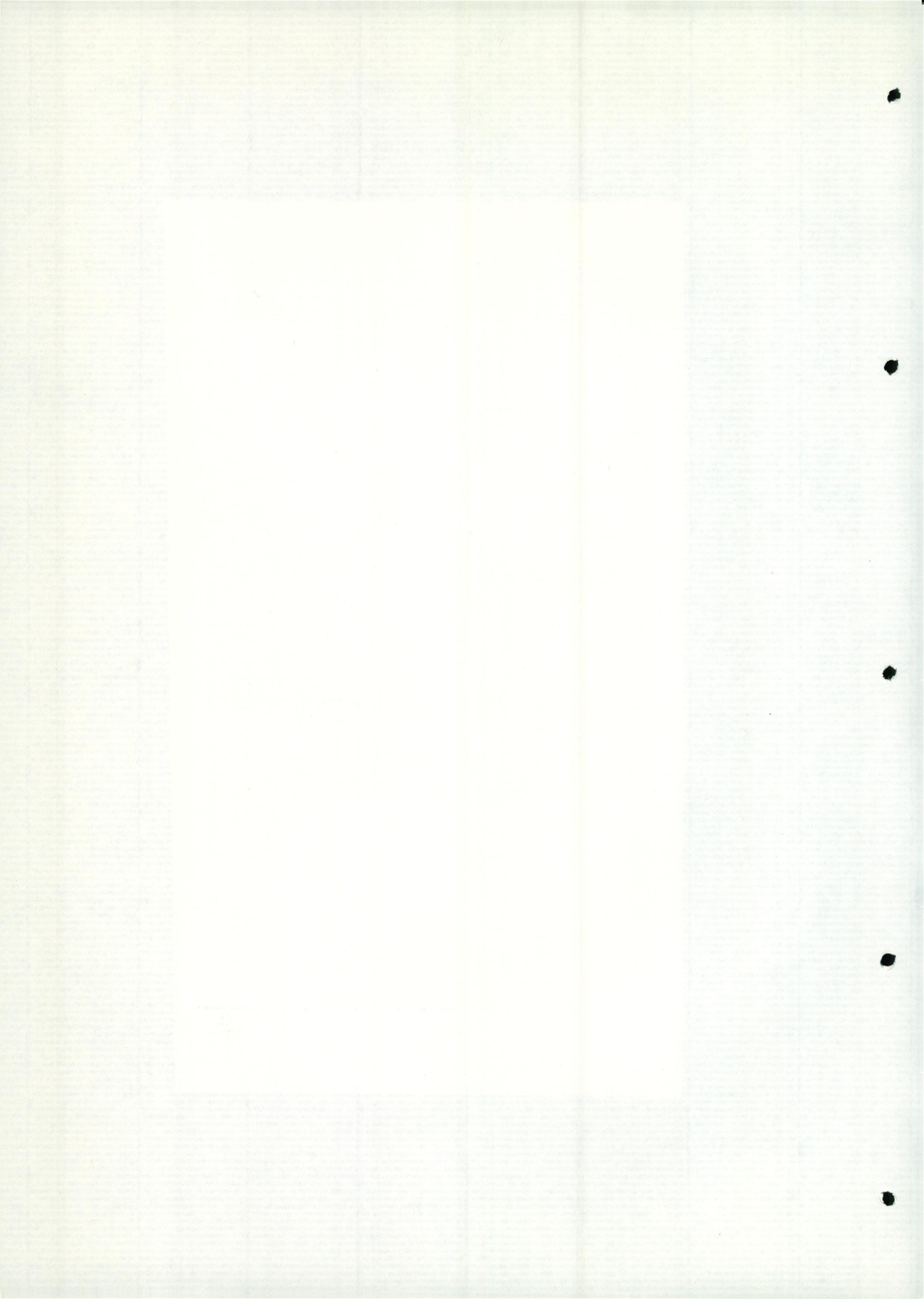
More importantly, as we will explore further in Chapter 2, Kiefer gives explicit priority to the signs, which make clear that to interpret his work, the viewer must engage in a form of archaeological dig, to create their own interpretations and thereby identify the true 'subject' of the painting, not the artist himself but the German Cultural History which prefigured Modernism. In 'Operation Sealion #1', Kiefer uses the hypothetical set-up of the planned Naval invasion of Britain, as the mechanism through which he can call the Modernist aesthetics and the Modern subject into question.



**Figure One:**  
Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair*, 1963.

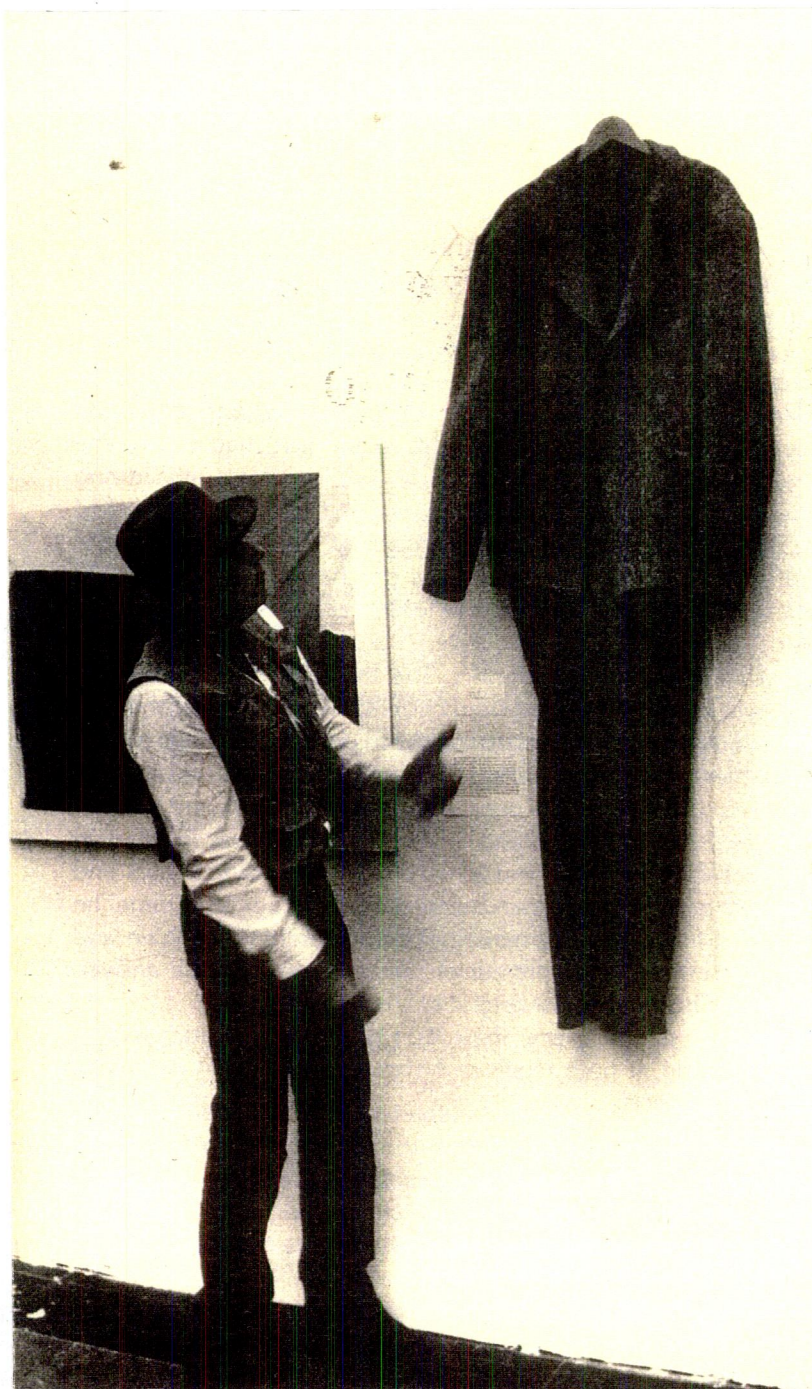






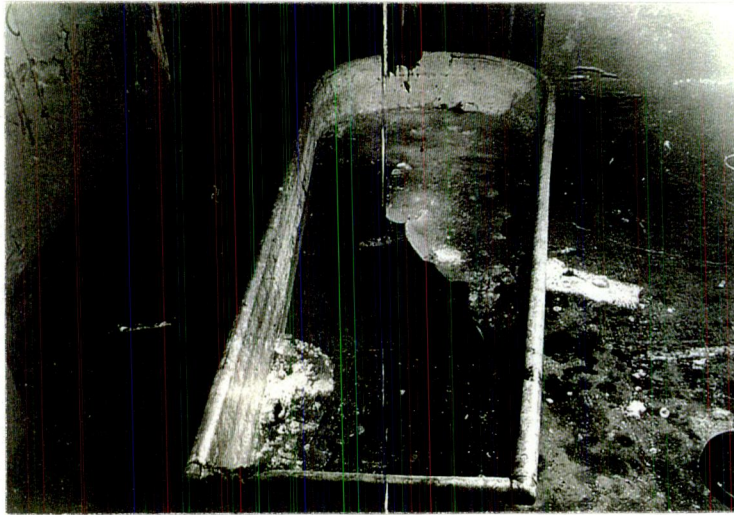


**Figure Two:**  
Joseph Beuys, *Felt Suit* (Multiple), 1980.





**Figure Three:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Operation Sealion* (from a book of photographs), 1975.

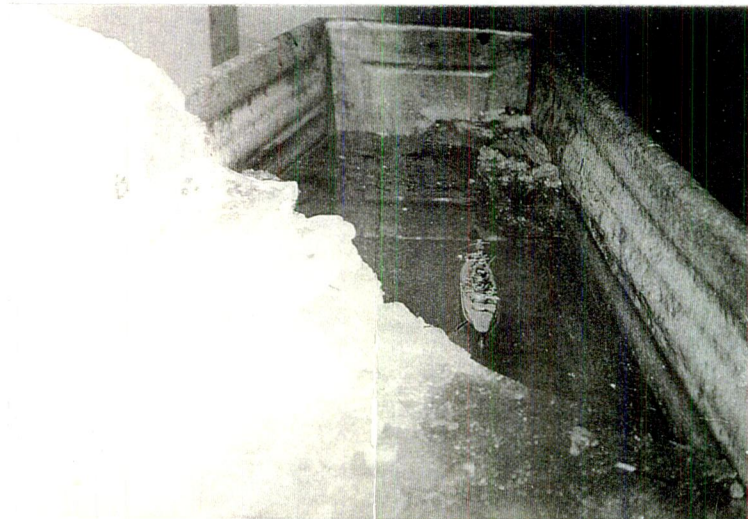


**Figure Four:**  
Joseph Beuys, *Untitled* (Bathtub), 1960.





**Figure Five and Figure Six:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Operation Sealion* (from a book of photographs), 1975.



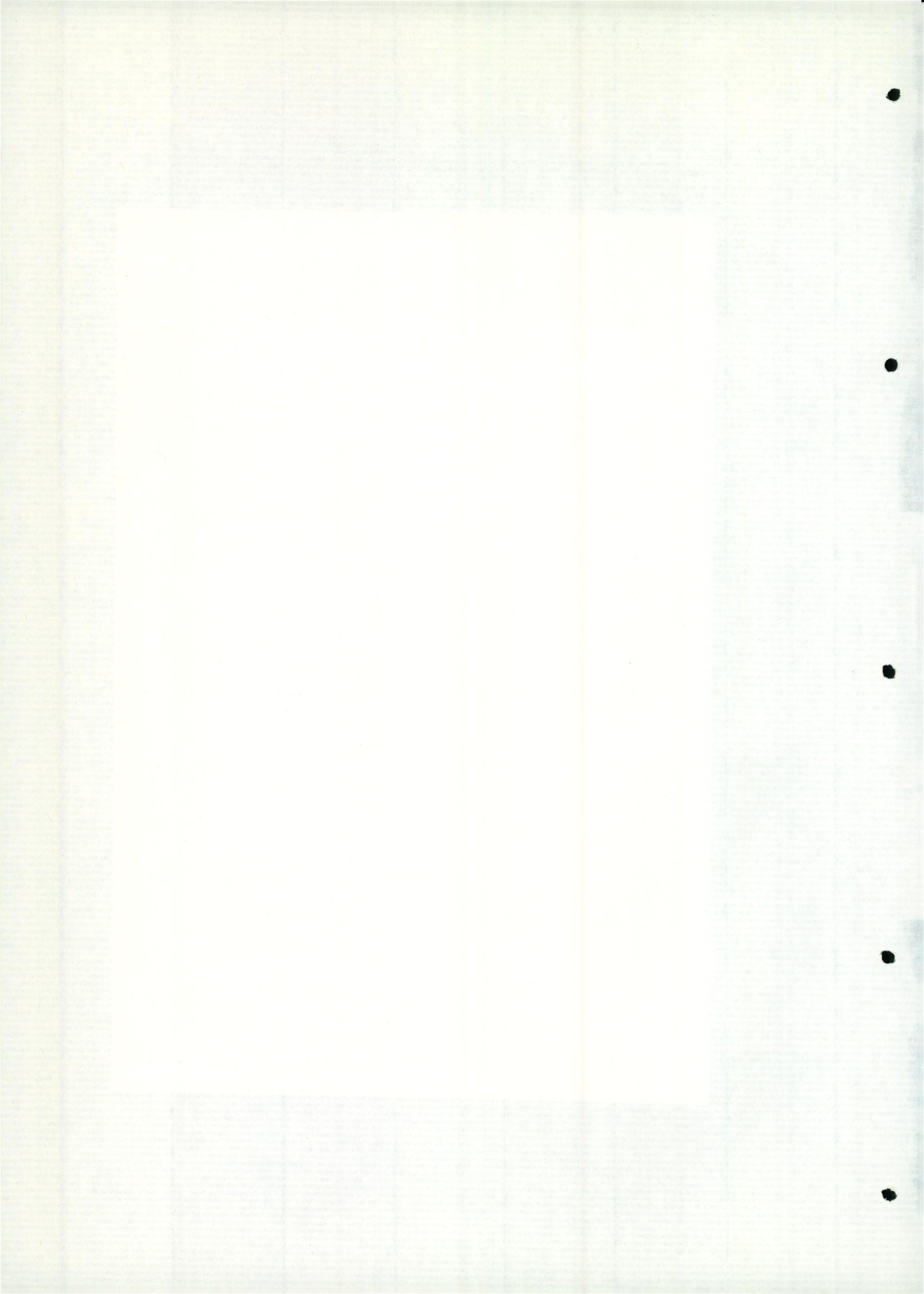




**Figure Seven:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Operation Sealion* (Oil Painting), 1975.









## **CHAPTER TWO: Germany's Journey through the Forest**

### **Hermannslacht**

The complex relationship between ecology, the forest, myth and history in the analysis of German identity requires some revision before Beuys and Kiefer's work, which relates to the forest, can be interpreted. The fascination Nazis held for the Forest can be seen when in 1934 Walter Schonichen, a member of the Forestry and Landscape Administration of the 3rd Reich published a series of pictures of fir trees made to look like ranks of soldiers. (Schama, 1995, pg118). The inspiration for much of Germany's strong relationship to the forest can be fixed in history, to the battle in 9 A.D. at Teutoburg forest between the force of spearmen under the control of German chieftain Hermann, and 3 legions of Roman soldiers, under the control of Roman general Varus. The victory of the Germanic force would come to symbolise the strength of German military might and tie that strength to the image of thousands of ancient German oak trees standing together against a common foe.

Roman Historian Tacitus set the story to words, and attributed to the barbaric Germans many virtues he identified as lacking in civilised Rome. Tacitus' manuscript "Germania" in which this history was recounted would become a source of the most enduring fascination to German theorists on National identity, and also become a huge influence on the progenitors of the Nazi movement. "Hermannslacht", or the victory of Hermann, (known to Tacitus by the Roman name 'Arminius'), became the point which 19th century theorists like Wilhelm Friedrich Riehl, saw as the beginning of Germany as a identifiable country. Tacitus



makes the point that the isolated nature of the German tribes during the first century A.D., and their ability to keep off total Roman colonisation for almost 400 years, made them the most 'racially pure' of all Europe, this conception of racial purity, alluded to even in Tacitus' 'Germania' relates Germans to Germany more strongly than any other nation of Europe, and was central to shaping ideas about German strength, purity, landscape and sense of difference to its neighbours in the 18th and 19th Century.

Riehl was a student of the enlightenment thinking of Descartes, and has commented that the German woods were "what made Germany German"(Schama, 1995, p116), Riehl's books, "Land and Leute" and "Gemeinschaft und Gessellschaft." ('Land and people' and 'Community and society') organised themselves around a series of binary oppositions that helped to identify what was German from that which was not. An example would be 'Road and Path'. A road was a result of Roman intervention, product of market forces, connecting producers and consumers, a path however connects villagers and citizens and develop organically.

Through this process, he intellectualised oppositions which included 'forest-field', 'town-city' and 'woodcutter-banker'. He complained: "that Jews were disproportionately represented in the commercial, urban, and cosmopolitan Gessellschaft that he believed was eating away at the true Germany".(Schama, 1995, p118) It was Riehl's influence then which influenced another binary opposition: 'German-Jew'. The historic attachment between Germany and its forest, was being put to use as a weapon of anti-Semitism. Riehl's anti-Semitism was an aspect of his broader anti-industrial hatred for the city, and what he perceived to be the corruption of the virtues of "Germania," the 'virtues' which made ancient Germany the rival of Roman civilisation.





Riehl's preoccupation's became Germany's, and his influence was felt so much so that by 1897 having lived a successful life as a respected educator in Munich, he received a state funeral, with imperial honours. His anti-urban, anti-modern, almost Marxist sensibilities, carried with them an anti-Semitism, which upon his death became his legacy to German nationalism. Riehl's passion had been the forest, and this combined with patriotic sentiment became part of popular culture, he wanted to be the saviour of the forest from industry and state policy, to do this he found "ways in which Government might be induced to act, if necessary against private and market interests, as the protector of the landscape patrimony." (Schama, 1995, p115).

### **Holzweg**

Likewise, Martin Heidegger shared many ideas with Riehl, and after W.W.II retreated into the forest, on a hermitic journey during which he would only speak in an ancient German dialect. There he wrote 'Holzweg' about Germany's journey of identity through the forest, since the Battle of Teutoberg. The future Germany found there would fall under the shadow of the holocaust. In German the word 'Holzweg' alludes to the forest journey of Hanzel and Gretel, the children who become lost in the forest, but eventually out fox the witch, and she ends up in her own oven. The rule of law does not apply in this place, but a form of natural, "primitive and absolute redress," takes place instead. It is a place where, barbarism, articulated as a virtue of 'Germania', becomes law. Carl Jung describes the German concentration on heroes and forces of nature as "Wotanic," after the "Nibelungen" God named after Odin.

"German mythology displays a lack of differentiation between Gods and heroes, and therefore creates psychic confusion. It is essentially a mythology of warriors - both Gods and heroes, and there is a strong emphasis on heroic death. The German sense of destiny is not



accompanied by a tragic emotional reflection of life, as for example is the Greek, but is related to that heroic death." (Pedraza, 1996, p10)

Jung says such a mythology can easily lead to a society becoming quickly possessed by group identification, and an abdication of responsibility, in favour of a powerful leader. It describes this mythology and its culture, as gripped by a "powerful irrationality," that can move from identification to madness. The Germany of the Weimar republic was led by a failing Socialist government, under constant attack from Communists and conservatives alike, it was inevitable that it would ultimately fail, with bitter street fighting and an unhappy police-force, many of whom were members of right-wing groups like the 'Stahlhelm' and the Nazi 'SA' (Steelhelmets and Storm department).

The Weimar government could not keep the peace, and into this loss of faith in socialist rule, the public "attempt to recover was executed with all the manic intensity of a holy crusade, a new found coherent social identity was established through a construction of difference, of what was other than the image of the purely German."(Fischer, 1985, p109) What the Nazi's offered after Weimar was the apparent return to simpler times, as represented by the 'Hermannslacht' and the 'Holzweg'. A return to their homeland before industrialisation and the coming of the Jews. The forest came to symbolise, "not the setting for German history, but German history itself."(Fischer, 1985, p.109) The influence of Riehl saw that there would be no European government with so ecologically sound a forestry policy, as that of the Third Reich. Goring even held the official post of Reichsforestminister for a time. The Hitler Youth, of which Joseph Beuys was a member, were to concentrate their efforts towards educating young people about the value of nature, as exemplified in the forest. It seems that the regime noted as one of the most inhumane in the history of civilisation was famous for it's regard for trees.





## Radical Ecology

It is not fair however to simply associate conservation with Nazism, more that these ideas were used by the Nazi's to good effect within their social programme. David Adams suggests, "While the content of Nazism has been condemned in post war Germany (though lately reappearing under the pretence of provocation), it's formal language, or 'Gestalt', is still widely used in the guise of a mythical anti-modernism (not to be confused with post-modernism), and a national aestheticism." (Ottmann, 1990, p124) Here he suggests that Beuys and Kiefer are following Heidegger in attempting to return to a tragic experience of a lost historic greatness, that is innately mythical. Adorno too warns against the "seduction of myth", myth here is seen, not simply as the mythological, but as part of a deep-felt archetypalism.

Simon Schama states that the Right-wing do not have a monopoly on nature, though "there is an undeniable connection between mythic memory of the forest and militant nationalism, which has created a great moral angst in Germany." (Schama, 1995, p.119). Since W.W.II green politics have been virtually a monopoly of the Left-wing, and largely as a result of the left-wing German Green Party, which was co-founded by Joseph Beuys.

For Beuys Germania was a metaphor for the wounded German soil, Germanness to Beuys represents the land in crisis. The post-war confusion over East and West, the pre-war confusion of Weimar and the Third Reich, the "very idea of Germania has always been chaotic and fluctuating." (Borer, 1996, p.28) Beuys represents this crisis, and it becomes the subject of his shamanic quest, to transcend the wounded soil through 'social sculpture'. Beuys was ecologically active before and after his co-



founding of the German Green Party. He even abortively ran for election in 1980, on the Green ticket, however he was never to hold elected office. In 1971 he and 50 of his students carried out an Action called: "Overcome Party Dictatorship Now!"( **Fig.8** ), which took the form of a peaceful demonstration against the levelling of a wooded area of Dusseldorf called the Grafenbergerwald. The protesters swept the forest floor with birch brooms, and painted white crosses on the threatened trees. Beuys promised that he would not allow the trees to be felled, and said: "Everyone talks about protecting the environment, but no one acts. If anyone ever tries to cut down these trees we shall sit in the branches!"(Stachelhaus, 1987, p.11). A strategy which has pre-figured the road protesters' actions in England over the last number of years.

### **7000 Oaks**

For Beuys, " thinking occurs not only in the mind, but also within external natural processes. The sharp clear thinking of limited materialistic and rationalistic thoughts, and the seemingly absolute Cartesian alienation of subject from object that this thinking is based upon, are the root causes of the ecological crisis. Human alienation was in turn inflicted on the environment."(Adams, 1992, p.26)

So despite the fact that much of Riehl's ideas have influenced Beuys' development, Beuys adopted a distinctly, anti-Enlightenment approach, socialising the environment and begging an evolution in our understanding of it. Beuys' ideas on education, the expansion of art and the environment came together in his proposal to plant 7000 oak trees in the city of Kassel in Germany for the 'Documenta 7' exhibition.





The project was conceived as a "Verwaldung, a redemption through afforestation", (Schama, 1995, p.124) It was to be the largest ecological sculpture ever planned, with each tree being installed beside a four foot tall basalt column, with a hole hollowing in each rock by the action of water over time. Each tree would need to be sponsored to the tune of \$210, the total costs of the endeavour to reach \$1.68 million. Businesses, schools, arts funding bodies and even governments supported the proposal, with money and with suggestions for the positioning of the trees. Despite the storms of protests over the 7000 basalt blocks when they were first delivered to the town centre of Kassel( **Fig.9** ), by 1986 when Joseph Beuys died over 5500 oak trees had found funding and homes. For the opening ceremony of 'Documenta 8', one year later, Wenzel Beuys, Joseph's son planted the last oak tree in the centre of Kassel.( **Figs.10&11** )

The '7000 oaks' Action undeniably ties Beuys' art to Riehl's vision of 'Germania', but Beuys' vision is not one where binary oppositions differentiate what is German from what is not. Rather Beuys wanted to create an environmental monument to improve the quality of urban life, to re-integrate into the modern city a sense of nature alienated through Modernism. This action had strong resonance in Germany, but Beuys was envisaging a global environmental evolution and took as his task the reconciliation of East and West principles in man, through the Action 'Coyote', which will be dealt with in Chapter III.

The same year that Joseph Beuys carried out the "End Party Dictatorship Now!" Action (1971), Anselm Kiefer and his wife moved to a new home and studio in the Odenwald, 40 miles from Frankfurt. Kiefer's new studio was in a converted wood-panelled attic, with a view of the surrounding woods from his windows. Kiefer began to paint a series of landscape paintings that placed either himself or his wife in the



woodland setting. In one of these "Mann im Wald", ("Man in a forest") he holds aloft a branch that is covered in flame. Fire and the Forest would become central motifs in his work for the next fifteen years. His home with its wooden attic was a converted schoolhouse, and the attic interior like a stage set. This 'theatrical' space became associated with the themes in Kiefer's work and he painted many pictures with his studio as the setting. "The Hall of Spiritual Heroes" and "Quaternity" are examples which show the play of cultural forces Kiefer is interested in within the attic interior. The hand-hewn interior possessed of an expressionistic presence, suggestive of its origins in the forest. His studio became "a metaphorical place where the artist attempts to understand complex ideas and themes, through the performance of his art." (Rosenthal, 1985, p.25)

## **Varus**

Kiefer's painting "Varus" ( **Fig.12** ), named after the leader of the Roman force defeated at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest, refers explicitly to the theme of 'Hermannslacht'. The painting is based loosely on the Casper David Friedrich's painting, "The Chasseur enters the Forest" ( **Fig.13** ). In Kiefer's painting we see a forest where the trees surround a snow-covered path, which is speckled with blood. The surface of the painting is inscribed with the names Varus, Hermann, Thusnelda and various names from German history, who like Riehl, have identified the 'Hermannslacht' as the basis of German culture. Varus' name is the only one to appear in black paint, the others all appear in white. The relationship between Varus and the chasseur of Friedrich's painting become clear if we examine contemporary responses to that painting. Contemporary critics identified the many symbols of Friedrich's painting as: Death, symbolised by the Raven, Dead soldiers from the old tree stumps, the Forest as Germany, and the Path through the forest as the





Hermannslacht. The Napoleonic French soldier faces his own death, and his country faces defeat, if he is to enter the German forest. The painting symbolises German military unity, cultural superiority and continuity through nature, with France cast in the role of a new Roman threat. Instead of Friedrich's lone chasseur before the impressive ancient oaks, Kiefer represents Varus by name only before the scraggy replanted conifers of the National Socialist Reich's forest Ministry.

"The action filled narrative is represented in linguistic terms by simply juxtaposing the names of Varus, Hermann and Thusnelda at the base of a trail in the forest... a network of spidery lines connects this bloody starting point to other names from later German history, thereby tying the German National Heritage into one comprehensible whole. The linear construct becomes a chart of heredity, linking all parts inextricably." (Rosenthal, 1985, p.49)

### **Worldly Wisdom**

The other names inscribed in the painting include Klopstock and Fichte, who both wrote on the subject of the Hermannslacht at the time of the Napoleonic threat. Holderin and Martin were two authors whose ideas, much like Riehl's were used by the Nazi's to legitimise their use of Hermann as a totemic figure to incite hatred of foreigners. Many of the same names appear in Kiefer's many reworkings of this theme, their faces in books of woodcuts, their names inscribed over photographs of forests, and finally in the 'Ways of Worldly Wisdom' series in a book of 'woodcut' portraits - the historic form for German Cultural iconography( **Fig.14** ). As in 'Operation Sealion', the faces become a series of readable signs, which when read in relation to each other form a cultural history of Germany based around the 'Hermannslacht' and its historians( **Figs.15&16** ). In combination the portraits essentially mean that Germany's path through the forest from the Hermannslacht to the Holocaust was inevitable. Far from representing a series of free intelligences in



these portraits, Kiefer shows they are all tied together by the spidery lines of shared history, culture and ideas. "The vision brought to this painting moves us to reflect on those representations of the German academy as being possessed by the same demonic forces that compelled Germany into the 'catastrophe'." (Pedraza, 1996, p.47). The need to be rid of an unpleasant past, in a Germany rebuilding after W.W.II is the central problem Kiefer confronts in the 'Wisdom' series. As Nietzsche points out in 'Thus Spake Zarathustra', the liberating force of 'Will' remains a prisoner of the 'Past', we cannot will backwards to change history, the past remains with us always in the present. A view re-iterated by Kiefer in 'Varus' and 'Ways of Worldly Wisdom'. The unstable artifice of German cultural identification with the 'Hermannslacht' was co-opted by the Nazi's, and the archetype of Germany's spiritual leader was adopted by Adolph Hitler, through a:

"hallucinatory identification with the pagan hero myth of Hermann, and through the romanticised accounts of Imperial Rome...the German social psyche's regressive and pathological relation to a fictionalised past, has the appearance of a perverse mourning resulting from the loss of ground after W.W.I and it's accompanying loss of self-esteem, social-coherence and faith." (Fischer, 1985, p.107)

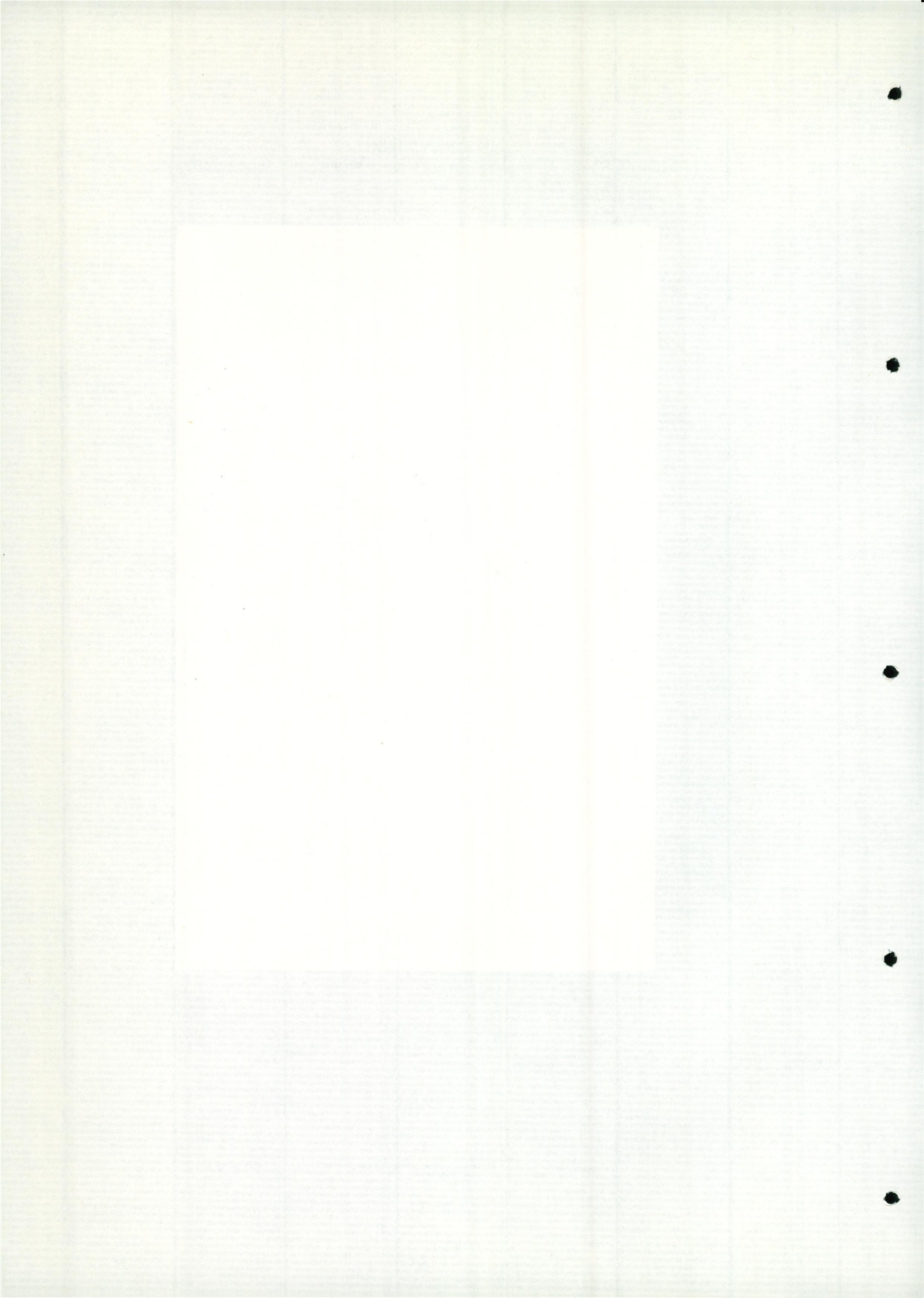
Beuys and Kiefer's Art confronts the 'Holzweg', Germany's journey through the forest, by dragging up the painful past to confront a nation steeped in amnesia. By identifying the mythic memory of the forest with militant nationalism, Kiefer reveals the anti-modernism of the Riehl's 'Germania', the forest home of German racial purity. While Beuys recreated 'Germania' within the modern Germany through his '7000 Oaks' action in Kassel. Not in the service of a militant nationalism, but to overcome the right-wing history of German conservation in favour of a new spirit of radical environmentalism. The confrontational nature of these artist's work will be dealt with in the final chapter, which concentrates on how Beuys and Kiefer tried to initiate cultural healing.





**Figure Eight:**  
Joseph Beuys, *Overcome Party Dictatorship Now!* (Action), 1971.







**Figure Nine:**  
Joseph Beuys, A Collection of Basalt Columns for the *7000 Oaks*  
Environmental Sculpture (Kassel Town Centre), 1984.

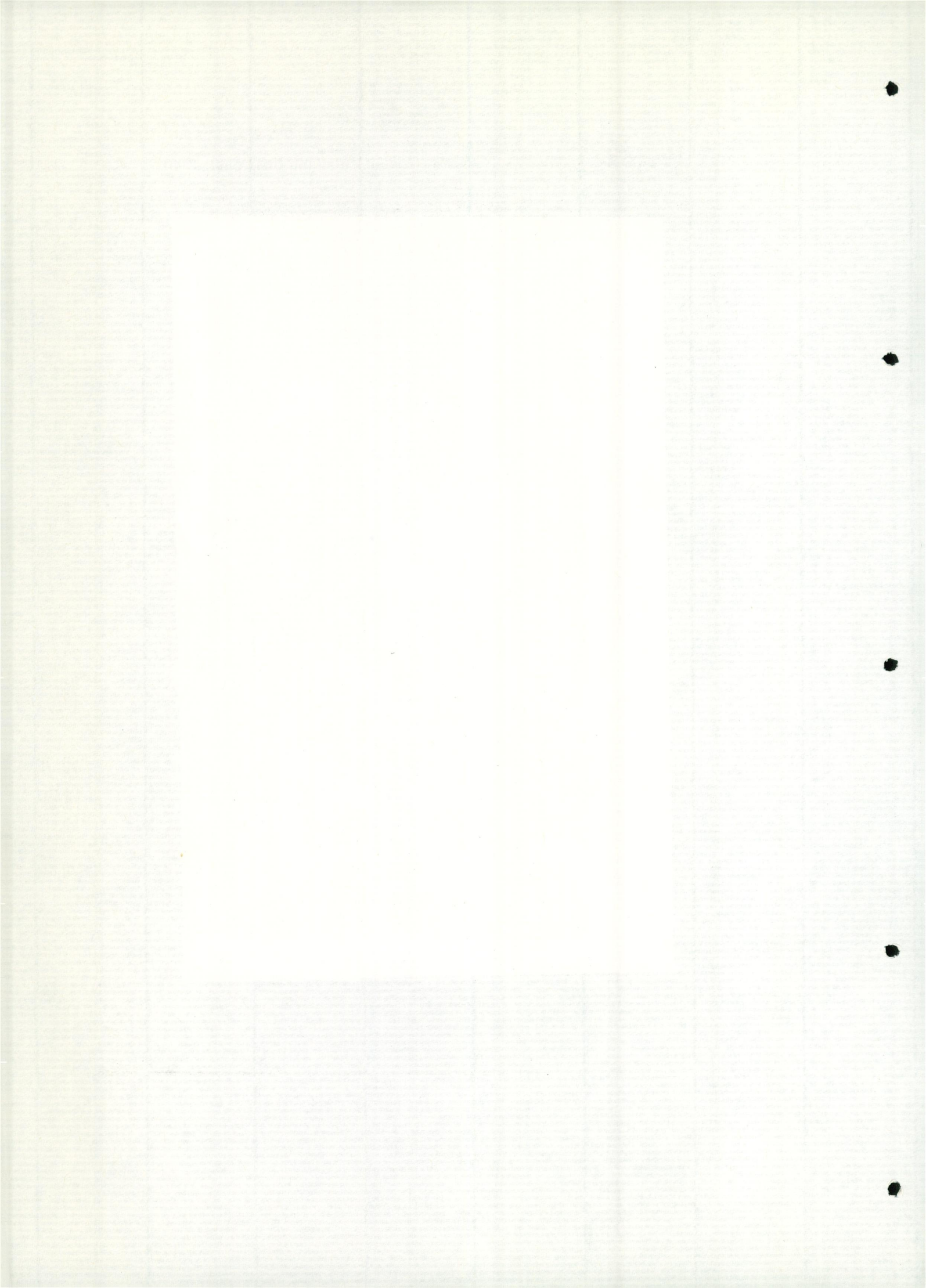






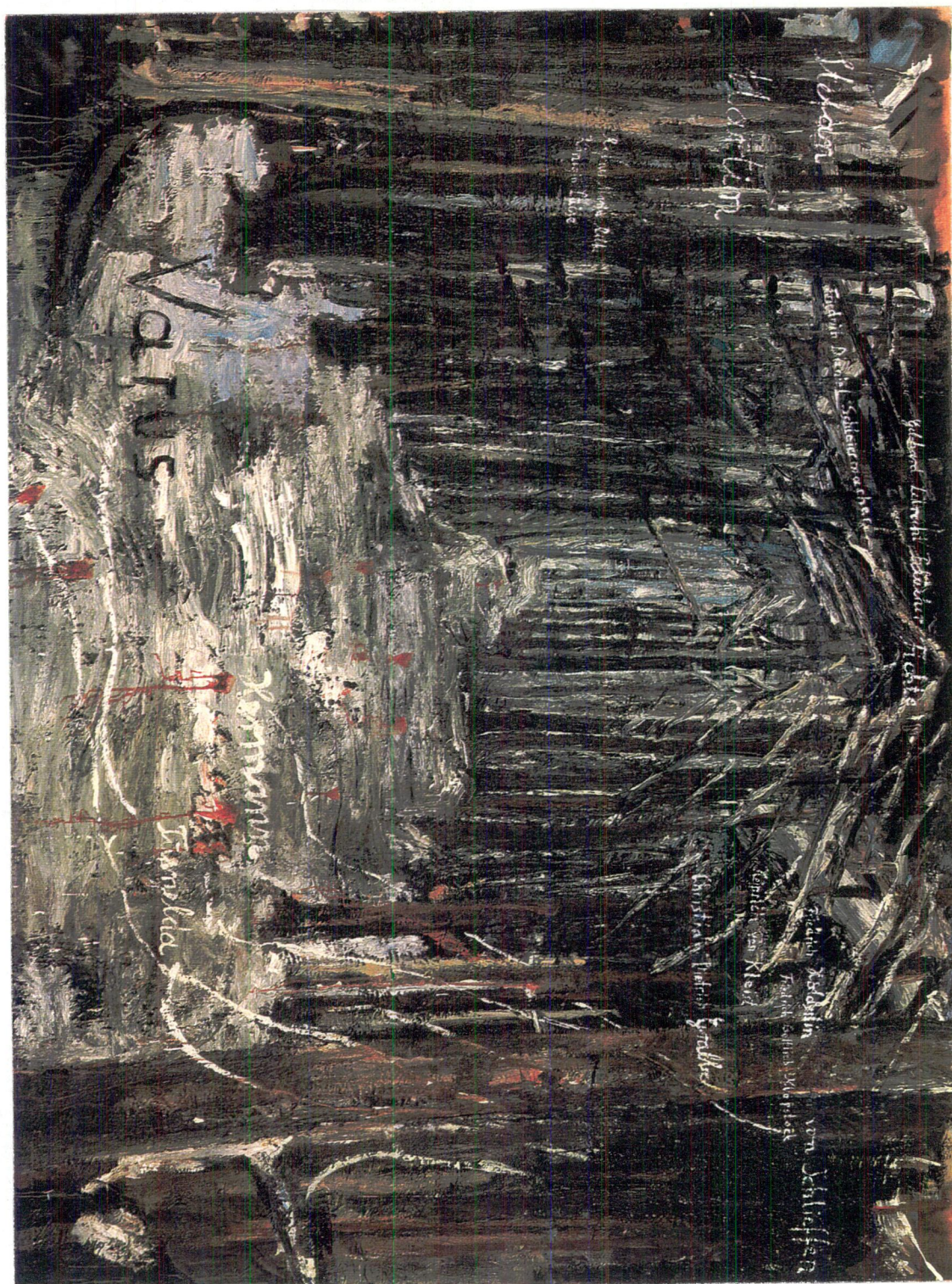
**Figure Ten and Eleven:**  
Joseph Beuys, *7000 Oaks* (Kassel Town Centre and Environs), 1986.







**Figure Twelve:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Varus* (Oil Painting), 1976.









**Figure Thirteen:**  
Caspar David Friedrich, *The Chasseur Enters the Forest* (Oil Painting), 1813.







**Figure Fourteen:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Hermannslacht* (Four Images from a book of Woodcuts), 1979.



Immanuel Kant



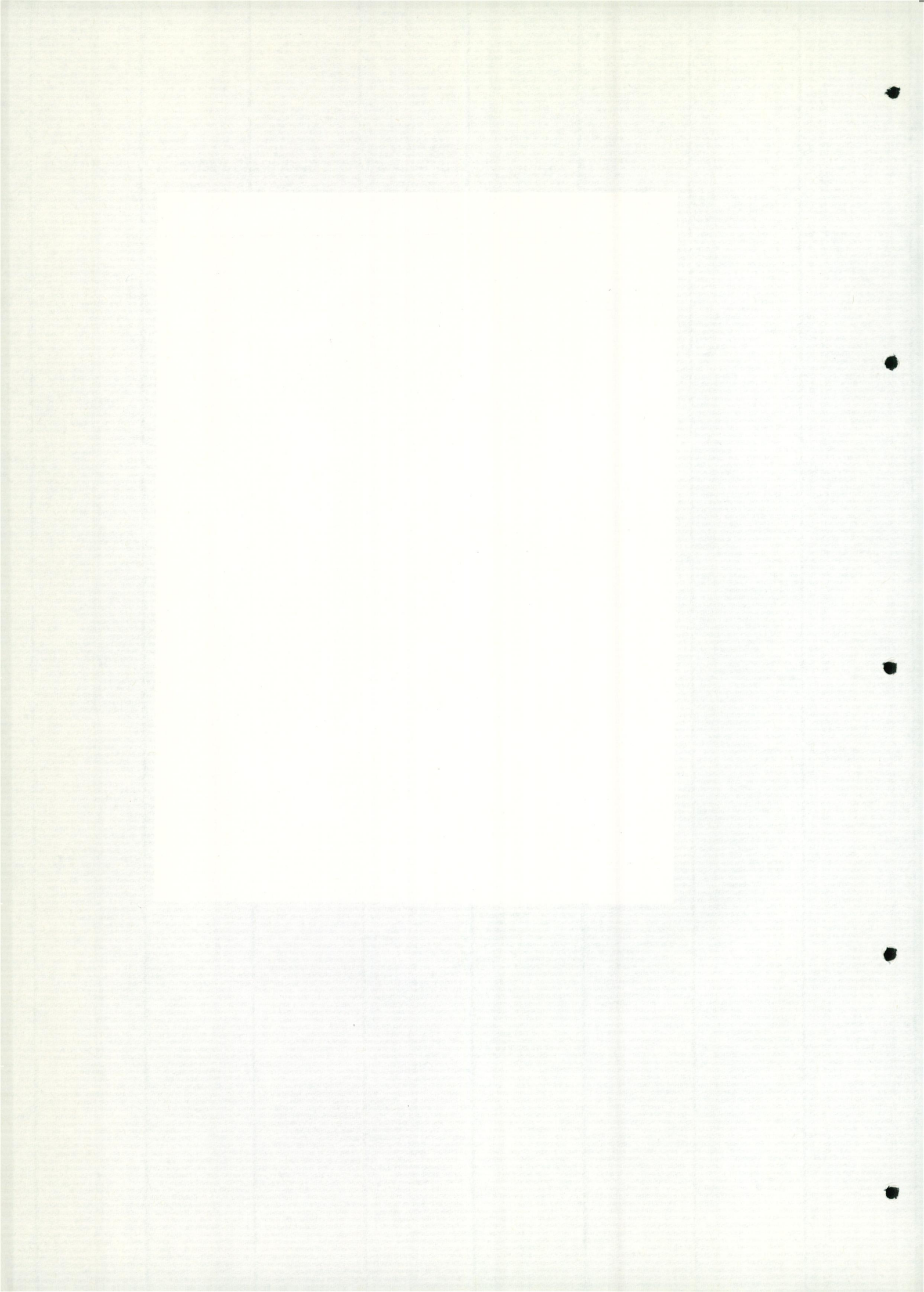
Joseph V. Eichendorff



Annette von Droste-Hülshoff



Martin Heidegger





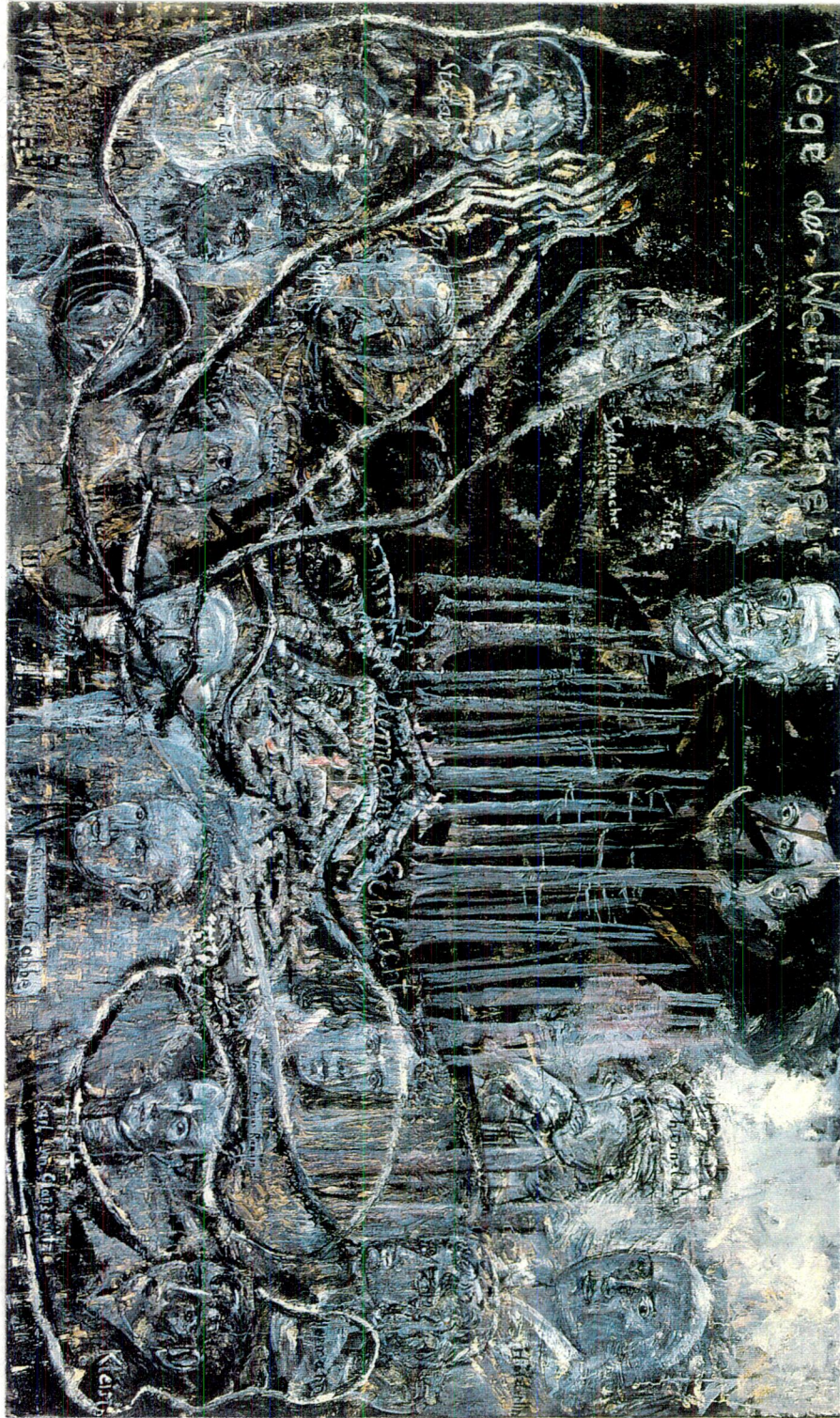
**Figure Fifteen:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Ways of Worldly Wisdom-Hermannslacht*  
(Acrylic and Shellac on Woodcuts), 1980.







**Figure Sixteen:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, 1977.







## CHAPTER THREE: Confrontation, Reconciliation and Cultural Healing

### Scabs of Memory

Confronting memory to produce healing is a theme that runs through both Beuys and Kiefer's work. Both have shown an ambivalence to Modernity, in its forms and effects, while their shared interest in Germany's 'Birth in Nature', has shown the need to inquire just how the German experience of Modernism could produce the particular conditions for the Holocaust.

The 'scabs of memory' were a favoured target of Joseph Beuys. In 1964 the Interior Ministry of NorthRhine-Westphalia accused Beuys of disorderly conduct for printing material that included the suggestion: "1964-Beuys recommends that the Berlin Wall be heightened by 5cm (better proportions!)." (Stachelhaus, 1987, p.131) When asked to answer the charge, Beuys' official reply read :

"This is an image and should be seen as an image... It is surely permissible to contemplate the Berlin Wall from an angle that takes only its proportions into account. This defuses the Wall at once. Through inner laughter it destroys the Wall. One is no longer so hung up on the 'physical' wall. Attention is re-directed at the 'mental' wall and how to overcome it, and surely that is the real issue." (Stachelhaus, p.131)

The communication of ideas that is Beuys' art is not a passive experience, and demands a participation on the part of its audience. The result of which can be the





establishment of an improved moral sense, a self-educated subject which could destroy all walls.

### **Transformation**

Beuys stressed the idea of transformation, an idea which became more popular with the proliferation of anthropological knowledge about shamanism after W.W.II. (Levy, 1988, p.55) The shaman's role in tribal society was to perform ceremonies which concentrated energies for the spiritual and therapeutic transformation of the community.

'Shaman', in fact is a Siberian term, and Beuys' near-fatal plane crash was precipitated over Russian soil. According to Beuys' telling of the events surrounding that crash, nomadic Russian Tartars found him and brought him into their tribe and healed him. Beuys quoted their Shaman as saying to him; "Du bist Tartar", meaning 'you are now a Tartar'. This 'transformation' is what Beuys suggests was responsible for his pursuing an art career. Shamens are known primarily as spirit-healers, 'medicine men', and for Beuys they symbolise a medicine which exists beyond European rationalist materialism, they are admired by Beuys as healers by nature. Anthropologist Carleton Coon describes shamens as "gifted artist's", becoming what they are through "an overwhelming experience at puberty, an event that snatches them from society and turns them inward... the troubled youth is then watched over by a tribal elder who convinces them that this 'visionary experience' or transformation will be a 'learning experience'." (Gordon, 1992, p.605)



So Beuys' crash becomes the moment of crisis, producing a transformation within the tribal structure to heal him physically, of his terrible wounds, but also to produce a psychic healing of the spirit in this dive-bomber pilot, and servant of German Modernism. Roland Barthes describes the avante-garde artist as somewhat like a 'witch-doctor', who concentrates on irregularities (like Beuys' perception of the Berlin Wall), to produce catharsis. Through "artistic creations and spiritual exercises, Beuys unites the divided, integrates the disparate, reconciles the estranged and fuses the opposed."(Thistlewood, 1995, p.163) Therefore Beuys in his role of Shaman/Artist indicates the trauma points of our society and initiates a healing process.

"He invariably worked with the utmost concentration, as if in a trance, expending enormous amounts of energy, and thus enacting the paradox that, as he himself said, through the dissipation of strength he nourishes himself. He always did the difficult thing, the seemingly unthinkable, like talking for one hundred days, sweeping out a forest floor, organising a political party for animals or bandaging a knife after he cut his finger."(Stachelhaus, 1987, p.19)

## Coyote

Most particularly in the Action 'Coyote', in May 1974, Beuys' shamanic performance sought to heal the post-war divide between East and West. This performance involved being locked up with a coyote, for three days and nights in a cage (**Fig.17** ). The performance started when Beuys arrived for his first trip to America at Kennedy Airport. Beuys was met by an ambulance, wrapped in felt and placed on a stretcher. He was then put into the ambulance and driven at speed to the Rene Block Gallery, in downtown New York. The Gallery was split in two, half of which was a huge cage, in which the coyote waited for Beuys. "I wanted to isolate myself, to see nothing of America except this animal."(Stachelhaus, 1987, p.174) The Coyote, or





North-American prairie wolf, is a nocturnal predator native to the forests and foothills of North America. It lives mainly on small animals and presents no threat to man.

The Coyote was revered by the Pueblo-Indians who used it as the sacred representation of the Trickster God. They admired the creature for his subversiveness and cunning, characteristics for which he came to be equally reviled with the coming of the White-man. The Europeans identified the Coyote with the wolf of the European forest, the malign influence of Grimm's tales. They characterised it's nature as anti-social and instigated a programme of extermination. To Beuys the Coyote can be seen to represent the crisis, or trauma-point between the Red and the White man, the victims of the clash of cultures. It was Beuys' wish to make "contact with the psychological trauma-point of the USA, the trauma with the Indians".(Stachelhaus, 1987, p.141) The emphasis was on connecting the entire species, across experience and through history.

Beuys saw that you could relate to an entire species of animals through one, because animals do not act independently of their group, they are dependant on their groups and group leaders. "The human-being on the other hand can exist as a free individual, and his freedom lies in his ability to mould his thoughts."(Tisdall, 1980, p.26) Beuys thinks humans can reach the evolutionary point where we can leave behind leaders, tribes and Gods. He sees this knowledge as available to us only now that we have developed and used weapons of mass destruction, as seen in the wartime acts of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. "The paradox of our potential freedom, is that man- the free individual- faced with the complexity of the society he has created, opts to delegate responsibility to a governing minority whose repressive control is greater





than that of the most authoritarian High-priest, and whose destructive potential is unequalled in history."(Tisdall, 1980, p.26)

Beuys, insulated by his roll of felt( **Fig.18** ), and bearing a shepherds staff, attempted to mobilise energies that might bridge the gap between east and west cultures, to attempt a reconciliation between the decimated Native culture and it's European settlers. Beuys arranged copies of the Wall Street Journal about the floor onto which the coyote could urinate. Beuys' staff had been used in earlier Actions also, called the 'Eurasienstab' or 'Eurasian staff', it's polarities reflected the polarities to be brought together by the performance. He identified the Native-Americans as the Easterners, as they had migrated across the Bering Straits from Asia. The 'Wall Street Journal' represented the materialistic society that super-imposed itself over the society of the Red Man, whose economic system was Barter. At one point Beuys threw the coyote a pair of his gloves to play with. These represented the human ability to take independent action, a result of the human evolution of opposable thumbs. An evolution symbolic of the human future Beuys saw for us beyond leader led society.

During the performance the coyote and man "exchanged signs of recognition adapted to each other, and even adopted each other, they became reconciled."(Borer, 1996, p.25) After three days and nights the performance ended when Beuys was again taken from the Gallery, wrapped in felt, and driven by ambulance to his awaiting plane.

This effort to reconcile Modern America with it's Native past, also stands for the reconciliation of East and West principles in Europe, where another trauma-point of



culture can be seen in the Berlin Wall. Through reconciling with the Coyote, Beuys transformed himself and his role as an artist into that of Shaman and Healer of cultures. He makes the point that the artist can place himself within the trauma points of history to effect healing. As Beuys used his body to fill the fissures between cultures, Kiefer identified the space of the picture plane as the site within which past and present could be reconciled.

### **Container's of Meaning**

In the 1980's Kiefer's wooden interiors gave way to the paintings of stone monuments to culture. No longer representing the wooden environments of Germany's primitive past, but through a Riehl-like binary opposition, the stone environment of 'civilised' post-war Germany( **Fig.19** ). These stone settings depict a failed culture, buildings whose open empty spaces are suggestive of the Modernist alienation of subject from object. Just as the wooden interiors, attics and forests represented the site of Germany's formation, so the stone monuments of Kiefer's later paintings appropriate the designs of Nazi architecture( **Fig.20** ). Kiefer shows this monumental architecture as containers of meaning, but whose meaning relates solely to their intended use. Therefore, after the Holocaust, these monuments become containers of a corrupt ideology.

These new settings isolate culture from nature, perhaps showing what was unnatural about the culture that made them. They became symbolic focal-points, like Beuys' 'trauma-points', for the potential reconciliation of history. They are as provocative as Beuys' Actions, because they use the language of Fascist architecture, but alter it's context to give new meaning to old forms. Kiefer's melancholic fascination for these





monumental images, shows the aesthetic allure of Fascism, and force us to confront the possibility that we ourselves are not immune to what we so rationally condemn and dismiss. "How else but through the obsessive quotation could he conjure up the lure of what once enthralled Germany, and has not yet been acknowledged, let alone properly worked through? How else but through painterly melancholy and nightmarish evocation could he confront the blockages in the contemporary German psyche?"(Huyssen, 1989, p.39)

The 'historikerstreit' still rages in Germany, the historian's debate over German responsibility for the Holocaust, with some German historians placing the entire responsibility for on the Soviets. This mirrors the conservative turn in German politics since the 1980's and the political efforts to 'normalise' German history, specifically to "free German nationalism from the shadow of Fascism, a kind of laundering of the German past to suit the conservative ideological agenda."(Huyssen, 1989, p.28) Kiefer plays a dangerous game with the icons, motifs, themes and architecture of Fascism, the entire aesthetic of that which many Germans still refer to as the 'accident'.

### **The Catastrophe**

In Carl Jung's essay, "After the Catastrophe"(1945), he adopted a moral but reflective stance to recent European events. He stated:" The fate of Germany should not mislead Europeans into nursing the illusion that the whole world's wickedness is localised in Germany."(Pedraza, 1996, p.23) Jung accuses the Pan-European psyche of denying the truth almost as utterly as the German psyche has. The Catastrophe which resulted in the Holocaust also resulted in Hiroshima, Pearl Harbour and





Stalingrad. Jung makes the plea for Europeans "to become conscious of his shadow and thus accept his own guilt for the catastrophe." (Pedraza, 1996, p.23) Kiefer confronts us with this aspect of ourselves and offers art as the means to initiate healing after the failure history.

When Kiefer took the design from Wilhelm Kreiss' Hall for the Great German Soldiers, as the basis for a painting entitled 'Sulamith' ( **Fig.21** ), he brought together the Fascist aesthetic with one of the Nazi's most celebrated architects and the poetry of Paul Celan, a Rumanian Jew who survived the Nazi labour camps to become the most celebrated German language poet of this century. (Pedraza, 1996, p.55)

### **Your Ashen Hair, Sulamith**

Kiefer reassigns the dedication of the building to the character of Sulamith from the Celan poem 'Death Fugue'. In Celan's poem, Sulamith is the ashen haired love of the Jewish narrator. She is absent and pined for, perhaps already lost to the gassings and burnings, and from this her hair is ash. The poet writes first from the perspective of the Jewish prisoner, and then from the perspective of his German jailer, who in turn pines for his 'golden haired Margarete'. 'Shulamith' is also the name of a Jewish character from the biblical book, the 'Song of Songs', while 'Margarete' is another name for Goethe's 'Gretchen', the lost love of his book 'Faust'. Kreiss' building then is transformed from an architectural memorial to the lost war dead, into a painted memorial to the lost womanhood of Germany, specifically Jewish womanhood.



Celan was an assimilated Jew, whose Father spoke Yiddish but whose Mother was wholeheartedly German. Sulamith and Margarete have been interpreted as twin animas, the female aspect of Celan's nature in ethnic opposition.(Pedraza, 1996, p.67). The suffering of Celan's poetry is also in part due to his love of German language, and it's co-opted use as a legitimising tool of the Holocaust. Sulamith is the rejected anima of the German Fatherland. "In Kiefer's view Germany maimed itself and it's civilisation by destroying it's Jewish members, and so by frequently alluding to Sulamith"(Rosenthal, 1985, p.99) he hopes to reintegrate the lost Jewish anima into German culture.

### **Your Golden Hair, Margarete**

Margarete, who Celan relates to Goethe's conception of perfect German womanhood, is the embodiment of Aryan virtue. In 'Faust', Margarete exhibits a pure love of Faust, and at first shows a completely ethical view of life, her innocence is seemingly innate. But love leads her to deceive her mother and kill her own child, and so Goethe represents the virtue of womanhood being compromised by it's love for man. When Margarete end up in prison, she sleeps on a bed of straw. So straw represents her on the surface of Kiefer's painting 'Sulamith'. Sulamith then represents the lost anima of all Germans, who lost her through their worship of a hero based culture, dependant on male leaders.

Theodor Adorno's warning that there could be no lyric poetry after Auschwitz, meant that any effort to reveal the horror of the Holocaust in words, or indeed to represent it in art, would be seduced by the same Fascist aesthetic that seduced the Nazi's. Paul Celan's Poem 'Death Fugue', show that this "crisis of language" could be articulated





in language", when writing poetry about incidents that "made language incommensurate".(Huyssen, 1989, p.40)

In 'Sulamith', Kiefer follows Celan into the territory of seductive aesthetics. But in 'Sulamith', the vaulted structure's roof looks blackened with fire, and its central altar bears the seven tiny flames of the Jewish ceremonial candelabra, the 'Menorah', dwarfed within this darkened space. "By transforming a Fascist architectural space, dedicated to the death cult of the Nazi's, into a memorial for Nazism's victims, Kiefer creates the effect of a genuine critical 'Umfunktionierung' ( or 'Refuctioning'), ... an effect that reveals Fascism's genocide... in its own celebratory space."(Rosenthal, 1985, p.43)

This critical 'refunctioning' of this Nazi space, from the German hero cult into a memorial to the Nazi crimes against the Jews and against the female principle, shows the similarities between Kiefer's painting 'Sulamith' and Beuys' Action 'Coyote'. Both achieve transformation of culture, first through the identification of a trauma-point in that culture, then through the artist's reconciliation of opposing principles. Beuys attempts to reconcile east and west around the image of an oppressed animal. Kiefer attempts the reconciliation of split identities, Germanness before it was identified through binary opposition with Jewishness, by concentrating on the image of the lost love of a Jewish concentration camp prisoner. The goal confrontation and reconciliation, to initiate the healing of cultural wounds after W.W.II..





**Figure Seventeen:**  
Joseph Beuys, *Coyote* (Beuys meeting the Coyote), 1974.





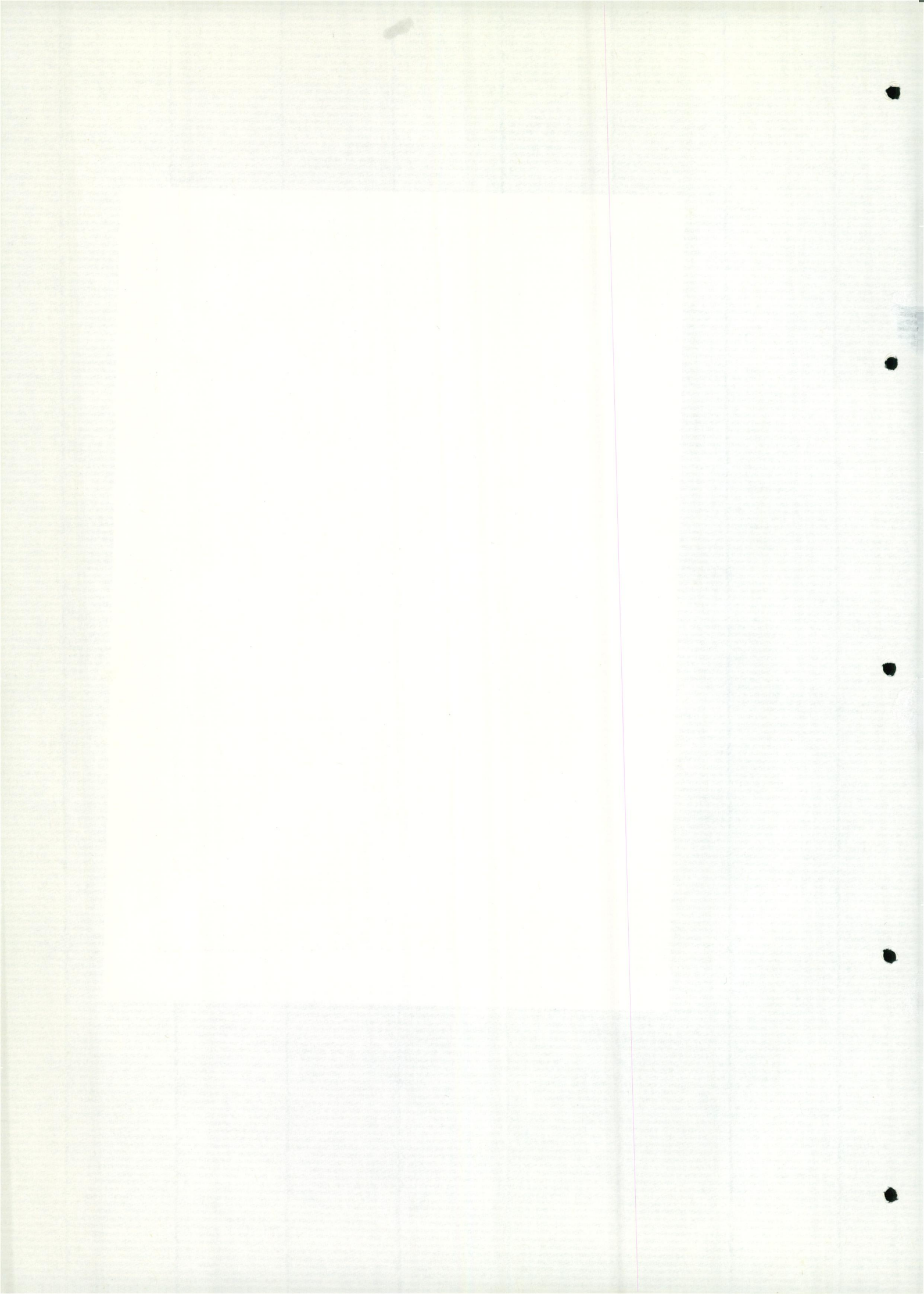




**Figure Eighteen:**  
Joseph Beuys, *Coyote*, 1974.

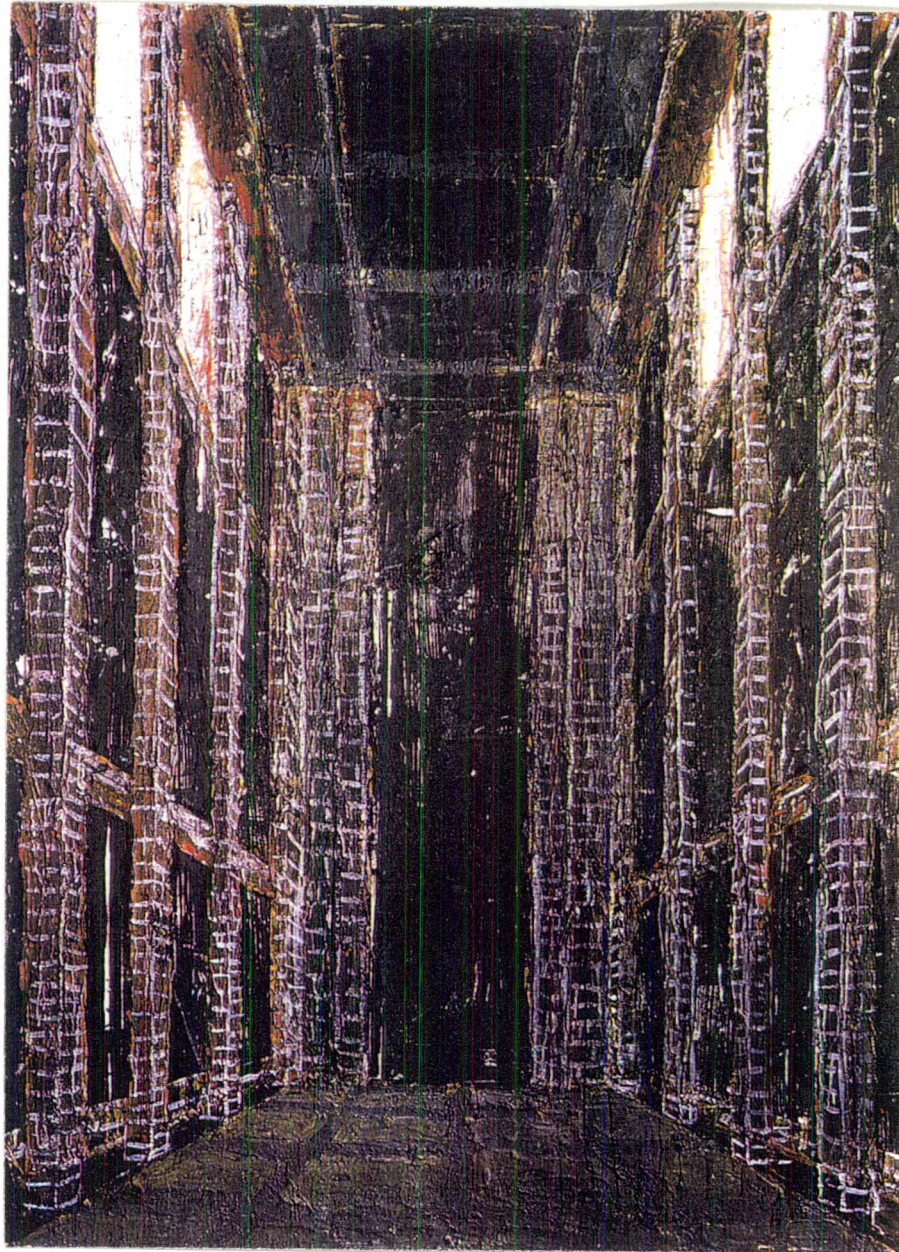




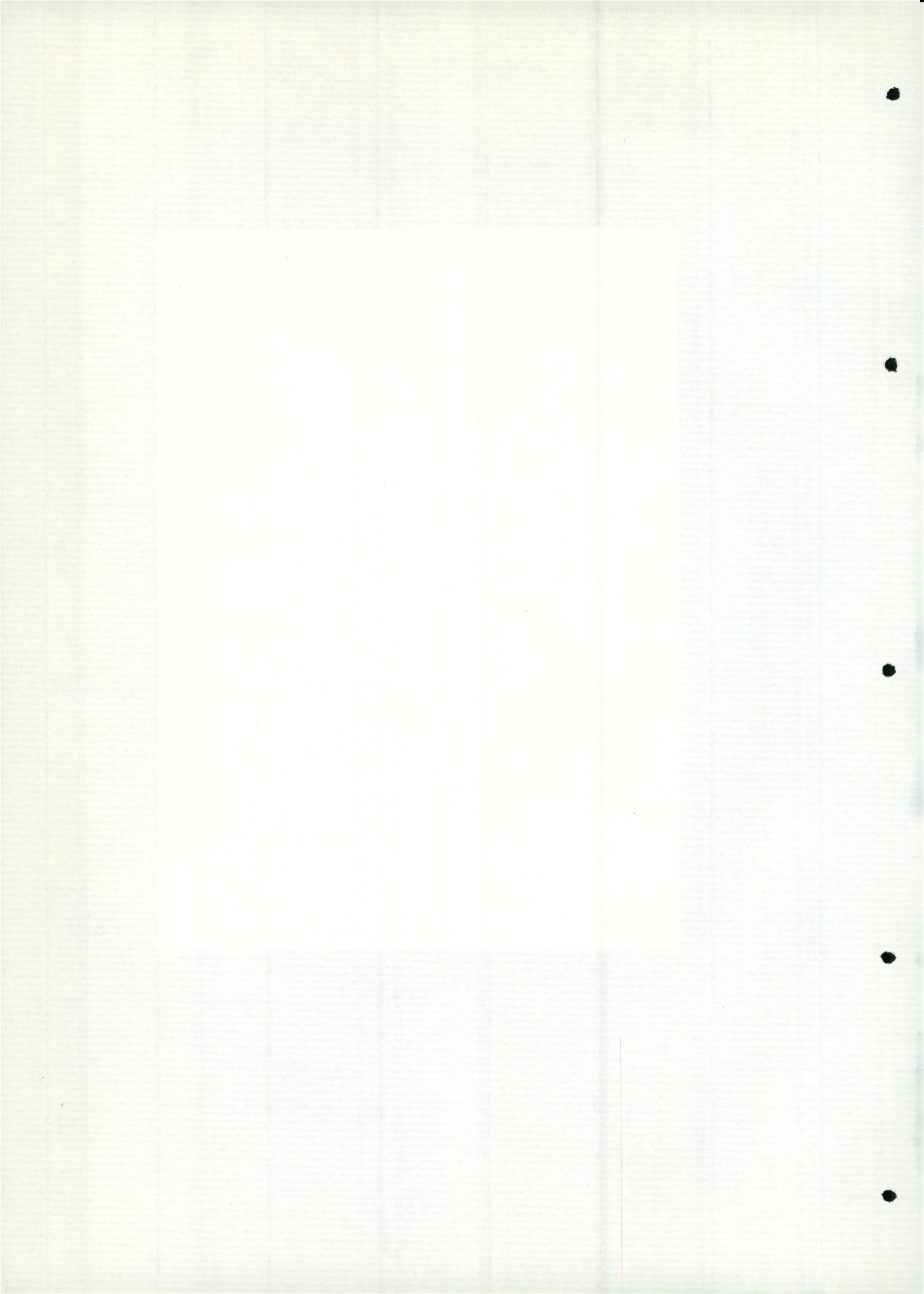




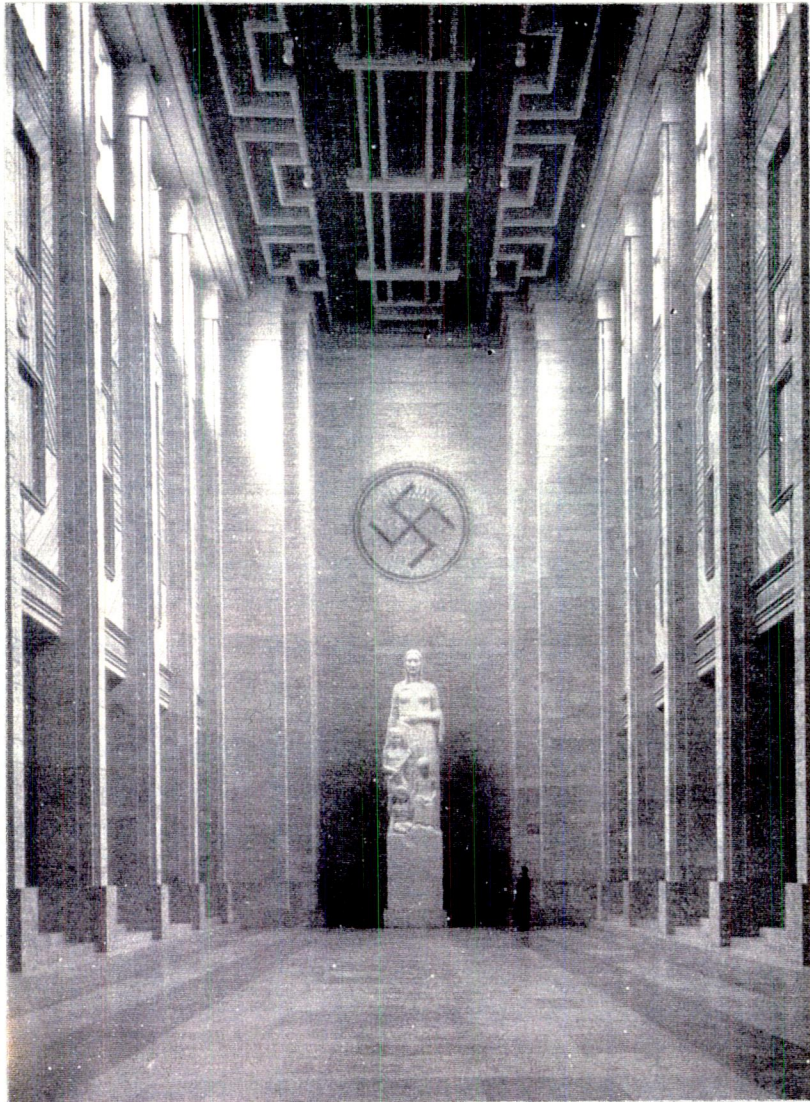
**Figure Nineteen:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Untitled* (Oil, Emulsion, Shellac and Straw on Panel), 1983.







**Figure Twenty:**  
Hans C. Reissinger, *Consecrated Hall* (in the House of German Education).

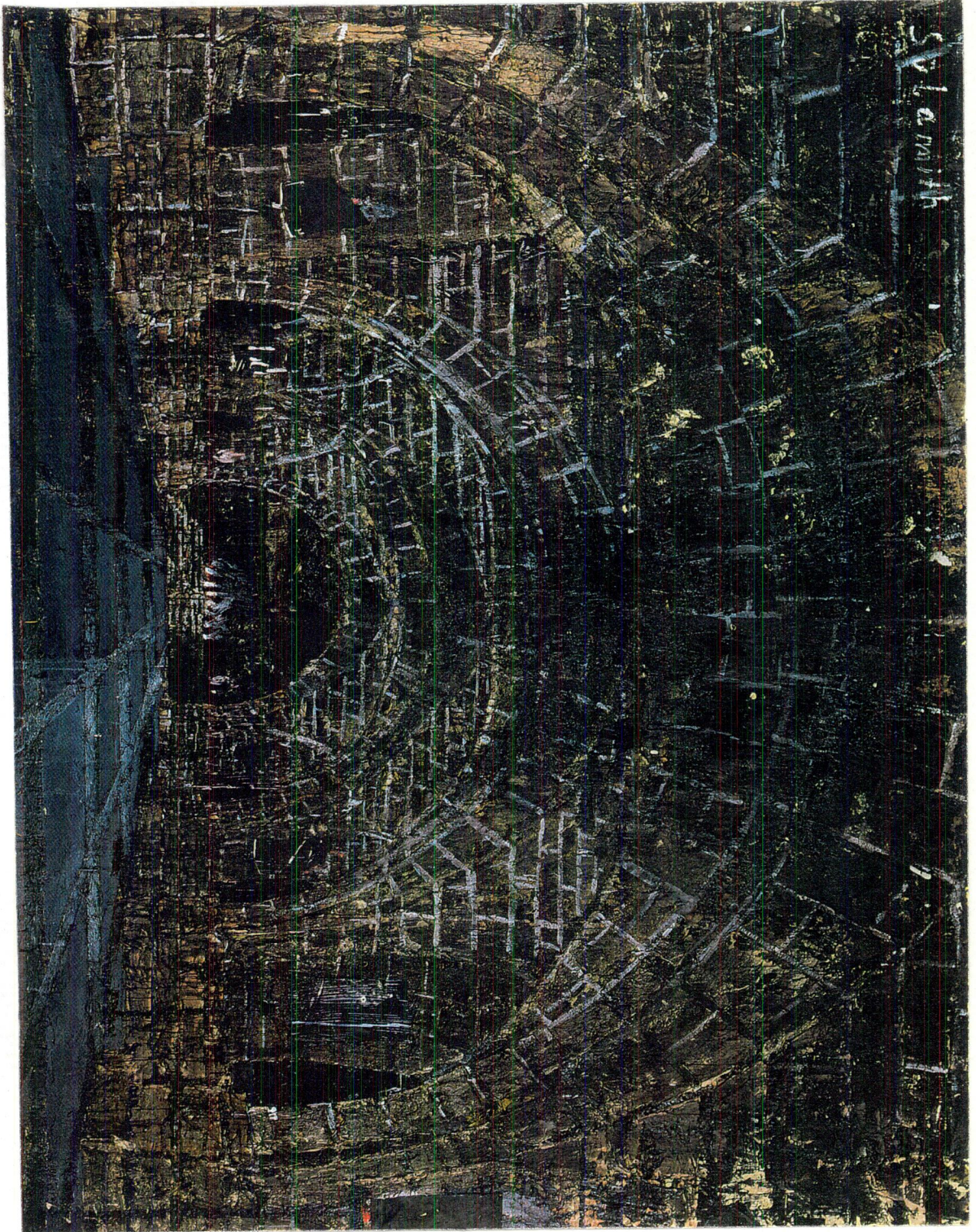








**Figure TwentyOne:**  
Anselm Kiefer, *Sulamith* (Oil, Shellac, Emulsion and Straw over Woodcuts), 1983.







## CONCLUSION

Joseph Beuys' main contribution to 20th Century Art, was his Expanded Concept of Art. Beuys was a post-war existentialist whose expansion of art embraced much of Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy, but he ultimately believed in a world without God, and beyond the certainties on unified religions. The Expanded Concept of Art embraces the entire Culture, Law and the Economy of a society in an attempt to effect change. Beuys used his expanded Art to call into question the very definition of Art and how society was formed. Beuys considered warmth to be the key element of this 'Social Sculpture', which he said represented fraternity and collaboration. The objects he created functioned as documents of his expanded social sculpture. The Art for Beuys took place when he communicated meaning. He considered teaching to be his most important art.

His student Anselm Kiefer's response to his teaching was to reject Modern formalist painting, he adopted a pre-modern practice. Central to the modernism that Kiefer rejects is the artist's invention of a personal, private style that links the idea of the individualism of the modern artist to Rene Descartes ideas on subjectivity. This thinking has produced a tradition in Art of a unified perspective system in painting. Kiefer's approach was to make many different representations, and to avoid a unified perspective or subject. His work concerning German identity reflects this. For him the German subject becomes formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways in which it is represented and addressed in the cultural systems that surround it.





His work requires an intertextual approach for interpretation. His art becomes a re-enactment of the follies of the past, not from his own perspective, but through the character of those denounced by history. Operation Sealion does not portray Kiefer's view of war, but holds the futility of others actions up for ridicule. Kiefer uses this as the mechanism through which he can call the Modernist aesthetic and the Modern subject into question.

Roman Historian Tacitus set the 'Hermannslacht' to words in 9 AD in his manuscript "Germania". Tacitus makes the point that the isolated nature of the German tribes during the first century AD, and their ability to keep off total Roman colonisation for almost 400 years, as a result of their forest home, made them the most 'racially pure' of all Europe, this conception of racial purity, was central to shaping ideas about German strength, purity, landscape and sense of difference to it's neighbours in the 18th and 19th Century and it found artistic expression in romantic paintings of the forest.. Wilhelm Friedrich Riehl first intellectualised the opposition between Germans and Jews. The historic attachment between Germany and its forest, was used as a weapon of anti-Semitism.

The influence of Riehl saw that there would be no European government with so ecologically sound a forestry policy, as that of the Third Reich. Though there is an undeniable connection between mythic memory of the forest and militant nationalism in Germany, it is not fair to simply associate conservation with Nazism. Beuys' co-founding of the German Green Party has had the effect of making ecological concerns a veritable monopoly of the Left since W.W.II. Beuys conceived the '7000 oaks' project as a "Verwaldung", a redemption through afforestation, to re-integrate into the modern city a sense of nature alienated through Modernism.





Kiefer's painting "Varus", and the 'Ways of Worldly Wisdom' series, far from representing a series of free intelligence's shows that all Germans are all tied together by the spidery lines of shared history, culture and ideas. The unstable artifice of German cultural identification with the 'Hermannslacht' was co-opted by the Nazi's. Kiefer and Beuys used these identifications in their Art in the seventies and eighties, dragging up the painful past, to confront a Germany steeped in amnesia. Confronting memory to produce healing is a theme that runs through both Beuys and Kiefer's work. Both have shown an ambivalence to Modernity in it's forms and effects, while their shared interest in Germany's 'Birth in Nature', has shown the need to inquire just how the German experience of Modernism could produce the particular conditions for the Holocaust.

Beuys stressed the idea of transformation, an idea which became more popular with the proliferation of anthropological knowledge about shamanism after W.W.II. His famous plane crash became a moment of crisis, producing a transformation within the tribal structure to heal him of his terrible wounds, but also produced a psychic healing of the spirit. Similarly Roland Barthes describes the avant-garde artist as like a 'witch-doctor'. Therefore Beuys in his role of Shaman/Artist indicates the trauma points of our society and attempts to initiate a healing process. Beuys' shamanic performance, 'Coyote', sought to heal the post-war divide between East and West. He thinks humans can reach the evolutionary point where we can leave behind leaders, tribes and Gods. He sees this knowledge as available to us only now that we have developed and used weapons of mass destruction, as seen in the wartime acts of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

Kiefer identified the space of the picture plane as the site within which past and present could be reconciled. He shows this monumental architecture of the Nazi's as



containers of a corrupt ideology, symbolic focal-points, for the potential reconciliation of history. He used the language of Fascist architecture, but altered its context to give it new meaning. In the painting 'Sulamith', he brought together the Fascist architecture of Wilhelm Kreis and the poetry of Paul Celan. Kreis' building is transformed from an architectural memorial to Nazi soldiers into a painted memorial to the lost Jewish anima. In Kiefer's view Germany maimed itself and its civilisation by destroying its Jewish members, and so by frequently alluding to Sulamith he represents the lost anima of all Germans, which they lost through their worship of a hero based 'Wotanic' culture, dependant on male leaders.

For Kiefer and Beuys the goal is to achieve beneficial change and to heal the cultural wounds after W.W.II.. Beuys brought art beyond the ideological boundaries of Modernism, and in doing so allowed the German artists of Kiefer's generation, the ability to confront the shadow of the Holocaust, to reconcile their national identity with their history and to engage the possibility of healing, in a 'post-Auschwitz' Europe.





## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

**BORER, Alain**, The Essential Joseph Beuys, Thames&Hudson, London, 1996.

**KOUNI, Carin**, (Ed.s), Joseph Beuys in America, Four Walls Press, New York, 1990.

**THISTLEWOOD, David**, (Ed.s), Diverging Critiques, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1995.

**TISDALL, Caroline**, Coyote, Shirmer-Mosel, Munich, 1980.

**SCHAMA, Simon**, Landscape&Memory, Bath University Press, Bath, 1995.

**ROSENTHAL, Mark**, Anselm Kiefer, Chicago&Philadelphia Press, 1985.

**NILSON, David N.**, (Ed.s), History and Heritage of the Northern World, Thames&Hudson, London, 1980.

**PEDRAZA, Rafael Lopez**, After the Catastrophe, Thames&Hudson, London, 1996.

**STACHELHAUS, Werner**, Joseph Beuys-A Biography, Abbeyville Press, New York, 1987.

**GILMOUR, John C.**, Fire on the Earth, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1990.

**HONNEE, Klaus**, Contemporary Art, Taschen Books, 1996.

**BESSEL, Richard**, (Ed.s), Life in the Third Reich, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987.

**GORDON, Stuart**, The Paranormal, Headline Books, London, 1992.





## Articles

**FISCHER, Jean**, "The Tale of the German and the Jew", Art Forum, No.24, September 1985, pp.106-110.

**LEVY, Mark**, "The Shaman is a Gifted Artist", High Performance, No.43, Fall 1988, pp. 54-61.

**AMMANN, Jean-Christophe**, "Interview with Beuys and Kiefer", Flash Art, No.126, February/March 1986, pp.36-40.

**KOETHER, Jutta**, "Under the Influence", Flash Art, No.133, April 1986, pp.46-50.

**OTTMANN, Klaus**, "Heidegger, Beuys and the Consequences", Flash Art, October 1990, pp.123-124.

**HUYSEN, Andreas**, "Terror of History-Temptation of Myth", October Magazine, No.48, Spring 1989, pp.26-34

**ADAMS, David**, "Pioneer of Radical Ecology", Art Journal, No.51, Summer 1992, pp.26-34.

**DUNNING, William V.**, "Post-modernism and the Construct of the Divisible Self", British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol.33, No.2, 1993, pp.132-141.

**HALL, Stuart**, "The Question of Cultural Identity", from "Modernity and its Futures", Oxford University Press, 1992.

**BARTHES, Roland**, "Myth Today", from "Mythologies", Paladin Press, London, 1982.

**SHIRER, William, L.**, "Intellectual Roots of the Third Reich", from "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich", Pan Press, London, 1964.

**GREENBURG, Clement**, "Modern painting", from "Modern Art and Modernism", Harper&Row, London, 1982

