

"THE LAMENTATION
OF DOCTOR FAUSTUS"

BASELITZ 1961-1967

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"THE LAMENTATION OF DOCTOR FAUSTUS":

BASELITZ 1961 - 1967

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Introduction

This is an essay about painting, and the paintings of Georg Baselitz. It is also about the ideas contained at the core of Thomas Mann's book "Doctor Faustus". The book is the fictional life and career of a German composer, Adrian Leverkühn, in the first half of the 20th century, who announced to his friends and contemporaries before he died in '1940' that he had made a bond with the devil 24 years previously which had infused and brought forth the extraordinary music that had earned him immense fame and respect. It is the pivotal 25th Chapter in the novel in which the devil visits the composer in Italy and discusses the business of creativity, eventually persuading the young man into an alliance to devote his music to the devil's hand, dispelling the self-criticism and doubt of the artist, that I am concentrating on. In this chapter lie a number of notions on the generation of artwork, relating in this case to the conditions in which painting operates.

The reasons why this essay is attempting to deal with Mann's "Faustus" and Baselitz's work as relative to each other are quite simple, and I find them exciting. Baselitz works without objectivity, the furtherance of painting is his undertaking. In the paintings since the early 1960's "Pandemonium" series his painting has progressed with its destruction. His aggressive disharmony is willing to brave any risk towards the future development of painting. Success and failure go hand in hand but in a sense the failure, the fall, becomes a necessary ingredient for progression. The inherent superficiality of this attitude to creative activity is as I see it the most underestimated value which painting can attire itself with.

At the risk of making too large a leap I see the same values in the arguments held between the devil and Adrian Leverkühn sees himself chosen, and why he has been sought out, but once these have been established, he is convinced most enthusiastically and testily by a cocky and cunning demon to allow his difficulties in creativity to be rescued. After a lengthy discussion of the rewards and drawbacks of the "artist-nature", we are never actually told how physically precise the offerance of Leverkühn's work to the devil's hand will relieve the conditions of its exegesis. One thing is known: Leverkühn has been visited and offered and has eagerly consumed the notion of immanent confusion and insanity by accepting the failure, the lack of control his situation deems, and for the next 24 years charts a most spectacular rise and achieves the heights he has aspired.



1.





3.

PART ONE

GERMAN PAINTERS

Modern Versus Historical in Expressionism

There is a feeling held about the figurative aspect of contemporary European art that is based in a complacency, a smugness stemming from a comfortable position of success. Progression has come this far and can allow each practitioner boundless pleasure, treating within a pluralism of meanings and aesthetic masquerades. This can be taken with the pessimistic view surrounding creation in a climate of desperation and passivity which generates, indulges and reaps benefit from some kind of hidden authoritarianism. It is familiarising us for what is yet to come.

On from this, it's almost as if the neurotic failure to go further leads back to history as the mine from which to excavate abandoned styles and appropriate them. There are terms like 'powerless' and 'entertainment' sticking to the norms like 'avantgarde' and 'subversive' where icons and items have been rescued from history's store to stir up utopian thoughts in this historicist image melancholic and infantile in its reaction to 'historical failure' and its abandonment of the frictions and contradictions of Modernism, some definitions are needed in front of examinations of individuals and styles.

First, the spinning collage of Modernist fragmentation, involving the laying bare of experience, voids, contradictions, and the confusion of the irreconcilable. The images are shattered, raw and truthful to experience. The Historicist image is opposite, with an illusion of unity and totality, the synthesis of historical determination. The definition of these terms and their acquired distance from each other relies on authenticity, whether you believe in either, or both. The truthfulness of expression in Modernism comes from the immediate, the startling and arresting image, its contradictions from within humanity and from where it lies, on view in an art context. The Historicist truth is guest of the authentic, determined feelings of domination from what has been done before and proved to be right. You can't argue (why should you) with that which by its proven correctness dispels the present and belief in the future.

A painter like Markus Lupertz, seeming to celebrate the obsolete by unearthing and repeating emblems from history simultaneously echoes the futility, the tragedy of original expressionism. His standpoint seems to be as a retarding and backward looking obstacle to the situation he has found himself to be in - a wail in the void of the future which beholds mockery and mimicry as the fundamentals of

expression. It is an old view - the radical as doomed to failure and absorption by that which it set out to subvert. That tends to mythologise and muddy the problems surrounding progression and creation. These problems of expressionism and historicism fuse in frustration, inability and the fear of failure.

Current German Painting

Contemporary German painters present us with a bad dream of history in a way which avoids the traditional standpoint of classicist negation in the illusion of reality presented and its invented naturalism there is in essence a standpoint of the future as history. It operates with an intense and sometimes quite seemingly obsolete naturalness which happens at odds with the abstract aesthetic. Regressive and decadent it may seem looking through from a formal ideal, but this is a situation it is operating in where social and artistic directions have not been established.

Where the abstract past is transcended, and the potential of naturalness is allowed to flourish, a Faustian situation blossoms. The uncertainty in naturalism gives more of a clue to the future than the certainty of abstraction. In German painting you don't get the claims of heterogeneity through the natural aura and presence of historicism and allegorical painting, as would be expected when the abstract past is consciously denied. There is a personal, dramatic, libertarian intensity in the work of Baselitz, Kiefer, and Beuys and an intention to use allegory without being afraid of the consequences of history, partly in search of a modern tradition and authentic identity in the world of allegory.

The whole idea of painting serving the purely historicist purpose of producing images in terms of the classical past will be regarded as too retrospective as long as personal expression is similarly regarded. From abstract or avantgarde position everything seems backward-looking. It's the personal expression of history (with or without allegory) which results in an exploration of modern tradition, an exploration hampered by aesthetics.

German painters expressing their German past are looking for trouble, and despite claims to be evoking an awareness of history's power, have been daubed as rightist. It might have as much to do with the ideology they are exploring as the fact that the propagators of fascist ideology used similar allegorical methods as precedents for their own aims. The totemic structures used by the German painters have become a scapegoat for their own attitudes. It's rarely seen that

their use of materials and images confirm their confidence of intention, and should reinforce rather than deny their authenticity as images of redemption and honesty. The emblems and desires of fascism remain as present as the 'reconciliation of knowledge' aspect coming from alchemical and transformative sources.

Fascism and alchemy 1. Fascism

The fascist aesthetic is a language, and in the case of the German painter has a relation with his/her origins far more meaningful than the languages associated with aesthetics. The language of abstract art becomes in this situation far more easily justified when it is used in the painting of themes ranging from awareness of a nation's past to sexual frustration and submission. Anselm Kiefer suffers the associations of nazism due to his thematic language and his desire to rediscover and transform the past. Georg Baselitz becomes similarly afflicted by his discovery of failure on a more personal, human level and his preoccupation with bodily and painterly destruction. Their destructive painting processes lead to an awareness of extravagance, endurance, horror, death and ruination. It is not negation for its own sake nor destroys for negative purposes, but it serves all the interests unfortunately conducive to fascist titillation. (1)

Baselitz and Kiefer share with Albert Speer an interest in the function of the ruin. Speer designed his third Reich monuments to resemble roman ruins after centuries. He saw everything but the tomb to be artless and designed with masses of people in cultic formations in mind. (2) When Kiefer is not directly using the solemn architecture left over from the Nazi era his use of architecture bears witness to the destruction and death of modern settlements by mythological forces. Speer would no doubt have found Kiefer's work fascinating, not so with Baselitz's. It is the indistinction between the natural cause of death and the artificial death which comes out of a preoccupation of death which gives Baselitz a nearness to fascist thinking, the same kind of nearness Kiefer provokes. The yearning after death and the justification of the ruin is a feature common to these 2 artists, but it is a lack of awareness into their transformative aspect which unfortunately brings on allegations of the glorification of history, and of egomania.

Fascism and Alchemy 2. Alchemy

As a painter Baselitz finds strength in painterly transformations, particularly the 'Fracture Paintings' executed before 1969. Here paintwork and imagery become instrumental to transmutation. There are traces of abstract painting and a predominance of human and animal imagery pointing to demonstrative interest more in the mental than practical approach to his art. There is obviously a paradox in the continuous presentation of images where the image is consciously and repeatedly destroyed. On the surface this appears as illustration coming from an opinionated stance on the roles and appearances of figurative/abstract painting. Here an insight can be found as to the parallels of alchemical sources found in Baselitz's fracture paintings.

The mirror of Nature, the guide to the knowledge of matter, the secret sources and transformations and the link between individual and whole comes out most strongly when the unity is actively destroyed. If destruction is transmutative, then the destruction of the image of the body by Baselitz and his further destruction of the picture point to non-fulfilment as indication to the scope of his ambition. Non-fulfilment is a seam running through Max Ernst's work as strongly as the oeuvre of Mann's imaginary composer A. Leverkühn.

Metaphor and allegory in the sense of alchemical use come through more strongly in Kiefer's work than in Baselitz's but in the letters it is more to do with sensitivity and worldview than the purposeful explosion of traditional vocabularies. It is not a free interpretation of classical symbolism in a mimetic way, but as an honest means of exploring what must be a fractured and pained vision of disunity. It is as relevant to his country's history as to the progressive history of his craft that Baselitz's painting fractures and denies the realities and progressions expected for success and acceptance to painting's model for the late 20th century.

Cultural Pessimism in German Painting

Baselitz' painting fits in with the tradition of Western painting, it continues it by means of predominately figurative, non-abstract motifs. He's more interested in freedom in description of a figure or object than with the motif involved. The figures and objects speak through painting's language rather than the language of association they otherwise might be pinned down by. Particular to

Baselitz is a determination to accomodate change habitually although since 1969 he has 'institutionalised' this by repeatedly painting upside-down. The traditional motifs reflecting the past, the traditions of narrative and object being identifiable with a time or a crisis and their conscious use and abuse can be seen as displaying a progressive or regressive tendency.

The ordering of the past by a contemporary painter points to either the establishment of a hitherto unavailable artistic authenticity or a pervasive desire to come to terms with the past. In 20th century German painting, investigations into cultural history try to place the awareness and experience of post-war Germany in terms of 'disjunction and continuities'. The cultural pessimism is inherent and passes through the references and concepts of historical time and progression. The pessimism is rife in all motions of populism and its dire political consequences. In the case of German painting and the work of Beuys and Kiefer the notion of the end of ideology comes out in a response, a transcendence of the style of the time and an answer to the expectations of progression in painting.

Baselitz, Kiefer and Rupertz in their time

Morbid memories, existential fear, and a sense of limitlessness preoccupied German painting immediately after the war. The country's isolation in world affairs while being in the centre of Europe created the foundations for the re-emergence and recognition of its art reflecting its spiritual and cultural lineage. These artists felt unshackled by the war, free from the expectations and progressions of art production by the horrible and special qualifications their shattered country held. There wasn't any need to probe the boundaries of modernism anymore, but it led to a search for the country's heritage which avoided the pressures or regression and negation.

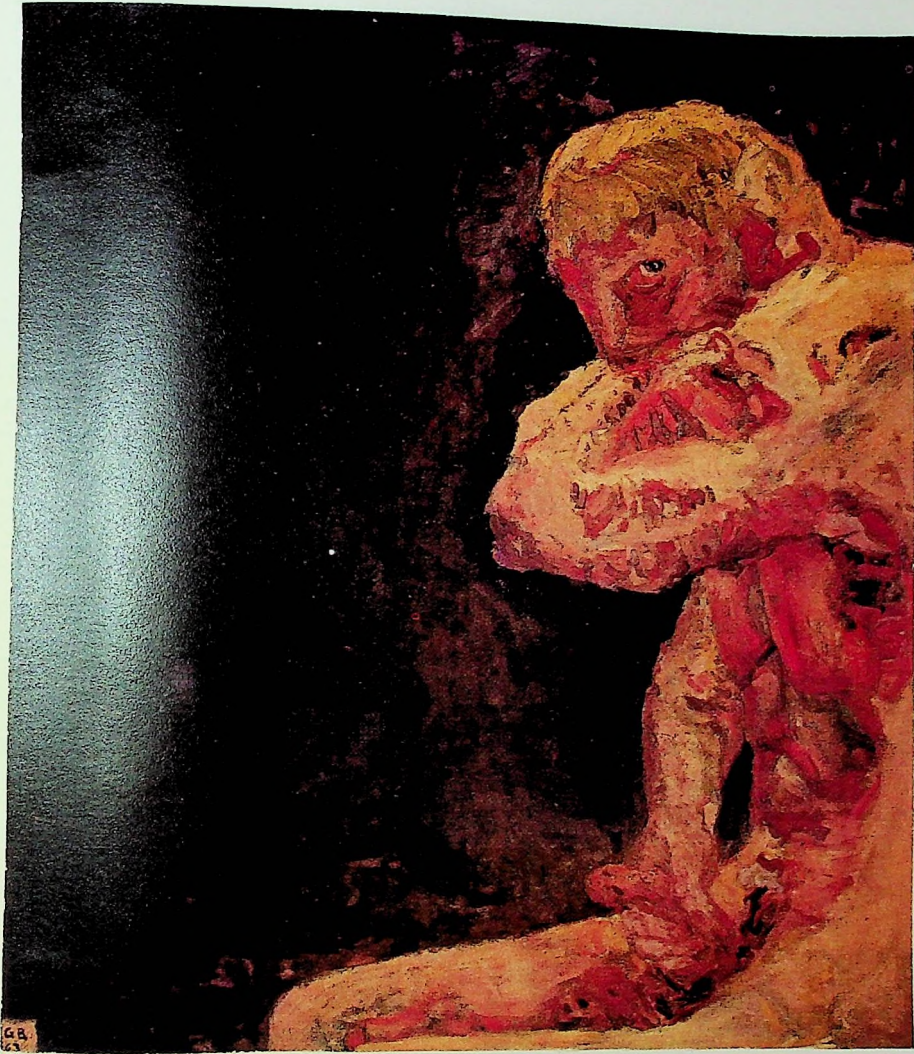
The denial of avantgarde painting led to a reassessment and rediscovery of traditional, provincial art. These works and painters had embodied the Northern spirit in German culture in their woodcuts, etchings and paintings and were eagerly fed upon as source material for art of a style independent of international uniformity. Even major artists like Cezanne, Munch and C.D. Friedrich were cited as important influences because despite their (Nordic) provincial origins they had attracted universal adulation due to their artistic power.

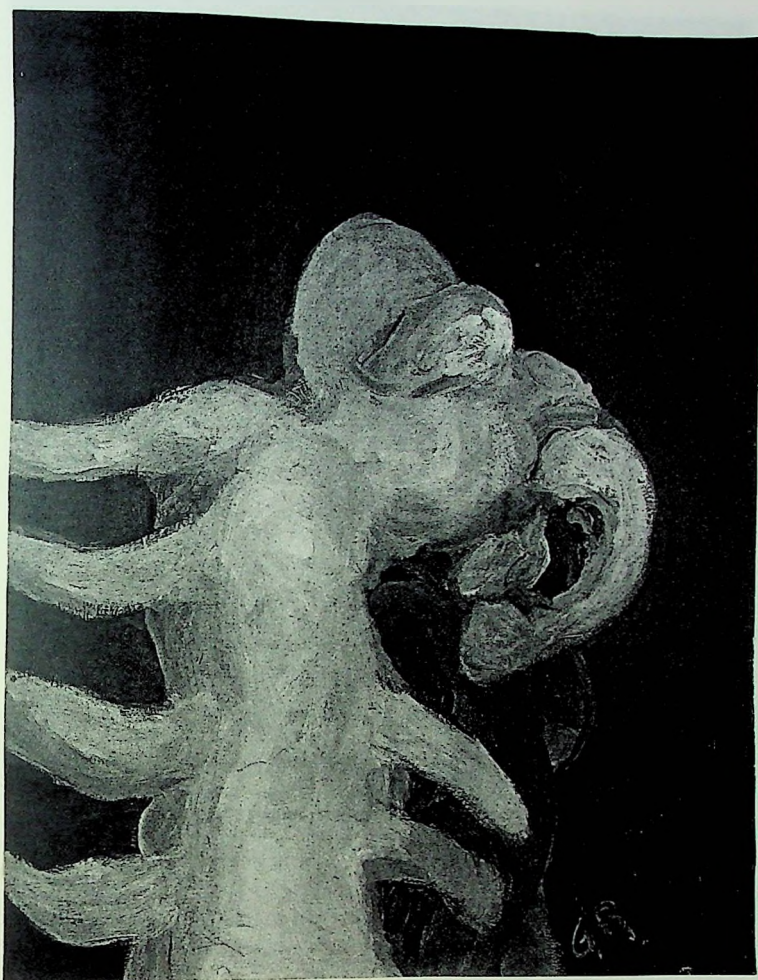
There was no shame in this identification with the Northern temperament and German origin, rather an impulse to ignore and challenge the precedents of a generation from which the post war German painter (Baselitz) had become orphaned. The international language of abstraction and expressionism had no longer become concerned with specifics, with communication of experience and suffering. The developments in pluralism coming from the prevailing concepts of avantgarde painting had to be gently and carefully ignored by the German painters.

It can be said that the recoil off this attitude leads to overemphasis on a romanticism of cultural heritage, in the sense of their 'looking for trouble' in their country's past. It's confusing, but there's no romanticising going on in laying out of memory for purposes of illumination. Kiefer, commonly accused of this (glorification of the 3rd Reich monuments), has happened upon the idea of art being able to change our interpretation of history. His peering back into the present history of the German nation has found no destiny, no solid progression which entitles a prevention of the terrible events of it's recent history. There's a demonic will, not an ability for its own sake, in Kiefer's thesis and the means which he allows it to propagate. He has found that the isolation of Germany's heritage after the abyss of the conflicts provides a levitant status, aloof and transcendent of the posturing of internationalism. Lupertz too invented his own painterly means to provide the freedom he felt he needed to elevate painting as a hymn onto itself. In his freedom he becomes the hero to generate the golden light of grace around the joyless world.

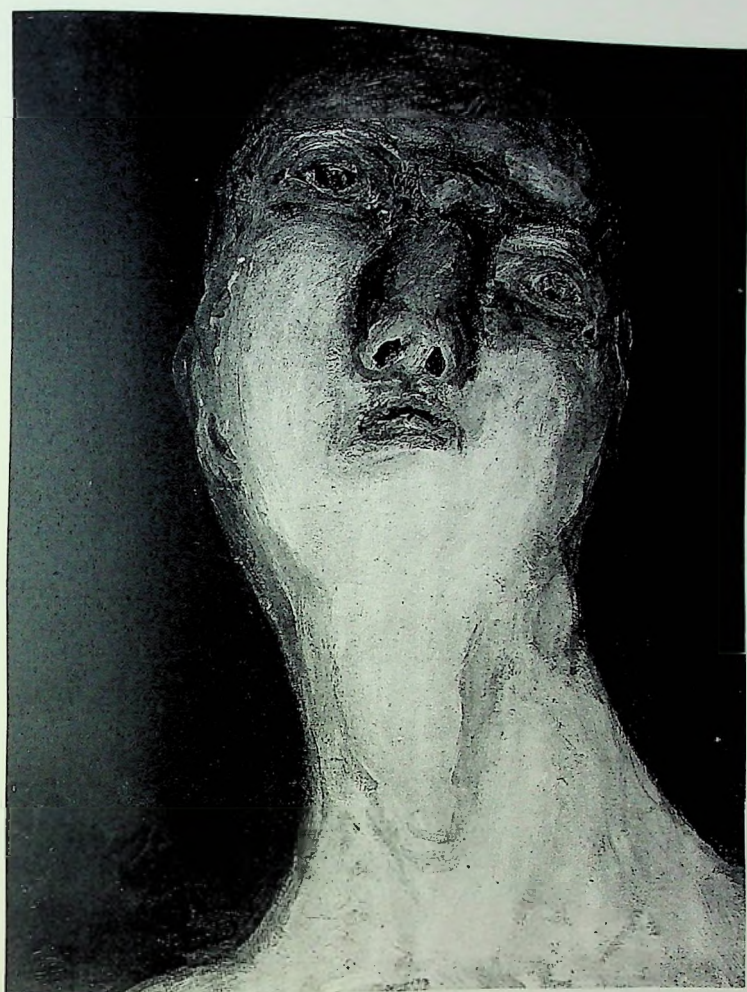
This adds to an insight into Baselitz's and Kiefer's situation, a Faustian stance of declaring to the origins of their future histories 'in all things thy equal' (4) and that they are not about to examine their situations from any inherited disadvantageous position. Declaring an interest in their histories summons up all sorts of possible pitfalls because in a modernist environment they are embarking on journeys into history, sacred, untamperable ground.

The fall as applicable to Baselitz, whose aggressive disharmony risks him and puts him at a precarious artistic balance, is necessary to him, to the future development of his art. A need of redemption, the admission of something painful and the willingness to brave any risk are imperative towards his particular vision of progress. Destruction of habitual colour and form harmony, might seem on the surface abhorrent and tampering with stylism for its own sake, but he has granted it to himself not as a privileged desire for originality, rather a dis-satisfaction with the acquisition of artistic terms. It's an embracing of alienation, he gives himself absolutely no right to expect homage as to what artists have done before, and often not the merest acknowledgement.





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Time, the Tragedy, the Hour-glass

"Time is the actual thing, the best we give, and our gift the hour-glass":(1) - so does Thomas Mann's devil grant the first insight into the nature of his visitation upon the composer Adrian Leverkühn. He first uses it when quizzed by the distrustful host as to the nature of Hell and a discussion on it. The devil skirts round this issue by explaining that a dissertation on Hell is unnecessary, as contemplation of the end of the hourglass while already sand trickles through the neck. The insinuation is that the boundlessness of satanic time is not worth worrying about, and that the half-empty glass of Leverkühn's time is. An agreement is going to be made, and it concerns time, the granting of it and the description of it. (2)

This is the first sequence in the dialogue between devil and man dealing with the issues of "artist-nature". It is the tragedy of a musician, of music, art and culture; the tragedy of humanity set alongside the tragedy of Germany. Its scope is the limitless, effortless creation comparable to the meaninglessness of individual life. The way Mann has the devil granting time and fluid harmony to the composer points out the antithesis: the pointlessness of human life, socially and personally, the reality of wretched failure in the best human aspirations. The "devil's-time" is the unnatural medium, distorted to a euthenasiac matrix, an outward power in which humanity moves and develops unnaturally. (3)

Time is the centrepiece of the Faustian ethos - it is the measure of suffering and degradation. It is what is spelled out to Leverkühn by his visitor as being the vehicle of greatness, aspiration realised in the grandest terms. His visitor is supernatural, powerful overtime and master of its procedure and outcome. Time in Faustian terms applies to an "independent and remorseless machine which flattens, levels and destroys all personal plans and wishes, all singularity, personality itself". (4) The despair and the impotence, the inability to move and operate successfully correspond to factors that are specific to this case. The Second World War and the evocation of the Northern temperament include themselves in everything that is important to this particular Faustian world, and to means and practices of art creation and their time.

Durer's 'Melancholia', the Strength of Failure

Leverkühn in mocking the devil has pieced together several clues in the devil's terminology and reference.(5) The Northern "yearning after the warmer South", the sequence of time through the hourglass, and referring to the composer's training in theology and gift for mathematics, seemingly precede the inclusion of the 'magic square', symbol of totality out of formula, and some correct hint as to what is yet to come.

There is an ambiguity in this, using Durer to suggest melancholy failure. The kind of saturnine frailty with an embodied meditative state of mind produces nothing in itself - its nature is failure, you cannot consciously create failure but its presence will touch everything it is associated in with the reedy fibres of uncertainty. Any uncertainty will seek its own redemption. The relative inactivity versus activity in Durer's 'Melancolia I' has across the centuries found it's characteristic in the fractured reality, the conscious destruction emanating from the brushstrokes and etched marks of Georg Baselitz.

Uncertainty, the strength of it in dealing with matter, in ability to do things with the use of pain, or stopping altogether because of it, has it's antithesis in parody and intellectual mockery.(6) Parody is like an admission, that while seeming to be the contrary, of being on very good terms with the world and being prepared to do nothin about it.

Adaptation and Mimicry

A great gift. It must be discussed because it is the sterility of being able to do something for it's own sake. Painting, for example is a tremendous force (and a private disease) and if it can be evoked free of skepticism and intellectual reserve it has an ability of unknowing potential or merely an awareness of an empire of mediocrity. If adaptation is a symptom of progression, that being an ability to do something in an acceptable fashion and reflective of the prevailing worldview, it becomes mimicry, clowning and entertainment.

Positioning painters like Kiefer and Baselitz in the modernist ethos is impossible, they don't aspire to be bedfellows of the generation of artists who rely on textual and theory-based sources solely as a means of reproducing and juggling with what are perceived as the prevalent, malignant mores of contemporary life. In the Faustus world of the twenty-one year old German composer it is the devil's offer of a period of time which solely forms a remarkableness of creativity stemming from ability, ability unsoiled by practice and reverence pandering to acceptibility (Leverkuhn, student of theology, works alone); he been sought out due to great talent, for diabolic stimulus in creation.

A Little Heating of the "Cooling Draught"

In his stating that leverkuhn's case was quite worthy of the trouble of intervention the devil hints that the man's gifts in composition have been granted from a higher power and that he is gifted enough to be angry.(7) There is a metaphor of the granting of poison (the "cooling draught") sucked on by a serpent through a wound.(8) This is a reference to the cause of

Leverkuhn's physical afflictions (migraines, photosensitivity) due to his contraction of syphilis in a meagre encounter with a prostitute.(9) Running alongside the ironic and poetic reference to the poverty of the young man's sexual career is the image of the poisonous draught of syphilis being the devil's bad seed planted in the healthy soil of the artist's ability, to be returned to and the blossoming of it admired. It comes back to the devil's reference: "gifted enough to be angry" - that the healthy aspect of the man has been soiled and ruined. His state of mind will deteriorate and become paralysed, needing to be overcome by demonic "hand-over-head illumination".

"Devil's Fire" is the only possibility for movement over paralysis and the sole factor in avoiding creative stasis. A little "heating" should provide the elation and creative intoxication and extinguish the crippling paralysis.

"Bedvilled Time": 24 Years of High Spirits and Melancolia

Countering the spell of paralysis with devilish illusion, the forces of creative rapture behold the artist living like a lord and astonishing the world as a "great nigromancer".(10) Metaphorically speaking there is an image of the time of art being produced as being "divels-time" with an end as unviewable yet fixed, and to be terminated, and the endless depths inbetween in which high and fruitful periods will develop from where important work will be plucked. In these periods paralysis is forgotten, proper stature is achieved, the worker can "rise out of himself" but remain the same, untranscendent, convinced the like hasn't been for a thousand years.

In the history-sensing terms of Kiefer and the more localised humanistic terminology of Baselitz's fractured heroes, there is room for excess on both sides, fitting for "artist-way" and "artist-nature" in their description of time and it's potential for opposites. The reconciliation of opposites, the prospect of 'redemption' through love and knowledge, the accordance of artistry through alchemical aims and the whole aspect of the artist as philosopher fit within the scope of the pendulum, operating in its own time and being reflective of it.

Kiefer uses his materials to fashion great reverence and importance to the juxtaposition of present with past, when these materials had a more authentic, potent meaning, and the way he uses them as 'history-seeker' points him along the path of alchemical freedom. His flights into the triumphs and failures of history, into images of nature and humanity in the most colossal sense, serve to map the landscapes of melancholy. The void he has sensed becomes the godlike depth of historical suffering, a nightmare of history emerging out of it's most glorious stories and structures. The desolation, on a more practical, personal and bodily scale paints Baselitz's version of humanity and it's operating-time. The familiar as embodied by

health and the manneristic treatment of forms swings like a pendulum alongside the bizzare, the destruction of the sick and diseased. In the 'Pandemonium' series there is presented the curse of disunity, continued alongside the lofty thrills of realisation and discovery in the "New Type" paintings of heroes in a mannerist pattern, yet imbued with destruction in every disharmonious line and brush-mark.

Whether their scale is that of a nation's consciousness of suffrage, or a procession of humanity reduced to single image, of flesh, there is the vision of the deep well of human punishment and grief. Positioned as the "inspired mouthpiece", the accusations of inflation and the scourge of falling victim to their own disease must be borne by these artists.

Disease, Private Disease

Read as metaphor, the parallel depths - the lofty thrills cohabitant with the "honourable deep" can be seen as relating to an historical level of mass consciousness or as a more personal attribute ("nothingness, desolation, barren melancholy"). The pains must sufferingly be endured, gladly paid with pride and pleasure, for "what he has so much enjoyed".

The metaphor of the source of the pain and disease is elaborated when the devil chillingly conjures up an image of viruses swarming over centuries of human achievement ("swarms of animated corkscrews") and operating as catalysts and necessitants to the human condition.(11) The infection of the devil's flagellants provides the disease, here illustrative of private contrast to the world, to the criticism of it and rebellion against it, and refuge with the "Free Spirit" in bookish meditation. Disease is not the vehicle or impetus for "sensational disease" of the higher world, but puts a critical repulsion, a contrasting humanity on a person. In this case it is not the syphilis which rots away the innards in terrible catalogue which is of remark, but Leverkuhn's cerebral condition, the fiery process of meningeal deterioration, the virus attacking the brain.

Leverkuhn's brain has been recognised by the devil as "the place of incipient illumination", diseased by viruses narrow and small and finely circumscribed and now the "workroom of the little ones". The devil, having intervened in Leverkuhn's past by limiting his treatment and allowing the disease to develop to the stage of imminent deterioration, puts it that the condition will enable the composer to soar, to conquer "lameness and halting", and be able to abolish doubt and moral barriers. Abandonment of these moral barriers strikes a chord of metaphoric megalomania, one that is self-willed but conditioned by a situation. A painter, inviting the energy to shock even himself by faultless honesty, by the shock of having to repay a kind of debt, and by the need to justify their art and activity, wills and is expectant of the "disease" surrounding self-doubt. Baselitz' disease is himself drawing failure passionately onto himself as if he could not bear it and was predisposed to suffer it.

Frequent achemical references and passages from the composer's past are used by the devil in his descriptions of the disease. There is the image of the osmotic journey through the spinal sac to the cerebrum where the venereal meningitis is at its "soundless stealthy work". An inability for the "little ones" to reach the brain without osmosis "paving the way for the scourges". It is the brain which "gapes at the visitation" and looks forward to it, as if any form of progressive abnormality is to be welcomed, and expected. The basic, initial invocation of Faust's Mephistopheles (12) who appears after 'summoning' to be of help and advantage to the good doctor, disguising the ultimate aim of ruin, is an echo and a precursor to the brimming disease, the madness of the strategy of destruction.

Inspirational Rapture, Sickness, Madness and Death

The schitzophrenic nature of the 'fracture paintings' and the velocity of the remainder of Baselitz's oeuvre is self-evident. It deals with imagery in a way at variance with external factors, and at variance with its own conditions. If the death and negation in the methods of attack and variance become productive, lead to an upward movement and a healthy appetite for change and regenerate ("the flora grows so rankly, in such diverse colours and shapes") (13), then what is sick and what is well in images of sickness? Baselitz's charting of the ways of sickness and death in the 'Pandemonaic' series have led the way of joy and life much further. These works have the illness and madness needed to differentiate themselves and their author the painter from the norm, to make a cleft in order that the normal be defined. It is when the illness and madness becomes and including factor for it's own forms alone, its own exegesis becoming the disease, that there is trouble, the neurotic need to fail becomes a desire to destroy.

In Doctor Faustus, at the still early stage in the dialogue, the nature of illness defining the sanity of thers, the neurotic rapture of healthiness and failure is questioned by the devil as being a simple "mad healthiness" and a mere metaphor of melancholia. He contraposes the two opposites, first, rapture:

"Am blissful! Am beside myself! That I call new and great! Seething bliss of inspiration! My cheeks glow like molten iron! I am raging, you will all be raging, when this comes to you! Then God succour your poor sely souls!"

And then, a rebound:

"Oh, flat and stale! Oh, a dog's life, when a man can do nothing! Were there but a war, so that somewhat would happen! If I could croak in good style! May hell pity me, for I am a son of Hell!" (14)

Although this is the devils' analogy of the elevation and rebounds of "artist-nature", in it is a foretaste of his eventual description of hell, of the ends and rewards of a life dedicated to embracing the joys and pangs of the eternal activity of the 'Melancolia'. Whether or not 'genius' is included in this, the activities of the artist, the maker, is on a par with the diabolic from hell by nature and stablemate of the criminal and the madman. In the devil's estimation of importance, work generated to learn and understand the way of the criminal and madman is true creation. The creations of the criminal and the Kiefer ("criminal") and Baselitz ("madman") strongly appeal to diabolic description, by these criteria.

Sparkling Unreflectiveness, the Devils Enthusiasm

Here it seems as if the imaginative is taking over, and the power of the strong metaphor is on the wane. It is a metaphorical dialogue and without the element of fancy and mystery would seem quite cold, a plain analogy of the ups and downs of creativity. Using the devil as a simile for inspirational impetus and freedom is as old as Faust itself, but with or without reference to the specific artists being evoked there are some powerful ideas coming out of Mann's demon as to the setting free of 'knowing', the "morbid and healthy" creativity, the devil's true rapture. He makes nothing new in itself, he only sets free: the devil becomes awareness, aware and being able to use the 'gifts' for furtherance of the aims of painting, the path of knowledge.

In an historical statement the devil hinges the entire nature and importance of the creative act. He tells Leverkühn, reaffirmingly, of the opposite to his own case, that of being talented and sought out:

"Where nothing is there the Devil too has lost his right and no pallid Venus produces anything worth while!" (15)

Lameness, scruples, doubts, chaste selfconsciousness are all devilled away. Fatigue of creation is able to be charmed off, by 'inflation' of the person and their time. The devil explains that he does not offer the experience of "classical time" in the way that this affords a 'wholeness' in perception of history, with it's joys and pangs and final end. His offer is that which has not been tried, genuine inspiration:

"...primeval enthusiasm, insicklied critique, unparalysed by thought or by the mortal domination of reason-" (16)

destructive criticism goes, and is replaced by "shining, sparkling, vainglorious unreflectiveness".

After this, using reference to Beethoven and that composer's flawless composition, there is the second part of the dialogue, with a more favourable Leverkühn being taught musical theory by

his visitor. The way in which Beethoven's notebooks illustrate how he took a respected musical idea or form and with "scant confidence in gods prompting" inspired to remound it to a situation of "no possible improvement" becomes a "sacred mandate". The devil here is trying (succeeding too) to tempt Leverkuhn into aspiring to Beethoven's heights. God is supposed to be incapable of that kind of visitation, he "leaves the understanding too much to do", and only the devil is the "master and giver of such rapture".

The analogy of musical form, of the absolute and immediate synthesis of compositional genius holds for originality in musical terms, but the emphasis is the same, can be applied to the surrounding layers of homage and procedure in composition today. Leaving the understanding too much to do, overcriticism in mass acceptance, being inspired to seek the past and having the courage to do so, without the former godly spectre being devilled away points out the devil's enthusiasm.

The Forbidding "Style-Garment"

The two German painters are not alone in their task. Penck, Schoenbeck, Lupertz and Immendorf have seen the seriousness and the consequence of their country's legacy and have taken historicism at its most imperative. But the neo-classic and avantgarde historicists, particularly in the U.S.A. and Italy seem to make a pretty decent career in paintings about painting history in the age of high modernism. Seeking to become master of irony by reflecting the blandness of today with dignity is pointless, it doesn't even get as far as being self-destructive.

Self-deception: in the work of David Salle, for example, he leads us to perceive mediocrity as the only possible outlet for a mediocre stimulus, and we are therefore supposed to find this highly ironic. Real analysis, analysis of real pain is brushed over here, it doesn't seem to be interesting enough anymore. The question is whether or not this is indicative of powerlessness in Faustian terms as the German painters analysis of powerlessness in the face of the past. The present doesn't have to be more interesting neccessarily just because it can be viewed in terms of history, but having the decency to be honest about any investigations of source-time always seems preferable.

The Inbuilt Distaste of Serious Honesty

A general sickness covers all art production, according to the devil, but he prefers those who refuse to don the cloak of mimicry in style acceptance and continue their work in "general impotence", being honest about it. In comments wholly reflective to the climate of pluralism occupied by artists since the late 1970's, and with reference particularly to Kiefer, he states that serious work when it comes to light under these conditions displays "effort and distaste". (17)

Any composition becomes too hard; an age which rejects sincerity in the production, a simple belief in one's own capability to work in a time where the solitary artistic activity becomes difficult to justify, is not conducive to production which can be judged distinctively. The new 'emancipation' of pastiche and formalism leaves the concept of the honest "masterpiece", the "self-sufficient" form, abandoned in the ranks of traditional art.

With widespread knowledge of every possible use of artistic and creative canons, "tone-formation" is given by the devil in his thesis as the factor which forbids their use. Applying musical descriptions, he advocates that their knowledge forbids their use. Any composer worth their salt would rigourously forbid themselves use of any musical value connected with traditional knowledge of musical composition. The "canon of the forbidden" censors to the honest composer the false, the worn-out, the cliché. The canon which adjudicates falsities breeds efforted work, but the guarantee of sincerity it will provide loses it the mantle of traditionalism and obsolescence.

Art Becomes Critique

Technical horizons, no matter how outstanding the specific weight of individual aspects, have lost their gravity when used, even in the most magnificent forms (here, Beethoven; the diminished 7th). The use by a historical process of any musical form irreversibly renders it obsolete, lost. And if the judgement of a composite depends on one single element (chord) due to the time-factor in musical appreciation, then what is right and what is wrong with the completed work depends on each "uncontradictory" sound, which provides the fragment to which the entire piece may be reduced. Therefore in every musical bar the 'honest' author exhausts their ability for execution, given their own forbidding canons for production.

The resulting self-criticism and moral hesitation in the attitude to composing art presents a severe claim on the author that they do justice to it in every aspect to which their work may be seen. It lets the capability of any art-producer be permitted to merely solve technical puzzles; "art becomes critique". In this range of practice, obedience and honour in rebelling with courage and independence are necessary. Supremely mocking everything that will ever be produced, the devil looks on the huge and dangerous scope for "uncreative" working practice as being a fact, one allowing the devil along the scope for kindling the young composer's work.

Transposing Thomas Mann's use of the chord's place inside of a symphony, to a painterly motif, and further down, to each mark which makes up the description, we see Baselitz's motifs as indicators of attitude, mannerist emblems which create their own origins. They are not 'critiques' of the conventions of painting, nor homages to either fascist or social realist imperative to tackle the straightforwardness of the idea - the devastation of figure or background, emerging out of history.

When the devil waxes on about composition becoming too difficult, the preconceptions and ambiguities of plain and simple imagery kindle a disharmony of meaning. What the devil in this case offers is a 'diabolic' harmony in breaking up the image, the sequence of marks destroying the bovine normality of representation.

Needs and Moment in Spontaneous Harmony

The only 'rightness' theoretically possible is the diabolical natural harmony generated from compulsion over thought. The devil cites Beethoven. But Beethoven can only now be judged to be lost in history, part of a preciousness enshrouding art, which has become a modern taboo. According to the principles of harmony thus given, the life-form of the work, time and extension of pretence, the superflousity and ornament are all disallowed by modern practices (self-critique) and fall away from the work. So too does formal glorification, which censors, by consequence the fictional passion and suffering, victims of a time which accepts as the height of its transgression the entirely unfictional - the unplayed "expression of suffering in its actual moment".

It is the middle ground, the devil's "ideological sickness" which contains the empire of scope for operation. The small and perscribed elements, themselves incapable of forming a single case, a single train of thought, the self-satisfied pretence of art as the make-up of several necessitants goes by the wall. Perennial codes of painting which have continued for centuries have led up in the preceding decades to playing around with its own conventions and has lately been it's own main concern. It's all over. Playing with the forms from which all life and expression seems to have disappeared points to an answer, a regeneration, not a continuation of "centuries of accomplished unity".

Parody of History, the "Despairing Heart".

Can the melancholic parody, the aristocratic nihilism be applied to history? Given the "despairing heart" of the German painter's situation, with a broken history and an international progression of art - movement spiralling upward, can history be tackled or probed with ambiguous irony? As in the Faustian dialogue, if we can metaphorically attribute religious alliance with this situation, the 'Christian' passion deals with knowledge and corruption thereof, but the devil's 'true' passion leans toward embracing the absolute questionable which can be explored and used to break through any doubts as to the 'corruption of virtuosity'. Reaching the "giddy heights of self-admiration" by rising above doubt leaves the creator shuddering in awe.

That which uplifts, increases the feelings of might and determination, preferably countering the moral angle, will be preferred to a virtuous truth. The virtuous truth will be objective truth over subjective, pure experience. The fading of his distinction echoes the same lack of distinction between disease and health previously given. It is a fact of life in the Faustian world of metaphor that creative disease is more dear to life than healthiness and steadiness.

The Mystic Passion of the Devil's Theology

The image of a whole legion of youth flinging itself on the work of the diseased and morbid genius promises a fitting end description of the results of devil's-genius, when the splendour outweighs the pangs, and thanks to the composer's 'madness' those who have exalted the work need no longer find themselves 'mad', but healthy in cultism. Such a totalitarian endpiece, the passion of barbarism, is Kiefer's godlike stance in exactment. His treatment of it is the theological grasp the devil has on the religious. He is "sole custodian" of theology; theological existence is recognised only through him. Likewise, historical existence is only recognised through its most excessive, paradoxical manifesto;- the disease of inhuman excess must be diagnosed in it's cause before it can be treated by being brought out into the open and cured.

HELL

A thousand times ten thousand metaphors for hell can be squeezed out, and that number is not significantly reduced when the meaning turns its scope to fashioning situations of creativity. Everyone has their own secret symbolism; to Faust, hell is the end, the pay-off for the granting of 'devil's-work'. There, "everything ends". Everything to do with grace, compassion, consideration and sparing, that which you "cannot do to a soul" - happens (18), soundlessly, outside the terms of language and with no connection with time or the future tense other than: there will be. The "ecstasies of anguish" which record the "unbelievable" and "irresponsible" activities of the soundless, unrecorded hell are the terms of opposite to the pleasures of life, and a scale as to the realising of life's unity. There, the "finest and proudest" will sink the lowest, endure the unendurable. (19)

A testament to the fact that to know a little about life you must try to understand death and to experience heaven you are obliged to satisfy the description of hell.

Imagery of extremes in cold and heat which always seem from their opposite to be relieving, but on getting there are immediately intolerable, describe the schitzophrenia of any attempt to unify the theological status of salvation in "devil-nature". The polarity itself is the salvus - "mediocrity". The creative attitude here it is encouraged to be of such a healles apacity that "it makes its man despair from his heart of redemption". The devil points this "sin" as the true theological way to salvation, and only he is the granter of the individualism and "naive recklessness of despair" out of reach to the conscious mind.

Hell is the conclusion and the perfection of pain to the psychological status of unity. Hell's mythological status of diabolism is worn by the living who creates their own dome of hell, refusing to justify the activity, in this case, art, or music, do you accept this justification gap as one inherited and passed on from history? Or as one that is assumed, hungrily, grasped as the perfect means of vision, and of truth.

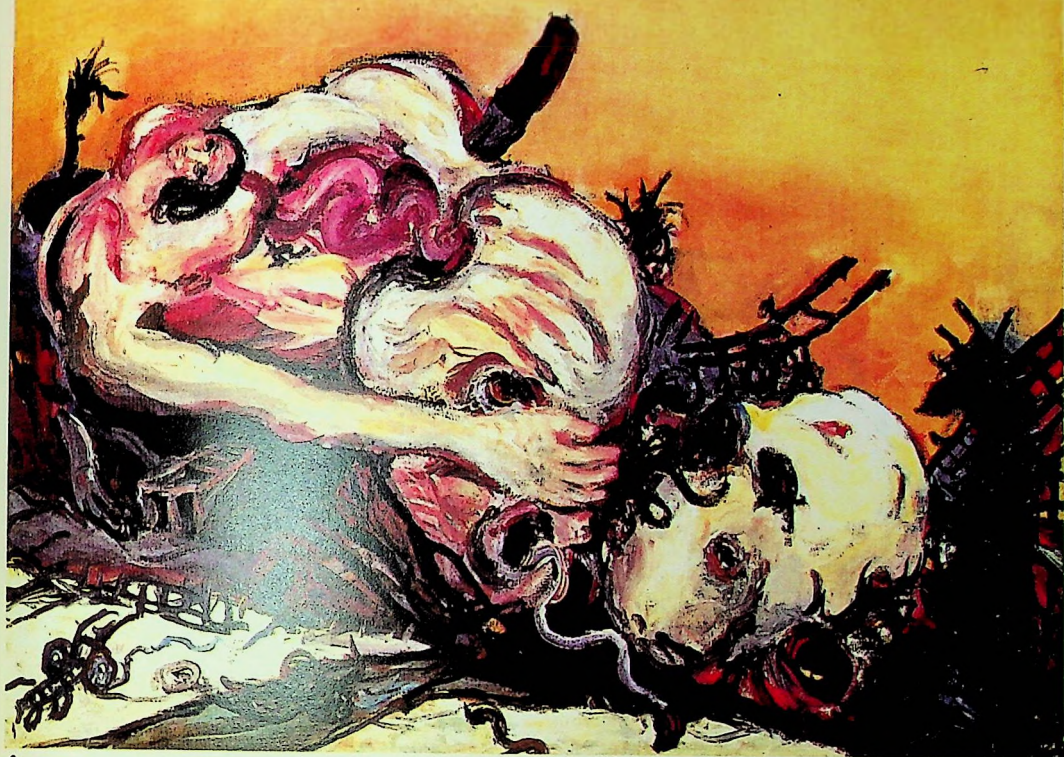
Kiefer's vision of 'hell' as the nightmares of history and their life in the present is quite difficult to justify. Almost every brushstroke Georg Baselitz uses (description of simple motifs excluded) becomes tough to justify. They are not trying to hoodwink anybody for the sake of reputation, fashion or market values or for donning of the "style-garment". If comparing them to the Faustian situation of the devil and Leverkuhn can illuminate the dischord between the best laid plans and the worst intentions, then it should not seem inappropriate; you have to believe their rootedness in history to get anyway close to them in the first place.

The public genius and private sanity which is poured on to the surfaces of their works and rests in the collective eyes and brains of those they reach can push and pull in the conscience of personal and national history as fiercely as the demonic pendulum between extreme cold and heat that can "melt granite". (21)



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PART THREE

BASELITZ'S PRINCIPLE

Mann's Faust, the composer Adrian Leverkühn exists in an aesthetic bubble, his tragedy is acted out in an intent and self-imposed seclusion. The tendencies of those he comes into contact with are in essence reactionary, the dilettantish intelligentsia preparing the outside world for the impact of fascism. His politics are negligible and his non-involvement in the affairs of his contemporaries or the political persuasions of the day leaves the path of his life wide open for the devil to influence. The 'unworldliness' of his existence, paying scant attention to outside influences contrasts with the grotesque and snobbish 'concern' his aesthete-like circle of friends act out to each other in their salons. How does this Faust achieve his magical breakthrough to the social world from a practice rooted in the tiny sanctuary of the study?

Leverkühn's tragedy is one of the 'inwardness' of the spirit of his age - the German, existential introspection capable of bringing forth immense powers for good or bad. Both Marlowe and Goethe had their Faust characters hungry for meaning in the social practices of youthful translation of ideas, whereas Mann's Leverkühn is sealed and celibate to the outside world. The inwardness and seclusion ferment the tendencies which open the door to the devil and also produces the spirit of the composer's concentration which becomes so uncompromising, puzzling the outside world with its aesthetic output. Leverkühn's Faustus is an index of possibilities out of knowledge and suffering, the isolated, contemporary spirit with capability in equal measure for good or evil. It is the German mind cloistered in the study, it ekes out a progression of its own destiny, its potential to operate with, and influence the external world with its sources. It's the purest source, the most problematic and the most dangerous one that refuses to buy time with contemporary instinct.

When Leverkühn rejects with contempt the devils offer of glory it is his wanting nothing to do with these basic instincts of his art. Having nothing to do with the prevalent art - sources puts the work that will be produced on the levels of parody no matter how weighs the pathos and intellectual irony:- and determines that the form and content of the work will be ultimately based on terms of opposition to the social currents of contemporary art. Similarly, how does the work of Georg Baselitz come by the illusion of his independence from contemporary art, that he owes nothing and concedes nothing to his contemporary surroundings? By examination of the historical situation he affirms his place as owing as much to history and previous art movements as he does to the artistic directions of the future, those yet to be realised. He knows well where his present-day historical situation is - the stylisms of the past twenty years have been terribly uncondusive to art - and the only illusion used is to fight the stylisms of modernism's progressions by active renunciation. With the methods and phenomena of modern art serving the purpose of becoming their own parody it is very hard to turn in and renounce the factors of art production without pandering to the nihilistic tendency. The route to painterly knowledge has to come from an imaginary position, the 'diabolic' illusion of self-importance and self-awareness.

The paintings of Georg Baselitz before 1969 make up a body of work intent and uncompromising in refusing to align to notions of progression, let alone the ones they themselves create. It's difficult to envisage the work as a whole, and the prevalent banality of some of the content questions the sufficiency of the motives involved. There is an attitude, a self-awareness of insolency buried deep in the work. The fracture paintings and 'pandemonium' series cannot pay debts or borrow them from the stylisms and conventions of contemporary work, or the artist's own contemporary history.

Further, this attitude involves the short, sharp and formally lucid expression of discontinuance. Every part of the painting is capable of its own expression, has been stated and need not be used again. This emphasis goes for all the periods of his work. It is as if the habits and practices which must be used for painting to succeed have taken on an insect scratchiness and have a distinct unease to be anything more than they actually are. This "agressive disharmony" will be shouted out to the viewer, each colour and brushstroke a caricature of reality, with only the 'dense suffering' (1) remaining to rest on the spectator with an existential eye. What is exciting and immediate about these works is that almost every ounce and shred of self-satisfaction and parody has been shrivelled, ghosted away.

The dramatic friction with reality contradicts the act and the art of painting. The only real intention in his work is the expression of disharmony becoming the vehicle for painting's furtherance. Evidence of Baselitz's experience and the visitation upon him of reality bringing suffering define an expressionist paroxysm of pain, despair, rage and impotence which are elementary to acts of paintwork holding claim to the remotest associations of honesty and authenticity. Though his anger, compulsiveness and impatience come out in line, colour and compositional form, there is something of agony, tenderness and love in the apocalyptic absurdities which pathetically shuffle through his trail of contents. Using the different pictorial elements there have been visions of tragedy and pain marked by elementary and careless construction and concealed, incurable suffering.

His wish is as clear-cut as the language he has used. To break from routine, habit, and lead the contraflow to established artistic categories and stylistic conventions; emphasising painting as being independent of subject matter and successive imitation. The 'subject' to Georg Baselitz becomes a vehicle for the manifestation of expression and the espressive forces of colour, form and composition.

A dramatic and grotesque friction emerges in the way figures and forms are reduced to preserve little or nothing of their beauty, their complacency. The aesthetic roots, the elements of satisfaction and delight decay in the horror and malevolent consciousness in which they are treated. Baselitz's universe is

rendered, his consciousness has had its certainty and its shape of feeling uprooted and moved by fury, only now able to manifest itself in forms raging, shapeless and turbulent to behold. Tremendous powers of expression emerge, unconnected to logic and thought in the way they are constructed. Nothing remains except the barest spiritual identification - a dearth of irony and sarcasm marking where the epitaph of parody was constructed. It attempts to see where the boundaries of toleration and comprehension are, and to go beyond them because human life is too short to allow for such limits.



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12.



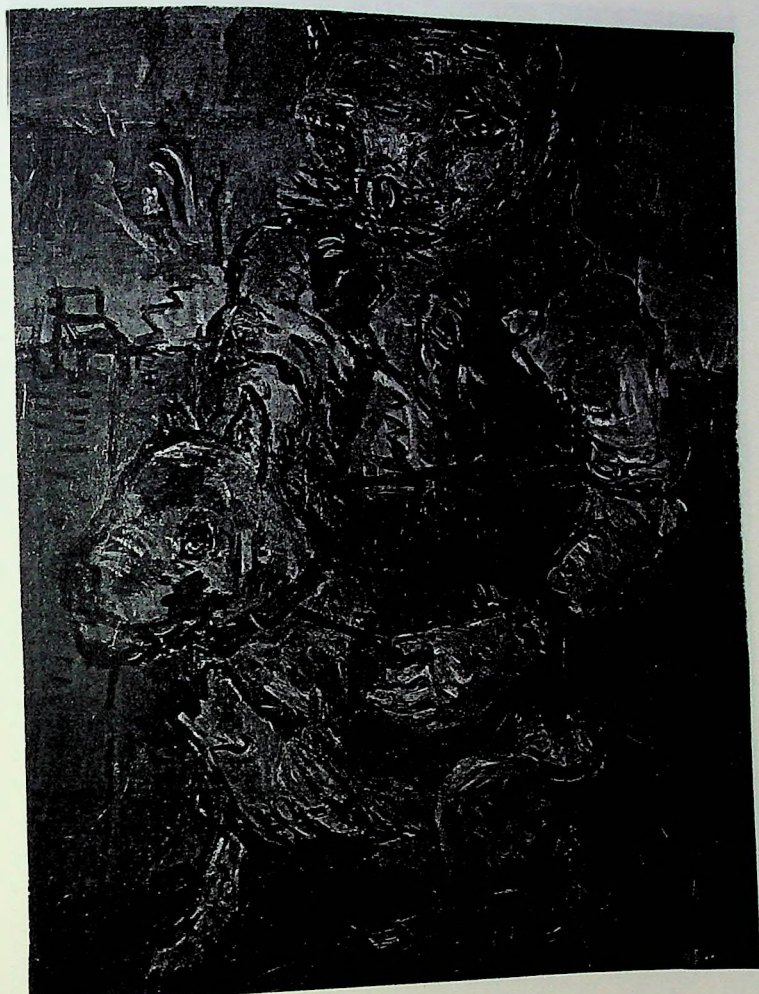
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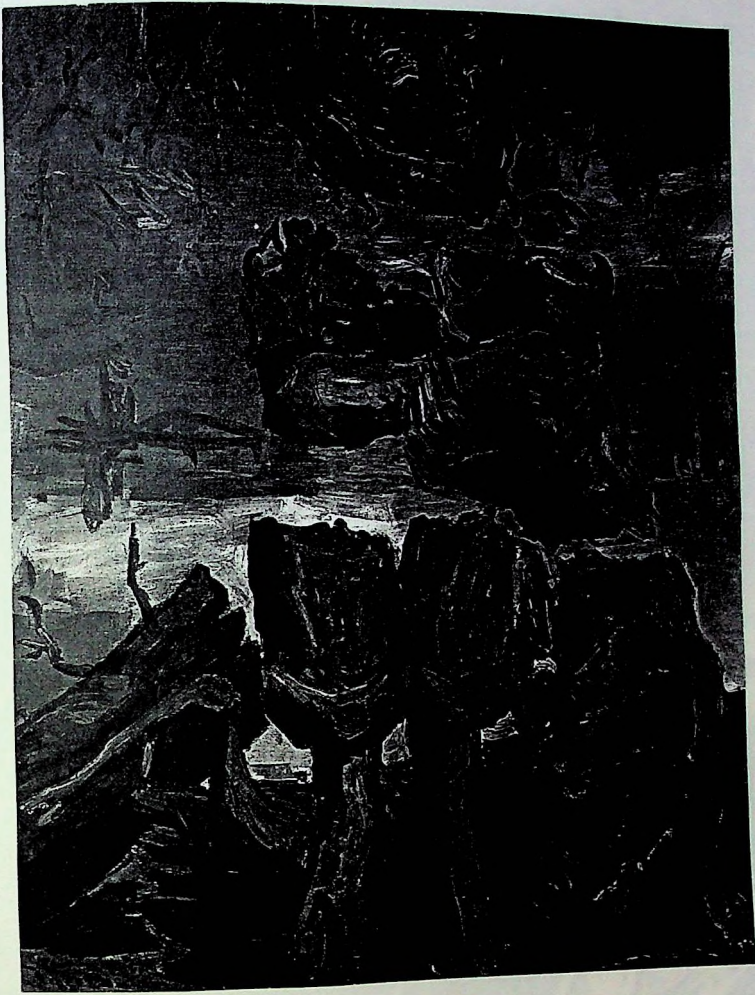
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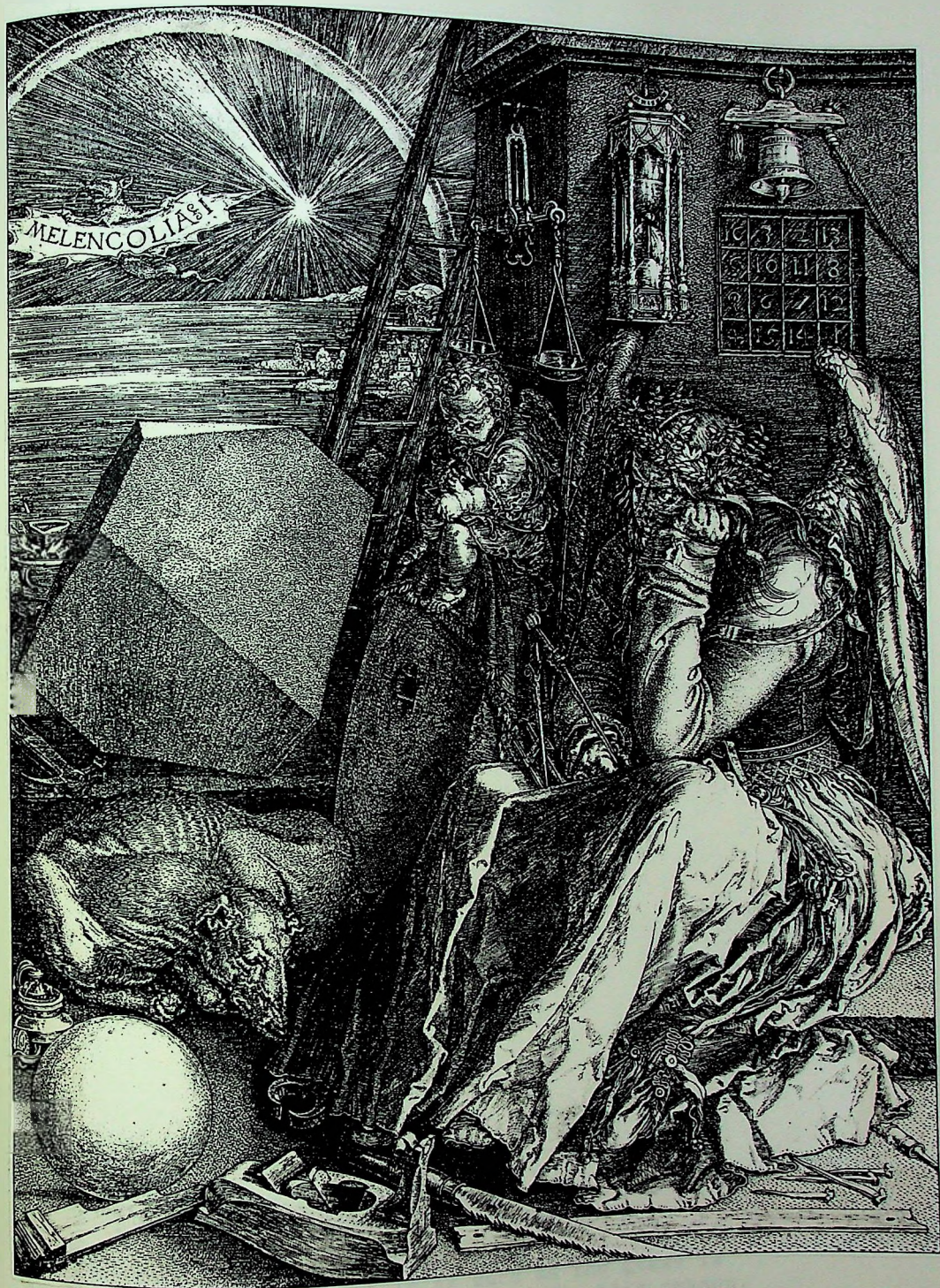
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17.



NOTES: Part One

1. Susan Sontag, A Susan Sontag Reader;
Fascinating Fascism, pp 325

"The color is black, the material is leather, the seduction is beauty, the justification is honesty, the aim is ecstasy, the fantasy is death."

2. Berthold Hinz, Art In The Third Reich;
Part 3: A Synthesis of Fascist Aesthetics.

"The tomb and the monument - everything else that serves a function has no place in the realm of art."
(Albert Speer)

3. Mino Gabriele, The Alchemical Tradition in the West;
Venice Biennale 1986, Art and Alchemy, pp 69

"It is an 'art' that claims to be the guide to the knowledge of 'matter'; The result of such knowledge was to be a religious vision, in the mirror of 'Nature', of the link between man and the cosmos, the individual and the whole."

4. J.W. Von Goethe, Faust/Part One; pp 48

FAUST (To a spirit): "And shall I, thing of flame, flinch at the sequel? My name is Faust, in everything your equal."

To which the vanishing spirit dismisses the despairing Faust soon afterwards:

SPIRIT: "You match the spirit that you comprehend, not me."

Part Two

1. Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus; pp 220

2. Ibid pp 220: "Albeit in as much as the glass is set and the sand has begun to run; for this reason, my good man, I would fain to come to an understanding with you."

3. Georg Lukacs, Essays on Thomas Mann; pp 79

4. Ibid pp 78

5. Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus; pp 220

Leverkuhn: "Extraordinarily Durerish. You love it. First "how I will shiver after the sun"; and then the houre-glasse of the Melancolia. Is the magic square coming too?"

6. Ibid pp 48: "In truth parody was here the proud expedient of a great gift threatened with sterility by a combination of skepticism, intellectual reserve, and a sense of the deadly extension of the kingdom of the banal."

7. Ibid pp 222: "...from early on we had an eye on you - we saw that your case was quite definately worth the trouble,..."

"Gifted but halt is the German - gifted enough to be angry with his paralysis, and to overcome it by hand-over-head illumination."

8. Ibid pp 222: "When once thou gavest to me
At night the cooling draught,
With poison didst undo me
* * * * *
Then on the wound the serpent
Fastened and firmly sucked - "

9. Ibid pp 149 - 152

10. Ibid pp 223: "Therewith a man can live at rack and manger like a lord and astonish the world as a great nigromancer with much divel's work."

11. Ibid pp 225: "...the loving guests from the West Indies into the German lands, the flagellants..."

12. J.W. Von Goethe, Faust/Part One; pp 75

FAUST: "... Who then are you?
MEPHISTOPHELES: Part of a power that would
Along work evil, but engenders good.
FAUST: What hidden meaning in this riddle lies?
MEPHISTOPHELES: The spirit I, that endlessly denies."

13. Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus pp 228

"What then does "dead" mean, when the flora...."

14. Ibid pp 229
15. Ibid pp 230
16. Ibid pp 230
17. Ibid pp 232: "Composing itself has got too hard,
devilishly hard. Where work does not go any
longer with sincerity how is one to work?"
- 18 Ibid pp 238
- 19 Ibid pp 238 - 239: A relentless barrage of
expletive terms descriptive of hell.
- 20 Ibid pp 240
- 21 Ibid pp 239 - 240: "(Of Hell) To knit up in two
works its quintessence,... is that it leaves its
denizens only the choice between extreme cold and
an extreme heat which can melt granite."

Part Three

1. Antoni Mari, Suffering as the route to knowledge, Georg
Baselitz, Fundacion Caja de Pensiones, pp 16

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