THE AESTHETICS OF ABSENCE: MARIELE NEUDECKER, THOMAS DEMAND,

AND GREGOR SCHNEIDER

by

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(Under the Direction of Isabelle L. Wallace)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation takes as its subject the nature and the limits of the relationship between history and representation as it appears in select works by three contemporary German artists: Mariele Neudecker, Thomas Demand, and Gregor Schneider. In strictly formal terms, the bodies of work under consideration here appear to have little in common with one another as they vary dramatically in medium as well as scale. Neudecker, in the works for which she is best known, crafts diminutive landscapes out of fiberglass, then places them in tabletop glass tanks filled with watery solutions that mimic atmospheric effects. Demand creates life-size buildings, rooms, and objects entirely out of paper and exhibits them as large-scale photographs. Schneider's most renowned work is also architecturally oriented: using ordinary construction materials, he builds one portion of a house after another—a bedroom, a kitchen, a staircase, for example—and invites spectators to wander through and explore the seemingly banal domestic spaces. Despite these formal differences, Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider do share a great deal with regard to cultural background, creative processes, and recurrent thematic choices: each, for example, was born in Germany in the 1960s and each turns repeatedly to discrete chapters of German history for subject matter. Moreover, Neudecker,

Demand, and Schneider engage their nation's history in such a way that each of their projects amounts to a veritable reconstruction of the past. Additionally, by virtue of an unwavering determination to extract all human figures from their compositions, a striking sense of absence emerges as a conspicuous presence in all three oeuvres.

INDEX WORDS: Contemporary art, Germany, Postwar, Absence, Enlightenment, Theodor Adorno, Sigmund Freud, Uncanny, Thomas Demand, Mariele Neudecker, Gregor Schneider

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

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May 2013

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For William, Isobel, Alexander, and Michael.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

years would have been like without my being immersed in this project, I cannot imagine

having done it without you.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation takes as its subject the nature and the limits of the relationship between history and representation as it appears in select works by three contemporary German artists: Mariele Neudecker, Thomas Demand, and Gregor Schneider. In strictly formal terms, the bodies of work under consideration here appear to have little in common with one another as they vary dramatically in medium as well as scale. Neudecker, in the works for which she is best known, crafts diminutive landscapes out of fiberglass, then places them in tabletop glass tanks filled with watery solutions that mimic atmospheric effects (*The Sea of Ice*, 1997; fig. 1). Demand creates life-size buildings, rooms, and objects entirely out of paper and exhibits them as large-scale photographs (*Klause I,* 2006; fig. 2). Schneider's most renowned work is also architecturally based: using ordinary construction materials, he builds one portion of a house after another—a bedroom, a kitchen, a staircase, for example—and invites spectators to wander through and explore the seemingly banal domestic spaces (*Staircase, Haus u r*, 1987; fig. 3). Despite these formal differences, Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider do share a great deal with regard to cultural background, recurrent thematic choices, and creative processes: each, for example, was born in Germany in the 1960s and each turns repeatedly to discrete chapters of German history for subject matter. Moreover, Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider engage their nation's history in such a way that each of their projects amounts to a veritable reconstruction of the past. And, by virtue of an

unwavering determination to extract all human figures from their compositions, a striking sense of absence emerges as a conspicuous presence in all three oeuvres.

Over the course of three successive chapters—one devoted to each artist—this dissertation examines in detail the most well-known projects of Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider with the purpose of explicating how each presents a contemporary perspective on the question of history's entanglement with representation. Further, by considering them side by side in this study, their works' numerous and specific points of overlap become especially apparent, as do their points of departure from one another. In turn, these observations form the foundation for asserting that the projects created by Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider constitute compelling evidence of a still-developing, cross-media phenomenon in German visual culture. By examining the precedents for, and weighing the implications of such a phenomenon, these three contemporary artists ultimately come to stand as key players in this new chapter of art's history—a chapter which, as it unfolds, eloquently articulates its relevance not only to the particular postwar German context in which it is being written, but also to all disciplines concerned with the mechanics and, in fact, the limits of representation.

As the following chapters demonstrate, Neudecker's tanks, Demand's photographs, and Schneider's building project are inscribed with compelling references to Germanic intellectual and cultural history. For example, we will see that Neudecker's landscapes are directly linked to Northern Romantic painting traditions; Demand's compositions are frequently associated with scandalous and traumatic events in Germany's twentieth-century history; and, Schneider's reconstructed spaces have an

austerity and eeriness to them that readily bring to mind Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny.

At the same time, the critical discourses of such prominent German writers as Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno weigh prominently into my readings of Neudecker's, Demand's, and Schneider's work. As figures whose own writings respond to the specific postwar German context in which they were created and constitute a significant contribution to the theorization of history, representation, and absence, their works bear directly upon those of Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider. Of particular importance in this regard is Adorno's 1959 essay, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?"[1] Its central tenets, focusing on the need to engage with the past in a manner that is both sustained and critical, occupy a significant place in each of the following chapters. Moreover, it is as a set of received notions, filtered to key ideas and reflecting much contemporary engagement with the issue of how it is that the past bears upon the present, that I apply Adorno's query and analyses to the works produced by Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider. In other words, while this study looks carefully at the ways in which these bodies of contemporary art reflect key facets of Adorno's treatise—in terms of the artists' creative practices as well as their works' themes and defining visual features—it does not aim, for instance, to critique the contents of the essay itself, nor to

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[1] Geoffrey Hartman provides the first English translation of Adorno's 1959 essay. See Theodor Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartmann, trans. Timothy Bahti and Geoffrey Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 114 – 129. As Hartman notes in his introductory remarks to his translation, the original German version of Adorno's text can be found in Theodor Adorno, *Eingriffe: neun kritische Modelle* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1963), and in Theodor Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10, pt. 2 (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), 555 – 572. Hartman states also that his work is a translation of the text contained in the 1977 *Gesammelte Schriften*.

contextualize it either within the entire corpus of Adorno's oeuvre or, even more broadly, within the complex analysis and criticism of Enlightenment principles developed by the Frankfurt School.

This approach, wherein a set of ideas such as those expressed in Adorno's text stand as a type of cultural artifact available for contemplation and as a prompt for reflection, informs much of this study; in large part, this is because it conforms to the manner with which these three artists appear to engage the traditions, concepts, and histories to which their works refer. As we will see, for example, this applies to the ways in which Demand's images relate to both Benjamin's appraisal of Eugène Atget's photographs and his thoughts about the mechanical reproducibility of art, and it characterizes the correspondence between Schneider's *Haus* project and theorizations about the home, along with the related concepts of the familiar and the uncanny, put forth in the last century by figures such as Gaston Bachelard and Sigmund Freud. In Mariele Neudecker's tank projects, as this study's first chapter will demonstrate, this approach finds what is arguably its most explicit expression. Neudecker's meticulously constructed, and grand yet miniaturized landscape compositions, which always sit like preserved specimens in glass vitrines, evoke the concept of the sublime as well as the empirical spirit associated with Enlightenment traditions; at the same time—and suggesting the contemporary point of view they share with Demand and Schneider—they present these subjects as intellectual artifacts, distilled ideas prepared for extended and careful observation.

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Mariele Neudecker was born in Düsseldorf, Germany in 1965. She studied art history, philosophy, and literary criticism at the University of Wuppertal from 1984 to 1985, and then undertook an apprenticeship in architectural model making with a Düsseldorf firm, Pfeiffer & Voss, specializing in architectural and engineering design work. In 1985, she left Germany for the United Kingdom where from 1985 to 1987 she was enrolled at the Crawford College of Art and Design in Cork, Ireland. Moving to London in 1987, she continued her education at Goldsmiths College, completing an undergraduate degree in 1990. She subsequently pursued graduate studies at London's Chelsea College of Art and Design from 1991 to 1992, and from 1996 to 1997, she studied Digital Image Creation and Manipulation at Tower Hamlets College, also in London.[2] Since 2001, Neudecker has lived and worked in Bristol, UK and since 1989 her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions throughout Europe, most prominently in the United Kingdom and Germany.[3] In 2010, Neudecker was shortlisted for the Fourth Plinth commission at Trafalgar Square, London.[4]

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[2] According to both Neudecker's official website and the most comprehensive monograph devoted to her work [Mariele Neudecker, Maite Lorés, Francis McKee, and Eszter Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker* (Colchester: Firstsite, 1999)], Neudecker earned a Foundation, 1st year Diploma from the Crawford College of Art and Design, a Bachelor of Arts degree, with Honours, from Goldsmiths, and a Master of Arts degree in Sculpture from the Chelsea College of Art and Design. No specific degree or diploma is named with regard to either Neudecker's program of study at Tower Hamlets College or her education at the University of Wuppertal. See also the biographical information provided by the Galerie Barbara Thumm, which represents Neudecker in Berlin: www.bthumm.de/www/artists/neudecker/bio.php.

[3] See www.bthumm.de/www/artists/neudecker/bio.php for an updated listing of Neudecker's solo and group exhibitions.

[4] The Fourth Plinth committee considered six proposals for the 2012 installation. In addition to Neudecker, the shortlist included two pairs of artists, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla as well as Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, and Katharina

Neudecker creates objects in several mediums including cast fiberglass, aluminum, medium-density fiberboard ("MDF"), epoxy resin, and paper. Although she calls herself a sculptor,[5] her creative output also includes film, video, and installation work.[6] Despite working with such varied mediums, there is a consistency to the themes that appear with the greatest frequently in Neudecker's work. Most notably, she draws from traditions and systems associated with modes of perception; her projects range from those incorporating cartographical processes and topographical imagery, to works making reference to the Romantic sublime, to images that explore the effects of deliberate visual distortions.[7] However, as noted, the works for which Neudecker is best known are her glass tanks and, as she has constructed more than 30 vitrines, they constitute the largest portion of her oeuvre to date.

Although Neudecker does not refer to the tank works as a cohesive series, the similarities between each of them are substantial both in form and content. For example, each tank contains a landscape scene and the compositions include no human figures. In

Fritch, Brian Griffiths, and Hew Locke. The commission was awarded to Elmgreen and Dragset for their sculpture, *Powerless Structures, Fig. 101*. For information and images regarding Neudecker's proposed Fourth Plinth work, *It's Never Too Late and You Can't Go Back*, see www.marieleneudecker.co.uk/itsnevertoolate.html.

[5] "Veracity: Mariele Neudecker," *CAFKA.09: Veracity* (www.cafka.org).

[6] Neudecker's official website (www.marieleneudecker.co.uk) includes a select but substantial listing of works in these varied categories, as does Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*, 74 – 75.

[7] For a general discussion and overview of Neudecker's cartographic and topographical projects as well as a selection of her film and video works, see Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*; Emma Posey and Angela Kingston, *Mariele Neudecker: Between Us* (Cardiff: Chapter and Howard Gardens Gallery, 2002); David Blayney Brown and Douglas Young, *Over and Over, Again and Again* (London: Tate St. Ives, 2004); and, Francis McKee, "The Weight of the World," (www.picture-this.org.uk/library/essays1/2004/the-weight-of-the-world).

addition, Neudecker works with similar materials from one tank to the next: glass planes

most often enclose solutions composed of water, salt, and food dye, and Neudecker

typically uses fiberglass and resin to create the landscape features that also occupy the

tanks. Further, while the vitrines' dimensions do vary, most of the tanks have lengths,

widths, and depths measuring between one and three feet. The following chapter will

examine these and other details in far more depth, but at this point it is important to note

that while each tank stands as an autonomous object, each one also relates closely to a

much larger and still ongoing body of work.

Thomas Demand was born in 1964 in Schäftlarn, Germany, a town approximately

twenty miles south of Munich. His formal education in the arts began at Munich's

Akademie der Bildenden Künste where, from 1987 to 1989 he studied interior design

with a concentration specifically on church and theatre design.[8] Demand then moved to

Düsseldorf, attending the Kunstakademie from 1989 to 1992, but not, notably, studying

with Bernd and Hilla Becher.[9] While a student at the Kunstakademie, Demand trained to

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[8] According to most published biographical accounts, Demand attended Munich's
Akademie der Bildenden Künste from 1987 to 1989. At his official website
(www.thomasdemand.info/press/biography), the dates of his enrollment are listed as 1987
to 1990.

[9] Demand studied with Fritz Schwegler (b. 1935), a sculptor whose students had also
included Katarina Fritsch (b. 1956) and Thomas Schütte (b. 1954). Demand once
remarked that his use of paper was "a reaction to the clear-cut, rigid assertions of
Katharina Fritsch and Thomas Schütte, who were using ceramics and bronze" [see Harald
Fricke and Thomas Demand, "Building Blocks of the Media: Thomas Demand's Staged
Photographs," *db artmag* (February 2005), unpaginated, at http:// http://db-
artmag.de/de/75/index.html. Demand has not elaborated on this reference to Fritsch and
Schütte, but he has made several comments about his appreciation for relatively
ephemeral materials and the efficiency of working with paper. For example, "I didn't
want to make traditional sculptures," he stated, "that is to say, objects that would have

be a sculptor and began working consistently with the medium of paper; at this time, however, he never intended to photograph the objects and architectural models he was creating.

About his decision in these early years to work exclusively with one material, Demand explained that, "[i]t's similar to language: if you use a different language every day, you lose the nuances and colors that are possible when you speak a language particularly well…[F]ocusing on one thing intently allows nuances to appear that wouldn't exist at all if you focused on something only fleetingly."[10] That he selected paper as his single medium, he also explained, was in part a matter of practicality. "I was making things I could complete in a day," he stated, "[and] then I would destroy them."[11]

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filled up space. Ad Reinhardt said that it is always the sculpture you stumble over when you walk backwards to get a decent view of the pictures. I didn't want to make sculptures that I would have kept on fiddling with, in bronze or what have you" [Demand quoted in, François Quintin, "There is no innocent room," in Thomas Demand, Francesco Bonami, François Quintin, and Régis Durand, *Thomas Demand* (Paris, London, and New York: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain and Thames & Hudson, 2000), 40]. Similarly, in a 2007 interview, when asked about the development of his working methods, Demand explained, "[a]t first, I didn't want to make objects that would be lying around afterwards getting in my way. Also, I was thinking about ways to keep things moving and avoid spending years and years in workshops…[and] every model—indeed, every type of rapid visualization—is easiest to do with paper" [Thomas Demand and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Thomas Demand, Hans Ulrich Obrist—The Conversation Series* (Köln: Walther König, 2007), 104].

[10] Demand and Obrist, *The Conversation Series*, 102.

[11] Martha Schwendener, "Paper Trail: Thomas Demand's photos trick the eye with construction-paper sets," *Time Out New York*, March 3 – 9, 2005, 59. In Fricke and Demand ("Building Blocks of the Media," unpaginated), Demand repeats this claim about working with paper, completing projects in a day, and discarding the objects, but he also adds that when he first began making sculptures at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf he "experimented with all kinds of forms [including] cardboard, paper, tinfoil, and balloons…" This reference to his using "tinfoil, and balloons" is atypical; interviews with him, and essays addressing his work, consistently state only that he constructed even his early works with various types of paper.

Later comments suggest that the appeal of paper was, or at least became more complicated and was bound both to its being an ordinary, ubiquitous, and disposable material and to certain of its conceptual properties. On the one hand, Demand stated, paper is "the material of ideas" in that it has a long history as a vehicle for recording and transmitting facts, hypotheses, and thoughts of all sorts.[12] At the same time, he continued, paper is a material most often "destined for temporary use…[and] everyone is familiar with it, everyone has their own experiences using it…What I'm actually interested in is the fact that paper is common merchandise, which absolutely everyone has experience of using."[13]

Demand's turn to photography came towards the end of his student days in Düsseldorf. By regularly discarding his paper constructions, Demand explained that he had no record of how, or if, his work was maturing. This issue, he recalled, came to his attention when "after two or three years, my professor, Fritz Schwegler, remarked that I wasn't getting any further in my development."[14] Soon thereafter, and prompted by Schwegler's comment, Demand began photographing his works "to find out if I was making any progress with them."[15] At this point, however, Demand was untrained as a photographer and he found his images disappointing and unhelpful ("the quality was just

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[12] Thomas Demand, Beatriz Colomina, and Alexander Kluge, *Thomas Demand* (London and Munich: Serpentine Gallery and Schirmer/Mosel Verlag GmbH, 2006), 90.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Fricke and Demand, "Building Blocks of the Media," unpaginated.

[15] Ibid.

too poor," Demand explained).[16] Hoping to rectify the problem, Demand turned to the

Bechers for advice. His path crossed only briefly with theirs, however, as he declined to

pursue the course they recommended for him in the early 1990s.[17] As Demand recalled,

"[t]hey just said: 'You must become a photographer, you must go to a photography

school for three years before we can teach you anything.'"[18] Rather than enrolling in

such formal studies, Demand began teaching himself to use a 35 mm camera and

continued to refine his ability to construct objects and scenes of varying complexity out

of paper.[19]

After completing his studies at the Kunstakademie, Demand spent a year in Paris,

at the Cité des Arts, and subsequently moved to London to pursue a graduate degree at

Goldsmiths College. Demand cites 1993—his first year at Goldsmiths—as the year in

which he ceased to photograph his work for purely documentary and evaluative purposes

and, instead, began building models with the intention of reproducing them as

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Demand does not cite the exact year in which this exchange with the Bechers took place; however, given he studied at the Kunstakademie from 1989 to 1992, and he notes that he turned to photography after developing his creative practice for at least two years, it seems this conversation would have occurred in 1992.

[18] In Quintin, "There is no innocent room," in Demand, Bonami, Quintin, and Durand, *Thomas Demand*, 43.

[19] Ibid. For a short (but unspecified) period of time, while he was first learning to take photographs of his work, Demand decided to make two versions of each sculpture: "the first," he said, "the proper sculpture, enabled me to give form to my idea, and the second, the object built in perspective and totally distorted because of the poor rendition provided by the 35 mm lens that would record it, allowed me to keep a trace of the first" [ibid.; see also, Marcella Beccaria, "Thomas Demand: The Image and Its Double," in *Thomas Demand* (Milan: Skira, 2002), 8]. There is no indication that Demand continued this doubling process beyond the earliest phases of his learning to work with a camera.

photographs. Of his two years at Goldsmiths Demand has said little, but the dean of the

college during his time there was Michael Craig-Martin, an artist who, according to art

historian and curator Roxana Marcoci, "played an important role in breaking down

traditional divisions between the departments of painting, sculpture, and photography,

and thus in fostering a post-medium spirit of experimentation."[20] Within this

interdisciplinary and exploratory milieu, Demand further developed the multi-media

creative processes he still employs today: basing his work on scenes taken from

preexisting images which he culls, most often, from a wide range of media sources,

Demand constructs elaborately detailed models, using only the medium of paper, and

then carefully illuminates and photographs his delicate sculptures. Leaving the models to

fall apart under their own weight, and on occasion destroying the paper structures

himself, Demand displays his work exclusively in the form of unframed, Plexiglas-

covered color photographs.

After earning his Masters of Arts degree from Goldsmiths College in 1994,

Demand lived and worked for a year in Amsterdam and then spent approximately three

years in New York. He subsequently relocated to Berlin, and currently he lists both

Berlin and Los Angeles as his places of residence. He has been the subject of major solo

exhibitions in Europe, North America, Asia, South America, and Australia since 1992

and is arguably the most celebrated artist under consideration in this study.[21]

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[20] Roxana Marcoci, *Thomas Demand* (New York: NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 13.

[21] For an updated list of Demand's solo and group exhibitions, see www.thomasdemand.info/press/newsroom/. The following catalogues also contain extensive listings of Demand's exhibition history: Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand*, 131 – 133; Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 132 – 135; Thomas Demand,

Gregor Schneider was born in Rheydt, a part of the city of Mönchengladbach,

approximately twenty miles west of Düsseldorf, in 1969. At the age of sixteen, while still

a high school student, Schneider began working on *Totes Haus u r*.[22] This project has

occupied him to an extent unrivalled by any other; it is the work for which he is best

known, and his involvement with it continues to this day. Most basically, *Totes Haus u r*

consists of Schneider's ongoing construction and reconstruction of the interior spaces of a

house, owned by his family and in which he lived for a period of time, located at 12

Unterheydener Strasse in Rheydt; a detailed account of this complicated building and un-

building project is forthcoming, in my chapter, "All the Trappings of Home: Gregor

Schneider's *Haus u r*."

Following his graduation from high school in 1987, Schneider was both rejected

from the art school to which he had applied and exempted from military service. He

provides no information about the art school circumstances, but with regard to the

military he made an ambiguous, but nonetheless suggestive and puzzling, statement:

> I had been exempted, exempted on psychological grounds. I was
>
> registered as having a perceptual disorder and as being mentally ill, but I

Dave Eggers, Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, Paul Oliver, David Foster Wallace, Ulrich Baer, Rachael Thomas, and Enrique Joncosa. *Thomas Demand: L'ésprit d'escalier* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2007). Demand has had a residence in Los Angeles since accepting the position of Getty Research Institute Scholar in Residence for the 2010 – 2011 academic year (see www.thomasdemand.info/press/biography/and Colin Westerbeck, "Demand's Mirror," *Art in America*, 4 May 2012, unpaginated, at www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/demands-mirror/).

[22] Accounts vary, with some texts stating that Schneider was fifteen years old when he first began working on his *Haus*.

had only told them that I build rooms, that I don't perceive as a room in a

room or a room around a room, that suddenly a wall is there and then gone

again, that I look at a wall and am interested in any unevennesses on its

surfaces: the tiniest hole, the slightest protuberance. And so they didn't

let me into the army.[23]

As Paul Schimmel wrote in "Life's Echo: Gregor Schneider's *Dead Haus u r*," these two

rejections proved fortuitous. "If he had gone to art school immediately after high

school," Schimmel stated, "or if he had begun military service, he would not have lived

in the house…The house was a free space within which he could develop as an artist. By

occupying the house, he entered the 'origin,' as the word *u r* implies."[24] Two years later,

Schneider did undertake a series of formal art studies. Beginning in 1989, he studied at

the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Münster, and the

Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg. He terminated his studies in 1992, without

having earned a formal degree. Both during and after his school years, Schneider

continued to devote his attention to the building and rebuilding of structures and spaces

inside the Unterheydener Strasse house.[25]

Since 1985, Schneider has shown his work in several galleries throughout

Germany. He has exhibited his work internationally since 1997, in locations as far-

reaching as Japan, England, and the United States. Selected to represent Germany at the

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[23] Gregor Schneider and Ulrich Loock, "'I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in
Gregor Schneider and Paul Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider* (Milan: Charta, 2003), 55.

[24] Paul Schimmel, "Life's Echo: Gregor Schneider's *Dead Haus u r*," in Schneider and
Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 104.

[25] Ibid.

Venice Biennale in 2001, Schneider transported the interior spaces of *Totes Haus u r* to the German pavilion; for his contribution, he was presented that year's Golden Lion award. Although Schneider has undertaken a number of ventures not directly drawn from the Unterheydener Strasse house,[26] as a whole his body of work is comprised of architecturally-based projects that delve into the themes and experiences of containment, doubling, and entrapment.

There is a final point to clarify before turning to the three analytic chapters of this text. Specifically, this dissertation situates Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider as part of a distinct, contemporary generation of artists whose work involves a set of ideas and issues evident in much German art produced in the postwar, and specifically post-Holocaust, years. In this, they represent the next generation of artists whose oeuvres variably engage themes—wide ranging, but also interconnected—such as personal memory, cultural history, mediation, national identity, trauma, and the ethics as well as the limits of representation. The literature pertaining to these areas of study and their intersection with the subject of the Holocaust is inter-disciplinary, immense, and, testifying to the continued relevance and unresolved nature of these complex topics, continually growing. The texts that are considered most influential in these related fields, and that are also foundational to the chapters that follow, belong to a diverse—but again, often overlapping—range of fields: from the psychoanalytic, to the sociological, to the

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[26] See for example, Andrew O'Hagan, Colm Toib'n, and James Lingwood, *Die Familie Schneider* (London, England and Göttingen, Germany: Artangel and SteidlMack, 2006); and, Gregor Schneider, Anita Shah, and Susanne Titz, *END* (Köln: Walther König, 2010).

political sciences, to all manner of art historical investigation. For example, Alexander

and Margarete Mitscherlich proposed a psychoanalytically-driven theorization of postwar

Germans' failure to process the various losses and senses of guilt stemming from both the

rise and fall of Hitler's regime in *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective

Behavior*, first published in 1967;[27] nearly a quarter of a century later, Eric Santner, in

Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany, revisited the

Mitscherlichs' ideas, filtering them through the lens of postmodern thought and turning

his attention to the medium of film in order to consider the legacy of fascism and the

Holocaust in postwar Germany.[28] Pointing to the cross-disciplinary nature of these

inquiries, Saul Friedlander's 1992 *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the

"Final Solution"* presents a compilation of essays, all addressing the ethical, aesthetic,

and epistemological problems of attempting to comprehend and represent the Holocaust,

written by scholars whose academic areas include history, comparative literature, critical

studies, philosophy, and English.[29] Historian Jeffrey Herf examined the intersection of

politics and memory in Germany, both during and after the Nazi era, in his 1997 text,

Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys;[30] and, in examining the

biographies and work of Anselm Kiefer and Gerhard Richter, two of the twentieth-

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[27] Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* (New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc., 1975).

[28] Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[29] Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution*" (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[30] Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

century's most preeminent German artists, Mark Rosenthal, Lisa Saltzman, and Robert

Storr provide extensive accounts along with discerning analyses of major developments

and issues informing postwar German art and the changing climates in which it has been

produced.[31]

With regard to this issue of changing milieus and, with it, a postwar genealogy in

the arts, the significance of the place that Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider occupy

rests upon the fact that each was born in the 1960s and by the early-to-mid-1990s was

producing a mature, cohesive body of work. This chronology establishes them, on the

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[31] See, respectively, Mark Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer*, Chicago (Philadelphia, and New York: Art Institute of Chicago, 1987); Lisa Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2000); Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002). See also, Lisa Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006). In addition to the aforementioned publications, the following offer significant contributions to the scholarship regarding history, politics, memory, and representation in the postwar German context: Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1984); James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998); James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Saul Friedlander, "History, Memory, and the Historian: Dilemmas and Responsibilities," *New German Critique* 80 (Spring – Summer 2000), 3 – 15; Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Alan S. Rosenbaum, ed. *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001); Robert G. Moeller, "What Has 'Coming to Terms with the Past' Meant in Post-World War II Germany? From History to Memory to the 'History of Memory," *Central European History* 35, no. 2 (2002), 223 – 256; Moishe Postone and Eric Santner, eds. *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); and, Dirk Moses, "The Non-German German and the German German: Dilemmas of Identity after the Holocaust," *New German Critique* 101 (Summer 2007), 45 – 94.

one hand, as part of a generation of artists coming after figures such as Joseph Beuys

(1921 – 1986), Gerhard Richter (1932 -), and Anselm Kiefer (1945 -), and, at the same

time, it aligns major moments in German history, but also broader, western history, with

key points in their own biographies. As we shall see, their work reflects, in intervolved

fashion, both sets of circumstances.

Bracketed by the 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall and the student protests of

1968, the 1960s in Germany was a decade marked by extraordinary events with regard to

the legacy of the Nazi past. As German cultural historian Wulf Kansteiner asserted:

> The silence of the postwar era ended in the late 1950s and early 1960s
>
> when the legacy of the Nazi crimes and the question of postwar German
>
> anti-Semitism was raised through a number of scandals and trials. A wave
>
> of anti-Semitic graffiti in 1959/60, the Eichmann-Trial in Jerusalem in
>
> 1961, and later the Auschwitz-Trial in Frankfurt in 1964/65, among other
>
> incidents, caused and indicated important transformations in West
>
> Germany's historical culture. For the first time since the immediate
>
> postwar years the question of how to come to terms with Nazism topped
>
> the national political agenda.[32]

Echoing and extending Kansteiner's sentiment, Jeffrey Herf characterized the 1960s as "a

caesura in the history of West German reflection on the Nazi past,"[33] and its effect, he

continued, was the creation of a climate in which "[c]onfronting the crimes of the Nazi

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[32] Wulf Kansteiner "The Rise and Fall of Metaphor: German Historians and the
Uniqueness of the Holocaust," in Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique?*, 226.

[33] Herf, *Divided Memory*, 334.

past constituted a, and in many distinguished cases *the*, central preoccupation of postwar

German intellectual, journalistic, literary, cinematic, theological, legal, and scholarly

engagement."[34] It was precisely this vocal, transitional context that provided the

backdrop for Joseph Beuys' emergence into the postwar German art world with works

that were comparably unprecedented and explicit in terms of their references to the Nazi

past. In performances, installations, and vitrines—which, with contents typically

including substances such as wood, copper, iron, felt, and animal fat, present a stark

contrast to the grand landscape imagery and atmospheric ethereality of Neudecker's

vitrines—Beuys' evocations of Nazi history often possess an undisguised directness. As

Lisa Saltzman noted, inside his 1955 *Auschwitz Vitrine* (fig. 4) Beuys placed "rows of

sausage-shaped matter, sketches of emaciated female figures, blocks of tallow, electrodes

and wires, maps of the railroad tracks leading to the death camp, and chimneylike

cylindrical forms."[35] Moreover, she pointed out, "many of the forms and materials Beuys

employed—the tallow/fat, the electrodes and wires—would recur in his performances

and vitrines throughout the 1960s and 1970s."[36]

　　While the overtly referential nature of Beuys' work corresponds to the cultural

climate in which he began working as an artist, it also reflects his own direct involvement

in the war—as a Luftwaffe combat pilot from 1941 to 1945 and prisoner of war from

1945 to 1946. Born in 1921, and subject to these experiences, Beuys was an active part

of the wartime period and thus not generationally removed from the history to which his

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[34] Ibid., 8.

[35] Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz*, 13.

[36] Ibid.

oeuvre alludes; much of his work, in turn, appears to embody this fact. This issue of historical proximity and distance is of central importance to this dissertation, not only because the artists under consideration represent a younger generation, but because, as the following chapters bear out, the very ideas of distance and remove assume a prominent place in their creative processes and completed works. This becomes evident when their work is set against that of a figure such as Beuys, and it comes into still sharper focus when understood as part of a lineage that also includes such significant predecessors as Gerhard Richter and Anselm Kiefer.[37]

Born in 1932, Richter is approximately a decade if not a generation removed from Beuys; his work, dating from the early 1960s and comprised primarily of paintings— watercolors, oil paintings, and over-painted photographs—demonstrates an equivocal relationship to both the subject of history in general, and the Nazi past, specifically. Two points are especially pertinent here. First, in those paintings that do refer to the history or legacy of the Third Reich, such as *Uncle Rudi* (1965; fig. 5) or the *October 18, 1977* series (1988; fig. 6), Richter employs his characteristic technique of blurring imagery and producing pictures that appear as enigmatic meldings of photography and painting. As such, with an overriding consistency, his work brings to the fore questions about the nature of painting and the notion of mediation. Second, unlike Beuys' work, and later, Kiefer's, subjects evoking the Nazi past by no means dominate Richter's oeuvre.

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[37] While these three figures are especially relevant to this discussion given both their prominence in the literature and the specific nature of their works' formal and thematic relationships to Neudecker's, Demand's, and Schneider's work, other artists could certainly be brought into this interpretive scheme, to varying degrees: Georg Baselitz (1938 -), Sigmar Polke (1941 -), and Jörg Immendorff (1945 -), for example.

Of that generation born after Beuys—in other words, the first distinctly postwar generation—Beuys' student Anselm Kiefer stands as a pivotal figure for his abiding, provocative explorations of national and artistic identity in the aftermath of the Holocaust.[38] However, for all of his engagement with these issues, there is a discernible element of distance evident in his work. From the oversized military attire Kiefer wore in his *Occupations* series (1969; fig. 7),[39] which gives visual expression to the notion of a generation gap,[40] to the vast emptiness pictured in compositions such as *Sulamith* (1983; fig. 8), which suggests that the present has been rendered bereft on account of events taking place in the past, Kiefer's work is, in Lisa Saltzman's words, "[l]aden with the burdens of historical belatedness."[41]

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[38] The whole of Saltzman's *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz* explores Kiefer's work from this perspective of belatedness.

[39] See also Chapter 1, "Mariele Neudecker: Enlightenment and the Ethics of Ambiguity," especially pages 51 – 52.

[40] One can make a similar point with regard to Richter's *Uncle Rudi*. Although the standing male figure's military garments appear to fit properly, the title—specifically, the designation of "uncle"—makes reference to an earlier generation.

[41] Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz*, 2. Two recent exhibition catalogues make notable contributions to the subject of postwar, and post-Wall, German art. As mentioned earlier, the relevant literature is extensive and broad, and the following two texts are cited here on the basis of the scope of their essays, biographies, theoretical considerations, chronologies and bibliographies: Sabine Eckmann, ed., *Reality Bites: Making Avant-garde Art in Post-Wall Germany = Kunst nach dem Mauerfall* (Ostfildern and St. Louis, MO: Hatje Cantz, 2007), and Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann, eds., *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures* (New York and Los Angeles: Abrams and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009). Finally, see also Matthew Biro, "Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the Memory of the Holocaust," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16 (Spring 2003), 113 – 146, and Matthew Biro, *Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

At yet another generational remove from the events of World War II, Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider create works characterized by still more, but also different types of, distance. As elucidated in the subsequent chapters, it will become readily apparent that this distance is bound up with, and distinguished by, a manifest investment in construction, reconstruction, and at times, destruction. This, too, reflects their generational specificity as it resonates with the cultural climate in which Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider established these creative practices: the end of the 1980s and the first years of the 1990s, when the activity and rhetoric of destruction and reconstruction assumed a place of singular significance with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and, in the following year, the reunification of East and West Germany. Considering this complex and continuing legacy, this dissertation aims to demonstrate that the work of Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider addresses the entwined subjects of history and representation in ways that disclose the particularities and even the problems of their postwar, post-Wall context; that is, with forms, themes, and creative processes that betray a pointed interest in retrospection and, at the same time, that cast a critical eye forward to those generations yet to come.

CHAPTER 1

MARIELE NEUDECKER: ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE ETHICS OF AMBIGUITY

I. Retrospection, Re-presentation, and Review:

The Foundations of Mariele Neudecker's Vitrine Works

Again and again—some 29 times since 1996—Mariele Neudecker has produced

works taking this specific form: a glass tank, poised atop a pedestal, enclosing a carefully

detailed representation of the natural world. [42] Neudecker creates both land- and

seascapes and, with consistency being a hallmark of her project, each of her three-

dimensional scenes possesses an extreme, even awesome, aspect. Two of her earliest

tanks, *The Sea of Ice* (1997; fig. 1) and *Morning Fog in the Mountains* (1997; fig. 9)

embody much of what is common to her vitrine project as a whole.

Measuring approximately 17 inches wide, 21 inches deep, and 16 inches high,

The Sea of Ice pictures an expanse of water rendered inhospitable by jagged shards of ice

piercing through its surface. Elevated by a pedestal as well as a small, footed platform,

The Sea of Ice reaches a height of 63 inches: a comfortable elevation for viewing by an

average adult. At this height, and housed in a case whose four walls and top are fully

transparent, the spectator can survey Neudecker's scene from innumerable points of

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[42] This count excludes two anomalous works. First, Neudecker's *Raft of the Medusa*
(1995; fig. 10) has a format deviating from that of the other tank works in that it includes
human figures. Second, Neudecker's *Landscape* (1996; fig. 11) also includes human
figures, does not sit atop a pedestal (it is set on a pair of brackets mounted to a wall), and
has only one transparent side (see
www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Landscape/420EF68BBD18C7D6)

view, apprehending more and more of the barren, glacial composition as he or she approaches and moves around each side of the tank. Upon close observation, an extraordinary amount of detail comes into focus (fig. 12). Countless shards and sheets of broken ice appear to rise abruptly from a greenish water whose cloudy translucency suggests a semi-frozen ocean surface; craggy, pyramidal slabs of ice push upward, with the largest masses sitting closest to the center of the vitrine as though they have thrust more violently into the scene than the smaller fragments scattered around their perimeter; and, the destructive power of the icy sea has turned not only on itself for, as one angle of vision reveals, the remains of an upturned ship appear wedged in the midst of an array of frozen peaks.

Created with molded plastic and wax, the bleak seascape is meticulously detailed: Neudecker fashions irregular, serrated edges and roughly textured surfaces to articulate each span of ice, she effects subtle shifts from a slight translucency at the sea's surface to a snowy, white opacity on the exposed ice forms above, and where the walls of the tank expose the foundation of Neudecker's sculpture—the sea from which the ice emerges— one sees tiers of a variously hued, waxy substance that recalls the layers of ice formed when water freezes, gradually and inconsistently, over time. Even the exact coloration and soft haziness of the atmosphere enveloping the sea and its wrecked ship is a product of Neudecker's finely gauged calculations, as she has learned to blend exactly those elements that will generate the particular visual effects she desires.[43] In this case, the mixture consists of water, salt, and food dye, and its effect is to bathe Neudecker's frigid

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[43] In "Veracity: Mariele Neudecker," www.cafka.org/cafka-tv/veracity-mariele-neudecker, Neudecker discusses the liquid mixtures she creates for her tanks.

scene in what appears a fittingly cool, bluish vapor. Only a tank with fully sealed edges could effectively contain such a concoction and, as close examination also reveals, the glass panes are impermeably glued to one another. Neudecker's stricken ship, icy shards, and frigid sea may appear surrounded by a misty ocean air but, as a scattering of small air bubbles resting against the tank's glass top confirm, the entire vitrine is liquid-filled.

Snowy, jagged peaks arise again in Neudecker's *Morning Fog in the Mountains* (fig. 9) but, unlike *The Sea of Ice*, where both the ruined ship and shattered ice convey a sense of nature's destructive power, the imagery here suggests a tranquil, static subject. Measuring approximately 24 inches wide, 27 inches deep, and 23 inches high, *Morning Fog in the Mountains* is elevated with the same pedestal and footed platform arrangement Neudecker used for *The Sea of Ice*; the dimensions and viewability of the two tank works are similar also, as *Morning Fog in the Mountains* reaches a height of almost 70 inches and its five enclosing glass planes allow the spectator to peer in from countless vantage points.

A craggy mass, creviced, steeply sloped, and dotted with hundreds of fir trees, dominates the lower half of this vitrine. As the mountainous formation rises from the base of the tank, the glass walls afford a view of the fiberglass medium Neudecker used for the model: appearing solid and grounded, it serves as a fitting foundation for the idea of the mountain itself. As the rocky terrain rises, it narrows and takes on a roughly pyramidal form; with the conical structure of the fir trees echoing this general configuration, the middle ground of the composition has a distinctly vertical orientation that directs the viewer's eye up toward and into the most ethereal portion of tank. The mountain appears increasingly insubstantial as it ascends: its size diminishes but so, too,

does its visibility as it becomes more deeply embedded in its foggy surroundings. In the lower region of the tank, the spectator can make out the smallest details of both the individual trees and undulating mountain surface; however, as the imagery draws the viewer's attention up and inward, detail gives way to obscure areas of darkness and hazy silhouettes which finally appear to dissolve into a misty expanse of sky. As in *The Sea of Ice*, and, in fact, as is the case with each of Neudecker's tanks, the landscape scene here sits inside a fully sealed vitrine filled to its very top with a water-based mixture designed to produce the look of Neudecker's desired atmospheric conditions.

As *The Sea of Ice* and *Morning Fog in the Mountains* demonstrate, from even the first glance Neudecker's vitrine works raise a question; specifically, what is to be made of their constitutive oppositions? They ask their spectators to consider the wildness of the world, for example, but that wildness is ineluctably contained. Their motifs—sea, sky, mountain—defy human scale, but in Neudecker's hands they are precisely scaled to the human. And, while Neudecker's models betray a remarkable fidelity to the look of the real, they are at the same time forthright about not being that real thing.

These tensions establish provocative lines of inquiry within Neudecker's work. As to the question of what might constitute the most effective means of navigating their many, and often entangled, queries, it happens that the works themselves suggest a particular type of approach. Three points are especially pertinent here: first, the diminutive scale Neudecker applies to her translations of vast natural phenomena; second, the fine detail she ascribes to the modestly sized scenes; and third, that Neudecker presents this imagery in three-dimensional form. Defined by these characteristics, each tank is its own spectacle and is likely to make a striking first

impression. However, these features also preclude the possibility of the tanks disclosing their contents fully in a single, instantaneous moment of beholding. Rather, in order to appraise thoroughly their depths and details, one must engage with the works at length and with concerted deliberateness. Only by peering into Neudecker's mountain crevices and through her obfuscating atmospheres, for example, and by examining the scenes from each of the vantage points afforded by the enclosing glass planes, can the spectator discover all that the tanks contain. As will become evident in the following pages, there is much to be gained from applying a comparably deliberate approach to the many questions that issue from, and bear upon, these intricately crafted tanks. Accordingly, this chapter will first isolate the manifold issues at play in each of the tank works and then, as an extension of those preliminary observations, consider the implications of their being brought together and presented in the very particular terms selected by Neudecker.

The single-most prevalent, uniform, and integral facet of Neudecker's project is the vitrine itself. It is the one component Neudecker employs with unrivalled consistency, it supplies the support essential for the liquid mixtures that comprise her scenes' atmospheric effects, and viewing her landscapes is literally impossible without first seeing and then looking through their glass housing. The tanks possess certain connotations as well, all of which center on the notion that their contents are meant to be the subject of purposive, circumspect examination; in other words, as a type of spectatorial device commonly found in museums, laboratories, and venues of all types dedicated to didactic and observational activity, they are associated with the same investigative attitude described in the previous paragraph. Just as a full apprehension of Neudecker's minutely detailed and multifaceted landscapes depends on sustained and

careful engagement, the presence of the vitrines serves as a repeated and unavoidable reminder that just such a thoroughgoing observational approach is indeed in order here. The tanks' pervasiveness throughout Neudecker's project—or stated otherwise, her insistence on them—only strengthens their directive.

Both the crux and potency of the vitrine's mandate are grounded in the fact that perhaps more than any other device, the vitrine is a display method designed expressly to facilitate and compel prolonged and systematic study. Its status as such an empirically oriented apparatus is the outcome of its long-standing identification with two cultural arenas whose histories overlap. In modern museum practice as well as in the field of scientific inquiry, the ubiquity of the glass tank centers upon its perceived ability to isolate and protect its contents. Whether employed as museum case or specimen box, both the practical realities and the connotations of the vitrine are unambiguous: as it seals away, it renders its contents untouchable but visually available; functioning as a place of safe-keeping, it insinuates that its contents need and deserve such extra-ordinary shelter; its walls, which are impermeable but translucent, assure that every viewer remains distanced, and yet not entirely disconnected, from the material within. What makes its contents special can vary—they may be fragile, or perhaps rare—but by virtue of being placed within the vitrine, they are marked as subjects worthy of uncommon care and lasting attention.

Observation and preservation are the ends most directly served by the vitrine and, not incidentally, the era that transformed the desire for observation and preservation into pursuits of a systematic nature was also the era that saw the advent of the modern museum, designed in some instances for art and, in others, for the artifacts of natural

history.[44] The vitrine has been a constant and customary fixture in these institutions,

routinely called on to further all manner of rigorous examination and protective display in

the arts as well as the sciences. Accordingly, it functions well as a symbol of these

interests becoming formalized and, in turn, can be understood in the scope of

Neudecker's work as one of many signs pointing to the period that brought about that

formalization: the eighteenth century and, specifically, the dawning of the Enlightenment.

Neudecker's repeated use of pedestals makes her works' allusion to

Enlightenment traditions especially strong. The point is subtle, but in light of her

unswerving dedication to the vitrine, her comparable commitment to the pedestal is also

noteworthy. Like the vitrine, the pedestal is a display device common to modern

exhibition practices, and in Neudecker's tank project the pedestals do conform to

standard conventions regarding their use. For example, in length and width they

correspond to the dimensions of the vitrines they support; they are most often enclosed on

all visible sides; and typically, they are constructed of wood—fiberboard, in Neudecker's

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[44] See Carole Paul, ed., *The First Modern Museums of Art: The Birth of an Institution in 18th- and early-19th-century Europe* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2012) for detailed accounts of the historical events and cultural contexts leading to the establishment and public opening of several of the earliest European museums, including the Capitoline Museum in Rome (opened in 1734), the British Museum in London (opened publicly in 1759), the picture galleries of Dresden, Düsseldorf, and Kassel (opened c. 1755), and Paris' Musée du Louvre (publicly opened in 1793). For additional information and analyses regarding the rise, development, and making public art and natural history museums, see for example, Arthur MacGregor, *Curiosity and Enlightenment: Collectors and Collections from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Andrew McClellan, ed., *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Andrew McClellan, *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub. Co., 2003; and Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

case—and painted white. However, it is also true that Neudecker chooses neither to use

pedestals supplied by her exhibition venues nor prefabricated by vendors; rather, she

builds them herself and varies them from one project to the next. Considered together,

Heaven, The Sky (2008; fig. 13), *Far Into the Day* (2000; fig. 14), and *Stolen Sunsets*

(1996; fig. 15) illustrate the range of choices she makes in modifying the pedestals.

Heaven, the Sky consists of two tanks, each with its own fiberboard pedestal and each

appearing as a solid rectangular prism. In height, width, and depth, the two differ from

one another by only a by a few inches: one measures approximately 83.5 inches high, 46

wide, and 32.5 inches deep, and the other, approximately 87 inches high, 42 inches wide,

and 30 inches deep.[45] In contrast, the single tank of *Far Into the Day* sits upon a pedestal

whose form has been likened to that of a cenotaph,[46] with three gray tiers that narrow

slightly as they ascend. In every dimension, it far exceeds either of the *Heaven, the Sky*

pedestals: approximately 96 inches wide, 50 inches deep, and 161 inches high—or more

than 13 feet—at the top of the tank. Finally, for *Stolen Sunsets*, Neudecker constructed a

steel support measuring approximately 71 inches high, 26 inches wide, and 18 inches

deep. Unlike the pedestals described above, it is not an enclosed platform but instead

resembles a table. In medium, dimension, and color, its horizontal and vertical elements

match the steel frame that Neudecker also applied to the edges of the tank itself.

In that the form, material, color, and size of the pedestals are project-specific, and

given that Neudecker builds them herself, it is impossible to conclude that the pedestals'

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[45] In addition, it should be noted that in some photographs one of the pedestals appears white and the other appears black. In fact, both are white and the dark appearance is the result of shadows created by gallery lighting and camera angles.

[46] Brown and Young, *Over and Over*, 17.

role in Neudecker's work is purely practical. *Far Into the Day*, in fact, confirms this: its pedestal elevates the tank to such a height that a full view of the landscape within is actually denied the spectator. Standing on the museum or gallery floor, the viewer can gaze up toward the mountainous scenery in the tank but will only be able to see fragments of the whole prospect. Although *Far Into the Day* is unusual in Neudecker's oeuvre in that the vast majority of her pedestals are of a height that affords a clear view into the tanks, it underscores the point that for Neudecker the pedestal is an essential aesthetic element intended to contribute to the overall experience and meaning of each work.

In the same vein, Neudecker fabricates the glass cases herself. These vary less from one project to the next than do the pedestals, as every tank is a rectangular cube made of float glass, with its edges fully sealed in order to contain the water-based solutions within.[47] Nonetheless, Neudecker is clear about wanting to be personally responsible for their construction. She explains, "I make them myself usually unless its [*sic*] in a hospital (which only happened once – because of insurance issues) or [unless] shipping costs exceed making costs."[48] Presumably, Neudecker could elect to place her

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[47] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, float glass is defined as "glass made by allowing it to solidify on molten metal" (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/). Two of Neudecker's earliest tanks have edges that are not only sealed to be waterproof but are also covered with strips of steel. They are *Landscape* (1996; fig. 11) and *Stolen Sunsets* (1996; fig. 15). In both of these works, Neudecker covered the horizontal and vertical edges with narrow bands of steel.

[48] Personal e-mail correspondence dated 26 September 2009. The full text of the email is as follows: "THE TANKS ARE FLOAT GLASS…I MAKE THEM MYSELF USUALLY UNLESS ITS IN A HOSPITAL(WHICH ONLY HAPPENED ONCE - BECAUSE OF INSURANCE ISSUES) OR SHIPPING COSTS EXCEED MAKING COSTS.) THERE IS ONLY ONE COMPANY IN SW ENGLAND THAT MAKES TANKS LIKE THIS. SO I ENDED UP DOUBLING UP WITH DAMIN HIRSTS

landscape scenes inside preexisting tanks sold through commercial outlets or provided by

her exhibition venues. That she chooses, instead, to create them herself whenever

possible suggests that, like the pedestals, the vitrines are not exclusively a practical

necessity for the project but actually contribute significantly to the meaning of the work.

Seen this way, Neudecker's considerable investment in the pedestals and tanks—fixtures

which spectators would typically regard only as *modes of display*—suggests that she

presents them here also as *objects on display*. The implications of this scenario will be

borne out in the later pages of this chapter, but at this juncture suffice it to say that the

pedestals and tanks themselves work in concert with the material they hold: they all point

to a set of investigative traditions associated with Enlightenment thinking and thereby

imply that the examination of those traditions holds an important place in Neudecker's

tank projects.

As even the cursory discussion above indicates, the issues stemming from

Neudecker's decision to turn repeatedly to the vitrine and pedestal, and to feature them as

vital parts of her work on almost thirty occasions, are abundant and complex. They are

bound not only to the history of these apparatuses, but also to the practices and allusions

associated with them, and they raise questions that extend into a variety of territories—

museology, empirical analysis, and the spectatorial experience, to name just a few. It is

worth underscoring here that studying Neudecker's work from the vantage point of any

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[*sic*]TANK BUILDER." The hospital commission mentioned above dates to 2006 and
consists of three tanks permanently installed in London's Great Ormond Street Hospital.
They are titled *It Takes Seven Years for the Human Body to Replace all its Cells* (fig. 16),
The Radius of the Earth is about 3963 Miles (fig. 17), and *It Takes 8.4 Minutes for Light
to Travel from the Sun to the Earth* (fig. 18) and are exhibited individually in different
wings of the children's hospital.

one of these subjects would doubtlessly prove to be a profitable endeavor. However, such discrete analyses alone would amount to insufficient analyses in that they would fail to take full measure of the fact that, as Neudecker executes it, such an impressively wide array of questions do not simply commingle, but actually converge upon one another. In other words, understanding the role of the vitrines and pedestals in this body of work requires making sense not only of their varied implications but, ultimately, taking stock of their cumulative effect. Of course, the same is true for every other facet of Neudecker's project. Her choice of landscape imagery, for example and as we will see, carries its own significance but its full import becomes evident only after reassessing it in light of the complete range of elements that together make up the vitrine project. The process of examining Neudecker's work, therefore, depends on isolating but then returning to and reevaluating its constituent parts—a strikingly apt methodology for a body of work that is itself, in formal as well as thematic terms, so resolutely invested in the concept of the return.

II. The Sublime and the Prospect of Enlightenment:

Mariele Neudecker's Case Studies

As discussed above, one consequence of Neudecker's consistent use of pedestals and vitrines is that the Enlightenment, as both a chapter in western history and an era associated with a particular set of ideas and traditions, asserts itself as an essential point of reference in Neudecker's project. These display devices do not operate alone, however, in making this allusion. Neudecker redoubles the weight of the Enlightenment reference by virtue of the material she places inside the tanks; that is, by way of what she most obviously puts on display. Of all the landscape types that might captivate

Neudecker's attention, in the vitrines she gives form only, and unmistakably, to the sublime landscape. Even more precisely, hers is a picture of the sublime that conforms to a distinctly eighteenth-century formulation of the concept.[49] As theorized in the early Enlightenment era by figures such as Joseph Addison, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant, the sublime is an experience associated with the contemplation of stimuli notable for their immensity, for their potential to overwhelm human perceptual faculties, and for their ability to trigger a complex mixture of terror, awe, and excitement. And, appearing in Neudecker's work, one finds just those phenomena that have served as emblems of the sublime since the eighteenth century, in art and literature alike: the sea, depicted as utterly desolate but for a solitary ship and the tip of a menacing iceberg; towering mountain peaks lurking within an obscuring fog; the eldritch forest at twilight.[50]

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[49] Although ancient in origin, the concept of the sublime became the subject of renewed interest in the eighteenth century; for a discussion of the concept's reformulation during this period see, for example, Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds., *The Sublime: a reader in British eighteenth-century aesthetic theory* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and, Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1960).

[50] Neudecker also often gives her works titles that evoke Romantic themes and motifs as well as empirical interests associated with an Enlightenment-based approach to studying one's surroundings. *Heaven, the Sky* (2008; fig. 13), for example, raises the question of perception and how it might inform one's understanding of the celestial realm. *I Don't Know How I Resisted the Urge to Run* (1998; fig. 19) suggests the terms of a psychological battle between impulse and reason and, with its undercurrent of terror, brings to mind much of the fantastical literature (fairy tales included) of the Romantic period. Concerns of a more exclusively scientific nature correspond to titles such as *Gravity Prevents the Atmosphere from Drifting into Outer Space* (2001; fig. 20) and (the three Great Ormond Street Hospital works) *It Takes Seven Years for the Human Body to Replace all its Cells* (fig. 16), *The Radius of the Earth is about 3963 Miles* (fig. 17), and *It Takes 8.4 Minutes for Light to Travel from the Sun to the Earth* (fig. 18).

As Neudecker always seals away her sublime tableaux in protective glass cases, she suggests that they are a type of precious material carefully prepared for the purposes of equally careful consideration. In fact, they do offer a great deal to spectators who take such an approach. In addition to the small details and varied views that only a thorough visual inspection can reveal, there are certain curious facts about Neudecker's compositions that also await discovery. Specifically, on a number of occasions, something far more particular than a general sublime landscape type, or the historic period associated with its conceptualization, accounts for the form she gives her work. In four of the tanks, Neudecker created imagery directly based upon scenes found in individual, identifiable Romantic paintings and, in these cases, she gave her compositions the same titles as those assigned to the earlier works.

The earliest of Neudecker's appropriations, *Fog* (1996; fig. 21), re-presents Caspar David Friedrich's *Fog* of 1807 (fig. 22). Neudecker's tank outsizes Friedrich's painting, but only by a few inches: hers measures approximately 19 inches wide, 22 inches deep, and 16.5 inches high (reaching to 66 inches high with its pedestal), whereas Friedrich's has a width of approximately 20 inches and a height of approximately 13 inches. Close in size, the two compositions of the two seascapes also have much in common. To begin, a narrow band of brown, rocky shoreline occupies the immediate foreground of Friedrich's painting; two ships, sharply foreshortened and almost fully obscured by fog, appear to rest in the water an indeterminate distance from the barren ground. The vessel closer to the shore resembles a small rowboat, with its single mast and two oars nearly invisible through the fog; beyond it, a larger ship whose hull is barely discernible as it fades into the dark haze surrounding it, comes in to view as its mast and

square-rigged sails rise up and become faintly silhouetted against a pale area of fog. The

largest portion of the scene, approximately its upper two-thirds, consists of fog-shrouded

sea, horizon, and sky: darkest in the space immediately around the two ships, the fog

begins to lighten in the space above the boats and finally, near the center of the upper

edge of canvas, it takes on a bluish hue suggesting a slight break in the mist. A hazy

seaside air likewise dominates Neudecker's *Fog* and, as in Friedrich's image also, water

and land meet beneath the misty sky and together occupy only a small horizontal strip of

space at the base of the composition. Neudecker's sea is a flat expanse of blue fiberglass,

and the ground that rises up from it, with a jagged surface and made of a deep reddish-

brown material, recalls the rocky shoreline in Friedrich's *Fog*. Further, just as Friedrich

painted a large ship near the center of his pictured space, Neudecker set a three-masted,

square-rigged boat near the middle of her sea; however, while the hazy atmosphere

surrounding her ship softens and blurs its forms, Neudecker's fog—another of her water-

based solutions—appears far less dense than does Friedrich's and, in turn, her sailing

vessel is more prominent visually than is Friedrich's. This is true despite the fact that

Neudecker's ship is a proportionately smaller part of the pictorial arrangement than

Friedrich's boat: comparing the amount of compositional space above their masts makes

this especially apparent.

On account of the relative clarity of Neudecker's image, it is also easy to see that

the small rowboat in Friedrich's work does not reappear in Neudecker's seascape. There

is no evidence, either, of the objects Friedrich painted on his rocky shore: an anchor, its

rope, and two y-shaped sticks.[51] As Joseph Leo Koerner explained in *Caspar David*

Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape, the significance of these small objects rests in

large part on their power to prompt narrative speculation on the part of the spectator; as

he put it, because we are "[g]iven so little within this canvas, we viewers tend to make

the most of what we have, and so we postulate…" about to whom these may have

belonged, or perhaps when and why they were left behind, and so forth.[52] Not only does

Neudecker omit these objects from her vitrine, leaving fewer compositional elements to

consider, but in their place—that is, in the immediate foreground of her composition,

regardless of which side one stands before—it is the opaque fiberglass substance of

Neudecker's model that faces the viewer. Rather than drawing the spectator into

narrative contemplation, in this way Neudecker's arrangement draws attention to the

materiality of the work. This is not to say that Neudecker's composition precludes

narrative engagement; her ship's isolation, the nearby rocky outcropping that might

appear as an imminent threat to the vessel, curiosity about any passengers or crew

members affiliated with the ship…there is plenty to trigger one's inquisitiveness and

imagination. The point is that there are simply fewer of these types of prompts and,

effectively, Neudecker exchanges them for details pertaining to her creation of the work.

 A comparable balance between this type of reductiveness, material display, and

faithful reproduction characterizes the other three vitrines in which Neudecker re-pictures

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[51] Joseph Leo Koerner explains that these sticks are "presumably poles for hanging fishing nets to dry," but he continues, one would be correct also to see "in these two sticks the suggestion of crutches." See Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape Painting*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2009), 110.

[52] Ibid.

specific Romantic paintings. Her *Morning Fog in the Mountains* (1997; fig. 9) and *The Sea of Ice* (1997; fig. 1), both discussed in the first pages of this chapter, re-present Friedrich's 1808 *Morning Fog in the Mountains* (fig. 23) and 1823/24 *The Sea of Ice* (fig. 24), and Neudecker based her *Shipwreck* of 1997 (fig. 25) upon a 1767 painting also titled *Shipwreck* (fig. 26) by Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg.[53] In each case,

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[53] In addition to those Neudecker works listed above, two other tank works correspond to specific nineteenth-century paintings. Neudecker modeled *There Go I* (2004; fig. 27) after Arnold Böcklin's *Island of the Dead* (1880; fig. 28). Böcklin painted two versions of *Island of the Dead* in 1880 and they are nearly identical to one another. The version pictured here is owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Also, Neudecker's *Raft of the Medusa* (1995; fig. 10) re-presents Théodore Géricault's well-known painting (1818/19) of the same name. These two tank works, however, differ from the others in the following ways: *There Go I* does not reproduce its referent's title, and Neudecker's *Raft of the Medusa* does not eliminate all of the figures that appear in Géricault's painting. No scholarship accounts for these anomalies but a few points about these works may be relevant to their unusual features. *Raft of the Medusa* is Neudecker's earliest tank; conceivably, she produced it during a relatively experimental phase of her career, before arriving at the decision to consistently leave all human figures out of her compositions. Böcklin's *Island of the Dead*, dated to 1880, post-dates the Friedrich and de Loutherbourg paintings by several decades, and by more than century in the case of de Loutherbourg's *Shipwreck*, perhaps suggesting that as a point of reference it functions differently for Neudecker than do the others. If this is the case, it supports the idea that Neudecker's *Raft of the Medusa* owes its atypical nature primarily (or even exclusively) to its being an early work because the Géricault painting it copies dates to exactly the period of the Friedrich images. Finally, it may be tempting to ascribe the anomalous nature of these two tanks to the fact that neither Böcklin nor Géricault is German (Böcklin was Swiss-born, Géricault was French), but this argument is undone by the fact that de Loutherbourg, whose composition and title Neudecker did replicate, was born in France (and lived most of professional life in London). To approach the question of these two tanks from an alternate perspective, one could question their having been selected by Neudecker as source images, given their distinctions. Finally, there are a few additional points that may bear upon these questions and as such could warrant further investigation in future analyses: *There Go I* conforms to the landscape type associated with the sublime; Böcklin was one of Adolf Hitler's favored painters, and at one time Hitler owned eleven of his paintings (John Vinocur, "The Burlesque, and Rigor, of Arnold Böcklin," *The New York Times*, 12 January 2002, at www.nytimes.com/2002/01/12/style/12iht-bocklin_ed3_.html), including the third version (of five) of *Island of the Dead*; Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* inspired Georg Kaiser's 1945 play which has been characterized as an "allegory of Nazi-Jewish relations" [Sidra deKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature*

Neudecker adheres to the essential compositional arrangement of her predecessor's work; and, given her ability to fabricate such subtle details as the distinctive look of a broken ice sheet's jagged edges or a craggy snow-covered mountain face, and then devise atmospheric effects that become especially striking as light filters through the glass of their enclosures, each of her vitrines presents a visually captivating scene. At the same time, Neudecker diminishes or even eliminates specific elements of the earlier works. The distant icebergs in Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice*, the subtly changing colors and overlapping layers that distinguish the cloudy sky in Friedrich's *Morning Fog in the Mountains*, and several of the foreground figures in de Loutherbourg's painting, for instance, do not return in Neudecker's compositions.

One particular type of reductiveness that characterizes every vitrine, but would likely be overlooked were it not for the comparisons that Neudecker prompts by copying specific Romantic paintings, concerns the representation of space in her imagery. Friedrich's *Fog*, for example, evokes a sense of the infinite in its depiction of sea and sky: these motifs, which in their vastness suggest enormous expanses of space, dominate his composition; the remnants of human presence situated on the shore, closest to the viewer—the two sticks, anchor, and rope—are so small in comparison that they underscore the immensity of the realm beyond; and, as the fog obscures the horizon, which is the one landscape feature that might hint at the idea of an end by appearing as a line of demarcation, much of the composition amounts to a picture of endlessness. In Neudecker's version of Friedrich's work, a similar combination of pictorial elements

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(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 157]; in 1938, Kaiser's plays were banned by the Nazis.

produces a notably different effect. As motifs, her sea and sky may suggest the notion of limitlessness, but the hazy atmosphere inside the tank can do nothing to erase the abrupt visual transition from water to air; from every angle, one sees the sharp line that articulates precisely where the blue fiberglass representing the sea ends and the misty sky begins. Further, the transparency of both the fog and the tank's glass walls precludes the visual experience of depth that is so notable—and so crucial to the impression of the infinite and thus the idea of the sublime—in Friedrich's painting. As Koerner describes, Friedrich typically created luminous, glossy surfaces on his canvases by applying layer upon layer of thin translucent glazes that "betray no evidence of brushwork and little of the physical presence of paint."[54] In this way, Friedrich's painting technique augments the sense of depth in *Fog* by providing a visually penetrable surface that seems to lead endlessly inward, unstopped by the materiality of either the paint or the canvas. In contrast, the penetrability of Neudecker's composition is much more likely to lead to a visual arrest: if spectators peer deeply into the fog, their gaze will travel into the space of the tank, but it will ultimately encounter the glass wall on the opposite side and, as a result, land outside the compositional space and fall upon portions of the vitrine's surroundings.[55] That Neudecker does not simply construct careful replications of Romantic paintings, but also consistently transforms them in these specific ways is crucial to understanding her interest in revisiting her predecessors' work; accordingly,

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[54] Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich*, 135.

[55] While this penetrability does vary from one work to another given that Neudecker prepares different atmospheric mixtures for each tank, the visual effects never fully eliminate the possibility of viewing through the tanks' sides.

following further analyses of Neudecker's vitrine project, this will be a central point in the chapter's conclusion.

The preceding paragraph began with the observation that important aspects of Neudecker's tanks would be difficult to notice if not for comparisons between her work and the paintings she copies; in fact, it appears that Neudecker encourages her viewers to uncover the connections and make the comparisons because she appropriates not only imagery but titles as well. Without her references to preexisting works, it might be tempting to contemplate Neudecker's vitrine project only in relatively broad terms, as a contemporary meditation upon the sublime, for example, or as an examination of the Romantic tradition that explored the sublime in visual terms during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The correspondences, however, underscore an important fact: Neudecker directs her spectators to distinctly *German* traditions.[56] Her repeated quoting

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[56] Despite the fact that Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg was not German, Neudecker's re-construction of his *Shipwreck* accords with her focus on Germanic traditions as well as her interest in subjects associated with the sublime. Additionally, de Loutherbourg is well-known for inventing the Eidophusikon (derived from the Greek, translating approximately to "taken from nature"), a mechanical theatrical spectacle involving mirrors, lights, colored glass, and his own paintings arranged and activated in order to suggest cinematic effects of passing time. In this regard, he is an interesting point of reference for Neudecker who also constructs carefully illuminated, visually captivating, panoramic views that recall Romantic landscape imagery. In terms of German heritage, De Loutherbourg was a native of Strasbourg, a French city located in close proximity to the German border. He traveled through the Alps and settled in London, England in 1771. See Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory 1648 – 1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2000), 857; and, Brown and Young, *Over and Over*, 257. Immersed in northern European traditions, de Loutherbourg is thus a suitable reference for Neudecker who has said that her work is concerned with the fact that the "relation between humans and nature is quite specific in each culture and…as northern Europeans we look at landscapes in a very different way to other cultures" ("Mariele Neudecker," Royal Academy of Arts video, at www.facebook.com/video.php?v=210048532946. Additionally, although Neudecker does not explain this statement in detail, it evokes the arguments posited by Robert Rosenblum in his *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to*

of Friedrich makes this relationship explicit, to be sure, but it is also true that even for those works without a specifiable art historical referent, it is the Kantian—that is, the eighteenth-century *German*—formulation of the sublime that her work most clearly evokes.[57] As if compiling an inventory, Neudecker fills one vitrine after another with representations of precisely those aspects of the natural world that Kant enumerates in *The Critique of Judgment* as most likely to elicit an experience of the sublime. In his *Critique*, as in her tanks, one finds a focus on "nature…in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation,"[58] landscapes comprised of "shapeless mountain masses piled in wild disorder upon each other with their pyramids of ice," "bold, overhanging, and, as it were threatening, rocks; [and] clouds piled up in the sky."[59] To behold Neudecker's vitrines, therefore, is to be reminded of a specifically Kantian conceptualization of the sublime, but also to be pointed simultaneously to a later body of work—German

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Rothko (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1975) in large part because Rosenblum focuses considerable attention on the emptiness evident in many of Friedrich's works and discusses it with regard to the concept of the sublime in much Abstract Expressionist painting. However, Rosenblum addresses the spiritual aspect of Friedrich's compositions and this a subject that does not hold a prominent place in Neudecker's statements about her work, nor in the literature pertaining to her vitrines nor, in turn, in this study.

[57] For discussion of the distinctions between the sublime as theorized by Joseph Addison, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant, see Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, 1 – 16; Edward Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 7: 201 - 205; and, Monk, *The Sublime*, 4 – 5. By re-picturing not just German Romantic paintings but, specifically, those German Romantic images that expressly point to the Kantian sublime, Neudecker effectively doubles her works' evocation of Germanic tradition.

[58] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 104.

[59] Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, 117 – 118, 125.

Romantic painting—which has its own firm ties to Kant's thinking but is significant here

for the history and allusions that are also distinct to it.

The connections between Neudecker's imagery and the German Romantic

tradition are acknowledged, albeit briefly, in monographic and catalogue essays as well

as critical reviews that take the vitrines as their subject.[60] Most commonly, Neudecker's

critics and reviewers regard her turn to this Romantic material as a political gesture, an

act of re-appropriation intended to counter the fact that in the early part of the twentieth

century, German Romantic art, including Friedrich's paintings, suffered egregious misuse

at the hands of Adolf Hitler. As has been well and frequently documented, art played a

significant role in the choreography of Hitler's rise to power,[61] with many Romantic

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[60] See for example, Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*; Posey and Kingston, *Mariele Neudecker*; and, Brown and Young, *Over and Over*.

[61] The 1937 *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich and its counterpart of the same year, *The Great German Art Exhibition*, are perhaps the most well known examples of Hitler's intention to disseminate Third Reich beliefs via art. In his speech inaugurating the *Great German* exhibition, Hitler was unequivocal about his position with regard to modern art, stating, "I declare here and now that it is my irrevocable resolve that just as in the sphere of political bewilderment, I am going to make a clean sweep of phrases in the artistic life of Germany. 'Works of art' which cannot be comprehended and are validated only through bombastic instructions for use [. . .] from now on will no longer be foisted upon the German people! [And,] when the *Volk* passes through these galleries it will recognize in me its own spokesman and counselor [. . .] it will draw a sigh of relief and joyously express its agreement with this purification of art" (see, Hitler's Speech at the Opening of the House of German Art in Munich, July 18, 1937, at http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1577). While the organization of the eight *Great German Art* shows was aimed at championing Hitler's favored contemporary artists, he also orchestrated a program of "visual arts management" that included the acquisition of art, for personal collections as well as state museums, created by both German and non-German artists from nearly all historical periods. Hitler is known to have had a special appreciation for painting from the Romantic era and for advancing the idea that "Austro-Bavarian landscape and genre painting of the nineteenth century…[was] recognized as the pinnacle of artistic accomplishment." See Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of Chapel Hill Press, 1996), 8, 11, 247-248; Klaus Backes, *Hitler und die bildenden*

images of the Germanic landscape—vast and magnificent, in some instances idyllically peaceful, at other times imbued with a sense of unmatched power—fitting well with the Third Reich's expansionist, nationalistic agenda. As the Neudecker literature explains it, the German Romantic tradition, having been harnessed for Hitler's propagandistic purposes and subsequently falling into disfavor as a result of this misuse, was in need of recuperation in the postwar years.

Neudecker's title *Stolen Sunsets* itself refers to the Nazi past, and later critical German responses to it, by echoing a statement made by Hans-Jürgen Syperberg in his 1977 film, *Hitler, A Film from Germany*, "Hitler stole our sunsets." Waldemar Januszczak, art critic for *The Sunday Times* (London), summarized the bearing of this history upon Neudecker's work. In his review of her 2004 exhibition at Tate St. Ives, *Over and Over, Again and Again*, Januszczak wrote:

> The Nazi zeitgeist thieves *did* steal the German sunset. Actually, they
> stole an entire landscape of possible Teutonic views…Indeed, given how
> much prime German Romantic terrain was appropriated by the Nazis for
> their image bank, it's a wonder that German art in the post-Nazi era had
> anything left to picture at all. Hitler stole the paintings of Caspar David
> Friedrich, too, and Wagner's overtures, and the fairy tales of the Brothers
> Grimm…So, an obvious way to understand Neudecker's oeuvre is to
> imagine that she is now busily stealing all this stuff back.[62]

Künste (Cologne: DuMont, 1988); and, Henry Grosshans, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983).

[62] Waldemar Januszczak, "Art: Scenes through a glass starkly," *The Sunday Times* (June 13, 2004) at www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/article108961.ece.

Januszczak's account repeats a typical interpretation applied to the preponderance of Romantic imagery in Neudecker's work.[63] The artist herself has neither confirmed nor denied this analysis of her subject matter, but it stands as a largely unproblematic reading given the essential elements of the project: Neudecker re-appropriates Friedrich specifically, as well as the German Romantic tradition in a more general sense, and then seals the material inside a type of vessel appreciated for its capacity to protect its contents. In fairly straightforward terms, Neudecker has indeed reclaimed a significant facet of her cultural heritage, and has done so in a way that conveys her dedication to ensuring its future safekeeping.

Might there be more to say, though, about Neudecker's tanks? Viable as this common understanding of her work may be, Neudecker's decision not simply to copy but also to make specific modifications to the earlier images suggests a more complicated situation. Further, the historically laden dynamic underpinning the vitrine project is too complex to be explained solely as a strategy for recovering that which was politically manipulated by the Nazis. The basic facts framing Neudecker's project—that she was born in Düsseldorf in 1965, and that by the time the twentieth century was approaching its end she was in the midst of creating a large body of work that points directly to several

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[63] For example, in the most extensive monograph devoted to Neudecker's art, Maite Lorés wrote, "The need to recall the sublime in a postmodern era has been a constant in Neudecker's work, as has the need to reclaim German Romanticism from its abuse and appropriation under the Third Reich. In common with other German artists, Neudecker feels compelled to redress Hitler's effect on German history. Caspar David Friedrich's paintings were appropriated by the Nazis as a paradigm of a romantic landscape [and] Neudecker inserts three-dimensional replicas of Friedrich's landscape paintings in a series of glass tanks filled with layered solutions of water, dyes, and salts." Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*,11.

chapters of German intellectual and cultural history, including those that are bound up with her nation's troubled World War II-era past—raise more questions than the re-appropriation interpretation alone addresses. Consider, for example, mapping Neudecker's project along a timeline determined by both her own biography and the historical references in her work. As it courses through distinctly German history, it marks the following places: the advent of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Third Reich, 1965, and the end of the century, which in this case is also the end of a millennium. Two issues pertaining to this timeline need clarifying. One relates to the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall and the other addresses the timeline's end.

First, regarding the Berlin Wall: as its construction began in 1961, it was essentially born of the same generation as Neudecker. Further, as addressed broadly in the "Introduction," with its demolition dating to 1989/1990 and Neudecker's vitrine project starting in 1995/1996, the first wave of tank works is concurrent with the first wave of activities and projects associated with the Wall's destruction. This timing invites the idea that Neudecker's work stands as a response to, or a reflection of, its post-Wall context. To this end, it is true that Neudecker takes on both the thematics and practice of reconstruction and preservation, and so creates a body of work aligning with concerns that were present in Germany, and other nations, for much of the twentieth century and that also came to the fore with the fall of the Wall. Literature regarding the nature and quantity of post-Wall activity abounds, its scope is vast, and its attention centers upon subjects ranging from efforts to re/construct Berlin as a unified city, for example, to wrestling with questions aimed at the issue of preserving and memorializing facets of pre-1989 Germany, including the Wall itself. A recent contribution to this field in the

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arts specifically was the 2007 exhibition *Reality Bites: Making Avant-garde Art in Post-Wall Germany*, and the show's catalogue opens with a series of observations exactly on point to this discussion. Carmen Colangelo wrote:

> There is an undeniable energy in post-Wall Berlin. During a recent visit I was struck by the sheer scale of activity, the sheer ambition of rebuilding. In the 1990s once-grand Potsdamer Platz—decimated by bombing during World War II, flattened completely by the erection of the Berlin Wall—became Europe's busiest construction site, its roster of international architects including Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers, Rafael Moneo, and Helmut Jahn. Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, Peter Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial, Sir Normal Foster's renovated Reichstag—such projects are at once communal and deeply personal, testament to the radical changes of recent years…
>
> [Among the works included in the show, one finds] historical and contemporary images of Berlin…architectural maquettes…photographs of the Palast der Republik (palace of the republic), the former seat of the East German parliament [that] focus on its deteriorating, mirrored surfaces, on which images of the old Berlin Cathedral can be seen…and [one body of work] recycles and reinvents modernist architectural design elements from the former East German Centrum-Warenhaus department store…[64]

[64] Carmen Colangelo, "Foreword," in Eckmann, ed., *Reality Bites*, 22. The catalogue also includes a brief discussion of Neudecker's work, and its primary focus is in keeping with the aforementioned discussion of Neudecker's turn to the sublime landscape type and her reappropriation of Romantic imagery. It contends that the tanks ask their viewers to evaluate the current validity of those culturally-determined associations that have

There is clearly no difficulty placing Neudecker's work within this general sphere of

post-Wall phenomena. While her vitrine project may not appear as architecturally-

oriented as one might expect given the account provided above by Colangelo, it is true

that Neudecker has been busily engaged with reconstructing elements of the past, and

specifically elements with direct associations to Germany's Nazi past, for an extended

period of time that overlaps the building activity Colangelo described. Moreover, with

her express interest in constructing the tanks' support structures, and her inclination to

reveal her handiwork—by varying the dimensions of the pedestals, by leaving visible the

glue that seals the glass walls, and by drawing attention to the fiberglass medium that

forms many of the models by situating masses of it directly against the tanks' glass

planes—Neudecker routinely highlights the idea of construction by putting on display

select aspects of her works constructed-ness.[65]

tainted the landscape imagery they re-present. Sabine Eckmann, writing the
"Introduction," sets the foundation for this line of thought, stating that Neudecker's
vitrines "explore images that connote Nazi ideology of the German soil in the form of
pseudoscientific models made to preserve things from the past" (Eckmann, ed., *Reality
Bites*, 39) and, later in the catalogue, Gertrud Koch adds that the tanks are "also about
provoking the historicity of the imaginary, our culturally-coded collective fund of
images" (Koch, "The Plasticity of the Real: Spatial Concepts and Reality Effects," in
Eckmann, ed., *Reality Bites*, 183).

[65] Also, within of the scope of this dissertation, one could argue that the events and
discourses bound up with the history of the Wall weigh most heavily, or at least most
explicitly, on the work of Thomas Demand and Gregor Schneider. Like Neudecker,
Demand and Schneider bring the past to the present, but their turn is to Germany in the
twentieth century. Further, while their projects do involve substantial amounts of
construction and reconstruction, the dynamics of destruction—which in several instances
is best described as a deliberate de-construction, or taking apart, of structural elements—
also assumes an important place in their work. More details regarding these practices
will follow in the chapters devoted to Demand and Schneider.

The second issue mentioned above regarding the timeline that underpins Neudecker's project relates specifically to the last entry in that chronology. The end of the twentieth century, or the turn of the millennium, does not signal the project's conclusion. No evidence exists to suggest that Neudecker has constructed her "last" vitrine. At what time, or with what work, the project will reach its completion remains unknown. The project's current status can only be described as *ongoing*.

Rather than associating the turn of the century and millennium with any endpoint in Neudecker's work, it is more accurate to link it with the beginning of her project. Inaugurated in 1996 (or 1995, if one chooses to include the anomalous *Raft of the Medusa*), Neudecker was just getting the project fully underway as the twentieth century's end became imminent. This isolates a very particular and complex moment as the vantage point from which to begin considering the various historical references within Neudecker's project. This is not to suggest that Neudecker's work is *about* the millennium per se, or about any particular anxieties attending its approach. Rather, it is to raise the question of how certain persistent and prominent features of her project might reflect comparably salient issues in millennial culture and, in turn, what these correspondences can contribute to interpreting Neudecker's work.

To this end, as utterly incommensurable as they are, both the Nazi era and the prospect of the millennium's end functioned as prompts for serious cultural apprehension and examination in a wide range of disciplines—and they both have a place in Neudecker's work. Begun in the final moments of the last millennium and referring to subjects enmeshed with the traumatic history of the Third Reich, Neudecker's project effectively draws a line connecting these two extra-ordinary contexts. However, rather

than arguing that any uneasiness or critical discourse circulating within millennial culture directly parallels or stems from postwar concerns (although they certainly have a place), it is more compelling to acknowledge the millennium as a moment of retrospection wherein an era comes to a close, is rendered inert, and so can be reviewed from a position of historical distance. It is this relationship between millennial thought and Neuecker's work that informs the analysis in this chapter. The vitrines do, after all, enclose emblems of Enlightenment tradition, set them out securely for contemplation, and place the spectator aside—in other words, at a distance—from them.[66]

In light of this discussion about cultural apprehensiveness, retrospection, and the moments that impel them, a word about the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 is in order. The prominent French philosopher, cultural critic, and postmodern theorist, Jean Baudrillard (1929 -) who, in addition to providing extensive commentary about the millennium, has written at length about the nature and consequences of the 9/11 attacks and has even theorized a connection between the two, described the terrorist strike of that day as "the absolute, irrevocable event."[67] Its shattering force was so great, he continued, that it brought down "a whole (Western) value-system and a world order"[68] and ultimately, when the World Trade Center fell, it was a collapse that signaled "a kind of

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[66] This is also a suitable approach to bring to the issue of the Berlin Wall as it, too, signaled a chapter's close and triggered a great deal of reflection. Moreover, coinciding as it did with the millennium's final years, it would make the notions of endings and retrospection resonate especially loudly at the very time Neudecker started building the vitrines.

[67] Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," in *The Spirit of Terrorism, and Other Essays*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 17.

[68] Baudrillard, "Requiem for the Twin Towers," in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 37.

dramatic ending and, all in all, disappearance…of the world system it embodies."[69] The

point here is much the same as that made regarding the legacy of the Third Reich and the

coming of the year 2000: the attacks of 9/11 amounted to yet another end and yet another

prompt to reconsider the principles and values that defined the culture upon which the

events had intervened. As a third moment marked into the contextual framework of

Neudecker's project that pushes to the foreground the concepts of ends and reflection, it

also adds emphasis to the interpretation that, with their static, spectacular, and

retrospective nature, the vitrines pointedly encapsulate the spirit of their times. Fittingly,

also, the relevance of this third point of reference, which is bound up with a condition

that western culture has repeatedly found itself in during the last century—that is, of

being thrust into a state of serious critique—is a subtle reminder that the notion of the

return is always at play in this body of Neudecker's work.[70]

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[69] Ibid., 40 - 41. Although one may argue that Baudrillard's assertion did not, ultimately, prove true and that an entire "(Western) value-system and a world order" did not meet its full demise in the wake of 9/11, it is important to note that Baudrillard was writing in the first weeks after the attacks, anticipating the longer-term consequences of the events well before their impact could be thoroughly appraised; that he wrote in such extreme, grandiose terms suggests his status as both an analyst and, effectively, a symptom of his times. Also, from the perspective of certain measurable standards, such as the long-term effect on world trade or the economic security of the United States, the 9/11 attacks might today seem far less momentous than Baudrillard described, but from more abstract standpoints—those, for example, related to the sense of an irretrievably lost individual or national safety, or to the aftermath of witnessing on live television the fall of the Twin Towers as well as the last moments of men and women leaping to their deaths—the extreme nature of Baudrillard's assessment may well reflect the nature of the events and the turning-point they represent.

[70] With the concept of the return so prominent a part of Neudecker's work, and with it at times correlating with episodes of cultural trauma, it might be tempting to cast a psychoanalytic gaze upon the vitrines and interpret their varied manifestations of repetition in terms of Freud's theorization of the death drive [see Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990)]. This is a direction not taken in this analysis, however, but instead deferred

The vitrine project's un-ended nature also intersects with the theme of the return and, even more explicitly, several of the tanks' titles bring the ideas of repetition and cyclicality to the fore. First, regardless of when or if Neudecker creates a vitrine that she calls her last, the fact is that to date 29 tanks comprise the project, meaning she has already made 28 returns to it. Then, for this project that repeatedly turns to the same genre (landscape), the same fundamental format (glass tank, pedestal), and the same traditions (German Romanticism, the Kantian sublime), Neudecker composes titles such as *Over and Over, Again and Again* (2004; fig. 29). Other examples, less forthright but attuned nonetheless to the concept of recurrence, include *Another Million Days and Nights Go By* (2002; fig. 30) and *It Takes Seven Years for the Human Body to Replace all its Cells* (2006; fig. 16).[71] As a variant on the theme of the return, several of Neudecker's works embody the idea and practice of repetition in that they are made up of more than just one tank. *Over and Over, Again and Again* is one such example. Its three tanks and vitrines are of equal dimensions, and the three mountainous forms they contain resemble

to the examination of Gregor Schneider's work. The reasons for this are as follows: Neudecker's work appears engaged with the tenets of Freud's death drive in a basic sense—meaning, her work does revisit the past (repeatedly) and does so in a manner that evokes the notion of having to come to terms with a past shaken by traumatic episodes; one could even, perhaps, draw a connection between the stillness of her scenes and the concept of stasis as it applies to the death drive (but this is complicated by the fact that her compositions are faintly animated by the subtly shifting fluids that create their atmospheric effects)—but it lacks the compulsive, consuming, destructive dimension associated with the death drive. Schneider's work, on the other had, has all this, and more. His is a project broadly and deeply connected to a great deal of psychoanalytic thought, teeming with allusions, for example, to repression, loss, and forces unseen but potentially sinister. Accordingly, see chapter 3 of this text for a (psychoanalytically-oriented) return to "the return."

[71] Those works whose titles refer to times of day also imply repetition (circadian repeats): *Morning Fog in the Mountains* (1997; fig. 9), *Stolen Sunsets* (1996; fig. 15), and *Looking West (Sunset)* (1996; fig. 31).

one another in color, texture, and scale so that together they read as a carefully correlated

set of scenes. Similarly, *Think of One Thing* (2002; fig. 32) consists of four separate

vitrines and, while their pedestals vary in height, in each tank the scenery depicts a rocky

peak arising above an expanse of fog.[72] Here, too, the mountaintops emerging from the

mist are matched in color, texture, and scale so they convey the impression of being

separate but related parts of a whole. The effect, as with *Over and Over*, *Again and

Again*, is to suggest that creating the complete, multi-part work was an exercise in turning

but then also returning to the composition at hand.[73] In all, every vitrine—those that

stand as single-tank works as well as those that are a part of a larger grouping—is

uniquely inflected, but none varies so much as to threaten the cohesiveness of the vitrine

project as a whole, reminding the viewer that each one is an integral facet of a larger, and

seemingly un-ended, dialogue between Neudecker and cultural history that is her subject.

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[72] *Think of One Thing* is a title that might sound ironic given it names a work composed
of four distinct parts, but it points directly to a subject discussed by Neudecker herself
and, accordingly, one that surfaces regularly in the Neudecker literature. That subject is
perception, or personal responses to given images and concepts. As a theme not
uncommon to a great deal of Romantic art and literature, it corresponds with the general
Romantic nature of the vitrine landscapes. With the subjective dimension in mind, the
four tanks that together constitute *Think of One Thing* suggest the multiplicity of
responses that can issue from a prompt such as "think of one thing." Neudecker's
Heaven, the Sky (2008; fig. 13) is another fairly explicit example of her exploration of
this subject.

[73] The other tank works made up of more than a single pedestal/vitrine are *Looking West
(Sunset)* (1996; fig. 31) and *Heaven, the Sky* (2008; fig. 13). These are like those
described above in that the contents of each tank resemble one another to such a degree
that it appears Neudecker returned to a single subject when she constructed each work.
Also, both *Looking West (Sunset)* and *Heaven, the Sky* consist of two tanks—in the case
of *Looking West (Sunset)*, the contents and dimensions of each are identical (although
Neudecker treated the water-based solutions in the tanks at different times—one week
apart from each other—so that the atmospheric effects are not quite identical; see Posey
and Kingston, *Mariele Neudecker*, 26, for more detail), and in *Heaven, the Sky* the
contents are closely related but the dimensions vary marginally.

As we shall see, teasing out the full significance of the tank project's *ongoing* aspect also requires a return to two basic biographical facts about Neudecker: that she is German and was born in 1965. As discussed in the Introduction to this text, the 1960s were unprecedented in terms of Germany's reckoning with the facts and legacy of the Holocaust. Jeffrey Herf's words on the matter bear repeating, as they offer a succinct evaluation of these circumstances. Generally speaking, he explained, "[c]onfronting the crimes of the Nazi past constituted a, and in many distinguished cases *the*, central preoccupation of postwar German intellectual, journalistic, literary, cinematic, theological, legal, and scholarly engagement."[74] Within this milieu, he continued, the decade of the 1960s was particularly remarkable, as it was the period in which several significant events took place; amongst the most notable, he claimed, were a series of parliamentary debates concerning the extension of the statute of limitations for prosecuting Nazi-era crimes, a number of widely-publicized trials of individuals accused of working in death camps, and the student uprisings of 1968. In the wake of these events, Herf emphasized, a shift occurred in the '60s whereby Germany's Nazi past became a subject discussed in far broader and more visible circles than had previously been the case; the topic moved, he explained, beyond the realm of "'a few politicians, theologians, and writers,'" and entered a much wider public sphere, which is where it has remained.[75]

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[74] Herf, *Divided Memory*, 8.

[75] Ibid., 342. Herf quoted Herta Däubler-Gmelin, Social Democratic Party representative, who was speaking in 1979 (for the full citation regarding the Däubler-Gmelin passage, see Herf, *Divided Memory*, 493).

The climate into which Neudecker was born, therefore, was unsettled,

transitional; the subsequent decades, constituting Neudecker's formative years and

beyond, brought and still bring varied efforts to contend with the Nazi past. Theodor

Adorno (1903 – 1969), one of Germany's foremost postwar theorists, wrote in detail

about this extraordinary milieu and his thoughts bear directly upon Neudecker's work.

Indeed, his ideas are relevant to a discussion of any German artist working in the postwar

period, but for Neudecker, whose work has a retrospective dimension that evokes

Enlightenment tradition as well as the facts and legacy of Hitler's program, his thoughts

are especially pertinent. In 1959—on the cusp of the decade Herf described as "a caesura

in the history of West German reflection on the Nazi past"[76]— Adorno published his

well-known essay, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?"[77] The analyses

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[76] Ibid., 334.

[77] Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" 114 – 129. Although
nearly 40 years elapsed between the publication of Adorno's essay and the construction
of Neudecker's first vitrine, as Herf explained, the question of "coming to terms with the
past" never ceased to circulate within a German context. A practically uncountable
number of projects, in a host of venues and media—essays, articles, exhibitions, films,
television programs, and novels, for example—have taken as their subject the course and
consequences of Hitler's rise to power. Moreover, as the twentieth century reached its
close—at just the moment Neudecker made the first of her tanks—it could be argued that
the question of properly processing the past acquired a renewed and intensified
immediacy. As discussed in earlier pages, the approach of the millennium's turn was a
period of extensive cultural critique, a singular vantage point from which to reflect upon
the past as well as the future. In addition, it coincided with several significant
anniversaries related to the Holocaust: 50 years since the end of World War II and the
closing of Hitler's concentration camps, for example, and ten years since the fall of the
Berlin Wall. In all, as the twentieth century neared its end, the past came to bear
particularly heavily upon the present. Testifying to the irresolution that still surrounded
the question of how best to acknowledge and relate to the past, along with these
anniversaries came a host of efforts—exhibitions, articles, anthologies, and symposia, for
example—aimed at grappling with Germany's Nazi history and its legacy. Finally, the
quantity and variety of projects focused on memorialization—its monuments, processes,
and theoretical underpinnings—further attest to the continued vitality of the subject.

and directives he advanced in the text, as well as several of its implications, apply so

pointedly to Neudecker's work that it is not an overstatement to contend that as surely as

her vitrines reproduce Friedrich, de Loutherberg, and Kant, they also reprise key aspects

of this specific tract.[78]

In "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" Adorno considered the

sociopolitical climate that produced, characterized, and followed the years in which

Adolf Hitler was in power, and he argued that fascism's continued existence amounted to

proof that Germany's World War II-era history had not been adequately processed; it

remained, according to Adorno, in need of reprocessing.[79] As to the question of what

would constitute a proper "coming to terms with" this traumatic past, he stressed the need

for a thorough examination of the many and varied conditions that allowed for the rise of

National Socialism in the first place. Such an analysis, Adorno explained, must involve a

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[78] Additionally, given that Adorno introduces his ideas with a title phrased as a question, Neudecker's visual translation of this particular essay might be interpreted as a move made in concert with her decision to utilize the vitrine structure: both choices draw attention to the rhetoric of inquiry.

[79] According to Adorno, several common and inadequate strategies for ostensibly "coming to terms with the past" were evident in Germany by the late 1950s. He cited, for instance, efforts aimed at "wiping it from memory;" claims of ignorance that defy logic given that "Jews were disappearing everywhere;" "a readiness to…belittle what happened [to the effect] that people are not ashamed to argue that is was surely at most only five million Jews, and not six million, who were killed;" and, even finding a way to contest the innocence of the Nazis' victims by constructing the idea that "such things…could not have occurred if the victims has not presented some kind of provocation" (Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg*, 115 – 116). In addition, Adorno dismissed the effectiveness of events such as "[s]peeches in praise of the Jews," "[r]eferences…to the great achievements of Jews," and "social gatherings…between young Germans and young Israelis" (ibid., 127).

commitment to "critical self-reflection"[80] at both an individual and a societal level, and

one of its essential aims would be understanding the dynamic by which political and

economic circumstances fastened together such that "nationalism [became] totally

sadistic and destructive."[81] It would be equally important, Adorno asserted, that an

effectual processing of the past include a "turn toward the subject" so that "individual

persons…[are] made conscious of the mechanisms that provoke their racial prejudice."[82]

If such analyses were not undertaken—as they had not been, in Adorno's mind, by

1959—then no claims to having worked through the past could be made and, most

problematically, history would be left to repeat itself.

There are several places in which to locate correspondences between Adorno's

text and Neudecker's tanks. For instance, in both his work and hers, one finds a deep

investment in approaching the past—and, of course, a distinctly German past—from an

investigative point of view. Moreover, for Adorno and Neudecker alike, the effort to

preserve that past is crucial. Faithfully constructing imagery derived from a bygone era,

Neudecker both evokes and pictures the past so that with every tank she offers a glimpse

back into the Romantic tradition. Further, she is unmistakably invested in preserving this

material (or, this past): first, she never fails to safeguard her scenes, and second, she does

so by securing them in vitrines which, because she constructs them herself, are without

question integral to the whole of her design. The entire dynamic rests on an impulse to

preserve, suggesting that the material at hand should remain an object of ongoing

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[80] Ibid., 127.

[81] Ibid., 124.

[82] Ibid.,128.

examination. There is also a discernible air of relentlessness in Neudecker's disposition toward this possibility: she did not stop at picturing and preserving the Romantic tradition on just one occasion, but instead has, thus far, revisited the task in a meticulous and consistent manner nearly 30 times.

Such determination begets a sense of insistence and persistence about Neudecker's approach, and this finds a match in the tenor of Adorno's own thesis as he, too, insists upon the need to ensure that history not be lost. As of 1959, Adorno maintained, fascism continued to pose a threat in Europe exactly because "the much-cited work of reprocessing the past…has not yet succeeded, and has instead degenerated into its distorted image—empty, cold forgetting."[83] The only possible remedy, he continued, would be one founded upon a commitment to "work, above all, against a forgetfulness that too easily goes along with and justifies what is forgotten."[84] The past must be "called up and made present,"[85] Adorno argued, in such a way that "one *endures* the horror [emphasis added]."[86] Adorno's language, and the mandates it articulates, call up the intertwined notions of preservation, resolve, and persistence, for the purpose of remembering and understanding the Holocaust in all its brutality, complexity, and enormity, would itself be lost if it were an awareness achieved only temporarily.

Compounding this charge against forgetfulness, and in the spirit of endurance, Adorno's tract does not only argue there *should* be ongoing efforts to remember and

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[83] Ibid., 124.

[84] Ibid., 125.

[85] Ibid., 126.

[86] Ibid.

understand the past, but it puts forth nothing to suggest that any single event *could* render

the past decisively *processed*. Indeed, it is *process* he repeatedly emphasizes. As

suggested above, those processes of individual and cultural analysis for which he

advocates are important not only in the moment in which he is writing, but for the future

as well, as the work of assuring that no "readiness for unspeakable actions survives in

people"[87] is one that must also extend to forthcoming generations. Adorno confronts his

readers with this open-ended aspect of his argument immediately, weaving it into the

carefully selected wording of the essay's title.   Adorno could well have taken as his

subject, and title, the question of what it means 'to *come* to terms with the past.' What he

chooses to ask instead is "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?"[88] with

"aufarbeitung" constituting a present continuous, or present progressive, verb tense that

can translate into the English "…coming to terms," or "reprocessing." While a degree of

richness or subtlety might be lost when the German term is assigned its approximate

English equivalence,[89] what does remain even in translation is the sense of continuance

that lies at the core of "aufarbeitung." This conjugation anticipates and complements

Adorno's call to ward off forgetfulness, and it finds a parallel in Neudecker's own work,

which is both an ongoing endeavor in a literal sense and is often explicit about assigning

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[87] Ibid., 115.

[88] Geoffrey Hartman provides this original German title of Adorno's treatise in his
editorial notes (in Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in
Bitburg, 129).

[89] In his prefatory remarks, Hartman briefly discusses the difficulty of translating the
essay's title. He focuses on the complexity of the German word (and concept)
"aufarbeitung," and does not discuss issues related to verb tenses (in Adorno, "What
Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg*, 114 – 115).

to itself the themes of returning and continuing (with titles such as *Over and Over, Again and Again*, for example, and with works made up of multiple tanks). In a fashion that also echoes Adorno's argument, Neudecker's tank project *is* an ongoing one and, in the absence of any evidence to suggest it is moving to a discernible point of conclusion, it seems most accurately understood as one that will remain so.[90]

The strength of the relationship between Neudecker's vitrine project and Adorno's treatise rests also with the fact that both bodies of work point directly to Kant. Here again, Adorno establishes an important aspect of his paper immediately, with his title. As his essay constitutes a response to the query posed in the title, the text reproduces the discursive strategy Kant employed with his 1784 disquisition, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" or in English, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'"[91] Further, Kant's reply to that question, which is also the very first sentence of his treatise, consists of the claim that, "Enlightenment is

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[90] This discussion of ongoing-ness also reverberates with remarks made earlier in the chapter about the death drive (see footnote 48). Here again, though, there is a deliberate (versus compulsive) and altogether unthreatening nature to Neudecker's work that makes it hard to reconcile with the more pathological state of being described by Freud. It is compelling, however, to acknowledge that within Germanic tradition, the idea of the return is open to seemingly antithetical conceptualizations. In the general scheme of Enlightenment thinking, for example, where a premium is put upon systematic, rigorous, and thorough investigation, practices founded on repetition are common and desirable. Per Freud, however, the return becomes associated with dysfunction, and specifically with an inability to satisfactorily complete (impossible) tasks. That these two types of pursuits are not necessarily mutually exclusive is an issue Neudecker's work raises if one interprets her investment in returns as a trait that does, indeed, hint at this psychoanalytic dimension. The conclusion of this chapter includes a discussion about certain implications of such a reading.

[91] Kant's essay is included in Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant's Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press), 1970, 54 – 60.

man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity."[92] In what can hardly be interpreted

as anything but a calculated evocation of this famed statement,[93] Adorno also brings the

notion of immaturity (self-incurred, no less) into his own theorizing. Specifically, as he

analyses the variables relevant to understanding fascism's enduring existence, he directs

attention to the unstable status of democracy in Germany at the mid-twentieth century.

Adorno associates its unsettled condition with what he identifies as a readily adopted

state of "immaturity" on the part of many German citizens.   He writes, "In Germany one

often hears Germans themselves advancing the strange proposition that they aren't yet

ready for democracy. They make an ideology of their own immaturity…[and they]

unnaïvely play upon their own naïveté and political immaturity...".[94] Merits or

shortcomings of Adorno's argument aside, it is plain that two of the most striking

elements of Kant's tract—the question/answer arrangement between title and text, and its

turn to the idea of immaturity—also appear in Adorno's own composition.

Having taken care to engage the terms of Kant's essay, which itself arrives

quickly at the subject of enlightenment, Adorno invites speculation that he, too, will

focus his attention on "enlightenment." However, "enlightenment" is a word

conspicuously absent from the text—until the concluding paragraphs, that is. After

making not a single appearance in the first ten pages of the work—which only runs

approximately 14 pages in total—"enlightenment" quite suddenly takes up a prominent

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[92] Ibid., 54.

[93] See Hartman's introductory remarks in Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with
the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg*, 114.

[94] Ibid., 119.

place in the essay. As the composition approaches its close—and, in fact, in the span of only four of its last paragraphs—Adorno offers his readers "enlightenment," "enlightened," and "enlightening" no less than seven times. Arranging his essay this way, Adorno performs the same task he prescribes for his readers: he (literally) works towards enlightenment by way of a process that casts a critical and wide-ranging eye on the conditions that together generated and perpetuated that brand of nationalism he described as 'totally sadistic and destructive."[95] His essay leaves no doubt, by its end, that "[e]nlightenment about what happened in the past"[96] is his subject. Moreover, his carefully crafted allusions to Kant leave little doubt that the very foundations of the notion of "enlightenment" have themselves also fallen under the scope of his critical, cautionary gaze.[97]

This observation raises a key question about Neudecker's project: does its evocation of enlightenment principles, Romanticism, Kant, and Friedrich have—as the reprisal of Adorno would suggest—a discernibly critical dimension to it? In other words, the vitrine project creates a complex nexus of ideas and references, all of which have preexisting relationships with one another, but, in the end, does it reassert conventional lines of thinking about this material or does it offer a more unexpected, and perhaps particularly topical, perspective? The following pages take these issues as their focus.

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[95] Ibid., 124.

[96] Ibid., 125.

[97] See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), for the full expression of Adorno's critique of enlightenment principles.

As discussed in the opening pages of this chapter, *Morning Fog in the Mountains* (1997; fig. 9) well represents the vitrine project as a whole: its jagged mountain peak, scattered with fir trees and enshrouded by a whiteness evoking both snow and fog, derives from Friedrich's 1808 painting of the same name; in its suggestion of dramatic and immense natural phenomena, it easily brings to mind Kant's sublime; and, although it is comprised of a single tank, the *Morning* of its title subtly conjures the notion of cyclicality and, by extension, the idea of the return. From a structural point of view it is also a fair representative of Neudecker's project. Its single glass tank sits atop a white fiberboard pedestal, and the dimensions of both components together (measuring approximately 70 inches in height and 24 and 27 inches in width and depth, although, as with all of her tanks, it is not possible to determine which sides represent *width* and *depth* because Neudecker does not identify any side as a *front*) place the landscape at a comfortable viewing height for the average adult spectator.[98] Inside the tank, a sculpted mountain dominates the composition. Neudecker constructed it of fiberglass, added detail with cellulose paint, and affixed dozens of diminutive model trees to its uneven terrain. To complete the composition, Neudecker filled the glass tank with a carefully

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[98] The tank works vary in dimension, but in almost every instance Neudecker sets the vitrines at a height close to the 70 inches mentioned above. For example, *The Sea of Ice* reaches 62.9 inches, *Stolen Sunsets* has a height of 70.8 inches, *Shipwreck* is 63.7 inches tall, *Fog* reaches 65.7 inches, *Ship* is 69.7 inches in height, and *Over and Over, Again and Again* reaches 62.2 inches. The anomaly in this regard is *Far Into the Day* (2000), which has a height of 161.4 inches (and was discussed on pages 29 - 30 of this chapter).

mixed solution—she uses water, food dye, and chemical mixtures variably, according to the atmosphere effects she wants to mimic—and then sealed it with its glass top.[99]

Like all of Neudecker's vitrines, *Morning Fog in the Mountains* contains no human figures. Where Friedrich often painted a solitary figure standing contemplative before an awesome landscape—as in *Monk by the Sea* (1809/10; fig. 33), *Chasseur in the Forest* (1813/14; fig. 34), or *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818; fig. 35), for example—Neudecker clears all traces of human occupation and leaves only the setting. In the absence of this Rückenfigur, who mediates and therefore directs the viewer's experience of the scene, Neudecker affords her viewers the opportunity to actually take the place of the solitary figure and navigate the extraordinary landscape in an unrivalled, unguided manner. This suggests that Neudecker's spectators occupy a position even more potentially masterful than those included in Friedrich's images and, in fact, this implication holds true even in comparison to paintings of sublime landscape types that themselves picture no human figures. Friedrich's *Morning Fog in the Mountains*, for instance, is as empty of human figures as is Neudecker's, but on account of the three-dimensionality of Neudecker's work, the spectator's experience of the composition is markedly different. Specifically, where Friedrich's spectators can navigate the painted landscape only in a relatively limited fashion by looking at the one, static view painted by the artist, Neudecker's viewers can circumnavigate of their own accord and survey the scene from any and all of the angles on display; if they choose, they can often even gaze in from above. In this way, there is much more of the scenic prospect available for

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[99] Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*,72. See also, "Veracity: Mariele Neudecker," www.cafka.org/cafka-tv/veracity-mariele-neudecker, wherein Neudecker discusses the chemical solutions that she creates for her tanks.

observation in Neudecker's scheme, and this gives the viewer the opportunity to know it more thoroughly than is possible with Friedrich's two-dimensional presentation.[100] No amount of time spent peering across Friedrich's canvas will uncover what lurks behind a patch of fog, for instance, because no matter how explicitly a painting's composition might invite a spectator into its space, its capacity for disclosing detail will fall short of what a three-dimensional representation of the same scene can offer. This is certainly a significant point for a project such as Neudecker's which places so much emphasis on the theme and practice of observation, and especially on that type of systematic and thorough observation that aims to produce more and better knowledge about its chosen subjects. In this regard, one can argue that Neudecker's work provides its spectators a more engaged, more autonomous, and more knowledgeable—in a sense, a more enlightened—position than that available to those who stand before a comparable, but two-dimensional, landscape. By this measure, Neudecker's vitrines are more effectual than their Romantic predecessors in giving visual form to Kant's ideas about the sublime; however, as Neudecker designs it, certain aspects of her project suggest that this does not entirely hold true.

As painstaking as Neudecker's efforts are to re-picture Romantic landscape imagery, the fact is that her scenes do differ substantially from the paintings she evokes and thereby raise questions about the traditions they cite. Appropriation has a significant

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[100] On this note, it is worth repeating that Neudecker creates the vitrines and pedestals in sizes that render the landscapes easily viewable. This applies not only to the heights of the works, as discussed earlier, but to the widths and depths, too. The perimeter of each work is small enough to walk around without difficulty, and viewers can take in and compare successive views quickly. All of this is complemented by Neudecker's decision to place her scenes in tanks with four fully transparent sides (five, including the top) and to set them out as freestanding objects.

place in Neudecker's oeuvre, but hers is not a body of work in the vein of artists such as

Sherrie Levine (fig. 36) or Richard Prince (fig. 37). By exhibiting their own photographs

of others' photographs, Levine's and Prince's images pose fairly direct questions about

issues such as authorship, originality, and social codes. Neudecker, however, re-presents

imagery but she also is explicit about transforming it: making this most obvious, a

painting becomes a sculpture, and in the place of oil paint she employs an array of

materials including fiberglass, wax, water, salt, and food dye. With this shift, rather than

pointedly interrogating concepts such as authorship and originality, Neudecker literally

sets the stage for a significantly recalibrated experience of subjects such as the sublime

and the prospect of enlightenment and, in turn, her work holds out the possibility of

arriving at significantly altered evaluations of these ideas.

According to Kant, human intellectual capability is the instrument responsible for

producing "true sublimity."[101] The phenomena likely to bring about an experience of the

sublime are those that a subject perceives as vast and overpowering; again, Kant's

examples of these prompts include "shapeless mountain passes,"[102] "bold, overhanging,

and, as it were, threatening rocks…[and the] boundless ocean."[103] Kant was clear to

point out, though, that no element of the natural world is itself inherently sublime;

instead, he explains, "[we] judge as *sublime* not so much the object, as our own state of

mind in the estimation of it."[104] This crucial "state of mind," Kant continued, hinges

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[101] Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, 117.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 125.

[104] Ibid., 117.

upon the acknowledgement that rational human cognitive abilities rein supreme over the faculties of sensibility or imagination. Efforts to comprehend phenomena that seem immeasurable can defeat one's powers of sensibility or imagination; however, subjecting these overwhelming phenomena to rational human faculties can transform them into manageable matters. As Kant put it, what was once overwhelming can dissolve into near insignificance "as a mere nothing in comparison with the Ideas of Reason."[105]

Kant described a specific process that generates a specific outcome: handled by the forces of reason, the threatening becomes unthreatening, the boundless is effectively contained, and these gratifying transpositions bring about an experience of the sublime. Like much Romantic landscape painting, including those works of Friedrich's that Neudecker reconstructs, the vitrines appear to illustrate the central points and conceptual outcome of this process. For example, in both versions of *Morning Fog in the Mountains*, the viewer encounters a representation of phenomena that Kant associates with sublime experiences; both picture his "threatening rocks…[and] shapeless mountain masses." In both cases, also, this material is the subject of its artist's calculated processing. Friedrich, of course, carefully composes, paints, frames, and displays his work. Neudecker takes an equally measured and precise approach to her imagery, and her choices advance its association with empirical traditions in a number of ways: she relies on the science of chemistry for its varied atmospheric effects; her investment in repetition brings to mind the methodology of scientific trials; and, on every occasion she displays her work in glass vitrines. In all, and to a significant degree, Neudecker

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[105] Ibid., 118.

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demonstrates that her work is fully enmeshed with "the ideas of reason" and, like

Friedrich, she presents an image of the boundless, potentially threatening natural world

that appears to be the product of deliberate, rational taming and containing; that is, she

illustrates Kant's dynamic of the sublime.

However, for all of the ways in which Neudecker restates and reaffirms this

Kantian tradition, it does not actually hold that for the spectator the experience of

Neudecker's work is purely one of security or mastery. As it happens, Neudecker also

builds into her compositions details that prompt a pause, or a call to reconsider the nature

of the system she so faithfully structures and displays. There is a useful parallel to draw

here between Neudecker's Romantic landscape imagery, the idea of the masterful

observer, and Anselm Kiefer's 1969 photographic series of self-portraits, *Occupations*

(fig. 7). Regarded as the first artist of the postwar generation to reprise Friedrich's

Rückenfigur, and doing so in a manner that expressly wrestled with Germany's Nazi

history given his *Sieg heil* salute and military garb, Kiefer is also an important precedent

for Neudecker.[106]

Comparing Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818; fig. 35) to

Kiefer's *Occupations* photograph, one recognizes instantly that Kiefer's image is as

carefully modeled on his predecessor's as Neudecker's compositions are. Of particular

note in the photograph is that, despite this close correspondence with Friedrich's image,

Kiefer cast a shadow of questionability over the ostensibly masterful bearing of the back-

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[106] For an extensive examination of Kiefer's *Occupation* series, including a discussion of its place in Kiefer's oeuvre, in postwar art more broadly, and its controversial nature, see Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer*, 12 – 31, 156; Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1995), 120 – 134; and the whole of Saltzman's text, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz*.

turned figure. Specifically, the ill-fitting clothing has about it the air of a costume: it

appears too large for its wearer and, at the same time, gives the impression of being more

unkempt and shabby than one would expect of a proper uniform. In addition, this figure

stands poised at the water's edge, surveying the vast expanse ahead of him, but his place

there appears precarious. Water rushes about his ankles and nearly consumes the rocks

beneath his feet. At any instant, it appears, he could be toppled by those very forces over

which he assumes the pose of authority. Notably, too, unlike Friedrich's *Wanderer* this

figure does not tower over the scene he observes. Fully subsumed beneath the visible

horizon line, with even his extended right arm failing to reach that horizon, he appears far

more diminutive before the landscape than does Friedrich's Rückenfigur. Similarly,

Friedrich filled his composition with diagonal lines, all of which lead the viewer's eye

directly to his Rückenfigur, and although one of the most distant peaks in the image rises

slightly above figure's head, it is a faint presence in comparison to the commanding,

robust wanderer before it. Kiefer marked his composition, however, with a series of

horizontal lines: three lines created by the movement of the water and, above them, the

horizon line. Where Friedrich's diagonals appear to radiate out from the standing figure,

enhancing the sense of energy and potency he embodies, Kiefer's figure, somewhat

unsteady and far less commanding, appears contained by the horizontal lines in front of

him and the actual horizon line weighing down from above.

Neudecker's vitrines share with Kiefer's work this ambivalence regarding the

history and traditions to which they refer: the sense of mastery in Kiefer's image begins

to unravel upon close examination and, similarly, as the final section of this chapter will

further discuss, what at first seems like a clear restatement of Enlightenment ideas in

Neudecker's work ultimately comes to embody a challenge to the stability of those same ideas. Ironically, as we will see, the challenge Neudecker's tanks present is largely borne out of those features that also make her work the more effective articulation of Kant's theorizing. As a result of its investment in empirical principles, for example, as well as its illustration of the essential tenets of Kant's theorization of the sublime, Neudecker's project produces questions about the viability and stability of exactly those traditions. The equivocal nature of the project may be, itself, a challenge with which its spectators must grapple, but it also attests to the complicated task Neudecker faces by working in the postwar, post-Adorno, post-Wall, and postmodern climate of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

III. Discordance and the Ethics of Ambivalence

Well before the carefully woven layers of allusions reveal themselves, and long after the work of appraising their implications ceases, each of Neudecker's tanks is, plainly, a spectacle.[107] Enchanting landscapes, exacting illumination, wondrous atmospheric concoctions, all cased in glass and set on a pedestal: every aspect of Neudecker's compositions accords with the concept and definition of the spectacle.

Modest in scale but teeming with striking detail and effects, each vitrine is a captivating sight even at first glance. By design, the tanks instantly, and even from a

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[107] "Spectacle," as defined in *Oxford English Dictionary* (cited at www.lucian.uchicago. edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/spectaclespectator/): "1. A specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature (esp. one on a large scale), forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment for those viewing it;" and, as defined in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spectacle): "1. something exhibited to view as unusual, notable, or entertaining; *especially*: an eye-catching or dramatic public display."

distance, attract the viewer's attention. They insist on being seen, and then ask to be seen again and again, glimpsed from countless angles, explored at length. A great deal awaits discovery in the tanks: what was invisible might come into view as the spectator moves about, the scene appears to be in near-constant flux given the confluence of glass and liquid and lights, and close examination uncovers features too slight to be seen from afar. From the standpoint of pure visual experience, these are objects that at every turn compel and reward concerted observation.

"Spectacle," however, does not simply describe the nature of Neudecker's tanks, it also operates as strategy in her project. That is, by turning to a particularly eye-catching mode of presentation for her compositions, and by steadfastly focusing on select motifs—dimly lit forests, ice-filled seas, barren mountain peaks, for example—Neudecker creates a body of work whose imagery can certainly be called spectacular, but she also *makes a spectacle of* the specific traditions and historical moments signaled by the tanks and their contents.

Neudecker augments this mandate *to look* by pairing it with a previously referred to second strategy: that of the return. In both variety and quantity, the returns are many: she returns to Friedrich's imagery, to the general themes and motifs of Romanticism, to the subject of the sublime, specifically as conceptualized by Kant; and, since 1996, she herself has returned to this project on nearly 30 occasions. Neudecker's directive, then, is not simply *to look*, but rather to take *another* look, and no tank expresses this mandate more explicitly than *Over and Over, Again and Again* (fig. 29). In this single work, Neudecker turns not once but three times to the task of building and displaying a foggy, mountainous landscape. She also applies to it a title that could hardly be more forthright

in presenting the notion of the return. "Over and over, again and again" functions as an apt descriptor—reflecting the tripartite form of the work, as well as Neudecker's own approach to the tank project as a whole—but also resounds as an imperative, as a succinct reminder of the charge issued from every vitrine to each of its spectators.

Neudecker reproduces the key elements of the Kantian sublime with such frequency and fidelity that in many respects the vitrine project as a whole stands as an analogue to his text. For example, he describes extraordinary natural phenomena that have the power to elicit an experience of the sublime, and Neudecker features those very same daunting landscape motifs in each of her tanks. Moreover, the shift in perceived power that is the essence of sublimity according to Kant also takes material form in Neudecker's work. "[I]n the immensity of nature," Kant explains, "and in the insufficiency of our faculties to take in a standard proportionate to the aesthetical estimation of the magnitude of its *realm*, we find our own limitation, [but] in our rational faculty we find a different, non-sensuous standard, which has that infinity itself under it as a unity…and thus in our mind we find a superiority to nature."[108] The effect of rationally processing that which suggests overwhelming enormity and power, such that all threats are neutralized and the contemplating human subject can claim a rewarding sense of security and command, is exactly what Neudecker presents with each vitrine. Those phenomena that, on Kant's account, conjure notions of immensity and peril, are those that Neudecker displays as expressly processed entities (the spectator sees the mountain peak, for instance, as molded fiberglass and paint); she presents them as diminutive, contained, and so power-less that they are now (visually) consumable.

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[108] Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, 125.

Notably, like Kant's approach to conceptualizing the sublime, Neudecker's tank project also embodies the specifically empirical spirit of the Enlightenment tradition. Glass cases suggestive of specimen boxes, a dedication to repetition that aligns with the replicated trials common to scientific methodology, a formal and thematic consistency lending an air of determined rigor to Neudecker's approach, atmospheric effects achieved by way of carefully measured and mixed chemical solutions, and an emphasis on observation; in all, a preponderance of evidence suggests this is a project steeply invested in re-presenting the Kantian sublime, both by illustrating its essential components and by recalling the empirically-oriented climate in which it was created.

Complicating this interpretation of Neudecker's project is the fact that it also strongly evokes Adorno's 1959 essay, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" Indeed, as aligned as her work his with his, it is only fitting to see hers as a project that heeds the call—or, perhaps, operates under the burden—of the mandates he issues in the text. Reflecting, mid-century, on the legacy of the Holocaust, Adorno issues a charge for individual as well as cultural examination, and this imperative weighs heavily into Neudecker's work. As it intersects with the vitrines' essential conceit of *taking another look*, it suggests a particular perspective from which to take that next look: return to these tanks, it urges, and look at these objects which stand as remarkably exacting encapsulations of Enlightenment thinking, with a decidedly *critical* eye.

Whether discussing the individual's need for "critical self-reflection"[109] or the broader "social context…behind the still current potential for anti-Semitism,"[110] the

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[109] Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg*, 127.

[110] Ibid., 128.

purpose of Adorno's own call for criticality was to expose and thus hopefully eradicate the causes that did and could again "lead to a politics of catastrophe."[111] Towards the end of his essay, Adorno makes a statement that fairly summarizes his general argument and, at the same time, is instrumental to the full analysis of Neudecker's project. "[T]he people," Adorno writes, "…should be made conscious of the mechanisms that provoke their racial prejudice."[112]

Both literally and figuratively, Neudecker's project actualizes this directive to "be made conscious of the mechanisms" that underpin systems of belief: literally, as she shows off the constructed nature of her tanks, and figuratively, as she demonstrates those ambitions central to Kantian, Enlightenment thought: the desire to contain, to classify, and thereby to survey, reduce, and master. Neudecker's vitrines realize these ideas to such a degree, in fact, that after taking the requisite critical second look at her work, it becomes evident that just as the tanks do faithfully illustrate the Kantian sublime, they also embody a challenge to it. Moreover, it is in their exacting fidelity to Kant that this challenge rests, so that what presented itself first as a 'faithful illustration' of his theses ultimately manifests as an erosion of faith regarding those ideas and, by extension, the larger Enlightenment tradition of which it is a part.

Whether considering the smallest of details in any individual vitrine—a single barren tree branch, perhaps, or a patch of fog hovering over a narrow mountain pass—or assessing the overall experience of standing before and appraising any number of the

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[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

tanks, it becomes increasingly apparent that Neudecker's project is rife with illusion and instability. The vitrines' sealed glass walls, for example, provide secure housing for their contents, but the view they afford is far less reliable. There is no way to see Neudecker's landscapes without peering through both glass and liquid, but this layering creates an element of visual distortion, and even the slightest movement on the part of the spectator amplifies its effects. Similarly, the appearance of the chemical solutions filling the tanks slowly changes over time. Some compounds settle, others rise, they can react with one another; the fact is that they are literally unstable. Neudecker describes both of these qualities:

> Not only do they change over time, over two or three weeks…or even two or three months depending on where I set them up…They are temporal, but that changes also, then mingled with our own walking around them and, visually, they do change a lot by doing that, and they sort of get animated by the water because the water reflects them and enlarges them and changes the whole image quite a lot.[113]

The unfixedness inherent to the works' design undercuts the reliability and validity of vision. In a project so clearly allied with empirical tradition, the process of observation would be expected to play a primary role in the pursuit of definitive information. Here, though, as it yields an unending and irreconcilable variety of views, it actually defeats such a purpose.

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[113] See "Veracity: Mariele Neudecker," www.cafka.org/cafka-tv/veracity-mariele-neudecker.

The same process of repeated and attentive observation, however, will confirm certain illusory aspects of the work. In large part, this arises from Neudecker's decision to leave undisguised the fabricated and artificial nature of the sculptural elements inside the tanks. "[I]t's quite important for me," she explains, "that they do look hand-made still…It's important that you see what it's made of for me, it's important that you get a sense of the 'stuff,' this is quite visible…[For example,] there's very obvious little bits of rope and string making up the branches of the trees…".[114]

It is not only the small details that are left with signs of their manufacture. In almost every work, a mountain, an iceberg, an ocean's surface, or a forest's ground abuts a tank wall, creating for the spectator a view comparable to a cross-section. As the glass planes appear to slice through the models, they not only reveal, they foreground the fiberglass material of which the objects are made. Abruptly, the illusionistic surface of a mountain or ocean, for example, gives way to an undifferentiated, monochromatic mass of synthetic matter. The suddenness of the transition is visually jarring, and while it makes the exceptional nature of Neudecker's illusionism particularly striking—showing off the stark contrast between the base material and the objects she crafts from it—it also disrupts that illusionism by making it impossible to overlook its constitutive artificiality.

With regard to illusion and artifice, every tank also has a highly theatrical character. Indeed, each one resembles a delicate and diminutive stage set: the vitrines are all made expressly for display, each one has an interior space housing a modeled fragment of the natural world, and in a sense, animated as they are with their unfixed

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[114] "Interview with Mariele Neudecker, Camberwell, 9th of January 1999," at www.safebet.org.uk/intervws/mariele.htm.

chemical solutions, each one does put on a show by enacting a particular type of atmospheric effect. There is no lack of dramatic lighting in this scheme, either, as the vitrines often have spotlight-like illumination, which Neudecker typically also designs herself.[115]

In keeping with the directive to "be made conscious of the mechanisms" that undergird one's object of study, there is clearly a great deal of exposing involved in Neudecker's work. At almost no turn can the spectator overlook Neudecker's inclination to expose the constructed, artificial nature of her Romantic imagery. However, this takes its place alongside an equally strident impulse that runs in the opposite direction; that is, Neudecker's determination to faithfully represent her subjects. Her investment in deliberately and carefully reproducing the look of a Friedrich painting, for example, or key tenets of Kant's theses on the sublime, or the terms of Adorno's critical postwar tract, is unfailing and it raises the question of how the spectator ought to reconcile these seemingly conflicted interests.

One way to approach this apparent contradiction—and this gives equal weight to both tendencies—is to recognize that, with its evocations of, and adherence to, essential facets of Enlightenment thinking, Neudecker's work turns the Enlightenment tradition into an observable object of systematic study. In other words, Neudecker uses Enlightenment-based principles to examine the Enlightenment itself. As to the question of what comes to light in the course of her doing so, this is where the second, incongruous facet of the project emerges and this is where Adorno's ideas become doubly important to Neudecker's work.

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[115] Vivienne Reiss (Interim Arts Manager, Queens House, Great Ormond Street Hospital, London) in conversation with the author 30 June 2011.

Specifically, in the aftermath of the Third Reich, and as Adorno's own critique of

the roots of that horrific period articulated, the Enlightenment can only be viewed

through the legacy of Nazism, especially so, in a German context. As a result, its

principles become acutely ambivalent: they stand for the prospect of concepts such as

ethics, reason, and progress, but at the same time, when seen retrospectively, they cannot

be severed from the forces that allowed for, and even propelled, the fascist agenda. Here,

with regard to this ambivalence, which is a key characteristic of Neudecker's work also,

another of Adorno's directives bears upon Neudecker's work. In his contemplation of

morality as it pertains both to those who create and those who consume visual or literary

works, and as an alternative to his often cited declaration that "[a]fter Auschwitz, to write

a poem is barbaric,"[116] Adorno theorized the need for an "ethical spectator."[117] As Lisa

Saltzman explained in her study of Anselm Kiefer, "Adorno allows the spectator to look,

but to look as ethical spectator."[118] What this means, she continued, is that the

experience of art should not be oriented exclusively to pleasure, and instead, to "view as

ethical spectators…[is to] accede to knowledge."[119] Given Neudecker's own grappling

with ethically charged material, as well as her work's investment in intellectually

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[116] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 34. For a thorough discussion of the implications of this statement, see Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz*, 17 – 18, 131.

[117] See Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz*, 22.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., 23.

engaged and critical ways of seeing, the notion of *acceding to knowledge* has pointed

implications for the ambivalence that also defines her project.

To begin, consider some of the more expressly ambivalent formal aspects of

Neudecker's work. The dramatic lighting mentioned earlier, for example, contributes to

the mysterious and suggestive nature of Neudecker's landscapes, but it also shows itself

as a crafted theatrical effect.   The lack of human figures in each tank is enigmatic, too, as

its effect wavers between conveying an impression of nostalgia or timelessness and

suggesting a scene of abandonment. In addition, the glass tanks and pedestals are

equipment crucial to making Neudecker's scenes so available for close and continued

observation, but they also make clear that the subjects on display rely on a great deal of

external support (most emphatically, the vitrines' sealed glass planes are utterly essential

for the very existence of Neudecker's impressive atmospheric effects; the scenes have a

delicacy to them that suggests a precious nature, but at the same time they are

unmistakably fragile and vulnerable). The tanks provide crucial support, but they are

significant also for their transparency. It is the feature that affords an especially

comprehensive view of the imagery, but it is this extended looking that ultimately dispels

the works' illusionism. This, in turn, alters the connotation of the transparency: it ceases

to function simply as a means of seeing into Neudecker's landscapes and becomes the

mechanism for "seeing through" their constructed, artificial nature.

The rigor Neudecker applies to her project, much like the concept of the return, is

comparably ambivalent. Her unwavering meticulousness, for instance, and her rigorous

reproduction of the dynamics of Kant's "true sublimity," conjure ideas about a positive,

thorough-going, conscientious approach to one's endeavors, but they can also slip

towards a type of relentlessness and impulse for control associated with the pathological.

On this note, where Neudecker's three-dimensional reproductions of Friedrich's paintings

at first appear to afford their spectators a more unmediated, unrivalled, and thus

empowered engagement with the sublime, the fact is that the viewers' experience is, of

course, entirely choreographed. The viewer may travel around and peer into the

landscapes, but Neudecker fully determines what the parameters of the encounter will be:

she not only creates the contents of each tank, but she arranges them in their exhibition

spaces so that, for example, there is a specific amount of space between the vitrines that

comprise her multi-tank works, she designs their light effects, and she even intervenes

upon the range of available views by modifying the pedestals' heights.[120]

Almost nothing in the whole of Neudecker's vitrine project is, in the end,

unequivocal. This is the first fact to which Adorno's ethical spectator, as called forth by

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[120] Presenting a version of "nature" that is explicitly constructed and packaged for its
audience, Neudecker's project also echoes that aspect of the Nazi program that was itself
invested in developing and advancing a specific understanding of, and role for, nature in
the design of its nationalist pursuits. Schama (*Landscape and Memory*, 118 – 119)
reviews and analyzes the origins and evolution of this agenda and notes, for example, that
> Tacitus's observation that their isolated habitat had made the Germans the
> least mixed of all European peoples would of course become the lethal
> obsession of Nazi tyranny. *Germanentum*—the idea of a biologically pure
> and inviolate race, as 'natural' to its terrain as indigenous species of trees
> and flowers—featured in much of the …literature both before and after the
> First World War…After 1933, forest themes invaded virtually every realm
> of art and politics…[there are] long, undeniable connections between the
> mythic memory of the forest and militant nationalism.
Additionally, in *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, culture, and politics in
Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge
University Press, 1984), 1, Jeffrey Herf discusses at length the ties forged
between the philosophy of the Third Reich and select facets of Romantic
ideology. He presents his thesis as one aimed at unerstanding the "reconciliation
between the antimodernist, romantic, and irrationalist ideas present in German
nationalism and the most obvious manifestation of means-end rationality, that is
modern technology."

Neudecker's work, should accede, and it is an apt response given both the project's and the spectator's postwar status.   However, in addition to taking on Adorno's question of what it means to come to terms with the past, Neudecker's work also proposes a means of coming to terms with the specifically post-Adorno mandate of *having to* come to terms with the past. The dually inflected nature of her project reflects the dilemma this situation represents: having to take on a task that, defined as a necessarily ongoing process, is impossible to complete. Indeed, completion—that is, arriving at a single and decisive answer—would be antithetical to the very spirit of the task. In the face of these complex circumstances, ambivalence not only constitutes a fitting reflection of the cultural context in which Neudecker works, it also suggests a deliberate, even crucial, point of view. It allows for openendedness. It precludes final answers. It calls for a continued inquiry and criticality. In all, it amounts to a moral stance. Doubly-inflected at every turn, Neudecker's project challenges its viewers, as ethical spectators, to follow its example and assume what can best be described as an ethics of ambivalence.

CHAPTER 2

THOMAS DEMAND: EMPTINESS, EVIDENCE, AND ETHICS

I. Praxis and Prepossessions

A five-year-old boy, identified in the press only as "Pascal," disappeared from his

hometown of Saarbrücken, Germany on September 30, 2001. An extensive search

conducted immediately after his parents reported him missing was unsuccessful:

authorities found no trace of the boy. The subsequent police investigation, however,

produced a horrific set of details regarding Pascal's fate. One hundred yards from his

home, Pascal was lured into a tavern. There, in a back room, at least a dozen men and

women engaged in repeated acts of violence against the child; their abuse of him ceased

only with his death. Afterwards, in a panicked attempt to cover up their crime, the

perpetrators concealed Pascal's body in plastic bag, drove a short distance out of

Saarbrücken, and disposed of the corpse in a quarry near the French border.[121]

Media interest in the case was substantial and sustained, but the press's

involvement was itself effectively mediated by the authorities. Publishing photographs of

those allegedly connected to the crime was prohibited and access to the tavern was

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[121] Media reports regarding the Pascal Zimmer case abound; www.stern.de/tv/sterntv
/fall-pascal-die-chronologie-der-ereignisse-641513.html provides a detailed a timeline of
events related to the child's disappearance and the investigative and court proceedings
that followed, as does the article titled, "Der kleine Pascal und die Hölle in der Tosa-
Klause," posted at www.welt.de. For Thomas Demand's comments about the case, see
Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand,* 85 – 90; Demand and Obrist, *The
Conversation Series*, 127 – 136.

restricted for several months after the boy's murder.[122] So delayed was the media's entry

into the tavern that the first photographs made publicly available pictured not the interior

spaces as they existed at the time of the killing, but their appearance after the property's

renovation: in an effort to maintain a viable business following the grisly events, the

landlord swiftly retooled the venue so that the seedy pub, the *Tosa-Klause*, became, after

repainting and redecorating, *Chez Gérard*, a pizzeria. As a result, the only media images

that could depict the crime scene as it stood at the time of the actual crime were pictures

of the tavern's exterior. This transformation project also had significant implications for

the police investigation: after securing confessions from five of the individuals involved

in Pascal's abuse and murder, the authorities instructed each defendant to re-enact

episodes from the night's events; but, given that the original crime scene no longer

existed, the investigators ordered the construction of a *Tosa-Klause* replica, and this full-

size model became the scene of the re-staged crime.[123]

On February 18, 2004, after collecting material evidence, witnesses' statements,

and confessions, the police made thirteen arrests in the Pascal Zimmer case. Six

individuals were charged with the child's abuse and murder, and seven were accused of

being accessories to the crime.[124] Their trial began in September 2004, nearly three years

to the day after Pascal vanished and, on account of numerous interruptions—several of

which were caused by key witnesses retracting their statements—the proceedings did not

conclude for another three years. Before the trial reached its end, both of Pascal's parents

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[122] Demand and Obrist, *The Conversation Series*, 133.

[123] Ibid.

[124] www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/feb/20/1.

were dead: in the summer of 2005, his mother suffered a brain hemorrhage, and his father

died of a heart attack just seventeen days later.

The trial's conclusion brought no sense of just closure to the Pascal Zimmer case.

On September 7, 2007, the jury acquitted each of the thirteen defendants. The judge

explained that the prosecution's case disintegrated irreparably as an ever-increasing

number of witnesses retracted their statements. Moreover, despite extraordinary

measures taken in the search for Pascal, the child's body was never found. In the absence

of credible testimony regarding the events of September 30, 2001, and in the absence of

the victim's body, evidence against the defendants was simply insufficient for conviction.

No one, the judge continued, could be convicted on the basis of suspicion alone and, in

the end, all that remained in the wake of Pascal's disappearance was an inescapable web

of uncertainty and suspicion.[125]

The Pascal Zimmer case came to Thomas Demand's attention just as it did to

countless others', by way of its media coverage; subsequently Demand decided to make a

series of five photographs, titled *Klause* (2006; fig. 2, figs. 38 – 41), based upon press

images of both the exterior and the reconstructed interior of the alleged crime scene.

Demand's creative process always begins with a decision such as this: he selects a

preexisting image, most often one that circulated through popular press channels,[126] and

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[125] www.welt.de/vermischtes/article1166222/Urteil-im-Pascal-Prozess-stoesst-auf-Kritik.html.

[126] Almost every publication that takes Thomas Demand's work as its subject includes a reference to Demand's practice of culling images from the media. See, for example, Andre Rottmann, "Thomas Demand: Neue Nationalgalerie," *Artforum International* 48 (January 1, 2010), 216. On occasion, Demand uses as source imagery photographs he

then constructs a meticulously detailed model of the site and objects pictured in that image. The models are always life-size and three-dimensional, and he builds them entirely out of paper. Once Demand completes a model, he carefully illuminates the constructed scene, photographs it and, finally, destroys the model; the only lasting evidence of the delicate sculpture's existence, therefore, is that which is preserved in the photograph.[127]

As exactly as Demand's works re-picture their source images, and as abundant as they are in detail, the depicted spaces are also, always, resoundingly empty. Demand includes no human figures in his work, nor is there text of any sort.[128] Moreover, neither

himself has taken or a picture retained only in his own memory; see, for example, Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 11; and, Ralph Rugoff and Julia Franck, *Thomas Demand: Phototrophy* (Munich, Germany: Schirmer/Mosel, 2004), 6. In addition, it should be noted that while Demand repeatedly confirms that he bases his projects on pre-existing images, for several of his photographs he has provided no explanatory information regarding their source material or the events to which they make reference.

[127] Most accounts of Demand's working process indicate that Demand dismantles his models after photographing them, but Dean Sobel, ["Thomas Demand: The Basic Facts," in *Thomas Demand Catalogue and Exhibition* (Aspen, CO: Aspen Art Museum, 2001), unpaginated] explains that some of the structures are simply left to "fall apart under their own weight" in Demand's studio. Additionally, Demand's standard operating method involves laminating individual photographs behind Plexiglas and hanging them without frames (Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 9; Rottmann, "Thomas Demand," 216). As to the length of time it takes Demand to create a paper model, it can be as brief as a few hours or as long as six months, depending on the complexity of the project and the number of assistants involved [see Mark Godfrey, "Nationalgalerie," in Thomas Demand, Udo Kittelmann, and Botho Strauss, *Thomas Demand, Nationalgalerie* (Göttingen: Steidl Mack, 2009), unpaginated].

[128] Two of Demand's photographs are anomalous in this regard: *Factory* (1994; fig. 42) includes the letters "DEMAND" placed upon the horizontal roofline of what resembles an industrial building (Demand also made an alternate version of the image, without the text; see, Fricke and Demand, "Building Blocks of the Media," unpaginated) and in *Podium* (2000; fig. 43), Demand included two sets of numbers, or dates: 1389 and 1989. These two images represent only a small fraction of his oeuvre; probably close to 99% of his models and photographs contain no text.

the spaces nor the objects Demand represents betray any sign of wear; even objects that appear haphazardly situated, as if to suggest their being subjected to an episode of human carelessness, look unwaveringly crisp and clean. However, it is not entirely accurate to say that Demand eliminates every hint of human presence from his images. Close examination reveals that the models and photographs include faint traces of their fabrication: edges can appear too sharp, small pencil marks are occasionally left un-erased, and between sheets of cut-out paper, the viewer can often detect narrow seams. In other words, Demand's own presence, and the integral role he plays in building every one of his scenes, quietly surfaces and also remains preserved in each photograph.

These subtle irregularities punctuate and animate what are otherwise, generally speaking, austere and static scenes. Given that Demand hand-cuts and assembles the innumerable paper pieces required to compose his models, one might be tempted to conclude that those residual marks and seams are an inevitable by-product of his labor-intensive, manual process.[129] Demand, however, has been forthright in explaining that this is not the case. "I don't cut out paper on purpose so that you can see how it was cut," he has said, "[b]ut it is true that at every stage I can choose whether or not to leave these visible flaws."[130] Evidently, although these vestiges of Demand's presence and process are always slight, their recurrent and deliberate presence in each composition suggests that their significance is, in fact, substantial.

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[129] The one exception to Demand's handcrafted process is *Grotto* (2006; fig. 44). In this project, Demand considered the ways that digital technology—but not digital photography—could find a place in his work.

[130] Thomas Demand quoted in Quintin, "There is no innocent room," in Demand, Bonami, Quintin, and Durand, *Thomas Demand*, 52.

To be sure, Demand's work is characterized by a remarkable degree of consistency: always media- or memory-derived, hand-crafted, life-size, paper-made, mixing absence with presence, and ultimately taking the form of relatively large, unframed, Plexiglas-covered photographs.[131] Although Demand is not quite so rigorously undeviating with regard to the specific nature of the subjects he chooses to picture, the type of sites that most frequently appear in his work fall into two thematic categories: those that have an ambiguous association with reality either because they hide it or relate to its simulation, and those that are historically-laden.[132] Amongst the works that fit into the first of these groups are those that engage topics related to deception, copying, or concealment; in short, places where truth is uncertain, or where reality is supplanted by its replication. Examples in this vein include Demand's *Window* (1998; fig. 52), which pictures a set of closed vertical blinds preventing any view through the window they cover; *Copy Shop* (1999; fig. 53), wherein Demand presents what appears to be a room housing office supplies and a total of seven photocopy machines;

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[131] On the issue of scale, Sobel says, "For his interiors, the models are built life-size (1:1); for the exterior views of buildings, the models are built to the size the photograph will be printed (a different 1:1)" (Sobel, "Thomas Demand: The Basic Facts," in Sobel, *Thomas Demand*, unpaginated). Demand said the same, that his sculptures "are mostly life-size environments," in Vik Muniz and Thomas Demand, "A Notion of Space," *Blind Spot* 8 (1996), unpaginated. See, also, a view of Demand's 2009 exhibition, *Neue Nationalgalerie* (fig. 45) for a representative sense of the scale of his images.

[132] This generalization about Demand's subject choices does not apply to his earliest ventures into photographing paper models. Between 1990 and 1993, he produced approximately 10 images, most of which picture ordinary objects in unremarkable, largely unarticulated settings (see, for example, *Two Cakes* (1990; fig. 46), *Nine Lamps* (1992; fig. 47), and *Untitled (Sandal)* (1993; fig. 48). By 1994, although Demand was still producing a small number of relatively simple images—for example, *Wurstplatte* (fig. 49), *Bierdeckel* (fig. 50), and *Sandals* (fig. 51)—his work had begun to take on the more complex, history-based, content that is characteristic of his oeuvre.

Laboratory (2000; fig. 54), representing an anechoic chamber designed to imitate the conditions of an open, windless space, for the purpose of testing automobile noise levels;[133] and, *Space Simulator* (2003; fig. 55), an image based upon NASA equipment used in the 1960s to prepare astronauts for space travel and moon landings.[134]

Amongst those works that fit into the second category described above, where Demand turns his attention to sites of specific historical significance, are *Room* (1994; fig. 56), which he based upon a photograph of Adolf Hitler's headquarters after it was bombed in an assassination attempt on July 20, 1944;[135] a representation of Jackson Pollock's Long Island studio, titled *Barn* (1997; fig. 57);[136] a cluttered and messy domestic scene, *Kitchen* (2004; fig. 58), re-picturing the hideout in which Saddam Hussein was captured in 2003;[137] and, *Control Room* (2011; fig. 59), which derives from an image of Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant following the 2011 tsunami that caused the facility's closing.[138]

On several occasions, Demand's images directly engage both of these thematic categories. In these instances, his selected subjects have a historical significance that is bound up with notorious episodes of doubt or deception. The *Klause* series is

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[133] Demand and Obrist, *The Conversation Series*, 139 - 140; Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 22.

[134] Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 23.

[135] Ibid., 13.

[136] Andreas Ruby, "Thomas Demand: Memoryscapes," *Parkett* 62 (2001), 6.

[137] Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 22.

[138] www.matthewmarks.com/new-york/exhibitions/2012-05-05_thomas-demand/

paradigmatic in this regard: because of its alleged relevance to Pascal's disappearance, the previously obscure *Tosa-Klause* acquired a sudden and shocking infamy, and even today—given that the case remains unsolved on account of the misinformation plaguing its investigation—the tavern is a site beclouded by deceit and uncertainty. A similar set of circumstances applies to Demand's *Corridor* (1995; fig. 60), which appears to depict an unremarkable hallway lined with a series of equally undistinguished doorways but, in fact, represents the passage outside of the apartment belonging to serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer.[139] Comparably, *Bathroom* (1997; fig. 61) is Demand's reconstruction of a Geneva, Switzerland hotel room; like both the *Tosa-Klause* and Dahmer's Milwaukee apartment, it became a site of public and investigative interest after a German politician, Uwe Bartel, was discovered in the room's bathtub—clothed, afloat, and inexplicably, dead.[140]

This overview of Demand's projects makes clear that Demand has been consistent in turning to, and then returning again and again, to certain types of subject matter, rather than producing an oeuvre that has developed along a single, discernible thematic trajectory. With the exception of his earliest photographed sculptures (see, for example, *Two Cakes* of 1990, fig. 46, or *Untitled (Sandal)* of 1993, fig. 48), which seem almost experimental in nature when compared to the more structurally elaborate and thematically complex work he produced beginning in 1994,[141] Demand's projects are

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[139] Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 20; Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand*, 19.

[140] Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 20 -21; Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand*, 19.

[141] See footnote 110 for a list of Demand's other earlier sculptures and photographs.

repeatedly borne of events and sites infused with elements of non-certainty and/or historical weight.

It is true, too, that images falling into both of these categories frequently possess a common cultural point of origin. That is, like Neudecker, Demand routinely culls subjects specifically from Germany's past. In terms of those works that Demand bases on his own store of remembered places, this is largely unsurprising. Germany is, after all, the country in which he was born and has lived most of his life.[142] Media-sourced imagery, however, could easily derive from any number of documented places, and therefore could easily be a means of bringing an explicitly global dimension to his oeuvre. That Demand does not cast his gaze so broadly, and instead often looks to events and sites with German connections, thus seems especially noteworthy. By no means does every one of Demand's photographs cite Germany's past, but the list of those that join *Bathroom*, *Klause*, and *Room* in doing so is substantial. *Studio* (1997; fig. 62), for example, re-pictures the set of "Was Bin Ich?," a German television quiz show popular in the 1970s;[143] *Haltestelle* (2009; fig. 63) represents a bus shelter in the German town of Loitsche, which gained fame for being the birthplace of the band *Tokio Hotel*;[144] and, *Parliament* (2009; fig. 64) is, in Demand's own words, a picture that "shows the old

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[142] See, as an example, *Staircase* (1995; fig. 25), which Demand explained "referred to the stairwell in my old school, as I believed I could more or less remember what it looked like" (in Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand*, 110).

[143] www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/8383931/Thomas-Demand-One-I-Made-Earlier.html.

[144] Hans Ulrich Obrist, ed., *Thomas Demand und die Nationalgalerie: Gespräch über die Ausstellung mit / A Conversation About the Exhibition with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Berlin 2009* (Cologne, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), 98.

Bundestag in Bonn…the well-known lecterns of the parliament with their gold and copper buttons."[145]

On several occasions, Demand narrowed his focus on German-based subjects to events or sites associated with the Nazi era. His *Room*, dating to 1994, is an early example of his interest in this material, and *Photobooth* (fig. 65), a 2009 project that re-presents a facility for photographing inmates inside the political prison in Gera, Germany, is a late example.[146] In the years bridging these points in his career, Demand dealt several times with topics tied to the history of the Third Reich. In 1995, for instance, Demand created *Archive* (1995; fig. 66), an image referring to the film collection of propaganda film-maker, Leni Riefenstahl, as well as *Office* (fig. 67), which he based upon a photograph of the Berlin headquarters of the East German Secret Police after it was ransacked following the fall of the Berlin Wall.[147] The next year, having discovered a photograph of the studio belonging to Richard Vorhölzer, an architect instrumental to Germany's postwar rebuilding campaigns,[148] Demand produced *Drafting Room* (1996; fig. 68), and in 2000, a photograph of Adolf Hitler and Albert Speer together admiring Speer's proposed design for the German Pavilion at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris served as the foundation for Demand's *Model* (fig. 69).[149]

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[145] Ibid., 102.

[146] Ibid., 101.

[147] Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 13 – 14; Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand*, 68.

[148] Pepe Karmel, "The Real Simulations of Thomas Demand," *Art in America* (June/July 2005), 148; Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 16.

[149] Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 15.

Demand's allusions to the Nazi past are not always as explicit as in the cases

described above. *Attempt* (2004; fig. 70), for instance, points to the legacy of the Third

Reich: it pictures a domestic interior space dominated by a tabletop piled with bomb-

making materials and refers to a studio targeted by Baader-Meinhof terrorists in the

1970s as a means for destroying the neighboring residence, which belonged to a state

prosecutor.[150] Demand's *Laboratory* (2000; fig. 54) has a relatively (albeit, in this case,

appropriately) opaque connection to Germany's Nazi history. It reproduces the

appearance of an anechoic chamber and was, in fact, modeled on a facility designed and

used by the German automaker Bayerische Motoren Werken (BMW); the company did

test vehicles used by members of the Nazi party, but until fairly recently the nature of its

relationship with the Third Reich remained unclear.[151] Finally, *Klause* (2006; fig. 2, figs.

38 – 41) bears upon this discussion also, as the commission that prompted the series was

inspired by the rediscovery of a set of prints created by the German artist Max Beckmann

(1884 – 1950) who, at the time of their making, was living in exile in Amsterdam after

Hitler's forces expelled him from his home in Frankfurt. Demand produced *Klause* as a

response to the theme of Beckmann's prints, the Apocalypse according to St. John, and

turned to the Pascal case as a means of exploring the idea of cataclysm in a secular

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[150] www.victoria-miro.com/exhibitions/_219/.

[151] Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 23. For a discussion of deeper ties between the Nazi party
and the BMW corporation, see Julia Bonstein, Hawranek, and Klaus Wiegrefe, "Breaking
the Silence: BMW's Quandt Family to Investigate Wealth Amassed in Third Reich"
(www.spiegel.de/international/germany/breaking-the-silence-bmw-s-quandt-family-to-
investigate-wealth-amassed-in-third-reich-a-511193.html) and Fiona Govan, "BMW
dynasty breaks silence over Nazi past" (www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-
two/8796157/BMW-dynasty-breaks-silence-over-Nazi-past.html).

context and, in keeping with much of his work, by way of a story that assumed a prominent place in the media.[152]

The most recent retrospective exhibition of Demand's work further underscored his inclination towards finding a significant place in his work for subjects that have a German connection. The show opened in Berlin in September 2009, thus coinciding with events marking the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall as well as the 60th anniversary of the founding of the democratic Federal Republic of Germany. Its inaugural venue was Berlin's Neue Nationalgalerie and, reinforcing the essentially German orientation of its conceit, it was titled *Nationalgalerie*.[153] Every image Demand selected for the exhibition ties in, one way or another, to some aspect of the German past: many are associated with historically significant events or sites, others were simply made while Demand was living in Germany. If any doubt existed regarding the importance of "Germany" as a theme running throughout Demand's oeuvre, this exhibition goes a long way toward quelling them: it was comprised of 40 photographs, it included works representing all phases of Demand's career and, of course, it was a project expressly sanctioned by Demand himself.[154]

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[152] For details regarding Max Beckmann's life and work during the years Hitler was in power, and for an account of how Beckmann's 1941 prints (which illustrate episodes of the Apocalypse from the Book of Revelation) came to inspire *Klause*, see Dietmar Dath, Christian Demand, Thomas Demand, and Joachim Valentin, *Klause* (Cologne, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König), 2006, unpaginated.

[153] 2009 also marked the 40th anniversary of the Neue Nationalgalerie. Demand's exhibition opened September 18, 2009 and closed January 17, 2010. Following its run in Berlin, it traveled to the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam (May 29 - August 22, 2010).

[154] For a discussion of the development and organization of the *Nationalgalerie* exhibition, see Obrist, ed., *Thomas Demand und die Nationalgalerie*, 65 – 67. See also

II. "The remarkable thing about these pictures, however, is their emptiness."[155]

Like Demand's *Klause* images, *Corridor* (fig. 60) pictures a scene associated with

horrific criminal activity: the hall and door leading to serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer's

apartment. Measuring approximately 72.5 inches high and 106 inches wide, *Corridor* is

a large visual field whose representational space is relatively shallow and contains few

compositional elements: the gray floor of an apartment hallway occupies the foreground,

and although the corridor extends to the left, right, and towards the background, these

areas do little to expand the compositional space as they all appear to terminate after only

short distances. The ceiling and walls are bare and white, one open passageway and three

yellow doors punctuate the primary wall that moves diagonally through the scene, a

narrow brown band resembling a baseboard lines the lowest inches of the wall, and two

light panels set into the ceiling appear as the only source of illumination in the pictured

area. The dominant wall, leading from the left edge of the composition into the gently

receding space of the background, leads the viewer's eye across the span of the

photograph to the corridor's end near the right side of the image; the dark line of the

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Udo Kittelmann, "Foreword," in Demand, Kittelmann, and Strauss, *Nationalgalerie*,
unpaginated.   Kittelmann notes that the exhibition takes "Germany" as its thematic
focus in that it presents "those works by the artist that are occupied with social and
political events of modern and recent German history and relevant sites and events," but
at the same time it has a broader scope in that it is "about the question of whether and to
what extent a national self-understanding is concentrated in images and condensed,
remembered, and communicated by way of such images. Is there a 'national gallery' in
the sense of a visual world that is able to embody a specific national self-understanding,
and a mentality based on a nationality? These are surely questions that the exhibition
raises rather than answers." The idea that Demand's work is illustrative of concepts that
are related to, but extend beyond, the specific events to which they make reference, is a
key idea guiding this dissertation.

[155] Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen*
13 (1972), 20.

baseboard reinforces this diagonal movement, and at the right side of the composition, the scene comes to an abrupt end with a shadowy area and a small panel of another wall that is cropped at the right edge of the photograph.

As is characteristic of all of Demand's work, *Corridor* is replete with conspicuous omissions. As the spectator's gaze follows the lines of the composition and surveys the scene, it will fall on no door handles, no numbers or letters marking individual apartments, no "Exit" sign, no switches on the switch plates, and no idiosyncratic details reflecting the lives or identities of the various residents who live or have lived behind these doors. Additionally, every edge and surface in the composition appears untouched, pristine, and unused. Even though Demand's image is of a scale and clarity that allow it to disclose even its slightest details—this is a large photograph, with the vast majority of its composition set in or near the foreground and with relatively few elements obscured by shadow—there is neither a scuff, a fingerprint, a worn patch of floor, nor any other visible trace of this hallway having been used by its residents or visitors.

In keeping with the whole of Demand's oeuvre, the only signs of human presence in this corridor point to the cutting, aligning, and assembling involved in building these scenes; in other words, they point to Demand, himself. Where walls and ceiling meet, for example, several narrow gaps reveal the papers' edges, and the same is true regarding the expanse of white wall near the very center of the composition where a slightly opened seam rises up from the baseboard. Demand's traces become especially visible against the flat, pale colors of *Corridor*; moreover, although these seams and gaps appear as irregularities in the overall scheme of the composition, they themselves possess a regularity that makes them especially difficult to overlook. For instance, at the upper

edge of the wall, on the right side of the photograph, each narrow gap lines up with, and visually leads to, the next. In length and width, they resemble the vertically-oriented seam positioned above the baseboard, near the central vertical axis of the photograph. There is a pattern that almost all of the traces in *Corridor* follow—they are fine, dark lines running parallel to the diagonal and vertical lines along which Demand organized the composition—and detecting the pattern, which is possible after seeing only two or three of the gaps, furthers the spectators' search for and discovery of them. In the absence of any human figures, any text, and any allusions to the presence or activity of the individuals associated with this set of apartments, Demand's *Corridor* stands as a scene defined by a sense of unusual stillness and emptiness.

Demand's oeuvre, like Neudecker's and, as we will see, Schneider's, is notable for its consistency; consequently, in all of Demand's photographs, one encounters an impression of absence and stillness comparable to that in *Corridor*. In these qualities, Demand's work evokes that of Eugène Atget as interpreted by Walter Benjamin (1892 – 1940) who, in both "A Short History of Photography" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," expressed a special regard for the photographic oeuvre of Atget (1856 – 1927).[156] Key to Atget's work, as Benjamin's comment above makes clear, is that although he produced more than 4000 photographs of the city of Paris, almost never did he include any human figures in his images (1924; fig. 71). As Benjamin saw it, when Atget pictured "the deserted Paris streets…he photographed them

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[156] Ibid., 5 – 26; Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 217 – 251.

likes scenes of crime [because] the scene of a crime, too, is deserted."[157] Benjamin's

words are apt and provocative descriptors of Atget's oeuvre, but they also suggest an

interpretive framework that applies equally well to Demand's work. In the following

pages, and with Benjamin's assessment of Atget serving as a point of departure, the case

will be made that the crime scene aesthetic is ideally suited to Demand's goals. It

variously aligns with and illuminates Demand's work, and its potency rests, from first to

final analysis, on that defining feature shared between his photographs and Atget's: "their

emptiness."

For Benjamin, it was with Atget's emptied city scenes that a new function for

photography was born. Rather than remaining bound to the purposes of portraiture (to

"[t]he cult of remembrance of loved ones," as Benjamin put it[158]), when Atget pictured

"the forgotten and the forsaken"[159] corners of Paris, photographs became allied with the

processes of evidentiary documentation. With this shift, as "photographs become

standard evidence for historical occurrences," Benjamin recognized that they came to

"acquire a hidden political significance."[160] By way of what they picture, in concert with

what they omit, photographs have the capacity not only to carry but also to disclose a

carefully calculated agenda. To be sure, this may always have been true of photographs,

but on Benjamin's account it is a fact that comes into focus with Atget; that is, with a

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[157] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 226.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," *Screen*, 20.

[160] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 226.

body of photographic work deeply concerned with loss, both evident and anticipatory, and inextricable from the appearance and purpose of the crime scene photograph.

A comparable convergence of variables resounds throughout Demand's oeuvre: it possesses a sense of loss that, it will be shown, is both retrospective and anticipative and it exquisitely balances presence with absence. The applicability of the crime scene allusion is also undeniable, and not only because Demand's photographs are as obdurately deserted as Atget's. Representations of actual crime scenes appear repeatedly in Demand's work[161] but, also, the procedures of forensic investigation have a role— which at times is an extensive and elaborate series of activities—in his own creative processes.[162] Even when not re-picturing a site associated with any type of transgression, Demand's methodical and exacting practices echo those of the investigator charged with the task of examining and reconstructing the scene of a crime: both carefully survey a given site, photograph it, then direct their efforts to the work of accurately re-presenting that space so that, ultimately, the scene can be documented and preserved for later scrutiny.[163]

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[161] As already discussed, Demand based *Room*, *Corridor*, *Office*, *Bathroom*, *Attempt*, and *Klause* on crime scenes. Other examples include *Pit* (fig.39; 1999) and *Embassy* (fig. 36; 2007).

[162] Parallels exist, also, between Demand's photography and the work of press photographers who seek out crime scenes, but such an analogy does not account for Demand's practice of re/constructing the sites he ultimately photographs.

[163] In an essay for a 1997 exhibition titled "Scene of the Crime," Peter Wollen paraphrased Ralph Rugoff's assessment of forensic photography, saying that, "by striving to be impersonal, forensic photography takes on the quality of a ritual act." Further, Wollen argued, "[t]he ritual quality of forensic photography is given added power by the ritual characteristics of the crime scene itself. Carefully delimited by police tape, the crime scene appears to us hallowed ground [that]…should be controlled, guarded, and protected; it should be preserved in its integrity…" (Peter Wollen, "Vectors of

Demand's adoption of the detective's role does, at times, go much, much further than the fundamental alignment just described. Recalling the development of one of his relatively early works, *Drafting Room* (1996; fig. 68), Demand shed some light on the investigative activities that typically precede his building a model (and the fortuitous coincidences that can come to light on account of his groundwork).

> I was looking for engineers' offices, workshops. I found a photo of an architect's office, the drawing office where the city of Munich was rebuilt after the war. I had the feeling that this could be the visual that I was looking for. I then researched the history of this image, as I usually do, to find out who took the photo, whether people still worked in that place, and if I could trace the original photograph. I found out that the person who directed the studio was Richard Vorhölzer, who had done most of his work building post offices…My grandmother even told me that [my grandfather and Vorhölzer] knew each other…[and] what's more, I grew up in a village where the post office had been built by Vorhölzer.[164]

In later projects, Demand would substantially extend the limits of his investigative procedures. To gather the information he wanted for *Junior Suite* (2012; fig. 72), an

Melancholy," in Ralph Rugoff, Anthony Vidler, and Peter Wollen, *Scene of the Crime* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1997), 24 – 25). Although Demand complicates such a theorization of the crime scene and its photographer by ensuring that traces of his own presence linger in his images (and these traces will be the subject of careful consideration as this chapter moves forward), the consistent, deliberate, and ostensibly dispassionate nature of his work has about it something of the ritualistic air described by Rugoff and Wollen.

[164] Thomas Demand quoted in Quintin, "There is no innocent room," in Demand, Bonami, Quintin, and Durand, *Thomas Demand*, 62.

image based upon press photographs taken inside the Beverly Hilton Hotel room in which Whitney Houston died on February 11, 2012, Demand pursued a mode of "research" markedly different from the largely archival methods he described with regard to *Drafting Room*. Essentially, he reconstructed the scene of the tragedy, but not, as is typical for him, just once. Before creating the paper model in his studio, he replicated the scene in the real space of the Beverly Hilton. Demand checked into a room with a floor plan identical to Houston's and then, given what he could discern from press photos, ordered the same food he believed to have been her last meal.[165]

Commenting on his actions, Demand stated, "I am neither a detective nor a policeman nor a journalist."[166] As it happens, it appears that his *not* being a detective, policeman, or journalist is exactly what prompted him to behave like one. Working as an artist rather than an official agent of any type, Demand was sure to be denied entry to the scene of Houston's death and so, before building a model of Houston's last meal, he initiated another sort of modeling by carefully following the sorts of copying maneuvers common to criminal investigations. In fact, Demand approximated the very procedures he had read about in studying the Tosa-Klause case: like Demand, Pascal Zimmer's investigators had no access to the site they needed to examine and so were compelled to stage reenactments in a space designed to be an exacting copy of the actual scene.

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[165] Carol Vogel, "A Remade Tabloid Image of Houston's Last Meal," *The New York Times*, 26 April 2012 (www.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/arts/design/image-of-whitney-houstons-last-meal-at-matthew-marks.html).

[166] Ibid.

To be clear, neither the legwork preceding *Drafting Room* nor the more elaborate

undertakings involved in *Junior Suite* is an anomaly in Demand's practice.[167]

Researching the history of an image is typical, as Demand said plainly in discussing

Drafting Room, and even the more complicated investigative scheme behind *Junior Suite*

does not constitute the most elaborate of Demand's behind-the-scene detective work. As

a final example, and a more extreme case, too, consider *Embassy I* (2007; fig. 73), a

series of ten photographs re-picturing Niger's Embassy in Rome where, on December 31,

2000, a puzzling break-in took place. The catalogue accompanying Demand's exhibition

of the photographs gives an account of the circumstances in which the embassy was

embroiled; in terms of the mystery and obfuscation characterizing the situation, as well as

the weight of their historical significance, they fully align with Demand's established

interests:

> The crime was a burglary that provided the pretext for fabricating
>
> documents—supposedly found amidst authentic ones stolen during the
>
> Embassy break-in—that buttressed the Bush administration's claim that
>
> Saddam Hussein was actively pursuing a program to build atomic weapons
>
> and seeking the raw materials in Africa. This claim—although repeatedly
>
> challenged by the CIA and almost every other intelligence source in the
>
> West—was used by the President of the United States, the Vice President,
>
> two Secretaries of State, the Prime Minister of Great Britain and countless

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[167] In addition to discussing the investigative work he conducted prior to creating *Drafting Room*, *Junior Suite,* and *Embassy*, Demand has detailed his efforts to unearth information pertaining to his *Corridor* [in Ruedi Widmer, "Building the Scene of the Crime," *Camera Austria* 66 (July 1999), 11)] and *Klause* (Demand and Obrist, *The Conversation Series*, 132).

other officials on countless other occasions to justify an otherwise unprovoked invasion of Iraq, thus precipitating a multi-sided war that continues to this day with ever more horrifying impact and perilous repercussions.

Needless to say even the most probing investigations of what actually happened have produced only fragmentary accounts, and all depend upon the work of people whose professional profiles—spy, free-lance go-between, diplomat, political apologists—make them implicitly untrustworthy. Moreover all of the action occurs 'off-stage,' or in secure locations where access is exclusively granted to those who have some part in the conspiracies.[168]

Just as Demand would find himself prevented from obtaining direct access to the information he sought for *Klause* and *Junior Suite*, here also he found himself having to go to considerable lengths to gather the information necessary to produce his photographs. In a scenario closely echoing that of the Pascal Zimmer case, no photographs of the embassy's interior spaces existed because, as the story was made public, no one covering (or uncovering) the chain of events was allowed entry into the offices.[169] Determined to take his own photographs of the crime scene, Demand embarked upon a complicated course of action, which began by having a meeting with

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[168] Robert Storr, "Paper Thin and Thick as Thieves," in Thomas Demand, Germano Celant, Carlo Bonini, Alex Farquharson, and Robert Storr *Thomas Demand* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2007), 39 – 41.

[169] Alex Farquharson, "The Paper Trail," in Demand, Celant, Bonini, Farquharson, and Storr, *Thomas Demand*, 64.

Carlo Bonini, the Italian investigative journalist who first reported on the scandal.

Demand described the general situation, his visits to the embassy, and the consequences

of his actions as follows:

> Outside the embassy, you could take photos and then you go inside and can
>
> also go to the door next to the elevator where you can still take photos.
>
> People, who tell the doorman downstairs that they are journalists, don't
>
> make it upstairs. I said I had to go to the dentist in the building…and then I
>
> went up there and took pictures and waited an hour. No one enters and no
>
> one comes out. On the third day, I knock and say I would like to talk to the
>
> ambassador. It's about a visa matter. The door opens a crack and an old
>
> lady shoves a piece of paper out and closes the door again. That was a
>
> French form, a visa application. That's all. One doesn't get any further. I
>
> sent a friend of mine over, he asked about doing an interview on how the
>
> whole story has developed. Once again, the door only opened a crack. No
>
> interest. Period. Door closed. Then I again asked Bonini, how do we get
>
> in there? Could a private detective somehow get in? Couldn't one bribe
>
> the woman?...Bonini said, bribery would be a problem…Then an apartment
>
> was available for rent two floors above. I looked at it and measured it to
>
> get a feeling for how the building is laid out, the types of details it has.
>
> Until at some point Bonini said, the only thing I would do in your place
>
> would be to go to them and say: I'm doing an art project, I'm an artist and
>
> I want to reconstruct your entire apartment from paper, in the original
>
> size…So I go there and say: 'Arte, arte.' And she lets me in but knows

very well that I am the same person who already knocked two days ago. In

the first room, I could still take two photos with the telephone while I was

sitting there. She talks and I give her the MOMA catalogue and say its

very important…At some point, she comes and says she spoke to the

consulate officials…and says the consulate official will now meet with you

for twenty minutes…He doesn't speak English, I don't speak French. I

pretend not to speak Italian. That means that communication is difficult,

which is of course to my advantage, because I can look around the whole

time…I sense that he actually finds me friendly, because I am open and

nice and don't appear to be up to anything wrong, but, on the other hand,

he watches me carefully the whole time. Then he closes the [MOMA]

book and says in fluent English: 'The Republic of Niger does not have any

interest in what you are doing. Thank you very much,' and sends me out.

But I made use of those twenty, twenty-five minutes I had there. I

immediately went downstairs and wrote down everything that I could

remember: Each electrical socket, each details. One knows very exactly

that half an hour later one has forgotten everything. And I then built the

entire thing based on this.[170]

Scheming, surveillance, and misinformation—this story is teeming with components that

surface repeatedly in Demand's work. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of their

presence here, though, is what one could describe as their being doubly present: they are

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[170] Demand quoted in Marcus Woeller, "Thomas Demand: More as Images of Images of
Models of Images of Images" (see www.stylemag-online.net/2008/06/05/thomas-
demand-more-as-images-of-images-of-models-of-images-of-images-engl/).

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constitutive of the narrative Demand pursued but also of his own actions in the course of that pursuit. Attempting to assemble the details he deemed necessary for this project, Demand very nearly became both investigator and criminal. This melding of roles is provocative, to be sure. In the first instance, as it has the effect of associating Demand with an ethically problematic role that is otherwise limited to the story's perpetrators. Moreover, this shadow descends as a result of Demand telling a story that takes as its subject the steps involved in being able to create *Embassy*. In other words, it is a story about the process of storytelling. In this sense, it is also an analog to Demand's photographs as they also, with their visible seams, folds, and pencil marks, are pictures that reveal a great deal about the process of their making. More will be said later in this chapter about the manifest constructed-ness of Demand's images but here, first, suffice it to say that the correspondence between this *Embassy* tale and Demand's work per se makes Demand's investment in disclosure especially apparent and, on account of the story's patently moral dimension, suggests that Demand is interested in turning his audience's attention to the ethical dimension of storytelling. Regarding this latter point, it is worth emphasizing that just as Demand intentionally leaves visible traces of his activity in each photograph, so he displays an unabashed readiness not just to approach the cusp of impropriety in his investigative pursuits but, more importantly, to tell the story of those exploits.

While the impulse towards disclosure might be forceful in Demand's work, it is also selective. Demand exhibits his photographs without providing information about either his investigative activities or the identity of his source images. The titles he assigns to his photographs provide no contextual information and suggest no narrative;

they seem to name simply what they picture in the most candid of ways. The

correspondence between title and image is so close that, contrary to convention, the two

fail to supplement or illuminate one another: *Corridor* (fig. 60), for example, pictures

nothing more than a seemingly ordinary corridor, and the title, like the image, reveals

nothing specific or singular about Demand's subject.[171] Instead of operating in a

customary manner, the image-text relationship that Demand employs defies most

expectations and its effect, which emerges in stark contrast to the abundance of detail

comprising each image, is to highlight just how much information Demand withholds

from his viewers.[172]

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[171]   Given Demand's practice of reproducing, in the medium of photography,
photographs derived from the media, those conventions associated with documentary
photography (loosely defined, to include press or investigative photography) are
especially relevant to his work. In this context, a title would function much like a caption
and, as Susan Sontag noted, "The caption of a photograph is traditionally neutral,
informative: a date, a place, names." See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*
(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 45. The only characteristic Demand's
titles share with this convention is neutrality; and, in fact, theirs is such a radical
neutrality that, along with the relatively generic appearance of the images, it asserts itself
more as strategy than straightforward objectivity. If these images/titles strike the viewer
as surprisingly neutral in disposition, they have effectively underscored just how rare
neutrality actually is in (documentary and other) photographic practice. This is no new
observation on Demand's part, but it is a significant one to make if, as mentioned above,
his work is invested in the ethical dimension of storytelling.

[172] Demand's unvarying approach to titling his images (with one or two simple words that
are accurate but un-illuminating descriptions of the photographs' content) warrants
placing his oeuvre amongst that of many others, from semioticians to conceptual artists,
who take as their concern the relationship between words and images. Key here is the
work of René Magritte, which not only ranks amongst the most prominent and influential
venture into this territory in the twentieth century (especially in the visual arts) but which
also is of noted interest to Demand himself. He has articulated his admiration for
Magritte's work on several occasions and in remarkably consistent form. In 2006,
Demand stated, "Magritte once said that an image doesn't show thoughts, it shows all the
things necessary for thoughts" (Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand*, 93).
Demand would return to this comment of Magritte's—repeatedly paraphrasing the idea
of 'only showing the things necessary for thoughts—in a number of interviews conducted

As each of Demand's images is infused with this carefully constructed tension

between divulging and denying information, and between a surfeit and scarcity of detail,

it is perhaps not surprising to learn that a commonly reported response to Demand's work

involves an unexpected and then increasing sense of suspicion about what his

photographs actually represent. Ralph Rugoff's essay in the catalogue accompanying

Demand's 2004 *Phototrophy* exhibition at the Kunsthaus Bregenz provides what is a

representative description of this experience:

> …Demand's works are constructed to ensure that our reading requires a
>
> series of steps, or conceptual doubletakes, that can only unfold at different

in subsequent years (see, for example, Demand and Obrist, *The Conversation Series*, 113; "Thomas Demand & Daniel Kehlmann," at www.artreview.com/profiles/blogs/thomas-demand-daniel-kehlmann; and, John-Paul Pryor, "Thomas Demand: La Carte d'après Nature," at www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/11024/1/thomas-demand-la-carte-dapres-nature). In addition, Demand curated a 2011 – 2012 exhibition at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco. Titled *La Carte d'après Nature*, the show was inspired by Magritte's famous play with words and images, and was titled after a publication of the same name, which Magritte produced between 1951 and 1964. All of the images Demand selected for the show depict elements of the natural world; as he put it, in his essay for the catalogue, "*domesticated* nature—that is, potted plants, gardens, theme parks and models of wild growth—transformations, every kind of presentation, interpretation and, finally, symbolic representation" [see Thomas Demand, Christy Lange, Tacita Dean, Rodney Graham, and Luigi Ghirri, *La Carte d'après Nature* (London, England: MACK), 2010, 92]. Demand also included his oft-repeated reference to Magritte in the essay: "'It is not possible to paint a thought; it is only possible to paint the things that were necessary for this thought,' [Magritte] once said" (ibid., 94). In a foreword to the same catalogue, Marie-Claude Beaud, Director of the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, described the project as "an undisguised tribute paid by Thomas Demand to René Magritte" (ibid., 7). Generally speaking, Demand's play with the word-image dynamic is clearly far more limited than Magritte's as he rigorously restricts it to the strategy of eliminating all text from every image and then applying text to each photograph in the form of a laconic title. In light of Demand's comments about Magritte's work, and given this unwavering practice of pairing meticulous visual imagery with a systematic and unexpected absence of written text, it appears that Demand shares with Magritte an interest in how it is that particular modes of communication operate. With Demand, however, the pivotal issue centers on omission. This notion of things omitted, or perhaps never extant is thus crucial to the majority of this study.

moments in time. Ironically, it is precisely the pristine intelligibility of his

images that triggers our first such doubletake. In particular, it is the

conspicuous absence in Demand's photographs of signs of environmental

wear and tear that arouses our suspicions…On further inspection, we are

unavoidably struck by the way the surfaces of every object and

architectural structure possess a disquieting sameness…As soon as we

closely scrutinize his photographs, we observe the twisted edges, snagged

cut marks and slightly irregular borders of the objects they depict, and their

material construction…At this point in reading Demand's work, our

preliminary sense of identification—our unquestionable certainty about the

content of his images—collapses, and we quickly reassess it as an act of

misidentification.[173]

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[173] Ralph Rugoff, "Instructions for Escape," in Rugoff and Franck, *Thomas Demand: Phototrophy*, 6. Consider also the accounts offered by Lars Lerup, Douglas Fogle, and Michael Fried. Lerup writes, "I remember well the first time I saw one of Demand's photographs. Coming across *Balconies* of 1997…I noticed that the image appeared unusually still, smooth, and even. But only at a second look did I realize that the scene was not 'real.' Something in the image made me stop: the 'real' was an artifice…Finally (probably because of some barely perceptible 'flaws' in the construction)…a vulnerability appeared—the artifice was made of paper! This paper-thin weakness introduced to the ironclad matrix of stillness…creates a fissure, a heat sink that sucks the curious into its vortex…I have since conducted a survey among some of my friends…The invariable reaction to this photograph is always the same double take, and a smile" (Lars Lerup, "Demand's Demand," in Sobel, *Thomas Demand*, unpaginated). Comparably, Fogle's submits the following description: "At first glance Demand's works appear to be excessively hyperreal depictions of the banal architectural spaces that we inhabit in our everyday lives. In these images we make our way through a variety of hauntingly familiar yet completely anonymous scenarios moving from a vacant staircase in some sort of nameless institutional setting…to a completely generic hallway in an average apartment building before making our way through a ransacked office…Upon closer inspection, however, these images start to become visually unstable as the seams holding together their carefully constructed veneer begin to show. What seems to have been at first glance a world of structural solidity turns out to be not quite what it

The spectatorial experience as outlined by Rugoff (and corroborated repeatedly in the Demand literature) fits neatly within the crime scene paradigm. It is a process punctuated by moments of doubt, attentive inspection, and circumspect reappraisal, and at the root of all its uncertainty and reevaluation is the intervention of those faint clues—the seams, folds, and strangely unworn surfaces—upon what had first held itself out as a largely unremarkable, even familiar, type of scene. They may be the slightest of presences in Demand's compositions, but these irregularities play a most significant role as they alert viewers to two essential and unexpected facts: one, that the sites in the photographs are constructed of paper (these specific sorts of traces—pencil lines, scissor cuts, folds, and so on—would be difficult if not impossible to leave so visibly with any other medium) and also, that they are painstakingly handcrafted. These are the realizations that dissolve the spectator's initial sense of assurance about what Demand's images represent, and they generate, in its place, the impulse for reevaluation described above. In other words, they amount to the first hint that when it comes to the the world of representation, all may not be nearly as stable—literally or figuratively—as it appears to be.

Once Demand's spectators arrive at this realization, their engagement with his work must change. Here again, Benjamin has bearing on Demand. Regarding Atget's Paris scenes, Benjamin wrote, "[t]hey demand a specific kind of approach; free-floating

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appeared" [Douglas Fogle, "In the Stomach of an Architect," in Thomas Demand, Helmut Friedel, Douglas Fogle, and Bart Lootsma, *Thomas Demand: b&k+* (Cologne: Walther König, 2004), unpaginated]. Succinctly, and acknowledging the routine nature of this type of experience with Demand's work, Michael Fried has also stated that " [a] standard description of the viewer's response to Demand's photographs (and one to which [Demand's 2005 MOMA solo exhibition organizer] Marcoci subscribes) is that initially he or she takes them for images of the real thing--the actual scene--but within a few moments a certain strangeness comes to the fore and the viewer then realizes that such is not the case" [Michael Fried, "Without a Trace," *Artforum* 43 (March 2005), 199].

contemplation is not appropriate to them. They stir the viewer; he feels challenged by them in a new way."[174] Atget's images, like Demand's, preclude the role of passive observer. Where they "challenge" or as they "stir" their viewers, they activate, engage, and implicate them, and in this way, they make each spectator a vital presence in these places teeming with absence. As Demand designs it, the dynamic of the crime scene, which is so applicable to the images he creates and the methods he employs in making them, also extends even further, and comes to envelop his spectators as well.

If, before his images, Demand's spectators find themselves pulled in, urged to explore, and compelled to examine, the question arises: to what end? What challenge do these images extend, and what is it that Demand veils in doubt and suspicion? Certainly, given that the photographs Demand creates are both in their inception and in their final form explicitly connected to another individual's work, his is an oeuvre that reflects much contemporary thought about the concepts of authorship, originality, and the deeply mediated nature of contemporary experience.[175] In fairly uncomplicated ways, Demand's work is analogous to ideas expressed by key figures in these discourses. Demand's working process, for example, brings to mind Roland Barthes' claim that "[every] text is

[174] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 226.

[175] In terms of questioning the notion of authorship specifically, it is important to note that the majority of Demand's source images would be, presumably, anonymous works: media images might become well-known to a general public, but the names of the photographers responsible for them rarely gain a comparable familiarity. This arrangement has the effect of positioning Demand as the "author" of previously "author-less" works, and in so doing, raising additional questions about what it is that constitutes an author. As this line of inquiry runs throughout his oeuvre, it places Demand's work in dialogue with a sizable body of literature addressing exactly the same issue; prominent amongst these texts, and notable for effectively posing the very same question as Demand's work, is Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books), 1984.

a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture…[therefore] the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original…"[176] In similar fashion, given that Demand's models and photographs simply could not exist without their predecessors' own work, they operate according to the logic Jacques Derrida explained when, with regard to the subject of meaning and its communication, he wrote that "[t]he signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other…".[177] Relevant to Demand's work, also, is Derrida's explication that any link in this "chain" can be detached from its original situation, re-placed, and thus inscribed with new meaning. "Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic," Derrida asserted, "…can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion."[178] Demand's work enacts exactly this process as he "cites" a preexisting image, remakes and relocates it in his own studio, and then transforms it into

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[176] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146.

[177] Jacques Derrida, "Différence," in *The Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1982), 11. The interdependence of parts that Derrida outlined is doubly present in Demand's work. First, the photograph he displays as the final work of art refers to the model he constructed, which itself refers to a preexisting photograph, which refers to a larger narrative context, and so on. In addition, the actual structure of each photograph relies on its own chain of (material) connections: every piece of hand-cut paper must fit in its precise way with every other piece in the composition, so that, like sentences that together constitute a meaningful paragraph (or words that form a sentence, or letters that form a word…) each facet depends upon, and is depended-upon by, every other facet such that the chain coheres and the intended content exists in a legible manner.

[178] Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins*, 320.

a new image that is designed expressly for repeated recirculation. As any of his photographs move, for example, from studio, to museum, to catalogue, to press review, to gallery, to private collection, and so on, they both enter and create "new contexts" in a theoretically inexhaustible, "nonsaturable fashion."

This notion of potentially endless re-presentation, which obscures or even erases any certainty about what might have been the "original," finds prominent expression also in Jean Baudrillard's writing about simulacra. Meditating upon the hyper-mediated nature of contemporary experience, Baudrillard contends that "[t]he real is produced from…memory banks, modes of control—and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these."[179] Indeed, his description works well as an account of Demand's process: Demand creates models based upon images pulled from storehouses of collective and personal memory (media images and his own recollections, respectively) and because the models cease to exist after he photographs them, the real is quickly replaced by its representation. Moreover, by working with the medium of photography, Demand is particularly well positioned to produce the real, as Baudrillard said, "an indefinite number of times."[180]

Baudrillard's theorizing resonates especially sharply with the experience of viewing Demand's images in person. Within a gallery or museum (as opposed to a

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[179] Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Shiela Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2.

[180] In "Paper Thin and Thick as Thieves," (in Demand, Celant, Bonini, Farquharson, and Storr, *Thomas Demand*, 35 – 43), Robert Storr discusses the relationship between Demand's work and Baudrillard's ideas about simulacrum. He suggests that Demand's extensive research practices, exacting reconstructions, and his making explicit the mediated nature of his photographs amounts to a "countermove in the game of unreliable representations" theorized by Baudrillard (see especially pages 35, 41 – 42).

publication about Demand's work, for example), the photographs typically stand alone,

without explanatory text. In this way, the exhibition itself reflects (or, one could say,

simulates) the contemporary condition as described by Baudrillard. Faced, for example,

with the expanse of foliage pictured in Demand's *Clearing* (2003; fig. 74), and with no

way of knowing that the image re-presents any actual site (or object),[181] the spectator is in

the midst of a scenario that recalls Baudrillard's explanation about the current "era of

simulation…[which is] inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials…[where it] is no

longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody…[but, instead, it] is a

question of substituting the signs of the real for the real."[182]

As invested in mediation and appropriation as Demand's process is, it comes as

little surprise to learn that these are subjects often found in the literature devoted to his

work. Two examples of such commentary—one from Dean Sobel's text, "The Basic

Facts: Thomas Demand," written for the 2001 Demand exhibition at the Aspen Art

Museum, and the other from Roxana Marcoci's essay for the catalogue published in

conjunction with Demand's 2005 solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art—are

illustrative of the manner in which these topics typically weigh into discussions about

Demand's oeuvre. Addressing this aspect of Demand's practice, and contextualizing it in

terms of art historical developments of the twentieth century, Sobel wrote,

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[181] Demand based *Clearing* on a specific location in Venice's Giardini, the park in which Biennale takes place. One can listen to commentary about *Clearing* at www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/18/475.

[182] Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation*, 2. Ironically, the exhibition also constitutes the most un-mediated way in which to encounter Demand's work. Further, in terms of the "liquidation of all referentials" mentioned by Baudrillard, the identity of several of Demand's source images remains undisclosed, and so he has photographs that refer neither to an extant model nor a known, preexisting image.

Demand's photographs are part of a now-prevalent, multigenerational approach in which photography is used as the foundation for a larger conceptual exercise. They have their specific origin in photo-conceptualism of the late 1960s and 1970s best demonstrated by Americans such as Vito Acconci and Ed Ruscha and Europeans like Hilla and Bernd Becher and Hamish Fulton. These artists made modest black-and-white photographs, often executed in series, to document either basic activities (Acconci) or aspects of the built (Ruscha, the Bechers) or natural (Fulton) environment. During the 1980s, this practice was filtered through a renewed questioning of the role the mass media plays in an image-saturated culture. Adopting new advances in color printing, artists (usually trained in areas other than photography) began making large-scale ("painting-sized") color photographs that investigated notions of representation and reproduction, theories that previously had been explored by semioticians and post-structuralist philosophers…Like many "post-conceptual" artists of his generation, Demand…is part of the growing tendency, post-[Cindy] Sherman, to make highly directed photographic fabrications that investigate issues surrounding the media's role in our culture…Demand is…interested in uncovering the power and neutralizing effect the media has on our culture.[183]

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[183] Sobel, "Thomas Demand: The Basic Facts," in Sobel, *Thomas Demand*, unpaginated. Sobel's remarks about the "neutralizing effect" of the media bring to mind the work of Andy Warhol who, although not discussed in Sobel's essay, demonstrated a similar

In the earliest paragraphs of her essay, Marcoci addresses the foremost place that media-related issues hold in Demand's work; she maintains:

> certain kinds of experience are indirect, rooted not in real life but in the media-drenched consciousness of the viewer, who recalls events from seeing them in pictures but cannot account for the reliability of the information they contain. Not surprisingly, in an age in which reality is dominated by mediated images, the truthfulness of the facts the camera records and the memories that are passed down to us, whether they be through the altered lens of the photograph, the newsreel, television, or the Internet, have unremittingly been put into question. The degree to which the reality of the picture makes us think of the ways in which the real is actually constructed is central to Demand's approach to photography.[184]

Pithy though his comments may be in comparison to Sobel's and Marcoci's, Demand nonetheless has spoken on this subject, also. Most commonly, his remarks are not only brief but relatively vague as well, and they pose no challenge to the standard interpretations of his work as typified by Sobel and Marcoci. In a 1996 interview, for example, Demand stated summarily, "I think photography is less about representing than constructing its objects…It also points to the problem of authorship, an issue which is

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approach to the subject of the media and its role in popular culture. Warhol's *Death* and *Disaster* images, macabre in tone and based on press photographs, make perhaps the best comparison to Demand's work. For discussion of Warhol's *Death* and *Disaster* projects, see Douglas Fogle, ed., *Andy Warhol/Supernova: Stars, Deaths, and Disasters, 1962 – 1964* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center), 2005.

[184] Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, 9.

becoming unavoidable for the new generation of photographers. At the same time as the eye cruises through more and more images, it cannot trust what it sees anymore."[185]

These varied stipulations about the potentially unreliable or suspect nature of photographic images leads this discussion back to its point of origin: that is, to Walter Benjamin's observations about Atget's work and, specifically, the photograph's propensity to "acquire a hidden political significance."[186] Certainly, the idea that photographs might document select facts and, at the same time, conceal others resonates with Demand's oeuvre, where every picture is constituted by a highly calculated balance of presences and absences. In fact, given Demand's unwavering adherence to this approach, one could infer that his work attests not so much to the ability of photographs to function in this way as to their inability to operate otherwise.[187]

Further, Demand brings this fine balancing of inclusion with omission to bear upon images that are large-scale color photographs of paper models of press and archival pictures; that is, upon images that are both super-mediated and media-saturated. In this, his photographs reflect the specific point he made about the increasingly and unceasingly media-dominated, media-dependent nature of contemporary culture and, in turn, they also serve as reminders that his observations are acutely relevant at present. Demand expands

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[185] Muniz and Demand, "A Notion of Space," unpaginated.

[186] See page 158, footnote 94.

[187] In this way, Demand's photographs suggest what Susan Sontag claimed unequivocally: "the camera's rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses" [Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1977), 23]. The question of what is not included in any given photograph (but not necessarily what is *hidden*, as if willfully concealed by either the photographer or the photographic subject) will inform the later portions of this chapter's conclusion.

on this point in several interviews, expressing both his own curiosity about, and the unavoidability of, media-determined phenomena. He stated, for instance, that "[I am] interested in the fact that something has entered circulation in the form of a photo," and as a result, because "I'm sitting in the very same media world as you are…I realize that there are places that we all know but have never set foot in…[and] I am fascinated by these images."[188] Rather than suggesting that this is any sort of novel revelation, Demand said also, "…we're at the stage now where…we know that our experiences stem from the media but also that this is all we have."[189] As to the role of art in these circumstances, Demand asserted, "it is not to alarm or to seek shelter. It's to make it transparent, to understand its quality and to be constructive."[190]

This last comment, with its attention to the "transparent" and "constructive," indicates a crucial interpretive direction for Demand's photographs. The statement dates to 1996, an early moment in Demand's career, but given the consistency characterizing his oeuvre it remains applicable. As discussed already in this chapter, an impulse towards disclosure always courses through Demand's work in that he never opts to conceal some faint irregularities that expose certain truths about his pictures' fabrication. However, this transparency operates in tandem with a substantial withholding of information and it is, ultimately, the calculated meshing of the transparent with the obscured that elicits an inquisitiveness on the part of the viewer. To reprise Benjamin's

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[188] Demand quoted in Widmer, "Building the Scene of the Crime," 14.

[189] Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand*, 107.

[190] Muniz and Demand, "A Notion of Space," unpaginated.

words, these images have the capacity to "stir [and challenge] the viewer,"[191] and it is this disposition that gives way to what can be regarded as the constructive element in Demand's photographs.

As with Mariele Neudecker's work, where the implications of creating art that adheres to principles of transparency and constructiveness are also important, Theodor Adorno's ideas about coming to terms with the past and, with this, his concept of the "ethical spectator"[192] bear significantly upon Demand's images. Like Neudecker's vitrines, Demand's photographs take on ethically charged subjects drawn from varied chapters of German history, many of which are bound up with the machinations of the Nazi era. Like Neudecker's work also, Demand's images, with their provocative presences and absences as well as their crime scene allusions, betray an investment in a type of seeing that is examinatory, investigative, and geared towards the contemplation of that which might not be conspicuously visible. His is a project, as is Neudecker's, that reflects the spirit of Adorno's mandate to turn, and then repeatedly return, to the past, and do so specifically in the role of the actively engaged "ethical spectator;" that is, as one who foregoes a purely pleasurable, aesthetic contemplation of art and instead demonstrates a willingness to "accede to knowledge."[193]

As Demand builds this instructive, principled dynamic into each of his images, the whole of his oeuvre can be said to manifest a vigorous and pointed constructive

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[191] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 226.

[192] See my earlier discussion on pages 23 – 27 and 45 – 46.

[193] Ibid.

dimension. Time and again, his work poses a strident challenge to any idea that the relationship between the real and the represented is either stable or complete. In fact, the preponderance of evidence, all of which is embedded in the photographs themselves, suggests just the opposite.[194] Furthermore, history-laden as Demand's images are, they confront their spectators with the question of what all of this might mean for the relationship between past and present. The past is real, to be sure—sometimes horrifically so, as Demand's images also let no one forget—but, complicating matters, the past is known only if it is told. This is a point that the Pascal Zimmer case makes emphatically clear: to this day, the real story of the boy's disappearance remains untold and he, tragically, remains lost.

Provocative even in its most general application, these observations are especially consequential for a country such as Germany where, on the one hand, the nation's "real" past is almost unmatched in its catastrophic magnitude and, at the same time, the charge to come to terms with that past remains steadfast; in short, where the need to process the past properly exists in the midst of, but incompatibly with, a hermeneutic system that

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[194] This point surfaces in some literature examining Demand's work. For example, Pepe Karmel wrote, "Reality is not something that exists without us, [Demand] seems to say; it is something we construct, cutting and pasting the raw materials of our lives" (see Karmel, "The Real Simulations of Thomas Demand," 149). Additionally, in "The Cavern of Images," Germano Celant explained that Demand's photographs investigate "perception through reconstruction—by exposing its imprecision and absence of detail…" (in Demand, Celant, Bonini, Farquharson, and Storr, *Thomas Demand*, unpaginated). The texts that do address this aspect of Demand's work tend not to take account of the cumulative effect of the many key, repeated elements that define his work. In other words, although they may briefly discuss these notions of instability or incompleteness, they do not draw into their analyses the implications of the works' German content, postwar context, paper medium, destroyed models, ubiquitous traces, etc. As this chapter hopes to make clear, it is exactly these combined effects that must be considered in order to most profitably interpret Demand's work.

destabilizes the very concept of the real. Demand's photographs, which reflect but are not exclusively bound to the specifics of his own postwar cultural milieu, suggest a way to proceed in light of this predicament. Specifically, they advance a means for coming to terms with the fact that the past is real but, if it is ever to become history, it can only exist as representation.

III. History, Re-presentation, and the Ethics of Absence

Demand's is a body of work that directs its attention to history and, in particular, history's inevitably mediated nature. What comes into focus in Demand's images is the unavoidable dilemma that to exist as history the past must be told, but precisely because it is told it can never be either stable or complete. Meticulously and expressly constructed, as we saw with *Corridor* (1995; fig.60) Demand's photographs are always a calculated fusion of omissions and inclusions, and are always a demonstration that the past can only ever be made present in a form replete with absence.

A comparison between Demand's work and that of Jeff Wall is especially useful with regard to this issue of history and the nature of its representation. Wall, like Demand, assigns the strategy of appropriation a significant place in his oeuvre, makes history—specifically, art's history—a direct point of reference in much of his work, and produces large-scale photographs of his compositions.[195] Additionally, striking thematic and formal parallels exist between certain of Demand's and Wall's photographs, making a comparative analysis especially compelling. Take, for example, Demand's *Haltestelle*

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[195] Jeff Wall, born in 1946 in Vancouver, British Columbia is best known for making large-scale photographic transparencies and mounting them in lightboxes.

(2009; fig. 63) and Wall's *The Goat* (1989; fig. 75), or Demand's *Pit* (1999; fig. 76) and Wall's *Polishing* (1998; fig. 77).

In the first instance, both *Haltestelle* and *The Goat* are compositions dominated by a single structure: a bus shelter and a garage, respectively. These two buildings resemble one another in terms of size, shape, and proportions, and both appear to be constructed of horizontally oriented wood siding. In each photograph, no more than a narrow band of space separates the base of the structure from the lower edge of the picture plane. Additionally, an unseen source of light illuminates a patch of ground before the buildings, as well as one side and the front of each structure, but large portions of each image are obscured by darkness. A scattering of leaves appears to have landed on the concrete around Demand's bus shelter, and Wall's garage looks to be surrounded by an abundance of foliage. The white paneled door of Wall's garage is fully closed and as such serves as the backdrop for four of the composition's five figures. In contrast, Demand's bus shelter has neither a door nor any figures in or around it. The entry to the shelter simply gives way to a dark, cavernous space, creating a void that reiterates and amplifies the emptiness of the scene as a whole.

This last observation—that in Demand's images, emptiness functions as a backdrop for more emptiness—sits at the crux of the Demand-Wall comparison. Accordingly, it informs the second pair of juxtaposed photographs, also. Demand's *Pit* and Wall's *Polishing* both present windowless, interior spaces, with a chair positioned slightly to the left of the composition's central axis, a table to the right, and a single personal item (a raincoat, a grey towel) hanging near the left edge of the pictured space. Both are relatively monochromatic images (save the yellow raincoat in Demand's

photograph), which to a significant degree is the result of each artist devoting substantial

portions of his composition to open expanses of beige wall space. As to the human

presence in Wall's image, it is of course most emphatically asserted by way of the male

figure situated between the chair, table, and closet. Not only is he the sole figure in the

photograph, he is literally central to the composition, positioned at the intersection of the

image's horizontal and vertical axes. Set against the drabness of his surroundings, the

figure's bright white shirt also draws the spectator's gaze and effectively places a

highlight upon the figure and his central position.

Seeing images such as *Haltestelle* and *The Goat* or *Pit* and *Polishing* side by side

amplifies the sense of emptiness in Demand's photographs. With no human figures upon

which to gaze, without even a fragment of text on which to ground any hypotheses

regarding the specific histories associated with the scenes, Demand's pictures appear

bereft of essential compositional elements. However, this is true only insofar as, per

convention, the spectator is trained to seek out, and assign privilege to, such human

presences.

In the long-esteemed tradition of history painting—and, given his subjects,

Demand is certainly a participant in this tradition—those components that point to the

human subject(s) of a given narrative are exactly what constitute an image's focal

points.[196] Compare, for instance, Jacques-Louis David's exemplar of Neoclassical history

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[196] Of course this is not only true with regard to images classified as history paintings, but in that Demand's photographs always refer to historically significant events and sites, this connection seems an important one to draw. Also, as history painting became most officially (and highly) recognized as the worthiest of genres at a time that coincides with the height of the Royal Academies in Paris (established in 1648) and London (established in 1768), its rise to can be counted as yet another tradition with origins located in a period associated with the establishment of Enlightenment thinking.

painting, *Death of Marat* (1793; fig. 78) with Demand's *Bathroom* (1997; fig. 61). Each

bath scene represents the site of a sensational, politically-motivated death: a German

politician's Swiss hotel room in Demand's case, and in David's, the home of a French

Revolutionary martyr. In each image, the tub—the composition's single largest

element—is partially concealed by folds of cloth, but in neither picture does the fabric

fully enclose the left side of the tub. There, in David's painting, the viewer glimpses

bloody bathwater and, emerging from it, Marat's lifeless body. Likewise, Demand

depicts a patch of dirtied water visible at the left end of Barschel's tub, but there is no

corpse and nothing else fills the space. In the extreme foreground of each image, directly

beneath the draping white fabrics, one finds evidence suggesting the murderer's presence.

David pictures a knife, with drying blood on its blade, resting beneath a trail of blood

whose point of origin is an open wound in Marat's chest. Occupying roughly the same

place in Demand's photograph, a creased bathmat suggests the movement of a departing

perpetrator, but no marks—a footprint maybe, or drops of water from a struggle in the

tub—blemish its pristine white surface.

The human presence in David's image is superabundant: flesh and blood in the

left half of the composition and, throughout the right, text, which is both personal and

distinctive, taking the form of cursive script as well as a highly specific dedication from

David to Marat. In Demand's photograph, the circumstances are decidedly different.

The painstaking precision and detail David applied to his convincing representation of

Marat's body and to those objects that tell the story of his murder (paper, quill, script,

knife, blood stains) are assigned in Demand's photograph to the setting alone. In fact, the

background in David's image is barely articulated at all. Consisting largely of a dark,

empty expanse rising up immediately behind the tub, it eliminates any sense of deep, recessional space, so that Marat, along with the letter in his left hand, stands out sharply against it in the extreme foreground of the compositional space. In Demand's work, no human element takes such an emphatic, central position. Instead, in the absence of figure and text, the spectator finds faint seams, slight pencil marks, and paper folds; in other words, one encounters the subtle but ubiquitous presence of Demand himself.

Out of both sets of comparisons—Demand's work alongside Wall's, and Demand's set against David's—a decisive point emerges. By excising human figures and text, and by representing culturally significant sites that display, at every turn, signs of their meticulous fabrication, Demand shows history as sheer context and constructedness. To be sure, this is a decidedly postmodern view; it aligns directly, for example, with the aforementioned theories advanced by Barthes and Derrida and, in terms of visual art specifically, it resonates especially closely with the ideas Mieke Bal developed in *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*.[197]

Bal posited a notion of history as fundamentally and necessarily unstable, an entity knowable and largely reconstituted by every successive telling of it. Her text begins with a passage that reads almost as if it were written with Demand's work in

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[197] Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). More generally on the subject of citationality, quoting, and contextuality, see again Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins*, 320, where he writes, "there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring." Gerhard Richter, writing about Derrida and deconstruction, also identifies the centrality of contexts when he states, "the thought and operation of deconstruction require that definitions and essentializing determinations be placed under erasure in favor of a perpetual recontextualizing [and] rereading…" [Gerhard Richter, "Between Translation and Invention: The Photograph in Deconstruction," in Jacques Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography*, ed. Gerhard Richter, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), xiii].

mind. "Like any form of representation," Bal claims, "art is inevitably engaged with what came before it, and that engagement is an active reworking. It specifies what and how our gaze sees. Hence, the work performed by later images obliterates the older images as they were before that intervention and creates new versions of old images instead."[198] As Demand is unremitting in ensuring that his images show off such an "active reworking" of the past, it is the very fact of historical "intervention" that his images put on display.

In a certain capacity, also, Demand's photographs quite plainly picture the instability to which Bal refers. The seams and traces reveal that Demand constructed his scenes of paper, an ephemeral and unstable material. Moreover, the unsealed edges and slight gaps hint at the idea that the sculptures, even at the moment Demand photographs them, might be nearing the verge of collapse. Of course, the medium of photography is itself commonly understood as a type of gesture against exactly this type of loss; as Roland Barthes remarked in *Camera Lucida*, photographs have "a strange stasis, the stasis of an *arrest*."[199] Fixing a moment in time, photographs hold out the possibility of preserving, of making something steady and lasting out of that which is, by nature, impermanent. Demand's images accomplish this, but ironically, as his photographs also

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[198] Bal, 1.

[199] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 91. Geoffrey Batchen also addressed the perceived power of photography to protect against anticipated loss. His discussion includes a consideration of the relationship between the origins of painting—and here he looks to Pliny's often-cited myth of the Corinthian maid, as well as Victor Burgin's, Robert Rosenblum's, and Jacques Derrida's work on the subject of the myth—and the origins of photography [Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 112 – 120].

capture and display the traces of their fabrication, they also fix the fact of their own

unfixed-ness.

Conceivably, Demand could assert the notions of instability and constructedness

in countless ways; that he does so, always and only, using a visual language punctuated

specifically by traces is especially suggestive. Particularly when discussing a body of

work with a postmodern mien, to speak of traces is to raise the specter of deconstruction

and, once again, Jacques Derrida, its seminal theorist.

Derrida defined neither "deconstruction," nor "trace;" doing so, he explained,

would misrepresent the nature of deconstruction itself:

> I would say that the difficulty of *defining* and therefore also of *translating*
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> the word 'deconstruction' stems from the fact that all the predicates, all
>
> the defining concepts, all the lexical significations, and even the syntactic
>
> articulations, which seem at one moment to lend themselves to this
>
> definition or that translation, are also deconstructed or deconstructible,
>
> directly or otherwise, etc. And that goes for the *word*, the very unity of
>
> the *word* deconstruction, as for every *word*.[200]

Nonetheless, the mode of analysis denoted by the term "deconstruction" as Derrida used

it is bound up with the concept of traces. Where deconstruction "involves taking

something apart in a way that heeds the logic of its own…plan and thereby exposes the

internal tensions that both enable and vex it,"[201] it presupposes the existence of "traces"

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[200] From Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," excerpted in Richter, "Between Translation and Invention," in *Copy, Archive, Signature*, xii.

[201] Ibid., x.

of those internal tensions, indicators that are integral to, but also destabilizing and largely

concealed portions of, the system under examination.[202] In Demand's work, where ever-

present but nearly intangible traces allude to both the building and the breaking down of

each representation, one finds visual expression of these central deconstructionist tenets.

The implication, following the logic of deconstruction, is that Demand's images expose a

principle—in this case, that history is matter inseparable from the facts of its context and

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[202] Further elaborating upon the interconnection between deconstruction and traces, and in the process suggesting the possible meanings as well as the necessarily elusive nature of both concepts, Derrida also stated, "The word 'deconstruction,' like all other words, acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions…For me…the word has interest only within a certain context, where it replaces and lets itself be determined by such other words as 'écriture,' 'trace,' 'différance,' 'supplément,' 'hymen,' 'pharmakon,' 'marge,' entame,' 'parergon,' etc." (quoted in Richter, "Between Translation and Invention," in Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, xii – xiii). Derrida also often writes about traces as types of signs that are not in any conventional sense either present or absent. They relate to a presence that infuses, but is also outside of, as a sort a contradiction and remainder to, that which is the object of his study. For example, Derrida seeks to conceptualize "[t]he trace (of that) which can never be represented, the trace which itself can never be presented: that is, appear and manifest itself, as such, in its phenomenon. The trace beyond that which profoundly links fundamental ontology and phenomenology…but also…threatens the authority of…the thing itself in its essence" (in Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins*, 23, 25; see also Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 26, where Derrida states, "Nothing…is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces"). Summarizing this idea, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wrote in the "Translator's Preface" to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, that "Derrida's trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present" [Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravaorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), xvii]. If Spivak's characterization of the trace resonates also as a description of the medium of photography per se, this is entirely apt: in that a photograph records (to quote Roland Barthes) "for certain *what has been*," (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 85) it does constitute a type of trace and, as Richter observed, "[f]or Derrida the photographic image cannot be thought in isolation from the concept of the trace…" (Richter, "Between Translation and Invention," in Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, xxvii). With regard to Demand's work, this makes the notion of the trace doubly meaningful as he creates photographs—traces—that are themselves teeming with traces. Accordingly, the idea that the significance of Demand's images is in part a product of that which is not expressly pictured in them will remain important through the rest of this chapter.

constructedness—that, although perhaps unrecognized, was "always already" present.[203]

To consider this in terms of the comparison between David's and Demand's bath scenes,

for example, it becomes evident that the *Death of Marat* is no less calculatedly

constructed than Demand's *Bathroom* and, like Demand's, its composition reflects just as

deliberate a balance of inclusions and omissions.

That it is specifically a photograph that gives way to these observations about

traces, absences, and presences, is especially fitting, for photography has, from its earliest

moments, been noted for its unmatched ability to capture the otherwise unseen and, at the

same time, for its singular relationship to both presence and absence.[204] With regard to

exposing that which may typically remain unrecognized, in 1839, the very year

photography was publicly unveiled as a new medium, a writer for the London *Literary*

Gazette reported that spectators were astonished when, after viewing a selection of Louis

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[203] As to the "always already" nature of what deconstruction often illuminates, Derrida says, "As we have seen, the very condition of a deconstruction may be at work, in the work, *within* the system to be deconstructed; it may *already* be located there, already at work, not at the center but in an excentric center…participating in the construction of what it at the same time threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes *afterwards*, from the outside, one fine day; it is always already at work in the work; one must just know how to identify the right or wrong element…[T]he disruptive force of deconstruction is always already contained within the architecture of the work…" [Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 73].

[204] The correspondence between photography and deconstruction is certainly open to theorization, also, as Gerhard Richter demonstrates in "Between Translation and Invention" (in Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*, ix - xxxviii). In addition, see Jacques Derrida, *Right of Inspection*, trans. David Willis (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), unpaginated, wherein Derrida claims that "[t]he spectral is the essence of photography." As significant as the concept of the trace is to both photography and deconstruction, and as poised between presence and absence as both the trace and the spectral are, one could also identify the spectral as an essential dimension of Derrida's theorization of deconstruction.

Daguerre's first daguerreotypes and then "applying the microscope [to them], an

immense quantity of details, of such extreme fineness that the best sight could not seize

them with the naked eye, were discovered."[205] Only a few years later, in 1846, a more

abstract and intangible photographic quality caught the attention of Walt Whitman.

Having visited "the Picture Gallery at the upper corner of Murray street and Broadway,

commonly known as *Plumbe's Daguerreotype establishment*," where hundreds of

photographic portraits lined the walls, Whitman remarked that, "…we identify the

semblance with the reality.—And even more than that. For the strange fascination of

looking at the eyes of a [Daguerreotype] portrait, sometimes goes beyond what comes

from the real orbs themselves."[206]

As photography's history developed through the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries, its discourses continued to include commentary addressing both of these extra-

ordinary capabilities. In the course of reflecting upon more than 125 years of that

history, for example, Susan Sontag maintained that "[w]hatever the camera records is a

disclosure—whether it is imperceptible, fleeting parts of movement, an order that natural

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[205] Reprinted from *The Literary Gazette* (London), July 13, 1839, 444, in Beaumont
Newhall, ed., *Photography, Essays and Images: Illustrated Readings in the History of
Photography* (New York and Boston: The Museum of Modern Art), 1980, 18. Susan
Sontag made a comparable point about the photographic enterprise of Daguerre's
contemporary, William Henry Fox Talbot, stating that he "immediately grasped the
camera's ability to isolate forms which normally escape the naked eye and which
painting had never recorded." See Sontag, *On Photography*, 95.

[206]Originally published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle and Kings County Democrat*
(Brooklyn, New York), July 2, 1846, unpaginated (first page of issue). See,
http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8460001_WHITMAN_PLUMBE_DAILY_
EAGLE_1846-07-02.pdf.

vision is incapable of perceiving or a 'heightened reality'..."[207] Sontag's words

themselves evoke those of Walter Benjamin, the figure she considered "photography's

most original and important critic."[208] Specifically, they bring his "Short History of

Photography" to bear once again on this discussion for, in the early paragraphs of that

text, Benjamin noted how, with a camera,

> …the most exact technique can give its products a magical value which a
>
> painted picture can no longer have for us…It is indeed a different nature
>
> that speaks to the camera from the one which addresses the eye; different
>
> above all in the sense that instead of a space worked through by a human
>
> consciousness there appears one which is affected unconsciously…
>
> Photography makes aware for the first time the optical unconscious, just as
>
> psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious.[209]

To a significant degree, photography's uncommon revelatory capacity is a consequence

of its most unique property; namely, in order to make a photograph, that which appears in

the image did have to exist in front of the camera's lens. Trick photography and digital

imaging technologies can disqualify this assumption, but Demand makes no use of such

processes; his images are solely the product of what he describes as "old-fashioned

'analogue' photography."[210] In this, they are fully bound up with what Roland Barthes'

articulated as the essential fact that, "in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has*

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207 Sontag, *On Photography*, 121.

208 Ibid.

209 Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," in *Screen*, 7.

210 Karmel, "The Real Simulations of Thomas Demand," 148.

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been there[211]…The Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been…*"[212]

On account of exactly the situation Barthes described, photographic images also create a unique continuum between past, present, and future; as such, they constitute a particularly apt medium for examining the nature of the relationship between history and representation. As I have tried to show, Demand's work is acutely honed in on precisely the dynamics of this continuum. Demand presents his work only in photographic form, and in most cases his photographs reprise preexisting photographs. Moreover, his images bring the past to the present in emphatic fashion; indeed, they are not only media-saturated, they are also history-saturated. Rather than simply picturing a discrete facet from the past, each of his photographs refers backwards three times, most proximally to Demand's own model, then to the image upon which he based the model, and most distantly to the history recalled by that image. However, for all of this calling forth and preserving of the past, Demand's photographs also betray a constant allegiance with the fact of absence. Here, it is important to note that Demand does not reproduce imagery that was already devoid of figures and text; instead, although his source images do have these elements, he deliberately and always leaves them out of own his compositions. Again, an image such as *Corridor*, for example, is highly suggestive of human presence and activity, but in Demand's photograph they are suspiciously absent. Working this way, Demand inflects the emptiness of his work with, specifically, a sense of loss and

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[211] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76.

[212] Ibid., 85.

this, in turn, calls attention to the issue of what these images, despite their unique relationship to the reality of the past, might in fact not disclose.

This is a way of considering the relationship between photography and loss that deviates from some of the most prominent theorizations of the topic and, accordingly, sets Demand's work apart from that of several of his most prominent predecessors. For instance, to extend the point made only a few pages earlier that photography has long been regarded as a powerful antidote to unwanted loss because it possesses, in Barthes' words, "the stasis of an *arrest*," [213] Susan Sontag succinctly noted, "[e]ver since cameras were invented in 1839, photography has kept company with death. Because an image produced with a camera is, literally, a trace of something brought before the lens, photographs were superior to any painting as a memento of the vanished past and the dear departed."[214]

Simply by virtue of being photographs, Demand's pictures do evoke this uniquely photographic capacity and, to this end, Demand acknowledges that "photographs are a metaphor of death. Because times stands still in them and because they illustrate the passing of time so clearly."[215] However, with their emphasis on not just emptiness, but on an emptiness associated with loss specifically, and along with this, the fact and frailty of their constructedness, his images also suggest a concerted investment in exploring

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[213] See page 40 and footnote 79. This is not to suggest that Barthes is not a theorist of photography as loss and death; rather, it is meant to imply that the idea of effecting a state of stasis or arrest can be conceptualized as a gesture against loss.

[214] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 24.

[215] Demand quoted in Widmer, "Building the Scene of the Crime," 15.

broader questions concerning the nature and limits of the relationship between history and representation.

For Walter Benjamin also, the notion of loss is inseparable from the medium of photography. In his formulation, the mechanical reproduction of a work of art—i.e., Demand's photographs of his sculptures—would suffer inevitably from what he termed a loss of aura. As Benjamin described it, "[e]ven the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element…[that is,] its unique existence as the place where it happens to be…the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced."[216] Demand's work poses two challenges to Benjamin's conclusion about the inherently diminished nature of the mechanically reproduced work of art. First, on the basis of source material pulled from the world of popular media imagery, Demand crafts objects—sculptures, but ultimately photographs—that circulate throughout the ostensibly more elevated cultural realms of the art museum, gallery, and collector. In addition, as Demand's photographs document his sculptures, they picture the product of a process that is a reversal of the one theorized by Benjamin: they display works of art that are manual reproductions of photographic images and, notably, it is the hand-crafted sculptures that have lost countless details regarding the "history which [the original scene, and its photograph] experienced."

This last point, with its emphasis on the fact that even the most painstakingly laborious and singular representation of the past is incomplete, is crucial to interpreting

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[216] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 222 – 223.

the sense of loss in Demand's work. Ulrich Baer, in his essay for the catalogue accompanying Demand's 2007 exhibition *L'Esprit d'Escalier*, directs his attention to exactly this aspect of Demand's photographs, and considers it in connection with the viability of "viewing the world either as an image (a standard photographic practice) or as the range of possible objects accessed via perception, cognition, or experience within a sphere of life."[217] Citing Martin Heidegger's theorization of "the world-picture [which] when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the *world conceived and grasped as picture*,"[218] Baer contends that "this transformation of what we can know into something that we can see amounts to a profound reduction of the world."[219] With this scenario in mind, Baer reads the omissions in Demand's photographs as an acknowledgement of the exclusions inherent to such a worldview. On account of what he describes as Demand's "obvious delight in the facsimile nature of his work,"[220] Baer also regards the exclusions as an invitation to think about incompleteness as a positive, promising condition. As Demand focuses on picturing the past, Baer maintains that the photographs "suggest that the gaps and omissions in our historical knowledge may not be 'problems to be fixed' by a better and more comprehensive telling but,

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[217] Ulrich Baer, "End of a World: On Thomas Demand's Photographs," in Demand, Eggers, Léith, Oliver, Wallace, Baer, Thomas, and Joncosa, *Thomas Demand: L'ésprit d'escalier*, 89.

[218] Ibid., emphasis added by Baer.

[219] Ibid., 91.

[220] Ibid., 88.

instead, a space in which to realize that all history leaves something out and that, in this sense, history might not be over."[221]

Although Baer's approach to Demand's photographs is not explicitly moral in nature, the idea that "history might not be over" converges with the ethical and open-ended mandate at the core of Adorno's thoughts about "coming to terms with the past." As Baer claims, the recognition that no story is complete "even (or maybe especially) when it has been presented to us in the form of a widely circulated image[222]…opens up history to re-vision, to another interpretation, and thus to revision in a positive sense."[223] Baer's qualification of "revision in a positive sense" evokes the issue of revisionist history, which is relevant to any episode in history including, of course, the Holocaust; his words are a reminder that the negotiability of the past is both liberating and dangerous. For Adorno, the Holocaust and its aftermath made the need for ongoing, critical retrospection both urgent and grave; Demand's imagery, with its provocative traces, its specific references to episodes of iniquity, and its general concordance with the crime scene dynamic, "opens up history" to a type of engagement that is comparably pressing, sustained, and critical. However, this is not where Adorno's bearing upon Demand ceases, nor does it mark the limit of the ethical dimension of Demand' work.

Standing before Demand's photographs, the spectator is faced with scenes that appear empty and austere yet filled with traces of human presence, that are banal but also oddly unidentifiable, and that have about them an air of desertion but at the same time

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[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid., 89.

[223] Ibid., 106.

seem carefully prepared for close scrutiny. Confronted with such an ambiguous array of clues and evidence, the spectator has decisions to make. How, for example, is it possible to reconcile the puzzling, even contradictory, aspects of Demand's photographs, and what are the implications of doing, or choosing not to do, so? By drawing the spectator into this line of inquiry and cultivating the forces of doubt and suspicion, Demand's photographs prompt an intellectually-engaged, critical way of seeing and so, as their focus turns consistently to the question of how it is that the past presses upon the present, they quickly raise the specter of Adorno's ethical spectator. As I am arguing, their challenge rests with the idea that the past can come to the present only in a form that is both unstable and incomplete. Furthermore, as we will see, it also turns on the fact that as surely as Demand's photographs make this assertion, they also expose an inclination to believe otherwise.

As most viewers' accounts indicate, the initial reading of Demand's images is that they picture actual rooms, buildings, and so forth. While this reflects long-standing assumptions about the veracity of what photographs represent, it may also point to a persistent desire on the part of the spectator to maintain faith in the reliability of representation. It is only after taking a second or third look, and conceding the presence of the unexpected seams, pencil marks, and paper folds, for example, that the spectator recognizes the artificial nature of Demand's compositions. In keeping with his interest in Heidegger's notion of the world-picture, Baer theorizes this tendency to engage with Demand's photographs in a conventional manner—that is, imagining they picture locations and objects that align with coherent, comprehensible sites and stories—as a sign "that we are willing, able, and even desperate to buy into a narrative…[and of] our

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investment in having a [picture-able] world at all."[224] For, if we relinquish our hold on the belief that the world is knowable by way of our picturing it, the stakes appear to be high: we resign ourselves to a place of uncertainty, and thus to the impossibility of a masterful position, relative to whatever it is we may wish to know. Like Adorno's words, Demand's photographs point to a moral stance aligned with a state of non-certainty; amplifying the relevance of Adorno's work to Demand's oeuvre, Demand sets this ethical position in contrast to one privileging the notion of mastery and thus calls to mind Adorno's concerns about coming to terms with the past in the aftermath of the totalizing, master narrative formulated and pursued by the Third Reich.

To be clear, asserting that history is incomplete or unstable does not necessarily equate with claiming it to be either flawed or diminished. Baer contends that the incompleteness of Demand's photographs is a desirable state: the work "pulls us in"[225] with its gaps and omissions and, as a result, it affords the opportunity to engage productively with the past. Keeping in mind Adorno's moral directive, Baer's line of though is further developed in the ideas of Mieke Bal and Lisa Saltzman, whose views about history, incompleteness, and ethics also resonate with Demand's work. In *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*, Saltzman considers the role of the index in contemporary art; she looks to artists who create photographs, films, silhouettes, and casts and finds that, to a significant extent, "these artists each pursue something of that indexical capacity of the image, of the visual field, only to

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[224] Ibid., 106 – 107.

[225] Ibid., 89.

question that capacity, critique that capacity, empty that capacity."[226] According to

Saltzman, the index continues to hold and convey meaning despite the fact that these

bodies of work deploy it as "the empty index, the impotent index, the index at one

remove, the index that is no longer a sign, but instead, pure signifier."[227] Although it has

been emptied in terms of "a certain [conventional] relation to the real,"[228] it has not been

rendered mute or purposeless; rather, its emptiness alters its referential capacity such that

it purposefully demonstrates "its self-conscious relation to, yet irredeemable distance

from, the historical objects it takes as its subject."[229] As Saltzman's argument turns to this

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[226] Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*, 12 - 13. The artists whose work Saltzman discusses most prominently include Krzysztof Wodiczko, Tony Oursler, Kara Walker, William Kentridge, Rachel Whiteread, and Cornelia Parker. Although Saltzman does not discuss Demand's work, she does mention, in a footnote related to James Casebere's photographs that "[o]ne might think as well here of the work of…Thomas Demand" (ibid., 121). In addition, as Saltzman notes, the idea of the critiqued and emptied index brings to mind the extensive scholarship devoted to the seemingly impossible task of representation, and especially painting, in the wake of the Holocaust (ibid., 6). As discussed in both the Introduction and Conclusion of this dissertation, Demand's work takes a place in this lineage; the references to Nazi-era German history, in combination with the various types of absence characterizing Demand's photographs, suggest this connection. At the same time, however, certain defining features of Demand's work—its deeply and explicitly mediated nature, for example, or its criminal dimension—suggest that rather than constituting a circumscribed engagement with topics directly associated with World War II, Demand's body of work intersects with facets of these subjects and the discourses surrounding them but, ultimately, extends and shifts its focus so that his creative practice relates more broadly to all disciplines concerned with history and its representation. For discussions and bibliographies regarding the question of representational impossibility in the aftermath of trauma see Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution;"* Saltzman, *Anselm Kiefer and Art After Auschwitz*; LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; and, Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*.

[227] Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter*, 13.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid.

"self-conscious" articulation of an "irredeemable distance" from the index's historical

subject, it could well be applied to Demand's work; making her argument's relevance

even more pointed, Saltzman suggests that the determination to display this

"irredeemable distance" is "perhaps…where the ethics…of such work may be

found…[for] as the historical continues to recede from the present, as contemporary

events continue to defy and yet demand representation, it will remain the ongoing

aesthetic and ethical challenge of the visual to find the means to make memory

matter."[230]

Bal asserts a closely related point. Like Saltzman, she notes "an engagement of

contemporary culture with the past that has important implications for the ways we

conceive of both history and culture in the present."[231] Key to her analysis is the idea that

all art, in differing ways and to varying degrees, engages with what came before it; it is a

reworking of concepts, forms, and traditions, for example, and as such is "an intervention

in the material handed down."[232] Not only, therefore, does the past bear upon the present

but, as we have noted, one must acknowledge also that the present bears upon the past

and, as a result, understand that history can never exist in a fixed, stable state.   However,

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[230] Ibid., 13, 24. Susan Sontag made a comparable argument regarding the fact that an indexical representation might be incapable of fully conveying the substance of the history to which it refers but nonetheless constitutes a crucial means of connecting the past to the present. "Let the atrocious images haunt us," she wrote, "[e]ven if they are only tokens, and cannot possibly encompass most of the reality to which they refer, they still perform a vital function. The images say: This is what human beings are capable of doing—they may volunteer to do, enthusiastically, self-righteously. Don't forget." See Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 115.

[231] Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, 1.

[232] Ibid., 9.

just as Saltzman associates the recognition of distance—the gap between historical

subjects and their representation—with an ethical stance discernible in much

contemporary art, Bal contends that "[t]his input from the present is—emphatically—not

to be taken as a flaw in our historical awareness or as a failure to distance ourselves from

our own time."[233] Accepting history's unfixed nature is crucial, Bal continues, for it

allows "history, instead of being the isolated and isolating act of severance it often is, [to]

become an act of connection again—of disciplines, discourses, and the images that are,

after all, the skin of our culture."[234] In words that evoke the spirit and the very title of

Saltzman's text, Bal says, "it makes the works, as well as their continuing presence, still

matter."[235] This is a quality, or a point of view, evident also in Demand's photographs,

and it rests with their slightest and most immaterial of details—the faint seams, gaps,

folds, and the constant emptinesses that house them—and their capacity to stir the

spectators' inquisitiveness and analytic faculties.

With these ever-present traces and absences, Demand's photographs appear at

every turn steeped in the aesthetics of the crime scene. For a body of work that is to a

significant degree focused on the subject of history, the relationship is fitting: by

definition, history's own subject is that which is no longer present, it exists only by virtue

of its representation, and on both counts, it is closely allied with the notion of loss.

Similarly, the vast majority of crimes, and certainly the largest portion of those to which

Demand's works refer are defined by loss: Pascal Zimmer's abduction, Jeffrey Dahmer's

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[233] Ibid., 15.

[234] Ibid., 268.

[235] Ibid., 15.

serial killings, or the mysterious death of Uwe Barschel, for example. With all of this in mind, and as this analysis of Demand's work nears its close, a return to the *Tosa-Klause*, a crime scene itself, is in order.

Klause I (2006; fig. 2) pictures a dramatically cropped view of an unidentified building's seemingly untouched and unremarkable exterior. A narrow, recessed entryway appears near the center of the composition, with a paneled door, a red and black mat, and a white mailbox occupying the entry space. Above and to the left of the mailbox, a single white hook appears affixed to the wall; to the right of the entryway, a piece of equipment resembling a wall-mounted vending machine sits beneath the lower portion of a white and green sign. Emphasizing the shallowness of the compositional space, only a small strip of ground separates the building's façade from the photograph's lower edge.

For a scene that may at first glance appear static and unforthcoming given its elimination of anecdotal detail, its relatively flat, uniform lighting, its cropping, and its lack of recessional, contextual space, *Klause I* does contain several compositional elements seemingly designed to pique the spectator's curiosity and prompt a sense of engagement with the material on display. For example, as the only recessed space in the photograph, the entryway is visually inviting. Its alcove extends forward and then down with a single step toward the spot that would be occupied by the spectator, suggesting a channel of connection between viewer and pictured space. Further, the door to which this passage leads appears slightly ajar: the darkened, vertical space between its right panel and its frame is just wide enough in comparison to the other gaps to imply that the door could swing, or be pulled, open. In these ways, the threshold appears to beckon rather

than bar entry, to invite rather than preclude interaction. Much the same can be said for other details in the composition: the small hook to the left of the entry looks no more bereft of what may have hung there in the past than it seems ready for what might come next, the vending machine appears emptied but also neatly prepared for a new supply of products, the unmarked mailbox seems cleared of all previous tenants' names or numbers and at the same time expectant of a new set of information, and even the mat, which like the door is slightly but noticeably askew, looks both used and left for future use.

Brought into the scheme of the crime scene, the viewer is placed in a position comparable to that of the investigators charged with visiting and revisiting the site of Pascal Zimmer's disappearance. Invited in, urged to explore, and asked to examine, the spectator is compelled to exercise an actively critical and inquisitive approach to the matter at hand. Crucially, though, the mandate Demand constructs is not only to adopt such an approach, but also to accede to the knowledge that the evidence may not, finally, fully convey the truth: the Pascal case does still remain unresolved, in part because of and in part in spite of the repeated interviews, reports, statements, and reconstructions. In other words, those curious and disruptive traces, which the spectator inevitably comes upon in the course of the visual scrutiny prescribed by Demand's photographs, must stand acknowledged. They concepts they signal—absence, presence, constructedness, unfixedness—along with their status as particularly effective prompts to look and think carefully, render them the most vital of all clues regarding the nature of history and its representation. They animate Demand's austere scenes, they engage his viewer's attention and, in turn, they bring the past to bear upon the present in manner that is not only pressing but is also distinctly ethically-charged.

Ultimately, Demand's photographs function as reminders that history is a field to be approached like a crime scene, where absences and presences command attention in equal measure, where the evidence at hand will always and only tell a portion of the story, and where, for exactly these reasons, the curious and disruptive traces must stand. Without doubt, Demand's images assert: any disavowal of those seams, gaps, and marks would amount to a deliberate act of denial or even a calculated type of cover-up, and this would in turn render the past inert and unyielding, the irretrievable victim of its own telling.

CHAPTER 3

ALL THE TRAPPINGS OF HOME: GREGOR SCHNEIDER'S *HAUS U R*

I. The House on Unterheydener Strasse

House u r
The *House u r* is located on Unterheydener Straße in Rheydt, Germany. An abbreviation of this address, "*u r*" also stands for *Umbauter Raum* (Constructed Room), *Unsichtbarer Raum* (Invisible Room), or it can evoke alternate associations.[236]

Gregor Schneider's *Haus u r* (fig. 79) is a model of both obsession and compulsion.   Located at number 12 Unterheydener Strasse in Rheydt, just south of the German city of Mönchengladbach, the structure was—before it became the *Haus u r* project—Schneider's family home. In 1985, at the age of sixteen, Schneider received permission from his father to use the then-unoccupied house as studio space. At that point, the building took on the roles it has never since relinquished: it became both the primary site and the medium of Schneider's work.[237]

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[236] Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 226.

[237] As will be discussed throughout this chapter, many details about Schneider's work on *Haus u r* remain unclear, and seemingly intentionally so. This is true with regard to the specific terms and history of Schneider's use of the property on Unterheydener Strasse. Commonly, no detailed information on these matters is included essays and articles about his work, and in texts that do address the issue the facts presented are often minimal. For example, Daniel Birnbaum wrote that "[m]ore than fifteen years ago, Schneider, a teenager at the time, began taking the building on Unterheydener Strasse apart from within. (The structure, apparently owned by his family, was once thought to be uninhabitable because of its proximity to an industrial complex)" [Birnbaum, "Interiority Complex," *Artforum* 38 (summer 2000), 142; reprinted in Udo Kittelmann, ed., *Gregor Schneider: totes Haus Ur: la Biennale di Venezia 2001* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 73). In "Life's Echo: Gregor Schneider's *Dead Haus u r*" (in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 103), Paul Schimmel explained, "when Schneider was sixteen, his father allowed him to use [the house] as a studio, later permitting him to live

Most basically, *Haus u r* amounts to an ongoing construction project, as it is Schneider's perennial reconstruction of the spaces inside the house on Unterheydener Strasse that constitutes the work. This means, for example, that in a bedroom, Schneider builds a wall on top of a wall, a hardwood floor upon a hardwood floor, a ceiling suspended just slightly below the original ceiling, and a window inside a window. Once Schneider completes the new room, it becomes impossible to discern that it is not in fact the original bedroom. Schneider applies this process to nearly every area of the house, building and rebuilding so that spaces including the main entry hall, the kitchen, a dining room, guest rooms, closets, and staircases are repeatedly, and seemingly endlessly, transformed into what appear to be exact replicas of themselves.

From the exterior, the house betrays nothing of either the nature or the scope of *Haus u r*. Indeed, from without, the structure simply seems to be an unassuming single-family terrace house. As such, its outward presentation is akin to the rebuilt rooms inside: each is a façade, a guise of ordinariness, a surface concealing the actual extraordinariness of Schneider's work. That this project is housed, as it were, behind such a veneer of nondisclosure is exactly fitting, too, for the dynamics of obfuscation that course through almost every facet of *Haus u r*. As meticulous as Schneider is with regard to his architectural reconstructions, he is equally calculating in terms of the information,

there." In an appendix to this 2003 catalogue, the simple statement, "Schneider has worked on the house since 1985," appears three times (ibid., 226). Schneider has described the project himself, succinctly, calling it "the recreation of my childhood home" [see Gilda Williams, "Doubling," *Art Monthly* 340 (October 2010), 2]. According to Schneider's own photographic documentation of his work, the first architectural elements he constructed in the Unterheydener house were walls, and they date to 1985. See Gregor Schneider, *Gregor Schneider, Arbeiten 1985 – 1994* (Krefeld: Krefelder Kunstmuseen and Gregor Schneider, 1994), 48.

misinformation, and lack of information he makes publicly available concerning his

work. The catalogue excerpt quoted at the opening of this chapter exemplifies the

situation: while at first it appears to provide clarification about the meaning of *u r* in the

work's title, ultimately it stands as an incomplete explanation, as it concludes with the

ambiguous allowance that the abbreviation "can evoke alternate associations." Further,

while the excerpt derives from a catalogue appendix, the passage has no named author.

Is it an explanation provided by Schneider himself, or by another contributor to the

volume, or perhaps a description originating in another publication? There is no way to

know. Its source is simply left unspecified, and its reliability thereby unsettled. In a

sense, this presentation functions as yet another façade. At first it reads as a common

type of statement—part of an appendix, providing supplemental facts as appendices are

understood to do—but then it gives way to an open-endedness that makes clarity and

certitude impossible. And just as Schneider is responsible for constructing the many

other veneers that play a part in *Haus u r*, so, in this catalogue, he hints that here, too, he

should be held accountable for this confusing state of affairs: if the reader finishes with

the appendix and turns the page, the first words to encounter there are "*Concept and

Design* Gregor Schneider."[238]

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[238] Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 2003, 228. This situation with the appendix is only one of several instances of misleading, or lacking, information in the catalogue. For example, one of the book's chapters is identified as a reprint of an interview between Gregor Schneider and a woman named Hannelore Reuen. Although she is not initially identified, in the body of the interview it becomes apparent that Ms. Reuen is a tenant of Schneider's in the house on Unterheydener Strasse. Her name surfaces again, in the catalogue's appendix, where one reads that she has been Schneider's tenant since 1990 and she also "makes her own work with Gregor Schneider's occasional assistance" (226). Then, below the entry concerning Ms. Reuen, one finds the name "N. Schmidt." This individual, according to the appendix, "[a]long with Gregor Schneider and Hannelore Reuen [has] resided at *House u r* since 1998"

Two preliminary points can be made with certainty on account of the enigmatic

nature of Schneider's work. The first is that the exact parameters of *Haus u r* are

uncertain. The project is, foremost, the rooms that Schneider constructs, but given the

care he also takes to craft and manage the information that circulates about his work, the

building cannot be considered as wholly independent of concomitant representations of it,

such as the aforementioned exhibition catalogue. Hence, this chapter will focus its

attention on Schneider's architectural practices but, as necessary, will also reckon with

the various explications of those practices as they appear in interviews, artist statements,

exhibition publications, and other sources.

The second point, which the abundance of misleading façades associated with

Haus u r makes especially clear, is that, as significant as appearances are, it is the activity

that takes place behind these façades that is particularly unusual and compelling. This is

an entirely apt scheme, of course, given that it is the psyche—a deeply interior and often

obscure realm—that is the territory of obsession and compulsion. Arguably, the ubiquity

of this contrast between exterior and interior in *Haus u r* compels a reading of

Schneider's project that is grounded in psychological terms, and Schneider's interminable

preoccupation with the building only strengthens this claim. As the one place that he has

consistently occupied, and that has consistently occupied him, since the age of 16, as a

site and a set of activities that Schneider seems unable and/or disinclined to escape, *Haus*

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(226). In fact, neither Hannelore Reuen nor N. Schmidt exist, except as characters or
alter egos invented by Schneider. Nowhere in the text does Schneider divulge this
information; it is a conclusion each reader can arrive at only by searching and cross-
referencing the contents of other sources that take Schneider's work as their subject.
Finally, not every publication concerning *Haus u r* is comparably riddled with specious
information; the reader must approach each source on a case-by-case basis.

u r not only *can* be interpreted, but is in fact *best* interpreted, as a structure intimately

bound to the troubling forces of obsession and compulsion. The remainder of this

chapter therefore aims to uncover and elucidate the defining features of Schneider's

engagement with *Haus u r* by, in large part, delving into the often murky regions of this

psychologically laden body of work and then considering the implications of the fact that

it issues from a specific, late twentieth-century German context.

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Rising three stories above street level, Schneider's house in Rheydt is an

unremarkable nineteenth-century structure: modest in ornamentation, narrow, rectilinear,

and largely symmetrical. No evidence, whether photographs, recollections, or otherwise,

exists to suggest that the façade has undergone any significant transformation during the

almost 30 years that Schneider has been working in and with the building. Even the

windows' coverings contribute to the unchanging nature of the building's appearance:

each of the six upper-level windows is veiled by a simple white curtain which, typically,

is drawn closed, and on the ground floor, the windows are covered by plain white roller

blinds, which are never shown open. Both sets of coverings augment the structure's

static, modest presentation, and at the same time they effectively ensure that no passer-by

will have the chance to steal a glimpse of the ongoing project inside.

Until 1996, when Schneider first publicly exhibited work from *Haus u r*,

opportunities to enter the house and behold the peculiar circumstances within arose on an

invitation-only basis.[239] Typically, those who did secure a visit were welcomed at the

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[239] According to Schneider's official website, the first showing of a room from the house
in Rheydt took place in 1994 at the Galerie Andreas Weiss in Berlin (see
www.gregorschneider.de/biography.htm#currently). However, it was in 1996 that

<div align="center">147</div>

entry by Schneider himself, and thereafter the tour would begin. Guiding his guests

through the labyrinthine structure, Schneider would explain that his work at the site

consists of a continual process of building, then partially disassembling, and again

rebuilding the house's walls, floors, windows, ceilings. Sometimes he builds only a wall,

at other times he constructs a complete room. Many of these structures and spaces almost

exactly duplicate those that were original to the house (fig. 3, figs. 80 - 81) and, often,

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Schneider began exhibiting small numbers of rooms from *Haus u r* on a regular basis
(typically scheduling one or two shows per year). See the same online site,
www.gregorschneider.de/biography.htm#currently, for a detailed, chronological list of
his installations. With regard to the issue of gaining entry into the house itself, little
specific information has been published about how such appointments could be secured.
Ulrich Loock explained that for those individuals who did secure a visit there was a
standard tour Schneider would provide, but Loock also stated that "Schneider has
managed very effectively…to guide only a very few people through the house over a
period of several years," and he called these visitors, "his chosen guests" [Ulrich Loock,
"An Urge to Build," in Gregor Schneider, Ulrich Loock, and Maria Ramos, *Gregor
Schneider* (Porto, Portugal: Museu Serralves, 2005), 52, 53. In addition, Udo Kittelmann
wrote that "people tried to garner invitations to the house on the periphery of
Rheydt…Whenever Gregor Schneider issued an invitation to visit the house, preferably at
night-fall, he also included directions for getting there…" (Udo Kittelmann, "Haus ur,
Rheydt versus Totes Haus ur, Venice," in Kittelmann, ed., *Gregor Schneider*, 13). There
is no available record detailing the total number of individuals Schneider has invited to
his house in Rheydt, and there are few published accounts of visits to *Haus u r*. Noemi
Smolik provides one of the more detailed descriptions of an invitation. In her essay for
the catalogue published in conjunction with the 2000 exhibition, "Gregor Schneider:
Keller," she explained: "One day I received a small card with the following content:
'The guestroom hasn't yet been put back together/guests can't sleep here at the moment.
But there's coffee and cake. Schneider/Rheydt'" [in Gregor Schneider and Noemi
Smolik, *Gregor Schneider: Keller 30. 3. – 21. 5 2000*, Vienna: Vienna Secession, 2000),
5]. For additional accounts, see Veit Loers, "Definition and Non-Definition: Gregor
Schneider's House *UR*," and Brigitte Kölle, "On my first visit…" in Gregor Schneider,
Andrzej Przywara, and Adam Szymczyk, eds., *Gregor Schneider: Totes Haus ur / Dead
House ur / Martwy Dom ur 1985 – 1997* (Mönchengladbach, Germany: Städtisches
Museum Abteiberg), 1997, 75-76; Birnbaum, "Interiority Complex," 142 – 147; and, Ben
Lewis' "Art Safari Gregor Schneider" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMqFSWGBL-c).
Additionally, Thomas W. Rieger, Associate Director of the Konrad Fischer Galerie in
Düsseldorf, which has represented Gregor Schneider since 1993, confirmed that very few
people ever have entered the Unterheydener Strasse house (in personal conversation, July
2011).

entire rooms are built within the very spaces that they replicate.[240] In certain areas, Schneider makes modifications: for example, he relocates a door, he constructs a wall in front of a window, or he removes a set of cabinets from the kitchen (figs. 82 - 83).[241] The number of rooms, passages, and discrete architectural elements he has constructed and dismantled is vast; according to Schneider, the quantity became uncountable long ago. As he described in 1995, "[t]he sheer amount that I have built here means that I can't distinguish any more between what has been added and what has been subtracted. There is no way now of fully documenting what has happened in the house."[242] Given that Schneider continued his work with *Haus u r* in the years following this assessment— indeed, it is a project that continues still—the building's history is almost unimaginably more complex at present.

While a small number of people experienced *Haus u r* by paying a visit to Unterheydener Strasse, the majority of the project's public exposure has come by way of off-site exhibitions. In most of these cases, Schneider displayed only a small portion of the house's spaces. His one exhibition in 1996, for example, at the Kunsthalle Bern included a bedroom, closet, and guest room that had been dismantled, shipped, and

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[240] Kittelmann, "Haus ur, Rheydt versus Totes Haus ur, Venice," in Kittelmann, ed., *Gregor Schneider*, 25, states, "In terms of its formal quality, i.e., outwardly, a transformed [or, rebuilt] room is similar to a former state." In addition, Ulrich Loock, in "Gregor Schneider: The dead House ur," *Parkett* 63 (2002), 138, writes "…with his own hands [Schneider] reproduces existing rooms in the same place…"

[241] Captions accompanying images of Schneider's work at the 2001 Venice Biennale, describe his work as a series of "developed and doubled rooms" (see www.gregorschneider.de/places/2001venedig/pages/20010610_deutscher_pavillon_venezia_01.htm).

[242] Schneider and Loock, "I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 35.

reconstructed inside the Bern, Germany gallery. In 1997, he reinstalled two of those

structures—the bedroom and closet—in a Düsseldorf gallery, and later that same year he

rebuilt five spaces from *Haus u r* (including the same bedroom and closet) for an

exhibition in Frankfurt.[243] On only two occasions has Schneider presented the contents of

Haus u r in their entirety: first, at the 2001 Venice Biennale, where he relocated the

interior of the Rheydt house to the German Pavilion (for which he won the Golden Lion

prize);[244] and then in 2003-2004, when he re-presented the work at the Museum of

Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.[245] Since 2004, a small number of Unterheydener Strasse

rooms have traveled to sites around the world, and a set of rooms has been permanently

installed at the Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach since November 2008.[246]

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[243] Schneider is (characteristically) not forthcoming about the under-layers that he builds for his rooms' off-site exhibitions; in other words, any number of strata comprised of re-built spaces exist inside his house in Rheydt (the quantity is unknown because he has never documented them, as noted above) and, comparably, no records reliably verify that when Schneider exhibits his work he transports and rebuilds all, or even any, of those older, accrued layers. What does seem evident is that in the exhibitions, Schneider is dedicated to rebuilding select rooms and areas as they looked when he last constructed them in the house on Unterheyedener Strasse.

[244] Schneider built 24 rooms into the German Pavilion for the 2001 Venice Biennale, according to the invitation card produced for the event. The card can be viewed at www.gregorschneider.de/places/2001venedig/pages/20010610_deutscher_pavillon_venezia_01.htm.

[245] The Venice and Los Angeles installations are the only exhibitions to have reproduced all of the then-current rooms from the Rheydt house. In addition, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles published an exhibition statement claiming that its presentation was "the last time it will be seen in its entirety" (www.moca.org/museum/exhibitiondetail.php?id=338). In Mönchengladbach, the Schneider installed his *Garage* (2009), from which he made accessible an expansive cellar-type area that leads to a pair of hallways and a series of spaces (studio, coffee room, pantry, bedroom, and closet) taken from *Haus u r*.

[246] The extensive excising and exhibiting of spaces from *Haus u r* raises the question of whether or not the house remains habitable, or even accessible. The matter is not

As every *Haus u r* exhibition is a restaging of spaces excised from Schneider's

home in Rheydt rather than a new suite of works designed for a new site, the rooms,

hallways, and staircases on display remain essentially unchanged as they move from one

venue to the next. On occasion, Schneider modifies a small number of details when he

reinstalls *Haus u r*. For example, at times he varies the appointments of a room, shifts the

placement of a door (figs. 84 - 85), or reconfigures the layout of rooms relative to one

another. What do not change appreciably from year to year or place to place, however,

are certain, basic architectural elements:[247] rooms and passageways not only maintain

their proportions, but their dimensions—if they vary at all—undergo only slight, usually

imperceptible alterations.[248] In addition, construction materials and finishes likewise

reappear in multiple rooms and successive exhibitions and are notably devoid of

seemingly idiosyncratic characteristics: white plaster walls, simple white baseboards,

dark wood floors or gray carpeting, a white radiator, and brushed steel door handles are

amongst the most standard features of the *Haus u r* rooms and their every re-presentation

(figs. 86 - 88). Similarly, Schneider appears to reuse furnishings and accessories. In his

Rheydt bedroom, for instance, Schneider set a narrow mattress on the floor, covered it

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discussed openly by Schneider and is made all the more unclear on account of
Schneider's decision not to document each phase and facet of work in the house. For
photographs and commentary derived from each of these events, see their accompanying
catalogues: Kittelmann, ed., *Gregor Schneider*; Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor
Schneider*, 2003; and Schneider, Shah, and Titz, *END*, respectively. For a frequently
updated list of Schneider's exhibitions, see his official web site,
www.gregorschneider.de/biography.htm#currently.

[247] Thomas Rieger, in conversation with the author, July 2011.

[248] See Schneider, Przywara, and Szymczyk, eds., *Gregor Schneider*, 161-170, for the
measurements of rooms constructed and reconstructed between 1985 and 1997.

with black fabric, and placed a thin, folded blanket upon it. In turn, when he rebuilt his

bedroom in Düsseldorf, Venice, and Abteiberg, it looked to contain the same mattress,

covering, and blanket (fig. 86, fig. 88).   In the coffee room, the situation is similar: no

matter the venue, Schneider supplies it with a simple wooden table, a pair of mismatched

wooden chairs, and a plain white tablecloth (figs. 84 – 85). As for the closet, it too varies

little from installation to installation: always modest in size and finished with white

plaster walls, it never appears to have anything stored in it (figs. 89 - 90).

The emptiness typical of Schneider's closet is a characteristic that seeps into

many of his other spaces, also. While the coffee room, bedroom, and kitchen, for

example, are not literally vacant rooms, they do consistently have about them a sense of

barrenness that seems unexpected for a house that for many decades was a family home.

The walls of these areas are always unadorned. Their window treatments consist of only

the simplest curtains or blinds. Their accessories are minimal both in number and design.

Further, in passageways such as the entrance hall and staircase, Schneider leaves no

objects at all—not a doormat or coat rack, for example, nor a single ornamental detail of

any sort. Austerity and absence pervade Schneider's living spaces, and although these

are qualities capable of producing an air of pristine sterility, here their effect is rather

different. They meld with a timeworn impression that is also ubiquitous in *Haus u r*—the

carpet outside the closet appears stained in at least two places (fig. 90), a dirtied rag and

soap residue occupy the corner of a kitchen counter (fig. 91), scuffs and grime mark the

staircase as well as the entryway from which it rises (fig. 92). Together, these

characteristics envelop *Haus u r* in a desolate and impoverished atmosphere; its spaces

look like they were once lived in, to be sure, but now they are disused and neglected.

An unfathomable amount of labor has gone into—and continues to go into—the task of creating, and ceaselessly, meticulously recreating, the spare and faded rooms from Unterheydener Strasse. About the basic mechanics of the project, Schneider has remarked, "my work is easy to describe—I place a wall in front of a wall, a room inside a room…A double just in front, just underneath or just inside what already exists, or a plausible double placed at another site. So there is no invention."[249] Like the living spaces he reproduces, his account is deceptively simple and reductive. That the project has continued for more than a quarter of century hints at the complexity that is buried within it—layers upon layers, additions and subtractions beyond documentation, as Schneider explained it—and attests to the power of the forces compelling Schneider to return to it year after year, even decade after decade. Speaking to questions of "why?"—why build a room, why build so many rooms?—Schneider answers, deceptively simply again no doubt, "There was nothing else I could do."[250]

II. Analysis/Synthesis/Exegesis (Of Lead, Lineage, and Loss)

In *The Poetics of Space*, first published in 1958,[251] Gaston Bachelard examines at length the close and powerful relationship between place—and specifically, the house—and memory.[252] To be sure, the house occupies a special point in the biography of every

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[249] Williams, "Doubling," 1.

[250] Schneider and Loock, "I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 54.

[251] *The Poetics of Space* was first published in French under the title *La poétique de l'espace* (Presses Universitaires de France) and was first published in English in 1964 (Orion Press, Inc.).

[252] While Bachelard is notable here for the detailed and lengthy attention he devotes to the ways and places in which memory entwines with domestic space, he is by no means

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individual—"it is our first universe,"[253] he notes—but the inner spaces of the house are also unmatched repositories of intimate histories. "Not only our memories," Bachelard continues, "but things we have forgotten are 'housed.'"[254] Like Bachelard's text, Schneider's *Haus u r* brings to the foreground the subjects of history—experiences remembered, as well as those lost to memory and the force of repression—and home, and pushes into focus the intricate nature of their entanglements with one another.

From his earliest working years, and in projects not directly affiliated with *Haus u r*, Schneider was drawn to the question of how history might leave its marks—visible or not—on the place in which it occurred. In the mid-1980s, for example, he wondered about and experimented with the lingering effects of a human scream. Regardless of their source, whether "screams of pain [or] shouts of liberation…[he] hoped that the scream would stay behind in a room after you had left it."[255] Not long after these exercises, he sought out extraordinary, and often grim, sites. Recalling these episodes, he explained (albeit in somewhat strange language) that "[I] went specially myself to places where certain events had taken place, amazing, found these places. Here in the woods a female art student had been killed…For a time [I] took photos of the place where the

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alone in theorizing the relationship between place and all facets of human experience. Accordingly, references to the work of several writers on the subject—Anthony Vidler, Sigmund Freud, and Martin Heidegger amongst them—will inform later portions of this chapter.

[253] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), 4.

[254] Ibid., xxxvii.

[255] Schneider and Loock, "I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 63.

student was murdered. Later there were flowers lying there…I kept on going back."[256]

What became evident to Schneider during this period, he continued, was "that things that

have gone nevertheless leave a trace."[257]

This notion of traces persisting and bestowing upon a physical space the power to

affect both the present and future echoes Bachelard's appraisal that "the house is in us as

we are in the house," and is a sentiment that occupies significant and varied places in

Haus u r. For example, in the spirit of Bachelard's writing about the ways in which a

house's idiosyncratic details can shape and accommodate experience,[258] Schneider

recounted his interest in "observing…things that are not recognizable but which are there

and which influence the way we feel, think and act…[For instance] various materials can

alter the effect of a room…Even the smallest protuberances and indentations on the

finished surface of a wall can arouse a response in the visitor."[259] Schneider remarked

also that, in extending his scream research, he experimented with the spaces he built by

"going into a room, leaving it again, [and] hoping that the experience would linger there

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[256] Ibid., 63, 68.

[257] Ibid., 68.

[258] Bachelard writes, for example, "…if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated. All our lives we come back to them in our daydreams" (Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 44). In a similar vein, he devotes a full chapter of his text to "Corners" (ibid., 136 – 147).

[259] Schneider and Loock, "I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 37.

and then inviting other people into that room."[260] Although Schneider's description of his

goals with these experiments—"hoping that the experience would linger there"—sounds

innocuous, it suggests a more menacing dynamic as well in that it implies the capacity of

architecture, like the psyche, to entrap.

This is exactly the direction in which his work soon moved when he brought a

decidedly morbid dimension into both the Unterheydener Strasse house and an off-site

exhibition. Here again, after pursuing his initial questions about the lasting effect of

screams, Schneider said that he "flipped into the opposite mode. Next came totally

insulated boxes…" This idea manifested in two directions. First, in 1986, Schneider

constructed a pair of cubes. Both structures, he described, "were relatively small, one

meter by one meter" and, reflecting the fact that he built them as airtight chambers, he

titled them, *Completely Insulated Boxes* (fig. 93).[261] Soon after, in 1989, Schneider began

constructing the *Completely Insulated Death Room* for a gallery in Giesenkirchen,

Germany (fig. 94). Each of these works—the two cubes and the single room—

constituted spaces of total isolation. Schneider said of these projects, "[I] used my

technical skills to completely insulate the [places] as far as the senses are concerned…If

you had gone into the [*Completely Insulated Death*] room the door would have swung

shut. There was no way of opening it either from inside or from outside…You would

have been gone."[262] The circumstances he conceived of with regard to the cubes were

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[260] Ibid., 55. Schneider does not elaborate here about the types of spaces in which he explored these scream ideas except to suggest that they were some of his earliest constructions in his house.

[261] Ibid., 66.

[262] Ibid.

similar. They were built to be "[j]ust big enough for a person to fit inside," but "no one would have stood it very long in there…I imagined an exhibition where there would be two boxes in a room, you come in, there's someone sitting in one of the boxes."[263] Interviewed about his ideas for these small containers, Schneider was asked explicitly if they would be airtight; after replying, "Yes," and acknowledging that the person inside would die "pretty quickly," Schneider added, "[o]f course it's very theatrical. But things like that do happen in everyday life. A child falls into a deep freeze, while the woman is standing right next to it doing the washing-up."[264] Schneider's interest, ultimately, lay in the possibility that even if "you can't hear the screaming outside any more…[you] would somehow sense that there was someone in it."[265]

In 1995, spaces of total isolation became a more permanent fixture in *Haus u r*. No documentation verifies the existence of Schneider's *Completely Insulated Boxes* beyond 1986, but in 1995 Schneider finished building a *Completely Insulated Guest Room* at Unterheydener Strasse (fig. 95). The building materials Schneider used to construct the guest room closely match those comprising the *Completely Insulated Death Room*: the Giesenkirchen *Death Room* required "lead, glass wool, [and] sound-absorbing material in the room," and for the later *Guest Room* Schneider applied "2 layers of lead, 3 layers of glass wool, 1 layer of rock wood, [and] 1 layer of of [sic] sound-absorbing

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263 Ibid.

264 Ibid., 66, 68.

265 Ibid., 66, 68.

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material around a room."[266] The fabric of these structures is a potent testament to the

sense of silence and seclusion which Schneider intended for the spaces; moreover, as the

lists of materials offer a degree of insight into Schneider's building practices, they raise a

separate set of issues, as well—issues that cast a distinctive light on the nature of his

work's engagement with, and twining of, the subjects of home and history.

In Schneider's work, the matter of home and history has both a narrow, personal

aspect and a broader, cultural dimension. In large part, both of these circumstances relate

directly to specific materials that Schneider built into the rooms of his *Haus*: on several

occasions, he used lead as a construction material, and in other instances, he brought in

expressly personal items, such as photographs. First, as noted above, a part of what

makes his *Completely Insulated Guest Room* so profoundly isolated is its "2 layers of

lead." This guest room, however, is not the only lead-clad area in *Haus u r*; a description

of room modifications dating to 1988 indicates that two other bedrooms have lead within

their walls and floors.[267] Schneider's use of lead is interesting for several reasons (and

these will be the subjects of discussion slightly later in this chapter) but foremost among

them is the fact that the very ground upon which the Unterheydener Strasse house sits is

itself a source of lead. In fact, the house, the Schneider family, and the lead are

intimately woven together in a story that spans several generations. Specifically,

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[266] Schneider, Przywara, and Szymczyk, eds., *Gregor Schneider*, 165, 169.

[267] The description specifies that alterations to the *Bedroom* included the placement of
"lead around a room," and "lead in the ground," and a list of construction materials for
the *Love Nest* includes a "floor of lead sheets" (Schneider, Przywara, and Szymczyk,
eds., *Gregor Schneider*, 161, 162, 170). The *Love Nest*, which dates to 1995/96 and is
also known as the *amorous bower*, was included in the Venice Biennale but has not been
frequently exhibited.

Schneider's residential property at no. 12 Unterheydenerstrasse is part of a large industrial complex whose primary business is lead processing. The factory, which is still operational today, is run by two of Schneider's brothers; before them, it was headed by Schneider's father and, even earlier, was owned by Schneider's grandfather. The company name is *Anton Schneider Söhne GmbH & Co. KG* and its address is listed as Unterheydener Str. 30, D-41236 Mönchengladbach: exactly adjacent to *Haus u r*.[268]

Schneider's lead-lined rooms are a veritable reification of this history. As the source of the Schneiders' livelihood, the lead factory was the essential reason for both the house and the family being on Unterheydener Strasse. In turn, although Schneider was in no way dependent upon the factory when he began working with the house, his decision to bring lead into certain of the home's structural areas made the factory's substance

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[268] Of his father—who died in 2004—and the question of using lead in *Haus u r*, Schneider has said "[a]t first I didn't want to use this material [lead] and then I did and I became much closer to my father than I though I ever would" [in Ossian Ward, "The Feeling is Mutual," *Artreview* (October 2004), 104]. For information about the Schneider factory's history, services, and products, see www.schneider-ass.de/en/schneider_about-us.htm. The correspondence between the company's work and Gregor Schneider's own labors with *Haus u r* surfaces, albeit it subtly and with no likely intentionality, in a few places on the website. For example, one portion of the site is devoted to the subject of "Soundproofing," and under the heading "About Lead," the reader finds a statement explaining that "[n]ot all products by SCHNEIDER are 'visible'. They can frequently be found in walls or on roofs, or are simply integrated into other products as components." As with many details about Schneider's life and work, questions remain about the nature of this business and its history, and particularly whether it has any connection to products manufactured during the Holocaust. A pair of seemingly contradictory facts suggests that there may be more to the story of this factory and Schneider's family connections to it. Reports often state that the lead factory has been in Schneider's family for several generations; see, for example, Gordon Burn's "Houses of Horror," which specifies five generations (www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2004/sep/22/art/print) and "This old obsession," in which Louise Roug describes the situation as one involving "many generations (http://articles.latimes.com/2003/nov). However, the company's website cites 1949 as the year of its founding. Whether the business existed before 1949, perhaps under another name, remains uncertain, but the contradictory information is at least provocative.

integral to the house again, in a literal manner. Effectively, with the lead sheathing Schneider refers to the family history in a particularly weighty, material form.

As it happens, lead is not the only piece of family history stored within the walls of *Haus u r*. "The original idea," Schneider once said, "was to have one layer of room per generation like an onion. And now there are photographs which represent each generation."[269] Like the lead, Schneider's family photographs are not visible to anyone passing through *Haus u r*. Schneider placed them between the layers of wall that comprise the small room he calls the *Wunderkammer* (fig. 96)[270] and to find them requires opening a window—behind which is another window—and reaching down into what appears to be a dark and dirty sliver of space. Schneider explained that "you can get up on to the windowsill and see old photos in the gap between the two…photos of my

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[269] Schneider in conversation with Ben Lewis at www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMqFSWGBL-c.

[270] The *Wunderkammer* is something of an anomaly in *Haus u r*. Not only is it the only room to have photographs between its walls, but it is usually teeming with a wide variety of odd objects: for example, a sculpted hand, old furniture, construction materials, a white sphere and a black sphere—covered in insulating material—hanging from the ceiling. While other rooms do, from time to time, appear moderately unkempt (most notably, the *Kitchen*), the *Wunderkammer* appears to be in a constant state of cluttered disorder. For this reason, its function seems more aligned with that of a private storage area. In addition, and following this last observation, the *Wunderkammer* rarely travels. Only once has it been included in a Schneider exhibition—at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles—meaning it must be one of the least-seen of all works from *Haus u r*. Although beyond the scope of this study, an analysis of Schneider's *Wunderkammer* in the context of precedents ranging from early Curiosity Cabinets or Cabinets of Wonder to, for example, Kurt Schwitters' pre-World War II *Merzbau*, would further extend the Schneider literature.

mother, of my father and, further behind, of my grandmother. One generation per layer of room."[271]

Deeply interred within the walls of *Haus u r*, the family photographs and the lead fairly encapsulate a fundamental aspect of Schneider's project. Specifically, while any work of art that is an actual house is prime territory for addressing a variety of themes related to the concept of "home"—for example, notions of domesticity, exile, gender, or nostalgia, to name only a few—this particular house points to a distinct set of issues. Significant here is the fact that *Haus u r* is no generic or random house; it is, of course, its artist's family house. This brings an explicitly personal and generational dimension to the work, which in turn is only amplified by the presence of the lead and the photographs. The lead, however, is also a direct allusion to place, to the soil upon which this project is grounded. As Schneider builds it into *Haus u r*—in such a way that, as he himself verified, it is inextricable from the house—Schneider expressly unites home and land, making *Haus u r* a work that is plainly bound up with the idea of "homeland." In this way, the lead further underscores the broader scope and the distinctly German resonance of Schneider's work, as the concept of homeland, or "Heimat," occupies a long-standing, often-theorized, and complex place in German cultural history.[272] This issue of home and

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[271] Schneider and Loock, "I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 99. Also, at one point during the tour of *Haus u r* that Schneider gives Ben Lewis, Schneider can be seen reaching into this inter-wall space and pulling out a moldy, decaying framed photograph of his mother (www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMqFSWGBL-c).

[272] See, for example, Neil Leach, "The Dark Side of the *Domus*," in *What Is Architecture?* Ed., Andrew Ballantyne (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 88 - 90; Alexandra Ludewig, "Home Meets Heimat." *M/C Journal* 10 (August 2007) at http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0708/12-ludewig.php; David Morely and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural*

land is yet another of the many concepts—along with history, memory, and identity, for example—that, as Schneider designs it, collapse into one another and infiltrate but, at the same time we will see, empty the spaces, structures, and practices that constitute *Haus u r*.

Schneider's engagement with *Haus u r* and its complex confluence of topics is, to say the least, a recurring affair that he seems disinclined to conclude. Schneider once said that after every *Haus* exhibition, he "will go back to square one and start [his] work again."[273] He has been true to his word. As a result of this insistence on returning to *Haus u r* time and again, taking up the work of its construction and deconstruction for more than a quarter of century and continuing it still today, *Haus u r* has become the defining work of Schneider's career. No other project has occupied as much of his attention, nor has any other work garnered him the amount of attention, as *Haus u r*. Furthermore, *Haus u r* both synthesizes and serves as a point of departure (or one could say, in a nod to the "u r" of its title, a point of origin) for themes he explores in other projects. Two such examples, mentioned here in earlier paragraphs, are Schneider's interest in isolation, as well as his curiosity about the past being able to leave invisible traces on the present.

Boundaries (New York and London: Routledge), 1995; David Morely, *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000).

[273] Schneider and Loock, "I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 100. Schneider does not explain what he means by "square one" or the practice of re-starting his work; however, by weaving together the scattered details he does provide about his working process, it seems that after dismantling exhibitions, he stores construction materials in varied locations ranging from the Unterheyedener Street house to warehouse spaces. Some of these he reuses, other remain in storage an indefinite period of time.

At the same time, the self-referential aspect of *Haus u r* is also something of a reformulation and extension of experiments in self-examination that Schneider undertook in certain of his earliest artistic projects. At the age of approximately thirteen, Schneider spent an extended period of time observing, sculpting, and re-sculpting one of his hands. In describing the object's creation, one point he emphasized was the gratification associated with not finishing the work, but with repeatedly returning to it. He explained,

> "[I]t simply gave me a sense of achievement to be able to …look at a hand
> and to be able to make a sculpture of it…Admittedly it isn't exactly right,
> but I sat looking at it for hours, for days on end and modeled this hand, my
> own hand, constantly moistening it again. It was nice, constantly
> moistening the clay again. If I worked in clay, I wouldn't fire the piece
> and just go on moistening it."[274]

Shortly after the hand sculpting, Schneider submitted his entire body to different types of trial and scrutiny. On one occasion, he fully covered himself with paint, "only to discover that the paint wouldn't come off again. So then [he] had to go into the shower and the whole family scrubbed away at [him] to get the paint off again. That was when [he] found some parts of [his] body that [he] hadn't felt before."[275] Relatedly, Schneider described a 1985 work titled *Meal Orgy*, in which he lay down, unclothed, in a tub filled with a mixture of flour and water (fig. 97), and then assumed a multitude of contorted positions, often while wrapping a rope around various parts of his body (fig. 98). While it may be tempting to interpret this activity as a type of reconsideration of canonical

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[274] Ibid., 63.

[275] Ibid., 57.

performance art from the 1960s and 1970s—the work invites comparison to both Carolee

Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964; fig. 99) and *Interior Scroll* (1975; fig. 100), for

example—*Meal Orgy* lacks the overt political content of such predecessors and,

moreover, there is no evidence to indicate either that Schneider ever performed *Meal*

Orgy for a live audience or that he exhibited his photographs of the episode. In other

words, the performative aspect of *Meal Orgy* is ambiguous, undercut by the basically

private nature of the venture.[276]

In the scope of Schneider's career, *Meal Orgy* is better understood as yet another

example—along with the hand sculpture and the paint submersion—of his early and

enduring interest in turning to himself as subject matter, and in his being impressed by

unanticipated experiences associated with his actions. Regarding this latter point, in the

only comments Schneider made about *Meal Orgy*, he mentioned the fact that after

coating himself with the sticky flour-water substance, he discovered "we had a burst pipe,

[so] I couldn't take a shower and…I cycled home through the cold and went to bed. The

next day it had solidified and I had to get straight into the bathtub to soften it again."[277]

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[276] The argument could be made, also, that the quasi-performative character of *Meal Orgy* prefigures Schneider's own subtly performative behavior in *Haus u r*. Specifically, visitors to *Haus u r* commonly remark that Schneider's blank affect, his ambiguous statements, and his apparent lack of spontaneous behavior left them with the impression—but only the impression, not any certainty—that his overall self-presentation was the product of a carefully choreographed operation. Ben Lewis' filmed excursion to *Haus u r* substantiates this assessment, as Schneider's mien during the visit could be described as coolly detached and his statements carefully calculated. It warrants restating, however, that only a very small number of people experience *Haus u r* in Schneider's presence. For the vast majority of spectators, the possibility of witnessing any performance on Schneider's part simply does not exist.

[277] Schneider and Loock, "I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 57.

Implicit in this anecdote is a situation, corroborated by the *Meal Orgy* photographs, that also has a place in *Haus u r*: namely, that for at least a short period of time Schneider was stuck in his gluey concoction. Not only does Schneider repeatedly take himself as his subject, but as *Meal Orgy* also points out, he routinely demonstrates an interest in creating works of art that have an obvious corporeal element to them. Notable, too, is that the bodily dimension in *Meal Orgy*, as in the *Insulated* spaces and, as will become evident, in *Haus u r*, tends with Schneider to be bound up with the subject of entrapment.

As Schneider hinted when he said ambiguously of his building practices that "[t]here was nothing else I could do,"[278] the experience of entrapment is not necessarily an exclusively physical one. It is, of course, equally familiar as a phenomenon rooted to the interior, psychological realm—to the presence of thoughts that are uninvited and are of a persistently imposing nature. As a psychological state, entrapment often acquires the label "obsession;" and, indeed, as the Latin "obsessionem" translates to "blockade [or] siege," the etymological path from entrapment to obsession is a direct one.[279] There is a dual aspect to entrapment, to be sure: inward, as mental preoccupation or obsession, but also outward, taking the form of repeated actions, or compulsion. In *Haus u r*, where repetitive behavior not only abounds but is framed by and produces spaces of an explicitly interior nature, these trajectories intersect. Moreover, given the relentlessness with which Schneider has been engaged with his *Haus* work—he has occupied the house, but it, too, has occupied him for most of his life—it is fair to say that the dynamics of entrapment are as integral to the project as is the lead. Like the lead also, they heighten

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[278] Ibid, 54.

[279] http://oxforddictionaries.com.

the Germanic dimension of the project, for it is in the context of psychoanalytic theory and specifically in the work of Sigmund Freud, that the literature devoted to understanding the paired concepts of obsession and compulsion has its point of origin.

In light of introducing a Freudian element into the appraisal of Schneider's work, and before saying more about how or why psychoanalytic theory might inform a reading of *Haus u r*, a moment needs to be taken to emphasize two points. The first pertains to the plausibility of interpreting *Haus u r* as a type of psychological model or, stated otherwise, as an analogue to Schneider's psychological state of being. The second concerns a fact about thematic coherence that is implicit in the observations made thus far about Schneider's project.

With regard to the first point: establishing a correspondence between *Haus u r* and the psychological realm of its creator is common in all manner of texts devoted to Schneider's work, from scholarly analyses to catalogue essays to exhibition reviews. Describing *Haus u r* at the Venice Biennale, for example, Iwona Blazwick explained that it required its visitors to engage "in an intense, one-to-one confrontation with the artist's own psyche."[280] Comparably, in *La Biennale di Venezia*, a visit into Schneider's installation in the German Pavilion is likened to a journey into "the abysses of the ego," and so the structure, the catalogue concludes, can properly be called a "psychogram."[281] In no uncertain terms, Schneider himself also draws the same analogy, saying, "[i]n my work it is as though I'm wandering through the layers and enclosures of my own brain,

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[280] See Ward, "The Feeling is Mutual," 103.

[281] Kittelmann, ed., *Gregor Schneider*, 42.

following the mechanisms of perception and knowledge."[282] Such correlations are hardly

unexpected, given the significant body of theoretical work whose inquiries about the

nature of human experience take place within an architectural framework. Even if one

were to limit one's bibliography of appurtenant texts to those produced in roughly the last

century—in other words, to the period that saw the advent and development of the

modern discipline of psychology—there would be no lack of prominent, influential works

to cite. Bachelard, for example, founded his *Poetics of Space* upon exactly this

relationship. Martin Heidegger, too, bears upon this discourse, as he argued in the mid-

twentieth century that the essence of being human cannot be disentangled from the

concept and practice of dwelling.[283] At the end of this chronological spectrum, where the

twentieth century gives way to the twenty-first, Anthony Vidler evaluated this theoretical

history and noted that

> "[f]ear, anxiety, estrangement, and their psychological counterparts,
>
> anxiety neuroses and phobias, have been intimately linked to the aesthetics
>
> of space throughout the modern period...[such that space] has been
>
> increasingly defined as a product of subjective projection and introjection,
>
> as opposed to a stable container of objects and bodies."[284]

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[282] Williams, "Doubling," 1.

[283] Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 100 – 109; first delivered as a lecture by Heidegger in 1951.

[284] Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 1.

In the course of applying a contemporary perspective to the subject of space and psyche,

Vidler turns repeatedly to Freud. Indeed, Freud is central not only to analogizing

psychological and architectural interiors—he advises, for example, that "[t]he ego is not

master in its own house,"[285]—but also to theorizing the uncanny as the German word

unheimlich makes clear. Given its complex Germany etymology, wherein the *unheimlich*

ultimately merges with the *heimlich*, the origins of the terms are bound up with the home,

and it is in this context of the homely becoming the unhomely, or the familiar shifting

into the unfamiliar, that Freud formulates his understanding of the nature of the

relationship between anxiety, repression, and repetition.[286]

While a solid theoretical base grounds the parallels that frequently arise between

domestic and psychological space, in *Haus u r* such comparisons are also encouraged by

the deeply interior and self-referencing nature of the project. Not only does Schneider

make allusions to his personal history a material part of the structure, but also, the

spectator's experience of *Haus u r* amounts to a series of explicitly inward turns. Most

obviously, whether visiting *Haus u r* on Unterheydener Strasse, at the Venice Biennale,

in Los Angeles, or Mönchengladbach, visitors must pass through a doorway, thereby

leaving the outside world behind, and step into Schneider's construction. Instantly and

fully enclosed by the work, spectators then encounter an ever-deepening sense of

interiority as they make their way through a labyrinthine succession of connected rooms

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[285] In James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953), 17:143.

[286] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (New York: Penguin Group, 2003). Freud's careful parsing of the semantics of "heimlich" and "unheimlich" appears on pages 124 – 134.

and passageways. The spaces are never brightened by natural light, nor is there ever the possibility of finding a view to the outside: Schneider builds no windows into the corridors, and where he does include windows in select rooms, they are either paned with frosted glass, backed by closed blinds, or placed immediately in front of another solid wall. In addition, Schneider's doors are typically heavy and hung so that they automatically close behind each visitor, and walls—which appear thick when they are exposed in doorways or window sills, and are often faced in a coarse plaster—also have a particularly weighty materiality to them. Finally, just as Schneider provides a single point of entry into *Haus u r*, he constructs only one exit. As the spectator crosses that last threshold, the exploration of *Haus u r* ends abruptly and emphatically, and no turning back is allowed. Only at this point does the spectator regain contact with the outside world.

To return to the second point introduced above, regarding thematic coherence: the practices and ideas Schneider brings together in *Haus u r* in many ways continue interests evident in much of his other work, but they also have a discernible cohesiveness about them. Specifically, in Schneider's turn to the past, in his propensity for self-examination, in his attention to facets of the German context that is the framework of his project, and in his ongoing cycle of construction and reconstruction, he forges a body of work—and, in fact, a career—closely aligned with a constellation of issues occupying a significant place in Western, and often specifically German, cultural analysis of the post-World War II, post-Holocaust period. Since the war's end, countless projects across a wide range of media have taken as their subject the emergence and legacy of the Third Reich and, as

discussed previously, in 1959 Theodor Adorno offered a succinct contribution to this

field by posing the question, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?"[287]

As earlier chapters in this study accounted, Adorno's essay engaged the query

posed in his title from several perspectives. The pursuit of enlightenment—as an

understanding about the past and the varied forces that converged in such a way so as to

allow for the Nazis' catastrophic intervention upon western history—is a theme threading

through Adorno's essay from beginning to end. Indeed, as Geoffrey Hartman noted in a

short essay added as an introduction to Adorno's text, Adorno's essay broaches the

subject of enlightenment from the very start as its title "[recalls] Immanuel Kant's tract of

1784: 'Response to the Question: What is Enlightenment?'"[288] Later, as the essay

reaches its conclusion, Adorno returns his readers to the query of the title, and asserts that

"[w]e will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then

are no longer active."[289] In the course of constructing his analyses and argument, Adorno

establishes significant places for at least three issues that are bound up with one another

and, also, are expressly borne out in Schneider's work: "reprocessing the past,"[290]

"critical self-reflection,"[291] and the value of bringing into these practices a "knowledge of

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[287] Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg*, 114 – 129. Also, see footnotes 25 – 30 for bibliographic information regarding the many projects that have addressed this issue of "coming to terms with the past."

[288] Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg*, 114.

[289] Ibid., 129.

[290] Ibid, 124.

[291] Ibid., 127.

Freudian theory."[292] In his essay's penultimate paragraph, Adorno reminds his readers of

the primacy and interdependency of these points, stating that "[c]oming to terms with the

past in the sense of aiming for enlightenment is essentially [a] *turn toward the*

subject…"[293] This study has already considered the significance of Adorno's text for

artists concerned with Germany's past, and here it is also Adorno's interest in Freudian

thought, and in fact Adorno's insistence on the relevance of psychoanalytic theory to the

project of coming to terms with the past, that is crucial.

As we have seen, Adorno's tract represents an early moment in the history of

works focused on the task of wrestling with Germany's Nazi history, and as Robert

Moeller noted in 2002, Adorno's question—and, accordingly, Adorno's essay—has

remained a foundational text within the postwar period. Titling his own text, "What Has

'Coming to Terms with the past' Meant in Post-World War II Germany" From History to

Memory to the 'History of Memory,'" Moeller began his analysis with the observation

that, "in 1959, Theodor Adorno asked Germans 'what does coming to terms with the past

mean,' and over four decades later, Germans are still asking the same question."[294]

Indeed, Adorno's essay suggests this should be the case. If, as Adorno charges, the work

of reprocessing the past is to take place at the level of personal and cultural analysis—in

arenas, therefore, that are never fixed or limited to any current state of being—it

necessarily looks beyond the present moment and implicates the future.

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[292] Ibid.

[293] Ibid., 128.

[294] Robert G. Moeller, "What Has 'Coming to Terms with the past' Meant in Post-World War II Germany," 224.

Returning to *Haus u r,* we see that once again Adorno is an important interlocutor. Being self-referential to an extreme, both in a personal manner as well as a broader cultural one, while demonstrating a seemingly endless concern with making concrete the idea of reprocessing the past, *Haus u r* bears out both Moeller's claim and Adorno's mandate. Moreover, Schneider's work raises the issue of what it means to operate not only in the shadows of traumatic history that is becoming ever more distant, but also in the now-lengthy shadows of Adorno's directive. In other words, *Haus u r* is not simply a part of the legacy Moeller identifies; it is, as I will argue, a project that betrays *the consequences* of being a part of that legacy.

Key to interpreting the nature of these consequences is the sense of emptiness suffusing each iteration of *Haus u r.* As discussed earlier in this chapter, the starkness of Schneider's rooms and passageways is not evocative of a pristine, clinical environment. Instead, the austerity of his spaces combines with marks of wear and neglect—the scuffed staircase, for example, or the residue clinging to the inside of a cup—conveying the impression that once, in a time now passed, these places were inhabited and used. As a result, "empty" is not quite adequate as a descriptor of *Haus u r*; its emptiness is more accurately understood as the state of having been emptied. This descriptive shift may seem slight, but its implications are substantial, for its effect is to qualify the emptiness of *Haus u r* in such a way that the project is permeated by an air of loss; in this, it recalls Demand's images which, despite having a crisp and unworn appearance that differs markedly from Schneider's spaces, always lack enormous amounts of detail. In *Haus u r,* the full significance of this particular and pervasive absence is a function of its intersection with those themes—history, memory, identity, home—already identified as

central to Schneider's work. On this count, the project yet again compels and rewards a turn to Germanic tradition for, as with the obsessive and compulsive aspects of *Haus u r*, psychoanalytic thought has been instrumental to the theorizing of these ideas.

Nowhere is the correspondence between Schneider's work and psychoanalytic literature more evident than in the parallels that appear between *Haus u r* and Freud's 1919 essay, "Das Unheimliche," or "The Uncanny."[295] Freud acknowledged that "[o]nly rarely does the psychoanalyst feel impelled to engage in aesthetic investigations,"[296] but it happens that this analysis of his, being one such anomalous effort, delves into the "aesthetics of anxiety"[297] by way of a concept that is not only framed in expressly architectural terms but, more pointedly, centers upon the space of the home.

The term "uncanny" is a common but somewhat imprecise translation of the German *unheimlich*. Etymologically, *unheimlich* correlates more accurately to the English *unhomely* and, in fact, etymology figures significantly in Freud's analysis of *das Unheimliche*. After brief introductory remarks, Freud presents in his essay a lengthy study of the uses and connotations of both *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, and he draws attention to the fact that *heimlich* is, in fact, an ambivalent term. As he explained, *heimlich* "belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other—the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden."[298] As a concept associated with meanings that

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[295] Freud, *The Uncanny*.

[296] Ibid., 123.

[297] Ibid., xli.

[298] Ibid., 132.

move in apparently divergent directions, *heimlich* is notable for being a word whose

definition can come to merge with that of its ostensible opposite, *unheimlich*.

Specifically, as Freud set forth, *heimlich* suggests that which is "familiar and

comfortable" exactly because it *is* associated with home (or its conceptual analogue, the

psyche or self), but also alludes to that which is meant to remain a part of that intimate

sphere and is thus "removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, [and] secret".[299] As a

phenomenon, *das Unheimliche* turns on precisely this ambivalence. As Freud remarked,

it depends on an unwelcome and unsettling perceptual shift whereby that which was

heimlich becomes *unheimlich*: the homely becomes unhomely, the familiar becomes

unfamiliar, and the affective response associated with the transformation is best described

as fear.[300]

To be sure, *Haus u r* has a profoundly uncanny nature. In fact, at even the most

straightforward level, Schneider's project is a veritable model of Freud's text: following

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[299] Ibid., 133.

[300] Freud explains further that the uncanny "is that species of the frightening that goes
back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (ibid., 124). In
theorizing what brings about this transformation from familiar to unfamiliar and veils the
experience in fear, Freud notes the significance of repetition. At times, he says, the
repetition may reveal itself in the form of a double, or *Doppelgänger* (ibid., 141), but it
can also manifest behaviorally as "a *compulsion to repeat*" (ibid., 145) and, even more
generally, he asserts that "anything that can remind us of this inner compulsion to repeat
is perceived as uncanny" (ibid.). The mechanism responsible for forging the link
between repetition and fear is repression. He explains:
> "[I]f psychoanalytic theory is right in asserting that every affect arising
> from an emotional impulse—of whatever kind—is converted into fear by
> being repressed, it follows that among those things that are felt to be
> frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown that the
> frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns.
> This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny…[T]his
> uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that
> was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through
> being repressed" (ibid., 147-148).

the Freudian schema, Schneider founds his work upon not just a domestic space, but on his family, and thus familiar, home. But, in seeming accord with Freud's theory, he also effects a series of returns by rebuilding the familiar spaces—his *Closet*, for example, existed in Mönchengladbach, but later reappeared in Bern, and the next year emerged in Düsseldorf—and modifying them by eliminating those details that typically animate a house in a distinctively personal manner. Transformed in these ways, this home becomes a generic, and thus de-familiarized, version of its original.

The historical context from which Freud's theory derives is as important as the shared framework described above. Freud completed *The Uncanny* in 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, and references to this postwar climate appear early in the essay. The first mention constitutes a disclaimer of sorts, as Freud prefaced his presentation of etymological data with the concession that his own literature review on the subject of the uncanny had been impeded by "reasons that are not hard to divine, and inherent in the times we live in."[301] Freud refered again to the postwar milieu in the latter paragraphs of the essay's second section, observing that "[p]lacards in our big cities," advertise lectures that are meant to instruct us in how to make contact with the souls of the departed."[302] Not only does this anecdote remind the reader of the topical nature of Freud's essay, it also makes explicit the reality of loss that was "inherent in the times we live in." Only a few paragraphs later, Freud turned his readers' attention once again to the wartime context that served as the backdrop for his investigations into the uncanny. Before recounting a moment in which he unexpectedly discovered a "quite naïve story

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[301] Ibid., 124.

[302] Ibid., 148-149.

[whose] effect was extraordinarily uncanny,"[303] Freud chose to establish that this episode occurred "[d]uring the isolation of the Great War."[304]

Freud's allusions to "the times we live in" subtly alert his readers to the congruence that exists between his subject and his circumstances. Specifically, Freud theorized and composed his essay at a time when the world he knew most intimately was taking on an unstable, frightening, and questionable mien; in other words, when there was something uncanny about his very own surroundings. As a result, there is a striking timeliness to *The Uncanny* despite the fact that Freudian theory in general, with its objectives of uncovering and understanding essential human instincts and impulses, sets its sights on the timeless. As the relationship between Schneider's work and Adorno's essay indicates, *Haus u r* likewise reflects and embodies much of what is singular to the circumstances surrounding its creation: begun in the late 1980s, with its first exhibitions in the early 1990s, *Haus u r* is a project whose chronology aligns with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the construction and reconstruction projects that followed. As discussed in this study's Introduction, like Neudecker's and Demand's work, *Haus u r* dates to a historical period defined by the exceptional prominence of both the ideas and practices of building, taking apart, and rebuilding. At the same time, of course, it also resonates within the larger postwar discourse addressed throughout this paper. Ultimately, the significance of Freud's *Uncanny* for Schneider's *Haus* rests in large part on the fact that

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[303] Ibid., 151.

[304] Ibid.

both are closely bound up with the notion of historical catastrophe; that is, with the task

of contending with trauma and its aftereffects.[305]

III. Revisit, Rework, and Return: Repetition as Stasis in *Haus u r*

Repetition and progress have a long-standing relationship. To reprise examples

relevant to the chapters of the present study, evidence of this relationship includes the

conscientious replication of clinical trials, the meticulous reduplication of a crime scene,

even the reenactment of a crime itself; in short, a constellation of activities associated

with the pursuit of all categories of mastery. Implicit in this last phrase, and as discussed

with regard to Neudecker's vitrine works, is the fact that repetition and progress share a

bond secured by ideals that were, fittingly, formalized and made systematic with the

Enlightenment. Schneider's *Haus u r*, however, deeply undermines this alliance: founded

on repetition, the project produces a diminished version of its original and generates a

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[305] On Freud's account, at essence the uncanny arises either when "repressed childhood complexes, the castration complex, the womb fantasy, etc…are revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs that have been *surmounted* appear to be once again confirmed….[and] in real life it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between the two species of the uncanny…[because] primitive convictions are closely linked with childhood complexes, indeed rooted in them…" (ibid., 155). It is the interpretive template provided by Freud's thinking—the familiar and untroubling can become distressing, repressed, and then repeatedly and disturbingly re-emergent, by way of unconscious mechanisms that are universally applicable—that is significant with regard to Schneider's work, rather than the notion that specific childhood or "primitive" complexes are being played out in *Haus u r*. In his analysis of Freud's text, Hugh Haughton provides an eloquent assessment of the persistent and wide-ranging importance of "The Uncanny:"

> Freud's haunted essay certainly put the uncanny onto the aesthetic map in ways not even he could have predicted. 'The Uncanny' has come back to haunt subsequent commentary on literature, film, photography and art ever since. And not only commentary…the Freudian uncanny has also haunted art and artists. Though written under the sign of the returning past, the Freudian uncanny, as both theory and narrative, shows every sign of persisting in new forms into the foreseeable future. (ibid., lv)

state of stagnation as Schneider never moves beyond his boyhood home—even when he moves that home to venues as far away from Unterheydener Strasse as the Venice Biennale or the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Schneider's own words, which closed the first section of this chapter, articulate the sense of entrapment that characterizes his place in this situation: "There was nothing else I could do," he said.

Negatively valanced by entrapment, emptiness, and stagnation, the compulsion to repeat that drives *Haus u r* evokes a distinctly psychoanalytic understanding of repetition. Specifically, Schneider's project bears out the model of repression, and its return, that Freud formulated in *The Uncanny*: where the past is marked by trauma, a struggle takes place between the defensive repression of that troubling past and the possibility of its return— a return which may be triggered by reminders of almost any sort. If the repressed does in fact return, this means that the *heimlich* will resurface in frightening form as that which is *unheimlich*, unhomely, uncanny. Taking his family's home and land, and thus the German past, as his subject, Schneider's *Haus u r* is bound up with a history punctuated the traumatic events of the Holocaust. Following Freud's scheme, while one can characterize that past in *Haus u r* as repressed, or buried, by the layers upon layers that Schneider applies to the structures, one sees also that, by virtue of the same process, the past is endlessly returning, in unfamiliar form. This return should come as no surprise. Reminders of the past are effectively ubiquitous, in both the family home itself and, more broadly, in a nation repeatedly attempting to come to terms with its history; they are, after all—and after Adorno specifically—mandated.

In its diminished and static nature, *Haus u r* calls to mind not only Freud's theorization of the uncanny but also, his related concept of the death drive. In *Beyond the*

Pleasure Principle, Freud again focused his attention on the function and meaning of

repetition, especially with regard to psychic processes involving the aftereffects of

trauma. Like *The Uncanny* also, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the product of a

postwar climate; Freud composed it at the same time that he worked on *The Uncanny*,

and published it in 1920.[306] The crux of Freud's formulation of the death drive—and the

point that relates the concept so directly to *Haus u r*—turns on the notion that trauma, by

definition, is a type of agitation, a rupture of the relative quiescence characterizing a

functional, non-traumatized state of being.[307] In the event of such a breach, Freud

continued, an innate need to quell the excitation asserts itself; this, he described, is the

death drive and it "is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things

which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external

disturbing forces."[308]

    Although the recovery of an interrupted state of quiescence may sound desirable

when set against the notions of trauma, excitation, and rupture, it nonetheless unsettles

the conventional correlation between repetition and progress: in its aim to reestablish a

prior way of being, it is not so much a movement forward as another type of return.

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[306] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, xxxviii.

[307] As Freud explained it:
> We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are
> powerful enough to break through the protective shield…the concept of
> trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an
> otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external
> trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the
> functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible
> defensive measure. (ibid., 33)

[308] Ibid., 43.

Moreover, as *Haus u r* bears out and as Schneider stated explicitly, any quiescent state associated with this project is fleeting: it will inevitably be interrupted again by that impulse Schneider identified when he declared that after finishing each room he would always "go back to square one and start work again."[309]

As *Haus u r* demonstrates with its unending tiers of walls, floors, and windows, its worn and empty spaces, its capacity to entrap, and the condition of stasis it perpetuates, the ongoing process of wrestling with the past may incorporate a degree of preservation—Schneider's family pictures are allegedly still within the walls, for example, and much of the original house reappears in its later incarnations—but the pursuit comes at a cost. It not only reseals and pushes the past farther and farther away, but it suspends the present in a constant state of deferral, and it sets in motion a course whose implications for the future are equally, if not more, burdened and bleak; with each successive chapter in its own history, *Haus u r* stands as an increasingly powerful testament to the inexorable and non-negotiable fact that the past can only be pursued at the expense of itself.

IV. Gregor Schneider: Afterword

In July, 2011, I had the opportunity to visit a set of rooms installed by Gregor Schneider at the Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach, Germany. Several of the

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[309] Schneider and Loock, "I never throw anything away, I just go on…" in Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 100. In addition, much psychoanalytic thought associates the traumatic with various types of impossibility; that is, with the impossibility of adequately accessing and thereby processing trauma. Amongst the most prominent theorists contributing to this field are Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok [see Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Nicholas Rand (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Jacques Lacan (see Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

spaces originally derived from the Unterheyedener Strasse house and others had their origins with other projects, but none of this was clearly explained on-site. Although the installation was closed at the time, museum staff arranged to open the area for me. After leaving my belongings at the Museum's front desk—no bags or telephones allowed—I was led to the exhibition's main door and, seemingly, given free reign to explore.

Few documented accounts of visits to Schneider's house at Unterheyedener Strasse or the installation of his rooms elsewhere appear in the literature devoted to Schneider's work. As a contribution to this limited field, and in the spirit of returning to the subject of Schneider's ongoing project in a manner that reflects something of the personal, perplexing, absorbing nature of *Haus u r*, I conclude this chapter with my impressions and recollections of the experience.

The visit begins with a short walk in the company of a museum security guard, down a concrete path to what appears an ordinary cement-clad, single-car garage set in a patch of grass. No driveway leads up to the closed steel door at its front, and the back of the structure abuts one of the museum's exterior walls, which towers over it. The path heads towards a narrow door near the rear of the garage; it, too, is steel, closed, and windowless. The guard unlocks this door, hoists it open, and gestures for me to enter. Before turning to leave, he instructs me to make sure that I pull the door completely shut once I am inside. Nodding in assent, I step into the nearly pitch-dark space of the garage and keep my hand on the door handle until I feel the latch click into its closed position.

To my right, a small light hangs from the ceiling. It dimly illuminates a metal railing attached to a ladder that descends into an indiscernible area at the back of the

garage. The light is too weak to afford a view of anything but this small portion of the

space and so I decide to search for a switch that might provide another source of

illumination. To my left, I can just barely make out a thin strip of light seeping in under

the bottom of the garage door; along with the bulb at right, and as my eyes adjust to the

darkness, this allows me to catch sight of a single wall switch. In the instant before

touching it, I hesitate with the realization that I have no idea what this device may

actually operate. Deciding to assume whatever risk might be involved, I press the switch,

wait, and find that nothing changes: the darkness remains, I listen for sounds suggesting

I have awoken some mechanism I cannot see, but the space is utterly silent, and I quickly

acknowledge my relief at having not extinguished the bit of light at the far end of the

garage.

Making my way around the perimeter of the space, I encounter nothing but

cinderblock walls, a concrete floor, and emptiness. The ladder beckons, albeit

ominously, as it leads to the only part of the structure I have left unexplored. Looking

before climbing down, I can see nothing of the space into which the ladder descends: it is

too dark to determine how deep it is, how wide or long it is, or whether I will be sharing

it with anything or anyone when I get to the floor below. After taking a few steps down,

and trying to peer left and right and behind my back without loosing my footing, a

passageway comes into view. The height and width of a standard door, it is set into the

wall opposite the ladder and when I reach the ground it becomes apparent that this lower

level space is small, designed so that the ladder basically leads directly to this opening.

Immediately inside the passage, on the right, I find another closed door. Wondering if it

opens, or if the installation ends here and I am meant to climb back up the ladder and find

my way out, I pull on the handle; it is unlocked and, pulling it open, I see absolutely nothing on its other side. Somehow, the space into which I am staring seems even darker than the place I am considering leaving.

Two sources of apprehension make me pause at the doorway. First, as dark as this next area is, I have no idea whether I would be entering open space; I could trip over or fall into something, I could walk straight into a wall. Second, if I commit to crossing this threshold, I wonder if I will be able to return to the ladder should I decide the darkness is simply too impenetrable to navigate? Keeping the door open, I turn its handle from the inside, trying to judge if it is designed to lock once it closes. It swivels freely, I decide to take a small step forward, and then, with a few lingering misgivings, I let go of the door. It swings shut.

It takes a moment to decide how to proceed. Engulfed in total darkness, I understand that the only way to move through this space is by keeping my back to the wall, with one arm reaching out to feel for any approaching obstacles or direction changes. The wall surface varies—flat, smooth, interrupted by small protrusions, on occasion feeling as if it is covered with a material feeling like felt—and I slowly follow its bends and turns. Nothing comes into sight until, after what seems a remarkably long time, a small light appears in the distance. Unable to tell how far away it is, or what lies between it and me, I keep to the wall and gradually get close enough to see that it is hanging, a carefully poised spotlight, over a lumpy black plastic garbage bag. Getting even closer, I realize my eyes have focused on a pair of legs extending out from the bag; I stop and reconsider my interest in proceeding.

Reasoning that I should be undeterred by the presence of a mannequin, I keep edging along the wall and it takes me closer and closer to the corpse-like figure on the ground. The space narrows and curves tightly around the body; in order to keep moving forward, I have no choice but to get much closer to it than I want to. When I am at my closest, standing only a couple of feet away from the prostrate form obscured by the trash bag, a moderate panic strikes me: what if one of those legs, or even just the tip of a foot, moves? What if the black plastic almost imperceptibly rises and falls, as it would if the figure inside were breathing? What if I was wrong in thinking of this figure as a corpse, or even in assuming it is mannequin? Given that the darkness precludes the possibility of quickly fleeing from my spot, I simply stare down at the prostrate figure, vigilantly watching for even the slightest hint of movement and eventually convincing myself that its stillness is permanent.

As I head into another cavern of blinding darkness, I think about how strange and extreme this state of isolation and sensory deprivation is. To compensate for it, or perhaps to distract myself, or maybe simply because nothing is preventing me, I become especially meticulous about feeling my way along the wall. I want to register each change in its surface and I try to recall every facet of the path I have already traveled (in part, I concede, this is so that I could retrace my steps and get out as fast as possible, if necessary). Parts of my conversation with the security guard come back to me, too. He specified that the museum only permits one person at a time to enter the space (thank goodness, I think at first, as the idea that there might be someone else down here with me is almost petrifying, but then I remember the guard was speaking only about visitors and, as the corpse encounter made clear, I cannot be sure about much of anything). He also

assured me that there is no time limit assigned to my visit (the possibility of collapsing with fright seems plausible, and I wonder how many hours would have to pass before someone would decide to search for me?); he made clear that nothing is off-limits to me in these areas (I cannot imagine what the scope of this comment might imply); and, he underscored that it would be obvious when I arrive at the end of the installation (although this is undeniably vague, it is the most, and maybe the only, reassuring statement he made; it also repeatedly convinces me to keep pressing forward).

As these thoughts run their course, I come upon a pair of steps leading up to another door and, pushing it open, I see instantly that it gives way to a vastly different type of space. This is the entry to a suite of connected rooms, all saturated with bright light, sparsely furnished, with unadorned white plaster walls. From a small antechamber, I enter what appears to be a bedroom, with a thin and narrow mattress resting upon the floor. The mattress has two blankets—a black one tucked all around it and a blue one, folded into a pillow-sized rectangle, placed at one end—but the space is otherwise bare. At the far end of the room, I see a window with a small radiator directly below it and, to the right, a second door. The window affords no view: not only are its blinds closed but they are affixed to outside of the frame and therefore untouchable. Reminding myself that "nothing is off-limits," I decide to explore: I look under the blue blanket (and find nothing), I press the light switch (which does nothing), and I try to open the window (it is sealed shut). Time to move on, I think, and see what the next room holds.

My inclination to investigate carries on as I make my way through a series of spaces that have a seemingly labyrinthine arrangement to them. One room, whose intended function eludes me, is long and narrow, with two sealed windows set side by

side. Their views are obscured not by blinds but by opaque white curtains hung, again, from the outside. A set of white cords, strung maybe five feet from ground level, spans the room like a series of washing lines. Perpendicular to them, near the back of the space, a white curtain descends from the ceiling but does not quite reach the floor. A white concrete slab rests on the ground between the curtain and the rear window. It is shorter in length than the mattress in the bedroom and is bisected by a sheet of metal approximately two feet in height; where the concrete and metal meet, I see a shallow, soiled indentation.

As I make my way through every unlocked door, I loose track of the number of spaces I encounter. Some lead to empty closets, others take me into small interstitial spaces between rooms, and some do not open at all. At one point, I come upon a set of simple cupboard doors built into a wall. They are white, nondescript, and slightly ajar, and I pull them open to find only a small, mismatched collection of dishes that appear rather old and a bit grimy, with spots of dried tea or coffee marking the inside of a few cups. After venturing everywhere I can, I understand that I will leave these rooms by way of the same door through which I entered them: the room with curtain and washing lines is a sort of "dead end," and so I must return to a space I traveled through earlier, a modest and austere dining room. It contains a rectangular table covered with a plain white tablecloth, dark wooden chairs are pulled up to the table, and a few dishes are set upon it. In keeping with the cups and plates in the cupboard, these dishes look ordinary, worn, and dirtied with the residue of unidentifiable substances. The table sits up against a wall, with another view-less window immediately behind it. I spend time picking up a few of the dishes, moving a chair out to sit on briefly before pushing it back, feeling the

texture of the tablecloth, and trying one last time to pry open the window. Finally, there

is nothing left to do but leave, to step into and through the original antechamber and then

re-enter the unlit space beyond.

And so, a few moments later, I am back outside the door, enveloped in a darkness

so complete in comparison to the stark brightness of the rooms behind me that it is almost

breathtaking. Out of habit, I suppose (because I know it is futile), I linger on the step,

hoping my eyes will adjust, and gradually a question comes to mind: what now? Given

how far I have traveled, as well as the strange objects and places I have seen, what could

be coming next, I wonder, and how long will it last? Daunted by the prospect of inching

along the perimeter of this obscured space for an indefinite amount of time, and in near-

constant dread of what my eyes might focus on if any other patches of light emerge as I

round a corner, I try to find consolation in the fact that I still could return to the garage.

Granted, it is not exactly a comfortable place, but it does offer a modicum of familiarity

and visibility. Suddenly, this line of thought comes to an abrupt halt. I remember

reading something about the dining room—and I was just there, twice—that I wish I was

not remembering: it can rotate. Imperceptibly, so that no visitor has ever noticed even a

slight sense of movement, it can turn within its architectural superstructure so that the one

door that provides access as well as exit might not deposit the departing visitor at the

original point of entry.

Is this cause for panic? Very likely, yes. If I am not where I thought I was and, in

fact, have no idea where I am, then the situation precludes the possibility of returning to

my own point of origin, the garage. This would present an entirely new state of

disorientation and, possibly, despair. Quickly, I realize it also limits my options: I can only go forward.

The circumstances are now similar to those I experienced before entering the illuminated rooms. For a time and distance that are hard to gauge, I follow the changing contours and textures of the wall, seeing nothing until a faint and distant light once again casts itself on a corpse-like form partly shrouded by a black plastic bag. This scenario arises a total of three times: light and wall lead me to a body, supine and with only its lower extremities exposed. In all, the three bodies could suggest a family relationship: a diminutive figure wears childlike shoes and socks, and the other two resemble, in size and attire, an adult man and woman. Nothing identifies any of them at all specifically; nor, for that matter, is there any firm evidence linking them to one another, aside from their uniform mode of presentation. Similarly, if the arrangement is meant to imply a connection between these figures and the domestic spaces I just left, the nature of that relationship is also obscure: the rooms are largely barren, and their few furnishings are so generic that they betray no bond with anyone in particular.

I begin to suspect that the end of the installation is near when, a few feet ahead, I can once again make out the door leading to the brightly lit rooms. What is puzzling and disconcerting, though, is that nothing strikes me as the obvious end mentioned by the security guard. Surely, I cannot have missed it. Methodical and thorough from the very beginning, I never declined to explore a passage and never refused to cross a threshold. As a sort of persistent refrain, "what now…" crosses my mind again and I run my hands over the wall at my side, wondering if one of its bumps or dents was meant to signal a way out: should I have been pushing and pressing, searching for moveable panels and

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secret escape routes? Retracing a few steps, while thinking I might be destined to retrace hundreds of steps in order to find the elusive end, I glimpse a sign I had never before seen. It is an ordinary, rectangular "exit" sign set above a door I had also, somehow, never found earlier. Whether my discovery is purely fortuitous or choreographed in a way I cannot fathom, I do not know, but then I also have no certainty that this is actually the exit: perhaps another part of the labyrinth awaits on the other side?

A moment after I step through the doorway, my experience takes an extreme turn. This space is different yet again from anywhere else I have been thus far: it is a narrow, concrete hall leading several meters to another door, and although it is a darkened space, there is illumination enough to make out the size, shape, and basic features of the corridor. At exactly the same time that I see all of this, the ringing sirens of an alarm fill the hall. My thoughts run in scattered directions. Should I turn around and leave so that maybe the alarm will stop…or hurry to the next door and hope for reprieve…or look for something that might be an "off" switch…? And then, abruptly, an intervention: the door behind me opens and I am not alone. The security guard has returned, fetching me just as swiftly as he first delivered me, saying, "Come this way. What happened?" What I say is, "I don't know," but what I am thinking is, "I should be asking you that."

His next words baffle me: "didn't you see it?" He guides me back into the darkness, but a small shaft of light coming from a nearby door (which I think must have been his point of entry, given how quickly he got to me once the alarm sounded) reveals a dark, metallic panel to my left. We approach it, he presses a spot on the wall, and the doors slide open: an elevator. This, he indicates, is the exit, the point of closure that I

was supposed to find but, remarkably, it seems the light illuminating its wall panel is broken. It was un-findable.

I step into the elevator alone and the security guard gestures towards the control panel before turning and disappearing into the dark. As the doors close, I press the button labeled Gregor Schnieder and wonder where I am going. A short ride later, the doors open, bright light streams into the elevator, and I walk out into the main space of the museum. Fascinated, confused, and disoriented, I wander about the gallery, vaguely registering the impressive nature of both its architecture and exhibition: crisp, white, modern space, a Warhol canvas in the distance…and then my thoughts drift away, back downstairs, as I try to process the whole of the Haus experience. For a while, I undertake a systematic recollection of the entire series of events, but this is interrupted by isolated ideas and images deriving from one striking moment or another. So many of my questions about the Haus project have been resoundingly answered: yes, there are unexpected objects awaiting discovery; yes, the rooms feel claustrophobic; yes, it is deeply unnerving. For all of these answered questions, though, plenty remain unanswered and, in fact, new ones have emerged. Will I ever think of a specific detail, for instance, that will grant some insight into the relationship between the three figures and the rooms they surround? Did the dining room rotate even slightly? Then, I second-guess my thoroughness and wonder if I accidentally failed to open a door: what might I have missed that could have clarified any of the mysteries still confounding me? The litany of questions continues to unfurl in my mind, the process of revisiting and reconciling the varied facets of this experience gets no simpler, and I come to think: I want to go back in.

CONCLUSION

The formal differences between the works that Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider create are substantial and instantly apparent. In terms of medium, they share essentially no common ground: Neudecker's glass vitrines, set atop pedestals, display plastic and fiberglass models submerged in watery solutions; Demand manually cuts and assembles ordinary paper of varying colors, textures, and thicknesses in order to build life-size objects and rooms which become the subjects of his large-scale, unframed photographs; and Schneider, using both basic construction materials and standard household appointments, produces and furnishes rooms and passageways familiar to much domestic architecture. With regard to scale, the discrepancies are equally evident. As Neudecker's vitrines rarely measure more than three feet in length, width, or depth, the landscapes they contain are decidedly diminutive; Demand's photographs, typically spanning several feet in both length and width, present an expansive area for their viewers to survey; and Schneider's work, as a full-scale environment, is an architectural setting that entirely envelops its spectators.

Although a great deal distinguishes these three bodies of work from one another, there is nonetheless a cohesiveness to them. As we have seen, Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider all bring elements of the past—and often the German past, specifically—to the present. In addition, the oeuvres of all three are founded upon the practice of literally reconstructing in three-dimensional form that which has existed previously. Moreover, their works are consistently without human figures or text, so that a pervasive sense of

absence and emptiness defines each of their compositions. Finally, in that they arouse

inquisitiveness and compel investigation, these compositions all involve, or even

implicate, their spectators in a notably direct manner. In fact, the figural and textual

absences that feature in each of these projects amplify this directness. No Rückenfigur,

for example, ever obstructs or mediates the viewer's gaze. At the same time, as the

works lack text they also lack a contextual specificity that could establish a sense of

separation—geographical, historical, or otherwise—between the viewer and the

compositions.

As set forth from the opening paragraphs of this study, the issue of context bears

heavily upon the analyses of these works. In addition to sharing an interest in omitting

contextual detail, which ascribes to each composition an air of non-specificity and

timelessness, these projects have a common contextual point of origin: not only postwar,

but very late twentieth century, Germany. Both aspects of this particular cultural milieu

are crucial to the focus as well as the major contribution of this study, for Neudecker,

Demand, and Schneider produce works that not only engage with the legacy of the

Holocaust and its implications with regard to the need for, and limits of, representation,

but their projects also reflect both the post-Adorno and postmodern nature of the climate

in which they work; that is, each oeuvre demonstrates a persistent and critical approach to

the subject of history, which is not only increasingly chronologically distant but, as we

saw especially pointedly with regard to Demand's work, an inherently unfixed entity.

It is in examining this confluence of circumstances and characteristics that the

current study significantly extends the scholarship pertaining to Neudecker, Demand, and

Schneider. To date, although select features of each of these bodies of work have been

the subject of scholarly and critical attention, the literature has left room for closer and broader scrutiny in terms of theorizing how one can account for, in a cumulative fashion, the key and recurring characteristics of emptiness, a return to and concrete reconstruction of the past, the elicitation of inquisitiveness, and the evocation of Adorno's questions and challenges, all while being mindful of the late twentieth-century milieu that was the backdrop for their emergence. Moreover, while such a comprehensive approach advances the Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider literatures individually, it also, by bringing these three bodies of work together and parsing both their shared and distinguishing features, expands the scope of their projects' significance by identifying in them compelling evidence of a continuing and cross-media phenomenon in postwar visual culture that turns on a complicated conjunction of immersion in, and distance from, the past.

Given the significance ascribed in this study to the issue of cultural context, it is fitting that varied forms of distance have a prominent place in each of Neudecker's vitrines, Demand's photographs, and Schneider's spaces; it is, after all, the reality of chronological remove that positions Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider as part of the next generation of artists whose work grapples with the relationship between history and representation in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In Neudecker's work, the glass panes surrounding her landscapes physically distance the spectator from the material at hand; the many tiers of mediation essential to Demand's creative process generate a photograph that is distanced in several ways, including chronologically, from the subject it ostensibly pictures; and, throughout Schneider's *Haus*, tiers also accumulate such that the original structure of his home is increasingly separated from what remains visible.   Notably,

however, none of these forms of distance interferes with the spectator's direct involvement with and implication in the works. In fact, reflecting the concurrence of remove and immersion that characterizes this phenomenon, these distancing techniques are instrumental to the viewers' engagement with the works. Neudecker's glass enclosures secure her vaporous compositions and encourage her spectators to look into and around the scenes from nearly countless angles; it is the traces of mediation in Demand's photographs that most often first rouse the viewer's curiosity and suspicion; and Schneider's home was never a publicly accessible space, wherein visitors would be left to explore at length and at will, until, with the first layers of construction, he began its transformation from house into *Haus*.

The issue of distance intersects also with the contextual non-specificity that characterizes these three bodies of work. Inasmuch as the absence of text and figures fosters an unimpeded connection between the compositions and their spectators, it also stands as an additional reflection of the artists' generational remove from the history they take as their subjects; that is, it makes their works' references to the past—whether those be allusions to one particular Friedrich painting, the fate of Pascal Zimmer, or the spaces Schneider's family inhabited at Unterheydener Strasse—less direct than they would be if they were to reproduce their referents' figural and textual details. Consider, for example, precedents set by Richter and Kiefer. In *Uncle Rudi* (fig. 5), for instance, Richter's monochromatic palette and familiar blurring technique divest his image of a degree of richness, detail, and specificity, but a discernible subject nonetheless remains visible in the composition. The viewer has no trouble seeing a male figure, standing alone on bare ground before a wall and multi-storied structure, wearing a military overcoat and hat,

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smiling directly out from the canvas; in addition, the work's title is both personal and precise. Similarly, despite an element of ambiguity in Kiefer's *Occupations* (fig. 7), the photograph makes unmistakable allusions to the Nazi past: although the solitary figure in the center of the composition stands back-turned and thus unidentifiable in garments that appear oddly oversized, the attire is recognizably soldierly, the lone figure enacts the "Sieg heil" salute, and the title possesses distinctly militaristic tones. By contrast, in the work of Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider, the ubiquitous absences generate an impression of non-specificity and generalization. These omissions advance the investigative dimension of the works by leaving their spectators to seek out by various modes of inquiry those details they desire regarding the histories informing the works, and they also bring a sense of timelessness and universality to their subjects. In turn, while these works are both bound to the specific historical episodes and traditions to which they refer, the points they illuminate about the difficulties and risks involved in grappling with the past also appear broadly generalizable, not exclusively applicable to the work of processing a past marked by trauma, but to any consideration of how it is that the past bears upon the present.

The vigor and prevalence of the investigative aspects in all three bodies of work, both in terms of their preserving the past by re-presenting it and their prompts to inquisitiveness and close scrutiny, may be interpreted as a type of antidote to the inevitably growing distance that exists between the past and those who, generation after generation, are compelled to pursue it. However, as we have seen, they also amount to a way of looking that conforms to Adorno's mandate for a continued and critical engagement with the past; this is especially true given the prominence of the theme and

practice of the return in all three oeuvres. From both of these perspectives, we can see that Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider present alternate but also overlapping responses to the task of coming to terms with the past. Neudecker's tanks, which evoke the ideas of specimen boxes and clinical trials, suggest but also raise questions about the work of the conscientious empiricist; Demand's compositions, with the stillness, emptiness, and traces of activity that bring to mind the aesthetics of the crime scene photograph, conjure the business of rigorous forensic investigation while blurring the boundary between criminal and detective; and Schneider, endlessly occupied with a project that is fully bound up with a grim and ever-enclosing sense of entrapment, calls forth the bleak hopelessness of the melancholic who, despite unending episodes of work, never breaks free of the past and, as a result, is consumed by a present that is both diminished and deferred. Disparate though these roles and responses are, we have seen that these bodies of work do in fact have much in common, and while the need or desire to return to a project that cannot reach a conclusion—that is, coming to terms with the past— may appear to assume its most explicitly dark and troubling form in Schneider's work, it informs Demand's and Neudecker's also. With this in mind, one is left to wonder: how fine is the line, and how easy is the slippage, between diligence and dysfunction?

Aptly, while Neudecker, Demand, and Schneider create bodies of work that raise this question, and do so most effectively when their projects are considered collectively rather than individually, they do not definitively answer it. Instead, they present a complicated, burdened notion of what it means to attempt to come to terms with the past in the postwar, post-Adorno, postmodern world of which they are a part. The past, they demonstrate, is always incomplete, elusive, and even at risk of perishing; however, this

does not diminish the significance of its bearing upon the present, nor the importance of its pursuit. In fact, while these are the conditions that ensure the difficulty and even the impossibility of the task, they are also what make it necessary.

In Neudecker's tanks, Demand's photographs, and Schneider's spaces, the past is ever-present yet never fully accessible, retrospection coincides with anticipation, and the impulse to preserve, investigate, and critique slips along an ethical continuum spanning the conscientious to the questionable. In terms that are both specific and wide-reaching, these bodies of work examine the nature of the relationship between history and its representations, and draw attention to the perils and predicaments that cannot be disentangled from the task of coming to terms with the past.

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Figure 1: Mariele Neudecker, *The Sea of Ice*, 1997 (Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*, 8)

Figure 2: Thomas Demand, *Klause I*, 2006 (http://www.artinfo.com/photo-galleries/thomas-demand?image=7; accessed 08-05-12)

Figure 3: Gregor Schneider, *Staircase*, Rheydt, 1989 – 1993 (Schneider and Schimmel, *Gregor Schneider*, 10)

Figure 4: Joseph Beuys, *Auschwitz Vitrine*, 1955 (http://www.studyblue.com/notes/n/organic-matter/deck/2265237; accessed 18-03-13)

Figure 5: Gerhard Richter, *Uncle Rudi*, 1965 (http://mostlyfilm.files.wordpress.com/2011
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Figure 6: Gerhard Richter, *October 18, 1977*, 1988 (http://www.moma.org/collection/
object.php?object_id=79037; accessed 18-03-13)

Figure 7: Anselm Kiefer, *Occupations*, 1969 (http://www.ciids.org/arthistory/resize/640/
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Figure 8: Anselm Kiefer, *Sulamith*, 1983 (http://arthistory.about.com/od/from_
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Figure 9: Mariele Neudecker, *Morning Fog in the Mountains*, two views, 1997 (left, Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*, 32; right, http://collection.britishcouncil.org/collection/artist/5/17764/objects/45717; accessed 11-10-12)

Figure 10: Mariele Neudecker, *Raft of the Medusa*, 1995 (Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*, 60)

Figure 11: Mariele Neudecker, *Landscape*, 1996 (http://www.artnet.com/artists/mariele-neudecker/landscape-V3BPquZ2Ra2ezhwCcWk_0w2; accessed 20-09-12)
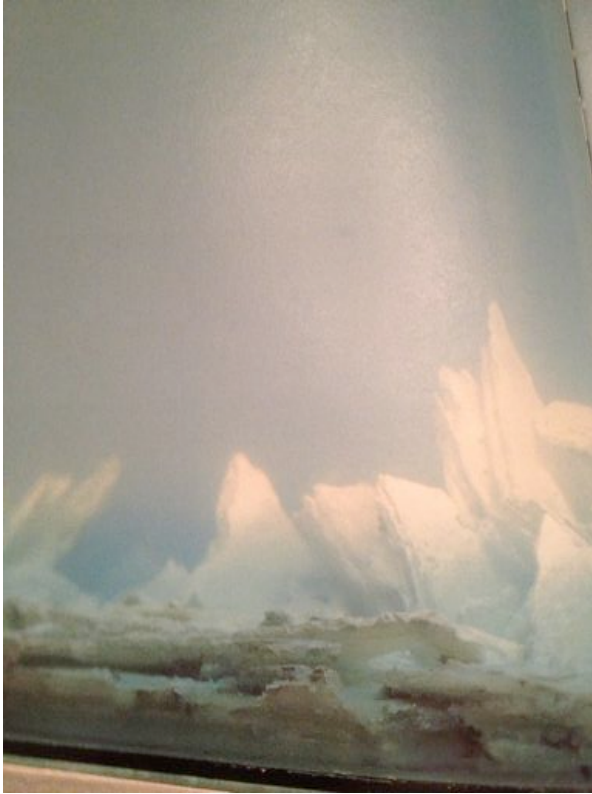
Figure 12: Mariele Neudecker, *The Sea of Ice*, detail, 1997 (Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*, 16)
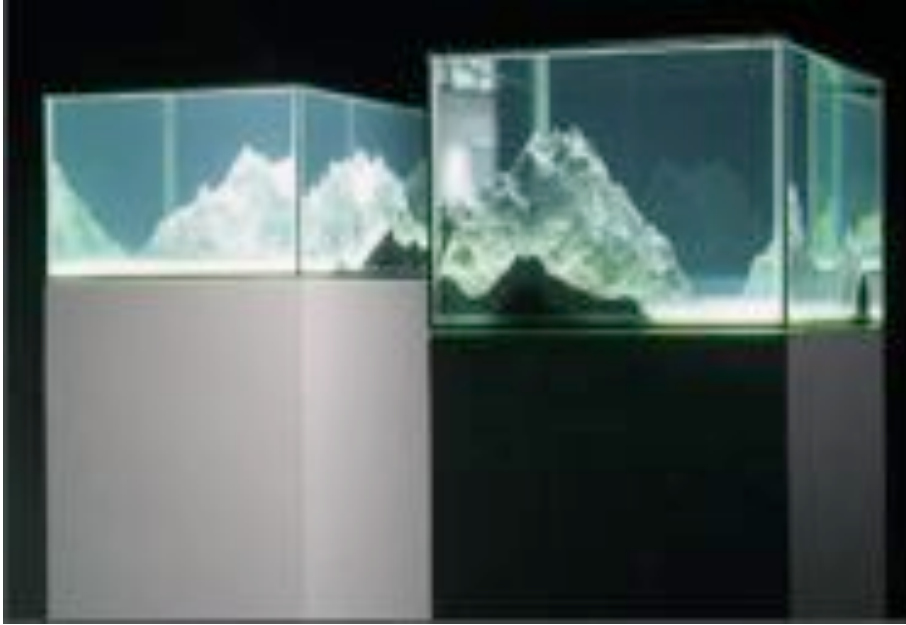
Figure 13: Mariele Neudecker, *Heaven, the Sky*, 2008 (http://www.aptglobal.org/Artist/
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Figure 18: Mariele Neudecker, *It Takes 8.4 Minutes for Light to Travel from the Sun to the Earth*, 2006 (http://www.marieleneudecker.co.uk/gosh.html; accessed 27-09-12)

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Figure 20: Mariele Neudecker, *Gravity Presents the Atmosphere from Drifting into Outer Space*, 2001 (http:///www.ciids.org/arthistory/resize/640/54798_640.jpg; accessed 27-09-12)

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Figure 22: Caspar David Friedrich, *Fog*, 1807 (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
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Figure 23: Caspar David Friedrich, *Morning Fog in the Mountains*, 1808 (http://en.
wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_033.jpg; accessed 21-09-12)

Figure 24: Caspar David Friedrich, *The Sea of Ice*, 1823 – 1824 (http://commons. wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_The_Sea_of_Ice_-_WGA8270. jpg; accessed 21-09-12)

Figure 25: Mariele Neudecker, *Shipwreck*, 1997 (Neudecker, Lorés, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariele Neudecker*, 31)

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hu/support/viewer/z.html; accessed 28-09-12)
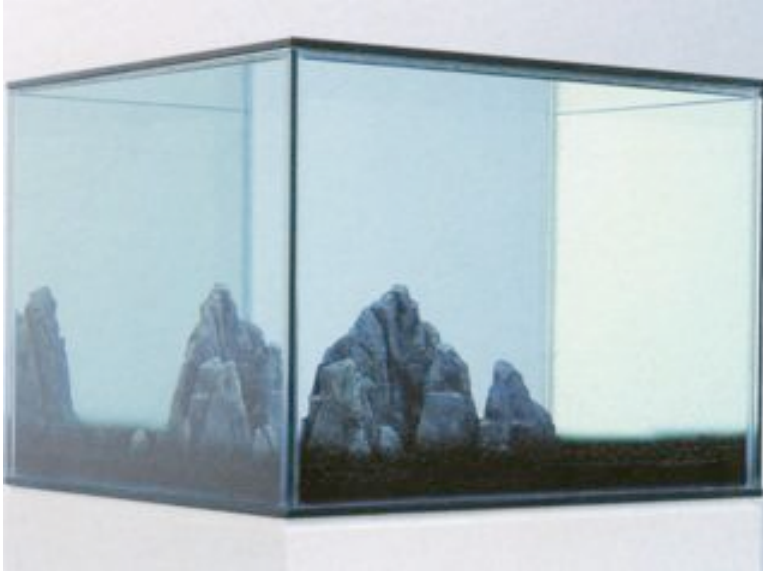
Figure 27: Mariele Neudecker, *There Go I*, 2004 (http://www.ciids.org/arthistory/
mainmenu.cfm?mediano=54813&cc=191&sc=7331; accessed 28-09-12)

Figure 28: Arnold Böcklin, *Island of the Dead*, 1880 (http://www.metmuseum.
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Figure 29: Mariele Neudecker, *Over and Over, Again and Again*, 2004 (http://www.
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Figure 30: Mariele Neudecker, *Another Million Days and Nights Go By*, 2002 (http://www.greenonredgallery.com/exhibition.php?intProjectID=58; accessed 12-10-12)

Figure 31: Mariele Neudecker, *Looking West (Sunset)*, 1996 (http://www.ciids.
org/arthistory/resize/640/54802_640.jpg; accessed 07-10-12)

Figure 32: Mariele Neudecker, *Think of One Thing*, 2002 (http://www.ciids.org/
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Figure 33: Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*, 1809 – 1810 (http://www.ciids.
org/arthistory/resize/640/11435_640.jpg; accessed 15-10-12)

Figure 34: Caspar David Friedrich, *Chasseur in the Forest*, 1813 – 1814 (http://www.
wga.hu/support/viewer_m/z.html; accessed 15-10-12)

Figure 35: Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, c. 1818 (http://www.ciids.org/arthistory/resize/640/11434_640.jpg; accessed 14-10-12)

Figure 36: Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans: 2*, 1981 (http://www.metmuseum.
 org/toah/works-of-art/1995.266.2; accessed 18-03-13)

Figure 37: Richard Prince, *Untitled (Cowboy)*, 1989 (http://www.metmuseum.org/
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Figure 38: Thomas Demand, *Klause II*, 2006 (http://www.artinfo.com/photo-galleries/thomas-demand; accessed 08-05-12)

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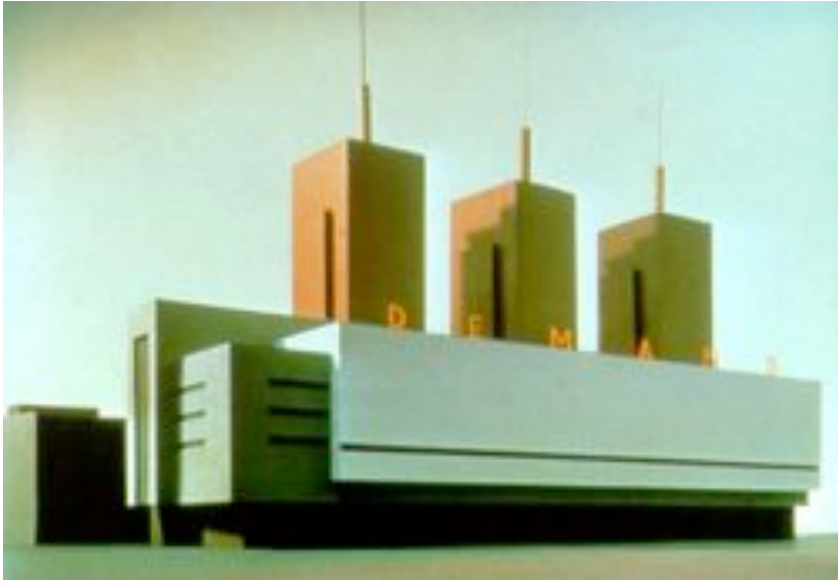
Figure 42: Thomas Demand, *Factory*, 1994 (http://www.artnet.com/
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Figure 43: Thomas Demand, *Podium*, 2000 (Demand, Colomina, and Kluge, *Thomas Demand*, 76)

Figure 44: Thomas Demand, *Grotto*, 2006 (http://www.ciids.org/arthistory/
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Figure 45: installation view, *Nationalgalerie*, Berlin, 2009 (http://arttattler.com/ archivethomasdemand.html; accessed 16-05-12)

Figure 46: Thomas Demand, *Two Cakes*, 1990 (http://www.mutualart.com/
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Figure 47: Thomas Demand, *Nine Lamps*, 1992 (http://www.christies.com/
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Figure 48: Thomas Demand, *Untitled (Sandal)*, 1993 (http://www.mutualart.com/
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Figure 49: Thomas Demand, *Wurstplatte*, 1994 (http://dlkcollection.blogspot.
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Figure 50: Thomas Demand, *Bierdeckel*, 1994 (http://phillipsdepury.com/auctions/lot-detail/THOMAS-DEMAND/NY010107/256/22/1/12/detail.aspx; accessed 24-06-12)

Figure 51: Thomas Demand, *Sandals*, 1994 (http://www.phillipsdepury.com/auctions/lot-detail/THOMAS-DEMAND/NY010107/255/22/1/12/detail.aspx; accessed 27-08-12)

Figure 52: Thomas Demand, *Window*, 1998 (http://arttattler.com/archive
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Figure 58: Thomas Demand, *Kitchen*, 2004 (http://ciids.org/arthistory/mainmenu.
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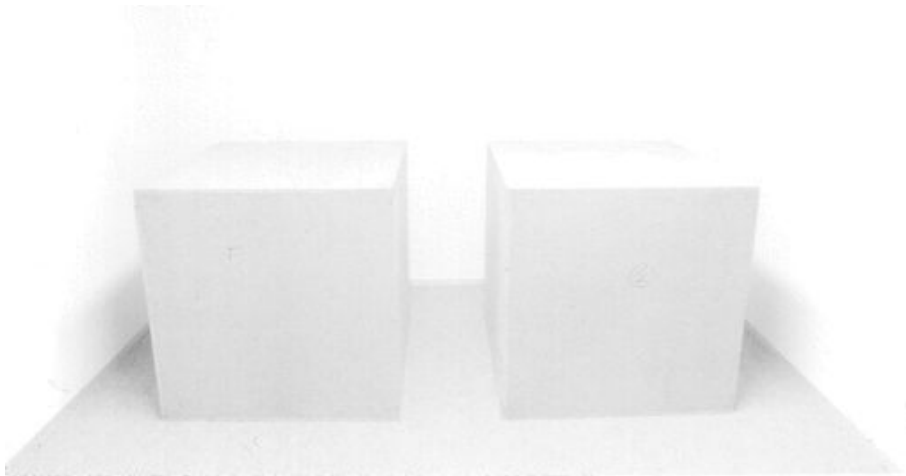
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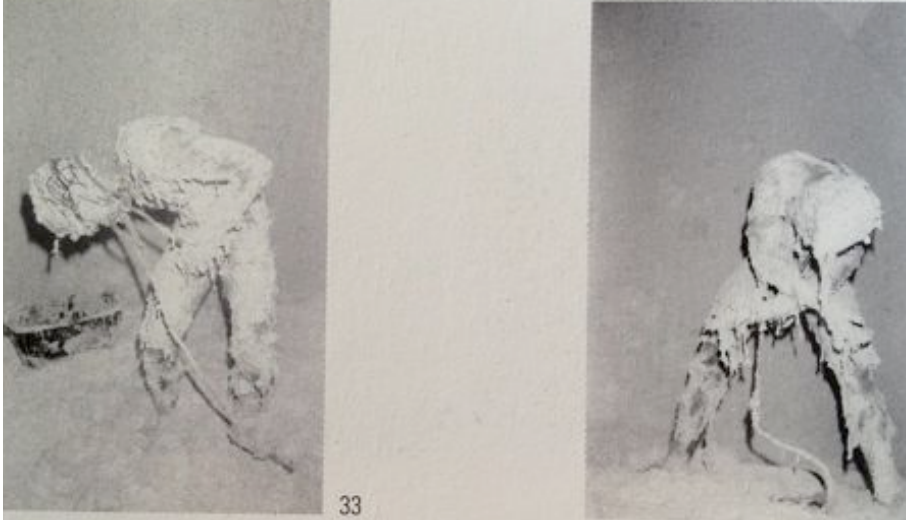
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