

*A comparative study of the conception and changes of the
German woods by Germans throughout history seen through art*

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Module: CP6013
BA Fine Art (Photography)
The Cass Dissertation

April/2016

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Introduction

‘A well ordered ideal of ecology... can only stem from art... Art is then, a genuinely human medium for revolutionary change in the sense of completing the transformation from a sick world to a healthy one.’¹ A quote from Joseph Beuys, one of the leading artists during the later part of the 20th century and one of the co-founders of the Green Party in Germany. He, and many other artists, primarily painters, has, throughout the historic period this dissertation will cover, portrayed the forest and created art reflecting or challenging the way the woods have been treated and perceived. By looking at the art during a period, one can therefore extract the fundamental values and debates that took place – regardless if an artist celebrates or condemns them. The art movements will have a relationship to the public views, and each of these artists included in this text has either been brought up as a visual example of beliefs in that period or are artists talking or reflecting the political standpoint at that time. That is the reason for including artists in each period of time and the ones chosen are key artists of their era. It is also crucial to look at the politics during the later conceptions since their relationship to art and the forest are more distinctive than earlier. In 1850, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl recognized that each period of time had a distinguished view of the world and the landscape and in more recent years in central Europe, there are several natural areas that have been changed by humans, one of which is the German forest.

In the last twenty or thirty years, we have seen noble trees and forests in many tracts of German landscape subjected to the most unholy and dastardly mischief. Whole forests have been cut down and whole areas denuded because the individual owner can do as he pleases with nature in the most arbitrary way. What difference does it make to somebody who needs money and intends to use up in ten years something that was meant to sustain his great-grandchildren, if he leaves behind a barren tract of land which will in future yield little pleasure and be of barely any use to people?²

This dissertation will compare three distinctive conceptions of the German woods in regards to art, and when necessary, politics, from romanticism in the 19th century to Nazism in the mid 20th century and environmentalism today. Romanticism, Nazism and environmentalism are all three conceptions that have stood out in history since the 19th century. German history goes long back, but the area that we today call Germany was formed in 1871, about 100 years after the romantic movement began to take shape. The forest has been an important part of German culture in history and during at least the past 2000 years the German forest has been thought of as much more than just a botanic place. Over its history, the perception, beliefs and thoughts of the forest have changed: from the mythical to the romantic conception, and from the Nazi to the environmental conception, and by the end of this text, one will hopefully have a clear view on how the forest has been treated and perceived throughout this part of history of the German forest.

¹ Joseph Beuys, ‘Time’s a thermic machine; a public dialogue, Bonn 1982’, quoted from Colin Riordan, *Green Thought in German Culture*, p. 250.

² Ernst Moritz Arndt, ‘Ein Wort über die Pfl egung und Erhaltung der Forsten und Bauern im Sinne einer höheren, d. h. menschlichen Gesetzgebung’, trans. by Colin Riordan, quoted in *Green Thought of German Culture*, 1997, p. 9.

During the time of these conceptions, it is important to acknowledge that people from different backgrounds have different relationships to nature. All through history different groups of people have had different conceptions of the forest, even groups living at the same period time, and within the same movement, could have slightly different views of what the forest actually stood for – it is not only black and white. It is also important to recognise that all people who might be at home in a natural environment, such as the forest, might not have the same feelings toward it. A hunter and an environmentalist might both like the idea of the forest, but have different ways of treating it. This text is not going to go into detail how people from different upbringings born in the same time relate to the forest, but to, on a more general standpoint, discuss how a particular conception and movement has influenced the German people's view of their forest.

The dissertation will begin in the 19th century by looking at romanticism and give a short introduction to it where the sublime and romantic painters are included. There will be examples of paintings of the forest to visually understand how it was portrayed and the similarities of the relationship to the forest and visual representation. Environmentalism was not a movement at this time, but the thoughts on preservation did exist. In the next chapter, Nazism and its relationship to nature is discussed in regards to politics, which then goes into a discussion about the link to art. The Nazis condemned modern art, which they referred to as 'degenerate', and celebrated romantic paintings, Caspar David Friedrich being one of Hitler's favourite painters. What kind of art was made during this era is looked at and there is an explanation of Germany's past during the first centuries AD. The Nazis did not invent green thoughts, but environmentalism has a past that interlinks with the Nazi government. How big and important this relationship is will be discussed to figure out how green the Nazis actually were. Nature preservation was at this time referred to as conservationism and was more similar to environmentalism than green thoughts were earlier in history. This chapter also talks about art made after the Nazis fall and the criticism toward the regime, how Germany wanted to forget and how environmentalism and art was used during the time after the war. The final chapter will have reached present day and environmentalism. There environmentalism is analyzed in regards to Germany's forest – and in this example, acid rain and the dying forests. Art made in relation to this is also shown and in the end there will be a conclusion of the findings to discuss the similarities and differences with these three conceptions and how they relate to the German forest and the art made during these periods.

Before going deeper into the dissertation, we will begin much earlier. During the period of time when German tribes lived in the German forest, long before the formation of Germany, romanticism, and the years this dissertation will cover, the people in that area saw the forest as something to worship, but for other people living outside the tribes, the forest was a vicious and wicked place. The tribal people created medicines from the trees and coined *Doppelgänger* – the belief that a person is spiritually connected to a tree and that the tree shares that person's fate. With this knowledge, one can now begin the journey through the German forest history, starting in the 19th century.



19th century

Conservation, the rise of environmentalism and the portrayal of the woods through art

Nature preservation during the 19th century was referred to as conservationism, but it was not so much of a movement as it was a belief or emotion. The main advocates for conservation were authors without much interest in organizations or creating a political debate. One of the foremost author's was Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl who in 1854 wrote the book *Natural History of the German People*, which glorified the German forest and the thought of having a 'natural right to wilderness'³. According to Riehl, the economic, political and moral wellbeing of Germany depended on the forest.⁴ Colin Riordan explains in his book *Green Thought in German Culture* that one of the causes the conservation or preservation movement became so popular was because of industrialisation. The people reacted against and wanted to protect nature instead of destroying it. However, Riehl did not believe that the industry was the only reason, but that the wish to expand agricultural land over forests to feed the growing population was a key factor as well. Organizations did exist at this time, as beautification societies, and their objective of protecting nature was aimed toward aesthetic improvement. Since Germany as a country did not exist the way it does today, uniting these organizations was difficult, and even after the foundation of Germany in 1871, the different regions in the country still had trouble unifying due to the varied ways each region thought of the preservation of nature.

The first conception looked at is romanticism, which was a movement that started to emerge in Europe during the 1790s and that ended in the 19th century. Romanticism is not as easily defined as other art movements in history since the aesthetics was very broad – for it was the focus *on* aesthetic that was in the centre of attention – and the purpose and meaning of the work began to be more frequently questioned by the art world; a discussion about art was born. The importance was the way pieces were done through the artist's emotional authenticity and sensibility rather than was actually created. It was the 'belief in the primacy of imagination, the potentialities of intuition, the importance of the emotions and emotional integrity, and, above all, the uniqueness and unique value of every human being in a constantly changing cosmos.'⁵ Many types of different paintings from this era, German paintings included, can be found in the National Gallery in London. Romanticism influenced the perception of nature, where nature was seen as beautiful, unique and rare and should be preserved that way. The wilderness, the woodland, mountains and lakes, were admired, but that admiration existed long before romanticism.

The sublime is a central concept to understand the romantic era for its relation to the aesthetic study. When putting it into the context of landscape painting it might be easier to understand. There are many examples of sublime paintings of the forest made during romanticism in Germany; Caspar David Friedrich is one example of artists. The sublime

³ Frank Uekoetter, *The Green and the Brown: A history of conservation in Nazi Germany*, 2009, p.17

⁴ Colin Riordan, *Green Thought in German Culture*, 1997.

⁵ Hugh Honour, *Romanticism*, 1979, p.21

is a way of reacting to an art piece and is difficult to define, but it is however easier to identify the effects of it. Edmund Burke describes it here, where he identifies the differences between the sublime and the beautiful:

The feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that arises only indirectly: it is produced by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger. Hence it is an emotion, and so it seems to be seriousness, rather than play, in the imagination's activity. Hence, too, this liking is incompatible with charms, and, since the mind is not just attracted by the object but is alternately always repelled as well, the liking for the sublime contains not so much a positive pleasure as rather admiration and respect, and so should be called a negative pleasure.⁶

The sublime is making the audience experience wonder, which is much more powerful than simply the viewer being pleased with the work. The book *The Sublime* by Philip Shaw is talking about how to define the sublime and it does that with a discussion about the thoughts of a few big writers of the sublime, such as Thomas Reid and Immanuel Kant. Kant, in his book *Critique of Judgement* from 1790, discusses the sublime. He says that one can judge an object on its physical appearance, like the rock is gray, for example, but judging something as beautiful is something different. Judging something on its aesthetics cannot be validated by understanding or reasoning. According to Kant's writings, the sublime contradicts this hypothesis. He means the sublime is found in an object without form, while beauty is concerned with an object with form. The sublime is the feeling when the audience become conscious of the transcendental dimensions of the encounter. The romantic discourse of the sublime was created as a reaction to the limits of Burke's experimentation of it.

The ideas of the romantic era were not about changing the German forest into a beautiful landscape, but about preserving the forest's natural beauty. In Germany at this period of time, the forest was associated with German identity. Through the artists like Carl Wilhelm Kolbe, the oak tree became a heroic German species. Kolbe created pieces of art and some which where the oak tree was the main focus, like *Study of oak trees (recto)* (1800). Freidrich Hölderlin, a poet and painter spoke much of the oak tree as a national symbol of the Fatherland, Germany being referred to the Fatherland. German fascism made extensive use of art and obviously aesthetic means in making its case.⁷

⁶ Edmund Burke, quoted from Philip Shaw, *The Sublime*, 2006.

⁷ Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, Chapter: Introduction p.4



Carl Wilhelm Kolbe, *Study of oak trees (recto)*, 1800.

From the romantic era, some of the most appreciated artists are British painters J. W. Turner and John Constable, and German painters Adrian Ludwig Richter and Caspar David Friedrich. They were all landscape painters with their own unique style. In Germany, Friedrich painted many pieces of the forests, portrayed in a dark, sublime way. He was a painter who isolated and withdrew himself much more than others and started receiving recognition in the beginning of the 19th century – but he did not become as well known during his lifetime as he would become in the 20th century because of events that would take place then. Three famous works are *The Chasseur in the Forest* (1814), *The Cross in the Mountains* (1812) and perhaps the most famous of them all, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818). In the first piece, *The Chasseur in the Forest* is generally identified with nationalism, which is a mistake. Friedrich was not nationalistic but instead critical to authority and his paintings should be seen as examinations of the mythical German forest.⁸ Comparing it with *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, the two paintings seem both very similar but also different. The second painting portrays a man standing on a rock or mountain, looking out over the open landscape, above the fog and the man can see everything. The first painting however is visually the opposite. It is still showing a landscape, but in this case it is closed off with the forest being a place one may never escape from. A French soldier is cut off from his troops and standing alone in the German forest – he is trapped, seems to have given up and one gets a feeling that the forest slowly captures its enemies. Both paintings are sublime with *The Chasseur in the*

⁸ Jonathan Jones, *The Ghost of Germany's past*, *The Guardian*, 2001.

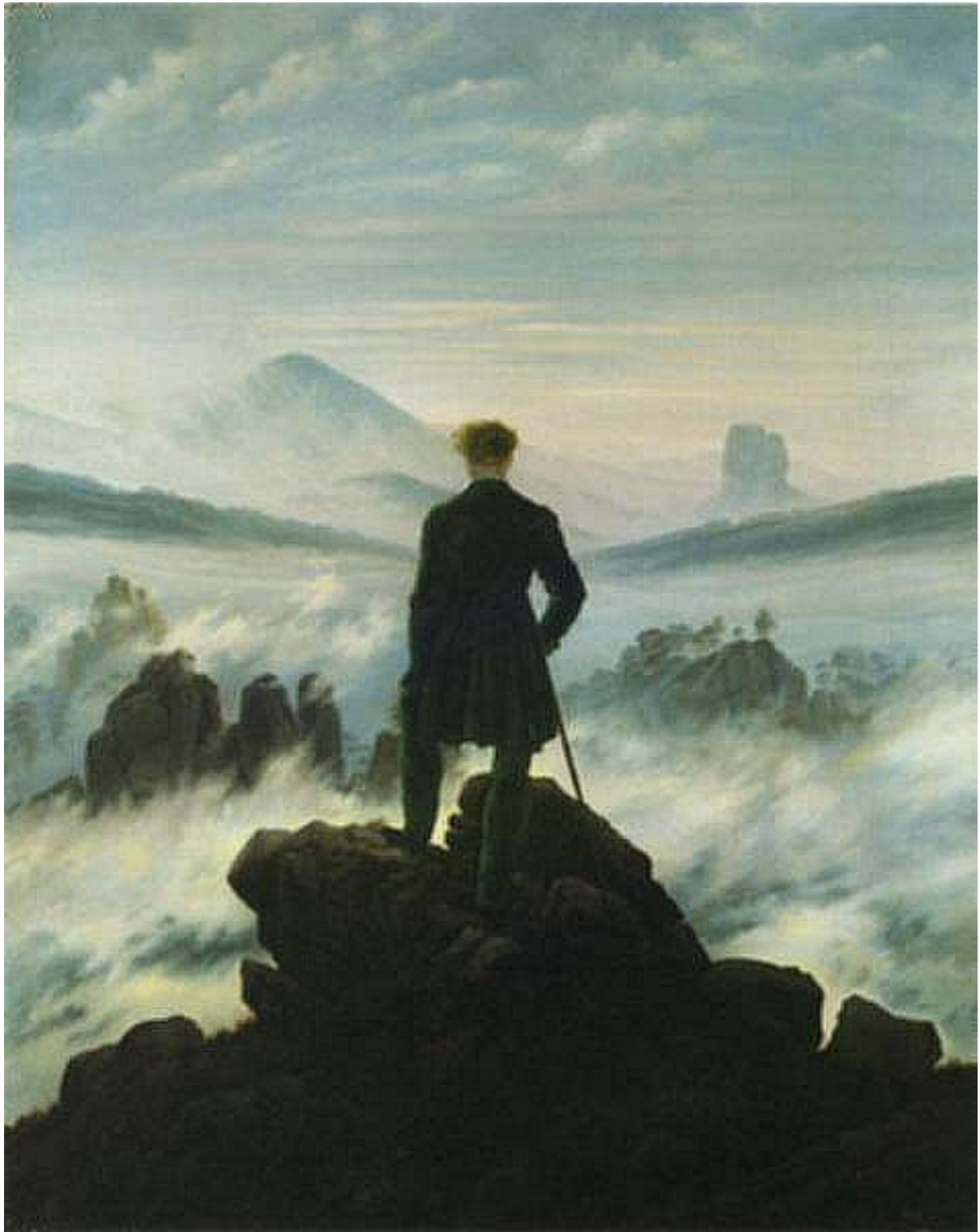
Forest exploring the sublime of the German forest and the *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* exploring an open landscape.



Caspar David Freidrich, *The Chasseur in the Forest*, 1814.



Caspar David Fredrich, *The Cross in the Mountains*, 1812.



Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1818.

Nature preservation and the forgotten art

Nazism's relationship to the forest and art

Nazism is perhaps not most well known for their green ideas, but for their fascism and belief in 'one perfect race is superior to others' and while that should not be forgotten or undermined, their relationship to conservation and green thoughts is an important thing in the history of environmentalism and their abrupt change in the German art world shows the power politics can have over art. Nazism's peak in Germany was not a long period of history, but the Nazi government still managed to endorse the most successful nature preservation law up to that date while they were in power: the Reich Nature Protection law (Reichnatschutzgesetz, or RNG). It was a law that was meant to protect and preserve the German landscape. Romanticism influenced Germany during this period perhaps more than romanticism has influenced the current environmentalism and even though these laws and actions were there to protect and preserve, the idea behind was mainly to preserve the beauty: to create a perfect land for the Nazi's 'perfect people'. Hitler created preservation laws and autobahn so his German people would be closer to nature. The minister of agriculture during the Nazi regime, Richard Walter Darré, established the term 'Blood and Soil' as a symbol for the Nazi's. He made sure that the protection of nature would be a priority for the state. However, when digging deeper into the values of the Nazi regime, the question whether the Nazis cared for nature emerges. To understand where Nazi Germany got their values and thoughts, one must understand where Germany comes from and go back all the way to the first century. In the year 9 A.D. there was a battle fought between the Romans and the German tribes in the Teutoburg Forest. The leader of the Romans was Varus and the leader of the German tribes was Arminius – someone who became a superhero living in the tribes. The Romans suffered a crushing defeat, leaving the land to the Germans.⁹

Publius Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman historian living in the first century. In 98 A.D. he wrote a book called *Germania* – a book, which would come to have a huge impact on Germany and the rest of Europe centuries later. In the book, Tacitus wrote about the tribal German people in that century and compared them to the Roman people. It was not for the Germans but for his fellow Romans to understand what relationship the tribes had to their forest. He gave the Germans their tribal identity and they were described as 'superior' with their light skin, blue eyes and large bodies. Tacitus explained the reason they looked like that was because of the fact that Germans did not mix with other races, hence being described as 'pure'. At that time, the Germans were not one people, but the land, that would later become Germany, was inhabited by 50 different tribes, according to Tacitus.

The book *Germania* disappeared for hundreds of years and it was not until the 15th century that it was found and translated into German. It is not difficult to understand why it was picked up by nationalistic forces in the 19th century and onwards. The book was everything they wanted as it described the superiority of the Germans and their unaltered and unmixed blood.¹⁰ To cite a translated version of *Germania*: 'the opinions of those who hold that in the peoples of Germany there had been given to the world a

⁹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 1995.

¹⁰ Cullen Murphy, *The Idea of Germany, From Tacitus to Hitler*, 2011.

race unmixed by intermarriage with other races, a peculiar people and pure, like no one but themselves.’¹¹ The Nazis later appropriated this view, and Heinrich Himmler especially was most interested in the book and its values and made a mission of bringing *Germania* to Germany since he believed it would be the crowning of the Fatherland (Germany). Though this book talks about the Germans and their history, it is important to remember that it was written by a Roman man. The thoughts and views put forward in the text were not what the Germans thought of themselves in the first century, even if it may could have been, but what an outsider thought the Germans were at that time. Tacitus had a view of Germans as the true indigents of the Earth and that Germans were ‘pure’. This is something that Richard Walter Darré realised and quickly took advantage of in his pursuit of the landscape.

The question of how green the Nazi’s really where has been asked by Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc and Thomas Zeller in the book *How Green Were the Nazi’s: Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich*. They put together a discussion with a few thinkers laying forward their thoughts on the matter. In Anna Bramwell’s *Blood and Soil* from 1985, she suggests that there is in fact a connection between the ideology from the Nazi’s and today’s environmental thoughts. She even argued that the Nazi minister of agriculture, Richard Walter Darré, was the ‘Father of the Greens’. Simon Schama, in his book *Landscape and Memory*, also sees a connection and refers to the Nazi’s as having a sinister relationship between barbarism and admiration for the land. However, there are many who do not wish to compare the Nationalistic conception of nature to the green thoughts of today. One of these people is Raymond Dommick who says that when comparing the two conceptions with each other, one only has a ‘superficial understanding of the history and world views of today’s Greens’¹². He continues by saying that the Nazi’s only took advantage of popular conservation views of nature to create propaganda and hence gaining more popularity. In the RND, many of the sections had roots dating long back. Section 1-4 came from romanticism and much of it was based on historic conceptions of the woods.

In the book *Green Thought in German Culture* by Colin Riordan, the question is raised again. National socialism used green ideas but also theories about healthy living that would make Germans the best of the Nordic races. Darré was perhaps the most enthusiastic about nature preservation among the Nazi government. He managed to persuade Hitler and Himmler in certain questions but faced much resistance and in the end failed and later lost his job in 1942. Darré stood for example behind organic farming, but because of the urbanization, the idea was abandoned.

Hitler was maybe the biggest reason for why we today remember Caspar David Friedrich. He liked the German painter and his sublime paintings of the German forest. Friedrich died in 1843 and was almost forgotten until Hitler came across his paintings and celebrated them. As previously mentioned, the Nazi movement had a preservative and romantic view of the German forest. They were trying to go back to Germany’s tribal roots and Friedrich’s paintings captured that beautifully.

¹¹ Tacitus, *Germania*, 98, quoted from Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 1995.

¹² Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc, Thomas Zeller, *How Green Were the Nazi’s: Nature, Environment and Nation in the Third Reich*.

There were two types of artist groups from Germany during the Nazi regime; those who's art was named 'degenerate' and might have fled because their art was not approved, many who today are well known modern artists, and those who stayed and did art that was approved by the Nazis but who today are almost forgotten. During the time when the Nazis rose to power, modernism was the art movement that struck Europe. It began after romanticism in the 19th century and by 1960, it was dominating the art arena. A few internationally recognised German artists were Paul Klee, Vasily Kandinsky and Ernst Barlach.



Ernst Barlach, *The Seventh Day (Der siebente Tag)* from *The Transformations of God (Die Wandlungen Gottes)*, 1922.

In the book *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* by Jonathan Petropoulos, Petropoulos writes about how the Nazis slowly seized control over the culture in Germany. When the Nazi regime first rose to power, they did not have an official agenda for culture or art. In 1933, they did not find it necessary to have a special department for it. The first department for visual art, called department for *Bildende Kunst* was not created until October 1934. The reason the leaders realised that control over culture was important was because they were slowly carving out control in all sectors, to go toward a fully totalitarian state. The way the Nazis controlled the arts was primarily not because of explicit cultural policies, but rather a result of controlling other posts. It is not unknown that Hitler liked romantic paintings, but his dislike for modern art only emerged gradually. Hitler even, during the first years of power, regretted the way the Nazis had attacked the Expressionist artist Ernst Barlach and suggested to reconcile. Perhaps it is that not because of Hitler's compassion but because the art Barlach did during the

beginning of the First World War was supporting the war. His paintings, however, were later discharged as 'degenerate' art.

Art in the Third Reich was a period in German art history, but it was also a result of a struggle in the art world at that time. Berthold Hinz discusses this in his book *Art in the Third Reich*. Much art made before the Nazi's assumed power in 1933 was declared as 'degenerate' art and eliminated by the government. For them, to find 'good' art, they set up an open call for an exhibition that would take place 1937 in the House of German Art in Munich. The art submitted was not necessarily political and the artists did not have a particular commitment to fascism. During the years from 1933 to 1937, the Nazi's made sure artists began to create 'appropriate' art while simultaneously launching a campaign against 'degenerate' artists and their art. 1937 was the year German art history changed completely. It was a turn toward 'new and genuine German art.'¹³ To have this exhibition, Hitler saw it as an opportunity to alter art policy. Nazi minister Wagner expressed two points that would be crucial for German art. Firstly, the works had to be 'finished and unproblematic', and secondly, the House of German art would become a museum of contemporary art where the works were exhibited and changed regularly. These two points were though problematic because most artists did not have time to fulfil the first requirement and not enough new art could be created within the time. The structure of this art was decided through artists wanting to get their pieces bought by the Führer. Hinz says that the Nazi's did not create a new art, but merely reactivate artists that had been 'left behind when modern art developed'¹⁴. Since the government disposed of all modern art, these artists saw the opportunity to fill the empty space that was left behind. In the exhibition in Munich, a few painters from the romantic era were included. They were not very recognised then and even less now but showed what the Nazi's wanted to see from German artists. Other, more well known painters, were also shown, such as art by Leonardo Da Vinci and other paintings that had been stolen from around the world.

As mentioned, art made during the Nazi regime and that was approved by the government, has been forgotten to a certain degree. However, a few painters at that time, whose work can be found today, are landscape painters Hans Thoma and Werner Peiner. Their works were not necessarily made between 1933 and 1945, but they were active painters at the time. An example is *The Hiker in the Black Forest* by Hans Thoma (1891). The Black forest is a forest in the southwest Germany, which would later get attention of its trees dying because of acid deposition in the 1980s. In Thoma's painting, one sees a man walking along a path, next to a stream in the less dense part of the forest. The style and dark colours reminds one of romantic paintings. The most important observation however, is the fact that the painting is picturesque, a term, which was introduced when romanticism began to emerge. One could almost think the painting was made during romanticism, perhaps even by Friedrich himself, since the aesthetics is similar to the romantics, maybe even identical to certain artists'. The forest in this time, as seen in Thoma's work, was portrayed in a similar way as during the romantic era, which proves the conception of the forest in Nazi Germany art, goes hand in hand with the politics during that period. Looking at paintings from Werner Peiner, the same thing can be said. There is by all means a distinctive change in style of painting, but both

¹³ Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, Chapter 1: p. 2.

¹⁴ Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, Chapter 1: p.15.

paintings contain the same elements of the sublime and similarities with art made of the German forest during the romantic era.



Hans Thoma, *The Hiker in the Black Forest*, 1891.

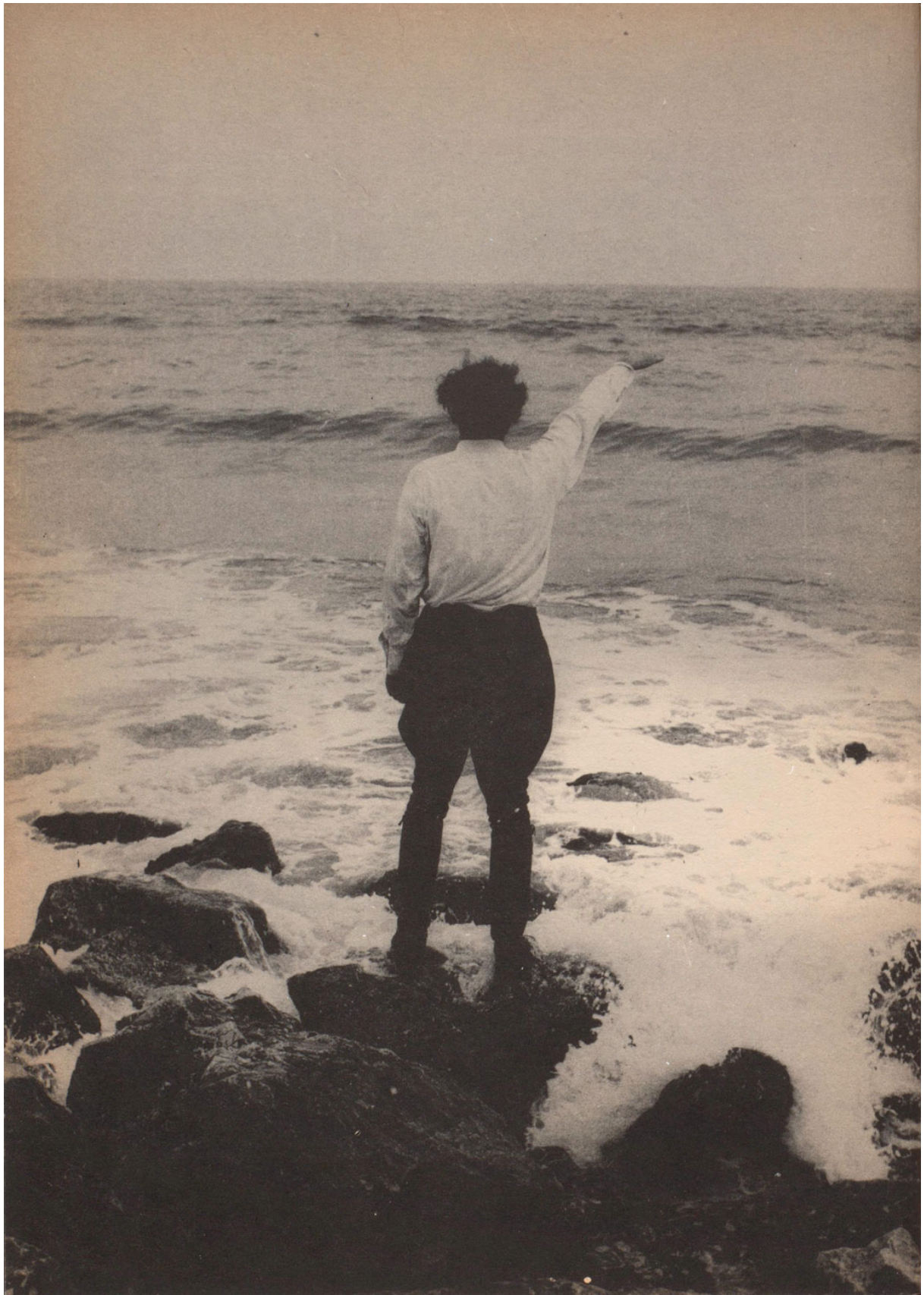


Werner Piener, *Hügellandschaft mit Feldern*.

Hinz mentions that when the art world today talks about the art made and approved by the government at that time, they say those artworks are non-art and thus does not earn our recognition. Outside of Germany, modernism continued without a stop, creating two different worlds in art in Europe. It is important though, to know that even though the government decided about the art in Germany, the public enjoyed the modernist artists and of the two exhibitions in München, the 'degenerate' art show had more visitors.

After the war, a new generation of artists emerged. One contemporary artist was Anselm Kiefer who has done controversial works and is most well known for doing work relating to German history, mythology, national identity and the Holocaust. As a German born the same year the Second World War ended, he was part of a generation that had not been a part of the Holocaust but still felt guilt over it. Perhaps is that the reason for him creating photographs in 1969 about the Nazi past that were provocative and then continued working toward Germany to recognise its horrible past. The photographs, called *Occupations*, were picturing a man standing doing the Nazi sieg heil salute in places across Europe. One of the photographs were taken at a location of a rocky shore, an image that was quoting Caspar David Friedrich's work *Wanderer of the Sea of Fog* (1818). Another piece of work he did was a large format installation called *Varus* that cites the battle of the Teutoburg Forest that established Germany as a nation. This is when the German 'hero' Arminius won over the Roman forces lead by Varus. The painting focuses on the dark and guilty side of the forest, something that also made Kiefer more controversial. In 1971, Anselm Kiefer moved to the Hercynian forest, but even at that time, not much of it remained. The term Waldsterben (forest death) is today used to describe what happened to the German forests. It could be seen in the

Hercynian forest at that time but the government did not start with any testing of the area until the 1980s.



Anselm Kiefer, *Occupations*, 1969.



Anselm Kiefer, *Varus*, 1976.

The German woods in the present

Environmentalism and art about the German woods

There are many ways nature has suffered and where the environmental movement has fought for the good of the land. One of these issues is acid rain, which the book *Acid Rain* by Louise Petheram brings up. The German forest has been one of the most affected forests by acid rain, although it has happened in many parts of Europe, and Scandinavia being the first ones that raised the issue, Germany's acid damage has been highlighted. Acid pollution is when acids falls over the land in either liquid form or dry form. To fully understand the impact, one must know how this can happen. The forest is an ecosystem and an ecosystem is complex. All aspects of this ecosystem, the trees, living organisms, water, the air, soil and the climate, filter the air and soil from toxic pollutants and balance the climate, and the ecosystem does much more than that. Effects of acid damage can possibly change the whole ecosystem. Tree growth is decreased, the PH-balance in water such as lakes can change and plants suffer from reduced growth. It can be seen that there is an apparent link between acid rain and the emission from the industry.¹⁵ As John McCormick mentioned in his book *Acid Earth* from 1989, during the 1970s, scientists realised that the forest in Europe was dying or was already dead, and it happened more rapidly as the years went past. They understood that it was much more widespread than previously thought and by 1982, SO₂ emission controls were agreed upon by the West German government. With environmentalism, laws and regulations were put in place. The government in Germany soon realised that the effects Sweden and Norway had raised previously were seen in the German forests as well. 'It becomes a problem when its steady deposition over time eventually exhausts the ability to receptor to counteract the acid's effect'.¹⁶ Acid deposition once or twice does not have to be dangerous to the forests, but repeated deposition over the land causes an effect where the ecosystem cannot repair the damages.

Another important setback to the forest has been deforestation and population growth. All throughout history, the human race has altered the forest to what has seemed appropriate to our needs. Human settlements have had the biggest impact on the land. That includes cutting down trees for using it as shelter, tool making and fuel for keeping warm and cooking food. It also includes planting new seeds for the future.¹⁷ Deforestation in Germany follows the increasing of the population and living standards. Forests were cut down to make room for more homes and other structures to create larger cities. It can be seen that during periods of decreased population (such as during the Black Death) the forest was not cut down and had time to recover.¹⁸

As discussed in the previous chapters, the idea behind environmentalism is not something new or unique to the contemporary world, but could be seen even as early as in the romantic era. Then the preservation was based around beauty, while it now is sustainability, though, as Greg Garrard writes in his book *Ecocriticism*, many agree that

¹⁵ Louise Petheram, *Acid Rain*, 2002.

¹⁶ Underdal, A., Hanf, K., *International Environmental Agreements and Domestic Politics: The case of acid rain*, 2000.

¹⁷ Michael Williams, edited by Meyer, W. B., Turner II, B. L., *Changes in Land Use and Land Cover: A Global Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹⁸ Roger Sands, *Forestry in a Global Context*, 2nd edition, CABI, 2013.

the birth of modern environmentalism was *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson in 1962. As mentioned in the last chapter, even the Nazis had green thoughts and much of it came from romanticism – to preserve and create a perfect country. 2000 years ago, Germany's forest was much more widespread than it is today. At that time, the forest stretched perhaps over 90 percent of the land, while it today is a mere 20 percent.

There are a large number of artists who have worked within the environmental field. An early German artist was Joseph Beuys who had a belief that art could change and improve society and made art towards that goal. From 1970 and onwards, Beuys became active within the Green party politics, as one of the co founders, and even campaigned for causes he believed in. The art he made, particularly in the second half of his career, were primarily installations. *Feuerstätte I und Feuerstätte II* (Hearth I and Hearth II), made between 1968–74 and 1978–9, were two pieces put together in an installation. During this time he was politically active and the works symbolise, that to make democracy to work, an open debate and exchanges of ideas is crucial. In 1974, he founded an academy where he would teach his aesthetic and anthroposopic intentions.¹⁹

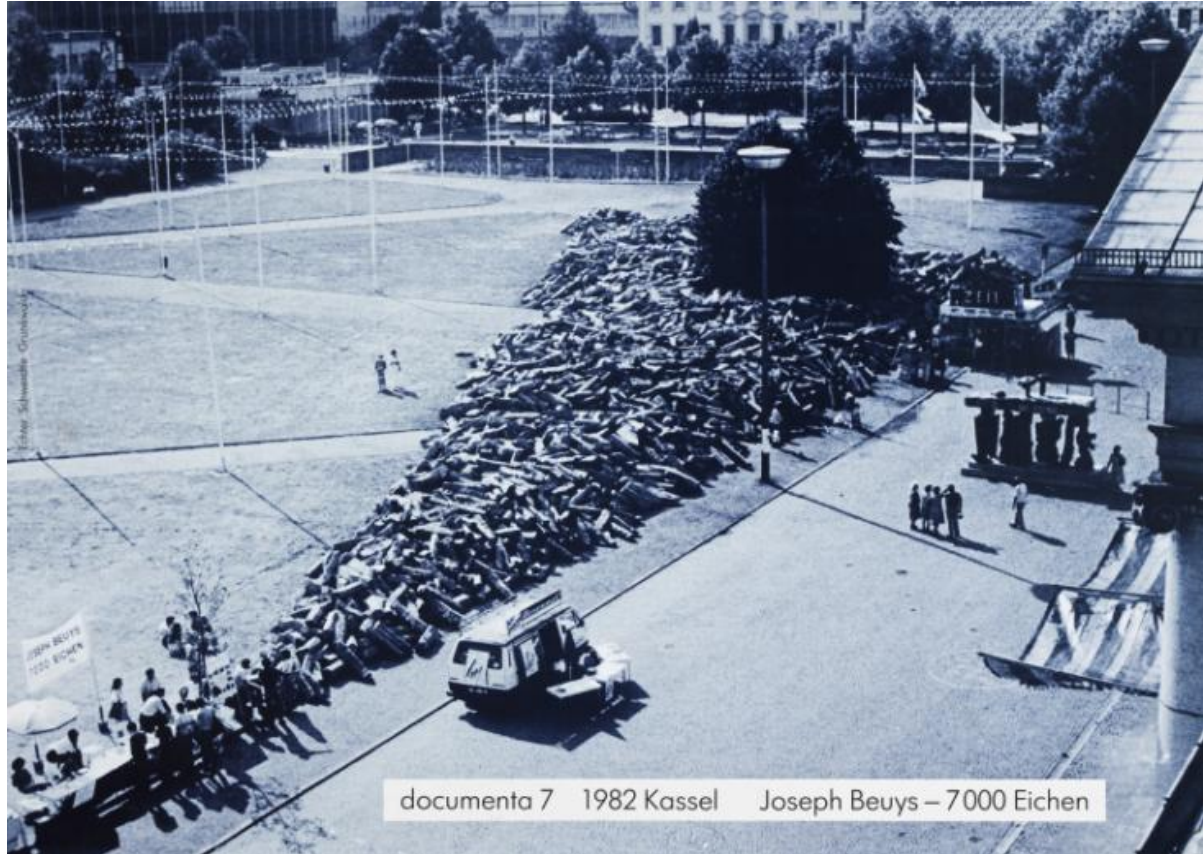


Joseph Beuys, *Feuerstätte I und Feuerstätte II* (Hearth I and Hearth II), 1968–74 and 1978–9.

Many of his works were to some extent about the crisis of the environment. Another famous, and in this text more important, installation that Beuys created during the end of his career was *7000 Eichen* (7000 oaks). Beuys wanted to, especially toward the end of his life, take action that would have direct impact on the public and the land – much more than any normal artistic communication would. The work was protesting against the eradication of forests, woodland and parks. It was about the decaying nature and to create something that would start a healing process. 7000 oaks was a project where Beuys planted 7000 trees, with the first trees being planted at Documenta 7, a large art

¹⁹ Frank Uekotter, *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany*, 2009.

exhibition in Kassel, Germany. He then continued planting trees in other cities around the world and it was seen 'as a gesture towards green urban renewal'²⁰. He used five different types of trees: ginkgo, bradford pear, linden, sycamore and the symbolic oak tree. The whole artwork took five years to complete and the final trees were planted by his son Wenzel in Documenta 8 after Beuys's death.



Joseph Beuys, *7000 Oak Trees*, 1982.

²⁰ Joseph Beuys, Tate, www.tate.org.uk, 2016.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the perception of the German forest has changed and evolved as the rest of society has changed, and hence has the art movements and art ideas developed in similar fashion. All these conceptions have things in common and things differentiating them. Romanticism, as the first movement brought up, was a conception where aesthetics and the beautiful were in focus. In the art world, with German romantic painters such as Friedrich, the sublime influenced, creating a view of the forest as a mystical, but also frightening, place. However, that was not something new, the land we today call Germany used to consist of tribes in the early years AD. Tacitus described the tribes worshipping the forest and seeing it as a magical place. This thought has stayed with the German people and when romanticism emerged, it was put into sublime and aesthetic paintings. This also reflected the preservation of the forest. Ideas of preservation emerged during the industrial revolution as a response to it, but the romantic idea of conserving the forest was primarily because of the aesthetic, to preserve the natural beauty. When looking at German paintings from this time, one can see that nature is portrayed the way it naturally looks.

Nazism draws much of its preservation ideas from romanticism. Nature conservation had started to take form before the formation of Germany in 1871, and was, by early and middle 20th century, developing and had become more like the environmentalism movement we have today. Nazism did not invent conservation, it existed outside the government and Nazism used it. Though Nazism politically was on the far right on the political spectrum and green thoughts today are more left wing, the government at that time did create the most important preservation law in Germany up to that day, the RNG. Many discuss how green the Nazis were and it can be concluded after much research that there were elements of green ideas and the conversationalists did take part in the regime, but the government did not come up with it nor were their way of thinking particularly green, with a few exceptions such as the agriculture minister Darré with his green ideas and Himmler who went out looking for *Germania* by Tacitus, though one can argue it was only because of Tacitus's description of Germans as a 'pure' race and finding the book would be the final proof of that. Just as the regime had power over forest preservation did they seize control over the art arena. Hitler was particularly admiring art from the romantic era and removed all art he did not approve of. It was not only the way of thinking when it came to preservation of the forest when the Nazis looked back at romanticism, but the art from that time was referred to as 'pure German art' and more modern art was 'degenerate' art, which was banished.

When the Nazi regime fell in 1945, the conservationist movement tried to forget their involvement in the past government, just as Germany as a whole wanted to forget it all. However, artists like Anselm Kiefer was keen on making sure Germany did not forget and hence making art showing that. It made him controversial but it shows two sides of Germany after the war: many, including the conservationists, wanting to forget and certain artists creating controversy by forcing the country to remember. Just as Hitler lifted up Friedrich as an example of good German art, Kiefer did art quoting him. Many of his works were referring to certain key points in the past, like *Varus* (1976) portraying the battle in the Teutoburg Forest. The work *Occupation* (1969) should therefore be seen as another way of remembering by using a painter highlighted by Hitler, Friedrich,

and creating a piece or work where a man is doing the sieg heil salute in what could be a 'Friedrich painting'.

German life continued and both the art and environmentalism developed and changed. Environmentalism became more focused due to the government realising how damaged the forest actually was, it was dying due to acid rain primarily from pollution and deforestation due to population growth. Cutting down trees is however not new, but the pace of deforestation was, and is, not sustainable for the forest to heal itself. Acid rain damages the forest by slowly killing the natural life in the area disrupting the whole eco system. The environmentalist movement grew in response to this and art was made in protest. Joseph Beuys was both an artist and involved in the Green Party in Germany. His late installation *7000 oaks* shows that he not just wanted to raise awareness, but also wanted to heal the forest by using art and planted 7000 oaks around cities. Art has throughout these periods been much of a part of the current events, of course not all art, but art has at least since romanticism reflected society in some way.

It is clear that over the time covered in this text, preservation of nature has been a key part. It has been noted in art, and politics to some degree. During romanticism, painters painted 'beautiful' forests, during Nazism, artists approved by the government went back to recreate the romantic view and much art after the Nazi's fell were first making sure Germany did not forget its past and later making environmental art, portraying the forest in different forms. After looking at the past, one can presume that the representation of the forest will continue evolving as politics and art movements change in the future.

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