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# Reflections on a Polished Floor

Ben Willikens and the Reichskanzlei of Albert Speer, by **Iain Boyd Whyte**

**IN CHOOSING IMAGES** of National Socialist buildings as the subject for a recent group of paintings, the German artist Ben Willikens asks questions about the nature of Nazi architecture and about the role of the artist in explicating the trauma of the Nazi tyranny. One of these paintings, *Berlin, Reichskanzlei (Ebrensaal)*, depicts the so-called Mosaic Hall of the new Reichskanzlei (Chancellery of the Reich); and it provides the inspiration for this essay. Designed by Albert Speer and built for Adolf Hitler in record time between January 1938 and January 1939, the Reichskanzlei was the representational epicenter of Hitler's power, and, as one of the very few Speer designs actually completed, it enjoyed a particular preeminence among the architectural initiatives of the Nazi Party. Lavish, full-color photographs of its marbled halls were widely published in the architectural and popular press of the day, and Willikens's work derives from these propagandistic images.

The core of the Reichskanzlei was a Baroque Stadtpalais, built by Graf von der Schulenberg in the late 1730s. It was subsequently sold to the Radziwiłł

family in 1796 and then to the newly formed German state in 1875, at which time it became the official residence of the first chancellor of the new German Reich, Otto von Bismarck. Among its obvious attractions were its location, adjacent to the Foreign Ministry, and its ample garden, which stretched westward to the edge of the Tiergarten. Remodeled and modernized in 1878, the Reichskanzlei enjoyed a life of shabby gentility well into the Weimar Republic, before the demands of government made an extension desirable.

A competition was announced in March 1927 and the winner was the Berlin architect Ernst Jobst Siedler. Laying the foundation stone for the building, Chancellor Wilhelm Marx stressed that while the extension should be worthy of its purpose, excessive grandeur or luxury would be inappropriate to the spirit of the times. "It should," he said, "announce that with unpretentious simplicity, but in fearless confidence, we are engaged in the reconstruction of our great German house, the German state."<sup>1</sup> Unpretentious simplicity in public building,

however, was not a quality esteemed by Adolf Hitler, who had cut his critical teeth on the vast public buildings of the Ringstraße in Vienna. On coming to power in 1933, he lost no time in damning the new extension to the Reichskanzlei: “Siedler has spoiled the whole of Wilhelmsplatz. Why, that building looks like the headquarters of a soap company, not the center of the Reich.”<sup>2</sup> No less damning was Hitler’s critique of the interiors; he described his office in the Siedler extension as “something like the tasteless room of a general agent in a medium-sized cigarette and tobacco company.”<sup>3</sup> In search of grander coulisses before which to enact the role of chancellor, Hitler turned to the architect Albert Speer.

Speer was brought in at first to work with Paul Ludwig Troost, who had been summoned by Hitler in the autumn of 1933 to redesign the interiors of the existing Reichskanzlei. Later that year, however, Hitler gave Speer his first independent commissions for the Reichskanzlei: the conversion of a hall overlooking the garden into a new office for Hitler, who wanted to escape the mob that thronged the street in the early days of National Socialism, hoping to view the Führer. In compensation, however, Speer was also asked to insert the “historic balcony”—as it is called in his memoirs—working from Hitler’s own sketch. This was a brilliant device; the smallest of interventions transformed the Wilhelmsplatz into a theater, in which the masses could pay homage to the leader.

The “historic balcony” was used to promote Hitler’s self-presentation to an adoring German public. The major redevelopment of the Reichskanzlei was intended to promote the selling of the new Nazi Reich to the wider world. Indeed, in his account of the rebuilding published in *Die Kunst im dritten Reich*, Hitler linked the two issues: “In December 1937 and January 1938 I decided to resolve the Austrian question, thus establishing a Greater German Reich. Under no circum-

stances could either the purely administrative tasks or the representative functions that were necessarily connected with this be satisfied any longer by the old Reichskanzlei. I therefore commissioned Generalbauinspektor Professor Speer with the rebuilding of the Reichskanzlei in Voßstraße on 11 January 1938, setting as the completion date 10 January 1939.”<sup>4</sup>

This account of the commission, which finds support in Speer’s memoirs, is entirely fictitious.<sup>5</sup> For detailed planning had begun in 1935, the year in which Hitler himself made a sketch setting out the axial ordering of the interior and the broadening of the street to form a court of honor on the Voßstraße. Indeed, the state began to buy houses on Voßstraße in 1935, and their demolition was under way by 1936. The submission by Speer in June 1936 of a cost estimate for the design of the new extension along Voßstraße shows how advanced the project was by that time. Why, then, the great disparity between the official history and the actual, documentable history of the Reichskanzlei’s gestation and planning?

The answer is simple: in Hitler’s scheme of things, the grand new extension to the Reichskanzlei symbolized the Greater German Reich, and could only be revealed as such after Austria had been absorbed into the Greater Germany. Back in the 1860s, Bismarck had employed an anti-Austrian policy to identify the Prussian cause with that of German unity. This unity, however, was never intended to embrace Austria.<sup>6</sup> After the Prussian defeats of Austria in 1866 and France in 1870, a unified German Reich under the leadership of Prussia was established in 1871, comprising eighteen German states but not including Austria. This was named at the time the “Kleindeutsches Reich”—the Small German Reich. As a pan-Germanist born in Austria, Hitler’s first expansionist ambitions involved the annexation of Austria and the belated creation of a “Großdeutsches Reich”—the Greater German Reich—

with an appropriately enlarged Reichskanzlei as the focus of the new imperial power. The plans to enlarge the building, however, could not be made public before Hitler’s ambitions towards Austria had been secured. And this could only occur when all the conditions were right and all opposition to the plan suppressed. This situation was reached in January 1938, with the dismissal on 26 January of General Werner von Fritsch from his position as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, followed by the dismissal a day later of Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, the Minister of War.<sup>7</sup> They were soon joined in retirement by sixteen other high-ranking generals and by Baron von Neurath, the Foreign Minister. With command of the armed forces and the administration of foreign affairs firmly in his grasp, Hitler initiated the annexation of Austria, which was accomplished on 12 March 1938.

Less than a year later and exactly on schedule, Albert Speer’s extension to the Reichskanzlei was complete. As the plan reveals, the largest part of the newly enclosed volume was empty space: reception areas, strangely empty halls with no function whatsoever, and long, long corridors. Offices were squeezed in along the Voßstraße front, again with excessive corridor space and poor vertical circulation. Even along the central axis, the planning is entirely one-directional. Having walked the ceremonial route from Wilhelmsplatz to Hitler’s inner sanctum, the visitor has no obvious way to return, and simply retracing one’s steps is a slightly risible option. In this design, as in Speer’s unbuilt set pieces for the National Socialists, the haptic and tectonic qualities of architecture were made entirely subservient to the visual and thus the reproducible. The process of transmission is more important than the building itself. Through the media of photography and film, the political event is bound neither to its space nor time: it can be relayed anywhere through the visual media and reviewed repeatedly. This, of course, is the theme of Walter Ben-

jamin's celebrated essay on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, written in 1936.<sup>8</sup>

Speer's Reichskanzlei received much publicity. Besides the predictably lavish coverage in the popular press, dedicated books and journal articles appeared, aimed at every level of consumption. At one end of the market were paperback collections of photographs. At the other end were luxurious folios with reproductions of paintings and drawings of the Reichskanzlei under construction and completed. There was even a collection of dry-point engravings in a leather-bound case, presumably intended to impress visiting dignitaries. The same descriptive texts do the rounds in these publications, detailing not only the structure, but also the furnishings and fittings, and the sculptural contributions of Arno Breker and Josef Thorak.

One of these texts was by the architect Hermann Giesler. As Gitta Sereny has shown, Giesler developed into one of Speer's most implacable enemies and conspired with Martin Bormann to prevent the centralization of building authority in Speer's organization, the GBI.<sup>9</sup> Under Giesler's name, however, a hymn of praise was penned to the Reichskanzlei. Entitled "Symbol of the Großdeutsches Reich," it makes explicit the ideological ambitions that informed the project.

Albert Speer has constructed the first state building of the Großdeutsches Reich, which in its significance and scale carries on the great achievements of German architectural history. The building was begun and completed in a year in which the world was full of anxiety and nervousness, in which Europe mobilized and the nations surrounding Germany barely retained their sense of the peaceable way of life. The wonderful discipline and vigorous alertness that marked the German nation particularly during 1938 are symbolically immortalized in this building, which at the same time reflects the external successes of that year. It is an outstanding accomplishment, the refutation of the liberal view of cultural

achievement as the product of wealth and tranquility. . . . As a consequence of the first power struggle that took place within its walls, which served the completion of the Großdeutsches Reich, this building has already entered into the annals of the Reich.<sup>10</sup>

The power struggle to which Giesler refers is the scene that occurred in the New Reichskanzlei on 14 March 1939, when the aged and infirm President of Czechoslovakia, Emil Hácha, was bullied into placing the fate of the Czechs in Hitler's hands. As Hitler reported to Speer: "At last I had so belabored the old man that his nerves gave way completely, and he was on the point of

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signing. Then he had a heart attack. In the adjoining room Dr. Morrell gave him an injection, but in this case it was too effective. Hácha regained too much of his strength, revived, and was no longer prepared to sign, until I finally wore him down again."<sup>11</sup> The German army marched into Prague the next day.

Hácha's fateful interview was held in Hitler's study. To get there he drove into the courtyard at the eastern end of Speer's addition and climbed the steps to the main portal, flanked by Arno Breker's two massive bronze figures, both over four meters tall, representing the Party and the Army. In a speech delivered at Stettin in June 1938, Hitler identified these two institutions as the pillars of Nazi society. "I am increasingly convinced of the necessity to secure on foundations which cannot be shaken two pillars in the state: on the one side the undying National Socialist Party sustaining the political life of the State, and on the other side the German Army. To the extent that these two pillars unite to

sustain the whole destiny of Germany, to that extent can the German nation face the future with calm confidence."<sup>12</sup> A year later the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* adopted Breker's giant figures to illustrate the point, in a drawing entitled "Party and Army Defend the Peace of the Reich." Peace was far from Hitler's mind, however, as Hácha ascended the steps and entered a vestibule that led into the Mosaic Hall, a top-lit space whose awesome emptiness is articulated in both plane and volume by the geometry of the marble panels and inlays.

Following the imperative of a line of inlaid marble stretching from door to door, President Hácha would have found himself in a small circular room,

again top lit. Pragmatically, Speer used this transitional space to correct the clumsy shift in his axis and to negotiate a substantial change in floor levels. Emotionally, the visitor is plunged here into a space both dark and disorienting, with the guidelines on the floor perversely abandoning the ritual path. With this almost subterranean chamber, Speer created the desired sense of tension and compression necessary for the *coup de théâtre* to follow. For on leaving the dark, claustrophobic drum, Hácha entered the vast Marble Gallery, nearly 150 meters long but only twelve meters wide, a space whose extraordinary dimensions conspired to create an almost sublime impression of immeasurability and thus incomprehension.

None of this was arbitrary or unplanned. In his memoirs, Speer records Hitler's delight that the Marble Gallery was twice as long as the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. This recalls a comment by Gerdy Troost, the widow of Hitler's first official architect, Paul Troost, when asked by

Hitler at a dinner in the Reichskanzlei what she thought of Albert Speer. Had Hitler asked her husband for a building one hundred meters long, she said, he might have concluded that structural and aesthetic factors demanded that it be only ninety-six meters long. But if Hitler were to ask Speer, she continued, for a building one hundred meters long, he would instantly say: “Mein Führer, two hundred meters!”<sup>13</sup> Speer’s penchant for the overblown and overdimensioned was shared by Hitler, however, who gloated over the distances foreign dignitaries would have to walk: “On the long walk from the entrance to the Reception Hall they’ll get a taste of the power and grandeur of the German Reich!”<sup>14</sup> But while Speer worried about the safety of polished marble floors, Hitler was perversely delighted: “That’s exactly right,” he insisted, “diplomats should have practice in moving on a slippery surface.”<sup>15</sup> In one of the deft cartoons in which he satirized the megalomaniacal pretensions of Nazi architecture, Hans Stephan—who worked with Speer in the GBI—shows a diplomat caught in the spotlight as he begins his precarious voyage across the slippery acres of the Marble Gallery. At the halfway point on the right-hand side the diplomat would reach the door to Hitler’s office, overlooking the gardens, where Hácha and Czechoslovakia met their doom.

The formal intentions of Speer’s design are easily listed: powerful, cubic massing, flat wall planes, deep window reveals, hard-edged moldings, vigorous repetition, and an insistence on axially and symmetry. Speer himself characterized the “new way of thinking about architecture” as “austere and severe, but never monotonous. Simple and clear, and without false ornamentation. Sparing in its decoration, but with each decorative motif placed in such a way that it could never be thought superfluous.”<sup>16</sup> Exactly these qualities of austerity and severity are those alighted on by the distinguished British critic Lionel Brett, who noted

in 1946 amid the ruins of the Reichskanzlei that “Speer’s taste was impeccable and it is remarkable that so cold and correct a piece of architecture should exhale such malevolence.”<sup>17</sup> This cold severity is also central to the fascination exercised by Nazi architecture, a fascination that draws a painter like Ben Willikens to reexplore its aesthetic devices.

In reworking the photographic image of Speer’s Mosaic Hall, Willikens strips the walls and floors of their red marble cladding, removes the mosaic garlands and decorations from the wall panels and pilasters, and offers instead a monochrome space whose flatness is relieved simply by gridded, rectangular planes and by the blind doorways. The message is unmistakable. Beneath the surface decoration, this was a modern building, conceived by the Nazi hierarchy as an expression of the modernity and technical know-how of the National Socialist state. Although Speer’s design nodded to antiquity in its detailing, the cultural comparison is not with Athens, but Washington.

Hitler made this ambition explicit in a speech given to mark the topping out ceremony of the New Reichskanzlei. Having detailed the extraordinary speed with which the “Haus des Großdeutschen Reiches” was planned and built, Hitler concluded: “That [speed] . . . is no longer the American tempo, but already the German tempo.” Making reference to the annexations of Austria and Czechoslovakia, he added: “If it is possible to integrate a state in three or four days into the Reich, then it must also be possible to erect a building in one or two years.”<sup>18</sup> Just as the United States had represented dynamic modernity for the German avant garde of the 1920s—for the likes of Georg Grosz and Otto Dix—so it also set standards of technical know-how and dynamism against which Hitler and Speer measured their own ambitions. Describing in his memoirs the plans for the railroad station at the southern end of the giant axis that he planned for Berlin, for example, Speer boasted, symptomatical-

ly: “It provided for four traffic levels linked by escalators and elevators, and was to surpass New York’s Grand Central Station in size.”<sup>19</sup>

Rather than to formal devices, Speer’s Reichskanzlei owes its modernity to its relationship to building types central to modern urban life: the department store, the theater, and the cinema. Indeed, as Dieter Bartetzko has noted, Nazi architecture derived much of its impact from the application of the techniques of display developed in the department stores and shopping emporia of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>20</sup> As a virtual emporium, known through publication to every adult in the state, the Reichskanzlei was intended to sell the Party and its policies to both domestic and international audiences.

The emporium was an obvious model through which to propose images of unity and reconciliation to a gullible and politically naive public. Max Weber famously insisted around the turn of the century that the world of industrial production and of the division of labor had become “eine entzauberte Welt,” a world stripped of its magic. One response to this loss, located firmly within the parameters of capitalism, was to “remagify” the fragmented culture of the industrial city through the realm of exchange. This was the rationale of the arcade and the department store. The principal aesthetic device in this process was the frame. In 1902 the sociologist Georg Simmel wrote an essay on the picture frame as an essential precondition for what he called the *aesthetic* appreciation of a painting. The work of art, he insisted, “closes itself off against everything external to it, as a world unto its own. Thus its borders . . . [are] an absolute end which enact a rejection of and defense against the external as well as an internal unifying concentration [*Zusammenschluß*] in one act. What the frame of the artwork accomplishes is that it symbolizes and strengthens this double function of the border. It closes off the artwork from the surroundings and thus also from

the beholder, and thus helps to place it in the distance from which and only which it can be *aesthetically* enjoyed.”<sup>21</sup> The violent act of isolation and concentration imposed by the frame was a

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recurring device in the public scenography of the Nazi Party. An early example masterminded by Albert Speer was the transformation of the Lustgarten in Berlin from an urban park into a parade ground whose granite slabs and spacers formed a regular grid. This intervention was unveiled for the Party celebrations held on 1 May 1936 to mark German Labor Day. The strict grid on the horizontal plane was reinforced on the long sides of the square by rows of vertical banners that isolated the space created for the display of party loyalty from both its physical and historical contexts.

The scene became the subject of contemporary paintings by artists like Rudolf Hengstenberg and August Blunck: the spectacle set inside the urban frame captured and set again within the frame of the painting that brings with it the challenge of aesthetic contemplation in Simmel’s sense. Newsreels of the same spectacle carried the same message at will to the cinemas of the nation. By a happy coincidence, Hengstenberg’s painting was copied on a large scale for one of the tapestries hung in the side aisles of the German pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition of 1937, again designed by Speer. The sequence of framing now takes on almost infinite dimensions: the framed space of the Berlin parade ground encloses the geometric ranks of soldiers who are then painted and enclosed within the picture frame. This image is then recast as tapestry, framed, and displayed in one of the rectangular bays within the orthogonal space of Speer’s pavil-

ion. In the process, the image becomes ever more potent, contact with any external reality ever more distant.

Not by chance did the German pavilion in Paris look exactly like a de-

partment store, housing all manner of desirable goods, from the celebrated Mercedes-Benz Silver Arrow to grand pianos and writing desks. As Karen Fiss has noted, Woldemar Brinckmann, the designer of the interior, “created a luxurious interior to make the disparate clusters of commercial goods look more glamorous.”<sup>22</sup> To do this, Brinckmann used the display techniques of the department store, with an insistent system of enframing that focused attention on the main commodity—the Nazi Party and its ideology. All connection with an external existence or a wider context is denied, and the isolated object is offered as a figure of unity, promising a self-contained perfection.

The lighting at the pavilion was immaculate, with floodlights on the exterior and elaborate chandeliers and sconces in the interior adding sheen and glitter to the products on display. For the Reichskanzlei, Speer perfected the theatrical lighting techniques first developed for Party rallies and then applied to the Paris pavilion. The spotlights in Hans Stephan’s cartoon of the foreign emissary, stranded on the marbled acres, emphasize the obvious point that the Reichskanzlei was the site of loud theatrical performance rather than the quiet art of administration. Lighting was key, and Speer manipulated both daylight and artificial light with enormous virtuosity. The official daylight photographs of the courtyard, for example, use the fall of shadow onto the central axis to reinforce the idea of an architecture marked not by decoration and orna-

ment but by cubic massing, axiality, and symmetry.

At night, under the more biddable conditions of artificial lighting, these qualities could be stressed even more strongly. Recalling her first meeting with Hitler at a preview of the New Reichskanzlei, Speer’s personal secretary, Annemarie Kempf, described the lighting as having a magical quality: “A huge celebration was planned for the opening, but Hitler came to meet us the night before. We all went around the building with him and Speer, we walking behind them. I thought it was beautiful, I don’t care what people say now. I was very proud that night. One has to imagine—well, it’s almost impossible to imagine—the lights, the flowers everywhere, the excitement of it.”<sup>23</sup> As in a theater set, the impact of the *mise-en-scène* derives from the framing power of the proscenium and the selective intensity of the stage lighting. Indeed, the Reichskanzlei looks especially convincing in nighttime photographs, when the aperture of the sky, which punctures a hole in the framed-off world, is closed off. In conditions of darkness, the isolation from external space and external time becomes total, and the internal spaces become self-referential, a law unto themselves. There is simply no outside and no sense of orientation beyond that allowed by the architecture itself. This quality becomes manifest if an image of the Reichskanzlei courtyard at night is simply inverted. The courtyard seen with the heavens below and the earth above leads persuasively to Ben Willikens’s painting of the Mosaic Hall.

In the Willikens version the floor is dematerialized: it has no surface, no substance, and offers no sense of resistance or support. The space in the painting is literally floorless. It rises up and flows around us as we fall through endless space, and the response is one of vertigo. The German term “*bodenlos*” comes to mind. Its literal meaning is “bottomless,” but its figurative meanings include “fathomless,” “unconscionable,” and “excessive.”

And the same is true on the horizontal plane: Speer's tapestries become menacing apertures, the doorways dark recesses leading one knows not where.

The relationship of the viewer to these spaces is ambivalent. The photographs of the New Reichskanzlei made for official publication function almost as essays in linear perspective, with the spaces stripped of meaning to become a rigid and highly ordered system of abstract linear coordinates. Just as perspective is a device for rendering three-dimensional space into two dimensions, so a building designed expressly to be publicized through photography, film, and painting was designed, not surprisingly, to lend itself to convincing perspectival presentation. In Renaissance and Cartesian theory, perspective was admired for combining mathematical tidiness and exactitude with an order of things that was nothing less than God's will. The visible world was arranged for the spectator as the universe was thought to be arranged by God.

For Speer and his masters, this homology between the visual microcosm of the Reichskanzlei and the Greater German Reich was clearly appealing. The marbled and unpeopled halls of the Reichskanzlei are offered not as the site of a narrative to be developed over time, but as the eternal container of an immutable process. The occupier of the space, the producer of the image, and the viewer are all excluded in favor of a timeless eye that transcends temporal duration. In the late 20th-century world in which Ben Willikens is working, however, such a position is no longer supportable. We are offered no solace by the Enlightenment project. Space is not a Cartesian abstraction, viewed with a geometer's eye outside and above the scene it surveys, but phenomenological space. As described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "It is, rather, a space reckoned starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me,

not in front of me."<sup>24</sup> Space is not an abstraction or a construction, but rather the realm in which the body can act, a function of one's own mobility and motility.

It is precisely this shift in the perception of space that Willikens explores in his work—in, for instance, his renderings of the *Last Supper* and the *School of Athens*, which are emptied of figures. As he explained in a 1978 interview with Rudij Bergmann: "The omission of the figure is not an anti-human gesture, the person [*der Mensch*] is always present, I haven't banished him from my empty rooms, but have opened them up to him."<sup>25</sup> Led by Willikens across the decades and back into the Mosaic Hall of the Reichskanzlei, how are we to respond to the monochrome spaces? What colors, figures, or events should we bring with us and reinsert into the space as the act of "becoming"?<sup>26</sup>

One clue might be gained from the insistent grids of both plan and elevation. In a well-known essay published in 1979, Rosalind Krauss identified the grid as the device that "declares the modernity of modern art." Explaining the power of the grid in the hands of Mondrian or Malevich to establish the modernist *tabula rasa*, Krauss notes, "The grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction)."<sup>27</sup> This ambiguity is one shared by National Socialist ideology, which straddled two quite opposing and contradictory positions. On the one hand, leading figures in the party such as Robert Ley, Fritz Todt, and Albert Speer were essentially modernist in their thinking, nurturing visions of an economy based on high technology that would outstrip the American economy in its commitment to scientific research, product design, and industrial rationalization. Others, however, including Heinrich Himmler, Walther Darré, and Alfred Rosenberg, had a mystical attachment to the German soil and to the whole

apparatus of "Blut und Boden," and dreamed of rebuilding German greatness through the labors and ethics of the German peasant. Hitler courted both camps, while cherishing his own dreams of an imperial splendor on the scale of Rome. The ideology of National Socialism offers few coherent patterns, and countless inconsistencies and contradictions coexisted behind its ordered facade. As William Carr has concluded, the Nazi state, "was no monolith but a mosaic of conflicting authorities bearing more resemblance to a feudal state, where great vassals were engaged in a ruthless power struggle to capture the person of the king who in his turn maintained his authority by playing one great lord off against another."<sup>28</sup> Subsequent attempts to comprehend the Nazi regime by historians and sociologists have, necessarily, reflected these ambiguities. Was the horror of the Nazi regime and its ultimate expression, the Holocaust, a delayed outburst of pre-modernist irrational barbarianism? Or did it mark the point at which the intellectual project of the European Enlightenment and the industrial system that it had spawned self-destructed, and began to consume itself?

These Byzantine complexities necessarily influence the work of a painter intent on engaging the Nazi past while addressing the present. Since the National Socialist experience was readmitted around 1970 as an inevitable and unavoidable subject of German art, different critical and technical strategies have evolved through which to apprehend its ambiguities. Two paintings of Speer's Mosaic Hall at the Reichskanzlei make this point. Anselm Kiefer's *Das Atelier des Malers, Innenraum (The Artists' Studio, Interior)* of 1981 proposes that there is no privileged form of knowledge to be derived from science or rationality. Kiefer reenacts the Mosaic Hall as the painter's studio, in his case a site where Nordic myths are retold, and alchemy and Jewish scripture reexamined, all to the rhythms of the blacksmith's forge. In support of the barbarian explanation,

the studio might carry as its motto a passage from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Almost everything we call 'higher culture' is based on the spiritualization and intensification of cruelty—this is my proposition; the 'wild beast' had not been laid to rest at all, it lives, it flourishes, it has merely become—deified. That which constitutes the painful voluptuousness of tragedy is cruelty; that which produces a pleasing effect in so-called tragic pity, indeed fundamentally in everything sublime up to the highest and most refined thrills of metaphysics, derives its sweetness solely from the ingredient of cruelty mixed in with it."<sup>29</sup> In the parlance of Holocaust studies, this is the intentionalist position.

Willikens's image of the same space, in contrast, points us towards the functionalist position, toward the engineer, the technocrat, and the bureaucrat. As summarized by the historian Christopher R. Browning: "The Nazi murder of the European Jewry was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also the organizational achievement of a bureaucratic society."<sup>30</sup> The vision of a fully designed, fully controlled society that admits no deviation or madness is the menacing context of a series of paintings focused on institutional furniture, produced by Willikens in the 1970s. Hospital beds, baths, lockable doors, and corridors with barred windows figure in these works, whose unspoken context is the relationship enforced by the Nazis between physical, mental, and racial hygiene. The point is well illustrated by comparing Willikens's 1975 painting, *Badewannen Nr. 1/2 (Baths Numbers 1/2)*, with an interior from a BMW factory in Munich, fitted out according to the dictates of Robert Ley's "Schönheit der Arbeit" (Beauty of Labor) department. Behind the serried rows of sinks we read: "Dreck gehört zur Arbeit, aber nicht zum deutschen Arbeiter!"—"Dirt belongs to work, but not to the German worker!"

As Ben Willikens himself has re-

marked, "I had to do these paintings, but I couldn't do them any earlier."<sup>31</sup> With his ghostly images of Nazi architecture, Willikens offers a richness of absence that challenges us to immerse ourselves in the historical reality of the subject in order to speak of it.

#### Notes

1. "Ordnung der Feier zur Grundsteinlegung für den Erweiterungsbau der Reichskanzlei am 18. 5. 1928, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, R 431/1585." Quoted: Angela Schönberger, *Die neue Reichskanzlei von Albert Speer* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1981), 19.
2. Adolf Hitler, quoted in Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 34
3. Adolf Hitler, "Die Reichskanzlei," *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich*, 3, no. 7 (July 1939), 279.
4. *Ibid.*, 280.
5. Schönberger, 38-44.
6. See Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1866-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), chapter 1: "The Unification of Germany, 1866-71."
7. Schönberger, 44-51.
8. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in: *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217-251.
9. See Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 236.
10. Hermann Giesler, "Symbol des Großdeutschen Reiches," *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich*, 3, no. 7 (July 1939), 283.
11. Adolf Hitler, reported in Speer, 116.
12. Adolf Hitler, speech at Stettin, 12 June 1938, in *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939*, ed. Norman H. Baynes, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), vol.1, 451.
13. Gerdy Troost, quoted in Matthias Schmidt, *Albert Speer: The End of a Myth* (London: Harvill, 1985), 44.
14. Adolf Hitler, quoted Albert Speer, 102.
15. *Ibid.*, 113.
16. Albert Speer, *Die Bauten des Führers* (Leipzig: Cigaretten-Bilderdienst Altona-Bahrenfeld, 1936), 74.
17. Lionel Brett, "The Architecture of Authority," *Architectural Review*, May 1946, 133.
18. Adolf Hitler, speech marking the topping out of the new Reichskanzlei, Duetschlandhalle, Berlin, 2 August 1938, quoted in Schönberger, 179-180.
19. Albert Speer, *Die Bauten*, 134.
20. See Dieter Bartetzko, *Zwischen Zucht und*

*Ekstase: Zur Theatralik von NS-Architektur* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1985), 118.

21. Georg Simmel, "Der Bildrahmen: Ein ästhetischer Versuch" (1902), in *Zur Philosophie der Kunst: Philosophische und Kunstphilosophische Aufsätze* (Potsdam: Kiepenhauer, 1922), 46-47. Quoted in Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 171.
22. Karen Fiss, "The German Pavilion," in Ades, Benton, Elliott, Whyte, eds., *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators, 1930-45* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 109.
23. Annemarie Kempf, quoted in Gitta Sereny, 151.
24. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Eye and the Mind," in Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 178. Quoted in Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 316.
25. Alexander Tolnay, "Der Bild-Raum als Bühnen-Raum bei Ben Willikens," in Ben Willikens, *Dynamic der Leere* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989), 8.
26. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible," in *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 232-309.
27. Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 9, 12.
28. William Carr, "Nazi Policy against the Jews," in Richard Bessel, ed., *Life in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 69.
29. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 140.
30. Christopher R. Browning, "The German Bureaucracy and the Holocaust," in Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes, eds. *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust* (Los Angeles: Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1983), 148.
31. In conversation with the author, March 1998.

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