Introduction:
Peter Weiss and The Aesthetics of Resistance

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Publication, Translation, Reception

Decades apart, the initial receptions of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* in Germany and the United States are marked by claims of both the novel's supposed antiquatedness and its orientation toward future readers. Peter Weiss published volume 1 in 1975, followed by volume 2 in 1978 and volume 3 in 1981. Soon all three volumes of Weiss's novel will be available in English translation, with volume 1 published in 2005, volume 2 in 2020, and volume 3 in 2023 (projected).[1] When the first volume appeared in English in 2005, Noah Isenberg reflected in the *Nation* on the translation's publication. "Like the work of Brecht and other old-guard leftist writers," he observed, "Weiss's *Aesthetics* seems, on occasion, rather anachronistic. The questions it addresses—what role, for instance, the artist should play in the class struggle—are so deeply rooted in the time when Weiss wrote that his novel cries out not only for linguistic translation but also for a kind of historical and political translation; the latter, it turns out, is more difficult." Without such additional contextualization, Isenberg doubted "whether the novel will ever find much of an audience in the twenty-first century."[2]

1. The first volume was translated by Joachim Neugroschel (1938–2011), and the second two have been translated by Joel Scott.

2. Isenberg, "Fighting the Abyss."

New German Critique 147, Vol. 49, No. 3, November 2022
DOI 10.1215/0094033X-9965276 © 2022 by New German Critique, Inc.

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Such concern regarding the novel's partial outdatedness has animated its reception since its initial publication in Germany. While Wolfgang Koeppen welcomed the first volume in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* as "one of the most thrilling, daring, and mournful books of my lifetime," Karl Heinz Bohrer lamented in his *Merkur* review that large sections of the novel comprised "officiously notarized theses of communist historiography."[3] However, where recitations of left doxa give way to moments of danger, pain, and terror, Bohrer recognizes a fundamental tension structuring the novel: in such passages, an "extreme aestheticism" inspired by surrealism suspends the "enlightened certainty" of Weiss's Marxism. Bohrer much prefers the former moments, such as Weiss's "breathless, monotone, lightning-like, puristic, petrified, wild" recuperation of the Moscow show trials of 1937, to the dominant mode. Alas, he concludes, Weiss ultimately takes the opposite tack and "violently turns the surreally lurking gaze and the notorious fantasies of catastrophe into enlightened certainty [*Aufklärungsgewißheit*]."[4]

Like Bohrer, critics who engaged with the novel in the 1970s and early 1980s often returned to this supposed politics/aesthetics divide in their readings. In 1983, when this journal published English translations of German scholarship on the novel, this bifurcation was reflected in two of the three contributions included. On the political side of the ledger, Ferenc Fehér characterized *The Aesthetics of Resistance* as "a novel in which . . . the theoretical elements must prevail over the sensuously depicted," discussing it as a further articulation of the author's idiosyncratic, evolving left activism.[5] Locating the novel more on the aesthetic side of the ledger, Burkhardt Lindner emphasized its *hallucinatory realism*, observing that "feeling, image, and dream characterize a counter-authority to the reason and the proximity to reality of the 'world of words'—a world in which the subjective element is de-concretized and consumed."[6]

In the same 1983 *New German Critique* issue, Klaus Scherpe offered a set of "ten working theses" on Weiss's novel. He conceded that at a superficial level of analysis, "the novel sounds, if striking, still not particularly *new* as far as its content is concerned . . . as if a belated leftist merely wished to get across his principles through literature." But this is far from the whole story. In fact, "the meaning of Peter Weiss's novel is revealed in the *way* in which it *consti-*

3. Koeppen, *Die elenden Skribenten*, 225; Bohrer, "Katastrophenphantasie oder Aufklärung?," 87.

4. Bohrer, "Katastrophenphantasie oder Aufklärung?," 89.

5. Feher, "The Swan Song of German Khrushchevism," 169.

6. Lindner, "Hallucinatory Realism," 151. The concept of hallucinatory realism is discussed in detail by Alex Potts in the present issue.

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tutes meanings, in the *writing experiment* which relentlessly puts these artistic and political problematics to the test." Reflecting on the novel's experimentalism in its relationship to the generic modes (such as *Bildungsroman*, autobiography, and historical novel) that it adduces, Scherpe contends that Weiss's formal strategies suspend the novel's constitution as a "closed totality."[7] As an experiment of collective fiction, an experiment that Ruth Klüger argued Weiss had begun with *The Investigation*, the three volumes of the novel have shed, as Hans Mayer suggested, all memory of the bourgeois novel.[8] Thus the novel's famous closing pages, as Scherpe reminds us, do not so much end the collective narrative of antifascist resistance as restart it and reorient it toward an uncertain, post-1945 future. Containing an obvious and resolute historical dimension, the novel is nevertheless not purely historical; like the Nemean lion's paw, hanging from Heracles' cloak on the Pergamon altar, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* gives an "indication, a sign of [the] historical work of liberation that has not yet become history."[9]

In *After the Great Divide* Andreas Huyssen contextualized his discussion of the novel with respect to Weiss's persistent attempts, since the 1960s, to "rescue the radical moment of the historical avantgarde for an age which by and large had comfortably regressed to a domesticated modernism and to an apolitical avantgardism of formal experiment." But Weiss's moment of remembrance, Huyssen showed, "salvages the memory of the avantgarde precisely by submitting it to an unflinching political critique."[10] In the spirit of Theodor Adorno's reflections on fascism and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coping with the past), Huyssen addresses the act of remembrance and memory in Weiss's novel. Emphasizing the third volume's "high-voltage writing" from its opening moment, when the narrator's mother falls into silence after witnessing scenes of mass murder in Poland, to the "coldly passionate" descriptions of the Plötzensee executions toward the novel's ending, Huyssen's reading brought *The Aesthetics of Resistance* into conversation with contemporaneous discussions of Germany's unmastered past (*AGD*, 131). By zeroing in on these traumatizing passages, his analysis further presages the developing discourse on Holocaust memory in 1980s Germany, with the *Historikerstreit* just one year away.

Relating the novel's insights to discourses still taking shape at the moment of his own reading, Huyssen demonstrates how Weiss himself shifts

7. Scherpe, "Reading the Aesthetics of Resistance," 98.
8. Klüger, "Dichten über die Shoah," 212; Mayer, *In den Ruinen des Jahrhunderts*, 42.
9. Scherpe, "Reading the Aesthetics of Resistance," 104.
10. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 115, 136 (hereafter cited as *AGD*).

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the emphasis from the novel's production to its reception, anticipating future readers who use the novel's broad margins to engage critically with the debates staged on its pages:

> In a limited sense, Weiss holds on to the historical avantgarde's much discussed project to return art back into life, but he gives this project a significant shift away from the emphasis on production (dissolution of the category of the *oeuvre*, critique of the institution of art, etc.) and focuses instead on reception and on how specific historically and socially positioned subjects relate the art/life problematic *in* the works to their own perceptions and experiences of modern life. (*AGD*, 125–26)

Even sympathetic early critics like Hans Mayer had been concerned that readers of the first volume could be tempted in 1975 to accept the political and ideological statements made by the first-person narrator as binding last words on these matters.[11] Writing after the publication of the third volume, Huyssen argues that *The Aesthetics of Resistance* achieves the precise opposite. As an "attempt to salvage the avantgarde dialogically rather than giving the reader a hard and fast position," the novel is according to Huyssen's reading "consciously bent on avoiding forced reconciliations of one or the other kind"—that is, a decision in favor of *either* Soviet-steered vanguardism and its popular front aesthetics *or* a modernist or avant-garde aesthetics unmoored from the concrete proletarian struggle (*AGD*, 124). This refusal to propose such decisions to its readers, Huyssen concludes, animates the novel's closing sentences, where a lacuna in the Pergamon frieze "marks the hope for liberation," presenting "the subject of history as an empty space still to be filled" and leaving the future of the aesthetics of resistance still fundamentally undecided (*AGD*, 137–38).

If Scherpe emphasized both form and content, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* as writing experiment and political activism, and Huyssen recovered the relationship of Weiss's project to the Frankfurt School's commitment to modernism, situating the novel as a critical text in the orbit of American postmodernism's project to appropriate the European historical avant-garde, Genia Schulz developed a more critical account of the novel's political ambit. The first single-author monograph on *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, Schulz's *Versions of the Indirect* (1986) echoed Bohrer's inquiry into the tension between the novel's modernist aesthetics and orthodox politics. Targeting (neo-)Lukácsian theories of realism, their underlying humanism, and author-centered readings, Schulz analyzed a radical disjuncture between content and form—or, to use

11. Schmidt, *Peter Weiss*, 348–49.

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her Derridean/Althusserian language, between Weiss's political-ideological and political-aesthetic projects, on the one hand, and his avant-garde *textpraxis*, on the other.[12] Schulz begins her analysis of the novel's political project with Weiss's characterization of the resistance fighters' situation: they think and operate under *Zeitdruck* (time pressure), a condition that necessitates simplifications. "'Later on,'" Schulz quotes the narrator, "'when our tasks have been carried out, we will expand the present black-and-white drawing into its full color spectrum.'"[13] This constellation of the narrator's *later* and his repetitive emphasis on history's lethal forward rush tends to produce, Schulz claimed, an apologetic stance. Weiss's political project ultimately stays close to the antifascist discourse of the German Democratic Republic; there is a collective voice, but it does not represent a genuine form of ideology critique. What Schulz means by this will become clear later.

In this context of the text's retrospective unfolding of complexity, Schulz traced the broad outlines of Weiss's political aesthetics. For Weiss, the act of writing is resistance against the pressure of the Real. "Not 'reality,'" Schulz writes, "but the recording [*Nach-schreiben*] of the conversations about . . . the events . . . constitute the work and its aesthetics" (*VI*, 11). "This 'later,'" Schulz writes, "is the textual praxis of the *Aesthetics of Resistance*." More significantly, "the aesthetic discourse is understood as a (politically necessary) correction of the political discourse," because Weiss thinks of the aesthetic discourse as a "completion and bringing to an end" (*VI*, 10). Speaking before the executions in Plötzensee prison—and thus the defeat of the Resistance—the narrator thematizes this problematic of a brutally arrested history: "But now nothing at all was left that could be brought to an end, no thoughts, no work, no life, everything would come to a premature and senseless stop [*Abbruch*]."[14] Weiss's text is a totalizing counterproject to this "reality" that remained empirically incomplete—and, from the perspective of Schulz's Derrideanism, had to remain incomplete. In *The Aesthetics of Resistance* "reality" demonstrates to "the eyewitness the failure of all totality" but [the process of] writing belatedly "sublat[es] reality's incompleteness" as historical reality becomes "'art'" (*VI*, 10). However, this transformation of uncompleted reality into "completed" art is only possible because "the writing process . . . resists [reality's] forward rush" (*VI*, 10). Weiss's writing opposes this rush by "immersing the gaze in details" (*VI*, 10).

12. Schulz, *"Die Ästhetik des Widerstands": Versionen des Indirekten in Peter Weiss' Roman* (hereafter cited as *VI*). Schulz's work is informed by Macherey, *Theory of Literary Production*.

13. Weiss, *Aesthetics of Resistance*, 1:214 (hereafter cited as *AR*).

14. Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 3:199 (hereafter cited as *ÄdW*). Our translation.

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Art here means Weiss's "expanded [Marxist] notion of realism" (*VI*, 24). The term *avant-garde*, Schulz cautioned, does not accurately capture Weiss's "conception of art" (*VI*, 22), because the latter exhibits "bourgeois" tendencies. Indeed, on the level of content, there are the novel's references and connections to tradition; on the formal level, there is its effort to combine realism, its "classicizing will to form," and "avantgarde aesthetics" (*VI*, 21–22). All of this is mirrored in the novel's formal features, striving for closure. Schulz is opposed to this political aesthetics, a problematic condensed in Weiss's aesthetic pedagogy.[15]

On the level of Weiss's explicit political and political-aesthetic project, Schulz thus regarded the novel as antiquated. However, introducing her own concept of the avant-garde, Schulz excavated a different logic at work in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*: the novel qualifies as "avant-garde—and thereby [as] aesthetically and politically relevant insofar as both aspects strive to undermine 'contemplation' and 'ideology'"—only through its writing praxis: through "the effective inconspicuousness of its diction," "the imitation of scholarly discourses," the "message that is permanently held in suspension," and "the dominance of its subjunctive modality" (*VI*, 22). *The Aesthetics of Resistance* overcomes the outdatedness of its political project and the bourgeois tendency of Weiss's political aesthetics because Weiss's *writing praxis* relentlessly subverts the author's own aims.[16]

The ekphrastic renderings of works of art and conversations about them are among the most powerful moments of textual resistance. Forcing the readers' attention to linger on details, they lay bare the logic of "contradiction between aesthetic avantgarde and political standpoint" that Schulz saw at work in Weiss's textual praxis (*VI*, 24). His "excessively detailed textualization" of *Guernica*, for instance, gestures at the "consciousness of a fundamental indeterminacy of the work's meaning," demonstrating that the "process of interpretation remains constitutively interminable" (*VI*, 23, 24). Here the narrator actually formulates "the ideal of *The Aesthetics'* reception": "The picture challenged us to use the first impression merely as an impetus to take apart what was given and examine the pieces from different directions, then fit them back together, thereby making

15. On "aesthetic pedagogy," see the discussion of Jameson below.

16. Here are some aspects of Weiss's *Schreibpraxis* that create fault lines in the text, working against the author's intentions: like Lindner, Schulz pointed to the eruptions of surrealist visions and subjectivity into the discursive text, moments like Stahlmann's derangement at Angkor Wat. (On Stahlmann in Angkor Wat, see Rupprecht, "Stahlmann's 'Asian Eyes,'" in this issue). Then there is the text's "Panik der Totalität," symptomatic moments of excess where Weiss piles detail upon detail and meaning falters (*VI*, 17). One of Schulz's primary foci was, however, Weiss's use of reported speech and subjunctive to display "recognizable material," creating a "confusing multiplicity of familiar discourses" (*VI*, 12).

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them our own" (*AR*, 1:295; translation modified). Weiss's text thus runs counter to its author's intentions, contradicting his outdated political project alongside his (for Schulz, unorthodox but antiquated) reflection theory, with its drive toward epic totality.[17] Or, to put it differently: the novel remains open to future readings—not by design, but against the author's intention.

Reading as Archaeological Excavation—Reading from the Future

In his 2005 foreword to the English translation of the novel's first volume, Fredric Jameson drew on Scherpe's, Huyssen's, and Schulz's consideration of the novel's relationship to the future, and to future readers. Taking a phrase from one of Weiss's intense ekphrastic renderings of canonical and noncanonical artworks, Jameson celebrated the novel as "a monument to radical instants," a reinvention of the historical novel whose formal innovations concern above all "a new reading practice."[18] This "aesthetic pedagogy" in the service of a future revolution (x) involves intense encounters with works of literature or art, engaging protagonists and (future) readers alike. Jameson calls his reading "a contemporary confrontation with [Weiss's] text" (ix). For Jameson, this contemporary moment was defined by postmodernism and its inconsequential, reified historical gestures, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the reverberations of the revolutions that ended the Cold War and as a result of which, Jameson states with a nod to Benjamin, "some future German radicalism will emerge in unexpected forms from those conquered provinces, and emerge without warning, like all great revolutionary moments" (viii). In this way, Jameson concludes, Weiss's daring experiment with the historical novel turns empirical history into "an unfinished project" (xlvii). What once appeared "over and done with," the desperate struggles and passionate debates of the antifascist resistance fighters that Weiss traces in his collective novel from 1937 to 1945, "is thus opened up for a new beginning, a new continuation" (xlvii). Far from merely depicting or commemorating this history, it reappropriates it for "some new future of our own present" (xlvii).

This is the question Edward Said asks in his 2003 return to Freud, *Freud and the Non-European*. Forcefully arguing against simplifying rereadings of authors from the past, and rejecting the "stupid notion" that he ever wanted to dismiss Marx or Jane Austen as "politically incorrect" because their thinking

17. For an article that explores the tensions within the novel's political project from a feminist perspective, see Hell, "Rosa oder die Sehnsucht nach einer Geschichte ohne Stalin."

18. Jameson, "Monument to Radical Instants," xii. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from Jameson's foreword.

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and writing were bound to "the perspectives of their cultural moment," Said instead proposes what he calls a form of reading "contrapuntally," informed by Auerbach's *figura*.[19] He distinguishes between texts "that are inertly of their time" and "stay there" and those "which brush up unstintingly against historical constraints" (*F*, 26–27). The latter are texts that "we keep with us, generation after generation," texts with the "power to instigate new thought" (*F*, 27).

Said explores this quality by excavating the contradictions around Jewish identity in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Jacqueline Rose pithily summarizes this Saidian intervention: "Freud's partial, fragmented, troubled, and at times self-denying relationship to his own Jewishness can provide a model for identity in the modern world."[20] There is thus a future-oriented quality to this symptomatic reading. Said's strategy of reading *contrapuntally* foregrounds this orientation toward the future: approaching texts that crystallize racist ideas or imperial imaginaries, he "tries to see them in their context as accurately as possible, but then—because they are extraordinary writers and thinkers whose work has enabled other, alternative work and readings based on developments of which they could not have been aware of—I see them contrapuntally" (*F*, 24). In the process, the authors of such texts become "figures whose writing travels across temporal, cultural and ideological boundaries in unforeseen ways to emerge as part of a new ensemble *along with* later history and subsequent art" (*F*, 24).

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), for instance, exemplifies this future potential of a text *and* the power of its future readers: "Conrad's writing is further actualized and animated by emphases and inflections that he was obviously unaware of, but that his writing permits" (*F*, 25). At stake are the text's "latencies": "The often surprising dynamics of human history can . . . dramatize the latencies in a prior figure or form that suddenly illuminate the present" (*F*, 25).[21] Works like Conrad's provoke "echoing answers" and "instigate new thought" for readers who do not live in Conrad's world (*F*, 24, 27). Thus thinking across the divide between the European and the non-European worlds, and across the divide of past and present, Said writes that "later history reopens and challenges what seems to have been the finality of an earlier figure of thought, bringing it into contact with cultural, political, and

19. Said, *Freud and the Non-European*, 23 (hereafter cited as *F*). On this topic, see Konuk, *East-West Mimesis*; and Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*.

20. Rose, "Response to Edward Said," 66.

21. With respect to Conrad, this means that precisely because the novel is based in an "essentializing" and "uncompromising Eurocentric vision," there is an "antinomian force" at work; "the intensity and power wrapped inside its sentences" (*F*, 26) attracted non-European authors like Tayib Salih to the novel and its tropes.

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epistemological formations undreamed of by—albeit affiliated by historical circumstances with—its author" (*F*, 25).

When the young workers and students in *The Aesthetics of Resistance* look at the Gigantomachy in the Pergamon museum, read Dante's *Divine Comedy*, or examine Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, they are fully aware that these works of art and literature were not intended for them. As one of them, Coppi, declares, "If we want to take on art, literature, we have to treat them against the grain, that is, we have to eliminate all the concomitant privileges and project our own demands into them" (*AR*, 1:33–34; *ÄdW*, 1:41). They seek to read them contrapuntally in a Saidian sense and find unforeseen significance for their own political situation in these works of art. While they are far from ignoring the ideological blind spots and historical situation in which Eumenes II dedicated the Pergamon frieze or Dante composed the *Inferno*, they emphasize the future-orientedness of these works of art and claim their cultural, political, and epistemological significance for their own moment and political crisis. In other words, the protagonists of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* model attempt to unearth and activate such latencies in prior works of art to illuminate their own situation.

As a writing experiment, however, Weiss's novel seeks to move beyond modeling to read past works of art and literature contrapuntally. Its experimental form anticipates future readings that might challenge the certainties shaping the ideological expectations of its protagonists and its author. As a work of literature of the 1970s and 1980s, marked by passages that occasionally demand historical and political translation, the novel emerges today—and the essays in this issue share this claim—with new cultural and political potentials for the contemporary moment. This perception of the novel's contemporaneous potential does not belong to the writers of these essays alone but is shared by new readers of the recently translated volumes. Selecting Weiss's novel as her favorite book of 2020, the poet and essayist Anne Boyer noted how "this dense, serious novel helped to anchor me against the panicked churning of the news cycle." The novelist Ryan Ruby, reading the book during the Trump presidency and the ongoing pandemic, recommended *The Aesthetics of Resistance* as a model for fellow novelists searching for an inspiring writing experiment that "transcends 'formal conventionality' without retreating into 'the politics of the apolitical.'"[22] Even more recently, Hannah Proctor drew on Weiss's novel to frame her review of Enzo Traverso's substantial work *Revolution*, noting that "Weiss's engagement with the faded greens and greys of *The Raft of Medusa* is

22. Boyer, "Leaders in Literature"; Ruby, "Resisting Oblivion."

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far more despairing than Traverso's but, like Géricault piling corpses from a morgue into his studio in an attempt to enter into the suffering of others, Weiss folds the past into the present"—with art, including the novel's own narratives of suffering, ultimately serving as an archive of past struggles and a resource for potential future revolutionaries.[23]

Methods of Rereading—the Present Volume

To mark the publication of the second volume of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* in English, we convened two panels on the novel at the annual meeting of the German Studies Association in 2019. Images circulating in the media at that time evoked different passages from Weiss's novel. For some of us, migrants adrift on an increasingly surveilled and fortified Mediterranean reawakened the intense experience of reading Weiss's discussion of Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, and the United States' 2019 abrogation of asylum procedures recalled Weiss's extraordinary account of the German exiles' flight across Europe. "With the political refugees having been criminalized and the racially persecuted dismissed as undesirable," the narrator observes in volume 2, "there was no reason to expect a rush at the border any more" (*AR*, 2:104; *ÄdW*, 2:112–13). For others, the rising threat of authoritarian/fascist movements, with their antidemocratic, antisemitic, and racist fervor, recalled the discussions about fascism and the possibilities of resistance, also in volume 2, with its proliferating narratives of flight and exile from fascism and its constellated networks of antifascist strategists, activists, spies, and saboteurs.[24] Finally, there were the renewed debates on the relationship between the Holocaust and European colonialism—debates spurred on since our panels with the German publication of Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* and Dirk Moses's "German Catechism" and traversing conceptual terrain at the center of Weiss's thinking since the early 1960s.[25]

However generative the process of forging such associations can be, rereading *The Aesthetics of Resistance* cannot be reduced to finding analogies, elective affinities, or resonances between Weiss's plotted material and the political history of the present. It must also involve the histories of literature and the

23. Proctor, "Lost at Sea."

24. In the present context, as Hannah Arendt's reflections on the totalitarian logic of fascism became more prominent in the United States, Weiss's *Aesthetics of Resistance* reemerged for all of us—though, curiously, for few others—as a text reflecting on fascism and the possibilities of resistance in a moment of danger.

25. See Rothberg, *Multidirektionale Erinnerung*; and Moses, "Der Katechismus der Deutschen." For Weiss's contributions to this topic, see the English translation in this issue of Weiss's exchange with Hans Magnus Enzensberger, along with Julia Hell's introduction.

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visual arts. So in returning to Weiss's monumental novel, we thought not only of the historical and political connections to be made but also of ongoing discussions about canonicity and canon formation, and of the very status of literature in our disciplines—discussions that often themselves involve histories of marginalization and oppression. Through their self-education, Weiss's proletarian readers seek not only to recover emancipatory tendencies in canonical artworks but also to recover the overlooked artworks, texts, and objects for which bourgeois criticism and academic art history had little use.

Fully cognizant of this novel's power to generate spontaneous, actualizing linkages with political predicaments, what we hope to offer with this volume's rereadings of Weiss's novel are not flat-footed political readings in the service of a new antifascist resistance or the coming socialist revolution. We are likewise uninterested in performing various noble acts of mourning, in the spirit of left-wing melancholia and disillusionment, wandering through the novel as through a graveyard and clearing weeds and moss, here and there, from the monuments we find. Instead, the contributions gathered here engage with *The Aesthetics of Resistance* as a complex *literary* text at the intersection of art history, literary history, and political history—an imageless image text whose collective voices and unfolding of aesthetic encounters, intense moments of immersion and distance, not only defy simplifications and the refusal of dialogue but are always opened up toward the future. Indeed, our intention is to rediscover Weiss's complex work on politics *and* aesthetics—to take the novel's political dimension seriously, rather than as a tired rehearsal of intra-Left debates interrupted occasionally by moments of existentialist brilliance (Bohrer), while rejecting a reductionist approach to thinking about antifascist aesthetics, in which art is just another weapon in the struggle. After all, when a few of the novel's characters adopt such a position on art's place in left-wing culture, their arguments are challenged, debated, complicated, and not infrequently refuted. Narration, organization, syntax, tense and temporality, paraphrase, description, ekphrasis, citation, and allusion—these are not incidental elements of *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, arranged around and atop its "content"; they are fundamental, essential elements that determine all its political and philosophical potentialities.

The relation between the novel's form and its orientation toward the future is at the center of Kaisa Kaakinen's contribution "For Future Reference: A Twenty-First-Century Reading of Peter Weiss's Poetics of Parataxis and Scenes of Walking."[26] Following Jameson's discussion of affect and realist

26. The essay builds on arguments regarding historical narration and its future legibility in literary texts that she developed in Kaakinen, *Comparative Literature and the Historical Imaginary.*

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writing, Kaakinen examines how the paratactic and multisensory narrative strategies in *The Aesthetics of Resistance* seek to avoid a hypotactic logic of hierarchy and subordination. Rather than explicating and determining the nature of linkages between events and scenes brought into a relation, the paratactic relations encourage readers to provide their own linkages and emphases while reading. Weiss's paratactic poetics, Kaakinen argues, thus mediates lived experience across geographic and temporal distances to disrupt rigid historical narratives. The novel offers itself to future readers, Kaakinen suggests, as a medium of historical orientation toward prospects of undecided futures not articulated in the text itself.

In "Looking Away: On Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* and the Narration of Political Pedagogy in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*," Kai Evers approaches Weiss's novel as a writing experiment preparing future rereadings within new political situations that may necessitate not-yet-foreseen models of aesthetics and political resistance. In this way, Weiss's novel not only models how to search for unforeseen significance in past artworks but also anticipates future readings that will challenge the certainties shaping the ideological expectations of these protagonists and their author. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's reflections on the future's unpredictability and the function of promise and forgiveness in her theory of political action, Evers argues for a second, future-oriented pedagogical dimension at work in the narrative structure of Weiss's novel. Reconsidering narratological models of mask narration, Evers rereads the narrator's interpretation of *The Raft of the Medusa* and finds below the surface of a seemingly invigorating contrapuntal reading a detailed account of the sacrifices and ideological self-censorship necessitated but never openly acknowledged by the narrator's efforts to remain part of the antifascist resistance. Once the narrator's model of reading, a poetics of looking away, is applied to a reading of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* itself, a probing of history, politics, and collective action emerges that diverges revealingly from the narrator's stated poetics and his historical and political assumptions.

In "Marxist and *Formless*: Uncanny Materialism in Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*," Richard Langston reads the novel as a search for new form, a form commensurate with Weiss's contemporary moment. Taking his cue from Georges Bataille's radical, antihumanist materialism (Yve-Alain Bois) to critique Jameson's dialectical approach to Weiss's novel, Langston argues that this search within the narrative wavers between form and *formless*, between constituting rigid and durable forms and dissolving them altogether.[27]

27. On Bataille's antihumanism, see Bois, "Use Value of Formless," 17.

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While the novel's narrator and his friends pursue their aesthetic education based on the expectation that history follows a path made legible and predictable by the method of dialectical materialism, Langston argues that the novel advances instead an "uncanny materialism" (Rosalind E. Krauss) that hovers between form and *formless*. The narrator's encounter with *The Raft of the Medusa* serves Langston as prime evidence that Géricault's search for form and the novel's search for form take again and again recourse to *formless*. Rather than stabilizing and fortifying an understanding of politics and history capable of sustaining antifascist resistance, the narrator's interpretation of works of art and literature vacillates between finding form and abandoning form altogether. Rather than affirming a dialectical materialism that reinvigorates utopian hope, Langston detects in Weiss's novel an uncanny materialism that approaches history without resorting to transcendence.

If the panels we organized around volume 2 returned again and again to *The Raft of the Medusa*, Alex Potts deliberately excludes the discussion of this painting and others that depict dramatic stagings of figures engaged in violent struggle like the Pergamon altar's Gigantomachy or Picasso's *Guernica*—works in the tradition of history paintings and its classicizing aesthetics.[28] Exploring Weiss's social realism as the artist's "anti-elitist commitment to . . . making visible their oppression and exploitation," Potts directs our attention to two forms of realist aesthetics that eschew the dramatic event in favor of "generic situations," capturing the "lived reality" of the oppressed. Briefly touching on the Hellenist altar panels, Géricault's classicized bodies, and Picasso's wrecking of the classical, Potts examines Weiss's engagements with works of late nineteenth- and early to mid-twentieth-century modern realism but ultimately privileges Weiss's attention to Pieter Brueghel the Elder, finding in these readings "an expanded, possibly 'epic' realism."[29] With their multiplicity of scenes, Brueghel's panoramic paintings like *Dulle Griet* (1563) depict the worlds of the everyday. Attracted to their "phantasmagoric" quality, Weiss, the former surrealist, harnesses their "imaginatively intensified reality," which captures the experience of the oppressed and their resistance (*resistance*, Potts insists, covers the spectrum from sheer endurance

28. The *Aesthetics* is an image-text that has attracted art historians from Alexander Honold, Ulrich Schreiber, and Nana Badenberg's *Die Bilderwelt des Peter Weiss*, an inventory of the works of art in the novel, to Frederic Schwarz's "Peter Weiss: Art and the Historiography of Resistance" and Jürgen Stöhr's *Das Sehbare und das Unsehbare*, a close phenomenological reading of Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* guided by Weiss's discussion.

29. For Weiss's reinvention of the (classical and/or Dantean) epic, see Matthew Miller's chapter on Weiss's text as "'impossible' Cold War epic," drawing on Franco Moretti's *Modern Epic*, in Miller, *German Epic*.

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and survival to heroic struggle). Like surrealist artists, Brueghel is "simultaneously concretely real and phantasmagoric" *and* represents "the unconscious and the conscious" not in a psychologizing manner but as "fundamental aspects of larger reality." Analyzing Weiss's art-historical work and curation of artworks, Potts rewrites art history with Weiss *and* connects Brueghel's "panoramic scenarios" to the novel's form: "A palpably present totality is conjured up that exceeds the bounds of a conventionally composed pictorial scenario, rather as the totality emerging out of the thick blocks of text in Weiss's novel exceeds the containment of a conventional narrative." Potts's attention to Weiss's revision of canonicity and canon formation is linked to the question of future readers disinterring, reconsidering, buried elements and bringing them into new relationships: in Weiss's radical art history, Adolf Menzel, Géricault, and Picasso are part of the same art history, visible to Weiss's antifascist beholders/readers.

Moving away from the art-historical aspects, three contributions to this special issue focus on how the novel explores the formation of political subjectivities, both individual and collective, capable of challenging the reigning order. In "Unfolding Political Emergence: The Knowledge of Visual Artworks in Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*," Stefan Jonsson discusses the passages in the novel narrating its protagonists' engagement with works of visual art and literature. These *foldouts*, Jonsson argues, "halt the narrative flow, break open a shaft in time, and unfold past struggles and traumas as decisive for the present." With "enormous swaths of history" folded into each painting, sculpture, or novel, only to be *un*folded in the young antifascists' (often collective) encounters with them, Jonsson argues that this device "enables the narrator to situate the reader inside the historical event, in the absolute present of trauma or revolutionary action, while at the same time remaining outside it, contemplating its meaning from the perspective of the survivor, or future generations." Drawing on the concept of political emergence developed at length in his recent contribution to *Theory and Event*, Jonsson shows how the protagonists' practice of unfolding "wire[s] multiple cases of collective experience to one another across historical time," both linking their struggle to long-buried antecedents and opening their resistance toward the future—and toward future resisters who will draw on their thoughts and deeds in turn.[30] They become subjects of aesthetic self-representation, claiming voice and presence, being seen and heard (Jacques Rancière)—acts that always precede

30. Jonsson, "Art of Protest."

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the appearance of emergence of collective actors as subjects and objects of political representation in the public space (Arendt).

In "Renewing Resistance at Sea and on Isles: Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, Volume 2, for the Twenty-First Century," Matthew D. Miller also considers how in Weiss's novel aesthetic encounters inform the emergence of political subjects. He begins with the narrator's consideration, "in disaggregate parts across five chapters," of *The Raft of the Medusa* and the ill-fated voyage it represents. Joining Jonsson in identifying a "collapsing [of] spatiotemporal difference" in aesthetic contemplation, a process that "permit[s] the narrator to experience 1938 as 1816 and Paris as the Atlantic," Miller likewise identifies a certain ambiguity of positioning, with the viewer both experiencing the traumatic instant from within and viewing it from without, that "open[s] up a space for solidarity and ethical orientation."[31] Turning then to the imaginary debate in the novel's second volume between Fredrik Ström and Sixten Rogeby—spokesmen for Swedish communism and social democracy, respectively—Miller shows how Weiss's narrator "models a new process of expansive political resistance beyond the coordinates of class struggle, bolstering the capacious view of resistance wrested from his interaction with Géricault's *Raft*" earlier in the novel. Ultimately emerging from the "dialectical chorus" of these two activists' discourse, sutured together by the narrator's own intervention, is nothing less than "a novel reconceptualization of class [accomplished] by severing affiliation with (and action in) political struggle from one's position in society's mode of production."

Similarly concerned with how diverse individuals and groups are forged into collective subjects is Seth Howes's contribution, "We Can Come Very Close to Them: Solidarity and the Struggle for Liberation in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*." Returning first to Weiss's 1965–66 debate with Hans Magnus Enzensberger on the possibility of solidarity with the Third World, Howes then shows how *The Aesthetics of Resistance* complicates the terms of this debate by considering different models of solidarity, in particular across the boundaries of racial distinction imposed and policed by both National Socialism and European imperialism. Though one cannot *become* another, Weiss suggests that through research, aesthetic contemplation, or one's own actions, one can *come very close* to the other in hopes of comprehending their experiences

31. In Miller's reading of this encounter—a reading in dialogue with Katja Garloff's—the danger remains that the "solidarity in the face of existential peril" emerging from "the narrator's identification with the castaways' predicament" (*German Epic*, 13, 11) effaces the determinants of that predicament (e.g., race, class, gender, or status as a colonial subject), which cannot help but give specific form to each individual's struggle against oppression.

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and sharing in their struggle. The question of shared struggle also animates the essay's second part, which considers the passages in the novel's second volume about Bertolt Brecht's abandoned Engelbrekt fragment. Here the narrator's "historical research," writes Howes, "brings into view the predicament of doomed Engelbrekt and his comrades, and as he aligns himself with the Engelbrekt revolutionaries' suffering and struggle, analogies emerge between that long-past moment and the Nazi threat to Sweden in the narrator's present day." Ultimately, Howes's analysis sees the novel as using the Sweden of both the 1930s and the 1430s to ask questions about solidarity and about national and international struggles for liberation.

Where Howes, Miller, and Jonsson reflect on the formation of political subjectivities, Caroline Rupprecht's essay "Stahlmann's 'Asian Eyes': Jewish Identity in Peter Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, Volume 3" explores Weiss's thematization of Jewish identity and left antisemitism on the level of the individual subject, undertaking a visual analysis of the text by focusing on the analysis of a visual scenario of recognition. Roughly outlining a trajectory from Weiss's "refusal to occupy a Jewish subject position" in the context of *The Investigation*, through his construction of "a position from which he could write as both a socialist and a Jew," to his exploration of the possibility of *deciding* to consciously affirm Jewish identity in solidarity with persecuted Jews in the context of the narrator's mother in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, Rupprecht offers an in-depth analysis of a passage critics rarely discuss: the visit of the Comintern agent and military adviser Stahlmann to the Cambodian temple complex of Angkor Wat, depicted by Weiss as monumental totalitarian art. Rupprecht, quoting Burkhardt Lindner, analyzes a specific moment of "hallucinatory realism," when Stahlmann recognizes himself in the Angkor Wat statues, and then relates this visual scenario to a similarly powerful visual scene in Weiss's autobiographical novel, *Vanishing Point* (1966), which Weiss thematized as the father hiding his Jewishness from the son's gaze. What connects these two scenarios, Rupprecht contends, is the antisemitic "Orientalizing" trope of "Asian eyes," Weiss's way of coding of Stahlmann as Jewish. The Angkor Wat passage is the only episode set on non-European terrain, and it is this geographic displacement that renders Weiss's examination of subjectivity possible. To explain why Weiss invented this "Orientalizing" scenario, Rupprecht unfolds the history of left-wing antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s (the epic's diegetic time frame) and in the 1970s, when Weiss wrote the book and encountered antisemitic suspicions of being "bourgeois," "Jewish," and even a "traitor," in Sweden as well as in West and East Germany.

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By exploring how antisemitic tropes circulating in the Western European Left during the 1970s were incorporated into Weiss's novel as elements of its complex engagement with his own Jewish self-identification, Rupprecht's act of double contextualization resembles the "historical and political translation" Isenberg imagined would be necessary to open the novel to new readers. But the 1970s, of course, were not the only decade in which Weiss's prominence in left politics gave rise to conflicting interpretations of historical and theoretical questions, or to competing viewpoints on tactical and strategic questions. In 1965–66 Weiss debated Enzensberger on the relationship between European left movements and liberation struggles in the Third World; from their anticolonial perspective, Weiss and Enzensberger implicitly revisited Adorno's 1962 response to Jean-Paul Sartre's essay about *littérature engagée*, the Sartrean position resonating in Weiss's own public statements about commitment in 1965 and 1966. Weiss's and Enzensberger's commentaries on one another's positions are included here in English, with a critical introduction by Julia Hell. This remains a rich and important exchange, notable not only for the connections Weiss draws between the Holocaust and colonialism but also for its appearance in *Kursbuch*, where anticolonial thinkers appeared in German translation for the first time.

Conclusion: Thinking in the Subjunctive

While working on the novel's second volume, Weiss was asked by interviewers for *Ord och Bild* whether his novel was—as some Swedish reviewers had charged on the first volume's release—an apologia for the Moscow show trials. In response, Weiss emphasized that the novel "lives by its openness to different perspectives, its exchange of voices."[32] A book, he continued, "is something very open, incomplete, just as my plays often have been: I am dealing with a topic, with material, and can always envision the problematic being expanded when others come along and are permitted to express themselves."[33] Made in the middle of a work process lasting more than a decade, this 1977 observation presages the future-oriented, subjunctive mood of the novel's concluding passages. These passages eschew empty assurances of eventual victory for a more

32. Adolfsson and Bjurman, "Herkules und der Klassenkampf," 236. That this is a particularly important strength of the novel with respect to its future-orientedness is reinforced in Miller's reading of the novel's retrieval of lives, and stories, formerly consigned by fascist violence to oblivion. "The polyphonic means by which [this retrieval] is accomplished confer the resistant potentials of narration to posterity for subsequent appropriation, elaboration, and expansion. In so doing, *Die Ästhetik* speaks to futures beyond its purview" (Miller, *German Epic*, 78).

33. Adolfsson and Bjurman, "Herkules und der Klassenkampf," 237.

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serious presentation of the dialectics of failure and struggle. As Weiss's recent biographer, Werner Schmidt, observes, "The novel . . . thematizes failure, unfulfilled hopes, and the not-yet-realized utopia; but also the importance of not letting these hopes be extinguished, of awakening them in a changed form in a future reader and giving this reader a ready means of drawing insights for herself from the attempts that have failed in the past."[34] While Weiss himself died in 1982, only a year after its completion, his great novel's orientation toward future readers has made for decades of involved scholarly conversation about the questions it raises, the answers its protagonists propose to them, and the applicability of its methods to other times and places. Each in its own way, the eight new engagements with the novel that are gathered in this special issue look back to Weiss's masterwork in order to bring its insights, methods, and ambitions to bear on contemporary problems in politics and aesthetics.

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34. Schmidt, *Peter Weiss*, 440. Schmidt (2016) and Birgit Lahann (*Peter Weiss*, also 2016) are the most recent of Weiss's biographers, following Robert Cohen (*Peter Weiss in seiner Zeit*, 1992) and Jens-Fietje Dwars (*Und dennoch Hoffnung*, 2007).

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