

## Foreword: A Monument to Radical Instants

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*The Aesthetics of Resistance*, Peter Weiss's three-volume historical novel about the struggles of the German Communist anti-Hitlerian networks from 1937 to the end of World War II, marks a powerful intervention in German historiography, or more precisely into the sense of history and the construction of the past in which Germans and leftists of the last decade of the Cold War still lived: an intervention felt in both the German West and the German East (it was published in both countries) and cutting across, while acknowledging, the sterile polemics about Stalinism still current in that period. Posthumously (Weiss died six months after the publication of the final volume in 1981), it now has a significant role to play in the historicity a united Germany must construct in order to incorporate the experience of the German Democratic Republic—a problem distantly comparable to the intellectual and historiographic appropriation of the complex and varied life world of the conquered South after the American Civil War. The new Germany is necessarily in search of a new vision of its own past, at the very moment when History, which will not stop for that effort of Hegelian *Er-innerung* and reconstruction of collective identity, is about to absorb Germany and its neighbors into some new and larger, transnational unity (at the same time that it threatens to annul even the autonomy of that new unity into the even larger networks of an all-subsuming late capitalist globalization).

But this is not merely a local German agenda: such dilemmas also confront the Left in general in the world today; and the modification of Germany's sense of its own radicalisms and revolutionary impulses must necessarily contribute to the reconstruction of a worldwide left vision of its vocation and its possibilities in a seemingly post-revolutionary world situation in which capitalism and the ever-expanding penetration

of the free market are commonly felt to be henceforth unchallenged. But the failure of the reconstruction of the former DDR means that some future German radicalism will emerge in unexpected forms from those conquered provinces, and emerge without warning, like all great revolutionary moments, very much according to Benjamin's messianic figures: "Every second of time is the strait gate through which Messiah may enter."<sup>1</sup> Thus here too the messianic preparation for a rebirth of the Left in Germany, and out of its older revolutionary traditions, stands as an allegory for the Left in general: Stalin, the cultures and strategies of Soviet Communism, the Leninist dimension itself, will never be reborn, nor is such a rebirth even desirable for revolutionary impulses (such as those depicted in Peter Weiss's novel) which deplored, feared, and loathed so many of the things associated with the old Soviet Union; but it will only be out of an unflinching contemplation of the past, an *acknowledgment* of it (to use Stanley Cavell's keyword), that the radical Novum of some new political and revolutionary movement can surge, unrecognizable, and seemingly without warning. But this contemplation is not required in order to "learn from the past and avoid its mistakes"—a silly notion at best; nor either to "make amends" and confess the guilt of the Stalinist period—for guilt is both a paralyzing impulse and a task in which, if properly considered, virtually everyone in the world might well be involved. Rather, just as in the familiar dialectic of the Communist period (reflected over and over again in the endless discussions and debates throughout *The Aesthetics of Resistance*), for which the defense of the Soviet Union was both impossible and unavoidable, so now the idea of the Soviet period, the memory of that immense historical experience, brooks no detour, even though there can be no reassuring way of "coming to terms with it." Such a confrontation with the past must also necessarily include the resistance to it and the disgust with which (West) German readers today greet the older political literature of the West German Gruppe 47 pre-unification writers,<sup>2</sup> as well as that which postmodern readers in general bring to the now dead past of the interwar years and of World War II—a boredom sometimes mingled with curious stabs of nostalgia, and strengthened by consumerist habits for which the outmoded and the old-fashioned are somehow more intolerable than the palpable shoddiness of much of what is truly contemporary. There is no right way of dealing with the past—forgetfulness is no more therapeutic than a mesmerization by persistent trauma; but history is not made up of passing fashions which you are free to discard or replace. Still, the afterlife of Peter Weiss's novel can be explained by the historically modified role it is called upon to play in this

new post-Cold War period, so different from the still feverishly political situation of the early German 1980s. This is the excuse (along with the unfamiliarity of the work to readers outside Germany or Sweden) for adding a contemporary confrontation with this text to the already voluminous critical work on Peter Weiss.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the active intervention in the past, the return to the only too familiar dilemmas of a worldwide left politics in the Hitler era—but this time beyond the sterile alternative of apologia or strident anti-Communism—this is not the only vocation of this “novel,” nor the only intellectual context in which its originality and power can be felt. The unavoidable references that have already been made to memory, collective and individual alike, remind us that for good or ill the last few years have known a feverish preoccupation with historical memory (and also autobiography), with mourning and melancholia, and finally with the Holocaust itself.<sup>4</sup> *The Aesthetics of Resistance* commemorates political failure and defeat, but scarcely overlooks the physical suffering and martyrdom that accompanied such defeat; and to this also it wishes to provide, not a monument of some sort (the question of monuments is also one of the burning issues of our period), but rather a machine for reliving that sheerly corporeal agony. This is not a testimony, either,<sup>5</sup> that witnesses might piously record and preserve: but rather an immediacy of the body and the anguished mind which we are ourselves called upon to retrace by way of reading. It is a peculiarly juxtaposed set of materials: sparsely selected yet vivid landscapes along with interiors and rooms which have a different function; the visual lessons of many paintings; and finally the sheer suffering of bodies whose primary sexuality (chastely absent from these pages) is replaced by pain. Peter Weiss has his contribution to make to current theories of the body as well as to the varied figural or intellectual, or sometimes wordless or impossible, modes of approaching something like the Holocaust. Yet, this is not a book about the Holocaust, I think, although a place is made for that within it. Still, it would be enough to remember the critiques addressed to his Auschwitz play, *The Investigation*—that in it Jews were assimilated unacceptably to the other victims, most notably to Communists; that the event was thereby stripped of its uniquely Jewish meaning<sup>6</sup>—a reproach which can be prolonged to the *Aesthetics* as well (despite Peter Weiss’s own half-Jewish origins)—to realize that the work cannot be claimed for Holocaust literature and the Holocaust tradition. But it certainly remains central to all the themes and theoretical questions raised by the debate over that literature, from that of the impossibility of representation all the way to that of the uses of memory.

The reconstruction of the past and of some future Left; the commemoration of the suffering of the dead—to these projects must be added another, already registered in the title: yet *The Aesthetics of Resistance* is not so much a contribution to aesthetic theory as rather the working out of an aesthetic pedagogy. For this is also a *Bildungsroman*, in which a young German worker learns a politics of resistance in the vicissitudes of history, but also appropriates a whole aesthetic culture, which is meant to complete that first and political education and which may in many ways even precede it and prepare the cultural (and dare one even say, in keeping with the German context, “spiritual” [*geistig*]) receptivity for those more pragmatic lessons and dilemmas. Famously, it is with a visit to the Pergamum altar by three schoolfriends that the novel begins: the first form of physical suffering in these pages is that of tortured statuary—the agony of the Giants crushed by the Olympians; the first political lesson is a mythological and aesthetic, an imaginary one—the vision of defeat, the triumph of the Olympian rulers over the rebellious demigods. The first step in this aesthetic pedagogy, in this aesthetic formation of the subject, is thus one of “a massacre impenetrable to the thought of liberation”:<sup>7</sup> a seemingly frustrating and paralyzing first step.

Yet this is a proletarian *Bildungsroman*, a pedagogy of the subaltern: and it is worth remembering that, of the hundreds of characters who people this vast novel, only three are fictional: the unnamed narrator and his parents. All the rest are real historical figures on whom Weiss did voluminous research. Nor should we forget that these three central fictive characters are only objects of autobiographical identification in a severely mediated way: for Peter Weiss was a bourgeois and his father a business manager. It would be abusive to suppose that the novelist was free to transpose his own experiences effortlessly into those of a fictive youth, who just happened to be a working-class subject growing up in a working-class neighborhood. The debates that have swirled around Proust’s fictional description of heterosexual love from a supposedly homosexual standpoint<sup>8</sup> ought to find their resonance and their analogy here, if we assume that this representation is also simply the description of an already existing experiential state of things or state of mind.

But the pedagogical framework, if it means anything at all, means that we have to do here not with a state of things but with an emergence and the modification of all such previous “states”: this is a self-fashioning, a construction of subjectivity, in which the subject attempts to master and reappropriate even those blows from outside which might ordinarily be thought to be beyond his control. He is to do this through art and cul-

ture, and, collectively, with his fellows and a few teachers (Brecht as well as the psychiatrist Hodann), to construct a new education for himself and for them. Politically and theoretically, of course, this pedagogical framework takes a philosophical position, which is recognizably that of certain new or oppositional Marxisms which have asserted the indispensability of consciousness and culture over against the reductions by a mainstream of praxis to the economic and the narrowly political-ideological.

Yet this is not merely a philosophical or an intellectual position: it has its symbolic working-through in the concrete process of reading itself. For whatever the value of such pedagogical demonstrations for a properly working-class or subaltern public itself (and it may be safely assumed that today the afterlife of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* is more secure in the former East Germany than in the old Bundesländer)—and whatever the implications for a socialist state in these new proposals for an *Erbe* and a new cultural tradition, and in particular for the hotly debated question of the appropriation or not of the bourgeois artistic tradition, not to speak of the precapitalist ones—it must also be remembered that we—the new current readership—are ourselves mainly middle-class people, formed under capitalism. Peter Weiss's personal effort of an imaginative self-projection into the *Bildung*-situation of a working-class protagonist from the 1930s is thus itself an allegory of our own possibilities of imaginative sympathy as readers of this text: it is his mediation that can alone make our own reading possible; even though one also wishes to reassert Sartre's famous insistence on the incomparable richness imposed on texts and narratives which cannot avoid addressing two distinct publics, two distinct readerships.<sup>9</sup>

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Yet to all these programs must be added a final one, a formal project this time, quite different in its problems and obstacles from any which have been mentioned thus far. For this is also a historical novel, and it must somehow confront and solve in new ways all the dilemmas which the newly emergent genre of the historical novel has had to grapple with at least since its first codification by Sir Walter Scott. Yet despite this respectable generic cover, apologists for the work have been remarkably defensive. Thus it has become conventional to begin discussion of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* by acknowledging its formal peculiarities: Manfred Haiduk calls it a "Monstruum"; Robert Cohen suggests that, of the three volumes, only the last is really a novel; and so on.<sup>10</sup> Formal innovations no doubt always make for problems and difficulties in reading: but it can happen, more rarely, that the formal innovation lies far more cen-

trally in the demand for a new reading practice. This was the case with the *nouveau roman*,<sup>11</sup> whose experiments with what is called “real time” in the media will be suggestive here; and it is also and preeminently the case with Peter Weiss, even though the innovation his book proposes is utterly different in meaning and spirit from theirs.

On completing his violin concerto, Schoenberg is said to have exclaimed, “Now they will have to invent a completely different way of playing the violin.” But I believe that a true avant-garde is characterized not merely by a modification in the way a work is constructed or executed, but also by a program of changes for its reception (it is true that the performing of an already written musical score lies somewhere in between these poles, which are often thought of as active and passive). New kinds of perception, new forms of listening attention, are explicitly demanded, along with the new material or content, the new formal structures, of the “text” in question. These programs then allegorically project the vision of a new community organized around them, so that while the essentially collective production of a given avant-garde is necessary in order to mark a given aesthetic moment as such, it is not sufficient. In this spirit, the *nouveau roman*, whose collective character as a “school” is in any case relatively dubious, is at best a borderline case.

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Peter Weiss, to be sure, reflected throughout his life and work on the possibility of an avant-garde, both artistic and political; but one may say, following the Deleuze of the film books (for whom political films are defined as such precisely by the absence of community and praxis), that that work, relatively solitary in its emergence, even though it is marked by collaboration and collective performance, mourns the loss of the possibility of an avant-garde more than it manages to reinstate one.<sup>12</sup> Comparable in that perhaps only to the expressionist group COBRA, his essentially late modernism attempts to repeat one of the earlier, now classical forms of the modern, but where the great majority of this production finds its coordinates in the “great moderns”—non-avant-gardists, writers of a solitary book of the world,<sup>13</sup> like Joyce or Mallarmé—Weiss still thinks in terms of movements, like surrealism and experimental film. In that, it is worth underscoring the analogies between Weiss and another immense yet unclassifiable figure of the postwar, who also tried to “reconcile” art and politics, Marx and Freud, sexual revolution and social revolution. Pier Paolo Pasolini was if anything even more of a loner than Peter Weiss, projecting his vision of the collectivity back into the myths and rituals of premodern villages and tribes, as supremely in the *Medea* (1970), with its cannibalism and magic, and its lament for the modern “desacral-

ization" of the world (the centaur teacher Chiron first appearing as centaur, then in modern dress clothes on two legs—because we moderns have lost the framework in which we believe in centaurs). But I want to underscore a more basic analogy between Pasolini and Weiss—both otherwise incomparable, and Weiss virtually without any national tradition of his own—contemporaneous with the Beats, but here too without any genuine similarities, nor can I think of any other figures to compare them with. What they shared formally, besides the themes I have mentioned, is that crude hacking simplicity of the pedagogue who initiates forms, who feels no particular respect for a series of formal exercises or innovations, but chops into the medium in order to convey a point which would be unsophisticated and programmatic in the form of a philosophical position<sup>14</sup>—as for example—the juxtaposition of Marat and Sade themselves, or the thesis on magic I have just alluded to in Pasolini's *Medea*. Add to this the reliance on preexisting texts—most often documents, in the case of Weiss, rather than myths or the tales of the *Decameron* or *The Arabian Nights*, in that of Pasolini.

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I have indulged this comparison in order to position Weiss in the post-war period, in a framework a little wider than the merely German one. The politics of both figures would merit attention, but for our purposes it suffices that alongside the reinvention of a kind of avant-garde art, both were passionately nostalgic for a vanguard politics as well, and both keenly attentive to the sexual liberation of the 1960s and 1970s. Pasolini's work is however drenched in sexuality from the very beginning, in contrast to the relative chastity of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (which would have to be juxtaposed to the sexual themes of the earlier works, along with the emblematic figure of Sade himself).

Yet in Pasolini, as with COBRA, a preoccupation with history takes the form of the archaic and the mythic, and expresses the conviction that collective life can only be glimpsed, let alone recaptured, by a return to pre-capitalist societies, from the astonishing rituals of Medea's tribal society all the way up to Boccaccio or *The Arabian Nights*. Contemporary works, such as *Theorema* (1968), are framed politically—the factory owner's gift of the factory—but in programmatic or utopian ways; even the early images of Roman low life and Pasolini's favorite *Lumpen* exclude the perspective of a historical interpretation and causal analysis of the recent past.

Weiss is thus alone, among the late modern writers (not to speak of overtly postmodern ones) to confront the dilemmas of the historical novel as a form; and this in so uncompromising a fashion as to demand a thor-

oughgoing (and, as has been seen with the critics, often a so perplexing) revision of conventional narrative and representational techniques. This is not to ignore the moments of narrative bravura of an older modernist style: as, for example, the great cross-cutting montage at the end of volume 1, in which the show trials and the execution of Bukharin alternate in dramatic Sartrean fashion with Hitler's *Anschluss* of Austria and the feverish discussion of the foreign militants on the rapidly deteriorating Republican front of the Spanish Civil War (253–68/288–304). Nor must we forget Brecht's flight from Sweden at the end of volume 2, during which, "collapsing on the gangplank, between the German embassy building, on the left, and the German freighters flying the swastika, on the right, he had to be virtually carried on board" (2: 331): all this preceded by an extraordinary comic sequence in which, visited by the Swedish secret police, who examine his library, Brecht celebrates their departure by pelting them with Edgar Wallace and Agatha Christie paperbacks from a second-story window. Yet such narrative set-pieces are inevitably affairs of beginnings and endings, whose unique tempos call forth the architectonic as such, the grand arabesque which is construction fully as much as decoration.

Otherwise this ostensible story of the teeming and dramatic events of the onset of World War II is conveyed by way of endless conversations and debates about political positions and strategy, housed in a strangely abstract space, whose very lyrical openings—onto the orange groves of Valencia, for example—at once turn into historical and economic disquisitions on the region and its agricultural characteristics. This is decidedly not the kind of vivid representation of the experience of history we have been trained to expect from fiction: with signal exceptions—the rather painterly account of the Bremen uprising of 1919, not to speak of the grisly step-by-step description of the executions of the last of the resistance network in Plötzensee, about which one could to be sure argue that such corporeal vividness is achieved primarily by way of its contrast with the time of discussions and debates, a time of waiting and of enforced passivity, in which history can only arrive in the form of news and rumor—historical events are here for the most part mediated, and "represented" at best second-hand, by way of a weighing of the conflicting evidence and a sifting of detail. Still, and particularly since the *nouveau roman* has been fleetingly evoked above, it is worth registering a similarity between the passage of historical time in this novel by Peter Weiss and the scoring and registering of reading time I have elsewhere described for a (nonhistorical) novel by Claude Simon<sup>15</sup> (a novelist to be sure equally ob-

sessed with history, but in a far more experiential way, and through deep memory and repetition). In *Les Corps conducteurs* a narrative apparatus is constructed in such a way that the time of reading has been dissociated into two distinct registers: on the one hand the time of the individual sentences and words, the microscopic fragmented perceptions we receive one after the other, up very close, in proximate vision and magnified reception; and the time of the pages and of the book itself, which slowly runs out, irreversibly and surely, irrespective of the minute content of the present of the words themselves. The clock is ticking, one wants to say, or better still, the meter is running: the page numbers are still changing, piling up, no matter how intolerably paralyzed or suspended we seem to be in an endless reading present. So in Weiss also: the time of history continues, despite these endlessly suspended arguments and exchanges out of time. Spain is slowly and irrevocably lost; the German armies inexorably colonize Europe; the war itself at length draws to a close—despite the agonized fixation of the characters upon their positions and perplexities, their ideological clashes, and their interrogation of the demands of the concrete situation itself, an interrogation which must remain abstract and a matter of thinking and argument, however urgent and particular the dilemma, which is in any case bound to be overtaken by events and transformed into a new and utterly different one. What can account for such a radical and seemingly perverse choice of narrative strategies, whose massive preponderance throughout these nine hundred pages goes well beyond any reasonable intention to bring out and articulate the ideological and philosophical issues at stake in the war itself?

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To be sure, *Marat/Sade* is there to remind us, if need be, of the dichotomous nature of Peter Weiss's conceptual imagination: everywhere in his work, forces and positions are defined by way of oppositions, from which the great political divergences of the Comintern and antifascist periods can scarcely be expected to be exempt. One imagines serious historians attempting to be even-handed, and to do justice even to the reasonings and motivations of those on the "wrong" side (here primarily the Stalinists and the orthodox party members, since, as in Malraux, the fascists and the Nazis are rigorously excluded from this cast of characters). Still, the discourse of the historians is fatally monological, as Bakhtin might have said; and any empathetic reconstruction of Stalinism is bound to be a set-up, in which the foreknowledge of historical failure and revelation to come cannot but influence the drift and the outcome. Nor is Weiss above the fray himself: as has been said, the pedagogical focus secures an option for cultural politics which will be incorporated in the doomed yet larger

than life figure of Willi Münzenberg—supreme genius of Communist agitation and world propaganda in the Popular Front period, hunted pariah in the first years of the war, when his body will be found hung from a tree in a French forest during the exodus. Hodann, the Reichian psychiatrist, who insists on the place of sexuality and the transformation of daily life in the midst of any committed politics, offers a realist and approachable analogue in the personal experience of the narrator. Yet even these passionate commitments (which are unmistakably those of Peter Weiss himself) cannot be expressed, let alone validated, without an argument with the opposite side; they have to emerge in struggle with persuasive adversaries, who sensibly and reasonably insist that the revolution must first be defended and secured against a frightening array of dangers and enemies, before the luxury of full personal and social liberation can be indulged. Finally, neither side wins these ideological battles; but each needs the other to achieve full expression and historical representation.

We may enumerate some of these oppositions, which are related but not identical. Clearly the great schism and opposition between German Social Democracy and the Communist movement (inside and outside Germany) will be a central preoccupation: in a scene on a bench in Paris during the 1930s, the narrator's father takes the position of disillusioned Socialists, while Herbert Wehner argues a Communist one (the narrator must himself reenact the argument with his father as he draws closer to the party). In Spain, to be sure, it is anarchism which becomes Communism's ideological adversary, and whose leaders and spokespersons are one by one physically eliminated.

Yet in a work whose palpable aesthetic preoccupations have not yet sufficiently been outlined, there will also be artistic oppositions, which are argued out fully as much in aesthetic as in political terms: most obviously that between modernism and realism, in an immense movement in which the deciphering of the utopian and social impulses at work in modern art will be matched by a faithfulness to the most neglected monuments of a genuine social or socialist realism. We will return to this, the narrator's aesthetic education, in more detail later on.

Yet this opposition inevitably generates that other one of which we have already spoken, which is related but not the same: the Münzenberg position on cultural politics, as it confronts the more military or sheerly political, resolutely non-aesthetic, strategies of others in the Communist movement. Hodann is then there to secure the modulation of this theme into the Reichian one of sexual politics as over against the conventional Left.

Finally, in a very different register there is the opposition of the father to the mother: the first a locus of historical working-class memory (the Bremen uprising), now withdrawn from current struggles; the mother sinking into a visionary and nightmarish schizophrenia, into a stubborn silence and mutism, born of the trauma of the collective agony and displacement by the Nazi armies and finally by the rumors of the death camps themselves; the father obsessed by the “machine” of this society. Both are thus locked in the past, but in active and passive registers respectively; the one brooding over the failures of praxis, the other immobilized by intense and vivid physical suffering relived over and over again. The narrator will unite these two registers, but overcome them in some new and future-oriented way, offering the promise—if not yet the image or representation—of the possibility of productively combining agency and mourning. Yet to all these we must finally add that opposition in which we ourselves share as readers: namely, that between bourgeois and proletarian experience, in which the whole notion of subalternity necessarily appears; the lack of access to this or that mainstream culture, the way in which mainstream (or bourgeois) culture is marked as belonging to others, and to some inaccessible upper-class or privileged elite, the sheer physical obstacles, finally, to the acquisition of culture by working people who have no leisure for its acquisition, or even for the acquisition of its preconditions. All of this is given to us in the account of the narrator’s *Bildung*, and in the harsher reactions of his family and fellows to an alien culture whose overt ideologies are often either privatized or aestheticized, if not openly those committed to oppression or repression—as at the very outset the glorification of the conquering Olympians in the Pergamum altar. This is an issue which, as we shall see, will lead to a hermeneutic deciphering far more complex than anything deployed in an exclusively bourgeois context.

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It would flatten out the specificity of all these issues and oppositions to resume them under the great antithesis of politics and art, which is nonetheless inscribed in its fashion in the very title of the work, and which is certainly one of the fundamental themes under which this work was composed. Yet it is always worth remembering Adorno’s remark—it being understood that in the twentieth century art itself is bound up with the problem of the avant-garde—that people today cannot imagine the degree to which, before the break of Stalin’s socialist realism in the early 1930s, the two avant-gardes were absolutely linked, and the fortunes of avant-garde art were never felt to be dissociated from those of vanguard politics (something Perry Anderson also points out for artistic modernity in a fa-

mous essay).<sup>16</sup> For us, or at least until very recently, when it is vanguard politics that has seemed to vanish, it was the other way round; and the various Western traditions have all seemed to insist on the way in which vanguard art—mostly conceived as modernist poetry—finds its precondition in an absolute separation from the political or from “social issues.” But Peter Weiss was one of the rare late-modern artists who refused this separation; and who tried, virtually by fiat and by an effort of the will, to put the two vanguards back together (as early as *Marat/Sade*), his originality having been the sense that dilemmas and contradictions relate fully as much as they separate, and that to impose the problem of the two avant-gardes is also at least partially to overcome it.

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But we have not yet replaced these forms and materials within the problematic of the historical novel as such, whose dilemmas—duly registered at the birth of this form of genre, and belatedly codified by Lukács in his *Historical Novel*<sup>17</sup>—can only be intensified in modernity with its demographic increase in technological innovations. Even the “traditional” historical novel, however, was inscribed at the center of two irresolvable oppositions or contradictions, which only palliatives (like Lukács’s “average hero” or observer) could weaken in such a way as to allow the novel to be written in the first place.

The first of these axes, unsurprisingly, is the opposition between the individual and the collective, or, better still, that between individual or existential experience and that dimension of collective reality inscribed in institutions, as what Sartre calls the practico-inert, in economics and the market as well, which finally and necessarily transcends all individual categories.<sup>18</sup> It is important to disjoin this problem from the act of witnessing as such,<sup>19</sup> even though the same impossibilities reign in that more restricted and specialized form of experience as well: for who has ever seen the depression, or the market system, or the nation-state? who has ever seen war as such?—something not to be restricted to the witnessing of a battle (even though Stendhal famously, and very early in the career of the historical novel as a form, inscribed even that impossibility in his historical narrative of the “experience” of the battle of Waterloo).<sup>20</sup> One is tempted to suggest that this is something of a spatial dilemma, with its temporal analogy in the individual biological life span equally out of synchrony with the great waves and rhythms of properly historical change.

Yet in modern history there have been rare moments in which the antithesis between the existential and the collective seems to have been transcended, if not overcome. These are not battle scenes, although for

the bourgeois reader the battle offers their most accessible analogy, other versions being ideologically subsumed under the stereotype of mob violence (even though it might also be added that for Americans World War II has sometimes seemed to offer a “moral equivalent”). The strong moment, however, clearly remains the experience of revolution, with its lower-order forms in the general strike and the mass rally or demonstration. Were we speaking ontologically here, I would want to argue that precisely in such moments the isolated being of the individual subject is heightened and dissolved, lifted up and transfigured, into a kind of collective being of a fleeting or ephemeral type, which nonetheless left political theory has always attempted to re-create in the concept and to prolong in new institutional arrangements (the “construction” of socialism as a temporal process, for example, rather than the actual institutions of some achieved socialism). Certainly Peter Weiss was fascinated by such moments, as the father’s narratives of the Bremen uprising testifies (I:86–87/I:100–106), and as the two emblematic novels also show, on which the narrator meditates at some length: Kafka’s *Castle* and the less well-known *Barricades in Wedding* by Klaus Neukrantz, a proletarian work from the 1920s which tells the story of an ill-fated Berlin uprising. These two works—for the bourgeois reader clearly of unequal value—dramatize the classic philosophical opposition between the making and what is made in the realm of history: reified structure from the outside, the dynamic historical process of struggle and collective resistance from the inside.

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But they also problematize any contemporary effort to reinvent the great collective scenes through which a Scott or a Manzoni, and later on a Victor Hugo or a Flaubert, attempted to dramatize history and make it visible to the individual reader/witness. Such scenes, rare and precious enough in literary history, and generally (as has been observed above) subsumed under this or that ideology of the mob famously codified by LeBon and Freud, wager their stakes on the possibility of a kind of collective narration, one which is not exactly impersonal or omniscient, but rather somehow extrapolated from extinct or nonexistent grammatical and verbal categories such as the dual: a kind of “man” or “on” (to appropriate Heidegger in his German and French versions, English having no equivalent) which, far from being the realm of the inauthentic, would offer a glimpse of the truly collective itself as it is momentarily revealed to be the demiurge of what we call history.

But demography and globalization mean that today this fiction of a truly collective narrative—or at least of a truly collective narrative mo-

ment—can no longer be sustained: it would be the worst sort of allegory to imply that this or that local street fight can truly stand in for the collective process (or if you prefer, can in the present situation convince us that genuine revolution is still conceivable, let alone possible). It is therefore not on the level of a linguistic innovation or a language experiment that Peter Weiss can resolve the formal problem of collective representation: the opposition between the isolated individual and collective history will certainly be inscribed here, over and over again, in the physical separation and loneliness of the individual militants and in the great collective forces at work beyond them, in Moscow or Berlin. But it is the form of the work as a whole that tries to convey the dilemma (and thereby negatively to offer its very representation).

xx The formal contradictions of the historical novel can, however, also be registered in a different way, in the opposition between power and its effects: but this is already a system which implies a frame, an extreme situation, such as war or revolution, since normally the locus of power is less visible and more difficult to anthropomorphize. Kings and queens, presidents, leaders, and bosses continue to exist in peacetime, but their real control over events, and above all their relationship to the functioning of a given social system itself, with its inequities and uneven privileges, its chances and its sacrifices, is less plausible, and certainly harder to dramatize. Even Hegel's concept of the "world-historical individual" is an intermittent one, its appearance dependent on the capacities for change inherent in a given moment of the system itself. Still, the aporias of such peacetime representations of power persist over into the crisis situations themselves, when these are interrogated with sufficient formal intensity.

If we look, indeed, more closely at the existential reality of decision-making, or of what is today loosely called power, it becomes evident that it is a diminished or impoverished situation which at its outer limit resolves into a room or a communications center with banks of telephones and the entrance and exit of innumerable messenger-bureaucrats. The dictator, at the center of this web, experiences very little in immediacy; everything is mediated to him (for example, it is said that in his early years of power, Stalin depended on his first wife, still a student, to tell him what was going on in the outside world and what his subjects were thinking and saying).<sup>21</sup> Far from being a full center on the order of Hobbes's sovereign, made up of innumerable little human beings, let alone Borges's aleph or Dante's ingathered Book, the center of power is existentially empty, and the attempt to represent it must at best fall back on conjectural psychol-

ogy: as witness the innumerable debates about Hitler's real motives or intentions—debates which either move in the direction of psychosis or childhood trauma or, on the other hand (as most memorably in A. J. P. Taylor),<sup>22</sup> decide to reduce this figure to a conventional German statesman, with fully rational plans, projects, and war aims. Thus, for Lukács, the “world-historical individual” must never be the protagonist of the historical novel, but only viewed from afar, by the average or mediocre witness (that such a figure can on the other hand be the center of historical drama, for Lukács, is explained by the fact that in that case it is we, the spectators, who are the witnesses, and who continue to observe the world-historical gestures and utterances from outside).

It was the originality of Solzhenitsyn to have grasped this, in *The First Circle*, and in a memorable scene to have given us an unaccustomed portrait of the dictator in his solitude:

xxi

And he was only a little old man with a desiccated double chin which was never shown in his portraits, a mouth permeated with the smell of Turkish leaf tobacco, and fat fingers which left their traces on books. He had not been feeling too well yesterday or today. Even in the warm air he felt a chill on his back and shoulders, and he had covered himself with a brown camel's-hair shawl.

He was in no hurry to go anywhere, and he leafed with satisfaction through a small book in a brown binding. He looked at the photographs with interest and here and there read the text, which he knew almost by heart, then went on turning the pages. The little book was all the more convenient because it could fit into an overcoat pocket. It could accompany people everywhere in their lives. It contained two hundred and fifty pages, but it was printed in large stout type so that even a person who was old or only partly literate could read it without strain. Its title was stamped on the binding in gold: *Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin: A Short Biography*.

The elemental honest words of this book acted on the human heart with serene inevitability. His strategic genius. His wise foresight. His powerful will. His iron will. From 1918 on he had for all practical purposes become Lenin's deputy. (Yes, yes, that was the way it had been.) The Commander of the Revolution found at the front a rout, confusion; Stalin's instructions were the basis for Frunze's plan of operations. (True, true.) It was our great good fortune that in the difficult days of the Great War of the Fatherland we were led by a wise and experienced leader—the Great Stalin. (Indeed, the people were fortu-

nate.) All know the crushing might of Stalin's logic, the crystal clarity of his mind. (Without false modesty, it was all true.) His love for the people. His sensitivity to others. His surprising modesty. (Modesty—yes, that was very true.)<sup>23</sup>

Here, then, the final form of this approach to the center brings us up short against a play of mirrors, and reality oscillates between its own reflections in some final static movement. It is as though Stalin himself became the reader in search for the ultimate representation; as though the emptiness of his own consciousness, his own *pour-soi* (an emptiness shared by all other human reality), incited him as well to substitute his own image for the missing self. The ultimate book within the book thus proves to be a children's biography, in which Stalin has turned into his own stereotype, power feebly and toothlessly attempting to find its own delectation in all that can be represented of itself. This extraordinary moment marks a kind of climax in the approach of the historical novel as a form toward its own limits and the impossibility of its representational aesthetic. After this the classical historical novel is at an end, and its world-historical individual must become an antihero.

xxii

This is the sense in which the most thoroughgoing and productive recodification of the larger form has been the new genre of the Great Dictator novel, most widely practiced in Latin America. But here what comes to the surface is the profound ambivalence of the figure, who fascinates at the same time that he repels. But it is a constitutive ambivalence which now reflects the geopolitical structure of the forms of power available for representation in the Latin American countries. For here the great dictator is still a monster, but one whose very inhumanity is required by the nature of the situation of sovereignty itself, that is to say, by the equally monstrous and overpowering presence of that force such a dictator can alone resist: namely, the United States.<sup>24</sup> Whence the mixture of admiration and loathing that these figures call up in the reader. From a structural point of view, however, this is the equivalent of saying that this particular center of power is ultimately not really the center, since its very power is ultimately not really the center, since its very power is reactive, and the true center lies elsewhere, to the North, remaining itself unrepresented.

We must thus appreciate in this light and context the wisdom of Malraux's choice, in his novel of the Spanish Civil War, *L'Espoir*, not to represent the enemy and not even to show fascist figures and protagonists as such, since the reader can have no real access to the Otherness of their evil, and thus at best risks a kind of mesmerized external fascination.

Camus's decision, in *La Peste*, to dramatize the occupation in terms of disease is clearly a more doubtful matter. This is also, as we have said, the case with *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, whose immense cast of (real, historical) characters remains limited to the Left, or to the various lefts within the antifascist movements.

Still, if the pole of power can finally not be represented, why should the same be true for the other pole of ordinary people, the subjects of power and the recipients of its effects? Why should some genuinely historical representation of daily life in a given crisis not be achievable? I think that this perfectly proper question also takes us to the heart of what is unsatisfactory in Lukács's more general notion of "typicality." But let me anticipate, and jump rapidly ahead in time to our own period, in order, by way of a form I have discussed in some detail elsewhere,<sup>25</sup> to show a kind of final formal outcome and a structural dilemma already implicitly in the earliest version of the historical genre.

For what "nostalgia film" shows us is that at the same time that history, the historicity of the various distinct historical pasts and periods, degenerates into visual images of itself—styles, pop music, appliances, clothing, hairdos, the furnishings of a given era—so also does the "knowledge" of historical events and the contents of historicity become degraded into the stereotypes of the simplified history manuals taught in the schools (or later on recycled through various television "instant replays"). This means that what we now take to be "typical" of a given historical period—its ideological preoccupations and struggles, characteristic events, the very kinds of people who populate its social space—are little more than stereotypes drawn from just such childhood reading as we found Stalin absorbed in. This is why "nostalgia films" fail to solve the older as well as the newer problems of historical representation (that they necessarily deal with historical materials is, however, constitutive of the "genre," if it may be called that). There is no novelty in the invention; we never encounter the contingent or the unexpected in such representations; and in that sense they fail to offer one of the basic pleasures of narrative form as such. And this is because we already know their content: their characters and events are always-already examples of a preexistent historical knowledge (or pseudo-knowledge). They must necessarily come before us as already familiar, since their validation as such depends on precisely such recognition by the spectator that, yes, that was what was happening in that particular period (the Roaring Twenties or the Great Depression)—I acknowledge that I recognize those "types" of characters, those "types" of events.

And this is the deeper reason why, at the pole of collective representation (as opposed to that of power or the state), the classic genre of the historical novel also confronts a fundamental dilemma: it must (insofar as it is also a novel) offer a narrative of individual lives and stories. But insofar as these stories are those of really individualized (that is to say, privatized) characters, there opens up here a realm of complete arbitrariness where the novelist's imagination reigns supreme. Yet this is to say that those private stories can be stories about anything: they are completely disengaged from their putative historical context; they could just as well furnish a contemporary novel as anything set in the past (once one removes the historical trappings, the costumes, the spatial layout, and the like). But insofar as those stories purport to entertain organic or constitutive links with a genuine historical situation, their motivation and their content will always reflect just that precooked stereotypical knowledge of a given past we have found to operate so close to the surface in postmodernity. "Typicality" in this sense is an unholy synthesis between a narrative particular and a conceptual (historiographic) universal; the latter tends fatally to transform the former into sheer example, thereby divesting it of its narrative immediacy.

Contemporary historical fiction will be authentic only if it confronts these contradictions and formal dilemmas in some energetic fashion that originates a formally innovative (if only provisional) solution. *The Aesthetics of Resistance* will never serve as a model for future historical representation; but nothing can do that anyway. Yet its structural novelties (so often, as has been seen, perceived as awkwardnesses or formal flaws or transgressions) can only be appreciated and evaluated in that light.

Peter Weiss's "solution" to these dilemmas—which is to say his intensified articulation of them—takes the form of a depersonalized collective voice which I will call a dialogical agon. It is a concept I want to model on that of a depersonalized individual subject whose forms one finds throughout contemporary literature, committed as it is to the theory and practice of a radically depersonalized consciousness beyond all individual identity and subjectivity: the famous "decentered subject" or "consciousness without the me" (Blanchot), sometimes illicitly celebrated in a rhetoric of the "death of the subject" or as an ideal schizophrenia (Deleuze), and to be found in all those enigmatic third persons of modern literature, more mysterious, as has so often been remarked, than any of its first-person characters, inasmuch as we can see and observe them, but must ourselves be confined to looking out through the gaze of this narrative one,

which then takes on something of the unknowability of Kant's noumenal subject, always adding "the I to all its acts of consciousness," while itself remaining unknowable and inaccessible. Yet these approaches to some anonymous individual subjectivity, which has become depersonalized and inaccessible, owing to the movement of history, and about which it is never clear whether modern philosophy's varied efforts to do away with its illusions of subjectivity simply replicate the tendencies in late capitalist society or on the other hand propose energetic reactions to it, remain locked in the "philosophy of consciousness." They are so many descriptions of the monad, which variously attack Descartes or enlist new interpretations of him with a view toward undermining his subjectivist and idealist heritage. Nor is it surprising that this should be so: one does not break out of monadic isolation by the simple act of taking thought; one does not produce collective forms and experiences by fiat.

XXV

In any case, and for the very same reasons, we find it difficult to think the collective except as modeled on the individual: the much-decried slogan of "collective consciousness" remains in place, however much we wish to analyze collective dynamics in a fashion rigorously distinct from those of the individual. Greek choruses, depersonalized historical narrative, "subjects of history," myths and archetypes, banal allegorical "representatives" of group forces—such are the traps and failures which lie in wait for any narrative commitment to collectivity (nor are their traces absent from this novel either).

This is why it seems desirable to resurrect the program of a poststructuralist onslaught on individual consciousness—itsself finally yet another avatar of an old individualist bourgeois subjectivity—and in particular to attempt to transfer its essential themes—decentering, depersonalizing, the notion that "identity" is an object for consciousness rather than its "subject," the materiality of a language which now "speaks us" rather than the other way around, the objectification of intention, the analytic dissolution of subjectivity into so many layers of stereotypes and of the inauthentic voices of a public sphere saturated with transpersonal information and images—to the new collective program.

Peter Weiss's conversations and debates—which take up so enormous a part of this three-volume novel—mark just such a new formal innovation; and if we read them as the interference of extraneous types of discourse—political commentary, philosophical argument, historical information; if we see the various interlocutors simply as so many mouthpieces for the author, or for the various ideological positions he means to represent—then we have let a constitutive tension go out of the reading, and it slack-

ens into mere retrieval. Yet a new text cannot really impose its new form of reading on us (as Plato says, when its father is gone, it cannot reply; it merely offers mute silence to our questions and conjectures); the reader must somehow restore the impossible aesthetic imperative of this experiment in collectivity and must grasp every moment of the irresolvable conflicts as a movement of absolutes. This is to say that in these obsessive rehearsals of the past—mistakes, missed opportunities, necessary crimes, or accidental miscalculations—and in the anxiety-laden, fearful, and hopeful prognoses of the future that accompany them in the form of strategies and tactics, assessments and the helplessness of sheer lack of knowledge or information, throughout these exchanges in which language itself seems discredited by the facts of the past and the unpredictability of the future, the reader must at every point reconstitute a present.

xxvi

I observed above that one of the temporal peculiarities of the text lay in an irreversible movement of history beyond the sterile opposition of fixed antitheses that never seemed to get off the mark: now we must add to that temporality the other related one, that history never exists in a past that preceded the current dilemmas or in a future in which they would be once and for all surmounted: it exists as sheer present in the heated disagreements of what may otherwise seem contingent circumstances and a merely particular content. Thus what is intolerable in these conversations is their very truth, aesthetic as well as historical: an eternity of debate and discord, a perpetual present of ideological passion and politicized consciousness. The reader is being trained to live within that present, already a modification of the traditional temporality of the novel and its readerly expectations. It will be interesting therefore to see how Peter Weiss can end his narrative (which began conventionally enough with the biological youth of his protagonist). History ends it to be sure but in some other, external way, which we know, but which is outside the text—as it is outside of and external to the characters and their debates about it.

Yet in another sense, such narrative resolution—or the illusion of such an impossible narrative resolution, as that generally presides over what is called fiction—has itself been drawn within the text, within the very content of the debates and arguments among its characters. For it is what is called *unity*, and all these verbal and ideological struggles turn on it in one way or another: since unity—or unification—is necessarily the most burning issue in all political theory which aims at action or praxis, rather than at simple rules for power or the analysis of power's mode of functioning in the status quo. It is this concentration on collective action (whether on the Right, as with Carl Schmitt or Hobbes, or on the Left, as with

Machiavelli or Lenin) which distinguishes the new science of politics that emerged in this century from the traditional bourgeois political philosophy into which it seems once more in the process of disappearing without a trace. And it is clear enough that its premise or fundamental starting point must be the question of unification—of which here the debates between Socialists and Communists offer only one empirical “example” and dramatization: for the end or aim can only emerge in the process of action itself; but action cannot begin until a unified agency is constituted: Gramsci’s meditations on the “historic bloc,” Laclau and Mouffe’s theorization of a kind of momentary hegemonic constellation—so many diverse contemporary reflections on the unavoidable first step or principle of unity itself.

So it is that the urgency of the dialogical, about which I’ve argued elsewhere that it has to be conflictual and antagonistic, is fueled by a passion for a unity that can never come into being. Yet Bakhtin’s supreme example was in any case Dostoyevsky, whose fevered debates between irreconcilable *Weltanschauungen* surely offer the model of a narrative pitched on this level beyond individual or the monadic. We have to invent a way of reading this text and in particular these endless dialogues as though politics had taken the place of Dostoyevsky’s metaphysical passions, and as though each of these interlocutors had become a kind of vehicle for the absolute on the order of Dostoyevsky’s figures.

xxvii

But there is a dialectic at work in the raw materials themselves: such a radical formal modification in the role of dialogue and in the way in which conversation advances narrative events cannot leave the rest of the novelistic apparatus intact. If here conversation as such tends to become an event in its own right, and a unique historical event at that—some mixture of feverish waiting and frustration, of rationalization and hope—we would expect the other conventional features of the traditional novel to be modified accordingly. This is preeminently the case with space itself, whose new role in Peter Weiss we must now characterize.

The nature of this space will naturally enough be determined by the nature of the event—the ideological debate-discussion—that it houses and of which it then stands as a kind of abstract container. This space has already been alluded to metaphorically; it is none other than the room itself which for the most part bounds the events of this novel: where the room is replaced—the museum island in which the initial viewing and discussion of the Pergamum frieze is conducted, the park bench in Paris on which the narrator’s father explores future political possibilities with Herbert

Wehner—these relatively more open, or at least opening, spaces mark a move toward the larger world, which will be identified in a moment.

Otherwise the room itself becomes a kind of absolute here: and that its essential form is abstract and utterly denuded is underscored for us in the opening section of the novel, where the kitchen takes on the traditional role of the place in which working-class families talk, assess situations, and make their decisions. Yet in this opening section (in which the narrator prepares to leave for Spain and the civil war) an even more fundamental process of stripping away and of abstraction down to an almost geometrical figure of extension is imitated, as it were, by the emptiness of the narrator's apartment, from which the parents have already left in flight to Czechoslovakia, taking all their furniture and belongings with them. Indeed, this moment of empty waiting, in anxiety and impatience in which one life is finished and another has yet to begin, proves to be an even more revealing form, an even more receptive vessel for the specific potentialities of the novel's categories of experience: for in this last night in Hitlerian Germany, the narrator dreams of an abolition of the room as such—the moldering corpse of his father (in reality still alive) shatters the floorboards, and the dreamer is allowed to float in oneiric suspension, like some of Chagall's flying figures, across the nightscape of Berlin. We will return to the significance of the oneiric in Peter Weiss later on: suffice it to say that if the sheerly dialogical agon is the strong form or category of experience here (with the abstract room as its correlative space of possibility), then there is a sense in which the oneiric is its other term, its opposite and its complement.

xxviii

It may then be asked whether the oneiric in its turn has any specific spatial vehicle or vessel that is characteristic of its narrative operations, or whether in fact it is not precisely characterized by the utter absence of any such spatial container, being the radical opening up of all space. Yet there is such an alternate space within Peter Weiss's production in general, and that is painting as such, or at least painting as he conceived and practiced it. It would be a mistake to characterize these large figurative and nightmarish works as surrealist inasmuch as Peter Weiss, coming out of the German expressionist tradition, was for a long time suspicious of the French movement and only began to appreciate it after the war, at a time when he had virtually completed his work as a painter: still, the Max Ernst-style collages which he constructed later on are certainly in that second modernist tradition, at the same time that they offer a second mode of representation of the oneiric which is much closer to the collages of documentary raw materials which make up most of the plays

as such (and whose research certainly underpins *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, even if it is not visible there). Peter Weiss himself associated the first figurative painting with Kafka, but we will see later on that this seemingly conventional reference has an unexpected specificity which tends to remove it from the stereotypically nightmarish.

This is obviously not the place to speak of Peter Weiss's considerable achievement as a visual artist: yet one further feature does demand mention in this particular context. It is the fact that he painted or drew virtually every room he dwelt in over the course of his life (and most of these representations have been preserved). The portrait of the room thus becomes a virtual genre in the framework of a work whose originality was, among other things, to have modified any number of traditional genres in idiosyncratic and profoundly meaningful ways. To memorialize your daily life in the form of the room is certainly to say something significant about that daily life; as I have suggested above, it is to produce a new category—and this *Novum* greatly outweighs the more conventional suggestion of an autobiographical sketch or note *pour mémoire*. Not to amass materials in view of some future account of a life, then, so much as to underscore some new conception of a life as the story of a movement from room to room; and this is precisely the conception—heightened by historical crisis and the convulsions of war—that we find in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*.

Once the new spatial category is set in place, its empty or abstract frame begins to evolve and to submit to all kinds of variations and developments in its content. It is as though the movement of the novel across space and through history offered some secondary and as it were philosophical advantage: to permit the interrogation of the category of the room from a variety of perspectives, to draw out its possibilities and dramatize the limits which not only inhere in it but also stand as its content. If indeed we follow Deleuze in thinking that a filmmaker or a painter also produces concepts as the philosopher does, yet in the distinctive and different nonconceptual form of their own media,<sup>26</sup> then indeed this series of rooms can be thought to be philosophical in its implications as well. The narrator himself directly reflects on these possibilities at the moment of leaving the last space he might have called “his”: “Ownership molded the attitude that was taken toward things [in the bourgeois novel and its descriptions], while for us, to whom the living room never belonged and for whom the place of residence was a matter of chance, the only elements that carried weight were absence, deficiency, lack of property” (I:116/I:133–34; the whole passage is of the greatest interest).

So the very nature of the room will be modified in clandestinity: or better still, a deeper feature of the room not normally accessible to legal or bourgeois or peacetime perception will in the new crisis situation be brought out. One thinks, for example, of Rosner's room in Stockholm (2:176): the gnome-like militant becomes virtually a prisoner in a back room sealed off from the official "apartment" of his hosts (an illegal, he must avoid any notice by the Swedish authorities). Yet in this room (to which we will return) paradoxically his political task is the diffusion of information to Communist movements all over the world—his clandestine journal is the recipient and the source of worldwide knowledge in strict correlation and inversion to his own lack of mobility.

xxx

When one thinks of clandestinity in Nazi Germany itself, however, the figure of imprisonment becomes even more intense. Thus the spaces through which Bischoff arrives back in Germany from Sweden: she spends three days and nights in the hold of the ship, and this new spatial modulation of room-like concealment has an unexpected result, a strange new ontological enhancement of her perception: "She perceived the whole ship, distinguished the directions of the footsteps, and whether a door had been opened or shut, when something was scraped or dragged, she recognized the movement of the lever of the mechanical telegraph, and adjusted to every maneuver of the ship itself. She rose through the ship, became it herself, heard its pulse and its shuddering in her ear, in her fingertips, her skin was at one with the vibrating metal plates" (3:73). This is in a sense an aesthetic apologia for the novel as a whole: how can one claim a generalized aesthetic interest for a work thus imprisoned in sensory privation as well as in the enforced lack of knowledge imposed by clandestinity? Yet in such a situation the signals from the outside become magnified, and their receivers undergo an unusual training in the decipherment of signs along with the apprehension of dangers. This is the perceptual world of *The Aesthetics of Resistance*; and we will have to see to what degree this simultaneous impoverishment and heightened sensibility figures in the larger picture of *Bildung* and proletarian cultural formation the novel means to propose.

Yet the final form of the room will clearly enough be the cell itself, and in this instance the death cell, from which the only spatial opening out is onto that covered inner courtyard in which the prisoners are hanged or guillotined: the novel itself wishes to be a different kind of opening in which their resistance and suffering finds memorialization and an active potential for energizing posterity.

These enclosed spaces, however, have their own specific dialectic: a

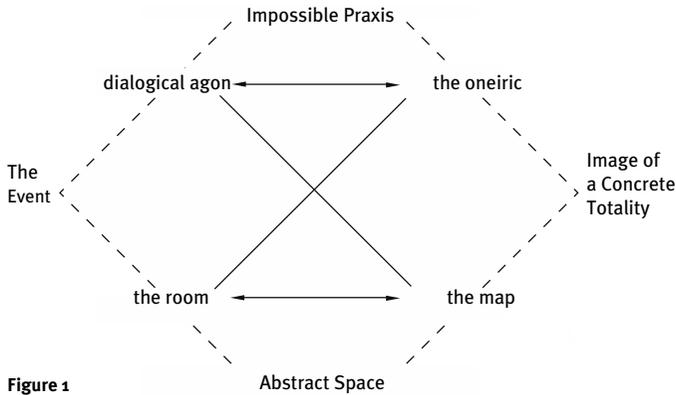


Figure 1

perception and a groping reading of the outside of them can themselves— a kind of blind cognitive mapping—only be organized by and projected onto some larger grid; just as the very movement of the clandestines from one room to another demands advanced planning and spatial foresight. The other pole of the closed room therefore turns out to be the urban map: mapped by foot by the clandestines as they move through Berlin (1:86–87/1:87–88), as they remember the topology of Bremen (1:89/1:97), or are treated exceptionally to an outside tour of Stockholm, like Bischoff during her provisional imprisonment (2:78–87). The narrator is able to juxtapose larger pieces of geographical space in his movement from Spain to Paris and then on to Sweden; but it is essentially the underground figure of Bischoff whom we accompany across the urban grid as such, returning with her first to Bremen and then to Berlin itself in wartime in the third volume of the novel (3:64, 158). We therefore confront a veritable system, which may be represented as shown in figure 1.

But we must not leave the matter of space without recording a further potentiality, and it is a rare moment of aesthetic flowering in the midst of the paralysis of collective action and the asphyxia of existential experience. We are in a room again, it is Rosner's, and one of the rare moments in which, besides the visits of the narrator (whose clandestine task it is to deliver information and remove copy from this frustrating "communications center"), two other important militants—Stahlmann and Arndt/Funk—join him for a truly conspiratorial discussion on the fate of the underground in Germany and the possibilities of action, at a time when the first rumor about the Holocaust and the fate of the Jews is beginning to emerge from the continent: "This room, three and a half meters long and two meters wide, as high as a shaft, with dusk

gradually darkening the green lampshades (the shutters could no longer be opened)—this tomb was the headquarters of the Party in the underground, a provisional headquarters, only for a few hours, to be struck again as the various participants scatter to their own individual ‘tombs’” (3:114). As the impossible conversation disintegrates without agreement or prospects, each of the three drifts off into his own private musings, Stahlmann to his experiences at Angkor Wat (to which a long chapter has already been dedicated), Arndt to his hobby of gardening, and Rosner losing himself in the Italian opera still quietly murmuring over the radio: “So, as I moved through the dawn to the train station, I took with me the picture of the three comrades, from out of their other existences, the unshakable spokesman of the Comintern paying homage to the art of song, the grim party organizer caring for his fragrant and decorative flowers, the man of war surrendering himself to a stone dancer on a frieze” (3:127). Nor should we forget the aesthetic fulfillment of the narrator as well, the would-be future writer, who has himself transformed this frustrating argument and fetid airspace for once into an aesthetic image—the very image of imaging itself.

Still, in the midst of these abstractions, characters remain and continue strongly to exist: that they are historical, and bear the names of real people, is no more relevant to their poetic or novelistic representation than the provenance of the names in Dante’s *Commedia*. But no less relevant either: both works (Dante’s being in a certain sense one of the models for this one) are prophetic investigations of History, which nonetheless rely on narrative techniques not greatly differing from what one finds in ordinary fiction. Yet as in Dante as well, these are not merely historical figures, who are present in the work on account of the purely empirical fact of their having existed in real history. Both works develop on the premise that empirical history also vehiculates transcendent meanings: and the characters thus somehow embody those meanings in what I hesitate (owing either to the frequency or infrequency of the uses of this term) to call allegorical. In *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, which also wishes to chart the *Bildung* of the proletarian student, militant, and author-to-be, they all have a function, which I want to outline briefly with respect to three of these supporting figures or characters.

Hodann begins the work and ends it: he summons the narrator to Spain to work in his clinic at the front, and the work closes, not so much with his death in Norway in 1946, after his break with the Party, as with his great speech at the end of the war, calling for unity once again and pro-

jecting a new kind of cultural politics (3:258), for which the term Cultural Revolution is perhaps not misplaced. For it is an essentially cultural politics that Hodann “represents” in this novel: behind him the dead figure of Münzenberg looms, the only truly world-historical figure celebrated in this novel, whose achievements in the enlargement of merely political propaganda to a Popular Front program of culture and the unification of left intellectuals and writers generally are nonetheless philosophically more restricted than what Hodann’s program embodies.

As a doctor and a psychiatrist, Hodann allows the fundamental concern with healing to be introduced into the twin dynamics of civil war and class struggle. Following Reich, he insists on the ideologically baleful effects of sexual repression and the necessity to link political commitment with sexual liberation. More modestly, in the context of the Spanish Civil War, he underscores again and again the constitutive relationship between political melancholy—the crippling discouragement of the losers with their embattled positions both in Spain and in the larger international situation—and sexual deprivation. (Not coincidentally, the political work of the war’s end and of the new postwar situation also begins with the soldiers: the German prisoners of war in Sweden will become the first new space in which a properly German radical political reeducation must begin [3:254, 262].)

Sexuality as a constitutive part of culture or of a revolution in consciousness: just as the narrower elements of the Party disregard and postpone genuine cultural questions, so in a context of left Puritanism generally (the revolutionaries themselves did not have the benefit of an already achieved cultural revolution), this emphasis on sexuality is even more scandalous and threatens a significant break: Stahlmann “brought along the magazine *La Voz de la Sanidad*, which had published an article by Hodann on sexual problems of soldiers in the war. Such a discussion, he said, was petty bourgeois; in a liberation struggle, such as was being waged in Spain, sexual needs had to be put last, and in a time like this it was not part of a physician’s duties to deal with private matters” (1:228/1:260). But what Stahlmann calls private matters (*die Privatsphäre*) are in fact public ones, or such is the argument of Hodann himself. It is a discussion framed by anxieties and arguments around Stalin’s trials, as well as around the execution of the POUM leaders: and in particular by an impassioned denunciation of what we would today call the sexism and patriarchal prejudices of the politburo itself, by a woman militant, Marcauer, who will later also be arrested (1:275/1:293).

Hodann is also to be sure a father figure for the narrator, who cannot

be said to have had bad fathers, only insufficient ones; his own illness and chronic fatigue reinscribe the body in the form of political weakness and strategic lucidity (“pessimism of the intellect”): “Although Hodann staked everything on the bringing into reality of that democracy whose seeds had been laid in the German underground, he was also a seer, and an adept of human weaknesses and confusions, and it was this that suddenly brought him up short” (3:256)—not a fit of coughing, however, but a sobering sense of the postwar political program of the Party members returning from the East, and its continuity with the mistakes of the past he had so often denounced. The Hodann figure thus sets in place a profound materiality or physicality of culture at the same time as a premonition of the impossible dilemmas of this postwar left future (which is now our own past).

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I have said that the framework of Peter Weiss’s novel excludes fascism and the Nazi “point of view”: now I must correct this assertion by identifying a major figure who had her moment of sympathy with the Nazi mass movement: for the task of an intelligent and thoroughgoing cultural-political strategy will be to seek to grasp the mass appeal of fascism with a view toward reappropriating its energies and its utopian impulse. But the Swedish writer Karin Boye also sets in place another dimension of sexual politics with the fact of lesbian desire, at that time irreconcilable with left politics and unthinkable in its context. Her suicide, in 1942, then poses yet a different kind of scandal for the political movement: namely, that of an overdetermination by political discouragement and the then impossible world situation, as well as by sexual misery and by personal guilt. This overdetermination itself poses a dilemma for the narrow political psychology of the time, whose horizons the novel can itself not transcend:

It may be the case [Hodann said] that some people are dominated by the idea of an unbridgeable gap between art and political life, while for others art is precisely inseparable from politics. Maybe these were only different conceptions of the same basic matter, and those who thought that she did not fail on account of the pressure of external realities on art, but rather because of the damaged and diminished power to bring art, that is, autonomous thought, to bear on and to change a seemingly unshakable external reality itself—those people had perhaps thereby only made themselves a life preserver, in order to stay on the surface, whereas Boye could not stop herself from diving as deep as possible. (3:48)

Is this only to say that unlike Hodann, who constitutes a whole program for the future and for politics, whatever its immediate fate in the postwar period and the Communist movement as such, Boye is laid in place as an unresolvable contradiction, on some future agenda? To be sure, Peter Weiss's own program overtly calls for some new unification of art and politics, as has been said above; but the status of such a program or cultural politics within the work of art itself can equally well be served by failure as by success. To have shown the antagonism between these practices and axiological domains, to have articulated that tension in the form of a contradiction, this is also in some sense to solve it artistically: one recalls Hegel's doctrine about limits (he's thinking of Kant's rationally unknowable noumena and the alleged limits of Reason), that whoever traces a boundary line is already beyond it and has already begun to incorporate it. Here too, under certain circumstances, difference can unify or relate fully as much as sheer identification.

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All of which is to neglect Karin Boye's art itself, which is equally re-appropriated by the process of *Bildung* of the novel: her *Kallockain* is a kind of 1984 to be sure, or perhaps less anachronistically a kind of *We*, a political dystopia. But it is one of the rare modern dystopias to have been based on the Nazi rather than the Communist movement. This work (less well known outside Sweden) clearly marks the psychic liquidation of her 1930s fascination with Nazism (the search for a lost father, as Hodann diagnoses it [3:41]). The novel is a science-fictional depiction of a scientist who invents a truth serum in order to help the Absolute state abolish truth altogether. Yet this is a leap ahead into nightmare, which confronts Boye with a vision of a post-ideological conflict between two instances of state terror. As with the schizophrenic nightmares of the narrator's own mother, there is here set in place yet another vision of the future, along with another distinct discourse or mode of representation of such a future: the question of culture cannot be properly raised unless we mention both things, both dimensions—the form or language of the vision and its content. In any case, this ending, along with Boye's art, can provoke the same stupid and realistic, unavoidable questions that Hodann's therapies aroused: are such cultural productions energizing now, in the midst of crisis and struggle? where is the place for the negative in an embattled political culture?

These are questions then equally appropriate in the case of our final figure, Brecht himself, whose relationships to his own doubts and discouragements were notoriously far more tactical and Machiavellian than for either of the other figures. There is no doubt for many of us some great

historical and literary satisfaction in this lengthy encounter with Brecht (whom Peter Weiss himself can only have glimpsed from afar during the former's brief stay in Sweden); whatever the accuracy of the portrayal, this is the section of the novel that comes the closest to the traditional pleasures afforded by the historical novel as a genre. The portrait has been described as a hostile one: besides Brecht's evasiveness about the Moscow trials, the presence of the various women is underscored, along with the rumors about them; and the narrator's own fictive role as a helper makes it clear enough how Brecht, to adopt a naïve American idiom, "uses people." Meanwhile, we have already observed his well-known physical cowardice and his disgrace at the end of volume 2, on his flight out of a Sweden now menaced by Nazi armies. No one would want to minimize these defects of character, for they are in fact precisely what fascinate us about Brecht and indeed, to be a little more provocative about it, what endear the personage to us. The Brecht we are shown here is not, however, the object of a satiric portrait but rather the space of literary and theatrical production itself. Peter Weiss uses this pretext to write or at least to imagine a project conceived by Brecht himself but never realized: an opportunistic project no doubt, for as an attempt to get his works performed in exile, Brecht always planned new works on the basis of national traditions (some were completed: *Herr Puntila* for Finland, for example; some left unfinished, as with *Der Brotladen* for the United States). The Swedish stay suggested a revolutionary episode from what we cannot too hastily call Sweden's middle ages (since alone of all the European countries Sweden never knew feudalism): rather a kind of first bourgeois uprising against the nobility in 1434, led by the serendipitously named Engelbrekt. The resultant sketch often sounds more like a Peter Weiss play than a Brecht one: tableaux, static speeches of ideological position, a seeming absence of those intricate and paradoxical exchanges in which Brecht inverts folk wisdom and common sense, cynically reifying the resultant maxim in a song placard or silent-filmic over-title. Yet even for Brecht himself we can draw some aesthetic consequences from the results (while Brecht's questions to his collective research staff are often more Brechtian than the narrator's summary of what in any case never gets written).

But it takes us some time to get to Engelbrekt himself: for a whole pre-history of the Swedish political situation, going back some eighty years, must first be set in place: the story of the struggle against the Danes for the accession to the throne of the Infanta Margareta. This is all sketched out in the style of the medieval theater, with levels for the classes, pageants, and the like: but it seems to me that its lesson for us is the drive of Peter

Weiss—in that compulsive archival scouring of the past for suggestive details and empirical inspiration which he shared with Brecht himself—to begin before the beginning, ever to seek out the sources of the seeds of time in the prehistory of their own flourishing germination. It is this impulse generally, then, which accounts for what seem to be lengthy historical essays and factual narratives interpolated throughout the novel: the history of the coast of Valencia, for example, stretching all the way back to the Phoenicians (and not coincidentally to the builders of the Pergamum altar); the history of Swedish Social Democracy in modern times (including the brief contact of one of its founders with Lenin as he passed through on his way to Petersburg and October [2:277]); the story of Angkor Wat. These seeming digressions in another (“non-fictional”) type of discourse will find their deeper justification in Peter Weiss’s conception of the aesthetic and of *Bildung* when we get to it: suffice it to say now that they mark a refusal of the distinction between form and content which is also a refusal of that between art and its non-artistic or historical pretexts. The material of the work of art has its own semi-autonomous history: but that history is itself part of the material, and one must seek it out just as one must appreciate the physical and chemical properties of the stone—quartz or granite, marble or porphyry—which makes up the building or the statue. This is an appreciation that must be achieved through knowledge itself: a knowledge which in this situation is not distinct from the aesthetic that henceforth includes it.

Yet Engelbrekt’s appearance—surging suddenly out of nowhere when history demands him (2:214)—presents the work-to-be with the formal problem of the revolutionary break with the past, which can thus no longer be incorporated except as what is repudiated. Is the preliminary work then useless and a waste of precious time? In any case it has been frequently broken off, not only by Brecht’s own illnesses but also by the heavy mood and confusions with which the collaborators receive the news, first of the German invasion of Poland, and then, in the East, the Soviet one (yet another cross-cutting section). Perhaps not altogether labor lost, however, and it is at least partly clear that what has been laid in place here is a conception of the work of art as a process fully satisfying in itself, and a collective process at that. Such a view of the work as process has surfaced any number of times in the modern period, from Valéry to *Tel quel*: but the collective constitution of the process has less often (which is a polite way of saying hardly at all) been added to the formulation, save in the various avant-gardes, most notably among the surrealists. The name Brecht is thus relatively unique in signifying not an

individual artist but a group, thereby incarnating not only what is necessarily and implicitly collective about any theatrical production, but also what is central for any Marxian view of production and praxis. (It is not inappropriate at this point to mention the unmarked collaboration, from *Marat/Sade* on, in all his works, between Peter Weiss and his spouse, Gu-nilla Palmstierna-Weiss.)

Still, the unfinished play is as valuable for its formal dilemmas as for its achieved historical glimpses. The dramatization of revolution is the foremost of these, for not only is its temporal structure problematic, as we have seen; its “representational” system must also raise doubts and problems from any left perspective, insofar as Engelbrekt’s moment is that of sharp popular unrest, and his very essence as “world-historical figure” consists in the hopes invested in him by a collectivity which cannot itself really be represented on stage (2:222). As with all left works (see above) Engelbrekt’s political problem is the achievement of unity between the various dissatisfied classes who have very different agendas; his downfall and assassination are the result of a situation in which he has been able to serve the interests of one party (the great nobles), who now no longer need him and can throw him aside: a vanishing mediator, who embodies the truth of a revolutionary and a populist rhetoric that was little more than an ideological mask for the more privileged component of this “popular front.” Here is then the central formal problem, which is also a political one: what Brecht and his co-workers took for a genuinely revolutionary moment turns out to have been a mere bourgeois revolution. There has been a good deal of interesting debate over whether a so-called bourgeois revolution is really a revolution at all in the Marxian sense; nor does the term particularly matter, provided we separate the two kinds of historical events sharply from each other. In that case, the first or bourgeois variety, with its necessary end in failure, can be the object of various kinds of representations, from Marx’s ironic-satiric one in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* to Michelet’s tragic narrative of the Great Revolution. The question would then be whether a socialist or proletarian revolution can be represented at all, since it precisely aims at challenging the political as well as the aesthetic sense of “representation” itself.

It is thus extraordinarily telling that Brecht’s greatest moment of enthusiasm for this material comes at the moment when Engelbrekt, in order to threaten the royal city of Stockholm, finds himself obliged to dig a considerable canal in order to reinforce the siege. “The building of the canal, Brecht opined, would almost be worth an entire play in its own right. Here we could separate the principle of collective work from the

power of egotism and profit. . . . A dragging and a hauling, a slave labor, yet voluntarily performed, as meaningful as after a triumphant revolution" (2:250). (This is, after all, the epic moment of Magnitogorsk, the Dnieper hydroelectric project, and the White Sea–Baltic Canal.) So the representation of production itself is at length laid in place, an impossible representation no doubt, as so many socialist realist novels testify, and yet here—in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*—inscribed as what cannot be represented, yet as the necessary and absent center of all work and value.

Such labor is first and foremost physical, to be sure, and the current theoretical celebration of the individual body as the very locus of materialism rarely enough includes labor alongside its privileged themes of desire and suffering. It may seem paradoxical to discuss suffering, trauma, and the body alongside Weiss's oneiric discourse, and yet the latter is the dialectical complement of the former, just as it constitutes a strange reversal and fulfillment of that "caverned" perception we attributed to the figures in the room or the cell, those "overwakened" senses that the condemned Heilmann evokes again on the eve of his death and in the content of a long final letter precisely devoted to dreaming: "There would be much to say about the abyss into which each of us has sunk, about the stone we taste and which seems through the outer efforts of our consciousness to have become as porous as dough in which our fingers can plunge and penetrate and yet our hands feel its hardness, so confusing is this new feeling" (3:211).

*The Aesthetics of Resistance* thus in fundamental ways calls out precisely for this "theory of dreaming" which Heilmann only tentatively elaborates on the eve of his execution, and which draws its ultimate poignancy from the fact that he will never dream again, "will never again fall asleep" (3:216). The lifelong significance of the oneiric for Peter Weiss himself can be documented by the paintings as well as the extensive role of dream protocols in his earlier fiction, all this theoretically reinforced by that appreciation for Jung that he derived from his youthful frequentation of Hermann Hesse (we may also suppose a certain distance from that side of Freud intent precisely on the analytic destruction of the "charm" and fascination of the dream experience). Yet we may at the same time detect a certain tension in Peter Weiss's relationship to this material, a refusal to abandon himself to the facile mythographies of a Jung or to the equally facile "automatic writing" of the surrealists either.

It is this tension—rather than any final conceptual "position" on dreams—which we must retrace in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. "In the

dream, I am a body that refuses to learn Thought" (3:214). At the same time, the dream is that space of infinite possibility before the world itself, as the youthful comrades once speculated in their discussions of Rimbaud or Hölderlin:

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We spoke about seeing in dreams. Asked ourselves how within such absolute darkness this intensity of colors could develop inside us. They are produced by our knowledge of light. Knowledge sees. Illumination stimuli are no longer present, but only remembered. We observed that the dream contained these earliest images, sharp and exact in every detail. Then in an immense variety reflections superimposed themselves on each other, ordered intuitively as they belonged to specific groups of experiences, they cluster together, or rather they swim, they float around the various emotional centers, they search each other out as sperm to the egg, lead to continuous insemination, each cell of feeling seems to be receptive, releasing ever newer apparitions generated by the ever changing thrusts, similarities and identities never occur, can owing to the perpetual flow itself never take place, yet always related images in this or that region, according to the goal-oriented intensity of the impulse toward its basic form, and sometimes it can even happen that the original image itself suddenly emerges, everything that concealed it washed away in a flash. (3:211)

In this earliest version of a kind of youthful "interpretation of dreams," then, the immense and demiurgic, generative productivity of the dream is somehow challenged by the real object of desire and the impatience of the Freudian "wish" that imperiously seeks fulfillment. But now Heilmann wonders about a different problem, a different tension, namely, "why we do not in dreams experience the suffering of which we are observers" (3:215). He juxtaposes with the oneiric that different and wakeful, yet equally intense, imagination with which he relives in sympathy that pathway of experiences, humiliation and pain, which his comrade Libertas must have traversed on her way to a neighboring cell. This is a different mode of image perception, in which the visionary suffers as much from his own helplessness and paralysis to change her destiny as from Libertas's own suffering.

I think that it is here that we must position the mother's schizophrenic hallucinations, which alongside the executions constitute the other affective pole of volume 3. Here clearly Peter Weiss faced a technical problem: how to incorporate the experience of Eastern Europe and the Nazi

concentration—and then death—camps in a narrative whose trajectory takes us from Berlin in 1937 to Spain, and after Spain to Paris and Sweden, only to re-infiltrate wartime Germany (Bremen and Berlin) in the person of the clandestine Bischoff at the same time that the narrator is able to piece together at a distance the executions of his old comrades on the Plötzensee. The (relatively awkward) solution lies in the flight of the parents from Czechoslovakia in the first days of the war: they are only able to make their way across Poland in the throes of the blitzkrieg, accompanying the exodus of populations in flight, including considerable groups of Polish Jews and passing near the significant railroad crossing of Oswiecim on an immense detour through White Russia and Lithuania, until they reach Riga, the Swedish consulate, and safety. Even this laborious journey is interrupted, however, when the mother, separated from her husband, identifies herself as Jewish and follows the refugees on their own path, huddling together with them in an act of wordless solidarity:

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She felt the thick warmth, she belonged to these sweating bodies, seized one of the feverish hands and gripped its fingers together, and as the hands reached to grasp each other, she pressed her face against a moist cheek. Arms, breasts, hips, straggly beards, a crowd made out of limbs, beating hearts, hoarse breathing, that she was in their midst gave her strength. The foul air was a blossoming for her, she breathed it in deep, she lived within this organism, never would she wish to emerge from out of this closed space, separation would be her own destruction, her downfall. (3:12)

And so it proves: her rescue precipitates her into a psychic withdrawal and a silence from which she never reemerges (only breaking it once, when she has been present at a discussion of the first rumors of the actual death camps themselves [3:134]). Thematically, this solidarity stands in dialectical opposition to the father's paranoid fantasies about machinery, and in particular about the universal war machine itself: it is an opposition which completes the image of the death camps in their two dimensions—the Eichmann-organized functioning of the logistics, the suffering of the victims. Yet two other features of the mother's fate seem more significant.

For one thing, the mother's sympathy and solidarity, like Heilmann's impossible attempt to imagine and to feel in the place of his beloved, are failures: she has, according to Boye, who becomes close to her in the final months, "passed beyond the limits of our power to imagine" (3:25). In her last moment of speech she tells of the grave in which she lay with the still warm and twitching bodies of the dead and dying (3:128): yet her unspo-

ken and unspeakable hallucinations show that even solidarity as extreme as this cannot come to terms with the absolute of other people's physical suffering. This is not however, at least on my view, a portrait of trauma, even though the narrator associates the mother with Dürer's great image of *Melancholia*, the angel paralyzed in silence and an almost catatonic inaction and incapacity to produce or create (3:136–137).

It is no doubt this association which prompts Hodann to suggest the other path of artistic expression: this is one of the moments in which the narrator's vocation comes to the surface in the form of that future conditional which will dominate the last pages of the novel itself ("some-day it would be possible to describe what my mother experienced . . ." [3:139]). For it is on that level of linguistic re-creation that the real problem of trauma (or what Shoshana Felman would call "testimony") is to be located: in the failures of language and the impossibility of expression—this, rather than the failure of sheer imagination, is the real problem of the relationship with the past, which is not so much that of reliving it as that of doing something with it:

Our incapacity to follow my mother was not conditioned by anything metaphysical or mystical, it was just that as yet we possessed no register for what transcended the ordinary, our helplessness was merely provisional, had not our whole development proved that concrete judgments were gradually constructed first out of dawning approximations and groping experiments . . . I thought that what now came upon us could be expressed only with some new language. But Hodann replied that for our purposes there would never be another language than the one known to everybody, and that what was to be expressed, in order to make it incomprehensible would have to be transmitted by way of the same old used-up words. (3:139–40)

The relationship of all these materials to each other can now be suggested by the diagram in figure 2.

And thus at length we come to the ultimate theme, the most important and central one, of pedagogy. In reality, with what has been termed above "the narrative resolution of trauma" we had already arrived there. For if the new cultural revolution, the new proletarian pedagogy, as it is the novel's vocation to describe and to embody it, is a kind of aesthetic education, it is also very much an effacement of subalternity and a transcendence of the trauma of historical defeat, class oppression, alienated labor, and the paralyzing humiliations of ignorance. The great works—

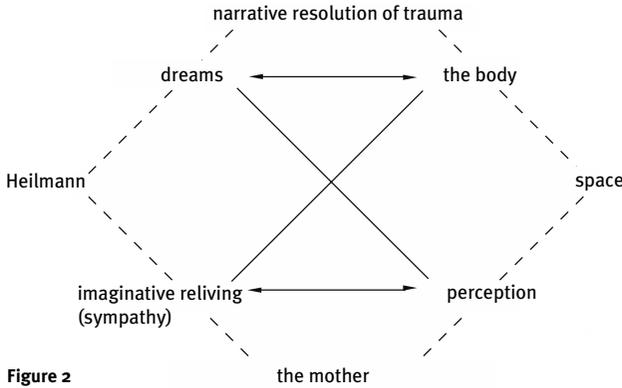


Figure 2

those “monuments to radical instants”—are no doubt memorials of pain and suffering: the butchering of the Giants in the Pergamum frieze, the starvation, debility, and cannibalism of the survivors on Géricault’s raft, the mute screams of *Guernica* as well, along with the minute daily fears and anxieties of Kafka’s characters; but the question is, rather, how to draw energy from such endless images of horror, how to enhance praxis and production by the spectacle of this charnel house, the “nightmare of history”?

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The famous opening sequence on the Pergamum altar remains the fullest statement of this aesthetic, which it may be useful initially to frame in the reduced terms of a “critical method,” supplementing it with other set pieces from the later pages—on Picasso, but also on Menzel and Koehler—and with the equally monumental discussion of Géricault in the next volume (significantly enough, volume 3 contains none of these aesthetic exhibits or readings).

The proliferation of themes and digressions around the Pergamum frieze makes it clear that any simple opposition between form and content needs to make way for a far more complex movement of multiple reversals and inversions. So it is, for example, that in the midst of the slow agony of the Spanish Republic, the narrator and Hodann, amid the orange groves of the landscape, begin to speak about “events that had occurred along this coast two millennia earlier” (1:282/1:321). The classical world of the Pergamum altar is now discovered to have had its outpost here in Valencia, and a history of the Spanish peasantry and that Spanish agricultural labor whose story will at length find its climax in the civil war reveals its immemorial continuities with the public work of art contemplated in the first pages. An emphasis on violence and death, on the fail-

ure of a thousand mortal generations to overcome their misery, is enough to secure this view of history from the idealistic illusions otherwise almost always implicit or explicit in theses about cultural continuities over time. But this materialism is also reinforced by the sharp mental reversal administered by such a view: we do not normally connect the Spanish Civil War with the classical past, and, even more fundamentally, we do not often see the history of oppressed classes as a continuity: continuities are always on the side of "culture," that is to say, on the side of the modes of living of the dominant classes. To invert these ideological priorities is thus not necessarily to revive an idealist conception of history, so much as to administer a materialist shock to just such categories and stereotypes. Thus Walter Benjamin recommends a dual procedure: "For the materialist dialectician discontinuity must be the regulative idea of the tradition of the ruling classes (essentially the bourgeoisie), continuity that of the oppressed classes (the proletariat)."<sup>27</sup> The figure of Heracles, whose mythic travels afford a different kind of link between the eastern and western shores of the Mediterranean, will be discussed in a moment.

In fact, it is precisely the idea of the methodological reversal which will provide the key to so many bewildering twists and turns in Peter Weiss's aesthetic analyses here: nor, given the agon-organized structure of his dialectical thought generally, should there be any surprise in the way in which the sympathetic contemplation of a given aesthetic position suddenly and without warning generates the emergence of a not always predictable opposite.

Yet the first moves are logical enough: the bloody triumph of the Olympians over the Giants is a celebration and a warning, and transposes and expresses the power of the Attalid dynasty that commissioned the frieze. And just as this translation of human rulers into divine ones effaces history with a vision of the sheer eternity of power, so also the sculptors must make of the frieze itself a superhuman artifact, from which all traces of production have been removed: stylistic perfection, then, here also serves the ideology of the masters. Yet this shift of attention toward the production of the work reminds us that class struggle can also be identified there, in the pulling and hauling of unskilled labor under the direction of the builders and master sculptors. Nor is the monitory effect of the frieze some merely "historical" one, which present-day viewers can abstract in the name of pure aesthetic reception: "We heard the thuds of the clubs, the shrilling whistles, the moans, the splashing of blood. We looked back at a prehistoric past, and for an instant the prospect of the future likewise filled up with a massacre impenetrable to the thought of

liberation" (1:9/1:14). But this reactivation of historical memory opens an access to the Alexandrian period generally, and in particular to Pergamum's own failed revolution, the uprising of Aristonicus (1:41/1:49), and even, ironically, all the way back up to the nineteenth century and the ideological reasons for the newly united German Empire to "buy" the newly excavated altar and transport it to Berlin (1:43/1:51). These seemingly extraneous historical footnotes are not only part and parcel of our reinterpretations: "And after a lengthy silence, Heilmann said that works like those stemming from Pergamum had to be constantly reinterpreted until a reversal was gained and the earth-born awoke from darkness and slavery to show themselves in their true appearance" (1:44/1:53). More than that, I think we have to conclude that, for such analyses from below, the split between form and content, between the intrinsic and the extrinsic, the aesthetic and its context, has not yet taken place. It is only for the bourgeois spectator or reader that it exists, only there that at best it has to be struggled against and overcome. It is the structure of bourgeois daily life and subjectivity, and the collective division of labor and privileges of power which tacitly underpin that structure, which exclude the social unity of the work of art as something that can no longer be perceived or conceived, that escape bourgeois categories of perception and reception, let alone analysis. A true "aesthetics" of resistance therefore will not seek to "correct" bourgeois aesthetics or to resolve its antinomies and dilemmas: it will rather search out that other social position from which those dilemmas do not emerge in the first place. The difficulties under which that other, proletarian aesthetic education labors, however, are of a different kind: not the philosophical or conceptual antinomies of form and content, but rather those of subalternity: fatigue after work, lack of access to knowledge and information, repudiation of the aesthetic as class privilege, underdevelopment, finally, of a stubborn will to appropriate the achievements of the dominant class—*aesthetic as well as scientific and technological*—in the interests of building a new social order. In the present instance one may say that the very existence of the project of a proletarian aesthetic education is a sign that this will already exist.

This is also to say that from the standpoint of suffering and defeat aesthetic experience is not devalued but rather able to emerge with a new kind of unity, transcendent as well as immanent: the problem of suffering adds urgency to the purely formal side of art, that is to say to the dilemmas of representation and the sign systems deployed, and otherwise so refractory to this ultimate mute and inexpressible experience. The nature of class subordination meanwhile, by revealing the solidarity be-

tween the “extrinsic” situation of the classes in the historical context and the “intrinsic” labor presupposed by the work of art itself, volatilizes the old (bourgeois) critical problems, endlessly and unproductively turning around the sticking point of some “specificity,” some unique poeiticity or literariness, of the aesthetic object itself. The commitment to suffering in the novel itself can thus be grasped not as some morbid fascination and intention of memorializing this past and these dead; but rather as the keeping open of a historical perspective—very precisely that of subordination and resistance—which enables praxis as such. Contemporary discussions of melancholy and mourning, which begin with the latter’s paralysis in muteness and inaction (as with the narrator’s mother), are only gradually moving toward an understanding of the ways in which such experience (politically termed “the experience of defeat”) can also constitute an energizing precondition for action. At the very least, and to reverse the argument, Peter Weiss’s novel can only be adequately read and grasped if this perspective is conceivable.

Now there is very little time to rehearse the other aesthetic demonstrations contained in this novel: one would want to single out the extraordinary concentration which replaces Géricault’s *Raft of the Medusa* in the position it deserves, between Dante and the Isenheim crucifixion, by restoring a situation of truly subaltern French colonization—the African destination as a sop thrown by the English to the losers of Waterloo—to the derisory and gratuitous conditions underlying the catastrophe (2:7–34). In *Guernica*, on the other hand, it is the bizarre presence of a winged Pegasus in Picasso’s earliest sketches, which allows us to reidentify the utopian moment of this bleakly archetypal work (1:294/1:332–36). The juxtaposition of Menzel’s great factory painting with Koehler’s *Strike* (1868—the first North American socialist realism!) allows the reader to identify the inescapable links between the painter’s inevitable class position and his technical and representational capacities (1:310–15/1:352–60). The reading, finally, of Kafka’s *Castle* as a proletarian novel (1:157/1:179) itself powerfully reverses canonical stereotypes and offers a new way into this nightmarish magic realism, whose gestural strangeness is the result of the paralysis of a disempowered and subaltern population.

There remains the question of the figure of Heracles, a leitmotif which runs from the absence of the legendary figure from the Pergamum fragments to its reemergence on the very last page of the novel. Heracles, I believe, is meant to figure a heroic temptation by the symbolic or the mythic: the hero, the “world-historical individual,” destined to fulfill the hopes of a whole people: none of the real historical figures is a hero in

this sense (even though the agony of Lenin's final illness is characterized as a "shirt of Nessus"). Is Heracles, then, meant to figure the illicit longing for positive heroes, or, worse yet, for charismatic leaders? Is he not also a locus for the old dilemmas of a ruling-class leadership in underclass political movements? For after all, on the frieze itself, his empty place stands among the Olympians rather than the Giants; while in an extraordinarily tortuous speculation, Heilmann attempts to reread the mythic labors as a covert form of resistance and of encouragement to the lower classes (I:14–20/I:23–25). I think we must see Heracles as an allegorical rather than a symbolic motif: that is, a place-marker for problems of representation, rather than an inscription of ideological content. Scherpe has characterized this function admirably: "Missing from the fragments preserved of the frieze is its most important symbol: the lion's paw of Heracles—according to the novel's symbolism the final and perfect historical act of liberation of the oppressed. The novel's last sentence cannot be in the historical indicative. . . . Peter Weiss' *Aesthetics of Resistance* wishes to be an indication, a sign of this historical work of liberation that has not yet become history. The empty space in the frieze, at the spot where the lion's paw of Heracles would hang, designates precisely something absent, unrealized. Literature cannot and should not fill this space by way of compensation, but rather render its contours sharp and visible."<sup>28</sup>

One final bourgeois opposition is displaced and cancelled by the perspective of *The Aesthetics of Resistance*: it is that between critic and writer. For the narrator's aesthetic education, the pedagogical training in the appropriation of a different class culture, is also the preparation for his vocation as a writer whose observation of history as a witness is also at one and the same time an intervention in it. The circularity of such narrative forms—the *Bildungsroman* which ends up in its own production—is familiar; the conclusion of this one in the future conditional is not. Anticipations of the failure of postwar hopes—the Cold War, the loss of unity in the revival of the Socialist-Communist split, the Stalinization of the East—are somehow destabilized by a tense which robs them of their sheer empiricity and allows something like an alternate future perfect to rise alongside them. Here factual history, seemingly as unshakable as being itself, is transformed—to use Habermas's glorious expression—into an unfinished project: what seemed over and done with is thus opened up for a new beginning, a new continuation. This is surely the ultimate and fundamental lesson of Peter Weiss's novel, a lesson about the productive uses of a past and a history that is not simply represented or commemorated but also reappropriated by some new future of our own present:

Again and again, when I would try to convey something of the time that ended with May 1945, its consequences would impose themselves on me. Across the experiences already soaked with death, there would superimpose itself a future colored shrilly, and once again filled with torture, destruction, and murder. It would again and again seem as though all earlier hopes would be brought to nothing by lost or forgotten intentions. And even if it did not turn out as we hoped, nothing would be changed about those hopes themselves. The hopes would remain. Utopia would be necessary. Even later on those hopes would flame up again countless times, smothered by the superior enemy and ever newly reawakened. And the realm of hopes would become greater than it was in our time, and would be extended to all the continents of the globe. The poorly repressed discontent would grow and the drive to contradict and to resist would not be lamed. Just as the past was unchangeable, so those hopes would remain unchangeable, and they—which we once, when young, burningly experienced—would be honored by our remembrance of them. (3:274–275)

## Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 264.
2. See the by now notorious Friedenspreis speech of Martin Walser, reprinted in *Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998).
3. I have drawn heavily here on the indispensable work of Robert Cohen, the annotator for this volume; see *Understanding Peter Weiss* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), which includes extensive bibliographical references, including his other works in this area.
4. See Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) for extensive bibliographical information.
5. See Shoshona Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
6. See James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); and for a more balanced general study of the matter, Robert Cohen, "The Political Aesthetics of Holocaust Literature," *History and Memory* 10, 2 (1998): 43–67.
7. References will henceforth be given in the text, with citations from the three-volume East German edition of *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* published by Henschelverlag, Kunst und Gesellschaft (Berlin, 1987); and, for the first volume, to the translation by Joachim Neugroschel published in this book. In the case of volume 1, the English reference will be given first; thus the present reference is 1:9/1:14. Translations from the last two volumes are my own.

8. On Proust, see Jean-Paul Sartre, "Présentation des *Temps modernes*," in vol. 2 of *Situations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 20–22. And see also, on Weiss's denial of any autobiographical elements, Klaus R. Scherpe, "Reading the *Aesthetics of Resistance*: Ten Working Theses," *New German Critique* 30 (fall 1983). Scherpe's collection, edited with Karl-Heinz Götze, *Die "Aesthetik des Widerstands" lesen* (Berlin: Argument, 1981), is still very useful.
9. Sartre, "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" in *Situations*, 2:143–50.
10. "A difficult book. Critic Heinrich Vormweg called *The Aesthetics of Resistance* monstrous . . ." (Cohen, *Understanding Peter Weiss*, 160). "Ein unbequemes Buch . . ." (Manfred Haiduk, "Nachwort," *Die Aesthetik des Widerstands*, 3:278). "This uncooperative work . . ." (Scherpe, "Reading the *Aesthetics of Resistance*," 100).
11. See below, n. 18.
12. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 2:281–91. Deleuze thus takes a quite different position from that of Jean-Luc Nancy, whose *Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), argues for the impossibility of *any* group solidarity after the end of the regimes of actually existing socialism.
13. See the work of Franco Moretti: *The Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1998).
14. "For that very reason he has to start immediately, and whatever the circumstances, without further scruples about beginning, means, or End, proceed to action." G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 240.
15. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), chap. 5.
16. T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 376–77; and Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," *New Left Review*, no. 144 (March/April 1984): 96–113.
17. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
18. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, vol. 1, trans. A. Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso, 1976).
19. See n. 5 above.
20. *The Charterhouse of Parma*, chap. 3.
21. N. S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 42–44.
22. A. J. P. Taylor, *Origins of the Second World War* (London: Hamilton, 1961).
23. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 86–87.
24. I am indebted to Carlos Blanco Aguinaga for this insight.
25. Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998), 7–8, 82.
26. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma*, vol. 1 (Paris: Minuit, 1983).
27. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 5:459–60.
28. Scherpe, "Reading the *Aesthetics of Resistance*," 105.