

HAU

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**The
Aes-
thetics
of Res-
istance**

Peter Weiss 100



When Peter Weiss wrote “The Aesthetics of Resistance”, he was looking back into the 1930s/’40s, at a Berlin of the antifascist underground, at the Spanish Civil War, and at a decade of European exile. It was a consideration of the 20th century – a novel combining art theory and worldview against the backdrop of the historical conflict between fascism and communism. Weiss portrays an emancipation process that is also highly central for questions of offering resistance today: the possibility of political participation by individuals.

In addition there will be a theory forum, a reading of the novel “The Aesthetics of Resistance”, a film programme in cooperation with the Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art and an exhibition by Altindere at the n.b.k.

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Additional text material in the German version of this newspaper at HAU or online!

“When is it right to stop fighting?”

Written by **Guillermo Calderón.**

During the Chilean dictatorship (1973-1990), several political organizations on the left decided to organize an armed struggle against the military regime. This was a controversial decision, especially because centrist political parties within the opposition believed that political violence would only exacerbate the government's cruelty against the Chilean people. Nevertheless, thousands of young people joined the armed resistance because they wanted to fight for a more dignified way to live, and to die. Yet the struggle did not only aim to overthrow the dictatorship, it also sought to establish a new kind of popular democracy, and with it a new economic system that was designed to bring social justice to all members of society. Many young men and women died believing that their surviving

comrades would keep the fight going until the final victory was theirs.

Yet this victory was never achieved. In order to avoid total defeat and at the same time keep the foundation of their regime intact, those in charge decided to call free elections. As a consequence, the new democratic leaders were both unable and unwilling to truly prosecute the dictatorship's human rights violations. In addition, the economic system was mostly kept intact and the extreme neoliberal reform programs were anything but abandoned.

This new democratic regime created a new problem for the young people in the opposition. They had to decide whether to keep

fighting. Or should they rather give up, accept and live according to the new regime's terms?

The answer may seem rather obvious from today's perspective, but at the time, in 1990, it was difficult to see clearly. Pinochet had given up the presidency, but he was still commander in chief of the armed forces. He was a vigilant, menacing presence with the power to destroy the newly elected government at will.

Confronted with this dismal perspective, many of the young fighters gave up on their political activism and disappeared into their personal lives. Others, however, kept the organizations going. Yet this time around, their struggle was considered as questionable, and even dirty. Those who had fought the dictatorship were



considered heroes; the faces of those who died fighting the dominance of military rule still appear in the form of painted images on the walls of the poor neighborhoods in which they fought. Yet after the dictatorship came to an end, those who kept fighting were called fanatics. With this change in public perception, the new democracy was able to isolate leftist organizations and even killed a few young men and women using methods once developed by the military.

When we discuss the central question of when it is right to stop fighting, it is important to remember that in the years of the dictatorship, the left defined the regime as fascist. This is the reason why the word resistance was used to describe the Chilean struggle for freedom. The intention was, of course, to make use of the mystique and dignity that the European fight against fascism was imbued with, and to hope for a similar kind of resistance, one that would never surrender and would, in the end, be able to emerge as a heroic, true symbol of pride.

Up to this day, no one questions that the resistance movement that swept across Europe had the right to use violence as a means to

wage a war of self-defense and aggression against fascism. Yet in Chile, a different attitude towards an armed struggle emerged in the aftermath of the dictatorship. People who engaged in political violence had to hide their past because they were not praised as heroes, but were instead denied any meaningful participation in newly emerging political processes.

So when is it right to stop fighting?

After only a few years of democracy, the armed organizations were decimated. Many militants left them, realizing that the Chilean people had abandoned their dream of a deep societal transformation. The ones who stayed found themselves bitter and isolated, but still holding on to guns and rifles. Some decided to rob banks in order to finance their ailing organizations, but also in order to make money for themselves. Banks were easy targets because nobody ever shed a tear over a bank losing money that it could easily recover with the help of its insurance. For decades many people have wondered whether it is worse to rob or to found a bank.

In the course of many years of committed militancy, these fighters had given up on their studies, their careers and personal lives. Initially, they believed that they would eventually be compensated for the years they had lost, that they would give up their struggle and start new lives.

Some bank robberies were perfectly clean. Others were ugly. Eager bank guards died and bank robbers, who used rifles that were designed for warfare, shot several members of the police.

This was certainly a sad and pathetic end for a generation of idealists who were willing to give up their lives for the cause. Defeat can be ugly. Victory can erase all stains. Victory can justify the ugliness of the armed struggle. Our problem now is defeat: we face the horror of not knowing when to stop, the horror of seeing history move on while still carrying a gun in our pockets. ■

“It is easier for gasoline to cross the EU border than it is for refugees!”

The novel ‘The Aesthetics of Resistance’ as a narrative foil for those who are not familiar with and do not understand the canon of Western art. In his newest work, **Oliver Frlijić** discusses the risks of an authoritarian and dystopic future Europe. In his interview with Doris Akrap, he explains how his theatrical language has been received in Europe.

Doris Akrap: In your newest piece “Unsere Gewalt und eure Gewalt” (“Our Force and Your Force”), you for the first time no longer focus on societal issues in the Balkans, but instead take a look at European societies and the double standards they professed in the recent refugee crisis. Why did you do so?

Oliver Frlijić: I used ‘The Aesthetics of Resistance’ as a foil in order to better understand the sort of art that we need today, and also to find out what art forms can be understood by people who have not traditionally been in a social position to comprehend the canon of Western art. ‘The Aesthetics of Resistance’ talks about members of the working class who are in search of an art form that adequately represents their social environment. Yet hardly a member of the working class ever read the book. Weiss’s novel is a re-

quiem for class-consciousness. Today, we would not even be able to find the graveyard where such consciousness is buried. And yet capitalism ends, by oscillating in a dialectical movement between economic exploitation on the one hand and dehumanization on the other, in fascism. This is the reason why capitalism is not only a topic that the arts are concerned with; it is a reality that they have to overcome.

I am well aware of the fact that the Western theatre market perceives me as nothing other than an imported commodity from the Balkans. We all love each other - as long as I keep talking about the war in Yugoslavia and the severe consequences that it had for the post-Yugoslavian societies. Yet as soon as I start asking simple questions - for instance why it is easier for gasoline to cross the European border than it is for

refugees - some people do not want to listen. It is essential for me to work against such individual interests, especially if they are presented as more general societal interests.

DA: Your approach to theatre reminds me of that of Zentrum für Politische Schönheit. This group works with provocations posited in public spaces. The reviews of your premiere in Vienna contained criticism that this group is also often confronted with: they mention self-importance and boredom. Has theatre forgotten how to be provocative today?

OF: The accusation of boredom is an age-old trick used by the bourgeoisie. They use it whenever their class’s value system is under attack. If it is merely boring, why are you so annoyed by it? Look, for instance, at the reaction caused by a scene in which the ac-

tress Nika Miskovi pulls an Austrian flag from her vagina. A critic from “Der Standard” wrote about this very scene: “at least we know now how a Croatian actress brings out the best in herself.” The nationality of the actress was apparently more important to him in this context than the role that her

body assumed in the course of the piece’s plot, where it becomes a last refuge of freedom. In the age of bio-politics, we have altogether lost sight of the illusion that the body possesses the power to escape the tightly knit networks of social control. With the emergence of the figure of the suicide bomber, the radicalism of body art has moved to the arena of actual political struggle.

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“I will not present theatre for its own sake, but rather use it as a tool.”

DA: Is your piece received differently in Western Europe and in the former Yugoslavian states?

OF: Audiences are never homogeneous or single monolithic blocks. And yet the mainstream reception is similar regardless of where you are. Critics tend to use similar labels to disqualify my work: pedagogical, boring, shallow, etc. At the same time, it would probably be a very bad sign if a piece received nothing but praise and positive reviews.

DA: After only two seasons as artistic director of Rijeka’s national theatre, you quit your job this June because of rather drastic budget cuts. Did you surrender?

OF: The governing right-wing party in Croatia, HDZ, has tried to intimidate me. The apartment that I share with my girlfriend was burgled, I was framed as a traitor to my country, and it was made clear that attacking me, either verbally or physically, would have no legal consequences. I recently started a new job that brings new challenges with it. I was ap-

pointed artistic coordinator and am now in charge for Rijeka’s theatre program, a city that will be Europe’s Capital of Culture in 2020. I do not plan to use this opportunity to idealize Europe, but would

instead like to discuss the threat of an authoritarian and dystopic future Europe. In order to do so, I will not present theatre for its own sake, but rather use it as a tool. This is my attempt to make certain conflicts known to more people and discuss them in a larger social environment. Instead of merely representing social conflicts on stage, theatre should put them up for discussion. ■

Doris Akrap works as a journalist and editor at “Die Tageszeitung” (taz) in Berlin. She writes about topics ranging from culture to society and sports.





How to Change Ourselves Every Day

Aenne Quiñones in an interview with Nicoleta Esinencu.

Aenne Quiñones: In the early 1990s, Heiner Müller gave an interview in which he commented on the global political situation at the time: “when the Berliner Ensemble traveled to Paris for a guest performance, the following dialogue between Ionesco and Brecht took place. Ionesco said: ‘You cannot change the world, it is immutable.’ Everyone looked at Brecht, who thought about what he had heard for a while before he answered: ‘How can you be so sure?’ And this is why we have to keep trying, again and again. But we should probably stop using the same large, all-encompassing concepts, and instead focus on individual aspects and find a niche that fits our capabilities. I know it sounds sort of pathetic, but it is all we can do at the moment.”¹ How would you evaluate our pos-

sibilities today, do we still all have to find our niche?

Nicoleta Esinencu: Yes, I agree that it would be naive to think that we can today solve global problems by applying one large idea. On the other hand, many recent examples have shown that we can change ourselves, one could say, on a daily basis. I speak, to be more specific, about myself, about my friends and also about those who are no longer my friends precisely because the constantly changing nature of things has led to differences between us. The same is true for the team that I work with; our conversations revolve around topics that correlate with our wish to gather a better understanding of how society works, and how we can relate to what is going on at the moment.

Talking about these things motivates us to do things in exactly the way that we do them now.

AQ: So it is no coincidence that you work with a theatre collective, one that wants to create its own unique structure?

NE: On the one hand, we want to create a space that enables us to shut ourselves off from a society that we do not approve of. The country that we live in has no interest in what we do. We have reached a point where we have to take protective measures against this country’s culture, against its traditions and of course also against its politics and propaganda. On the other hand we know that we have to address these very problems.

I do not mean to say that our theatre is designed as an exclusive space. It should, in the contrary, be open to everyone. We also do not say: "You are dumb, we are the ones who know what's right and can lead the way." We rather try to get our audiences to talk, to establish a conversation with them.

AQ: One of "Life's" protagonists, Liudmila Andreevna, has decided to defy the war in Ukraine by trying to maintain her daily life. Every day she fights all odds in her pursuit for a dignified life. How would you describe such a form of resistance?

NE: Let us go back in time, to the beginning of the war in Ukraine, and look at the moment when it could be felt most acutely here in Moldavia: I think there was not a single day when we did not talk about what we would do if the war came to us, too. My mother was very ill at the time. My first reaction was: if there is a war, I will pack my things and leave. Yet at the same time I knew that I could neither leave my sick mother behind nor pack her up in a suitcase and take her with me. I return to this personal example of mine because Liudmila Andreevna is a mother, and because she does something unexpected. She

"It often appears to me as if the resistance that happens on a daily basis and emerges from people's daily lives is far more important than single heroic moments."

does not follow her daughter to Kiev, but decides to risk her life and stay where she is. This decision becomes the vantage point of her resistance. She does not only stay in a world that has been overtaken by war, but also lives in a world that is supposed to become a new republic. While both of these things change her life tremendously, she tries to continue her daily routines and retain her humane relationships to others, despite the fact that her situation renders such relations almost impossible. Her daughter is probably in a situation that is just as complicated and difficult as hers. She failed to convince her mother to leave the war zone and perhaps gave up at some point, either because she was exhausted or because she understood her mother's decision. It often appears to me as if the resistance that hap-

pens on a daily basis and emerges from people's daily lives is far more important than single heroic moments. I believe that our society should in fact invite such reactions. Yet in a country like Moldavia, we ignore the importance of these intersubjective relations. Although we know that we live in a society that is governed by a political caste of oligarchs, we still lack any sense of solidarity. Liudmila Andreevna's example lets me reflect on our own social behavior and on the way in which we structure our daily life. It lets me think about how to build relations to neighbors, friends, and our social environment – even if we are not in the same state of emergency as the protagonists in our piece.

AQ: You talk about a lack of solidarity. What's going wrong?

NE: It is very easy to criticize, but it is often just as difficult to really understand the context that people come from. Every person standing with you at a bus stop has lived a particular life, and we often simply ignore that life, as if these people did not all have their own story.

They may be educated, or they may have never had access to education. In Moldavia, we have to take into account that people do not always have access to good education. In addition, the generation that is growing up at the moment gets to read history books of a completely new kind. What these young people know and learn changes in accordance with the political climate. Propaganda and brainwashing are engrained in our system; it starts in education in the schools and moves to the families. This is why it is so difficult to blame anyone in particular; people grow up to be nationalists, they are raised to be orthodox radicals who honor the tradition of the patriarchic family. Yet every single one of them has a story and a life that we tend to ignore. This reflection is a start when trying to demonstrate our solidarity.

"For me, art does neither begin nor end on stage."

AQ: But these vastly different conditions make it especially difficult to bridge the gap and draw connections. How do you create these links in your artistic work?

NE: I do not talk exclusively about art. I could, for instance, not work with someone who goes on stage and talks critically about nationalism, but who then acts in a nationalistic way in private. For me, art does neither begin nor end on stage. And that is the way it should be in a society that wants to

live in solidarity. I do not believe that what a doctor or a farmer does is less important than what I do. The only important thing is that we find good moments to communicate with each other. Recently I have often reverted to an example that may perhaps demonstrate the sad situation here in Moldavia most vividly. Moldavia passed a new law that prohibits smoking in public places. The people have been encouraged to film others, who smoke in places where it is not permitted, or to call the police so that a penalty can be imposed. Apart from the fact that such a law may be questionable, it is remarkable that people do not even for a second consider to simply talk to each other, to address the other and say: "Hey, you may not be aware of it yet, but there is a new law against smoking here." Most people actually prefer to tell on each other and call the police instead. ■



“Double Consciousness / Double Shooting”

Written by Rabih Mroué.

An image can shock us, hurt us, and burn our eyes. Images can assume the role of our nerves; they can transmit pain and physically experienced feelings into our whole body. This is why it can be almost agonizing to see particularly painful images.

In the first year of the Syrian revolution, Syrian protesters uploaded several videos on the Internet. In these videos, we witness how a protester, who is filming, is shot by a sniper or the regime's soldier forces.

These videos show moments of eye contact between sniper and cameraman, moments in which the gun's line of sight meets the camera's lens. First we see and hear the sniper shooting, and then the movement of the mobile phone indicates that the cameraman is falling to the ground.

The cameraman is always off-camera; he remains outside the image. For the viewer, it is impossible to tell whether he is dead or alive. On-screen, you see no blood, no corpse, and no real violence. Everything happens outside of the image's frame and inside of us; it happens inside our bodies and our minds, we experience it on our skins.

Not all videos allow the viewer to look through the eyes of those who made them. Yet there are a few videos, such as the Syrian one, that give their viewers this sense of being right there at the place of the action. The cinematic term for this technique is subjective camera. Here, the spectator beholds the event through the actor's eyes, as if she/he experienced the event her/himself. It is not a coincident that this technique is often used in both horror movies and pornography. What these two film genres have in common with war imagery is the obscene manner in which they are shot. They all aim to portray the shocking and scandalous potential of the event that they depict. They would like to strip the event down to its essence and capture its sheer nudity or cruelty. They want to show the action in a way that is as real as possible - without hiding anything. They search for total nakedness, for fear and danger, and for the moment of pleasure that always withers in the wake of shooting, or of ejaculating; the moment that leads to (a metaphorical) death.

Yet there are at least three factors that make war videos more powerful and more hurtful than those created in the realm of the two mentioned film genres. We are here, first of all, faced with non-fictional images that can be differentiated from horror movies performed by professional actors. They secondly do not depict staged

scenes, as is the case in pornography. This is why they thirdly refer to a real death that is captured in their making.

Showing images of wars and catastrophes in such an obscene manner positions the real at the same level as the representation of the real because it presents the image in a way that is raw and naked. It is for this reason that it is unbearable to look at these images, which is why people tend to shift their gaze away from them, or even close their eyes in order not to see them. And even if they decided to face them, I think that such images would burn their eyes. In the mentioned cases, the eyes would perhaps even refuse, as a means of self-protection, to decipher the content of what they are looking at. If something like that happens, we see and yet do not understand what we see, as if we had gone completely numb.

I believe that it is impossible for human beings to live without representation, that is to say without metaphors, allegories, signs, and language, without ideas, questions, lies, rumors, jokes, doubt and even betrayal.

To see the suffering of others and sympathize with them is not enough; it will not make the world a better place. Something different must be done, something that goes beyond feelings and emotions, and that amounts to more than shedding tears and contributing to charities. There surely must be something else that we can do, and yet I still cannot say what exactly that would be.

What we capture with our eyes is essentially the same thing that the Syrian protester's eyes captured through his mobile's lenses.

In such videos we re-experience the camera's way of zooming in and out with our own eyes. We feel the movement and the rhythm of the protester's body, we feel him holding his mobile phone and filming - although we are not really moving.

Through his eyes, we witness what happens to him. By becoming eyewitnesses, we also become engaged. At the same time, however, we remain passive because we feel powerless as we cannot prosecute his killers.

We feel, see, and live in our own off-camera reality. We establish this reality not solely with the help of our own eyes, but also through our past experiences. This reality is a construction. It is for this reason that we can also reconstruct the death that happens outside of the image. We in-

herently try to understand what happened, to create meanings and draw connections, to make sense of the blurred and fragmented images that we watched and connect the seen to the unseen, that which is visible to the things that remain absent.

The absence of the off-camera is projected onto our minds and translated into sensations that we experience in our bodies. We see it, we feel it, we listen to it and touch it. It has weight and warmth.

I am concerned with the question of how to learn again to really see. Because we are today invaded by images of wars and catastrophes, I often feel blind and numb. So if I decide to newly open my eyes in order to really see these images, I do not only see, but also ache and may even die a little.

If I see directly and immediately, there is no representation, there are no metaphors and allegories. Everything is direct: the blood is blood, the pain is pain, and the death is death.

This is why in my works, when I make use one of such videos or images, I insist on playing them frame by frame. In doing so, I make them look artificial to desacralize them, to analyze, deconstruct, and dissect them. It is my way to learn how to see and think about what we are seeing.

In the Syrian protesters' videos, we feel pain and fear, but there is no direct identification since neither the victim nor the perpetrator has a face, a personal past, or a future. So after watching the video, all that is left is ourselves: our self is in fact the only person we face. At the same time, watching this video puts us in the position of the victim. But becoming victims makes it extremely difficult for us to think and reflect upon what has happened.

Eye contact between two people always opens up the possibility of seeing one's image reflected in the eyes of the other - and vice versa. In the Syrian protester's video, the sniper has to fix his eyes on the viewfinder of the gun while the cameraman has to fix his eyes on the viewfinder of his camera. As soon as their eyes meet, both the sniper and the cameraman are in a position to say the same thing: "I can see my image reflected in one of your eyes."

Logically, a moment of eye contact between these two people creates two mirrors (or pupils) that face one another. The sniper can see his image reflected in the eye of his victim. And the

victim can see his image inside the eye of the sniper. As long as eye contact is maintained, these images stay there, too. Thus, the two mirrors create a feedback loop of the same two images, an endless and hypnotic *mise en abyme*. Such a situation would become possible if each one of the two men focused on the other's pupil and kept staring at it for a while. Instead of standing face to face with the other, each one would then face him- or herself; both would see their own image staring back at them, and inside this image another image of the other person staring at him could be seen. This would not only create an awkward situation, it would also make the beholder feel eccentric and even strange. The subject would eventually lose sight of his main object and would reach a trance-like state with a heightened focus and concentration on no one other than his own inner self.

By being hypnotized in such a way, before any action can take place, both participants would become complicit. It would be as if each of these human beings inhabited both personas: they would at once be the criminal and the victim. This is why I assume that the duration of eye contact between the two could not be endured for long, and would have to be cut before both (or one of them) is hypnotized. One of them should react quickly; either the camera man should run away and hide, or the sniper should shoot and kill. This way the moment of complicity could be undercut.

I think that the scenario of the two mirrors facing one another can never happen between these two people. Instead, each one would be drawn by the image of the other and would thus never be able to see his or her own image. It would be as if someone looking at the mirror could not see his reflection in it, as if they had lost the ability to look at themselves.

Is it possible to bring the perpetrator into the light and ask him to talk about the reasons for his crime? Or should we only rely on the victim's testimony?

In a suicidal operation, both the perpetrator and the witness are eliminated. The crime remains obscure, incomprehensible, and is easily considered a terrorist act.

I do neither defend the perpetrators nor do I underestimate the testimonies of the victims. This is how I escape the dichotomy that divides everything up into black and white, into good and evil, into innocent and guilty. These dichotomies make life unbearable and almost impossible to live.

The tension lives within us forever. There is something rotten in the air, beneath the earth and inside the souls. Sometimes we smell and feel it, although very few of us can see it. I wonder how we can live in peace knowing that there are still unresolved issues; so much business remains unfinished and ghosts continue to seek revenge.

In my theatre piece *Riding On A Cloud*, my brother Yasser, who recovered from brain injury inflicted during the Lebanese civil war, says the following:

Descartes says: I think, therefore I am.

Kundera says: I ache, therefore I am.

There was a time in my life when I was not thinking, and I was not aching, but I was.

I knew that I was because of two things: because of my eyes that were moving, and the people around me who were moving.

So I move, therefore I am, although there was nothing moving in me, except for my eyes.

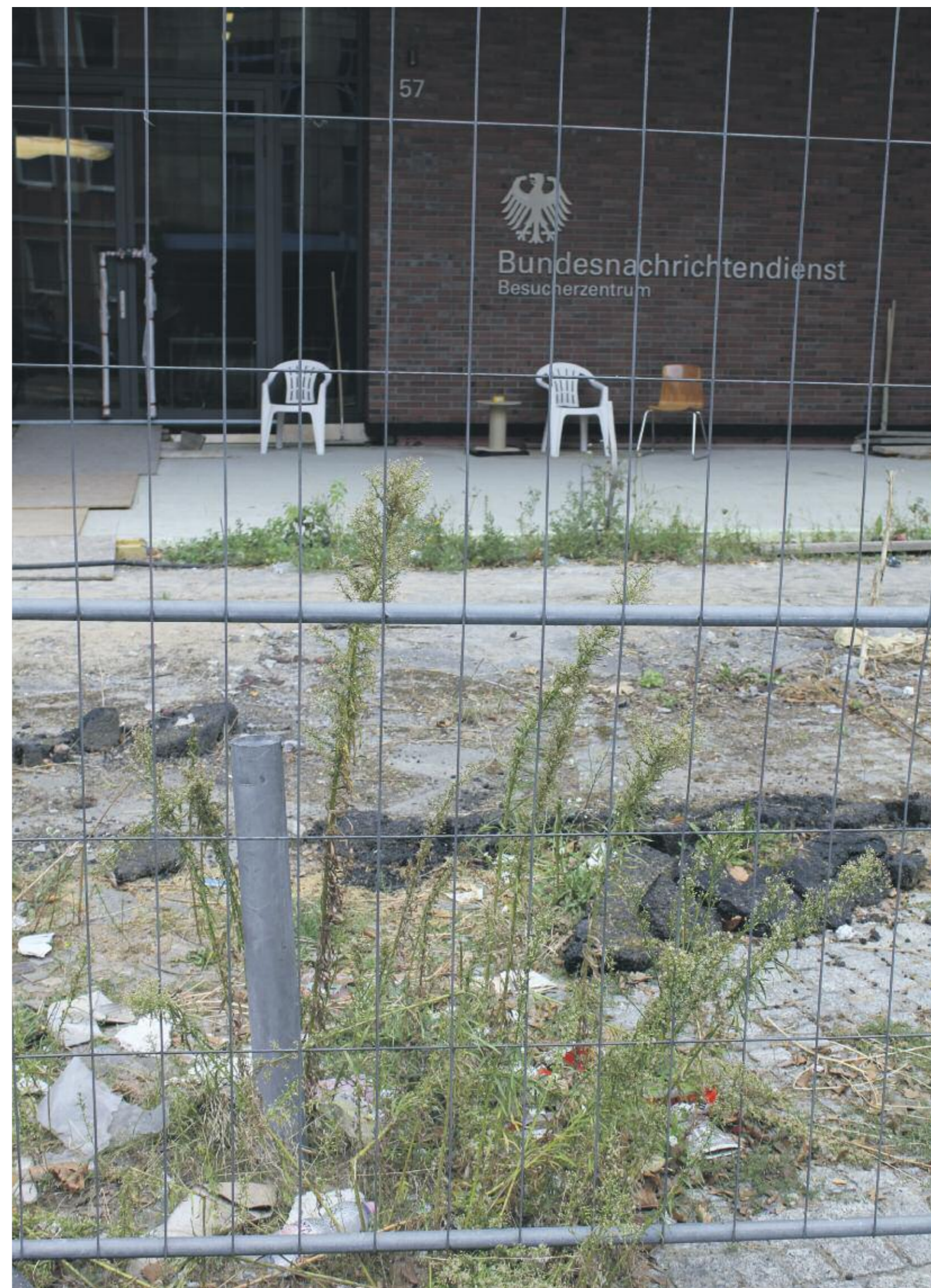
As soon as someone is conscious, he or she can confirm: yes, I am.

There is constant movement between thinking and aching, between reason and emotion, between here and there. Life is about moving. Stillness is death. But what if nobody recognizes that I am moving, can I still say that I am?

If I am in pain and no one feels my pain or if I have a thought and no one listens to me, then what happens? When we do not know about a certain incident, then it appears as if this incident does not even exist. This also means that if the media does not cover an event, then it is as if this event never took place. Social media is so very important to people because it provides them with the possibility to communicate without the use of their bodies, and thus without pain.

Many things happening around us that we are not aware of. Not seeing the other does not mean that this other does not exist. It may be there, but we cannot see or recognize it. It is a state of latency.

And then suddenly, one day this other stands in front of us. Isn't that what happens with the so-called ISIS today? Everybody is shocked and asks: but where did these people come from? Where were they before? They act and talk as if these people came from an unknown, other planet. In reality, however, they were within us: they live in the same society, even in the same house, but our eyes are closed to them. ■



“We would be out on the streets, at the place where a storm is more than thunderous applause”

In his work with the theatre collective “La Re-sentida,” **Marco Layera** searches for his own form of resistance against the art scene’s system of rules and regulations. How can one, he asks, create meaningful theatre in a country like Chile, where the Mapuche still fight the destruction of their intellectual and cultural sovereignty, and where massive student protests work against the plans to privatize the education system?

We tend to think that theatre does not have a strong effect on politics. We even believe that other tools are much more effective, although they may not resonate with the same glamour or enjoy the same recognition as our craft. By assuming this perspective, we also assume responsibility for our own cowardice and complacency. We tell ourselves that we would not be doing theatre if we were true radicals and political activists. We would be on the streets instead, we would be at a place where storms designate more than thunderous applause, where sceneries are not made of cardboard and blood not only an effective symbol. At times, we convince ourselves that a commitment to the arts is today synonymous with turning our backs on the world. We act almost as if we wanted to reflect on humanity’s cruelty only in order to then receive praise and recognition for doing so.

“Our Work”

Every artistic endeavor is rooted in the artist’s desire to communicate his or her own version of understanding the world, in short: TO BE HEARD. In our case, the work is grounded in our non-conformity, our dissatisfaction, and the romantic image of a better world. Were it not for these sentiments, we would by now have turned to other things. Because we are, however, concerned with these issues, our pieces focus on topics that generate conflicts or reveal contradictions. We tackle topics that have in the past decades confronted our society with problems that have not yet been resolved and that continue to raise questions rather than provide answers. Our fleeting, often short-lived line of work must recover its subversive and revelatory powers. This is why we insist on: Dissent / Cruelty / Irony / Absurdity / Humor / In-

credibility and, above all, PASSIONATE SARCASM. This is the ultimate provocation: **TO DEFEND TODAY’S ORDER OF THINGS TO THE EXTREME, TO PASSIONATELY JUSTIFY THAT WHICH IS NOT THOUGHT.**

Provocation thus becomes a method of reflection.

“Dictatorship of Coolness”

On the occasion of Peter Weiss’s 100th birthday, we were invited by HAU Hebbel am Ufer to curate a project that rethinks the author’s *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. After reading the novel, we decided to draw a connection to the resistance movement in Chile, for instance to the struggle of the MAPUCHE people, to the STUDENT MOVEMENT, or to the resistance groups that were active during the country’s military dictatorship. Yet we first had to ask ourselves how to present these experiences without running the risk of compromising their radicalism when perceiving it through our own bourgeois lens. We know that each and every form of artistic expression, no matter how subversive it may present itself to be, never stops to be a privileged statement made in a safe space, far away from the existential risk that the real action poses. We decided that the only way to stay true to the spirit of these movements would be to put its real protagonists on stage, so that they could in fact present their own struggle. Yet this option confronted us with new questions: how do WE offer resistance today? Is all we can do stage the resistance of others?

In the end, we felt it necessary to reflect critically on the life styles and values of our own social environment, and on the ‘petit bourgeois’ sector of society that shamelessly reconciles the ad-

vantages and privileges, which the capitalistic system offers them, with their social awareness of a progressive world. We are here faced with a new bourgeois middle-class that not only naturalizes capitalism, but that also plays an increasingly dominating role. We believe that our era will be defined by the way in which we talk about this particular social class. We will perceive it as a cold and apathetic era that used its consumption and the complacency within its homes to OFFER RESISTANCE, so that it could in the end nevertheless perceive itself as a group of sensitive human beings, who are committed and politically active.

“Dictatorship of Coolness” paints a monstrous picture of us and of our times; it depicts today’s fascism of images, its kingdom of the self, and tells the story of how the arts trivialize the brutality that surrounds us.

“Dictatorship of Coolness” determines the performance quite literally, from its beginning to its very end. We are part of what we criticize, and we have no idea how to resist its temptations. “Dictatorship of Coolness” is frantic and rough, a social satire that portrays the contemporary life styles of ‘bourgeois bohemians:’ during the night of May 1, while the streets of Santiago are alive with protests, a group of friends who belong to the city’s cultural and artistic elite gather in order to celebrate the newly appointed secretary of culture. The secretary, however, decides to boycott his own celebration and instead turns it into a nightmare. He does so after he realized the hypocrisy that reigns within his circle of friends, and recognized that no real social change can emerge out of this sort of bourgeois culture. ■

Translated by Mieke Woelky.



"Köfte Airlines" by Halil Altındere (2016)

(To be) Continued Reflections on the Aesthetics of Resistance

Hans-Thies Lehmann

“... The right of man to liberty is based not on the association of man with man, but on the separation of man from man. It is the right of this separation, the right of the restricted individual, withdrawn into himself. The practical application of man’s right to liberty is man’s right to private property ... The right of man to private property is, therefore, the right to enjoy one’s property and to dispose of it at one’s discretion (à son gré), without regard to other men, independently of society, the right of self-interest. This individual liberty and its application form the basis of civil society. It makes every man see in other men not the realization of his own freedom, but the barrier to it.”²

(Karl Marx, “The Jewish Question”)

“... you have to depersonalize yourself, cannot endure, can only survive without hope, you cannot live with hope”³

(Peter Weiss, Notizbücher 1971–1980)

The tradition of “leftist” thought experiences a moment of failure and defeat at the moment. Those who do not want to accept our political system in its current form, and do not want to take its ultimate wisdom for granted, perhaps because it forces its people to regard each other as competitors and not as potential aides, stand and watch helplessly, as if deprived of all power. We are asked to act according to our ‘egotistical’ private interests, and not to regard ourselves

as ‘species-beings’ – despite the fact that human beings are obviously meant to exist as political animals, in cooperation and connection with each other. We have apparently forgotten that the political sphere, despite its continuous emphasis on freedom and human rights, does not amount to more than a delusion as long as it remains without a truly human, social form of emancipation from materialistic pressures and the competition that comes with it. We witness, with mounting terror, that even in truly democratic states, where both politicians and people defend democratic values, the ‘leader principle’ regains force: authoritarian governments rule but keep the appearance of ‘democratic’ procedures more or less intact. In some instances, these legitimizing procedures are even fully abolished, and the ruling class blatantly implements inhumane methods, supposedly in the name of its ‘people,’ a people who can easily be manipulated by the media because they are anything but well informed. This is how governments can (intentionally) instill fear of terror, and act as their wholly imaginary identity was at risk. Last but not least, leftist consciousness faces, rather helplessly, the shattered remains of a once vibrant discourse on European humanism. It is bewildered and disgraced by the fact that 800 million Europeans can apparently not afford to provide a dignified form of protection to 2 or 3 million refugees who have fled one of the cruelest wars that recent history has seen.

It is this moment of powerlessness, and not of sovereignty and victory, that raises the urgent question: what, essentially, is a subject? Or, more specifically, what constitutes a (politically) active subject? When we work at this question and try to define what a subject of political action looks like, we also have to ask what it means to ‘act’ – and not just to appeal and address. The question of locating the subject in its own powerlessness is absolutely central to Peter Weiss’s monumental essayis-

tic novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. In the course of the 1000-page narrative, the first-person narrator, whose persona closely resembles that of the author, guides the reader through the horrors of exile and escape, as well as through the defeat and murder of resistance fighters.

Today, in 2016, we celebrate Peter Weiss’s 100th birthday. And although our feelings of incapacity and the defeat of a critical spirit are in no way comparable to the terrible impotence felt by those who were active in the resistance against Nazi Germany, the topic that *The Aesthetics of*

Resistance focuses upon, the book’s strong sense of futility turns it into an unexpectedly timely read. Karl-Heinz Bohrer was the first to point out that the book emerges from a surrealist tradition and the “aesthetics of terror,” and should therefore not be considered a work of “socialist realism.” It could even be argued that the peculiar form of this unique work does not allow for any easy analogies, and even forecloses a comparison to any other work of German literature. The author forces his readers to act in a certain way, to answer resistance with resistance. The text itself, to be more precise, puts up an enormous resistance: it is devoid of any entertainment, its pace and tone remain unchanged throughout the book, not a single paragraph allows you to relax and exhale a little. Although much of the book is a description of dialogues, it uses no direct speech. This is why the reader has to overcome his or her own resistance in the process of reading, a resistance against the desire to escape from the experience that the text’s initially inaccessible regularity evokes. The single pages appear, perhaps because of their lack of paragraphs, like gravestones that repel the reader’s gaze. While the book is determined by an air of factual description, the constantly present feeling of desperation and helpless anger reach their climax in the depiction of horrible scenarios: from the raft of the Medusa to the victims that the Spanish civil war’s defeat brought about to the horrific depiction of how the Nazi’s executed the resistance group led by Schulze-Boysen in Plötzensee. Every detail that the novel describes seems either doubly broken or doubly abstracted: each of

“What constitutes a (politically) active subject?”

these details is solely the product of a character’s consciousness. And the content of this consciousness appears only indirectly, in the form of a report, and is thus even further estranged.

It is no coincidence that the first-person narrator’s encounter, or rather confrontation, with Bertolt Brecht and his political aesthetics – which Weiss considers the only aesthetic program that can be connected to his own Surrealism and his “aesthetics of horror” – takes place when the book reaches the lowest point of the historical development that it traces, namely the moment when the Hitler-Stalin Pact threw everyone who considered themselves part of the European and international Left into turmoil. “We felt that we were now at the mercy of a political form of power that we could not influence and that would crush all of our individual considerations.”⁴ With time, the resistance fighters realized that Stalin’s Soviet Union was ready to make use of political methods that would go against everything that Anti-fascists had hoped for. The book describes one of the Comintern’s representative’s awkward attempt to justify the Pact as a politically necessary step that the Soviet Union had to take: “Rejected by England and France, the Soviet Union took the measures that were necessary to ensure the protection of its land (...) it should now be made very clear, he said pushing the dishes aside, that the Soviet Union, which was driven

“Resistance of the aesthetic thus means, above all, to remember how artistic endeavors have been used to put up a resistance.”

into an isolated position by the Western states, is now doing all it can to relax the situation (...).”⁵ In the novel, Brecht responds to these statements with nothing but skepticism. The book’s sentiment of meaninglessness increases gradually so that it comes to dominate the action: “You could really feel all the things that we had lost

when Rosalinde stuck her head out of the train’s window and said, with tired voice, that she would soon have no other option than to follow Toller’s example”⁶ – Toller committed, as is well known, suicide. “And when every attempt (to provide assistance) is futile, and when the person that was our closest friend is torn apart in front of our eyes, then the desperation can become so unbearable that we would like to take our own life, and if only to end our own powerlessness and achieve a moment of peace.”⁷



The monumentally epic novel suggests that art played a rather complex role in the resistance. In the book, *Aesthetics of Resistance* also refers to a resistance of the aesthetic, a resistance against the feeling of complete powerlessness. Weiss notes that “in the arts, the motif of resistance (...) has become a priority (...) because the weight that people carry has

become so heavy that it appears unbearable –.”⁸ Resistance of the aesthetic thus means, above all, to remember how artistic endeavors have been used to put up a resistance – and to remember that such resistance is possible, although its realization is anything but certain. An artistically determined form of resistance calls for an aesthetic program of the subjunctive, one that focuses on memories of the past and does not gaze at cheaply available hopes for the future. It is in this mode that the aesthetics of resistance question, to speak with Walter Benjamin, our history; they address not only its lost future, but also defy the terror of a linear timeline that reduces history to a homogenous list of victories. In light of the denial and repression, the lazy forgetfulness and belated denunciation that could be observed in past resistance movements, the arts must return to its central task, namely that of reflecting, pausing, and interrupting. Art must reflect on the resistance that has already happened, and should not trivialize it.

When looked at from this perspective, it becomes clear that the aesthetics of resistance must not give up, and should also not be replaced with activist aesthetics of insurrection. We can today differentiate between two ways in which the political appears in politically motivated art: we observe the aesthetics of insurrection on the one hand and the aesthetics

of resistance on the other. In the aesthetics of insurrection, the arts participate very directly in a political movement so that aesthetic action becomes, very immediately, political action. In such a case, the artist functions as a societal agent. Practices that emerge from such aesthetic programs, such as for instance a theatre piece’s invitation to a political as-

“Yet we do not achieve much by simply feeling better because we do good.”

.....

sembly, change its character, as it is not always primarily an aesthetic practice – but rather one that was ‘aesthetically inspired.’ The aesthetics of resistance are, on the contrary, based on the artist’s reflection of his or her own political consciousness,

its doubts and history, its past and possible future failures – the unanswered questions that accompany all political action and that it can nevertheless fully resolve. Georg Büchner wrote “Dante’s Death” (*Aesthetics of Resistance*) and “The Hessian Courier” (*Aesthetics of Insurrection*) almost simultaneously. We can today neither dismiss the aesthetics of resistance as a passive, possibly sad contemplation of our world: it explores human forms of self-expression and reflects aesthetically on all human action. The aesthetics of insurrection, on the other hand, can today still be regarded as practice-oriented, and thus as a mediocre form of art. In addition, it often happens that supposedly political art manifests mostly the artist’s personal perspective while the ‘political’ label is merely an effective way of ensuring good publicity. Yet we do not achieve much by simply feeling better because we do good. Compelling – we could also say: complex – art often faces the accusation of being too aloof, too distant from the struggles of real political practice. Yet this actually applies much more often to art that benefits from its label as ‘politically engaged,’ but that only appears to really confront the complex

contradictions inherent in political activism. Even if resistance fails, it is all about resistance. When Weiss brings his book, after almost 1000 pages, to its brilliant ending, the reader is led before the Pergamon frieze whose description already opened the book. Weiss here returns to the observation that the figure of the heroic Heracles, who could here appear as a potential liberator and savior, is missing: in between all the sculptures that the frieze, which depicts the battle between Giants and Olympian gods, shows, the figure of Heracles with his lion skin appears only as a void:

“... and having turned blind from their long battle, those who rebelled against the higher powers would begin to attack each other, would choke and pound on each other in exactly the same way as they had done before, in the sky, when they, carrying heavy weapons, ran over and mangled each other, and Heilmann would cite Rimbaud, and Coppi would recite the manifesto, and there would be one vacant space in that crowded scene, and in that spot the lion’s paw would hang, easily reachable for everyone, and as long as those who still fought beneath would not let go of each other, they would not even see the lion skin’s paw, no one would know about it and would come to fill that vacant spot, so they would have to become active themselves, would have to breach that gap, strike out and swing at it, they would have to make the one large move that could finally free them of the terrible pressures weighing on them.”⁹

Weiss’s book *The Aesthetics of Resistance* ends with an image that is written in the subjunctive, an image of resistance that, as it finally happens, may perhaps, just perhaps even become victorious – if only in the form of a memory that retraces the past’s possible future. ■

Translated by Mieke Woelky



What Does Resistance Mean Today?

Bini Adamczak explores contemporary notions of resistance. What does resistance mean today, and is it enough to merely constrain and stop all evil? What measures do we have to take in order to create a world that we can bear to live in?



Those who want the world to stay as it is do not want it to stay¹⁰
(Erich Fried)

Most often, superhero stories follow rather traditional plots. A super villain – a mad professor or the like – hatches a diabolical master plan. Enraged by an insult and driven by the desire for revenge, she wants to obtain global sovereignty in order to change the world radically – most often to the worse. It is up to the superhero to sweep in, thwart this plan, and save the world at the last second. Happy end of no return. And yet the viewer leaves the movie theatre with a lingering, stale aftertaste: while the imminent danger was fended off, the world remains in just as bad a condition as before.

The majority of emancipatory resistance movements still oblige to this script. Instead of lowering rent prices, their gradual increase is merely slowed down. Houses are no longer occupied, but their evictions are still fought. The bad condition of the global climate is not improved,

but protected against further deterioration. We choose, in times of Hofer and Trump, Le Pen and Erdogan, always just the lesser of two evils, which is also the reason why contemporary power relations lead to the strangest of inversions: anti-capitalists defend the European Union against British nationalists, and anti-nationalists defend the German male soccer team against racist comments made by members of the AfD party. They do so knowing that the anti-Greek troika is almost impossible to democratize, and knowing also that German nationalism experienced a major breakthrough precisely because of this soccer team. The prototype of this kind of resistance is called anti-fascism. This is why it has the unfortunate task to deal with the biggest issues and prevent the worst. It has to do so despite the fact that it is normally not even particularly interested in the perpetuation of the status quo. The most active defenders of democracy are, at the same time, the fiercest critics of its representative limitations. It is for this reason that they are at times compared to Nazis because of their supposedly totalitarian tendencies, belittled as ‘do-gooders,’ or instrumentalized as voices of a protest movement that has no political weight.

Ever since neo-liberalism started its triumphal march, the conflicts that are fought within the economic sector follow a similar rationale. Closures are to be prevented, layoffs to be limited, and pay cuts should be taken back. The same tendencies could be observed in the defense of the welfare state, at a time when it still existed. People with a progressive attitude turned conservative and demanded that the past’s achievements had to be protected against a neo-liberal conversion. In a rather helpless attempt, they searched the past for allies that shared their belief in a seemingly social economy – and were defeated.

The fights that largely failed to materialize in Germany in 2003 are now, in 2016, fought in France. The massive protests that France has witnessed this year alone were fueled by the implementation of a new labor market law that is designed to include a relaxation of dismissal protection for adolescents, an annulment of coverage, and the abolition of the 35-hour work week. While the German press covered the conflicts that flared up between nationalistic hooligan groups during the European Championships in great detail, it acted as if the movement that happened at the same time,

and which consisted of occupations and strikes, large gatherings and massive protests, never happened. They did so despite the fact that this movement is clearly connected to and part of the cycle of conflicts that opened with the Arab Spring in 2011, and that has since then morphed into a movement that has expanded to South Europe and the United States, where it has been continued under names like Indignadas and Occupy. At times, when it seems as if the cycle has been closed, new forms of the same struggle emerge, seemingly out of nowhere, at a different place. This time, the occupation of Place de la Republique, which appeared almost like a typical Occupy operation and gave the Nuit-Debout-movement its name, was combined with forms of political protest that were traditionally used in French labor conflicts: large strikes were organized in schools, oil refineries, and nuclear power plants, and even the garbage disposal and transport sectors participated. Despite these massive protests, the new labor laws were passed – with the help of an emergency decree and against the will of the public majority and the parliament. On June 14, when more than one million people gathered for the largest demonstrations that this movement has seen, they were brutally attacked by the police. Apparently, the police used more stun grenades and tear gas that day than they did during the heyday of the student protests in May 1968.

These forms of repression have become a necessary means for the governing socialist party who is eager to improve France's position in the location competition and decrease its unemployment rate with the help of mini-jobs and low wages. This is why the new law, Loi travail, is at times also described as the French version of the "German model," and thus as the country's way to catch up with its neighbor's Agenda 2010. It was, after all, this Agenda, which Germany introduced while under social-democratic rule from 2000 to 2008, that turned it into the only European country whose real wages decreased while its overall productivity increased. The competitive advantages that Germany earned that way were further solidified with the introduction of the Euro, since other countries within the EU could now no longer revert to currency devaluations in order to protect themselves from cheap German exports. This is why the downward dynamics that the German government of Gerhard Schröder

and Joseph Fischer initiated can still be felt in Spain and Portugal, Greece and France, where it continues to put pressure on wage earners. These people thus have to fight battles that were fought much too cautiously in Germany, and that only reemerged with renewed strength within the last year, when pilots, train drivers, and nurses fought fiercely for better wages. Global capital cannot be curbed with the help of local and limited resistance. If German capital exports the crisis to Greece, then those who fight against it have to import the Greek resistance to Germany. If France's ruling class implements the "German model," then Germany's oppressed class has to respond by adopting "French habits."

So far, however, this opportunity has been missed because the countless initiatives, like strikes and Blockupy protests, are not yet more than single sparks of resistance. But there are at least two good reasons why it is so important that these single actions lead to a bigger and more unified movement. It first of all seems as if the network of the European economy has already created a shared connection through competition that is so strong that the battles fought in Greece, Spain, and even in France can only become a success if they also move to the German centre. And history has secondly taught us that in times of crisis, emancipatory tendencies are often followed by restorative reaction. When confronted with the dire conditions that accompany a crisis, it is not enough to merely defend the status quo. As could recently be observed all across Europe, right-wing parties gain power wherever the Left loses votes. The author Peter Weiss knew that. His novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* revolves around the fight against fascism. This resistance against fascism is, however, always at the same time a fight for communism. It is, to be more precise, a battle fought for a non-authoritarian form of communism that emerged in the rather narrow – and unusually hopeful – time of the 1918 Spartacist League, in between the looming stalinization of the Bolsheviks and the nationalistic betrayal of social democracy in Germany. The failure of this fight is exactly the loophole that National Socialism used for its ultimate breakthrough. When taking this historical perspective into account, the movement in France can clearly be seen as a powerful form of resistance against the anti-Semitic, racist, and sexist strategies

that the German AfD or the Front National use in times of crisis.

As long as the term resistance is taken literally, in the original sense of the word, and thus limits itself to arresting and stopping, to defending and diminishing, it will not lead anywhere. It is not enough to prevent the worst, and thus retain the bad. And even if we go one step further, and dare to abolish, dissolve, and destroy, we will not get anywhere. What this is really about is creating a world that is more bearable. We should not try to do so from scratch, but rather by reassembling already consisting parts. This is the specific strength of the movements that have emerged all over the world since 2011. They have recognized that individual interests have a greater chance at being enforced when things like higher wages, lower rent prices, protection against state security, affordable public transportation, and ensured residence permits are pursued in a collective effort. They have, in other words, learned that solidarity can, under certain conditions, become a valid way to ensure survival – and to achieve better living conditions. And they have realized one more crucial thing: that they have to reclaim the depopulated public arena and occupy this divided space in order to reconvert it into a room that enables real encounters. They have overcome many of the differences that the ruling class imposed on them by dividing them into groups and separating them into single entities; they have even managed to reverse this process by creating a new societal life that is based on its literally social dimension. This is why their gatherings – *asamblea*, *assemblée générale* – are not just a means to mobilize the masses to fight for their political goals and rights. The solidarity that they embody is not just a necessary tool in this battle – *united we stand, divided we fall* – it is the reason why they gather and thus also presents an end in itself. They want to achieve more than the abolition of a single law. They want to create a different kind of community, a different sort of sameness. What they fight for is, essentially, the societal construction of a relational sense of solidarity. To put it differently: precarious superheroes do not merely fight in order to maintain the status quo. If you want to save the world, you need a diabolical plan that will also radically change it. ■

Translated by Mieke Woelky

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