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## **Aesthetics of Resistance: On the Politics of Aesthetic Thought in Hegel’s Theory of Aesthetics and Peter Weiss’ Novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance***

**Abstract:** Through a confrontation of Hegel’s theory of aesthetics and Peter Weiss’ novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* this paper criticizes the theory of aesthetics for its lack of aesthetic thinking. While Hegel’s theory of aesthetics is introduced as a paradigmatic case of this problem, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* is read as an attempt to “re-aestheticize” the thought of aesthetics. Following a brief introduction and contextualization of the problem within the theoretical discourse on “aestheticization”, Hegel’s theory is analyzed and then contrasted to *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. The analysis is carried out in three steps, which correspond to the three forms in which Hegel’s lectures represent the movement that leads from the aesthetic form of art to the – in his view – no longer aesthetic form of aesthetics. This analysis of Hegel’s theory is finally confronted with a reading of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* according to which the novel reverses the movement delineated by Hegel’s theory through aestheticizing aesthetics.

**Keywords:** aesthetics; Hegel; Peter Weiss; *The Aesthetics of Resistance*; literature, politics, aestheticization.

### **Introduction**

The central concern of this paper is to criticize the theory of aesthetics for its anaestheticization of aesthetic thinking.<sup>1</sup> The critique draws on the following dilemma: if theory and its thinking are conceived as purely conceptual, while the non-conceptual is seen as constitutive for the aesthetic, then the theory of aesthetics cannot grasp the aesthetic in its own terms; it must anaestheticize and, thereby, deprive itself of it. As a paradigmatic case of this anaestheticization Hegel’s theory of aesthetics is discussed, and subsequently contrasted with Peter Weiss’ novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, read as a reversed attempt to aestheticize aesthetics and its thinking.

<sup>1</sup> The term “anaestheticization” describes an aesthetic strategy, “[...] desensitized to its own aesthetics [...]” which “ethically and politically goes hand in hand with a desensitization to what is foreign.” (Juliane Rebentisch, *Die Kunst der Freiheit*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012, 344). Correspondingly, the theory of aesthetics is “anaestheticized” when desensitized against its immanent aesthetic; when it transforms itself into “pure thought”, from which everything “foreign” and materially mediated has been removed.

This critique of aesthetics has a political dimension, because it ultimately addresses the epistemic order, on which the theory of aesthetics relies. That epistemic order is embroiled with power relations<sup>2</sup> based in an economy of exploitation, routed in slavery and patriarchy.<sup>3</sup> This epistemic order denies being mediated by the material conditions, established through these unequal power relations and exploitative practices. This denial of its material basis also implies a denial of the immanence of the aesthetic, which according to Hegel is mediated by sensuous materiality. The denial of the immanence of the aesthetic within the epistemic order has thus a political dimension.

Accounting for the critique of the political aspects of this epistemic order, this paper reinscribes an aesthetic moment into its conceptual form by confronting Hegel's anaestheticized aesthetics with a literary text: *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, which is concerned with both aesthetic resistance against the anaestheticization of aesthetics, and political resistance against the Nazi regime including the racialized capitalist and patriarchal power relations it vindicated (that is, power relations with which the anaestheticized epistemic order is also embroiled). *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, thus, emphasizes the political dimension of the methodological problem of aesthetics criticized by this paper. This critique is influenced by a discourse evolving around the concepts of aestheticization and anaestheticization outlined in the following.

### **“Aestheticization” and “anaestheticization”**

“Aestheticization” refers to the aesthetic transgression and transformation of normative orders outside of art, for example of the political and epistemic field.<sup>4</sup> According to its critics, aestheticization causes crises within such normative orders.<sup>5</sup> Their critique is opposed by positions which regard the aesthetic as inherent to and constitutive for these orders.<sup>6</sup> This critique of the critique of aestheticization shows

<sup>2</sup> Foucault's work on power and knowledge lends evidence to this idea (cf. Michel Foucault, *Der Wille zum Wissen. Sexualität und Wahrheit I*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1977, 75).

<sup>3</sup> Spivak's writings on colonialism's effects on the aesthetics of enlightenment supports this claim (cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Kritik der postkolonialen Vernunft. Hin zu einer Geschichte der verrinnenden Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014). Her attempt to aestheticize the “anaestheticized” philosophy of enlightenment (cf. Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, 16) by “reading it against the grain” (cf. Spivak, *Kritik der postkolonialen Vernunft*, 58f) corresponds with the concern of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ilka Brombach et al. ed., “Ästhetisierung”: *Der Streit um das Ästhetische in Politik, Religion und Erkenntnis* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2010), 7f; Christoph Menke, *Die Kraft der Kunst* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 111.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Platon, *Politeia*, in (idem): *Werke in zehn Bänden, Bd V*, Hüser, Karlheinz (Frankfurt/M. [i.a.]: Insel-Verlag, 1991); Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2007), 46; Jürgen Habermas, “Philosophy and Science as Literature?” in: *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), 222–43.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen. Die Politik der Kunst und ihre Paradoxien* (Berlin: b\_books, 2006); Christoph Menke, *Kraft: Ein Grundbegriff ästhetischer Anthropologie* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2008); Rebentisch, *Die Kunst der Freiheit*.

that the immanence of the aesthetic within the epistemic or political field is involved in both the successful constitution of their normative orders and their destabilization, because by resisting those orders from within, the aesthetic enables their transformation. From this point of view, anaestheticization – not aestheticization – threatens the success of political and epistemic orders.

An early critic of aestheticization was Plato,<sup>7</sup> who disapproved of the aestheticization of politics in democracy<sup>8</sup> and of poetry's putative corruption of the reference to truth in thought.<sup>9</sup> For Plato, the aestheticization of politics resulted from a delimitation of the excessive freedom of art, encroaching on society as a whole and enabling the emergence of democracy as well as its in his view necessary transition into tyranny.<sup>10</sup> Recently, Plato's anti-democratic critique of aestheticization has been refuted by Juliane Rebentisch, who insists that the freedom Plato associates with the aestheticization of politics is not a weakness, but a strength which enables democracy to transform itself.<sup>11</sup>

Similar to Rebentisch's apology of the aestheticization of the normative order of democracy, this paper defends the immanence of the aesthetic within the epistemic order and the theory of aesthetics. Thereby, it returns the critique of anaestheticization to the theoretical discourse of aesthetics itself, and reveals the central contradiction between aesthetics and its subject matter, delineated in the introduction: When the epistemic order denies the immanence of the aesthetic, aesthetics must anaestheticize the aesthetic form and itself – this is what happens in Hegel's aesthetics.

## Hegel's lectures on aesthetics

Hegel's lectures describe a movement which increasingly negates the independent material existence of the "sensuous element" of art, until it finally turns into thought when art is sublated by aesthetics.<sup>12</sup> This movement is represented in three distinct ways – as a shift from art to aesthetics, from symbol to sign and from poetry to prose – all of which are examined in the following.

### From art to aesthetics

According to Hegel, the *aesthetic form of art* mediates its *intelligible content*

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<sup>7</sup> This is contradicted by his own philosophical experiments with literary text forms.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rebentisch, *Die Kunst der Freiheit*, 29ff; Juliane Rebentisch, "Theatrokratie und Theater. Literatur als Philosophie nach Benjamin und Brecht," in: *Literatur als Philosophie – Philosophie als Literatur*, ed. by Eva Horn, Bettine Menke, Christoph Menke (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2006), 297–318.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rancière, *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rebentisch, *Die Kunst der Freiheit*, 29ff, 72ff; Platon, *Politeia*, 595a–608c.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rebentisch, *Die Kunst der Freiheit*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Erster und zweiter Teil*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971), 37f.

through its *sensuous means of expression*.<sup>13</sup> Because of its content, the aesthetic form differs from sensuous existence or materiality; in it spirit begins to grasp its truth and liberates itself from the necessity of nature. However, the aesthetic form cannot realize the deepest truth and highest liberation of spirit, because it also relies on sensuous mediation by its means of expression. This antithetic structure of the aesthetic form – that it is a liberation from sensuous materiality, but also relies on it – is its deficiency for Hegel, which must be surmounted by a form that is no longer mediated sensuously: *aesthetics*. Despite the supposed deficiency of the aesthetic form, *aesthetics* is still a worthwhile form of philosophical inquiry for Hegel, because he sees art as a sensuously alienated form of spirit. Spirit can recognize itself within this “other” by “transmuting” its sensuous element into thought (spirit’s innermost nature).<sup>14</sup> Through this transmutation, the form of aesthetics is generated as a fulfillment of the aesthetic form that realizes art’s striving for truth and liberation. For Hegel, aesthetics is the form in which spirit recognizes itself in its other (the aesthetic form).

The problem with this view is, however, that the transmutation of the sensuous element simultaneously anaestheticizes the aesthetic form, which stops being aesthetic when it is no longer mediated sensuously. But when the aesthetic form is anaestheticized in aesthetics, spirit paradoxically effaces the “other” in which it was supposed to recognize itself. It thereby misses out on both: the aesthetic form, and its self-recognition in it. While for Hegel the true nature of art is realized when it becomes identical to spirit, the actual strength of the aesthetic form is that by pursuing *identity* with its own antithetical, or dialectic form, it remains *non-identical* to spirit.<sup>15</sup> What Hegel sees as the “deficit” of the aesthetic form is actually its *strength*. And the movement through which aesthetics purportedly compensates this “deficit” is in fact its own weakness. Because by purging itself of the aesthetic, aesthetics ultimately undermines the dialectics of its own form.

### From symbol to sign

The described movement is in Hegel’s lectures also represented as a historical development of art, aligned to the stages of theoretical spirit and its products: the symbol and the sign.<sup>16</sup> The development begins with the symbolic art form, which is structurally analog to the form of the symbol produced by symbolizing imagination, and ends with a form that corresponds to the product of memory, the sign. Like intelligence frees itself from material reality by moving through the different stages of theoretical spirit and its products, spirit frees itself from sensuous materiality by

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 52, 565.

<sup>15</sup> Adorno unfolds this dialectic in a similar critique of Hegel’s aesthetics (cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003, 203, 263, 292).

<sup>16</sup> For a similar observation see Paul de Man, *Zeichen und Symbol in Hegels Ästhetik*, in: *Die Ideologie des Ästhetischen*, edited by Christoph Menke (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1993) 39–58; Paul de Man, *Hegel über das Erhabene, Die Ideologie des Ästhetischen*, ed. by Christoph Menke (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1993), 59–82.

historically passing through the different art forms.

The symbol differs from the sign, by holding in its outward appearance the content of the general idea it denotes; it can only represent what corresponds to its external appearance.<sup>17</sup> However, it never becomes identical with that appearance, but retains an ambiguity through which its content goes beyond its sensuous form. Therefore, the symbol is doubtful for Hegel: its meaning cannot be deduced with certainty from its sensuous shape.<sup>18</sup> While symbolic imagination cannot resolve this ambiguity conclusively, memory produces a firm unity between the two sides of the symbolic link. So the meaning no longer needs a sensuous representation and is understood immediately. This marks the transition from symbol to sign, in which the meaning can be represented by any external material.

Like the symbol, the symbolic art form, is doubtful for Hegel.<sup>19</sup> The people who produced it allegedly lived in a “poetic state” and realized their deepest truths as symbolic imaginations, not in the form of thought.<sup>20</sup> This “deficit” is surmounted by classical art in which content and representation form a perfect unity (the ideal) that is no longer symbolic, because all ambiguity has disappeared from it.<sup>21</sup> Although the classical art form is beyond the symbol, it has not yet become a sign, because its perfect integration of sensuous form and intellectual content lacks the indifference of both sides towards each other. Thus, it is merely a transitional form. This “deficiency” is subsequently surmounted by the romantic art form, in which the intelligible content becomes indifferent towards its external sensuous representation. The romantic art form thus corresponds structurally to the form of the sign.

The shift to romantic art is induced by a transformation of art’s intelligible content, which cannot adequately appear in sensuous materiality anymore. Therefore, the ideal disintegrates into two separate sides, the intelligible content and its external appearance. According to Hegel, this division is necessary for spirit to reach a deeper reconciliation “within its own inner element [thought].”<sup>22</sup> In romantic art the transmutation of sensuous materiality is taken a step further. When the intellectual content becomes indifferent towards its sensuous representation, everything – the most common place objects – can represent it equally well. The equivalence of all subject matter, however, also implies its potential dispensability. It has no value in itself anymore, but receives its value solely from the intellectual content which it represents in a negative form. In this sense art in its romantic form is already “without figuration”<sup>23</sup> for Hegel. What appears in it, is not the represented external reality, but the interiority of the

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Erster und zweiter Teil*, 424f.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 426f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 429–37.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 434. Hegel’s remarks on the symbolic art form can be perceived as reproducing orientalist and racist stereotypes. Therefore they must be criticized. A prominent example of such a critique is Spivak’s deconstructive reading of Hegel’s aesthetics (cf. Spivak, 2014, 57ff).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Erster und zweiter Teil*, 436.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 565.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 578.

subject. As the represented reality becomes indifferent, the materiality of the sensuous means of expression gain significance. Hegel exemplifies this by Dutch genre painting, which is a sheer “color composition” for him.<sup>24</sup> However, as no sensuous representation is adequate for the intelligible content anymore, the aesthetic form as such does no longer suffice.<sup>25</sup> Art after its romantic form, thus, has to abolish itself. For Hegel it is “[...] in a field other than art that they [the intelligible content and its exterior form] have to seek their absolute union.”<sup>26</sup> In his view they find it, as already explained, in the philosophy of art (aesthetics).

The movement from the romantic art form to aesthetics corresponds to the transition in theoretical spirit from memory to thought. Memory for Hegel is the form in which intelligence is freed from the bondage of external materiality, because it turns symbols into signs. Memory recognizes the thing in the sign, without needing a retained image or actual perception; it is free from this externality.<sup>27</sup> However, through the mechanical memorization of signs as if they were a list of names without meaning, an “internal exteriority”, is established within intelligence. For Hegel this is the precondition for thinking; without it, thought would have no existence.<sup>28</sup> – Through the mechanical memorization of signs intelligence shifts into thought, like art shifts from the romantic art form into aesthetics: by leaving behind external sensuous materiality. Hegel sees both, thought and aesthetics, as anaestheticized forms which have allegedly overcome the sensuous element.

But although memory operates with signs, it still relies – opposed to Hegel’s conception – on sensuous materiality, because its activity – the memorization of signs like a list of names – “cannot be separated from the notation, registration or inscription of those names.”<sup>29</sup> If mechanical memory still relies on a material trace to provide the “internal exteriority” needed for thinking,<sup>30</sup> then thought itself – as well as aesthetics – remains materially mediated. And because they remain mediated materially, form and content do not find their “absolute union” within them. By reading Hegel against the grain it can be demonstrated that aesthetics and its thought are more aesthetic than Hegel thinks; the theory of aesthetics turns into aesthetic theory.

### From poetry to prose

A third description of the movement delineated by Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics is the shift from poetry to prose. Since they share the same linguistic means of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 666.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 579.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 635.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften III: Philosophie des Geistes* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), 279f.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>29</sup> de Man, *Zeichen und Symbol in Hegels Ästhetik*, 55.

<sup>30</sup> Paul de Man makes a similar point (cf. *ibid.*)

expression, Hegel sees them as different forms of mental representation. As such “poetry” is not limited to literature, but can be expressed in all the arts, regardless of their means of expression. In this sense, poetry is “the general art”<sup>31</sup> for Hegel and becomes akin to the concept of the aesthetic form. The concept of prose, too, is broader than its generic use. “Prose” for Hegel comprises not only prosaic literature, but also the “prose of life” and the “prose of thinking”, which includes theoretical thought, but is not limited to it.<sup>32</sup>

The difference between aesthetics and art is not synonymous with the difference between poetry and prose. Nevertheless, the contradiction between the former can be specified within the latter. The increasing internalization of the sensuous element in the development of the aesthetic form corresponds with Hegel’s taxonomy of the arts, according to which the sensuous element is increasingly idealized throughout the different arts until in poetry it ultimately turns into pure mental representation. In poetry, art exchanges “[...] its external reality with an internal one and maintains an existence only within consciousness itself, as something that is merely represented mentally.”<sup>33</sup> After poetry, the internalization of the sensuous element cannot continue within the aesthetic form. Hegel, therefore, sees “[...] poetry as the art at which art itself begins to dissolve [...]”,<sup>34</sup> where it transitions into the “prose of thought.” While poetry stands at the threshold of speculative thinking, prose for Hegel has crossed that line and is, hence, anaestheticized.

But the prose of thought is actually mediated by the activity of mechanical memory which relies on a material trace, a notation or a text. Hence, it remains – against Hegel’s assessment – an aesthetic form.<sup>35</sup> Poetry, on the other hand, which Hegel sees as the epitome of art, is revealed as an ideological construct, because it denies its need for material mediation. Hence, the poetization of speculative thought Hegel commends,<sup>36</sup> is not an aestheticization of thought (for which it could be mistaken), but its anaestheticization. Prose objects to this anaestheticization by revealing its dependence on the activity of mechanical memory and the “material trace accessible to the senses” it relies on.<sup>37</sup> This trace is the “aesthetic moment”, which marks the beginning of thought.<sup>38</sup> As thought comprises this aesthetic moment, aesthetics – which relies on thought – is an aesthetic form. This aesthetic form, however, is not poetic,

<sup>31</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Erster und Zweiter Teil*, 149.

<sup>32</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Dritter Teil: Die Poesie*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971), 19, 25, 28.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 13f.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Surprisingly, it is the genre most often associated with “poetry”, which is most prosaic – namely lyrical poetry – because it most conspicuously emphasizes the sensuous material aspects of language, such as the sound, the rhythm, and the visual appearance of the text on the page.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel views the task of poetry in a continuous re-melting of prosaic brittleness (cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Dritter Teil: Die Poesie*, 29).

<sup>37</sup> de Man, *Hegel über das Erhabene*, 64.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

but prosaic. Accordingly, aesthetics has been described as a “deeply prosaic discourse on art.”<sup>39</sup>

As a prosaic discourse on art, aesthetics is “political”, because “prose begins in the slave”<sup>40</sup>. It is driven by the activity of mechanical memory – which, by carrying out the “piecework” of memorization, becomes a mere instrument of intellect. Also it “begins in the slave”, quite literally, because it first evolves in a genre invented by a slave – the Aesopian fable. Aesop, to whom the dissemination of his insights was forbidden under the penalty of death,<sup>41</sup> had to invent this prosaic genre to voice his ideas.<sup>42</sup> The prosaic form is thus associated with speaking truth to power from a position of subjection.<sup>43</sup> When aesthetics is considered a prosaic form it is thus “politically just as legitimate and effective as overthrowing an usurped authority.”<sup>44</sup> The Aesopian fable and The Aesthetics of Resistance are both prosaic forms insofar as they describe events in “concrete detail”<sup>45</sup> and accordance with objective material reality.<sup>46</sup> In its prosaic form The Aesthetics of Resistance can be read as a contribution to the political discourse that begins in the slave.<sup>47</sup>

### The aesthetics of resistance

The Aesthetics of Resistance describes the history of socialist resistance before and during World War II. The historical events are presented from the perspective of a nameless protagonist who in Swedish exile under the influence of Brecht starts writing, and is eventually revealed as the fictional author of the text. Accounts of historical developments are repeatedly interrupted by ekphrases of canonical artworks, analyzed in relation to the described events. The artworks are criticized from the perspective of the working class and reclaimed for its liberation struggle. Because of the quasi-theoretical discussions about art’s relationship to society and politics, the text can be read as a contribution to the discourse of aesthetics; this is also suggested by the title, which presents it as an *aesthetics* of resistance.

The title is ambiguous, not only because of the genitive’s double meaning, but also because the term “aesthetics” is polysemous: it can refer to a theoretical discourse

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 369f.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. ibid. Hegel, “Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I,” 497.

<sup>43</sup> It is thus related to Foucault’s concept of “Parrhesia” (Cf. Michel Foucault, *Diskurs und Wahrheit. Berkeley-Vorlesungen 1983* /Berlin: Merve, 1996/).

<sup>44</sup> de Man, *Hegel über das Erhabene*, 79.

<sup>45</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I. Werke, Bd. 13*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer et. al (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), 495. Aesopian fables are “fictional”, but they employ a realistic, detailed mode of description.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. ibid., 494f.

<sup>47</sup> *The Aesthetics of Resistance* references Aesop explicitly (cf. Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 369f., 383) which could be understood as a self-reflexive gesture concerning its own aesthetic form.

on art and to a nominalized form of the adjective “aesthetic”, usually associated with art. Both meanings resonate in the title and correspond to an actual ambiguity within the text, which can be read as both, a contribution to the discourse of aesthetics and as a literary text. The text renegotiates the boundaries between the theory of aesthetics and the aesthetic form of art. Contrarily to Hegel’s aesthetics its description of other artworks results again in an aesthetic form. Thus it aestheticizes aesthetics and resists against the epistemic order which denies the immanence of the aesthetic. The term “resistance” in the title of the book, hence, refers to the political resistance the text speaks about and to the aesthetic resistance the text accomplishes. How the aesthetic resistance is realized and intertwined with the political aspect of the text is discussed below.

### Anaesthesia as aesthetic principle

“Anesthesia belongs to highly engaged, position taking art, because without its help we would be overwhelmed, either by compassion for the suffering of others or by our own suffering [...], and couldn’t transform our silence, our paralysis of terror, into the aggression needed to eliminate the causes of the nightmare.”<sup>48</sup> This passage seems to perform the very “anesthesia” it deems necessary for “engaged” art.<sup>49</sup> Articulated is not the perspective of the fictitious author, but of one of his friends (Heilmann); for him the “anesthesia” of political art is liberating, because it implies a transferal of suffering into language: “The agony of dream and literature, as Heilmann said, was the extradition to a situation from which no escape was possible, there everything would happen to us as if it was real, but as in dreaming the insufferable would lead to awakening, so in literature it would be liberated by its transfer into the word.”<sup>50</sup> Literature is compared to both, the sufferance of the nightmare and the liberation from it in the word.

This structure is analogue to the Hegel’s antithetic determination of the aesthetic form which is at once mediated by sensuous materiality and a liberation from it. If it was only sensuous (dreaming) it would remain suffering, so it must liberate itself from that suffering (awakening); if it would cease to be sensuous and forget the suffering of the nightmare, however, it would become complicit to what it strives to abolish. This is why Adorno writes that “[...] it would be more desirable that someday art would disappear, then that it would forget the suffering, which is its expression and at which form has its substance.”<sup>51</sup> Art must paradoxically be both, dream and awakening, sensuous and liberation from sensuousness. Literature, as well as the aesthetic form of art in general, resists a reduction to either one of the sides. It is aesthetic, because it anesthetizes sensuous materiality; it cannot wake, if it does not dream.

<sup>48</sup> Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 104.

<sup>49</sup> The “anaesthesia” of sensuous materiality, which produces the aesthetic form, is not identical to the “anaesthetization” of the aesthetic, which is the anesthesia of an already partially anesthetized form (the aesthetic form).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 387.

While this dialectic of the aesthetic form is for Hegel surmounted by aesthetics, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* re-inscribes it into aesthetics. To further elucidate this, consider the following description of Piero della Francesca's "dreams"<sup>52</sup>: "Shadowless, in a room without depth, were the figures, with their weapons, warhorses and flags [...], and every detail, may it be [...] a buckle, a hinge, a panache, the eye of a soldier or a horse, was equal, subjected to no other laws, than those enacted by the composition ground."<sup>53</sup> The style of this ekphrasis is characterized by "cold distance" and "attention to detail";<sup>54</sup> and has been described as an apparatus-like "registry."<sup>55</sup> The coldness of the description is also inherent in the described painting. The narrator's friend describes as it "[...] found this gaze cold, withdrawn [...] every sentiment was cut off to the benefit of a wattlework of visual relationships."<sup>56</sup> The painting distances itself from material reality to produce its own material composition: "[...] despite its figurative content, it wanted to imitate nothing of nature [...] the event in it was an accord of colors."<sup>57</sup>

This recalls Hegel's description of romantic art, in which the means of expression begin to overshadow the represented reality and the painting becomes a sheer "color composition."<sup>58</sup> As opposed to Hegel's aesthetics, the description in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, however, is itself an aesthetic composition, similar to the one it describes. In the quoted passage each minor detail turns into a fragment of equal importance. The text does not only speak about the equality provided by the laws of the composition ground, but reproduces it in its own materiality. In *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, the seemingly anaestheticized form of aesthetics is mediated through this materiality of the text and, thereby, turns into an aesthetic form.

#### Prosaic form of the aesthetic

The form of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* is prosaic. Its prose is opposed to the aesthetic form of poetic unity, which – as explained above – is ideological because it ultimately denies its sensuous mediation. The prosaic approach of Weiss' novel is exemplified by the many ekphrases of artworks it contains. They fit seamlessly into the text, because they are in line with its general descriptive approach. In this novel the description seems to turn everything it touches into prose – even poetic artworks. Consider the following ekphrasis of the *Pergamon Frieze* (a poetic artwork in the Hegelian sense): "Around us bodies lifted themselves out of the stone [...] intertwined or scattered to fragments, with a torso, a resting arm, a cracked hip, a scabbed chunk suggesting its shape, always in a gesture of combat, evasive, rebounding, attacking,

<sup>52</sup> Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 104.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Genia Schulz, "Die Ästhetik des Widerstands": *Versionen des Indirekten in Peter Weiss' Roman* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1986), 109.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>56</sup> Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 105.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik: Erster und Zweiter Teil*, 666.

shielding, stretched up, bent, here and there obliterated, but still pegged [...] into one single joint movement.”<sup>59</sup> Through the detailed description of the artwork, the text is splintered into fragments. The poetic unity of the classical artwork described by the text, is transformed by the prosaic description of the text. The description does not reproduce the poetic form of the artwork it describes, but turns it into a prosaic form.

“Prosaic” refers to a concept of the aesthetic form which reveals its material mediation. The prosaicness of *The Aesthetics of Resistance* is manifest in its emphasis of the materiality of its text. Firstly, this is expressed by the prevalent listings of details, names and dates.<sup>60</sup> The reading of such lists is “piecework” and points towards the activity of mechanical memory, which memorizes signs “as if they were a list of names.”<sup>61</sup> Through the cumbersome listings of details the text seems to strive for a reproduction of the external sensuous reality, but in fact emphasizes its own materiality. Thereby, the mediation of the description by the text is revealed. Secondly, the text’s materiality is emphasized by its unusual layout, which refrains from the use of paragraphs, and employs instead large “text blocks”, in which different text layers are squashed together. These text blocks loom heavy on the page, like marble cubicles from the Pergamon Frieze, tugged and carved by the Pergaminian slaves and workers. The description of the struggle of the giants against the Olympian Gods depicted by the Pergamon Frieze, is mediated by this stone like materiality of the text.

However, the description does not become identical with this materiality. While in the actual frieze the wretched remain paralyzed by the terror of the gods, in the description by the novel they seem to awaken from their nightmare and become liberated from their petrification. The text thus has the dialectical structure of an aesthetic form: it acquires a stone like quality through which its content is mediated, but at the same time it is also a liberation from this petrification. Unlike poetry, which strives to abolish its sensuous mediation, this text explicitly exposes it, and thereby, reveals itself as an aesthetic form. And this form is prosaic. As the text can be read not only as literature, but also as a contribution to the discourse of aesthetics, it re-inscribes the dialectics of the aesthetic form into aesthetics. *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, thus, resists to the anaestheticization of aesthetics by transforming it into an aesthetic form.

## Conclusion

In summary, the confrontation of Hegel’s aesthetics with *The Aesthetics of Resistance* has substantiated and concretized the problem of the anaestheticization of aesthetics and its thinking. The close reading of Hegel’s aesthetics has brought to light its lack of aesthetic thinking and the dissolution of the dialectics of the aesthetic form in aesthetics. This anaestheticization was criticized according to its three representations

<sup>59</sup> Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Often the text itself reads like a list (see the quotes ekphrases); sometimes a list is also explicitly installed into the text (*ibid.*, 838).

<sup>61</sup> Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften III*, 280.

in Hegel's lectures, as a movement from art to aesthetics, from symbol to sign, and from poetry to prose. Subsequently, The Aesthetics of Resistance was introduced as a reversal of the criticized movement; as a form of aesthetics which re-aesthetizes aesthetics and its thinking. This aesthetic resistance – a resistance against the epistemic order which denies the immanence of the aesthetic due to its entanglement in exploitative power relations – was further analyzed through the exploration of the aesthetic form of the text. This form was revealed as prosaic rather than poetic. That is, it was recognized as a form, which emphasizes its own mediation through the material trace of the text. In conclusion, Hegel's aesthetics conforms to the epistemic order and its anaestheticization of thought, while The Aesthetics of Resistance resist to that order and its political implications through the aestheticization of aesthetics.

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