Inseparable from economic advantage was the superiority of knowledge. Ownership involved greed, and the advantaged tried as long as possible to block the road to education for the have-nots. The privileges of the ruling class could not be eliminated until we gained insight into the conditions and acquired fundamental knowledge. We kept getting repulsed over and over because our ability to think, to deduce, and conclude was insufficiently developed. This state of affairs began changing with the realisation that the upper classes essentially opposed our thirst for knowledge. Ever since, our most important goal was to conquer an education, a skill. In every field of research, by using any means, cunning and strength of mind. From the very outset, our studying was rebellion.
strata which we have to lift off so that we can find ourselves. That is what I wanted to say. That no equality exists. That no matter how hard we strive for independence, we always bump into someone who prescribes what we have to do. That we are incessantly regimented. That no matter how right the things presented to us are, they are nevertheless wrong so long as they do not come from ourselves, from myself. But the Party, someone else threw in, it stands for us, we are the Party. That is what they say, replied Münzer. But the people who say that usually come from the upper regions. And when they say it, they have a transcendental aura. They rely on their decision-making privilege and on our compliancy; they remain unapproachable by dint of their rank. Diaz leapt up, for a while only an excited tangle of voices could be heard, but then Hodann likewise got to his feet and shouted with unexpected sharpness that Münzer still had the floor. In the ensuing hush, Münzer said that there was a lot of talk about the future man in the future society, but that we absolutely had to think about today’s people, for if they were fearful and humiliated, crooked and crippled, then they would be of little use to the people of the future. The so-called policy of freedom, aimed as in Spain at the authoritative, centralist model, said Hodann, basically belonged to a bourgeois revolution. In their rejection of political actions and in their striving for independent production collectives, the anarcho-syndicalists were following a populistic direction, in stressing individualistic values they did not want to get beyond small natural work groups. Just as they were against the mass organisations, the bureaucratic Party machine, the state machinery, so too they opposed technological development, the planned economy. In a romantic, nostalgic artisanship, instead of impelling it forward toward a socialist economy. Münzer for his part recurred to the conscious personal limitation, the discipline bordering on self-surrender, that threatened to stiffen, to harden the Communists. The greatest freedom, he was answered, was precisely to be found in this resolve to step back as an individual for the good of the cause, which was the best for the many. Settling the conflict, Hodann insisted that we focus on the Spanish problems, especially since tonight a member of the Socialist Youth Alliance was to join our discussion...

Peter Weiss’s ‘The Aesthetics of Resistance’ is an astonishing book. We are publishing these three extracts as some sort of taster, let’s be clear about that. If we could we would type up the entire book and publish it for free. But then there is the problem of the second and third books which are, as yet, untranslated into English.

The story concerns three young workers in pre-war Nazi Germany who are in the midst of an all-encompassing struggle to use, re-think and seize the content of earlier art works, be they bourgeois culture that works for us in our own self-education and collective self-understanding and that furthers our fight against capitalism? It is neither a matter of reclaiming old artworks for the working class nor of becoming artists and writers to compete in that same order but to ‘contest the oppressive living conditions’ with the precise desire that culture in any future post-capitalist world would come ‘from ourselves’, the distinctions between art and life being destroyed in a world of totally remade social relationships.

The setting is poignant and ever disturbing, as the young workers view the final disintegration of the promise of the Russian Revolution of 1917 into Stalinist tyranny alongside the rising darkness and violence of German fascism. The final part of Volume One of The Aesthetics of Resistance sees the narrator travelling to fight on the Republican side in the last years of the Spanish Civil War where the determined practice of the Anarchists to hold firm to the gains of the social revolution are under attack from the Russian-controlled Communist Party’s notion of strict adherence to Party discipline to win the war.

But this is not a historical novel despite the slightly askew real life characters that come and go throughout the book. It’s a book whose form is as startling as its content. Written as large blocks of text with various
devices for contrast, juxtaposition, jumps in time and setting, the way the book reads is an aid to understanding the slow and revelatory way the young workers dig in, maul and find political use from the art and writing they encounter.

The pertinent questions for us, and from this book you could find one on every page, are what are the ways in which we can self-educate and what are the times and spaces where we can do this? School and college education is systematically being dumbed-down accompanied by both an increase in ideological push against learning for knowledge and understanding towards sheer vocational training and a decrease in the ease of access for poorer people. How do we continue the tradition of self-learning and collective teaching? What practices, tools and styles are useful - free schools, publishing, alternative and radical pedagogies, occupations, teach-ins and so on. How do we learn, where do we learn but also how does this fit in with the everyday struggles against work, that time thief that prevents us from spending the days reading, talking, looking, producing things by and for ourselves.

Also, how do we deal with questions and tensions around art and politics and what use can we make of any politically engaged art that itself isn't rigidly ideological. What would be a public culture that doesn't merely represent and bolster either bourgeois notions of taste and value or maintain the ideological positions that ensnare us in the totalising 'second nature' feel of social relations under capitalism?

We recommend you get a copy of The Aesthetics of Resistance and devour it. We also highly recommend the value of reading this book as part of a reading group.
very lofty glass roof down to the second floor gallery, lightly fluttered in the breeze over the wooden hoop of the candelabrum, was part of the effort to transform the nature of the confiscated building, but the perforated rolls, inserted into the piano case at the outset of the discussion and emitting the Tannhauser overture, Cavallria Rusticana, and Sibelius's Tristesse, had actually hammered the ghostliness in. The winged lions pulled here too, on small slabs, around the walls, and angels, with worn naked chests, hoisted themselves out of the door frames. Security was simulated by the seething distillation apparatus and by the mugs filled with a few drops and handed around but, freezing, we huddled together on the wall benches and around the tremendous boardroom table, and our breath rose in clouds from our mouths. Most of us were still silent, and how could we even think of a discussion, someone asked, if every utterance was to be recorded and, should the occasion arise, be laid at the speaker's door. Hodann designated himself as liable for all the statements, he alone, as head, as officer, could be called to account by superiors. This was rejected, it was paradoxical, they said, that people who, conscious of their responsibility, had joined the defence, should agree to be patronised. Each man, they said, had to answer for his own words because they were all under the same flag. Hodann's remark may have been deliberately provocative. He turned to Diaz and said that the power of dogmatism had to be countered by increased historical, scholarly, scientific, and philosophical education, voicing opinions was unavoidable precisely in a critical situation. That, Diaz replied through his interpreter, would bring about anarchism at a time when the working class needed the tightest possible organisation to resist the irruption of chaos. Actually the restraint effected by Diaz and his group of followers was consistent with our situation, for the desire to explore was bound to trigger protests from men advocating the commandment of unconditional allegiance. This was the case not only in this circle but also wherever the Party of the Proletariat fought to maintain and expand its positions. We were in a state of war, no latitude could be given for doubts and deviations, the orders of the higher Party organs were binding and brooked no contradiction. Hence Hodann's project was dangerous, and it could awaken the suspicion that he indeed had anarchistic or bourgeois-liberal motives for trying to pilot the discussion. The question of whether an open debate was at all possible could theoretically widen into the pronouncement that, given the enemy's watchfulness, the slightest mistake on our part could have devastating consequences. But that would mean, said the first speaker, whose powerful face, de-

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...Inseparable from economic advantage was the superiority of knowledge. Ownership involved greed, and the advantaged tried as long as possible to block the road to education for the have-nots. The privileges of the ruling class could not be eliminated until we gained insight into the conditions and acquired fundamental knowledge. We kept getting repulsed over and over because our ability to think, to deduce, and conclude was insufficiently developed. This state of affairs began changing with the realisation that the upper classes essentially opposed our thirst for knowledge. Ever since, our most important goal was to conquer an education, a skill. In every field of research, by using any means, cunning and strength of mind. From the very outset, our studying was rebellion. We gathered material to defend ourselves and prepare a conquest. Seldom haphazardly, mostly because we continued with the things we understood, we moved from one object to the next, fending off weariness and familiar perspectives as well as the constant argument that we could not be up to the strain of self-education at the end of the workday. While our numb minds often had to squeeze out of a void and relearn nimbleness after monotony, we did not want paid labour to be either derogated or despised. In rejecting the opinion that it was a special achievement for people like us to deal with artistic, scientific, and scholarly problems, we wished to maintain ourselves in work that did not belong to us. When Coppi's father, in a dark suit shiny from many brushings, a collarless shirt, a beret pulled way back from the forehead, with a battered briefcase under his arm, entered the kitchen and stood by the table, we all felt the day hanging down on us and the huge gap we had to overcome before laying claim to imagination, excessive mental pressure, or meditative leisure. Once, we had furiously refused to admit that reading a book, going to an art gallery, a concert hall, a theatre would require extra sweat and racking of the mind. Meanwhile our attempts to escape speechlessness were among the functions of our lives, the things we thereby found were first articulations, they were basic patterns for overcoming muteness and measuring the steps into a cultural realm. Our idea of a culture rarely coincided with what constituted a gigantic reservoir of goods, of pent-up inventions and illuminations. As have-nots we initially approached the accumulations with anxiety, with awe, until it dawned on us that we had to fill these things with our own evaluations, that the overall concept might be useful
only when expressing something about the conditions of our lives as well as about the difficulties and peculiarities of our thought processes. The topic had been taking up by Lunacharsky, Tretyakow, Trotsky, whose books we were familiar with; we also knew about the initiative that had emerged during the twenties for educating worker-writers, and in study groups we had discussed the statements that Marx, Engels and Lenin made about cultural issues. All these things may have been informative, stimulating, and perhaps also indicative of the future, but they did not chime with the totality we were striving for, instead they expressed traditional notions, conventions that ultimately did not renounce the standards of the dominant class. We too, as we were told by progressives, should benefit from what was known as culture, we recognised the greatness and power of many works, we began understanding how the social stratifications, contradictions, and conflicts were mirrored in artistic products of eras, but we did not yet achieve an image that included us ourselves, everything that was supposed to jibe with us was a conglomerate of forms and styles borrowed from various sources. Whatever we read into completed things could only confront us with our own exclusion, when we were in the midst of discovering timeless and powerful things, we ran the risk of estrangement from our own class. Our using new names, new associations aroused the distrust of those who had been so violently raped by the predominance of bourgeois ideology that they did not even contemplate gaining any access to intellectual levels. Yet we only had to glance at their faces to recall the expressive power concealed in them. Before nineteen thirty-three, when I sometimes visited my father during lunch breaks at work, a representative of an educational alliance might be lecturing or reading poetry in the canteen, and I realised how impossible it was to establish a link to the intellectual regions in this way. There the workers sat over their metal boxes, their thermos bottles, their sandwiches wrapped in greasy paper, their ears half-deaf from the smashing of metal and the riveting hammers, with only twenty minutes allotted them for eating, and the reason they kept avert their faces from the speaker and crouching deep over the table was not that they had to wolf down their food, but that they were embarrassed at failing to make head or tail of the well-meaning presentation they were offered. When they subsequently applauded, about to dash back to the factory halls, they clapped out of politeness, he, the artist, got something from them, but they left empty handed. This efunken, the six members of the editorial committee spelled one another, monitoring the landspeaker. At night, however, the summing-up of the bulletins triggered the dichotomy inherent in every utterance. What should we select, we wondered, how could the enemy’s announcements be set off most urgently against the Republican reports, how could omissions, obscure presentations be translated into comprehensible facts, just what, in the roaring profusion of voices, was important, tenable, showed the way. The reports we received from the transmitter of the brigades, short-wave frequency twenty-nine point eight, constituted a norm for the pages we tacked on the hallway bulletin board every morning. Here, from Madrid, we heard whatever concered all of us in the same measure, about the status of international aid, about the further efforts at unity, about the situation in Germany. And again we caught the names of those who supported the Spanish struggle, who were here, like Renn, Uhse, Weinert, Bredel, Regler, Busch, Marchwitza, Seghers, Kisch, Alfred Neumann, Alberti, Hemingway, Ivens, Ehrenburg, Malraux, Saint-Exupery, Branting, Toller, Spender, Dos Passos, Neruda, Siqueiros, or those who addressed the public from abroad, people like Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann, Arnold Zweig, Feuchtwanger, Brecht, Wolf, Piscator, Roland, Shaw. What we did not write was that the circle of solidarity was very small, compared with the enormous concentration of forces steering toward a world war, and that it was always the same voices warming, calling for common sense. In France, in the British labour movement, in Scandinavia, in the United States, in Indochina, and especially in China, we looked for any hint of socialist development, every demonstration, every agitation, every strike helped our cause. And then came along Diaz, first he complained about the radio reporting, the many sides of which simply made it confusing, and as for the wall newspaper, which appealed to most of the men, Diaz called it an inadequate outlet that made further discussion extraneous. No, replied Hoddan, the wall newspaper only reproduced something, and while it was informative and useful, the real benefits were the conclusions drawn from this review and the comments it provoked. In late October, he had ordered a meeting in the hall. The winter was early, with storms and rain squalls, the bats, one of which was preserved in Albacete’s municipal coat of arms, threw themselves against the house, emblems torn loose, blindly fluttering around the symbiosis of banking, and latifundia, we heard them thumping against the colourful panes of the windows above the stairs, and the dull thuds mingled with the crackling of the wood burning in the fireplace. The red flag, hanging from the
A few men still baulked at dealing with their situation, reflection could be disconcerting, the men lacked any direct guidance for overcoming their ill humour. Others, albeit, undecided, voiced the notion that the goals in Spain were not just military and political, their task was to change human beings and all their living conditions, and such a change would only if it were implemented in each person's consciousness. Yet such ideas also revealed how shaky, how unlikely they were, for the things we were mainly confronted with in this seclusion were distress and scarcity, were the unspeakable difficulties in procuring even the most makeshift necessities, the constant search for surrogates for whatever we lacked. We had no medications for calming the mentally disturbed, nor could we use pain-killing injections since many of the patients had dysentery, and the hygienic equipment was inadequate, so the issue of the importance of one's own personhood sounded almost ludicrous. But that was precisely where Hodann's argument began, each man, he said, was part of the forces working on the future. No one must lag behind the decision-makers and let himself be patronised. Having evinced courage and steadfastness at the front, they should now practice mental endurance. However, the contradiction still existed between Hodann's demand for sincerity, questioning, criticism and Díaz's emphasis on the necessity for unconditional agreement with the proclaimed policy, and the gap elicited a reaction of caution and distrust at every larger meeting. When Díaz called for ideological firmness, Hodann declared that our allegiance could never be damaged by the demand for constantly examining the politics that we had chosen as our own. If anyone ventured to speak, he performed a balancing act between the desire to gain clarity in an issue and striving to say nothing that might flout the official resolutions. We know, cried Hodann, the integrity of your stance, so you do not have to look for the correctness of every single word, you do not have to make an effort to repeat what you have learned, instead you might tackle things that are still vague, imprecise. But there was no way of eliminating their inner tension, their fear of being reported by the commissar. Heightened alertness was the law. The man whose views did not conform to the specific model was bound to face mistrust. Each man was intent on proving that he was doing his duty, that he was rigorously following the current catchphrases. No matter how convinced he was of his own loyalty, the fear of something suspect could sometimes almost tear him apart. Amid all these unresolved matters only the news service found a continuous form. This was something regulated, iron-clad. Technicians had supplied a roof antenna for the radio receiver, a Tel-
could be used in the political struggle, and we accepted it if it was openly partisan. But then again we stumbled on things that did not reveal an immediate political impact and yet had disturbing and, we felt, important qualities. If books or paintings of this sort, especially when decried as degenerate by the new rulers, were removed from public collections, then we felt all the more strongly about including them in the registers of sabotage acts and revolutionary manifestations. We had already been impressed by Surrealism when Hodann, in Haeckel Hall, proceeding from numerous questions about the origins of neurosis, depressions, and obsessions, pointed out the links between social conditions and illness motives, the dream impulses, and explained the repercussions in an art that followed the unhindered torrent of inspirations. This kind of expression transcending logic, acknowledging all exotic terrifying things in order to thrust forward to the causes of personal behaviour, was right up our alley in our search to find ourselves. After all, we distrusted anything that was definite and solid, and beneath the envelope of legitimacies we saw the manipulations that were destroying many of us. Dadaism likewise evinced some of our tendencies, it had split into elegant parlours, it had toppled the plaster busts from their pedestals and shredded the garlands of petty bourgeois self-aggrandisment, that was fine with us, we endorsed the ridiculing of dignity, the deriding of holiness, but we had no time for the call for a total annihilation of art, people who were sated with culture could afford such slogans, but we wanted to take over the cultural institutions left unscathed and see which of their contents could be made serviceable for our craving to learn. In the paintings of Max Ernst, Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Schwitters, Dali, Magritte, we saw dissolutions of visual biases, lightning flashes exposing rot and ferment, panic and upheaval, we drew the line between attacks on worn-out, perishing things and mere thumb nosing that ultimately left the market in peace. We thrashed out the conflict between those who preferred to depict the present in its intricacy, fragmentation, and chaos making it blaze and burn, like Nolde, Kokoschka, or Beckmann, and those who preferred to render the disintegration objectively and accurately, like Dix and Grosz, who painstakingly dissected and measured the existing reality, like Feininger. Spurred on by the fiat of mandating what art now meant, by the censoring measures that disclosed the undermining abilities that the rulers ascribed to painting and literature, we constantly sought out books and magazines contain-arduousness of the overall project initiated by Hodann and was then thwarted by the remark that it made no sense thrashing out issues of wage labour that they were all acquainted with. What interested them, they said, was information about the military and political developments. The news reaching us twice a week from Albacete was not enough to supply a picture of the situation, these men wanted precise facts about the fight with the anarchists and the Marxist opposition, about the intentions of the Popular Front government and the Socialist Party, about the background of the war, about countless details that had always required elucidation by an expert. As long as the experts had not yet arrived, Hodann again wondered whether each man’s image of the International Brigades might not be deepened if they presented the motives that had brought them here. Perhaps it was proof of strength that nothing could be said about this, that they had come simply because this was the only possible thing for them to do. But Hodann was not satisfied with that, and it was only when it came to a conflict between him and Diaz that some of the men began to understand what he was after. Diaz, the deputy from Marty’s staff, had to watch out for any deviations from the correct line. To him, probing the possibilities of self-studies was questionable. He opposed the idea of assigning a group to listen to and elaborate on radio reports. You see your job, said Hodann, as goading the troops on with speeches buoyed by sloganising optimism. You believe you can maintain Party discipline only with the principles of orders and obedience. You build on the authoritarian models to which many of the volunteers feel close by force of habit, and you thereby prevent them from freely speaking their minds. When fighting, they did not ask one another about party membership, they judged one another purely by their military abilities, by how reliable they were. The Popular Front was put into practice there. Here, the cooperation that prevailed in the combat sector has to be practice in a different way. The responsibility that each man bore in the field is still the same, but it has less to do with the immediate adjustment and integration than with a self-reliance that has yet to be formulated. Since according to the statutes it is a political commissar’s obligation to look after the person, not the soldier, you have to do all you can to foster the initiative, the inventiveness of each individual. After the vehement retorts from the man responsible for political matters, the only decision was to authorise a news service, but now more and more of the men became active. Since my main function was nursing, which brought me into contact with all the patients in the home, I could take in some of the deliberations emerging all around me.
roic, said Hodann, than protecting the fighting troops. The greatest sacrifices, I protested, were being made at the front, and no work as an organiser or first-aid volunteer could replace that service. And yet, said Hodann, you are where you are needed most, and now we had walked through the pine grove, over to the whitewashed barrack with its twenty double beds, where the apathetic patients were lying here and there.

...They had to begin with the men who suffered the most from being inactive, who were tied to no language, who could communicate only by showing their wounds, but otherwise held their tongues. The promise of communality had to be demonstrated to them, a few Danes, Swedes, Yugoslavs; the daily atheletic hours, the soccer matches, the games of pinochle, of chess, the gatherings at the electric piano in the hall of the main building were of no help. One had to start with the men who felt the most alien, yet that touched on something that applied to all the others too, the fundamental difficulty of expressing oneself. It it was a matter of standing up for a cause, each man could muster all his energy and generosity, but when asked about his experiences, his leanings, he had to grope for words, and he was beset with the inhibitions imposed on him since his youth. Coming from kinds of trades, they might have shared their opinions on vocational problems, but their modesty prevented them from voicing theoretical statements. Hodann's goal was to make them sure that they experienced their stint in the sick ward not as a weakness, a failure, but as a new concrete task, to be performed as matter-of-factly as when they had chosen their side in the struggle. Just as they could rely on one another at the front, so too they now had to fortify one another with organised conversations, discussions. Lecturers, training leaders had been requested, but instead of waiting for them, said Hodann, they could start the instruction themselves, in their own group, for everyone who had learned something ought to be able to impart his knowledge, everyone was a potential teacher, and by sharing what he knew he would not only gain in self-confirmation, he would also inspire his listerners to have faith in their own knowledge. But Hodann's suggestions, in the barracks or at meetings in the manor hall with its wooden panelling and high ceiling, were greeted with embarrassment. All these men certainly wanted to learn, to continue their education, but they could find nothing that they felt was worth passing on. English translations and Hodann's familiarity with Norwegian drew the foreign comrades into deliberations and the laboriousness of this procedure matched the ing testimonies by the pioneers, who were now working surreptitiously or had gone abroad. As we wondered if secret poetic languages, image codes, and magic symbols were appropriate for depicting obscure seemingly irrational processes or if, confronted with the unintelligible, an unambiguous rendering was necessary, Heilmann joined us after reading us his translation of Rimbaud's Un Saison en enfer at Gleisdreck Station on the way back from night school. Both sides are correct, said Heilmann, the lunge that yanks the ground out from under our feet as well as the effort to establish a solid basis for investigating simple facts. Most people are too remote from such inquiries, said Coppi's father, to see any necessity in them, your words fly past them. There was a humming in the ears, it would not be penetrated by words coming from a stage, from the notes emitted by the strings and woodwinds on the platform, and besides, sitting with a painful back on the folding chair was impossible. The to-and-fro of arms in the blackness of the tuxedo and the stuff hammered into the keys and gushing out of the yawning piano up front would be torture for a head in an iron ring. Before starting with their painted lips, their ambivalent gestures, spotlighted in their rich colourfulness, surrounded by artificial spaces, they had to comply with their need to sleep. They hung fast, to the limits of endurability, between the straps of the workbenches, and the cold hardness of the concrete floor banged incessantly against their feet. These people had been up since three of four AM, and if they tried for a while, said Coppi's mother, to escape the place where they were beaten to a pulp, they would sink into the cushions of a seat between Rembrandt and Rubens, they would feverishly pull the blankets over their faces. There could be no question of getting to understand the things written in thick tomes, going to windows, filling out forms, specifying wishes, which meant admitting to total ignorance. From the metal factory, from the railroad houses, from the terminals of buses, beaten paths were all that led in directions that could be taken with half-shut eyes, mechanically dragging feet. The problem was not how one style developed from another, but what would happen if one day of sickness were followed by a second day of feebleness, for given the paltry government support the third day would bring naked need. It was more likely for illness to assault the toiler than for knowledge to come to him, his eyes stumbled over the lines along which his fingers moved, his lips murmured something that his brain promptly forgot. Catastrophe invaded the room where the rent could no longer be paid
and where the landlord now barged in without knocking. Things leading to catharsis in the lofty admired dramas were now mercilessly transplanted into daily practice amid utter secrecy and discretion. Working, said Coppi's mother, become even harder after an interruption. Nevertheless, replied Coppi, we have to keep asking ourselves what our mission is, no one else can explain to us the structure we are caught in. And that was exactly what allowed us to talk about the things that could not really be accessible to us. To interpret theories that might say something about the ways and means of our liberation, we first had to understand the system we were moving in. The fact that we had not yet achieved anything was shown now that the loss of self was greater than ever. Cultural work was Coppi's term for the transition from enclosure in the factory to the openness of the night school class, for getting there was the achievement, it had to succeed, it had to overcome the exhaustion that tried to hold us back. More than half of the participants dropped out after the first few sessions. The foreheads striking the desk, beaten down by twelve hours, were made of lead by seven PM. The school system took these casualties into account, the survivors held their eyes open with their fingers, gaped at the blurring blackboards, pinched themselves in the arm, scribbled up their notebooks, and during the final phase more participants dropped out, they only had to lose a week because of apartment hunting, job hunting, because of an accident or simply because of discouragement, and they were yanked out of the class. It would have been presumptuous to try and talk about art without hearing the shuffling as we shoved one foot in front of the other. Every metre toward the painting, the book, was a battle, we crawled, pushed ourselves... we viewed a painting was a web of threads, shiny threads, clotting into lumps, flowing apart, shaping into fields of brightnesses, darknesses, and the switch-gears of our optic nerves marshaled the oncoming storm of tiny luminous dots into messages that could be deciphered. We could recall all the circumstance along the road to knowledge because we remained in a constant stage of preparation, because we sometimes never got beyond the start, because nothing was handed to us on a silver platter, because the encounter with a literary, an artistic subject could never be taken for granted. It was only with the works of Socialist Realism that we held back our questions mutual trust. The sole task out there was to defeat the adversary. Now that they were separated from their units and left to their own devices, their shock-like experiences were making themselves felt and had to be overcome. When they had faced the enemy, there had been no doubts, no vagueness. The anti-fascist struggle in Spain was the touchstone for a generation of workers and intellectuals. By joining the battalions, they had taken an unequivocal stand. In their partisanship they had been able to transcend any imbalance in their personal lives. It was only here, in this banal seclusion that they felt their own needs reasserting themselves. Not only was the sexual abstinence disquieting, but ambivalences, antagonisms in the political picture haunted them, evoking questions that they, however, did not dare to ask. And so they were assailed by gloom, by brooding. They, whose sincerity was beyond a shadow of a doubt, revealed anxious, unworthy characteristics, they grew quarrelsome, often, to their own surprise, indulging in outburst, which may have merely been signs of a desire to be brought back to their senses by objections, rebukes. With more than a hundred patients, only one assistant doctor, and a few trained people, it was impossible for Hodann to fulfil every wish for conversation and support. One of my tasks would be to aid him in trying to activate the convalescents, say, by forming study groups or publishing a news sheet, a wall newspaper. Under Hodann's gaze, I realised what the decision of this hour would mean to me. I wondered whether I was capable of performing the administrative job demanded of me and whether I was not about to retreat. Hodann's eyes were nearly black, his right eye was bigger, the brow pulled up. I had counted on joining the military units. There were three front lines in this war, the military, the political, and the cultural front. Although they formed an inseparable whole, the military front was the most tangible, here the actions led to an immediate outcome, were carried out by and on one's own self. The front was simple, clear-cut. It fitted in with the intentions of most people who had set out for Spain. Now, after I saw the marked faces of the men who had returned from the front lines, it became clear to me that during my preparations I had never weighed the possibility of losing my life there. Had I instantly joined the armed units, then this fearlessness might have continued. But now, held back here, I became aware of the tremendous risk of participating in a war, I became conscious of how terrible and indeed unnatural this conflict was. If I was evading Hodann's demand, it was because I was intent on denying a stirring of cowardice or showing that such fearfulness was part of my decision to face combat. Fighting on the front-most line was not necessarily more he-
ing the family, was now condemned to inactivity, no office or factory hired her, and in her restlessness she, who had always done her part of the housework quickly, now spent hours polishing the sideboard, the table, the chairs, the silver, and, occasionally lost in thought, she would stare into space, oblivious of her surroundings. Once, when we had sat down on the bench in the front yard of the house, the landlady, Frau Goldberg, came and asked us to leave the yard, because first of all, she said, we were paying only for the apartment and not the garden, and secondly the bench was not meant for Jews. When I indignantly tried to reply, my mother held me back and, standing up, pressed my arm hard against her body. While pulling me into the house, she said that after being called a Jew several times because of her dark hair, she had now declared herself a Jew, which, however, made it difficult for her and Father to find another apartment in Warnsdorf. So she had to knuckle under to the owner of the house, who made it clear to her at every chance she got that she would get what was coming to her. During one of my last days in Warnsdorf I saw what that could mean. On the edge of town, coming from Saint George’s Valley, near a gravel pit, where the road passed through the so-called Kirchenbusch, I heard the shrieks and laughter of a group of children and adolescents. At first I thought they were playing a war game and I slowly walked on, but then I noticed that in their midst a man was lying in the shingle, uttering rattling sounds, and as I came closer, I saw that it was Eger Franz, who was being called names, village idiot or Yid, a harmless, mentally retarded day labourer. His face was covered in blood, his mouth foaming, he rolled around convulsively amid the teenagers who kept kicking him and smashing sticks into his head. Driving his tormentors away, I picked him up and carried him to the Fiala Nursery in Niedergrund, where help soon came. I later heard that he had died as a result of his injuries. His young murderers, whose identities were known, were never called to account, it was announced that the vagabonding Jew had fallen during an epileptic fit and fractured his skull.

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...The soldier had suddenly been pulled from fire into idleness. At the front they had bonded closely because of nonstop tension, the danger, the necessity for about style and form, acknowledging only the content, which differed fundamentally from that of all other art movements. We were acquainted with the stages that led to these painting trends, which demanded acceptance purely on the basis of novel expressiveness. They bore in on us from the nineteenth century, from a strenuous darkness, evincing the forerunners of those who were now powerfully rising up, freed and proud. The tremendous feat was even plainer in that behind it the slaves, the parched, the impoverished became visible, generations of them thronging against the superior strength, which seemed invincible. Nothing but humiliation, suppression, and imprisonment existed in the paintings of the Russian Realists, yet in their rapport with the people they portrayed, in their depiction of the injustice that afflicted them, they were already siding with the planners of a renewal. There were Repin’s boat haulers hanging in their straps, Savitsky’s forced labourers toting soil for building the railroad embankment, Perov’s children dragging water barrels through the blizzard, there were Yarosyyenko’s haggard stokers singed by red heat, locked in the low-ceilinged furnace room, clutching the pokers in their swollen thickly veined hands. The faces of the ragged bearded serfs, barefoot or in tattered sandals and straw boots, trudging through the sand of the shore, were snuffed out, drained of all hope. The children pulling the sleds were emaciated, their features waxen, dull with exhaustion. It was the year eighteen seventy-four, when the road workers, guarded by soldiers, braced themselves over the fully-loaded cars by the dusty embankment. In the wasteland, in the devaluation of their lives, they had never heard of the revolutions in France, the Commune, for them the Middle Ages were still present. Nor were Courbet’s stone breakers granted any relief, yet their drudgery in the detritus was no longer marked by hopelessness. Their clothing was shabby, seedy, but their motions imparted something of the strength of the rebellions in February and June eighteen forty-eight, and though the revolts were quelled, the jolt with which the young worker heaved up the basket of stones, and the older man’s hard grip on the hammer shaft resembled the gestures at the building of barricades, at the furious clashes. Both men had their backs to the viewer, the reproduction showed them against a swarthy background, there was a dented pot of food for the road, a couple of pickaxes lay ready like weapons, if the men turned their movements would be forceful. We had found a great deal from our own lives in such paintings, as imperfect and
allusive as we had seen them in books and magazines were our own concepts and schooling. Anything we expressed about them could only be a sketch, a draft. Decades would be needed for our approximate insights to mellow into knowledge. By way of experimenting, usually very remote from encounters with the originals, we investigated what appeared as a shadow of the artistic reality, thus sharpening our eyes for the typical, the gesture, the relationship between the figures for everything that could be gleaned even from a smudged grey. The workers in Dore’s suite about the London waterfront were in the same abysmal murk that dominated his illustrations for Dante’s Inferno, however these labourers were not deserted by the world, they slogged on in a living circle whose hallmark was the steam and the smoke, the fiery glow, the seething water. For Millet, whose colours we did not yet know, daily work was an incessant, necessary torment, his country folk existed in a haze that blended the sweating of bodies with the smouldering sunlight, they were grafted on their tools, they were entangled in strawstacks, they wrestled with the harvest, stood like clods of earth in the sultriness. Yet they too did not own the soil they tilled, and while the day likewise gave them nothing but sweat, physical emaciation, and the few coins necessary for food to ride out the coming day, they were nevertheless fully engrossed in what they were doing, the work was not alien, not forced on them, they participated in every push and pull, when knuckling down they felt their stamina, there was never anything sullen or broken about their bodies. They were represented as natural beings, creature-like they bent there way over to pluck out the haulms, a row of three women, in a continuous motion, the first hand about to grip, the second hand clutching the spikes, the third gathering the sheaf, all figures equally heavy, equally important, their slow, bent striding unstoppable, yet still vegetative, not seen as a component of a specific production process. The uprisings of the year eighteen forty-eight were communicated in the gestures of the workers but they did not yet challenge their social existence even though, monumental, they occupied a more stable shape for the spatula that squeezed the pigment through the master of fine-meshed wire cloth. Resettlement had been harder on my mother than on him. She, who was accustomed to working, who had always contributed to support-

over cultural values from the hands of the people who with their privileges had formerly served the rulers, for that would have involved adopting the de-politicisation of culture, the rejection of the class struggle. Instead, there had to be a reciprocity between the things that had been shaped and the quest for an expression of their own. While we acquired culture, that overall mechanism, of which culture had been a component, had to be destroyed. That which could continue educating us had as yet to be created. Once they were put on the ground of the proletariat and interpreted there, the works of literature, art, philosophy would gain a new meaning. From deep down, our eyes focused on a scientific age. We were still in the phases of terror and persecution. In the narrow window above my father’s head, we again saw the marching legs, in lace boots and white stockings, behind them, on a taut leash, an Alsatian with an open maw, whistles could be heard and the thunderous shouts that demanded submission to the empire of violence. But how can we be sure, I asked, that there will not be a new fraud when the trained academics begin having an impact on our fragmentary knowledge. In his response, my father combined Luxemburg’s notions of a school of free initiative, an education in creative activity, with Gramsci’s negation of mechanistics, of authoritarian learning. Ahead of us, said my father, we still have the cultural revolution that was talked about in the early twenties. This would transform not just us but all the people who were receptive to the pressure of history. The common intent to take possession of work would drive us to a mutual understanding. And if we stopped handing over our basic production and started using it ourselves, he said, who would then deny that, once their organisational and pedagogical capacities for planning and guiding were liberated from suppression, all our former suppliers and subalterns are intellectual workers. His indulging in such reflections showed that time had not yet worn him down, that he was still ready to begin afresh. Indeed, as he had often done in Berlin, he now turned the kitchen into a workshop and was occupied with a series of improvements in block printing. On his workbench he had one of the wooden frames on which he was strengthening the fortification arrangement for the printing table, just as he was trying to provide a more stable shape for the spatula that squeezed the pigment through the master of fine-meshed wire cloth. Resettlement had been harder on my mother than on him. She, who was accustomed to working, who had always contributed to support-
capitalism, they too were wage earners, producers of surplus value, bled white, none of them, whether in an office, a bureau, a university, or a research centre, owned the means of production. If they dared to see through their situation, they all made contact with people in the industries, the workshops, thereby broadening their concept of the working class, more and more of these people, who had once had to be counted as part of the bourgeoisie, made the path of the proletariat their own, often even adding weightiness to it with theoretical and practical contributions. These reflections were very seldom to be gleaned directly from books on the era of crisis, outwardly most works were still reserved for the educated elite, the definitive step was not taken, was guessed at only in impatience, as dislike of the status quo, as something in the future. New progressive forces that had freed themselves from earlier bonds drove us to make others more conscious of our own position. The students and academics, the artists and writers who joined us had not seen their background as definitive, and we likewise had to overcome the arrogance of assuming that we alone, on the basis of certain social and economic conditions, were at home in the proletariat. Rather, by precise differentiation, we had to once again choose and define our standpoint. A person belonged to the working class if he acted on its behalf no matter where he came from. This was particularly important now that large segments of labour had gone astray and were being shoved away from their point of departure. The broad unity of proletarian action had failed to materialise. The workers had not known how to define themselves against fascism. A defence was now possible only if they became a Popular Front that included organisations, parties, social strata that were not counted as part of the proletariat but shared its interest in defensive combat. While the working class had not yet erred its ranks, cooperation with other political groupings should not mean abandoning the goal of the leading role that it would have to take some day and that it already had in the Soviet Union, in Spain, in China. Despite all tactical alliances, the conflicts between the classes had to be continued and, if necessary, exacerbated. My father described the restructuring inside the social forces as a historic block, he spoke about Gramsci, who had died that April after ten years in the prisons of the Italian fascists. Gramsci, on the basis of the historical realities, had pointed out the route that the intelligentsia, freed of the bourgeois obsessions, would take together with the workers. Yet this could never mean simply taking them, and this mythological vastness was still present in his paintings. The revolutions, had, at first glance, accomplished little, and any gains had instantly been shattered by the power of the bourgeoisie, but the exertion of force, the stretching, the leap were an achievement that could not be denied, and Millet knew how to capture and render this proletarian energy. He was no politician like Courbet, he did not follow up on the consequences of social turmoil, he merely rendered what he encountered, as a realist he portrayed the new resoluteness in human behaviour, he could not see the workers possessing a power that was still utopian, but he showed them with the dignity they had fought to attain. His pictures reveal an interlude, the physical expressions of the figures had to be ascribed to the revolutionary experiences, but the step toward their self-awareness had only just been initiated, the violence they were capable of appeared only in rudimentary form, and yet by lifting such life into the salons of society, by removing the sweaty figures with the earthy features, their loamy weight from where they had endured anonymously and placing them in between the well-groomed portraits, the nymphs and shepherdesse, he did something on a par with the revolutionary aim. However, the mere appearance of such figures in the very midst of the bourgeois precincts was a slap in the face for the connoisseurs, since those people ought to remain outside, in their filth, where they belonged. But now they were no longer to be rebuffed, intimidating as they were, even when standing during the Angelus, in this devotion, this mystical absorption, which could settle on Millet’s fields, the farm labourer then blatantly ominous, in the klutzy sabots, breathing heavily over the hoe, and the sower, black, inky, sombre, plodding through the soil, barely a trace of sky, he had started trudging before dawn, he would not stop before onset of darkness. These impressive gestures belonged to the revolution, all at once the maids and farmhands had broken into the venerable precincts of academicism, into middle-class security. The harvesters in Lhermitte’s canvas were getting their day’s pay from the estate manager, standing up-right, without humility, one of them stretched out his receiving hand, another meticulously counted the coins, a third sat proud, massive, with the sharp gigantic scythe in front of him. The wage issue was then broached here, as was the cheating of manpower. They were worth no more than what they received this evening, the wealth of grain lying before them belonged to other people, yet there were five of them and only one leaseholder, and their
superiority was shown not only in this ratio but also in the effect of their physicality. Meunier’s miners, dockers loomed motionless, deeply earnest, imbued with strength, yet they did not raise a hand. Very seldom in art, where they were shown with a gesture of resistance, attack. Still, their emergence as a new class, their lifelike appearance in front of the flabbergasted spectator, those were artistic feats enough. Behind them lay a string of revolts and revolutions, and although driven back each time, they had gained experience each time, and perhaps would be better equipped for the next charge. By approaching them, by seeking motifs from the workaday world, the painters showed that art too was freeing itself from old obligations, that energy coming from the populace was forcing itself on art, energy that had to be articulated, at first by those capable of speech, of expression that mediated. The painters understood this exhortation, they were as yet unable to apply it to the overall system they lived in, but they accused, they emphasised the plight, they saw the workers as their patrons, they protested on their behalf; they occasionally identified with them, but then they also let themselves be inveigled anew by lures of conventions. As usual the contradiction was that things emanating from the populace found shape only on a higher level, and they were no longer reliable as authentic utterances, they did not need to be idealised or dramatised, but in a world of forms and colours they easily took on a life of their own. The realistic works of the past century could help the workers only indirectly. Long after their effigies began spreading through the sphere of art, they, the inspirers, were still excluded from it, they barely caught a glimpse of what the figures of the masters had captured of their life, but the privileged learned to focus on them, to deal with their problems. For the time being, that was the only possible course of development. Just as the basic actions of revolutions had always been taken up and utilised from above, so too the thoughts and hopes of people who wanted to move up were precipitated in the basin of culture to be sublimated there. The society, often full of compassion, gave the masses something that belonged to them anyway. Breaking through this cycle, which was a steady insult, a rebuke, this had to be our goal. This is why Coppi and I unreservedly confronted the pictures showing the first major breakthrough of the labourers, their victory, the establishment of their rule. In our eyes, the works were exactly as they had to be, unambiguous, true to nature, consistent with the events, they came not from above, where artistic activity usu-
Klaber, Gotsche, Hoelz, Bredel, Marchwitza, or Neukrantz, we were confronted with the proletarian reality, between drab, grey exhaustion and open fighting, between living in a hideout and being locked up in a prison cell. Often we heard the opinion, and advocated it ourselves, that only these works had any validity for us because they provided the instructions that everyone could comprehend, the directives for transcending the oppressive monotony and developing our own strength. We found that their linearity, their plan, reportage-like style chimed with our efforts to get the condition of oppression clear in our own minds. A deepening of every character, every artistic technique in rendering the mental world or the changing spaces struck us as deviating from the actual topic. We felt it was right to lend expression not to the personal but to the interests of the class. In this compactness, we figured, the writer had to stand up against the individualised novel, which, superior, rich in associations, rose up, opposite us, tower by tower, in the rampart of bourgeois culture. Yet Rolland, Trakl, Heym, Hauptmann, and Wedekind already made our attitude totter to the extent that we had worked our way out of ignorance we had also become more open to accounts of experiences that were beyond our immediate sphere of life, the language tied to our everyday practices had expanded, suddenly we understood poems that seemed to have nothing to do with our timecards, our inventory lists, our wage negotiations and union meetings. And within a short time we had come so far that during lunch breaks, in a corner between crates, we read Jean-Christophe, van Gogh’s letter, Gauguin’s journals, Gide’s Counterfeeters, or Hansen’s Hunger, wrapped in wax cloth. Weinert, Becher, Renn, Plivier, Doblin, Seghers, Kisch, Weiskopf, Friedrich Wolf, and Brecht had emerged from the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, reorienting their thinking and thereby becoming spokesmen for the working class, and likewise, without our changing our position, it was possible for us to gain insights into the problems of the other part of society. Thrust into the contradictions of a transitional phase, we absorbed the things that the bourgeois authors, with the detailed precision they had taken over from classical security, knew how to say about the crumbling, the rate drops, the fiascoes of their era. Occasionally our dealings with their disclosures had given us bad consciences when we were rebuked for meeting them halfway, reconciling with them, or preparing to become turncoats, but when I looked around, any activity in this area was justified. The system of exploitation ally had its seat, but directly from the ranks of those who had waged the struggle and wanted to recognise themselves here. Those people followed a familiar manner of painting, they did not demand a turnabout of visual habits, there were more important, more fundamental things in education than dealing with new style trends in order to understand the depictions of the revolutionary events. A tremendous leap had been taken, from the time when the workers had received their pay, mute, withdrawn, hired out, to the day when they lifted their own tools, switched on their own machines. The image of reality was continued intact, but the despotism hanging over the old Russian portrayals of the life of the people was swept away, the figures no longer stood waiting as condemned men, they now had a pride, a laughter such as no one had ever seen them having before. Still, the fact of this revolutionary process, said Heilmann, does not exempt us from asking how this process is captured in painting. When acting, people likewise, he said, carefully considered what was right and what was wrong, what could imperil the subsequent movements and what could safeguard them and move them further ahead. Reflection, he went on, had been the hallmark of violent action. That was why we had to examine how human energy, enthusiasm had been transformed into the value obtaining for the artistic handicraft. So long as such a quality could not be ascertained, he said, the object remained a mere byproduct of the realm of external action. This kind of art, Coppi retorted, has broken with all earlier criteria. It issues straight out of reality. Perhaps the rags and chains were painted better in the old political system, perhaps the compositions, the colour contrasts, the effects of light and shadow attained perfection in the portrayals of the dungeons, perhaps new art movements could be inferred from the renderings of poverty and misery, but these paintings here express something that never succeeded before, the event in which labour takes possession of itself. The realism in this altered situation, said Heilmann, had yielded to an idealising and heroising, a stance reemerged after being overcome by the realists at the turn of the century, that was why, he said, the true events lost their authenticity in the paintings. The painters of battles and allegories, he added, are still at work here, though with different contents. Our normal critical approach, said Coppi, will not get to the heart of these pictures. The triumph of them is in their truth. To the person for whom the construction of Socialism is meaningless, such art may seem like sheer decoration, and the rapture like emp-
ty glorification. But in a place where the step to freedom has been taken, which we do not dare to do as yet, excessiveness corresponds to reality. In judging such art, said Heilmann, we let ourselves be guided by our respect, our admiration for the workers’ state. But when dealing with artistic issues we cannot make emotional and ideological allowances. Anything that is to be part of our cultural foundation must stand the test. These paintings encourage us, said Coppi’s mother, we need such help now that so many of us are throwing in the towel. But Heilmann stuck to his guns. These paintings do show achievements, accomplishments, he said, but they cover up the contradictory processes in which new things emerge. Their contents cannot be evaluated as something self-contained. Just as the thoughts of revolution was not yet the revolution but only demanded its deeds, so too the pictorial idea called for its implementation in form. Content and form do not coincide here. A worn-out style mixes into the effigies of revolutionary events. The painters who want to champion the future are resorting to the methods of a romantic naturalism, which looks back, toward the bourgeois era. Their naturalism, said Coppi, shatters everything that was a visual delight for the philistine; it is precisely by evoking the old and the familiar that their naturalism shows us how it transcends the earlier idylls of profit and exploitation. Moreover, he went on, in this urgent situation, art could not aim at setting up ultimate things, essentially it had to point out the strength and desire to defend the gains. We had to approach these paintings morally, he said, and also accept defects until an art was found that fully corresponded to the greatness of the achievement. We declare all our studies null and void, said Heilmann, if we knowingly acquiesce to an artificiality, a pose, if we halt at a point where advances have long since been traced out. A cultural counter-revolution, he said, is sneaking into our image of society. Philistinism is forcing itself upon us, undermining our conceptions, and we fail to notice it. He believed, he said, that it was because in the formation of their taste numerous political activists had been bogged down between plagiaries and surrogates. This was understandable, he said, since compared with a total absence of artistic objects the mixture of fus-tian, pinchbeck, and sentimentality in the philistine home could certainly represent something loftier, and many who started by looking for a road to education stumbled upon these rudimentary things and mistook the disguised misery as tokens of culture. The struggle for our art, he said, must simultaneous be a strug-
era, I led the strikers, I had memorised the Manifesto and now I blared it through the loudspeaker across the square in front of the Stettin Railroad Station, or else, behind the studio windows that I had seen on the roof of a house in Dresdener Strasse, on Oranienplatz, I painted gigantic allegories of liberation. Afterwards, on Pflugstrasses, the visions had evanesced, no wishful thinking led us out of the social insecurity, the economic plight, the political rape, and it was only in September of thirty-seven that I began to understand that in trying to gain insights, we always had to share the burden of the muteness and weariness of our fellow workers and that anything we found was also acquired on their behalf. For our efforts to conquer art and literature could have no other purpose than to strengthen the togetherness of people who had so far sensed only their isolation. If we wanted to flee the intrinsic value of an artwork, we risked winding up in a vacuum, our learning, our studying could be fruitful only by interacting with the conditions, peculiarities, and behaviours in the territory of our life. We had long since determined that a day was unfulfilled if we had not spent at least one hour with a book, a scholarly or scientific problem. In our struggle against the normal obstacles to thinking we had obtained subject matter from political and sociological manuals, from the night-school courses, but we had to rely on ourselves to discuss the topic that particularly attracted us in those years and that contributed toward expanding our consciousness, it was the theme of ambivalence, of controversy, of contradiction under which we lived. Here, where the issue was the sensory absorption of reality, it was mostly stimuli from poems, novels, paintings that we linked to our experiences and ideas, this was the best method of achieving harmony with ourselves. Our reflections dashed to and fro between antitheses. We were to be ground down, against that we pitted our endurance. Our imagination held its own against the system forced on us. Our initiative was our response to the systematic underminding of our freedom to act. There was no way we could gain an absolutely correct, accurate view of current affairs, but we resisted this impossibility with our fundamental decisions. After Zola, Gorki, Barbusse, Nexø we had read the proletarian writers of our day. What was new about them was, first of all, the depiction of our existence in the back courts and tenements, in the dark, filthy workshops and storage basements, at the lathes, machines, and loading docks, the reporting on shop-floor meetings, strike preparations, and political clashes. In the books by
mute in the jam-packed trains at four-thirty A.M and after the shift, and the material force in Neukrantz’s book would have been useless had it not been backed up by ideas. The labyrinth and the parable were as close to us as coping with the things that were immediately tangible before us. Investigation and defensive combat were two sides of one and the same position. Here in Warnsdorf, during the days of roaming, the criteria of art, which had previously seemed encumbered with the reaction of retreat, now became more graspable and self-evident; while reading, while examining images I no longer entered a secluded special area accessible only to initiates, instead everything that was shown was integrated into my daily experiences. When reading Neukrantz’s account I had already managed to think of the activity of writing as a handiwork, a vocation. Earlier I had read James Fenimore Cooper, Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, Frederick Marryat, Herman Melville, Jonathan Swift, Edgar Allen Poe, Joseph Conrad, and Jack London, but Barricades in Wedding was the first work that made me wish to set down something myself, make something visible. I wanted to to tackle it with the same bluntness, the same openness and partisanship, and I tried to do some when composing my essays in Scharfenberg. The book about the Castle then settled upon a long pent-up disquiet and an incipient craving for knowledge. It invoked anxiety, forced me to to view my weaknesses and omissions. Back then, six years earlier, nothing had been insurmountable, I sat in the branches of the linden grove, on the reed bay opposite Baumwerder, and I wrote in the blue notebook, never changing a single word, swift, unhindered, following my inner dictation, then I entered a single work world, and easily my creations could be rendered, it was arduous capturing anything that had actually happened to me. While seeking expression I first had to overcome the smashed things, the ripped things burdening us. We asked ourselves what was true in art, and we found that it must be the material that had passed through our senses and nerves. Yet when we applied to weighing and judging entirely to ourselves, when we said that they were part of existing and they had to connect with one and other and imbue our self-determination, then we again felt that our tools, machines, and time clocks, our overcrowded rooms depended on all libraries and museums, all science and scholarship, and amid erupting scorn, amid mutual ridicule, we saw no continuity, no expanded field of vision, just the blenders on our functionless minds. There on the edge of the School Island, in a primordial glance to overcome petty bourgeois leanings. We need only reach for a sketch dashed off by van Gogh, and the clumsy strokes will reveal the beauty to which the colossal gold-framed paintings aspire in vain. I would also, he continued, put up with the one-dimensional optimism if it did not claim absolute validity, a hegemony that shoves any other statements aside. He recalled the other things that had come about, especially in the area of film, where in the year before the Collapse we had received impressions that were crucial in moulding our political convictions. In Gorky, Ostrovsky, Gladkov, Babel the characters were never stereotypes, and during the years around October, painting and architecture had drafted constructive possibilities that tallied around the essence of the revolution. Why, asked Heilmann, were they receding behind the previous gains, why was a revolutionary art being denied and outlawed, why were the works that gave voice to the experiments of our time, that were subversive because the life surrounding them was changing through and through, why were these bold stirring metaphors of awakening replaced by ready-made things, why was a narrow limitation of receptivity introduced if Mayakovksy, Blok, Bedny, Yessenin, and Bely, a Malevich, Lissitzky, Tatlin, Vachtangov, Tairov, Eisenstein, or Vertov had found a language identical with a new universal consciousness. The things the Cubists and Expressionists churned up in the decade before October, said Copp, occurred in a world of forms with which only specially trained people were familiar. It was a revolt by art, a rebellion against the norms. Granted, the turmoil in society, the latent violence, the yearning for radical upheaval found expression, but the workers and soldiers of November of nineteen seventeen had never seen or heard these artistic metaphors. The Dadaists and Futurists in Moscow continued the transformation on a level with which the fighters were not intimate. Henceforth, art was to belong to them. But what came upon them now originated in the western European countries, where the representatives of the intelligentsia had received their impressions, this was not their own property, once again something was being served to them, the goods of emigrés, of literates were grafting things. It was fruitless for them to be told that the revolution of forms was now to be united with the revolutionary transformation of the whole of life, what the vanguard in literature and painting designed was bound to be unintelligible to the Russian workers. No paintings hung in their basement hovels, at most they had a colour picture from a magazine as we do. For the time
being, Modernism, Abstraction had to remain the privilege of people who dealt with artistic problems, no proletarian art could arise from there even if the artists believed they were speaking the true language of a revolutionary nation. During this state of transition, people asked which was better, things that developed the highly nourished intellect or things that helped the beginner along. These ponderings included the opposition between the national and the international guidelines. Had the Revolution spread, then art would likewise have maintained a revolutionary versatility. The temporary isolation of the Revolution, the necessity of continuing a lone struggle, of preserving and defending oneself, of entrenching oneself against the enemy pressing in from abroad, forced art too into this position where every work had to be utilised as a social weapon, every statement had to be precisely examined for its immediate usefulness in resistance and production. As a result, everything showing signs of complications, conflicts was rejected, it would have served neither the Soviet state nor us on the outside. The paintings there could not be shattered, dissolved, fermenting, labouring with new elements again and again, like our art, there was no room for subjective contemplation, they demanded concrete things that could be tested, criticised, like an engine, a building construction. The workers in the iron plants, the machine factories, the shipyards, the kolkhozi saw themselves confirmed in these paintings. Their milieu, the processes of their labour, their handlings of the tools had to be rendered correctly. That was the goal. What was portrayed functioned, it was a component in a social, a technological plan. This art, said Coppi, takes its place next to the dams and collective combines, next to the electrification, the agrarian reform, and the workers' universities. This art is utilitarian, just like schools, political organisations. Practical demands are made on it, it has to respond not to the cogitations of an individual but to the expectation of the majority. And yet, Heilmann retorted, this art cannot suffice for the worker. No matter how squarely it places him in the middle of events, it nevertheless underestimates him by granting him only one aspect of reality. He must feel that tailored themes prevent him from making up his own mind. With the significance allotted to Socialist culture, the worker who has been studying, reading, who wants to express something himself in painting, in writing, realises that important, indeed crucial things are being kept from him. He sees situations rendered with photographic accuracy, yet instead of nearness they produce detachment, with a vacuous verbal stew, they had nevertheless shown that they could push into the heart of the enemy fortress. This was exemplary, under the prevailing conditions it was the highest possible achievement. And the subsequent fight waged in the streets was likewise proof of utmost courage, for there was only one escape from death and destruction. The Castle was still invincible, and the desire for a dignified life, for eliminating the cheating of workers, encountered only people who said this was outside their jurisdiction and who referred them to people who were beyond reach. The paralysis that wore down the villagers could no longer be endured, it was more dreadful than the approach of the tanks, the booming of cannon, it had to be demonstrated that the people were still determined to rise up, to hit back, the mere fact that the workers held out for two or three days was their victory. Henceforth the lords of the Castle would know that workers on the outside refrained from making demands only because they had no choice, and that they might start in again at any moment. Kafka had circled around the theme, he kept returning to the same point of departure, he brooded, tried new possibilities of moving, lay in wait, lurking, roused himself, let himself be fooled, rejected, thrown down, could never achieve any result, yet he never even considered giving up. His book had no end, and his project was likewise endless, he dealt not with an individual case but with all existence, which contained no hope, yet it did contain action. His hero was anonymous, a cipher, it was only thoughts that developed their images, that were tortured by the limits imposed on them, and that wanted nothing other to expand these limits, burst through them. Neukrantz dove right into a specific historical situation, matter-of-factly, with the help of documents he explained how to get at the root of what had happened. His language was not finely chiseled, people spoke as they would speak at work. The obvious thing would have been to emphasise the world of the intellect over the world of labour, but then the aims of either book would have been falsified. In the past, I had sometimes felt that dealing with art and literature as opposed to practical tasks was an evasion, a self-isolation, just as other people distrusted and disparaged intellectual products. However, both books, which I now compared to one another, showed clearly that the differences were interdependent, that they complimented one another and could not get along without each other. While reading Kafka's book I never removed myself from our daily schedule, from the packing rooms, the assembly halls, from the com-
And whenever I compared the book about the Castle with Barricades in Wedding, there was another clash of the two opposites that were decisive for me, on the one side the difficult, intricate, constantly evasive reality, and on the other side realness, tangible, massive, a squared block. Kafka's work, in earth-brown binding, was filled with endlessly ramified trains of thought, with connections and intersections of moral, ethical, philosophical notions, with constant questions about the meanings of manifestations, the intention of activities, Neurkrantz's small battle-book, from the Red Novels series, priced at one mark, did not ask, it only supplied an answer, called upon readers to forestall nihilism, to throw up a practical defence against suffering, it spurred us on to direct intervention and could be understood by all the people who lived on our streets. There was no time for sidestepping, for reflecting, the things that had to be tackled was clear and complete, the thing that towered, fateful, fraught with doom, over Kafka's village, for the inhabitants of Wedding, easy to grasp as a class-determined process of oppression to which they showed a bold front. The one book consisted of flowing material that could slowly take shape in the imagination, the other book was an object that you bumped into. It had no intricate conversations, no dissections of the psyche, no guilt-fraught, doubt-ridden investigations of a cosmology in which the reader's self was entangled, it had only the concrete stone that was joined to the other stones on the street, the beam that blocked the front door, the cloth that bound the wound. Everything that was a discussion of the nature of the Castle in Kafka was an accomplished fact here. The workers did not shrink back from entering the building that the surveyor found questionable, for them it was the police headquarters on Alexanderplatz, they headed there straight-away in stained trousers and smocks, coming from their scaffolding, strode along the corridors to the rooms of the potentates, marched into the anteroom of the supreme boss, refused to be put off by secretaries, and stood in front of the representative to state their demands. This mannequin was straight out of Kafka. His custom made clothes, useless for any physical labour, snugly enveloping the wretched figure, his prattling, his pomposity were suitable for the Castle official, except that the delegation paid him no respect whatsoever, the workers did not approach him as petitioners, they demanded their rights. And even though he courteously ushered them out
that was what they called the men who two decades ago had carried out the Revolution and founded the Soviet state. They, Lenin's comrades, wanted to annihilate Socialism, smash industrial life, sell large portions of the country to the fascists, and reintroduce capitalism. But indirectly, Heilmann said, this is a terrible indictment of Lenin, for he, whose acumen, whose understanding of the future always inspires us, has sought colleagues and confidants who had now all been exposed as criminals, mangy dogs, enemies of the people, and yet from the very start they would somehow or other have revealed their plans to destroy all achievements. Why had Lenin not seen through this riff-raff, asked Heilmann, which had become known to us as the Bolshevik Guard, why did only one man who was worthy of succeeding him survive. The situation during the final year of Lenin's life was different from the situation after his death, said Coppi. The cohesive energy issuing from his personality enabled his closest comrades-in-arms to develop their most valuable qualities. He also saw their weaknesses, he kept warning them about the power struggles, the schisms that were bound to be lurking where such a collection of obstinate men were trying to build up something completely new. The internationalists, who had spent many years in exile with Lenin, who had oriented themselves by the outside world, clashed with the people who had stayed at home, who were rooted in the people. In the decisive situation, when the revolutions failed to materialise in the West, when all energy had to focus on preserving the isolated Socialist state, the secretary-general, whom Lenin managed to criticise for his crudeness, his intolerance, had become the figure who connected and concentrated everything, he had kept aloof from the rancour, rivalry and factionalism that emerged as Lenin lay dying, it was the secretary-general who represented calm and control, who arbitrated, who offered his verdict when the struggle for succession erupted. History, said Coppi, would show whether he was self-seeking when he held back or acting in the best interests of the people, but the authority had been delegated to him by the Party congress because no-one seemed more capable of assuring the unity of the Party in the period of mortal danger. Amid the rage and cunning of fascism, which was setting out to mobilise every available force against the workers' state, it was possible for the fascists to win over even individual people and groups in the land of Socialism by exploiting the infighting, and to turn them against the leadership, so that it became justified and necessary to eliminate all those work-

Kafka had written was a proletarian novel. Love was never talked about, it never even struck us that we were lacking anything, missing anything, and the young working girls, the unemployed girls were subject to the same humiliation as the women in the village, clerks and secretaries from the Castle could grab them, summon them, use them up, and toss them away, they were at the mercy of those people, and yet they talked themselves into believing that their value increased whenever they caught the eye of some brute and surrendered to him. Many of the female packers, the errand girls hoped to be discovered by a penpusher, just as the female secretaries, above us, in the offices, spruced themselves up for the dandies in the administrative building. Frieda had stepped back to someone in her own class and had promptly been disciplined for her dissidence, her resolve to no longer be abused made her an outcast. In the society ruled by the law that demanded she sell herself, Frieda, trying to plead for her independence, was doomed. Standing on the Lausche, the highest peak in the mountain chain, peering over at Germany and at the town my parents lived in, behind the autumn-coloured forests under the Spitzberg, I wondered if these devastations and desolations, these areas of defeat that Kafka described might not make us brood unproductively, render us apathetic, if these torturous memories of the filth, the misery, the baseness of all the things that were close to us might not rob us of the strength to rebel against what seemed beyond change. But then again I saw that my resistance was linked to my bewilderment, I had recognised my neighbours, myself, in these crooked, damaged, used-up villagers, there was this mustiness between us, this stunting, this philistine moroseness, and even when the issue was ideals, getting ahead, many of us shared the surveyor's striving to be finally appreciated by the authorities in the Castle. Granted, one could repeatedly tell oneself that over there, behind the border barriers of Seifhensersdorf, a reality began that did not brook the slightest weakness, slightest inattentiveness, a reality in which any sign of lethargy had to be fought, and yet Kafka's book retained its validity for our social and political world. Not only the Castle with its hierarchic structure, where everyone had his assigned precinct and knew no more than what he happened to be allowed, always carrying out only what others demanded, not only the Castle but also the things occurring on our own level possessed a kind of strength in which concrete experience passes into the image of dreams.
mained equally far from this humming though participating in it as stokers, mechanics, luggers, cart pushers, all we possessed as a result of our self-education was a power to go on strike. Nor could Kafka be faulted for not pointing this out, for we had been too timid about using even the weapon of work stoppage, and, upon resolving to go ahead with it, we had constantly returned to the old invariable high-spirited singing that had faded only temporarily in our insignificant circle but had continued elsewhere merely all the louder. The deeper I got into this book, the more it touched upon the world we lived in. After all, it dealt not only with our lack of connection to work but with our entire relationship to the ubiquitously active establishment. We could have no impact on the plans of the concerns and monopolies, and likewise we had realised that the transactions of exchanging goods had grown more brutal, that exploitation had been joined by homicidal robbery, even in our political cells we were still closer to the village’s ignorance than to the state of knowledge promised us by social science. Never had my parents, my friends been able to choose their places themselves, we had to let ourselves be moved willy-nilly, glad to just have a place at all. I could see my mother, sitting crooked on the sofa, her hips, her back rheumatic after years of standing on the stone floor of the factory, I could see Coppi’s mother, her swollen feet in the basin of water, I could see my father in the steam of the textile plant, see him in the kitchen in Warnsdorf, with a bare torso, scrubbing away the red, bluish-violet spots left by the block printing, just like the evenings in Bremen, when he had cleansed the sprayed tar and metal dust from his skin, and all the people I knew resembled these villagers, large groups of them always crowded into a room, men, women and children, one person sleeping here, the blanket pulled over his head, others sitting at the table, washing themselves in the trough, everything happened in the same room, here some people were conversing, there someone, his hands on his temples, was huddling over a book, and anyone over forty was already an invalid, the oldsters crouched like refuse in a corner. There was no possibility of retreating, of being alone with someone. The encounter with a woman took place behind a bar, on the floor, amid beer puddles, and even Frieda, the surveyor’s companion, who had something special about her because she had been the lover of a Castle official, was scrawny, sickly, with yellow skin, sparse hair, any sexual temptations, any intimacy offered in literature, in movies was inconceivable for us lot. What

ing against adherence to the official policies. Yet, retorted Heilmann, not only were spies, assassins, and traitors dragged out of the government administration, the economic sector, and the military, but many artists who had familiarised us with revolutionary experiences were suddenly labeled scum, decadent, contaminated with bourgeois ideas, books were pulped, movies destroyed, theatres shut down, some artists, like Babel, Mandelstam, Meyerhold were arrested and may have already been shot, liquidated. These words, said Heilmann, the words of defamation to which we close our ears here, in the precincts of murder and robbery, should we accept those words when they come from people on our side, and what about artistic investigation, should we surround it with taboos, with atavistic and irrational omens, and let ourselves be persuaded that all this is justified, meaningful only because we feel close to the country in which such orders are given, because nothing must imperil this country, because it must be kept alive, defended not only by our acting, but also by our incessant thinking. How could it happen, he asked, that such distortion, such scorn could seep into what we considered clarity, and how should we muster the strength to keep championing something that has been tainted. In the cramped kitchen, where Coppi’s father was pacing to and fro, letting his shadow shrink in front of him, on the door wall, on the window wall, all we could think was that had proved every detail of the misdeeds of the defendants, who had been on trial for over a year now, after all, authors like Feuchtwanger, Heinrich Mann, Lukacs, Rolland, and Barbusse, Aragon, Brecht and Shaw believed the revelations and had bowed to the evidence. No doubt must arise about the legitimacy of the proceedings now that the Anti-Comintern Pact had been signed between Germany and Japan, now that the Chinese armies were retreated from Shanghai, Nanking was being bombed, and Peking threatened, now that Italy was about to join the Pact after conquering Ethiopia, now that the Germans and the Italians, supported by the non-intervention policies of France and England, were stepping up their aid to Franco, and now that voices were talking louder and louder about the Greater German Empire, the right to colonies, the drive to the East. The thing is, said Heilmann, we are confronted with events that we have to put up with silently, that we are not allowed to touch on, suddenly our thirst for knowledge, which is part and parcel of dialectics, is supposed to be all we need to damn us. It is precisely because we have to hold up this country as exemplary to the world, said
Heilmann, that I have to ask myself what is going on there, and if I had previously avoided trying to understand the historical connections, I would have remained on the other side. It is up to the Soviet people, said Coppi’s mother, to take a position on events and eventually explain them to us. Do we expect that such a gigantic country, such a continent, with its two hundred million people, its fifteen republics could be turned inside out within twenty years, and that everything should promptly be top-notch after so much deprivation. After all, what did we do, here, we left them on their own, back when they were starting out, we exercised patience instead of doing what they called upon us to do. Let us trust them, for they are ahead of us. But at that moment Coppi’s father found the cramped kitchen unbearable, he had to have a breath of air, he switched off the light, we heard him trudging through the darkness, he would have shattered the panes if the window had been bolted, he would have dulled his fingernails on the wall if there had been no window open, coolness came in and the smell of moist dust, and our field of vision expanded to include a few dark grey facades with black squares, and mirrored clouds drifting across them.

2.

...Before the Spain Committee in Prague notified me that Hodann was expecting me at the Cueva la Potita Hospital near Albacete, I spent a few days in a state of mind that had already developed in Berlin during the final hours in our apartment. I waited, and this waiting was neither calm nor idle. If, sitting on the floor of the kitchen in Pflugstrasse, I was absorbed in a kind of hermitage, a contemplation, it was because everything that had gathered inside me was overpowering, demanding an examination, a clarification. Everything that had been thrashed out since our encounter with the Pergamum Altar concentrated into a basic image, a thesis, a way of living, from which I had long since been involved in the secret priming for actions that would change our situation.

What I read in Kafka’s book did not leave me hopeless, it made me feel ashamed. I had often enough faced on the engineers or overseers at Alfa Laval, just as was the case between the Castle envoy and a villager in Kafka’s spaces, and at such moment the same artificially veiled gap opened between us. I remembered the glib friendliness displayed by the inspector, though it was obvious that he did not see me, that I did not even exist for him, making his morning rounds of the assembly hall he was well rested, well fed, freshly bathed, while we, after four hours of assembling cream separators, were sweaty and weary. Glancing around, nodding our way, exchanging a few words with the foreman, he made it clear to us, with not a single one of us waxing indignant, that it was the shareholders who provided our work, and so we were unexpectedly reconciled and may even felt praised and honoured because the inspector had brought us closer to the factory management and for an instant we felt safe from dismissal to the poorhouse. It was always touch and go whether the decision makers still found us acceptable, nor could the unions offer any security during the crisis years, the middlemen of the higher consortia always said well-meaning things about the reforms and rights we gained, but these achievements were wiped away with a casual, deferring hand if they did not suit them. It was this definitive gap in power and privilege that was expressed in Kafka’s book. We had constantly put up with the way our principals sat so high above us that we never set eyes on them, the thought of visiting them in their shells, simply opening the doors to their offices, standing in front of them, speaking our mind was as unthinkable for us as the road to the Castle was for the surveyor. The ruler’s least messenger was worth more than we, nothing ruffled him, he could strut in front of us, take any liberty. It was entirely consistent with the events around us that the commanders stayed hidden in their regions, that their diligence grew into a chiming, a singing, a roaring just as the surveyor heard when he, worn out, worn down, picked up the receiver in order to place a call to the Castle. And naturally, what he heard gave him no information about the machinations up there, he merely got the impression that something important, momentous was happening, tremendous, worldwide doings, which we, as tiny components of the machinery had to serve. That was how the voice of imperialism sounded to the person who had previously been too weak to obtain knowledge about the dynamics of the economic processes. But even if we gained understanding, we re-
tions of workers during the two decades of my growing up, then life in the miserable dwellings that the villagers made the best of was even more undisturbed than in the cities. Only the resignation that was repeatedly broke through was absolute here. Since the poverty, the humiliation were even greater for us than here, amid the eternal petitioners and labourers, the whole, seemingly incredible prostration had to strike us too and perhaps even more powerfully than in the village. The coercion to work at the mercy of this system, to perform labor that was far below our abilities, characterised the lifestyle in the village as well as our own experiences. Not only myself, my parents, Coppi’s parents, but also all the people next to whom I had worked in various jobs, were constantly exposed to this degradation. But since production offered them nothing but the chance to perform a few minor flicks of the wrist, they had to deny their qualifications from dawn to dusk while sinking deeper and deeper into torpor and apathy. This state of defeat, together with the widespread illusion that our subsistence was a matter of grace, formed the basis of Kafka’s book, and it unnerved, oppressed the reader because it actualised the full range of our problems. We could cite our political measures, we could talk about perspectives that would lead us out of captivity, and yet we felt the same constriction as the surveyor. We could reproach the author of the book for not more clearly specifying who lived in the Castle or showing the preparations for its fall, but these objections, which, as I now recalled, I had heard earlier, were meaningless, for the principle described by the writer was sufficiently insightful, and the consistency in the manner of depiction evoked an even stronger mental involvement. The Castle was shabby, after all, brittle, old-fashioned, there was nothing imposing about it, there were no fortifications, it could have easily been taken, and the officials, if they ever appeared, were frail, feeble, woe-begone people. That was how the structure of capitalism had shown itself to us, as on the verge of collapse, bizarre and despicable, and yet it remained erect, doling out its mean little strokes, its frauds, its nasty tricks, keeping us at bay with its unreliable messengers, customs officers, and sentries. In the debate on realism, Kafka had been written off as a decadent. But his detractors had thus closed themselves off to his intensified image of reality, in which the lack of rebellion, the sedulous circling around trivia, the dreadful absence of insights confronted us with the question of why we ourselves had still not taken action to eliminate the deplorable state of affairs once and for all.

Thus my activity, paltry, infinitesimal in the gigantic network of forces, led me from the underground into the stage of national war, which the class struggle had now entered. Here, in secluded Warnsdorf, I was mentally participating in the armed conflict. The enemy had to be defeated before the development imagined by us could be realised. The motive force behind this focus had been an incessant hatred, a hatred of greed and selfishness, of exploitation, subjugation, and torture. At first, this hatred had expressed itself subjectively, it had targeted a diffused and total superior force, a society that wanted to prevent us from studying, from advancing. Later, after we achieved political understanding, our hatred grew more intense, we began purposefully fighting those who tried to hold us down, annihilate us. We were guided by a cold, homicidal repulsion. Very seldom did we find this sensation articulated in art, in literature, rudiments surfaced in pictures by Grosz and Dix, Heartfields’s collages came closest to it, we then found it clear-cut in Lenin’s April Theses. For us fascism contained all that was inimical. Whatever we learned in daily work, in social life, in our investigations of painting and writing, of science and scholarship, it was drawn into the chief task of overcoming the enemy world. Every theme we assigned ourselves, every project actualised the clash between rapacity, monstrous destructivity, and the scale of values that gave meaning to our lives. At times the hatred was suffocating in its overpressure, it wanted to burn itself up when faced with the gigantic power of those, plundering and murdering, wanted to pull the world to its doom. There were periods when all reason abandoned me, when there was nothing but the hammering in my temples, when my brains were made of lead, and only rage, blind fury could be mobilised against the forces that were thoroughly obliterating us. But then another impetus broke through, our integrity was at stake, our ability to hold our ground. Tied to the wish for achieving a fundamental transformation, for building a new existence was the sense of togetherness with the country that had toppled the rule of capitalism and established the power of workers. Our indignation and rebellion would have been hopeless if that country had not spelled something indestructible for us, something that had to withstand all insult, all malevolence, all anxiety. Out of our own despair, we understood that fits of derangement, of frenzy could occur there too. We approved of the intolerance that was deployed there. There could be no waiting-and-seeing. A reconciliation, a compromise were unthinkable.
While people might speak of aberrations, blunders, panic, we felt that any hitting, any violence was justified. The country stood alone, just as we stood alone, and in standing alone we were bound to one another. This bonding offered the only conceivable endurance, and this endurance contained the unique and thrilling images of October. No doubts, no qualms could dim these images. They overrode everything, wiped away everything aimed at plunging us into darkness. They prompted each of our actions, each of our references, those that were marked by emotions and dreams as well as those that were precisely weighed, calculated, constructive. It was this main thought, this maxim that lent a rationality to fleeting things, things that seemed inexplicable, and this rationality was a feature that enabled us to get through the period of tribulations. We therefore never got rid of the skepticism, the uncertainty that might overcome us, anything dubious merely impelled us to initiate new attempts at explanations, and if something we recognised was outmoded, then we went on to new interpretations. Despite the certainty and unanimity that we had given it, the thesis of our choice was composed of many things, it had developed in a process of assertions and counterarguments, of assumptions, findings and conclusions. The fight against fascism, the solidarity with the Soviet state, these were the absolute necessities resulting from our experiences. Like Coppi and Heilman and countless others who remained in their places, I too was ready to carry out orders I received in Spain, and since this was correct, conceivable, tenable for us, these days that suddenly emerged without responsibilities did not become untenable. Again they conveyed the assurance that we were inside a totality, that nothing could guide us but that which we had justified ourselves. It had often happened to me that our consciousness, that every concentration on a specific field of interest ran into things that were connected, that were vital at that very point. Our consciousness guided us to books and pictures, it triggered conversations for which we had become ready only at this moment. This too showed in what universality we were at home, nothing took shape if its premises had not yet been created, we recognised the things already preformed in us, and we incessantly relied on the totality for our subject matter, storing it, enriching it, often unawares, until it became perceptible, concrete. The sensation of hatred always hovered nearby, for that openness that was intrinsic to us, acting as the basis of our autonomy, was to be ground down, and how many had already fallen by the wayside, so utterly destroyed that they did not even recognise the disfigurements to which they fell victim, this had been described in very sharp detail by someone whose work, The Castle, I found in the bookshop in Market Square... The village to which the surveyor came was the home of those who questioned nothing. Even the Castle was visible with its flat, far-stretching buildings, its round and ivy-shrouded turrets, its swarms of crows, it was nevertheless situated utterly beyond any possibility of approach. The agonising thing was that this separation was determined from the very start, that nobody wondered why the law of inaccessibility had to apply to the Castle. All the people living down here in the hamlet, even the surveyor, a newcomer, put up with the forced gap between their world and the world of the lords and masters, accepted it as an absolute. During the days on which I read the book, in the Lausitz mountains and on the Schober Line, a pass that, fortified with bunkers, constituted the border, I got to know my own traits and features and those of my people, characteristics that I had previously kept at arm’s length or had dealt with only casually. The surveyor spoke about his being a worker, about his being a subordinate, he based it on his contractual arrangement with the Castle, he had no interest in moving up, in gaining something outside his class, he only wanted to be recognised in his work. Rather than bucking the system that made him a servant and the employer an autocrat, he simply wanted to be appreciated as what he was, an attitude recalling how greatly people like us were always under duress of frugality and how many people there are who, for self-preservation and with no approval, actually defended the situation they were in. Often, fearing that protesting, rebelling, striking would cost them their jobs, they said they ought to be grateful for the work given them by the owner of the plant, the workshop, their entire consciousness was shaped by the fact that they could never cope with the greater force, that they always had to be below, trodden, knuckling under, that there was no justice for them, only a kick for acting up. We condemned the resignation to such a state of affairs, but there had been little we could do to repudiate it. Our superiors and also the Castle let it be known that they wanted satisfied workers. But in no way did they advocate oppression, rather they practiced supreme justice, though beyond our influence. A heavy responsibility lay on the authorities, they were incessantly given to pondering in order to keep the economy of the village going. And when I thought about the wretched living condi-