

THE ORDER OF BOURGEOIS PROTEST*

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We can only build communism out of the material created by capitalism, out of that refined apparatus which has been molded under bourgeois conditions which—as far as concerns the human material in the apparatus—is therefore inevitably imbued with the bourgeois mentality. That is what makes the building of communist society difficult, but it is also a guarantee that it can and will be built. In fact, what distinguishes Marxism from the old, utopian socialism is that the latter wanted to build the new society not from the mass human material produced by bloodstained, sordid, rapacious, shopkeeping capitalism, but from very virtuous men and women reared in special hothouses and cucumber frames. Everyone now sees that this absurd idea really is absurd and everyone has discarded it, but not everyone is willing or able to give thought to the opposite doctrine of Marxism and to think out how communism can (and should) be built from the mass of human material which has been corrupted by hundreds and thousands of years of slavery, serfdom, capitalism, by small individual enterprise, and by the war of every man against his neighbor to obtain a place in the market, or a higher price for his product or his labor.¹

V. I. Lenin

The proletarian revolution is essentially the liberation of the productive forces already existing within bourgeois society. These forces can be identified in the economic and political fields; but is it possible to start identifying the latent elements that will lead to the creation of a proletarian civilization or culture? Do elements for an art, philosophy and morality (standards) specific to the working class already exist? The question must be raised and it must be answered.²

Antonio Gramsci

It would seem reasonable to assume that instances of committed protest in the various literary, artistic, musical, cinematic, philosophical, and culture-critical artifacts of capitalism constitute among the significant “latent elements” of “the mass human material” necessary for the struggle in opposition to bourgeois coercion and hegemony and on behalf of proletarian revolution, dictatorship, and culture. Whether protest is to be located in the artifacts themselves or in some specific analytic procedures is an old, but today still contested question. So, too, is the question whether effective protest is to be located in the self-conscious formal manipulation of the device in avant-garde cultural practices (in film, for example, foregrounding the artifice of the medium versus the suturing effect of realism), or rather somehow in the nooks and crannies of mass culture itself, since the very possibility of protest in the postmodern era may reside only—if at all—in dreams, fantasies, and the imaginary, rather than in any conscious formal intentions. The unexceptional (if correct) answer to all such questions must be properly dialectical and historical. But further, as I shall argue in “orthodox” fashion, the fully dialectical position requisite to formulate adequately and to construct provisionally a theory and practice of protest can not be provided by *any* single discursive practice available on the late capitalist academic market, including Western Marxism, and can be produced and activated *only* by critics and artists who, working in solidarity with nascent communist societies, can commit themselves to the vanguard party in their own social conjunctures. My argument to this effect addresses, I hope, a subject of broad theoretical interest. It is also occasional to the extent that it is directed specifically at (and against) the theoretical

underpinnings of contemporary “liberal” and many “leftist” students of the phenomena of protest in literature of the twentieth century.

I. Situations of Protest Criticism

In light of the relative and symptomatic paucity today of theoretical discussion of protest and commitment in literature and the arts (the situation is only nominally different in film studies), Adorno’s reference in 1962 to “the now half forgotten controversy about commitment” seems regrettably apposite even now, well over two decades later.³ Even if we consider Adorno’s influential essay to be less than prescient (written as it was at a time when the neo-imperialist war was already hatched in Indo-China and about to rip nearly apart not only that region but also the aggressor, the most advanced capitalist country in history), and even if we overlook Adorno’s own subsequent position (or effective lack thereof) with regard to those world-historical events, his laconic comment about our collective amnesia still oddly rings true. Certainly the level of current theoretical debate on the “left” about protest literature and art appears passing low when set against the compelling urgency of the arguments begun in the period immediately leading into the October Revolution and then World War II, and continued fitfully on to the early 1970s, the period now retroactivated in some quarters as the origin of “our postmodern condition.” The sheer variety and multinational character of the “keywords” marshalled in those seminal arguments (e.g.: *partignost*, *die Tendenz*, *l’engagement*, commitment, partisanship, dissidence, relevancy, counter-hegemony) once signaled their vitality back when they were fighting words. Today our own paucity of theoretical discussion of commitment and protest—let alone a way of applying the theory “and using it to establish firm guidelines for all questions on the daily agenda”⁴—seems (over)compensated for by a variant in academic discourse of the return of the repressed. For whenever critics try to say something substantially “new” about the situation of literature in the 1920s or 1930s, or even about contemporary protest literature in the 1980s, they seem compelled to do so, whether consciously or not, within the parameters of the “ordre du discours” (Foucault), “Kommunika-

tionsbereich" (Habermas) or "problématique" (Althusser) "always already" prescribed earlier, albeit in quite different historical conjunctures. Not the least consequence of this mode of cultural repetition compulsion is that "we" seem fatally forced to speak about protest now at the level not even of tragedy, but farce.

Thus a powerfully ambivalent attraction (often to the point of romantic nostalgia) draws "leftist" critics toward the brute energy and urgency of the texts generated, say, between the world wars by the "Expressionism," "Realism," or "Modernism" debates (including the well-known interventions of Klaus Mann, Kurella, Walden, Balázs, Bloch, Seghers, Lukács, Brecht, and the later correspondence between Benjamin and Adorno) or by the equally important, if less familiar, "Cinema" debate that extended in Germany from the turn of the century to the early 1930s.⁵ Nor can we forget Lukács's "Tendency or Partisanship?" (1932), or Benjamin's "The Author as Producer" (1934) and "The Art Work in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility" (1936). We recall, too, the post-war arguments centered around Sartre's "What is Literature?" (1947): first, Barthes's barely veiled response in *Writing Degree Zero* (begun in 1947 but finished in 1953); then, Adorno's more belated reply to Sartre in "Commitment" (1962) and the position taken by Adorno near the end of his life, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms* (1967); and finally, Sartre's own reply to Barthes (but not Adorno), first in "Plea for Intellectuals" (1965) and then "The Friend of the People" (1970). And we remember the critical moments represented by these documents: Enzensberger's post-Benjaminian/post-McLuhanian analysis of the possibility of progressive protest in the age of mass culture, "Building Block for a Theory of the Media" (1970); Marcuse's reflections throughout the 1960s on cultural production in consumer society, including *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), so influential on the "New Left" and against which Enzensberger was partially reacting; Negt and Kluge's audacious post-Habermasian contribution to the cultural politics of the New Left, *Public Sphere and Experience* (1972); and the seminal arguments advanced in the late 1960s and early 1970s by Anglo-French film theorists for the progressive function of avant-garde cinematic practices.⁶

Now, each one of these representative texts was of course deeply rooted in its specific historical and social moment: whether this was

the United Front or later Popular Front and Left Turn strategies of the Comintern; or the necessity for Leninists to respond to the Trotskyite Left Opposition of the early 1930s; or existentialist reaction to neo-aestheticist currents in post-war, post-resistance France. Later, the apparently different critical models of Barthes, Adorno, Marcuse, and Enzensberger, or of avant-garde film theorists writing in such journals as *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Screen*, and *Jump Cut*, would tend in different ways to vaporize the concrete historical references and functions of artifacts. But theirs were no less reflections of history and ideology, namely responses to the variously described "post-bourgeois," "post-Freudian," "post-literary," or even "post-proletarian" and "post-industrial" age ostensibly dominated without recourse by the excretions and cooptions of the "culture industry." And all the writers who were alive to witness it were forced, willingly or not, to situate their thinking and their actions around ephemeral, potentially promising, and then deeply disappointing events such as May 1968—or more profound ones like the (alleged) disorder and opportunism of the Western trade union movements and of Eurocommunism.⁷

The historical specificity of the major modern theoretical discussions of committed protest literature should hardly dissuade, and indeed positively encourage, historical materialists to transform our negative theoretical moment, when discussion of commitment and protest lies relatively dormant, into an occasion to take stock of the situation by analyzing what it is that these earlier theories, especially to the extent that they reflected bourgeois and petty bourgeois interests, precisely had in common. We must look hard at what is, in fact, the prehistory of our own inactivity. By hypothesizing an unacknowledged methodological, ideological, and hegemonic *consensus* shared by these texts (with each other and with less theoretically charged research into the phenomenon of protest), I do *not* mean merely some "textual" or even "intertextual" coherence (e.g. the tangled significance of Sartre for Barthes and Adorno, of Benjamin for Adorno and Enzensberger, or Brecht for Wollen and MacCabe). Intertextual analysis cannot but shift the critical focal point away from lived history and society. *Nor* do I mean to suggest that we should ignore the textual fact that most of the relevant theoretical interventions were profoundly and intentionally *difficult*, even to the point of deconstructive self-contradiction or hermetic indeterminacy. We should never rush, however, to celebrate textual

“undecidability” or “heteroglossia” (*raznorecivost, raznorecie*) at the cost of blinding ourselves to hegemonic overdeterminations or of making determined political actions impossible. “Advanced” theory ought to be leery, for example, of currently trendy critical positions that, leaping on the Bakhtin bandwagon, identify “the basic condition governing the operation of meaning in *any* utterance” as contextual (i.e. “social, historical, meteorological [!], physiological”) and hence “heteroglot,” whenever the ultimate aim is to conclude ahistorically and fetishistically that utterances are nothing more than “functions of a matrix of forces *practically impossible* [!] to recoup, and therefore *impossible to resolve*.”⁸ A valid theory and practice of protest will need to see the practical trees as well as the conceptual forest.

The texts I have alluded to decidedly tend (appearances sometimes to the contrary) to avoid “concrete analysis of a concrete situation” at least to the extent that none provides either a theory adequate to the full range of cultural practices or, certainly, a detailed example of how one might analyze a discrete artifact. Nor can I provide more than an argument for the necessity of both in the space provided here.⁹

A complexly motivated reluctance to provide empirical evidence or in-depth analysis unites into a virtual consensus of negative methodological coherence texts otherwise positively different at the level of consciously articulated theory. For all its anecdotal richness and topicality, “What is Literature?” (English translations, in a successful bid to market it as transcendently “existentialist,” dropped the last section on “The Situation of the Writer in 1947”) is a symptomatic, because only apparent, exception. Sartre talked there in sufficiently abstract terms about “the work of art as an act of confidence in the freedom of *all men*,”¹⁰ that an analytic critic may be forgiven for buying into the notion that Sartre’s theses are adequate to “*all* literature.”¹¹ Sartre’s text was at least prolix in adduced evidence and plotted its main argument for committed literature in a way that was decidedly more than merely an arbitrary and self-serving “narrative that facilitates thinking about literature.”¹² This is, however, precisely the temptation in which Barthes’s response to Sartre indulged, with one concomitant that his readers are *still* seduced into the reactionary fantasy that a single novel by Roger Garaudy (virtually the only concrete example analyzed by Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero*) can stand *pars pro toto* for all communist

literature. Nor did Marcuse's often florid or Adorno's typically minimalist remarks (at least in their explicitly theoretical writings) about Kafka and Beckett or other representatives of poetical "liberation," artistic "permanence," and critical "autonomy"—let alone Enzensberger's voluntaristic pleas for orgasmic cultural-political activity,¹³ Negt and Kluge's largely hypothetical construction of a "proletarian public sphere,"¹⁴ or the post-Lacanian, post-Metzian arcanum arcanorum of so much film theory—demonstrably contain much that most work-a-day critics have been able to find helpful for their "explications de textes," "werkimmanente Interpretationen," or "close readings." Although I would be one of the last people to embrace the Know Nothing rejection of "Theory" so common among teachers in the academy (whose work is infested with all manner of unacknowledged theory), I believe as strongly that we must confront head-on the fact that the major theorists on the "left" of protest literature did share an anti-empirical bias against specific analysis that was, and continues to be, fixated in the form of a certain privatizing indulgence.

One has to "leave philosophy aside" . . . , one has to leap out of it and devote oneself like an ordinary man to the study of actuality, for which there exists also an enormous amount of literary material, unknown, of course to the philosophers. . . . Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love.¹⁵

Up to a point "traditional" critics will fall over themselves to be the first to agree with their new-found (although otherwise strange) bed-fellows, papas Marx and Engels: "Isn't all that Theory just a lot of masturbation? No wonder Theorists are so damn blind to practical matters and to what our students really need!" And so it is that, in inverse proportion to the *over*theorized (to be sure often intentionally non-instrumental) theory of protest from the 1920s to the early 1970s, we are confronted with the flip side of a rather worn record, namely a drastically *under*theorized quotidian practice of protest studies in twentieth century literary criticism.

II. The Orders of Bourgeois Protest

Now, from the perspective of most quasi-leftist, liberal or even conservative "common sense" pragmatism, the current situation for the analysis of commitment and protest seems auspicious. Several conditions speak for at least guarded optimism. The climate of critical opinion around various, otherwise quite different critical approaches seems to sanction at least some sort of shift away from purely aesthetic interests. The strangle hold of "New Criticisms" (read: the bad faith desire of consumers of artifacts to become "creators") seems effectively, if not conclusively, loosened in many quarters beyond the "left" (where it is occasionally alive and well). Most national and regional academic organizations (including the Modern Language Association, The American Historical Association, The German Studies Association, The Society for French Historical Studies, the various meetings of professional art historians, and even bastions of conservative men's club academia like the American Philosophical Association) have sessions at annual meetings devoted to some version of "protest thought and culture." Typically the questions asked at such occasions by scholars of national regions or by interdisciplinary comparativists are posed at sufficiently high levels of generality that a broad range of important themes might be addressed separately or even collectively: aesthetics and politics; sexism and feminism; formalism and realism; the theory and practice of the avant-garde; art and persecution and art and propaganda; popular or subaltern and high culture; modernism and postmodernism, *et cetera*.

To be sure the term "protest" is rarely defined by its students on such occasions in any rigorous manner. It is hardly atypical that a once influential German book with the title "Protest and Promise: Studies in Classical, Romantic, and Modern Literature" claimed that "every poetic work, be it of classical, romantic, or modern stamp, constitutes its Truth as protest against our ossified consciousness and on behalf of the promise of universal consciousness."¹⁶ On the economic law that under capitalism "all that is solid melts into air," the term "protest," too, sooner or later evaporates into nothingness. But lack of definitional rigor can be productive, as can under certain conditions even "non-reductive, causal pluralism."¹⁷ And thus there is now available an enormous capital of primary materials for the study of protest literature on which to draw interest: we have, for

example, extensive collections and annotated bibliographies of oppositional literature and periodicals from various ideological positions, including "exile" and "inner emigration" literature of various types. From an empirical perspective, then, the only ultimate obstacle to progress would be quantitative: addressable if not immediately answerable by colleagues at scholarly meetings or in journals such as this one, a filling-in by means of discrete studies ("The Protest Literature of X") of the interstices of a grid always already laid out before us. Then it might also follow that the proper function of theoretical reflection would be to act as what Locke might have called "a literary critical underlaborer" to the vast but not ultimately unmanageable empirical effort, providing periodically updated critical states-of-research, metacritical projections of whence we've come, where we are, and whither we're headed.

The problem, as even unreconstructed pragmatists know, is that "theory" by rights ought to be more than that. So while eschewing use or even implicit mention of the sophisticated theoretical discussion of committed protest literature produced by Sartre or Barthes or Adorno, some rather strident scholars, pleased to view themselves as on or near the cutting edge of their profession, develop their own theory or methodology in explicit distance from what one of them ridicules as the "material collectors, political rhetoricians, and amateurs." Darkly and vaguely intimating, for instance, that the work of amateurs in the field of protest literature is "meaningless or even dangerous,"¹⁸ we are told that there is never anything "escapist" about "specifically literary responses" to the objective horrors of the twentieth century; indeed literary response *tout court* is defined as:

more important in terms of developing necessary self-awareness and of developing human values than any political action ever could have been. Above all, it is literature which is our subject matter as literary critics. (p. 14; emphases added)

From this self-serving and tautologous idealist position, which positivistically takes as unquestioned given the entire academic division of labor into "disciplines," it seems natural to write such things as this:

Judging aesthetic subjects, i.e., literary works of art, as mere political treatises is somewhat like picking the plainest girl in a beauty contest as queen simply because her political views are

“correct”—whatever “correct” might mean in this context.
(p. 9)

Noting that the word “mere” in this passage begs many of the pertinent questions about protest artifacts, we pass by other features of this formalist “argument” in silence. (Whether sexism is a necessary or merely contingent feature of this all-too-popular critical position is presumably not for us, but for “literary critics” themselves to know, since it is they who claim a monopoly on understanding relations between “form” and “content”—all of which they believe to be “ideologically neutral.”)

The dominant mode of research on protest literature can be called part of the “order of bourgeois protest,” in the dual sense of an ideologically inscribed *system* and of a specific problematic that *commands* only certain types of class interested questions about artifacts. There is nothing “wrong” with this order to the extent that we all (co)exist in a world of clashing and ultimately irreconcilable ideologies of the two major world cultures (late bourgeois and nascent communist). When it occurs, the bad faith resides in the fact of the refusal to take responsibility for the ideological position one holds vis-à-vis these two cultures and for the consequences of that position.

A few examples of the order of bourgeois protest are required and must suffice. I take them almost randomly: one from the realm of “practical” criticism, one from “Theory,” and one from the contemporary scene of multimedia and performance art. First, consider the following symptomatic remarks from a discussion of Hogarth’s etchings:

Beer Street was perhaps too “joyous and thriving” to be altogether convincing but *Gin Lane*, one of the great graphic masterpieces, that transformed the humbler regions of the parish of St. Giles’ into a fevered vision, transcended propagandistic aims by its intensity.¹⁹

An operative but tacit presupposition here (clearer in the context of the book in question) is that certain values exist dormant “in” Hogarth’s various works of presumed social protest and, further, that the critical disclosure and comparative evaluation of these works and this protest constitutes a socially necessary, somehow progressive, and even sufficient scholarly activity. More specifically, the passage

just cited is initially grounded in unsubstantiated *ad hominem* opinion (as in the aesthetic valorization of the first clauses). The tautology consists in the way the supposedly crucial question is then begged in the parentheses (*Gin Lane* is essentialistically posited as a "great graphic masterpiece"). The consequent idealist absurdity is patent and not mere rhetorical indecision: an authentic work of art (and the criticism adequate to that work) "transforms" the "humbler" (!) regions of an impoverished and subjugated London district. Genuine art, or rather the romantic-sounding "fevered vision" of its geniuses (and, again by implication, critics) can never itself be "mere" propaganda when it is Good, True, Beautiful. Indeed, the "transformation" by protest art of reality never occurs in reality at all, since it is ultimately unnecessary and even undesirable that it do so. Obscured by the argument is the ideological and historical fact that when Hogarth published a "cheap" series of prints like *Gin Lane* or *Beer Street* the event was explicitly, in the words of one of Hogarth's own advertisements of 1751, "calculated to reform some reigning vices peculiar to the *lower Class of People* in hopes to render them more extensive *Use*."²⁰ Occluded from view, finally, is the fact that Hogarth worked so hard for copyright laws to protect his (and other bourgeois artists') mechanically reproduced prints that the bill passed in 1734/1735 to protect these rights from genuinely proletarian uses is still called in England the Hogarth Act.²¹ The then progressive struggle of middle-class artists, in which Hogarth was one seminal figure, to escape the patronage system and to appeal to a "larger audience" was at least double-edged: a way of consolidating and monopolizing art and visual ideology for specific class interests in the name of the general public welfare. Today the order of bourgeois protest more or less unwittingly replicates this ambivalent creative act at the level of ultimately repressive criticism, pedagogy, and vision.

Equally to be rejected, however, is the currently prevalent assumption that one can avoid the ideological traps and liabilities of "traditional scholarship" by shifting to "Theory." Compare the following "radical" text by a self-styled "advanced" theorist (similar passages run like Ariadne's thread through most apologies for poststructuralism, not to mention its founding texts). "At stake" in this example is the well-known Derridian deconstruction of one variant of linguistics at the turn of the century:

What Saussure calls "the natural bond" between sound and

sense—the guaranteed self-knowledge of speech—is in fact a delusion engendered by the age-old repression of a “*feared and subversive*” writing. To question that bond is to *venture into regions as yet uncharted*, and requires a rigorous effort of conceptual desublimation of “waking up.” Writing is that which exceeds—and *has the power to dismantle—the whole traditional edifice of Western attitudes to thought and language.*²²

Recently there has been at least one incisive critique of such *ipse dixit*, inflated, and leftist-sounding rhetoric.²³ But perhaps the best criticism was provided already by Marx in his attacks on the Young-Hegelian idealists of his own day who, “in spite of their allegedly ‘world-shattering’ statements, are the staunchest conservatives” in terms of the effects of their actions.²⁴ It is still the case:

The most recent of them have found the correct expression for their activities when they declare they are only fighting against “*phrases*.” They forget, however, that they themselves are opposing nothing but phrases to these phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world when they are combating solely the phrases of this world. (p. 30)

Poststructuralist theory finds its rough artistic equivalent in a performance work by Saul Ostrow in which he places a sign “Work for the Unemployed” in a vacant storefront off Times Square. Upon entering, the desperate, now hopeful visitor is confronted with an inchoate taped monologue on the artist’s “politics” and linocut handouts reading: “Wages a Form of Slavery” and “Everyone Who is Employed Is Being Robbed.” Lippard’s penetrating comment on Ostrow’s “perhaps courageous but singularly ineffective and even insulting piece” is this:

Just as it is not a matter of jazzing up factories or city walls so that art improves the working environment without doing anything about fundamental social inequities, neither is it a matter of gratuitously provoking ideas without being willing to follow them through.²⁵

If Norris or Derrida or Ostrow himself denies that he is “conservative” in any meaningful sense of the term, and I assume they all do deny it, then one response is to raise the polemic ante against their

“cucumber frame” naïveté. Deconstructive anarchism is always only the reverse side, the binary term, of conservatism in practice.

A petty bourgeois driven to frenzy by the horrors of capitalism is a social phenomenon which, like anarchism, is characteristic of all capitalist countries. The instability of such revolutionism, its barrenness, and its tendency to turn rapidly into submission, apathy, phantasms, and even a frenzied infatuation with one bourgeois fad or another—all this is common knowledge.²⁶

But not common enough it seems among our “leftist” cultural critics who, in their isolation and defeatism, often enough serve a counter-productive “terrorist” function in the academies of late capitalist society. This is what one perceptive Soviet scholar, Yuri Barabash, has rightly termed “a pseudo-revolutionary irritant [that] makes it easier to wage battle against genuinely revolutionary principles.”²⁷ Much the same thing can be said, too, against the voluntaristic abandonment of art practiced sometimes by artists and critics—which, in turn, is not to deny that there come times, in the words of perhaps the greatest Romantic lyric poet, when one “must throw the pen under the table and go in God’s name where the need is greatest and we are most needed.”²⁸ This is, however, a sometimes necessary tactic, not a coherent or productive strategy for real social change.

The current version in literature, the arts, and criticism of what Lenin called “infantile disorder” may be one result, as Lenin himself lucidly argued, of the “opportunistic sins of the working class.”²⁹ Today theoretical anarchism (“Question All Authority!”) and a coeval scholarly and artistic conservatism (“Do Nothing About It!”) are both equally symptomatic of the “double consciousness” that elected North America its most dangerous leader. He was not elected by the majority of the trade unions and certainly not by their (to be sure as yet largely unacknowledged) vanguard party. The failure of culture critics on the Left to grasp this situation fully is particularly ironic and even pernicious in light of the importance in late capitalist societies of media politics and cultural hegemony—forces that culture critics should know most about.

For whatever else Reagan may represent to his supporters (a return to traditional values, a refusal of modernity), he remains, even for them, vaguely a figure of camp, a poor man’s cowboy

most often associated with movies in which he shared billing with a chimpanzee. Reagan's ambivalent image only offers another sign of American culture's growing mythological self-consciousness. Indeed, perhaps only a former movie star could satisfy an age that is at once so nostalgic for, and so cynical about, clear-cut action and straightforward heroes.³⁰

This formulation of the argument may swerve from the recognition of certain *economic* determinations on what Marx long ago called "commodity fetishism." Even Horkheimer and Adorno concluded their essay on the culture industry with the observation that one of the great triumphs of advertising is that "consumers are compelled to represent themselves via products that they are able to see through."³¹ What this insight should mean to us is that our ultimate point of attack must always be commodity *capitalism* and not just commodity advertising, *capitalist* industry, and not just industry. But Ray, as Adorno and Horkheimer before him, does broach the very serious question of whether there is any effective way for scholars and teachers on the Left in effect "to protest" against the Reagan-Rambo "mythology" by studying protest. It seems clear that they can do little *as isolated individuals*.

III. Immodest Proposal

I have suggested that the current state of academic analysis of protest culture is caught in a consensus-concealing antinomy: a widespread, undertheorized quotidian practice of "traditional," "non-political," or more or less "liberal" critics, scholars, and teachers, on the one hand; and on the other, a powerful tradition of overtheorized "leftist" reflection, which typically seems without practical application and which has exerted virtually no influence on traditional modes of criticism and research, incapable as it is to lead them or channel their movement in new directions or applications. "Thus we commence," as E. P. Thompson argued in *The Poverty of Theory*, "with a *de facto* sociological and intellectual separation of theory and practice."³² Both moments of what I have been calling "the order of bourgeois protest" are politically debilitating to the precise extent that they occlude the possibility of strategies and tactics of effective

protest and organized commitment against the economic, social, and cultural conditions of late capital. In Lenin's uncompromising terms, however, communism simply cannot be initiated or achieved without dialectical interaction with this whole "refined apparatus."³³ And if it is the case that the entire Western Marxist tradition is systemically compromised by a "hypertrophy of the aesthetic," with enervating consequences for any working class revolutionary practice,³⁴ then an equally deep sense of impotence and sterility is *a fortiori* experienced, not to say celebrated, "globally" as what Lyotard and others have too precipitously accepted as "our postmodern condition."³⁵

A different, *red* thread leads through my reflections to a single overdetermined point. Protest theories and artifacts, like all protest practices, are contested sites for which we all (Right, Liberal, Left) must continually *struggle* with whatever weapons are available and appropriate. For the Left, however, individual contributions to this struggle are always inadequate. Individual protest against capital can and will be eventually coopted; a truly revolutionary party can be momentarily destroyed, but never coopted and never ultimately destroyed. Any theory and practice of "counter-culture" must be anchored, as Michael Parenti has correctly argued, "in an alternative politics and political party so that it confronts rather than evades devolving into cultural exotica and inner migration."³⁶

A powerful bourgeois consensus cuts across apparent ideological differences and denies the Marxist-Leninist thesis that a vanguard party organized on the principle of democratic centralism is absolutely necessary for successful revolution. Liberal and conservative scholars would of course normally have little reason to affirm it and better reason not to. For them, the study of Left-wing protest and commitment remains a historicistic pursuit. For them, scholarship and teaching are not themselves acts of protest requiring ideological commitment, except perhaps in the sense that understanding historical and contemporary cultural artifacts of committed protest can help make micro-adjustments in a political and economic system which is already sufficiently democratic at base. Protest practices like Communist ones which historically or today threaten to exceed this order are readily and eagerly coopted, and used for legitimizing the rule of the bourgeois class. What is so interesting in the situation regarding the study of protest culture is not the position of liberals or conservatives, who could hardly be expected to cut their own (ideological) throats, but the stance taken by "leftists." Western

Marxists (among them many poststructuralist and postmodernist practitioners of "Theory"), in spite and because of their ultrist rhetoric, themselves comprise a variant within the order of bourgeois protest. Their anti-empirical and overly theoretical biases tend to conceal the empirically uncanny fact that theirs is ultimately a bourgeois class allegiance. It is my thesis that Western Marxism's major theoretical statements on the subject of commitment and protest are indelibly inscribed by a fatal prejudice against commitment to the *party*. It is this problematic, *which of course has historical and social as well as theoretical determinants*, that I would most like to expose and to open up to debate. We must be wary of all self-fulfilling prophecies that an effort to do so will be doomed in advance, just as we must be wary of all self-fulfilling prophecies that Leftist academics or other progressives have no party to which they can turn.

Interestingly enough, the "left" is quite ready to concede that organized *Right-wing* criticism can in effect produce progressive art. In the case of nineteenth-century France, for instance, it has been persuasively argued that it was in large measure the protests against Courbet led by bourgeois critics (who then as now "set the tone" of criticism) that helped transform the paintings by the "Proudhon of Painting" (in which, for the first substantial time in the history of art, working people "set the tone") into acts of effective political protest.³⁷ We also know that progressive *Liberals* can organize themselves as a group with some success to protest attempts by the Right to coopt artistic impulses. Such was the case when German artists, writers, and critics banded together in 1911 to attack publicly Carl Vinnen's anthology "A Protest of German Artists," a *völkisch* slander of Gallic influence in modern painting.³⁸ Equally evident is that this collective response, for all its positive anti-*nationalist* sentiment, was unable to call into question its own *class*-specific nature or achieve solidarity with working-class *internationalism* in the arts.

So it is, too, that "leftist" critics today are singularly embarrassed by the fact that Benjamin (whom many of them otherwise idolize) briefly argued in 1934 the *dictatorship of the proletariat* was required to make "the conventional bourgeois distinction between the author and the public begin to disappear."³⁹ He also warned:

A political tendency, no matter how revolutionary in appearance, functions as counter-revolutionary, so long as the

writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat only in his attitudes, not as producer. (p. 689)

To be sure, Benjamin's concept of "producer" was vague and the conclusion to his text undialectical; to wit: "The revolutionary struggle does not take place between capitalism and *Geist*, but between capitalism and the proletariat" (p. 701). This serious theoretical slippage occurred, however, not because Benjamin was unable *see* the problem of capitalist hegemony, but because he could not see it *through*. This prototypical Western Marxist intellectual could not bring himself to see the party as the only effective way of opposing dominant hegemony and simultaneously producing and leading the forces of counter-hegemony. It was in a not entirely dissimilar manner, in spite of his many real differences with Benjamin, that Lukács, two years earlier, had constructed his argument against Trotsky.⁴⁰ Lukács, I think correctly, attacked Trotsky's dangerously mechanistic separation "in essence," as Trotsky put it, of the dictatorship of the proletariat from "the organization for the production of the culture of a new society."⁴¹ Lukács's manifest concern, of course, was to argue on behalf of objective "partisanship" and against merely subjective "tendency" in literature and in criticism. But his argument to that effect curiously defined literary partisanship less in terms of Lenin's more flexible conception of the democratic centralism of the party,⁴² than in terms of "the proletariat itself"—a position Lukács later saw, as part of his own ruthless self-criticism of a similar problem in *History and Class Consciousness*, as an aspect of "messianic sectarianism."⁴³ However one chooses to interpret this moment in Lukácsian theory,⁴⁴ I would insist that what was ultimately at issue in the entire "Modernism Debate" was not Formalism, or any other aspect of literature, but the necessity for a vanguard party. And this is just the issue still occluded from view by all contemporary Western scholars of this debate. But then of course none of current Western Marxist theory appeals even to *this* Benjamin, let alone *this* Lukács.

The anti-party bias is so deeply and fundamentally entrenched in "leftist" discussion of commitment and protest literature that it is high time for the "left" to really debate it. Perhaps nothing better illustrates the obstacles it will then face than certain tendencies in Sartre's "What is Literature?" and in the response it has generated.

For Sartre, "actual literature [la littérature en acte] can only

achieve its full essence in a classless society" ("Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" p. 194). But precisely this entirely correct slogan is made unrealizable by Sartre. His notion of "freedom" is resolutely intransitive; it is hardly ever conceived as freedom *for* something. Or rather, freedom is displaced from the rest of reality into part of it: into writing and reading, and hence into the ideal state (recognized as such by Sartre) of a "free dream" or, alternatively, of a "pact of generosity between author and reader" (p. 105). This reciprocal contract he terms a "symmetrical and inverse appeal" (pp. 100-01). But it is not, as he thinks, "dialectical" (pp. 100-01), but hermeneutically circular. (It is probably derived from Heidegger's notion of *Vorhabe* and prefigures by several decades Iser's notion of *Appellstruktur*.⁴⁵) Questions of the *ideological* determinations on such dreamy pacts are left unspecified as one result of the grammatically uncertain status of "freedom." Further, if the Heideggerian sources of Sartre's "What is Literature?" dictate an abstract relation to fundamental ontology (in the form of Sartre's existentialist *Entwurf*), then a kind of neo-Kantian, empirio-critical epistemology (*à la* Vaihinger) intrudes to argue that we can only conceive of freedom in the mode of absurdity: "as if this world had its source in human freedom" (p. 106; emphases added). The consequences for the ensuing conception of "commitment" are serious. A free-floating sense of objective reference and a lack of specificity about historical freedom legislates in advance against Sartre's noble attempts, especially in the third section of his essay, to situate writers and readers concretely as members of a *class* or, in the fourth section, as participants in a concrete historical conjuncture circa 1947. Sartre's text, for all its struggle to use ideological and historical categories of analysis, drifts irrevocably into its famous absolute dicta. Thus "all prose is in essence utilitarian" (p. 70). By this Sartre of course means that all prose literature is *political*. This may sound intuitively correct to Marxists coming from Eagleton and others. But Sartre also means that committed literature is political *a priori*. It is more than ironic that supposedly "dogmatic" Marxists (whom Sartre, Barthes, Adorno, and all Western Marxists after them prefer to call "Stalinists") deny that artifacts or their reception are political (or anything else) "by definition," but only in one of their aspects and in the last instance, namely depending on concrete functions at given moments in the class struggle.

Sartre's tendency toward abstraction works in tandem with a

tendency toward spontaneism: "To speak is to act" (p. 72). He demands that committed writers elicit from themselves and others "the engagement of immediate spontaneity" (p. 76). But there is nothing "spontaneous" (in the sense of historically unsituated) about Sartre's use and abuse of a wholly undefined notion of "permanent revolution"—and in 1947 this was particularly irresponsible politically. He brings the penultimate section of his essay to a close by saying: "In a word, literature is, in essence, the subjectivity of a society in permanent revolution" (p. 196). This is literary Trotskyism at its worst. By this existentialist move, Sartre would point toward a world, as he had said earlier, "without dictatorship" (p. 160); but in the full context of his argument this can only mean "without a dictatorship of the proletariat." And without *that* there can be no basis for a single substantial *proletarian* freedom in the world in which we live.

For Sartre, the "classless society" he envisioned as the only acceptable foundation for a free literature, and to which he claims he is committed (p. 194), cannot have any basis in reality. Or rather, it can—but only *qua* readers and writers in allegedly "free" social contract with one another. Intellectuals (i.e. those who read and write committed prose literature) are, however, "*perpetually unclassed* [perpétuels déclassés]" (p. 146; emphases added). This influential claim reveals the *class* solidarity behind Sartre's *own* argument. As he himself said of an earlier century, "the bourgeois could be recognized by the fact that he denied the existence of social classes, particularly of the bourgeoisie" (p. 159). As Yuri Davydov has been able to show brilliantly, Sartre's finally bourgeois argument for committed *literature* crucially displaces commitment to the *party*. "The party of literature" associates itself in the last instance with no other real party but itself.⁴⁶ Sublimated commitment can only admit, at the most honest and desperate moment in Sartre's text, that although "it is possible to conceive of a free society, *we have at our disposal no practical means whatsoever of realizing it*" (p. 197; emphases added).

Still in 1965, Sartre's intellectual was "vainly searching for his integration into society, only in the end to encounter solitude," a solitude which he could at best "choose."⁴⁷ After 1968, when the Events of May had flashed an *ignis fatuus* of revolution across the capitalist world, Sartre began dreaming, too late, of "*organizations* that would bring workers and intellectuals together."⁴⁸ But this

"friend of the people" could only lamely come up with "guys like the 68ers [des types sortis de Mai]" for his revolutionary base ("L'Ami du peuple," p. 476).⁴⁹

Whatever else is transpiring in it, Barthes's reply to Sartre in *Writing Degree Zero* closes with *no* significant aspect of the problematic just adumbrated, and so *replicates* it at another discursive level. Barthes himself apparently believed that he had somehow "Marxianized" Sartre's notion of commitment.⁵⁰ But the effect of what Barthes in fact did was to attack a certain kind of "communist" writer, or rather "scriptor [*scripteur*] halfway between the party member [*le militant*] and the writer [*l'écrivain*]." ⁵¹ This was the scriptor later identified *mirabile dictu* as Garaudy. For him, language "tends to become the sufficient sign of commitment" (p. 41). This accurate description of a very real problem is applicable, however, to no style of writing more than Barthes's own: that of the *écrivain* for whom language never is a transparent medium but always a self-conscious exploration of "duplicities." Such authentic writing or *écriture* (by the time of *S/Z*, Barthes seems to say that he is sooner describing a mode of *reading*) is constituted in the full knowledge of an "ambivalent reality" wherein a "tragic reversal" occurs away from "confrontation with reality" to "the instruments of creation" (pp. 26-27). Such writing is the "morality of form," although admittedly it always "falls short of revolution" (p. 26). What is really hidden beneath the surface of this implicit critique of Sartrean commitment is the fact that the reason why (some) communist writers "go on keeping bourgeois writing alive long after they themselves gave it up" is *not* because they are powerless to create an immediately "free writing" (p. 103). They never intended to do so. Communist writers ought to believe quite the opposite, namely that a free society under First World conditions can only be constructed through revolution on the base of bourgeois society and, further, that individual bourgeois *or* communist writers and their written "signs" can at best provide some of the necessary but never the sufficient conditions for actually achieving social and economic freedom.

Perceptive bourgeois commentators on Barthes's project are only too happy to see in Barthean literature an "agonized suspension" between literary "commitment" (Sartre!) and literary "self-transcendence" (Adorno?).⁵² It is here that Sontag locates the proper terrain of the "responsible critic" (p. xxii). Yet neither she nor Barthes himself has any way of escaping the suspended animation of

disembodied critical perception that is ostensibly "between" political engagement and self-referential undecidability. Just as with Sartre's position (supposedly one extreme pole of a "spectrum" that Sontag thinks we need to "mediate"), critical energies are diverted from the creation of classless society, and the party necessary to realize it, toward a literature conceived as "the Utopia of language" (*Le Degré zéro*, p. 146). This "advanced" position of bourgeois literary criticism ends up negating *all* human subjectivity, first, because it cannot conceive of a *collective* one and, second, because it has the honesty to despise its *own* self-serving solipsism. Thus Barthes later admitted (in terms reminiscent of Mallarmé's famous ascetic remark that he "only existed on paper, and there so little"):

I have no biography, that is to say, since the time of my first written line, I no longer see myself . . . , everything happens via writing.⁵³

Barthes is perhaps not, as Culler thinks, a "hedonist"⁵⁴ so much as he is, in Steve Ungar's cunning application of a phrase, "the professor of desire."⁵⁵ But it is precisely hedonism *and* desire that are rigorously absent from the second great response on the "left" to Sartrean commitment, namely that of Adorno. If Barthes's reply has determined much of the Anglo-French poststructuralist position vis-à-vis commitment and protest, then Adorno's lies near the root of the position of the other, German half of Western Marxist (and now postmodernist) "Theory."

Sartre tried hard to demonstrate that prose literature coincided *qua* genre with political commitment, but he did not conceive of it as an effective instrument of specific political *rivalry*. Thus was obviated the question of whether writers should associate themselves with any party; in fact Sartre *excluded* this possibility in advance. It is here that the deepest level of agreement between the Sartre and Barthes of the late 1940s and early 1950s and the early Frankfurt School of the 1930s is to be located.⁵⁶ For the arch hedonist Marcuse, "rebellious art" came to have the miraculous power to be "a liberating force on the societal scale."⁵⁷ His was the flower-child faith that "Beauty has the power to check aggression: it forbids and immobilizes the aggressor" (p. 26). For Marcuse, commitment to or truck with any "centralized communist organization" had to be abandoned permanently—in his case on behalf of "anarchist liberation" (p. 89). And so it came eventually to pass that in the end Marcuse could locate an

authentic revolution "hitherto suppressed in the previous historical revolutions" only in "the remembrance of things past."⁵⁸

This damnably unproductive anti-party bias takes a less effusive tone, but, as such, may be more influential, in Adorno's most expansive statement about Sartrean commitment, one which he delayed making until 1962. As we saw, Barthes had effectively brushed aside Sartre's false question of genre to begin the long, on-going project of eliminating Sartre's committed *subject* from the debate on committed protest, only unwittingly to have a supposedly hyper-selfconscious subject recur as a mode of *writing* that always rebounds to have physical contact only with itself. As if already anticipating Sontag's popularizing reading of Barthes's project as an act of mediation, Adorno explicitly denied that for him the question of art was in any way one of a "compromise between commitment and autonomy" ("Engagement," pp. 429-30). But Adorno's apparently independent response to Sartre was to take only a nominally different tack in eliminating the subject from history: the *personification* by "immanent criticism" of what he called the "autonomous aesthetic object." This object, rather like Bishop Berkeley's God, did not even require that it be viewed by living people in lived history. On Adorno's intricate argument:

The primacy of the aesthetic object as one that is perfectly formed does not entail smuggling back in by detour consumption, and therefore false understanding. For although the moment of pleasure, even were it extirpated from the effect of a work, constantly recurs in it, nevertheless the principle that supports autonomous works is not any context of effectivity, but rather only their own inherent and self-sufficient structure [ihr Gefüge bei sich selbst]. They are knowledge *qua* nonconceptual object. Herein rests their dignity. It is not they that have to persuade humans of this dignity, simply by virtue of the fact that dignity is given unto them. This is why the time has come in Germany to speak on behalf of the autonomous rather than the committed work. The committed work all too readily credits itself with all the noble values, only then to play tricks on them. (pp. 428-29)

Authentic works of art "are knowledge," "pleasure recurs in them," they "do not need to persuade people" that they "have dignity given unto them," they don't "play tricks" on the noble values. This

grammatical personification is no contingent rhetorical dross. It is absolutely necessary to Adorno's argument since it is left to art works alone to combat the "cultural twaddle" of mass culture: "They have been charged with the task of wordlessly holding fast to what is barred from politics," at just the moment when "the paralysis of politics approaches" (p. 430). This type of Cold War thesis⁵⁹ should be read less as a self-denunciation or self-immolation of the man Adorno himself than of whatever remains of the class position occupied by him and Marcuse and Sartre and Barthes. The eschatological tone of Adorno, the benevolent guru tone of Marcuse, the vibrantly engaged tone of Sartre, the increasingly onanistic tone of Barthes thus all reveal a common class consensus and its largely unexamined anti-party prejudice (Sartre's other writing contains exceptions).

Adorno's "positive" answer to this grave historical and social aporia on the Left was of course a necessarily *negative* one: the proto-postmodern gesture of "immanent criticism." According to immanent criticism, for example, what is false about ideology is only "its pretension to correspond to reality."⁶⁰ By "reality" is meant *all* reality. With this drastic slight of hand is eliminated most especially the necessity or possibility of ever committing oneself, let alone a group of people, to the specific ideology of any specific class. Again and again analysis turns away in disgust both from the filthy empiricity of the culture industry and from its allegedly passive reception (both of which are now celebrated by postmodernism's simple inversion of "immanent criticism"). Adorno himself had nowhere else to turn but toward "autonomous works of art." Again and again it is they that take on the life denied human participants in history:

The successful artistic construct is less one that resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony but rather, according to immanent criticism, one that expresses the idea of harmony negatively, by embodying the contradictions, pure and without compromise, in its innermost structure. (p. 27)

Authentic works of art do not "resolve contradictions," they "express ideas" and "embody contradictions." There is nothing else left, and certainly no flesh and blood human being, to protest or have commitment, save perhaps a suitably disembodied "dialectical culture critic" who somehow "must both participate in culture and not participate" (p. 29).

Contrast this aesthetic nihilism with the claims made by Gramsci for an actively dynamic Marxist-Leninism. "The philosophy of praxis" he defined as this:

a philosophy that has been liberated (or is attempting to liberate itself) from any unilateral and fanatical ideological elements; it is consciousness full of contradictions, in which the philosopher himself, understood both individually *and as an entire social group*, not only grasps the contradictions, but posits himself as an element of the contradiction and elevates this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore of action.⁶¹

This argument powerfully restores, in the face of "leftist" proto-postmodern antihumanism, the possibility of a properly human subject: not a bourgeois subject (and certainly not a hypostasized, autonomous work of art or bloodless moment of immanent criticism), but rather the individual as participant in the vanguard party (Gramsci's euphemism under prison censorship was "social group") struggling to embody but also to resolve the real oppositions of capitalist society.

Merely to *juxtapose*, however forcefully, Gramsci to Adorno on the subject of contradiction is not thereby to *win* or perhaps even *make* an argument. My immediate purpose has been to pry open a space again for discussion of committed protest in the specific sense of commitment to the only effective means of protest: the vanguard party. Perhaps this cannot be done convincingly within a tradition of Marxist theory and of the order of bourgeois protest which, in its Western form as represented by Benjamin, Sartre, Barthes, Marcuse, and Adorno, always already denies access to such an attempt.

IV. Toward a Conclusion

I write in a climate of opinion on the Left in which our most intelligent cultural theorists and critics *continue* to dismiss "communist vanguardism" out of hand as yet another variant, along with capitalism itself, of "the mindset of modernization."⁶² They conclude that we all move trapped in a "vicious circle" wherein "all seemingly cultural positions turn out to be symbolic forms of political

moralizing, except for the single overtly political tone, which suggests a slippage back into culture again."⁶³ In such a climate, genuine questions concerning a theory and practice of commitment and of protest will continue to seem obviated. The only possible way out of such desperate circling must indeed appear from the perspective of the "left" to be located "*besides* praxis itself" (p. 65) rather than *beside* it.

It may be untimely but appropriate, then, to *conclude* this essay on commitment and protest in literary theory and other cultural practices at the point where Sartre *began* his Cold War answer to the question "what is committed literature?"—namely the comment in 1947 of *un jeune imbécile*:

"If you want to commit yourself," writes a young imbecile, "what's holding you back? Join the Communist Party" ("Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" p. 57).

Sartre himself came to value the term "idiot." It is now time that other Western Marxists commit themselves at least to reopening the question of his "imbecile." What *is* holding them back?

NOTES

*An earlier version of this essay was delivered at an annual MLA session organized by Karl E. Webb, to whom I owe an opportunity to express ideas decidedly not his own. I also wish to thank Yuri Davydov, whom I have never met, but whose pathbreaking work on Western Marxism has decisively challenged my own understanding of it. This essay is dedicated to him in hopes for common ground.

1. V. I. Lenin, "A Little Picture in Illustration of Big Problems" (1918/1919), in his *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960), XXVIII, 388.
2. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, trans. William Boelhower (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 41.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, "Engagement," in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), II, 301. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page number in parentheses.
4. Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, trans. Nicholas Jacobs (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT University Press, 1971), p. 13.
5. See especially the following anthologies: *Die Expressionismusdebatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973); *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. *New Left Review*, afterword Fredric Jameson (London: NLB, 1977); and *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verständnis von Literatur und Film, 1909-1929*, ed. Anton Kaes (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1978).
6. Only a few of the many important texts on this issue include: Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni's editorial position paper in *Cahiers du cinéma* (1969), reprinted as "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 22-30; Brian Henderson, "Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style" (1970/71), reprinted in *Movies and Methods*, pp. 422-38; Peter Wollen, "Counter Cinema: *Vent d'est*," *Afterimage*, 4 (Autumn 1972), 6-16; and Collin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," *Screen*, 15 (Summer 1974), 7-27.
7. For a powerful rebuttal of this ubiquitous "leftist" pessimism, see the Draft Trade Union Program of the Communist Party, U.S.A., "New Times, New Problems, New Ideas," in *Daily World*, Thursday, June 27, 1985, 13D-20D.
8. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), p. 428; emphases added.
9. For a detailed application of the theoretical and methodological position outlined in this essay, see my monograph "Lenin in *Las Meninas*," forthcoming in *History and Theory*. I should add, too, that the present essay is the short version of a longer text: many historical illustrations have been deleted for the sake of brevity.
10. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" in his *Situations, II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 111; emphases added. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page numbers in parentheses.
11. Arthur C. Danto, *Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), pp. 36-37; emphasis added.
12. Jonathan Culler, *Roland Barthes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 31.
13. See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien," *Kursbuch*, 20 (1970), 163-85.
14. See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organization von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972).

15. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845/1846) in their *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), V, 236.
16. Wilhelm Emrich, *Protest und Verheissung: Studien zur klassischen, romantischen und modernen Dichtung* (Frankfurt am Main and Bonn: Athenäum Verlag, 1960), pp. 9-10; emphasis added.
17. See Gregor McLennan's excellent book *Marxism and the Methodologies of History* (London: NLB, 1982), esp. pp. 233-36.
18. Joseph P. Strelka, "Material Collectors, Political Rhetoricians, and Amateurs: Current Methodological Problems in German Exile Literature Studies," in *Protest-Form-Tradition: Essays on German Exile Literature*, ed. Joseph P. Strelka et al., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1979), p. 10. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page number in parentheses.
19. William Gaunt, *The World of William Hogarth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 93.
20. Cited in *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, ed. Ronald Paulson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), I, 206; emphases added.
21. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty: With the Rejected Passages from the Manuscript Drafts and Autobiographical Notes*, ed. Joseph Burke (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 205
22. Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 29; emphases added.
23. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 158-77.
24. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, in their *Collected Works*, V, 30. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page number in parentheses.
25. Lucy Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), p. 76.
26. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Communism—An Infantile Disorder" (1920), in his *Collected Works*, XXXI, 32.
27. Yuri Barabash, *Aesthetics and Poetics* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 72.
28. Friedrich Hölderlin, letter to his brother, 1 January 1799, from Homburg vor der Höhe, in his *Sämtliche Werke (Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe)*, ed. Friedrich Beissner and Adolf Beck (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1954), VI, 307.
29. Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Communism," XXXI, 32.
30. Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 366-67.
31. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1969), p. 176.
32. E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York and London: The Monthly Review Press, 1978), p. 184.

33. Specific recommendations for the scholarly pursuit of commitment and protest are developed in detail in the longer version of this essay and include the following. First, the Left should not "break" irresponsibly with the great tradition of bourgeois scholarship and pedagogy, but rather develop and expand it. More profound and immediately useful techniques of reading, listening, seeing, and thinking can be learned (ideology aside) from, say, Erich Auerbach, Edward Lowinsky, Aby Warburg, and, yes, Leo Strauss than from almost any poststructuralist deconstructor. "Proletarian science" is *contradictio in adjecto*; historical-materialist pedagogy has very little in common with liberal notions of "progressive education." Second, students of protest must radically question Eurocentric, gender, modernist, and literary biases and undertake to analyze a wider range of artifacts from other geographical regions, earlier periods, and "subaltern" (non-white, non-male, non-upper class) types of signifying practices. Third, Leftists must recognize that significant blockages to the study of commitment and protest have come from the Left. To take but one example, Sartre's dictum that "no one can imagine for a moment that anyone could write a good novel in praise of anti-semitism" ("Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" p. 112) drastically underestimates the mechanisms and effects of dominant hegemony. On the one hand, we need to study harder the sometimes "well-intentioned" commitment and protest that comes from the Right. On the other, we need constructive criticism of the practices of the Left itself, including all those that increase gaps between "history," "theory," and "practice." In short, we need to know much better *what* protest is, *where* it may be found, *how* to locate it, and what to *do* with it. It should go without saying that some of the most powerful forms of protest in history take the form of mass movements, many of which—from the *Bundschuh* to the T'ai Ping and beyond—contain a significant cultural (counter-hegemonic) element. See, for example, the important, on-going work of George Rudé, including *Ideology and Popular Protest* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

34. See Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 17-19 and *Considerations on Western Marxism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 75-94.

35. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.) Bleak, wholesale rejections of any possibility for art to have progressive clout occur throughout Western Marxism and not only in the current debate about postmodernity. In Luperini's view, for instance, *all* art can only "reassure the bourgeois that he is contemplating the 'realization' of his values in a safely enclosed site of immunity which, while exalting these values, transcends them into a pure world that does not require in practice any immediate and consequent commitment [che non implica alcun immediato e conseguente impegno pratico]." Romano Luperini, *Marxismo e letteratura* (Bari: De Donato, 1971), p. 172. Constanzo Di Girolamo enthusiastically adopts this extremely ahistorical view in *A Critical Theory of*

Literature (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), p. 59. This is particularly unfortunate, since he presents a very interesting case for developing a properly Marxist semiology on the basis not of Saussure's linguistic system, which has led to all manner of dead ends in modern literary theory, but Hjelt's potentially more useful one. For a contrasting, clear-headed analysis of the possibilities today in the West and Third World for an effective protest culture, see Angela Davis, "For a People's Culture," *Political Affairs*, 64, No. 3 (March 1985), 17-24.

36. Michael Parenti, "Monopoly Capital and Culture," *Political Affairs*, 64, No. 3 (March 1985), 3-11.

37. See T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973); also Régis Debray, "Image of the People," *New Left Review*, 94 (November/December 1975), 55-60.

38. Compare Carl Vinnen's pre-World War I anthology *Ein Protest deutscher Künstler*, ed. Carl Vinnen (Jena: E. Diederichs Verlag, 1911) with the immediate response by various artists, gallery directors, collectors, and writers, in *Im Kampfe um die Kunst: Die Antwort auf den "Protest deutscher Künstler" mit Beiträgen deutscher Künstler, Galerieleiter, Sammler und Schriftsteller* (Munich: R. Piper Verlag, 1911).

39. Walter Benjamin, "Der Autor als Produzent," in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), II:2, 688. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page number in parentheses.

40. See Georg Lukács, "Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit?" in his *Werke* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971), IV, 23-24.

41. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (New York: International Publishers, 1925), p. 190.

42. Lenin, "Party Organization and Party Literature" (1905), in his *Collected Works*, X, 44-49; also Lukács himself in *Lenin*, pp. 24-38.

43. Georg Lukács, *Record of a Life: An Autobiographical Sketch*, ed. István Eörsi, trans. Rodney Livingston (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 76-78.

44. For an articulate, if on my view mistaken, version that is very much in opposition to mine, see Ferenc Fehér, "Lukács in Weimar," in *Lukács Revalued*, ed. Agnes Heller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 75-106.

45. I am thinking especially of Iser's "Antrittsvorlesung" of 1969, *Die Appellstruktur der Texte: Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa* (Constance: Universitätsverlag, 1971), in which, however, Sartre is not explicitly mentioned. Sartrean existentialism had an enormous, largely unacknowledged, and I think baneful influence on several generations of literary scholars and teachers, especially in North America. Although the full extent of this impact is still to be researched, Frank Lentricchia's book *After the New Criticism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980) provides many excellent insights (see especially pp. 44-53, 78-81, and 285-87).

46. Yuri Davydov, *Myth, Philosophy, Avant-Gardism: Philosophic Myth-Making and the Literary Avant-Gardism*, trans. Laura Beraka and Alex Miller (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1983), p. 171.
47. Sartre, "Plaidoyer pour les intellectuels," in his *Situations, VIII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 432.
48. Sartre, "L'Ami du peuple," in his *Situations, VIII* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 476.
49. For an historical case study that shows the necessity of making and maintaining close ties between the student movement and the vanguard political party (this, along with sexism, one of the most serious failings of the Students for a Democratic Society in the late 1960s and 1970s), see José Maravall's important book on Spain, *Dictatorship and Political Dissent: Workers and Students in Franco's Spain* (London: Tavistock, 1978), esp. pp. 144-64.
50. Roland Barthes, "Réponses," *Tel Quel*, 47 (Fall 1971), 92-93.
51. Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1953), p. 41. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page number in parentheses.
52. Susan Sontag, "Preface" to Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. xxii. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page number in parentheses.
53. Barthes, *Le Grain de la voix: Entretiens 1962-1980* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981), p. 245.
54. See Culler, *Roland Barthes*, pp. 91-100.
55. See Steven Ungar, *Roland Barthes: The Professor of Desire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
56. See Davydov, *Myth, Philosophy, Avant-Gardism*, p. 165.
57. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 48. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page number in parentheses.
58. Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 73. It is not terribly clear which "Marxist aesthetics" Marcuse intended here to attack.
59. Compare the remarkably similar rationale behind Central Intelligence Agency support for exhibitions of Abstract Expressionist painting throughout the world. See Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* (June 1974), 39-41.
60. Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" (*Prismen*), in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), X:1, 27.
61. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publications, 1971), pp. 404-05.

62. Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *New German Critique*, 33 (Fall 1984), 11 and 13.
63. Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate," *New German Critique*, 33 (Fall 1984), 65. Hereafter cited in body of my text with page number in parentheses. See further Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 146 (July/August 1984), 53-92. Also, Fred Pfeil, "Makin' Flippy-Floppy: Postmodernism and the Baby-Boom PMC," *The Year Left: An American Socialist Yearbook I* (1985), 263-95.