War and Representation

FREDRIC JAMESON

*A vast entity, a planet, in a space of a hundred million dimensions; three-dimensional beings could not so much as imagine it. And yet each dimension was an autonomous consciousness. Try to look directly at that planet, it would disintegrate into tiny fragments, and nothing but consciousnesses would be left. A hundred million free consciousnesses, each aware of walls, the glowing stump of a cigar, familiar faces, and each constructing its destiny on its own responsibility. And yet each of those consciousnesses, by imperceptible contacts and insensible changes, realizes its existence as a cell in a gigantic and invisible coral (*polyp*). War: everyone is free, and yet the die is cast. It is there, it is everywhere, it is the totality of all my thoughts, of all Hitler's words, of all Gomez's acts; but no one is there to add it up. It exists solely for God. But God does not exist. And yet war exists.*

—Sartre, *The Reprieve*

Stalingrad is like a painting that cannot be observed from close up, but from which one must step back in order to do it full justice.

—Joseph Goebbels

[I]

WAR OFFERS THE PARADIGM OF THE NOMINALIST DILEMMA: THE abstraction from totality or the here and now of sensory immediacy and confusion. For Tolstoy, as for almost everybody else, the representational consequence was most memorably drawn by Stendhal in *The Charterhouse of Parma*: Fabrice unaware that he is an involuntary witness to the emperor's last stand ("I'm off to the Battle of Waterloo" would be a modernist replay of the exit line Walter Benjamin claimed to have found in one of his baroque tragedies: "I'm off to the Thirty Years' War"). Yet in both novelists the aesthetic is already

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one of what the formalists called *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization (estrangement), in which a stereotype is dismantled and brought before us in all its nameless freshness and horror. Whether this is an essentially modernist operation or, on the contrary, something all the realisms are by definition called on to do is a question we will for the moment leave open.

Still, it suggests that there exists some stereotype of war for such passages to defamiliarize and that there must then also be representations of war that are content to confirm the stereotype. Indeed, one often has the feeling that all war novels (and war films) are pretty much the same and have few enough surprises for us, even though their situations may vary. In practice, we can enumerate some seven or eight situations, which more or less exhaust the genre. If so, and despite experience that confirms this opinion, this would be an astonishing fact, given the radical changes in warfare historians document since the hand-to-hand combat in the plains before Troy (Hegel's prototype of that human and unalienated form, the epic, as opposed to the modern "prose of the world," denatured by money, commerce, and industry): there is then, marked by technological advances (gunpowder, machine guns and tanks, aircraft, unmanned cybernetic weaponry), a whole periodization of structural changes in warfare and its accompanying strategies that needs to be combined with the narrative typologies we are about to enumerate and to examine in more detail. Add to this complication a periodization of properly aesthetic modes and transformations (allegory, realism, modernism, postmodernism), and we confront a combination scheme of no little complexity that may strike us ultimately as serving less to explain these representations than simply to classify them. But perhaps such possibilities, which account for the organization of the notes that follow into a sampling of exhibits rather than a unified and systematic theory, may be reduced and simplified by the rather different consideration cutting across all of them—namely, the suspicion that war is ultimately unrepresentable—and by an attention to the various forms the impossible attempt to represent it may have taken.

As for the narrative variants, which seem to me to hold for film as much as for the novel, I enumerate eight of them: (1) the existential experience of war, (2) the collective experience of war, (3) leaders, officers, and the institution of the army, (4) technology, (5) the enemy landscape, (6) atrocities, (7) attack on the homeland, and (8) foreign occupation. The final category does not include the related subject matter of spies and espionage (now largely settled into a generic category of its own); nor does it exhaust the phenomenon of guerrilla warfare, from the current United States occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan all the way back to the Vendée and indeed to the earliest institutionalization of armies: for guerrilla warfare—the result of uneven development and of the incursion of an "advanced" mode of production into an "underdeveloped" one—can also offer the prototype of war itself and not its savage exception. Yet these very exclusions suggest a different way of cutting across the plot types, for the typical events of foreign occupation (and of espionage, for that matter) take us back to institutions and to the state as actor and agency, while the horror of guerrilla warfare (whether urban or rural) seems rather to lie in the unidentifiability of its actors, who emerge from their surroundings without warning and just as unexpectedly disappear again.

What may prove most helpful here, then, is Kenneth Burke's "dramatistic pentad," which differentiates between act, agent, agency, purpose, and scene as so many distinct media through which the narrative material can be focused. To use a more structural terminology, we may say that each of Burke's categories constitutes a different kind of dominant and thereby produces a somewhat different projection of the material, it being understood

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that there is no correct or true, photographically accurate rendering of such multidimensional realities. Still, narrative semiotics, by identifying Burke's first three categories with one another—an act always somehow implying an agent and the agent in turn implying an agency—suggests a different ordering of these perspectives, in which purpose somehow withdraws (as a feature of interpretation rather than of representation), while scene emerges as a new element in its own right: in scene, the anthropomorphic is eclipsed and some new and as yet unrecognizable narrative reality comes into view. For the act and its accompanying actantial categories always presuppose a name, and thereby a preexisting concept of the event identified (as already with the word *war*), while action and agency seem to be determined in advance by this or that institutionalized and organized agent.

Scene, however, remains unnamed at this level of narrative complexity, becoming concrete in the course of the representation. Spatiality is only one possible dimension of scene, to which anthropomorphic elements are subordinated in unaccustomed and estranged ways.

Technology, meanwhile, as alienated and reified human labor and energy, is always a slippery category, moving back and forth between allegory and external (or proto-natural) doom yet sometimes also celebrated as the triumph of human inventiveness and an expression of human action (or its prosthetic extension). It wanders across all our tale types, sometimes organizing their periodization (as I suggest above), sometimes generating a uniquely nightmarish experience, as in the terror and panic aroused by the appearance of the first tanks at the Battle of the Somme in World War I or by the V-2 rockets in that war's sequel. Yet technology is truly the apotheosis of a properly modernist teleology, a direct line from the slingshot to the megaton bomb, as Theodor W. Adorno put it. Each innovation is also the same in its embodiment of radical difference: witness Ermanno Olmi's wonderful film *Il mestiere delle armi* (2001), on the development of artillery in the sixteenth century.

The first category of war narrative, that of the existential experience of war—which has its classical literary realization in Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* (1895)—most often expresses the fear of death and, a somewhat different thing, death anxiety: as such, although this category is surely the quintessential form the representation of war takes in most people's minds, its content (personal danger, decisions and hesitations, contingency, apprenticeship) can be transferred to other generic frameworks. War then becomes the laboratory in which, like the bullring for Ernest Hemingway, such experiences are most unfailingly aroused and observed. Yet it tends toward the bildungsroman to the degree to which it is generally a question of a young and inexperienced soldier, whom the experience does not leave untouched.

With the collective focus, everything changes; yet here also we find ourselves in the presence of a content fully interchangeable with several other familiar and well-defined genres, which call the generic specificity of the war film back into question. For the collective war story turns on the interaction of various character types apparently gathered at random. The experience is the national one, of universal conscription as the first occasion in which men from different social classes are thrown together, at least until the public high school dramas of more recent memory. In the Europe of emergent nationalism, the experience was called on to level the old regional cultures (Sicily, Brittany) and to standardize language and the state's claims of authority—to encourage discipline, obedience, and recognition of the national system. American war films, taking class difference for granted and only gradually absorbing racial difference, found their originality psychologically, in the typology of personalities thrown together in a group (or war machine). The intelligent upper-class figure, the sociopath, the weakling, the

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bully, the fixer, the jokester, the trickster, the Don Juan, the ethnic type (generally southern European; but a black man, a Chicano, or a Native American gradually follows), the religious fundamentalist, the nice guy, the nerd: the list is endless, but the combinations—that is to say, the fundamental dramatic conflicts and clashes—are probably statistically limited and certainly generically predictable.

The crucial thing about this collective system is that it is itself the abstraction of something else. We may focus the action in terms of male bonding or the psychology of hierarchical institutions, with the problem of authority figures (incompetent, psychotic, etc.) added later on. The first versions of the form emerge in what we may call a prefeminist world, and certainly the absence of women is a significant structural part of the form—later women will be admitted as yet another variation on the male character types—but the crucial feature here is the absence of the family and of peacetime, indeed of wage labor. This is why a juxtaposition with the heist or caper film is so interesting: for in this last we find the same abstract structure, the same variety of character types and their clashes, the same as it were sealed social world, but in which the legitimacy of the institution of the army and the declaration of war has been stripped away, yielding a different kind of defamiliarization, where the overall aim of the collective action is not even war aims (defeating the enemy, defending freedom, or some other such socially plausible motive) but rather simply money itself—the ultimate abstraction, the ultimate "axiomatic" emptied of concrete content. Yet the absence of wage labor or commodified labor is here retained; and as in many other kinds of crime films, there is a utopian overtone in which the characters live in a disalienated world and in which activity is akin to play (I have elsewhere tried to show that these utopias can be invested with very different valences: for example, the Mafia film quintessentially appeals to nostalgia for the family by way of collective envy of the southern European clan system).

Thus, what both war films (of the collective buddy type) and caper films abstract from and yet dramatize in their own specific generic ways is the division of labor itself: each of the character types stands for a certain competence, something brought out much more strongly in the caper films, where each character is selected for a specific specialty. The small or micro group is the Deleuzian nomadic war machine, literally or figuratively—that is to say, an image of the collective without the state and beyond reified institutions. Still, such "groups-in-fusion," as Jean-Paul Sartre calls them in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, become forerunners of the institutional as such as they ossify. Indeed, when the peacetime army (or indeed the police force, in current procedurals) comes into its own mode of representation, it is rather bureaucracy whose epic is sung before us (without being named as such, except in socialist realism), and the collective structure of the nomads is appropriated for the celebration of the state. Both are afterimages of the social, and we make a more productive use of Gilles Deleuze when we grasp his dualism as an alternating possibility and realize that libidinal investment in the nomads can be no less reprehensible (but also no more so) than libidinal investment in the state.

As for the third category, that of leaders and institutions, it initiates a shift of gravity toward the exterior of the experience of war, whether individual or collective, for the officers are ordinarily as much a part of the soldier's external environment as the enemy itself; and are indeed equally often objectified into what gets identified as the bureaucracy or the state. Initially, however, such characters furnished the staple of the older chronicle history, with its great men and world-historical figures—what Georg Lukács assigns to the potentialities of the stage, as in Schiller's *Wallenstein*, Strindberg's *Gustavus Adolfus*, or Shakespeare's war-riddled history plays (and

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the shorthand German imitations that come out of them, like Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen* or even dramas of Kleist and Büchner). This is, on one traditional yet rather narrow acceptation of the term, the place of politics as such; and it cannot be doubted that the various populist representations of the simple soldier and the common man in uniform are dialectically later than these less and less glorious figures striding about the stage and vocalizing their decisions, with or without a note of human, all-too-human pathos.

Tolstoy's notorious loathing for Napoléon is in that sense merely the other face of his hero-worshipping portrayal of the uniquely Russian bluffness and acumen of Kutuzov, a historical figure Tolstoy himself had not many years before this characterized as "sensual, cunning and unfaithful"—just as he had in earlier times called such patriotism "a fairy tale which aroused national feeling" (Eikhenbaum 149, 144). Perhaps the classic defamiliarization of the "great general" comes closer to Tolstoy's representation of "world-historical" decision making and his inveterate resistance to it (a stance to which we owe the concluding "theory of history" in *War and Peace*):

> But at that moment an adjutant galloped up with a message from the commander of the regiment in the hollow and news that immense masses of the French were coming down upon them and that his regiment was in disorder and was retreating upon the Kiev grenadiers. Prince Bagratión bowed his head in sign of assent and approval. He rode off at a walk to the right and sent an adjutant to the dragoons with orders to attack the French. But this adjutant returned half an hour later with the news that the commander of the dragoons had already retreated beyond the dip in the ground, as a heavy fire had been opened on him and he was losing men uselessly, and so had hastened to throw some sharpshooters into the wood.
>
> Prince Andrew listened attentively to Bagratión's colloquies with the commanding officers and the orders he gave them and, to his surprise, found that no orders were really given, but that Prince Bagratión tried to make it appear that everything done by necessity, by accident, or by the will of subordinate commanders was done, if not by his direct command, at least in accord with his intentions. Prince Andrew noticed, however, that though what happened was due to chance and was independent of the commander's will, owing to the tact Bagratión showed, his presence was very valuable. Officers who approached him with disturbed countenances became calm; soldiers and officers greeted him gaily, grew more cheerful in his presence, and were evidently anxious to display their courage before him. (163)

This pretense of freedom in the face of necessity, however, pales in comparison with the criminality of the officers' decisions in World War I, so memorably exemplified in Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1968); and it is to be remarked at this point that many mass cultural genres—the police procedural, the spy novel—end up turning less on the pursuit of the enemy or the official Other than they do on their own institutional framework, with its ineffective and ill-informed command system and internal subversion, by moles and double or triple agents.

Perhaps the abstract theoretical debates on strategy and tactics are relevant here in a new and more formal way: the debate on the influence of Carl von Clausewitz, for example. His notion of war as a duel is as anthropomorphic as the conceptions of Hegel or Homer, his notion of the decisive final battle is a thoroughly narrative one (which has wrongly been criticized for omitting the very different dynamic of guerrilla warfare), and even the famous maxim of war as the continuation of politics by other means is a way of translating warfare and its specialized personnel back into more familiar peacetime and civilian realities amenable to the techniques of the more conventional realist novel.

Behind all such discussions lies a narratological problem and a challenge to anthro-

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pomorphic representation and to the mimesis of human actions and characters, which questions whether such possibilities are not altogether obsolete in the age of nuclear weapons, drones, and suicide bombers. These debates are waged back and forth across history by generals and commanders, dictators (in ancient and modern senses), and other war leaders. They reenter the narrative representations of war in the form of unwarranted hero worship and blind allegiance, or a sense of betrayal, or the contempt of footsoldiers for stupid officers or cowardly generals. These are all what semiotics terms actantial questions, issues of action and human agency; and even our fourth category, that of technology, seems to move uneasily in and out of the whole area of personification and anthropomorphism.

When it comes to the next set of categories, however, my sense is that the focus of the war narrative subtly changes and that in Burke's dramatistic pentad we have begun to move from the first four categories to the fifth, which he called scene and to which he attributed a different and perhaps more diffuse kind of rhetorical and representational power.

[II]

For even atrocities might seem to us today to belong rather to the malignant properties of evil or cursed landscapes than to the savagery of individual actors; and it is as though with this and our other later plot types we pass from a world of acts and characters to one of space: scene, landscape, geography, the folds of the earth that determine military campaigns by introducing contingency or the main chance—a heterogeneous element as much *Stimmung* or affect as it is a mere stage or context for human gestures. Bombs falling out of the sky are part of it, along with the lunar landscape of trench warfare; the silence of deserted villages is a narrative player in such tales, along with the menace of empty windows and the complicity of nature in ambush or pursuit—in concealment as well, camouflage being a way that humans acknowledge the primacy of scene, just as maps are another.

This category abolishes or suspends the distinction between the enemy's landscape and our own, the latter no less fraught with peril than some unknown, hostile terrain. Here the great hand-to-hand duels of the armies (Napoléon versus Kutuzov, Wallenstein versus Gustavus Adolfus) give way to imagery of penetration (the first glimpse of a sea of tanks at the battle of Kursk, the smell of sweating armies miles away in World War I, the screaming of dive bombers, the first exposed steps in an abandoned hamlet). The space of modern warfare is vulnerable by definition and no longer belongs to anyone.

That was also the case in the Thirty Years' War, whose most extraordinary literary document begins in full incursion and horror, as mercenaries (of whatever affiliation) loot villages and torture peasants for food and gold:

> Da fing man erst an, die Stein von den Pistolen und hingegen an deren Statt der Bauern Daumen aufzuschrauben, und die armen Schelmen so zu foltern, als wenn man hätt Hexen brennen wollen, massen sie sich einen von den bereits in Backoven Steckten, und mit Feuer hinter ihm her waren, ohngesehen er noch nichts berkannt hatte; einem anderen machten sie ein Seil um den Kopf und rettelten es mit einem Bengel zusammen, das ihm das Blut zu Mund, Nas und Ohren heraus sprang. (Grimmelshausen 17)

> Then they used thumbscrews, which they cleverly made out of their pistols, to torture the peasants, as if they wanted to burn witches. Though he had confessed to nothing as yet, they put one of the captured hayseeds in the bake oven and lit a fire in it. They put a rope around someone else's head and tightened it like a tourniquet until blood came out of his mouth, nose, and ears. In short, every soldier had his favorite method of making life miserable for peasants, and every peasant had his own misery. (Schulz-Behrend 7)

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The period has virtually become defined by such atrocities, which I am tempted to count into scene, into space itself as one of its properties during this long war, in which most of central Europe is consumed, at all scales from macroscopic to microscopic: armies pursuing each other from one end of Europe to another, enemy battalions unwittingly colliding in marshes during the night, bands of marauders burning villages, a deserter ransacking an empty house.

> "Noses and eares cut of to make hatbandes." . . . "The robbers and murderers took a piece of wood and stuck it down the poor wretches' throats, stirred it and poured in water, adding sand or even human faeces. . . ." "They tied our honest burgher Hans Betke to a wooden pole and roasted him at the fire from seven in the morning until four in the afternoon, so that he gave up the spirit amidst much shrieking and pains." (Clark 32–34)

With such nightmares, one has the sense that the two categories of internal invasion and intervention and of war carried to foreign, unfamiliar territory coincide and dialectically reinforce each other. This is not so much the pseudo-synthesis of a "civil war" (an oxymoron if there ever was one) as an utter transmogrification of the familiar into the alien, the *heimlich* into the *unheimlich*, in which the home village—the known world, the real, and the everyday—is transformed into a place of unimaginable horror, while the neighbors of the home country (the eternal peasants, the stock characters of village life) become sly faces of evil and of menace, ambushing the soldier who strays from his company and lynching the few they can safely overpower, concealing food, and hiding in the woods like savages (anachronistically to redeploy that Fenimore Cooper imagery Balzac so relished). But this is something that happens, not so much to individuals, to characters as such, as to the landscape, which fades in and out of nightmare, its mingled dialects now intelligible, now the gibberish of aliens.

Some such gestaltlike metamorphosis from familiar to unfamiliar, from the anthropomorphic to the micro- or macroscopic play of material elements, can be observed in what the Thirty Years' War imposes on our attempts to conceptualize it as a whole. On the one hand, the great strategic trajectory of the armies of a Wallenstein or a Gustavus Adolphus, of ferocious condottieri like Ernst von Mansfeld or the Bavarian general Tilly, or of the Spanish armies of intervention, in search of the enemy and of some decisive bone-jarring clash. On the other, a well-nigh optical enlargement, an eyelash-brushing approach in which the seemingly intelligible units of the official armies disintegrate into minute bands of individual marauders spreading across an everywhere-identical landscape of fields and woods, huts and paths, and offering the same scenes of carnage and flight over and over again, beyond history, beyond narrative.

This effect is caused not solely by the complexity of this block of historical time, with its innumerable agents and actors (who constantly change position and swap their functions with one another), a multiplicity only momentarily simplified by the conventional stereotype of religious war and the climactic struggle between the Counter-Reformation and Protestantism. For the Counter-Reformation is already divided and multiplied by the triple centers of the papacy, Madrid, and the Habsburg emperor Ferdinand II (more Catholic and fanatical than the pope and than his Spanish relatives), while what is loosely called Protestantism—already locked in internecine warfare between its two branches, Lutheran and Calvinist, both of them anathematized by innumerable millenarian sects—is itself susceptible to infinite fission and the propagation of innumerable subsidiary local and foreign conflicts.

To assign the guilt of striking the first blow is a philosophical quandary of the first magnitude. Even the most warlike of the participants—Wallenstein, for example—can

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also be read as embodying a humane will to peace, to the ending of the indefinite proliferation of the war and an establishment of central European unity on a new basis. (Even Schiller's Hamlet-like version of the great generalissimo's assassination leaves us with multiple interpretations of his motives: Does he want to found a dynasty and make himself emperor? Does he want to unite Germany in some prefiguration of nineteenth-century nationalism? Is he, against all appearances, a moderate and a peacemaker? or even a Protestant sympathizer? Etc., etc.)

In fact, although Ferdinand would like to repeal many of the confessional compromises of the preceding century, it is the Protestant side that provides the provocative and incendiary pretext: the Protestant elites of Prague, dissatisfied by Habsburg sovereignty, persuade the elector of the Palatinate, a son-in-law of James I of England, to assume the throne of Bohemia, normally a prerogative of the emperor's dynastic lineage. But the elector only wins the mock title of Winter King, owing to his brief tenure, cut short by the decisive battle of White Mountain (1620), and leaves the unhappy Friedrich to wander from ally to ally in search of a renewal of fortune, in a hapless quest that turns him into the very allegory of weakness and indecision. Here is a modern version of this uninspiring and vacillating figure, perking up somewhat at the prospect of meeting his mercenary generals, themselves revived by the intermittent and sluggish streams of cash flowing reluctantly into The Hague, "refreshed by the sums like flowers in the dew," as they ride out to greet their sometime employer:

> His heart beat strongly in his breast as he saw powerful hooves drive these armored and undisciplined men toward him. They told of the Danish king, Christian, and of Lower Saxony, magnificent in its prosperity; told also how the emperor lusted to swallow up Magdeburg, and gave news of the latest effort of the distinguished house of Habsburg to acquire a reliable mooring, namely a certain Wallenstein, the three making merry over this unknown name. And the slack Friedrich felt himself awakening to life again, swept back into the old excitement by the proximity of these two stormily galloping, heavily ironclad warriors. (Döblin 248)[1]

The stereotypical vacillation (shared by the emperor) does not equip this personage to be a protagonist, any more than the grim but indistinct determination of the true instigator of this war, the Bavarian elector Maximilian, entitles him to be the villain of the piece (Mann 299–300). But we must also pause here a moment to register the existence of that extraordinary literary document, the novel entitled *Wallenstein*, an untranslated and visionary nightmare dreamed and written up by the young surgeon Alfred Döblin in evenings during the bloody trench warfare of World War I and published in 1920, nine years before *Berlin Alexanderplatz* made him world famous. No background in Döblin, no preparation, no perspective, it comes before us as a perpetual present that is at every moment, on every page, in every sentence, filled space, without a pause or backward or forward glimpse. The armies are in movement even when at rest in their temporary quarters. The army's pauses are movement; they hint at some sly signal by Wallenstein, who rebukes the kaiser by not following his directions, feints the enemy, pretends to obey the commands to stop (says one of the imperial counselors, "[E]s ist mir nicht klar, gegen wen der Herzog Krieg führt" [254]). Yet the space is filled at every moment with names, with all the characters of history, some known, some only mentioned in passing, and with place-names as well—not even the map is enough to accommodate them all. It is a pulsing interminable uninterrupted flow, true textuality (not mere form without content) in which everything is in perpetual change back and forth across central Europe yet driving forward temporally so that time, the passing instants, becomes invisible. Only

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the events are generated, and they never stop; the writer never stops (he thereby disappears also); and the sources are so thoroughly used up that nothing is anymore allusion. Schiller has long since vanished. There is no longer any competition with this unending flow of text but only the affect that pulses through it and changes color from pallor to flush, purple to sallow yellow. All the tonalities of the affective spectrum stream through the interminable moments, none of them truly fulfilled or effectuating any lasting pause or destiny.

Not the least interest of this novel is indeed the recurrence in its form of an allegorical habit profoundly consanguineous with the baroque content of its setting in the Counter-Reformation. Thus, here it is money itself that ultimately revives the unhappy Winter King: the lifeblood of the money that runs through the immense continental expanse of the conflict, feeding it locally and organizing its forces into impermanent groups, from foraging deserters and guerrillas up to official and unofficial warlords and the leaders of the royal and imperial adversaries. The great and bloody rhizome of the war then becomes a representation of money, riches, wealth, taxes levied, the very sustenance of potatoes impounded from villages in flames and from peasants dead or in flight. Everything here—from the penniless imperial court, which counts on Wallenstein to raise forces for it at the same time that it tries to give him orders, down to the brutal *soldateska* who live off the countryside—has to do with money and with an immense coral polyp that refuses to starve or die away but keeps itself alive for unforeseeable years by the very strength with which it draws money out of its hiding place, like magnets drawing, or blood from a stone, soaking it up interminably, reproducing itself, using its population of generals, peasants, priests, burghers, kings, lepers, the landless, heiresses, as so many divining rods, so many instruments for draining the last drops of wealth from the devastated land. Wealth then becomes the conduit of energy, whether blood, sexuality and libido, activity, irritability, sensation, impulse, drive, propulsion; it is what makes the sentences pound forward like horses' hooves as well as the human individuals themselves to their otherwise incomprehensible yet irrepressible heat-seeking clashes. The libidinal apparatus of the war—of this extraordinary, unique war—thus ensures the most fully realized representation of finance and its networks and capillary extremities, making wealth in its "early modern" sense appear before us as a phenomenon in its own right, in the strong Heideggerian sense of the *phainesthai*, the appearance of Being, in ways frontal narratives of trading companies and usurers were unlikely to convey, or the abstractions of religious moralizing or economic philosophy.

All this eventuates in blood and landscapes of dead bodies, the world of Jacques Callot anachronistically revived in that of World War I, which reproduces it only for reasons of historical underdevelopment, because its generals failed to grasp the proper use of machine guns or of tanks. Still, we may wonder what forms the representation of agents and agency can take under the regime of the scene, in this interminable narrative of events and sequence of grotesque or nightmarish figures, more human in their caricaturality than any of the genuine human beings of realism or of our acquaintance. No causes, to be sure, and yet immense allegorical figures, like the famous frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan* or, better, Giuseppe Arcimboldo's vegetable portraits, in which the sovereign is called on to be his own multiplicity and his own multitudinous subjects. But here the "world-historical figure" allegorizes not subjects or a people, not even the collectivity of the men under his command, but rather his own victims and the corpses he has in effect become. Here is Tilly, one of the more fearsome of these legendary imperial warlords, as he entertains an audience with the equally fearsome Wallenstein himself:

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> The Brabanter [Tilly], stiff and ghostly, with a white scarf, two pistols and a dagger in his belt, and short white hair; at the hairs' tips like ears of wheat there waved the corpses of a thousand men cut down. His pale, sharp features, bushy brows, stiff brushlike moustache rippled with the mutilated regiments of a whole generation; they clung in slippage to the buttons of his jerkin, to his belt. His gnarled fingers each one testified to the annihilation of whole cities; with every knuckle a dozen exterminated villages. Over his shoulders there crowded forward, writhing, the bodies of slaughtered Turks, Frenchmen, Palatiners, and yet someday he would meet his judgment with them on himself along with their horses and dogs, hanging every which way in front of each other and one on top of the other, a burden so immense his very head and little hat vanished beneath it. Necks ripped open and scabby, stomachs with white and livid colors, veined and dripping on the slit and restrained arms and the spastic legs. Guts in loops of intestines in which he was wrapped, sloshing and flabby over the braced knees encased in leather, an interminable limp wormlike rippling train that as he dragged it creaked with every step. He weighed the earth down like a mammoth but bore himself icily, deaf to the screams of the men and those, bone-shattering, of the swine, the shrill cries and piping of the horses, all of them holding to him, seeking to suck their life out of him, out of the most minute hairs on his head; horses' necks straining, their nostrils trembling, piebald, black; dogs shot to pieces and yet snuffling at his mouth and nose, greedily sucking up his breath. He should have long since been drained; they were sucking dry wood; he clicked and clattered around inside and yet could not be brought down. Behind him fourteen regiments of infantry and six of cavalry.
>
> In front of him Friedland [Wallenstein], a yellow dragon emerging from the bubbling bogs of Bohemia, plastered with black slime to the hips, drawn back onto his knobby hind legs, sulfur pressed into the earth ringing him, waving his broad elastic rump in the air behind him with his big jaws wide open, blissfully and with the fury of a serpent exhaling hot breath in intermittent blasts, with a panting and grunting that struck fear. (243–44)

These portraits, which we may characterize as rehearsing the modes of allegory and symbol respectively, are drawn into an uninterrupted stream of filled time and space, of a visual writing only occasionally punctuated by dramatic scenes, by a showing that mainly takes second place to the telling of the visionary nightmare, which feeds on the interminable war as on indefinitely renewable fodder.

Wallenstein's biographer gives us a more articulated picture of the perpetuum mobile of this infernal machine, which seems unable to run down and stop (and indeed Wallenstein's function, for good and ill alike, is to have been able to supply the gradually less and less enthusiastic kaiser with ever-renewed reserves of troops):

> After not much more than a year [after White Mountain], people began to fear that the rapid exhaustion both sides felt was premature. A definitive victory would have had to be a universal one and could never have existed. Partial victories, however, each of which related to the whole in a different way, called new enemies into the field, who then gave new energies to the old adversaries, humiliated and pillaged. Bohemia, although isolated in its captivity, remained a part of Europe, and Germany even more so owing to its size. This is not merely an individual opposition, a struggle between two power centers, or the aggression of a single one of them. It is a tidal succession of wills in conflict, some of which claim to be able to form them into a single unified will and campaign against another one, and yet never do completely subsume the wills of their individual allies. A fencing court. Individual pairs joust. Suddenly they form two fronts which begin to move in opposition to each other. Yet as they do so, the ballet of betrayal sets in within each. One party withdraws into a corner, exchanges meaningful looks with its former adversary, maneuvers between the two fronts, seeking to mediate. Another tries to entice this or that

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> participant out of both fronts and to form a third. All this is laden with illusion, mistakes, deception. No one knows enough about the other, and some don't even know their own minds. (Mann 287–88)

This fencing ballet of the war as a whole, as in an aerial shot, stands in sharp contrast to the horrors on the ground, as recorded by Grimmelshausen and others—a kind of no-man's-land in which all spaces are identical and all the atrocities as well, a kind of nightmarish repetition moving from Bohemia to the Baltic and back, a triumph, as it were, of space and identity over time and its differentiations, a virtually nonnarrative flow for which the only appropriate registering apparatus or point of view would seem to be the eyes of an idiot or of a child, as in Ambrose Bierce's terrifying story "Chicamauga."

[III]

And this is indeed how *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus* begins—the supreme literary monument produced by one of the participants in this war, its six books published in 1668 and 1669, some 150 years after *Don Quijote* and *Lazarillo de Tormes* and 50 before *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Yet it is clearly incorrect to characterize *Simplicissimus* as a picaresque novel or even as a bildungsroman (the hero is certainly a naïf, who seems to maintain his innocence even during the episodes in which he has technically become a trickster figure). Not only is this enormous text episodic in the extreme, it is also rhizomatic, a kind of hypertext throwing off all kinds of ancillary episodes, at least one of which, *Courasche* (1670), has known a prodigious afterlife in Bertolt Brecht's theatrical version.

But we will argue that *Simplicissimus* is more than episodic; it is an extraordinary machine for generic production, for the narrative progression tirelessly generates one new genre after another, from the war novel and the lives of saints to the final utopia and desert-island narrative. How to account for this unparalleled literary autopoesis, this nonteleological proliferation of generic exercises, which goes well beyond what has been identified under the term *generic discontinuities*? Is it possible that it is precisely out of that undifferentiated space of local yet universal conflict, whose fever chart runs from the plundering of villages to the sacking of whole cities and back, that in the absence of ready-made narrative microforms the various genres are themselves summoned into existence?

At any rate, we begin virtually in the state of nature, in which the youthful protagonist scarcely has language—in particular, he does not know his own name or has none—and is being ordered around the field by his brutal father (whose very status is registered in dialect—"knan"—equally bereft of a family name). He flees into the woods during the mercenaries' sack of the village from which I have quoted above and there meets a pious hermit who instructs him in religion and, even more remarkably, in the classical languages and their rhetorical traditions (the causes of this saintly hermit's withdrawal from the world, a premonition of Simplicius's own eventual destiny—it is indeed the hermit who thus baptizes him—will be related in a later discovery, which recapitulates the different genre of unhappy love). On the death of the hermit, the boy returns to the world of social beings, becoming page to the governor. Then, abducted by Croatian mercenaries, he is incorporated into the imperial troops, where, after a number of humiliations, he reemerges generically as the trickster figure mentioned above, a *Jäger* supremely gifted in warfare and plunder or theft of all kinds, after which he marries and then, in a more magical episode, discovers treasure.

Yet these potential destinies are all abruptly broken off, whether out of impatience or boredom or owing to the serial production of the various books, if not the fermentation of new genres at work in Grimmelshausen's

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feverish imagination. There follow a salacious episode in Paris, a spell as a traveling salesman, a fall into the bad company of a real thief who tries to teach him the way of the real world ("du bis noch Simplicius, der den Machiavellum noch nit studiert hat" [353]), a religious conversion, his founding of a new landed estate and family, a Vernian journey to the center of the earth, and finally travels that lead to his shipwreck and a hermitlike existence on a desert island, where his autobiographical notes are found by a Dutch sea captain, who brings them back to Europe and to publication.

Finally, it is not so much the narrative quality of the episodes that strikes the reader as rather the restlessness of the character's exploration of his possible destinies and that of the author's experimentation with the various narrative genres they carry within themselves. We are here, in the German principalities of the empire, still very far even from the sophistication of the Spanish monarchy, in which the first realisms flourished so many generations earlier and in which the urban worldliness of commercial life and colonial and military power generate the picaresque, along with an extraordinary theatrical culture. Germany is here still profoundly prenovelistic, and indeed the first crystallizations of form in Grimmelshausen's seemingly interminable text take the form of immense allegorical dream frescoes—most strikingly, that of the class divisions and struggles of the feudal world, with its prelates and nobles at the top of the allegorical tree and the nameless peasantry at its base (45), along with the dream transformation into an animal, reminiscent of *The Golden Ass*, of Apuleius. But it would be equally incorrect to read such allegorical episodes as the self-indulgence of an autodidact reveling in his classical education. For in this great laboratory of forms, baroque allegory is closely affiliated with utopia as such, which one may perhaps indeed in hindsight identify (in Thomas More) as an allegorical form.

The devastated landscape, indeed, calls out for the relief of utopian transfiguration. Such is the first crossing of the border into Switzerland:

> The landscape struck me compared with other German lands, as strange as Brazil or China. I saw people trading and strolling about in peace, barns full of cattle, courtyards full of chickens, geese, and ducks. The streets were used by travelers in safety, taverns full of people making merry, no fear of the enemy, no worry about plundering and sacking, no anxiety about losing land or life and limb. Everyone lived safely under his grape arbor or fig tree and, in comparison with other German lands, in pleasure and content, so that I took this country for an earthly paradise, although it seemed primitive enough. (391)

Later on, among the hallucinations of the desert island, this earthly paradise will be transformed into a vision of primeval bliss—"so we lived like the first men in the golden age, where a bountiful heaven lets all the fruits of the earth flourish without work" (582)—until the devil in the form of a woman shatters the vision and sends the text itself, in the generic reversion, back into the anchoritic withdrawal of its own beginnings.

I want to draw the conclusion that war, perceived at this existential proximity of scene, is virtually nonnarrative and that this raw material seeks to appropriate its missing protagonist from any number of narrative paradigms, ranging from the conventions of generic war films and novels enumerated at the outset to the multiplicity of generic experiments in Grimmelshausen's peculiar text.

[IV]

It is a hypothesis we may now test on the aerial warfare of World War II, about which it will be recalled that the most famous representation of its most famous (European) atrocity—*Slaughterhouse-Five*—sets the firebombing of

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Dresden offstage, behind the sealed door of the protagonist's eponymous cellar. About this kind of warfare, W. S. Sebald, who grew up in a part of Germany untouched by the air war and exiled himself to England at an early age, has oddly maintained that the Germans have repressed its experience and indeed that of the defeat in general. He excepts from this accusation one of the most remarkable writers (and filmmakers) of modern Germany, Alexander Kluge, whose portrayal of the Battle of Stalingrad (*Schlachtbeschreibung*) already presents many of the features to be noted in the later account of the bombing of his native city, Halberstadt, on 8 April 1945 (1: 509–791).

It was indeed Kluge from whom we selected the remark by Goebbels that figures as a motto to the present essay; and it is in precisely this sense that Stalingrad seems to disintegrate into a host of unrelated colors and brushstrokes as we gradually approach our eyes and faces to the canvas. It would be facile to characterize this text as a deconstruction, either of the traditional narrative account of the battle or of the battle itself. Yet in some literal sense the word is apt, provided that we take it backward, as referring to an account of the elements and raw materials that went into the building of the phenomenon hereby unbuilt: indeed, the Stalingrad book has as its suggestive subtitle *The Organizational Construction of a Catastrophe*. Kluge redistributes the building blocks of the defeat in what may be called nonexistential segments, which is to say nonnarrative units set side by side in a kind of collage. We here find extracts from an army manual on winter warfare side by side with historical accounts, pictures of the landscape, interviews with survivors, medical descriptions of the most characteristic wounds and mutilations, a chronology, the propaganda rhetoric of pastors and preachers on the subject, the language habits of the officers and staff, press clippings and conferences, dispatches from the front, the whole interlarded with anecdotes and other stray observations and testimonies, among which Hitler's vacillations and tactical inattentions are duly registered in passing—in what could, I suppose, be called a nonlinear "narrative" if one still likes that kind of terminology. It should be understood that Kluge's interest lies in the enumeration of destinies and the deployment of anecdotes, not in any sustained or novelistic storytelling or longer narrative breath. It may be said that he practices a unique type of didactic abstraction, in which a given outcome is x-rayed for the components it incorporates of life-promoting or lethal energies respectively.

"The Bombing of Halberstadt" is another such collage (2: 27–82), in which individual experiences, in the form of anecdotes, are set side by side less for their structures as the acts of traditional characters (Burke's agents) than as names and destinies, the latter being reduced in many cases to peculiar facts and accidents, of the type of *Ripley's Believe It or Not*. The juxtaposition of these anecdotes with quotations from academic studies on the history of bombing and on RAF techniques, from scholarly conferences on the relation between aerial strategy and ethics ("moral bombing" is, for example, specified as a matter, not of morals, but of morale), and from interviews with the allied pilots who participated in this raid—all these materials, which we take to be nonfictional (although they may not be; the interviews in particular bear the distinctive marks of Kluge's own provocative interview methods), raise the question of the fictionality or nonfictionality of the personal stories of the survivors as well. Halberstadt is, to be sure, Kluge's hometown, and he is perfectly capable of having assembled a file of testimonies and eyewitness documentation and of using the names of real people. On the other hand, these stories, with their rich detail, afford the pleasures of fictional narrative and fictional reading.

Is this text (written in the 1970s) a nonfictional novel? I believe that we must think our way back into a situation in which this question makes no sense and in which—as

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with the storytelling that precedes the emergence of the so-called Western novel—the distinction between fiction and nonfiction (or history) does not yet obtain, any more than that (so closely related to it) between figurative and literal language. This is to say not that Kluge marks a regression to precapitalist storytelling but rather on the contrary that postmodernity as such has now rendered those distinctions obsolete in the other direction: now it is not so much a question of all narrative being fictional as it is of a reading process that is always literal, even when we are reading what is technically a fiction.

At any rate, it can be argued that the opening section of "The Bombing of Halberstadt" is less a matter of assembling the personal experiences of the survivors, the moments of the first bombs—in what amount to six successive waves of bombers—than it is of a use of named individuals to map the small city itself (64,000 inhabitants) as they try to make their way across streets increasingly blocked by fires and rubble. (Indeed, we will learn shortly that such attacks follow a specific and intentional pattern: first, strikes calculated to identify targets by columns of smoke identifiable from the aircraft; then the systematic blocking off of streets so the fleeing population is trapped; then an initial destruction of roofs and top storys, with a calculated time lapse to allow a later wave of bombers to drop new explosives through the holes and set fire to the buildings as a whole—these procedures carefully designed to produce the so-called firestorm characteristic of the raids.) A certain amount of curious detail is amassed here, such as the effort of the civilians to get rid of flammable materials such as the stocks of paper in the newspaper offices or hosing groups down to survive the heat. Mainly, however, these opening chapters document the regression of the civilians into their private obsessions and neuroses and their decidedly meaningful and intentional yet aberrant activities, as with the random scattering of an anthill. Thus, in the opening section, which, so characteristically for this writer-filmmaker, deals with the local movie theater, the Capitol, and its manager, Frau Schrader (the owners are on vacation in the country), this particular character is at first worried about the next matinees at three and six o'clock (the first bombs begin to fall at 11:20 a.m.) and only later about the bodies of the initial spectators. Her emotional low point is reached, however, when she finds nothing to do and "feels herself 'useless'": not deadly danger but the blockage of activity is the phenomenon that interests Kluge here.

The agitated movements of these named and presumably real-life characters serve to map out the streets they attempt to negotiate, the routes in and out of town, and the positions of key buildings—the institute for deaf children, for example, or the church tower, on which civilian volunteers are stationed to observe and report the attacks, which of course exceed anything they had expected and at the same time destroy any number of telephone lines and other channels of communication. Both these situations will be given a turn of the anecdotal screw in the second part, in which the postwar interviewer inquires into the possibility that a white flag of surrender had been shown on the tower ("surrender to whom?" the American pilot asks; "how do you surrender to a squadron of bombers?"), while a colonel attempts to get information by telephone about the state of things around his sisters' home outside town (from Magdeburg, owing to the destruction of the lines, he has to "make connections via Croppenstedt, Gröningen, Emersleben, and Schwanebeck and then back through Genthin, Oschersleben, and, further south, Quedlinburg"; he never gets through, although the operators realize that this is not official but rather private business). From the two parts, we may retain (and compare) the initial attempt of Herr Grämert to rescue his twelve thousand tin soldiers, which represent Napoléon's winter campaign in Russia; the episode of the "unknown photographer"

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(characteristically, the surviving photographs are here reproduced, along with much other visual material in part 2); and the episode in part 2 in which a teenager succeeds in mastering his piano lesson but not in persuading his piano teacher to reschedule his lesson for the next day, on which, escaping the burning city, he takes refuge in a village, where he practices nonstop so energetically that the owners have to tell him to give it a rest.

Part 2 lets us into the formal secret of this work (I will not say its message or its meaning, exactly), with its differentiation of a strategy from below and a strategy from above (the latter, to be sure, outlines the bombing techniques and conveys what it would be improper, as we shall see, to call the point of view of the American pilots). Thus, Gerda Baethe has learned that the pressure from the bomb blasts will damage the lungs; she tries to make her small children hold their breath during the explosions. Meanwhile, Karl Wilhelm von Schroers, a convalescent veteran in charge of the prisoner-of-war camps in Halberstadt, eagerly visits key points in and out of the city, giving and taking orders but above all satisfying his keen scientific curiosity. This characteristic, like Baethe's "strategies," is not to be understood in any subjective way, even though the two are vivid personalities succinctly conveyed in a page or two. In keeping with the neutrality of this text and with the generic focus of the anecdote as a form, these are external or objective traits, of the type one registers in other people, as when we note that someone (a proper name) is "quick to anger" or that some other proper name is "indecisive."

But Schroers is more significant than that, insofar as his "scientific curiosity" constitutes something like an "aspiration to totality," which his position on the ground can scarcely satisfy. He is indeed a "collector of strong sense impressions" (66).

> His capacity to feel increasingly curiosity rather than anxiety is not based on any lack of imagination. To be sure, with his physical eyes he only sees this particular tavern, a partial view of Wherstedter Bridge (and nothing of the torn-up rails), and perhaps a few houses, but he can imagine the whole city. What he doesn't know [we are still in the night before the bombardment] is that this will be the last conscious glimpse of the cityscape intact. (68)

Like Frau Schrader, he has his later moments of depression (owing to the absence of goals and intentions to be fulfilled, activities to be carried out), but at length he recovers his original energy and curiosity.

Another cameo appearance is made by the head of the fire brigade, who deplores the ignorance of the city officials and their haste to extinguish fires that will be controllable only at a later stage of their chemical life and development and who takes a reasoned decision to allow the city's archives and its museum contents to go up in flames: "I was virtually the last person in this city to see its valuable memorabilia, to say farewell, to estimate the value of the collection" (78).

Here the micro perspective, the view from beneath, dwindles to its vanishing point. Yet it should not be imagined that the view from above, that of the pilots and crew, is more comprehensive or reliable. Indeed, as has already been hinted, there is in fact no view from above insofar as the pilots are expected not to see but rather to determine their movements by map and by mathematical calculation, by radar rather than by "sight" (an expression that here in any case signifies strategy, not the personal organs of the participants [54n12]). All the studies of aerial warfare and its techniques foreground the depersonalization of the individuals involved and their assimilation into the larger machinery first of their own aircraft and then of the squadron as a whole. "Here there do not fly individual airplanes as in the Battle of Britain but rather a whole conceptual system, an intellectual construction in metal" (to quote one of the discussants at a symposium [51]).

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Abstraction versus sense-datum: these are the two poles of a dialectic of war, incomprehensible in their mutual isolation, which dictate dilemmas of representation navigable only by formal innovation, as we have seen, and not by any stable narrative convention. It is not to be imagined, however, that we can return to some earlier state of wholeness, in which, as in Homer, individual hand-to-hand combat would at one and the same time somehow epitomize the totality.

On the other hand, the contradiction can be exacerbated even further, and continues to be in contemporary warfare. Michael Hardt has evoked a kind of dialectic of the body in the most recent American wars, in which the solitary body of the suicide bomber, on the one hand, finds itself opposed, on the other, to the smart bombs and pilotless drones of an aerial warfare visible only on monitors at thousands of miles of distance—a contradiction itself reproduced in the distance between the conventional duel of armies ("mission accomplished") and the house-to-house urban resistance of guerrilla warfare (Hardt and Negri 45). Does this opposition then not correspond to what I previously identified as a distinction between the named (or institutionalized) action and the blooming, buzzing confusion of scene, from which as yet no formalizable actantial categories have emerged? The abstract category may also stand in constitutive opposition to what I called the existential experience of war, through which an equally undefined subject or consciousness finds representation. But scene is in its fullest reality necessarily collective, and it is the multiplicity of the collective that marks the difference between the representational problems we have rehearsed here. The language of the existential individual already possesses an elaborate history with all kinds of stereotypes that it can be the task of representation to correct, disrupt, undermine, or metaphysically challenge. That of the collective does not yet exist. Group, nation, clan, class, general will, multitude—all these remain so many linguistic experiments for designating an unimaginable collective totality, a manifold of consciousness as unimaginable as it is real. War is one among such collective realities, which exceed representation fully as much as they do conceptualization and yet which ceaselessly tempt and exasperate narrative ambitions, conventional and experimental alike: unless, of course, this particular reality ceases to exist.

Note

1. Unattributed translations are mine.

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