



WALLENSTEIN AND AFTER
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ONE: My plan when my wife Ruth Leys, our daughter Anna, and I arrived at Wiko last August was to spend the next eleven months finishing a book on Caravaggio, based on lectures that I had given at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., five years before. As of the present moment (mid-July 2008), I am partway through the footnotes, with the expectation of completing the manuscript within the next two or three months. In the course of the year I also wrote from scratch four lectures on contemporary artists (Anri Sala, Charles Ray, Joseph Marioni, and Douglas Gordon), which I delivered on successive afternoons in late March at the University of Toronto. As soon as *The Moment of Caravaggio* is off my hands I will make those lectures into a short book. It goes without saying that none of this would have been possible without fabulous library support from

Frau Bottomley and her staff, as well as, in organizing my Powerpoint presentations for Toronto, from Benny Drieschner in computing services. Plus I wrote some poems. I'd have liked more, but strictly in terms of work it has been a good year.

TWO: However, Wiko is famously more than simply a place to get work done. In that larger sense, my year at Wiko truly got under way when, on October 4, 2007, I turned out to be the only Fellow rash enough to accept an invitation extended to us all to attend a ten-hour performance of Friedrich Schiller's stupendous dramatic trilogy *Wallenstein*, starring Klaus-Maria Brandauer in the title role, an extraordinary actor named Jürgen Holz in the complementary role of Buttler, and directed by Peter Stein, a major figure in the modern history of the German theater. (Also a controversial one, for his admirable refusal to go along with the otherwise all but universal tendency to play fast and loose with classic texts.) The trilogy, held in an abandoned warehouse before no less than 1200 spectators, began at 2 p.m. and ended around midnight. There were, I think, four intermissions, one of them long enough for a quick dinner in a nearby restaurant or at one of the food stands outside the building. As it happened, I had read *Wallenstein* in translation several months before, and in preparation for the performance I read it again from start to finish the previous day; in effect I had the whole text in English available to be scrolled through mentally as the play unfolded in Schiller's demanding – and to me almost perfectly opaque – German on the stage. I found the entire occasion immensely gripping, probably the most rewarding experience in a theater I have ever known. But the afternoon and evening were also remarkable in that I found myself seated next to Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, whom I had previously encountered over early lunches and dinners at Wiko, but still as yet hadn't really gotten to know. We exchanged a few words before the curtain went up, but we spent the intermissions together talking about the play, and when it came time for dinner Reinhart led the way to a nearby restaurant where we each had a plate of pasta produced in no time at all (under the circumstances, though, I found it marvelously tasty). By the time the performance ended at midnight, there existed between us a connection that I could already see would be deeply meaningful for me during the months to come.

THREE: Just before coming to Berlin I had completed a big book on art photography since the late 1970s, entitled *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*. About half of the figures dealt with in that book are German, and in the course of writing it I had become friendly (if not yet friends) with two outstanding photographers, Thomas Struth (based in Düsseldorf) and Thomas Demand (who lives and works in Berlin). I got in touch with Demand as soon as I arrived, and through him I soon met other artists of his generation

or younger, such as the painter Thomas Scheibitz and the photographer and videomaker Anri Sala. During the months that followed I saw a great deal of Thomas Demand and Anri especially, though I also gave a talk on Struth's family photographs at the opening of an exhibition of them in Cologne (and spent the next afternoon with him going through the show), lectured on Andreas Gursky in Basel (also in connection with an exhibition of his work), and – realizing a fantasy – gave a lecture on the photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher in Düsseldorf with Hilla Becher in the audience (Bernd had died in June 2007). In Düsseldorf, too, I met and spoke at length with the sculptor Thomas Schütte. On another occasion Thomas Demand and I drove for hours through the former GDR countryside to visit an older photographer named Michael Schmidt, whose powerful and original work was only partly familiar to me; we all spent an intense afternoon talking and looking at photographs, with Thomas serving as both brilliant interlocutor and equally brilliant translator. Recently Demand and I conducted a public conversation about his work in the Hamburger Kunsthalle, where he had installed an outstanding exhibition comprising two recent series of photographs plus several related pieces. Another younger artist I have come to know is Tino Seghal, who generously arranged for a “sculpture” of his, *Kiss*, to be performed for Ruth and me in the Johnen Gallery by two dancers (as Seghal is aware, his work engages with issues of “theatricality” in ways that I can only find extremely challenging). I also saw something of Douglas Gordon, whom I had met the previous year in New York, and Mitch Epstein, another first-rate photographer, who spent the spring of 2008 at the American Academy in Berlin. All this barely scratches the surface of my engagement with contemporary art and artists during the past eleven months, but it perhaps suggests how crucial it has been to my experience of living and learning in Berlin.

FOUR: In February 2008 there arrived for a month's stay at Wiko one of the most distinguished senior art historians anywhere, Willibald Sauerländer, together with his wife Brigitte. I had first met Willibald at Wiko roughly twenty years ago, when Wolf Lepenies, then Rektor, invited me to lecture on the French painter Gustave Courbet. Willibald was in the audience, and he, Ruth, and I all had dinner together the next day. At that time Ruth and I were living for six months in Paris, and Willibald visited us there as well. Over the years we remained intermittently in touch, but it was altogether special to have the chance to spend hours at a stretch in his company, both at Wiko and in Berlin museums talking together in front of paintings. So for example Willibald, Brigitte, Ruth, Reinhart, and I devoted an unforgettable afternoon to the Menzels at the Alte Nationalgalerie. (That's Adolf Menzel [1815–1905], a far greater artist than tends to be recognized even in Germa-

ny; see my book *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* [2002], an excellent German translation of which came out in the fall.) And on the evening of February 29, Willibald's birthday, at the invitation of Luca Giuliani, I delivered a lecture on Caravaggio in his honor. In May, too, Willibald returned to Wiko for a week and we again passed hours in fruitful and, for me, fascinating conversation. Shortly after that I visited Munich, where he and Brigitte live and where he and I spent an afternoon going through a temporary Menzel exhibition that included numerous works from private collections and from the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, an occasion that was marked by Willibald's repeatedly setting off the gallery alarm by his insistence on studying the paintings and drawings at much closer range than the authorities considered safe. In short, looking at art and talking about it with Willibald Sauerländer was one of the high points of my year.

FIVE: Among the other Fellows at Wiko I soon became friendly with Antjie Krog, who is the author of a brilliant book on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Ruth taught the book at Johns Hopkins) as well as a poet in Afrikaans of tremendous power and distinction. Starting in February 2008 Antjie, Reinhart, and I met in Reinhart's office to read German poetry together for two intense hours one afternoon each week; we started out with Gottfried Benn, then moved on to Paul Celan, to whom we devoted the lion's share of our sessions, then to Georg Trakl, then (briefly) to Hölderlin, and finally (at Reinhart's insistence) to Goethe . . . The sessions themselves had a simple format: we would painstakingly read and discuss just a few poems extremely closely, with the aid of dictionaries but no translations, and naturally under Reinhart's expert and passionate guidance. We also gave two weeks to Celan's extraordinary 1960 prose text "Der Meridian", arguably the most important essay in poetics since the Second World War. There is no describing how thrilling it has been to work through such poems in Antjie and Reinhart's company; I only wish we had begun meeting sooner. There is no feature of the past year I expect to miss more, back in Baltimore.

SIX: I'm conscious, of course, of how much a short account like this leaves out of what has made my time at Wiko so enjoyable. But let me close by mentioning two noteworthy excursions Ruth and I made with other Fellows, one with Catriona McCallum and Peter Jones to Braunschweig to look at paintings in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum there (my target was a Giorgione self-portrait but at least three other canvases, by Orazio Gentileschi, Bartolomeo Manfredi, and Peter-Paul Rubens, were terrifically rewarding) and the second with Gustav Seibt, a historian and regular contributor to the feuilleton of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, as navigator and Ruth at the wheel through the Mark Brandenburg, with special

emphasis on places and scenes important to Theodor Fontane, author of *Before the Storm* and other major novels and an aficionado of that region. The latter excursion took place on a beautiful late June day, and ended, more or less, with an al fresco dinner in Neuhardenberg within sight of the gleaming white and breathtakingly original Schinkel-Kirche ... A few weeks earlier, Gustav had led Ruth and me to the vast and moving – also artistically compelling – monument to the Soviet army dead in Treptower Park, and thinking about both visits now they seem to encompass so much of our experience since arriving in Berlin eleven months ago.