

tive instinct working under a thin veil.¹⁸ Those talking most about the positive are in agreement with destructive power. The collective compulsion for a positivity that allows its immediate translation into practice has in the meantime gripped precisely those people who believe they stand in the starkest opposition to society. This is not the least way in which their actionism fits so smoothly into society's prevailing trend. This should be opposed by the idea, in a variation of a famous proposition of Spinoza, that the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better.¹⁹

R*esignation*

We older representatives of what the name "Frankfurt School" has come to designate have recently and eagerly been accused of resignation. We had indeed developed elements of a critical theory of society, the accusation runs, but we were not ready to draw the practical consequences from it. And so, we neither provided actionist programs nor did we even support actions by those who felt inspired by critical theory. I will not address the question of whether that can be demanded from theoretical thinkers, who are relatively sensitive and by no means shockproof instruments. The purpose that has fallen to them in a society based on the division of labor may be questionable; they themselves may be deformed by it. But they are also formed by it; of course, they could not by sheer will abolish what they have become. I do not want to deny the element of subjective weakness that clings to the narrowed focus on theory. I think the objective side is more important. The objection, effortlessly rattled off, runs along these lines: the person who at this hour doubts the possibility of radical change in society and who therefore neither participates in spectacular, violent actions nor recommends them has resigned. What he has in mind he thinks cannot be realized; actually he doesn't even want to realize it. By leaving the conditions untouched, he condones them without admitting it.

Distance from praxis is disreputable to everyone. Whoever doesn't want to really knuckle down and get his hands dirty, is suspect, as though

the aversion were not legitimate and only distorted by privilege. The distrust of whoever distrusts praxis extends from those on the opposite side who repeat the old slogan "enough talking already" all the way to the objective spirit of advertising that propagates the image—they call it a "guiding image"—of the active, practical person, be he an industrial leader or an athlete. One should join in. Whoever only thinks, removes himself, is considered weak, cowardly, virtually a traitor. The hostile cliché of the intellectual works its way deeply into that oppositional group, without them having noticed it, and who in turn are slandered as "intellectuals."

Thinking actionists answer: among the things to be changed include precisely the present conditions of the separation of theory and praxis. Praxis is needed, they say, precisely in order to do away with the domination by practical people and the practical ideal. But then this is quickly transformed into a prohibition on thinking. A minimum is sufficient to turn the resistance to repression repressively against those who, as little as they wish to glorify their individual being, nonetheless do not renounce what they have become. The much invoked unity of theory and praxis has the tendency of slipping into the predominance of praxis. Many movements defame theory itself as a form of oppression, as though praxis were not much more directly related to oppression. In Marx the doctrine of this unity was inspired by the real possibility of action, which even at that time was not actualized.¹ Today what is emerging is more the direct contrary. One clings to action for the sake of the impossibility of action. Admittedly, already in Marx there lies concealed a wound. He may have presented the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach so authoritatively because he knew he wasn't entirely sure about it. In his youth he had demanded the "ruthless criticism of everything existing."² Now he was mocking criticism. But his famous witticism against the young Hegelians, the phrase "critical critique," was a dud, went up in smoke as nothing but a tautology.³ The forced primacy of praxis irrationally stopped the critique that Marx himself practiced. In Russia and in the orthodoxy of other countries the malicious derision of critical critique became an instrument so that the existing conditions could establish themselves so terrifyingly. The only thing praxis still meant was: increased production of the means of production; critique was not tolerated anymore except for the criticism that people were not yet working hard enough. So easily does the subordination of theory to praxis invert into service rendered to renewed oppression.

The repressive intolerance to the thought that is not immediately accompanied by instructions for action is founded on anxiety. Untrammelled thought and the posture that will not let it be bargained away

must be feared because of what one deeply knows but cannot openly admit: that the thought is right. An age-old bourgeois mechanism with which the eighteenth century enlightenment thinkers were quite familiar operates once again, but unchanged: the suffering caused by a negative situation—this time by obstructed reality—becomes rage leveled at the person who expresses it. Thought, enlightenment conscious of itself, threatens to disenchant the pseudo-reality within which actionism moves, in the words of Habermas.⁴ The actionism is tolerated only because it is considered pseudo-reality. Pseudo-reality is conjoined with, as its subjective attitude, pseudo-activity: action that overdoes and aggravates itself for the sake of its own *publicity**, without admitting to itself to what extent it serves as a substitute satisfaction, elevating itself into an end in itself. People locked in desperately want to get out. In such situations one doesn't think anymore, or does so only under fictive premises. Within absolutized praxis only reaction is possible and therefore false. Only thinking could find an exit, and moreover a thinking whose results are not stipulated, as is so often the case in discussions in which it is already settled who should be right, discussions that therefore do not advance the cause but rather inevitably degenerate into tactics. If the doors are barricaded, then thought more than ever should not stop short. It should analyze the reasons and subsequently draw the conclusions. It is up to thought not to accept the situation as final. The situation can be changed, if at all, by undiminished insight. The leap into praxis does not cure thought of resignation as long as it is paid for with the secret knowledge that that really isn't the right way to go.

Pseudo-activity is generally the attempt to rescue enclaves of immediacy in the midst of a thoroughly mediated and rigidified society. Such attempts are rationalized by saying that the small change is one step in the long path toward the transformation of the whole. The disastrous model of pseudo-activity is the "do-it-yourself"* [*Mach es selber*]: activities that do what has long been done better by the means of industrial production only in order to inspire in the unfree individuals, paralyzed in their spontaneity, the assurance that everything depends on them. The nonsense of do-it-yourself in the production of material goods, even in the carrying out of many repairs, is patently obvious. Admittedly the nonsense is not total. With the reduction of so-called *services** [*Dienstleistungen*], sometimes measures carried out by the private person that are superfluous considering the available technology nonetheless fulfill a quasi-rational purpose. The do-it-yourself approach in politics is not completely of the same caliber. The society that impenetrably confronts people is nonetheless these very people. The trust in the limited action of small groups recalls the spontaneity that withers beneath the encrusted

totality and without which this totality cannot become something different. The administered world has the tendency to strangle all spontaneity, or at least to channel it into pseudo-activities. At least this does not function as smoothly as the agents of the administered world would hope. However, spontaneity should not be absolutized, just as little as it should be split off from the objective situation or idolized the way the administered world itself is. Otherwise the axe in the house that never saves the carpenter will smash in the nearest door, and the riot squad will be at the ready.⁵ Even political undertakings can sink into pseudo-activities, into theater. It is no coincidence that the ideals of immediate action, even the propaganda of the act, have been resurrected after the willing integration of formerly progressive organizations that now in all countries of the earth are developing the characteristic traits of what they once opposed. Yet this does not invalidate the critique of anarchism. Its return is that of a ghost. The impatience with theory that manifests itself in its return does not advance thought beyond itself. By forgetting thought, the impatience falls back below it.

This is made easier for the individual by his capitulation to the collective with which he identifies himself. He is spared from recognizing his powerlessness; the few become the many in their own eyes. This act, not unwavering thought, is resignative. No transparent relationship obtains between the interests of the ego and the collective it surrenders itself to. The ego must abolish itself so that it may be blessed with the grace of being chosen by the collective. Tacitly a hardly Kantian categorical imperative has erected itself: you must sign. The sense of a new security is purchased with the sacrifice of autonomous thinking. The consolation that thinking improves in the context of collective action is deceptive: thinking, as a mere instrument of activist actions, atrophies like all instrumental reason. At this time no higher form of society is concretely visible: for that reason whatever acts as though it were in easy reach has something regressive about it. But according to Freud, whoever regresses has not reached his instinctual aim. Objectively regression is renunciation, even when it thinks itself the opposite and innocently propagates the pleasure principle.⁶

By contrast the uncompromisingly critical thinker, who neither signs over his consciousness nor lets himself be terrorized into action, is in truth the one who does not give in. Thinking is not the intellectual reproduction of what already exists anyway. As long as it doesn't break off, thinking has a secure hold on possibility. Its insatiable aspect, its aversion to being quickly and easily satisfied, refuses the foolish wisdom of resignation. The utopian moment in thinking is stronger the less it—this too a form of relapse—objectifies itself into a utopia and hence sabotages its

realization. Open thinking points beyond itself. For its part a comportment, a form of praxis, it is more akin to transformative praxis than a comportment that is compliant for the sake of praxis. Prior to all particular content, thinking is actually the force of resistance, from which it has been alienated only with great effort. Such an emphatic concept of thinking admittedly is not secured, not by the existing conditions, nor by ends yet to be achieved, nor by any kind of battalions. Whatever has once been thought can be suppressed, forgotten, can vanish. But it cannot be denied that something of it survives. For thinking has the element of the universal. What once was thought cogently must be thought elsewhere, by others: this confidence accompanies even the most solitary and powerless thought. Whoever thinks is not enraged in all his critique: thinking has sublimated the rage. Because the thinking person does not need to inflict rage upon himself, he does not wish to inflict it on others. The happiness that dawns in the eye of the thinking person is the happiness of humanity. The universal tendency of oppression is opposed to thought as such. Thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness: by enunciating it. By this alone happiness reaches into the universal unhappiness. Whoever does not let it atrophy has not resigned.

In the article he quotes in part a poem he wrote years earlier, addressed to querulous readers: "And Where is the Positive, Mr. Kästner?" The poem, "Und wo bleibt das Positive, Herr Kästner?" is originally from the collection *Ein man gibt Auskunft* (1930), now in *Gesammelte Schriften für Erwachsene*, 1:218–219.

18. The "destructive instinct" [*Destruktionstrieb*] together with the "aggressive instinct" [*Aggressionstrieb*] are expressions used by the later Freud to define more clearly the biological and psychological dimensions of the "death instinct" (which he introduced in the speculative *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920) such as it is directed at the external world. See Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923) in vol. 19 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1975).

19. Presumably a reference to Spinoza's proposition "omnis determinatio est negatio" (*Epistula* 59) refracted through Hegel's theory of the "speculative proposition." Hegel claimed that Spinoza's proposition, while "of infinite importance," resulted in mere abstract juxtaposition of determination and negation, whereas reality contains the negation as potential and hence implies a subsumption [*Aufhebung*] of the determination and its negation at the level of a reflected category. In this way "determinate negation" [*bestimmte Negation*] drives thought and being forward to their ultimate, fully mediated identity. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I and II, Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 5:121–122; 6:195–198. English: Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 111–114 and 536–540 respectively.

Resignation

1. Radio version: "In Marx the doctrine of the unity of theory and praxis was inspired by the possibility of action, which even at that time was not actualized but yet was felt to exist."

2. Allusion to Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge, part of the public correspondence between them and Bakunin and Feuerbach, published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1844): "If we have no business with the construction of the future or with organizing it for all time there can still be no doubt about the task confronting us at present: I mean the *ruthless critique of everything existing*, ruthless in that it will shrink neither from its own discoveries nor from conflict with the powers that be" (Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton [London: Penguin Books, 1992], 207).

3. Cf. the first joint publication by Marx and Engels, a satirical polemic against Bruno Bauer and the Young Hegelians: *Die Heilige Familie, oder Kritik der kritischen Kritik* (1845); English: *The Holy Family: A Critique of Critical Criticism*, in vol. 4 of *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, ed. Y. Dakhina and T. Chikileva (New York: International Publishers, 1975).

4. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Die Scheinrevolution und ihre Kinder: Sechs Thesen über Taktik, Ziele, und Situationsanalysen der oppositionellen Jugend," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 5, 1968, p. 8. In English, cf. Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

5. Cf. act 3, scene 1, of Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* (1804):

A man with eyesight clear and sense alert,
Who trusts in God and his own supple strength,
Will find some way to slip the noose of danger.
Mountain-born was never scared of mountains.
(Having finished his work he puts the tools away.)
There now! That gate should serve another twelvemonth.
An axe in the house will save a joiner's labor.
(Reaches for his hat.)

(Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell*, trans. and ed. William F. Mainland [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972], 64–65 [ll. 1508–1513])

6. "Instinctual aim" [*Triebziel*] in Freud refers to the activity a sexual drive tends toward in order to release an inner biological or psychological tension. Whereas Freud developed the idea in terms of various stages of infant sexuality closely bound to specific organic sources of instinctual aims in *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1905), in the later *Triebe und Triebchicksale* (1915) he considers more sublimated cases in which the aim can be modified through the influence of object-choice, anaclisis, substitution by the instincts of self-preservation, etc. In *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* Freud came to see regression [*Regression*] as operative when the libido reverts to an earlier stage in the child's psychosexual development or, as presumably Adorno here implies, to a more primitive, less differentiated form of psychosexual organization, which Freud also often called "fixation."

A relatively constant concept in Freud's economical model of the psyche, the "pleasure principle" [*Lustprinzip*] denotes the strategy of directing psychological activities toward the goal of obtaining pleasure and avoiding its opposite. Several problems arise, such as the pleasure afforded from maintaining a constant tension of psychic energy (the "constancy principle") versus the tendency toward a complete dissipation of energy (the "death drive") and that of the complicity between the pleasure principle and the reality principle for the sake of guaranteeing satisfactions at the expense of the pleasure principle's fundamental (utopian) role in fantasy, dream, and wish-fulfillment, to which Adorno apparently is referring. Cf. Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920); English: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), 18:7–64.

Appendix 1: Discussion of Professor Adorno's Lecture "The Meaning of Working Through the Past"

1. Cf. §143 of G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I, Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 8:281–284. English: *The Encyclopedia Logic: Part I the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences, with the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991).

2. Eugen Kogon, *Der SS-Staat: Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1946); reprinted by various publishers. Eng-