

Completed December 1997
Resumed September 2016

Introduction: Yet Another Person's Reflections On Translating Adorno

Finding a point of entry into any Adorno essay is not easy. Perhaps latching on to one small but not insignificant idiosyncrasy in "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis" can give us some foothold. This is the imprecise, though only sporadic, use of psychoanalytic terminology in the essay. The use of these terms presents a problem not only of interpretation but of translation, because we must decide whether to use their standard English translations. When Adorno employs the rare word *agieren* to describe the laboring subject's necessary resistance to the pleasure principle, it is clear that he means to use it in Freud's sense: "...daß man einst wider das Lustprinzip agieren mußte, um der Selbsterhaltung willen..." (section 2). Yet Freud uses the term in the sense of "acting out" or reenacting a primal situation, and Adorno seems to be thinking of a less technical sense of the word, "*tätig sein*."

In this case, the best way to resolve the crux is to recall the context of the essay. Together with the much better-known piece on "Subject and Object,"¹ it constitutes the concluding section of *Stichworte*,² entitled "Dialectical Epilegomena." In the preface to the collection, Adorno says that he had prepared the pieces months before for a lecture he was to have held during the fateful summer semester of 1969. It does seem probable that the events which took place that summer, and which prevented the lecture from being delivered, had an effect in sharpening the tone of the essay that it became. All speculation aside, the passages that sometimes read like unconsidered or knee-jerk reactions to the recent student protests were actually the culmination of a lifetime's work. Perhaps we might see them as reflections of the Frankfurt School's undigested Freudianism, rather than of some supposed political conservatism.

¹ Translated in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gerhardt (Urizen, 1978). In his *Adorno*, Martin Jay devotes virtually all of his second chapter to this essay, which he sees as a central point of reference for Critical Theory (Harvard, 1984).

² According to the Internet bookseller *amazon.com*, a translation of this and another book by Henry Pickford is forthcoming February 1 from Columbia University Press.

Adorno's interpretation of the student movement along sub-Freudian lines in sections four, seven, and nine as the expression of weak, alternately paranoid, alternately reified egos recalls the empirical work on *The Authoritarian Personality*, in which the "integrated personality" was the ultimate measure of resistance to authority.³ As in that study, Adorno here seems at times almost tempted to compare the students with the fascists—though he certainly never goes as far as his erstwhile colleague Bruno Bettelheim, who during the same period was to testify before Congress that the rebellious students were reenacting their Oedipal dramas and were "Nazis" reincarnate.⁴

Though much more subtle, Adorno's rhetoric tries to use Freudian parlance to similar effect. More than the students or their opponents themselves, the ego and the pleasure principle, reality-testing and various screen-images (*Deckbilder*) are the principal antagonists of some of the more dizzying sections of the "Marginalia." The Freudian terminology has a kind of shrill urgency to it that recalls some of his other summary judgments. He gives the following brief physiognomy of Wagner: "the fawning stance of the momma's boy who talks himself and others into believing that his kind parents can deny him nothing, for the very purpose of making sure they don't."⁵ No doubt, many such examples could be adduced. The reliance on psychological archetypes runs through his work. It becomes evident, then, that his indiscriminate use of psychoanalytic concepts compels a deeper investigation into Adorno's style generally.

Adorno's contemporary response to the student movements does give the essay a kind of historical significance, but that is not the reason I decided to try to translate it. The stylistic traits that make his analysis of the student movements seem so brusquely dismissive also inspire Adorno's most brilliant writing. His sentences are marked by a dialectical, chiasmic motion that

³ Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (UC, 1973; 1996) 245.

⁴ See Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling* (Pantheon, 1989) 61-70.

⁵ Qtd. in Fredric Jameson's book on Adorno, *Late Marxism* (Verso, 1990) 254n.4.

is unmistakably his. Gillian Rose has shown how concepts taken “from traditional philosophy...are transformed into principles of social criticism by use of the figure of chiasmus.”⁶ This is one way in which his (inventively) opportunistic use of Freudian terms can be understood: as a way of claiming the concepts and their history for his argument without having to subscribe to the whole system. In a writer less subtle than Adorno this would qualify as name-dropping. Through his aphoristic sentences that undo themselves like so many chiasmi, the viability of each concept is simultaneously functionalized and undermined; in each sentence, whole systems of thought are invoked, discarded, and, perhaps, transcended. I think it is necessary to preserve the recognizability of these systems of thought. Although I know I have not been able to keep up with Adorno, I have tried to render the terms from Freud and Marx consistently with their English equivalents, though I know I probably missed many references to Hegel and to Weber because I don’t know enough of their work. In any event, this is offered as a kind of baseline for any translation of Adorno.

Adorno is hard enough to translate into English, but it must be harder still to translate him into Romance languages. The reason for this difficulty is that Adorno tends to prefer the Romance-derived word for philosophical concepts, precisely in order to insist on the disruptive force of their foreignness. As Adorno suggests in another essay, the strangeness of Latinate words in the German language suggests that “civilization as Latinization only half succeeded in Germany.”⁷ This foreignness is much less visible to an English reader, but certainly still present to an extent which might be missed by, say, the reader of a Spanish translation of Adorno.

For the translation taking Adorno into English, the translation of these “words from abroad” will seem obvious—too obvious. Words like *Approbation*, *Denunziation*, *Intention*, *Reflexion*, *Repression*, *Relevanz*, *Rationalität*, *Adäquanz*—to name but a few of Adorno’s choice

⁶ Qtd. in Jameson 256n.38. Rose’s book offers by all accounts the best discussion of Adorno’s style, but it not available in our library.

selections—could perhaps simply be put into lower case, and that’s that. Many, however, have very specific denotations in German. When Adorno uses *Differenz* at one point to denote the primal division of theory and praxis, I translate it (for better or worse) as “differentiation,” to suggest an active opposition instead of a passive unlikeness. Even when the reasons guiding a particular choice are not semantic, some deeper stylistic principle may be at work. Robert Hullot-Kentor has noted that Adorno will always use the word *Authentizität* in a positive sense, whereas *Eigentlichkeit* is always derisively handled.⁸ The former, with its Greek/French derivation, contaminates the very enunciation of authenticity, revealing non-identity working at the heart of identity. This is what makes Adorno’s *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* such a devastating title: the word “jargon,” with its tangled history of *Gerede*, is placed side-by-side with Teutonic authenticity.

Adorno’s diction reflects a deliberate stylistic principle of verbal adulteration. It indicates Adorno’s sensibility for the affinity of philosophy and etymology: “To anyone in the habit of thinking with his ears,” runs the brilliant first sentence of his “Cultural Criticism and Society,” “the word *Kulturkritik* must have an offensive ring, not merely because, like ‘automobile,’ it is pieced together from Latin and Greek. The word recalls a flagrant contradiction....”⁹ I am not able to reproduce such revealing contingencies in English. I have simply reproduced the German where the word-choice seems deliberate, as in the almost farcical coinage *Depotenzierung*, which I translate with the equally ugly word “de-potential.”

Adorno’s recontextualization of concepts seems to militate against terminological consistency in translation, and yet to require it in order to make those recontextualizations recognizable. I have deliberately violated terminological consistency internal to the text in many

⁷ “Words from Abroad,” *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 1.187.

⁸ In his translation of *Aesthetic Theory* (Minnesota, 1997) 370n3.

⁹ In *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams, rev. ed. (Harcourt Brace, 1992) 1033.

cases. I sometimes translate *Vernunft* as reason or rationality; Adorno also uses the term *Rationalität*, but also in a positive sense, and without any clear difference in meaning—*vernünftig*, after all, always needs to be “rational” instead of “reasonable” here. *Mitteln und Zwecken* needs to be “means and ends,” but *Zweck* means simply a purpose or aim, so I’ve translated this word variously. *Einzelne* and *Individuum* certainly do not have the same resonance, since the one is consistently used in discussing Hegel and the political philosophy of the state, the other in the psychological sense of a socialized individual. Nonetheless, I often had to translate both as “individual,” since “single person” or “monad” usually cannot stand in for *Einzelne*. *Selbstbesinnung* is used more than once in a passage at the end of section ten which even someone who knows very little Hegel recognizes as unmistakably Hegelian; here the translation is “self-consciousness,” but in other places “contemplation” (for *Besinnung*) or “coming to one’s senses” fits better. The greatest difficulties, however, are produced by the word *Schein*, both as prefix and as substantive, whose translation Fredric Jameson has extensively discussed in his book on Adorno.¹⁰ Translating this word as “appearance” would imply, Jameson argues, that there is something “real” besides the appearance; and this is completely foreign to the aesthetic sense of the word. Jameson offers no perfect solution and, in any case, Adorno uses the word primarily in a mocking sense to denounce “seeming” or “apparent” or “illusory” praxis or revolution, though there is certainly a trace of the “fictional” (Jameson) here, too.

In one case, terminological consistency is absolutely crucial. Some previous translators of Adorno have translated *verdinglichen* as “objectify,” others as “reification” or “thingification.” It seems absolutely critical to me, in an essay in which the word *Objekt* and its corresponding parts of speech are used repeatedly (*objektiv, objektive, Objektivität*), not to translate *verdinglichen* as “objectify” in order to make sense of the differences. So I prefer “reify.”

¹⁰ *Late Marxism* 165-71.

Objekt and *Subjekt* play the roles of grammatical adverb, subject, and object in Adorno's sentences. Sometimes I have had to translate these as "with reference to the object," "subjectively speaking," etc. This makes these sentences sound a little clumsy, and such phrasings will always presuppose a particular interpretation of the sentence. Nonetheless, I hope they make the sense of some sentences clearer.

Like a few other words in the essay (e.g., *heimbefehlen*), *Gestus* has no entry in the Grimm lexikon. Those translation dictionaries that have the word usually refer one to "gesture"; in some German-German dictionaries, "Gestik" is used as an equivalent. But Adorno apparently is not always using the word to describe a totality of gestures (*Gestik*) so much as a general "*Habitus*," which the Duden gives as one of the senses of the word. So I could choose from either "deportment" or "disposition," but in the end I preferred "bearing" in the one case where this was important, which gives—through its other meaning, a "direction" as on the compass—a sense of an object *toward which* one's bearing is directed. In the other cases I translated this as "gestures," "gesturings," et cetera.

Adorno's style has evoked eloquent and divergent descriptions from his readers. His first reviewers—they were discussing his *Kierkegaard* (1933) but their comments are still apposite—spoke of the book as "swirling and swimming," "ranting and dictatorial," and "hovering and fragile."¹¹ More recently, Adorno's sentences have been said to conduct, adapting a line from T.S. Eliot, "a set of guerrilla raids on the inarticulable."¹² These contradictory accounts only begin to describe the dialectical movement of his sentences, which seem to offer apodictic statements—this is doubtless where the ill-timed comments about Adorno's "dictatorial" manner come from—but then undergo a kind of reversal. Referring to theory, Adorno closes out section two: "Trotz all ihrer Unfreiheit ist sie im Unfreien Statthalter der Freiheit." Sentences like these

¹¹ Citations from the translator Hullot-Kentor's introduction to *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minnesota, 1989) xiii.

can almost be scanned for meter, but the rhythm is generated as much by the sense of repetition and return as by any arrangement of syllables.

The dialectical movement inheres in the sentence structure itself. As I tried to show earlier, Adorno's political commentary is bound up with his style. So too the philosophy. I have tried to maintain the typical rhythm of his sentences. Typically this has meant refusing to cut the English sentences off, inserting dashes and semicolons instead. More subtly, I have avoided the present participle, which is not available in German. This is usually a hallmark of bad translations from the German, which inevitably ends up making the writer sound much more oracular than s/he is. Nonetheless, I think Adorno's aphoristic style is well served by such a decision. When he writes of the insurgent students in section nine, "Die eigene Relevanz überschätzen sie narzißtisch...Ihre Bedürfnisse installieren sie unmittelbar....Sie verdinglichen die eigene Psychologie...." it would sound slack and simply whiny as "They are overvaluing their own relevance,... installing their needs as...They are reifying their own psychology...." Adorno is expressly speaking about a timeless archetype, the student/political martyr, and this is incidentally part of the problem with his analysis: he seems to be confusing the student of the 1960s with the type of the right-wing student well known to German history, worst of all to the 1920s and 30s. For this reason, I feel that the simple present is called for, not the participle; in the former tense Adorno's statements sound all the more devastating and also, in this case, somewhat deplorable.

Adorno also favors verb-preposition constructions like "zu...werden" which turn the object of the verb into the object of a preposition, and tighten up the sentence structure considerably, as in the famous opening of *Ästhetische Theorie*: "Zur Selbstverständlichkeit wurde, daß nichts, was die Kunst betrifft, mehr selbstverständlich ist..." In the essay, this construction is repeated time and again, even with verbs other than *werden*, and it makes some

¹² Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Basil Blackwell, 1990) 342.

sentences very hard to understand at first (or even second) reading, but adds tremendously to the economy of their structure. This could not be carried over in translation. Adding to this tautness of design are the sudden shifts of gear without explicit transition. The relatively short eighth section, for example, goes from the *huis clos* to Bolivia, and from McLuhan to the moon and back. I have tried, as much as it was possible, to maintain this tension in English.

Marginalia on Theory and Praxis

For Ulrich Sonnemann

1

The extent to which the question of theory and praxis depends on that of subject and object is demonstrated by a simple contemplation of history. At the same time that the Cartesian principle of dual substances ratified the dichotomy of subject and object, the concept of praxis was represented in letters, for the first time, as questionable because of its tension with reflection. For all its eager realism, pure practical reason has no object, just like the world which, for industry and manufacturing, becomes so much unvalorized matter for processing, which for its part cannot show its real identity anywhere but in the marketplace. Even as praxis promises to lead human beings from their constraint [*Verschlossenheit*] into itself, it is already sealed off [*verschlossen*]; that's why practical beings are unresponsive, why the object-centeredness of praxis is a priori undermined. It might well be asked whether to this day all praxis which dominates nature has not been, in its indifference to the object, an illusory praxis. It bestows its illusory character on all the actions [*Aktionen*] which adopt the old violent gestures of praxis unchanged. Since its early days American pragmatism has justifiably been reproached with making knowledge endorse existing conditions, in that it designates as a criterion of knowledge its practical utility; nowhere else—so they argue—can the practical effects of knowledge be investigated. If however in the end theory (which must concern itself with the whole if it is not to

be in vain) gets finally nailed down to the here and now, to [the question of] its practical efficacy, then this very fate will befall it, despite the belief that it escapes being immanently within the system, from which theory can only part itself where it is freed from pragmatic fetters, no matter how modified they may be. All theory is gray: so Goethe has his Mephistopheles lecture the student whom he leads around by the nose;¹³ that sentence was first of all ideology, and a deception as to how little green the tree of life really is that the practical people planted, and which the devil compares with the metal gold in the same breath; the grayness of theory is for its part a function of the life which has lost life's qualities. [On this view] nothing should exist which doesn't let itself be taken hold of; not even thought. The subject, thrown back onto itself and divided from its other by an abyss, is incapable of acting. Hamlet is as much the primal history of the individual in his subjective reflection as the drama of the man who, in acting, is crippled by this reflection. The individual's abandonment [*Selbstentäußerung*] to that which is not like him is felt to be unworthy of him and he is inhibited from completing it. Not much later, the novel will describe how the individual reacts to this situation, which is wrongly called alienation [*Entfremdung*]¹⁴—as if in the pre-individual era there were a nearness which after all can hardly be felt by anyone but the individuated: the animals are in Borchardt's phrase "solitary communities," with only pseudo-activity. The follies of Don Quixote are attempts to compensate for the other that is slipping away: to use the clinical language, they are restitution-phenomena [*Restitutions-phänomene*]. What since then has counted as a problem of praxis and is today once again sharpening into the question of praxis and theory, coincides with the loss of experience induced by the rationality of the always-the-same. Where experience is blocked or simply doesn't exist anymore, praxis gets damaged and hence longingly, distortedly, disconcertedly overprized. In this way what is called the problem of praxis is closely linked with that of knowledge. The

¹³ [The passage in *Faust* comes at the end of the third study scene, in which Mephistopheles tempts the student who has come into Faust's study. The clinching lines in the seduction are:

Grau, theurer Freund, ist alle Theorie,
Und grün des Lebens goldner Baum. (ll. 515-6)]

abstract subjectivity which is the terminus of the process of rationalization can in a strict sense hardly do something which is attributed to the transcendental subject, precisely that which it is said to have: spontaneity. Since the Cartesian doctrine of the indubitable certainty of the subject—and the philosophy which described it codified something historically completed, a constellation of subject and object in which, on the model of the ancient topos, only the unlike should be able to recognize the unlike—praxis has taken on something sham-like, as it couldn't quite make it over this chasm. Words like hustle and bustle [*Betriebsamkeit und Geschäftigkeit*] concisely convey this nuance. The seeming realities of some practical mass movements of the twentieth century, which became bloody realities and yet had the shadow of the not quite real, the delusory, cast over them, were only born at the moment when real deeds were first demanded. While thinking confines itself to subjective, practically utilizable reason, its other is correspondingly assigned a praxis which, to an increasing extent, lacks a concept and acknowledges no limits but itself. The bourgeois spirit [*Geist*], as antinomical as the society which sustains it, unites autonomy and a pragmatic hostility to theory. The world, which gets constructed by subjective reason only after the fact and in line with the general tendency, is supposed to be changed constantly, in accordance with the commercial tendency to expand, yet nonetheless remain as it is. That which touches thinking gets cut off from the world: theory, too, which demands more than a construction after the fact. It would be necessary to produce a consciousness of theory and praxis which neither separates the two in such a manner that theory become powerless and praxis despotic, nor one in which theory breaks through the ur-bourgeois primacy of practical reason proclaimed by Kant and Fichte. Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis; only the ideology of the purity of thinking deceives itself about that. It has a dual character: it is immanently determined and logically compelling, and nonetheless an indispensably realistic way of acting within existing reality. Insofar as subject, the thinking substance of philosophers, is object, insofar as it comes within object, it is also already practical.

However, the irrationality of praxis, always coming on top again,—its aesthetic archetypes are the sudden actions of chance through which Hamlet realizes what he had planned and then through which he fails at the realization—tirelessly breathes life into the appearance [*Schein*] of the absolute separation of subject and object. Where the subject is led to think of the object as absolutely incommensurable to itself, the communication between them becomes the prey of blind fate.

2

One would be handling the problem crudely if one wanted, for the sake of a historico-philosophical construction, to date the divergence of theory and praxis as late as the Renaissance. It's just that at that time, after the collapse of the *ordo* which presumed to assign to truth as well as to good works their hierarchical position, this divergence was first reflected on. One experienced the crisis of praxis in this form: not to know what one should do. Together with the medieval hierarchy, which was bound up with casuistry put into execution, the practical mandates crumbled which at that time, as dubious as they were, appeared at least adequate with respect to the social structure. The much-debated formalism of Kantian ethics was the culmination of a movement which got rolling, unstopably and with intellectual justification, after the emancipation of autonomous reason. The failing with respect to praxis was primarily a consciousness of the lack of regulators, already weaknesses at the outset; from this stem the vacillating, the joining of theory to contemplation, and the hindering of praxis. The formal character of pure practical reason is the basis of its failure in relation to praxis, and naturally gave rise to the self-examination that led beyond the tainted notion of praxis. If autarchic praxis has always been burdened by manic and compulsive aspects, then we need to come to our senses about it, and interrupt action directed blindly outwards; unnaïveté is the transition to the human. He who does not want to romanticize the Middle Ages must trace the divergence of theory and

praxis back to the most ancient division of physical and mental labor [*Arbeit*], probably back to the darkness of pre-history. Praxis arose from labor. It came to be a concept when labor no longer wanted simply to reproduce life directly but to produce its conditions: this clashed with the conditions existing at that time. Its origin in labor weighs heavily on all praxis. Until this day it is accompanied by the moment of unfreedom which it schlepped along [*mitschleppte*] with it: the fact that one once had to act out [*agieren*] against the pleasure principle for the sake of self-preservation—though the labor, reduced to a minimum, now no longer needed to be coupled with renunciation. The close relation of the longing for freedom to the aversion for praxis is also suppressed by contemporary actionism [*Aktionismus*]. Praxis was the reflex action of vital need; this still disfigures it whenever it tries to eliminate the vital needs. To this extent art is a critique of praxis as unfreedom; with this its truth begins. The abhorrence at praxis, which is all the rage everywhere today, may be probed further and shockingly felt in phenomena of natural history like the buildings of the beaver, the industry of the ant and the bee, the grotesquely arduous crouching of the beetle transporting a blade of grass. The latest praxis has been crossed with something very old; it is being turned into a holy animal once again, just as it may well have been thought sinful in the ancient world not to devote oneself slavishly to the self-preservative work of the species. The physiognomy of praxis is animal earnestness; it is shaken off only when genius [*Ingenium*] emancipates itself from praxis: this was probably what Schiller's theory of play meant. Most actionists are humorless in a way that is no less alarming than the humor of those who "laugh with" others. The lack of self-consciousness stems not only from the psychology of praxis. This lack marks it as soon as it becomes its own fetish and a barricade to its purpose. The dialectic despairs that the spell in which praxis enfolds people can only be broken through praxis, that the dialectic itself must in the meantime play a muffled, narrow-minded, dispirited [*geistfern*] part in intensifying the spell. The latest hostility to theory makes an agenda out of it. But the practical purpose, which encompasses the emancipation from everything narrow-minded,

is itself not indifferent to the means used to attain it; otherwise the dialectic would degenerate into the vulgarly Jesuitical. The idiotic member of parliament in Doré's caricature, who boasts "Gentlemen, above all I am practical," exposes himself as a scoundrel who can't see past impending tasks and even thinks something of himself for it; his gestures denounce the spirit [*Geist*] of praxis itself as a demon [*Ungeist*]. That which is not narrow-minded is represented by theory. For all of its unfreedoms, theory is the bulwark of freedom, even in bondage [*im Unfreien*].

3

Nowadays the antithesis of theory and praxis is once again being misused to denounce theory. When the student's room was smashed up because he preferred work to taking part in actions, it was scrawled on his wall that he who occupies himself with theory without conducting himself in a practical manner is a traitor¹⁴ to socialism. Praxis was used as the ideological pretext of the conscience-compulsion, and not only against him. The thinking which is defamed by them apparently tires out the practical among them unduly: it occasions too much work, is too practical. He who thinks engages in resistance; it is more comfortable to swim with the stream, though he declare that he moves against it. Insofar as one gives in to a regressive and disfigured form of the pleasure principle, making it easier on oneself, letting oneself go, one may hope for a moral bonus from those of the same mindset. The collective substitute-superego demands, in a coarse inversion, that which the old superego disapproved of: the ceding [*Zession*] of will itself qualifies the willing one as the better person. In Kant, too, emphatic praxis was good intentions; but also just as much autonomous reason. Only a concept of praxis that is not narrow, though, can encompass politics, those relations of society which largely condemn the praxis of each

¹⁴ The concept of the traitor is taken from the timeless stock of collective repressions, irrespective of its particular color. The law of conspiratorial societies is their irrevocability; for this reason conspirators like to rekindle the mythic concept of the oath. He who is of a different mindset is not only expelled but put at the mercy of the most severe moral sanctions. The concept of a morality [*Moral*]

single person to irrelevance. This is the point of difference between Kantian ethics and the views [*Anschauungen*] of Hegel, who—as Kierkegaard saw—does not actually recognize ethics in the traditional sense. The moral-philosophical writings of Kant were, in accordance with the state of enlightenment in the eighteenth century, individualistic for all their anti-psychologism and all their strivings toward an absolutely binding, overarching validity; individualistic insofar as they had recourse to the individual as the substratum of right—in Kant: radically rational—behavior. All of Kant’s examples come from the spheres of business and private life; the concept of *Gesinnungsethik*, whose subject must be the individuated single person, is conditioned by this fact. In Hegel the following realization is made for the first time: the behavior of the individual, no matter what his good intentions, does not attain a reality that would prescribe or restrict the scope of his conduct. In that Hegel expands the concept of the moral into the political, he sublates it [*löst er ihn auf*]. No apolitical reflection on praxis has been persuasive since. One must, however, be no less aware of the fact that the extension of the concept of praxis to politics entails the repression of the single person through the general. Humanity, which is nothing without individuation, gets virtually offset by the snotty pre-conditioning [*Abfertigung*] needed for it. If, however, the conduct of the single individual, and thereby all individuals, is made contemptible, then it cripples collective behavior, too. Spontaneity appears trivial in view of the actual dominance of objective conditions. Kant’s philosophy of morality, and Hegel’s of right, represent two dialectical stages in the bourgeois self-consciousness about praxis. Both, divided according to the poles of the particular and the general that tear this consciousness apart, are also false; each contains a truth missing in the other so long as a possibly higher form of praxis does not reveal itself in reality; its revelation requires theoretical reflection. No doubt, the rational analysis of the situation is the pre-requisite of an at least political praxis: even in the military sphere, in which praxis enjoys a crude priority, things proceed in this way. Analysis of the

requires autonomy, which however is not tolerated among those who always spout off about morality. He who in truth would deserve

situation amounts to more than an adjustment to it. In that this analysis reflects on the situation, it will underline moments which may go beyond the situation's particular imperatives. This is of unforeseeable relevance for the relationship between theory and praxis. Through its differentiation [*Differenz*] from praxis, which cannot be mediated and is chained to the situation, in other words through its coming to be independent, theory becomes a practical, productive force capable of changing things. If thinking concerns itself with something, no matter what, then it triggers a practical impulse once and for all, no matter how concealed that impulse may be from thinking. He alone thinks who does not want to take passively what has been given before—from the primitive who considers how he could protect his little fire from the rain or where he could hide himself from the storm, to the enlightener who contrives how humankind can rise from its immaturity [*Unmündigkeit*] through its interest in self-preservation. Motifs like these continue to resonate; perhaps their effects will only really be heard once the theme ceases to offer immediate practical occasions for them. There is no thought, provided that it is something more than an ordering of data and a little bit of technique, that does not have its practical telos. Any meditation on freedom at all must prolong itself into a conception of its possible realization, as long as the mediation does not get reined in by the bit of praxis and made to fit the outcome it demands. The separation of theory and praxis can no more be revoked by the authoritative decision [*Machtspruch*] of thought than there can be an unmediated unity of theory and praxis: this unity imitates the false identity of subject and object and perpetuates the dominant principle which fixes identities, against which true praxis must fight. The truth-content in the talk about the unity of theory and praxis was tied to social conditions. At the junctions, at the fractured spots of its development, reflection and action may be sparked; even then, the two are not one.

Praxis must heed the primacy of the object; the idealist Hegel's critique of Kant's conscience-based ethics [*Gewissenethik*] first records this. Praxis is correctly understood as that which, insofar as the subject is for its part mediated, the object wants: praxis follows its need. But not through that adjustment of the subject which merely reinforces the objectivity of heteronomy. The need of the object is mediated through the total social system, hence only critically determinable through theory. Praxis without theory, below the most advanced state of knowledge, must fail, and according to its very concept praxis likes realization better. Faulty praxis is no praxis. The despair that blindly rushes in because it finds the exits blocked allies itself, despite the purest intentions, with calamity [*Unheil*]. The hostility to theory in the spirit of this time, its in no way coincidental extinction, its ostracism caused by the impatience that wants to change the world without interpreting it, when in that very passage it is written, after all, that the philosophers had hitherto *only* interpreted—such hostility to theory becomes a weakness in praxis. That theory should yield to praxis—saying such things has become practical at this time—means liquidating theory's truth-content and condemning praxis to madness. Collective movements, apparently regardless of their content, get their sinister appeal from the dram of evil.¹⁵ According to Ernst Simmel's insight, unintegrated individuals cope with their private paranoia through the collective one, through their integration into the collective madness. At the moment this paranoia expresses itself, first, as the inability to thoughtfully take in objective contradictions which cannot be resolved by the subject into a harmony; convulsively uncontested unity serves as the screen-image [*Deckbild*] for the self's unremitting self-division. The sanctioned madness is excused from the reality-testing that would necessarily confront the weakened consciousness with intolerable antagonisms like that of subjective need and objective

¹⁵ [I translate *das Quentschen Wahnsinn* as "the dram of evil" because another reference to *Hamlet* is perhaps meant here, in which Hamlet is describing how wickedness can infect the best characters:

the dram of ev'l
Doth the noble substance often dout
To his own scandal. (1.3.36-8)]

failure. The fawningly malicious servant of the pleasure principle infects the moment of madness with a sickness which mortally threatens the ego through the semblance [*Schein*] of its security. To fear this would be the simplest and, therefore, equally repressed [instinct of] self-preservation: the unflustered refusal to cross the Rubicon between reason and madness which dries up so quickly. The transition to a praxis without theory is motivated by the objective powerlessness of theory. This powerlessness is multiplied through the isolating and fetishizing of the subjective moment in the movement of history: spontaneity. Its deformation must be traced back to a reaction against the administered world [*verwaltete Welt*]. In that it nonetheless convulsively closes its eyes to the totality of this world and behaves as if the whole thing were up to human beings among themselves, without mediation, praxis conforms to the objective tendency of progressive dehumanization—also in its practices. The spontaneity which stimulates the need of the object would have to pin itself to the assailable spots of the hardened reality, to those spots where the fractures, caused by the pressure of hardening, break outwards; not lashing out haphazardly, abstractly, or without regard for the content of that which is often attacked only for the sake of the advertisement.

5

If, just this once, one risked a so-called broad perspective reaching above and beyond the historical differences in which the concepts of theory and praxis have their life, then one would catch a glimpse of the unending progress of the much-decried separation of theory and praxis, which Romanticism and the many socialists in its wake (but not the mature Marx) bewailed. The spirit's dispensation from physical labor is certainly a sham, for spirit presupposes material labor for its own existence. But it is not just a sham, does not just bolster repression. The separation marks the stage of a process that leads out of the blind supremacy of praxis, potentially toward freedom. Though an unjust privilege, the fact that some live without doing physical labor and,

like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, delight in their own spirits, also indicates that it is possible for everyone, especially when the technological forces of production are at a stage where the prospect of a general dispensation from physical labor and its reduction to a fraction is foreseeable. The cancellation of this separation by fiat [*Machtspruch*] thinks itself idealistic but is in fact regressive. Sending the spirit home [as though from work?] without a bonus of praxis would be concretism. [*Der ohne Überschuß in die Praxis heimbefohlene Geist würde Konkretismus.*] This spirit would conform to the technocratic-positivistic tendency that it means to oppose and with which it (and incidentally certain political factions) has more of an affinity than it lets itself believe. With the division of theory and praxis, humanness is awakened; it is alien to that state of non-separation which really only lends itself to the primacy of praxis. Animals, like patients in regression from an injury to the brain, know only objects of action: perception, guile [*List*], feeding are all controlled by the same compulsion, which weighs even more heavily on the un-subjected [*Subjektlosen*] than on the subjects. Guile must become fully independent so that the individual creatures can gain the distance from feeding whose telos would be the end of the mastery through which nature perpetuates itself. The mild, good-natured, gentle, even the conciliatory aspect of praxis imitates the spirit, a product of the division whose retraction is urged by all-too unreflective reflection. Desublimation, which can hardly be endorsed in the present era anyway, helps to preserve the benighted condition which its advocates want to shed light upon. Aristotle's ranking the dianoetic virtues above all others had, without question, its ideological aspect—the resignation of the Hellenic private citizen who had, out of fear, to avoid influencing public issues, and needs some justification for it. But his doctrine of virtues also opened the horizon to blessed observation: blessed, because his doctrine would have escaped the exercise and suffering of violence. Aristotelian politics are more humane than the Platonic state to the same extent that a quasi-bourgeois consciousness is more humane

than the restorative one that, in seeking to impose itself on an already enlightened world, prototypically turns into totalitarianism. The goal of right praxis would be its own abolition.

6

In the famous letter to Kugelmann, Marx warned of the threatening relapse into barbarism which must have been foreseeable even at that time. Nothing could have better expressed the elective affinity of conservatism and revolution. Already to Marx these seemed the *ultima ratio* in averting the predicted collapse. But this fear, which would occupy later minds than Marx's, is now outdated. The relapse has taken place. To await it in the future, after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, is to heed the wretched consolation that it could always get worse. The mankind that performs the bad and submits to it thereby ratifies the worst: one only has to eavesdrop on the twaddle about the dangers of relaxation. The praxis that is now needed is the effort to bring oneself out of barbarism, and this alone. This barbarism has, with the acceleration of history to supersonic speeds, flourished to such an extent that it infects everything that strives against it. The excuse that only barbaric means are acceptable against the barbaric totality sounds plausible to many. In the meantime, however, a threshold has been reached. That which, fifty years ago, offered the all-too-abstract and illusionary hope of total change and which may have seemed justified for a brief period—violence—is, after the experience of National-Socialist and Stalinist grayness, and in view of the longevity of totalitarian repression, inextricably entangled in that which would need to be changed. If the shared guilt of society and, with it, the prospect of catastrophe has really become total—and nothing allows us to doubt it—then there is nothing left for one to counter with but that which the grand bourgeois illusion about its society [Verblendungs-zusammenhang¹⁶] has precluded, instead of participating in it in one's own manner. Either mankind must give up on the like-for-like of violence, or ostensibly radical political praxis will renew the old terror. The *Spießbürger's* pearl of wisdom—fascism and

communism are the same—becomes an ignominy, or the latest saying—the ApO is helping the NPD¹⁷—verified: the bourgeois world has become wholly as the bourgeois imagines it to be. He who doesn't help to carry out the transition to irrational and raw violence sees, in his neighborhood, the reformism being pushed which for its part is culpable in the continued existence of the bad whole. But no rash action helps, and what helps is densely covered over. Dialectic rots into sophistry as soon as fixes itself pragmatically on the next step, beyond which the knowledge of the totality has long stretched.

7

The falsity of the primacy of praxis being practiced today becomes clear in the priority given to tactics above all else. The means have become independent to the utmost degree. In that they serve their purposes without reflection, they have become estranged from them. So discussion is being called for everywhere—at first, to be sure, out of an anti-authoritarian impulse. But tactics have reduced the discussion—a totally bourgeois category, by the way, like the public sphere [*Öffentlichkeit*]¹⁶—to complete ruin. That which could result from discussions—the resolutions which have a higher objectivity because of the interpenetration of intentions and arguments—doesn't interest those who automatically want discussions, even in completely inappropriate situations. Each clique that becomes dominant has the outcome it wants ready in advance. The discussion aids the manipulation. Every argument is cut to fit the aim [*auf die Absicht zugeschnitten*], unconcerned with its validity [*Stichhaltigkeit*]. What the adversary says is hardly perceived; or only in order that one may, at best, offer the standard formulas against it. One does not want to have an experience, insofar as they are to be had at all. The opponent in discussion becomes the function of the various plans: reified by the reified consciousness malgré lui-même. Either one wants to persuade him to do something useful, or to discredit him in front of the

¹⁶ [Untranslatable?: “Zusammenhang zwischen gesellschaftlichem Sein und daraus sich bildenden falschen Vorstellungen vom Wesen der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft” (*Duden Deutsches Universalwörterbuch*, 1996).]

disciples; or they just talk because they like talking to a brick wall, or for the sake of publicity, whose prisoners they are; pseudo-activity can only keep itself going through relentless advertising. If the adversary doesn't give in, then he is disqualified and accused of lacking those qualities presupposed by the discussion. The concept of discussion gets so cleverly and so completely twisted around that the other must let himself be persuaded; this reduces the discussion to farce. Behind this technique an authoritarian principle is at work: the dissenting party must adopt the group opinion. The unresponsive project their unresponsiveness onto those who will not let themselves be terrorized. With all this, actionism fits right into the trend that it intends to set itself against (or so it claims): the bourgeois instrumentalism which fetishizes the means, because reflection on purposes is intolerable to its kind of praxis.

8

Pseudo-activity is a praxis which, to the same degree that it loses contact with the object and any sense of proportion, takes itself all the more seriously and isolates itself from theory and knowledge. It is the product of the objective conditions of society. It is in truth conformist: conforming to the situation of the *huis clos*. The ostensibly revolutionary gesturing [*scheinrevolutionäre Gestus*] complements that military-technological impossibility which is spontaneous revolution, as Jürgen von Kempster already pointed out years ago. Against those who control the bombs, barricades are ludicrous; for this reason the barricade is toyed with, and the masters momentarily let the players carry on. With guerilla tactics in the Third World, the situation may well be different; nothing in the administered world functions without a crack. For this reason, those in the most technologically advanced countries choose models [*Muster*] from the underdeveloped countries. These countries are as powerless as their cult of personalities and

¹⁷ [**ApO**: *außerparlamentarische Opposition*, a loosely organized anti-authoritarian group, composed largely of students and young people, which sought political and social reforms through extra-parliamentary means during the regime of the CDU/SPD coalition from 1966 to 1969; **NPD**: *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (taken from *Duden*)]

their shamefully murdered leaders are helpless. Models that fail even to stand up in the Bolivian bush can hardly be applied elsewhere.

Pseudo-activity is elicited by the state of the technological productive forces that simultaneously condemns them to unreality [*Schein*]. Just as personalization offers the false consolation that individuals don't matter anyway in the anonymous clockwork, so too pseudo-activity misleads about the de-potentialization of a praxis which presupposes free and autonomous actors who no longer exist. It is also relevant for political activity to ask whether astronauts were even needed for the circumnavigation of the moon—astronauts who not only had to go by their buttons and apparatuses but, on top of everything else, even had to accept meticulous commands from the central headquarters below. Physiognomy and social character with Columbus and Borman differ in every respect. As a reflex action against the administered world, pseudo-activity duplicates that world in itself. The luminaries of the protests are virtuosos of standing orders and formal procedures. These sworn enemies of all institutions particularly like to demand that this or that (for the most part the wishes of some committee thrown together by chance) be institutionalized; whatever is talked about must be “binding” at all costs. Subjectively speaking, this all gets carried out through the anthropological phenomenon of “gadgeteering,”¹⁸ through the affective hold of technique over any reason still left [*jegliche Vernunft*], which it crushes, spreading out over every domain of life. As it turns out, McLuhan has ironically—in the deepest debasement of civilization—been proven correct: “the medium is the message.” The substitution of means for purposes transfers the qualities into man himself. Internalization would be the wrong term for it, because this mechanism does not even permit the formation of firm subjectivity anymore; instrumentalization usurps its place. With all this pseudo-activity, right up to the seeming revolution [*Scheinrevolution*] itself, the social tendency toward the objective smoothly conforms

¹⁸ [In English in the original, as with the other words and phrases which will be cited from now on in quotation marks.]

to the degeneration of the subject. World-history parodically produces, once again, those whom it needs.

9

The objective theory of society, as something independent of living persons, has primacy over psychology, which does not encompass the essential things. Of course this insight was, since Hegel, mixed up with a lot of other things—very often with intrigues [*Rancune*] against the individual and his (however particular) freedom, and especially against desire. This insight shadowed bourgeois subjectivity and was at the bottom of its bad conscience. The askesis from psychology is, however, not objectively endurable. Since the market economy was destroyed and patched together through one provisional measure after another, its laws alone no longer suffice to explain it. Not to go through psychology, in which the objective compulsions ever internalize themselves afresh, would be to fail to grasp both that human beings will put up with a state of destructive irrationality without seeking to change it, and that they will join movements whose opposition to their own interests should in no way be hard to perceive. Related to this is the function of psychological determinants in students. In relation with real power, which can hardly be tickled, actionism is irrational. The smarter ones are conscious of its hopelessness, others laboriously conceal themselves. Since there has hardly ever been a larger group more intent on martyrdom, the psychological mainsprings [*Triebfedern*] need to be reckoned in here; direct economic motives are, by the way, not as absent as the nonsense about the society of prosperity [*Wohlstandsgesellschaft*] would have one think: as always, countless students scrape by on the verge of hunger. The erection of apparent realities is, in the last analysis, likely compelled by the objective confines; it is psychologically mediated, and the suspension of thinking is conditioned by the dynamic of the drives. There is, moreover, a striking contradiction here. Even as the actionists have an extreme libidinal interest in themselves, in their own psychic needs, and in the secondary pleasures of their involvement, the subjective moment—provided it comes to be seen

by their opponents—arouses them to a malicious frenzy. One will, first of all, find in all this an extension of the Freudian thesis in *Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*: the *imagines* of authority have, for the subject, the character of coldness, of lovelessness and lack of relationships. As in the authoritarianism of those against authority further west, they thus dress up their negatively cathected *imagines* with the traditional dictator-qualities and get uneasy as soon as these dictators are different, and fail to correspond to what those against authority secretly desire from authority. Those who protest the loudest are, in their resistance [*Abwehr*] to introspection, like those personalities who are tied to authority; when they think about themselves, they do so uncritically, and in a wholly externalized direction. They narcissistically overvalue their own relevance, without an adequate sense of proportion. They immediately install their own needs, often under the banner of the “learning process” [“*Lernprozesse*”], as the criterion for praxis; little room has been made for the dialectical category of self-renunciation [*Selbstentäußerung*]. They reify their own psychology and expect a reified consciousness from anyone who faces up to them. They actually put a taboo on experience and get allergic as soon as anything reminds them of it. For them, experience is reduced to what they call a “head start of information” [“*Informationsvorsprung*”], without noticing that the concepts of information and communication which they ridicule are imported from the culture industry. With respect to the object, they contribute to the regressive transformation of what is left of the subject, from the point of reference of the “conditioned reflexes.”

10

With respect to science, the separation of theory and praxis has in modern times, and in sociology, where this separation is necessarily a constant theme, radically and unreflectively made its mark in Max Weber’s doctrine of the value-free science. Almost seventy years old, it continues to exert its sway even in the latest positivist sociology. The arguments offered against it exercised little influence on the established science. The immediate, more or less explicit

counter-position, that of a materialist ethics of value that would direct praxis, discredited itself through its retrogressive arbitrariness. The Weberian doctrine of the value-free was anchored in his concept of rationality. It is debatable which of the two categories props up the other in the Weberian version. As is well known, for him rationality means—and this is the center of his work—largely the same thing as a rationality of ends. It is defined as a relation between appropriate means and ends, which are in principle outside rationality; they are left to a kind of decision, whose dark implications, those Weber did not want, were made obvious soon after his death. Such an exemption of ends from the ratio, though Weber hedged it in restrictive clauses that unmistakably shaped the tenor of his scientific doctrine and the whole of his scientific strategy, is however no less arbitrary as any decree of values. Rationality can no more easily split off from self-preservation than from the subjective authority that it serves, the ego; and indeed, Weber's antipsychological, but subjectively oriented sociology did not try to do this. Ratio only arose as the instrument of self-preservation, that of reality-testing. Its generality, which was convenient for Weber because it granted him immunity [*Abhebung*] from psychology, broadened its scope beyond its immediate bearers, the individual human beings. This emancipated it, even at its origin, from the vagaries of individuals' setting their own ends. The self-preserving subject of the ratio is, in its immanent, intellectual generality, something really general: society, and in its widest sweep humankind. Humanity's preservation lies within the inalienable purview of rationality: it has its end in the rational establishment of society, or else it would be arbitrarily arrested by own movement. Humanity is only rationally ordered when the socialized subjects hold back their unfettered potentialities. Conversely, the madly irrational would be—and this example is more than an example—that, though the adequation of destructive means to the destructive purpose should be rational, the end of peace and the elimination of those antagonisms which hinder it, *ad Calendas Graecas*, would be irrational. As the mouthpiece of his class, Weber turned the relationship of rationality and irrationality on its head. The rationality of ends and

means does, against his intentions and as if in revenge, a dialectical reversal. The development of bureaucracy, the purest form of rational domination, which Weber had prophesized with a candid shudder, is, in the society of the shell [*Gehäuses*], irrational. Words like the shell [*Gehäuse*], cage [*Verfestigung*], the becoming-independent of the device [*Verselbständigung der Apparatur*], and its synonyms indicate that the means thereby designated have become their own ends, instead of fulfilling their rationality of ends and means. This however is no symptom of degeneration, as it pleases the bourgeois self-understanding to think. Weber recognized so piercingly how, on his conception, the irrationality which he had described and disguised logically followed from the determination of means by ratio, and from the concealment of ends from critical awareness. The resigned Weberian rationality becomes irrational precisely because—as Weber postulated in furious identification with the attacker—its askesis from ends remains irrational. By not stopping to consider the specificity of the object, ratio runs away from itself: its principle becomes one of a bad infinity. Weber’s apparent de-ideologization of science was an ideology devised against the Marxist analysis. It unmasks itself, however, in its indifference to the obvious madness, to the uncogent and contradictory as such. Ratio cannot descend below self-preservation, namely that of its own kind, on which the survival of everyone literally depends. Through self-preservation ratio naturally attains the potential for a self-consciousness that could one day transcend the self-preservation to which, by being limited to a means [*Mittel*], self-consciousness had been confined.

11

Actionism is regressive. Enthralled by the positivity that has long been counted among the instruments of the weak ego, it refuses to countenance its own powerlessness. Those who constantly cry “too abstract” cultivate a concretism, an immediacy that is stronger than the theoretical means available at present. This benefits illusory praxis. The especially crafty say that theory is—and they judge art just as summarily—repressive; such activity, in the middle of the

status quo, just isn't their style. But the unmediated doing, which of course urges overthrow, is incomparably closer to oppression than the thought that takes breath. The Archimedean point—how would a praxis which is not repressive be possible, how one could steer between the alternatives of spontaneity and organization—is not to be found, if at all, in any other manner but through theory. If the concept is discarded, then symptoms like a uniform solidarity which is out of control will become visible. Straightaway the bourgeois supremacy of means over ends wins through—the same spirit which one is, according to the program, supposed to be fighting. The technocratic reforms in the university that one wants, perhaps still bona fide, to avert, are not first and foremost a retaliation against the protests. Academic freedom is being reduced to customer service and needs to have controls put in place.

12

Among the arguments that actionism has at its disposal is one which, though far from being a political strategy that one would like to boast about, has that much greater power of suggestion: one must—so the argument goes—opt for the protest movement precisely because one recognizes its objective hopelessness, taking as examples Marx during the Paris commune or the intervention of the Communist Party during the collapse of the anarcho-socialist elected government in München in 1919. Just as these modes of action were triggered by despair, so too must those who despair of success support a pointless doing. The inescapable defeat commands, in the capacity of a moral authority, solidarity even from those who saw the catastrophe coming and had not before submitted to the diktat of uniform solidarity. But the appeal to heroism in truth prolongs this diktat; he who has not allowed his sensibility for these things to be driven out will not mistake the hollow ring in this. In secure America, one was able, as an emigrant, to bear the news from Auschwitz; it is not easy to believe someone who says that he's losing sleep over Vietnam, especially when every enemy of colonial warfare must know that the Vietcong, for its part, tortures in the Chinese way. He who, as a product of this society, imagines himself free

from the bourgeois coldness, harbors illusions about the world and about himself; without this coldness no one would be able to go on. The ability to identify with foreign suffering is, without exception, small. That one could simply no longer look on, and that no one of goodwill could look on any longer—these are the rationalizations compelled by the conscience. The conspirators of July the 20th, who preferred risking their painful undoing to passivity, learned just how possible and admirable this attitude is among those watching the grayest horrors from the sidelines. To claim from a distance that one feels like them is to confuse the power of imagination with the violence of the immediately present. Pure self-protection prevents him who is absent from imagining the worst, especially of events which leave his very self at their mercy. To recognize oneself is to admit the limits, which have been objectively forced upon him, of an identification which clashes with his rights to happiness and self-preservation; it is to refuse to behave as if one were already a person of that type which will only be realized in the state of freedom, that is to say a person without fear. One cannot fear the world enough as it is at present. If someone sacrifices not only his intellect but himself, no one may stop him from so doing, though it means an objectively false martyrdom. To make a command out of such sacrifice belongs to the fascist repertoire. Solidarity with something which is transparently an inevitable failure may yield an exquisitely narcissistic profit; in itself this is as deranged as the praxis from which one conveniently hopes for a reward, only presumably to have it taken away in the next moment, because no sacrifice of the intellect is ever enough for the insatiable demands of mediocrity [*Geisteslosigkeit*]. Brecht (and he was still in a position at the time to do something about politics (instead of its surrogate)) once said, to repeat the gist of it, that he was au fond more interested in the theater, when he was perfectly honest with himself, than in the transformation of the world.¹⁹ Such a sensibility would be the best corrective to a theater that today mistakes itself for the world, just as the “happenings” put on by the actionists every now

¹⁹ Cf. Walter Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht* (Frankfurt, 1966) 118.

and then confuse aesthetic appearance [*Schein*] and reality. He who does not want to fall behind Brecht's freely offered, courageous confession will regard most praxis today as suspiciously lacking in talent.

13

The present *Praktizismus*²⁰ is based on a moment that the abominable language of scientific sociology has christened suspicion of ideology [*Ideologieverdacht*], as if the motor driving the critique of ideology were not the experience of its untruth, but the *Spießbürger's* low regard for anything spiritual [*Geist*] because it allegedly cannot be disinterested, which interests the skeptical interested party presumably projects onto the spirit. But if praxis obscures the one relevant [*aktuelle*] impossibility with the opiate of collectivity, then the ideology becomes its own. This ideology bears an unmistakable sign: the automatic huff around the question about What to do, which is used to answer any critical thought even before it has been uttered, let alone mutually understood. It recalls the gesture of demanding one's passport. The command is unexplicit, yet all the more powerful: you must subscribe to this. The individual must yield to the collective; as a reward for jumping into the "melting pot," he is promised the concession of a sense of belonging. The weak and intimated feel strong when they hold each other's hands while running. This is the real moment of change in irrationalism. The promise that one will, by giving up one's own reason and judgment, partake of a higher, indeed collective reason, is defended with countless sophistries, impressed on one with countless means of moral pressure—whereas one could really, to tell the truth, use this inalienably individuated reason that they tell you is obsolescent; though whatever doubts it may register have already been proven wrong anyway and taken care of by the intrinsically superior wisdom of the comrades. The same disciplinary attitude which the communists once practiced is again used as a fall-back. What was productive and deadly earnest when conditions still seemed ripe will be repeated, in accordance with a

dictum of Marx's, as farce among the ostensible revolutionaries. Instead of arguments, one runs up against standardized slogans which are obviously being circulated by dictators and their followers.

14

If theory and praxis are neither one, without mediation, nor absolutely different, then their relationship is one of discontinuity. No straight path leads from praxis to theory—that is just what he who is going there means by the spontaneous moment. But theory belongs in a relationship to society and is, at the same time, autonomous. Nonetheless, praxis does not run its course independently of theory, or theory independently of praxis. If praxis were the measure of theory, then it would, for the sake of the *thema probandum*, become the trickery denounced by Marx, and would consequently not be able to attain what it wants; if praxis were directed simply by the mandates of theory, then it would harden into a doctrine and, on top of it all, falsify the theory. The mischief that Robespierre and St. Just started with the *volonté générale* of Rousseau, who did not lack the repressive trait himself, is the best-known but certainly not the only piece of evidence for this. Contrary to the teachings to which it refers, the dogma of the unity of theory and praxis is undialectical; it obtains an identity through devious means, there where the contradiction alone has a chance of being fruitful. While theory cannot be cut from the total social process, it also stands on its own within it; it is not just the means of the whole but also a moment in it; otherwise there is no way it will be able to withstand the spell of the whole. This relation of theory and praxis is, after each has distanced itself from the other, one of qualitative change, not of transition, and certainly not of subordination. They stand in a polar relation to one another. The theory that would have the greatest hope for realization would be that which is not thought of as a mandate to be realized, and would be somewhat analogous to that which took place in the natural sciences between atomic theory and nuclear fission; the common part, the

²⁰ [“bes. ehemalige DDR: Neigung, die praktische Arbeit verabsolutieren und dabei die theoretisch-ideologischen Grundlagen zu

shared reference to possible praxis, lay in the technologically oriented reason as such, not in the thought of its application. The Marxist doctrine of the unity of theory and praxis likely originated in the presentiment that it might soon be too late, in the Now or Never. To this extent it was certainly practical; but the most accomplished work of theory, the *Critique of Political Economy*, lacks those concrete transitions to praxis that, according to the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, should be its *raison d'être*. Marx's reluctance about theoretical recipes for praxis was hardly less strong than his unwillingness to describe a classless society in positive terms. The *Capital* contains countless invectives, mostly against national economists and philosophers, but no program for action; every speaker of the ApO who learned Marx's vocabulary must curse the book as abstract. From the theory of surplus value one cannot gather how to make a revolution. With regard to praxis in a general way—outside of isolated political questions—the anti-philosophical Marx hardly went beyond the philosopheme that the emancipation of the proletariat could be the proletariat's affair alone; and at that time the proletariat was still visible. In the decades recently gone by, the *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, the *Authoritarian Personality*, as well as the in many respects heterodox *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, were written without any practical intention and nonetheless had certain political effects. Whatever effects radiated outwards from them were due not least to the fact that, in a world in which even thoughts have been turned into commodities that provoke "sale's resistance," no one could possibly think, in reading these volumes, that he is being sold anything or talked into taking something. When I have intervened, in the narrow sense, in immediate [*unmittelbar*] concerns with a view to political effects, it occurred through theory alone: in the polemic against the youth movement in music and their followers; and in the critique of the new German jargon of authenticity which makes this very virulent ideology of amusement less palatable [*versaltzte*], in that this ideology was re-directed and brought back to its own terms. If these ideologies are in

vernachlässigen"—*Duden Universal Wörterbuch*, 1996]

fact instances of false consciousness, then their ruin, which resonates further, throughout the medium of thought, inaugurates a certain movement toward maturity [*Mündigkeit*]; this movement is, mind you, practical. The corny Marxian wordplay on “critical critique,” the humorlessly pleonastic, hackneyed humor which, in that it is theory, theory seeks to obliterate, covers over the uncertainty of its conversion into praxis. In no respect did Marx, neither then nor later, assume the responsibility for this conversion himself, despite the International, with whom he was on bad terms. Praxis is the fount of theory, is not endorsed by it. Within theory, praxis appears simply, and mind you by necessity, as a blind spot, as an obsession with that which is criticized; no critical theory is to be carried out in detail [*im einzelnen*] that did not overvalue the single person [*das Einzelne*]; but without the detail it would be trivial. The addition of madness in the process warns, however, against the excesses through which it would irreversibly expand.