

Who's Afraid of the Ivory Tower? A Conversation with Theodor W. Adorno

Translated, edited, and with an introduction by GERHARD RICHTER
University of Wisconsin-Madison

“Philosophy, which once seemed passé,” Theodor W. Adorno’s *Negative Dialectic* begins, “remains alive because the moment of its realization was missed” (“*Philosophie, die einmal überholt schien, erhält sich am Leben, weil der Augenblick ihrer Verwirklichung versäumt ward*”).¹ This perspective encrypts the double movement of a simultaneous resignation or lament and a productive, enabling force. It is only because the philosophy of which Adorno speaks—negative dialectics—was not realized that its actualization is yet to come. That it once existed without becoming an actuality means that it still remains to be thought, as both a failure and a promise. The erratic traces of this double movement not only name but also enact Adorno’s notion of a negative dialectic. The movement of the negative dialectic of failure and promise has strongly marked the reception of the English translations of his writings. After all, Adorno’s German, and the thought that it enacts, is rigorously and infamously resistant to translation. His writing is both strange and foreign—*fremd*—even in its “original” German.

To acknowledge this strangeness is also to acknowledge that what Adorno says cannot be separated from how he says it. As Samuel Weber, one of Adorno’s earliest translators so apodictically and incontrovertibly puts it in his 1967 “Translating the Untranslatable,” the “specificity of Adorno’s thought is inseparable from its articulation,” so that “conceptual concreteness may be measured by the density with which thought and articulation permeate each other.”² For this reason, any translator who, in spite of these difficulties, attempts to translate Adorno’s sentences runs the risk of constructing an Adorno who, in the words of one of his most astute American translators, Robert Hullot-Kentor, appears “dubbed rather than translated.”³ Thus, as Hullot-Kentor points out, while many admirable English translations of Adorno’s texts exist, others deserve to be retranslated.⁴ The process is now well under way, with, for instance, Hullot-Kentor’s responsible retranslation of *Aesthetic Theory*, which replaces the problematic British version of 1984.⁵

The following interview with Adorno has not received the attention that

it deserves. It originally appeared on 5 May 1969, three months before the philosopher's death, under the title "Keine Angst vor dem Elfenbeinturm" in the widely circulating German weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*.⁶ Shortly after it appeared in Germany, an English translation, which has been virtually ignored in the American context, was published in a British journal.⁷ In a very real sense, then, the "moment of its realization was missed." To present this important document today in an entirely new translation, in agreement with *Der Spiegel*, means to take seriously—with a bit of Blochian non-synchronicity—the critical potential that it still may hold for readers interested in the relation between aesthetics and politics. But the re-presentation of the document today also requires an explanation of historical contexts and political references, glosses that culturally aware readers in 1969 may not have required and that were provided neither in the British translation nor by Adorno's German editors, who later included the text in his collected writings (*Gesammelte Schriften*).⁸ I have therefore provided explanatory footnotes to clarify historical references for today's readers.

To appropriate the conceptual content of the discussion with Adorno for our time also requires some contextualization in the tensions of its own time. The immediate occasion for the highly visible interview was Adorno's cancellation of his University of Frankfurt lecture course "Introduction to Dialectical Thinking" during the summer semester of 1969, following confrontations with student activists who disrupted his lectures with heckling. During the previous semester, Adorno's decision to involve the police in clearing student occupiers from the Institute for Social Research (the Frankfurt School's departmental unit at the University of Frankfurt) had caused controversy. While some regarded Adorno's reliance on the authorities as a betrayal—a siding with the enemy against the common cause of social progress—others tended to agree with Adorno's assessment of the radical activism of some students as misguided or even, in the words of his former research assistant, Jürgen Habermas, as a form of "left-wing fascism."⁹ On the day that the *Spiegel* interview appeared, Adorno writes to his friend and Frankfurt School colleague Herbert Marcuse: "One should refrain from [. . .] demonizing the police wholesale. I can only repeat that they treated the students much more gingerly than the students treated me. That was beyond description." He continues: "The other day I was told by Mr. Cohn-Bendit during a departmental town meeting that I only had the right to call in the police if people actually wanted to beat me up with metal rods. I answered that then it would be too late."¹⁰

The irony of the tensions between Adorno and some student activists are legible enough. On the one hand, his theories had contributed to the establishment of the first general wave of political activism in Germany after World War II and to a general critical engagement with the legacies of German fascism, a subject that had largely remained taboo after 1945. Examples of Adorno's theoretical interventions that were especially significant in this

regard included his and Horkheimer's analysis of the culture industry, his dissection of the authoritarian personality, his subversive reflections on what it means to be German, his meditations on education "after Auschwitz," and his anti-fascist reflections, among many others. But on the other hand, more concrete signs of solidarity were expected of Adorno after December 1966, especially on the part of the "APO." "APO" stands for "Außerparlamentarische Opposition" ("Extraparliamentary opposition"), the collective name of the German student and New Left movements, along with a variety of smaller oppositional groups that were not presented in the German parliament. The APO came into existence in 1967, in response to the "Grand Coalition" formed between Kurt Georg Kiesinger's conservative CDU/CSU and Willy Brandt's social-democratic SPD on 1 December 1966, that is, when almost no opposition remained within the German parliament itself. Many in the APO now looked to Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School for practical political leadership, often in vein.

In a patricidal reversal that pitted parts of the Student Protest Movement and the New Left against one of their theoretical fathers, Adorno was subjected to a series of institutional and personal attacks at least since 1967, and leaflets proclaiming that "Adorno as an institution is dead" ("*Adorno als Institution ist tot*") were circulated during his lectures. For instance, when he was invited by Peter Szondi and Wilhelm Emrich on behalf of the Departments of German and Comparative Literature at the Free University of Berlin to deliver a lecture in July 1967 on "The Classicism of Goethe's *Iphigenie*," a meditation that was later included as an essay in his *Notes to Literature*, Adorno was greeted with heckles on the part of some. Adorno had earlier refused to write a letter of support exculpating the activist Fritz Teufel, whose controversial hand-outs and leaflets had been read by his accusers not as a satire but as a concrete incitement to arson and violence. Because Adorno refused to conduct a political discussion instead of delivering his lecture as planned, his detractors regarded his decision to speak on Goethe as a retreat from political intervention into classicist aesthetics.

But the most notorious incident was yet to come. During an April 1969 assault, an instance of "planned tenderness" which has come to be known as the "breast action" (*Busenaktion*), three female sociology students wearing long leather jackets invaded the lecturer's podium, sprinkled rose and tulip petals over Adorno's head, attempted to plant lipstick kisses on his cheeks, exposed their naked breasts to him, and provoked him with erotic pantomimes. Adorno, attempting to protect himself with his briefcase, proceeded to exit "Hörsaal V" ("Lecture Hall V"). This attempt to embarrass Adorno publicly was a sign of the larger structure of misunderstanding between Adorno and those student activists who had grown increasingly impatient with their theoretically-minded teacher's reluctance to engage in street interventions and other forms of political activism.

The tension and misunderstanding between Adorno and some of the student activists was by no means universal. Indeed, many found the public provocations of Adorno by a minority of students misplaced and embarrassing. Those critical of the activities to which Adorno was subjected must have recalled not only their indebtedness to the theoretical apparatus for a critical analysis of society and culture that he had supplied, but also Adorno's general interest in being a public intellectual open to discussion and to a sustained engagement in concrete political causes. For instance, after the so-called German-American friendship week had been marred by severe street violence and clashes between protesters and the police in May 1967, Adorno, along with his colleague Max Horkheimer and others, on 12 June 1967 engaged in a public discussion with students and activists regarding the relationship between Critical Theory and political praxis. Similarly, Adorno spoke out publicly against the German *Notstandsgesetze* (Emergency Laws). These Emergency Laws were to enable the German government to suspend certain basic democratic citizens' rights when protests and concrete opposition threatened to destabilize the basic order of the state. The proposed bill that would make Emergency Laws legal in Germany was passed on 30 May 1968. Two days earlier, Adorno had made a last-minute effort to derail the passing of these laws, formulating a firm rejection of these curtailments of civil liberties in an address entitled "Gegen die Notstandsgesetze" ("Against the Emergency Laws") in the "Große Sendesaal" of the *Hessischer Rundfunk* (Hessian Broadcast Service).¹¹ And as Adorno reveals in a November 1968 letter to the writer Günter Grass, he maintained friendly relations with the Social Democratic politician Gustav Heinemann—then West Germany's Minister of Justice and later, from 1969 through 1974, President of the Federal Republic—whom he closely advised regarding West Germany's progressive criminal law reform. Similarly, Adorno was instrumental in helping to work out a compromise agreement between the "IG Metall," West Germany's Metal Workers' Union, and their companies. But while he supported these and other political causes, such as then Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor Willy Brandt's concrete attempts to loosen the iron collar of Cold War ideologies through a new political relationship with countries to West Germany's East, he remained suspicious of certain "aporias of the politics of reconciliation" ("Aporien der Versöhnungspolitik"). These included the politics that he feared would disguise the ways in which the Soviet Union's gestures of political reconciliation with its satellite states could also be read as attempts at even greater domination of these states. Here, he feared, the questionable and deeply problematic political interests represented by both Washington and Moscow found a possible way of supplementing one another in their expansionist quests for world domination. Rejecting what he often denounced as "erpreßte Versöhnung" ("forced reconciliation"), Adorno confesses to Grass his "mounting aversion to any kind of praxis in which my natural disposition and the objective hopelessness

of praxis in this historical moment may meet each other.”¹² Between the writing of these lines and his death some ten months later, this aversion may have grown ever more pronounced in light of the heightening intensity with which the personal attacks against him were carried out.

In the interview reproduced below, Adorno explains, in more lucid and conversational terms than is characteristic of his formal writings, his conceptualization of the political relevance that his theoretical work may have. For Adorno, the political impact of his work is not to be measured by the extent to which it enables unmediated social praxis but rather by the extent to which it effects a broad change in consciousness. Here, the oppositional pair of thought and action itself is suspended. The text belongs in the general orbit of similar meditations that Adorno devoted to this subject in the late 1960s, such as his texts “Resignation” and “Marginalia on Theory and Praxis,” and his conversation regarding Critical Theory and the Protest Movement with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.¹³ Indeed, there is no sentence in Adorno’s mature work that is not touched by the political implications of the thoughts that he expresses in the *Spiegel* interview.

In my English translation, I have attempted to capture some of the informal conversational tone of Adorno’s sentences, a tone that may strike some readers as belonging to a surprisingly different register than that found in the formal and rigorous precision of his written works, where his German prose, in its persistent self-reflexivity and performativity, often appears, quite strategically, to resemble no living language. The sinewy lucidity of Adorno’s spoken and improvised language in this interview cannot be explained fully by *Der Spiegel*’s editorial practices, as listeners to the recently published collection of five compact disks containing a variety of his speeches and interviews can attest.¹⁴ Adorno’s fluid style as a live interlocutor and public speaker—especially as he developed it for his various radio, television, and mass print appearances soon following his return to Germany from American exile in 1949—should be placed into a dynamic constellation with his written language to assess the shifting contours of his imagined relationship to the audience.

I wish to thank *Der Spiegel* for kindly granting me permission to translate and reprint this interview.

SPIEGEL: Professor Adorno, two weeks ago, the world still seemed in order . . .

ADORNO: Not to me.

SP: You said that your relations with the students were not strained. In your courses, you said, discussions were fruitful, sober, and untainted by personal disturbances. But now you have cancelled your lecture.

A: I did not cancel my lecture for the entire semester, but only until further notice. I hope to start up again in a few weeks. All colleagues do this when their lectures are so massively disrupted.

SP: Were you subjected to violence?

A: Not physical violence, but so much noise was made that my lecture would have been drowned by it. That was obviously the plan.

SP: Are you repulsed only by the manner in which students today take action against you—students who once were on your side—or did their political goals also disturb you? After all, it is fair to say that there used to be agreement between you and the rebels.

A: That is not the dimension in which our differences play themselves out. Recently I said in a television interview that, even though I had established a theoretical model, I could not have foreseen that people would try to implement it with Molotov cocktails. This sentence has been cited numerous times, but it requires substantial interpretation.

SP: How would you interpret it today?

A: In my writings, I have never offered a model for any kind of action or for some specific campaign. I am a theoretical human being who views theoretical thinking as lying extraordinarily close to his artistic intentions. It is not as if I had turned away from praxis only recently; my thinking always has stood in a rather indirect relationship to praxis. My thinking has perhaps had practical consequences in that some of its motifs have entered consciousness, but I have never said anything that was immediately aimed at practical actions. Ever since the first bedlam was organized against me in 1967 in Berlin, certain student groups have time and again attempted to force me into solidarity, demanding practical actions of me. I have refused.

SP: But Critical Theory does not wish to keep conditions as they are. The SDS students learned this from you.¹⁵ You, Professor Adorno, now refuse practical action. Are you not cultivating a mere "liturgy of critique," as Dahrendorf claims?¹⁶

A: In the case of Dahrendorf, a tone of fresh and cheerful conviction reigns supreme: If only you change little things here and there, then perhaps everything will be better.¹⁷ I cannot accept this presupposition. But among the APO, I always encounter the compulsive pressure to deliver oneself, to join in; this is something I have resisted since my earliest youth. And in that area nothing has changed in me. I attempt to put into words what I see and what I think. But I cannot predicate this on what will be done with it or what will become of it.

SP: Scholarship in the ivory tower, then?

A: I am not at all afraid of the term "ivory tower." This term has certainly seen better days, as when Baudelaire employed it.¹⁸ But since you bring up the ivory tower: I believe that a theory is much more capable of having practical consequences owing to the strength of its own objectivity than if it had subjected itself to praxis from the start. Today's unfortunate relationship between theory and praxis consists precisely in

the fact that theory is subjected to a practical pre-censorship. For instance, people wish to forbid me to put into words simple things that show the illusionary character of many of the political goals that certain students have.

SP: But these students apparently have a large following.

A: A small group of students succeeds time and again in enforcing loyalty, something which the vast majority of leftist students may not fully resist. But I wish to emphasize again the following: They simply cannot refer to models of action that I allegedly gave them in order then to place me at odds with these models. There are no such models.

SP: Yet it is the case that students refer, at times very directly, at other times indirectly, to your critique of society. Without your theories, the student protest movement might not even have developed.

A: I do not wish to deny that. Nevertheless, it is difficult for me to assess this connection fully. I would like to believe, for instance, that a critique of the manipulation of public opinion—which I consider legitimate even in its demonstrative form—would not have been possible without the chapter on the culture industry in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Horkheimer and myself. But I think that one often conceives the connection between theory and praxis too reductively. If one has taught and published for twenty years with the intensity that I have, it does enter into general consciousness.

SP: And thus also into praxis?

A: Possibly, but not necessarily so. In our writings, the value of so-called individual actions is delimited by an emphasis on societal totality.

SP: But how would one go about changing societal totality without individual action?

A: This is asking too much of me. In response to the question “What is to be done?,” I usually can only answer “I do not know.”¹⁹ I can only analyze relentlessly what is. In the process, I am reproached in the following manner: “If you criticize, you have to say how to do better.” But I consider this a bourgeois prejudice. Historically, there have been countless instances in which precisely those works that pursued purely theoretical intentions altered consciousness and, by extension, societal reality.

SP: But in your writings you have set Critical Theory apart from other kinds of theory. It should not merely describe reality empirically, but also should consider [*mit bedenken*] the proper organization of society.

A: Here, I was concerned with a critique of positivism.²⁰ Note that I said *also consider* [*mit bedenken*]. In no way does this sentence suggest that I would be so presumptuous as to tell people how to act.

SP: You once said, however, that Critical Theory should “lift the

rock under which barbarism breeds." If the students are now throwing this rock—is this so incomprehensible?

A: Certainly not incomprehensible. I believe that their actionism [*Aktionismus*]²¹ can essentially be traced back to despair, because people sense how little power they actually have to change society. But I am equally convinced that these individual actions are predestined to fail; this also proved to be the case during the May revolt in France.²²

SP: So if individual actions are pointless, is not the "critical impotence," of which the SDS has accused you, the only thing that remains?

A: There is a sentence by Grabbe that reads: "For nothing but despair can save us."²³ This is provocative, but not at all dumb. I cannot fault someone living in our world today for feeling despairing, pessimistic, and negative. Those who compulsively shout down their objective despair with the noisy optimism of immediate action in order to lighten their psychological burden are much more deluded.²⁴

SP: Your colleague Jürgen Habermas, also a proponent of Critical Theory, has now conceded in an essay that the students have developed an "imaginative provocationism" and have really managed to change some things.²⁵

A: I would agree with Habermas on this point. I believe that the university reform, of which we incidentally do not yet know the outcome, would never have been set into motion without the students.²⁶ I believe that the general attention to processes of dumbing down, which are prevalent in our present society, would never have crystallized without the student movement. And furthermore, to mention something very concrete, I believe that it was only through the investigation, led by Berlin students, of the murder of Ohnesorg that this horrifying story penetrated public consciousness at all.²⁷ With this I wish to say that I in no way close myself off to practical consequences as long as they are transparent to me.

SP: And when have they been transparent to you?

A: I participated in demonstrations against Emergency Laws [*Notstandsgesetze*], and I have done what I could in the area of criminal law reform. But there is a decisive difference between doing something like that and taking part in the half-crazed activity of throwing rocks at university institutes.

SP: How would you determine whether or not an action is worthwhile?

A: For one thing, this decision depends in large measure on the concrete situation. For another, I have the strongest reservations against any use of violence. I would have to disown my entire life—my experiences under Hitler and what I have observed of Stalinism—if I did not refuse to participate in the eternal circle of using violence to fight violence. The

only meaningfully transformative praxis that I could imagine would be a non-violent one.

SP: Even under a Fascist dictatorship?

A: There certainly may be situations in which things would look different. To a real Fascism, one can only react with violence. I am anything but rigid on this point. But I refuse to follow those who, after the murder of countless millions in the totalitarian states, still preach violence today. That is the decisive threshold.

SP: Did students cross that threshold when they attempted to prevent the delivery of Springer newspapers through sit-down strikes?²⁸

A: I consider this sit-down strike legitimate.

SP: Was this threshold crossed when students disrupted your lectures with noise and sexual theatrics?

A: To think that they did this to me, of all people, someone who has always opposed any kind of erotic repression and sexual taboo! To mock me and to loose three girls dressed up as hippies on me! I found that repulsive. The comic effect achieved by this was nothing more than the reaction of a philistine [*Spießbürger*] who giggles "he-he!" [*der Hihi! kichert*] at the sight of a girl with naked breasts. This nonsense was naturally planned in advance.

SP: Was this unusual act perhaps intended to ruffle your theory?

A: It seems to me that these actions against me have little to do with the content of my lectures; what is more important to the extreme wing is the publicity. They suffer from the fear of being forgotten. In this way they become slaves of their own publicity. A lecture such as mine, which is attended by about 1000 people, is obviously a magnificent forum for activist propaganda.

SP: Can this deed not also be interpreted as an act of despair? Perhaps the students felt left in the lurch by a theory that they had considered at least capable of being translated into societal praxis?

A: The students did not even attempt to have a discussion with me. What makes my dealings with students so much more difficult today is the prioritization of tactics. My friends and I have the feeling that we have been reduced to mere objects in precisely calculated plans. The idea of minority rights, which after all is constitutive of freedom, no longer plays any role whatsoever. One blinds oneself to the objectivity of the matter [*Objektivität der Sache*].

SP: And in the face of such abuses you make do without a defensive strategy?

A: My interests are turning increasingly toward philosophical theory. If I were to give practical advice, as Herbert Marcuse has done to a certain degree, it would detract from my productivity.²⁹ Much can be said against the division of labor; but even Marx, who in his youth at-

tacked it vehemently, later on conceded that we cannot do without the division of labor after all.³⁰

SP: You have chosen for yourself the theoretical part, then, leaving the practical part to others; indeed, they are already working on it. Would it not be preferable if theory simultaneously reflected praxis? And, by extension, also the present actions?

A: There are situations in which I would do this. At the moment, however, it seems much more important to me to think through the anatomy of actionism.

SP: So, mere theory again?

A: I value theory more highly at this point. I dealt with these issues—especially in my *Negative Dialectic*—long before the current conflict erupted.

SP: In *Negative Dialectic*, we find the following resigned observation: “Philosophy, which once seemed passé, remains alive because the moment of its realization was missed.”³¹ All conflicts aside, does such a philosophy not become “foolishness”? A question that you have asked yourself.

A: I still believe that one should hold on to theory, precisely under the general coercion toward praxis in a functional and pragmatized world. And I will not permit even the most recent events to dissuade me from what I have written.

SP: So far, as your friend Habermas once put it, your dialectic has, at its “blackest spots” of resignation, surrendered to “the destructive pull of the death drive.”³²

A: I would rather say that the compulsive clinging to what is positive stems from the death drive.

SP: Then, would it be the virtue of philosophy to look the negative in the eye but not to change it?³³

A: Philosophy cannot in and of itself recommend immediate measures or changes. It effects change precisely by remaining theory. I think that for once the question should be asked whether it is not also a form of resistance when a human being thinks and writes things the way I write them. Is theory not also a genuine form of praxis?

SP: Are there not situations, for example in Greece, in which you endorse action that goes beyond critical reflection?³⁴

A: It goes without saying that in Greece I would approve of any kind of action. The situation that prevails there is totally different. But for someone who is ensconced in safety to advise others to start a revolution is so ridiculous that one ought to be ashamed of oneself.

SP: So, you continue to view the advancement of an analysis of societal conditions as the most meaningful and necessary aspect of your activities in the Federal Republic?

A: Yes, and to immerse myself in very specific individual phenomena. I am not in the least ashamed to say very publicly that I am working on a major book on aesthetics.³⁵

SP: Professor Adorno, we thank you for this conversation.

¹*Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975) 15. All translations are my own.

²Samuel Weber, "Translating the Untranslatable," Introduction to Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981) 9–15, here 11f.

³Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Translator's Introduction," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) xi–xxi, here xv.

⁴In addition to his "Translator's Introduction" to *Aesthetic Theory*, see also, for instance, his commentary on his retranslation of the Odysseus essay of Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "Notes on Dialectic of Enlightenment: Translating the Odysseus Essay," *New German Critique* 56 (Spring-Summer 1992) 101–108.

⁵For a commentary on this new translation in the context of Adorno's philosophy, compare further Gerhard Richter, "Adorno's Scars, Bloch's Anacoluthon," *German Politics and Society* 18:4 (Winter 2000) 93–112.

⁶*Der Spiegel*, 5 May 1969, vol. 23: 19, pp. 204–209.

⁷It appeared under the somewhat misleading title "Of Barricades and Ivory Towers: An Interview with T. W. Adorno" in *Encounter* 33: 3 (1969) 63–69.

⁸Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 20:1, *Vermischte Schriften 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986) 402–409.

⁹Habermas first used this term in a discussion at the 1967 conference on "Bedingungen und Organisation des Widerstands" ("Conditions and Organization of Resistance") in Hannover. Specifically, he accused student leader Rudi Dutschke of an ideology that "under today's condition—at least I believe to have reason to suggest this terminology—one must call 'left-wing fascism'" ("'linken Faschismus' nennen muß"). Today, Habermas's remarks, along with others he made in the context of the Protest Movement, can be found in his *Kleine Politische Schriften I–IV* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) 199–307, here 214.

¹⁰Daniel Cohn-Bendit, today a Green Party member of the European Parliament, was one of the most influential and charismatic figures in the Protest Movement in both Germany and France. For book-length articulations of Cohn-Bendit's views on political activism in the context of the Protest Movement, see Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Linksradikalismus. Gewaltkur gegen die Alterskrankheit des Kommunismus* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1968) and, more recently, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Wir haben sie so geliebt, die Revolution* (Bodenheim: Philo.-Verlag, 1998).

Adorno's letter is located in the Herbert Marcuse Archive of the Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main. It has recently been made available in the comprehensive three-volume collection of documents *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung: Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail 1946–1995*, ed. Wolfgang Kraushaar (Frankfurt am Main: Rogner und Bernhard bei Zweitausendeins, 1998), volume 2, 624–625, here 624. This collection also contains a series of interesting essays by a variety of scholars on the relationship between the Student Movement and the Frankfurt School. For more general assessments of the German Student Movement, see, among others, Gerhard Bauß, *Die Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und Westberlin. Ein Handbuch* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1977) and Jürgen Miermeister and Jochen Staadt, eds., *Provokation. Die Studenten- und Jugendrevolte in ihren Flugblättern 1965–1971* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1980).

¹¹"Gegen die Notstandsgesetze," *Gesammelte Schriften* 20: 1, *Vermischte Schriften* I, 396–397.

¹²Adorno's letter to Grass is located in the Adorno archive in Frankfurt. It is reproduced in *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, 472–474, here 474.

¹³The essays can be found in his *Gesammelte Schriften* 10:2, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II*, 794–799, 759–782, respectively. The interview with *Süddeutsche Zeitung* can be found in *Gesammelte Schriften* 20:1, *Vermischte Schriften I*, 398–401.

¹⁴Theodor W. Adorno, *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit: Reden und Gespräche*, selected and with an accompanying text by Rolf Tiedemann, 5 Compact Disks (Munich: Der HörVerlag, 1999).

¹⁵"SDS" is an abbreviation of "Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund" (Socialist German Students' Union), founded in 1946 with the support of Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) and dissolved in 1970.

¹⁶The critic in question is Lord Ralf Dahrendorf (b. 1929), the German-born British sociologist and former FDP (Free Democratic Party) politician. The controversy between Adorno and Dahrendorf regarding the relationship between theory and praxis took place in Frankfurt in April 1968 at the "Deutscher Soziologentag," the conference of German sociologists, where Adorno had held the opening keynote address on "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" The following day, Dahrendorf responded critically to Adorno's lecture with his own presentation, initiating an intense debate. Dahrendorf's and Adorno's papers, along with their discussions, are documented in the conference's published proceedings, *Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft? Verhandlungen des 16. Soziologentages*. Im Auftrag der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie herausgegeben von Theodor W. Adorno (Stuttgart: Elms, 1969).

¹⁷Adorno here alludes to his conviction, expressed most memorably in *Minima Moralia*: "Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen" ("There is no right life within the wrong one"). *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969) 42.

¹⁸Among other things, Adorno here alludes to Baudelaire's initial support of the 1848 revolution that initiated France's Second Republic and his later retreat from political life following his disenchantment with that revolution's results.

¹⁹The implicit reference here is to Lenin's famous 1902 meditation on "What Is to Be Done?" See Vladimir I. Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?* trans. S.V. and Patricia Utechin, ed. S.V. Utechin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963).

²⁰Adorno here refers to the so-called *Positivismusstreit* (Positivism debate) in which he was engaged, arguing against the straightjacket that uncritical, positivistic sociological paradigms such as those propagated by Alphonse Silbermann imposed on a critical theory of society. See especially Theodor W. Adorno et al., *Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1969).

²¹I have rendered Adorno's German term "Aktionismus" as the somewhat strange-sounding English term "actionism" in order to preserve in the neologism his critical emphasis on the ideological dimension of a belief that favors action and intervention at all cost and with dogmatic fervor.

²²Adorno here evokes the May 1968 events in France, during which Paris was subjected to violent police oppression following a series of strikes and an attempted general revolt, in which many French intellectuals, among them Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, had taken part. In the wake of bloody street battles and civil war-like unrest, Charles De Gaulle dissolved the French National Assembly and instigated new parliamentary elections.

²³The original sentence quoted by Adorno reads "Denn nichts als nur Verzweiflung kann uns retten." Such formulations were often used, in different variations, by the early 19th century dramatist Christian Dietrich Grabbe in such plays as *Herzog Theodor von Gothland*, *Die Hermannsschlacht*, and *Marius und Sulla*. They are often considered "nihilistic."

²⁴Implicitly, Adorno here also alludes to others on the left, such as Georg Lukács, who had risked his life in the 1956 Hungarian uprising and who had faulted Adorno for valorizing despair as a politically productive category. In July 1962, Lukács had in the new introduction to his *Theory of the Novel* explicitly singled out Adorno for criticism: "A good part of the leading German intelligentsia, among them Adorno, has moved into the 'Grand Hotel Abyss,' a 'beautiful hotel,' as I wrote on the occasion of my critique of Schopen-

hauer, 'equipped with all amenities at the edge of the abyss, nothingness, and meaninglessness. And the daily sight of this abyss, in between cozily enjoyed meals or artistic products, can only enhance the pleasure of this refined comfort.' *Die Theorie des Romans* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984) 16.

²⁵The essay in question is Habermas's 1969 "Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform" (Protest Movement and University Reform), now collected in his *Kleine Politische Schriften I–IV* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981) 265–303. Habermas speaks of the students' "phantasiereichen Provokationismus" on page 284.

²⁶At stake in this university reform was a far-reaching democratization of the academic system in the Federal Republic. One of the most pervasive slogans associated with the reform movement was the students' assessment of their professors: "Unter den Tälaren—der Muff von 1000 Jahren" ("Under their robes—the smell of 1000 years"). One of the earliest and most influential publications that helped to set the reform movement into motion was Georg Picht, *Die deutsche Bildungskatastrophe* (Olten: Walter Verlag, 1964).

²⁷The student Benno Ohnesorg was shot and killed on 2 June 1967 in Berlin during a demonstration against the visit by Riza Shah Pahlavi of Persia, who had crushed democratic uprisings and who had come to stand as a symbol for political oppression.

²⁸Germany's Springer Publishing House is considered by many to have a conservative or even right-wing agenda. It is the publisher of Germany's most widely read daily, the tabloid *Bild-Zeitung* and of newspapers such as *Die Welt* and *Die Welt am Sonntag*. In fact, there was an extensive grassroots anti-Springer campaign, and members of the APO along with writers such as Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Peter Schneider conducted the so-called Springer-Hearings in West Berlin from September 1967 through April 1968. During these Springer tribunals led by students and intellectuals, one of the most memorable slogans was "*Bild schießt mit*" ("*Bild* shoots along," or "*Bild* shoots as well").

²⁹It should be noted that Marcuse, who played an active role both in the US and in West Germany during the revolts, later took exception to Adorno's characterization of his stance. As Marcuse writes to Adorno on 4 June 1969, about a month after the *Spiegel* interview appeared: "You know that you and I both reject any unmediated politicization of theory. But our (old) theory has an inner political content, an inner political dynamic, which today more than ever pushes toward a concrete political position. This does not mean giving 'practical advice,' as you claim of me in your *Spiegel* interview. I have never done that. Like you, I find it irresponsible to encourage, from one's desk, action in those who, in full awareness, are prepared to have their heads smashed in the service of the cause. But this means, in my view, that in order for us to remain our 'old' Institute, we must write and act differently than we did thirty years ago. Even undamaged theory is not immune to reality. While it is wrong to negate the difference between the two (as you justly accuse the students), it is just as wrong to hold on abstractly to this difference in its previous form, if it changes in a reality that comprises (or opens up) both theory and praxis." *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, 649–650.

³⁰In his discussion of the division of labor, Adorno is presumably referring, on the one hand, to the early Marx's *Pariser Manuskript*, which criticizes the division of labor, and, on the other hand, to the later Marx of the third volume of *Das Kapital*, in which he juxtaposes, more pragmatically, what he names "the realm of freedom" and "the realm of necessity." Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Dietz, 1987) 828.

³¹See footnote 1.

³²*Spiegel* is quoting from Habermas's 1963 essay on Adorno, "Ein philosophierender Intellektueller." There, Habermas worries that the "dialectic of enlightenment," "at its blackest spots" ("an ihren schwärzesten Stellen") "despairs in light of its final turnover." In that case, Habermas writes, the "dialectic of enlightenment" resigns itself to the thesis of the "counter-enlightenment," which argues that horror cannot be abolished without also obliteration civilization itself. In this scenario, the dialectic of which Habermas speaks would "surrender to the destructive pull of the death drive" ("überläßt sie sich dem destruktiven Sog des Todestriebs"). But because Habermas does not italicize or put into quotation marks the phrase "dialectic of enlightenment," it cannot be decided for certain

whether he means Adorno's and Horkheimer's specific work by that name or the actual dialectic that is at play in the enlightenment. This is an important difference that the *Spiegel* ignores. By foreclosing the double reading that Habermas's passage enables, the question misses the opportunity to conceive of this undecidability as the very enactment of the dialectical structure that it addresses. "Ein philosophierender Intellektueller," in his *Philosophisch-Politische Profile*, enlarged edition (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987) 160–166, here 165.

Be that as it may, we might note that Habermas's reference to the death drive ("Todestrieb") is overdetermined in that it also evokes the Freudian elements in Adorno's philosophy. Compare further, for instance, Freud's elaborations on the death drive in his 1923 *Das Ich und das Es*. In: Sigmund Freud, *Studienausgabe*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2000) 273–330. Adorno shared with the rest of the Frankfurt School an interest in the development of a new Critical Theory founded on an innovative constellation of the theories of Hegel, Marx, and Freud.

³³The reference here is to the eleventh of Marx's "Thesen über Feuerbach": "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in different ways; the point is to *change* it [Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden *interpretiert*; es kömmt darauf an, sie zu *verändern*]." Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Dietz, 1987) 7. The *Spiegel* interviewer seems to miss the point—already implied in Marx's own perspective—that for a change of the world to occur, this change must be based on a prior interpretation or reinterpretation of the world and the ideologies that trave it. This interpretation is the task of philosophical inquiry. For Adorno's own reflections on the relation between theory and praxis in the context of a negative dialectics that perpetuates and transforms the projects of Kant, Hegel, and Marx, see the "Einleitung" to his *Negative Dialektik*, 13–66.

³⁴Following a coup d'état by the Greek army on 21 June 1967 under the leadership of General Gregorius Spandidakis, a military regime was installed and democratic politicians were arrested. Constantine Kollias became Greece's new Prime Minister. In December, Colonel Georgias Papadopoulos became Greece's new Prime Minister and, beginning one year later, its de-facto dictator. Greece began to return to democratic conditions in late 1973.

³⁵This work, which remained unfinished at the time of Adorno's death in August 1969, was published posthumously one year later as *Ästhetische Theorie* under the editorship of Adorno's widow, Gretel Adorno, and his student Rolf Tiedemann. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).